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Mis-en-Scene In *Sweetie* and *Psycho*

Although quite different in most respects, *Sweetie* and *Psycho* do share one important characteristic: structurally, both attempt to conceal their essential element from the viewer--at least to a certain point. In the case of *Psycho*, this is the identity of the murderer and, just as importantly, the mental condition expressed by that revelation. In *Sweetie*, the essential element is incest, the discovery of which also reveals clues regarding mental conditions. Since they do share this common structure, it is hardly surprising that other similarities exist, particularly regarding mis-en-scene.

The most striking likeness is each film's respective use of setting. The two main interiors of *Psycho* are perfect externalised representations of Norman's split personality. The motel's decoration is entirely emblematic of Norman, the house--excepting Norman's bedroom--of his mother. In the motel, Marion Crane's¹ room displays hanging pictures of birds. Not only does her name associate her with the subject these pictures, but Norman tells her, in case we have not grasped the obvious, "You eat like a bird." The appropriateness and meaning of the bird

¹We might also note the suggestive use of names that *Psycho* shares with *Sweetie*.

motif is not at first apparent. When we move to the next-door office, Norman's discussion of his mother is made ominous by composition which displays a stuffed and swooping owl over his shoulder. "I hate what she has become," he says, as we watch the bird of prey. The stuffed birds of *Psycho* have only the power of symbol. Similarly, the flowers in *Sweetie*, as mere representations of nature, have been divested of their perceived power and so are safe. The birds, like the artful representation of nature in *Sweetie*, are merely an indication of the problem, not the problem itself.

Another clue in *Psycho* is the picture of rape which covers the peep hole. This more overt offering finds no counterpart in *Sweetie*, which also avoids the simplistic and inappropriate explanation that mars *Psycho's* conclusion. Nevertheless, there is a gradual revelation in *Psycho* which is quite similar to *Sweetie*; and it is not until Norman's split personality is finally revealed that we understand the clues inherent in the many symbols.

A theme both films share is that of a frozen and filtered past. This finds expression in identical fashion: in Norman's bedroom, we see all the chattels of childhood: a one eared stuffed rabbit, a broken truck and torn Teddy. Similarly, the beds of both *Sweetie* and Kay are home to soft toys. Even Kay's car dangles a small Teddy from the mirror.

Where *Psycho* limits its thematic use of setting largely to interiors--with the possible exception of the gothic house and also the swamp, which swallows up the remains of Norman's

murders, seeming, however, more a convenience of plotting than a thematic representation--*Sweetie* portrays an entire indoor outdoor world which is not so much a place in which the character's move as an extension of the characters themselves. Examples of this are numerous: the back gardens of Kay and her neighbour's houses, separated by a fence over which we see Gordon watch Sweetie--implying the unspoken division that keeps them apart. We notice also that Kay's garden is covered mostly with concrete, where next-door there is grass. The contrast between natural and man made elements, on the beech and outside the house as Louis walks away from Kay being two examples, suggestive of the whole nature theme and Kay's problems with her own sexuality. The extremely phallic and giant ant hills where Gordon, Kay and Louis stop, drawing our attention to the unnatural attention Gordon lately paid Kay; a scene which also features Gordon poking a hole with a stick. And of course, Gordon's garden with the well-lit tree-house needs little explanation.

Of course, there is none of the subtlety in *Psycho* that we find in the mis-en-scene of *Sweetie*. Nevertheless, we do find an indication, in both, of the importance of mis-en-scene, particularly pertaining to setting, which is not limited to a simple recreation of environment, but to the intrinsic nature of the film itself.