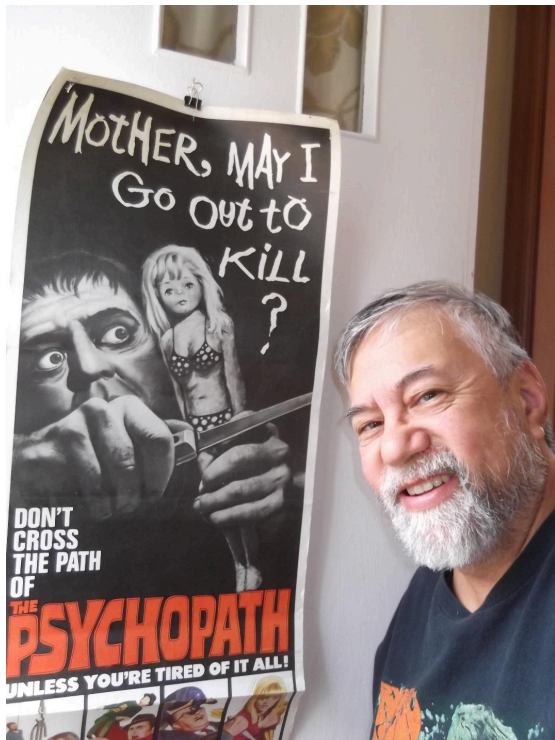


Poster Exhibit:

PSYCHO KILLER, QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST?:

The line quoted above is from the Talking Heads song “Psycho Killer.” It feels apt, since the public



seems to have a fascination with Psycho Killers. The names of some fictional killers have become household names, like Hannibal Lector, Dexter, and Norman Bates. Hitchcock’s movie PSYCHO (1960) is probably the grand-daddy of all psycho movies that we see today. Hitchcock’s achievement with PSYCHO was to demonstrate that a “monster” didn’t have to look like a monster, but could exist in the same room with us, unsuspected. It planted the seed in the audience’s mind that yes, you too could be the victim of a psycho killer. I’m not including PSYCHO as part of this exhibit, since it’s been covered in our previous Hitchcock exhibit, but I acknowledge it’s influence on the whole Psycho Killer genre. So instead, let’s see how the Psycho Killer genre continued to proliferate

in the decades that followed. Of course, this is only a small sample of what’s out there, and I’m not even including some of the more famous examples, since they’ve become so familiar their edge has worn off, like HALLOWEEN and FRIDAY THE 13th. So, during the chilly month of October, follow me along this blood-strewn path and let’s see where it takes us....

Barry Yuen, Poster Collector & Writer

October 2024

HANDS OF THE RIPPER (1971)

Jack the Ripper is one of most famous serial killers of all time. This movie hypothesizes, what if Jack the Ripper had a daughter? And what if, after seeing him commit one of his crimes, she became so traumatized that, when circumstances trigger that memory, she takes on the personality of Dear Ol' Dad and murders people in a trance state? For a long time, this movie could only be seen in a drastically censored version, but now you can see it uncut, and some of the violence is pretty startling.

PLAY MISTY FOR ME (1971)

In one of the first movies to deal with the subject of “stalking” (even though that term would not come into use for another couple of decades), Clint Eastwood plays a D.J. who becomes the center of attention of an obsessed fan (played by Jessica Walter, who would later become a regular on *ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT* and *ARCHER*), who becomes more and more clingy and demanding, finally erupting into rage and homicidal mania. *FATAL ATTRACTION* would use this movie as a template, with Glenn Close stepping into the Jessica Walter part (and adding a new wrinkle to the story with the boiled bunny). I've noticed that the tagline on the poster, “The scream you hear may be your own” was copied from the poster for Hitchcock's *THE BIRDS*.

DRESSED TO KILL (1980)

Brian DePalma was often cited as the modern-day Hitchcock, or, if the critics were feeling uncomplimentary, as a Hitchcock Wanna-Be. His films very frequently quoted scenes or themes from Hitchcock films, such as REAR WINDOW, VERTIGO and especially PSYCHO. DRESSED TO KILL very definitely invokes memories of PSYCHO. Even the title seems to be a playful reference to PSYCHO's plot, while Angie Dickinson and Nancy Allen function as "Hitchcock blondes" but in a more modern context. Also, as in PSYCHO, we seem to following a particular narrative path, when our main character is suddenly murdered by an insane killer. DePalma's film brought down the wrath of feminists of the time, who condemned the film (and DePalma himself) as misogynist. Even so, it remains one of his best films.

CRUISING (1980)

Another controversial film, about a serial killer taking victims from New York's gay bars, in particular the bars connected to the gay S & M scene. The gay community didn't wait for the movie to be released before they protested against it. There were some protests that took place on location, while the movie was being shot. The gay world shown here is depicted as unsettling and scary, which would have the effect of feeding into straight audience's feelings of homophobia. The somewhat improbable story has Al Pacino as a cop assigned to go undercover as a gay man in an attempt to nab the killer. But as events unfold, the story seems to get muddled and unclear. Director William Friedkin may have been deliberately trying to make the movie ambiguous, but audiences found it frustrating. There are many questions/possible interpretations left at the end. Is Pacino the killer? Or did he somehow become unhinged by his experiences and committed only the last murder? For that matter, did posing as a gay man make him gay? (a very reactionary view which should be criticized) Or was he gay all along, and this just brought out a latent side of his personality? Why would a straight man take on such an assignment, since having sex with other men would likely be part of maintaining cover? None of this is given a definite answer.

THE PSYCHOPATH (1966)

A British film, with a screenplay written by none other than Robert Bloch, the author of the original novel PSYCHO, which Hitchcock made into his classic film. Just from the title, you can tell that Bloch is plagiarizing from himself, if only just a little bit. Murders are being committed with the unique twist that the killer leaves next to the corpse a doll which is a perfect replica of the victim. The police find a suspect who had a connection to all the victims: a middle aged woman who is obsessed with dolls, and who lives in a house crammed to the rafters with them. Only problem is, she's in a wheelchair, so she couldn't be the murderer. Or could she? But she also has a devoted son. As the movie goes on, events become more irrational, and the mother-son relationship becomes more twisted than we first thought. The ending is sort of like PSYCHO in reverse: instead of going down into the basement to find a terrible secret, the Final Girl climbs up a steep flight of stairs to find...a terrible secret.

DIE! DIE! MY DARLING! (1965)

Part of the trend of films trying to copy the success of **WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?** (while the title copies the cadence of **HUSH HUSH SWEET CHARLOTTE**), where we find actresses from Hollywood's Golden Age now past their prime (too old to play romantic leads) and playing psycho killers. This film has the legendary **TALLULAH BANKHEAD** as Mrs. Trefoile, a religious fanatic who holds her dead son's fiancée (played by **STEFANIE POWERS**) captive and heaps various abuses on her so she will fit to join the dead son in heaven! And yes, at one point she says to her, "You must Die....Die, my Darling." Famed Canadian **Donald Sutherland** has a small part (early in his career), playing a mentally deficient household servant. The movie also contains a couple of visual references to Hitchcock's **PSYCHO**, like the lightbulb swinging over the face of a corpse.

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991)

More than any other movie, including MANHUNTER, this kicked off the intense public fascination with serial killers that continues to this day. Even though both Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins had been working in the Hollywood system for years, it was this movie that catapulted both of their careers into the stratosphere. The movie swept the Oscars that year, and we started seeing more serial killers not only in film but in all other media as well: TV, books, true crime podcasts, you name it. Writer Thomas Harris, realizing he was on to a good thing, wrote 2 more books about Hannibal Lector, and Hopkins would end up playing the part 2 more times, in HANNIBAL (which Jodie Foster declined to appear in, being replaced by Julianne Moore) and a remake of the earlier story, RED DRAGON. Audiences were fascinated by the way Hopkins managed to be charming and deadly at the same time, like they were being hypnotized by a cobra.

THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED (1970)

A somewhat obscure Spanish horror film that used to play on late night TV. It deserves more recognition. A boarding school for young girls who are either delinquent, orphaned, or unwanted by their families provides plenty of victims for a serial killer. The Girls' School setting was obviously an influence on *SUSPIRIA*. Only two murders are shown onscreen, but they are filmed in a very interesting, stylish way. The director knows how to build suspense and create a scary atmosphere. And then you have the surprise ending, where the killer and his motive is revealed. It's a twist that beats the pants off anything that M. Night Shyamalan would come up with.

REPULSION (1965)

Roman Polanski began making a reputation for himself with this unsettling, nearly clinical telling of a young girl's descent into schizophrenia, homicidal behaviour and finally catatonia, brought on by isolation and a fear of the opposite sex. Hints are dropped that a traumatic incident from her past is the root of it all, but nothing is overtly stated. As her grasp on reality disintegrates, the audience is made to share her point of view, so her hallucinations are presented as reality. It occurred to me that at the end, because of her non-responsive state, no one would be able to tell what had actually happened, or even know that she was the murderer. They would probably assume she was one of the victims.

THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE (1970)

Cult director Dario Argento made his debut with this film, which inspired a slew (if you don't mind the pun) of imitations in Italy, and also set the pattern for his entire career. The witness to an attempted murder (one of several murders being committed by a mystery killer) believes he saw some sort of clue, but can't place what it was. The murders continue, and his own life is threatened as he conducts his own investigation. The final reveal shows that he misread the entire situation. The notion of the half-remembered clue, or mis-perceived clue, would be a plot device that Argento would use again and again, in films like DEEP RED, SUSPIRIA, and TENEBRAE, to name just a few. I remember walking by the ODEON theatre in 1970 where this movie was playing, and seeing the poster, I thought this movie looked too scary for me to see. (Hey, I was only 9 years old, okay?) Now I own both the poster and the movie.