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[Untitled]

by

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## *Introduction*

“See, if it doesn’t gel, it isn’t aspic, and this isn’t gelling.” Arbogast

In *Psycho*, the character of private investigator Arbogast has one purpose; his *raison d'être* is to reason. I find it interesting that he chooses to embody problems of logic through a metaphor that locates and ascribes meaning to the contrast of fluidity and rigidity. This thesis will attempt to use the concepts of fluidity and rigidity as a critical tool to analyze film and its presentation of culturally-loaded material to an audience. To illustrate this method, I will cite examples from three horror films, *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush*.

### *Why horror?*

The concept of fluidity and rigidity is not limited to an application to horror. Potentially, films in all genres could be evaluated using this tool because all films ultimately communicate culturally-loaded material to audiences through their use of motifs and cinematic style. Horror, however, is an arena in which the visual is purposefully overproduced and over-exaggerated. Gratuitous images of blood and gore, weapons and violence, and, sometimes, female nudity are both expected and encouraged by the audience. The greater purpose of horror, after all, is to challenge

cultural norms by inverting them, inundating the audience with images of what should not be in an attempt to reinforce or refute the audience's pre-conceptions of normalcy and natural order. For example, Mrs. White, in *Carrie*, is not just shown as a religious fanatic, but THE religious fanatic. Her larger-than-life, gothic appearance, super-human strength, and blinding self-righteousness move her character out of the world of reality and into the realm of the mythic. Visual representations of Mrs. White, in this film, must be exaggerated in order to embody for the audience all representations of the forces of Christian extremism and decry their propensity for intra- and interpersonal annihilation.

In addition to extreme visuals that display the film's message, horror also has a tradition of selecting the female body as the site of extreme violence or the source of the horror itself. This is particularly true in regard to assaulting the audience with visualizations of women's bodily functions and fluids. In *Carrie*, for example, menstruation is equated with terrible power and the woman who produces blood as so rawly sexual that she becomes associated with the bestial.<sup>1</sup> In *Hush*, amniotic fluid is seen as harboring the potential for monstrosity. Containment and elimination of the evidence of female fluid is a main concern in *Psycho*.

### *Why Psycho, Carrie, and Hush?*

*Psycho* and *Carrie* are two of the most viewed and analyzed films in the horror pantheon. *Carrie's* inheritance of motifs and styles made iconic by *Psycho* was often mentioned in many of my sources. No matter which of the two films they were analyzing, authors could not seem to resist digressing into or footnoting parallels between the films and their directors.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the comparison of the two films

can only be a parallel, and scholars can do little when comparing the two, only traveling back and forth on the same line of association. Therefore, I submit that offering a third film to connect to *Psycho* and *Carrie* would create not a line but a plane with middle area that would provide more “space” for discourse. *Hush* lends itself perfectly to this triad because it contains some of the same iconography that is so often analyzed in *Psycho* and *Carrie*. Using these shared motifs as a hub, other aspects of the three films can be spun both toward and away from each other while maintaining their connection. These connections can be useful in showing how rigidity and fluidity is manifested and presented both in regard to one film in itself, and then across the films.

In this analysis, I will utilize these films to illustrate how fluidity and rigidity are utilized to communicate culturally-loaded ideas to film audiences and, in turn, how those audiences might internalize and interpret those images. In Chapter One, I will explore two ways in which a film can present fluidity and rigidity—through opening segments and non-diegetic title sequences and through shared motifs. Specifically, I will investigate the effect on audiences of semantic or referential fluidity or rigidity in film titles and in the presentation of sexuality and female bodies. More specifically, I will use the title sequences and shared motif of wetness and water in *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* for illustration.

Chapter Two will apply fluidity and rigidity to analyze phallic and archaic mothers and the presentation of these mothers and their relationships with their children-victims. I will show this by analyzing genre conventions of presenting terrible mothers through

their costuming and the way they are shot throughout the film as well as their association with death, violent desire, and the gothic 'terrible place.'

Chapter 3 will use fluidity and rigidity to analyze genre and genre conventions. I will then show how a blending of melodrama with horror, as with *Hush*, can produce more potential for the uncanny and, as a result, horrify the audience than more conventional horror films with uncanny elements such as *Psycho* and *Carrie*.

Ultimately, my goal in studying the films in this way is not only to demonstrate the validity of my approach, but also to reveal the subtle, and not so subtle, ways in which horror films intentionally draw upon and manipulate cultural sensibilities so as to make their arguments to an audience.

## *I.*

The presence of rigidity and fluidity in film can provide the audience with key insights into the film's presentation of bodies and sexuality. These presentations are made meaningful to the audience only when they are considered as elements of the film's greater culturally-loaded exchange. It is important to understand that the presence of fluidity and rigidity does not symbolize specific meanings in film. Depending on how they are presented, elements of fluidity and rigidity have both negative and positive meanings and consequences. In order to show how fluidity and rigidity signal audiences to interpret film elements, this chapter will explore: 1) rigidity and fluidity as a tool to explore title sequences and opening segments as similarly placed non-diegetic material in the visual narrative and, 2) images of wetness and water as shared motifs in *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush*.

### Title Credits and Opening Sequences

Rigidity and fluidity as a way to understand a film can and should be applied even from the opening credit sequences of films. The title sequences are often crucial to an understanding of the film's goals because, in addition to introducing the film's title, they also present the audience with clues to the mood, themes, and pace of each film through their aesthetics. The title itself can clue the audience as to whom they are supposed to identify or empathize with throughout the film. In horror, this character is

most often the victim, or the victim-hero. Sometimes the title has rigid properties. For example, the title, *Carrie*, definitively distinguishes one character, Carrie. This title clues the audience to concentrate on this specific character and, because it only provides only this one word, it leaves the audience little room for any other interpretations. When a title contains both referential ambiguity and semantic fluidity, as in *Hush*, the audience is not immediately informed as to who or what is the main character with whom they may share point-of-view or emotional empathy; hence, the identities of the victim and, by process of elimination, the victimizer remain ambiguous. The presence or lack of fluidity and rigidity in a title sequence's aesthetics can also provide the audience with suggestions about each film's goals in presenting mood, themes, and pace and the audience's anticipated reactions to these elements. Equally important to the impression given by the title credits are the opening images that immediately precede and/or follow them. The opening images' rigid adherence to or fluid variations on the title credits' established mood, themes, and pace can regulate the audience's anticipation of horror.

The vertical black and white bars in *Psycho*'s opening credits quickly slide across the screen, revealing and wiping out cast and crew information almost as fast as it can be read (fig. 1). The accompanying audio, a fast paced, flowing "running and chasing" melody, emphasizes and heightens the kinetic energy of the visual swipes. Combined together, they set the dark mood and quick pace of the film's two suspenseful, plot-driving cat and mouse games between Marion and the authorities and between Lila, Sam, and Arbogast and Norman and his mother. The credit sequence prepares the audience to anticipate impending horror even though the opening scene of "disrespectful respectability" between Marion and Sam, which follows immediately after



the credits, hardly arouses any feelings of terror. The most shifting and changing credit is the title credit itself. The “Psycho” title fractures as it shifts in opposing directions, linking instability with a possible duality whose sides can easily transplace each other. This fluidity challenges a rigid definition of “psycho” and a set perception of how a psycho looks and behaves, preparing the audience to be unprepared.

The theme of easily permeable and continuously unstable boundaries between happiness and horror, humanity and monstrosity, angelic and demonic, and beauty and the reviled are all expressed in *Carrie*’s opening scene and the following title credits. The first shot is an overhead view of a volleyball game, a sport that requires a fluid exchange between its members and “action [that] ebbs and flows” to continue (Coykendall 346).<sup>1</sup> Carrie ruins the game by her rigidity and inability to participate in the fluid group. This non-action is immediately followed by the sounds of disappointment from the other girls and Chris’ assertion, “You eat shit.” This brief scene not only sets up the dynamics of the other girls’ relationships with each other and in a united opposition to Carrie, but also pinpoints Carrie’s rigidity as the cause, or at least the justification, for her ostracism.

In the credit sequence that immediately follows the opening scene of *Carrie*, the written words themselves are an exercise in contrast. The title credit “Carrie” and the actors’ names are written in a feminine, flowing script, but they are also colored a bright, blood red. The red credits propose a link between femininity and blood, a fluid that will soon be seen as a horrifying but necessary part of Carrie’s womanhood.<sup>2</sup> The credits do not exist independently of the action of the film, and are superimposed over a slow, continuous pan of the girls’ locker room.<sup>3</sup> Instead of chaos and clamor, the slow motion

editing combined with lightly sensual music and an absence of diegetic sound creates entrancing and enrapturing fluid vistas between the rows of lockers.<sup>4</sup> The girls seem less human than nymph-like in their frolicking, playful dance.<sup>5</sup> Steam flows throughout the room, touching naked female bodies as they touch each other. As it softens the edges of objects in the room and creates the suggestion of a fantasy-world, the fog of steam also fills the air and connects the girls by filling the voids between them.

Carrie, however, is filmed in the shower, nearby but definitely separated from the other girls and their ecstatic dance. In "Bodies Cinematic, Bodies Politic," Abigail Lynn Coykendall describes the camera pan as shifting, placing her in "a haven, a reprieve, a noticeably constructed sanctuary away from the conflict and commotion of the scene before (346).<sup>6</sup> She is shown taking obvious personal pleasure in her solitude via her reactions to the shower water, her mouth open as she innocently, or not so innocently, caresses her breasts, womb, and thighs.<sup>7</sup> The soothing music comes to an abrupt halt and is replaced by chaotic diegetic sound with the discovery of blood, indicating that Carrie's innocence and the dream-world is obliterated with the intrusion of this feared fluid. The audio track of "lyrical sounds [is] shattered by repressive reality, that is, by natural but malevolent sounds" (Ehlers 46). The fluidity of the visual image is profoundly disturbed by the sight of "her menstrual blood and with the violent reactions of the surrounding women" (Coykendall 345). That the girls rush over to Carrie can be construed as a signal that her menstruation has called attention to her and that her womanhood will prevent her throughout the remainder of the film from ever being able to be anonymous or separated from this group of female peers again. The scene again shows the audience that the film will continually dissolve boundaries as, at the sight of

Carrie's blood, the girls instantly turn from nymph-like and playful to demonic and aggressive. In this way, Carrie's fluid forces her and the audience into a new, adult world that they, through Carrie, have no choice but to confront and try to find a place in. No matter how far she tries to crowd into the corner of the shower, the audience knows that in this horror film, Carrie will never again be able to retreat back into her world of innocence and separateness. From this moment on, she will be constantly hunted by Chris and her crowd.

In order to continue and reinforce this idea of "blood relatives," the camera follows Carrie as she contaminates Sue and Ms. Collins with blood as she reaches out to them for help; her fluid singles them out to the audience as key players who will have important connections to Carrie. In related fashion, the shattering light bulb gives the first hint of Carrie's preternatural powers associated with the onset of her period. This image juxtaposes the triteness of Carrie's flow, "just her period," with her extraordinary aptitude for destruction. Carrie's telekinesis defies rigidity because it allows for "*changes* in objects by force of the mind." This fluid power that comes directly out of Carrie's rage also defies rigidity because it becomes an intangible weapon which is, as the events of prom night later indicate, seemingly limitless.

The opening credits of *Hush* are more akin to *Psycho*'s than *Carrie*'s because they lack not only a previous interlude but also do not contain images inside the action of the plot. A kaleidoscopic view of an antique carousel toy is paired with the sound of a tinny music-box-quality lullaby. The view is fractured, but does not immediately suggest anything but the possibility of a multiple, repeated, and hypnotically spiraling view of the same object.<sup>8</sup> As the screen fades to black, "HUSH" appears in a reverse fade and

then spreads out, its appearance and movement mimicking the sound of a mother's soothing "shhhhhhhh." The rest of the credits are played over the opening action but are so subtle that the audience can easily ignore them.

One important distinction that makes *Hush*'s title credits and the scene that follows them different from those of *Psycho* and *Carrie* is the lack of a sinister mood signaling the audience to anticipate impending horror. As previously discussed, *Psycho*'s chase music and racing, fragmented words do not allow the audience to consider that the normalcy of the first scene will continue throughout the film. *Carrie*'s blood-red titles and abrupt shift from beauty to malevolent contortions of that beauty establish from the beginning that the film-world of *Carrie* is one in which the mood can change to its polar opposite instantly and without warning. *Hush*'s opening sequence mocks the other films' juxtaposition of the heightened and the understated by following neutral opening credits with an equally neutral scene of Jackson and Helen alone in the car discussing Helen's seemingly trite "horror" of "meeting the parents." These two scenes of non-horror do not lead the audience to anticipate impending horror, creating the potential for greater shock when horror is revealed.

The importance of film titles' fluidity or rigidity extends beyond their graphic representations in the opening credits to the semantics of the actual words themselves. The titles give the audience one of the first on-screen clues as to who or what the film will be about. Of the three films, *Carrie*'s title is the least ambiguous. The title immediately sets up Carrie and the central character and figure around which all of the other characters' actions will revolve. Its introduction, following the volleyball scene, only reinforces that "Carrie," the character attached to the most-used word in the

opening sequence, (“give it to Carrie, she’ll blow it,” Aww, Carrie”) will continue to be the focus of the film. Not only does the title identify Carrie as the main character, it also informs the audience that they are to primarily empathize and identify with her throughout the film. *Carrie* is most definitely Carrie’s story.

In contrast, neither *Psycho* nor *Hush* rigidly defines their subjects with their titles. As I discussed above, *Psycho*’s title credit and how it is represented raise questions concerning the label “psycho” and who should or should not be classified as one. In the opening scene, the audience is allowed to “get to know” Marion or Sam’s characters as it voyeuristically observes a private discussion of their affair through the partially-raised mini-blinds of their motel room. The leading shot to the window and the camera’s deliberate “peek” under the blinds in themselves cue the audience to their own voyeurism and eavesdropping. The audience is aware that it has caught Sam and Marion unaware, in a situation in which they share each other’s secrets and desires, and should have no qualms about accepting these portraits of the characters as legitimate. Barring some extreme reversal of this portrait, the audience can safely conclude that though they may be guilty of “loose morals,” neither Sam nor Marion fit the description of the title character. Not until later in the picture will the audience be introduced to Norman/Mother, the first character(s) whose sanities are questionable. Until the “unmasking” of Norman and Mother as the same person and the explanation by the psychiatrist, the audience will not realize the true identity of the film’s murdering psycho.

The *Hush* title is even more semantically fluid and ambiguous in its association than “psycho” because it does not give the audience any clues as to which character it

identifies or correlates with. “Hush” is onomatopoeic, just as much a fluid, sibilant sound as a word. It raises the questions: Who is being hushed and why? Who is hushing? From whom does the sound originate? Does the word/sound only pertain to one character or event or can it have multiple sources and targets? Unlike in *Psycho*, however, the answers are never definitively resolved and their ambiguity creates the potential for the audience to interpret them many ways throughout the film. Its most immediate effect is referential ambiguity and semantic fluidity. The audience is not encouraged to align itself with any one character and is also not alerted to look for any specific theme or characterization. The possibility for flux in the interpretation of the title sets up all characters as more or less equal in the audience’s perspective. The lack of a rigid definition thus allows the audience to empathize with both Helen and Martha simultaneously or oscillate its empathy from one character to another throughout the film.

### Images of Water and Wetness

Rigidity and fluidity cannot only be applied to cinematic components but also to “themed” moments within films. The presence of fluid as a motif holds within itself connotations of fluid as it pertains to each film. If the fluid is connected to a source, the connotation directed toward the fluid may be intended to carry over to the source as well. Therefore, if the fluid is seen as negative or horrific, then the audience may be influenced to see the person creating it the same way. The second half of this chapter will explore fluidity manifested in the thematic expressions of water and wetness. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* lend themselves easily to comparative analysis because they share common themes and images.

Though the three films are filled with references to fluids, this section will focus on specific scenes where fluids filmed in association with the two events of rain and bathing. Again, this analysis will present rigidity and fluidity as tools to elucidate the film's presentation of wetness to the audience and the larger meanings that the audience may accrue as a result of that presentation.

In all three films, rain is associated with desire for change and a turning point in the film that will spin control out of the victim's hands and into the hands of the killer. In *Psycho*, rain is associated with Marion's aborted fluidity as she attempts to change her life. Before the rain, Marion encounters manifestations of rigidity in male authority figures: real estate agent, the police officer, and the car salesman.<sup>9</sup> The rain itself obscures things and makes it hard for Marion and the audience to see images as they truly are. This obscurity is instantly dangerous and forces Marion off her path. Lesley Brill, in *The Hitchcock Romance*, declares that the "rain smears on the window of Marion's car before she turns into the Bates Motel" importantly introduce images of water and its "associate[ion] with death and disintegration" (226).<sup>10</sup> Its full danger is that Marion is exposed to and led deeper into Norman and his mother's deadly psychotic world. Here, she cannot survive and cannot escape even after she decides to go back to Phoenix. From these scenes, the audience can conclude that both rigidity and fluidity are conspiring against Marion. The film implies that once Marion decided to change, she became fixed by a narrative progression that she could no longer control and, subsequently, is fated to die.

In *Carrie*, the scene that includes Carrie convincing her mother that she should go to the prom and the scene of the pig-hunt that will yield the fluid that will end Carrie's

happiness are shown consecutively. Through their connection by the event of rain, these scenes are presented to the audience as occurring simultaneously. The pig blood and the rain shower correlate to the earlier shot of Carrie's menstrual blood in the gym shower through one of the male's reference to girls as pigs. Through this juxtaposition of images, sexuality is again associated with the bringing forth of female blood; Billy shouts "That's my baby" as he chooses his victim and Chris screams "Do it" orgasmically as he bashes the pig-girl on the head.

This shot is immediately followed by a shot of the White house in the midst of what the audience must assume to be the same thunderstorm. The rain and flashing lights of the storm are not only clues to narrative time, however. They also highlight the first time that Carrie has attempted her personal change by mentioning her desire to go to the prom to her mother. A loud thunderbolt occurs simultaneously with Mrs. White's repetition of the word "prom," signaling the epic battle of superhuman wills that will soon commence. Carrie's petition for change marks a turning point in the film because it is at this point that Carrie unknowingly places herself in a position where she will be vulnerable. After Carrie desperately asserts that she wants "try to get along with other people" and to be "not funny" like her mother, and to "be a whole person," her mother responds by throwing fluid in Carrie's face. The equation of Carrie's desire for independence with her sexuality is made again through a bestial metaphor—girls may be pigs, but boys are dogs who sniff for the source of the scent of menstrual blood. A shot of a window slammed rigidly by Carrie's telekinetic force shuts out the rain from the audience's view and signals an end to the argument. This action dramatically marks the first time Carrie is shown defying her mother and winning by employing her telekinetic



powers. The effect of Carrie's change is deadly and its effects are out of her control; the audience has viewed narrative events, already set in motion, which will conspire to destroy Carrie socially and physically. The audience knows that her decision to go to the prom leaves her vulnerable to Chris's joke, while her metamorphosis in Mrs. White's eyes from rebellious teenager to abominable witch leaves her vulnerable to infanticide.

Like Carrie, but unlike Marion, Helen is given the voice to actively choose change. Helen's change is not of self but of place. Immediately following the scene where Helen learns that her husband owns Kilronan, a shot from the exterior of Jackson and Helen's apartment shows Helen looking out of her window at the city being covered by a torrential rainstorm. In this shot, she is presented gazing out of the window meditatively, suggesting that the vision of the city drenched in rain may have inspired her idea to move from New York to the picturesque Kilronan. This scene represents a change that will transfer Helen's seeming control over her life to Martha, who will later attempt to murder her.<sup>11</sup>

Rain is not the only fluid that signifies change. Motifs of bathing and showers in the three films are all associated with metamorphoses and can also indicate changes in the film's mood. The shower scene in *Psycho* is arguably one of the most discussed and analyzed moments in film.<sup>12</sup> In the previous scene, Marion confides to Norman that she will be returning to Phoenix the next morning in an effort to reverse her earlier attempt at change and get out of her increasingly constricting private trap. Since this shower marks another attempt at change, it can be considered baptismal. Like Carrie, Marion is filmed with mouth open, enjoying the shower as she caresses and scrubs her body and washes away the dirt of the road as well as her feelings of guilt and shame.

Unfortunately, as Lesley Brill warns, in *Psycho*, “water fails to refresh, it blurs, dissolves, and drowns” (226). Marion’s “baptismal cleansing runs with blood, [so that the] true figuration of water is fixed,” and her baptism becomes an “abortion” (Brill 226;221). The intrusion of the rigid knife and the piercing violin shrieks that accompany it signal that this attempt at change, too, will be aborted.

Unlike the rain that merely deters Marion’s earlier attempt at change, however, this shower water washes away her life fluids and renders her a corpse, permanently preventing her from changing ever again. In his article “Shall These Bones Live?,” Larry E. Grimes argues that “her story (along with her intentions) is slashed to pieces in the shower” and acknowledges the water’s power, as “all hopes for life disappear down the drain” (22). Unlike Carrie, Marion has no chance of rebirth. The water remaining on her body, both of which were so recently eroticized and full of energy, becomes as lifeless as she is. Norman is primarily horrified by another fluid, blood, located on another body, his mother’s, as his voice is heard emanating from the house, “Mother, Oh God, Mother, blood, the blood.” The audience becomes distracted from the clear water and focuses on the extremely dark blood that mars the whiteness of the tub and tile as Norman painstakingly washes away and contains Marion’s fluids.

As Norman’s repulsion and aversion to her blood is transferred to Marion’s corpse, the audience is encouraged to stop thinking of her as a woman, but as an object that is unclean and must be removed. In *Psycho*, “time is linear” and “paths...lead but to the grave” (Brill 200). For Marion, this grave will be the watery swamp behind the motel; water subsequently gains a new importance as the chosen means through which the body will be covered and forgotten. There is a moment of uncertainty, for Norman

as well as the audience, that fluidity will again be aborted and water will not cover the evidence of Marion's newest shift. The bubbles that rise to the surface after the car completely submerges signal calming water, but also Norman and the audience's catharsis that the offending corpse, which has experienced a metamorphosis from humanity to disgusting object in a matter of moments, is finally disposed of. At the same time, any identification the audience had with Marion as a viable person ends and must be displaced, possibly to Norman, at this point seen as the devoted son who must clean up the debris left in the wake of his mother's monstrosity. Elisabeth Weis, in *The Silent Scream*, posits the idea that Marion as a character through whom we briefly identify must be removed for the audience to "experience the sensation [of horror] more directly" (137). Before the shower scene, the tension and suspense created by the narrative has the *potential* to become horrific. The acts of Marion's murder and the disposal of her body make that potential kinetic. Therefore, the mood not only changes from suspense and unease to outright horror at the point of Marion's murder, it also intensifies as a result of the fluid identification between audience and character.

The first section of this chapter discussed Carrie's first bathing scene in which she morphs without warning from child to sexual woman. Her second bath of blood after she has been doused with pig blood at the prom displays Carrie's attempt to reverse this earlier change. The shot of Carrie stripping off her bloody panties and submerging herself in the bath waters also suggest baptism or rebirth as an innocent child. The blood tub is more evocative of a womb than the sexually gratifying shower. Shelley Stamp Lindsey identifies Carrie's return "to the amniotic fluid of the maternal womb in the bath" as complicit in her regression back to pre-pubescence (291).<sup>13</sup>

When Carrie emerges cleansed, she dons a childlike nightgown and begs her mother to hold her.

What her character doesn't know, (but the audience does) is that Mrs. White will also attempt a return to innocence by killing Carrie. Mrs. White is shown kneeling and looking up, but her accompanying blank stare and lack of eye-contact with Carrie suggests that she is not on her knees to converse with her daughter, but to confess to God and repent of her sins of intercourse and liking it. Mrs. White's white nightgown represents that her virginity and "sinlessness" will be renewed by sacrificing her offspring. Since the audience is aware of Mrs. White's malevolence and plan to inflict violence on Carrie, no mood shift occurs during this scene—the continuation of horror is obvious. The knife wound creates the suggestion that Mrs. White's desire for change trumps Carrie's, and Carrie can only be saved by using her telekinesis to extract more fluid from her mother through multiple penetrations.

The use of bathing as a motif *Carrie* is related to the ability for the victimizer to further isolate her victim in *Hush*. While Martha bathes Helen and Jackson, Helen in (womblike) bathtub, Jackson under (seminal) hose, the dynamics of the plot begin to shift. As Helen is seen sitting in a tub full of warm water and imbibing hot liquid, Martha mentions the potential withdrawal of Jackson's semen and the potential for horror located in Helen's amniotic fluid. This is the first time that either Helen or the audience is persuaded to consider the possibility of horror from within. Amongst the tea and motherly advice, Martha tenderly washes Helen's back, but the audience sees Helen shift as if uncomfortable. This shot represents the first time that the audience sees Helen recognizing Martha's manipulation. Consequently, the mood of the film begins to

shift to make way for a propensity to horror. The story itself, not the characters, is changed and reborn as a horror story. A second bath scene highlights the dynamic between Martha and Helen's other ally, Alice. While Alice is bathing, Martha demeans her and reveals her lack of power by equating her crippled finances with her crippled reproductive ability. This correlation changes the audience's view of Alice as a wise crone with agency to a view of her as impotent and ineffective. In return, Martha's ability to subjugate her mother-in-law indicates to the audience that this character's potential for agency and, thereby, her potential to generate horror, has increased.

This chapter explored how analyzing film using fluidity and rigidity as a critical tool can evaluate how the audience may interpret some of the cultural-loaded images in film. Again, images of fluidity and rigidity do not in themselves contain specific meanings. For example, *Psycho*'s association of water with to how this particular film reinforces or refutes cultural beliefs that the audience already has death and female bodies does not mean that all horror films, or any other films, that utilize water as a motif will use it to present the same associations to an audience. Using fluidity and rigidity as a way to unpack the use of this motif in regard to *Psycho* can only provide clues in regard to death and female bodies. In the next chapters, this idea will be further developed in regard to cinematic depictions of mothers and children and expressions within and between genres.

## *II.*

Rigidity and fluidity can be applied to film to discuss how the status of mothers, women, and children in culture is portrayed to the film audience. In *The Monstrous Feminine*, Barbara Creed states that “at times the horrific nature of the monstrous-feminine results from the merging of all aspects of the maternal figure into one—the horrifying image of woman as archaic mother, phallic woman, castrated body and castrating parent represented as a single figure within the horror film” (27). In order to explore two of these aspects of the maternal, this chapter will first give background information on the development of the phallic mother and the archaic mother in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis can then be used here to discuss representations of phallic and archaic mothers in film and the subsequent reception and interpretation by the audience who views them. *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* easily lend themselves to an application of my definition of rigidity and fluidity because the screen-time of all three films is dominated by references to or shots of the mother and her child. All three films are also united by the presence of shared characteristic components of mothers and mother/child relationships. Specifically, I will explore: 1) how each film uses the visual cinematic elements of setting and costuming to present its mother(s) and then 2) discuss the way film’s representation of mothers through these elements and motifs and its positioning of maternal characters in relation to other characters influences an audience to view mothers in horror.

### Psychoanalysis and the Phallic Mother

Sigmund Freud primarily conceptualized the mother as simply “the original object” of children during their development (“Femininity” 308). Though the mother was central to both male and female children’s development, their development was achieved through the children’s actions on the mother rather than her influence on them. She is the primary object because she functions as a static existence with no agency that the children act upon and react to. In Freud’s terms, the child can become self-sufficient primarily by making “its mother into the object and [behaving] as the active subject toward her” (“Femininity” 333). Interestingly, Freud does accord some capacity of action to women who lack femininity and become abnormal mothers. Freud used the phrase, “phallic mother”, to describe abnormally developed, uncastrated mothers.<sup>1</sup> By virtue of her masculinity, the phallic mother wields and manifests her awesome and unfeminine agency and power.

Eventually Freud’s theories began to be removed from the purely biological realm and considered in terms of cultural desire and power. Karen Horney, one of Freud’s students, modified many of his theories in her study of feminine psychology. She also began to make the leap from Freud’s conception of development as focused primarily on biology to incorporating elements of the symbolic and of biology symbolically tied to social perceptions of men and women. Horney recognized the patriarchal system that held the perception of a good mother and the position of women in place. She explained that “males will always be in favor of motherliness, as expressed in certain spiritual qualities of woman, i.e., their nurturing, selfless, self-sacrificing mother; for she is the ideal embodiment of the woman who could fulfill all his expectations and longings”

("The Distrust Between the Sexes" 114). By reversing this, it can be assumed that mothers who do not fulfill these roles and support patriarchy are dangerous and unwanted by men.

Horney also gave agency to the mother by representing her psychology instead of just regulating her to an impotent object of the child and its development. Horney considered that mothers become mothers for their own selfish reasons and recognizes their subjectivity and narcissism when she stated, "There may be many conflicting unconscious tendencies connected with the wish for a child. The natural maternal instinct may be counteracted by certain unconscious motives...For those women who in some part of their mind have an intense wish to be a man, pregnancy and motherhood, which represent the equivalent female accomplishment, have an enhanced significance...The state of pregnancy has for them an exquisite narcissistic value" ("Psychogenic Factors and Functional Disorders" 171). In Horney's presentation "Maternal Conflicts," she assigns women a complex psychology and recognizes the power of social pressures that cause, what she saw as, abnormal and undesirable mothering. In studying abnormal mothering, Horney develops a concept of duality when she divides this phenomenon into two categories. She theorized that "the masculine tendencies are shown by the woman's domineering attitude and her desire to control the children absolutely. Or she may be afraid of this, and therefore be too lax with them. One of the two extremes may show" ("Maternal Conflicts" 180).

In continuing the idea of the phallic mother's desire and its effects on her child and own subjectivity, Horney's idea of the two extremes of mothering can be further elucidated using the work of a contemporary writer, Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin, in



discussing power and sexuality in her book The Bonds of Love, posited the theory of mutual recognition and applied it to the mother/child dynamic. For both the child and the mother to psychically exist and have selfhood, pleasure, and distinction, they have to see each other as selves recognizing each other back as selves. A negative cycle of recognition can be caused when the search for recognition becomes a power struggle and neither separateness nor union is possible. In explaining how these negative cycles can be manifested, Benjamin echoes Horney by setting up the dichotomy of the all-sacrificing mother who gives into all the desires of her child against the mother who denies her child any expression of his/her individual will. Benjamin says that both are equally undesirable because they both create systems of domination and subordination where true selfhood for either party is impossible. The child of the self-sacrificing mother has no boundaries and experiences him/herself as powerless to effect recognition from the mother. The self-sacrificing mother obliterates herself and her interests, is destroyed and ceases to be viable. On the other hand, the "phallic mother" gives the child the "idea that there is only room for one ego in the relationship" and the child looks toward future retaliation against her (39). The phallic mother, though dominant, negates her possibilities to be a true self by refusing to acknowledge her child as a viable, separate self.

By definition, the phallic mother is masculinized. She is fixated on language and the Law. The idea of the phallic mother is most useful in studying interpersonal relationships between, not real mothers and their children, but the power dynamics between the cultural positions and understandings of Mother and Child that real people use to interpret mothers and children. Freud, Horney, and Benjamin all agree that the

phallic mother is not a positive mother. Though phallic mothers have power by subjugating their children, and thereby teaching them that there is only room for the mother's ego, they become vulnerable by negating their own subjectivity. Horney and Benjamin, however, emphasize that the phallic mother subjugates because she has the desire and agency to do so, even if their employment of these characteristics has negative consequences.

By contrast, Creed describes the archaic mother as embodying the positions of "mother as originating womb" and "mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and end of end. (Creed 26; 17)." The archaic mother occupies the position of "sole parent" and "threatens to reabsorb what it has birthed" (Creed 26; 27). As I stated above, phallic mothers are rigid and choose to control and sublimate because they have the *desire* to do so. In contrast, archaic mothers are fluid and, by their nature, *function* to envelop and swallow existence. The archaic mother has no desire; her existence is predicated on her fulfillment of her roles. In other words, the archaic mother cannot exist outside of her function; she swallows because she is a swallower. She cannot change lest she negate herself. The archaic mother is more horrific than the phallic mother because its lack of will positions it as arbitrary and in close association "with death and its negative aspects—death seen as a desire for continuity and the loss of boundaries" (Creed 30). If this association is permitted, "psychic death" results (28).

Film's depiction of mothers through their setting and costuming can provide the audience with clues as to how mothers might be interpreted as phallic or archaic and connect them to the overarching pre-existing cultural ideas of horror. The mothers in *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* could be analyzed as solely phallic mothers. All, at first

glance, seem to fulfill the characteristics of the phallic mother who dominate their children through their will and desire. The mothers in *Psycho* and *Carrie*, however, because of the lack of attention in the narrative given to their pasts, their superhuman and supernatural appearance, and their close connection with death are positioned beyond cultural understandings of real mothers.

### Visual Representations

The way that mothers are costumed and seen or unseen through a film presents the audience with images of how a mother should or should not look. In *Psycho* and *Carrie*, the mothers are presented as larger-than-life and having characteristics of the nebulous, mythic archaic mother. Mrs. Bates first of all, has no first name and no history. Her entire existence is as monolithic, all-originating Mother; even the information about her husband's death and her affair are told in the context of the effects they had on her son or her ability to raise him. For most of the film, Mrs. Bates also does not look like anything either; she is visually absent. It is Norman's silhouette that can be seen through the lace curtains of the Bates mansion. The first time that the audience even sees her body is toward the end of the film and from the overhead shot of Norman carrying her down the stairs. Throughout, the entire film, whatever the audience may suspect, Mrs. Bates is only an inert preserved corpse dressed in a modest nightgown. For a dead person, she does, in a way, exert a tremendous amount of power beyond the grave. As Lesley Brill states, "Norman's mother, a person who is literally not there, will eventually dominate the lives of everyone in the film (223). She does this not in the "world" of the characters and their relationships, but from the omnipresent position of non-diegetic catalyst. Michel Chion claims that "the fiction is

propelled by the *idée fixe* of entering the house in order to see the mother” and the supposed “eminent embodiment” of what the audience believes is her voice. (197; 198).

Mrs. White’s body, by contrast, is visually forced onto the audience. Like Mrs. Bates, she is referred to as someone’s mother and not by her first name. She also has no past that we are aware of except for Carrie’s conception and her husband’s abandonment of her. She is truly larger-than-life and is often filmed from underneath to exaggerate her size. Shelley Stamp Lindsey gives a thorough description of Mrs. White’s appearance; “the film goes to great lengths to situate Mrs. White’s views in the context of the archaic and horrific. Her dark cape, severe black stockings, and cascading hair mark her Gothic appearance” (285). Mrs. White is often shown breezing through doorways and hallways, like when she visits Mrs. Snell to “spread the gospel of the Lord’s salvation.” Her hair lifts, becoming wing-like and she seems to be flying on the influence of some greater power.

Little background information is given on Martha, the mother in *Hush*, outside of comments made about her relationship with her son and her husband’s death. Martha’s appearance, however, is completely unthreatening and is prolific throughout the film. Unlike the old-fashioned, gothic appearances of Mrs. Bates and Mrs. White, Martha is costumed attractively, wearing outfits that are age-appropriate but are fitted so to allow for the audience to see her as a fertile, sexual creature.<sup>2</sup>

Setting is related to the mother as an extension of her costume. The mother’s primary domain is the house and she rarely leaves it except to commit mischief in the outside world. The setting becomes an extended metaphor for the potential horror of

the mother through its inclusion of a secret “Terrible Place” where terrifying truths are revealed. Through repetition and re-visioning, genre conventions have assigned certain locations within horror films the connotations of the “Terrible Place.” Carol J. Clover conceptualizes the “Terrible Place” as the site where victims find themselves emeshed in horror (30). The locations are terrible both on the inside and outside because of their appearance but also because of what they contain (Clover 30). Clover elucidates the relationship between the victim and the “Terrible Place”; “Into the houses unwitting victims wander in...it is the conventional task of the genre to register in close detail the victim’s dawning understanding...of the human crimes and perversions that have transpired there. That perception leads directly to their own immediate peril” (30, 31). Creed says that specifically the archaic mother can manifest its presence as the terrible place itself. If the mother is the terrible place, its secret room becomes uterine.

The association of the archaic mother and the room/womb is further elucidated by Claire Kahane in “The Gothic Mirror.” The gothic space, according to her, is an imprisoning labyrinthine structure that contains a secret room sealed off by its association with death; specifically the spectral presence of a “dead or displaced mother” (Kahane 335). This room symbolizes “the womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged, the tomb to which it knows it must return at last” (Kahane 336). The fear of the maternal is dramatically rendered in the secret room “where boundaries break down, where life and death become confused, and images of birth and sexuality proliferate in complex displacements” (Kahane 338). The house is antagonistic to the sense of self because it seeks to devour (Kahane 341).

*Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* all locate the mother's domain to be a house. In *Psycho*, Norman's old-fashioned, ornate, maze-like mansion on a hill is made to seem even more rigid and outdated as its architecture clashes with the modern neon sign and utilitarian, linear architecture of the motel. Lace curtains obscure the view of the interior and make all objects appear only in silhouette. Like the preserved hands on the dresser and the museum-like house, Norman has preserved his mother to conform to his own ideas and images of her. Lila's discovery of Mother's body imprint in her bed is evidence of her rigid body's inability to change or shift. The fruit cellar is the old house's "terrible place" where Mrs. Bates's corpse and Norman's secret are kept. The terrible place's associations with death and decay are reinforced when Norman cites the certainty that, without his presence, the house would become "cold and damp, like a grave."

The White home in *Carrie* also contains a contrast of interior and exterior. The brightly lit exterior of a suburban home is contrasted with the interior that resembles a small gothic cathedral housing the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost more than the suburban home of a single mother. Leigh A. Ehlers describes the interior of the house as "replete with doorways, arches, windows, and mirrors so that its inhabitants are consistently caught within numerous frames, which impart to the house a distinctly prison-like atmosphere" (44). Shelley Stamp Lindsey argues that "against the ranch-style bungalows of the suburban community, her home is a veritable mausoleum lit only by candles and proverbial lightning flashes outside (285). Cathedral, prison, or mausoleum, the interior is rigid and claustrophobic. The White home's "Terrible Place" is the prayer closet where the Christian trinity resides. This space is dark and

constricted, like Mrs. White, and contains her answers for salvation. The closet functions as a vehicle through which the audience can see the brutality that Carrie's mother is capable of. Her rigid and unwavering fundamentalist views seem to give her super physical strength in addition to her awesome self-bestowed righteousness as she easily drags the kicking and screaming Carrie across the room and throws her into her prayer closet. Images of death are mixed in with sexuality as Carrie prays in front of the effigy of a martyr to be forgiven for her impurities.

*Hush's* setting, by contrast is not in the typical gothic. Instead of somber lighting, the house is usually well-lit and the film provides the audience with plenty of bright outdoor shots from the grounds. Helen actually moves from "Gotham" City to live in Kilronan because of its wholesome appeal. The mansion at Kilronan contains a terrible place where truth is revealed and horror ensues, but although this old-fashioned, ornate nursery has characteristics of the gothic in appearance, it is still a brightly-lit nursery. Therefore, it loses some of its dark room/womb/tomb associations. The corpse, or object which reveals the extent of Martha's desire for the baby, is present as Helen's locket containing the pictures of her dead parents. Still, the nursery is a far cry from a fruit cellar containing a preserved corpse.

#### Implications for the Audience

So if visual representations of elements in the film such as costuming and setting can clue the audience to see the mother as either archaic or phallic, what does this mean in terms of the audience's greater understanding of the mother? The view of the mother as phallic and archaic is not just about how they are labeled, but about what characteristics are associated with them. Ironically, archaic mothers are fluid and

unlocalizeable ideas but cannot change. Because they cannot develop within the film, they, as characters, are considered to be rigid and stock. As a result, the audience is less likely to identify with them as the more dynamic, humanized characters. Because the audience feels no sympathetic connection to the mother and has become, through its viewing of the visual representations of the mother throughout the film, afraid of her, the audience is more likely to accept the views of the outside “experts” as legitimate. In *Psycho*, the mother is positioned by the voice of authority, the psychiatrist, as the ultimate victimizer but never as the victim. He even suggests that Norman was absent from the killings and at the time he was “all Mother” and she killed Marion and Arbogast. According to the psychiatrist, Mrs. Bates’s loose sexuality and extreme domination of Norman made Norman a victim, so much so that he *had* to kill her. In fact, places the stress of her death on Norman, stating that “matricide is most unbearable, especially to the son who commits it.” Norman might have been able to physically kill his mother, but “she” can never be completely eliminated because Norman’s projection of her remains in his fractured psyche.<sup>3</sup>

Carrie is also positioned as the victim-child tortured by a larger-than-life mother. She may kill her mother and, basically, everyone else, but the audience has been encouraged early on through its identification of her as the title character to be understanding and sympathetic. Vivian Sobchack describes Carrie’s fury as a “response to a comprehensive betrayal...irrational in its power and force, perhaps, but rationally motivated” (15). Because the audience has experienced first-hand the other girls’ torture of Carrie and the suffocating will of Mrs. White through both practice and the views of authorities, they continue to empathize with Carrie and see her as a



monster, but a sympathetic one. Carrie has to use every object in the kitchen to impale her mother and stop her from carrying out her plan to kill Carrie. When Carrie tumbles down the stairs with a knife wound in her back being resolutely pursued by her mother, the audience knows that the only way she can kill her mother is by using her preternatural telekinetic ability. When she returns to the prayer closet with her mother's body, the audience realizes that Mrs. White's grip on Carrie's psyche is so great that Carrie, like Norman, cannot bear her matricide. As Kahane predicts, Carrie experiences psychic death as the walls of the "Terrible Place" implode and bury her.

In *Hush*, Martha's main weapon is language. Her mask of femininity blinds and hypnotizes others with charm, drawing attention away from the evil intentions that come from her lips. Throughout the film, Alice's character as an authority figure functions to provide both Helen and the audience with increasing amounts of information about Martha's past. In the audience's mind the increase in information about Martha's past and Alice's presence challenges any claim Martha's character might have to being an archaic all-originator like Mrs. Bates and Mrs. White. Once Martha silences Alice, she has the potential to be viewed as archaic and indestructible. Helen, however, is able to de-center her and challenge her status as all-originating womb by occupying and exercising her new role as mother.<sup>4</sup> As a phallic mother and not a monolith, Helen can speak as both a child and a mother and masks her own destructive language with femininity.

In the end, Martha is eventually destroyed by her own weapon, but what is important is that the audience was able to identify with Martha as "real" due to her vulnerability as a phallic mother more than they could ever identify with Mrs. Bates or

Mrs. White. Since Martha is denied status as archaic and monolithic, Helen is able to destroy her without risking her own psychic death. The ending is wrapped up in a picture-perfect shot as Helen, the “true mother,” is presented to the audience as respectfully positioned next to Alice, the recognized matriarch.

### *III.*

The previous chapter of this thesis discussed fluidity and rigidity as a critical tool for interpreting positions of adult and child in mother/child dyads within film and explored the resulting consequences when these positions interchange or remain static. This chapter will apply fluidity and rigidity to posit the same question of interchangeability in regard to film genres. Films are associated with a particular genre based on their inclusion of various reoccurring structures and motifs that carry similar meaning from film to film within that genre. For example, the choice of a knife for the murder weapon, and its association with phallic properties, is usually a convention of horror. Films can also be placed in genres based on intended audience reaction. Sobbing, as an audience reaction, is most often a reaction associated with melodrama. Genre, itself, is fluid and changes in response to current social trends and audience preferences. Not only can genres perpetuate, they can also disappear or combine to form new genres. Specifically, the genres of horror and melodrama will be explored here both separately and as sharing what Vivian Sobchack calls a “common space.”<sup>1</sup> A critical application of fluidity and rigidity to these genres, specifically in regard to the films *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush*, will show both the consequences of horror films that remain within the horror genre and the consequences of horror films that utilize this “common space” to

incorporate elements of the melodrama genre. These consequences include the effect of a film and its genre on the audience and, particularly, how a film's combinations of genre expectations change the target audience, create or deny space for female subjectivity, and alter a film's potential for the uncanny.

### Horror, Melodrama, and their "common place"

The horror genre generally includes films that are loosely united through both their inclusion of a feared monster (or monstrosity) who threatens normalcy and their objective to inspire fear and/or revulsion in the audience. The world of the horror film is often located in the familial and domestic. Vivian Sobchack situates the "normalcy" that is disturbed as "the natural order (assumed to be God's order)" and "*harmony* of the hearth and home" (144).<sup>2</sup> In horror, therefore, the audience is encouraged to see the pre-monster world as the legitimate one and in a positive context. In her treatise on gender and the modern horror genre in *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Carol J. Clover states that horror films are variants of each other, that "the 'art' of the horror film...is to a very large extent the art of rendition or performance and is understood as such by the competent audience" (11). Audience understanding of a film to be a horror film because of its horrified reaction to it as such, is essential in the labeling of films as "horror." Clover identifies this "majority viewer" of horror films as male and argues that horror is primarily performed for a young male audience (7).

For its part, melodrama's objective is not to insert disharmony but to function as "a type of sense-making characterized by 'indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy; persecution of the good and the final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant

expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety” (Kaplan 63).<sup>3</sup> E. Ann Kaplan makes melodrama the focus of her study *Motherhood and Representation* because she feels that it is the only genre where feminists can find “daily, lived pleasures and pains of women within the intimate personal psychic/unconscious familial sphere that they have so long inhabited” (26). Kaplan, referencing Peter Brooks, states “melodrama in its Gothic form foregrounds what the social order forbids and represses about familial relations...we are led back to the sources of ‘the uncanny’ in the processes of desire and repression analyzed by Freud” (63-4). According to Clover, the main spectators (and intended audience) of horror films are male. In contrast, Kaplan states that, “melodrama in the modern era is a form that has always most explicitly addressed a *female* audience” (11).

Horror and melodrama are linked through the familial sphere, though one threatens to destroy it and on to make sense of it. Vivian Sobchack, in her article “Bringing it All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange,” locates the home and the nuclear, patriarchal family as “the common place” shared by horror, science-fiction, and family melodramas (146). These genres function to “test and represent the coherence, meaning, and limits of the family” (Sobchack 147). The figure of the child and its position in the film is central to determining where agency lies or is lacked, who is authorized to use it, and for what purpose. In horror, the responsibility for the breakdown of traditional family relations... has been transferred from child to parent,” specifically the father whose absence or impotence creates a void where horror can occur (Sobchack 152). In contrast, Sobchack claims that popular melodrama “invert[s] the horror film” by “attributing the destruction of the nuclear family to ‘Mom’” through her

absence (154). In horror, the child becomes a “sympathetic victim whose special powers are justifiably provoked” (Sobchack 150). In melodrama, the precocious or insightful child “has the power to authorize the family” and can either deny or legitimize the particular family’s existence as a viable structure (Sobchack 155).

### *Horror and Melodrama in Psycho, Carrie, and Hush*

As I stated above, genre is a loose categorization. For example, no one film is able to embody all that a horror film should be because the society’s perception of what is horrific and, therefore, the conventions of the genre are always changing and evolving. The fluid nature of genre itself becomes problematic when trying to label films as being only in one genre. This is certainly true for *Psycho* and *Carrie* because both contain elements of other genres. For example, the role of the lone detective Arbogast in speeding up the action of *Psycho* mixes in a convention of the mystery genre. Likewise, the intermingled shots of the students trying on clothes and makeup for the prom with the accompanying funky non-diegetic music in *Carrie* are more characteristic of teen comedies than of horror films. Both do have a monster, seek to challenge “normalcy,” and anticipate audience reactions associated with horror. For the purposes of this project, therefore, *Carrie* and *Psycho* will be considered to be good examples of horror films because they are often seen as “classic” examples and are usually analyzed as horror films.<sup>4</sup> They can then serve as one side of a loose dichotomy between horror and horror-melodrama, as exemplified in *Hush*.

Both *Psycho* and *Carrie* are located in the common place of the domestic, which they both threaten to destroy. Part of the horror of *Psycho* is enacted in an impersonal,

non-domestic motel but is enacted on a female body belonging to a woman who has been presented to the audience as willing to do anything to achieve domesticity. The other part of *Psycho*'s horror is played out within the extreme domestic symbiosis between Norman and his mother in their gothic house. This makes identifying the monster in *Psycho* difficult because the killer and victim can be viewed as conflated. In the most literal sense, Norman is the killer who murders Marion and Arbogast. Norman can also be interpreted by the audience as both the physical killer but also as a psychological victim of his demanding mother (or his fantasy of her as such).

This latter view is emphasized and reinforced by the character who is portrayed as the authoritative voice of reason in the film—the figure of the psychiatrist. In the final scenes, Lila and Sam are shown seated, passively waiting for the psychiatrist to explain and “teach” them the answers to the questions that brought them to the Bates Motel in the first place. Like Sam and Lila, the audience is also seated with the psychiatrist positioned in front of it, teaching it in the same manner and interpreting for it all that it has seen since it was first taken to the Bates Motel.

The film, through this authority figure, influences the audience to consider Norman as a victim whose outbursts are triggered by the stress of a “demanding” mother who damaged her child in a symbiosis allowed by paternal absence. Space for female subjectivity is denied since the mother (and now Marion) is dead and only “her” voice channeled through Norman remains. At the end of the film, Norman’s psychosis is explained (away), but Norman’s survival invalidates any attempt for the natural order to be restored.

In *Carrie* the site of horror remains the same (the female body) but the source of horror shifts inward to focus on a monstrous femininity located within the title character. Carrie's monstrosity is located both in her uncontrollable bodily functions of menstruation and her questionably controllable mental telekinetic power. In *Carrie*, Carrie's potential for monstrosity is influenced by her experience in the domestic. Again, authority figures throughout the film, beginning with the gym teacher Miss Collins and the school principal one of the first scenes, locate Mrs. White as the source of the perception of Carrie as outsider, leaving her vulnerable for attack by the other girls.

Like Norman, her destruction of human life is justified by the stress of an extremist mother who is not regulated due to the absence of her father. In *Carrie*, this stress is coupled with the stress of the onset of womanhood and her humiliation at the hands of her schoolmates. This conflation of the domestic and her (mocked) sexuality is obvious during the scene immediately before Carrie manifests her telekinesis on the prom which is filmed as a kaleidoscopic spin. The blend of her mother's voice saying "they're all going to laugh at you" imposed over the dizzying shots of her betrayers influences the audience to see her mother and schoolmates as connected by their equal responsibility and role her destruction. Carrie's response destroys not only her family, but everyone and everyone else's familial harmony. By the end of the film, there is no place for female subjectivity because Carrie, Mrs. White, and all the schoolmates except Sue are dead; and Sue is so mentally affected by Carrie's monstrosity that she all but dead. At the end of the film, as in *Psycho*, the natural order disturbed by the monster is not restored.



The previous chapter showed how Helen, the mother-child, is able to unmask and defeat the phallic mother because she has the fluid ability to speak from both the mother and the daughter's place. In the same way, *Hush*, as a film, speaks from both the position of horror and melodrama. In fact, it constitutes a hybrid of the two genres. The combination of melodrama and horror doubly locates it in the realm of the familial. This is evidenced by the film's placement of the camera; most of the shots are from inside Helen and Jackson's apartment or the house and grounds at Kilronan. Martha is also a mother shown to be out of control; the paternal is absent, however, not through the father's fault or choice but because the mother eliminated him. The intrusion of Martha's monstrous appetite for the familial disrupts the natural order of the hearth and home as horror films do. Melodrama provides the familial space of females, specifically one being shared (or not shared) by females who occupy different places in a social hierarchy that is constantly being called into question. Alice is set up as the matriarch that is physically crippled but also socially crippled within the family; she has been relegated to a position of child, one that is cared for down to the basic tasks of bathing and ambulation. Martha fulfills an old-testament version of mother and daughter-in-law relations. Like Ruth whose story she recites alone in the confessional, Martha expects Helen to "do exactly as her mother-in-law had instructed."

Melodrama creates a space for expression, specifically female expression. In *Hush*, Helen's special power that destroys the monster is not manifested physically through weapons, as in the other horror films, but through language. Unlike Kaplan's prediction that the insertion of thriller into melodrama "results in the repression of the female discourse and of female subjectivity; it legitimizes the ultimate control of the

narrative by a male protagonist, who is responsible for unraveling the mystery,” the insertion of melodrama into horror creates a space for female discourse and female subjectivity. In *Hush*, the main focus of the film is on two adult women and the power-dynamic in their relationship, and the one-dimensional object-male is faded into the background. Helen continuously questions her ownership of Jackson, her own will, and her child. Helen asks Jackson, “Is this my baby or is it hers?” She might also ask, as the audience must ask themselves, “Is this my story or is it hers?”

By heavily incorporating melodrama and placing the film’s emphasis on females and their relationships with each other, *Hush* becomes a horror film most likely performed for females. This audience, however, has no one of authority to interpret and regurgitate the sanity or insanity of each female character. *Hush*’s title and opening sequence are ambiguous in both association and mood; the audience cannot be entirely sure which character they are expected to identify with. The audience continually sees both Helen and Martha in “private” moments where they can voyeuristically apply their omniscience and “spy” on each character and interpret their private intentions. The only outside voice of authority comes from the physically crippled Alice who is sarcastically self-described as “incompetent and incontinent, sort of unreliable at both ends.” Martha’s early insinuations that Alice is “just a crazy old woman” who doesn’t deserve Helen’s attention casts doubt that Alice could be mentally crippled as well. Alice hardly comes across as a reliably wise old crone until much later in the film after the audience has seen some of Martha’s ventures into her true unbalanced, phallic self. The one-dimensional Jackson cannot be trusted as a voice of authority because he is definitely not an outsider, but, in fact, the object being fought over. Helen’s view, also,

is not continuously portrayed as trustworthy and is often called into question. The audience must also entertain the notion that Helen is wrong that she could be, in fact, “maybe...just being paranoid” or that her pregnancy, as Martha suggests, is making her mind “just go haywire.” It is not until Helen is already trapped beyond escape, locked in Kilronan with the onset of labor eminent, that the audience realizes the full horror that the mother is capable of—simultaneous matricide and infanticide as she kills the child that has also just become a mother.

Once the true horror is revealed, Helen, as child-mother, functions more as melodrama’s insightful child who evaluates the family and uses of language to challenge its dynamics. Like a child of the horror genre, however, Helen’s power of agency allows her to change the dynamics of the family by removing one or more of its members before she legitimizes it. Helen’s survival in the end ensures that female subjectivity will not die with Martha’s loss of it. In the end, the image of Helen, Jackson, and their son huddled around the matriarch Alice gives a final image to the audience about the nature of the true or approved family. *Hush*, as a horror film tinged with melodrama, is able to not only destroy order, but make sense of the family’s world and restore complete order and harmony before the end of the film. It does this, however, without resorting to melodrama’s indulgences in female emotional overkill.

### Genre and Freud’s Uncanny

Before the effects of a film’s fluidity or rigidity of genre on an audience can be discussed, a short description of Freud’s concept of the uncanny is necessary. He first says that the uncanny is “undoubtedly related to what is frightening—what arouses dread and horror” and “leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” but has

been repressed (“The Uncanny” 219; 220). Everything uncanny, or *unheimlich*, is what ought to have remain hidden but has come to light. Most interesting is Freud’s mention of the uncanny in fiction. He says that there is more opportunity in fiction to create the uncanny, and fiction is at its most uncanny when it is situated in common reality. Freud says the director/author betrays the audience by overstepping the truth and tricking the audience just long enough to achieve his object. Freud also states that “the storyteller has a peculiarly directive power” over the audience and can control emotion with moods (“The Uncanny” 251). This statement can be easily linked to modern film, specifically in this case to *Hush*.

For a film to inspire the uncanny, therefore, it must present the horrifying subtly. *Psycho* and *Carrie* both contain elements of the uncanny such as “living” corpses and the public display of menstrual blood, but by adhering to genre conventions and flaunting these images, their aptitude for the uncanny is severely limited though they succeed in producing horror in the audience. On the other hand, *Hush*’s fluid combination of horror and melodrama twists audience expectations by hiding its phallus from the audience through the inclusion of melodrama. The iconic all-consuming, phallic, monolithic mother should remain hidden but slowly comes to light instead of being revealed, at very early points in the films, to be extreme or hold extremist ideas regarding sexuality, their children, and outsiders. *Hush* shows, not tells the mother’s potential for the horrific. Its weirdness is harder to detect because it lies in the unseen and unlocalized psychological, not in the overt visual (or audio) stylings of horror as evidenced by *Psycho* and *Carrie*’s representations. From the film’s unhorrifying opening credits involving a lullaby (a masked threat) and a carousel to Helen’s unseen

but potentially frightening amniotic fluid, *Hush*'s aptitude for the horrific is masked from the audience.<sup>5</sup> Unlike, most films in melodrama, however, the presence of horror conventions in *Hush* prevents the inclusion of extreme and extravagant images or dialogue that would place overt focus on the female characters and distract the audience from the larger power struggle located in the relationships themselves. *Hush*, as a horror-melodrama, therefore, has more potential for reproducing the uncanny than, "classic" horror films such as *Psycho* or *Carrie*. In effect, *Hush* also has more potential for inciting feelings of horror in the audience.

This conclusion is important because *Hush* illustrates that films which fluidly combine horror and melodrama can both challenge "normalcy" and provide lasting space for female subjectivity. The fluidity between genres is also crucial for creating a horror film that speaks to melodrama's primarily female audience.

## *Conclusion*

Throughout this analysis, I have demonstrated that fluidity and rigidity is a valid tool for analyzing film, particularly films in the visually-saturated horror genre. By using this limited lens to look at specific cinematic elements, I was able to apply greater focus to the visual presentations and motifs that I chose to explore. Many of these findings carried over from chapter to chapter, accruing more significance each time. For example I found that the presence or lack of semantic and referential ambiguity in a film's title had applications in all of my chapters. When the meanings associated with the words of the title are not clear-cut and the title references no one person or thing, this fluidity has far-reaching consequences on the audience's perception of the main character and the figure of the mother as well as their expectations of the film based on the anticipated genre.

More importantly, however, I found that I could also expand my view outward from the original focus to explore how films intentionally manipulate and re-present culturally-loaded motifs and themes to audiences. I was able to use *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* as films to illustrate my application of fluidity and rigidity to film and connect them through shared themes and motifs, such as bathing. But why is bathing such a reproduced motif in horror? I submit that it is *because* one bath scene is art reproduced from one horror film to another that films purposefully use motifs' property of accruing meaning to challenge or affirm earlier and current cultural beliefs.

It is, therefore, difficult to *not* see the bath scenes in *Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *Hush* as a continuum in which one film continually comments on the previous work. This merge of meaning is unavoidable because audiences cannot help but connect and interpret

these visually potent motifs on several levels based on prior representations and experiences with the topic. The unexpected onset of Carrie's menstruation in the school shower in front of everyone is horrifying to anyone, male or female, that can imagine their body or bodily functions exposed in a public place. It is also horrifying because the image asks the audience to participate in a full-on public viewing of a fluid which has cultural associations that society strongly bans from public discourses. Again, if an audience is viewing *Carrie*, after having seen *Psycho*, the horror will multiply because the motif becomes another layer on a palimpsest that is impossible to read in isolation from the previous layers.

Bathing as a visual theme also cannot be extrapolated and viewed independently from the female body that receives the action and becomes the site of horror. The audience must also question what films are saying about the status of these women, and in turn, all women in society and, specifically, what kind of woman they identify as the culturally-accepted "right kind" of woman. In this example, it is Helen who survives. The happy-family ending portraying a woman occupying space within a nuclear family is evidence that film wants the audience to believe that the nuclear family is the rightful place of a good woman, a good wife, a good mother, and a good daughter. By presenting the violent deaths of Marion, Carrie, and Mrs. White, film shows audiences that these women are the wrong kind of women because they cannot recognize and fit into the culturally-accepted bounds of sexuality and domesticity.

Further research could definitely be done applying fluidity and rigidity to other genres, especially ones that also have a propensity for overstating the visual such as melodrama, science-fiction, or even the new breed of gross-out comedies, to elucidate

how films in this genre manipulate and re-present femininity, sexuality, the domestic, and the politics of bodies. Also, the same re-presentations could be analyzed using a specific genre of horror films within the larger genre, such as the presently popular psychological thriller.



## Notes

### Introduction

1. The association between women, specifically Carrie, and pigs will be mentioned in Chapter 1. See also Ginger Snaps for connections between menstruation and the bestial.
2. For examples, see Ehlers, Leigh; Creed, Barbara ; Clover, Carol J.; Coykendall; Abigail Lynn; Lindsey, Shelley Stamp.

### Chapter 1

1. Coykendall specifically names Miss Collins as the director and coordinator of this “ebb and flow.”
2. Ehlers, in her analysis of the uses of red and blue in the film also argues that “red is [first] associated with Carrie’s menstrual blood, the badge of her emerging sexuality and her status as a victim” (45).
3. For a discussion of visual pleasure and voyeurism in the locker room, see Paul 357 and Coykendall 342-48. For comments on the horrors of voyeurism, see Stamp 283.
4. Ehlers distinguishes all of Carrie’s struggles toward happiness, including her masturbatory touching in the shower, with “the magical, dreamlike quality of the flute solo repeated throughout the film.” My personal observations of the use of the flute solo includes, specifically, Carrie’s conversation with Tommy at the prom during which she votes for herself as prom queen.
5. Lindsey also describes Carrie’s schoolmates as “ethereal creatures, nymphs at the water pond” then “as demons hurling tampons and abuse” (282).
6. Coykendall also personifies the camera in this instance in terms of voyeurism, and claims the camera has “predatory intentions to ‘single [Carrie] out’” (343).
7. Lindsey makes a connection between *Psycho*’s shower scene and Carrie’s shower scene in the way that the camera shows “Carrie’s body as torso, legs, breasts in much the same way that Marion Crane’s body is ‘dissected’ in the *Psycho* attack (282)”
8. Later in the film, Helen and Martha are filmed separately, each looking at the carousel. In connection with Martha, the carousel will echo completeness and a sense of return to motherhood, while in connection with Helen it symbolizes horror and panic at being caught in a dangerous web.
9. These will be echoed in the later manifestations of the private investigator, the sheriff, and the psychiatrist.

10. Brill surprisingly says little about the significance of rain in this particular scene in *Psycho*. Instead Brill uses it as an interlude into discussing water in the shower scene.
11. Later in the film, water in the form of a muddy stream slows her escape from Kilronan and represents an obstacle in her aborted attempt to change place and save herself from Martha.
12. For discussion of the shower scene connected with: the look's deconstructive method, see Cohen 5; desire and character relations, see Brill 221-37; bodies and *Psycho* as an advent film, see Grimes, Larry E.; voyeurism, visual pleasure, and the spectator, see Modleski, Tania 14; women and defilement, pollution, see Modleski, 101-13; Norman's psychosexual fury, Marion as sexual transgressor, shock, and audience as a witnessing body, see Clover 21-64.
13. Though I agree that Lindsey is correct in viewing the bath water as amniotic, her attempt to connect Carrie's white nightgown to this rebirth is false since Carrie's nightgown is blue, Ehler's color of hope and happiness.

## Chapter 2

1. Freud also uses the term "phallic mother" in "Femininity" pp. 126, 130 and "Revision of the Theory of Dreams" p. 24.
2. This tasteful home décor and fashion of Martha's house and wardrobe raises the interesting possibility that her character was named for Martha Stewart.
3. Paula Marantz Cohen defends Mrs. Bates, saying "Norman's mother is not guilty of anything as far as we can tell, despite what the pontificating psychiatrist at the end would have us believe. It is Norman's imagination of the mother, his projection of an idea onto her corpse, that constitutes Mrs. Bates in the film" (148).
4. For information on the effects of speaking from both the mother and child's place in psychoanalysis, see Jane Gallop.

## Chapter 3

1. The term, "the common space," comes from Vivian Sobchacks' article and her argument will be discussed in more detail during the first part of this chapter.
2. Emphasis mine.
3. Kaplan is here quoting Peter Brook's book, "The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
4. Carol J. Clover places both *Carrie* and *Psycho* in the genre of "quality" horror.
5. See Warner, Marina.

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