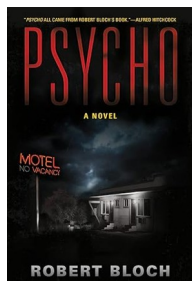




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Psycho
By Robert Bloch
Discussed October 2009

Background

Psycho, the novel (1959) - Written by Robert Bloch

Psycho, the film (1960) - Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Screenplay by Joseph Stefano

Film Cast:

- Anthony Perkins – Norman Bates
- Janet Leigh – Marion Crane
- Martin Balsam – Detective Arbogast
- John Gavin – Sam Loomis
- Vera Miles – Lila Crane
- Simon Oakland – Dr. Richmond

Psycho was inspired by the Ed Gein murder case (Nov. 1957).

- Gein's hometown was Plainsfield, Wisc. (Bloch was living 36 miles away, in Weyauwega.)
- Gein was arrested for the murder and mutilation of 2 women. He was also discovered to have been responsible for robbing the graves of at least 10 women.
- After his arrest, police searched his house and found furniture, silverware, and clothing made of human skin and body parts. Psychiatrists theorized he was trying to make a "woman suit" so he could pretend to be his dead mother (a puritan who dominated her son).
- In 1968, Gein was declared sane enough to stand trial. He was found guilty of first-degree murder, but was declared legally insane. He died of heart failure due to cancer in 1984 at the Mendota Mental Health Institute (Madison, Wisc.).
- Bloch was familiar with the case, but stated he didn't know the specific details until years after he wrote the book.

Discussion Questions

1. Did you read the book or did you watch the film? Or did you do both?
2. If you only read the book (or only watched the film), what did you especially like about it? Did you find the book (or the film) particularly "scary" or "horrific" or "eerie" (or some variation on those adjectives)? How did the book (or the film) "deliver the goods" for you?

3. If you both read the book AND watched the film, which did you think was “scarier” (or whatever)? Which medium was most effective for you: print or film? Why? Did you find that each medium had its own particular advantages?
4. The Horror genre has often been called the most “conservative” type of speculative fiction, because it seems to invariably punish societal/sexual transgressors. How does *Psycho* fit with this view of horror fiction?
5. At the end of the film, Dr. Richmond (portrayed by Simon Oakland) spends several minutes explaining Norman’s mental condition to a roomful of people. In the book, Sam Loomis spends several pages explaining all about multiple personalities, transvestism, and such to Lila Crane (as it had been explained to him by Dr. Steiner). As a viewer (or reader), how did this “expository lump” affect you?
6. The book and the film provide very different physical descriptions of Norman Bates. Why do you think this was the case? If you both read the book AND watched the film, which version of Norman Bates was more effective for you? What do you think about the choice of Anthony Perkins for the role of Norman Bates?
7. Based on the version of *Psycho* you read/viewed, what impression did you have of Norman Bates’s sexuality? If you both read the book AND watched the film, did there appear to be different interpretations? Do you think your impression was affected by the choice of Anthony Perkins for the role of Norman Bates? Have the facts of the Ed Gein case affected your impression?