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Notions of the Gothic in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock

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Abstract

The films of Alfred Hitchcock were made within the confines of the commercial film industries in Britain and the USA and related to popular cultural traditions such as the thriller and the spy story. However, many of the films possess characteristics associated with 'high' culture. Part of the interest in his work lies in the ways in which such traditions intersect with and accommodate each other and how they relate to the other determining contexts of the director's work. This thesis focuses upon the cultural and literary tradition of the 'Gothic' and the German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s as key influences upon Hitchcock's work in general and on some of his films in particular.

Part of the work consists of an overview of Gothic literature in its many forms with specific attention to the classic English Gothic. A definition is provided, based upon the identification of the main elements and motifs of the tradition. There is also a study of the German Expressionist film which identifies its main features, locates it in the history of silent cinema and relates it to the tradition of the Gothic.

The main part of the work is a detailed study of the films of Alfred Hitchcock, relating them to the cultural tradition of the Gothic and to its specific manifestation in the German Expressionist film. This involves consideration of the concept of 'influence' and the extent to which Hitchcock's films derive from such traditions; an analysis of the films which identifies Gothic and Expressionist features; an assessment of the ways in which such traditions were mixed with others, including classical narrative structure and style, generic traditions of suspense and romance, to produce the distinctive form and content of the Hitchcock film; and a consideration of the ways in which such traditions played a role in much of Hitchcock's output, regardless of the different genres in which he worked.

Research has included primary sources: Gothic novels (from 1764 to the present day) and the films of both Hitchcock and the German Expressionist directors; and secondary sources and critical studies of the Gothic texts and the films. There has been much written on the Gothic tradition although many critics fail to explain the term or to identify what the genre actually represents. Similarly, though much has been written on the subject of Alfred Hitchcock's films, the topic of Gothic has only really been referred to briefly and no one has addressed it in any detail.

Contents

1. Introduction

Alfred Hitchcock was born in London in 1899, just two years after the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: a novel marking, for many, the end of the most popular period of traditional Gothic novels. Hitchcock's career as a director (1925-1976) spanned a period of significant social and political change. We must also consider that he made films on both sides of the Atlantic and take into account any cultural or ideological implications of this. Furthermore, although film techniques did develop quickly, Hitchcock was still working with a relatively new medium and this afforded opportunity for experimentation.

Although the main focus of this study is the notion of Gothic in the directorial output of Alfred Hitchcock, it is necessary to define and contextualise Gothic itself and to address the distinction between Gothic and other similar genres and types. It is also necessary to show that whilst some films demonstrate some similarities with written Gothic texts there are added visual (and aural) elements. In order to show this there is a focus on German Expressionism as an example of Gothic on film. The directors who made these films used and adapted many of the features of traditional Gothic novels and a combination of presentational and stylistic features that can be seen to have incited similar audience reaction to that of Gothic writing. The social and political contexts of these films can also be directly compared with those of the traditional Gothic period.

With regard to the films directed by Hitchcock it is also necessary to acknowledge that people other than Hitchcock were involved in the making of them. Many of the films were adapted from existing novels or plays (some with very few changes to the plot and / or characters) and these adaptations (as well as the original screenplays of other films) were not written by Hitchcock himself. Along with this must be considered the on screen presence of particular actors (the casting of whom was also often out of Hitchcock's control) as well as the controlling influence of studios and producers (such as David O Selznick), particularly early on in Hitchcock's career. Notwithstanding all of this, there is still a quite unmistakeable quality about Hitchcock's work, much of which can be seen in the effect on the audience.

Though Hitchcock is commonly regarded as 'the master of suspense', it must be remembered that not all of Hitchcock's films are suspense thrillers. It could be assumed, then, that not all of Hitchcock's films will demonstrate Gothic features. Whilst this study covers the entire fifty-year period of Hitchcock's career, there has been a necessity to focus on certain films in particularly and to regard others (to a certain extent) as largely irrelevant to this topic. There is also a case study of a particular film from each period that demonstrates more of these features than most of the other films.

Notions of influence must also be considered when approaching this kind of study. It could be argued that Hitchcock was directly influenced both by Gothic novelists and German Expressionist filmmakers but it might also be argued that any similarities between these works might largely be due to contextual (or even biographical) factors. The notion of Hitchcock's own influence on the work of other directors (both contemporary and more recent) might also be considered.

2. Gothic Literature

The Gothic genre consists of a variety of features and elements that also appear in works of other genres and this can make it difficult to formulate a distinct definition. However, certain features of the form are usually alluded to in reference works. The *Oxford Reference Dictionary* defines the Gothic novel as 'an English genre of fiction, popular in the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, characterised by an atmosphere of mystery and horror and with a pseudo-medieval ('Gothic') setting.'[1] The *Cambridge Guide To Literature in English* defines the Gothic novel in more detail as:

> A type of romance popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 'Gothic' had come to mean 'wild', 'barbarous' and 'crude', qualities which writers cultivated in reaction against the neoclassicism of earlier eighteenth century culture. Gothic novels were usually set in the past (most often in the Middle Ages) and in foreign countries (particularly the Catholic countries of southern Europe). Monasteries, castles, dungeons and mountainous landscapes were made settings for plots which hinged on suspense or mystery and flirted with the fantastic or supernatural.[2]

In its infancy Gothic literature was seen in rather negative or unpleasant terms. Julian Petley explains:

> In Britain, as far back as the first half of the eighteenth century, the term 'Gothic' had already acquired distinctly negative connotations. As Fred Botting explains, it had become 'a general and derogatory term for the Middle Ages which conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness' (1996: 22). In other words, exactly the opposite of the then highly valued ideals of the Enlightenment, with its stress on harmony, order, rationality, symmetry, proportion and classical, rule-governed artistic forms.[3]

It was not all negative, however, as Petley goes on to say:

It does not need to be stressed from the outset, however, that the reception of the Gothic novel was by no means uniformly negative. Nonetheless, it attracted sufficient negative comments couched in strikingly similar terms to enable one to isolate a number of recurring themes and to suggest that a quite specific critical discourse was at work here.[4]

We can see the contemporary effect of this negativity in much of the criticism of Gothic literature. Michael Gamer refers particularly to a damning review by Scott of Maturin's *The Fatal Revenge* (1807):

> Usually considered one of the few defenders of Gothic writing in these years, Scott himself damned Maturin's novel to a literary hell below even that occupied by novels of scandal, those 'lowest denizens of Grub Street narrating...all that malevolence can invent and stupidity propagate'... Scott's review directs us away from political and moral status of the Gothic and towards the question of literary taste and social class that Gothic writing consistently raised as the nineteenth century turned... More fundamentally, however, reviews like Scott's demonstrate how Gothic writing's ascent to popularity in the 1790s forced writers and reviewers to reconsider and redefine what constituted literary value.[5]

According to some, this negativity has never fully been eradicated. Botting particularly says that 'Gothic productions never completely lost their earlier, negative connotations to become fully assimilated within the bounds of popular literature.'[6] This might account for its reputation as a less valued form of literature, even today.

Several critics (including Fred Botting[7], E.J.Clery[8] and Victor Sage[9]) agree that the first Gothic novel was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) which was subtitled 'A Gothick Story'. Ann Radcliffe is the other author most frequently mentioned in relation to the Gothic. Most famous of her six novels is *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) but *The Italian* (1797) also demonstrates all the features commonly associated with the genre. Botting particularly marks the end of the traditional Gothic period with Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)[10] though it seems more reasonable to include texts written throughout the nineteenth century up to and

including the novels of Bram Stoker and most famously *Dracula* in 1897. A comparatively small number of Gothic texts have been produced since then including some of the works of Daphne du Maurier in the early twentieth century and, more recently, novels by Anne Rice, Stephen King and Angela Carter. Whilst these more recent texts differ from their traditional counterparts, many features of them, as well as their overall effect on the audience, remain the same. Similarly, several countries have produced texts in the Gothic tradition including Britain, Germany, Russia and America and whilst these do have some differences from each other in terms of overall style, they still demonstrate these intrinsic features. The main aim of this study is to provide a general definitive outline of Gothic literature (largely in terms of these features) that can be applied to later texts and particularly the films of Alfred Hitchcock, so it is these features that will be my main focus.

Similar genres and types of Gothic

Gothic literature is very closely related to other types of literature including Romantic fiction and poetry, detective stories, horror and ghost stories. Romanticism is of particular relevance if we consider the following definition:

> A comprehensive term for all the various tendencies toward change observable in European literature, art and culture in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although it manifested itself everywhere in the form of a pronounced shift in sensibility, Romanticism was not a unified movement with a clearly agreed agenda, and emphases varied widely according to time, place and individual author. A similar derangement of the official political economy of the emotions seems to have been the effect, if not the conscious intention, of the Gothic novel.[11]

Kilgour confirms these ideas when she says, 'Like Romanticism, the Gothic is especially a revolt against a mechanistic or atomistic view of the world and relations, in favour of recovering an earlier organic model'.[12] In many respects, then, the terms 'Gothic' and 'Romanticism' are very similar. Philip W. Martin outlines Romanticism as demonstrating:

a high valuation of emotions and subjectivity, a trust in the power of imagination, an interest in the psychology of perception, autobiographical writing, and a veneration of 'Nature' as an organic entity continuous with the mind or as a region of innocence and simple values. In its more popular usage, Romanticism refers to an attitude of mind that is escapist, idly speculative or gripped by the features of romance (love, disguise, imprisonment, chivalric quest). In the eighteenth century, this kind of romance was relegated to a position of inferiority by the writers of novels.[13]

This last point might possibly explain part of the reason for the negative attitude towards Gothic novels which were often subtitled or described as 'a romance'. Martin goes a step further in an attempt to explain the difference between Gothic and Romanticism:

> In addition to [this] genealogical link, Romanticism's writers regularly engage with the Gothic idiom. Works such as 'Christabel', *Remorse*, 'The Ballad of the Dark Ladie' (Coleridge); *Manfred* (Byron); *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley); *Zastrozzi* (Percy Bysshe Shelley); *Eve of St Agnes* (Keats) are unequivocally Gothic in style, while novelists such as Charles Maturin (*Melmoth the Wanderer*) and James Hogg (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) are claimed as canonical writers by critics of either movement. Romanticism shares Gothic's sustained interest in the borders of human experience: as the range of Gothic motifs produces a symbolic language capable of representing repressed desire, or an obsessive fascination with taboo, so Romanticism takes an interest in that language for its own fascination with the disturbing power of imaginative or psychic activity.[14]

We could say then that whilst Gothic and Romanticism are both reactions to their environment or context and both reject traditional authority and values, Romanticism is concerned with emotion and mysteries of life but is generally much gentler in pace and in atmosphere than Gothic which tends to be more unpleasant and borders on the horrific.

Gothic is also very similar to both horror and terror literature (themselves very similar to each other and often used interchangeably). Punter makes a distinction

between horror and terror as follows:

> Horror is crudely terminal; it has to do with what frightens, or disgusts us to
> death. Terror, on the other hand, has the hallmark of a regime; it is both deeper
> and less total than horror, offering us the dual possibilities of submersion in a
> condition of political abjection and at the same time the thought of an escape
> into the realm where terror has ceased and we can re-emerge from our hiding-
> place. Horror, we might say, induces, or capitalises upon, impotence; from
> terror we can gain a certain sense of ourselves, and return to the world no doubt
> sadder but also politically wiser.[15]

Punter simplifies this by saying 'Horror...is a stark transfixed staring; terror has more
to do with trembling...horror, to use a contemporary idiom, is 'in your face', whereas
terror consorts with a certain withholding of the *occasion* of fear.'[16]

Manuel Aguirre described the horror novel as 'the first psychological novel'[17]
and the perfect example of a writer in this genre is Edgar Allan Poe (particularly with
his story "The Fall of the House of Usher"). However, Bloom claims that 'horror is the
usual but not necessarily the main ingredient of Gothic fiction and is determined in its
plotting by the need for horror and sensation'.[18] Gothic fiction can contain elements of
horror or terror (as well as elements found in other genres) creating different types of
Gothic. Clive Bloom says:

> Although the term 'Gothic genre' may be singular its incarnations are diverse
> and often retain only the slightest genuflection toward an original 'core' or
> formal set of generic properties. Furthermore, the nature of the Gothic is so
> disparate that it can include (because of formal similarities) works of fiction
> that contain neither supernatural nor horror elements but which do contain
> similar attitudes to setting, atmosphere or style.[19]

There are then various forms of Gothic literature and variations in the genre
include 'Gothic Terror', 'Psychological Gothic', 'Gothic Romance' and 'Female
Gothic'. The final major subgroup of the Gothic genre is Gothic Parody, the two most
famous purveyors of which were Jane Austen (*Northanger Abbey*, 1818 though
actually written twenty years previously) and Thomas Love Peacock (*Nightmare*

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Abbey, 1818). The appearance of such parodies shows both the popularity of and uneasiness with the Gothic genre.

Perhaps most frightening and with a more direct approach to issues of the supernatural is Gothic Terror. It could, of course, be argued that novels such as *The Italian* come under this heading although here the familial or romantic themes may override the terror. The term 'Gothic Terror' is usually applied to the work of authors such as Beckford and Lewis and this type of Gothic 'became a means of escaping from the elementary moral restraints that keep civilised people from torturing, murdering and mutilating one another out of idle curiosity.'[20] Although another of Gaull's exaggerations it is true to say that all literature provides, for the reader, a means of escaping from reality into fantasy.

The Psychological Gothic novel often situates one character in isolation or opposition to the rest of his or her community or society and explores the psychological reasons for their isolation as well as the results of it. Prime examples of this type of Gothic range from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) to Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). It is easy and very tempting to psychoanalyse the authors of such novels themselves and to speculate about their reasons for writing such works.

The Gothic Romance does not constitute modern romance or love stories as such. Indeed, as Victor Sage points out: 'The primary meaning of the Gothic romance [then] lies in its substitution of terror for love as a central theme of fiction'[21]. The Gothic Romance is very closely linked with Burke's concept of the Sublime. Edmund Burke attempted to define the experience of the Sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). He spoke of 'an experience of a power that exceeds the quantifiable and the usable. Encounters with such a power, he observed, are characterised by pain and terror rather than by pleasure and love.'[22] Burke identified the Sublime with the idea of pain or the annihilation of the self, 'at a time when one also knows that one's life is not genuinely threatened.'[23] It is therefore, like the Gothic, an unsettling or unfamiliar feeling associated with something that is, at the same time, very ordinary and familiar indeed. Burke also defined the Sublime as:

> whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible or is conversant about terrible objects, or

operates in a manner analogous to terror...that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[24]

Milbank explains this further:

> Burke...locates the sublime purely in terms of fear, the source of which is the 'king of terror' himself – DEATH – and a sense of possible threat to the subject's self-preservation. The threat must not be direct else pleasure or delight cannot be extracted from the experience.[25]

The Sublime refers to a high or elevated discourse[26]. For the Romantics the Sublime was also distinctly gendered. According to Mellor:

> the sublime is associated with an experience of masculine empowerment; its contrasting term, the beautiful, is associated with an experience of feminine nurturance, love and sensuous relaxation.[27]

In Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction* we are told that 'sublime ideas filled her young mind' but it was 'her sensibility [which] prompted her to search for an object to love.'[28] Wollstonecraft here sought to claim the masculine reserve of the Sublime for femininity. Later in the novel, whilst on board ship, Mary does just that when she has a very concrete experience with the Sublime, singing Sublime songs (including extracts from Handel's *Messiah*) on deck in the midst of a storm at sea[29]. Wollstonecraft is thus subverting the expectations of her readers and making her subject matter Gothic. Like the Gothic, then, the Sublime is characterised by a fear of what we imagine *might* happen rather than what we know *will* happen. As Judith Wilt puts it:

> Dread is the father and mother of the Gothic. Dread begets rage and fright and cruel honour, or awe and worship and a shining standfastness – all of these have human features, but dread has no face.[30]

Modleski says that the Female Gothic represents the most intimate fears of women.[31] We can see what she describes as the 'claustrophobic nature of their existence' in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* in the way that Ellena is constantly confined

in some kind of convent or monastery and even moreso in small rooms or towers often with secret passageways that only her captors know of. All of this represents the way women are confined in their lives. The theme of imprisonment (both actual and metaphorical) recurs particularly in Female Gothic and perhaps can be seen most clearly in Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*. Those Gothic characters that are not actually imprisoned are often pursued in some way like Godwin's Caleb Williams. The early poems of Coleridge also concentrate heavily on the themes of self, imprisonment within the self, and the ability to transcend this imprisonment. Indeed, the aim of the Romantics to create a new spiritual society often begins with the self and related problems and then moves on to tackle wider issues. Coleridge, however, seems to have a fear of this not working and of the impossibility to expel corruption, although he does maintain that it is possible to escape from imprisonment in the mind. In 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' there are two kinds of prison: one within the mind of the narrator and a natural one formed by the lime-tree bower itself. In the line 'silent with swimming sense' (line 39) the narrator is overwhelmed with something stronger than himself.

'Furthermore, Female Gothics provide an outlet for women's fears about fathers and husbands.'[32] We could see this in Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' where he says that something which is Uncanny could be something which was familiar to us but has become alienated through a process of repression[33]. We could also look at this in the light of Freud's reading of the Oedipus complex as related to *Hamlet. The Italian* can almost be seen as a reworking of *Hamlet*: Uncle (Schedoni) kills father and marries mother. Here, of course, the traditional male role is given to Ellena. Similarly, in the role of the Marchesa (an evil and seemingly powerful woman) we see this role reversal. These aspects of the story can be seen as Uncanny in that they are unusual variations on traditional literary themes; we recognise them but we do not necessarily expect them in this form. Radcliffe's Ellena, as a Gothic heroine, realizes she has an enemy but doesn't know his identity. Thus there is a desperate need 'to find out who her 'enemy' is and the equally imperative desire to discover that the enemy is not the father (or the lover who is the father substitute).'[34] This situation is all the more uncanny in *The Italian*, of course, because of Ellena's uncertainty as to who her father is. Also related to this idea of the 'Return of the Repressed' is the fate of Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*. Lucy is attractive and rather flirtatious but as a vampire she becomes overtly and aggressively sexual, suggesting that this aspect of her personality

existed all along and was merely repressed because of the expectations of society and what was (and was not) acceptable behaviour for women at that time.

Freud described the Uncanny as 'something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light.' It is that which is both familiar and absolutely alien to the conscious mind. We are thus forced to ask ourselves how something familiar can become frightening. According to Jentsch:

> in telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton.[35]

We could apply this directly to the mysterious monk in *The Italian* (a Gothic or Uncanny figure). The monk is an almost ghostlike figure who *appears* to glide through the air and also *appears* to walk through walls. Later in the novel the same monk appears to Vivaldi in the prison of the Inquisition whilst the guards seem to see nothing. A rational explanation is given to these events later, of course. The frightening or Uncanny aspects of these events are actually caused by a misunderstanding by the characters and, as the readers are shown everything through the viewpoint of these characters, we are naturally as paranoid as they are.

According to Tania Modleski:

> Gothics present us with the frightening familiar precisely because they make the familiar strange – which is, it will be recalled, the way Freud said the uncanny sensation in literature is produced.[36]

In *The Italian*, Schedoni lifts Ellena's veil to reveal the previously unknown and succeeds in unmasking the most familiar.

We can see, then, that the Uncanny (leading to a Gothic effect) is achieved largely through contradiction, which Varma describes as 'surrealism'. For example, he sees *The Castle of Otranto* as:

> a queer combination of the 'trivial' and the 'mighty', a mixture of the 'big' and the 'small'. The 'gigantic' helmet descending on a 'little' prince, the gigantic hand in armour and the giant's foot, the spectre of the dilated Alfonso cracking

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the walls of the castle, a large portrait inspiring observers with fear, are some of the tricks used by Walpole. The statue bleeds, and the figure in the portrait walks away, and Walpole masters both the active and inactive agents of terror: the villain and the castle.[37]

He also says that '*The Castle of Otranto* is particularly surrealist in its dialogue, and the juxtaposition of the language and sentiments, of the 'beau monde' with Gothic violence.'[38] These are just some examples of deliberate overstatement or exaggeration as Gothic technique. The extent of this can have very serious effects upon a reading of a text. The works of Edgar Allan Poe, for example, are in many cases extremely ironic and full of deliberate exaggerations and clichés. This means that although these stories are still Gothic and a little unsettling they are not frightening as such. Depending on the perspective of the reader, these stories may even become comical although this may not have been the original intention of the author.

According to Todorov, the 'Fantastic' (which he terms 'unnatural') falls somewhere in between the 'Marvelous' (or supernatural) and the 'Uncanny' (or natural) and it acts as a link between the other two. He outlines definitions of the three as follows:

> In a world which is indeed our world...there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions...The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous...The possibility of hesitation between the two creates the fantastic effect.[39]

Whilst reading a text, then, we might hesitate before deciding ultimately on our interpretation or before all the events are revealed. We may interpret events in one text as supernatural (Marvelous) whilst we may see events in another as having a natural (Uncanny) explanation, however odd (and initially unlikely) these events may be. The hesitation we experience before making this decision or reaching the end of the text is thus the Fantastic (a form of suspense). Most texts (though not all) will require one or other of these two outcomes and will not end with the Fantastic effect. We could argue

that Todorov's three definitions are types rather than genres and can be applied to texts of varying genres. We can thus have a text that is Marvelous Gothic, Fantastic Gothic or Uncanny Gothic.

At a very basic level, there are two distinct types of the supernatural in Gothic literature; that which is implied but later explained in rational terms (Uncanny) such as the events of *The Italian* or *Jane Eyre*, and that which is never explained and either leaves part of the story to the imagination of the reader (Fantastic) or states in no uncertain terms that there is something extremely strange or unusual in the text (Marvelous). There is never any doubt in our minds, for example, as to whether or not Dracula actually is a vampire and, indeed, vampirism is not explained in the novel in straightforward terms at all; it is just stated as a fact, albeit a strange one.

Not all Gothic writers rely on the supernatural to make their writing successful. William Godwin, for example:

> appears to have understood that the Gothic narrative need not rely on
> supernatural events or a pseudo-medieval scenario. What it needs is an inner
> anguish that projects images of its own mental state upon the world from the
> prison of an alienated solipsism.[40]

Godwin is able, particularly in *Caleb Williams* to achieve the same level of suspense without turning to the supernatural. He shows that things in the real world can be just as frightening.

The appearance of supernatural elements is not original or peculiar to Gothic. Many writers incorporated the supernatural into their writing as far back as the Renaissance and possibly even further. Shakespeare's plays are excellent examples of the weird and supernatural. Varma summarises this very well:

> *Hamlet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar* and *Richard III* have ghosts; *Macbeth* and
> *Julius Caesar* use prophesies and supernatural portents: *King Lear* has a
> desolate heath and nature at her wildest in thunder, lightning, and rain; *Romeo
> and Juliet* has a whole gamut of horrors: tombs, vaults, sepulchers, bones and
> fumes; *Hamlet* has stark battlements in the dead of night; several other plays set
> their scenes in old castles; *Macbeth* has a variety of apparitions, a signal bell, a
> forest, thunder and lightning, a cavern, a castle, and a midnight murder done to

the accompaniment of supernatural sounds. Banquo's spectre 'with twenty trench'd gashes on his head', is a distant precursor of the Schauer-Romantik method.[41]

The ongoing success and popularity of Shakespeare and his plays during the eighteenth century may also have been important in influencing or persuading Gothic novelists to include some of his elements or techniques (and particularly the use of the supernatural) in their own work. This demonstrates the enduring popularity of such subjects from one age to another, seemingly unaffected by the fact that, as Kenneth Graham points out, the Witchcraft Act was repealed in England in 1736[42], proving that curiosity and interest in the supernatural did not decline with the change in the law.

It is also worth noting that Gothic drama as a distinct genre was popular during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many writers best known for their Gothic novels also wrote Gothic novels including Horace Walpole whose *The Mysterious Mother* (1768) 'is considered to be the first Gothic drama'[43]. Jeffrey N. Cox sees these Gothic dramas as having 'some recognizably standard devices' regarding settings and characters but also using 'a wide range of theatrical techniques''[44]. He also goes on to say that the popularity of Gothic drama arose as a response to the need for new theatrical forms although many of them were dramatisations of existing Gothic novels[45]. Overall, the effect of Gothic dramas seems to have been similar to that of Gothic novels, a threat to social order.

Context

The period in which the Gothic novel was at its most popular was a period of significant change in all areas of life. Clive Bloom acknowledges this when he says that 'a [final] claim of Gothic writing may [also] be seen to be social disturbance, thereby questioning technological, scientific and social norms as well as class relations in a way unavailable to realist fiction.'[46] Of course, Bloom is not saying here that the period was volatile but rather that the genre can disturb social norms. Much writing from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries responds to significant social and political changes. One of the most celebrated works that can be seen as a comment on scientific and technological changes is, again, *Frankenstein*.

We could say that certain changes which happened in other countries in this

period did not happen in England, or at least, they happened in significantly different ways. Maggie Kilgour explains this with reference to revolution. She says that in the view of many English thinkers:

> the English Revolution was good because it aimed at the preservation of the past, the reinforcement of continuity and tradition. In contrast the French Revolution was an attempt to break all links between past and present. It was thus a totally novel form of social change, an overthrow of natural order whose inevitable result would be a return to 'Barbarism' and 'chaos.'[47]

Various Gothic and Romantic works of the time focused very heavily on this 'barbarism' and 'chaos' as a major theme or element in their literature. Such a focus may have been influenced by the French Revolution. However, by focusing on these chaotic or barbaric features these writers actually draw attention towards the more normal or everyday realities of life. According to Kilgour:

> Like the Carnivalesque, the Gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them, an eruption of unlicensed desire that is fully controlled by governing systems of limitation. It delights in rebellion, while finally punishing it, often with death or damnation, and the reaffirmation of a system of moral and social order.[48]

Hence, whilst Bloom sees the genre as able to disturb social norms, Kilgour sees it as actually reinstating them. I think both are possible depending on interpretation. Marilyn Gaull says that during the period between *The Italian* (1797) and *Frankenstein* (1818):

> English life itself acquired gothic dimensions as the war against France escalated, the wounded and maimed returned to a free country where the free were hungry, often homeless vagrants, and where the children were abandoned, disfigured and tormented in factories, workhouses and mines; where the King was mad, blind and sequestered in Windsor Castle conversing with the dead while his children, their friends and mistresses, populated the country houses and clubs with other children whose lineage was as mixed and obscure as any

gothic hero, or lived in artificial ruins dividing their attention among lapdogs, pet monkeys and costumes; where an illiterate peasant could be hanged for stealing a turnip or become a prophet by predicting an earthquake; where gas and steam and electricity were animating the inanimate and enslaving the people who created them; where galvanism (battery-generated electricity) made corpses smile and mesmerism (hypnosis) made people look dead; where Jeremy Bentham, one of the greatest philosophical minds of a generation that sought the permanent destruction of tyranny, spent most of his life designing the perfect prison; where London, Birmingham, and Manchester, the most advanced industrial centers in the world, lay under such a pall of smoke that they were used by Gustav Doré to illustrate Dante's *Inferno*; where graves were robbed on such a regular basis that the London poor suspected medical schools of starting epidemics to replenish their supply of corpses for the dissecting room. In other words, the real horrors had exceeded the fictional ones, and the public needed an adaptive mechanism, not an escapist one; it needed drama, not novels.[49]

This may be a list of clichés or exaggerations on one level but on another it shows that this was a period in which many developments and improvements were made and that these were simply not in the areas of life which benefited most people. Thus the distortions and exaggerations in Gothic texts simply reflect those of real lives at the time.

Edmund Burke, whilst not a Gothic novelist, did write extensively about the French Revolution and made these events appear Gothic through his use of language. He uses an almost classical style of language that sounds quite rehearsed or practiced, even rather aristocratic. This language is also quite theatrical, suggesting that Burke saw the Revolution itself as a kind of theatre or theatrical performance that he was allowed special access to as an onlooker or member of an audience. In places Burke also uses the language of romance in order to imply farce or to exaggerate events. We can see, then, that the setting of these events, along with the particular type of language used, evoke in the reader the same type of response as a typical Gothic novel.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be seen, in many ways, to be analogous with the French Revolution. Victor Frankenstein himself has many of the features of the Jacobins; Frankenstein makes a new body from old parts whilst the Jacobins

dismembered the existing government and made a new 'body politic'. Due to inept parenting, Frankenstein's creature turns deviant and murders Victor's family and friends whilst the Jacobins' 'body politic' became diseased because the leaders became fanatical and mass murder ensued (the September Massacres). Finally, Victor's creature becomes corrupt and immoral when he plants William's portrait of his mother in Justine's pocket, so condemning her for murder whilst Danton and others made money from the Revolution. Robespierre was also corrupted but by power rather than money. Overall, Mary Shelley seems to be saying that the Revolution should not have happened at all, or at least, it should have happened via different methods. Perhaps the revolutionaries, like Victor Frankenstein, simply did not think about the consequences before they acted. In *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Franco Moretti sees Frankenstein's creature as analogous to the proletariat rather than to the Revolution as a whole:

> Like the proletariat, the monster is denied a name and an individuality. He is the Frankenstein monster; he belongs wholly to his creator…like the proletariat he is a *collective* and *artificial* creature. He is not found in nature, but built.[50]

According to Moretti, then, Mary Shelley is thus telling us that the proletariat reacted against their mistreatment but in the wrong way. Ultimate responsibility for the outcome of events must lie with the bourgeoisie (and with Frankenstein in the novel). Although in England any movement toward revolution in this period was prevented, the events in France shifted the existing foundation of thought. The infinite promise of the Revolution fostered the sense in writers of the period that theirs was a great age of new beginnings and high possibilities.

Settings

Whilst most critics have seen the foreign settings of Gothic novels as adding to the mystery and as a way of heightening the sensation of the Uncanny or unfamiliar for the reader, Victor Sage sees the plots or stories of such novels as actually focusing on these 'alien cultures' when he says:

> The Gothic novel [then] is a specialised form of the historical romance, a form of fantasy about past history and alien cultures which has a meaning for its

present audience through a variety of cultural and political reflexes.[51]

The meaning for the contemporary audience thus seemed to be one of nostalgia for times past or a longing for a different type of life or culture as experienced in other countries.

The settings in Gothic literature are usually gloomy, dark and in some way mysterious. They include moors (particularly in the novels of the Bronte sisters and especially *Wuthering Heights* - reflecting the lifestyles of the authors themselves), castles, churches and haunted houses. The castles in these novels are often in ruins; possibly a comment on the lives of the characters or on the state of society. Mary Shelley is said to have got the title for her most famous novel and its eponymous character from the name of a German castle that she and Shelley saw in 1814. Although the castle (built in about 1250) was more of a manor house than a Gothic castle 'it had a terrific name meaning castle or rock of the Franks and a legend associated with it - the legend of the alchemist and necromancer Johann Konrad Dippel who was born a refugee in the castle in 1673 and thus signed himself 'Frankensteiner'.'[52] Thus Shelley ultimately roots her novel in reality and in history giving it a certain air of respectability. In the novel, Victor's father sends him to a German university in Ingolstadt 'to complete his education and to experience the customs of another (European) country.'[53] However, it is by no coincidence or simple chance that Shelley chooses Germany rather than any other European country and Ingolstadt rather than any other German or German-speaking town or city. As Hindle tells us:

> Ingolstadt was where a secret revolutionary society called the Illuminati – as William St. Clair has aptly noted, so neatly cognate with the 'Enlightenment' – had been founded in 1776 by the university's Professor of Law, Adam Weishaupt. It was the Illuminati who had masterminded international Jacobinism.[54]

This again highlights the political and revolutionary interests of the Romantics. Another major setting in *Frankenstein*, Geneva, also has social and political significance in that it 'symbolised freedom in a Europe still dominated by a multiplicity of (largely Catholic) monarchies they would have deemed ruthlessly

corrupt.'[55] We could see, then, that in another setting (or selection of settings) *Frankenstein* would carry the same message about ambition and science but here we have the added dimensions of political and revolutionary influences.

Family homes often feature in Gothic texts but, like the families that inhabit them, they are usually inadequate or incomplete. *The Castle of Otranto* is not only set in, but also named after the home of Manfred and his family. The fact that Walpole entitled the book so might imply that the castle itself is at the center of (and perhaps responsible for) events, rather than the characters. Even in the twentieth century, settings in Gothic are of extreme importance. In Marie Belloc-Lowndes' *The Lodger* (1913), for example, almost the entire story is set in the Bunting household; an old London house. Here, the house itself adds to the mystery of the story; the lodger inhabits particular rooms on two floors, whilst Mrs Bunting feels safest in her cellar kitchen (with the door locked).

Haunted houses feature quite heavily in Gothic novels as well as in horror and ghost stories. These houses are not always haunted necessarily but their dark appearance and isolation make them the ideal setting for mysterious events. Within these 'haunted houses' there is often a particular room or area which is more haunted or atmospheric than the rest. A staircase, for example, often has a Gothic or mysterious air. Stairs are symbolic as they can represent movement or transition. Often characters are confronted by something evil at the top or bottom of stairs. Attics and cellars are particularly Gothic or mysterious areas in houses as they are at the very top and very bottom of stairs respectively. In *The Italian* cellars are of great mystery as they lead to secret underground passageways which, in turn, lead to a monastery; another very Gothic setting. Belloc-Lowndes' lodger has four rooms on two floors, separated by a staircase. Mrs Bunting takes refuge in her cellar kitchen, down another flight of stairs. In this novel, different floors of the house serve different purposes and have different atmospheres. In *Jane Eyre*, Mrs Rochester rather famously becomes 'the Madwoman in the attic' and Grace Poole, her guard, has (for Jane and the reader) almost the same level of mystery as she also inhabits the strange realm of the attic.

In Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* a whole wing of the house has an atmosphere of mystery because of its connections with the equally mysterious (even sinister) Rebecca. We almost expect Rebecca to appear any minute. An even more recent example of a haunted house can be found in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* where the ghost of Eel Marsh House actually infects the whole island on which the house

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stands.

There are also variations on the traditional haunted house tale. The Bates Motel in Robert Bloch's *Psycho* is the scene of Mary Crane's gruesome murder but it is the Bates' house in the background that is the haunted house in this text. Another example is the Overlook Hotel in Stephen King's *The Shining*, which has been described as:

> A contemporary version of the Gothic castle, isolated among lowering and 'sublime' mountain peaks and staffed by a full complement of unsavory, supernatural inhabitants ('Every big hotel has got a ghost'), threatening and brooding, inviting Jack Torrance's flawed Byronic character.[56]

Here again we have settings within the main setting that are more disturbing than the rest. The Overlook Hotel is a haunted house but room 217 and the Presidential Suite both were scenes of horrific murders and still hold atmosphere and memories. It is in these rooms that the most frightening events take place and that the Gothic atmosphere is most strongly felt.

In most haunted house stories supernatural events happen as a direct consequence of actual events in the past. A more traditional, and often quoted, example of a haunted house story is *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson. As far as the genre is concerned, Jackson says:

> The concept of certain houses as unclean or forbidden – perhaps sacred – is as old as the mind of man. Certainly there are spots which inevitably attach to themselves an atmosphere of holiness and goodness; it might not then be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad. Hill House, whatever the cause, had been unfit for human habitation for upwards of twenty years.[57]

Overall though, these settings, whether supernatural or simply unfamiliar, cannot be Gothic without a reaction from (or a psychological disturbance of) a character or the reader.

Doors, windows and gates are also very important as they symbolise some sort of movement or change (although all novels tend to be about movement and change to a certain extent). These feature very prominently in many Gothic stories, particularly *Wuthering Heights* in which characters are often locked in or out and thus denied

movement or social change, and in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* where the mysterious Mr Hyde enters and leaves Dr Jekyll's house by a rear / side entrance so that he will be less likely to be seen and will thus remain hidden (and true to his name).

Regarding the settings, we could again divide these texts into two distinct types of Gothic. Many of them, particularly the older texts, are set in foreign countries; usually Catholic European countries (with obvious political or religious importance) which many of the authors were familiar with through travel but which most readers in the past may only have known through literature. In more recent novels the settings may not be so unfamiliar to the reader but are still chosen for particular effects. Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, for example, has three main settings: London, St. Petersburg and Siberia; each city more remote and isolated than the last and offering a statement on the characters and their lives and relationships. The physical journey from place to place represents the mental and emotional journeys of the characters.

Other settings form a part of our own world (whether now or in the past) but are still alien from it. Fairgrounds, circuses (Dickens' *Hard Times*, Carter's *Nights at the Circus*) and amusement parks (Highsmith's *Strangers on a Train*) all fall into this category. Theatres and the stage are also used in a similar way. These settings are unfamiliar aspects of the familiar world. They can exist within the most ordinary of places but as soon as we enter them things appear strange and the people unusual. This technique was also used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In *Hamlet*, for example, the actors giving a performance of "The Mousetrap" are providing us not only with a 'play within a play' but with a 'world within a world'. More recently this technique could be more useful in another way as the wider world is now more recognisable to the readers; there are fewer places likely to be completely alien to the reader so smaller, more mysterious communities or worlds have to be created in order to evoke the same response.

Some locations obviously evoke more fear or discomfort in the reader than others and this is often (at least partly) affected by the reaction of the characters themselves. Stephen King outlines the 'bad place' as one of the main basic elements of modern horror[58] and this is also applicable to Gothic texts. The 'Bad Place' in horror (and Gothic) could be seen to refer to one of two very different things. Firstly, it might represent an actual physical location as it does in *The Shining* and in other haunted house stories. Furthermore, the 'Bad Place' can also be seen to represent a metaphorical place or a place within the self, be it that of the author or of his

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characters.

In Dean Koontz's novel entitled *The Bad Place* there are several such places, some metaphorical and some actual. The novel mainly centres on Frank Pollard, a man who teleports, unwittingly. He fears learning the truth behind his power and about where he actually goes when he teleports. He is afraid to go to sleep (the world of dreams is itself a Gothic realm) because he may have dreams or nightmares, because he may teleport and because he is being pursued by an unknown assailant. It becomes obvious that his abilities are linked with his past and he thus fears visiting the 'bad place' in his mind as much as he fears visiting the 'bad place' where he goes when he teleports. A parallel story in this novel concerns Thomas who has Downs Syndrome and lives in a care home. It becomes apparent that Thomas has the ability to sense things and to see things that are going to happen, or as Stephen King might put it, he has 'the Shining'. He continually speaks of the 'bad thing' and 'the bad place'. For Thomas, 'Hell is a bad place but death is *the* bad place.'[59] It is a place he fears and from which there is no return.

All of these settings conform to stereotypes or conventions which the reader easily recognises. M R James saw this as of vital importance. He said a writer should establish a setting that was:

> fairly familiar and the majority of the characters and their talk such as you may meet or hear any day. A ghost story of which the scene is laid in the twelfth or thirteenth century may succeed in being romantic or poetical; it will never put the reader into the position of saying to himself 'If I'm not very careful, something of this kind may happen to me.'[60]

Characters

Most of the characters in Gothic texts conform to a stereotype and are often extreme exaggerations, sometimes to the point of caricature. Michael A Morrison summarises the characters of classic Gothic as follows:

> The classic Gothic novel featured the vampire, the eternal wanderer (Melmoth and his literary kin), and the 'thing without a name' (Frankenstein's monster and others). The late-Victorian short story gave top billing to the revenant and

the human monster Jekyll/Hyde.[61]

We could add to this the equally stereotypical Gothic figures of heroine, hero and villain, the last two of which are often combined within the same character (an anti-hero in some respects). The hero is often insecure (sometimes to the extent of paranoia), usually upper middle class and, rather than rescuing the heroine, often appears to be in need of rescue himself. Weak heroes can be seen almost as feminine characters and are marginalized as such.

According to David Punter:

> The villain is always the most complex and interesting character in Gothic fiction, even when drawn with a clumsy hand; awe-inspiring, endlessly resourceful in pursuit of his own opaquely evil ends, and yet possessed of a mysterious attractiveness, he stalks from the pages of one Gothic novel to another, manipulating the doom of others while the knowledge of his own eventual fate surrounds him like the monastic habit and cowl which he so often wore.[62]

Punter fails to point out, however, that the villain is usually aristocratic and/or of foreign origin. All of this considered, we have the perfect description of any number of Gothic villains including Schedoni (*The Italian*), Rochester (*Jane Eyre*) who is both hero and villain, Falkland (*Caleb Williams*) and Dracula. Others such as Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*), again both a hero and a villain, have their origins remain a mystery throughout the novel. We speculate as to where Heathcliff comes from and, later in the novel, where he gets his wealth. This enigmatic quality makes him simultaneously more heroic and more villainous and much more attractive to us as a character generally. Like the Gothic genre as a whole, it is the mysterious and unknown aspect of these villains that makes them more frightening. We fear what we do not know or understand. The Gothic villain always has control of his surroundings and this is, of course, linked in with his social class. Hence, Heathcliff is not a true villain at the beginning of *Wuthering Heights* and it is only when he obtains wealth and property that he can become truly villainous.

The social standing or class of the villain is, of course, inextricably linked with the social and political context of the text as Punter realizes when he describes the

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vampire as 'a fundamentally antibourgeois figure' and 'a participant in a myth produced by the middle classes to explain its own antecedents and its own fears.'[63] He goes on to explain how this has changed and developed over time by saying:

> The vampire in Polidori is capable of 'winning'; by the time we come to Stoker's version almost a century later, he is defeated by the assorted forces of science, rationalism and ethical conformism. He is a rebel, not by virtue of turning from society, but by having pre-dated it; he is the unassimilable aspect of the past.[64]

Developments in the social, political and scientific worlds have thus led to developments in these fictional characters.

It is, however, the heroines and female characters generally who provide perhaps the most interesting and complex Gothic characters. In these texts, women are usually either seen as typically weak (the damsel in distress and others) or are marginalized or undermined because of their strength. Pure, innocent, virginal women survive to the end of the novel whereas women with loose morals or sexuality must always be seen to be punished. Jane Eyre and Mina Harker (*Dracula*) both fall into the first category and, whilst we may argue that they are weak in many ways, they demonstrate feminine strengths in other ways, particularly in protective and maternal ways (which are acceptable as they are not a threat to masculinity); to help others and not themselves. Their counterparts (Bertha Mason and Lucy Westenra) are, by contrast, wild, rebellious and sexual women. These women must be seen to be punished by the end of the novels in order to maintain the social equilibrium. The degree of strength these women demonstrate could affect the reception and success of the text as a whole as well as the reputation of the writer. The poetry of Christina Rossetti provides excellent examples. Rossetti attempts to conform and to make a social statement simultaneously. Spinsters and fallen women appear throughout her poetry but often in slightly altered guises. Generally her heroines choose to stand alone and those who choose love and either marriage or romance usually find disaster and unhappiness. In 'Goblin Market', Rossetti's story of temptation, fall and redemption, the goblins' power over the women comes ultimately from the women's own (erroneous) belief that the goblins have something the women need in order to make themselves complete. Here, Rossetti relocates human value in reproduction and motherhood and it is only

when Laura and Lizzie accept these roles that they can be truly happy and fulfilled.

Gender role reversal is quite a common feature of Gothic literature and is often linked with family life. In *The Italian*, for example, Vivaldi's father is the more protective and maternal parent who sends people out to look for his son whilst his mother is the frightening, aggressive, patriarchal figure. Families feature heavily in Gothic but never in the completely traditional sense. Parents particularly are usually either ineffective or absent altogether and it is this poor parenting which often has adverse effects on the other characters. Victor Frankenstein does not begin his research earnestly until his mother dies and, indeed, she survives until chapter 3; quite an achievement for a Gothic mother! In the same novel *all* other mothers are absent (Mrs Beaufort, Mrs Lavenza, Mrs Clerval, Mrs De Lacey, Mrs Walton) and Victor himself is both mother and father to his creature. It could be argued that it is Victor's assumption of a female role, rather than anything else, which is his downfall.

Jane Eyre features a succession of mother-figures and families; the Reeds, with an absent father, and Lowood School, with only mother figures (Miss Temple, Helen Burns and others). Thornfield has a distinct patriarch in Rochester but Adele has no mother and the Rivers are parentless siblings. All the families in the novel which are predominantly female or headed by women are ultimately doomed to failure. Usually where mothers do exist in Gothic they are either weak and passive (such as Mary's 'ill' mother in Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction*) or are simply denied the opportunity to fulfil their maternal responsibilities (as with Wollstonecraft's Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*).

Relationships between characters are also a cause of uncomfortable and unusual feeling for readers of Gothic. They are often relationships which are untraditional or unexpected. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, for example, Maria's husband has her imprisoned on the (albeit false) grounds of insanity; a punishment for her unusual feminine strength, this is definitely not a traditional husband and wife relationship. We could look at the relationship between Rochester and his first wife (Bertha Mason) in almost the same terms. The husband and wife relationships in *Frankenstein* all seem quite incestuous; Alphonse marries Caroline, the daughter of his best friend; Victor and Elizabeth are brought up as brother and sister; Safie seems almost like a sister to Felix; and indeed, if he had not destroyed his female creature, Victor would have given her (his 'daughter') to his first creature (his 'son') as a 'wife'. Throughout this novel Victor continually forms close relationships with a male 'other': Walton, Clerval, the

creature and so on. All of the women in the novel are punished and eventually destroyed, probably because of their femininity and it is this very quality within Victor himself, which ultimately destroys him.

Many Gothic characters either mirror or double other characters and, in doing so, they reinforce certain character traits and the Gothic style generally. This also underlines the parallel nature of these texts. *Frankenstein* in particular is structured along parallels or in a circular way. The story ends where it began and the second half almost mirrors the first (the structure of *Wuthering Heights* is very similar). All the other male characters in *Frankenstein* can be seen as mirror images of Victor. Walton, Clerval and the creature all highlight different aspects of Victor's personality or ambition. His identification with his creature is of particular importance as, at a crucial turning point in the novel, their positions become reversed and the creature gains the upper hand.

In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester and St. John Rivers are compared with each other as opposing representations of masculinity. Jane herself is doubled by several of the other characters including Mrs Reed and Adele. 'Jane's actions are reminiscent of Mrs Reed and Adele's plight is reminiscent of Jane's own at Gateshead.'[65] Jane is, of course, also a double of Bertha. In particular, we can compare the scene where Jane is locked in the Red Room by Mrs Reed with Bertha's imprisonment in the attic. At Thornfield, both women have rights to and connections with the family but, at the same time, both are outsiders. Jane sees her own image in a mirror but does not recognise herself because of her lack of identity. When she sees Bertha she also misrecognises her for similar reasons. At the end of the novel, with Bertha dead, Jane is set to marry Mr Rochester, giving both herself and Bertha the same identity; that of Mrs Rochester. A similar technique was used by Mary Wollstonecraft in *The Wrongs of Woman* where the doubling of Maria and her jailer, Jemima, also serves to highlight class differences.

A very easy way to create a doubling effect is with the use of mirrors (as used in *Jane Eyre* and elsewhere and, perhaps most significantly, in *Dracula* where the Count allows no mirrors in his castle as he has no reflection and, therefore, no need for them) or portraits. *The Castle of Otranto* has a painting come to life, as does *The Picture of Dorian Gray* but to different effect. In *Frankenstein*, two pictures of Caroline Beaufort (Victor's mother) feature: the miniature of her taken from William's body and the portrait of her standing by her father's coffin, which hangs in the library in Alphonse's house as a constant reminder both of Caroline and of death.

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Mark Hennelly speaks of the 'double aspect of the self' in *The Moonstone*. We can see this particularly in Godfrey Ablewhite who, we are led to believe, is a good, charitable man whose dark side is released when he realizes the potential of possessing the diamond and who actually dies in disguise.[66] Another good example would be that of Franklin Blake who, according to Betteridge, has numerous different personalities and who actually steals the diamond whilst in a trance and 'not himself'. Each character in the novel that demonstrates this 'double aspect of the self' further complicates the multiple narrative technique. We could say that we have almost twice as many narrators as it would at first appear.

Narration

The narrator is a character often overlooked in Gothic literature. Often (although not always) written in the first person, the Gothic novel quite often takes the form of a journal (in the case of *Dracula*) or letters (*Frankenstein*, for example) highlighting the text as a reflection of, or comment on, real life. The readers are sometimes directly addressed (*Jane Eyre*). The story is often told from more than one point of view, all in the first person (Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) or in multiple frames of narrative (*Frankenstein* or *Wuthering Heights*). This type of narrative technique enables the author to use multiple viewpoints and flashbacks and forces the reader to rely on a narrator who may or may not be reliable. When the story is told via a circular narrative structure (such as in *Frankenstein*) not only do we have a potentially unreliable narrator to contend with. Here we have to consider the fact that the story is told through more than one (potentially unreliable) narrator at the same time. The story is thus filtered through several different perspectives before it reaches us.

In *The Moonstone* we also have many narratives within narratives such as that of Rosanna Spearman whose story, in the form of a letter, appears within the narrative of Franklin Blake. The way *he* reads her letter obviously affects how *we* interpret her part of the story. He also decides which parts we see and which we do not. For example, when he asks Betteridge to skim through the part of her letter concerning her suicide so as to spare himself the knowledge of the truth of her feelings[67], he also succeeds in concealing part of her narrative from the reader.

The two main narrators of *Wuthering Heights* each tell us a different part of the

same story and they are both situated (to some extent) outside the main story (one is a tenant, another a servant) whereas in *The Moonstone* all of the characters have some involvement in the crime and so hide a certain amount of truth from us. Many of the narratives here are telling us of the same events but from a different viewpoint. So whereas in *Wuthering Heights* we get a continuous story, in *The Moonstone* we are constantly rereading and reevaluating the same events and rather than gaining a more subjective view (as we might expect) we are continually misled. For example, Sergeant Cuff and Mr Bruff serve to 'throw the moral scales out of balance in opposite directions: Cuff, by offending the entire Verinder household with his suspicions of Rachel; Bruff by holding himself aloof from what he sees as the quackery of Ezra Jennings.'[68] In chapter III of Betteridge's narrative, Penelope and her friend watch the Indians through the hedge; this reflects the readers' view of the text as a whole; we are given a distorted view and never see things as they really are: a distinctive feature of the Gothic genre.

Themes

There are several major recurring themes in Gothic. These range from quite established themes such as romance (indeed, as Punter points out, *Caleb Williams* was the first English novel with no love interest[69]) to more recently developed ones. Nature and its power was perhaps the most popular theme of the Romantic poets, particularly as this is used to highlight political changes. Again linked with changing social context is the recurring theme of persecution (whether social, religious or psychological). Here Punter points our attention particularly to Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.[70] In some cases leading directly from persecution is the theme of flight and pursuit. The best examples of this are possibly *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein* (and also later Gothic novels such as Robert Bloch's *Psycho* when Mary Crane absconds after stealing her boss's money). These differ, however, in that Caleb is pursued because of something he *knows* whereas in *Frankenstein* first Victor is pursued (by his creature) and then the creature is pursued (by Victor), in each case because of something they have *done*. This style or theme adds an almost epic quality to these novels and allows the characters to travel long distances (usually over unknown territory) enabling them to transcend boundaries: physical, moral or otherwise.

There is much travel in Gothic, again highlighting movement and transition, not only of the characters but also of society as a whole. Sometimes the travel serves a particular purpose whilst in other cases it seems to be simply travel for travel's sake. *Dracula* falls into the first category as Harker must travel to Transylvania to tell Dracula about the house and then the Count must travel from Transylvania to England to take up residence in his new home and in order to spread his evil influence to another (more civilised and less superstitious) culture. Maxim De Winter in *Rebecca* seems to just enjoy travelling and is doing it for no particular reason, just as is Mrs Van Hopper to whom our heroine is companion. This highlights the social class of our characters and the age in which they lived. Constant movement or travel also serves to heighten the Gothic or unfamiliar aspects for the reader and works almost as well here as in texts such as *The Italian* years before.

Of course, in order to travel, one must have means of transport. These vary according to the date of the text but novels written in the last century or so seem to favour ships and trains: communal modes of transport. Dracula is the only surviving voyager to disembark from the ship from Transylvania whilst Walton (in *Frankenstein*) feels isolated on his ship despite being surrounded by crew members. Caleb Williams plans to escape by ship (as do Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*) but his plans (and theirs) are foiled. Older Gothic novels often feature the more traditional transport of horseback whilst more recent texts feature trains: perhaps most famously Patricia Highsmith's novel *Strangers on a Train* and even more recently Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. Transport again emphasizes movement or transition from one state to another as well as the changing nature of the world. It can also suggest an attempt to escape confinement or isolation such as in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction* where the heroine is attempting to escape the bonds of marriage and forge an identity for herself.

Frankenstein also has the theme of science, of course, which is again an implication of change or transition. Mary Shelley does manage to keep an element of mystery here, however, by not giving any details as to exactly how the creature is animated, thus allowing much interpretation by the reader and ensuring the timelessness of the novel. It cannot be rendered out of date by new discoveries in science or by the ruling out of any ideas. Furthermore, this is another example of the reader imagining something more disturbing and unnerving than anything that is actually written on the page.

Isolation is a theme of utmost importance in Gothic. It can refer to the physical isolation of a building or a setting where the action takes place (Wuthering Heights is a prime example) or the mental or emotional isolation of a character. There is nothing in the human mind quite so capable of rendering (or escalating existing feelings of) fear or terror as the feeling of being completely alone. In haunted house stories (from the earliest written to more recent ones on film) it is true to say that there is safety in numbers and only when the characters are alone do Gothic things really happen. It is also through isolation that the sublime is truly felt as in Shelley's 'Mont Blanc', for example.

Power and authority, of one kind or another, are frequently themes of this genre. Victor Frankenstein obviously aims to harness the ultimate power of nature and of creation. Heathcliff struggles and eventually gains power over those who mistreated him as a child. Melmoth gains power over life (albeit temporary) through selling his soul (as Faust before him in all his literary incarnations). All of these characters gain power only temporarily, however, and by the end of each novel, each has been defeated in an appropriate manner. Frankenstein is mentally tortured and dies in a deranged state; Melmoth's time simply runs out and Heathcliff dies and is reunited with Catherine.

Along similar lines Jane Eyre spends much of Bronte's novel searching for an identity and attempting to identify her rights. She loses one identity after another before identifying one that should have existed all along (and the rights to go with it). Similarly, in *Rebecca* the heroine is only ever identified as 'the second Mrs De Winter' or 'Maxim's wife' (the way she introduces *herself*) and is constantly overshadowed by Rebecca. It is only at the end of the novel, when Mrs Danvers (and the memory of Rebecca) is destroyed, that the heroine appears to have an identity of her own, or at least, the opportunity to create one.

Gothic themes are perhaps as stereotypical as the characters (or, at least, they have the potential to be so). Death is one of the most obvious themes and appears in several guises. The poetry of Christina Rossetti is filled with images of death and decay and these are written from a variety of viewpoints, including that of the deceased in 'After Death'. This poem is unnerving to the reader as it tackles a subject which is familiar to all of us but forces us to look at it from a viewpoint which is (as far as we know) impossible. Other poems by Rossetti are written from more the conventional perspective of the person left behind after the death of a loved one. The short stories of

Edgar Allan Poe also focus very heavily on this topic. In 'The Fall of the House of Usher' the decaying state of the house itself becomes a metaphor for the death and disease present in the Usher family. Poe even explores the even more Uncanny and unknown aspects of death by looking at issues such as premature burial and hereditary illnesses. Victor Frankenstein creates life out of death but is unable to prevent the deaths of his loved ones in the novel. The creature is responsible for some of these deaths but others, particularly that of Caroline Frankenstein, die natural deaths which cannot be prevented. Victor creates one life but becomes responsible for the deaths of many and when he destroys his female creature the laboratory resembles a murder scene.

Whilst the 'murders' in older Gothic texts are often ambiguous and not always proved (for example, did Heathcliff actually kill Hindley in *Wuthering Heights*?), those in more recent Gothic texts are often much more obvious and much more violent. Maxim De Winter kills Rebecca (albeit accidentally), Belloc-Lowndes' lodger is a serial killer resembling Jack-the-Ripper and Guy and Bruno plan and 'swap' murders in *Strangers on a Train*. In *Psycho* the murder scene is even more violent and frightening. Mary Crane is beheaded and this could be seen as an attack on her femininity, a complete destruction of her identity. There could be several reasons for this escalation in violence in Gothic but perhaps the most obvious is that audiences are much tougher nowadays and not so easily unnerved. Readers of Walpole and Radcliffe lived in a much less travelled and educated world. This century has seen two world wars and much destruction as well as development. Literature must keep up with this ever-changing world and Gothic literature must learn to turn it on its head in order to suspend disbelief and to shock its audience.

Possibly because the beginnings of Gothic coincided with such a crucial period of change and development, a major recurring theme is that of education, learning or knowledge. This is often forbidden knowledge, as in the cases of *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein*. These texts (written in an age when poverty and illiteracy were still quite common) suggest or imply that knowledge itself can be potentially quite corruptive. Delamotte questions what is actually meant by knowledge. She outlines two meanings: one in the sense of learning attained by education, scientific investigation, study and exploration; and secondly with regard to human intimacy, the confidence of lovers and friends: knowledge in the sense of sexual relations. She goes on to say that the two different definitions:

are closely woven in the Gothic romance, in which love, mystery and misery are so often the soul of the plot. The terrors of knowing and not knowing, the perils of the heart unable to make itself known and the heart exposed to the knower's gaze – all are aspects of the theme of knowledge as Gothicists explore it.[71]

It is clear, then, that however we define 'knowledge', there is something quite unnerving about it. Some Gothic characters know too much and are punished for it. Others do not know enough. It is, again, what we (or they) do *not* know which is terrifying. Our imagination fills in the gaps for us.

Gothic characters (especially women) are often denied access to certain knowledge or to education generally. This corresponds with Rousseau's view of the appropriate education of women:

> A woman's education must…be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what should be taught when she is young.[72]

Wollstonecraft structures *The Wrongs of Woman* in such a way as to highlight the injustice of this established idea. Maria is imprisoned by her husband and separated from her child. She is an intelligent and educated woman who continues to stimulate her mind whilst she is in prison by reading borrowed books. This novel is also structured as a letter from Maria to her daughter.

Letters are an efficient device used by Gothic writers to fill in gaps within the narrative (even to the extent of introducing completely new characters such as William in *Frankenstein*). They also, again, highlight the importance of education and learning as well as remind us that what we are reading is itself a written text. Many Gothic texts also refer specifically to, or demonstrate indebtedness to, other texts. *Frankenstein*, for example, has obvious references to 'Paradise Lost', 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and poems by Shelley, Wordsworth and others. Several other Gothic texts demonstrate similar levels of intertextuality. This fragmentation and changing, developing and

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reworking of existing literary ideas further adds to the already unsettling and uncanny nature of Gothic.

Atmosphere and overall effect

It is, then, the overall sensation gained from reading these texts which is the true meaning or definition of Gothic. The reader gains a feeling from these texts as from no other genre. It is not a feeling of absolute terror as is gained from horror novels or simply an air of mystery. Instead, the reader leaves a Gothic text having read of events and characters, which, in one sense are very familiar, and in another sense very *un*familiar. There is almost a feeling that such things can happen in our own lives and in the real world. Some Gothic novels do, of course, verge more on the horrific or Supernatural side and the effects of these are slightly different as these supernatural elements serve to exaggerate certain points. Everything within Gothic combines to evoke these feelings and reactions and so, whilst many aspects of Gothic are present in other genres also, it is their particular combination and the effect of this combination of elements that is relevant here.

Whilst at its most popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Gothic literature has been produced on a smaller scale and in many different contexts. The later texts are still distinctly Gothic, however, and it is because of this that Kelly Hurley says:

> Most critics have found it useful to retain an understanding of Gothic as a transhistorical genre. Its plot elements and setting may change, but its plots still remain exorbitant, piling incident upon incident for its own sake, and its settings are still overcharged with a fearsome and brooding atmosphere. The nature and social and clinical understandings of mental disorder shift as well, but the Gothic still shows a fascination with extreme behaviour and derangements of human subjectivity. The genre is about excess, Fred Botting argues in *Gothic*: excessive imagery, excessive rhetoric, excessive narrative and excessive affect.[73]

Gothic has similarities with many other types of writing or effects such as the Uncanny, the Sublime and the Fantastic. It is often concerned with the same (or very

similar) subject matter as Romantic writing. It also has many of the same stereotypical features as horror texts. Where it differs is in the combination of these features and in its overall effect on the reader. Rather than frighten, Gothic aims to draw our attention to certain things about the characters, the settings, the events (and even ourselves) and to make the familiar seem strange to us, thereby unsettling us. Gothic literature has been given many other labels over the years but is probably best summarized by quoting H.P. Lovecraft who said 'The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers.'[74] It is, therefore, not a fear of what is actually written on the page that unnerves us, but rather what we imagine *is going to happen*. A writer cannot possibly evoke the same reaction from every reader but by leaving a certain amount of information to the readers' imagination, we are all left to frighten or unnerve ourselves.

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3. German Expressionism and Early Gothic Film

With the development of film, the Gothic genre took on new dimensions. Though made in a different context to traditional Gothic novels and with the added visual (and eventually sound) elements, these Gothic films have many of the same features and elements as the earlier written texts and with much the same effect on the audience. Gothic films can be grouped into several main categories or periods, mainly German Expressionism (1910s and 20s); Universal horror films (1930s and 40s); the horror films made by the British Hammer studios (mainly 1950s and 60s) and the films directed by Roger Corman (also in the 1960s) and based largely on the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. There has also been a recent re-emergence of Gothic on film in the shape of films such as *The Sixth Sense*, *What Lies Beneath* and *The Others*. As with the earlier written texts, there is much crossing of boundaries between Gothic and other genres. The distinctions between Gothic and horror and Gothic and terror are largely the same as those discussed with regard to Gothic literature in the previous chapter.

One particular type of film also relates almost directly to the notion of Female Gothic:

> The Gothic woman's film was not established until the cycle of persecuted women or woman-in-peril movies of the 1940s. Repressed or paranoid, the persecuted woman is fearful of her husband's past or of an unseen malevolent male. Seeking explanations she becomes trapped in an old and gloomy building, where its mysteries only increase her fears. The castle or secluded house which had accommodated the fiendish devices and monstrous creations of the uncontrolled scientist or aristocrat – the erotic Gothic of the villain with power – became the unknown space of the terrified woman...Feminine space, the home, is denaturalised and presented as menacing. It is only rendered familiar through the revealing of a hidden past. Locked doors are to be opened, forbidden staircases to be climbed and histories explained.[1]

The films thus have the same subject matter as the earlier texts and also relate directly to Freud's definition of the Uncanny.

Although very similar, according to Misha Kavka's definition the Female Gothic differs from Film Noir on certain points. Firstly, the protagonist is female whereas that of Noir is male. Secondly, 'the *femme fatale* of the noir cycle reappears in Gothic film as the double or alter ego of the female victim / instigator…Gothic casts this into the zone of the supernatural.' Finally, 'the Gothic is played out in the space of a wider law rather than the law of the everyday', the latter being a feature we would naturally associate with Film Noir.[2] Michael Walker (in Ian Cameron) sees the main difference as being that Film Noir is 'a certain type of crime movie'[3], whilst Thomas Schatz sees Noir as very closely linked and indebted to Gothic Romance:

> The Gothic romance was [equally] important in generating the noir style and [that] Gothic noirs such as *Gaslight* (1944) share a close 'family resemblance' to hard-boiled noirs in both style and themes.[4]

Spicer elaborates on Schatz's comment when he says 'As film noir continued into the 1950s, it became dominated by the male-orientated crime thriller, but the importance of the Gothic romance to early film noir is immense.'[5] All of these films share the presence of a flawed protagonist. They also share an overall atmosphere with the traditional Gothic texts.

One of the major overall effects of Gothic on the audience (both in literature and on film) is suspense. Suspense is a distinctive feature of some (though not all) Gothic texts. Gow argues that 'cinema is a medium that can induce suspense more readily than any other' and that suspense can be built up on film by showing 'merely the killer's hands or feet, close to camera, and thereby impact the ultimate in tension and mystery.'[6] He goes on to say that:

> the key figure in a suspense film is very often isolated and vulnerable. This person's dangerous solitude can be evoked quite strongly through the mise en scène, and the setting is a major factor, enclosing the potential victim in an atmosphere of latent menace.[7]

All of the elements of Gothic discussed in the previous chapter combine to make the audience react in a particular way. In many ways the plot itself is irrelevant; it is the technique or mode of presentation which is most important. The ultimate

examples of this are the films of Alfred Hitchcock, the 'Master of Suspense' who, above all, attempted to give the audience a feeling of tension and terror, often not by telling or showing but simply by implying something. This all seems to suggest that it is in the individual human mind where the terror actually lurks. What is frightening or disturbing to one person may not be to another, so by leaving some events up to the imagination of the individual viewer the effect can be both more overwhelming and more universal. Hitchcock's films therefore concentrate on what is in the mind rather than what is on the screen and by showing that it is in the mind where the real terror actually lurks. Although Hitchcock may have been the master of this he was not the first. He was predated by other directors, perhaps most importantly the German Expressionists.

Although most critics agree on the origin of the term ("'Expressionism' was first chosen in opposition to 'Impressionismus'"[8]) defining the actual concept has proven to be a little less clear cut. The trend within film demonstrates an obvious indebtedness to a very particular style of art and literature which had been in existence for several years but, according to Kracauer, 'acquired a public only after 1918'.[9]

Elsaesser writes that Expressionist films:

> mix popular, romantic and thriller fantasies based on novels by Hanns Heinz Ewers, ETA Hoffmann and Dostoevsky, with elements derived from the vogue (which had already peaked) for Expressionist motifs in the established arts such as painting and the theatre. Examples of these motifs were stylization of the décor, extreme artificiality, effective lighting design (lights and shadows), stereotypical characters and exaggerated acting.[10]

However, it is the term Expressionist, seemingly chosen for its specificity, which seems to cause confusion for some. According to Robinson:

> Particularly when the term is applied to the theatre and cinema [however], there is semantic confusion about the word Expressionism, succinctly analysed by John Willett, the term, he explains, has varying meanings which differ according to the context (and to some extent the country) in which they are used. Expressionism then is normally:
> 1.a family characteristic of modern German art, literature, music and theatre,

from the turn of the century to the present day;

2. a particular modern German movement which lasted roughly between 1910 and 1922;

3. a quality of expressive emphasis and distortion which may be found in works of art of any people or period.[11]

Depending upon which of these definitions we most readily accept, our identification of particular films which we could label as Expressionistic may vary. In his 1979 article 'From Caligari to Who?' Barry Salt gives a brief outline of German Expressionist film:

> Six films made between 1919 and 1924: namely *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), *Genuine* (Wiene, 1920), *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (K. H. Martin, 1920), *Torgus* (H Kobe, 1921), *Raskolnikov* (Wiene, 1923), and *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (Paul Leni, 1924). These are the only films in which most features are indebted to Expressionist painting and drama. The only arguable addition to this list is Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926)...There is a fairly small number of other films that have one or two features derived from Expressionist art and drama, in particular Expressionist acting from a leading player. But does one raisin turn a suet dumpling into a Christmas pudding?[12]

Although these films are seen by most as the main films of the Expressionist movement, most critics do not see these six as the only ones. F W Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1921) and *The Last Laugh* (1924) and Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) and *The Last Testament of Dr Mabuse* (1933) (amongst others) also demonstrate many of the same features as the six films mentioned by Salt and so could also be seen as Expressionist. Above all this disagreement seems to rest on variations in actual definitions of Expressionism:

> What's called Expressionist film mainly reflected common tastes and preferences among this remarkably tightly knit community of professionals – no more than two dozen names – who operated as teams and skills networks. With the exception of Fritz Lang, Murnau and a few others, the directors were no more than first among equals, with the set designers probably leaving the

most lasting impression on the look of the films.[13]

The directors themselves often seem unsure:

> Like Paul Wegener, who always insisted that his film *Der Golem* of 1920 was
> not an Expressionist film as many of his critics maintained (mainly on account
> of Poelzig's sets), Lang rejected the suggestion of an Expressionist influence on
> his films. As President of a round table on Expressionism arranged in 1960, he
> would say 'What is Expressionism? Neither Brecht nor I was ever an
> Expressionist'.[14]

Similarly, whilst *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* is often regarded as the first Expressionist
film, Eisner recognises that 'Expressionist effects existed in films long before *Caligari*.
This was not the first valuable film to be made in Germany'.[15]

German films from this period could be regarded as a reflection of public
mentality; an address or appeal to an anonymous multitude.[16] They were also
suggestive of mass desires.[17] However (and perhaps partly because of this) they were
not universally popular in their own time. They are now held in high esteem and have
been a strong influence in the film world for many years. S.S. Prawer expresses this
very well when he says: 'Like any genuine work of art, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* has
its roots deep in the society of its time; but its significance, its appeal, and its influence
far transcend its origins'.[18]

Context

The timing of the arrival of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* was also very
important. Pre-war German cinema lagged behind that of the rest of Europe and most
successful films shown in Germany before the First World War were imported from
France, Italy, America and Denmark. The war cut off this supply, however, and:

> all film imports except from Denmark were officially banned early in 1916 – at
> precisely the time when demand for films escalated dramatically. With the
> resulting boom in domestic film production, the number of film companies
> grew from 30 in 1913 to 250 in 1919.[19]

Although this explains the sheer number of films made, it does not really explain the content or style of these films.

The emergence of so many films in this style, along with the sudden increase in popularity of Expressionistic art and literature, suggests that conditions in Germany at that time provided a receptive audience. After the First World War Germany was crippled by reparations, had lost many of her richest territories and had an extremely high level of inflation. Unemployment was high, overcrowding was common and social unrest was a constant threat. Cinema is always a good source of escapism but in Germany during this era it was also (perhaps primarily in some cases) a reflection of social, economic and political conditions. Ott supports this view when he says:

> Expressionism was yet another manifestation of the chaotic conditions which prevailed in Germany in the immediate post-war era. The Expressionist painters, sculptors and literati rejected the imitation of external reality in order to express the inner self or some essential vision of the world. As an artistic movement, German Expressionism antedated the First World War and can be seen to have crested with the collapse of the empire in 1918 and the social revolution which followed.[20]

Although as Salt points out, the earlier movement 'had nothing whatever to do with Hitler' (1979, 119), the rise of the Nazi Party in the 1920s and the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor (or at least the changes effected by these events) can be seen to be reflected in the later Expressionist films. Indeed:

> The rise to power of Nazism can only have made Lang increasingly aware of the viciousness of mob enthusiasm: this may indeed be the inspiration behind the false Maria's rabble-rousing of the masses in *Metropolis*.[21]

These references became less subtle as time wore on and some of the later films (particularly those made by German directors *outside* Germany) made more direct references. For example, *The Testament of Dr Mabuse* can easily be read as 'a thinly disguised picture of the Hitler menace'.[22]

The rise of the Nazi Party caused changes for many directors and stars

personally. Lang left Germany as soon as Goebbels suggested that he make Nazi propaganda films. Jensen suggests that alongside his own beliefs, 'Lang also feared that Goebbels would discover that his mother had been Jewish'.[23] Lang left behind in Germany his wife, Thea von Harbou (a member of the Nazi Party), who had collaborated on most of his films up to this point. This, along with the general influence of his new American surroundings and access to different actors, sets, etc., could also account for any major changes in style or content in Lang's later films made in the USA.

Other conditions and events can clearly be seen as influences on specific films. For example, when considering influences on *Nosferatu*, Thomas Elsaesser points to 'the winter of 1919-1920 [when] a Spanish flu epidemic and famine hit Germany, ravaging the country and reportedly killing more civilians than the Great War itself.'[24]

As well as their social and political context, there was much inspiration for Expressionist film. These influences came primarily from art and literature, of course. This was by no means a coincidence, particularly with regards to F W Murnau who (as Eisner tells us) was originally trained as an art historian and: 'whereas Lang attempts to give us a faithful reproduction of the famous paintings he sometimes uses, Murnau elaborates the memory he has kept of them and transforms them into personal visions.'[25] For different filmmakers, art provided inspiration in different ways. Firstly:

> Since in those early postwar days the conviction prevailed that foreign markets could only be conquered by artistic achievements, the German film industry was, of course, anxious to experiment in the field of aesthetically qualified entertainment. Art assured export, and export meant salvation.[26]

As well as art, Lang was strongly influenced by architecture. Lang actually trained as an architect (as did his father):

> But although he rejected architecture as a career, Lang's contact with that field prepared him for Expressionism and its creative use of physical surroundings. This was particularly – though not exclusively – true of his silent films made during the so-called 'Golden Age' of German cinema.[27]

This can be seen very clearly in *Metropolis* where in many respects Lang can almost be considered an architect himself through his overseeing of the design and building of sets and the geometrical positioning of bodies and structures. He is also highly admired for his documentary techniques[28] that are indebted to artistic and architectural influences.

Where the subject matter was not an area of his expertise, Lang (like many other directors before and since) did thorough research:

> As field research for *M* Lang spent 8 days in a mental institution; he had also known and studied many murderers, supposedly including Peter Kurten, who alone had killed about 10 people in the period around 1925. Real criminals were used in certain scenes, resulting in a high turnover rate among the extras; a total of 24 cast members were arrested during the filming.[29]

Robert Wiene needed to do no such research for *Caligari* as it is commonly known that his own father went quite insane towards the end of his life. Wiene used his own personal knowledge and experience of the condition in his filmmaking.[30]

Themes

With regard to the theme or subject matter of these films, as with the Gothic there is often an element of the supernatural or an implication of it that is later explained in everyday terms. Again, however, Salt disagrees to a degree here when he says (regarding the supernatural in Expressionism) 'it is surprising how little there was'. He goes on to say:

> Do ten films with a leaning to the supernatural out of a couple of thousand constitute a significant trend? (German production was well over two hundred films a year right through the 1920s). To be fair, these supernatural films were more successful with the public than the Expressionist films which, with the exception of *Caligari*, nobody wanted to see at the time.[31]

Salt thus also differentiates between Expressionist films and those with a supernatural or implied supernatural theme although I would argue (along with many critics) that

these two overlap considerably and are not simply two distinct types of film. German Expressionist films (in their subject matter at least) thus correspond directly with their earlier Gothic literary counterparts. Within these supernatural plots such subjects as demonic possession were addressed and S.S. Prawer discusses this at length, particularly with regard to *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.[32]

Many Expressionist and Gothic films have psychological rather than supernatural storylines and this again can be seen as a reflection upon the period in which they were made. Like those with a supernatural theme these can also be separated into two distinct (though linked) categories: films with psychological items or references and those that can be seen as manifestations of psychological states and can thus be analysed in terms of psychology. Kracauer says that '*The Blue Angel* and *M*...can be considered statements on the psychological situation of the time'[33], *The Blue Angel* because it 'stigmatized the peculiar vices of German bourgeois society'[34] and both films 'confirm...that in the wake of retrogression terrible outbursts of sadism are inevitable'.[35] *M* is Lang's personal favourite amongst his own films '*because* of the social criticisms it contains'.[36] The film overall has a psychological theme but certain aspects in particular can be seen as more relevant than others from this perspective such as the murderer's whistling which Eisner describes as 'both a motif and a psychological quirk'.[37]

There is, in these films, a very fine dividing line between the theme of psychology and that of madness. This is, perhaps, most obvious in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and particularly in the framing story which is, of course, told by Francis, a patient in an asylum. The sets in the film also both represent and reflect the madness of the character(s).[38] The climax of *Dr Mabuse* shows Mabuse going mad surrounded by the ghosts of his victims. Finally, both Caligari and Mabuse end up patients in their own asylums.[39]

The insanity of some Expressionist characters is expressed most clearly through issues of identity and particularly of false identity and loss of the self. In some films, most notably Murnau's *Sunrise* (perhaps not an Expressionist film overall but one that certainly demonstrates *some* features of the genre), the characters are not even named. Mabuse continually has new disguises so it is difficult for Lohmann (and for us) to identify his real self. Jenkins argues that in *The Testament of Dr Mabuse* 'identity means nothing because there is nothing to identify, there is only a plethora of signs'.[40] Jensen explains this further when he says:

> ...even though Mabuse is a specific individual, he remains a general
> anonymous force through his ability to change identities, which penetrate all
> levels of society and allow him to hide behind innocent and unsuspected
> facades.[41]

Mabuse loses himself in the confusion. In the Mabuse films and in *Caligari* distinct identity is also lost through the use of hypnosis. Consider the character of Cesare who has no personality or identity of his own and simply does Caligari's bidding. Lorre's character in *M* is also essentially without identity and the search for Beckert is perhaps the search for an identity. He is identified only when marked with a chalk 'M' and he seems to recognise *himself* only when he sees this mark reflected in a window.

In almost a reversal of this, Balduin in *The Student of Prague* (1926) has two identities. For Kracauer this represents 'a theme that was to become an obsession of the German cinema: a deep and fearful concern with the foundations of the self'. He explains this further:

> By separating Balduin from his reflection and making both face each other,
> [the] film symbolizes a specific kind of split personality. Instead of being
> unaware of his own duality, the panic-stricken Balduin realizes that he is in the
> grip of an antagonist who is nobody but himself.[42]

Not only can social conditions and social turmoil be seen as a direct influence upon these filmmakers, this also emerges as a major theme. This is, of course, more obvious in some films than in others. As Kracauer points out, Mayer and Janowitz were 'subjects of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy' and so 'were in a better position than most citizens of the Reich to penetrate the fatal tendencies inherent in the German system'.[43]

We can also see a reflection of social turmoil in *Nosferatu*:

> The horrors *Nosferatu* spreads are caused by a vampire identified with
> pestilence. Does he embody the pestilence, or its image evoked to characterise
> him? If he were simply the embodiment of destructive nature, Nina's
> interference with his activities would be nothing more than magic, meaningless

in this context. Like Attila, Nosferatu is a 'scourge of God', and only as such identifiable with the pestilence. He is a blood-thirsty, blood-sucking tyrant figure looming in those regions where myths and fairytales meet. It is highly significant that during this period German imagination, regardless of its starting point, always gravitated towards such figures - as if under the compulsion of hate-love.[44]

It is without doubt that the period in which these films were made was of considerable importance in Germany.

In *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (*Waxworks*), Leni, through the characters of Haroun-al-Rashid and Ivan the Terrible, manages to ridicule 'the manner of tyrants'.[45] It is also Kracauer who tells us of the programme brochure published by Decla-Bioscop for the premier of *Dr Mabuse* that describes the Mabuse world as follows:

> Mankind, swept about and trampled down in the wake of war and revolution, takes revenge for years of anguish by indulging in lusts...and by passively or actively surrendering to crime.[46]

These films are thus criticisms of their culture rather than just observations. They are, in many ways, remarks about authority, lack of authority and corruption of authority (here, the predominance of madness is again significant). Mabuse manipulates a corrupt system for his own ends[47], as does Caligari as the head of the asylum. This corruption is, however, surely seen most clearly in the kangaroo court in *M*.

Death and disease feature heavily in Expressionist films, perhaps linking with social criticism. Clemenceau said 'The difference between the Germans and other races is that the Germans have a taste for death, whereas other nations have a taste for life'.[48] (Eisner, 1973, 89). Whilst this is rather a sweeping, general statement, it cannot be disputed that death does indeed predominate in the German films of this era. Death even appears as a character, both directly in *Der Müde Tod* (*Destiny*), and indirectly in the dance of death in *Metropolis*.

Adding to the supernatural or surreal nature of some of these films is the theme, or subplot, of dreams. Sometimes the dreams are actual, such as in *Schloss Vogelod* (Murnau), although treated comically (according to Eisner[49]), or the doorman's

drunken dream (hallucination) in *The Last Laugh*, whilst other scenes or sequences are simply dream*like* through surreal or distorted images. *The Student of Prague*, for example, is, according to Ott, 'photographed in keeping with the theme of a fantasy.'[50]

Many of these films bear a strong resemblance (either directly or indirectly) to classic stories, for example, *The Golem* (*Frankenstein*), *The Student of Prague* (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) and *Nosferatu* (*Dracula*). Some can be seen as reworkings of fairytales, from the more obvious *Der Verlorene Schuh* (*Cinderella*) to the more simply fairytale-*like* films such as *Faust* or *Der Müde Tod*[51], whilst others are more closely linked with myths and legends, such as Lang's *Die Nibelungen*. This reworking or crossing over of genres is obvious in other films also such as *Metropolis* which succeeds in being both science fiction and horror.

Although many Expressionist films have an almost fairytale-like structure, this is not always the case. As with many Gothic novels, many of these films adopt a particular time frame that often consists of a back and forth movement of the story with much told in retrospect. Popular also is the technique of the framing narrative, 'a rahmenhandlung or conventional prologue and epilogue'[52], often using a central narrator who either may or may not be a character in the main story. This can perhaps be seen most clearly in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* where the framing story is set in the garden of the asylum. This emphasized the story as a 'madman's fantasy'[53] and thus has symbolic significance.

In *Waxworks* the framing story appears at intervals throughout the film rather than just as a prologue and epilogue and thus appears as a kind of story-within-a-story (drawing the audience's attention to the both the differences and the similarities between fact and fiction, as discussed in the previous chapter). Leni integrates his framing narrative and the character of the writer by showing the individual sketches of Haroun-al-Rashid, Ivan the Terrible and Jack the Ripper as emanating directly from the imagination of the writer, particularly the final story which takes the form of a dream and actually involves the characters of the writer and the girl.

This device is by no means peculiar to these films. It has been used in other films including later films by the same German directors (for example, Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door*) and also in films of more recent years. An example quoted by S.S. Prawer is that of *Dead of Night* by Cavalcanti, Dearden, Hamer and Crichton in which five stories are linked by a sixth framing story that appears intermittently throughout the film.[54]

A major theme is that of doubling. This theme emerges in several different ways, the most straightforward of which is simply one character doubled, mirrored or twinned with another:

> This dualism appears in many German films: Caligari is both the eminent doctor and the fairground huckster. Nosferatu the vampire, also the master of a feudal castle, wishes to buy a house from an estate agent who is himself imbued with diabolism. And the character Death in *Destiny* is also a traveller in search of land for sale. It would seem from this that for the Germans the demoniac side to an individual always has a middle class counterpart. In the ambiguous world of the German cinema people are unsure of their identity and can easily lose it by the way. Thus Homunculus, a kind of Führer, can even split his personality at will; disguised as a worker, he incites the poor to rebel against his own dictatorship. The same morbid taste for split personality is also found in Fritz Lang's two Mabuse films and *M*.[55]

Doubling in these films is also sometimes done in a more subtle and indirect way. In some cases the actions of a character are mirrored by those of another. For example in *Metropolis* 'Maria trying to force a skylight is counterpointed with Freder hammering at the door of the mysterious house in which Maria is held prisoner'.[56] In the same film we have Rotwang and Maria crossing the rooftops in much the same way as Cesare carried Jane in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*.[57]

Imagery

Another popular way of creating the doubling effect is with the use of mirrors. However, as we know, a mirror does not present reality but rather a distorted version of it. This is reminiscent of the hall of mirrors in the fairground (symbolically the setting for many Expressionist films and Gothic because they unsettle the audience with their uncanny nature). German filmmakers also used other things to symbolise mirrors such as windows, glazed doors, puddles, jewelled rings and so on.[58] Distortion is also reflected in *Caligari* in the setting and scenery (I will be returning to this later).

Doubling is taken to the extreme via the character of the doppelgänger and this is perhaps put to greatest effect in *The Student of Prague*. According to Frederick Ott,

Wegener got the inspiration for the film when he saw some comic photographs of a man fencing and playing cards with himself.[59] The source of this inspiration can perhaps be seen most clearly in Balduin's mock duel with his reflection in the mirror. Rentschler does not think the doppelgänger in *The Student of Prague* (1926) is convincing as Veidt plays the role of the mirror image too independently[60] although this perhaps indicates that Rentschler has missed the point. Mirrors were also used in the Edison Company's 1910 version of *Frankenstein* where Frankenstein sees the monster's image in the mirror instead of his own.[61] In both cases the doubling effect highlights the evil side of the characters. Kracauer has compared Beckert in *M* with Balduin as each character 'succumbs to his devilish other self'.[62]

It is not only mirrors which are used to create this effect but anything with a reflective surface. In *M* Beckert is seen reflected in a shop window whilst 'Paul Leni juggled with the numerous facets of the stone in a magic ring reflecting the face of the baker Assad in *Waxworks* in a dozen or so simultaneous images'.[63] Some directors, particularly Murnau, used mirrors and other reflective surfaces for an effect other than creating a doppelganger or dualled image. Murnau used these surfaces to filter and reflect light in 'an almost impressionistic way of evoking atmosphere'.[64]

Portraits are also frequently used in German Expressionist film (as in Gothic literature) both to create a doppelgänger effect and to introduce new (and absent) characters or new aspects of existing ones. A variation of this is the statue of Freder's mother in *Metropolis* as this is the only representation of her.

Just as writing and learning appears to be a major theme throughout much Gothic literature, the motif of writing itself seems to be a major one in Expressionism:

> Murnau's *Nosferatu* is full of writing and printing of various kinds, including the diary of Johann Cavallus from which the story is said to derive; Jonathan Harker's letter to Nina; the strange hieroglyphics in which Nosferatu and Renfield correspond; and the Gothic print in the book on vampires which Jonathan takes on his long journey and from which Nina learns how she can rid the world of Nosferatu at the cost of her own life. When Bruṣuel saw Lang's *Metropolis* in 1927, he was particularly impressed by the way in which writing was integrated into the movement of the film: 'Even the titles', he said, in a review that distinguishes admirably between the work's lyrical beauty and its

obnoxious fable, 'ascend and descend, twist round, dissolve into light and shade, fuse with the general movement - they also burn into images.' No one in fact has used lettering with greater virtuosity than Lang.[65]

This was done to great effect before, however, particularly in Wiene's *Caligari*. In *Caligari* there are several examples of letters and journal entries. Here, however, Wiene also employed a technique which was quite unique. As well as the intertitles themselves (often used quite sparingly in Expressionist films) words appear on the screen. The style of these words is quite abstract and distorted and they are meant to reflect the thoughts of Dr Caligari, a man whose own thoughts are themselves distorted from reality. In *Caligari* then, this lettering becomes part of the setting.

Many of the Expressionist directors believed that in order to make film a pure form they should be able to convey a whole message or story in a visual way and should not rely on titles. Murnau seems particularly skilled at this and some of his films have no titles at all, whilst *The Last Laugh* has just one. According to Wollenberg:

> They were convinced that if the film was to become an art in its own right, it was necessary to free it from the assistance of the word as such. The titles inserted in the silent film were obviously crutches. But the film should be able to walk on its own feet without the aid of crutches. In other words: everything, without exception, that the film had to say should be stated in visual terms.[66]

Others such as *Tabu* (technically *not* a silent film though displaying many of the features of one and not using very much sound) rely heavily on the use of letters within the film to fill in gaps left by the action. It is, of course, difficult to judge many of the silent films in the light of this nowadays as many have lost some, or all, of their original titles.

Settings

Expressionist settings are in some ways very straightforward and often very similar to those of Gothic novels. One of the most common is the stereotypical Gothic castle, ranging from the classical (in *Nosferatu*) to the completely Expressionistic (in

The Golem, for example). Other specific buildings include haunted houses (perhaps more popular later but appearing in this period in Leni's *The Cat and The Canary* (1927)), and the isolated and almost fairytale-like cottage such as that inhabited by Rotwang in *Metropolis*. Gunning tells us that:

> Harbou's novel describes the house as 'older than the town' and relates that it was built by the supernatural power of an evil magician. When modernisers tried to pull down the house, it responded with a malevolent power, killing those who attacked it. It remained as an ancient relic until the inventor Rotwang chose it as his home.[67]

Other buildings include madhouses and brothels, places of residence and business found in real life but which are still rather unfamiliar to the majority of people, despite our knowing of their existence.

The exact locations in some of these films are left very vague. The locale of *Sunrise*, for example, is extremely vague and could be no place and every place. To Eisner, the village looks 'completely German'.[68] The city in the film has English shop signs but is definitely *not* American in architecture.[69] Whilst the towns in *Caligari* and *The Golem* (1920) are obviously created specifically for the films and distorted in order to reflect the subject matter, Murnau managed to make an actual town (rather than a created film set) appear terrifying in *Nosferatu*.[70] There are also other, less realistic towns such as the Inca city in *Die Spinnen* that serves as a draft for the underground cathedral in *Metropolis*.[71]

More popular is the fairground. Prawer reminds us that the cinema itself originated in the fairground.[72] The fairground presents a distorted version of the real world and has magical and supernatural elements. This has a similar effect to the foreign (usually Mediterranean) and historical settings of the Gothic novel. The readers/audience are observing a world unreal and unfamiliar to them; a world which we recognise but which is different from our own and which we could not possibly live in. The events may not be unusual in themselves but the setting makes them seem unfamiliar. Kracauer says:

> Significantly, most fair scenes in *Caligari* open with a small iris-in exhibiting an organ grinder whose arm constantly rotates, and, behind him, the top of a

merry-go-round which never ceases its circular movement. The circle here

becomes a symbol of chaos. While freedom resembles a river, chaos resembles

a whirlpool.[73]

A similarly chaotic effect is gained from the movement of the revolving door in the

hotel in Murnau's *The Last Laugh*.

Paul Leni's *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (*Waxworks*) is entirely set in a

fairground in which the wax figures of various tyrants, misfits and murderers from the

past are animated by the writing of a visiting poet. The figures themselves (including

that of the poet) are stereotypically Gothic (either heroes or villains in turn) as are their

actions. The whole story is almost dreamlike and this can be seen to refer back to

Gothic novels as well as to the actual state of writing them (many of them were

influenced by dreams). Hypnotism, another major theme in Expressionism (*Caligari*,

Mabuse and others) also adds to the dreamlike atmosphere. Variations on this

fairground setting include the circus in Murnau's *The Four Devils* (see Eisner[74]) and

the café and amusement park in *Sunrise*.[75]

Theatres also feature quite heavily in Expressionist films. *Pandora's Box*, for

example, opens with a scene of backstage fever[76] and also has a view of the stage as

seen from the wings by the performers.[77] Jensen argues that the only Expressionist

scenes in *Dr Mabuse* are those in the theatre.[78] This is in direct contrast to Eisner who

states 'in *Dr Mabuse* the only genuinely Expressionistic feature is the restaurant with

its flame walls where Wenck and his friend have dinner'.[79] Some films, such as *The

Blue Angel*, have obvious links with the theatre, whilst others are slightly more

obscure. In later years, the courtroom in *Fury* could be seen as a stage, whilst movies

and movie audiences are recurring images in the film.[80] Salt points out that whilst

Expressionist film is indebted to Expressionist theatre, none of the books discuss its

features.[81]

Also as in Gothic, corridors and staircases are of utmost importance in

Expressionism (see comments in previous chapter, particularly regarding *The Lodger*

and *Jane Eyre*). Here they serve mostly the same purposes but with some significant

changes and additions. Lotte Eisner says:

Remembering the German fascination with *werden* (becoming) rather than *sein*

(being), it could perhaps be granted nevertheless that their staircases represent

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an upward movement, the degrees of which are represented by the stairs themselves. And we can perhaps infer from the striking German respect for symmetry that the symmetry of a staircase embodies ideas of balance and harmony.[82]

So, as in Gothic literature the staircase represents a transition or movement from one stage to another. In Expressionism, however, the staircase can also represent continuation or balance. It can thus be both a positive and a negative symbol. In *The Hands of Orlac*, the main character meets a mysterious stranger in a basement inn which can only be reached via a dark flight of steps. It is here that the truth of the mystery is revealed and the true murderer is unmasked.

M is full of staircases. In one of the opening scenes Mrs Beckman is calling her small daughter Elsie. She leans over the top of the stairwell and calls her name. We see the shot from Mrs Beckman's point of view from the top of the stairs. She sees the flights of stairs endlessly winding downwards into the darkness. This is just like the chaotic whirlpool of the fairground merry-go-round all over again.

In the previous chapter (on Gothic literature) I said that often characters are confronted by something evil at the top or bottom of stairs and that attics and cellars are particularly Gothic and mysterious because they are at the very top and very bottom of stairs respectively. These highly Gothic notions transfer with very little change to Expressionist film. In *M* the angry mob track the child murderer to an office building which they then proceed to search for him. They believe he is in the cellar (he is, after all, the lowest of the low: a child murderer) but he is actually in the attic. Once the child murderer is caught he is taken by the mob to the cellar of an old distillery where he is given a mock trial.

The sets and scenery of Expressionist films are highly reminiscent of the art that inspired them and often give a very surrealist feel to the whole film, again making things unreal or unfamiliar for the viewer. In *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts* 'the sets and even the faces and costumes of the actors were striped or spotted in white and dark tones.'[83]

This distortion of reality is taken several steps further in *Caligari* where the whole set (buildings, streets etc.) is totally distorted in shape. Roofs all point in different directions and edges of buildings are sharp and triangular in shape. Windows and doors (themselves Gothic symbols: see comments particularly on *Wuthering*

Heights in the previous chapter) do not sit flat and straight on walls but rather are angular and point in strange directions. This Expressionist architecture can be seen as 'translations of a madman's fantasy into pictorial terms'.[84] The distortion of the background and of the characters' actions reflects the distortion in Caligari's own mind.

In *Nosferatu* many of the houses have this same pointed, angular style but here the set was not contrived and created. Murnau filmed on location in real German towns and with the use of lighting and camera angles managed to make these houses and streets appear terrifying. In *Metropolis* we find almost the opposite. The houses in the workers' city are shaped like boxes or cubes with tiny square windows and doors, symbolising that the workers are trapped and isolated from the outside world. Even in the world above ground the buildings are symmetrical and nothing differentiates one from another (perhaps suggesting that Lang's vision of the future was that no one would be free from the trappings of capitalism and industrialisation). The only exception to this is Rotwang's house underground. He is the only one who really asserts any independent thought or action and seeks to be free of his surroundings. Overall, settings are usually on a vast, or at least larger than average, scale. In *The Student of Prague* (1926), for example, the sets appear heavy and pompous through the use of high ceilings and satin curtains.[85] Nature, however beautiful in some cases (*Die Nibelungen* or *The Student of Prague*, for example), is usually threatening, whether because it is deserted, or it is claustrophobic, such as in the case of the Odenwald forest in *Siegfried*.[86]

Characters

The characters in German Expressionism are often traditional, almost stereotypical Gothic characters and as such can often be seen to be very exaggerated. Heroines, for example, are frequently presented as the stereotypes of virgin or whore. We see this from Kriemhild who is 'idealized, almost deified'[87], to Pabst's Lulu whom Eisner describes as 'like some pagan idol'.[88] Some women seem very vulnerable, such as Countess Told in *Dr Mabuse*: 'a neurotic, bored, heavy-lidded, hypochondriac, disappointed in love and possibly rather frigid, orchid-like and thus the ultimate in smartness according to the styles of the time'.[89] Others seem incredibly strong, for example, Maria in *Metropolis*. Some, like Ellen in *Nosferatu*, seem stereotypically

weak but are eventually heroic and thus fit the stereotype of the Gothic heroine.

Mothers and mother-figures also feature frequently in these films. Maria in *Metropolis* is not only a Madonna figure and therefore associated with religious connotations[90], but also the idealized mother. Jenkins explains: 'the threat surrounding the figure of Maria is very explicitly a threat against the law of the father.'[91] In the existing versions of the film Freder's actual mother is absent and represented only by a statue. He is, like many Gothic heroes, without a positive maternal influence and his behaviour is shaped accordingly.

Other female characters are much less wholesome and identified particularly by their sexuality. In *Pandora's Box* 'the lesbian, in order to save her girlfriend, is forced to seduce the fat acrobat[92] and so is forced to deny her own sexuality and to be controlled by a man in a very stereotypical way. Other women, on the other hand, attempt to *take* control by means of their sexuality. Eisner points to the recurring femme fatale who ruins men, particularly in Lang's films[93], whilst, describing the vamp from *Sunrise*, Fischer says:

> Since the term 'vamp' derives from the word 'vampire', it is not surprising that she resembles Murnau's Nosferatu – magically summoning the man with her whistle, hovering over his neck as she kisses him, and slinking off at dawn when the man is reunited with his wife.[94]

Fischer also sees this as relating to the 1920s figure of the flapper, 'an archetypal metropolitan female of the 1920s...suggesting urbanity, female independence [and the] aftermath of suffrage.' This woman is 'non-productive...unlike the wife/mother'.[95] This female figure, like the sexually aggressive Lucy in *Dracula*, has to be removed in order for the social equilibrium to be returned to normal.

The heroes in Expressionist film are equally stereotypical. They often resemble the typically weak Gothic hero: Hull in *Dr Mabuse*, for example, or Hutter in *Nosferatu*, who has no control over his surroundings[96] and who is ultimately saved by his wife. Gunning also says of Freder in *Metropolis*, 'for an archetypal hero he is amazingly ineffective'.[97]

Often there are doctors or scientists in these films or variations on these characters (the teacher in *The Blue Angel* or Rotwang the inventor in *Metropolis*, for example). Often this is the central figure and usually the villain of the piece, perhaps

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suggesting that there is not only power, but also a danger in knowledge (a theme pursued in many Gothic texts, particularly *Frankenstein*). Prawer describes Caligari and others as a combination of scientist and mystic.[98] In *Nosferatu*, of course, we have the Van Helsing figure of Professor Bulwer but as Prawer points out, attention is deflected away from him and towards the woman.[99] As several critics have noted, Caligari's appearance and movement match his surroundings[100] and demonstrate or reflect that he is morally twisted.[101]

Often, as with the Gothic, the most fascinating figure is that of the villain. Here, he appears in many guises, and none of them very subtle. Death becomes personified as the ultimate villain, particularly in *Destiny* where he is the villain from whom there is no possibility of escape. Lang also has many characters that can be seen as almost the equivalent of Death:

> tyrannical male figures whose actions instigate narratives which threaten the fulfilment of desire, with the latter signified by and embodied in the relations between a young couple.[102]

The most obvious of these is the figure of the Grim Reaper in *Metropolis*. Other typical villains, particularly in Lang, are master criminals, possibly a sign of the times. Returning to the theme of religion (which recurs in many of these films), Eisner says of Mabuse:

> Mabuse can be seen as a tragic figure, a fallen angel; and it was not accidental that Lang in one scene puts him beneath the picture of a giant Lucifer, lit by the firelight as if by flaming phosphorus. Lang recognises that Dr Mabuse could only have been invented in Germany, the country of kadavergehorsam (absolute obedience), where Nietzsche's idea of superman was born .[103]

Where there is a villain there has to be a victim. Obviously this is often a female character as previously discussed. However, Cesare (*Caligari*) is the ultimate victim despite the fact that his actions appear, on the surface, to be those of a villain. He is silent, uncommunicative, has no personality or free will, and is completely controlled by Caligari. In many ways he is the ultimate passive (even stereotypically feminine) figure.

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Like Mary Shelley's creature, many characters that seem frightening or to have evil or unpleasant intentions often evoke feelings of sympathy from the audience. The Golem looks imposing but will be a saviour; Cesare is zombie-like but acts out Caligari's will, not his own. Prawer says that Cesare is 'a monster but also pitiable and lovable.'[104] Both of these characters are outsiders and strangers in town, marked by idiosyncrasies.[105]

Rotwang is a mad scientist (and thus a deviation from the norm) and the whole story here is almost a reworking of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. *Metropolis* is also a direct comment on the state of society. The robot-like movement of the workers echoes the rhythm of the machines. Much of the movement of the characters in *Metropolis* consists of large groups or crowds moving as one, suggesting that people in modern societies have no individuality and no control over their own lives or destiny. The movement of Dr Caligari consists of twists and turns reflecting the cracked and crooked aspects of his own nature as well as that of his surroundings. Prawer sees the figure of Cesare (the somnambulist who leaves Dr Caligari's cabinet nightly to seek his next victim) as the forerunner of later horror film characters such as the zombie or the robot (also seen in *Metropolis*):

> He is a human being robbed of an essential part of his humanity: his consciousness and his will. He is a human dreamer forced, by a malevolent agency, to lose himself in a dream.[106]

In this way Cesare is also the descendent of Gothic characters such as Frankenstein's monster or the vampire. Above all, this is the figure of the stranger or outsider.

Mise En Scène

Of course, film has dimensions that literature does not and so whilst German Expressionist film has many of the motifs and features of Gothic literature many of these are expressed in different ways or have added extras. One major feature of German Expressionism is the use of light and shadows. Harry Alan Potamkin describes this as the German cinema's 'major contribution to the cinema'.[107] It is commonly agreed that experiments in this field began with Max Reinhardt but that he was not the only source of inspiration. Eisner points particularly to Reinhardt's use of darkness

between scenes.[108] Reinhardt conducted an experiment on the stage just before *Caligari* in a production of *Der Bettler* (*The Beggar*) which was described as 'one of the earliest and most vigorous manifestations of expressionism – he substituted for normal settings imaginary ones created by means of lighting effects.'[109] With the use of light, directors were able to give an impression both of depth and of sound, particularly in *Metropolis*.[110] The use of light and particular camera angles can also have the effect of significantly changing the scenery.

The use of shadows is perhaps the Expressionist technique most often commented on by critics. Shadows are used to terrific effect in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* when Alan is murdered only in shadows, and in *The Student of Prague* (1926) when Scapinelli's shadow supernaturally expands to reach a note on the top of a wall much taller than himself. Perhaps one of the most famous examples is from *Nosferatu* when Count Orlok is seen climbing the stairs to Ellen's room, his long, bony hands pointing the way, all in shadow. All of this serves to take us back to a Gothic world in which terror lurks in the unknown of shadows.

The acting styles / techniques of Expressionist actors were also very much inspired by Reinhardt. Many of the most famous actors (including Werner Krauss, Emil Jannings and Conrad Veidt) came from his troupe.[111] Many of the actors knew each other, therefore, and often we find the same actor playing similar roles in several Expressionist films. The actor brings with him his own reading or interpretation of the role and in this way almost acts the role of author or narrator (as does the director of course). We also often see different scenes from the point of view of different characters and in this way the film (Expressionist or otherwise) could be compared with the type of novel (Gothic or otherwise) in which the author has employed a multiple narration technique. With regards to the acting itself Salt says: 'There was in fact an explicit theory of Expressionist acting, according to which broad and slow gestures amplified the actions communicated to the audience, and gave them time to think about the emotions being felt by the characters in the play.'[112] Further to this:

> A major theme on which variations were played by Expressionist actors was the use of the shoulders: held raised a little throughout by Werner Krauss in *Caligari*, held pushed forward by Ernst Deutsch in *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, pushed right up around the ears by Paul Wegener in *Vanina* and so on.[113]

This amplified and exaggerated style of acting draws attention to things that perhaps might otherwise be missed by the audience. For example, in *The Hands of Orlac* Conrad Veidt is repulsed by the hands (his own hands, or at least, those that have been transplanted onto his body) he believes have murdered and he holds them up in a very unnatural manner.[114] This is almost reminiscent of Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* who is almost forced to hold out his own hands in a strange way because of his large, bony fingers and pointy, misshapen nails.

Nosferatu also features another specifically Expressionistic style, that of the forward movement of the actors towards the camera to create an atmosphere of horror.[115] Eisner sees this as a feature of Murnau's films particularly – that he 'gives dimension to his symbols by varying the shooting angles.'[116] Pabst had a slightly different style – he concentrated on close-ups and faces in particular.[117]

Murnau's use of the camera does appear to have been debated, however. Whilst Eisner says 'all Murnau's films exploit the possibilities of panning, tracking and high-angle shots to the full'[118], Salt contradicts this entirely by saying that there is 'hardly any camera movement in Murnau's films'.[119] This perpetuates the theatrical experience; each member of the audience sees only one stage from one viewpoint. Although angles are very important the movement of the camera is not always so vital. With regard to Murnau's films, both Eisner and Salt are correct, depending upon which films they refer to. Murnau used both techniques and for very different purposes.

Although most Expressionist film is highly visual we must not forget the other dimension of sound. Eisner describes the 'language of Expressionism' as a telegraphic style of short phrases and exclamations and of symbols and metaphors, 'intentionally obscure, designed to be intelligible only to the initiated'.[120] She also says that sound is perceptible throughout *Sunrise*[121], referring to the use of a synchronised soundtrack incorporating a musical score and sound effects. Murnau also conveys sound to us through the use of visual images and this, in itself, can be very unsettling for the viewer.

In *M* the sound is particularly complex. The murderer makes himself known to us by his constant whistling. Here Lang draws attention to the significance of sound. For example 'as Lorre is fleeing towards the building where he will go to earth, a fire-engine clangs noisily past. In the next shot the entry into the building is empty and silent.'[122] Overall, *M* is highly reliant upon sound. In one scene we hear Lorre's voice

but he remains off screen.[123] This has quite a similar effect as when an actor is on the screen but their voice is dubbed and thus coming from elsewhere. It is disjointed and can be quite disturbing. Other filmmakers preferred to continue to rely on almost purely visual techniques, even after the development and general introduction of the sound film. Murnau's final film *Tabu*, for example, is more like a silent film despite being made and released in 1931 when the 'talkie' was very much in vogue.

Most of the other techniques employed by Expressionist directors are peculiar to the medium of film. Most of these films were made in black and white, but with the use of lights, shadows and mirrors many different shades of black and white can be created. Some of the Expressionist directors used tinted prints and some (limited) colour technology was available at the time. It is unlikely that directors today could achieve the same results with the use of modern colour film (perhaps Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho* could be seen as a case in point).

Everything in Expressionist film then, is done to give a feeling of uncertainty and terror to the audience. Prawer summarises this as follows:

> The most frequently tested means of harnessing the spirit of place to terror is that of suddenly transforming the familiar into the strange. This can be done in many ways -from focusing, as so many German filmmakers did, on huge shadows thrown by everyday objects, on to the walls of a stairwell or room, to that sudden cracking or softening of walls, that opening of blocked up doors, which makes the urban apartments of *Repulsion* or *Rosemary's Baby* so uncanny. The part that the opening of a door or gate, the appearance of apertures where there were none before, play in mystical and fairytale texts may serve to suggest some of the archetypal hopes and fears on which the makers of terror films have been able to draw.[124]

We can thus see that in many ways the German Expressionist film is a direct descendent of the Gothic novel. It gives a feeling of the macabre, uncanny and supernatural in the same way as Gothic writers did as well as using effects common to the theatre. Through all of this and the actual choices of plots and stories Expressionist directors provided us with the earliest examples of Gothic on film. Like Gothic novels, these films are influenced heavily by social context (here, mainly the after-effects of

the First World War). They concentrate on the madness of society and of individuals. Through distortion and similar techniques German Expressionist films (like Gothic texts) are able to reach areas of expression closed to realism and to evoke a particular emotional response from the audience.

Notes

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[15] Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, London: Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1973, p.39

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[23] Paul M. Jensen, *The Cinema of Fritz Lang*, London: A. Zwemmer Ltd., 1969, p.104

[24] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Six Degrees of *Nosferatu*', p.13

[25] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.98

[26] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p.65

[27] Jensen, *The Cinema of Fritz Lang*, p.9

[28] Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, p.89

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[32] Prawer, *Caligari's Children*, p.171

[33] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p.215

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[35] Ibid., p.222

[36] Jensen, *The Cinema of Fritz Lang*, p.95

[37] Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, p.123

[38] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.29

[39] Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p.148

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[80] Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p.225-226

[81] Salt, 'From Caligari to Who?', p.171

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[83] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.29

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[90] Jenkins, *Fritz Lang*, p.84

[91] Ibid., p.83

[92] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.140

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[94] Fischer, *Sunrise*, p.41

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[98] Prawer, *Caligari's Children*, p.173

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[103] Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, p.61

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[108] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.48

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[112] Salt, 'From Caligari to Who?', p.120

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[114] Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p.45-47

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[119] Salt, 'From Caligari to Who?', p.122

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4. Silent Hitchcock

Alfred Hitchcock began working as a film director in the 1920s. Several of his critics (including Barr[1], Ryall[2] and Spoto[3]) point towards a strong influence from German Expressionist directors working in the 1920s and in the decade before. Hitchcock was a regular cinema goer in this period and probably viewed many of the major films by these directors which were screened in London theatres by the Film Society. In his teenage years, Hitchcock was also an avid reader of detective fiction, penny dreadfuls and, particularly, the works of Edgar Allan Poe.[4] Much of Hitchcock's early reading and film viewing was thus of texts with established Gothic features and atmosphere. Whilst working on *The Blackguard* in the UFA studios Berlin in 1924, Hitchcock watched F.W. Murnau filming *The Last Laugh* in a nearby studio and he himself acknowledged the influential effect that this experience had on him. From this, Hitchcock gained insights into set design and the idea of purely visual cinema.[5]

Themes

The Pleasure Garden marked Hitchcock's full directorial debut and whilst not a thriller it does display some of the style and trademarks that were later to make Hitchcock's work so immediately recognisable. The film was shot in 1925 in a Munich studio and on European locations and was an Anglo-German co-production between Gainsborough and Emelka. Although made in Germany the film displays only some of the features most common to German films of the period and, indeed, in many ways seems more American than German, particularly with regards to the nationalities of the people involved in making the film, though there are some Germanic overtones in the film. The two female stars were American (Virginia Valli and Carmelita Geraghty), 'the script-writer was English, the cameraman was Italian (the Baron Ventimiglia) and the art directors were respectively English and German.'[6] Added to this, of course, were the English Alma Reville and Alfred Hitchcock himself. The film is partly a moral tale and partly a romance (or perhaps more accurately, an anti-romance).

Downhill is an overtly Gothic film with regards to the theme, the setting *and* the characters. This film seems most obviously to fall into the sub-category of

Psychological Gothic. On the surface it is the story of a young man who takes the blame for a school-friend's misdemeanour and subsequently sinks into despair and poverty. To a certain extent the misdemeanour itself seems unimportant and this is possibly why Hitchcock fails to tell us exactly what it is. We assume Roddy is accused of getting the waitress pregnant but the accusation could just as easily be of some kind of theft; we are reminded of the little boy who bought much more than his penny's worth of goods and of Roddy keying the wrong amount into the till. Mabel, the waitress, also mentions money in her accusation. Rohmer and Chabrol also refer directly to a theft.[7]

The Ring is another of Hitchcock's films that does not appear to be overtly Gothic but which does demonstrate particular features and motifs of the genre. This is, quite simply, the story of a love triangle. The hero, Jack, suffers because he is innocent and naïve. He cannot see that his fiancée is in love with another man and he marries her in this state of ignorance.

The Manxman fits the description of both Gothic Romance and Female Gothic and is essentially the story of a love triangle. The situation involves three very different characters who all suffer because of their actions or lack of action. The themes of the film do go much deeper than this, however, and include what Yacowar describes as 'a tension between moralist and passionate romantic'.[8] In this sense this film has obvious links or similarities with The Pleasure Garden that was also partly a moral lesson on the dangers of love and romance. Patsy, a chorus girl, befriends Jill and, through her, meets Levet whom she marries. Levet goes to the Far East to make his fortune and whilst away he has a romantic liaison with a native girl. When Patsy visits unexpectedly, Levet's secret is discovered: he drowns the native girl in the sea and then, in delirium, attacks Patsy. Patsy is rescued and has a potentially happy future with Hugh, Jill's former fiancé. On the surface this is the complete story but there is much more to it than that.

Isolation, of one kind or another, appears to be a predominant theme in many of Hitchcock's silent films. Despite their marriages, for example, the four characters in The Pleasure Garden seem to remain individuals throughout and are constantly isolated from each other, something that is emphasised much further when the action of the film moves to the Far East and thus becomes more geographically isolated also.

In Downhill, Roddy becomes increasingly isolated and rejected, partly because of the changing locations and partly because of the companions and jobs he chooses.

He (and the audience) is unsettled even further by the predominance of deceit or pretence as a major theme. Perhaps one scene that unsettles us the most is the first scene in the theatre. We assume that Roddy is a waiter but when the focus of the camera widens we learn that he is actually an actor playing the part of a waiter. The characters deceive each other as well as us. Yacowar refers specifically to the lie on which Roddy's decline rests when he says that 'in showing Mabel's lie on the same literal level as the 'facts' of the film, Hitchcock commits what was called a mistake in *Stage Fright*, giving a lie visual embodiment.'[9] We could say that this was not a mistake and that Hitchcock does this to further unnerve his audience.

Settings

The Pleasure Garden is the name of the theatre where Patsy, and later Jill, works. This immediately sets the ironic and pessimistic tone because, as Yacowar points out, the theatre hall is 'neither a garden nor a pleasure'.[10] The film opens with a shot of chorus girls descending a spiral staircase to the stage, perhaps making rather negative or pessimistic comments regarding the theatre or the stage itself as moving down a staircase can often imply a symbolic or moral, as well as a literal, descent. The fact that this is a spiral staircase perhaps suggests chaos or a certain lack of control. The girls are thus perhaps seen as rather common or 'flighty'. Our own perspective is brought to a similarly low level. The camera angle is high and is brought down to look at the action first from the wings of the stage and then directly at the audience. The fact that the action begins with a show in the theatre and only *then* moves to the real lives of the performers perhaps suggests that real life is not actually real at all and that appearances can be deceiving. This theatrical theme is continued throughout, even in scenes not set in the actual theatre itself. Patsy's room is behind a curtain, backstage so to speak (as is Levet's house in the Far East later). As soon as we know we are in a theatre watching a performance we are shown the audience. Surely in a setting of this kind we would expect the focus of attention to be the performers? The audience consists of men, mostly middle aged and middle class, who are leering at the girls on the stage rather than simply watching them. These early scenes highlight class distinctions and establish gender roles. They also serve to give a viewpoint which we would not normally expect and to reverse the roles of performing and real life. The film's audience is thus unsettled from the start.

The theatre is a world within a world, typically used in traditional Gothic texts. It is both part of the real world and totally separate from it at the same time. It is when these two worlds become intertwined that events (and characters) become confused and chaotic. Events only take a really dramatic, even Gothic turn when the action relocates to the Far East. Although the exact location (and nature of Hugh and Levet's work) is left ambiguous, this is a very unfamiliar setting in which the characters (and audience) are a little out of their depth. Caruthers becomes the heroic figure (rather unexpectedly as we have only seen him briefly up to this point). None of the characters (or the settings) are ever what we expect.

Throughout *Downhill*, Roddy travels from one location (and one adventure) to another learning things about himself and about human nature generally. This is a feature of various Gothic novels from *Caleb Williams* onwards (though it is also a feature of other genres). His story begins in a very traditional environment (his school) where he is protected and kept in a state of blissful ignorance. The school itself is on a grand scale and has examples of traditional Gothic architecture (particularly in the headmaster's study and in Roddy and Tim's room), a style also prominent in the Berwicks' house (or at least in the parts we see). Next we find Roddy working as an actor at the theatre (itself a Gothic setting as previously discussed). However, the only parts of the theatre we see (apart from the stage) are dressing rooms and we can directly contrast Roddy's with Julia's. The differences between the two highlight the class and social differences / distinctions (Roddy has sunk down the social scale somewhat by now) and also demonstrates Julia's recklessness and frivolity.

The settings reflect Roddy's inner turmoil and his feelings generally and it is this that gives them a Gothic atmosphere. Roddy's lodgings further demonstrate how low he has sunk. His room is small and dark and is reached via a steep and narrow (and equally dark) staircase. (The apartment he buys after he marries Julia is quite the opposite of this; large, spacious and full of light. It also has Gothic features similar to those of the school, particularly arched windows). Next we see Roddy in a music hall working as a gigolo. The room has artificial light and the curtains are only opened when there is an emergency.

Perhaps the most obviously Gothic place we see Roddy in is his room at the Marseilles docks. This is a small room, sparsely furnished. It has a sloping roof and long shadows are thrown on the wall. It is a room highly reminiscent of scenes in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Nosferatu* (as well as Mrs Bunting's room in *The Lodger*).

From here, Roddy is taken below deck on board ship, another dark and mysterious place in which characters from his past who have wronged him come back to haunt him, just as Mabuse's victims came to him.

There is a predominance of staircases in this film and with obvious significance. At school, Roddy and Tim seem only to ascend staircases, they never *de*scend. When Tim leaves the headmaster's office we don't follow him so we don't see him descend the stairs on the way. However, when Roddy leaves, in disgrace, we watch him descend these few stairs and then, a little later, the whole staircase. Tim follows Roddy to halfway down the staircase but goes no further. This tells us that Roddy descended morally and socially and that, to a certain extent, so has Tim who is, after all, responsible and had descended somewhat in Roddy's (and our) esteem. Roddy next goes to the underground and literally descends in the lift. We watch from behind as he moves further and further out of shot. Later, after leaving Julia and Archie, Roddy again literally descends in the lift. His expulsion from school and the sudden break-up of his marriage are the two biggest upheavals of his life and the effects are highlighted by these physical descents. Roddy does *as*cend in between these two events, of course, when he goes upstairs to his lodgings. This shows us that on the surface he seems to have found his feet and things are improving. This is also where he learns of his inheritance. However, this staircase is very dark and steep and has a mysterious and unpleasant atmosphere, suggesting, perhaps, that things are not as they seem and that something unpleasant lurks at the top. Indeed, the inheritance does not turn out to be the blessing it first promises. The next time Roddy ascends is when he climbs off the ship and on to the dock upon reaching England. This represents a conscious effort at self-help.

There are several settings in *The Ring* and most of them can be considered mini worlds or communities within the larger society. Primarily is the fairground, a sub-society or culture within the wider, everyday world (like the theatre in the earlier films). The film opens with scenes from the fair; swings, roundabouts, carousels, stalls and sideshows. The fairground is a place the audience recognise but do not live in every day; it is both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. The people who live in this community are much more likeable and honest than those who invade it from the outside world (like Bob, for example) and in this way they resemble both the circus community and the people in the freak show in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* who are perhaps the most 'normal' and well balanced characters in the novel. On a

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smaller scale the boxing ring itself is a world within a world. It is also a type of stage upon which Jack and Bob give a performance to an audience. Like in a theatre there are also dressing rooms where the 'players' prepare for their performance and go to recover afterwards. This is a transition stage between the place of performance and the outside world.

The theme of isolation (one that features regularly in Gothic texts) is reflected particularly in the setting of *The Manxman* and reflects the feelings of the characters. Although filmed in locations in Cornwall and Hertfordshire[11] the film is set entirely on the Isle of Man. The island setting and the small community (who do not seem to communicate with each other for the most part of the story) serve to emphasise the isolation of the main characters. The characters are not saved by success either; as Yacowar points out "even status isolates".[12] The gap between the two main characters, Pete and Philip, is widened when Philip becomes more successful. Other settings include the old mill (a family home on a grand scale, isolated from all others: a variation on the Gothic castle), Philip's office (large, impersonal and isolated from other people), the courtroom (full of unfamiliar and threatening faces) and the houses in the village (small, uneven and almost reminiscent of those in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, although not so extreme).

Characters

In many ways, the characters in *The Pleasure Garden* are typically Gothic. At first the film seems to have two heroines: Patsy and Jill. When we first see Patsy she is in the chorus on the stage. Our attention is drawn to her because the camera, giving us the perspective of one of the men in the audience, gives us a close-up iris shot of her. After the performance the man comes to talk to her backstage and compliments her on her kiss curl which she promptly removes and gives to him. We learn that she is not blonde as she first appears and her behaviour is not what we would expect. Far from being a timid, passive character, she appears to be quite strong and outspoken from the beginning. Patsy is thus like a Gothic heroine who is actually quite strong despite first appearances (Jane Eyre, for example). In contrast with this is Jill who appears at first to be the archetypal weak heroine.

Jill first appears outside the theatre and hesitates before going inside. As she stops, a man steals a letter from her bag. This is a letter of introduction which she

needs in order to speak to the theatre director. The theft is necessary to prove (to us) that the letter did actually exist and thus to establish Jill as an honest and trustworthy character. We assume that she is stereotypically feminine, that she is weak and in need of protection, and it is at this point that Patsy steps in as her protector, almost a mother figure.

Back at Patsy's home we learn more about both of the girls. Firstly we meet Patsy's dog who, it seems later, is a very good judge of character. Jill tells Patsy her story but we only learn parts of it. As the girls undress, at opposite sides of the room, they are both filmed quite differently. We see Patsy in full screen whilst Jill appears in an iris shot from the shoulders up. This perhaps suggests that Patsy is up front and confident whilst Jill is secretive, shy or dishonest. Even their nightwear shows the contrast between them. Jill wears a nightdress and appears typically feminine whereas Patsy wears pyjamas which makes her appear more confident and somewhat obscures her gender identity (she appears to be rather tomboyish). When Jill says her prayers she again seems innocent and vulnerable but this view of her is confused when she cruelly kicks the dog away for licking her foot.

Jill initially seems innocent and vulnerable and is quite likeable, possibly because of these qualities. She quickly changes and becomes more confident, however, and at her audition she is arrogant and conceited. She becomes outspoken and confident, bargaining for a higher wage. During Jill's audition our attention is again distracted. For the most part of the scene the camera does not focus on Jill but on those watching her. This scene also stresses the separation of performers and audience. Here we see the stage is separated from the seating by the orchestra pit and the two are joined by a plank, almost like a bridge. When Jill crosses this bridge to talk to Hamilton, the director, she also crosses several metaphorical boundaries (social and behavioural).

Jill never seems to talk to Hugh but we can only imagine that she must have changed since they became engaged. Jill eventually seems to become unimportant and disappears from the camera altogether. She appears to have been merely a kind of narrative device; she introduces Hugh and Levet to the story. In relation to Gothic traditions, she is also wild and rebellious and against stereotype so must be punished or removed from the story (like Jane Eyre's counterpart Bertha Mason, the 'madwoman in the attic', who eventually dies by throwing herself from the roof). She is quite unpleasant and in many ways can be seen as a villain.

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As Jill becomes more confident and changes from a likeable, seemingly innocent young woman, Patsy seems to lose her strength and becomes vulnerable and gullible. Unlike Jill, however, Patsy is never unpleasant. The two women are always opposites and many of the actions of one reflect those of the other. For example, on her honeymoon, Patsy prays for happiness. She seems totally genuine here whereas, in the light of her later actions, Jill's earlier prayers seem a little difficult to take seriously. Patsy also seems to become more stereotypically feminine later, particularly when she takes on the role of nurse to Hugh. It could be perceived that Patsy is punished for her feminine strength and needs to change in order to be accepted by society and particularly by men.

The female characters in *Downhill* also demonstrate stereotypical Gothic characteristics and are no less complex than those in *The Pleasure Garden*. There is an immediate contrast in the two characters of Mabel who flirts with Roddy and seems to make him nervous and Sybil Wakely (Tim's sister) with whom he comfortably chats at dinner and who is shocked when she accidentally sees him in a state of undress in the changing room. Sybil thus has the makings of a traditional weak heroine in need of protection whilst Mabel is more of a villainous character, the vamp who appears in the films of Murnau and Pabst.

Mabel is corrupt and flirtatious. She is also greedy and lies, accusing Roddy of the 'crime' as he has more money, money that we assume she never receives. Julia is slightly more successful. In the same way as Mabel, Julia uses her sexuality to her own advantage. She flirts, lies and cheats and only Roddy seems unable to see this. She continues to flirt with Archie in Roddy's presence and yet he doesn't notice. Like Mabel, she is only interested in his money and once that is gone, so is her interest in him. She is more the villain than Archie who seems more of a plot device (although he does seem to fit the stereotype of a Gothic villain) All the relationships in the film are untraditional and cause discomfort for the characters and the audience. They all consist of someone taking advantage of someone else.

We could also see the girl in *The Ring* as a villainous character although she causes trouble almost by accident and mainly because of her own inability to take action. She is a terrible flirt but does not seem to realise the consequences of her actions until it is too late. She serves primarily to pit the two male characters against each other and in many ways she has no identity of her own. Her personality is formed only by her relationships with the two men and she is not even named.

The central female character of *The Manxman* can also be regarded in certain negative terms. Kate suffers because of her own actions and it is hard to feel sorry for her when she so clearly takes advantage of Pete from the beginning. She never loves him yet still agrees to marry him, partly because she feels she can't refuse and possibly because she already knows she is pregnant, any husband is better than none and she knows that Philip will not marry her. Kate is thus hypocritical and manipulative throughout the film. She demonstrates many of the weak traits of a typical heroine. It is first her actions, then her lack of action, and finally her attempts to act to put things right that cause misery. Ironically, both Kate and Philip agree to keep their secret because they feel a duty to Pete and yet this did not prevent their actions in the first place (they were very close even before the erroneous news that Pete was dead).

The male characters in *The Pleasure Garden* perhaps have more obvious Gothic traits than their female counterparts. Hugh initially appears to be presented as the hero figure. He is handsome, kind and honest (and the dog is nice to him!); he poses no threat. He is weak and insecure and later is ill and needs help, thus making him, ultimately, a passive victim in need of looking after. He does, however, indirectly rescue Patsy via Caruthers, the real hero of the piece.

Levet appears to be a Gothic villain through and through. We suspect him immediately because the dog dislikes him. He is shifty and manipulative. Patsy is obviously attracted to him but perhaps because she sees him as a protective authority figure or possibly because of his mysteriousness. Yacowar actually describes him as a threatening father figure because of his age.[13] He is a villain reminiscent of Schedoni in *The Italian* or Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*. Patsy, who had appeared to be strong, confident and intelligent, seems to be taken in by him completely. As well as the dog's dislike for him, there are many other early indications of his unpleasantness. In particular, in a scene quite early in the film as Patsy stands by a wall Levet approaches her but he casts a huge, sinister looking shadow on the wall behind her before he even enters the shot, highly reminiscent of German Expressionism.

Neither Patsy nor Levet declare their love for the other; it appears to be a marriage of convenience. Indeed, Hitchcock focuses much more on the honeymoon than on the wedding. Here Levet changes (or begins to show his true colours, depending on your point of view), perhaps posing the question of why he married Patsy in the first place. He is unfaithful to Patsy, drowns the native girl, then attempts to kill Patsy and is shot dead.

The main character in *Downhill*, Roddy could be described as a typical Gothic hero. He is rich and handsome, he gallantly saves his friend (Tim) from blame (if his friend, or indeed either of them, were actually guilty), he is taken advantage of, is naïve and gullible and finally returns home and is accepted and saved by his father. At first Roddy appears to be a very strong and confident character but ultimately he demonstrates his faults and weaknesses. Initially he seems to 'save' Tim but finally becomes in need of rescue himself. He is, in effect, a Gothic hero in the fashion of Heathcliff, Jonathan Harker and others.

Tim, in contrast to Roddy, is from a poor background. His father is a clergyman and can only afford to send Tim to the school thanks to a scholarship. Tim thus has two distinct possibilities as a character from the outset. He can either be a villainous or corrupt character as are so many poor characters in classic texts, or he can be the pure and honest character who is revealed as a true hero. He is not as sophisticated, aristocratic or wealthy as a traditional villain. However, since we are led to believe that Tim has associated with Mabel on other occasions which we, the audience, have not been a party to (the main clue here being the box from the bunne shop) he is established as a secretive or possibly dishonest character even at this early point in the film. Furthermore, Tim is not seen again after Roddy's departure from the school and so has no chance either to redeem himself or to develop as a character.

The hero of *The Ring*, Jack, suffers because he is innocent and naïve. He is not simply another weak and ineffective hero, however, as he soon realises his mistake (albeit after everybody else) and takes action. He will, literally, fight for his wife. He fights fairly, however, and is a completely honest character throughout. Bob, on the other hand, is quite a manipulative and devious character. He seems suave sophisticated, wealthy and mysterious, not a typical *aristocratic* Gothic villain, but very different from Jack from the beginning. From the moment we see him he seems to have a hidden agenda. As far as the girl is concerned, however, we may assume that if she were his legitimately then he would no longer be interested. When he does lose her it appears to be no great tragedy to him. Bob is contrasted quite clearly with Jack on several levels. Bob is well dressed and has an established manager whilst Jack is quite poor and lives and works in a fairground. Bob is quite a well-known and established boxer whilst Jack is only well known in his own small community. Bob is also portrayed as quite intelligent (even if he does use his intelligence mainly for manipulation) whilst Jack appears to be quite lacking in intelligence; he is

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straightforward and down to earth as well as completely loyal. In very basic terms, we could see Jack as the hero figure who eventually triumphs in spite of everything. At first we despair of him because he is so naïve but we forgive him this later when he asserts himself. Bob is the villain of the piece. He is almost like a pantomime villain whom the audience boo and hiss at every time he appears. This exaggerated nature of his personality serves to highlight his unpleasant characteristics.

Pete has all the qualities of a distinctly heroic figure in *The Manxman*. He is a fisherman, honest, loyal and down-to-earth. He adores Kate and is not afraid to show this. He is also, later, a very devoted father. It is perhaps as a result of these qualities that he is in many ways a weak and ineffective hero. He is innocent, naïve and gullible and this enables his friend and his wife to deceive him easily. In many ways Philip is Pete's opposite. He is wealthy, sophisticated, selfish, secretive and disloyal, although we could say that he does not deceive his friend on purpose and he feels miserable as a result of it. His treatment of Kate cannot be excused so easily, however. He chooses his career and his own future over hers. He wants to have a successful career as a Deemster and to keep Pete as a friend (his only friend it appears) and can only do this by keeping the secret. It is ironic that as a lawyer (and later Deemster) he is the upholder of law and order and yet appears to have sinned more than anyone else. He begins the story as a potential hero and ends it as the villain.

Class distinctions or differences, along with the need to preserve tradition, are prominent throughout *The Manxman*. The three main characters are distinct from each other in terms of class / social standing. This is perhaps demonstrated to greatest effect by Philip's aunt (a substitute for his absent mother) who says:

> You were with that publican's daughter again today…it doesn't improve your prospects to be seen about with that girl…your father married beneath him – let his ruined career be a warning to you…don't spoil your future by a foolish entanglement – break it off while there is still time.[14]

It is possible, of course, that she is genuinely concerned for her nephew or that she may really have a reason to dislike Kate but it is more likely that she is a snob and has rather selfish reasons for her frank talk, particularly when she points out that "I've devoted my life to fitting you for the day when you become Deemster." Caesar seems

to have similar reasons for initially not thinking Pete good enough for Kate. When Pete returns with money and success Caesar changes his mind.

As in traditional Gothic texts, parents either do not feature or are ineffectual in these films. In *The Pleasure Garden* none of the main characters have any parents. Patsy, who seems the most well-balanced of these characters, has a landlord and a landlady who seem to be parental substitutes.[15] However, they are lacking in this role and do not appear to be a stereotypical couple. The landlady is a rotund and rather authoritarian woman who bosses her husband (they almost seem to be forerunners of the couple leaving the Blaney Bureau in *Frenzy* almost fifty years later). It is perhaps merely the presence of these parental substitutes that keeps Patsy quite grounded and sensible (in comparison with Jill and the two men), although their ineffectual guidance leads to her still making some mistakes.

There are two fathers and one father figure in *Downhill*. Both Roddy's father and the headmaster are stern and authoritarian. They both demonstrate pride in Roddy at the rugby match at the beginning of the film but are both very quick to believe in his guilt and to disown him. Both men are also keen to redeem themselves at the end; Roddy's father welcomes him home and the headmaster allows Roddy to play at the Old Boys' match (although this also benefits the school and so may be done for purely selfish reasons). Tim's father, on the other hand, is a clergyman and seems to be a less harsh figure than the other two men but Tim seems afraid of him (perhaps because of the nature of his 'crime'?). Early on in the film it seems that Tim has a lot more to lose than Roddy. The Berwicks' butler could also be seen as a father figure although with less authority. In a way he seems to be the central figure in the family home and twice he welcomes Roddy inside the house. His presence is also a very strong indication of the wealth and status of the Berwick family.

Maurice Yacowar sees these characters as typical of Hitchcock's British films marking a contrast with his later American films. He says:

> Hitchcock's British films in general offer harsh father figures while in his American films the mothers threaten the stability and comfort of the central figure. Either harsh parent serves to free a considerable anxiety.[16]

In many ways Roddy's father is mainly responsible for his downhill descent as he immediately believes in his guilt and rejects him. Roddy's mother is never given a

chance to help her son, and although she survives to the end of the film (unlike most Gothic mothers) she is very weak and ineffective. She is (with the possible exception of Sybil Wakely) the only woman not to take advantage of Roddy or his wealth.

Charles Barr is highly critical of *The Ring* particularly because of the lack of backgrounds and families of the characters.[17] These things are simply not relevant here. The fairground people are, in effect, their own family community and the unusual nature of this 'family' is one of the things that gives this film Gothic atmosphere. Jack's trainer is almost a father figure to him, for example when he puts a towel over Jack's face so that he can't answer awkward questions about his wife.

Mise En Scène

We are further unsettled by particular camera angles. For example, Yacowar refers to the incident in the taxi where Julia nudges Roddy's leg with hers and which we see from a perspective that could only be possible if the roof of the taxi was missing. Yacowar is mistaken here, of course, as it is actually Archie's leg that Julia nudges but the angle of the shot is still as relevant. Commenting on this scene, Ivor Montagu said:

> The apparent distance of the knees from the spectator was so great as to jolt the
> spectator out of engrossment, for he could not have seen what he saw unless the
> roof of the taxi had been removed.[18]

We are thus given privileged information but rather than giving us a feeling of control or power we are made to feel uncomfortable.

We are given a privileged viewpoint elsewhere in the film when Roddy sits in a chair in the forefront of the shot. His father in the background cannot see him and the audience are the only ones who can, quite literally, see the whole picture. This shot is almost reversed later when Archie sits in a similar chair in Julia's dressing room. Here, however, Archie deliberately draws attention to himself by smoking, drinking and generally making a lot of noise. Roddy later sits in the chair at his father's house again. Although the situation is rather different this time we are as anxious as he is as to what his father's reaction will be. Overall in *Downhill* the audience is made to feel

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uncomfortable throughout. We share some of the experiences of Roddy and we agonise because his naivety leads him into so much trouble and despair.

On perhaps a more Expressionistic rather than Gothic note, it is necessary to mention the use of light and shadows. Shadows are used to particular effect in *The Manxman* in the scene where Pete is about to leave to seek his fortune. He stands on the dock with Philip and we see the enormous shadow on the wall behind them of the steps up to the ship that Pete is to board. This shows the scale of the ship and also allows Hitchcock to show us two different things at once. The slightly sinister use of shadow here is also perhaps indicative that something unpleasant is about to happen. Lighting is used to wonderful effect throughout what is, in terms of theme and atmosphere, quite a dark film. The light mainly comes from the lighthouse and is a constant reminder of the remoteness of the island and the nature of its livelihood.

Imagery

Some of these films make use of specific motifs or types of imagery which link with traditional Gothic texts and serve to unnerve the audience in some respects. Some of the symbolism in *The Ring* is quite subtle. For example, the old and worn 'Round 1' sign is changed for the brand new 'Round 2' sign, signifying that Jack has never gone to two rounds with any opponent before. Another subtle motif is Jack's clothes that improve as he becomes more successful. The most obvious use of symbolism is perhaps the bracelet that represents several things including relationships, infidelity, sexuality, marriage and the boxing ring itself. One of the more overtly Gothic motifs, however, is the picture of Bob that the girl keeps on top of the piano. Pictures and portraits feature predominantly in Gothic texts and are used particularly as a means of focusing on a character in their absence. This is also a feature of other genres but in Gothic the presence of portraits tends to be linked with absence through death particularly and with strange, unpleasant or supernatural events. The Frankenstein family portrait gallery grows with every death in the family whilst the portrait in *The Castle of Otranto* comes to life. Overall there are several aspects of *The Ring* that unsettle the audience and create the type of atmosphere most usually associated with Gothic. This by no means can be said of the film as a whole but is certainly true of the setting and of particular character traits and plot motifs.

In *The Pleasure Garden* there are many symbols and motifs which are reminiscent of Gothic such as portraits (the one Jill has of Hugh, the one of Patsy on the mantelpiece), the use of staircases (particularly in the opening shot of the film) and particularly the written word (also a popular motif in German Expressionism), appearing in the guise of a newspaper article (announcing Jill's marriage to the Prince) as well as letters. The story also crosses other genres and particularly can be seen as a fairy story (possibly a sub-genre of Gothic in itself) in scenes such as where Patsy kisses Hugh and he suddenly recovers from his delirium; she is the handsome prince to his Sleeping Beauty (or Snow White or any number of others). Overall, despite first appearances, Hitchcock's first film has many Gothic features.

Many typically Gothic motifs also appear in *Downhill* and one that stands out, is letters. Letters are used frequently in classic Gothic texts, often to fill in gaps in the knowledge of the narrator or character. In *Frankenstein*, for example, Elizabeth writes letters to Victor to explain what has happened at home during his long absence and to introduce new characters to the audience. In *Wuthering Heights* a letter from Isabella is used to fill in the gaps in the knowledge of Nelly Dean (the narrator) as to what has happened at Wuthering Heights in *her* absence. In German Expressionist films they were used to similar effect and also to communicate information directly to the audience as an alternative to titles. In *Downhill* Hitchcock shows us several letters including one from Mabel to Tim (instructing him to meet her) and one from Roddy to Tim (found in his pocket at Marseilles). There is also the telegram announcing Roddy's inheritance, as well as various signs, a calendar, bills and so on. The written word generally is seen as a reliable source of information and here appears at significant parts in the film: Roddy's expulsion (and the reasons for it), his father disowning him, his inheritance, the loss of his money and his return to England.

Many of these early films have a dark and mysterious atmosphere, dealing with unpleasant aspects of life and human nature. The audience is made to feel uncomfortable by the subject matter and by the actions of the characters. Hitchcock draws our attention towards certain things by concentrating on specific motifs and by using particular camera angles and lighting. Many of the characters in these films conform to stereotypes of Gothic characters to give an overall effect of darkness, isolation and uneasiness, both on the screen and in the mind of the viewer.

Notes

[1] Charles Barr, *English Hitchcock*, Moffatt, Scotland: Cameron and Hollis, 1999, p.7-8

[2] Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, London and Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Athlone, 1996, p.81

[3] Donald Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock: The Dark Side of Genius*, Collins, 1983, p.69

[4] Ibid., p.39-40

[5] Ibid. p.68-69

[6] John Russell Taylor, *Hitch: The Authorised Biography of Alfred Hitchcock*, London: Sphere Books, 1978, p.42

[7] Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, translated by Stanley Hochman, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979, p.10

[8] Ibid., p. 85

[9] Maurice Yacowar, *Hitchcock's British Films*, Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977, p.46

[10] Ibid., p.26

[11] Barr, *English Hitchcock*, p.6

[12] Yacowar, *Hitchcock's British Films*, p.90

[13] Ibid., p.48

[14] Alfred Hitchcock, *The Manxman*, 1928

[15] Barr, *English Hitchcock*, p.27

[16] Yacowar, *Hitchcock's British Films*, p.47

[17] Barr, *English Hitchcock*, p.34

[18] Ivor Montagu, in Yacowar *Hitchcock's British Films*, p.45

5. *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*

Although the first of Hitchcock's films not to be filmed in Germany, *The Lodger* (1926) is the most Germanic in style and appearance and in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich 'Hitchcock acknowledges that the dominant influence on *The Lodger* was the German Expressionist school.'[1] The serial killer in the story is based loosely on Jack the Ripper and so atmosphere is invoked immediately. This also gives us a direct link to Paul Leni's film *Waxworks* ('which Hitchcock would have had opportunity to see when it was screened by the Film Society in 1925'[2]) that included a sequence in which Jack the Ripper pursued the writer and the young woman through the fairground in a sort of dream sequence. There are major differences, of course; particularly 'Leni's account of Jack the Ripper is all hallucinatory, expressionist fantasy, while Hitch's is clearly rooted, like all his later work, in everyday reality.'[3]

Themes

The Lodger is, without doubt, the darkest and most thrilling of Hitchcock's British films. It is also his most overtly Gothic. Set in London in the early part of the twentieth century, a serial killer is on the loose, preying on young blonde women. In the middle of a fog a man arrives at a house enquiring about rooms to let. He takes the rooms, befriends the daughter of the house and then becomes the chief suspect in the murder case. Saved just in time from a lynch mob, his innocence is proclaimed and a happy ending ensues.

The film is, primarily, an adaptation of the original novel by Marie Belloc Lowndes. The film is certainly more than just loosely based upon the novel although Hitchcock did make some major changes. The roles of the two main female characters undergo significant changes, and perhaps most dramatically the lodger himself, though eventually discovered to be the Avenger in the novel (although he escapes) is innocent in the film. The main reason Hitchcock offered for this was that his choice of actor, Ivor Novello, was a major matinee idol and could not be seen to be playing the role of a serial killer. This seems a little unlikely, however, as this surely would have shocked and unnerved the audience more successfully than anything else. Charles Barr offers an

alternative suggestion for this alteration. He points to the 1920s stage adaptation of the novel entitled *Who is He?* which Hitchcock saw. The lodger was innocent in this version also. Barr says 'it is hard to see that the film would be strengthened in any way by making him guilty.[4]

Hitchcock also brought more religious and mythological features to the text. Most critics point to the Christ symbolism of the scene where the lodger is chased and ends up hanging on a railing, trapped by the handcuffs he is wearing. Some, particularly Lesley Brill, also point to the Persephone myth and its reworking here. Brill says:

> The story of Christ, like that of Persephone, has to do with descent and return, death and resurrection. Its evocation in a narrative infused with these themes, then, seems consistent and appropriate.[5]

Characters

In the novel by Belloc Lowndes, the lodger is given a name, Mr Sleuth (which has certain connotations regarding his role in the story) but we learn very little about him and see nothing from his point of view. In Hitchcock's film, however, the character and his portrayal are quite different. We see things from his point of view on several occasions and are given privileged information about him that the other characters do not see. He still maintains an air of mystery, however, and above all throughout most of the film we are deliberately led (or misled) to believe that he is the Avenger. The lodger also has no name and is identified only through his status and his relationships with others (the Avenger, Daisy, the Buntings, Joe, his mother and his sister).

The lodger is rich, handsome and sophisticated and these qualities immediately make him the perfect hero figure resembling Mr Rochester from *Jane Eyre* or Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*. Furthermore, just like any traditional Gothic hero he is weak and ineffective. He failed to protect his sister and she was murdered in his presence, he is understandably suspected of crimes he has not committed and is powerless to stop the lynch mob from attacking him. Instead of catching the Avenger and rescuing Daisy (and the whole of London) from a serial killer, he has to be rescued himself, by Daisy and Joe.

The lodger also has many of the characteristics of a typical Gothic villain. He may not be *the* Avenger but he is certainly *an* avenger who, we presume, plans either to bring the Avenger to justice or (remembering the gun) to kill him. As Brill points out, 'for most of the film [he] has the air at once of a criminal and a gentleman'[6] and this proposed plan of action seems the culmination of this. He also diverts Daisy's attentions away from Joe as well as Joe's attentions away from the real Avenger who is captured by pure chance in the absence of all the main characters.

Our uncertainty about the lodger begins with his first scene. As he approaches the house (significantly number thirteen) we see things from his point of view, we approach the door with him. In a scene highly reminiscent of German Expressionism we see his shadow before we see him. The scene is dark, it is late on a foggy evening and even the inside of the Buntings' house is dark, the gas has dimmed and Mr Bunting needs to put some money in the meter. As Mrs Bunting answers the door our perspective changes and we see the strange visitor from inside the house. Our first view of him is therefore the same as Mrs Bunting's. However, there is not really much to see as he is completely muffled up, possibly (and quite simply) to protect himself from the cold, and possibly (a little more sinisterly) he is in disguise.

The lodger is firmly established in his rooms before anyone else in the family even sees him. He almost seems to hide in the shadows. For example, when Joe teases Daisy at the bottom of the stairs the lodger stands in full view on the landing watching the whole incident but he appears not to be seen by the other characters. He has very little luggage (only the mysterious black bag) and only goes out at night. In many ways he thus represents the traditional Gothic figure of the vampire and in his dual role of hero and villain he also seems like Jekyll and Hyde.

Rothman suggests that the lodger's link with the Avenger is seen firstly and most prominently when he looks out of the window and hears the newsboy announcing the latest murder.[7] The shadow cast from the window symbolically cuts the lodger's face in two, again suggesting two opposite sides to his character.

Rothman also refers to the 'death' of the lodger[8], which seems to symbolise the end of one part of his life and the birth or rebirth of another. We could regard this as proof that he and the Avenger are one and the same person and that this 'death' is that of the Avenger. A similar reading can be provided of *Frankenstein*; when Victor dies his creature still lives and we could regard this as simply the death of just one aspect of the character.

The Avenger *should* be the main villain of the story but we never actually see him because, as Rothman says, '*The Lodger* never tells the Avenger's story.'[9] However, without the Avenger there would be no story and so, in a way, even in his absence, he becomes a central figure. At the end we are told that he is caught but we never find out who he is and so his identity remains a mystery.

As well as forming a double with the Avenger, the lodger also has parallels with Joe. Joe also seeks the Avenger but Brill suggests that Joe expects 'personal profit and pleasure from his pursuit of the Avenger'[10]; it is his job and a means to an end; as he says, 'When I've put a rope around the Avenger's neck I'll put a ring around Daisy's finger.' Joe and the lodger are also rivals for Daisy's attention. We are led to believe that Joe is Daisy's fiancé but for most of the film she seems to spurn his advances and he seems to be more a friend of her parents than of her. Joe can also be seen as both a hero figure (in this case extremely ineffective) and a villain both because his advances towards Daisy seem unwanted and because he falsely accuses the lodger and almost causes his death. He believes (or wants) the lodger to be the Avenger 'because he wants him to hang for stealing Daisy.'[11] His motives are all wrong.

The heroine, Daisy, is equally as complex a character. She is lively, flirtatious and fickle. She also has a dual role or purpose in the story. Rothman points out that she also has two introductions.[12] She is introduced to us as a model firstly (and a potential victim of the Avenger) and then as the daughter in the Bunting household (and fiancée of Joe, a policeman). In both roles (and to differing extents) she is an object of desire, something to be viewed by others. She is also, according to Brill, 'both the likely prey of the Avenger and the protector of the lodger. Thus she is potentially victim and saviour.'[13] She initially appears to be a stereotypically weak female character but eventually emerges as a strong woman who believes in our hero and rescues him from the mob (or at least holds them back until Joe arrives).

Mr and Mrs Bunting are extremely ineffective parents, particularly Mrs Bunting who believes the lodger to be the Avenger and yet still lets Daisy go out with him. Yet she is still more of a presence than her husband who is active only when the gift arrives for Daisy.[14] Mrs Bunting appears to be the central figure in the household. Indeed, she does not leave the house until the very last scene. Hitchcock made significant changes to the character of Mrs Bunting. In the novel she is the second wife of Mr Bunting and only the stepmother of Daisy (who does not actually live with them and only comes to visit). These changes made by Hitchcock perhaps draw more

attention to the ineffectiveness of the Buntings as parents. As her real mother (rather than stepmother) Mrs Bunting could perhaps be expected to be even more protective towards her daughter. Most of the original story is told from Mrs Bunting's point of view. In the film we really only see things from her perspective twice: once when the lodger first arrives and once when she hears him go out at night. For the majority of the film our attentions are focused on the lodger and on Daisy, both of whom are able to transcend boundaries and exist in the worlds both within and outside number thirteen.

The lodger's mother also appears in the film. As a stereotypical Gothic mother, she dies at the beginning of his story (although almost at the end of the film, in his flashback) thus rendering him alone in the world. In a sense, however, she is still a presence in the story as it is she who asks him to avenge his sister's death. Rothman describes him as being 'under his mother's command'. Further to this, Rothman adds:

> Yet the 'mother' who dominates him is his projection and creation, to be kept alive within himself. He is her creature, but she is also his. His project makes him a composite figure, mother and son together; perhaps this above all makes him the ancestor of Norman Bates in *Psycho*.[15]

This again brings our attention to the concept of dual personality and also to the fact that the lodger is isolated both in that his entire family are dead and also isolated in his task and the secrecy and mystery it involves.

Settings

The settings of the film evoke a stereotypically Gothic atmosphere and have Gothic effects on the audience. The film is set entirely in London but it is a very specific London. It is continually night and so is dark and bleak. There is also fog, which obscures the view of both the audience and the characters still further. Despite being in a busy city full of people most of the characters seem very isolated and do not interact much with others.

Within this London setting we have several others. Firstly we have the dressing room of the theatre (a world within itself, a world of illusion and disguise) and then the salon where Daisy models (again a type of disguise and pretence). Mainly though we have the Buntings' home, number thirteen (unlucky for some and also the title of

Hitchcock's first and unfinished feature) and particular rooms and areas within that house. This is the perfect example of the potential terror lurking in everyday settings. It is also a variation on the traditional haunted house / Gothic castle story. The film explores "the sudden, unpredictable incursion of terror into an unimpeachably safe, sober, respectable home."[16] The realities of everyday life can be seen in many scenes in the film including one in which we see Daisy in her bath (although this is much more subtle than Hitchcock's later and more famous bathroom scene!). This scene almost reverses Gothic suspense as we think that Daisy is in danger (as the lodger approaches the bathroom door and hesitates with his hand on the handle) whilst she seems completely unaware of the potential danger (the audience and some of the other characters have been led to believe that the lodger is the Avenger). Here Daisy is almost a damsel unaware of her distress and necessity of rescue.

Within the house the action takes place in several different locations. Mr and Mrs Bunting (and Joe) are associated with the downstairs part of the house and particularly with the basement kitchen, an almost self-contained part of the house and the main living area, the 'heart' of the home. In the novel Mrs Bunting locks herself into the kitchen when she is frightened. Hitchcock does not give her this safe haven. Instead he lets us see how frightened she is in her own home where there is no escape.

Whilst Mr and Mrs Bunting and Joe are associated with downstairs, the lodger is associated with his upstairs rooms. His rooms are on the first floor, neither at the very top nor the very bottom of the house, adding to his ambiguous status and identity. His rooms are the nicest in the house; they are brighter, more spacious and have better furniture than any of the rooms inhabited by the Buntings. As Brill points out, only Daisy seems to feel comfortable anywhere in the house.[17] Daisy is completely at ease with the lodger and his rooms but she is the only one who does not suspect him of being the Avenger. Mrs Bunting's bedroom appears to be in direct contrast with that of the lodger. Her room is dark, bare and full of shadows. The walls are plain and bare, a blank canvas with enormous shadows cast on them. It is the ideal room to induce a nightmare or to encourage an overactive imagination.

Much action in this film takes place on the stairs. According to Richard Fisher there are important staircase scenes in at least eighteen of Hitchcock's films and in these films 'even elaborate staircase scenes often have little or no dialogue.'[18] Maurice Yacowar explains this in more detail when he says 'whether upward or down, Hitchcock's stairs take his readers and his audience to the fears, dangers and rewards

of self-discovery.'[19] The lodger is torn between two places and between two roles and the stairs represent the transition between these. The main staircase is, of course, the centre of the house. Rohmer and Chabrol refer to the opening scene of the film as follows:

> The opening of the film is dazzling: a close-up of a man's hand on a stairway banister; a pan shot discloses the stairwell in which light and shadow are ominously apportioned. The man goes into the night. Shot of a newspaper announcing a new crime.[20]

This is also quoted elsewhere as being the opening of the film so it is likely that Rohmer and Chabrol are not mistaken. The version of the film commonly known today actually opens with the scene that originally followed this. Another scene which does still exist in the film however is remarkably similar to that described above suggesting either that there were originally two similar scenes that mirrored each other or that the film was re-edited and that this is the same scene moved to a different part of the film. In the scene we know today (about halfway through the film) the lodger is leaving the house in the middle of the night. Mrs Bunting hears him and looks terrified. Once he has left the house she creeps out of bed, peers down the stairs and then goes to look in his room. This is her home yet she is frightened to walk around.

Stairs take on significance in several other scenes in the film. In particular, after Daisy and the lodger speak through the bathroom door (another barrier) he walks down the stairs to leave the house. The camera remains upstairs and we watch the lodger through the rails of the banister giving an impression of metaphorical imprisonment and emphasising his isolation. The staircase at number thirteen contrasts with that in the lodger's own home at the end of the film. Here we have a large open staircase rather unlike the steep, narrow and dark one at the Buntings'. Overall, the lodger's home is large, bright and spacious emphasising both his wealth and the fact that all secrets are now out in the open (or at least we think they are).

Imagery

There are a great many Gothic motifs in the film (as outlined in the earlier chapter on Gothic literature). Primarily there are mirrors and reflective surfaces. There

is a large mirror in the lodger's room which he never actually looks into at his own reflection but which nevertheless highlights the theme of the double. There are also mirrors in the dressing room at the theatre and in the salon. Portraits, predominant in Gothic texts, also feature here, particularly in the form of the pictures of blonde women which hang in the lodger's room and which he has removed. These serve to remind us of the Avenger's victims and the lodger's dislike of them makes us suspect him immediately. The lodger also keeps a picture of his sister.

Another potentially Gothic motif is the sign 'Tonight Golden Curls' which appears at both the beginning and end of the film. At the beginning it tells us about the show the girls are in and at the end perhaps signifies that life carries on as usual and that the Buntings (and their status) have now moved or improved slightly as the sign (a representation of the corruption of the city) is further away. It may also, and slightly more sinisterly, suggest that 'Golden Curls' may still be in danger; perhaps the Avenger (or the true Avenger) has not been caught at all? Perhaps the lodger is indeed the Avenger? We learn the lodger's story in a flashback told by himself, which we have no way of checking. As will later be discussed, particularly regarding *Stage Fright*, the flashback is not always accurate or reliable. Here then we also have a problem with the reliability of the narrator. The fact that the flashing neon sign appears at the beginning and end of the film also makes them appear like film or show credits perhaps suggesting that we have been watching a performance. The crowds in the film act almost like an audience and so back up this idea. For example, the crowd at the beginning of the film all look up together 'to all appearances, an audience viewing a film.'[21] This is followed by shots of individuals in a montage, all listening to the same story on the radio news. Even the lynch mob later can be seen as representative of the audience as they, like us, have been directed to suspect the lodger of being the Avenger.

Mise En Scène

There are many scenes in the film in which light is manipulated in various ways, including the gas lamps in the Bunting house, which dim just before the lodger arrives, the street lamp under which the Avenger attacks one of his victims and where the lodger tells Daisy his story, and the ceiling lamp. The latter is not important in itself but because it (and the famous glass ceiling) shows that the lodger is pacing up and

down in the room upstairs, seemingly troubled. The swinging ceiling lamp does illuminate but metaphorically rather than literally.

Many of the cinematic effects in the film add to the overall Gothic style. Rothman describes the mystery of the camera and the mystery of the Avenger as the same thing[22] and this can be seen throughout the film. Particular camera angles and the perspectives they give are reminiscent of German Expressionism and serve to highlight exaggerations and to draw the audience's attention to specific things. These range from things such as the glass ceiling shot to the lodger's first approach to number thirteen (focusing on the front door and clearly showing the house number though in the looming shadow of the approaching lodger). It is perhaps also significant to note that shortly after the lodger's arrival at the house the camera, at the bottom of the stairs, focuses on him standing at the top. Later, after he is arrested, with the camera still pointing from the bottom of the stairs, the lodger stands only a couple of stairs from the bottom, whilst we see Joe now standing at the top, having seemingly replaced the lodger in our eyes. We now sympathise with Novello's character and see Joe as the villain. Other uses of the camera include extreme close-ups such as the lodger's face (seemingly quite threatening, as he looms in to kiss Daisy), the focus on his feet as he returns to the house after the murder, and his hand on the bathroom door when Daisy is in the bath. This last example is followed immediately by a close-up of Daisy's feet in the bath, inter-cut with a focus on her head and shoulders, possibly to emphasise her nudity and vulnerability. Other techniques are used, such as montage to focus on the poker in one scene where we think the lodger is possibly going to attack Daisy and the focus, from above, on the stairwell in darkness, clearly showing only the lodger's hand moving slowly down the banister. One example that Brill draws attention to is the ball in the flashback:

> The ball at which the lodger's sister is murdered is brilliantly lit and shot from predominantly low camera angles which make it appear to be a brighter, higher world than the dark, foggy London into which the lodger descends on his quest.[23]

The spacious nature and social mobility of this world is also demonstrated through the use of the moving camera. Taylor refers to this and says that Hitchcock:

Made it appear that the camera had moved away from a couple dancing in a ballroom, across a table between a couple sitting facing each other, out through a window which then proved to be set in a solid wall, then right back across a courtyard.[24]

The audience are thus given privileged information and a privileged point of view. We are also unsettled by this point of view as it is one that would not be visible by a viewer in the real world. The use of light and of specific camera angles also emphasises the use of shadows in the film, another major effect used in German Expressionism. When the lodger talks to Daisy under the street lamp his face is in shadow perhaps indicating that whilst he is telling his story he is hiding something.

The ending of the film is full of Gothic features and effects. In many ways the story is drawn to a close and loose ends are tied up but this really depends upon your reading of events. From one perspective the killer is caught, the innocent man is freed and he marries the heroine, rescuing her from her humble origins. In effect, order is restored. On another reading, the chaos and corruption still exist ('Tonight Golden Curls'), the representative of law and order (Joe) is removed from the story, the lodger tells us a story we cannot possibly verify to deflect attention and blame away from himself, and the heroine ends the story potentially in more danger than she has been in up to this point. However we read the ending it is true to say that our main character loses all identity by the end of the story. Throughout the film he has been identified only as 'the lodger' and he is now no longer a lodger but is reinstated in his own home, but we do not even know his name.

Audiences may have read against the way in which Hitchcock suggested ambiguously that the lodger was going to leap upon Daisy in the bath or attack her with the poker because of Novello's status as a big star. However, this possibly adds to the tension of the picture precisely because we are forced to question whether he was totally innocent. This also possibly unnerves audiences further simply because they would not have expected Novello (a matinee idol and archetypal good guy) to play the role of a villain. Overall *The Lodger* is a dark and mysterious film with familiar yet strange settings and characters that fit Gothic stereotypes. The story works on several levels. The audience is kept in suspense throughout and continually unsettled by events, camera angles and lighting.

Notes

[1] Richard Fisher, 'Hitchcock's Figure on the Staircase', in *Thousand Eyes*, July-Aug 1976, p.3

[2] Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, London and Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Athlone, 1996, p.25

[3] John Russell Taylor, *Hitch: The Authorised Biography of Alfred Hitchcock*, London: Sphere Books, 1978, p.57

[4] Charles Barr, *English Hitchcock*, Moffatt, Scotland: Cameron and Hollis, 1999, p.34

[5] Lesley Brill, 'Hitchcock's *The* Lodger', in Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Eds), *A Hitchcock Reader*, Iowa State University Press, 1986, p.69

[6] Ibid,, p.70

[7] William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982, p.20

[8] Ibid., p.21

[9] Ibid., p.18

[10] Brill, 'Hitchcock's *The* Lodger', in Deutelbaum and Poague, *A Hitchcock Reader*, p.73

[11] Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, p.41

[12] Ibid., p.11

[13] Brill, 'Hitchcock's *The Lodger*', in Deutelbaum and Poague, *A Hitchcock Reader*, p.74

[14] Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, p.31

[15] Ibid., p.47

[16] Taylor, *Hitch*, p.49-50

[17] Brill, 'Hitchcock's *The Lodger*', in Deutelbaum and Poague, *A Hitchcock Reader*, p.70

[18] Fisher, 'Hitchcock's Figure on the Staircase', p.3

[19] Maurice Yacowar, *Hitchcock's British Films*, Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977, p.18

[20] Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, translated by Stanley Hochman, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.,1979, p.8

[21] Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, p.9-10

[22] Ibid., p.8

[23] Brill, 'Hitchcock's *The Lodger*', in Deutelbaum and Poague, *A Hitchcock Reader*, p.68-69

[24] Taylor, *Hitch*, p.52

6. Hitchcock's British Sound Films

Hitchcock directed fourteen sound films between 1929 and 1939 from *Blackmail* to *Jamaica Inn* (fifteen if we include *Mary*, the German language version of *Murder!*), many of which demonstrate some of the same Gothic features as his earlier silent films. In fact, all of Hitchcock's films of this period demonstrate at least some Gothic features. Most of these will be discussed here though *Blackmail*, possibly the most completely Gothic of these films, is discussed in more depth in a separate chapter.

Themes

Some of the films of Hitchcock's British sound period are more Gothic in theme than others. Some belong to the genre of Gothic whilst others can be more realistically described as part of one of its sub-genres such as Gothic Romance or Gothic Horror (as previously discussed). There are variations here on the genre of the Gothic Romance, particularly regarding issues of love versus duty. This can be seen perhaps most obviously in *Blackmail* which Hitchcock himself described as 'an exercise on the traditional conflict between love and duty'. This comes through particularly in the parts of the film that focus on the 'duty and daily business of the policeman'.[1] This theme can also be seen in *Murder!* when Sir John plays amateur detective in order to clear the name of the woman he loves (and writes a part for her in his new play). Romance also rears its head in *Young and Innocent* (the burgeoning romance between Robert and Erica), *Sabotage* (a potentially happy future for Ted and Mrs Verloc), *Rich and Strange* (where Fred and Em return home, still bickering but perhaps happier, or at least more content, than before) and *The Lady Vanishes* and *The 39 Steps* (both featuring initially love-hate relationships which later appear to have some hope for future happiness).

Some of the films fall perhaps more obviously into the category of Psychological Gothic where one of the characters is placed in opposition to the rest of society (*The 39 Steps*, *Murder!* and *Young and Innocent* all have elements of this). Some fall more obviously into the sub-genre of Female Gothic which highlights the most intimate fears of women (*Sabotage*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and

Jamaica Inn all demonstrate elements of this). Some of the films seem to fit into both of these categories (most obviously *Blackmail*) whilst some demonstrate features of slightly different sub-genres of Gothic.

Whilst there is much mystery in many of these films (either for us or for the characters) there is no element of the supernatural and Hitchcock thus focuses more on what is Gothic or frightening in the real world rather than in fantasy. Whilst there are no outright horror films in his work of this period, many have certain horror or thriller elements, particular with regard to atmosphere. Perhaps the openings of *Murder!* and *Number Seventeen* are the best examples. Sinyard says that *Number Seventeen* could have been a thriller if Hitchcock had not got carried away with technique.[2] Barr (amongst others) points to the film being a parody, though this was not realised by everyone at the time.[3] Although only *Number Seventeen* can be seen as a Gothic parody there are comedy elements in several of the films which serve to draw attention to certain detail and to exaggerate certain issues (in the traditional Gothic style). Examples of this include the tea room in *Blackmail* (which both couples fight for and then both leave), the contents of Ben's pockets in *Number Seventeen* (where he sarcastically says the sausage was the murder weapon), the woman in court in *Young and Innocent* (who asks the judge for a longer sentence), and perhaps most extremely, the very deep carpet in Sir John's office in *Murder!* (also an obvious reference to his wealth and comforts).

There are several obvious influences on Hitchcock's work of this period. Barr points to four in particular: the cinema of America, Germany and the Soviet Union and the contemporary English stage and novel.[4] The films were also very much influenced by their social and political context. They were made in the pre-war period 1929-1939, a period of immense change and unrest (both social and political) not only for Hitchcock and his British contemporaries but also for the writers and directors in America, Germany and the Soviet Union by whom (it could be argued) he was so influenced. In the climate which existed it is easy to see why Hitchcock was drawn to the spy thriller and why he made so many of them in this period. All of Hitchcock's films of the period were filmed in England including *Mary*, the German language version of *Murder!* There were unforeseen problems with this film, however, caused by the expectations and cultural differences of the German cinema audience (discussed in detail by Taylor[5]). One would have to argue, of course, that, had these differences not been addressed, *Mary* would simply be a British film with German dialogue.

Traditional Gothic texts were usually written during times of social disturbance and the events within them often reflect this. We could see the theme of espionage and Hitchcock's spy thriller sextet as a direct descendent of the traditional Gothic text and its references (either direct or indirect) to revolution and social and / or political unrest. If we analyse Palmer's view of the thriller we can trace direct comparisons with the traditional Gothic text. Palmer defines the genre as:

> One in which the hero as representative values is opposed to the collective conspiratorial forces which threaten the character of his world. The element of conspiracy is defined as central to the thriller, distinguishing the genre from its literary neighbours such as the classical detective story. The world of the thriller is a paranoid one in which the major problem confronting the protagonist is the pervasive surrounding threat, the abiding context of menace. The thriller then pits a hero against a shadowy conspiracy, a basic oppositional structure which lends itself to a variety of permutations and transformations.[6]

We thus have a hero figure attempting to defeat the forces of evil in order to save others and in spite of any physical or moral danger to himself.

The Lady Vanishes is even closer to the traditional Gothic texts in terms of its subject and influences if we agree with Sinyard's view that the film is 'an allegory about the condition of England on the eve of world war'. He explains further by saying:

> In this classic movie a group of disparate and desperate English people band together against a foreign foe, and an appeaser waving a white handkerchief (Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain waving his Munich Peace Pact) is shot for his pains.[7]

As with most Gothic texts there is a demonstration of chaos and disorder in many of these films. *Sabotage*, for example, is primarily concerned with 'the dark underside of human nature' and furthermore 'has the alarming look of a documentary film'[8] implying that these are not just fictional issues but that they apply to the real world as well. Sterritt writes of birds as 'one of [Hitchcock's] favourite symbols for the disorder and chaos of the everyday world'[9], as in *Blackmail* and *Young and Innocent* in

particular. In both of these films birds can be seen as representative of aspects of nature which are wild and uncontrollable but the caged bird in *Blackmail* can be seen as a specific reference to an attempt to control or restrain an aspect of nature, or perhaps more specifically here, human nature.

The 39 Steps is perhaps one of the more obvious references to this theme of chaos and disorder. Yacowar refers to two of its themes as: the chaotic and fragmented world returning to one of harmony and order (at the end of the film); and 'the growth of the Donat and Carroll characters to be able to adjust to and handle the unruly upsets of their lives'.[10] Order is thus restored and the characters similarly adjust themselves to take account of their experiences and their new situations.

The pirates in *Jamaica Inn* obviously disrupt the usual social order. They cause shipwrecks in order to seize cargo and kill any survivors so they will not be able to say what really happened. The characters' dishonesty also means that they have to put up a façade or play a role on a daily basis. Only within the group can the thieves be themselves. Trehearne is the only one who plays a role within the group itself as he is a police officer working under cover.

A major theme in the films (and one which has extreme Gothic undertones and connotations) is that of murder. Murder (or the threat of it) is a major theme that runs throughout many Gothic texts, along with various things connected with it such as violence, fear and mystery. If we agree with Sinyard's viewpoint that the English have a fascination with murder and with Hitchcock's own observation that they have more murders than anyone else[11], we could see this as an understandable feature of the work of a very English director. Where there is a murder, there is, generally speaking, a body or corpse. In *Murder!* Diana Baring is already at the scene of the crime and so we do not see the 'discovery' of the body. Instead, we enter the already crowded scene along with the Markhams and are treated to a moment of almost suspended animation in which we are able to take stock of the whole scene before us. This is a very theatrical scene in a film set almost completely in and around the theatre and issues concerned with acting.

If the theatre is a major setting of these films (and of Gothic in general) it is no surprise that acting and pretence are quite common. In *Rich and Strange* there is a carnival and a fancy dress party as well as a princess who is a phoney. In *Murder!* Fane commits suicide to an audience. This is both a private and a public act: he sets the scene and dramatically falls (or rather jumps) to his death. Despite the element of

performance, Fane actually dies off screen[12] and we see only the rope swinging back and forth across the screen although the on-screen circus audience see the entire performance.

As much of *Murder!* takes place in the theatre we thus have many characters playing more than one role. The role of policeman is perhaps the most important. We know that there was a fake policeman as well as a real one at the scene of the murder, there are two of them (or at least two actors playing policemen) backstage when the questioning takes place and Sir John is, of course, simply playing or assuming the role of a detective. There is a slight variation on this in *Number Seventeen* where there are crooks posing as detectives and vice versa.[13] The mask in the British Museum at the end of *Blackmail* surely draws attention to the pretence and dishonesty present throughout the film as it suggest a masking or covering up.

All of this pretence and the presence of figures of law and order surely must point to an absence of morals or at least an attempt to reinstate or reform them. In *Blackmail*, of course, we are forced to ask the questions 'is Alice justified in killing Crewe' and 'does Tracy (the blackmailer) get what he deserves?' The man and woman who pose as husband and wife in *The Lady Vanishes* clearly demonstrate an absence of morals (particularly as they are both actually married to someone else), as does Hornblower's daughter-in-law Chloe in *The Skin Game* whose previous 'occupation' was co-respondent in divorce cases. Morals (and moralistic behaviour) in these films have broader implications. For example, in *Rich and Strange* Em worries about whether or not she should use the Gents toilet even though the two of them are deserted on a waterlogged ship[14] thus making comment (albeit comically) on social class and etiquette.

Although not always as obvious as Fred and Em's shipwreck, there is much isolation in these films (both physical and metaphorical) mirroring the isolation of traditional Gothic texts and with similar results and / or effects. French points specifically to Verloc in *Sabotage* and the various reasons for his isolation:

> Verloc, the outsider tolerated by the upper classes, living within a cinema that people despise, wanting to frighten them, but only inducing laughter, and spied upon by a suave middle-class Special Branch detective disguised as a Cockney greengrocer.[15]

Verloc is isolated because of his looks, his foreignness and his secret identity as a saboteur. Many of the characters in *Murder!* are similarly isolated. Diana Baring is isolated by her imprisonment and by the belief of all but Sir John in her guilt. Sir John himself is isolated by his social class and (from the rest of the jury) by his belief in Diana's innocence, whilst Fane is isolated by his secrets: his guilt as a murderer, his love for Diana and his identity (whether we see this as half-caste, illegitimate or homosexual).

Characters

The characters in Hitchcock's British sound films appear to follow the same models as those of his earlier silent films. Some of the heroines in these films demonstrate certain qualities or strengths that might seem uncharacteristic and in this sense they are the direct descendants of the strong heroines in the earlier Gothic texts. Mrs Lawrence in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), for example, likes to play typically male sports (and is very good at them). She is also a very strong woman (mentally and emotionally) but these strengths are mostly maternal so there is no need for a severe punishment from the patriarchal society she lives in (although her husband does treat her, and talk to her, like a child). She ultimately saves the day by foiling an assassination attempt by screaming, a traditionally feminine act. Mr Hornblower's daughter-in-law (Chloe) in *The Skin Game*, however, demonstrates her independence in other ways. She has been named as co-respondent in divorce cases, a 'profession' which has obvious links with prostitution.[16]

Other typical Gothic heroines demonstrate strength of character and manage to rescue, or help rescue, the male protagonist. One of the best examples from this period of Hitchcock's work is Erica in *Young and Innocent*. Not only is she the strong (and only) woman in her family, she fights against her own morals and judgements before finally believing in Robert Tisdall's innocence and agreeing to help him out. As things turn out, her judgements do appear to be much better and much more accurate than those of the male characters. Erica is thus punished initially for her strong will and rebellious behaviour but also for her superior judgement.

Mary Yelland, the heroine of *Jamaica Inn*, is a stereotypical Gothic heroine in many ways. She is a beautiful young orphan and a stranger to her surroundings. However, she also demonstrates independence of mind when she goes to live in

Cornwall with her aunt and uncle, is loyal to Joss in spite of everything and is very brave when she rescues Trehearne and again later at the harbour. She is perhaps spared mainly because of her naivety which, despite her bravery and independence, leaves her vulnerable and in need of rescue.

Some other heroines are much more passive and weak, relying on men to save them. In some ways Alice White (in *Blackmail*) fits into this category as she is ultimately saved from the blackmailer (and from herself) by Frank. Others are made more weak and passive by their absence from the screen and their inability to speak or act for themselves. Diana Baring in *Murder!* is such a heroine. She is seldom on the stage until the very end of the film when she is literally on stage in a play.[17] This is quite the opposite of Alice White who is seldom off the screen in *Blackmail*. The ultimate passive female, however, is the woman who does not speak at all (or is allowed to say very little) and there are at least two of these in Hitchcock's British sound films. Firstly is the supposedly mute woman in *Number Seventeen* and secondly the nun in *The Lady Vanishes*. Neither of these women are what they first appear to be and both of them eventually speak, to the benefit of the protagonists.

Alice White is the first in a long line of tormented blonde heroines (or victims) in Hitchcock's films.[18] She can also be directly contrasted or compared with several of her successors. For example, both Alice and Mrs Verloc in *Sabotage* attempt to confess their crimes at the end of the film but are prevented from doing so.[19] Furthermore, they are prevented by overpowering male figures of authority who are apparently acting as their protectors. Mrs Verloc has even less control and independence than Alice White, however. She is never even given a first name and is 'the embodiment of femininity in distress', according to Cohen.[20] Mrs Verloc is identified only by her relationship to her husband. She retains this basic and restraining identification / label even at the end of the film when her husband is dead.

Most of the heroes in Hitchcock's British sound films are also typically Gothic, although some are more active than others. Many of the films have a noticeable absence of strong male protagonists. Yacowar describes *Rich and Strange* as 'a film without a hero'.[21] We could say that this is because Fred is weak and passive but also he could be seen as an anti-hero because he is unfaithful to his wife and has every intention of leaving her. Rothman takes this idea a step further when he says that *The Man Who Knew Too Much* lacked a male protagonist in whom the audience may take a strong personal interest' (possibly partly explained by the presence of a very strong

female lead character as previously mentioned). Rothman says this is a problem that Hitchcock sought to address in *The 39 Steps*.[22]

Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps* holds no mystery for the audience. Unlike the lodger, we are told from the beginning that he is innocent (we actually follow the story as he does and we learn virtually nothing that he does not) and he spends most of the film actively trying to prove his innocence. To quote Rothman, however, 'Hannay has invisibility - he is not striking and immediately attention grabbing', as compared with the characters played by Cary Grant, for example:

> If there is a picture of Cary Grant in the newspaper, someone is sure to recognise him, as in *Suspicion* or *North by Northwest*, for example. Grant is too striking to go unnoticed, or to sit within Mr Memory's audience.[23]

Robert Donat, by contrast, simply blends into the crowd: he is an everyman. Hannay also has no villainous qualities. He is immediately established as a gentleman ('a gentleman from Canada' according to Mr Memory); he is dressed differently from the other people in the music hall and later he sleeps on the couch so that Annabella can have his bed. Hannay is helped along the way, mainly by women (Pamela and the crofter's wife). However, unlike traditional Gothic heroes, he is not a completely passive character and he does take action to help himself.

Other heroes seem a little more helpless and have to be helped in more obvious ways. Robert Tisdall in *Young and Innocent* is perhaps the best example of this. Again, we know of his innocence from the very beginning and we follow him on his quest to prove it. The initial accusation is by two young women and when he is questioned at the police station he faints (like many of his Gothic predecessors) and is helped and brought back to consciousness by Erica who later helps him to prove his innocence. However, she does not voluntarily choose to help him initially but is partly bribed and partly persuaded into doing so after he first appears to help her by pushing her car and then leaves himself penniless by paying for her petrol.

James Trehearne in *Jamaica Inn* is a police officer (like Frank in *Blackmail* and Joe in *The Lodger* as well as many others) though he is working under cover. He seems innocent and helpless at first and would probably have died if Mary had not saved him. Later he also has to be freed by Aunt Patience, again helped by a woman but here also demonstrating his powers of persuasion. He does rescue Mary twice, however (once

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after his initial escape and later on the ship) and seems to gain confidence as soon as his real identity is revealed. Ultimately he does seem to have more weaknesses of character than strengths (particularly in his poor judgement of character when he trusts Pengallan), making him a typical Gothic hero like Jonathan Harker in *Dracula*.

In *Murder!*, Sir John is the social and intellectual superior of everyone else. In many ways this is of help to him but in others it is a hindrance. He is unfamiliar with both the location he is in and the ways of the people he is working with. He is also directly paralleled (or, rather, contrasted) with two other male characters. Markham appears to be his direct social and intellectual inferior, almost the Watson to his Holmes. There is also a direct contrast between Sir John and Handel Fane:

> Sir John is the born winner; his adversary Handel Fane is the born loser. [He] harbours several guilty secrets, he's the murderer, he's the half-caste, and perhaps for those spectators who in those days knew about such things, probably a gay transvestite.[24]

However we view him, Fane's sexuality is ambiguous and it is possible to read 'half-caste' as a euphemism for homosexuality. He is clearly rather effeminate and demonstrates physical, mental and moral weaknesses, rendering him the perfect Gothic hero in many ways. He is a villain but not an evil one and may be read rather as a victim than anything else. Fred in *Rich and Strange* has a similar ambiguity regarding his sexuality (depending upon our viewpoint, of course). Taylor sees Henry Kendall as being totally miscast (an opinion he implies Hitchcock shared) because he describes him as 'a sophisticated West End comic actor and fairly obvious homosexual in the role of Fred, the quintessential ordinary suburban husband'.[25] Whilst this might explain certain character weaknesses and a certain effeminacy, this view was written over thirty years after the film was made (and therefore in a totally different social climate) and it may be true to say that the role did require certain heroic weaknesses.

French points out that 'In Hitchcock's British movies, figures of authority and menace are usually middle class or foreign'[26], thus perfectly fitting the stereotype of a traditional Gothic villain. Verloc in *Sabotage* is an excellent example (although Sinyard argues that this film has no villains, only victims[27]), as is the magician in *The Lady Vanishes*. The latter is not *the* villain of the film, however. Millar says of *The Lady Vanishes*:

> It's easy to spot the villain, and that's very reassuring. He sports a cruelly trimmed moustache and wears gloves at all times. His accomplice's disguise as a nun is easily seen through as she is wearing her high heels. Though Hitchcock's speciality is said to be that of revealing the menace beneath the ordinary, it is less often pointed out that you don't have to look very hard to see that the ordinary is rather odd to start with.[28]

Whether ordinary or extraordinary, then, we should immediately recognise the 'Princess' of *Rich and Strange* as phoney and potentially villainous, whilst the very English General appears to be completely genuine.

Some characters are almost the exact opposite and are exaggeratedly English. Lawrence in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* has exaggerated English manners as does the main protagonist of *Number Seventeen*. Charters and Caldecot in *The Lady Vanishes* are perhaps the most obvious and extreme example; they stand to the national anthem and discuss cricket at length. They are traditional and eccentric. Presumably, if foreign appearances and manners are to signify villainy then an exaggerated English character should surely signify honesty and reliability, even if accompanied by a certain level of ridiculousness.

Pengallan in *Jamaica Inn* also fits the Gothic villain stereotype. He is a rich, landowning magistrate (giving him ultimate control over his surroundings). He deceives everyone including his loyal butler and his friend although it perhaps does not come as a surprise to the audience that he is corrupt. This may also perhaps make Mary seem (at least to the audience) even more naïve when she trusts him. Pengallan is completely corrupt unlike Joss who is redeemed before his death. Joss is only a secondary villain here and although he is cruel and unpleasant he is ultimately loyal to both Mary and Patience and seems quite helpless at the end.

Handel Fane in *Murder!* is born with villainous qualities. Depending upon how we read the film he is a half-caste, a transvestite, and/or a homosexual. If we see these as villainous qualities (they are all deviations from the accepted 'norm') then Fane cannot avoid being labelled a villain. He is a villain and an outcast because all of these things make him socially and morally unacceptable. The film itself does not focus primarily on the crime, of course, but on the detection of it and so Fane has only a small role in the film (as pointed out by Rothman[29]).

Families and parents (or parental substitutes) feature in many of these films although mostly in unusual or unexpected forms. A family group appears in *Sabotage*, for example, but this is no ordinary family. It consists of a young wife with a much older husband and a child who is not their son but her younger brother, himself 'a caricature of an English-accented schoolboy'.[30] The obvious absence of any children of their own throws mystery upon the Verlocs' relationship; he appears to be more of a guardian or father-figure than a husband and if Stevie were their son this would have obvious (sexual) implications. The fact that Stevie lives with his sister and her husband also draws attention to the obvious absence of his own parents and makes both himself and his sister typically Gothic (child) characters who have a lack of parental guidance and authority.

In *The Skin Game*, Hitchcock presents us with two families. Durgnat sees the story as 'a classical metaphor for a social change' in which:

> two families – one landed gentry in decline, the other pushy middle-class – struggle for ascendancy. Both get morally humiliated, each in its own terms: the gentleman by the blackmail methods of his class; the factory-owner by his daughter-in-law's past profession.[31]

As we can see from traditional Gothic texts, where complete families do appear they are usually uncommunicative and dysfunctional; parents particularly are ineffective. Even the families who seem to be happy and 'normal' have problems. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) the mother 'disobeys the father'[32] thus disrupting the usual expectations of family life. Yacowar points to 'families disturbed by intruders' in (amongst others) *The Pleasure Garden*, *The Lodger*, *The Manxman* and *Blackmail*.[33] This would explain a lack of coherence or characters who seem constantly distracted.

The parents in these films are as ineffective as those of traditional Gothic texts. In *Blackmail* Alice's parents must be extremely unobservant. She stays out all night without them noticing and they seem completely unaware of any of the other events of the story. Yacowar focuses on fathers in the British films in particular. He says:

> Hitchcock's British films in general offer harsh father figures whilst in his American films the mothers threaten the stability and comfort of the central figure. Either harsh parent serves to free a considerable anxiety. Hitchcock

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gives us harsh fathers in *Downhill*, *Champagne*, *The Manxman* and *Waltzes From Vienna*, threatening father-surrogates in *The Ring*, and *Jamaica Inn*, unsympathetic fathers in *Young and Innocent*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes*...Verloc in *Sabotage* seems nice and cuddly but is as false as a stepfather as he is as a citizen.[34]

Many of the films have no such parental figures whilst some have only parental substitutes. Yacowar quotes Iris in *The Lady Vanishes* as having 'a forceful but absent father' whilst 'Miss Froy's has been lost and helpless in the mountains'[35]. Iris's mother, on the other hand, is absent altogether. Barr goes into more detail:

> We hear nothing of the mother, who is presumably dead or otherwise absent or simply like the mothers of *Downhill* and *The Manxman* – subserviently ineffectual. Iris needs a mother to save and guide her. Act 1 offers not only an alternative love-object (a man very different from Charles) but a mother-figure whom she meets casually in the hotel corridor and then on the platform: Miss Froy.[36]

Iris is a typically Gothic heroine who lacks parental authority, as does Gilbert, the hero of the same film.

The only parental figures Mary has in *Jamaica Inn* are Joss and Patience, her aunt and uncle, as her parents are both dead. Mary seems old enough to take care of herself but chooses to put herself in their care. Joss (as previously discussed) is unpleasant and demonstrates many villainous qualities whilst Aunt Patience (Mary's mother figure) mostly seems quite helpless and vulnerable. However, she asserts herself later and refuses to leave without Joss, sealing her own fate. She really does appear to love her husband and ultimately seems to have some control in their relationship although her love for him is eventually her downfall. Throughout the film she looks wide-eyed and frightened and offers no guidance to Mary.

Erica in *Young and Innocent* acts as the woman of the family, and particularly as a mother to her younger brothers (their real mother is never mentioned and we presume her to be dead). They respect her and when she is in disgrace they sympathise with her. However, her father (another policeman authority figure) is very ineffective

and when he discovers her actions he 'sends her to her room as if attempting to keep her a child by a child's punishment'.[37]

In the absence of parents or obvious parental figures, the only guidance for many of the characters in many of these films is provided by figures of law and order. Frank in *Blackmail* has a hold or control over Alice because he knows she is guilty of murder[38] (or manslaughter, depending on our point of view); it is thus a kind of patriarchal control. Policemen or amateur detectives appear in several other of the films: Ted in *Sabotage* and Sir John in *Murder!*, for example, and Brill notes that many Hitchcock films end 'with lovers united in the presence of policemen'.[39]

As in traditional Gothic texts, there are many examples of doubling or of characters demonstrating more than one personality or set of characteristics. In *Blackmail*, Alice has more than one personality: the one she shows to Frank and the one that tempts her to go with Crewe to his studio. Diana Baring in *Murder!* also seems to have at least two personalities and we are led to ponder at one point whether she could have committed the crime and not remembered it.[40] Perhaps the most obvious example of doubling in the British sound films is that of Sir John in *Murder!* standing in front of his bathroom mirror and debating with himself. We thus see two images of him: a double image of the self. The use of the mirror itself might suggest an incidence of misrecognition or simply of self-reflection.

Settings

Whilst it is true to say that all Hitchcock's British sound films were filmed in England (and mostly in studios in London), several of them are set, at least in part, overseas. Several of them are set in Switzerland or neighbouring countries (*The Man Who Knew Too Much, Secret Agent, The Lady Vanishes*) whilst *Rich and Strange* is perhaps the most well travelled and varied of them all. Some of the film is set in London, some in Paris (for which Hitch and Alma did some research including a visit to the Folies Bergere[41]) and some in the Far East. In traditional Gothic texts, these settings would have been chosen because whilst the audience would have recognised them they would not be over-familiar; they are settings which still retain a certain element of mystery. The mountainous and snow-covered settings of some of the others serve a similar purpose and to similar effect. The mountains in the opening of *The Lady Vanishes*, particularly, set the film up as an atmospheric mystery. The setting here

could just connote 'exotic holidays' in a quite innocent or neutral fashion as confirmed by the social status of the young women on holiday. However, this also resembles the kind of scene-setting typical of Gothic literature and is reminiscent of things such as the Carpathian mountains in *Dracula* particularly. The social status of the young women could just as easily be shown without the use of such mysterious and isolated settings.

Charles Barr describes Hitchcock's films of this period as 'English' rather than 'British'. He quotes Anderson who said that British cinema was usually English and particularly southern English. Barr says that 'Hitch doesn't seem to have gone north much in his English films'. He focuses particularly on *The Manxman* which uses locations in Cornwall and Hertfordshire to represent an island in the Irish sea, and on *The 39 Steps* (the exception), a film in which Hitchcock 'did venture significantly north of Watford [but] does not have much of a Scottish feel to it, and casts no significant part with a Scots actor other than John Laurie as the Crofter.'[42]

The settings in the opening scenes of these films do vary enormously but many have similar Gothic effects prompting certain responses from the audience. *Blackmail* opens on busy, crime-filled, London streets, scenes which later recur when Alice wanders from Crewe's flat. This setting is very similar to the dark and gloomy London of *The Lodger* only three years earlier. The opening scene of *Young and Innocent* is quite different on the surface – a beach house away from the big city. However, the beach (and the house) is extremely isolated and this isolation is exaggerated further by the darkness and stormy weather. The opening of *The Skin Game* also appears to be a contrast with the overtly Gothic scenes of some of the other films. Here there is the beauteous expanse of nature, fields, trees etc (very similar to the opening of *The Student of Prague* (Galeen, 1926), perhaps ultimately one of the most obviously Gothic of the German Expressionist films). The beauty of nature appears to be at odds with the characteristics of the people who inhabit the place. There appears to be an attempt to highlight the unpleasantness and corruption lurking beneath a seemingly beautiful exterior.

Jamaica Inn opens with a view of the inn itself on a dark windy night. The events take place in Cornwall, shown throughout as a threatening landscape (and only seen at night) with a harsh, isolated and dangerous coastline. This setting was not completely unfamiliar to the audience but by showing it only at night and under

particularly harsh weather conditions it is made alien and unwelcoming. Hitchcock was to return to this setting for his very next film, *Rebecca*.

The houses in *Jamaica Inn* (both inside and outside) look particularly Germanic. They are reminiscent of the buildings in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (although to a lesser extent) in that they are narrow, dark and have strange angles and very small windows and doors; above all, everything is uneven and crooked. Jamaica Inn (which is only ever seen in the dark) seems rundown and ramshackle in appearance with its uneven outside stairs and its low roof and outbuildings. Inside, the rooms are small, dark and sparsely furnished. Overall, it resembles Wuthering Heights as described by Lockwood in the opening chapter of Emily Bronte's novel. Contrasted with this is Pengallan's house; a large mansion house with extensive grounds and servants. The house always seems full of people and we first see it in the middle of a dinner party. Everything in the house seems on a grand scale; the rooms are light and spacious and filled with elaborate furniture. This is not Gothic in the same sense as Jamaica Inn but seems just as unwelcoming and threatening in its own way. In *Wuthering Heights*, Thrushcross Grange is a very wealthy household but the characters who live there always seem much more cold and lonely than those in the neighbouring farmhouse (particularly during the early events in the story).

Much of the action in *Number Seventeen* takes place on or around the staircase which is quite literally at the centre or heart of the house. The opening of the film establishes atmosphere in much the same way as that of *Murder!*. It is night, we watch leaves blowing in the wind along a dark street (indicating that it is also Autumn or possibly early Winter and furthering the gloomy and cold atmosphere). We follow a man up to a house, he goes into the house and up the stairs. Later in the film (approximately half way) there is a shot in which most of the characters stand at the top of the stairs watching in silence as a figure walks up the stairs; all we see is a hand on the banister. This is almost a mirror image of the shot in *The Lodger* where we follow an almost disembodied hand down the stairs, holding on to the banister.

As with Hitchcock's earlier silent films and the films of the German Expressionist period, a popular setting for some of the films is the theatre and variations on this. Again, the film which demonstrates this most overtly is *Murder!*. Rothman focuses on this when he says:

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Hitchcock sets *Murder!* in a theatrical setting in part to dramatize the fact that, in the world of a film as in reality, acting is not confined to the stage. Traditionally the stage is the designated place, set off within the world, where acting is authorized, where performances take place before an audience, without real consequences. Roles may be played which fulfil wishes, as in a dream; staged, violence is only spectacle, sexuality saves and condemns no one, and death can be faced unafraid.[43]

Charles Barr's opinion of Hitchcock's choice of setting is a lot more succinct. He quotes Rothman's view (above) and says:

> This notion is developed in an interesting enough way, but its starting point is fallacious. The reason for the theatrical setting of *Murder!* is precisely the same as the reason for the Dublin setting of Hitchcock's previous film, *Juno and the Paycock*: it is taken from the original text that is being adapted.[44]

Whilst this is very accurate, one might also venture to agree with Barr when he continues:

> The fallacy – that Hitchcock created it all *ex nihilo* - could be avoided by reworking the idea in some such way as this: 'Hitchcock may have been attracted to the novel *Enter Sir John*, which he filmed as *Murder!*, by its theatrical setting, and by a story that plays upon the shifting borderlines between theatre and life' – or this: 'having taken on the project of filming *Enter Sir John*, Hitchcock devised ways of exploiting to the full the dramatic possibilities of its theatrical setting'.[45]

Whatever the reasons for the choice of setting there is no denying its effects. Rothman also points to the fact that ' In *Murder!* the camera's subjects at times appear to know they are being filmed.'[46] This would account for certain exaggerations of characters and effects which combine to create a typically Gothic atmosphere. Not only is there an actual theatre in the film, Yacowar argues that there are several theatrical stage settings within *Murder!* including Sir John's apartment and Diana's cell (although he mistakenly refers to her as Norah, the actress rather than the character she

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plays).[47] Throughout the film, theatrical motifs are used also; a curtain appears to rise on Diana's cell[48] and ultimately Sir John must use the theatre in order to trick Fane and to save Diana. The technique he uses is that of the play-within-the-play, an established form used perhaps most famously in *Hamlet* by the central character. In the course of the film people are questioned by Sir John as another play is performed; the questioning takes place backstage and is constantly interrupted as the actors go on stage. This resembles an earlier scene which appears just after the murder (a scene which itself appears to be in suspended animation to exaggerate everything and to draw attention to detail). Mrs Markham and the landlady move constantly from one room (stage) to the other, making tea for the police and Diana. Spoto points to Sir John 'trying to get at 'nothing but the truth'', itself the title of a play in the company's repertory.[49] In the last scene of the film boundaries are blurred and it is not very clear whether we are still watching the play or the wider picture. The circus in *Murder!* is used to a similar effect as the theatre. Fane dies at the end of his last performance, watched by an audience who, until the last minute, think his suicide is part of the act.

Another theatrical aspect to *Murder!* is the courtroom and jury. The courtroom is a kind of stage on which performances are given. In one sense the deliberation of the jury takes place backstage and in another sense it can be seen to be taking place on stage, a performance given directly to an audience. The jury members all sit along one side of a table, facing the audience. When their decision is reached and the verdict is read (back in the courtroom), we remain in the backroom. All this takes place regardless of Sir John's declaration to Fane that 'the law has no sense of drama'.

Whilst predominant in *Murder!* as both a theme and a setting, the theatre or stage does also appear in other Hitchcock films of this period. Sterritt focuses on *Blackmail* in particular, from the opening scenes in which the flaps on the back of the police van act like stage curtains[50], to Alice in her bedroom doing her hair and make-up as if in preparation for her next scene on stage.[51] Rothman also points to the murder itself which takes place behind a curtain which he describes as 'Hitchcock's declaration of his theatricality and his own mystery'.[52] This fits in with the Gothic (and Hitchcockian) idea that what happens in the mind can be more frightening than anything the eyes can see so in order to create the utmost tension and terror, key scenes such as this are hidden from direct view.

Variations on the theatrical setting of Hitchcock's British sound films are the circus in *Murder!* (which is not as prominent as the theatre in the film but still serves as

a world within a world, one which is both unfamiliar and exaggerated), the cast list at the opening of *Number Seventeen* ('The Players') and, perhaps most overtly, the cinema in *Sabotage*. The movie theatre / cinema is the setting of the main part of the film, some scenes (one in particular) take place literally behind the screen (backstage), and we also have the film-within-the-film, *Who Killed Cock Robin?* This serves the same purpose as the play-within-the-play in that it draws attention to the film as a performance and to the characters as performers. It also focuses attention directly onto the most recent event, Stevie's (accidental) death at the (unintentional) hands of Verloc and, in particular, focuses on Mrs Verloc's reaction. As *Murder!*, at least in part, is aware of itself as a performance, *Number Seventeen* draws attention to itself as a film being shown in a cinema, particularly when Ben says 'you don't have to do nothing in this here house, you stay still and things happen'.

Imagery

Returning to the idea that Gothic literature is defined by its motifs or features we should take Spoto's view of *Number Seventeen*: 'Hitchcock seemed to settle for atmosphere as he accumulated Gothic elements: cobwebs, shadows on doorknobs, strange noises, vanishing corpses...'[53] In this respect we could regard *Number Seventeen* as the ultimate Gothic film. Each of these things do not just feature, however, they are deliberately exaggerated in order to focus the attention of the audience on them.

Durgnat describes *The 39 Steps* (amongst others) as a stream of vignettes:

> like a random sample of ordinary people, all bizarre in different ways – the cheerily obliging milkman, the dead-souled underwear salesman, a tramp who lives by mending broken crockery (an index of poverty).[54]

These minor characters themselves act like Gothic features or motifs, all exaggerated caricatures created simply for effect.

Bird imagery recurs in several of the films and is used primarily (as previously stated) as a metaphor for chaos and disorder, whether of the world at large, of a more small scale, local community or merely the people in it. Birds are symbols of something that cannot be harnessed by man and are therefore an ideal metaphor for the

peculiarly Gothic themes of chaos, disorder and general unrest. This imagery begins with *Blackmail* when we see a caged bird that chirps very loudly when Alice's mother comes into her room to 'wake her'. The chirping, growing continually louder, is almost a declaration of Alice's guilt, her having literally just returned from the scene of the crime. Birds appear in *Sabotage* also and Spoto discusses this in detail:

> Taking his cue from art history and literature, Hitchcock employs birds as destruction caused by human frailty – and sometimes of monstrous evil unleashed by situations often thought to be petty and inconsequential. Stevie, soon to be the innocent casualty of Verloc's sabotage, is shown in Trafalgar Square surrounded by birds, he feeds the birds, tries to befriend them – and presently he becomes the recipient of a gift of birds from Verloc. The boy is, then, constantly associated with 'the birds that will sing on Saturday', which phrase is the spies' code for the bombing of Piccadilly Circus. Innocence is swallowed up in a caldron of unthinking evil... Stevie is subsequently told by Verloc to 'kill two birds with one stone' by delivering film tins which (he is unaware) contain explosives – bombs Verloc has collected from an accomplice who, we might have guessed, tends a bird shop. Hitchcock has reached his stride at this point, for now we have a complete fusion of the *film* imagery with the *bird* imagery; he has not only linked the Verloc movie cinema with death and destruction, he has also pointed brilliantly to the ultimate significance of the murderous bird cartoon later. In this regard, it's no accident that after Stevie's death Verloc kneels before his wife, in contrition, but when she rises abruptly to leave him, the camera pulls back and we see Verloc kneeling before the caged birds, those metaphoric carriers of the destruction he uncaged.[55]

Whilst in some ways Spoto here seems to be reading quite a lot between the lines, the presence of so many bird images cannot be a coincidence, particularly if we look at Hitchcock's other films alongside.

The written word also features in similar ways as in traditional Gothic texts and German Expressionist films also, and for similar reasons. In *Young and Innocent*, for example, newspaper headlines explain the identity of the murder victim and Tisdall's arrest and questioning (there is also a certain element of montage here, highly reminiscent of the Soviet filmmakers) whilst the opening of *Sabotage* provides the

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audience with a dictionary definition (albeit fabricated) of the term 'sabotage' which gives an impression of reliability.

Mise En Scène

Murder! has perhaps the most atmospheric and overtly Gothic opening. In this scene it is dark (night time) there are bats, a clock striking, a woman screaming and a cat hurrying away, all the stereotypically Gothic atmospheric features. This is also a typical example of scene setting; it gives us the background for Hitchcock's only whodunit. It is also highly reminiscent of German Expressionist style as Rohmer and Chabrol point out:

> Though the setting is London, there is nothing British about it. It recalls German expressionism and suggests Berlin…The prison scene in which Sir John questions the woman he loves, and who is going to be hanged, and everything – the framing, the lighting, and even the décor, which is reduced to a few essential lines – irresistibly evokes Murnau.[56]

Despite these being Hitchcock's British sound films, many of them do display some of the features of their silent predecessors. Most of the obvious uses of sound appear in *Blackmail*, for example when the scream of Crewe's landlady upon discovering his dead body coincides with Alice's own scream when she sees the hand of a sleeping vagrant outstretched in the same manner as that of the man she has just killed. A further experimentation with sound occurs in *The 39 Steps* when the scream of Hannay's landlady is replaced by the sound of a train's whistle, followed by a cut to a train as it travels into a tunnel. Trains themselves (and transport in general) feature heavily in many of these films (*Blackmail, Number Seventeen, The 39 Steps, The Lady Vanishes, Secret Agent*) symbolising, as they do in traditional Gothic texts, both the changing face of the 'modern' world and some kind of movement or transition.

Rich and Strange has more silent features than *Blackmail* (and, of course, stars Joan Barry, the voice of Alice White). The opening of the film is highly reminiscent of silent cinema (although it does have some sound) and only one fifth of the entire film contains dialogue.[57] Elizabeth Weis argues that *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) is marked by 'an absence of any expressive use of sound' and suggests that 'is a

symptom of moral paralysis… in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* it is also a sign of emotional paralysis.'[58] Some of the other films (perhaps *The Skin Game* and *Number Seventeen* in particular) could be said to have too much dialogue in parts. The absence of a lot of dialogue or sound in some of the films draws attention to what is there and exaggerates the atmosphere and isolation.

This works particularly well in a scene in *Sabotage*. Mrs Verloc stands at the table serving vegetables, having just discovered that her husband was responsible for the death of her brother. Her eyes repeatedly focus on the carving knife on the table (as does the camera with every other shot, drawing our attention to it), then back to her face, over and over again, thus ensuring that the audience is fully aware of what is going through Mrs Verloc's mind. This scene does differ from a similar one in *Blackmail* (in which the word 'knife' becomes distorted through exaggeration and emphasis) in one major way, however, in that there is no dialogue at all. Here, then, the same result is achieved (that of exaggeration for effect) but this time in a purely visual way. A knife also appears in *The 39 Steps*, firstly used by Hannay to prepare supper, and then as a murder weapon when it reappears in Annabella's back.

Some of the framing in the films is also unusual or exaggerated. Some examples of this have already been mentioned: the apparent slicing of the staircase in Crewe's building in *Blackmail* so that the audience view the characters apparently through a missing wall, or the suicide of Fane in *Murder!* where the camera simply focuses on the swinging rope rather than on the body hanging from the end of it. Several more examples exist in *Murder!* alone, including one of the opening scenes in which the Markhams are framed in their window, almost like the use of a spotlight on stage. The sash window here also forms a metaphorical guillotine when they lean out and possibly suggests the future implications of the events that they are attempting to see (i.e. a murder has just been committed, the perpetrator of which must be executed, in one way or another).

Hitchcock himself commented on the use of the camera in the murder scene in *Sabotage*, saying:

> …you gradually build up the psychological situation, piece by piece, using the
> camera to emphasize first one detail, then another. The point is to draw the
> audience right inside the situation rather than to watch it from the outside, from
> a distance. And you can do this only by breaking the action up into details and

cutting from one to the other, so that each detail is forced in turn on the attention of the audience and reveals its psychological meaning. If you played the whole scene straight through, and simply made a photographic record of it with the camera always in one position, you would lose your power over the audience. They would watch the scene without becoming really involved in it, and you would have no means of concentrating their attention on those particular visual details which make them feel what the characters are feeling.[59]

The audience are thus meant to feel part of the action rather than impartial observers of it. This ensures a feeling of discomfort and tension or suspense which needs to be experienced to the end and cannot simply be switched off.

As in German Expressionist films and the silent films of Hitchcock, lighting and shadows are used to create extreme Gothic effects. Much of *Blackmail* is set at night and a dark and atmospheric mood is set up immediately. Towards the end of the film, as the police chase Tracy through the British Museum (ultimately to his death), the scene keeps cutting back to Alice sitting at home alone waiting. As time moves on a shadow slowly moves up the screen, eventually forming a noose-like shape around Alice's neck, reminding us of her guilt and implying that she is constantly coming closer to discovery. She is, after all, planning to confess her crime.

A similar technique is used in *Murder!* when Sir John's investigation seems to be running out of time. Its final stages are cross-cut with images of Diana sitting alone in her cell awaiting execution or, more probably (depending upon your point of view), rescue by Sir John and a pardon and release. The stark barrenness of Diana's cell throughout the film is continually broken by shadows of the window cast upon the wall. When Sir John visits Diana the shadow also falls upon her face (but not that of her visitor). This particular shadow obviously serves to remind the audience of the location (a prison cell) and by throwing the shadow over Diana's face, her own imprisonment is reinforced for us; she is quite literally trapped behind (the shadow of) bars. This particular technique seems more obviously suited to the stage than to the screen and reminds us of the setting and theme of this particular film, the theatre. A similar technique is used later in *Young and Innocent* when a shadow of the window is cast upon the wall of the police station as Tisdall is questioned.

Number Seventeen demonstrates great use of shadow as we perhaps would expect from a haunted house story set entirely at night. Here, shadows of bars are not

from windows but from the banisters on the staircase but they give a similarly enclosed feeling. Only a few minutes into the film we see the shadow of a hand lying between these bars / banisters (that of the 'corpse') and later the shadow of a hand on a door handle. Ben is also frightened of his own shadow until he realises (and double checks) that it is indeed his own. This might make him appear somewhat weak and stupid but does seem quite a realistic reaction given the rest of the circumstances.

Spoto points to the use of shadows in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) which are used to contrast one setting or sequence of events with another. He describes the film as:

> ...a story designed entirely in terms of related contrasts: the glamorous Alpine resort is contrasted with the grimy alleys and sooty slums back home; an elegant Swiss hotel and its glittering public spaces are reversed by dingy, narrow staircases and eerie shadows in which the later action occurs. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* in fact creates and sustains tensions by becoming ever more claustrophobic; lighting and set design do not merely locate the story, therefore, but also create mood.[60]

The shadows and grimness of one location serve to make the earlier one even more bright and full of life. Both are extreme exaggerations.

Overall, most of Hitchcock's British sound films demonstrate a combination of a variety of features to significant effect and can be accurately described as Gothic. *Blackmail* perhaps more obviously demonstrates more of these features than any other, though the Hitchcock film of this period which demonstrates most use of shadow is perhaps *Murder!*. Aside from those already mentioned, shadows appear in numerous scenes, including the murder scene itself. This film can perhaps be described as Hitchcock's most Germanic (at least from this period) and is the one most often compared (particularly by Rohmer and Chabrol) with the films of the German Expressionist directors. In his British sound films, Hitchcock unsettled his audience and achieved Gothic effects through a variety of means including the use of sound as well as visual effects. Other aspects of the films such as characterisation and settings conform to Gothic stereotypes as used by Hitchcock in his earlier films as well as by the authors of Gothic novels.

Notes

[1] Maurice Yacowar, *Hitchcock's British Film*, Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977, p.99

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[3] Charles Barr, *English Hitchcock*, Moffatt, Scotland: Cameron and Hollis, 1999, p.123

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[5] John Russell Taylor, *Hitch: The Authorised Biography of Alfred Hitchcock*, London: Sphere Books, 1978, p.88

[6] Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, London and Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Athlone, 1996, p.121

[7] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.25

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[9] David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.43

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[11] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.25

[12] William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 94

[13] Raymond Durgnat, 'The Business of Fear', in *Sight and Sound* 'Hitchcock' Supplement, BFI, 1999, p.5

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[15] Philip French, 'Alfred Hitchcock: The Filmmaker as Englishman and Exile', in *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1985, p.117

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[20] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1995, p.32

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[24] Durgnat, 'The Business of Fear', p.5

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[28] Gavin Millar, 'Hitchcock versus Truffaut', in *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1969, p.85

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[31] Durgnat, 'The Business of Fear', p.4

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[34] Ibid., p47-8

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[48] Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, p.71

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[50] Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.30

[51] Ibid., p.43

[52] Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, p.58

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7. Blackmail

Blackmail (1929) is, in many ways, the most obviously Gothic of Hitchcock's British sound films. This can be seen through its general storyline, with its focus on blackmail, attempted rape, murder and corruption, as well as various characters, settings and motifs.

Characters

Alice White is a typical Gothic heroine in many respects. She is obviously expected by those around her to be weak and passive and to correspond with the connotations of her surname (regarding purity and innocence). Her parents (and her boyfriend, Frank) treat her like a child even though she clearly is not one and obviously do not expect her to have a will or mind of her own. This corresponds with the old-fashioned attitude that women were the weaker sex and should do what they were told. They were the property of their fathers until they married and became under the control of their husbands. Alice, however, is very strong willed and seems to constantly attempt to throw off this pure image (almost like a child or teenager rebelling against her parents and authority generally). This involves treating Frank very badly and behaving in a generally rebellious way. To a certain extent this does result in her behaving like a rebellious child and this could be seen as partly to blame for the male characters in the film behaving in rather a patronising way towards her.

In one way, Alice could be seen as responsible for her own suffering and seems to escape relatively unpunished. In another way, however, it could be said that she suffers at the hands of men (and a patriarchal society generally) and that she only narrowly escapes a severe punishment for something that is not really her own fault. In this sense she mostly resembles Maria in Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, a Gothic heroine who is naïve and gullible rather than stupid and who suffers because of it. As Modleski points out, Alice begins by laughing at a man's joke and ends up being the butt of one.[1] She also argues that this relates to the overall theme, that of wresting power from women for men.[2] Generally speaking, many of the women in these films are punished for human indiscretions. Durgnat comments that:

> In *The Lodger* and *Blackmail*, unsophisticated girls from lower-middle-class homes are attracted, innocently enough, to 'classy' male strangers and then sucked into a realm of 'chaos and old night'. Both girls have policeman boyfriends who seem ponderous and stuffy beside their more cultivated rivals.[3]

Alice White is the first in a long line of tormented blonde heroines (or victims) in Hitchcock's films.[4]

Alice's boyfriend Frank also demonstrates weakness of character and so resembles a traditional Gothic hero. He is a police officer and initially appears to be an honest character with strong established morals. However, he soon abandons these morals for the sake of Alice. He thus appears to have been almost blackmailed (emotionally) by Alice (although there appears to be no clear intention on her part) as she has been blackmailed (literally) by Tracy. We could also assume that Frank loses any chance of future happiness because of his actions.

Whilst Alice's parents are present in the film they do not exert a positive influence over her. They are extremely unobservant, she stays out all night without them noticing (even though they do seem to be overprotective in other ways and treat her like a child) and they seem generally unaware of most of the events in the film. The person who has most influence and control over Alice is Frank. He has a hold over her because he knows she is guilty of murder[5] (or manslaughter, depending on our point of view) and this is thus a kind of patriarchal control.

With regard to the villain, *Blackmail* is quite complex. The label can initially be applied to Crewe, the artist, who takes Alice up to his studio and attempts to rape her. When he is subsequently killed by Alice, the story takes a different and perhaps unexpected turn. In many ways, Alice herself could now be viewed as the villain, depending upon how we view her 'crime' and her actions following it. Crewe's place as the villain of the piece is more directly taken by Tracy, the blackmailer, who chooses to be villainous (unlike Alice, who does not seem to be in control of her own actions). We could argue that Crewe was never intended to be an actual villain but was merely a temporary stand-in. Even his villainous moustache is an illusion, the shadow from a chandelier in one shot. Although Tracy has no moustache, his actions are overtly villainous; they cannot be misconstrued or misunderstood. At the end of the film we might even say that Frank is the villain as he knows about Alice's guilt and

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chooses to let Tracy take the blame. This is made worse by the fact that Frank is a police officer and it is his duty to tell what he knows and to ensure that justice is done. *Blackmail* thus resembles several Gothic texts in which it is difficult to ascertain who the villain is because many of the characters demonstrate villainous qualities. Various Gothic texts fit this description but *Wuthering Heights* is possibly the best example, with Heathcliff being chief candidate for the role but various others having unpleasant characteristics.

Settings

The various settings of the film can also establish it as Gothic. The film opens on busy, crime-filled, London streets in scenes that later recur when Alice wanders from Crewe's studio. This setting is very similar to the dark and gloomy London of *The Lodger* only three years earlier. This studio is at the top of the house and is reached by several staircases. As we watch Crewe and Alice climb the stairs to the studio there is a very odd and slightly unnerving shot in which the exterior house wall appears to be missing (perhaps suggesting that there is more to the situation than meets the eye, at least as far as Alice is concerned). This is contrasted with the classic vertical stairwell shot as Alice leaves after the murder, demonstrating her steep descent into guilt and remorse. Fisher says 'the descent expresses her anxiety over the man's death but also her guilt for having gone to a stranger's room in the first place.'[6]

Theatricality appears to be a feature of some scenes and settings in the film. Sterritt focuses in particular on the police van in the opening of the film. 'The flaps resemble a curtain, and the police officers' action resembles the start of a theatrical performance'.[7] He also focuses on the scene in Alice's bedroom when she returns home and is 'woken' by her mother:

> She is performing directly for the camera (and Hitchcock) in this scene, reassuring them (and herself) that she is still a healthy and vibrant young woman despite the trauma she has gone through. She starts the process by putting on makeup at a dressing table, then pulls her new dress from a curtained closet. The camera then frames her entire room frontally, as if it were a stage, before cutting in for close-ups. After changing, Alice walks through her bedroom door and appears at the head of the staircase, carefully preparing her

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entrance into the next part of the film – a spectacle staged for, as well as by, Hitchcock and his camera.[8]

This could, of course, alternatively be interpreted as a realist passage where Alice simply gets up and prepares for the day. In either case, this can be regarded as a Gothic scene, in the first instance by exaggerating her actions and creating a non-realist atmosphere, and in the second instance by unsettling the viewer by placing Alice's actions in Crewe's apartment, and her current state of mind, in the context of everyday life.

Rothman also points to the murder itself which takes place behind a curtain that he describes as 'Hitchcock's declaration of his theatricality and his own mystery.'[9] This fits in with the Gothic (and Hitchcockian) idea that what happens in the mind can be more frightening than anything the eyes can see so, in order to create the utmost tension and terror, key scenes such as this are hidden from direct view. This also corresponds with conventional positions on horror and violence coming across more powerfully in cinema if they are suggested obliquely rather than depicted graphically.

Mise En Scène

Changes and developments in filmmaking obviously had a profound effect on this film. It is, of course, widely acknowledged as the first British sound film, although there also exists a silent version with some differences. There were some difficulties regarding sound in the film, not least the very strong Czech accent of lead actress Anny Ondra. This was overcome by recording the sound simultaneously with the images, Ondra's lines being spoken off-screen by Joan Barry with the on-screen actress miming. Whilst this was very well done, it does add another dimension to the film. It succeeds in making Alice's voice both part of her and yet independent of her at the same time. She is not in control of her actions so why should she be in control of her voice? This adds a certain amount of mystery and a distinct air of the Gothic to the character and to the film as a whole.

What is perhaps the most famous feature of the film, the 'knife' sequence, is also dependent upon the use of sound and is also unsettling to the audience, or perhaps more accurately, the listener (as well as to Alice herself). It could be seen primarily as an experiment with sound. The word 'knife' becomes more and more distorted (when

any word is repeated over and over again it makes less sense each time and seems to come to mean something completely different) whereas the rest of the dialogue blurs and becomes completely muffled. This is clearly an example of exaggeration to draw attention to detail. The audience become completely focused on one thing (one word, in this case) at the expense of everything else around it.

A similar effect is achieved (though not to such extremes) during the scene in Alice's bedroom the morning after Crewe's murder. Here, the chirping of the bird in the cage seems to grow continually louder 'adding to the psychological pressure on Alice'.[10] This could simply be seen as a common technique in early sound films designed to draw attention to the additional element introduced by sound technology.

Gothic atmosphere is provided in *Blackmail* through the use of lighting and shadows particularly. Much of the film is set at night and a dark and atmospheric mood is set up immediately. Outside his flat, Crewe talks to Tracy (later to become the blackmailer). They talk quite a distance from Alice in order that she cannot listen and the camera remains on her throughout. The shadows of the faces of the two men are cast on the door beside Alice, giving their conversation a more sinister undertone and suggesting that something regarding one or both of the men will haunt Alice in one way or another later on. Upstairs in Crewe's studio, Alice looks down from the window and sees a policeman by the streetlamp outside. He is bathed in light whilst all else is in darkness, perhaps suggesting his honesty and reliability, at least as far as Alice can see. She feels safe when she sees him. Later in the same scene (in both the silent and sound versions) Alice struggles with Crewe in the shadows, the shadows themselves perhaps suggesting that neither character is as straightforward as they first appear and that they both have something to hide. Another example is the noose-like shadow that gradually tightens around Alice's neck in a scene towards the end of the film (this is discussed further in the previous chapter).

Imagery

The knife and the bird are symbolic motifs in the film. Sterritt focuses on a series of iconographic features or motifs in Hitchcock's films, including in *Blackmail* the laughing jester painting, the mask in the artist's apartment and the sculpture in the British Museum.[11] The jester painting has received much attention from critics, perhaps because its presence makes it almost into another character, one without an

actual voice but who still manages to make his (metaphorical) voice heard and who acts almost as an eyewitness to the crime of murder. The painting is present at the police station leading Sinyard to deduce that the jester, and ultimately the artist, has had the last laugh.[12] This also ensures that all those involved are reminded of Alice's guilt and possibly suggests that her guilty conscience will remain with her and be her punishment.

Overall, *Blackmail* tackles dark subject matter, topics that would not seem out of place in a traditional Gothic text. Characters are unhappy and displaced and the settings are dark and mysterious. Exaggeration techniques are used throughout to unsettle the audience, perhaps to make us feel as uncomfortable as Alice White herself. The tension may be relieved but the dark, Gothic cloud is never lifted as the film ends on a very negative note.

Notes

[1] Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York and London: Routledge, 1988, p.19
[2] Ibid., p.19
[3] Raymond Durgnat, 'The Business of Fear', in *Sight and Sound* 'Hitchcock' Supplement, BFI, 1999, p.4
[4] Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.19
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[7] David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.30
[8] Ibid., p.43
[9] William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1982, p.58
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8. Hitchcock's Early American Films

After his successes in both silent and sound films in the UK, Hitchcock moved to the USA in 1939 where his success continued beginning with *Rebecca* in 1940 (which is dealt with in a separate chapter and so will only be mentioned briefly here). Whilst the films Hitchcock made in the USA resemble his earlier British films in many ways, they also have distinct differences in style and appearance. Much of this can be attributed to the contribution of David O Selznick to whom Hitchcock was contracted. Selznick employed Hitchcock 'for only three films – *Rebecca, Spellbound* and *The Paradine Case*; for seven other pictures, Selznick loaned him out to other producers and studios, earning a huge profit'.[1] It must be noted that (particularly on *Rebecca*) Selznick was responsible for crew, casting and other major decisions.[2] Other significant differences between Hitchcock's early American films and those he made earlier in Britain can be attributed to other obvious factors such as changes in both geographical and political contexts (particularly the Second World War and the Cold War) as well as access to a much bigger budget. Despite all of this, Hitchcock's early American films (including those made under contract to Selznick) do still demonstrate many of the Gothic features of Hitchcock's earlier work.

Themes

The theme of *Suspicion* is one that recurs in Hitchcock's films and in other films of both the Gothic and related genres such as Film Noir (Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door*, for example). This theme, a woman suspecting her husband of trying to kill her, firmly places *Suspicion* in the sub-genre of Female Gothic (highlighting the fears of women), along with others of this period such as *Rebecca, Shadow of a Doubt* and *Notorious*. Other films from this period such as *Spellbound, Rope, Under Capricorn, Strangers on a Train* and *I Confess* more obviously fit into the category of Psychological Gothic. Hitchcock also made two comedies in this period: *Mr and Mrs Smith* that has quite a screwball quality in some respects and has very few Gothic features and *The Trouble With Harry,* a black comedy that unsettles the viewer by treating the unsavoury subject of death (and potentially murder) in an unexpected and

funny way. On the surface this might not seem like a Gothic film but this treatment of subject matter, along with the presentation of stereotypical characters and some of the setting, combine to give an overall unsettling effect usually associated with Gothic.

Murder features in the majority of Hitchcock's early American films. Whilst not a Gothic theme per se, murder does feature in a lot of traditional Gothic texts and it could be argued that the effects of it on the characters and the audience add to the overall Gothic atmosphere and feeling of uncertainty and discomfort. Murder serves to upset the equilibrium. The whole story in *Rope* centres on murder, 'a truly immaculate murder' committed just for the sake of it. David is not murdered because of who he is or anything he does but simply because of a game ('cat and mouse') or experiment. It is clearly well plotted (at least by Brandon) and the dinner party is prepared well in advance. The conversation even centres on the subject of murder, a subject that only Mr Kentley seems to find unsavoury.

Various other themes recur in these films, some of which can be obviously linked with that of murder. Flight and pursuit features heavily (in *Saboteur* most obviously), along with the theme of the wrongly accused man. This is obviously the main theme of the film *The Wrong Man*, a particular favourite of Hitchcock himself. In the film we follow Manny through the entire police process of arrest, fingerprinting and so on, almost as if we are experiencing it along with him. Throughout the entire process Manny is very polite and respectful. Sterritt looks at this in detail:

> Manny calls everyone 'sir' and strains to cooperate with the most humiliating demands, such as the forced parades through the recently robbed establishments. He calls his own lawyer 'Mr O'Connor' while the attorney calls him by his first name. (An authority figure in Manny's eyes and therefore wise in all things, O'Connor must even perceive and point out Rose's degenerating mental condition before Manny can take notice of it).[3]

Manny is completely out of his depth in this kind of situation and resembles a child in need of help and guidance from his parents. He does not flee because he (rather naively) believes that justice will prevail. He knows he is innocent and assumes the police will find out the truth eventually.

Disguise and deception feature in the films in various ways ranging from role-play in *Stage Fright* (an obvious link with its theatrical setting) to the keeping of a

confession secret for religious reasons in *I Confess*. Whilst murder is obviously a central theme in *Shadow of a Doubt*, deception is also high on the agenda. At the beginning Uncle Charlie provides a false name, then travels under another, pretending to be ill. The means by which the detectives gain access to the house and family are also highly deceptive; they pose as journalists conducting a National Public survey on the typical American family.

Deception and disguise are also predominant in *To Catch a Thief*. Overall the film centres on Robie, a reformed cat burglar and his 'copycat' but the theme climaxes in a scene where all the characters are disguised at a costume ball, a situation where everyone is pretending to be someone else. This is taken a step further when Robie changes disguise part way through the ball, adding to the confusion and unsettling the audience.

Characters

Many of the characters in Hitchcock's films of this period share Gothic qualities with their earlier counterparts. Many of the heroines seem weak and passive on the surface though many of them assert themselves and demonstrate some strengths whilst the heroes usually demonstrate inherent weaknesses, leaving them in need of help from others. Villains are often stereotypically sophisticated and wealthy and are often in the position of a father figure or other protective or trusted role to the central heroine. In many cases the central male figure fits into the role of anti-hero (demonstrating a combination of the qualities of both hero and villain) as in many traditional Gothic texts.

In *Suspicion*, Lina initially lacks confidence and self-respect and seems to marry Johnny Aysgarth to spite her parents who are familiar with his reputation of being 'an irresponsible but dashing spendthrift'.[4] When we first see Lina she is wearing glasses and tweed and looks very dowdy, not at all the kind of woman we would expect Aysgarth (the sophisticated, society man) to like. It would appear that he is attracted to her *because* of her naivety and lack of self confidence rather than *in spite* of it. Lina is by no means unattractive, she just doesn't seem to feel confident attracting attention.

Nothing is really hidden from the audience about either character from the beginning. Aysgarth is set up as a con man right from the start when he has the wrong

train ticket. We find out who he is at the same time Lina does; from the photograph in her book. This saves a long, elaborate (and probably boring) explanation and serves the same purpose as the written word in this type of film (and particularly in films of the silent era). His confidence and sophistication also seem to set him up as a potential villain from the beginning. However, he is also in need of help from Lina (particularly financially) and this seeming weakness possibly suggests he also fits the role of hero. Here Hitchcock leaves us in doubt throughout as to whether Aysgarth is good or bad and whether Lina is correct in her assumptions or just paranoid.

Aysgarth does lie to his wife about gambling, losing his job and so on and though the ending seems to suggest that they will live happily ever after we (and Lina) will perhaps never know whether the milk was poisoned and whether or not he was attempting to push her from the car. Throughout the film we are given the impression of a nervous and highly suspicious (even neurotic) woman who has an overactive imagination which is not helped by her selection of letters in the anagram game, by her detective-writing next door neighbour, Aysgarth's lies that we do know about, or by the death of Beaky. Overall, the audience is left uncertain of the characters and events throughout the film.

Barry Kane in *Saboteur* is a typical Gothic hero as well as a typical Hitchcockian hero. He is accused of a crime he did not commit and is pursued by both the villains and the police. He is unable to help himself and has to rely on the assistance of others. The heroine, Patricia Martin, is highly suspicious of Kane from the start and initially seems to be a very strong willed character. However, it is, of course, Kane who emerges as more heroic at the end (or, at least, he attempts to be) so undermining Patricia's strength. She also demonstrates certain feminine weaknesses such as being frightened when Kane tells her there are snakes.

Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt* is an effective Gothic villain. He is both familiar and unfamiliar, in this case, to his family; they know him and yet they do not know him. He is charming and seductive and something of a local celebrity, leading to him giving a lecture to the local women's group. Widows flirt with him and see him as attractive and posing no threat. It is precisely this, his power over people, the power to make people believe that he is a good person, that makes him appear so villainous. He has 'a mission to destroy' (perhaps another reference to Jack the Ripper?), said Hitchcock in his interview with Truffaut. In the same interview Truffaut points out that 'the character...even has the public's sympathy, probably because [you] never actually

show him in the act of killing the widows.'[5] His evil is thus only suggested; we never actually see it. Even when he dies, the full extent of his villainy is never even suspected by the majority of the characters.

We first see Uncle Charlie lying, fully clothed, on a bed in the dark. Some critics have pointed to the character's vampiric qualities. He lies in the dark beside a pile of money, there are no photographs of him (he says) and he actively avoids cameras. Sterritt says that:

> Vampire references follow him through the film. He is like a vampire in his coffin when first seen, waiting for the sun to sink below the horizon so he can begin his evil activities. When the landlady draws the blind on his window her action is traced by the movement of shadow down her face, in a shot that could have been borrowed from a Universal or Hammer horror film. Other signs include his refusal to be photographed and Saunders's half-joking request for Ann to tell 'the story of Dracula' as they walk away from church on a Sunday morning.[6]

McLaughlin compares Uncle Charlie with Dracula himself:

> Like Dracula, Uncle Charlie comes from 'the East.' Like Dracula, he possesses a fearsome grip – twice Charlie complains that he hurts her when he grabs her. Like Dracula, he is associated with the dead and the dark. (There are those great stretches of night in *Shadow of a Doubt*, those realms of darkness which haunt the day without yielding an hour and disappear eventually only in the new night of death.) When Uncle Charlie speaks to the landlady of the boardinghouse, he sounds barely alive, indeed looks barely alive, until she pulls down the window shade. Thereupon, Uncle Charlie springs up from the bed with a startling automatism and throws his glass against the wall: the darkness, with its magnetic obscurity, attracts and provides him with an explosive revivification.[7]

Overall, Uncle Charlie is associated with darkness and death.

The heroine in the film, young Charlie, is set in contrast with her villainous uncle. She is young, vibrant and full of life. She is perhaps a little young at the beginning of the film and seems a little flighty and gullible at first but she gains

strength and maturity as the film progresses. She is intelligent; more intelligent, it seems, than the rest of her family who remain oblivious throughout. Gallafent says that *Shadow of a Doubt* represents or provides 'the best example of the monstrousness of family in the horror film.'[8]

Lifeboat might at first seem an unlikely film to be labelled Gothic but it nevertheless has some typical Gothic features. The characters mostly appear to be exaggerated, at some points almost to caricature. Constance is perhaps the most exaggerated of all. She is represented through a series of material objects, all of which represent a different part of her personality. When she loses these things one by one (her camera, typewriter, suitcase, fur coat and bracelet) she also loses her identity and has to create a new one. At the beginning she is presented as hard-hearted, unfeeling (a stereotypical journalist?) and perfectly presented in terms of hair, dress and makeup. As the story progresses she lets her hair down (both literally and metaphorically) and becomes a much more likeable character. She is also a very strong woman at the beginning but seems to lose some of her strength in some ways when she loses her belongings and she eventually appears to be less harsh and much more feminine.

Just as many of the earliest Gothic texts were (either directly or indirectly) comments on the social and political contexts in which they were written, *Lifeboat* can be seen as 'an uncompromised microcosmic representation of the World War II situation.'[9] The characters each represent nations or cultural groups (albeit stereotypes) and their varying loyalties represent the alliances of the nations during the Second World War.

Constance Peterson in *Spellbound* at first appears to be a very strong heroine. She is intelligent, attractive and good at her job, until Dr Edwards / John Ballantyne comes along. Up to this point she has not been a romantic and she talks about love as something scientific. Throughout the story, Constance seems to be the strong figure who helps others but we could argue that her judgement becomes seriously impaired when she falls in love. Dr Brulov says 'the mind of a woman in love is operating on the lowest level of the intellect'. Almost like Constance in *Lifeboat*, Dr Peterson seems to become more feminine as the film progresses. John Ballantyne, by contrast, is a typically weak Gothic hero. He is constantly in need of Constance's help. He is so passive that he doesn't even know his own identity or what he has done in the past; when he looks in the mirror he sees only the mirror.

Devlin in *Notorious* is a cool, calm and collected hero (even when he is being driven, at high speed by a drunken Alicia). He loves Alicia but seems unable to tell her and this is possibly why she marries Alex Sebastian. *She* never tells Devlin that she loves him either and this is possibly why Spoto describes *Notorious* as 'a film about concealing feelings.'[10] Devlin is also very suave and sophisticated, attributes that could suggest he has villainous qualities but these do seem to be regarding his concealing his feelings towards Alicia. This, along with him needing Alicia's help to uncover Sebastian's actions, also seems to be his weakness.

Anthony Keene in *The Paradine Case* is a wealthy, intelligent man with a weakness; his feelings for Mrs Paradine. He has a beautiful, intelligent wife who is loyal and loving towards him. At the end of the story she is the one with the strength whilst he is the one who needs to be rescued. Mrs Paradine is guilty but Keene seems unable to see this. Whenever we see her she is always shadowed, for example when Keene interviews her in prison we see shadows of the bars of her cell across her face (symbolising her guilt).

The hero in *Rope* would be extremely difficult to identify. The two central figures could be seen as having some heroic features but we must remember that the film opens with them murdering someone! Philip is the most likely candidate for the label of hero (or perhaps more accurately, anti-hero). The murder appears not to have been his idea and he took part seemingly against his better judgement. He is thus very easily led and largely innocent: a typical Gothic hero with weaknesses. He is very nervous throughout the film, making mistakes when playing the piano and cutting his hand when he breaks his glass; all going to show that, unlike Brandon, he has a conscience.

Brandon is immediately set up in contrast with Philip. The murder seems to have been all his idea and he has, in some way, managed to manipulate Philip into helping him. Overall he seems confident but always gives the impression that he has a hidden agenda. Brandon does seem to get nervous when Rupert arrives but this is more like nervous excitement rather than anxiety. He seems to seek Rupert's approval whilst Philip seems to be more worried about what Rupert will do if he discovers what they have done. Brandon, it seems (unlike Philip), has no conscience. Whilst Philip sees everything as a sign of his guilt (for example when Mrs Atwater tells him his hands will bring him great fame), Brandon deliberately draws attention to the details of their guilt as if to see how far he can push his luck.

The most obvious hero figure in the film would be Rupert, Brandon and Philip's housemaster from school. He is a sort of father figure for the two young men who seem to constantly seek his approval. He is highly intelligent and very well respected by everyone. His words are easily misinterpreted (or twisted?), however, when he says 'murder is a crime for most men but a privilege for the few'. He either really believes this or simply does not think through before he speaks.

The heroine, Janet, is, in many ways, a typical heroine. She is headstrong and confident and seems to be able to use her sexuality to get what she wants (she writes for a magazine called *Allure*). She is currently David's girlfriend; before that she went out with Kenneth and before that, Brandon. Cohen describes her (quite appropriately) as 'fickle and mercenary'.[11] She is also very passive and says stereotypically feminine things such as 'mind my hair' and 'you smell dreamy'. She sits whilst the men stand and stays out of the conversation because she has nothing to add, thus keeping herself in a position of inferiority.

The most passive character in the story, though, is David Kentley: Harvard undergraduate and murder victim. He is introduced to us when he is named in full at the beginning. As David is already dead when we first see him (albeit only just) he is denied a voice. However, he does link everyone in the story and other people constantly ask where he is and express concern about him.

In *Stage Fright* the heroine Eve Gill is an actress and takes every opportunity to play a part. She plays the part of amateur detective and the part of Doris the maid (Nellie's imaginary cousin). She persuades Nellie to go along with this by telling her she is a journalist; she is thus playing the part of a journalist playing the part of a maid, acting twice. Charlotte Inwood, a professional actress, puts on a spectacular performance to the police about her husband's murder. Jonathan (Johnny) Cooper also gives a very convincing performance to Eve regarding the murder. He is perhaps convincing because he does not present himself as a completely innocent figure; he says he was having an affair with Charlotte Inwood and that she killed her husband, but that he helped her afterwards. However, he does imply that she emotionally blackmailed him. Charlotte's story is rather different; she says Johnny killed her husband (whilst she was in the room). The audience are more convinced by Johnny's story because we are *shown* it in the now infamous lying flashback sequence. We have been given the opportunity to get to know Johnny and to sympathise with him. His character is already established for us when we meet Charlotte so we assume that she

(seemingly hard hearted and arrogant) is lying. In traditional Gothic terms she is also set up as a villain from the start because she is foreign.

The hero figure in *Stage Fright* is Wilfred O Smith, a piano playing policeman. We know he is a nice man because he has tea with Eve's mother who likes him. He seems ineffectual because he doesn't appear to notice what is going on in front of him (although it eventually becomes clear that he is not as naïve as Eve, and we, first thought). He is a professional detective in contrast with Eve, the amateur. When he realises Eve is Doris he takes charge; they work together but they do things his way.

The hero of *Strangers on a Train*, Guy Haines, has typically Gothic aspects to his personality. When he first appears he seems to be very nervous and restrained, almost shifty. Throughout the film he suffers because of his inability, or perhaps reluctance, to act. In many ways Bruno does him a favour (he gets rid of Miriam, an obstacle to Guy's future happiness) and, although he is innocent, Guy does not tell the police what happened. He feels responsible for Miriam's death and perhaps a little guilty because Bruno has done something which he himself would have liked to have done but didn't have the courage to. Guy's only really heroic act appears to be when he saves the little boy on the carousel during his fight with Bruno (with no apparent thought to any danger to himself). Throughout the film Guy is a very ineffectual hero who is constantly helped by others. When considering the theme of guilt in this film we are forced to wonder to what extent Guy even considered Bruno's offer and how far he is therefore to blame for what happens.

Equally weak in certain ways is the villain of the film, Bruno Anthony. Unlike Guy, at the beginning of the film Bruno seems to be very laid back and open, even trustworthy. Ann's senator father describes him as 'an interesting personality', perhaps suggesting that there is more to him than meets the eye. We can tell quite early on that Bruno is going to be unpleasant when he deliberately bursts a child's balloon with a cigarette. However, this directly contrasts with his helping a blind man cross the road outside the fairground. The 'doubling' motif of the film thus centres on Bruno himself who seems to have two very distinct and opposing personalities. Although very intelligent he does not seem to recognise sarcasm and when Guy humours him by telling him 'sure, they're all ok' (referring to his ideas) he thinks he means it sincerely. He is also unnaturally calm after Miriam's murder.

Ann (Guy's fiancée) seems older and more mature than Guy and Wood argues that their kiss 'lacks real intimacy or tenderness'.[12] She seems to take the place of a

mother figure for Guy whose real parents are never mentioned. There is also an immediate contrast between Ann and Miriam (who is quite a villainous and immoral character) in terms of looks, personalities and social standing. Both women, however, seem to use their sexuality to get what they want, as seen when Ann kisses Guy to prevent him repeating that he would like to kill Miriam, who herself visits the fairground with *two* young men, making her appear even more loose and immoral than she did before.

In *I Confess* Father Logan's behaviour does nothing to divert any attention away from him. He behaves suspiciously and seems unable to answer any of Larrue's questions. On the surface he seems to be the ultimate heroic figure; he is a handsome war hero (awarded the military cross). He would not marry Ruth before he went away to war because he said he did not want her to be a war widow, and it was she who married someone else in his absence, making him the victim. When the two of them spent the night together in the summerhouse (when, to a certain extent, it is left to the audience's imagination to decide what does or does not happen) he was not a priest and did not know she was married so he was innocent, or at least ignorant, of any immoral act. His only crime seems to have been when he hit Villette in anger and it is this action that is referred to in court to suggest that he is capable of murder.

The truth only comes out after the trial. Father Logan is not acquitted because of his innocence but because of insufficient evidence. The judge (and everyone else) disagrees with the verdict and all seem too eager to believe in his guilt (perhaps a comment on the power of religion and the eagerness of some to see it fail). The absurdity of religion is emphasized throughout, centring, of course, on the tradition of the confession and culminating in Father Logan reading Keller his last rites as he dies, showing his forgiveness. Father Logan sticks to the dictates of his religion but *it* does nothing for *him* when he needs help. Father Logan's religion is represented by his dog collar, emphasized as he descends the stairs outside the courtroom when someone shouts 'take off that collar'. Fisher says Logan's:

> long descent down the circular staircase after his murder trial is a kind of metaphor for the degradation of the innocent man before the mob. The staircase heightens the intensity of his emotional trauma.[13]

In this way he hearkens back to Novello's character in *Downhill* whose moral and emotional descent is represented by his physical descent down stairs, escalators and a lift.

The only character in the film that is ultimately able to draw attention to the truth is Anna Keller. She is one of only three characters who know the truth (along with her husband and Father Logan) but, like Father Logan, she is restricted. He is restricted by his religion and she by her traditional feminine role in the household. She eventually tells the truth outside the courtroom and her husband shoots her. She has demonstrated strength and been punished for it.

This is another example of a Hitchcock film with two villains. The first, Villette, is a blackmailer (always a secondary crime with Hitchcock) and, it could be argued, gets what he deserves. Ironically, however, it is not one of his victims that kills him. Keller kills Villette accidentally (with no knowledge of the blackmail) and his real crime comes later: what he does to Father Logan. Keller also blatantly lies in court. Other characters agonize over telling the truth in court and doing the right thing by the church but Keller doesn't seem to care. Ironically, however, he is relying on religion (and Father Logan in particular) to protect him and keep his secret.

In the first scene of *Dial M For Murder* Margot is dressed in white and she kisses her husband, though not passionately. In the next scene she is dressed in red (suggesting immediately that she is not as pure as we were led to believe) and passionately kisses Mark. This is seen as Tony's justification for trying to kill his wife. In other ways Margot is seen as quite gullible and she never suspects Tony of trying to kill her. On the contrary it seems she looks to Tony for protection; he is much older than she and he seems to be more like a father figure than a husband.

Mark appears to be the real heroic figure, or at least has the potential to *become* a hero. He is the one who figures out what Tony has done and his only desire is to help Margot, the woman he loves. Tony Wendice plays the role of a loving husband and even speaks up in Margot's defence after she is arrested. He is clever and plans everything in advance but is eventually tripped up when he uses the key from the stairs that theoretically should not still be there. Tony asks Mark earlier if he believes in 'the perfect murder', presumably to tell us that this is what he is planning. Tony has also blackmailed his wife (anonymously).

Although Tony is the ultimate scheming villain we must not forget C A Swan, the man hired and paid to kill Margot. He is a stereotypical villain; he has a moustache

and has already been in jail. In some ways he is also a victim of Tony; he doesn't seem to have the option of refusing the offer and is ultimately killed because of it. During their conversation Tony never uses the word 'murder' although Swan says it several times.

L B Jeffries in *Rear Window* is a weak and passive hero. He is confined to a wheelchair because of his broken leg and is unable to move very far or to leave his room. He also has to have everything done for him by either Stella or Lisa and is thus completely reliant on women. In the very first scene he is on the telephone and through his conversation and the camera movement around the room we learn that he is a photographer, how he broke his leg (and that his cast will come off in two weeks) and his views on marriage (from his discussion of 'nagging wives'). He is also, of course, an amateur detective, an interest taken up through boredom rather than any other reason. Jeff resembles what might be seen as a stereotypically female character and it is possible to read this film as an example of Female Gothic in which the anxieties of a seemingly passive female figure (here represented by Jeff) are a stimulus to events.

Lisa Fremont is described by Jeff as 'too perfect'. She is beautiful, loving and extremely patient. When we first see her she has prepared herself and the scene and introduces herself to us, lighting the room as she goes. She is set up from the beginning as an object of desire and is seen through a misty haze, Jeff's perspective as he wakes up. At the beginning of the film she is also extremely feminine, with regards to both her behaviour and her appearance. As the film progresses she becomes more adventurous and the possibility of taking on an active masculine role seems to excite her. Even her clothes change; she wears very feminine dresses at the beginning and trousers at the end (although the magazine she reads in the final scene suggests she still retains her feminine passivity). Modleski looks at this in detail: at the end Jeff has two broken legs, 'the body less perfect than ever, while Lisa lounging on the bed, has become the mirror image of the man – dressed in masculine clothes and reading a book of male adventure...'[14] As she takes on a more active role this also seems to make Jeff see her in a different light and become more fond of her than before.

Lisa wants to marry Jeff but he isn't ready. She is thus the strong decisive one who knows what she wants whilst Jeff is weak and unable to make up his mind. His confusion is obvious (along with his desire to keep control of the situation and not give Lisa the upper hand) when he is obviously disturbed that Lisa says goodbye rather than goodnight after he has spurned her advances. Theirs is not a relationship of equals. He

is older than she and at points seems almost like a protective father figure rather than a potential lover, whilst at other times she seems to be the one in control and must, therefore, be kept in her place. When Stella calls Jeff 'window shopper' she is just as easily referring to his relationship with Lisa as to his voyeuristic tendencies. Lisa appears to be genuinely in love with Jeff who remains unresponsive, perhaps even repulsed throughout. Like Victor Frankenstein faced with the prospect of a relationship with a very beautiful (possibly perfect) woman, he is unable to act.

Mrs Thorwald is the ultimate Gothic passive victim (and has obvious similarities with David Kentley in *Rope*). She never speaks or gets to defend herself and yet (because of her murder) she is, in effect, the central focus of attention throughout the film. Her husband never speaks either and so is never able to defend or explain his actions. His lack of verbal defence or representation makes him seem less human; we are unable to empathise with him or even to see him as a real person. These characters (and all the neighbours) are detached from the 'reality' of the world of Jeff's apartment and are depicted in an exaggerated, almost caricature fashion.

Jeff introduces us to the 'characters' he watches by discussing them with Lisa. Modleski points out that Jeff names all the women opposite according to body parts and she sees this as a direct link to the 'gruesome jokes about Lars Thorwald's cutting up his wife's body'.[15] Modleski also thinks 'Thorwald's murder of his wife enacts a wish on the part of Jeff to be rid of Lisa.'[16] Others have compared Jeff with Mrs Thorwald rather than her husband. Cohen refers to Hitchcock's interview with Truffaut in which he points to Jeff's incapacity as a reflection of the female position in culture and particularly a reflection of Mrs Thorwald; Jeff is thus feminized.[17]

In *To Catch a Thief* Hitchcock presents us with a strong heroine who is forced to use her sexuality to her advantage and who eventually has to accept a traditional feminine role. The portrayal of Francie can also be linked back to the theme of deception if we consider Deborah Thomas's view:

> As a younger version of her mother (earlier that day Francie has remarked, 'There's not much difference between us'), Francie, like her necklace, is an imitation, presenting no more than an impossibly beautiful and flawless surface, while her mother, whose jewels are genuine, is, in some sense, the real thing.[18]

We also have a female villain in the film who is clever and agile but eventually caught, and a hero who, like traditional Gothic heroes, is in need of help.

Jennifer Rogers in *The Trouble With Harry* is young, independent, strong and attractive. She need not be undermined for her strength, however, as all of it is directed into mothering. As with traditional Gothic heroines, maternal strength does not pose a threat to patriarchal authority and so need not be punished or repressed. The hero, Sam, is strong, handsome, and a stranger in town, his potential weakness. In this film we also have the ultimate passive victim in the form of Harry, the corpse, who, it seems, got exactly what he deserved. Like Jennifer Rogers, Jo McKenna in Hitchcock's 1956 remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is a very strong mother. She saves her child with the strength of her love and is not a typical weak woman. For the most part, her husband Ben is ineffectual as a hero or as a father and has to sit back helplessly.

Manny in *The Wrong Man* is a weak hero. He is always willing to believe the best in people, he is a good man, a loyal husband and a loving father, as well as a good son to his mother. He agrees to go with the police to various places, cooperating because he has no reason not to. Eventually he has to play detective to provide himself with an alibi because the police are particularly ineffectual. They appear to be friendly at first and say they will call his wife but they don't until much later. Though not so detailed as in *I Confess*, this film does develop a theme of religion. Manny is a devout Catholic who keeps his rosary beads in his cell and holds them during his trial. Later he prays for justice and is saved. Unlike Father Logan, Manny seems to be helped by his religion.

Ultimately, Manny's alibi rests on his having a swollen face at the time of one of the robberies, which would have made him look completely different from his usual self. In this ultimately unsettling aspect of the film, then, we learn that, at the time of the robbery, the real hold-up man looked more like Manny than Manny did himself and, it could therefore be argued, had stolen his identity along with everything else. This loss of identity is emphasized further when Rose breaks the mirror and Manny's reflection becomes 'the reverse side of his perfect fatherly image: the cracked clownish face of an obscene madman.'[19] Even Manny's reflection is distorted and, not only did the women at the police station misrecognise him, he also, at this point, misrecognises himself.

Manny's wife Rose is quite strong at the beginning of the story. She is a loyal wife and a good mother and despite a painful toothache she does not complain. She

never questions her husband's innocence but she (along with his mother) is unable to help him directly and has to call his brother-in-law. (Even Manny's father is ineffectual; we never see him as he is at home ill). This all suggests that women (and parents) are weak. This is reinforced later when Rose loses all her earlier strength and is eventually committed to an asylum. As she is led away she doesn't even say goodbye and Manny is left alone and helpless at the door.

As with many of Hitchcock's earlier films there is a strong presence of parental figures and substitute parents in these films. As is usual in Gothic texts most of these figures are extremely ineffective in their caring and guiding role and their children (or the characters under their care) often fall into danger because of their negligence. Lina's parents are present throughout *Suspicion*; the portrait of her father is a constant presence even after his death. However, despite this, they are still ineffectual. They know of Aysgarth's reputation but are unable to prevent the marriage and do very little for her afterwards. They criticise their daughter and call her 'spinsterish'; when they should be trying to boost her self-confidence, they are undermining it.

The only major character with any parental authority in *Saboteur* is Philip Martin, Patricia's uncle. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to De Lacey in *Frankenstein*, Martin is old and blind. This, of course, means that he is ineffectual as an authority figure because he is unable to actually see what is happening and unable to defend himself. However, unlike De Lacey, who seems to be completely unaware of things around him, Martin is more perceptive than we first think; for example, he knows that Kane is wearing handcuffs. The similarity with the storyline of *Frankenstein* cannot simply be coincidental; Martin is not just an old blind man, he is also alone in a cottage in the woods.

In a sense, Uncle Charlie (*Shadow of a Doubt*) is a father figure to his niece and this is reminiscent of various other Hitchcock films in which women marry (or are attracted to) men old enough to be their fathers whom they then suspect of trying to kill them. It cannot be denied that there is an attraction between Charlie and her uncle, a hint at incest making the story even more disturbing. Family relationships are obviously important here. McLaughlin says 'the representative American family [in short] is the true horror of the film.'[20] The police pose as reporters writing a story about a 'typical American family' and young Charlie's guilt and confusion are caused simply because she doesn't want to hurt her mother by telling her what has happened. Her mother is 'a wonderful woman, she's not just a mother'. Wonderful though she may

be, she remains unaware of everything her brother has done. She is so out of touch with the world that she shouts on the telephone, much to the dismay and embarrassment of her children (symbolic of her ignorance).

Young Charlie's father is an honest man who works in a bank. Despite his frequent discussions with Herb, his next-door neighbour, about methods of murder, he remains, like his wife, unaware of what is actually happening. His discussions with Herb are a black comedy touch, ironically hinting at what is happening whilst the characters remain blissfully ignorant: an unsettling emphasis for the audience. McLaughlin says 'the father becomes the presence that is really an absence' referring not only to Charlie's symbolic / metaphorical returning of his sister to her younger unmarried state[21] but also to Joe's obvious lack of authority over his children; he plays the role of a typically Gothic ineffectual parent. Husbands (perhaps also as a controlling or authoritative presence) are also absent in the film; hence the 'merry widows'.[22]

Parenting plays a major role in *Notorious*. Alicia's father, John Huberman, committed treason against the USA and killed himself in his cell, leaving his devastated daughter to rebuild her life after the shock. Modleski points to this father figure as being the reverse of that in *Suspicion*: one is an upstanding military officer and the other is a traitor. In both films Cary Grant plays the antithesis of the father.[23] Madame Sebastian is evil and twisted and it is she, rather than Alex, who poisons Alicia and emerges as the real villain of the piece. Alex is almost like a little child who needs his mother to take care of him; it is *her* he runs to when he is worried or upset, *she* keeps the house keys and *she* says she will sort things out. Their relationship is almost incestuous and he says she has been jealous of every woman he has gone out with. In some ways (not least of these being the presence of a domineering mother) we could see Alex Sebastian as Norman Bates' natural predecessor. Alex was a friend of Alicia's father and he seems almost a father figure to her. It is certainly not a marriage of equals and whilst she seems happy being cared for in a fatherly way, he is made to feel superior to someone and everyone in the Sebastian household (including his mother) seems to form a social hierarchy. At the end of the film Alex is abandoned to the mercy of his cohorts, possibly as punishment for his previous weak behaviour. Thomas sees this as 'a particularly clear example' of 'where the so-called 'bad' woman turns out to be 'good' [and] her lover's sadism is all the more blatantly exposed.'[24]

Mrs Wilson in *Rope* is another parental figure. She is the housekeeper and thus plays a traditional female role. She talks to Philip like his mother, making sure he eats properly for example, but is otherwise very unobservant. She comes closest to discovering what has happened and yet still remains blissfully unaware. The only *actual* parents in the film are Mr and Mrs Kentley, the latter of which does not actually appear (she is ill) but does express her concerns for her son over the telephone. Mr Kentley does not express the same concerns even though he is at the scene of the crime, along with his sister-in-law, Mrs Atwater.

In *Stage Fright*, Eve's mother seems observant when she sees through her disguise very easily but she seems oblivious to anything else happening in her daughter's life. Commodore Gill (Eve's father) seems rather eccentric and perhaps not the best influence on his daughter. He and Eve's mother are also divorced and he is not a constant presence in Eve's life, which means he is unlikely to ever have been an effective authority figure.

In *Strangers on a Train,* what seems to shape Bruno's personality more than anything else is his relationship with his parents. His father is very authoritarian and Bruno seems to have some fear of him. Bruno's relationship with his father is emphasized by his mother's painting which he assumes is of his father. He seems very close to his mother, however (perhaps a precursor to Norman Bates), and she is very overprotective, treating him like a child and trying to protect him from his father. When Guy visits the Anthony house late at night Bruno says he will not shoot him because 'it might disturb mother'. He mentions her within minutes of our (and Guy's) meeting him; she bought his tie-pin with his name on it, almost like children's clothes with name labels in. When Ann tries to help Guy she doesn't talk to Bruno but to his mother.

The rectory where Father Logan lives in *I Confess* is a sort of microcosm of the world surrounding it. The people who live there, whilst not related to each other (except Mr and Mrs Keller), are a kind of family. Father Millais is the father figure in this 'family' but, as with most Gothic parents, he is ultimately ineffectual and does nothing to protect or defend Father Logan. Figures of law and order in *I Confess* seem to be equally ineffectual. Pierre Grandfort (Ruth's husband) is a respected politician but is unable to prevent his wife from being unfaithful and later, from confessing all in a public forum and risking humiliation for them both. Inspector Larrue is very unobservant and never changes his way of thinking. Every other priest in Quebec can

account for his own movements on the night of the murder but Inspector Larrue never considers that the murderer may have been someone *dressed* as a priest. It seems that imitating a priest may be too great a crime to even consider, even greater than murder.

Stella in *Rear Window* is Jeff's nurse and the obvious mother figure in the film. The first thing she says is 'we've become a nation of Peeping Toms. What people ought to do is get outside their own houses and look in for a change' (a quote Jeff says is from *Reader's Digest*) and this is surely a prediction of what will happen in the course of the film. Whilst Jeff does not always seem to take Stella seriously he does need her. Not only does she look after him but she has to go and bail Lisa out when she is arrested, something Jeff is physically incapable of doing. It is only when Stella leaves him that he is in danger from Thorwald. Parental responsibility can be applied to Jeff himself. Wood says that Jeff is 'like a father: in fact, we realise that his gazing gives him a sense of power over those he watches, but without any accompanying responsibility.'[25] He is put in the position of a typical Gothic parent who is present, watching over his children throughout, but who has no control or authority (and seeks to gain neither) over them.

Settings

It might perhaps be expected that the settings for these films are quite different from those made earlier. However, Hitchcock's very first American production *Rebecca*, was set in Cornwall, England and several others, including *Stage Fright* and *The Paradine Case*, were also set in England. Some have settings that could be almost anywhere whilst others are more specific.

Under Capricorn is set in Sydney, Australia in 1830. The setting here is used in the same way the traditional Gothic novelists used settings such as Mediterranean countries; it is a setting which is familiar to the audience but that still holds some level of mystery (particularly as it is set in the past, somewhere the audience can never actually visit). The Flusky house (itself a Gothic mansion) is set up as having some element of mystery or unpleasantness, emphasized by the sign outside ('why weepest thou?') and the reluctance of the driver to go in.

The settings in *Suspicion* add to the uncertainty of the heroine. The atmosphere of the windy heath (like that of *King Lear*) adds to her nervousness and she assumes (perhaps correctly) that Aysgarth is trying to kill her when he touches her. These

events are mirrored later when they are driving along a cliff road and she assumes (again possibly correctly) that he is trying to push her out of the car (although he says he was trying to close the car door). Throughout the film he treats her like a child and so this may be believable under the circumstances. The house Aysgarth buys is large, spacious and very light and so provides an immediate contrast to the house in which Lina grew up. In her parents' house she stands in the hallway and we see the shadows of the window on her face resembling bars and suggesting that she has a feeling of being trapped.[26] (A similar technique is used on the train at the beginning of the film where both Lina and Aysgarth are in the same carriage but shadows appear on only his face perhaps suggesting that he has something to hide or that he should be feared). When she moves into the light and spacious house with Aysgarth this seems to suggest freedom but this changes later when she decides to leave him and we see the shadow of window bars across her chest. After this we also see shadows on the stairs, a hint of things to come later. The staircase serves the same purpose as in Hitchcock's earlier films. Here we have Aysgarth ascending the stairs with a glass of milk, specially lit (by Hitchcock) from inside to make it glow. Our attention is drawn to it so that we suspect (as the heroine does) that Aysgarth has poisoned it. This danger, then, is steadily ascending the stairs and getting closer and closer to Lina who, weak as she is, is unable to escape it. The next morning comes, however, and it is revealed that Lina has not drunk the milk and is packing to go see her mother.

In *Saboteur* there is an obvious similarity with Tod Browning's 1932 film *Freaks* when Kane and Patricia are helped by the members of a travelling circus. This, in typical Gothic style, is a mini world within itself and each character is a stereotypical representative of some aspect of humankind. The travelling circus (train) itself represents the constant changing of the world and the people in it. This mini culture manages to be part of the real world but, at the same time, remains completely isolated. Aside from Martin's cottage and the travelling circus train, there are several other settings in the film that serve to isolate the characters including Soda City, a ghost town still loosely connected to the real world via a working field telephone, and the ball room at the party. Here Kane and Patricia are surrounded by other people but are still isolated: they are the only people who possess certain information and are vulnerable. Hitchcock commented in depth on this scene in his discussion with Truffaut:

I remember asking myself, how could I create an impression of a man and a girl being absolutely trapped in a public place. Anyone in that situation would go up to someone and say 'Look, I'm a prisoner here'. And the answer would be 'You must be crazy'. And yet if they moved over to any one of the doors or windows, the villains were there waiting for them. To the average person, that situation is so fantastic as to be unbelievable.[27]

A similar effect is gained from using the Statue of Liberty as a major setting. All other sightseers have left so Kane and Fry are alone in a place we would usually expect to be full of people. Fry's fall from the statue is one of Hitchcock's most elaborate and most unsettling shots as Fry seems to fall in slow motion and is watched by the audience from Liberty's head.

The setting of *Shadow of A Doubt* is very specific: Santa Rosa, California. When Uncle Charlie sends his telegram he repeats 'California' for stress. Santa Rosa is a small, pretty town where everyone knows everyone else. The Newton house is bright and cheerful, like the family that inhabits it, but a dark cloud appears over it when Uncle Charlie arrives. The house has a certain element of symmetry (reflected particularly in the presence of two staircases) and the house has certain areas that are more obviously Gothic than others. The garage, for example, has particularly Gothic atmosphere. It is a small, restricted space set slightly apart from the house and it is where young Charlie almost dies, locked in and isolated where no one can hear her cries. The staircases (particularly the outside one) are also Gothic. The first thing the mother says in the film is 'those back stairs are steep' (a comment perhaps made to ensure the audience focus on the stairs from the start) and later, when a step is tampered with, young Charlie nearly falls down them. Her mother's reaction of 'Oh darling, you could have been killed' is accompanied, as usual, with ignorance. Emma Newton thinks this was an accident. In one memorable scene, uncle and niece talk at the top of the backstairs, partially in shadow, a scene which serves as an uncanny precursor to one in *Psycho* where Norman and Marion talk on the porch of the motel. When Uncle Charlie thinks his secret is safe because another man has been arrested:

he bolts up the stairway with obvious relief. The camera views him from the bottom of the stairs. But when he reaches the top, he suddenly turns around apprehensively. The camera reverses to his subjective view of young Charlie

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standing in the doorway at the bottom of the stairs. The battle lines have been clearly drawn, and it is now to the death. How appropriate that this battle should be fought out on the staircase.[28]

Here there is danger at both ends of the staircase; danger for young Charlie lurks at the top whilst for her uncle there is danger at the bottom (her knowing the truth). Deutelbaum and Poague discuss the contrast or paralleling of the two staircases. They discuss 'the clean public front and the dangerous, steep, private back, the latter which Uncle Charlie uses to escape and to threaten Charlie. The two-staired house works as an image of a societal ideal, both of which project a front that is more attractive and safer than their hidden natures.'[29]

Charlie's room seems to have more of a Gothic atmosphere when she gives it up for her uncle. Once occupied by him, the room takes on a sense of sinister mystery. When Uncle Charlie paces the room we see him from a distorted camera angle to emphasize his state of mind. When young Charlie goes up the stairs to her room she appears trapped behind huge shadows of the banisters, like prison bars. These perhaps mirror the shadows on Uncle Charlie's face at the very beginning which seem to indicate that he has a guilty secret even at this early stage.

The very restricted setting of *Lifeboat* is also Gothic. Spoto says:

> The ultimate terror generated by *Lifeboat* derives from its setting rather than from any specific action within it with no music (except under the opening and closing titles) and with no sound but wind and waves, thunder and storm; the film conveys a horrific sense of endless floating, with no sure port. There's no background but the infinite water, no escape from the sea that beckons to death and invites annihilation as the ultimate liberation. *Lifeboat* has, finally, a hallucinatory quality, a nightmare sensation with an overwhelming sense of imminent doom. Even the protracted talk cannot diminish the film's overarching atmosphere of dread.[30]

Overall, the characters in the film are taken out of an everyday setting and an everyday situation and put into a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean in which they are forced into a very public and yet very isolated situation where they are not guaranteed survival.

They are in an intense and unsettled situation and we feel the same way when watching them.

The various settings of *Spellbound* can also be described as Gothic, beginning with Green Manors (an asylum) which:

> can be read both as a social microcosm and as a monstrous, perverted family, characterised at once by sexual repression, a claustrophobic lack of privacy, and a pervasive immaturity and childishness.[31]

This is the sort of setting where anything might happen; the inhabitants of the asylum are there because of some kind of instability and what we would usually consider 'normal' behaviour is unlikely to occur. The constant possibility of strange or dangerous events occurring means that the characters and the audience are always apprehensive.

The Sebastians' house in *Notorious* is cold and unwelcoming. It is a very large house and many rooms are kept locked. Alicia feels trapped and isolated and this is emphasized further by her apparent abandonment by Devlin. Throughout the film Alicia has been made to feel uncomfortable in various ways: the behaviour of her father followed by his suicide, the 'bugging' of her bungalow, her isolation in a strange country and the constant threat (which becomes a reality) of what her husband will do when he finds out she is an American agent. In many ways Alicia plays a traditional female Gothic role in that everything she suffers is at the hands of men.

At the beginning of *Rope* we see the street outside (the street scene might suggest that the story could be set just about anywhere) and are then led into the apartment where the rest of the action takes place. This gives both the setting and the atmosphere an extremely restricted, almost claustrophobic air. In the apartment most of the action takes place in the main living room although we also see the hallway and the kitchen briefly from the doorway when Brandon puts the rope in the drawer (in an interesting disjointed shot where the door swings backwards and forwards, meaning we only see every other second of the action). The telephone is in the bedroom ('how cosy' says Janet) and a second bedroom is mentioned later, thus suggesting that Brandon and Philip do not share a bedroom even though we assume they both live there. The restrictive and claustrophobic nature of the setting adds to the tension of both the characters and the audience and constantly draws our attention to the chest at

the forefront of the 'stage'. The positioning of the chest means that the corpse is present throughout the play and could be discovered by any of the characters at any time, leading to tension and anticipation for the audience.

Dial M for Murder is based on a stage play by Frederick Knott and according to Peter Bordonaro the two texts are basically the same with only a few underlying differences.[32] The action mostly takes place in the Wendices' apartment (a sort of stage set) and even the murder plot seems 'staged' as Tony talks Swan through his plan via various props on the set. Tony and Margot's apartment has high ceilings and windows, a large fireplace and beautiful fixtures and fittings. Most of the action takes place in the main room but there is also the hallway and staircase (where the key is hidden), the bedroom where Mark hides when Inspector Hubbard talks to Tony and the kitchen which we never actually see. We do, however, see the shadows from the bars on the kitchen window when the police arrive following the murder, perhaps pre-empting Margot's arrest and imprisonment. Although Margot has a trial there is no courtroom as such and this is signified only by dim lighting and a plain background. Similarly the death sentence is signified by the simple addition of a black cap.

Stage Fright has the traditional Gothic setting of the theatre and the traditional Gothic theme of pretence or deception to go along with it. The film reaches its climax with Eve trapped under the theatre stage with Johnny whom she now knows to be guilty of murder. He is then killed in an accident on the stage, making this his final performance.

The main setting of *Rear Window* is Jeff's apartment which appears to consist of at least two rooms (there is a kitchen that we do not enter) but all the action takes place in one main room. The other apartments opposite (that form a kind of stage upon which Jeff's neighbours provide him with a performance) constitute the whole world and in this sense they are a typical Gothic setting; they represent a microcosm of the real world in the same way as a circus or fairground (or lifeboat?) and all the characters are thus stereotypes of people in society. The window of Jeff's apartment, which gives him such a clear view of this mini world, seems to be much larger than the rest, presumably because of the perspective from which everything is seen. It is also a point to note that we do not see the other apartments in Jeff's own building until he falls from the window at the end; he needs to leave his little world, albeit temporarily, in order to look into it from the outside. In contrast with Jeff's apartment, all those opposite seem largely two dimensional or flat; we see only a window and the outer

edge of a room (or two rooms) in each case (like a television picture). We hear no dialogue and we are unable to watch all the apartments all the time, just as we cannot watch all television channels at the same time.

Staircases can be seen to be used the same way in this film as in traditional Gothic texts, indicating danger at the very top for the hero / heroine. There is one leading to the Thorwalds' apartment (the evil lurking at the top of the stairs?) which features predominantly when Lisa visits the apartment. There is also an outside fire escape that is used when the murder of the dog is discovered.

The central theme of the film is voyeurism. Jeff is watching a film (just as we are) and is an outsider to the story. He sees suspicious or sinister things going on on the screen but this does not mean that things don't happen in his real life (such as the subplot of his relationship with Lisa). Spoto goes a step further and suggests that Jeff is simply an observer rather than a participant in life.[33] The story changes pace quite dramatically as soon as Jeff becomes involved in the action rather than staying on the outside. Throughout the film Jeff watches his neighbours and they see nothing. When Jeff falls from his window everyone else watches him and he becomes the subject of attention, the observed rather than the observer. Only at a couple of other times in the film is it even suggested that the neighbours are aware of Jeff's (or, at least, someone's) presence (for example when Miss Lonelyheart closes her blinds). This is quite unnerving for Jeff and for the audience of the film.

The theatrical theme of *Rear Window* is made even more obvious in some places. Jeff's whole apartment is staged, Lisa adjusts the lighting, and at the end of the first 'act' she closes the blinds to signify a temporary end to the action. This emphasis on performance serves to draw attention to some aspects of the action and to exaggerate some storylines at the expense of others.

Another quite theatrical setting can be seen in *Strangers on a Train* in the shape of the listening booth in the record store where Miriam works. It is in the booth that she and Guy have their argument (relatively) unheard but in full view of everyone else in the store. It is isolated and restricted but definitely not private and serves almost as a stage where a scene is played out for an audience. There are several typically Gothic settings in *Strangers on a Train*, perhaps the most overtly Gothic of which is the fairground that appears twice. Both visits to the fairground are climactic and end in a death (Miriam and Bruno). According to Wood:

The fairground and amusement park is a symbolic projection of Miriam's world: a world of disorder, of the pursuit of fun and cheap glamor as the aim of life, of futility represented by the circular motion of roundabout and Great Wheel that receive such strong visual emphasis in almost every shot.[34]

It is also a representation of society as a whole, along with its facades and deceptions.

As Spoto points out the use of a fairground in this film is by no means original but rather a development of earlier ideas by Hitchcock and other writers and filmmakers:

> From Jonson's *Bartholemew Fair*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Goethe's *Faust* and from the German expressionist movie classic *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Hitchcock drew on the tradition of the fairground as the place where the demented aspects of life are concentrated and expressed, where all the Dionysian riots and the repressions of the year are set free. This is the place – as it had been more gently and comically in *The Ring*, *Murder!*, *Saboteur* and *Stage Fright* – where the grotesque is enjoyed but where Bruno actualises the metaphorical and the surrogate, unleashing the forces of madness and death. And at the finale, the same amusement park is the place where the cycle of lunacy is broken, the whirling carousel destroyed so that normality may be restored. In this regard, it is noteworthy that both killer and victim are associated with the destruction of circles – burst balloons, carousels set out of control, broken gongs, shattered eye glasses and bitter fights at a record shop – images of order disrupted, of harmony destroyed.[35]

Above all in *Strangers on a Train* the fairground represents chaos, particularly in the second visit where the controller of the carousel (a figure of control and authority) is shot, thus leaving the carousel and its passengers unattended.

Other settings in the film also have a Gothic quality. Bruno's house, and particularly its large open staircase, is Gothic. It is a very large house with high ceilings and tall windows (reminiscent of Manderley though on a slightly smaller scale). In this house it first appears that the evil lurking at the top of the stairs is the dog but this is misleading because, although physically threatening, the dog is a very ineffectual guard dog; rather than biting Guy or chasing him away, it simply licks his

hand. We (and Guy) have been misled and the evil, therefore, is still to come. Indeed, when Guy reaches Mr Anthony's room he finds Bruno there, with a gun. This, then, is the real threat.

I Confess is set in Quebec, a town which (in the film at least) seems to be quite unlike the world as a whole. Life in the town appears to centre on religion and there is more than an average number of churches. Most of the churches have obvious Gothic architecture with all its exaggerations. During the police search and questioning of priests there is a focus on several churches, themselves represented by their various towers and spires (an example of Hitchcock using a part to represent a whole as well as an example of a montage as used by Soviet filmmakers).

Whilst not a necessarily Gothic film as a whole *To Catch a Thief* does have some features which give it a Gothic atmosphere in places. Firstly, the film is set in the South of France; a setting to which the main characters and the main target audience are foreign. This is thus a setting that we recognise but which is not overly familiar to the majority of the audience and so serves the same purpose as the Mediterranean setting of the early Gothic texts.

The asylum / hospital in *The Wrong Man* is a Gothic setting as it represents various repressions and restraints on its patients who themselves form a sort of mini community separate from the wider world. The film opens with a scene in the Stork Club, another miniature world within a world, though perhaps more closely related to the fairground than the asylum. Manny is taken to various places where he is forced to put on a performance for people. Then, in turn, he is taken to the police station, the courtroom, Long Island City Jail and a cell. In each of these places he becomes more and more isolated (even the police station is very spacious and empty, there is no one else there), culminating in his being surrounded by faceless prisoners with no identities in the jail and then being completely isolated in his cell. This particular scene is referred to specifically by Sterritt:

> Manny's vertiginous reaction to imprisonment is evoked by a whirling camera movement that couldn't be more removed from standard documentary practice.[36]

This camera movement shows that Manny is feeling confused and unsettled and it has the same effect on the audience.

<u>Imagery</u>

Hitchcock uses many motifs in these films to focus the audience's attention, often to mislead us and make us even more unsettled. There is a strong use of motifs in *Shadow of a Doubt*, amounting to great stress on individual things for an exaggerated effect. These are mainly the waltz and the ring, both symbolic of Uncle Charlie's crimes. The ring is particularly significant as it has an engraving that incriminates Uncle Charlie and this demonstrates perhaps his only clumsy act, that he did not check it. Cohen says the 'ring-giving scene' is the 'most unsettling in the film.'[37] This unsettling feeling adds to the generally Gothic atmosphere.

In *Rope* there is also a focus on particular motifs which have certain connotations. The chest is almost constantly present throughout and the rope itself reappears tied around Mr Kentley's books (Brandon's little 'joke'). These are constant or recurring reminders of the murder that serve to add to the tension and demand particular reactions from the audience. At no point in the film are we allowed to forget what is in the chest.

There is substantial use of various other Gothic features and motifs in *Stage Fright* including the settings of a boat and a theatre, the garden party (a microcosm of the real world) and the use of shadows (on Eve's face when she is in the telephone box and on both Eve and Johnny's faces when they are under the stage and both in danger). At the end of the film Eve and Wilfred walk away together in the shadows (like Alice and Frank at the end of *Blackmail*) signifying that some things are still unknown or unpleasant.

There are many motifs in *Dial M For Murder* that add to its Gothic atmosphere. Here we have the spoken word (including the radio programme that Margot is staying in to listen to, as well as the telephone call) and the written word (the blackmail letter, a newspaper headline). There is also the key, the photograph (with Hitchcock's cameo), the white gloves (that Tony wears to avoid fingerprints), the stockings and the scissors. All of these serve the purpose of stage props and emphasize the style of the film as a play with all the Gothic imagery associated with the theatre.

It is perhaps no surprise (given the title) that trains feature heavily in *Strangers on a Train*. The film opens with the two main characters approaching a train and frequently returns to this motif. The sound of a train obscures Guy's voice when he

says he'd like to strangle Miriam and later in the observation car we see Guy and Collins, the singing drunk who later becomes his alibi. It is thus ironic that the train is where this all started and then it provides him with an alibi.

There is a constant doubling motif throughout the film which begins with the two pairs of feet approaching the train in the opening minutes, becomes most obvious with Bruno's suggestion of 'swapping' murders ('criss-cross') and continues throughout. When Guy sees Miriam he calls her a 'little double-crosser' and later it becomes obvious (to the audience and to Bruno at least) that she bears more than a passing resemblance to Babs, Ann's younger sister. This continues Hitchcock's obvious use of the double from *Shadow of a Doubt* and serves as a precursor to his use of it in later films, particularly *Psycho*. Spoto reflects on this:

> In the Romantic and Victorian precedents, the double always reflects on strong inner conflict, a clash of wills, of the reach towards integration and the peril of disintegration. Familiar with these sources, Hitchcock could exploit the double as the messenger of death. Hitchcock required no training in psychology to be aware of this common creative currency and its imagery: it was one of the major recurring motifs in the art and literature of his time, and inevitably the cinema, *his* cinema capitalized on the forms and patterns of this device.[38]

The use of the double in this film thus emphasizes Bruno's double personality as well as Guy's own inner conflict.

Shadow of a Doubt opens with almost parallel scenes, setting up a theme or element of doubling from the very beginning. It is not only staircases that are paralleled in the film; there is a constant theme of doubling running throughout. This begins at the start of the film when young Charlie and her uncle are directly contrasted through their movements, thoughts and actions and particularly their telepathic telegrams. Spoto looks at this doubling in detail:

> Like many great storytellers, Hitchcock is intrigued by the association (not the identification) between wickedness and goodness. The two Charlies inhabit the same world, and the extremes they represent coexist to a greater or lesser extent within every human being...*Shadow of a Doubt* offers us two apparently opposite but actually complementary, not mutually exclusive personalities.[39]

Neither character seems able to exist without the other and, although a happy ending seems to be suggested for Charlie, there is still a cloud hanging over her and she now has a guilty secret that must be kept from her mother. Spoto goes on to quote a whole list of doubles from the film[40] suggesting that this is not merely coincidence and that this doubling serves the same purpose here as in traditional Gothic texts, that is to doubly exaggerate certain aspects of the story to emphasize them and to emphasize the supposedly innocent young Charlie's links with her guilty uncle. As Hitchcock himself said:

> There is a moral judgement in the film. He's destroyed at the end, isn't he? The niece accidentally kills her uncle. What it boils down to is that villains are not all black and heroes not all white; there are greys everywhere. Uncle Charlie loved his niece, but not as much as she loved him. And yet she *has* to destroy him. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde: 'You destroy the thing you love'.[41]

Good and evil are, therefore, ambiguous, so closely linked that it is difficult to separate them.

Mise En Scène

The style and appearance of some of these films is also used to give a particular air of gloominess or bleakness and serves to unsettle the audience even further. For example, Spoto describes *The Paradine Case* as having a 'languorous, darkly Gothic atmosphere that never yields to an audience's demands for easy glamour.'[42]

Several of Hitchcock's earlier films were partly set in theatres and many of them have elements or features of the theatre (or cinema or similar) but *Rope* actually resembles a play set on a stage. *Rope* was largely an experimental film. It was Hitchcock's first colour film and was filmed in ten-minute continuous takes. It also takes place in real time, 7.30-9.00pm. It takes the form of a filmed stage play creating more tension. The audience experience the events in real time and along with the characters. Of the disguising edits in the film, Thomas says 'the blackness of these junctures [provides] yet another example of ontological duality, that is, an example of two separate realms of existence layered one upon the other.'[43] This is particularly

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disturbing for the audience as it draws attention to the fact that what we are watching is both a play (and not a play) and a film (and not a film).

The characters on the stage are isolated from the real world (which is only alerted to the action by Rupert's gunfire from the window at the end) and Brandon and Philip never actually leave the stage. At the end of the film the credits fit this style, entitled as they are 'The Players'. The curtains are closed at the beginning and again after all the guests leave. This adds to the theatrical style as well as throwing atmospheric shadows on the scenes. Atmosphere is added further when Rupert fires the gun at the end and we hear sirens; we know what is happening so don't need to actually see it. Throughout the film we have tension from various things such as Philip's mistakes when playing the piano and the metronome that seems to tick louder and louder when Rupert talks to Philip alone.

Certain camera angles and individual shots in the film also add to this claustrophobic tension. We constantly see a panoramic view from the window representing freedom outside the apartment and thus emphasizing the restriction within it. There is also a scene in which a conversation goes on amongst the characters whilst Mrs Wilson clears crockery away from the top of the chest. During this entire scene the camera focuses only on the chest and Mrs Wilson emphasizing that we know what is in there and adding tension because we assume it will be discovered any minute. Later, when Rupert looks in the chest we see only the lid at first and then his reaction. We never see the contents of the chest so the horror lies in what we imagine is in there rather than in what we see. The fact that the film opens with the murder of David Kentley is deliberately shocking and the audience may be led to question the evidence of their own eyes. Nothing on the screen could possibly shock the audience further than this first scene so from then on any element of horror is left to the imagination of the viewer.

Various aspects of the mise en scène in *Strangers on a Train* serve to highlight its Gothic nature from the camera angles to the use of lighting. At the beginning we do not see Bruno and Guy, only their feet (a part used to represent a whole). We only see the two characters properly after Guy's foot accidentally knocks against Bruno's, emphasizing (at least for Wood) the chance nature of this meeting and proving that Bruno does not engineer it[44], he simply takes advantage of it. Other strange or unusual camera angles serve to show us things from the perspective of the characters such as the focus on Bruno's tie-pin, showing it to us from Guy's point of view. Lighting (and

the use of shadows) is used to its greatest Gothic effect in the scene by the park gates opposite Guy's apartment. Guy stands behind the gates, seemingly trapped by the bars, but the shadows of the bars appear on the faces of both characters suggesting that, by this point in the film, they are both guilty. This is in direct contrast to the first scene on the train where there are shadows on only Bruno's face because Guy is innocent at this earlier point. Everything in this film, from plot and characters to the use of lighting and motifs such as circles, 'criss-cross' and the mirror / glass combine to give a very overtly exaggerated and Gothic atmosphere.

There is a lot of darkness in *I Confess* (both literal and metaphorical). The murder is committed at night along with Keller's escape down dimly lit streets to a deserted church. Much of the story is also told in retrospect, particularly Ruth's alibi and the evidence of the two schoolgirls (evidence which ultimately puts Father Logan on trial). Unlike in *Stage Fright* the flashbacks here are somehow seen to be more realistic and reliable but are still flawed because they don't show the whole story.

In *Rear Window* although we (and Jeff as representative of the audience) do not empathise with Thorwald we do feel some disappointment when we think he has not killed his wife. This is reminiscent of Catherine Morland's disappointment in discovering that Northanger Abbey is not haunted and that Tilney has not murdered his wife. Of course, in *Rear Window* this is only a temporary setback and the true story develops later. Throughout the story we are forced to see things from Jeff's point of view (much of it through his camera) and share his disappointment, however temporary it is. Only at certain points in the story do we deviate from this; for example when Jeff is watching Thorwald and he falls asleep we are forced to continue watching because the camera focuses on Jeff's watch and on the window. We are trapped just as Jeff is trapped in his room. The only time the perspective changes is when Jeff falls from his window. Suddenly we see things from his neighbours' point of view and they see Jeff, seemingly for the first time. When Jeff actually falls from the window the angle and movement of his fall are very disjointed and highly reminiscent of Fry's fall from the Statue of Liberty at the end of *Saboteur* and a precursor to Arbogast's fall down the stairs of the Bates house in *Psycho*. In each case, the odd movement serves to focus the attention of the audience and to make them feel rather uncomfortable about what we are watching. This feeling of being isolated yet restricted at the same time is constant throughout the film due to the confined nature of the settings. Thorwald's own isolation from the other characters is emphasised when, after the murder of the dog, he

is the only resident *not* to come out or look out of the building to investigate the noise. As a Gothic text *Rear Window* builds appropriate atmosphere from the very beginning. The film opens with a cat running up stairs, reminiscent of *Murder!* particularly. Later when Jeff watches Thorwald at night it is dark, silent and raining, a typically Gothic atmosphere in which only something unpleasant could happen.

The Wrong Man is a dark film with stereotypically Gothic characters and restrictive settings. Overall, Rohmer and Chabrol think it resembles Murnau's *The Last Laugh* in its 'fascination with abjection; to which he ceded and makes us cede along with his hero.'[45] As pointed out by Sterritt, the film was made mainly in a documentary style, partly because it was based on real life events. Sterritt also points to Hitchcock's use of other styles including German Expressionism (as in the scene in Manny's cell) and Film Noir 'itself an amalgamation of German expressionism and other elements.'[46] Sterritt goes on to say:

> The influence of noir is felt in such major elements of *The Wrong Man* as its shadowy mise-en-scène, its brooding urban landscapes; the labyrinthian set of challenges faced by its protagonist, and (a feature of many non-noir 1940s and 1950s films as well) its fascination with Freudian psychiatry. Smaller details such as telephones in the narrative and mise-en-scène, also recall noir conventions; and the last shot is pure noir, countering an unhappy narrative and ambivalent plot resolution with a tacked-on 'happy' ending that couldn't be more deliberately unconvincing.[47]

Hitchcock's early American films develop many of the ideas he introduced in his British films. Many of the films have distinct similarities: murder, deception, love (though not necessarily in that order), whilst some are developed much further and some (such as psychoanalysis) are completely new but achieve very similar effects on the audience. The films have, by and large, been transplanted to new American settings but still retain their basic outlines: large houses, theatres, family homes, and some of the films are even set in England (*Rebecca, The Paradine Case, Stage Fright*). Many of the characters retain the Gothic nature of their predecessors: strong heroines, weak heroes and ineffectual parental figures. Overall then, despite Hitchcock's move to the USA, his films in this period, whilst mostly on a much larger scale (and with a much

bigger budget) still demonstrate the same Gothic style and atmosphere as those he made in England.

Notes

[1] Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, New York: Anchor Books, 1976, p.166

[2] Ibid., p.82

[3] David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p.74

[4] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.101

[5] François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1966, p.127

[6] Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.57

[7] James McLaughlin, 'All in the Family: Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*', in Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Eds), *A Hitchcock Reader*, Iowa State University Press, 1986, p.142-143

[8] Ed Gallafent, 'Black Satin: Fantasy, Murder and the Couple in *Gaslight* and *Rebecca*', in *Screen*, Vol 29 Number 3 Summer 1988, p.84

[9] Sam P. Simone, *Hitchcock as Activist: Politics and the War Films*, Michigan: UMI Research Press / Ann Arbor, 1985, p.87

[10] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.154

[11] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1995, p.98

[12] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.91

[13] Richard Fisher, 'Hitchcock's Figure on the Staircase', in *Thousand Eyes Magazine*, 1976 No. 12 Jul-Aug, p.3

[14] Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York and London: Routledge, 1988, p.84

[15] Ibid., p.79

[16] Ibid.

[17] Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, p.101

[18] Deborah Thomas, *Beyond Genre: Melodrama, Comedy and Romance in Hollywood Films*, Moffat, Scotland: Cameron and Hollis, 2000, p.21

[19] Slavoj Žižek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*, Verso, 1992, p.191

[20] McLaughlin, 'All in the Family', in Deutelbaum and Poague, *A Hitchcock Reader*, p.150

[21] Ibid., p.144-145

[22] Ibid., 146

[23] Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.57

[24] Thomas, *Beyond Genre*, p.31

[25] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.101

[26] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.106

[27] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p.124

[28] Fisher, 'Hitchcock's Figure on the Staircase', p.4

[29] Deutelbaum and Poague (Eds), *A Hitchcock Reader*, p.18

[30] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.133-134

[31] Andrew Britton, 'Hitchcock's *Spellbound*: Text and Counter-Text', in *CineAction!*, Winter 1986, p.78

[32] Peter Bordonaro, '*Dial M for Murder*: A play by Frederick Knott / A film by Alfred Hitchcock', in *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1976, p.175

[33] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.221

[34] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.88

[35] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.193-194

[36] Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.69

[37] Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, p.72

[38] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.195

[39] Ibid., p.119

[40] Ibid., p.120

[41] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p.127

[42] Ibid., p.163

[43] Deborah Thomas, *Reading Hollywood: Spaces and Meanings in American Film*, London and New York: Wallflower, 2001, p.106

[44] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.86

[45] Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, 'The Wrong Man', in Albert J. LaValley, *Focus on Hitchcock*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972, p.146

[46] Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p.69

[47] Ibid.

9. *Rebecca*

Rebecca (1940) is the most overtly Gothic of Hitchcock's early American films. It is perhaps best described as an example of Female Gothic as it concerns the fear and paranoia of the wife (though it could also be seen to display some characteristics of other categories of Gothic such as Psychological Gothic particularly). It demonstrates many of the features of his earlier films regarded as Gothic but also has significant differences. *Rebecca* was Hitchcock's first American film and is significantly much larger in scale than anything he had completed before, particularly with regards to sets and the overall setting. It was also produced for David O Selznick's studios and is regarded by many as more obviously a Selznick film than a Hitchcock. In his discussions with Truffaut, Hitchcock himself said:

> It's not a Hitchcock picture…The story is old fashioned; there's a whole school of feminine literature of the period and though I'm not against it, the fact is that the story is lacking in humour.[1]

Whilst some might disagree with this point of view, it would be true to say that any humour in the film is a distinct kind of black humour associated with the rather less pleasant side of life; a type of humour that Hitchcock developed further, and to terrifying effect, much later in *Psycho* particularly.

Characters

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the entire film is the fact that the heroine (like the one in the original novel by Daphne du Maurier) has no name and so, for the most part of the story, no identity. This makes her appear a weak, helpless and vulnerable character. The heroine is best identified by the label 'the second Mrs de Winter'. This is an identity she doesn't take to easily, however, as when she answers the house telephone she says 'Mrs de Winter has been dead for over a year'. Fisher summarises this very well when he says ' Then she cringes as she sees Mrs Danvers and realises that she has just denied her own existence in front of her housekeeper.'[2] It

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is almost as if she rejects the one identity she has been offered. When she meets Beatrice and Giles she introduces herself as 'Maxim's wife', making her seem like an appendage rather than an individual in her own right. This inability to name herself emphasizes particular aspects of her character that we come to recognise at an early stage in the film. She is shy, nervous and extremely lacking in self-confidence. She is, as Beatrice says, 'a placid little thing'. Often the nervousness of the character is caused by an overactive imagination which serves to exaggerate a normal situation (this is taken to further extremes by Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*). This is perhaps what Britton means when he refers to 'the horror of the normal'.[3]

At the beginning of the story she works as a paid 'companion' to Mrs Edith van Hopper who treats her like a child. At this point in the story she has no identity at all and she cannot even be described as ' the second Mrs de Winter' yet. The heroine has no other ties, she appears to have no friends and her parents are both dead. She is thus positioned as a typical Gothic heroine and is completely at the mercy of Maxim and his past. She is always placed on the sidelines and always identified by her relationship with someone else (usually Maxim). This is made clear in physical terms when we look at her positioning within the frame. In scenes with Mrs van Hopper the girl is always 'on the extreme right of the frame, almost pushed off view by the busty [Florence] Bates and the overwhelming glamour of Olivier.'[4] The marginalizing of the character is made even more obvious by Hitchcock's choice of actress; Joan Fontaine had neither the screen presence of Ingrid Bergman nor the sheer glamour of Grace Kelly. Whilst attractive on screen, Fontaine does not demand the attention of the viewer as these other actresses do. Instead, she simply blends into the background.

Towards the end of the film the heroine asserts herself and she becomes a much stronger and more mature character because of her love for and her loyalty towards Maxim. He preferred her as she was however, and is disappointed that she has had to grow up. He has treated her more like a child than a wife and has ensured that she will be dependent upon him. He feels helpless when she manages to gain some control for herself but eventually accepts and appreciates her for what / who she is and the ending suggests a happy future for them both. Modleski sees this relationship of dependence as being emphasized particularly by the difference in their ages.[5] It is also clear through the way that Maxim talks to her. During their 'courtship' he tells her to 'stop biting your nails' and he makes her wear a coat when it's cold ('You can't be too

careful with children', he says). Even his proposal sounds more like a telling off: 'I'm asking you to marry me, you little fool'.

Maxim is a typically Gothic anti-hero with very few actually heroic qualities. He is weak and unhappy and we could argue that he marries the heroine because she is someone who could easily be dominated and this gives him a feeling of superiority. His weakness, like that of Hamlet, Victor Frankenstein and countless others, stems from his inability to act or even to speak about the events that disturb him. All of Maxim's qualities are exaggerated: his wealth, his politeness, his sensitivity, even his 'Englishness' (his interest in cricket, for example). His secrecy is also exaggerated and this is what makes his presence unsettling for the heroine and the audience; we know, as does she, that there is something he is not telling us and that that something is unpleasant. Although Maxim did kill Rebecca he still retains his heroic status as this was an accident. At the end he is redeemed and absolved of all blame by his wife who persuades him to say nothing. She has acted as his confessor and has taken away the burden of his guilt whilst the death itself is written off as a convincing suicide.

The role of the villain is a little more complex and perhaps belongs, in varying degrees, to several characters. Jack Favell seems to be an obvious choice. He exhibits the qualities most usually associated with villains; he lies and cheats and has a particularly manipulative character. He is also a car salesman: a stereotype (perhaps even a caricature) typically associated with dishonesty. Favell is also a blackmailer although (as in *Blackmail*) this appears to be a secondary crime for Hitchcock and so Favell does not emerge as the ultimate villain. Once the whole story becomes known, Rebecca herself seems to be the most clearly villainous. She is described as the perfect woman, beautiful and intelligent. 'Everyone loved her' just as, according to Victor Frankenstein, 'everyone loved Elizabeth'. Just as Elizabeth is seen and described only through the eyes of Victor Frankenstein, Rebecca is only described by the other characters (as she is already dead at the beginning of the story), most of who say only pleasant things about her. As it turns out, most of the characters were deceived by Rebecca. It is Ben (the strange man at the cottage) that gives the first clues that Rebecca was not pleasant; she threatened him with the asylum. Rebecca was dishonest and disloyal; she was unpleasant, committed adultery, lied to her husband and then tried to goad him into killing her. She used her good looks and sexuality to get what she wanted and was ultimately punished for it. Even at the end, dying from cancer, she

could not face up to things (either her disease or her actions) and wanted someone else to save her.

Mrs Danvers plays the role taken in traditional Gothic texts by mysterious figures such as vampires, monsters or ghosts. Overall, she is the most obvious villainess in the story. She is unpleasant, scheming, secretive and manipulative and is loyal only to Rebecca. She seems to be Rebecca's representative after her death and her own unpleasant characteristics serve to draw attention to the unpleasantness associated with Rebecca herself. What makes Mrs Danvers so thoroughly creepy and almost supernatural, however, is her movement. She seems never to walk from one place to another but rather she simply appears, standing perfectly still. Hitchcock explained his reason for doing this:

> In this way the whole situation was projected from the heroine's point of view; she never knew when Mrs Danvers might turn up, and this, in itself, was terrifying – To have shown Mrs Danvers walking about would have been to humanize her.[6]

This thus positions the audience with the heroine, the only character in the film who did not know Rebecca.

Settings

The settings at the beginning of the film are typical of a Gothic text. The film opens in the South of France and the characters travel to various other foreign locations from there. However, the majority of the film centres on Manderley, Maxim's house set somewhere in Cornwall (although, as Hitchcock pointed out, the exact location is never specified). This makes the house (and the heroine) seem completely isolated in time and space. Hitchcock also saw Manderley as central to the story: 'in a sense the picture is the story of a house. The house was one of the three key characters in the picture.'[7]

At the film's opening the house is in ruins and the rest of the story is in flashback. We know then from the beginning what will happen and that the house, perhaps as a metaphor for Rebecca herself, must ultimately be destroyed. Above all, Manderley serves as a more modern version of the mysterious castle, church or abbey

of older Gothic texts with their dark corners, cellars and unseen rooms and creepy staircases. It is surrounded by high walls and great iron gates that do not open in the first scene to let us in; instead we go through them, closed and unwelcoming.

Maxim does not seem as bothered by Rebecca when he is away from Manderley, almost as if the further from the house the characters get the less control Rebecca has over them. Manderley is haunted by Rebecca even though she is not a physical presence as such. Everything in the house is associated with her and everyone in the house believed her to perfect (apart from Maxim, of course). The house is 'the subject of history, the repository both of 'secrets' and of 'the truth' about the family.'[8] It is the place where a husband has buried a secret which must be uncovered by his wife (a theme later developed by Cogeval and described by him as 'the partner marked by the past'[9]).

As with all Gothic buildings, Manderley has some areas that are more mysterious and have more unpleasant connotations than others. Upon arrival, the heroine is shown to her rooms in the East wing, a part of the house never used before. From then on, the West wing, previously inhabited by Rebecca, holds a certain amount of mystery and the heroine feels automatically drawn to it. Rebecca's room is the most obviously Gothic of all with large open space and high Gothic windows covered with long, flowing curtains. The rest of the house has similar features (although mostly on a smaller scale). The elaborate nature of these features, along with the exaggerated scale serves to dwarf the heroine, adding to her sense of isolation and helplessness. For example, the fireplace in the library towers over her; it later towers over Maxim, emphasizing her growth in strength and self-confidence and his severe loss of both.[10]

One of the most significant turning points in the film comes when the heroine, advised by Mrs Danvers, dresses for the ball. Her descent down the stairs is accompanied by dramatic music and an impending sense of disaster. This is emphasized by Maxim's turned back, to draw attention to the fact that he has not seen her. This scene works so well because throughout it the heroine is descending the stairs and getting closer and closer to the danger at the bottom. There is added danger at the top of the stairs in the form of Mrs Danvers. The heroine appears trapped and vulnerable in the middle.

The cottage by the beach is even more isolated than the house and is extremely vulnerable left, as it is, to the ravages of nature. Nature here is seen in all its uncontrollable and wild glory, in the form of the sea (and later the storm). Gallafent

also describes the cottage as the only dirty part of Manderley[11], significant, of course, as this 'dirt' is itself a metaphor for the events which took place there (both the secret liaisons between Rebecca and Jack Favell and, later, Rebecca's death).

Themes

There are various Gothic themes in the film (all of which appear in the original novel). The central theme or issue could be regarded as the heroine's lack of (and quest for) an identity. Cogeval says 'the entire film appears constructed around Joan Fontaine's intrusion into Rebecca's room'[12] whilst Modleski seems to think that the heroine 'overidentifies' with another woman.[13] When the heroine eventually gains (or seizes?) an identity for herself (and some degree of strength and self confidence to go with it) it is still not an identity of her own, it is that of Rebecca: '*I'm* Mrs de Winter now'. Murder / death and mystery are also central to the whole story. In one of the most tense moments of the film Mrs Danvers tries to persuade the heroine to throw herself from the window and the pivotal issue in the whole film is Rebecca's death (not actually a murder but more like a tragic accident).

Imagery

There are various typically Gothic motifs in the film including the portrait of Rebecca (and the other family portraits at Manderley) and the written word which serves as evidence or proof of various events (for example the wedding certificate symbolically thrown to Maxim from a window when he forgets it). Rebecca's existence is constantly underlined by the presence of her stationery and the fact that the heroine is forced to use Rebecca's writing desk. Other notes etc. are used such as Rebecca's final note and the embroidered pillowcase, a lasting monument to Rebecca; when the pillowcase is destroyed, so is she. Earlier in the film, the broken cupid ornament is itself symbolic of both the lack of emotion between the couple and the lack of the heroine's authority regarding the servants.

The atmosphere of the whole film creates the Gothic feel. The beginning of the film is not Gothic at all and whilst the characters are in Europe the scenes are all bright and sunny. This changes as soon as the action moves to Manderley; there is rain on the approach to the house which makes the house seem dull and frightening to look at. When Maxim talks of the night of Rebecca's death, he describes the night as he put her body into the boat; it was dark and there was no moon; in other words, it was as dark as possible. Elements of the lighting and the appearance of shadows also add to this. At one point we see the shadow of a hand on a door handle in a scene reminiscent of *Nosferatu*. Even the camera in this film serves to make the audience uncomfortable at times. For example, when Maxim tells the heroine about Rebecca's death, the camera pans around the cottage and back to him, looking at everyday objects ('the horror in the normal'?) and leaving us to picture things for ourselves.

Gothic pervades the film from all angles and in varying forms. The film could be described particularly as a Gothic Romance. This is not romantic in the conventional sense but does show the development of the relationship between Maxim and his new wife. This does not appear to be a true love story and this is emphasized in many ways throughout the film, not least in their honeymoon home movie which features only one shot of them both together. Diane Waldman sees Gothic emerging through the uncertainty of the heroine:

> The central feature of the Gothic is ambiguity, the hesitation between two possible interpretations of events by the protagonist...In the Gothic, this hesitation is experienced by a character... who is female.[14]

(This also reminds us of Todorov's notion of the Fantastic.) The film is also an excellent example of Female Gothic, highlighting the most intimate fears of women and often featuring some aspect of imprisonment. In *Rebecca*, the heroine is almost literally imprisoned in Manderley and metaphorically in a life that she feels is not really her own.

Notes

[1] François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1966, p.104

[2] Richard Fisher, 'Hitchcock and Welles: Tormented Wives and other matters', in *Thousand Eyes*, No. 10, May 1976, p.6

[3] Andrew Britton, 'A New Servitude: Bette Davis, *Now Voyager* and the Radicalism of the Woman's Film', in *CineAction*, 26/27, 1992, p.41

[4] Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, New York: Anchor Books, 1976, p.85

[5] Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York and London: Routledge, 1988, p.47

[6] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p.106

[7] Ibid., p.107

[8] Ed Gallafent, 'Black Satin: Fantasy, Murder and the Couple in *Gaslight* and *Rebecca*', in *Screen*, Vol 29 Number 3 Summer 1988, p.90

[9] Guy Cogeval, 'What Brings You to the Museum Mr Hitchcock?', in Cogeval and Paini (Eds), *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences*, Mazzotta Edizione, 2000, p.30

[10] Fisher 'Hitchcock and Welles', p.7

[11] Gallafent, 'Black Satin', p.93

[12] Cogeval, 'What Brings You to the Museum Mr Hitchcock?', p.29

[13] Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, p.44

[14] Diane Waldman, in Rhona J Berenstein, 'I'm Not the Sort of Person Men Marry', in *CineAction*, 29, 1992, p.84

10. The Classic Period

Four of Hitchcock's films are perhaps more well known (and more regularly viewed) than the rest and have been described by some critics as his 'classics'. It seems sensible then that these four: *Vertigo, North By Northwest, Psycho* and *The Birds* (Sinyard also includes *Marnie*) be studied together and compared and contrasted with those that came both before and after them.

Characters

As in Hitchcock's earlier films, there are flawed heroes. In *North By Northwest* the hero, Roger O Thornhill is introduced to us when someone directly addresses him by his full name. He later says that the O stands for nothing and it is indeed a zero representing a certain hollowness in his personality. His whole life is based on pretence or rather 'expedient exaggeration' (not lying) as he describes his advertising career. Sinyard actually describes him as 'the hollow advertising man who gradually comes to care for someone enough to risk his life'.[1] Thornhill disguises himself as a porter in order to escape from the train (and later hides by putting shaving foam on his face), adding to this theme of pretence, and the whole story actually centres around a case of mistaken identity. It could be argued that the central character of the film is actually George Kaplan, who we know does not exist. The mistake Thornhill makes, as so many Hitchcock heroes before him, was simply to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whilst Thornhill is a likeable character he certainly has faults. He is arrogant and has an air of self-importance.

Scottie in *Vertigo* is perhaps even more flawed than Thornhill. He is physically as well as mentally paralysed and several critics (including Sterritt and Cohen) compare Scottie's corset with Jeff's leg cast in *Rear Window*. Scottie's most obvious weakness is his vertigo and it is because of this that Elster hires him in the first place. It becomes obvious, however, that his real weakness is Madeleine / Judy and the extent of this is something that Elster *did not* anticipate. Scottie seems to become even more anxious and frustrated with himself but it is difficult to tell whether he is more annoyed to discover that his Madeleine was not real or that Elster used him.

On the surface, Mitch Brenner in *The Birds* seems to be strong, confident and heroic. He is a successful lawyer, is verbally articulate and very charming. He is also very overtly masculine (particularly when studied in direct comparison with his predecessor, Norman Bates) and protective in many ways, when he boards the windows up, for example. He is, however, emotionally handicapped by his mother who seems to wield power over him, particularly regarding his relationships with women.

Eve Kendall is perhaps not typical of Gothic heroines although she does share many of their traits. On the surface she seems very strong and independent but it is difficult to determine how much control she actually has over her own life and actions and to what extent she is controlled by others. She seems very forward when she first meets Thornhill but this initially seems to be part of the job. She was also Vandamm's mistress before she was an agent and so was controlled first by him and then by the CIA. In a way, Eve seems to almost welcome this control. She is intelligent and has a lot of information on Thornhill. She also appears to have principles (making him sleep on the floor). She introduces herself as 'Eve Kendall, 26 and unmarried', implying that she sees herself lacking or failing in some way because she does not have a husband. She thus appears to be strong and independent but really longs to conform to stereotype and expectations. She also, ultimately, needs to be rescued by Thornhill on Mount Rushmore although we do not see the actual rescue, as Hitchcock cuts from this scene to the final one on the train, perhaps undermining Thornhill's role as a rescuer and strengthening Eve's role as the independent heroine. Her role is also partially that of villain and Eve thus perhaps takes on the role filled by men in most of Hitchcock's early films, that of the anti-hero. Her villainous attributes are debatable and due to a lack of understanding (by Thornhill and the audience) of her true position in the story.

The role of heroine in *Vertigo* is perhaps a little more complicated. The central female role is that of Judy / Madeleine who are both the same person (or rather, two roles played by the same person), perhaps suggesting different aspects of the same person and thus representing both heroine and, to a certain extent, villain. Madeleine is, to Scottie at least, the perfect woman but we never actually see or know her. The only time we see the real Madeleine is when she is dead, everything else is Judy. Sterritt describes Madeleine as 'an alluring woman of mystery'[2], whilst Wood says she is 'so much more erotic because of [this] combination of grace, mysteriousness and vulnerability' and that she is 'presented as a dream, in some sense; and she becomes our dream as well as Scottie's'.[3] Judy is Madeleine's alter ego but it is debatable which

one of them is real and which one is fake. We never meet the real Madeleine but we are never given the chance to get to know the real Judy either. It is difficult to tell how Judy really feels about Scottie but it is obvious that she dislikes, even resents, being made into Madeleine by him. Just as Gavin Elster controlled his wife (and her death), Scottie wields complete control over Judy by effectively turning her into someone else. Madeleine's mystery also perhaps suggests she is a villain as she fits the Gothic stereotype of the mysterious, sophisticated villain.

It seems the real heroine of *Vertigo* should be Midge, although she is never really given a chance to develop fully and eventually disappears from the screen altogether, possibly because her world is incompatible with that of Madeleine and they never share a scene.[4] Midge is very straightforward and talks about things in a very matter-of-fact way. Wood describes her as 'entirely devoid of mystery or reserve'[5] and it is seemingly this that determines that Scottie will never love her as much as she loves him. In this way she resembles Lisa Fremont from *Rear Window*.[6] Midge's independence and strength of mind and character, coupled with her clear need of help or cooperation from others (Scottie), makes her the ideal Gothic heroine.

Midge has very similar character traits to Melanie in *The Birds*. Melanie has every advantage in life, she is attractive, intelligent (she tracks Mitch down) and has a good social position. Wood sees her sophistication as a 'disguise for underlying insecurity'.[7] Part of this insecurity may possibly be caused by her abandonment by her mother, a feature of many Gothic texts and of many earlier Hitchcock films. Like many before, Melanie appears on the surface to be strong and independent but is actually quite vulnerable (perhaps even stupid, depending on how we interpret her going up the stairs alone in the house when everyone else is asleep). She needs Mitch and Lydia almost as surrogate parents. Melanie also has an unpleasant or villainous side. She is known as a prankster or joker and some people also blame her for the bird attacks on the bay because they do not start until she arrives.

Melanie's alter ego is Annie Hayworth, a character who is, in many ways, much more deserving of the label 'heroine'. She does not have the same background as Melanie but is a well respected school teacher with a good reputation. She is also an obvious victim, as are Melanie, Madeleine (*Vertigo*) and, to a certain extent, Eve Kendall (*North by Northwest*) and Judy (*Vertigo*) in the sense that they are all used and manipulated by men, making them all candidates for the role of Gothic heroine.

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In *Vertigo, North By Northwest, Psycho* and *The Birds*, the heroes and heroines, to a certain extent, all have some villainous qualities. The villains of the first two of these films are successful by preying on the weaknesses of others. Wood says that Gavin Elster, 'like other Hitchcock villains (Bruno Anthony, for example), besides being a clearly defined character in his own right, is related to a weakness in the hero.'[8] Elster's plan would not work in the first place were it not for Scottie's vertigo (of which Elster must have had prior knowledge) and Vandamm's plan works much more efficiently (at least at first) once George Kaplan is personified. The villain of *Psycho* is a little more difficult to define. Norman's projection of his mother is the ultimate villain and her (or his, depending on how we look at it) actions are determined and/or controlled by Norman's weaknesses as well as those of his victims.

The ultimate villains of *The Birds* have to be the birds themselves. Individually the birds cannot pose a real threat to the human characters but as a collective they are extremely threatening. Mrs Bundy (the bird expert in the café) points out that birds of different species have never been known to flock together. The birds are always in control throughout the film and at the end they seem to choose to let Melanie and the Brenners go. The birds are a symbol of chaos (as they were in some of Hitchcock's earlier films) and above all symbolise the lack of control the human characters have over their own lives and environment.

There are several other characters in the films that appear briefly but are unpleasant or villainous. In *Psycho* particularly there is the highway policeman: the figure of law and order who (under normal circumstances) should be reassuring but who (in Marion's state of mind and circumstances) is very threatening, particularly in a physical way. His expressionless face (with eyes covered) looms into Marion's car and offers no reassurance at all.

Other figures of authority in these films either die or are simply very ineffectual. The CIA in *North By Northwest* do not help Thornhill because it suits their purpose to keep up the pretence that he is Kaplan. In *Psycho*, Arbogast is brought in to solve Marion's disappearance and is then killed. In *The Birds*, Annie Hayworth is the source of much information for Melanie (as well as being a potential rival for Mitch's affections) and has a certain level of authority in the local community due to her position as school teacher. This does not prevent her from being killed horrifically by the birds. This all corresponds directly to ineffectual figures of authority and their outcomes in traditional Gothic texts.

Also ineffectual, as is often true of Hitchcock films and particularly of Gothic texts, are parental figures (and particularly mothers). In *Vertigo* there is a complete absence of parents and families and the only relationships that do exist (Madeleine and Gavin Elster, Judy and Elster, Madeleine and Scottie, Judy and Scottie, Midge and Scottie) are all fraught with problems and based on some kind of dishonesty. Roger Thornhill's mother is perhaps 'the most scattily insensitive of Hitchcock's mothers.'[9] This is in spite of her son's obvious need for her help and support. Thornhill calls his mother three times in the first section of the film; even when arrested he uses his only phone call to call his mother rather than his lawyer. Later, Thornhill pays his mother for her help. In spite of all this she appears to be of little help at all and seems really unaware of her son's situation. When he tells her he is in danger she doesn't believe him. The most obvious way in which a parent can be ineffectual is by their complete absence. Mrs Bates is present in a physical way but she is dead so she is unable to be an effective parent.

In *The Birds* Melanie has no mother (she left her) and a rather ineffective father. Spoto described the film as:

> the story of [Melanie's] search for her lost mother, a woman who abandoned her years ago and whom she 'refinds' at the end in Lydia Brenner, the very woman who at first seems to reject her.[10]

Lydia is an ineffectual mother to her own children (particularly Mitch) and she blames much of this on the absence of their father ('if only your father were here'). Wood discusses the relationship between Mitch and his mother as being one of the two red herrings in the film:

> The mother-son relationship…leads one off the track into speculation about possessive-incestuous involvement, despite Hitchcock's explicit warning (through Annie Hayworth) that Lydia is not a 'jealous, possessive mother' (a diagnosis amply confirmed later in the film in the development of Lydia herself).[11]

It seems that Lydia attempts to be a good mother. She disapproves of Melanie because of her reputation and so has only her son's best interests at heart.

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Adults generally (and parents particularly) in *The Birds* seem unable to help or defend themselves or children. The children's party highlights this point perhaps better than any other example. The concept of family seems central to all of these films. Sinyard points to the fact that:

> In all these films, the family is incomplete or inadequate in some way. Father figures are absent, and clinging or possessive mothers figure in *North By Northwest*, *The Birds* and particularly in *Psycho* and *Marnie*. What these films propose is wholesale condemnation of matriarchal America.[12]

In *The Birds* it is only when the characters attempt to cohere as a family that 'aggressiveness seems to be inspired'.[13] The most aggressive attacks do seem to be concentrated in scenes where the characters work together (the café, the children's party and later in the house) and this is perhaps what gives the final scene so much tension in that Melanie and the Brenners leave the house together as a coherent family group, closely watched by the birds.

Settings

The dark, mysterious, brooding settings usually associated with traditional Gothic are present in these films, as are the more subtle settings associated with more recent or later Gothic that achieve similar effects as their earlier counterparts.

In *Vertigo* the overall setting of San Francisco is perhaps not typically Gothic, and neither is Scottie's apartment, but they do both add to the feeling of vertigo of both Scottie and the audience. Certain areas of San Francisco that are used, particularly the bay, do have a mysterious and slightly frightening quality. Other settings have an almost dreamlike quality and seem quite unnaturally isolated in one way or another. When Scottie follows Madeleine to her boarding house it is quite old fashioned and dark inside and this, along with the fact that the landlady appears not to have seen her enter the building, exaggerates Madeleine's mystery. Even when she is in the art gallery, surrounded by other people, she has a certain air of isolation. The most isolated or mysterious setting in the film is the Spanish mission. Miles from anywhere (a hundred miles away from San Francisco at least) and resembling a town from another culture and another time, the mission (and particularly the church tower) is the focus of

most of the dramatic action of the film. The church tower is reminiscent of many churches, castles and isolated haunted houses in any number of Gothic novels.

In *North By Northwest* Thornhill is also isolated whilst surrounded by lots of other people. Nobody else is aware of his situation and their presence serves to highlight the fact that he is being pursued for reasons unknown to himself. The film is thus a good example of Psychological Gothic where one character is set in opposition to all others. Hitchcock uses the same technique here as in *The Lodger* and *Saboteur* whereby a character is shown to be in danger whilst in a crowd of people. Townsend is stabbed in a busy room yet no one sees it and everyone thinks that Thornhill did it (although no one saw). Later Thornhill is only able to escape Vandamm's men by causing a disturbance in a crowded auction room and getting himself arrested. On the train and in the train station, Thornhill is in crowds but uses this to his advantage. Eve takes advantage of a crowd in the cafeteria when she shoots Thornhill.

Other settings in the film are quite the opposite of this. Thornhill comes from New York, an extremely busy and overcrowded city, but the settings he finds himself in become gradually more and more isolated as the film progresses. The setting where he is most helpless and vulnerable is the crop field. In this scene there is no sign of life for miles around and Thornhill is without any means of shelter or escape. Strangely, at the climax of the scene, several vehicles appear at once on the bleak landscape providing both a distraction and a means of escape. Sinyard describes this scene as:

> A setpiece that is brilliantly set up by the film, establishing a hero who is the embodiment of urban man and then suddenly depositing him in a setting where he is small, vulnerable and exposed.[14]

It is therefore not just the geographical isolation of this location but its contrast with Thornhill's usual environment that exaggerates this scene and makes it more effective and more Gothic.

The most isolated and unusual setting in *North By Northwest* is Mount Rushmore, a national monument usually viewed from a distance and where the characters are unlikely to meet anyone else. The size of the monument is exaggerated and its overall effect is both dramatic and symbolic.

As with many of his earlier films, Hitchcock also employs various modes of transport here to highlight the transition from place to place. Most effective is the train

and particularly the cabin Thornhill shares with Eve, twice in the film. The motif of the train, or more specifically, modes of transport, was used in many Gothic texts to highlight movement and the theme of pursuit.

The Birds also begins in San Francisco but quickly moves to the more isolated and sparsely populated Bodega Bay. When Melanie asks for directions to Annie Hayworth's house she is told to drive to the very edge of town and the Brenner house is reached either by a long winding and deserted road or (the route taken by Melanie) by boat directly across the bay. Even when surrounded by other people, Melanie is distinctive and either separates herself (as in the telephone box where she becomes trapped rather than safe) or is pushed out by others.

The Brenner house becomes even more isolated once the birds attack and the family effectively imprison themselves inside it when they board up the windows and chimney. The birds congregate in the attic, a typical Gothic interior setting where danger often awaits the characters. Wood describes Melanie's going up into the attic as being similar to Lila Crane's going up to the Bates' house in *Psycho*.[15] We are forced to identify with the characters in each case, who find themselves in extreme danger whilst in an everyday setting that is not normally threatening.

Themes

In these films Hitchcock concentrates on rather heavy and unpleasant subjects and in *Psycho* (and possibly *North By Northwest*) the use of irony or black comedy adds another dimension to the subject matter, bringing it closer to the themes or subjects dealt with in traditional Gothic texts (particularly issues of death or sexuality as seen in *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights* and many others).

In his study of *Vertigo*, Peter Wollen provides a lengthy list of what he sees as the key themes of the film:

> It parades before the viewer specimen episodes of delusion, fetishism, sado-masochism, mourning and melancholia, guilt complex, phobia, catatonia, scopophilia, fixation on the primal scene, obsession, repetition compulsion, loss of identity, latent homosexuality, unconscious slips and bungled actions, and finally, as Hitchcock gleefully noted, necrophilia.[16]

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One thing that all the themes on Wollen's list have in common is a lack of control by the characters. They all imply some sort of dominance of nature over culture as well as some element of compulsion on the part of the character. Other themes (in all of these films) follow this pattern. All of these subjects are (or at least, are presented as) unpleasant and disapproved of by wider society. Gothic texts usually dealt with rather dark or unpleasant issues or with subject matter that was deemed improper. This contributed to Gothic novels being seen as rather trashy.

All of these films address issues of pretence or acting, again often beyond the control of the characters. In *Vertigo* Judy is forced, by Scottie, to become Madeleine, having already played the role for Gavin Elster. It is difficult to see who she really is. Wood analyses this a step further by saying that Scottie also has an unstable identity:

> Scottie, the 'wanderer' who is going to 'do nothing': he is 'Johnny' or 'Johnny-O' to Midge, 'John' to Madeleine, 'Scottie' to Judy: the identity is created in part by the relationship.[17]

As none of these relationships are stable then neither is Scottie's identity. Cohen even ventures to say that *Vertigo* is 'a series of impersonations', for example 'Judy pretending to be Madeleine pretending to be Carlotta'.[18] It is difficult for the audience as well as the other characters to trace back to the original and get any idea of the real character.

As previously noted, Roger Thornhill is also forced to take on another identity in *North By Northwest*, or as Spoto puts it, he is forced to become a 'non-person'.[19] Eve Kendall is similarly forced into the position of someone she is really not. It is particularly difficult for the audience (and Thornhill) to tell which side Eve is on, thus blurring the boundaries between right and wrong, as was often the case in Gothic texts. This theme is possibly at its strongest in *Psycho* when Norman Bates does not merely impersonate his mother, he actually *becomes* her, though this is not through his own choice, he is compelled to do it.

Love (and particularly the loss or lack of it) and relationships play a crucial role in these films. Sinyard says these particular films:

> also bring[s] to a climax Hitchcock's treatment of sexual relationships. As we have seen, the fears and fantasies, anxieties and unease that have surfaced in

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Hitchcock's treatment of sexual attraction generate a profoundly disturbing tension in which feelings fluctuate violently between love and hate.[20]

As with all subjects, Hitchcock has taken the subject of love and/or sexual relationships and concentrated only on complex or negative aspects and, just like Gothic writers before him, has exaggerated the subject matter to such a degree that it is almost unbelievable.

Characters in these films are also often pursued (as in various Gothic novels, most notably *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein*) and for various reasons. The human characters in *The Birds* are pursued by the birds, Scottie pursues Madeleine (in one way or another) throughout *Vertigo*, Thornhill is pursued by Vandamm (thinking he is Kaplan) and in turn, Thornhill pursues Kaplan (until he discovers he does not exist) and then Vandamm is also pursued by the CIA. In *Psycho* it is Marion Crane (and the $40,000) that is pursued, rather than Norman Bates. His crime (and his problem with his mother) is, in effect, discovered by accident.

As in traditional Gothic texts, the idea of chaos, or simply the overturning of order, is used to great effect by Hitchcock in these films. Nowhere is this more obvious than in *The Birds* where the birds themselves are used to represent chaos. This is also used to a lesser extent in *Psycho* when we see stuffed birds in Norman's parlour (dead, of course, but made to look alive and threatening) and pictures of birds hanging in Marion's cabin, one of which is brought to our attention when Norman, shocked by what he sees in the bathroom, knocks it off the wall. The birds overturn order by becoming the controllers in society and by wreaking havoc throughout the quiet community of Bodega Bay. Birds, by their very nature, are out of the reach of human beings and this, coupled with the fact that domestic birds (the types featured in the film) do not usually pose a threat to humans, makes this subject appear even more frightening. Hitchcock thus uses a typical exaggeration technique.

Imagery

Sinyard describes *Vertigo* as having a 'cluster of images', first forming around Madeleine's obsession with Carlotta and then Scottie's obsession with Madeleine. Later 'recurring images of death corridors and an open grave seem about to swallow up all the main characters in darkness'. Furthermore, the film is dominated by circles and

spirals.[21] These circles and spirals are used to the same effect as in Hitchcock's earlier films, those of the German Expressionist filmmakers and the original Gothic storytellers. They symbolise a descent into chaos and despair, a lack of control. Wollen describes *Vertigo* as 'a filmed dream'[22] referring to its mysterious and dreamlike quality. There are also dreams mentioned in the film but whilst we see Scottie's, we do not see Madeleine's, perhaps suggesting that she never really had one and she made it up.

Some of the motifs in *North By Northwest* are so exaggerated they are almost taken to the point of comedy. For example, the sight of Thornhill in (the fictional) Kaplan's clothes, far too small for him, is rather amusing. The clothes (and their size) draw attention to the fact that Thornhill definitely could not be Kaplan; even the suggestion must be ridiculous.

The main motif used in *The Birds* (as previously discussed) is that of the birds themselves. Other motifs correspond directly to the birds. The two lovebirds at the beginning, for example, are kept in a cage and later Melanie and the Brenners become trapped in a similar way inside the house. Spoto also points to eyes and eyesight as a central motif here.[23] This is central to several scenes such as the children playing blind man's buff at the party, Don Fawcett having his eyes pecked out by the birds and Lydia covering up the lovebirds (so they can't see) when they become restless. These references, along with those to windows (they are obstructed when boarded up) serve to highlight and exaggerate the lack of vision or understanding of the characters as to what is happening.

Mise En Scène

Various camera angles and uses of shadows also serve to highlight or exaggerate the Gothic atmosphere of the films. In *Vertigo* several shots are interrupted or disturbed by things dividing the screen, such as the rung of a ladder.[24] This obstructs our viewing of the film and is slightly unnerving, relating to Scottie's state of mind:

> In *North By Northwest* the crop dusting scene is particularly effective as
> it shows his arrival at the scene from a vantage point that subtly implies danger
> without revealing precisely what it is. This crop-dusting episode is an object
> lesson in how to prepare and place a suspense sequence.[25]

This suspense unsettles the audience in the same way that readers were unsettled when awaiting an attack from Dracula or Frankenstein's creature in their respective novels.

This unsettled feeling is achieved in *The Birds* primarily through Hitchcock's use of darkness in the Brenner house coupled with an almost eerie silence. The only sound effects in the film are those made by the birds themselves and the complete absence of any music somehow exaggerates this eeriness further. Judith Halberstam says of *The Birds*:

> The Gothic nature of this film lies in its insistence upon the multiplicity of readings for any set of weird phenomena, its seeming persecution of a single female victim and its apparent alignment of female desire with both conservatism and monstrosity. Obviously there are other Hitchcock films which present themselves as more apparently Gothic (*Psycho* most obviously) but this one codes both the punishment of femininity and the potential of female aggression in both complex and readable ways.[26]

It is thus the weird happenings and their symbolic nature that make *The Birds* Gothic. Halberstam goes on to say:

> A paranoid Gothic reading of *The Birds* recognizes right away that femininity in this horror film resides in the birds themselves as much as in the female characters. Femininity here characterizes both monster and victim and the film places femininity always alongside transgression.[27]

The Birds can thus be read as an allegory for the position of women in society. After all, Melanie is the central female figure here and only when she enters the Bay (along with her reputation and the lovebirds in a cage) does chaos ensue.

Overall, the films of Hitchcock's classic period are in many ways more overtly Gothic than many of his earlier films, simply because the exaggerated storylines, characters and settings are on a scale never seen in his films before. In these films, Hitchcock takes us to such extremes that, in many ways, he leaves us on the brink of comedy and fantasy but always with an undertone of unpleasantness.

Notes

[1] Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Multimedia Publications (UK) Ltd, 1986, p.103

[2] David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.90

[3] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.114

[4] Ibid., p.116

[5] Ibid., p.111

[6] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1995, p.135

[7] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.134

[8] Ibid., p.112

[9] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.103

[10] Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, New York: Anchor Books (Doubleday), 1976, p.334

[11] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.152

[12] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.95

[13] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995, p.133

[14] Ibid., p.104

[15] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.153

[16] Peter Wollen, 'Compulsion', in *Sight & Sound*, April 1997, p.16

[17] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.123

[18] Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, p.137

[19] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.308

[20] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.95

[21] Ibid., p.8

[22] Wollen, 'Compulsion', p.16

[23] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.337

[24] Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.84

[25] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.104

[26] Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, p.128

[27] Ibid., p.131

11. *Psycho*

Psycho (1960) is probably Hitchcock's most famous and most frightening film. In many respects it is also his most (or certainly one of his most) overtly Gothic. This is obvious with regard to characters, settings and the overall atmosphere of the film. It has elements of Female Gothic (given that the earlier part of the film has a central female figure, Marion Crane), Psychological Gothic (both Marion Crane and Norman Bates are isolated characters set apart from everyone else) and Gothic Romance (Marion and Sam).

Characters

Marion Crane is a strong minded woman. She is attractive and independent. She is also a fallen woman and a criminal. She is conducting a relationship with a man who is technically still married to someone else and has illicit lunchtime meetings with him in hotel rooms. She also steals $40,000 from her boss. These last two things are linked; she plans to use the money to escape a life in which she feels trapped and set up a new one with her lover (is this, then, a crime of passion?). By no stretch of the imagination does Marion intend to harm anyone and she is certainly not inherently evil or villainous. Furthermore, she regrets the theft almost as soon as she has had time to think about her actions and she intends to head back the next morning and return the money. Crime does not come naturally to her and she is not very good at it; her boss sees her as she makes her getaway and later she forgets that she has given a false name at the motel.

Marion has many positive qualities. She is physically attractive, intelligent and she has a conscience. Above all, we are forced to weigh up the pros and cons of her behaviour. Many critics have remarked that Marion simply gets what she deserves but as she plans to return the money and appears to be full of remorse does she really deserve such a horrible ending as a punishment mainly for her relationship with Sam? If we consider Mrs Bates' remarks about her it appears that Marion is punished for her overt sexuality and the potential threat this poses for Norman (this is also confirmed by the psychiatrist at the end of the film). In Gothic terms Marion is a strong heroine who

does appear to be in need of rescue. When her knight in shining armour appears (Norman, who inadvertently persuades her to go back and rescue herself) he is just a little too late.

Much more virtuous, and more typically resembling a traditional Gothic heroine, is Lila, Marion's sister. Robin Wood sees Lila simply as an extension of Marion[1] and in this sense we might regard her as representative of all Marion's good qualities and none of her bad ones. It is because of her purity and lack of sexuality that she is able to survive to the end. She plays amateur detective and attempts to be independent in her search for her sister but she is ultimately controlled (and rescued) by men: Arbogast and, particularly, Sam.

Sam is an attractive, dashing, heroic figure. He is traditionally handsome and almost instinctively protective towards Marion and Lila, although usually the heroism seems due to luck rather than skill or intellect. He is also an amateur detective but is guided and informed for the most part by Arbogast and Lila.

In *Psycho* we have a hero and a villain (or anti hero) in the shape of Norman Bates. On the surface Norman Bates is the archetypal 'boy next door'. He is young, good looking, shy, hardworking, honest and, above all, he loves and respects his mother. At first, Norman seems to be rather naïve and stupid but later we realise that this is not the case when it becomes clear that he remembers that Marion gave the name Marie Samuels and said that she came from Los Angeles. It is also clear later (to the audience, at least) that he knows much more than he tells Arbogast. The detective really does not suspect him of withholding information and believes that it is Mrs Bates who has the answers.

Norman's really heroic qualities show through mainly in his role as dutiful son, particularly cleaning up after his mother's murders. Norman really believes his mother to be a living, breathing person in need of his help. It is due to his belief in her that she is still, in effect, able to control him despite the fact the she no longer exists. Durgnat says:

> Norman is an engagingly naïve country youth, very honest, unconcerned with making money, almost a symbol of rustic virtue and country contentment. The whole film hinges on his sensitivity and charm – we tend to like him whatever his faults. His friendliness is all the more reassuring in contrast with the sinister atmosphere (the stuffed birds of prey, the Victorian house just behind the motel,

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where his petulant, tyrannical old mother lives). He seems tainted by the atmosphere, but the over-obvious horror clichés shift our suspicions from Norman to the atmosphere.[2]

The exaggerations in the setting and atmosphere thus serve to highlight the exaggerations of Norman's character. He is almost too nice, too honest, but Durgnat is right to suggest that our suspicions (or attentions) are focused on the atmosphere rather than on Norman. We think him the most normal (and harmless) thing in the place and feel sorry for him because he doesn't fit in.

As with all traditional Gothic texts, all the parental figures in *Psycho* are either absent or very ineffective. The most obvious parental figure in the film is, of course, Mrs Bates. She is present (and watching over Norman) for the majority of the film even though she is not alive. When Arbogast questions Norman he is led to believe (as are the audience) that Mrs Bates is alive and well and that she at least knows more about Marion Crane's disappearance than it at first seems. The viewers have already witnessed Marion's murder by a woman we must now assume to *be* Mrs Bates. This all seems very straightforward until Sam and Lila are told by the sheriff and his wife that Mrs Bates is dead and buried. From then on the film takes a mysterious turn, hinting at supernatural events and becoming even darker than before.

Although it appears to have been Mrs Bates who murdered Marion Crane and Arbogast, it was not the real Mrs Bates. Instead it was Norman's projection of her (Norman being completely unaware of all of this). It is suggested by the sheriff that Mrs Bates was a perfectly normal, even likeable and popular woman in her lifetime and Durgnat says that 'Mrs Bates comes from Norman's childhood and it's fitting that she should exist in an aesthetic idiom now considered childish'.[3] In many respects Mrs Bates was an ineffective mother whilst she was alive and it is these failings and faults that have become exaggerated in Norman's projection of her to the point that any positive or normal qualities have been eradicated. This means that whilst Norman is not responsible for the murders, it is only a small portion of his mother's personality (or rather, his memory of it) that is. This also explains Norman's childlike qualities and the fact that the character of his mother (as projected by himself) treats him like a child. This part of the story also provides us with perhaps the most obvious case of character doubling in any of Hitchcock's films. Norman *becomes* his mother to the extent that he takes on all of her characteristics; he dresses in her clothes, talks in her

voice and even becomes right handed when he is himself left handed. At the end of the film the psychiatrist says that 'he was never all Norman but he was often only mother' and that by this point 'Norman Bates no longer exists; he only half existed to begin with'.

Parenting, or lack of effective parenting, is a very common feature of Gothic and it also features very heavily in *Psycho*. Mrs Bates seems to have been murdered because of her inadequacy as a mother and is, therefore, a present but ineffective parent throughout the whole film. Mrs Bates, it appears, died long before the events of this particular story. Mr Lowry (Marion's boss) could be a parental substitute but he is also sadly lacking in authority and therefore is inadequate in the role.

Whilst Mr Crane is not mentioned at all, Mrs Crane (Marion and Lila's mother) is another absent parent whose presence is still felt. She is mentioned in the very first scene when Sam and Marion discuss their relationship. They talk about putting an end to their lunchtime meetings in seedy hotels and instead discuss meeting at Marion's home when her sister would be present and there would be a picture of her mother on the mantelpiece. Mrs Crane would therefore be a parental authority figure but would not actually be present. She would simply be represented by a portrait or photograph, as are so many absent parents in traditional Gothic texts. Perhaps we should assume that Marion would not behave as she does if her mother was present. Sam also mentions his father in the very first scene. He says he is working hard to pay both his ex-wife's alimony and his dead father's debts. He is therefore responsible for his father in a case of role reversal.

Detective Arbogast is another obvious authority figure in the film but he is also very ineffective. He is a private detective hired by Lowry / Cassidy to investigate the disappearance of the money rather than of Marion. He is not a police officer and, in many ways, seems very amateur in his investigative methods. Durgnat refers to Arbogast as 'coarse and obnoxious'[4] but this is perhaps simply because we see him from Sam and Lila's point of view. We perhaps also see him as a little harsh and unfeeling as his priority is the money and we already know that Marion has been murdered. Between them, Arbogast and the highway police officer (who is actually quite threatening, at least for Marion who is already feeling anxious about what she has done) serve to give the viewers (and the other characters) a view of authority figures as ineffective and quite inhuman. Overall, the amateur detectives, Sam and Lila, are much

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more effective in the role than the professionals, possibly because of their personal involvement in events.

Settings

As this is a Gothic film, the settings are mostly isolated, gloomy and lacking in personal or human touches. The majority of the main action in the film takes place in and around the Bates motel and the house just behind it. The Bates motel used to be on the main highway but the highway moved (according to Norman). It is in the middle of nowhere, isolated from civilisation, Marion finds it by accident (or fate) and Arbogast (as well as Sam and Lila) has to go out of his way to look for it (and only then because he is looking for Marion). Arbogast actually says the motel looks 'like it's hiding from the world'. Norman is associated with this place and with nowhere and no one else. It is almost as if the motel is in another dimension: after all, Marion finds it by accident when she almost falls asleep in the middle of a rainy night, almost as if it is a dream.

The motel seems to be only a shadow of what perhaps it once was. We are led to believe that it was once a thriving business but it certainly is not any longer. Norman still changes bed linen and cleans the rooms just in case people come but all the cabins are always empty. It seems Mrs Bates was persuaded to build the motel by her boyfriend. It would thus be sensible to assume that Norman holds a grudge against the motel in the same way that he holds one against his mother and her boyfriend. The motel has kept Norman trapped just as his mother has.

The parlour in the motel has an intensely Gothic atmosphere. It is full of eerie looking stuffed birds of prey and is very dimly lit. It is Norman's domain, somewhere we don't imagine his mother has ever spent any time in and, as such, reflects his personality. There is an atmosphere of something rather sinister and unpleasant about the parlour that is perhaps emphasized most when Norman takes down the picture enabling him to spy on Marion through a hole in the wall. It is shortly after this spying that 'Mrs Bates' enters the room and murders Marion, perhaps posing the question: who was watching her through the wall, Norman or his mother?

Cabin one is where Norman puts Marion, so she will be close to the office if she needs anything. It is also, conveniently, the one with the hole in the wall. As Norman points out, the cabin has all Marion could possibly need but it is not exactly 'homey'. The pictures of birds connect the cabin with the parlour and whilst they don't

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give the room quite as sinister a feel as the parlour next door, there is still a feeling of uneasiness about the place.

The bathroom in cabin one (that Norman is unable to name either because of past events or (and possibly more likely) because of its implications of nudity or privacy) is perhaps the pivotal setting in the story. The very nature of the bathroom suggests isolation from other people. It is also a suggestion of the everyday nature of life, relating to Hitchcock's own suggestion that murder belongs at home. The implication here (and connection with Gothic) is that people should feel safe at home or in a setting they recognise and that by showing a murder (and a very gruesome one at that) in a bathroom (a setting we all recognise) Hitchcock unsettles all his viewers. This setting has the same sort of effect as others such as the fairground; it is a setting that we all recognise but it is an unfamiliar sight on the screen. This unsettles us and makes us uncomfortable. LaValley sees the shower murder scene in *Psycho* as 'the incursion of evil into our well-laundered existence'.[5] This murder has worked its way into a cleansing, everyday scene. The shower is used as an everyday setting. Hitchcock uses the shower to show us just how vulnerable we are whilst participating in the everyday act of taking a shower. Marion cannot hear or see clearly because of the running water.

Perhaps having even more Gothic features than the Bates motel is the house behind it. The house is large, gloomy looking and built in the American Gothic style. It is even more isolated than the motel and has few visitors. In many ways it resembles the traditional haunted house (or castle) of the classic Gothic texts and has a sinister or supernatural air to it. There is an obvious presence in the house that seems to be ghosts from the past, not just Mrs Bates. Upon investigating the house, Lila goes into Mrs Bates' room which bears all traces of her in terms of clothes, jewellery and so on. It seems that she could be back any minute and, for a split second, Lila thinks she is when she misrecognises her own reflection.

Norman's room is equally unnerving for Lila and for the audience. On the surface it appears to be the room of a small child and the fact that Norman is a grown man makes this even more disturbing. The fact that Norman had no male authority figure (his father died when he was very young) and that his mother was very ineffective in the role led (or at least helped in part) to him being seriously mentally disturbed. His room suggests that at least part of him has refused (or been unable) to grow up. His room is also significantly at the very top of the house, an area in Gothic

texts generally associated with unpleasant events. This can also be said of cellars (at the very bottom of stairs), one of which in this film is featured at the very climax of events.

The cellar is where Norman hides his mother (or rather her corpse) and where she is finally discovered by Lila. Luckily for Lila, Sam regains consciousness in time to save her as this is also where Norman appears dressed as his mother and prepared to kill Lila as, it appears, he killed her sister. Cellars and attics particularly feature in Gothic texts as their positioning in the house means that inhabitants can usually not go any further; they become trapped as, generally speaking, the only way out is the same way they came in. This is particularly clear in a climactic scene in *M* when Beckert, the child killer, is cornered in an attic.

Staircases are also relevant because of their positioning leading to attics and cellars. Symbolically, something unpleasant lurks at the very top or very bottom of the stairs respectively. In *Psycho* the Bates house itself is at the top of a flight of stairs, making it appear as if looming at a strange angle, almost like Dracula's castle, up a mountain in the Carpathians. Stairs are also significant in *Psycho* when Arbogast is attacked and stabbed by Mrs Bates on the stairs in the Bates house.

The film opens on a scene in a hotel where Marion and Sam have met for a secret lunchtime rendezvous. The hotel room is dark and unwelcoming and lacks any personal touches. Marion's room at home is very similar. The only difference between the two settings seems to be Marion's clothing. In both we see her in her underwear: white at the beginning (when she is party to adultery but otherwise innocent) and black when she is at home packing (after she has stolen the money).

The fact that some of the action of the film is set in such everyday settings (a bathroom, a hotel room, a bedroom, an office, a hardware store) again reinforces the idea of unsettling the audience by showing such unpleasant events taking place in ordinary settings everyone recognises. As has been pointed out before, early Gothic texts were generally set in foreign countries with which readers were not familiar whilst more recent Gothic texts are less able to provide unfamiliar settings mainly because people are much more well travelled nowadays. Writers and filmmakers thus have kept such elements as isolation and gloominess in their settings but have (partly through necessity) used much more ordinary locations as the focus of the main action.

Psycho opens with a date and time of day on the screen (but no year). This might imply that such events could occur anywhere and at any time. This also emulates

the style of many eighteenth and nineteenth century novels (although not necessarily just Gothic texts) which also used this device regarding years and place names.

Themes

Many of the themes of *Psycho* are familiar to Gothic texts. In one sense, death, and particularly murder, seems to be at the centre of the narrative. Though not necessarily central only to Gothic texts, these themes are presented in such a way and in combination with other features that they create a particular effect and evoke a particular response from the audience. The pivotal point in the film is undoubtedly the murder of Marion Crane that happens approximately one third of the way through the film. As Rothman points out 'the murders here are shown whereas in all the others up until now murder was either disguised or it happened off the screen'.[6] Whilst this was not necessarily true of all of Hitchcock's earlier films, the murder of Marion Crane was possibly one of the most gruesome to be seen by this time. In the earlier films, then, much was left to the imagination of the audience. Here we are shown what happens to Marion. Perhaps, then, we could say that the audience of *Psycho* are deliberately shocked rather than just unsettled. However, because there is an element of the unknown and some hint at the supernatural this still has the Gothic effect of unnerving the audience (we know that Marion has been gruesomely murdered but we are still unsure as to who did it and are, in part, unwilling to believe the evidence of our own eyes). This is also achieved, particularly with the first murder, as it is completely unexpected that the heroine (and main character) of the film would be killed off only thirty minutes into the film.

Furthermore, far from leaving less to the imagination of the audience by showing this brutal and gruesome scene, it makes them imagine more. Hitchcock commented on this, saying:

> The showing of a violent murder at the beginning was intended purely to instil into the minds of the audience a certain degree of fear of what is to come. Actually in the film, as it goes on, there's less and less violence because it has been transferred to the minds of the audience.[7]

It is almost as if Hitchcock just points the audience in the right direction, shows them how to think and then leaves them to it. Whilst the first half of the film does have some genuinely disturbing moments that are made so by a very direct portrayal of events, the second half is much more subtle. The audience are shaken by murders and then disturbed further by the other events and revelations.

Death (as well as murder) also features in the film. One of the main characters (Mrs Bates) is dead from the beginning of the film and, although the sheriff tells us that Mrs Bates is dead, this is not really confirmed until the end. It transpires that Mrs Bates was herself murdered by Norman ten years ago. In this way, then, the audience are unnerved by the possibility that a woman who may or may not be dead may have committed murder, and disturbed further by the revelation that she was murdered by her own son.

It could be argued that love is one of the themes of the film and the initial focus on the relationship between Marion and Sam seems to set the film up, at first, as a Gothic Romance. Durgnat seems unconvinced that the couple are actually in love[8] but surely any anxiety or unhappiness stems from the obstacles to their relationship: namely lack of money and the fact that Sam is still married to someone else. It is therefore for love that Marion steals the money. It is also for love, or rather lust, that she is murdered. Mrs Bates (or at least, Norman's projection of her) murders Marion because Norman is attracted to her and could be led astray. There is no positive or normal representation of love in the film, a disturbing (and cynical) perspective on modern life.

Madness is another major feature of the film. Love and madness are not particularly Gothic themes per se but placed in a certain context or combined with other things can evoke a certain response from the audience. Norman is the obvious focus of this although for the majority of the film we are led to believe that he is completely normal. The psychiatrist's explanation at the end of the film can be seen as its weakness but may be necessary for some viewers in order to put the events into perspective. We could also argue that Marion is temporarily insane when she steals the money (Norman draws her, and our, attention to this when he says 'we all go a little mad sometimes, haven't you?'). Only when she thinks about what she has done does she regret her actions and decide to do the right thing. The real Marion Crane would never have stolen the money. Several characters in this film are not what they appear to

be and this is perhaps what Mark Jancovich was referring to when he discussed the 'instability of identity' and 'issues of self division' in the film.[9]

Psycho also seems to focus on morals and justice. Marion feels guilty as soon as she steals the money and she is almost drawn to the Bates motel by fate. Durgnat refers to the theological notion of predestination whereby 'God sends sinners a chance to repent *in order that* by rejecting it, as he knows they will, they will damn themselves more thoroughly than ever.'[10] Marion does repent but it seems she is too late. She has already made up her mind to return the money when she is murdered. Does this mean, then, that she is punished for *this* crime or for her adultery? Is her murder a justified punishment for her behaviour or just a tragic event in a strange setting that she found herself in by accident?

Imagery

Many of the recurring features or motifs in *Psycho* resemble those of traditional Gothic texts. Many of them seem to be hints at what will happen later in the film and some of them are very much everyday objects whose presence in the film, in such settings and during such extreme events makes them appear quite threatening and unusual. Of prime importance seems to be the $40,000 (the Macguffin) which is the main focus of the first part of the film. The audience are unsettled when this is no longer the case. Marion is murdered and the money ends up at the bottom of the swamp, unnoticed by Norman. When Sam, Lila and Arbogast investigate Marion's disappearance they believe the money to have been the motive but Norman is completely unaware of its existence. In some way, the fate of the money is even more shocking to the audience than that of Marion.

As discussed previously, birds are used in several of Hitchcock's films as representative of chaos and disorder. Birds feature prominently in *Psycho* in the form of the stuffed birds of prey in the parlour and the pictures of birds in cabin one. The parlour appears to be solely Norman's domain, the only place not controlled by his mother. Birds can be interpreted as an aspect of nature that is usually beyond the control of man. The fact that these particular birds are dead and stuffed demonstrates man's (and particularly Norman's) attempts to control this chaotic aspect of nature (perhaps an attempt to take control of his life generally) and this is made all the more relevant by the fact that they are all birds of prey. This also makes them more

threatening. Marion is quite disturbed when she first walks into the room because the birds are all stuffed in positions of action and seem to be staring at her, about to pounce. This surely should be a forewarning of what is to come: that she is to become Norman's prey. The pictures of birds in cabin one might be a hint as to the location of the attack. The presence of birds may also be a forward reference to Hitchcock's next film. When Norman rushes in to cabin one and realises what 'his mother' has done he inadvertently knocks one of the bird pictures off the wall, subtly drawing attention to this motif. Spoto points to both the 'sexual wordplay' (Norman's love of 'stuffing birds') as well as the irony in that 'the last 'stuffed bird' is, aptly, a woman named Crane, who came from Phoenix (a city named for the mythic bird that returns from the dead)'.[11]

The shower (or bathrooms generally) may be seen as a motif in the film. This is a prime example of using everyday settings for scenes of shocking or horrific events in order that the audience feel even more disturbed: this could happen to any one of us. Other than the most famous scene, we see the bathroom (and particularly the shower) in the background when Marion is packing in her room and she also goes into the washroom at the garage when she stops to buy a new car. Marion flushes the written evidence of her theft down the toilet (generally acknowledged to be the first time a flushing toilet appeared in film) where a tiny piece of paper with a figure on it is later found by Lila. Perhaps significantly, Lila does not go into the bathroom in the Bates' house. The shower / bathroom motif perhaps suggests some issue of cleanliness or purification, drawing attention to Marion's crime and her plan to put it right. It also ironically becomes the location of her murder. The fact that we saw the shower earlier in her own room (though very briefly) is perhaps a suggestion of what will happen later.

Portraits (or photographs) do not appear to be overused in the film despite being a motif used very heavily in Gothic texts, usually to represent absent characters. When a character (often a parent) dies in a Gothic text they are often simply replaced with a portrait of themselves as a reminder to those left behind. In *Psycho* Marion speculates about having dinner with a portrait of her mother on the mantelpiece. Arbogast later shows Norman a photograph of Marion and asks if he has seen her before. Norman says it is not a good photograph of her but the audience is unable to comment as we do not see it. Unlike in traditional Gothic texts, Mrs Bates is *not* replaced by a portrait and this seems to divert attention away from the fact that she is

dead. Her lack of representation by other means (a portrait or photograph) suggests that the real Mrs Bates is still very much alive.

The recurring motif of the eye draws attention to the fact that this is very much a film about watching (as are several other Hitchcock films, most notably *Rear Window*):

> This is why Martin Balsam is stabbed in the eye; and why Vera Miles hits a suspended bare light-bulb, causing it to swing and cast shadows that make the empty eye sockets of the mother's skeleton seem to have darting eyes. Like all the seeing in the film, however, the skull's 'gaze' is an empty, illusory, dead stare, recalling most of all the astonishing open stare of Janet Leigh's corpse – the stare that has its origin in her smug stare-smile early in the film as she drives her car and considers her crime, and that points forward to the mad stare-smile of Perkins at the end, grinning at the triumph of death over life.[12]

This voyeurism is continued in the scene where Norman spies on Marion through the peephole in the wall. Spoto comments on the picture that usually covers the peephole as that of:

> Susanna and the elders, the biblical story (in Daniel 13) of a woman overtaken in her bath by voyeurs whose passions were aroused as they spied on her from a secret place as she prepared to bathe.[13]

Both the irony and significance are obvious here. The position of the audience also seems one step further removed from the action and we are thus unsettled from our own expected position.

Mirrors (and windows to a lesser extent) are used in the film, corresponding to their use in Gothic texts along with issues of doubling. Marion and Sam stand at the window in the hotel room at the beginning of the film where she also dresses in front of a mirror. She later packs in a room featuring a large mirror and stands in front of the mirror in the garage washroom. The most obvious use of mirrors in the film is when Lila goes into Mrs Bates' room. She is startled because she thinks she sees someone when, in fact, it is herself she sees reflected in two mirrors on opposite sides of the room. Eisner says 'mirrors which face each other across a room are a good opportunity

for evoking the famous double'.[14] In this film (as in many Gothic texts) many characters are doubles of others (most notably Norman and Mrs Bates, but to a lesser extent we could also regard Marion and Lila and Norman and Sam as doubles) and some subplots can be paralleled with each other. Overall, elements of doubling and mirroring are perhaps even more obvious in Hitchcock's American films than in his earlier British ones. 'In the Romantic and Victorian precedents, the double always reflects strong inner conflict, a clash of wills of the reach towards integration and the peril of disintegration.'[15] Guilt and innocence often mirror each other but more often we find two characters who are both guilty but of different things or to different degrees. We have perhaps the most obvious example of this in *Psycho* when we see Norman and Marion talking on the porch of the Bates motel. Marion has only a shadow, representing her guilt over the stolen money (a guilty secret) whereas Norman has both a shadow *and* a reflection indicating that he has both a deep, dark secret *and* an alter ego.

Mise En Scène

The atmosphere of *Psycho* serves to make the film Gothic, aided to no small degree by Bernard Herrmann's distinctive score. Much of the main action takes place at night time and the general darkness of the film is emphasized by the fact that it was filmed in black and white, highlighting the contrasts between light and dark; building 'an impression of a divided world, in which the forces of light and darkness are at war.'[16] These black and white contrasts appear right at the beginning of the film when Marion and Sam stand at the hotel window and 'the shadows of the blind slats fall on them like prison bars' suggesting they are doomed from the start.[17]

There is an element of comedy in the film (Hitchcock always maintained that the film was a comedy) but it is an extremely dark form of humour. Overall the film has a feeling of suspense, as in scenes such as when the car doesn't look as if it will sink in the swamp, and particularly in the fact that the audience are forced to identify with Marion Crane for the first part of the film and when she is murdered we are left bewildered and lost. Overall, the film locates the most frightening and shocking events within both everyday settings (with some added gloominess and Gothic atmosphere) and within the human mind itself.

Notes

[1] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.147

[2] Raymond Durgnat, 'Inside Norman Bates', in Albert J. LaValley, *Focus on Hitchcock*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972, p.129

[3] Ibid., p.129

[4] Ibid., p.132

[5] Albert J. LaValley, *Focus on Hitchcock*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972, p.88

[6] William Rothman, *The Murderous Gaze*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982, p.249

[7] Stephen Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*, London and New York: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 1990, p.121

[8] Durgnat, 'Inside Norman Bates', in Albert J. LaValley, *Focus on Hitchcock*, p.127

[9] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996, p.239

[10] LaValley, *Focus on Hitchcock*, p.129

[11] Donald Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock: The Dark Side of Genius*, Collins, 1983, p.425

[12] Ibid., p.424

[13] Ibid.

[14] Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1973, p.129

[15] Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, New York: Anchor Books (Doubleday), 1976, p.195

[16] Richard Wiles (ed.), 'Alfred Hitchcock: The Ultimate Collection on Video, Volume 1: *Psycho*', De Agostini, 1999, p.7

[17] Ibid., p10

12. Later Hitchcock

Hitchcock completed five films after his 'classic' period: *Marnie, Torn Curtain, Topaz, Frenzy* and *Family Plot*. Of these, *Frenzy* has most in common with the director's earlier work and can be seen to have many Gothic elements though these will mostly be dealt with separately. Of the others, *Marnie, Torn Curtain* and *Family Plot* each deal with themes and issues tackled by Hitchcock on previous occasions and each have some elements typical of the Gothic tradition.

Characters

Marnie has few positive qualities and really cannot be described as a heroine. The audience has difficulty in trying to get to know her character very well and her identity is rather unstable. In the first few scenes we do not see her face, we see her choose an identity from a collection of ID cards and wash a false colour out of her hair. From the very beginning it is difficult to tell who the real Marnie actually is. It is only when she takes on a false identity that she is able to demonstrate any confidence or strength of character. As herself 'Marnie is pathologically frigid and a compulsive thief.'[1] Throughout the film, Marnie is unable to act and unable to be herself. When Mark Rutland tries to force her to act, her paralysis spreads to him[2], almost as if it is contagious. Marnie, the independent single woman who masterminds criminal activities is still in need of a man to unlock her secrets and help her to recover. She is thus the Gothic heroine who seems strong on the surface but who does have the stereotypical weaknesses of her sex.

The heroine of *Torn Curtain* certainly has confidence and independence. Sarah Sherman (Julie Andrews) is intelligent and attractive. She is also:

> a quite emancipated young woman, a nuclear physicist in her own right, and not just a jumped-up secretary as she so easily could have been. The main weakness in her character is that she is not particularly interesting.[3]

Sarah is also quite inquisitive (perhaps even nosy) and usually observant but she still seems to know little about her fiancé. She is a little rash in her behaviour, often acting without considering the consequences. This type of behaviour is often seen as a weakness and is stereotypical of Gothic heroines (perhaps most obviously Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*) and also as an effeminate feature of some male characters (most obviously Victor Frankenstein).

Significantly, Sarah is only Michael's 'common-law wife' and whilst in some ways this makes her a modern independent woman, in others it gives her a highly dubious and perhaps even unsavoury reputation. However independent she is, standing by Michael 'draws her towards the false position of sacrificing her own integrity.'[4]

The farmer's wife in *Torn Curtain* also acts very quickly and with more thought for Michael than for herself. She is unable to kill Gromek alone and has to be helped by Armstrong although she does seem to be the quickest thinking of the two. Her role is also almost completely silent. This all gives the impression that she is almost a device or a puppet rather than a character in her own right. She is a woman who is present simply to help the hero.

There are two main female characters in *Family Plot*: Blanche and Fran. Blanche is supposedly one of the good guys but is still a con artist. She poses as a spiritualist and is not particularly convincing (although we do question her abilities at the end of the film). Indeed, in his trailer for the film, Hitchcock himself assures us that Madam Blanche is a fake (though this could be a ploy to lead us to question her talents). Not only does Blanche manipulate her clients, she also manipulates George and she really seems to be the one in charge of their relationship (both personal and professional). Cohen compares Blanche with Fran:

> [Blanche] whines rather than emotes, is cute not beautiful, wears jeans and sneakers and not glamorous gowns. Even her name is the epitome of anti-glamour...Fran, on the other hand, superficially resembles traditional Hitchcock women (she even wears a blonde wig during the kidnap transactions), but she is their self-consciously artificial derivative, a woman who explicitly fulfils what has been the implicit ideological function of woman in film throughout the classical period: to serve masculine prerogatives and plot-driven ends.[5]

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Blanche and Fran are thus almost exact opposites in many ways although they both demonstrate stereotypical weaknesses.

In the traditional Gothic text the beautiful heroine is often either overtly sexual or very stupid (or sometimes both) and either of these things can lead to them being manipulated or abused by men. Fran is definitely manipulated by Adamson and is a very vulnerable character, and (as Spoto points out) she does not even have a surname.[6] Wearing a blonde wig and turning herself into the traditional Hitchcock blonde seems to accentuate this vulnerability. Blanche, by contrast, is much more ordinary (at least physically) but has a much more developed personality. These two seem to most obviously resemble the two main female characters of *Dracula*. Fran resembles Lucy, the beautiful but shallow young woman lusted after by all the male characters and weakened and eventually destroyed by Dracula. Blanche is more like Mina, the intelligent, confident and more maternal woman whom the men look to for guidance (though they still need to take care of her) and who can be seen as largely responsible for Dracula's destruction.

Mark Rutland in *Marnie* has been described as 'the strongest hero of Hitchcock's later films but his methods can hardly be endorsed.'[7] On the surface he appears to be a hero figure but can perhaps be best described as an anti-hero. In one way he seems to want to protect Marnie and acts as a sort of father-figure towards her in the same way that Schedoni acts as a protective figure towards Elena in *The Italian*, for example. This protective relationship in Gothic texts is usually fraught with problems and eventually points towards an inadequacy on the part of the protector.

In another way, Mark is very cruel and manipulative. He blackmails Marnie into marrying him and then forces himself upon her on their honeymoon. Mark is quite superficial, he sees women in terms of their looks ('the one with the pretty legs') and uses his wealth to manipulate people to his own advantage. In this way he resembles a large number of Gothic characters who usually have an element of control (often financial as well as physical) over women.

Michael Armstrong in *Torn Curtain* is intelligent but secretive and does not really consider the consequences of his actions until it is too late. Sinyard describes Armstrong as:

less of a patriot than a plagiarist, and one could take *Torn Curtain* as a faustian tale about a scientist who sells his integrity for ultimate knowledge and, in doing so, consigns his soul to damnation.[8]

Despite some outward appearance of masculine strength, Armstrong is continually helped by women throughout the film: the farmer's wife, the countess, Dr Koska and, particularly, his fiancée Sarah. Although these women help him, however, they all have flaws so Armstrong still maintains an element of superiority. The audience are forced to identify with Armstrong and:

> It is this involvement with a character, hence with a course of action, that makes the killing of Gromek the most disturbing murder in the whole of Hitchcock. The murder of Marion Crane shocked us, certainly; but at least we were taken by surprise, and had never *wanted* it. But here, as soon as Gromek reveals his presence, we say, 'He will have to be killed', and as the moments pass and nothing is done, this merges into 'Go on – kill him.' We are implicated – we are killing Gromek – and Hitchcock spares us no discomfort for our complicity.[9]

There are numerous villains in *Torn Curtain*, though some are more directly villainous than others. Gromek is perhaps the most obvious villain; he is big, aggressive and unpleasant, though Wood describes him as 'more pathetic than sinister'.[10] Any sympathy we may have with him when Armstrong and the farmer's wife first attack him disappears when he proves so hard to kill. Overall (with the possible exception of Michael Armstrong and Sarah Sherman) all the characters are quite unpleasant and difficult to like.

Unlike George, Adamson, the villain in *Family Plot*, is a strong personality. On the surface he is wealthy and charming (a stereotypical Gothic villain), though his charm is misleading and his wealth has been gained by dishonest means. Cohen points out that we never learn about the circumstances surrounding Adamson's birth or why he was driven to murder his adoptive parents.[11] Adamson thus remains quite enigmatic although we still know more about him than the other characters do. The way Adamson looks and behaves, along with his status, gives him much more power and control than the other characters, all of whom are villains in one way or another.

Maloney, who perhaps may be considered the more traditional villain of the piece, is also manipulated and ultimately destroyed by Adamson.

At first glance, *Marnie* appears not to have an obvious villain. For some time we are perhaps led to believe that Mrs Edgar is the villain as we think she killed a man and she does not care for her daughter. Mark has villainous qualities when he resorts to blackmail and rape to get what he wants from Marnie. Marnie is a villain (or at least a criminal) herself as she is a liar and a thief. Lil has villainous qualities (from Marnie's point of view) as she is suspicious of Marnie, listens to her telephone conversations and seems jealous of her relationship with Mark. Even Jessie can be seen as a villain as far as Marnie is concerned as she seems to have replaced her in her mother's affections. As with *Torn Curtain*, for the most part it is very difficult to like any of these characters although once Marnie's real problems come to light, the audience do feel sympathetic towards her.

As is the case with many of Hitchcock's other films, *Marnie* has a storyline featuring strong parental influences. Mrs Edgar will not let her daughter touch her, seemingly because she does not love her. Wood says Mrs Edgar's 'maternal impulses are suppressed and Marnie is a constant reminder of her guilt'.[12] Mrs Edgar also has very definite ideas about men ('a decent woman don't have need for any man') which seem to influence Marnie's attitude towards them ('Men, you say 'no thanks' to one of them and suddenly you're a candidate for the funny farm'). It eventually becomes clear why Mrs Edgar holds the views she does and that she does actually love her daughter and has protected her for years. This fits much better with Lil's comment when (paraphrasing Norman Bates) she says 'I always thought that a girl's best friend was her mother'. Marnie's odd relationship with her mother and the belief that she did not love her, along with the complete absence of a father, has clearly influenced her behaviour and character. As in most Gothic novels, the absence of parents is obvious in this film. Not only does Marnie not have a father, Jessie has no father and has a highly ineffectual mother. Mark, on the other hand, has no mother and his father seems to have little (or no) authority.

Family Plot, as the title might suggest, does deal with some issues regarding parents and families. The catalyst of the story is the first meeting between Julia Rainbird (a mother-like figure, though perhaps only in age) and Blanche when she tells her about her sister who was forced to give up her child. We then inadvertently follow the story of this child whilst Julia Rainbird seemingly disappears, demonstrating her

own ineffectiveness as a parental substitute figure. All four of the main characters are independent from both parents and children and seem to suffer from a lack of guidance or support.

Settings

Most of the settings in these films do not resemble those of traditional Gothic texts but many of the effects achieved by them are very similar. The first few settings in which we see Marnie are everyday places but Marnie appears to be isolated in them giving them an unsettling feel. This is achieved partly through the focus of the camera just on Marnie (although not on her face in the first few scenes) and seemingly ignoring everyone around her. Later scenes in the film show Marnie isolated in other ways, alone in Rutland's offices or Mark's home or out on the hunt. Other settings are unsettling in their claustrophobic nature: Marnie and Mark in the car, for example. Even on their honeymoon on board ship, where Marnie obviously feels trapped (there is no escape), Marnie chooses to make her suicide attempt in a small, enclosed pool rather than in the wide open sea. This effect is perhaps put to best use, however, in the scenes in and just outside Mrs Edgar's house. The shipyard at the end of the street gives a particularly closed-in feel: there is no other way out. The houses are small and close together (particularly compared with the large country house of the Rutland family) and the general atmosphere both inside and just outside the house is not welcoming. It transpires that it is the house (and particularly Mrs Edgar) that holds the key to Marnie's troubled past and it is only through confronting this that she can ever hope to be free or happy. In many ways, Marnie feels safer when enclosed; she needs to find the courage to face up to her past and to confront memories she has suppressed. She later gets this courage from Mark.

The settings of *Torn Curtain* are all quite gloomy. The film opens with a scene on board ship, the characters freezing because the heating is broken, thus setting the scene for a film focusing on events in the Cold War, harking back to the periods of social and political instability in which so many traditional Gothic texts were written and set. As the film progresses, the two main characters find themselves enclosed, not only in a city (and a country) they can't get out of, but also in various buildings. There are hotel rooms, a post office, a museum, a lecture theatre and a theatre. Escape from the last of these proves especially difficult and chaotic. Perhaps the most isolated

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location of all in the film is the farmhouse in which Gromek is killed, the lack of music in the scene adding to its unsettling, even disturbing, atmosphere.

The two characters seem to find themselves in increasingly smaller, more confined and claustrophobic places as the film goes on. Much of the tension in the scene on the bus seems to stem from the fact that there is no escape from the bus, along with the fact that some passengers are nervous (one is even hostile towards them). Their final escape from East Berlin is made in a theatre costume basket, barely large enough for them to fit inside.

Some of the settings in *Family Plot* are perhaps a little more traditional and what we might expect from a Gothic text. The film opens on a scene in Julia Rainbird's house, in the parlour, a very old fashioned place decorated in the style of Victorian Gothic. Blanche's house is also old fashioned and rather quirky and unusual, matching her personality and physical appearance and dress. Adamson's house is almost the opposite but still has Gothic features. The whole place seems dark, shadowy and atmospheric with large, wide staircases and grand features. Perhaps most mysterious and Gothic of all is the basement with the secret room where Fran and Adamson hide their kidnap victims, including Blanche.

Other settings in *Family Plot* also give the film a Gothic feel, such as the graveyard with its mazelike paths, the church and the tiny café in the hills. The drive through the countryside (resembling the opening to Kubrick's *The Shining* a few years later) is perhaps when the characters are most isolated and when they are in most danger as the brakes on their car have been tampered with.

Themes

Crime, and particularly that of theft, is prevalent in both *Marnie* and *Family Plot*. In *Marnie* the first shot is of Marnie's purse and this is echoed in the last word, also 'purse'.[13] This focuses both on the theme of theft and also on Marnie's femininity. Perhaps even more obviously, the first word heard in the film, 'robbed', is spoken by Strutt[14], focusing the audience's attention immediately on what will turn out to be one of the film's main themes. This gives the film an air of mystery and means that events surrounding Marnie are very tense and unsettled because she risks discovery at any moment.

Deception or pretence is another aspect of *Marnie* that, in many ways, is closely linked to crime. Most of Marnie's life appears to have been based on or around some sort of deception. Since Marnie's childhood, her mother has taken the blame for a murder the child herself committed and most of Marnie's problems (psychological and otherwise) seem to have stemmed from this. Marnie's changing identities (along with her changing hair colour and ID cards) at the beginning of the film continue this theme of deception. We can never be sure what Marnie will do (and even to a certain extent we don't know who she is) and this adds to the audience's uncertainty and general feeling of unease. Mark Rutland seems to know about Marnie's crimes from the start and is attracted to her *because* she is a thief. He blackmails her into marrying him and so even their marriage is based on pretence.

In *Family Plot* the themes of crime and deception work on various levels. The film begins with a séance conducted by Blanche for the benefit of Julia Rainbird, leading to her asking Blanche to find her missing nephew. We soon learn that Blanche and her partner George are crooks and that they aim to con Mrs Rainbird out of her money. The next scene of the film focuses on a kidnap and ransom plot by Adamson and Fran that is to continue throughout the film. This crime is on a much larger scale and is much more successful and lucrative than anything attempted by Blanche and George, who seem quite amateurish in comparison. By the end of the film both of these crimes converge, bringing all the characters together.

There are various other crimes and deceptions in *Family Plot*. To begin with, Julia Rainbird's sister Harriet covered up the fact that she had an illegitimate child by giving him away. A little older, this child (who turns out to be Adamson) had his adoptive parents killed, covering this up as an accident and then faking his own death. Throughout the film several other plots are uncovered including Maloney tampering with the brakes on George's car and Adamson planning to kill Blanche and make it look like suicide.

Spoto describes the characters in *Family Plot* as 'constantly assuming false identities'[15] and this role-playing certainly adds to their crimes and deception. Blanche appears to be a fake spiritualist (Hitchcock tells us so in his trailer) although we are possibly led to question this at the very end. George is an actor (though not a very good one) and so makes his living by pretending to be other people; most significantly here he pretends to be a lawyer, McBride. When we first see Fran she is disguised as a tall blonde, with the aid of a wig and some very high heels. Adamson has changed his

whole identity and name (twice if we consider his origins as Mrs Rainbird's nephew) and ironically stands to benefit from Mrs Rainbird's fortune if only he was honest about his identity. In this film, no one is what they seem and it is thus quite fitting that the screenplay was originally 'tentatively called 'Deception'.'[16]

Deception also features in *Torn Curtain*. Defecting to the enemy was seen as the ultimate taboo in the 1960s[17] in the climate of Cold War and general distrust. Further to this, Armstrong's pretence endangers his relationship with Sarah[18] and, ultimately, both their lives. *Frenzy* is based around Rusk's deception. He poses as Blaney's friend whilst murdering several women and getting his 'friend' accused of *his* crimes. (This is dealt with in more detail in a further chapter).

Relationships feature heavily in all of these films. As with relationships in traditional Gothic texts, all of these relationships have a degree of imbalance and manipulation. They can never run smoothly. Marnie has a dysfunctional relationship with her mother and is unable to forge normal relationships with men. In *Torn Curtain* Sarah and Michael appear, at first, to have a normal relationship based on honesty and equality. It becomes clear that this is not the case but they do work together and, possibly because of their love for each other, they manage to escape together. The main characters in *Family Plot* form two couples. Both the relationships in the film seem to be based on power, 'William Devane dominating Karen Black, Barbara Harris manipulating Bruce Dern'.[19] Both of these characters allow themselves to be manipulated (though they do seem to realise they are being used) and both stand to gain from these relationships. Fran gains financially whilst (we presume) George gains sexually.

The theme of sex and sexuality is present in all of these films to varying degrees. Spoto sees *Marnie* as 'the midpoint of a quartet on the sex-theft complex that began with *To Catch a Thief*, continued through *Psycho*, and concludes with *Family Plot*.'[20] Sinyard describes *Marnie* as:

> a moving study of a single woman trying confusedly to operate in a world of men and still somehow maintain both her sexuality and her financial independence.[21]

Marnie's theft can be seen as part of her psychological state and somehow highlights both her strength and her vulnerability as a woman. Condon and Sangster seem to

imply that Marnie's sexuality is of utmost importance when they say that the film was 'billed as Alfred Hitchcock's suspenseful sex mystery.'[22]

The relationship between Sarah and Michael in *Torn Curtain* appears, on the surface, to be open, honest and happy though we come to learn that Michael keeps secrets from Sarah. There are clues even before this, however, that Sarah is not completely happy or relaxed in their relationship:

> There are [also] several comments about premarital sex. Sarah claims that she doesn't want to be the only 'common-law wife' living on the university campus, and is determined that Michael make an 'honest' woman of her.[23]

This suggests that Sarah feels unfulfilled in the relationship and that Michael gets more from it than she does. The first scene we see them in bed together shows that this is a sexual relationship though we know it is not one of equality.

The relationship between Blanche and George in *Family Plot* is based on similar values. When Mrs Rainbird asks Blanche to find her nephew she tells George about the money and suggests they could get married. He does not seem keen. She then says that she will tell him about it in bed afterwards (thus manipulating him by bribing him with sex). He persuades her to tell him anyway.

In *Frenzy* both Brenda and Babs die after having relationships with Blaney and, significantly, after having sex in the film. Brenda's murder follows a horrific rape scene. Marnie is also raped by Mark on their honeymoon (though these two events and scenes are very different). These are obvious examples of men dominating women in both an emotional and a physical sense. In many ways all the women in these films are very strong and, in a sense, must be seen to be kept in their place as the 'weaker sex'.

Imagery

Motifs are used to great effect in *Marnie*, many of them in a metaphorical sense serving to exaggerate certain features of the heroine herself. For example, animal imagery is widely used to highlight the fact that Marnie feels trapped like an animal and that Mark hopes to train Marnie as he trained the jaguarundi. Horses feature in particular: Mark's father likes horses ('if you smell anything like a horse, you're in'); Mark and Marnie's first date is at the races (watching a horse called Telepathy); and

Marnie's best friend is a horse called Forio, whom she is later forced to shoot when a bad fall renders him lame.

Colours are also widely used in the film, particularly red. Gladiolas, the jockey's silks and the red ink spots on Marnie's blouse all serve to exaggerate her fear of blood and draw the audience's attention to Marnie's psychological state. The colour red also features in *Torn Curtain* and fire imagery is particularly used, in the opening titles, the ballet and when Michael shouts 'fire' to create a diversion in order for them to escape from the theatre (Gromek's cigarette lighter could also be seen to form part of this imagery). Here the imagery relates or refers to passion, danger and possibly communism (Hitchcock uses similar motifs for similar effects in *Topaz* in this period).

All of these films also feature various modes of transport referring to travelling and the transition of the characters, a feature that is present in detail in many Gothic texts. This motif is most obvious in *Torn Curtain* (which begins and ends on board ships and features various other methods of transport in between, most notably the bus), but is used to a lesser extent in all the other films of this period (*Marnie* has cars, horses and a ship, *Frenzy* has a potato truck, an ambulance and a stolen car, *Family Plot* has various cars and a helicopter).

Mise En Scène

Other means of exaggerating aspects of the characters or storyline include the use of comedy, the use of the camera and general atmosphere. *Family Plot* is a black comedy, mainly regarding the relationship between Blanche and George and Blanche's skill (or lack of) as a spiritualist. The film even draws attention to itself as a film when Blanche winks at the camera at the end. This unnerves the audience as it is almost as if Blanche has been watching us rather than vice versa.

Shadows are used for effect in all these films suggesting that things are hidden from the characters and from us. Mrs Edgar appears in a shadow at the top of the stairs as if to imply that her presence is somehow linked with Marnie's nightmare. In *Family Plot* George hides in the shadows in Adamson's basement and even Hitchcock's cameo is in shadow (at the registrar's office, drawing attention to the film's focus on birth and death). Other things are portrayed indirectly. For example, in *Marnie* Hitchcock implied nudity rather than showing it (as in *Psycho*) 'achieving much more powerful

results'[24] (Obvious nudity was used later in *Frenzy* though this seemed to emphasize the earthy, dirty nature of the film rather than being attractive or titillating).

Mystery and tension are built up in *Torn Curtain* in various scenes. There are unusual camera angles used in scenes where Michael falls down the stairs and when Gromek is pulled towards the oven in the farmhouse, distorting our view of events and unsettling the audience. Scenes between Sarah and Michael are also often similarly distorted. The opening scene shows them cuddling closely so the camera shows only one of their faces at a time. Later they talk from opposite sides of a hotel room and again we see only one of them at a time. This serves to highlight how far apart from each other they really are in some ways.

The films of this period vary from psychological thriller (*Marnie*) to black comedy (*Family Plot*) and sheer unpleasantness (*Frenzy*). The overall atmosphere achieved in each of them is claustrophobic and tense. Claustrophobia is built in Mrs Edgar's tiny house (in a street packed with many others) and the costume baskets used at the end of *Torn Curtain*, for example. Tension and suspense are built up in many ways, particularly in the bus scene in *Torn Curtain*. Whilst the films vary widely from each other they each have some sense of the Gothic in their portrayal of characters and storyline and particularly in the use of exaggeration. *Marnie*, *Torn Curtain* and *Family Plot* all fit into the categories of both Female Gothic and Psychological Gothic in that they are all concerned, to a certain extent, with the innermost fears of the female characters but also they have characters who are in dangerous isolation (of one kind or another) for much of the story.

Notes

[1] Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, New York: Anchor Books (Doubleday), 1976, p.341
[2] David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.145
[3] Paul Condon and Jim Sangster, *The Complete Hitchcock*, Virgin Publishing Ltd, 1999, p.268
[4] Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.200
[5] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1995, p.160

[6] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.386

[7] Ibid., p.342

[8] Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Multimedia Publications (UK) Ltd, 1986, p.132

[9] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.202

[10] Ibid., p.199

[11] Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, p.159-160

[12] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.178

[13] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.340

[14] Ibid., p.344

[15] Ibid., p.384

[16] Donald Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock: the Dark Side of Genius*, Collins, 1983, p.527

[17] Condon and Sangster, *The Complete Hitchcock*, p.267

[18] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.200

[19] Ibid., p.226

[20] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.341

[21] Sinyard, *The films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.125

[22] Condon and Sangster, *The Complete Hitchcock*, p.262

[23] Ibid., p.267

[24] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.122

13. *Frenzy*

Frenzy (1972) was Hitchcock's penultimate film and his last made in England. In many ways it marked a return to his earlier form and particularly bears a resemblance to *The Lodger*. Set in the back streets of London, *Frenzy* highlights the seedy side of life and there is really very little that is pleasant about the film in terms either of its style or its subject matter. The film is an example of Psychological Gothic with Blaney isolated and in danger throughout.

      Sinyard describes the film as 'a funny and ferocious farewell to Hitchcock's British period'.[1] The comedy of the film is very black whilst the ferocity is mostly concentrated in the graphic nature of some scenes and in the coarse language spoken by most of the characters. Spoto describes the film as 'an exercise in Gothicism'[2], no doubt a reference to the overall style of the film as certain aspects of character, theme and setting.

Characters

      The film revolves around various relationships between couples, friends, employers and employees and so on, all of which are of an unpleasant and exaggerated nature. At the centre of this particular theme is the Blaney Marriage Bureau run by Brenda Blaney, ex-wife of the main protagonist. The bureau obviously aims to match people up with suitable partners but we only see one couple leaving the office and they seem to be very poorly matched: the man is short, quiet and very passive whilst the woman is large, talkative and very bossy. The only thing they appear to have in common is an interest in beekeeping. It is unclear whether we are to assume that these two are a typical example of the clientele of the Blaney Bureau. The only other client we see is Mr Robinson a.k.a. Bob Rusk. We assume that he is definitely not typical as Brenda simply refuses to help him because of his rather unusual and unpleasant requirements. Linked with the bureau is the relationship between Brenda and Dick Blaney. They were divorced partly because of his violent behaviour but seem to get on very well, particularly as they have not seen each other for some time. Their roles in

the relationship (in terms of wealth and power) seem to be the reverse of what is typical and whilst Brenda is quite happy with this, Dick seems rather uncomfortable.

Sex in any of these relationships seems to be the ultimate taboo and rather sordid:

> As in *Psycho*, an unmarried couple go to a hotel and are forced to adopt a fake name (premarital sex was still taboo in 1972!) and the porter nudge-nudges with 'Can I get you anything from the pharmacy?' – possibly one of the first references to condoms in the cinema.[3]

This is a film set in the modern world and aims to shock modern audiences, in more ways than one. The most shocking scene in the film is probably Brenda's rape and murder and much of the film is not quite as direct as this but even the dialogue spoken by the characters is very direct and rather coarse. Even though they are a couple and Babs seems willing to give up everything for Dick, in many ways he really seems unmoved by her murder (or that of his ex-wife). These are far from loving relationships. Even the Porters and the Oxfords (the only married couples in the film) have severe breakdowns in communication and are not happy couples. Spoto points to the 'failure of love and friendship in every single relationship in the story – even the couple matched by the Blaney bureau.'[4] Wood goes a step further by describing the film as 'a surreptitious attack on the institution of marriage itself.'[5]

The most intriguing relationship in the film is that between Blaney and Rusk. They have evidently been friends for some time but actually know very little about each other. Rusk is not only a serial killer but is willing to frame his friend for his crimes. Spoto sees this as the central relationship in the film. He says it is 'about a betrayal of friendship, about the cross-matched relationship between a psychotic and an angry non-hero.'[6]

There are distinct characters in the film yet, in many ways, their actions and characteristics blend together and they are all rather unpleasant in one way or another. Spoto says that:

> *Frenzy* may, first of all, be profitably considered as the fourth in a tetralogy that began with *Shadow of a Doubt* and developed into *Strangers on a Train* and *Psycho*. In all four, Hitchcock examined a pair of complementary personalities

– only apparently opposites, actually matched aspects of a single character. Once again, innocence and guilt are interrelated and there are several levels of disturbing moral ambiguity.[7]

Spoto thus points particularly to the connections between Blaney and Rusk. Blaney's behaviour is highly suspicious and all evidence points towards him. The audience must believe him to be guilty until we are shown direct evidence to the contrary. Spoto describes Blaney as:

> Hitchcock's least attractive innocent, a man capable of Rusk's crime even more than Guy Haines (in *Strangers on a Train*) was capable of Bruno's. Angry, hard-drinking, violent when married to Brenda, he finally plans a worse crime – a premeditated revenge murder worse even than anything the demented Rusk could have hatched.[8]

It is understandable that Blaney should want to avenge the murders of Brenda and Babs but he seems to be seeking vengeance more for his own suffering and accusation / imprisonment rather than for the murder of his girlfriend and his ex-wife. Despite his innocence, we are reluctant to feel sympathy towards him because he is generally unpleasant. He is also a weak character and is helped and / or hindered by others, particularly women, throughout, really only taking control of his own actions in the latter part of the film. Significantly, the women who attempt to help Blaney are murdered, whilst those that hinder him (believing him to be guilty) survive the film. This is another pointer towards Blaney's guilt; he is responsible for their deaths (albeit indirectly).

As none of the characters are particularly likeable, there is no clear heroine in the film either. Babs seems to be the most obvious choice. She is a strong woman who is persuaded to believe in Blaney's innocence and spends time trying to persuade others of the same. She pursues this (indirectly) even after her death by holding on to the tiepin. This shows us that she has fought against Rusk in some way and was not a completely passive victim. We are unable to see this struggle however (except in very vague flashback), as her murder occurs behind closed doors. Brenda's murder, on the other hand, is shown in great detail. Cohen describes Brenda as 'the most attractive person in the film. Moreover, her creativity in casting relationships and her air of

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professionalism make her seem the character most akin to the filmmaker.'[9] She is also possibly the strongest character in many ways. She is confident and independent; she runs her own business and is quite wealthy, buying Blaney dinner and giving him money (without his knowledge). Not only is Brenda the boss at work (employing another woman and organising the lives of both men and women), but she also takes charge in her relationship with her ex-husband. Her very graphic murder seems to be almost a punishment for her strength and success (as many Gothic heroines are punished for similar reasons) and this is perhaps the very reason why it is shown in so much detail. It is also her death that directly leads to Blaney being suspected and eventually arrested.

Also because of the unpleasant or unlikeable nature of the characters (with the possible exception of Brenda Blaney) there are also several characters that fit the role of villain in one way or another. These include characters who only appear briefly such as Forsythe, landlord of the Globe, and Mrs Porter, who believes Blaney is guilty and won't allow her husband to help him, and Monica (Brenda's secretary), who first points the finger of blame at Blaney because she misinterprets the evidence of her own eyes and ears (understandably). Blaney is also a villain, of course, although not *the* villain (rather like the lodger). He is guilty of many things (including a sort of murder in the final scene) and is an unpleasant character that it is very difficult to like.

Rusk is the ultimate villain in the film. In many ways he is a typical Gothic villain: he is successful, reasonably wealthy, suave and charming. Blaney thinks he is his friend, Babs thinks she can trust him and the police think he is helping them by turning Blaney in. The only times we see the real Rusk are when he is with his victims and Brenda seems to be the only one who actually sees this side of his character (to our knowledge) although he gives her a false name and so is still not himself. Spoto sees Rusk as having 'simply actualized Blaney's potential for violence and abuse'[10] thus suggesting that whilst Rusk acts the crimes out, Blaney is the true villain. Rusk may also be seen as the only main character who is blond, thus putting him on a par with Hitchcock's numerous other blondes although perhaps not as a typical victim like his predecessors (possibly as another comment on our changing society).

There are few authority figures in the film, all of whom seem to lack real insight. Only one character has a parent: Rusk's mother appears very briefly in one scene ('She's from Kent – the garden of England'). She does not say very much and is

not a constant presence and is thus rendered ineffective. None of the other characters have this type of potentially guiding or authoritative parental figure at all.

Inspector Oxford is the main figure of authority in the film although he is not an overwhelming character. He is mild mannered and rather passive: he cannot even tell his wife that he does not like her food. He is not a completely unpleasant character, however, and the audience relies on him to solve the crimes and apprehend the real murderer (although it is his wife who seems to solve things first). Wood views Oxford and Rusk as opposites who do not meet until the very end of the film.[11] The two have been pitted against each other throughout, although Oxford was unaware of this until later because of Blaney's position as a sort of red herring. Rather than have Inspector Oxford discuss the case in scenes with other police officers, Hitchcock has him discuss it at home with his wife, over dinner. Mrs Oxford seems to be a better detective than she is a cook. Ironically, although she seems quite perceptive regarding the murder case (women's intuition), she fails to realise just how much her husband dislikes her cooking (at one point she does say that her women's intuition tells her that he would like steak and a baked potato, but he actually gets pigs' trotters: perhaps she just likes to be in charge of the relationship or thinks that she knows best). The scenes between them provide most of the comic relief of the film.

Settings

Though updated, the settings of *Frenzy* correspond very well with those of the traditional Gothic novel. The overall setting is London and whilst it is not exactly the same London as that of *The Lodger* almost fifty years earlier, it is equally dark and seedy. Sinyard says that *Frenzy* is:

> A sly contrast between the quaint touristy façade of modern London and the polluted and ferocious undercurrent which reveals a capital city that is going to seed. There are quite a lot of jokes about diluted drinks and smelly food, as if London is both sinking and going putrid.[12]

The London of *Frenzy* is identified by narrow back streets and by the Thames, full of pollution (drawing our attention to the pollution in society), particularly the dead body floating in the river in the opening scene. The London setting is specifically

Covent Garden, with its links with food. Blaney is of no fixed address, but we do see the interiors of various other homes and buildings in the film though many of them have no direct connection with any of the murders. For example, scenes take place in the homes of Brenda Blaney, the Oxfords and the Porters (a high rise flat symbolising their wealth and elevated position in society).

Most of the settings also seem to have some aspect of unpleasantness. The Globe is a small, rather dim and dirty looking pub, the Porters' flat is cold and unwelcoming, the Oxfords' house is perhaps the most homely but there is an air of coldness and discomfort emanating from the lack of communication between the Inspector and his wife. Rusk's lock up seems very grimy and disorganised despite the nature of his work: food. It has dark corners and Rusk is able to hide both literal and metaphorical secrets there (including Blaney hiding from the police).

Rusk's flat also holds an element of mystery. We see this setting in more detail than perhaps any of the others and yet we are not allowed to witness the main events that take place there: two murders (Babs and the final victim). This is also where Blaney is arrested (after Rusk hands him in), where Blaney attempts to murder Rusk and where Rusk is finally caught by Inspector Oxford. All of this considered, this must surely be seen as the central setting of the film. The flat itself is rather dark and full of dark furniture. It has large windows, almost like eyes, and overlooks Covent Garden, Rusk's empire. The flat is significantly up a flight of stairs (quite dark, narrow stairs). It resembles Crewe's studio in *Blackmail* and Rusk lures Babs up there as Crewe lured Alice White, but with quite different results. The stereotypical Gothic heroine as defined by Hitchcock has thus become more feminized and more marginalized in just under fifty years.

Brenda Blaney's marriage bureau is the site of the other murder in the film and is also (significantly) up a flight of stairs. As previously discussed, in Gothic something dangerous always lurks at the top of the stairs. The fact that these two sites of murder are both up stairs means that they are slightly more out of the way, making it more difficult for witnesses to see or hear anything. When Brenda realises she is in danger she reaches for the telephone as she realises how pointless it would be trying to run away or shout for help. Not only is the office upstairs but it is also down a very quiet, narrow back street, all making it much less likely that Brenda would be heard if she called for help.

The Coburg Hotel resembles hotels from various other Hitchcock films from *The 39 Steps* onwards. Whilst it is quite light and airy in terms of appearance it has quite an unpleasant atmosphere. The receptionist and the porter gossip amongst themselves and the porter is a little too direct in his comments. The Cupid Room sounds as if it should be comfortable (even luxurious) and romantic, but it is actually quite seedy. The room is the setting for premarital sex (and probably not just on this occasion): the ultimate taboo. This would also be the ideal setting for another murder and this crosses the mind of the viewer even though we know that Blaney is not the killer.

There are various other settings in the film that serve some official function: a police station, a prison and a hospital, and these are also quite disturbing to the audience. Even the hospital, which should be clean and hygienic, seems quite grimy and unpleasant. None of these places, or the people in them, seem to exude justice and none of them really help Blaney.

Unlike the murders in *The Lodger*, all the murders in *Frenzy* take place in the daytime and all indoors (with the possible exception of the murder of the woman found in the Thames at the beginning). The Gothic nature of these settings ensures that the audience are shocked and disturbed by what they witness. The settings are of an everyday nature (and so are unlike those in the very earliest traditional Gothic texts) but are isolated and act like traps for Rusk's victims. The fact that these are such common, everyday settings makes the events more shocking precisely because we don't expect (or want) to see such things happening there.

Themes

There are several recurring themes and motifs in the film, all of them unsavoury. Cohen is of the opinion that 'the film is organised around two motifs – marriage and murder – each represented as parodic of their traditional manifestation.'[13] The film as a whole links three main themes: sex, murder and food and presents them with an undertone of black humour. This treatment of these themes is disturbing to the audience. Although the film opens with the discovery of a woman's dead body in the Thames (reminiscent of an early scene from *Young and Innocent*), we don't actually see a murder until twenty-five minutes into the film (Brenda). Up to this point we have been led to suspect Blaney as the murderer but we are now shown, in no uncertain

terms, that it is Rusk. The murders here are quite different from those in previous Hitchcock films, however:

> The act of murder in Hitchcock's films had always been stylized by the devices of editing and photographic wizardry that conveyed a sense of awfulness and of shock without languid attention to detail. But *Frenzy* was designed differently, for *Frenzy* was at once a concession to modern audiences' expectations and a more personal self-disclosure of the director's angriest and most violent desires. The Covent Garden grocer…commits in this film the ultimate Hitchcock murder…Hitchcock insisted on all the ugly explicitness of this picture, and for all its cinematic inventiveness, it retains one of the most repellent examples of a detailed murder in the history of film.[14]

In *Psycho* the audience were highly disturbed by the horrific murder of a main character only half an hour into the film but actually saw nothing directly. In *Frenzy*, not only do we see the murder of a main character only twenty-five minutes into the film, but we see her raped and then murdered in close-up, with nothing hidden or simply implied. Where *Psycho* disturbed us, *Frenzy* is downright horrific.

'The Britishness of the film has been much noted.'[15] It is noticeable in many things: the characters, the way they dress, the way they speak and, particularly with some of them, the way they behave, the settings (interiors and exteriors but particularly the overall setting of London) and the comedy element. According to Wood, this 'Britishness':

> offers a salutary reminder of the strength of Hitchcock's English middle-class roots in its constricted view of human potentiality (as well as its saving grace of robust humour). The attitude of *Rich and Strange* has never really been abandoned.[16]

The 'Britishness' of *Rich and Strange*, however, did seem to concentrate mainly on a certain restrictedness or restraint which the majority of the characters in *Frenzy* certainly do not have. Perhaps the film is meant to be a comment on (or a reflection of) the changing nature of our own society.

Food is both a recurring motif and an underlying theme of *Frenzy*. There are constant references to food throughout the film:

> Hitch examines the tradition of linking food with sexual desire in greater depth
> than before. Early on, the landlord of the Globe reprimands Babs, pointing out:
> 'This is Covent Garden, not the Garden of Love' – a clear reference to the
> Garden of Eden, at the centre of which is Bob Rusk, the purveyor of
> (forbidden) fruit. Note how Rusk hides the body of one victim in the Thames,
> where, as we hear at the start, men used to fish for trout; a second, that of
> Brenda, is left with its tongue hanging out in a grotesque parody of someone
> licking their lips; another is thrown into a truck filled with potatoes. Finally, we
> have Inspector Oxford, who chooses mealtimes to discuss the case in great
> detail with his wife, always with a horrific culinary concoction created from the
> discarded remains of animals (birds' claws, pigs' trotters).[17]

The references to food are thus the opposite of what we would usually expect. The gruesome details of murder are discussed over food by Inspector and Mrs Oxford. She is taking a cookery course but all the food she cooks is practically inedible, thus adding to the comedy element: she is becoming a cordon bleu cook and spends most of her time cooking and yet he has to eat at work because her food is so terrible. Food is also used to highlight the unpleasant side of life, when Inspector Oxford says the man is 'positively glutinous with self-approbation'.[18] Overall, food becomes a metaphor for the main events in the film and Spoto sees this 'brilliantly sustained extended metaphor' as 'the film's most remarkable achievement'.[19] This was not new to Hitchcock; indeed Spoto discusses food or meal related scenes in earlier Hitchcock films and says:

> For Hitchcock there was always an ambivalence, a conflict about food and
> eating, and in *Frenzy* food becomes at last the main character...This visual
> association lifts the picture to the level of metaphor, for it's really about the
> kind of exploitation that becomes the devouring of people...People become
> food for their victims.[20]

Far from being a film primarily about murder, *Frenzy* is about the hunger that affects people's behaviour and drives them to commit murder among other things. Hitchcock has taken an everyday aspect of life and exaggerated it, drawing our attention to it in a way that is not the norm.

Mise En Scène

Most of the scenes in the film are set in the daytime, drawing attention to the griminess in life and making the events even more disturbing. One noticeable exception is the scene in the potato truck. The darkness in this scene makes it more difficult for Rusk to find his tiepin and for us to follow the action. It also draws more attention to the headlights of passing and approaching cars, highlighting the possibility of Rusk getting caught. On one level here we don't want Rusk to be caught (because that would mean an end to the tension and to the story); we want him to retrieve his tiepin just as we wanted the car to sink in the swamp in *Psycho*.

The presentation of the two murders differs. Brenda's rape and murder is extremely graphic and violent whereas we don't actually see Babs's murder. Instead, we see Babs and Rusk enter his flat and close the door, then the camera moves back down the stairs and out of the front door, just as it did after showing us the graphic scenes in Brenda's office (and just before Monica discovers her dead body). With Brenda's murder, nothing is left to the imagination but it is all we have to rely on with this later murder. With the first murder, Hitchcock shocks us with detail; with the second he forces us to imagine something even worse.

It is difficult to watch *Frenzy* without being shocked and rather unnerved by some of the explicit scenes and the language and behaviour of most of the characters. It is, by far, Hitchcock's most violent and unpleasant film and even a modern audience can find it hard to watch, perhaps partly because the settings particularly seem to have grown even more seedy and grimy over the years. Hitchcock clearly intended to show us the most unpleasant side of life and of society and never meant us to like (or identify with) any of the characters.

Notes

[1] Neil Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Multimedia Publications (UK) Ltd.,1986, p.132

[2] Donald Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock: The Dark Side of Genius*, Collins, 1983, p.578

[3] Condon and Sangster, *The Complete Hitchcock*, Virgin Publishing Ltd., 1999, p.281

[4] Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock:Fifty Years of his Motion Pictures*, New York: Anchor Books (Doubleday), 1976, p.376

[5] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.202

[6] Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.509

[7] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.371-2

[8] Ibid., p.374

[9] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1995, p.158

[10] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.374

[11] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.225

[12] Sinyard, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* p.140

[13] Cohen, *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism*, p.158

[14] Spoto, *The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.513

[15] Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.226

[16] Ibid.

[17] Condon and Sangster, *The Complete Hitchcock*, p.280

[18] Ibid., p.280

[19] Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, p.372

[20] Ibid., p.373

14. Conclusion

Taken separately, Gothic literature, German Expressionism and the films of Alfred Hitchcock may all seem quite distinct and different but upon further analysis it becomes quite apparent that they all have common features. Writers of traditional Gothic literature used a particular set of features and techniques to give a specific overall effect. The setting, characters and overall theme, along with certain properties and motifs, all serve to give the audience a sense of the Uncanny and unfamiliar and, ultimately, to unnerve and disturb. Much Gothic literature was written (either directly or indirectly) as a response to the social and political climate in which the writers found themselves so as the social and political contexts changed, so did the nature of the texts themselves.

German Expressionist filmmakers incited a similar response in their audience by using some of the same techniques and by adding and developing new ones. Obviously, certain devices could be used in film that could not be used in literature and so the Expressionists used scenery, lighting (and particularly the use of shadows) and overall style to create a disturbing atmosphere. In these early silent films all of these effects had to be visual. With the advent of sound, dialogue and sound effects were used in order to achieve a similar disturbing or Gothic effect.

Much of Alfred Hitchcock's work seems to bear similarities both with Gothic literature and German Expressionism, for several possible reasons. It could be argued that Hitchcock was directly influenced by these earlier works or that he was simply drawn to a particular type of story and a particular type of expression and style. It could also be argued that the time in which he directed his films (1925-1976) was one of significant development and upheaval socially, politically and within the film industry itself. The subject matter of many of Hitchcock's films, and the way in which this was expressed on film, can be seen as a response to the time in which the films were made.

As many of Hitchcock's films were based on established texts (mostly novels and plays) much of what appears on the screen depended upon the original text. Similarly, much of the writing of the screenplays for his films (both original and adaptations) was not done by Hitchcock himself and much in the films was also determined by the control or presence of others (from producers to actors). We may

thus be led to question to what extent Hitchcock was actually in control of his own films (and this is particularly true of several of his early American films made for Selznick). However, although much was out of his control, Hitchcock was able to create a distinctive style of film. It perhaps becomes clear that plot is actually of secondary importance to technique and representation. In Hitchcock's films, it is not the type of storyline that is immediately recognisable, but the interpretation and presentation of events. The style of a large number of the films, their mise en scène, their overall atmosphere and the effect on the audience (that of unsettling or disturbing) have significant similarities with the earlier Gothic texts, and whilst this is not present in all Hitchcock's films, there is enough to describe it as a major feature in his work as a whole. Furthermore, whilst there are significant differences between Hitchcock's work of different periods, as well as between his films made in Britain and those made in the USA, this Gothic aspect is present throughout his work.

Hitchcock achieves the Gothic effect by various means including his use of the subjective camera, making the audience focus on particular things through the use of specific camera angles or close ups, the key in Alicia's hand in *Notorious* or the knife in *Sabotage*, for example, or showing us events through the eyes of a character such as Jeff in *Rear Window*. In *Rear Window* we see only one vent that Jeff does not (Thorwald leaving at night whilst Jeff is asleep). This voyeuristic approach also makes the viewer identify with the character (whether hero or villain) and this identification is often made much easier by Hitchcock's choice of actor. For example, the viewer identifies with (perhaps even likes) Mark Rutland in *Marnie*, despite his unpleasant qualities, perhaps mostly because he is played by Sean Connery.

Both the subjective and voyeuristic viewpoints are very narrow, however. The specific focus limits the information available to the viewer and we are thus unsettled by the knowledge that there is more to know and that we are unable to know (or to see) it. This effect in Hitchcock's films is possibly not unique although his methods of achieving it may be so.

It must be noted that what we find in Hitchcock is a particular kind of Gothic. If we remember Todorov's three categories of Marvellous, Fantastic and Uncanny and consider these in relation to Gothic, we can see that many of Hitchcock's films fall into the category of Uncanny Gothic. Hitchcock does not deal with the supernatural although this is sometimes hinted at (Blanche's powers at the end of *Family Plot*, perhaps, and the controlling presence of Mrs Bates in *Psycho*, for example). There is

often mystery but this is always explained at the end of the film. Before the final explanation we experience what Todorov called the Fantastic (when we first learn that Mrs Bates is dead but still believe her to be responsible for the murder of Marion Crane, for example) but the final outcome of the film is always a return to reality (with the possible exception of *The Birds*) and a plausible explanation for the events, however strange, that we have just watched.

Much of what is Gothic in these films seems as if it should be achieved mostly on first viewing. The shock value of *Psycho*'s shower scene, for example, surely cannot be the same upon second viewing. What is distinctive in Hitchcock's films, however, is that they have the power to shock and disturb viewers even on repeated viewings. We know what will happen to Marion Crane (we have seen it happen before) but we are still shocked by it. Repeated viewings present new things to us and we focus on slightly different things the second (or third) time around, noticing things we did not see before and the events themselves seem even more disturbing in some ways simply because the shocking events are reinforced by repetition.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that Hitchcock was not the only director to have made films with Gothic features. The work of some of Hitchcock's contemporaries also demonstrates some of these features and to a similar effect. We might consider the work of William Castle, for example (particularly *Homicidal* (1961), considered by some as highly dependent upon *Psycho*), or individual films such as *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963), a film where the audience (and the characters) see very little but much is implied and we are disturbed by these implications and by the sound effects particularly.

More recent directors have also made films with Gothic effects. The work of both Brian de Palma and, much more recently, M Night Shyamalan (among others) has been seen as highly dependent upon Hitchcock and the recent new wave of horror films such as *The Others* (Amenabar, 2001) and *What Lies Beneath* (Zemeckis, 2000) seem indebted to Hitchcock for their style, atmosphere and effects. The significant number of films made by Hitchcock and the abundance of these features in his films make him an important focus for this kind of study. However, if we consider that Hitchcock took his lead from earlier writers and filmmakers we must surely regard him as an inheritor rather than a forerunner of Gothic on film.

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