

Horror: What Are We Afraid Of?

A horror movie analysis
booklet by
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1922

“Nosferatu”



Summary

Main character and realtor, Thomas Hutter, travels to Count Orlok's home to possibly endorse him as a new client. Orlok wants to buy a home near Thomas and his wife, Ellen. Thomas eventually finds out that Orlok is a vampire and tries to escape the castle. In the end, Ellen is killed by Orlok, who has been planning on drinking her blood since the beginning of the movie.

Color Palette



Fears Behind the Movie

This horror movie is very influential, and one of the reasons for this is because it is one of the first full-length horror movies to ever be made. This film draws in the fear of the

unknown, as topics like this were unprecedented on screen, and people were still trying to figure out what to do with the new art form. People were introduced to an entirely new fear that ended up influencing the future of horror films.

Main Themes

- **Personal Destiny:** Soon after the opening credits were shown, a quote appeared on the screen, saying that “You can’t escape destiny by running away.” This is a perfect synopsis of the film’s main theme, which is that a person will succumb to fate, no matter how hard they try to escape it. For example, once Thomas finds out that Count Orlok is a vampire, he works hard to protect himself and his wife. Despite this, his wife is still killed by Orlok, proving that nothing can save a person from their destiny.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This film was initially made in Germany, and it centers around the risk of manipulation. This movie came out in the 1920s, which was a time period where Germany was very susceptible to manipulation after the end of World War I. People feared what would come next for them as well, which draws in the fear of the unknown. The Treaty of Versailles also had a big impact on German life, as they had to give up a lot of land. This is symbolic through the movie because of Thomas’s job as a realtor, and Count Orlok’s desire to obtain more land.

1956

“Invasion of The Body Snatchers”



Summary

An extraterrestrial species invades a small suburban town in California. The pods that fall from space end up turning into humans that already exist, stealing their identities. The town doctor slowly discovers this invasion and works hard to save his love interest, as well as the town.

Color Palette



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie threatens the firm trust people have for their loved ones. The first people who notice that something is wrong are the children and close family of the people the aliens are replacing. This had the ability to make people question who they could trust. Additionally, the entire alien invasion is completely silent, which leads people to question what might be going on in their town without their knowledge. This also makes sense for the 1950s, as this time period defined the American Dream as having a nice house and perfect family.

Main Themes

- **Inescapable Danger:** “Invasion of the Body Snatchers” emphasizes this theme using shadows. It is typical for movies filmed in black and white to use shadows to add another layer to the fear factor, but in this case, the shadows seem to follow the main characters, defending the idea that danger cannot be avoided.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This movie reflects the time period fears surrounding the Cold War. The central fear of the time period was communist infiltration, and as aliens literally invade a peaceful setting and start taking over, this fear is only heightened. This movie also makes a connection to the 1950s idea of conformity, especially in the suburbs.

1960

"Psycho"



Summary

Marion Crane is on the run after stealing 40,000 dollars from work and has plans to meet up with her boyfriend. She ends up at the Bates Motel, where she meets Norman Bates, the hotel manager.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie surrounds the fear of deciding who to trust. Before this film was made, horror characters were very much connected to the way they looked on the outside. Finally, appearance was removed from the equation and people had to use their best judgement on who they should trust. In reality, Norman didn't give Marion any reason not to trust her, but this movie forces people to question the true meaning of trust.

Main Themes

- **Empathy:** This movie begins with a woman on the lamb coincidentally meeting a seemingly innocent man trying to run a small motel. It is easy to feel empathetic for Norman, especially because we don't know who his mother really is. Though this may be the case, we don't feel any sympathy for Marion up until she gets killed. The movie toys with the viewer's emotions, and no one really knows who to feel for until the very end of the movie, if even then.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

The 1960s was a time period where familial roles were shifting. The idea of family and the "American Dream" was broken down in this film. It seems like Norman and his mother have a typical family relationship, but this could not be farther from the truth.

1968

“Night of the Living Dead”



Summary

A group of people coincidentally converge in an abandoned house after a zombie apocalypse starts to overtake the entire town. The eight strangers must overcome their differences and work together to try and save themselves and each other from being killed or turned into ghouls (zombies).

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

When this movie was made/ released, the Vietnam War was coming to an end. The battle between the ghouls and the eight remaining humans parallels that of the

opposing sides of war. This hit home for many people, as they had trauma from the war, whether they were on the front line or waiting for a loved one to return home.

Main Themes

- **Trust (or lack thereof):** This movie proves time and time again how essential trust is in life, mainly through the character Harry, who is one of the people we are introduced to at the abandoned house. Harry is skeptical of everyone, especially Ben, as new people enter the house with ideas of how to survive the attack. Harry is constantly blocking people out, both literally and figuratively and lacks the ability to let anyone else contribute to the group's survival.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

Although the actor who played Ben, the black man who is also the lone survivor of the zombie attack, was very coy about the way race was applied to the film, it is very important to acknowledge the impact it had on society during the 1960s. This movie was released in 1968, which was the same year that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. This gave viewers the hope/idea that black power was on the rise, and that there is strength in interracial friendships, which is demonstrated as Ben tries to help everyone he comes across.

1973

"The Exorcist"



Summary

Regan, the tween daughter of a famous actress, is suddenly possessed by the devil that has been lurking around her home in Washington D.C. After medical and psychiatric intervention is unsuccessful, the town's priests perform an exorcism to try and draw the devil out of Regan.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

Family is a focal point of this movie, which brings forth the idea of familial responsibility. The entire situation that this movie follows is every parent's worst nightmare: your child infected with a seemingly incurable illness, and feeling completely helpless as they suffer. This movie also highlights the fear of change. This family is living a very simple life until chaos is tossed at them and confusion and turmoil ensue.

Main Themes

- **The Definition of True Evil:** The viewer is forced to question the meaning of evil throughout the movie, but especially when the devil takes over Regan entirely. The belief of evil often surrounds the idea that it can only be present when good is completely absent. This movie proves this wrong, as a struggling mother works to save her daughter, who was entirely innocent throughout the movie.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

The 1970s started the shift of societal gender roles. Women weren't always staying home with the children and men weren't always supporting the family. The appearance of an "average" family was changing, in this case it being a well-off single mother and her daughter. There were some people who feared this shift, but this movie makes the statement that change cannot be bad when evil still lurks among us.

1974

“The Texas Chainsaw Massacre”



Summary

After finding out about the possible vandalism of her grandfather's grave, a teenage girl, her disabled brother and their friends set out to investigate the damage, but end up getting caught up on their way home. Before long, they become the next prey of a rural family of cannibals. This movie is often credited with giving birth to the slasher era of horror films.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

The 1970s involved a lot of fear surrounding a lack of materials and jobs. For example, the entire situation the characters face is provoked when the car runs out of gas. Additionally, both groups of people that are represented aren't depicted as overly wealthy, which represents a timely fear of being out of a job and not having money.

Main Themes

- **Vegetarianism:** This theme is entirely centered around irony, mainly including how the innocent humans that were killed were hung upside down in a basement/warehouse resembling a slaughter-house. This represents the suffering of the animals used as food for humans, and shows the horror of being completely incapacitated and unable to defend yourself as you help another being to survive.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This movie had a lot of connections to the events of the time period that it came out in. They all surround the chaos that was the years of Nixon's presidency. The craziness of the time period is represented in the film. For example, throughout the entire movie, all of the characters are clueless as to what is happening to them and how to handle it. This is similar to the country and its response to Nixon's presidency and the decisions he made during it.

1975

"Jaws"



Summary

A young couple and their children are living on Amity Island as a designated relief from everyday life. Unfortunately, trouble ends up finding them when a huge killer shark haunts the seas. It results in a man vs. nature battle as the chief of police, a researcher and fisherman fight off the shark.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie plays on a time period fear of the government. The government of Amity Island is not looking out for the wellbeing of their citizens, and is more focused on the economy of the town. This film was made during the height of the Cold War, so the fear of the government was heightened during the 1970s.

Main Themes

- **Vulnerability:** Similar to "Psycho", this film uses the idea of bare skin as a symbol of vulnerability. The entire idea is that in the water, you don't know what's going on beneath you.
- **Masculinity:** In this film, all of the essential characters to the movie, both protagonists and antagonists, are male. Additionally, the men are the ones who end up killing the shark in the end.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This movie was made during the height of the Cold War. Therefore, the shark in the movie plays on the fear of a big, irrational killer that strives to destroy everything in its path. This movie also makes a connection to the time period's desire to escape from modern everyday life.

1978

“Halloween”



Summary

15 years after six year old Michael Myers kills his sister, he escapes imprisonment on Halloween, stalking Laurie Strode, in hopes of murdering her too. Meanwhile, Myers's doctor searches the city with law enforcement to try and find him before anyone else gets hurt.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

Although the obvious thing to be afraid of in this movie is Michael Myers, everyone takes on this fear in a different way and approaches it differently. This is shown throughout the movie through Tommy's, the young charge of Laurie, fear of the BoogeyMan. Whenever Tommy sees Myers, he thinks it is the BoogeyMan. While showing a sense of childish innocence, it also shows that everyone interprets fear differently, and we all have things that we are scared of.

Main Themes

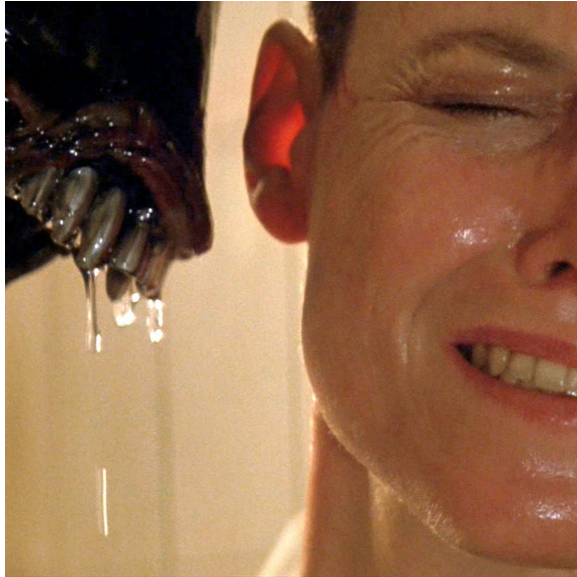
- **The Design of Fate:** In school, Laurie and her classmates learn about the idea of fate, and according to their teacher “He (a character in a book) was destined to his own fate.” This all happens while Michael Myers is standing across the street watching Laurie through a window. This quote rings true for the duration of the movie, in the sense that you can't really escape what is coming for you.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

In the 1970s, there was a significant increase in crimes in the United States, including rapes and murders. This made this movie even more frightening because serial killings didn't seem as abstract as they might have before.

1979

“Alien”



Summary

Far off into space, a team of space explorers are alerted by an alien distress signal and take a detour on their way back to Earth to investigate the situation. What they find is shocking, unprecedented and life threatening, and the group of astronauts must work together to save themselves and arrive home safely.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie brilliantly ties in an uncountable number of phobias and fears to terrify the audience. These include the fear of the dark, germs, death, the government, assault and claustrophobia, but the list goes on and on. The number of ways to be frightened by this movie seems never ending, which is one of the reasons Ridley Scott gets so much praise for this film.

Main Themes

- **“The Perfect Organism”:** This theme is drawn forth after finding out that Ash is some sort of robot-alien hybrid. He is described as the “perfect organism” because he is designed in a very specific way and essentially has no flaws. Once he is destroyed, we are forced to question what the definition of perfect really is, if it exists at all.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

Sigourney Weaver’s character was intended to be a male, but after she auditioned, they decided to change the character of Ripley to a woman. This is an important turning point for the movie because the 1970s were an important decade for women’s rights. Her character is not only the lone survivor of the film, but she also plays a key role in the destruction of evil. Ripley’s character represents that women can play important roles in crucial situations.

1991

“The Silence of the Lambs”



Summary

Trying to track down a psychopath on the loose, agent-in-training Clarice Starling starts talking to a convicted murderer and cannibal, Hannibal Lecter. The two form a friendship, but it doesn't take Lecter long to use this to his advantage.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie has more of a manipulative and mental fear than anything else. Hannibal Lecter's character represents what the mind is really capable of. This forces the viewer to question what goes on in other people's heads.

Main Themes

- **Identity:** At the beginning of the movie, every character is defined in some way or another, whether it be through profession or criminal acts. However, as time passes, we find out that these people are more than their jobs or notorious acts, and personal identities are defined.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

Coming out only two years after the Cold War had ended, this movie provoked the question of what goes on that we don't know about. Every person, neighborhood, etc. is only a small part of the world, and it forces people to wonder about things that may seem minimal to them, but are a much bigger deal to the people involved in them.

1996

"Scream"



Summary

A psycho killer is on the loose a year after the rape and murder of Sidney Prescott's mother. As people are killed off one by one, Sidney continues to question the reality of her mother's murder and finds herself in trouble with the killer.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie forces people to question the life that they have become familiar with. Both Tatum and Lindsey care very deeply for their boyfriends, but they have no idea who they really are. It makes the viewer wonder who they can trust, and instills a fear that you might not know who someone really is or what they are capable of.

Main Themes

- **Humanity:** One big difference between this horror movie and other movies that came before it is that the killer(s) isn't a grown up psychotic maniac with a tortured past. Stu and Billy are just two teenage boys dressed up in costumes. They make stupid decisions, and unlike a lot of horror movie killers, they don't give off the appearance of being immortal. This gives the film an entirely different level of humanity.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This movie has a lot of instances of girl power, mainly in the main character, Sidney, and reporter Gale Weathers. After suffering with male dominance, both of these women rise up and take charge of their situations. This connects to the 90s time period because there was a large wave of feminism.



2013

“The Conjuring”



Summary

In the 1970s, a husband and wife team of demonologists help the Perron family to rid of evil that they believe is lurking in their home. Their daughters are seeing figures, hearing voices and being thrown around the room as they sleep. Unfortunately, the family's mother is possessed by the spirit and attempts to kill her children while her husband and the demonologists do all that they can to draw the evil out of her.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie causes a lot of fear surrounding faith and religion. Faith is all about believing in the signs around you, or not needing proof at all that something exists. This movie sends the idea that there can also be faith in evil spirits, instead of just good ones. This could make people question what they believe in, or feel forced to pay more attention to the true signs that they might be seeing.

Main Themes

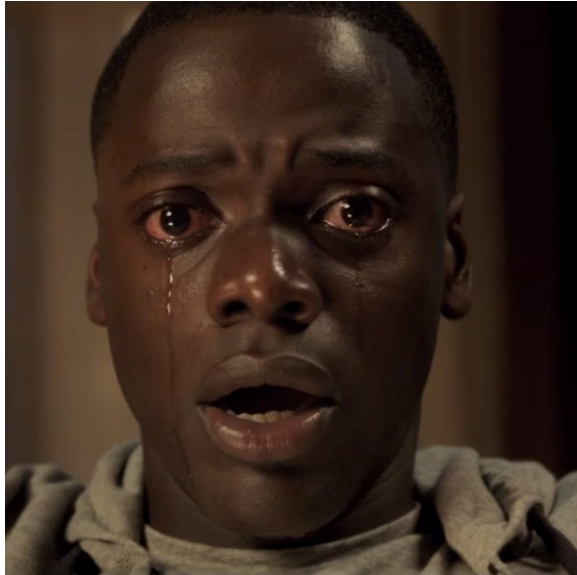
- **Good vs. Evil:** The overall theme of this movie can be summarized by a quote one of the investigators states at the end of the film: “The Devil exists. God exists.” In other words, the entire film plays on the decision of being good or evil. As an evil spirit takes over Carolyn. It also continues on as the saga of “The Conjuring” movies expands in years to come.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

During the 2010s, it was noted that there was a significant amount of crimes and killings. This movie doesn't focus on killing as heavily as it does on being manipulated by an evil force. However, it still connects to the time period because

2017

“Get Out”



Summary

Rose, a white girl from the south, invites her boyfriend, Chris, to travel back home with her to meet her parents, who act very strangely upon the couple's arrival. At first Chris thinks this is because of their interracial relationship, but as things continue to get more and more intense, Chris has to fight for his life and freedom.

Color Pallet



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie provokes a lot of fears surrounding race, specifically being taken advantage of for your skin color. This would lead to a significant amount of fear for not just black people, but people of all skin colors because it shows what is really possible in the world we live in.

Main Themes

- **Race:** Race plays an extremely important role in this movie from the very beginning. Whether Chris is being wrongly pulled over by the cops or is being put into a trance by Rose's mother, he is constantly being manipulated and mistreated because of his skin color.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This movie has a close connection to today's society in terms of racial interactions. Although we have come a long way from the beginning of slavery and the Jim Crow Era, the connection between society and race is far from perfect. This movie has a way of critiquing the poorly constructed system and points out the flaws in the way we live today. There are still many fixes that need to be made.

2017

"It"



Summary

Seven young teenagers must face off with Pennywise the clown, who comes up from the sewers every 27 years and haunts people using mind tricks and deception. The kids band up to take down the monster and learn more about themselves along the way.

Color Palette



Fears Behind the Movie

This movie incorporates every possible fear that a person could have, as Pennywise uses mind manipulation to trick his victims into living their worst nightmare. They are all

related to a personal trauma or fear, including abuse, the loss of a loved one, illness and bullying.

Main Themes

- **Friendship/Teamwork:** The importance of working together is a very emphasized theme in this movie. Although the majority of the kids were close before everything started to fall apart, they bonded through the experience and became much closer through the trauma they faced together. The kids worked together to take down the clown, which bonded them on a whole other level.

Cultural Connections and Impacts

This movie demonstrates the importance of standing together, which connects to the 21st century in a lot of ways. Bullying is a serious issue that kids face everyday. With Pennywise serving as the bully and the group of kids playing the fearful, yet strong willed, school children, this movie represents the importance of standing up to your fears and taking down the monsters of the world.



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