The Fear of Mrs. Bates
The Use of Psychoanalytical Aspects, Anticipation and Retrospection in Robert Bloch’s *Psycho*

Rebecca Spolander
Abstract

This essay focuses on psychoanalytical notions in Robert Bloch’s novel *Psycho*. The theoretical framework is based on Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis. Slavoj Žižek’s idea that the house serves as a symbol of Freud’s concept of the Super-Ego, Ego and Id is presented and further developed. Moreover, it is exemplified how the idea of repression as a defense mechanism can be traced in the novel. It is then explained that repression is used as a tool for making the reader feel sympathy for Norman Bates. In addition, Wolfgang Iser’s reception theory is used to explain how Bloch uses gaps and pre-intentions in order to create anticipation and retrospection in the reader to produce suspense and horror. The intention is to prove that the attention to the psychological issues is what makes the monster of the novel more sympathetic and recognizable to us as readers. Thus, the result is that we position ourselves closer to the monster, which leaves us wondering if we could, due to our shared psychology, be monsters as well.

Keywords

Table of Contents

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 4
2 Psychoanalysis and Reception theory ................................................................................................. 6
3 Notions of the Super-Ego, the Ego and the Id in Bloch’s novel *Psycho* ........................................... 11
4 Repression as a defense mechanism in the novel ............................................................................... 17
5 Bloch’s use of gaps, anticipation and retrospection ......................................................................... 20
6 Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 27
Works Cited .......................................................................................................................................... 30
1 Introduction

“I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times” (Bloch 38). Norman Bates utters these words to Mary Crane, suggesting that even though we think we are in total control of our behavior, we can not ignore the fact that our mind is a complex construction which we sometimes lose control over. This essay explores how the attention to psychological issues creates a source of horror in Robert Bloch’s novel Psycho. The focus is also on how horror is produced in the process where the reader actively modifies his/her perception of Norman’s character.

The theoretical framework is based on Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis; this theory will be complemented with Wolfgang Iser’s reception-theory. The aim is to, first, identify aspects of psychoanalysis, specifically the concept of Super-Ego, Ego and Id, as well as the idea of repression as a defense mechanism, and investigate how the reader might perceive Norman’s character through these. Then I will use Wolfgang Iser’s ‘reception theory’ to explain how through anticipation and retrospection the reader gradually acquire a greater understanding of Norman’s mind, which in turn produces suspense and horror.

Psychoanalysis as a form of therapy aims at making the unconscious conscious. It is a process where the psychoanalyst explores the mind of the patient, by gradually revealing and realizing the unconscious matter. Therefore, psychoanalysis correlates with the function of reception-theory in how the reader takes the role of the analyst as he helps with completing the narrative and to make connections between events, thus gradually realizing the meaning of the literary text. In Psycho, the gaps and retrospection help the reader to gradually realize the true nature of Norman Bates as well as obtain a greater understanding of his intricate mind. As I suggest that the reader is, in a sense, diagnosing Norman through the reading experience, my use of Freud can be considered to be somewhat “folk psychological”.

The novel Psycho is written by Robert Bloch, who was an American writer. The novel is narrated by a third-person omniscient point-of-view, where different chapters tell the story from different characters' perspectives, therefore the reader experiences the story from parallel points of view. Psycho tells the story of a young woman called Mary Crane who is on the run because she has stolen a large sum of money. On her way to her lover Sam Loomis, she stops at the Bates Motel which is run by Norman Bates. Bates lives with his dominant mother, named Norma Bates, in an old house close to the motel. At first, Norman seems like any other man,
but the reader soon finds out that he is really a very troubled person. At night, Bates’ mother comes into Mary’s room and murders her. A few days later, Mary’s sister Lila Crane, along with Sam and a private detective named Arbogast, drives to the Bates Motel in hopes of finding the now missing Mary. There, the truth is revealed – Norman’s mother has been dead for several years. It is Norman who has committed the murders at the house, dressed and acting as “Mother”.

*Psycho* was first published in 1959, yet it still feels contemporary and has continued to intrigue and horrify us to this day. In 1960, Bloch’s novel was adapted into a movie of the same name by Alfred Hitchcock. The movie became a huge success and is today considered a classic; therefore, it is likely that Hitchcock’s movie is more well-known than Bloch’s novel. Most people would agree that *Psycho* belongs to the horror genre because it contains a vicious killer, a creepy setting and a grinning, shriveled corpse. The intention of the horror genre is to induce feelings of horror or terror upon its reader. Traditionally this is done by exposing the reader to mystical settings, scenes of gore and dark supernatural creatures and monsters. Bloch’s novel differs in that respect as the main source of horror is not the depiction of monsters and gore, instead, the horror effect is created by the reader’s active participation in the reading process.

*Psycho* is a popular subject for investigation among scholars and several studies have been carried out on both the novel and the movie. In the article “The Death-Mother in Psycho: Hitchcock, Femininity, and Queer Desire” David Greven examines the role of Norma Bates as the essential subject of horror. Similarly to this essay, Greven concludes that it is the fear of Norman’s mother that produces feelings of fear and horror. However, Greven’s study is primarily concerned with the concept of Mrs. Bates as a maternal figure and the character’s relevance to issues of femininity and queer sexuality. This essay only focuses on the use of the character of Mrs. Bates as a narrative tool for anticipation and deception; the character of Mrs. Bates is not itself the subject of the analysis. Furthermore, in her study “Coveting the Feminine: Victor Frankenstein, Norman Bates, and Buffalo Bill”, Diane Negra focuses on the split in Norman’s personality, which is also the focus of this essay. However, Negra uses Lacan as a framework when arguing that the split in Norman’s personality is produced due to the imposition of gender categories, while this analysis is based on Freud’s concept of the Super-Ego, Ego and Id and argues that the alter egos created is a symbol of said concept. What further separates this study from other studies is how the combination of psychoanalytic theory and
reception theory is used in combination to explain how the reader acquires knowledge of Norman’s monstrous mind and thus realize the novel’s main source of horror.

I will argue that the attention to the psychological issues makes the monster more sympathetic and recognizable to the reader, which ultimately is the main source of horror. This response is produced in the process where the reader actively changes his/her perception of Norman from an ordinary man to monster.

This would suggest that the novel will stay modern and contemporary as well as universally relatable. This aspiration to prove that Bloch portrays a character who is monstrous due to psychological aspects is also important because it widens our perception of the horror genre and what themes it involves.

2 Psychoanalysis and reception theory

Psychoanalytic literary criticism builds on the techniques of psychoanalysis which is a form of therapy based on specific ideas of how the unconscious influences the human mind and the behavior. Teresa De Lauretis explains that even if psychoanalysis is drawn to the scientific discourse due to its theoretical construction, the focus on figurative meaning and language aligns it with literature (De Lauretis 114). De Lauretis further explains that literary analysis and psychoanalysis are similar processes. The intention of using literary analysis is to extract meaning and the message that the author is intending to convey by looking at, for example, symbols and metaphors. The psychoanalytical process works in a similar way; the aim of psychoanalysis is to expose the unconscious that affects the psychological processes by observing material effects, such as behavior (De Lauretis 114).

The examination of psychoanalytical notions in the text focuses mainly on defense mechanisms, specifically on repression which is a key concept of this theory. Repression is a defense mechanism of suppressing instinctual demands (Freud, *Psychopathology* 324) or traumatic events (Freud, *Metapsychology* 147) which are forced out of the conscious mind and into the realm of the unconscious (Freud, *Psychopathology* 242). The focus is also on Freud's idea of the Super-Ego, Ego and Id which are the three parts, or realms into which Freud divided the structural model of the psyche (*Introductory Lectures* 104).
Freud's theory of the Super-Ego, Ego, and Id serves as the framework for this essay. Freud suggested that the human psyche is divided into, not two as was the previous assumption, but into three categories (*Introductory Lectures* 21). This division of personality corresponds with a division of the mind where the Ego would represent the realistic and organized, the Super-Ego would identify the critical and moralizing function and the Id would correspond to the unconscious instinctual drives (Freud, *Metapsychology* 22).

According to Freud, the Id is a dark, unreachable part of our personality. He describes it as a negative character which is a complete contrast to the Ego (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 105). It represents the unconscious, primitive instincts, passions and impulses (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 106). The Id is in control of inherited human drives such as instincts and sexual and aggressive impulses. However, it can be seen as a chaotic realm of the psyche which has no organization and does not produce a collective will. The Id is entirely driven by passion and strives for immediate satisfaction of the instinctual needs according to the pleasure principle (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 106). Tobias Deutsch further explains that its strive for satisfaction is what drives the Ego to act. Because no logical laws or moral judgements apply to the Id, it is the job of the Ego to control the orders that come from the Id (Deutsch 378). Freud explains that between an impulsive need coming from the Id and this need being translated into an action the Ego has interjected a postponement in the form of thought activity. By thinking before acting the Ego has overthrown the “pleasure principle that dominates the id and replaced it by the reality principle” (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 108). This process is known as reality testing (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 108) and will prove more successful for the individual than acting out on every impulse.

As the conscious and reasoning part of the mind, the Ego can be distinguished from both the Id and the Super-Ego. The Ego is connected to the external world because of the awareness of reality and the function of consciousness is created in the Ego (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 107). The Ego is influenced and shaped by the real world (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 108). In addition to controlling the primitive impulses of the Id (Deutsch 379) and adapting these impulses to external reality, the function of the Ego is also to accommodate the requirements of the Super-Ego. To perform these tasks and to evade conflict from the other divisions, the Ego makes use of defense mechanisms such as those presented above (Deutsch 379).
The Super-Ego represents the moralizing conscience and ideals of the mind. Pamela Trevithick explains that this division of the mind provides rules, moral codes and prohibitions as mechanisms for controlling behaviour (Trevithick 394) and influences the actions of the Ego (Deutsch 379). If the Id is regarded as representing primitive pleasures and instincts and the Ego as representing what is real and common sense, the Super-Ego represents the ideal and moralizing conscience (Trevithick 394). Freud argues that the Super-Ego has a certain degree of autonomy over the Ego. He further explains that the Ego sometimes can be helpless against the demands of the Super-Ego. When there is tension between the Ego and the Super-Ego this is expressed by a moral sense of guilt (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 92). Furthermore, in the intervals when the Super-Ego is less dominant, the Ego experiences a delightful stage of intoxication. The liberated Ego celebrates its conquest of the Super-Ego by, almost in a manic state, satisfying all its appetites (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 93). Additionally, Freud argues that the instance of the Super-Ego can be identified as a parental agency (*Introductory Lectures* 95). The Super-Ego has the same role as the parent as morally guiding the child.

The three parts of the mind all have their own function and defenses that they use to protect the ego from threats. Moral anxiety in the form of feelings of guilt and shame is what emerges from the Super Ego when personal, moral or social codes have been broken. Neurotic anxiety is described by sudden desires and impulses which arise from the Id in order to put up a defense. These reactions are common to all people (Trevithick 394). Building on the idea that the mind has methods of defense, the following section explains the classic psychoanalytical concept of defense mechanisms with a particular focus on repression.

Freud explains that repression is a psychological procedure for avoiding, admitting and recognizing ideas that are painful and potentially damaging to the individual and preventing the idea from becoming conscious (*Psychopathology* 242). Defense mechanisms have two key features: the first is that it is used to guard us against distressing ideas or impulses which are threatening the well-being of the individual (Breuer and Freud 291). It is a psychological “attempt at flight from instinctual danger” (Freud, *Psychopathology* 303). Examples of this can be protecting us from thoughts, feelings and actions that signal danger or are anxiety-provoking (Trevithick 391). If the person does not have the ability to cope with such feelings, they could be potentially damaging to the individual in terms of “later illnesses and functional disturbances” (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 182). Examples of such feelings are sadness, guilt and shame. The second aspect of defense mechanisms is that they hold the ability to distort our
perception of reality. Trevithick explains that when we repress memories that would be potentially damaging to us, we also distort what is remembered. The result is that it might be difficult to acquire an accurate depiction of actual experiences and events in one's life (Trevithick 391). Repression is considered to be the most dangerous mechanism. The consequences of other defense mechanisms are serious, but they do not produce as great a change in the personality as repression might do. The disassociation from the Ego combined with a withdrawal of consciousness from whole sections of emotions may destroy the integrity of the personality forever (Trevithick 395).

To add to the psychoanalytic interpretation, the analysis will be complemented with an analysis on how Bloch’s narrative technique creates anticipation and retrospection in the reader, which in turn create suspense and horror. Wolfgang Iser developed the modern criticism known as ‘reception-theory’ in which he includes the ideas from phenomenological theory. The theory explains the reader’s experience as a valuable way of realizing the literary text because it gives the reader a chance to imagine what is not formulated by the narrator (Iser 294). Iser argues that a literary work is more than just the text; he explains that the text comes to life when it is realized by the reader. The realization of the text is produced by the different narrative tools that the author uses in combination with the reader’s individual disposition. The aesthetic realm of the text is created by the reader, through narrative techniques provided by the author, and the reader with the help of his/her imagination creates a virtual dimension of the text. In other words, the reader brings the literary text into existence (Iser 298). Iser claims that if the reader was to be given the whole story without the possibility to integrate his/her own imagination, the result would be that the text would resemble a factual text which would leave the reader bored and possibly disappointed (296). Iser stresses that it is therefore important that the literary text is structured in a way that it will give the reader a chance to use his imagination and work things out for himself (296); this is done by leaving gaps in the narrative. When the whole story is not presented to the reader, he must use his own imagination to complete the narrative. The unwritten part of a text is an example of what stimulates the reader’s creative participation (Iser 296).

Furthermore, Iser argues that the various perspectives that a text presents to the reader offer new ways for the reader to understand the text; the reader’s apprehension of the reading develops as it progresses. When the reader begins the work of interpreting the text, the process ultimately awakes a response within the reader himself. Reading creates a dynamic relationship
between reader and text (Iser 295). The world that a literary text presents is constructed of what is referred to as intentional sentence correlative. Phenomenological theory examines how sentence sequences act upon another. The idea is that sentences make claims or statements that are indicators of what is to come and they also form an anticipation of what is to come – this is known as pre-intentions (Iser 297). The anticipation one experiences when reading a text is continually modified as the reading progresses. By equally calculating and evaluating an upcoming event, the experience of suspense is produced, and according to Noël Carroll, suspense is a key narrative element in horror fiction (128).

Each intentional sentence correlative opens a new horizon – a new possibility – which is modified by the following sentences. The expectations given to the reader by the text will spark an interest in knowing what is to come. The modification of sentences will also have a retrospective effect (Iser 298). The intelligence we gather as the text progresses will provide a new understanding of what we have already read, thus the main purpose of retrospection is to give answers to questions that have not yet been answered (Carroll 134). Whilst being subjected to the anticipation of what is to come and the retrospect, the reader establishes a relation between past, present and future (Iser 298) similar to what we experience in real life. Thus, the reader creates a virtual dimension that feels very real, making the reader feel as if he himself is participating in the text (Iser 298). The virtual dimension is what is created in the dynamic relationship between reader and text and it is the virtual dimension that “transforms the text into an experience for the reader” (Iser 300). Accompanying this theory, Carroll explains that the characters in works of horror demonstrate for us the way in which to react to the monsters in fiction: the reader’s emotions mirror the emotional responses of the characters (17). Because the reader experiences the story from the protagonist’s point of view, the reader begins to sympathize with the protagonist (Carroll 89). Also, when a sympathetic character is threatened, the reader begins to feel fear (Carroll 90). The emotional responses produced in the reader contribute to a more life-like reading experience. In order to analyse the creation of horror in reading Psycho, I will next explain how the psychological aspects provide an understanding of Norman’s mind and how concepts of reception theory are used to create suspense and horror in the reader.
3 Notions of the Super-Ego, the Ego and the Id in Bloch’s novel *Psycho*

The Bates House can be seen as a symbol of the Super-Ego, Ego and Id of Norman Bates. Slavoj Žižek explains in the documentary “The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema” (2006) that the house that Norman Bates lives in is a symbol of the structural model of Freud’s division of the psyche - which is separated into the Super-Ego, the Ego and the Id (as discussed in the previous section). The house, which is situated right next to the Bates Motel, is an old house that consists of three floors. Each floor represents a division of Bates’ mind.

According to Žižek, the first floor is a symbol of Norman’s Super-Ego (“The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema”). In addition to this claim, it is my view that Norman’s mother also is a symbol of the Super-Ego because the first floor of the house is where Norman’s mother Norma Bates’ bedroom is. It is also the place where Norman keeps his mother’s corpse. When she was alive, Norma Bates was a dominating and controlling woman, who governed her son with rules and moral standards to protect him from feelings of lust and desire which she considered to be morally corrupting. When Norman drives Mary’s car into the swamp to hide the evidence of her stay at the motel, he tries to make sense of why “Mother” has killed her. He thinks to himself:

> She had flaunted herself before him, she had deliberately tempted him with the perversion of her nakedness. Why, he’d wanted to kill her himself when she did that, because Mother had taught him about evil and the ways of evil and thou shalt not suffer a bitch to live. (Bloch 62)

Norman’s thoughts reflect his mother’s view of sex and desire and the quotation shows how her ideas still influence him. Therefore, the idea of Mrs. Bates being a symbol of the Super-Ego corresponds with Freud’s previously mentioned claim that the Super-Ego acts as the parental agency providing moral guidance to the child (*Introductory Lectures* 95).

The description of Mrs. Bates as a controlling woman, who imposed feelings of guilt upon her son, is much related to how Trevithick explains the function of the Super-Ego which produces moral anxiety in the form of feelings of shame and guilt in order to protect the Ego from threats when moral or social codes have been broken (394). It was Norman who murdered his mother. When he did this, his personality split in two and Norman created an alternate personality which was still governed by the rules and morality of Mrs. Bates. This is explained
by a psychologist called Dr. Steiner in the novel. Because there are two versions of Mrs. Bates in the novel; the actual, dead Mrs. Bates and Norman’s alternate personality, I have chosen to refer to the character created by Norman’s psyche as “Mother”.

Žižek also claims that the ground floor of the Bates House is a symbol of the Ego (“The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema”). Žižek does not develop this claim further, though, as previously explained, the function of the Ego is to connect the Super-Ego and the Id with rational decisions. Because the ground floor is the only floor in the house which has a door that opens to the external world, this can be seen to correspond with Freud’s idea of the function of the Ego as a reality-tester and it being influenced by the real world (Introductory Lectures 108). Furthermore, when Norman moves around the ground floor, he behaves relatively normal and controlled. It is on this floor that he seems to be himself, where he reflects on his own life and make his own decisions as a grown man without the interference of his mother’s influence. However, Norman is constantly aware of the moralizing presence of the Super-Ego (“Mother”), who is keeping an eye on him from upstairs. When he later invites Mary to have dinner with him at his house, he is aware of “Mother’s” judging presence on the first floor:

Just getting through the meal had been an ordeal. He’d been afraid Mother would make a scene . . . But she had kept very quiet, almost too quiet, as though she was listening. Probably that’s just what she had been doing. You could lock Mother up, but you couldn’t keep her from listening. (Bloch 44-45)

The fact that Norman is unable to prevent “Mother” from observing his actions corresponds with Freud’s argument that the Ego sometimes is helpless against the Super-Ego which has a certain degree of autonomy over the Ego (Introductory Lectures 92).

After Mrs. Bates, or “Mother”, has murdered both Mary and Arbogast, Norman feels that he can no longer control his mother. Norman is not only afraid that his mother will continue to harm other people, he is even more afraid that if she does, someone will find out that she exists and take her away from him. Norman expresses this fear when he thinks the following:

He mustn’t call the police. Not even now, knowing what she had done . . . He couldn’t take Mother away from this and see her locked up in a bare cell . . . the police couldn’t find out about Mother and what she was like. They’d put her away to rot. No matter what she’d done, she didn’t deserve that. (Bloch 52-53)
When Norman realizes that the police will come and search the house, the fear of the police discovering his mother makes him decide to move her from her bedroom upstairs down to the cellar where he locks her up. Norman felt like “He had to control her, and he would” (Bloch 115). Moving the Super-Ego from the overlooking position of the upstairs to the secluded area of the cellar can be understood to be a symbolic representation of a shift of dominance in his alter egos and a change in the structural balance of the psyche. Žižek explains that this action is a metaphor for the psychological agency of Super-Ego dominance to Id being the controlling force as he argues that the cellar is a symbol of the Id (“The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema”). Žižek further explains that “the Super-Ego is always bombarding us with impossible orders, laughing at us when we cannot ever fulfill its demand. The more we obey it, the more it makes us guilty” (“The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema”). Guilt is what has controlled Norman his entire life, his mother used it as a tool of dominance while she was alive, and after she died her character continued to control Norman as a manifestation of the Super-Ego. In my opinion, it is therefore plausible that Norman is transferring the dominance to the instinctive Id instead, in order to escape the feelings of guilt.

Also, in addition to trying to avoid feelings of guilt, I consider the move to be an act of self-preservation. Norman thinks to himself: “As long as he was careful about Mother, there’d be no risk. He had to protect her, and he had to protect others” (Bloch 96). Norman knows that he will be lost if “Mother” is taken away from him. Because “Mother” is created as a defense mechanism, Norman will be robbed of this method of defense if she is to be found, which will ultimately destroy him. Unfortunately for Norman, he could not know that by moving the Super-Ego into the realm of the Id, he combines the two into one terrible force which has an overpowering influence on the Ego. Freud described the Id as a chaotic realm driven by passion and impulses in strives for immediate satisfaction of the instinctual needs (Introductory Lectures 106). In my reading, this is exemplified by the risk “Mother” takes when she tries to murder Lila even though there are several people present and the chance of getting caught is substantial. This reckless action is what ultimately exposes ‘Mother’ to the world. In the last chapter of the novel, there is a change in the narrative perspective, the last pages are narrated from “Mother’s” point of view. She thinks to herself: “The bad man and the bad boy were both dead, or else they were just part of the dream. And the dream had gone away for good. She was the only one left, and she was real” (Bloch 174). This proves that combining the dominant Super-Ego with the Id, Norman has merged the alter egos into a ruling force that has completely overpowered the Ego – “Mother” is there to stay. The fact that the “Mother”-identity has taken
over Norman’s identity also corresponds with Trevithick’s claim that the consequences of defense mechanisms are serious and can destroy the integrity of the personality forever (395).

When Lila searches the house, the reader gets an alternative insight into Norman’s mind, and this new aspect is crucial in how the reader acquires an understanding of the different layers of Norman’s mind. As previously explained Iser argues that various perspectives offer new ways for the reader to understand the text (Iser 295). Similarly, when analysing the psychological aspects of Norman’s mind, Lila’s alternate perspective functions as a tool for the reader to examine the unconscious matter; the psychic content that Norman himself wants to keep hidden from the reader, or, is simply unaware of. As Iser explains, when the reader begins the work of interpreting the text, the process ultimately produces a response within the reader (295); considering Carroll’s claim that the reader’s emotions mirror the emotional responses of the characters (17), the emotional response produced in the reader is the same feelings that Lila experiences when she explores the interior of the house; discomfort, shock and fear. The anticipation that Lila’s presence in the house creates in the reader is something I will explain further in section 5.

Mary’s sister Lila is worried because her sister is missing. She goes to find Sam, Mary’s lover, to ask him if he knows what has happened to her sister. Sam has no idea what has happened to Mary, and soon a detective called Arbogast shows up. He has been hired to find Mary and the stolen money. Sam and Lila convince Arbogast that they are not involved in Mary’s disappearance and they start working together to find her. Arbogast decides to follow a lead that points to the Bates Motel. When he gets to the motel, he interrogates Norman and demands to meet his mother, and as he enters the house he is immediately killed. Lila and Sam get worried when they do not hear back from Arbogast after he left so they decide to drive out to the Bates Motel themselves. Lila wants to talk to Mrs. Bates in order to find out what has happened so while Sam distracts Norman Lila enters the house determined to find Norman’s mother. It is at this point when Lila is alone in the Bates House that the reader gets a thorough description of what the house, the symbol of Norman’s mind, looks like from an outsider’s perspective.

When Lila first enters the house, she is slightly shocked by the interior of the place: “Lila had never seen such a place except in a museum” (Bloch 155-156). She continues to describe the interior as old, unmodern and even ugly. When Lila enters Mrs. Bates’ bedroom, she describes her experience as physically stepping into another era. She “found herself there,
back in the world as it had been long before she was born. The décor of this room had been outmoded many years before Bate’s mother died” (Bloch 158). Joseph W. III. Smith explains in his book *The Psycho File: A Comprehensive Guide to Hitchcock’s Classic Shocker* that the interior of Mrs. Bates’ bedroom is working to demonstrate that Norman’s whole world is “dead, frozen, trapped in the past” (123). When Lila enters Norman’s bedroom, the scene is arguably no different: “Bates’s bedroom—singularly small, singularly cramped, with a low cot more suitable for a little boy than a grown man” (Bloch 156). Lila describes Norman’s bed as a bed which is suitable for a small child, not an adult. Norman is now a grown man, yet, he has chosen to stay in his cramped old room even though he could choose any room in the house for his bedroom. In my view, this choice confirms the idea that it is his mother who dominates his Super-Ego. Also, the emphasis on the room being singularly cramped and small suggests that he has no intentions of sharing his room with anybody and he is still suppressed and confined to the position of an obedient son.

However, in my reading, it is not only the first floor that is described to be a curious display of past times. The ground floor, the symbol of Norman’s Ego, is also described as frozen in time. When Mary first entered the house she too was shocked by the inside:

> At first glance she couldn’t quite believe what she saw; she hadn’t dreamed that such places still existed in this day and age. Usually, even when a house is old, there are some signs of alteration and improvement in the interior. But the parlor she peered at had never been “modernized”; the floral wallpaper, the dark, heavy, ornately scrolled mahogany woodwork, the turkey-red carpet, the high-backed, over-stuffed furniture and the paneled fireplace were straight out of the Gay Nineties. There wasn’t even a television set to intrude its incongruity in the scene. (Bloch 32)

What Mary finds shocking is that everything she sees appears to belong in the past. Nothing has changed or been replaced since Norman was a child. This suggests that it is not only the Super-Ego that has been shaped by Norman’s childhood, his whole identity is stuck in the past, frozen, it has stopped developing and no attempts have been made to change it.

Another significant thing that we learn from Lila’s exploration of the house is how the content of the rooms hints at Norman’s impossible desire to escape and connect to the rest of the world. When Lila searched Norman’s bedroom, she found a bookshelf filled with books
about popular science: “Lila found herself pausing, puzzling, then peering in perplexity at the incongruous contents of Norman Bates’s library … These were not the books of a small boy, and they were equally out of place in the home of a rural motel proprietor” (Bloch 157). The science books are probably the only things that Norman himself has chosen to bring into his room; with no TV or radio, they are a way for him to get knowledge of the outside world. We know that Norman lives isolated in the old house which he rarely leaves; thus, Smith suggests that the books that he reads are the only way for him to connect with the world at large (126). Among his books, there is also a book of pornographic pictures, which indicates the failure of these impossible desires. Norman longs for intimacy and human affection, but he cannot satisfy this need because in real life he even flinches at the bare touch from a woman. So instead he resorts to looking at pictures, “artificial images frozen in a stimulated travesty of physical intimacy” (Smith 126). In my opinion, the signs of Norman’s incapability to relate to the real world make him seem infantile and the reader sympathizes for his incapability to take control of his life. Thus, Lila’s findings have helped create an emotional response in the reader.

The personal belongings that Lila finds when she searches Norman’s and Mrs. Bates’ bedroom offer the reader more uncomfortable intimate details of Norman’s life than we probably would have had if Lila had not invaded his personal space. When Lila searches through a bureau in Norman’s room, she notices that “The bottom drawer was filled with white, shapeless garments which she finally—and most incredulously—identified as nightgowns. Maybe he wore a bedcap, too.” (Bloch 156). In my reading, Lila’s invasion of this personal realm begins to feel like a sort of a violation. Not only is she searching through Norman’s personal belongings, she is mocking his old-fashioned and childish nightwear. This creates a sense that the reader and Lila are ridiculing Norman behind his back. In addition, Smith argues that Lila entering the house is also a violation since she is secretly going through the house while Sam is distracting Norman (124). Arguably, at this point in the story, the reader is not yet aware that Norman is the madman who is committing the murders. Our only knowledge is that Norman is afraid of his mother being confronted, which would result in his failure to protect both his mother and Lila. Therefore, the reader can feel even more sympathy for Norman, who almost seems bullied into a corner and forced to share his innermost personal secrets. Sympathy is important because it draws the reader emotionally closer to the character of Norman, making him feel more recognizable, this will ultimately raise the question which is the main source of horror in the novel; could we be monsters as well? The reader’s involvement in the events will be analysed more closely in section 5.
4 Repression as a defense mechanism in the novel

Norman’s defense mechanisms are slowly turning him into a monster. Psychiatrist Dr. Steiner, who examined Bates when he was admitted to the mental hospital, explains to Sam and the Sheriff that after Norman killed his mother, he could not accept his own actions, so he began to repress the feelings of guilt. When his mind repressed the murder, his mother’s personality manifested itself as a division of his personality:

“They knew, at the time, that he was hysterical from shock and excitement. What they didn’t know is that while writing that note, he’d changed. Apparently, now that it was all over, he couldn’t stand the loss of his mother. He wanted her back. As he wrote the note in her handwriting, addressed to himself, he literally changed his mind. And Norman, or a part of him, became his mother.” (Bloch 170)

The function of defense mechanisms is to protect us from feelings of guilt that can provoke moral anxiety (Trevithick 391). What we can understand from Bates’ behavior is that he uses repression as a defense mechanism. When Norman murdered his mother, he could not cope with the emotions that he experienced afterwards, so he repressed the memory of killing her. In addition to repressing the murder, Dr. Steiner also explains that Norman has developed multiple personalities (Bloch 170). One of the personalities is Norman, the other has manifested itself in the shape of Mrs. Bates. There are literary scholars who are of a different opinion, like Julie Tharp, who argues that Norman is deliberately dressing up and acting as his mother when he feels threatened or is triggered by sexual desires. According to Tharp the explanation of this behavior would be that Norman battles with a fear of the feminine, which he struggles with by alternately performing it and destroying it (106).

However, in my opinion, Norman is not deliberately dressing and acting as Mrs. Bates. The fact that Norman is never conscious of when his “Mother”-alter ego is going to take control of his actions, nor can he remember the events that take place when “Mother” is in control, suggests that dressing up as Mrs. Bates is not a deliberate action. Dressing up and acting as Mrs. Bates is rather an unconscious action carried out by an alternate personality who is not acknowledged by Norman himself with the intention to repress feelings of guilt. One evidence of this is when Norman wakes up from being passed out and he looks into Mary’s room to see why the shower is still running, he panics because of the blood on her bathroom floor. The
reader knows that the blood comes from Mary being stabbed, but Norman thinks that “She must have slipped, she must have fallen and hurt herself” (Bloch 50). He is completely unaware of what has happened to her. He only comes to the conclusion that “Mother” has killed her after he remembers that “Mother had keys to the motel too” (Bloch 50). This example also corresponds with Trevithick’s claim that defense mechanisms have the ability to distort our perception of reality (391), not only our perceptions of what has happened in the past, but in Bates’ case, the perception of present events. Trevithick explains that this is especially damaging because the disassociation from the Ego combined with a disconnection of consciousness from whole sections of emotions may destroy a personality forever (395). This is what is slowly happening to Norman, he is transitioning into someone else, a monster. However, the transformation is not brought on by some supernatural external force. The transition is controlled by the psyche, a human feature we all share with Norman. Thus, we are not different from him. This is what makes the novel horrifying, we cannot separate us from the monster that is Norman Bates.

In addition to repressing feelings of guilt, Norman has also repressed his sexual desires. Throughout his entire life, his mother has raised him to believe that sexual emotions and feelings of desire towards a woman is something dirty and wrong. When Mary Crane checks in at his motel, he starts to experience these feelings, but he is able to control his emotions. The reader gets an idea of how repressed his sexual emotions are when Norman invites Mary to have dinner with him. Mary notices that Norman is embarrassed to speak with her: “He turned away, but not before she caught a glimmer of his reddened face. Why, he was actually embarrassed!” (Bloch 31). Mary smiles at the idea of a grown man being shy to talk to a woman. Later that night she is once more surprised by his insecurities towards the opposite sex: “He was afraid to touch her. That was it. The poor guy was actually afraid to get near a woman!” (Bloch 37). As explained in section 2, Carroll argues that the reader’s emotions mirror the emotional responses of the characters (17). Here, Mary concludes that his shyness must be the reason for his odd behavior at dinner and her sympathy towards Norman is transferred to the reader. Sympathy is important because, through the feelings of sympathy, we build a connection with Norman. In order to feel sympathy, we must somehow recognize something from ourselves in the other character. If Norman was a supernatural being, different from ourselves, we would not have felt the same emotional connection with him. Mary’s reflections on Norman’s behavior function as a narrative tool that provides information necessary for the reader to make an analysis of Norman’s psyche. In combination with the reader’s own
disposition - his/her sympathy for Norman - this example corresponds with Iser’s claim that the different narrative tools that the author uses in combination with the reader’s individual disposition help the reader bring the literary text into existence (Iser 298) making it feel more real. Thus, a conclusion might be that the two aspects of psychoanalysis and reader response are working together to enhance the reading experience for the reader.

However, Norman’s anxious feelings towards Mary are later replaced by anger and fits of rage. Until now the reader has felt sympathy and compassion for the awkward, subdued man, who flinches at the touch of a woman. This sympathy is suddenly mixed with feelings of unease due to Norman’s sudden rage. When Mary has checked in to her room, Norman is arguing with the voice of his mother, he is trying to defy her control over him. As he is attempting to do this, he chooses to follow his instincts and decides to watch Mary through a peep-hole that he has created in the wall. As he is faced with the woman who is beginning to undress in front of his gaze, Norman suddenly takes on a new tone of voice. He thinks to himself: “That’s what the bitches did to you, they perverted you, and she was a bitch, they were all bitches, Mother was a—” (Bloch 48). It is hard to imagine the shy Norman using a word like ‘bitch’, but the reader knows that earlier Norman’s mother had used the same word when referring to Mary. Mrs. Bates had screamed: “If you bring her here, I’ll kill her! I’ll kill the bitch!” (Bloch 44). Because of the change of tone, the judging, aggressive voice which uses the word bitch when referring to an innocent girl can only be assumed to be influenced by the Super-Ego (“Mother”). This example also agrees with Freud’s description of how the Ego feels liberated and free to satisfy its appetites when the Super-Ego’s influence is less dominant (Introductory Lectures 93). Norman feels like he is free to spy on Mary as she undresses. However, we are reminded of Freud’s claim that the Super-Ego has a certain degree of autonomy over the Ego (Introductory Lectures 92), as the Super-Ego (“Mother”) soon steps in and take control over Norman’s personality, making him think of Mary as a cunning bitch. The assumption that “Mother’s” voice is a symbol of Norman’s Super-Ego interfering is confirmed only at the end of the novel, because it is not until then that the reader realizes that Mrs. Bates is not alive, she only exists as a manifestation of Norman’s psyche. Because the reader does not know this yet, he is left with a feeling of unease. The emotional response created in the reader is crucial in creating horror in the novel. This will be further discussed in the following section.
5 Bloch’s use of gaps, anticipation and retrospection

_Psycho_ provides the reader with plenty of gaps in which the reader must resort to his own imagination of what has happened. The gaps are essential to the reader acquiring knowledge about Norman’s twisted mind. As stated in section 2, Iser explains that it is the gaps in the narrative that stimulate the reader’s creative participation (296). It is when the reader is forced to use his imagination to fill in the blanks that the dynamic relationship between reader and text begins. The reader creates a virtual dimension where he brings the literary text into existence (Iser 298) and it is this process that makes the text feel real to us. Even though _Psycho_ is considered to be a horror novel, Bloch does not spend a lot of time depicting the murders. In fact, the murders in _Psycho_ are described in very little detail. The first murder that takes place, the famous shower scene, is simply described as follows: “Mary started to scream, and then the curtains parted further and a hand appeared, holding a butcher’s knife. It was the knife that, a moment later, cut off her scream. And her head” (Bloch 41). By deliberately leaving out gory details, Bloch forces the reader to imagine the details for himself, almost like playing it up like a scene from a film in his/her head. The murder would be described differently depending on who the reader is and how far his/her imagination is willing to go. You could almost say that the narrator tells the reader that Mary has been killed, but in a sense, it is the reader who imagines the knife stabbing Mary’s body, therefore it is the reader who “performs” the murder. The gaps that Bloch leaves in the text forces a dynamic relationship between the reader and the text, drawing the reader closer to both the story and to Norman, which in turn makes the story feel more real to the reader.

The gaps in the text give the reader a chance to imagine the horrors of Mrs. Bates. In _Psycho_ we are experiencing what happens at the motel from Norman’s point of view. When the horrible murders take place, Norman is not there to provide the reader with information on what has happened. He is either asleep or passed out. The moments before “Mother” appears in Mary’s room, Norman begins to fall out of consciousness. He describes it like this: “Then everything was silent. _Sleep, silent sleep._ Norman came to it with a start, jerking his head back. God, it ached! He’d passed out there in the chair, actually passed out” (Bloch 49). Both Norman and the reader return to the scene and are faced with the horrible scene without exactly knowing what has happened. At this point, the reader is yet unaware of Norman’s psychological issues (as previously analysed in sections 3 and 4). The narrator gives information on how the murder was committed, but only a small clue of who committed the act, because the victim never sees
the murderer’s whole face. Just moments before Mary is stabbed in the shower, she noticed the intruder:

At first, when the shower curtains parted, the steam obscured the face. Then she did see it there—just a face, peering through the curtains, hanging midair like a mask. A head-scarf concealed the hair and the glassy eyes stared inhumanly, but it wasn’t a mask, it couldn’t be. The skin had been powdered dead-white and two hectic spots of rouge centered on the cheekbones. It wasn’t a mask. It was the face of a crazy old woman. (Bloch 41)

Even though Mary says that the face that looked at her from behind the knife was the face of an old woman, much emphasis is put on describing the ways in which the features of the person are hidden from view. Mary first thought the intruder was wearing a mask which concealed the murderer’s identity. Even though she tells us that the person was not, in fact, wearing a mask, she describes the face as being covered in heavy make-up. This also functions as a cover-up of the person’s true identity. Because the narrator leaves out that the hair is a wig, how Norman’s features can be found behind the make-up, and how badly the clothes fit on the man’s body, the reader has to imagine what the assumed old lady looks like. Therefore, we are deceived to believe that it is Mrs. Bates. The missing information on Mrs. Bates’ character is particularly important in the reader’s attempt to piece together the information of Norman’s mind. The fact that Mrs. Bates is “hidden” from the reader’s view, even though she is such an influential character, suggests to the reader that she is a key piece in the puzzle that is Norman’s psyche (as analysed in section 3 and 4). As previously explained, to fully understand Norman’s mind is important to the reader as it is the main source of horror.

The gaps in the text stimulate us to imagine what is not there and the idea expands in our mind due to the limitations of knowledge. This is an on-going process and our ideas are constantly modified. Iser claims that the assumption of what has happened, which is worked out by the reader’s imagination, also sets the given situation against a background which gives it far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own because it is a product which only exists due to the interaction between reader and text (Iser 296). An example of this is that the reader might have had an idea of Norman as an awkward, sad and pathetic man until the first murder takes place. We might have questioned why he has not simply moved away from his mother if he thought she was such a pain. When the first murder takes place and the reader gets a hint that it is Mrs. Bates who is responsible for it, our imagination is let loose, and
we can imagine what a terrible character she must be. When Norman wakes up and discovers Mary’s dead body, our idea of the situation and the background has been modified. Our perception of Norman’s character has changed: the reader now knows how dangerous his mother is and that it is because Norman fears her that he has let himself be controlled by her for so long. Suddenly we sympathize with Norman and understand his fear of leaving his mother.

Anticipation is what creates suspense in the novel. It is not only the gaps in the text that modify our experience of the text, but pre-intentions or anticipation forms an expectation of what is to come (Iser 297). In addition to producing suspense, the foreshadowing suggests to the reader that he/she is still in the process of understanding Norman’s true self. The anticipation will not only function as a fulfillment of the reader’s expectation, but it also functions as a continual modification of it (Iser 297). The title *Psycho* itself starts to build up tension and anticipation in the reader even before he/she has started reading because the title leads us to believe that the story will involve some sort of madman. The word psycho refers to a person who is deranged or psychopathic. When reading the word psycho, most people would imagine what a psychopath looks like, and it is this image of a crazy-looking, unpredictable, dangerous person, who is carrying some sort of weapon that we expect to be the main character of the novel. Because we imagine one of the main characters to be a psychopath, we also anticipate that the novel will contain at least one murder.

The story begins with Norman sitting on the ground floor, reading a book and behaving relatively normal (as suggested in section 3) when his mother comes into the room and starts to criticize him. At this point, the reader has no reason to suspect that there is anything wrong with his mother, although, the reader gets an idea of how Norman feels about her. The reader also gets to learn that Norman is the owner of the motel that another character is to visit. It is a dark and rainy night and Mrs. Bates demands that Norman go down and turn on the motel sign, a duty he has been neglecting for some time. Because of this, we get a clue that someone will be checking in to the motel that night and because of how the setting is described, we anticipate that something ominous is about to happen.

Initially, the reader will believe that the story will be a detective story. Horror fiction and detective fiction are similar to each other in the way they both draw upon mystery and suspense. However, detective fiction focuses on the solving of a crime or discovery of the antagonist, whereas horror fiction does not necessarily have to present a solution to the crime;
the intention is to inflict feelings of fear upon the reader. When Mary is introduced to the plot, the reader is led to believe that the story will be focused on the crime she has committed. Anticipation is created for the reader to know what will happen to Mary; will she get caught? Also, when Arbogast the detective is introduced to the story, the reader is once more convinced that *Psycho* will be a detective story. By using Mary’s theft of money, the narrator deflects focus from what is going on in the Bates House, so when “Mother” suddenly appears with a knife and murders the detective, this comes as a shock to the reader. It is shocking, because as Tzvetan Todorov explains, the primary rule of a detective story is that the detective is immune from harm (227). The interruption of anticipated events makes the reader aware that he is not able to foresee the coming events, which creates a feeling of unease.

The anticipation of what “Mother” is capable of, combined with the constant anticipation of “meeting” her, produces the feelings of suspense and horror within the reader. The reader's feelings mirror the fear that Norman towards “Mother”. What Norman (and the reader) does not know yet is that what Norman really fear is himself. As the story continues, the reader knows that Mary is dead even though the quest of finding her continues. What the reader is more concerned with is what will happen when the characters meet “Mother”. The potential meeting with Mrs. Bates is what creates the most tension and suspense in the novel. It is the fear of “Mother” that positions the novel as horror fiction, rather than a crime thriller. The reader is more or less familiar with all characters except for the one who he has begun to fear. Early in the novel, the murder of Mary takes place and Norman has led us to believe that it is Mrs. Bates who is responsible. Ever since that first murder, we are reminded repeatedly of Norman’s fear of “Mother” repeating the action. One example of this is when he thinks to himself: “Mother had looked out of the window a lot during the past week . . . He wouldn’t permit her to come down to the motel and help out . . . you couldn’t trust Mother around strangers, not any more” (Bloch 94). Norman never explicitly explains to the reader what will happen once the other characters meet “Mother”. This makes for a gap in the description of what should be anticipated by the reader. The anticipation of what “Mother” is capable of, combined with the constant anticipation of the meeting, produces the feelings of suspense and horror within the reader.

Furthermore, as much as the reader fears the moment he will finally meet “Mother”, the reader also hopes that “Mother” will be found. Throughout the novel, the reader is aware of “Mother’s” presence because of her conversations with Norman. As mentioned in the
introduction, the novel is narrated by a third-person omniscient point of view. The narrator is able to give information to the reader about each character that the other characters in the story might not know about each other. The exception to this is Norman’s mother. Almost every time “Mother” is present, her actions are narrated through Norman’s point of view. It is only when the murders occur that Norman is not present to focalize the narration. This way of presenting “Mother” makes the reader feel excluded. In a sense, Bloch keeps “Mother” out of reach of the reader, and the result is that the reader becomes aware that he is not getting the full story, which makes him eager to “meet” this mysterious character himself. Because the narrator never includes “Mother” in the narration, the only possibility for the reader to be introduced to “Mother” is through another character meeting her. When Lila enters the house in hopes of finding Mrs. Bates, the anticipation builds up in the reader. He is influenced by Norman’s fear of what will happen if she finds her, but he is also hoping that Lila will find her because then we will finally “meet” the character who has eluded us for so long. Thus, even though we as readers are aware that once Lila sees Mrs. Bates she will probably die, we still secretly cheer her on, wanting her to go down the stairs, wanting to yell to her “hurry, she is in the cellar!”

The climax is reached when Lila finds Mrs. Bates’ corpse and she is then suddenly face to face with Norman dressed as “Mother”. With this new information, it is only by retrospect that the reader is given the explanation to why “Mother” has only been narrated from Norman’s point of view; it is of course because she only exists in his mind. Therefore, retrospect is not only important in understanding the psychological issues of repression and the layered mind, it also functions as helping the reader understand the feelings that the text projects upon the reader.

Furthermore, Bloch’s use of retrospection makes us realize that we have been in the presence of the monster the entire time. The constant modification of the text will also have a retrospective effect on what has already been read (Iser 298). We cannot understand the significance of background events until we have continued reading; only then the reader is able to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. Similarly to the process of psychoanalysis, retrospection helps the reader put the pieces together in order to get the full picture of his mind. It is through retrospection that the reader can complete the psychological reading of Norman’s mind and fully engage with the text. In *Psycho* the reader does not get the full understanding of what has happened at the Bates Motel and at Bates’ house until Lila has reached the cellar in her search for Mrs. Bates: “Lila opened the door of the fruit cellar. It was then that she screamed.
She screamed when she saw the old woman lying there, the gaunt, gray-haired woman whose brown, wrinkled face grinned up at her in an obscene greeting” (Bloch 163). Lila has found the shriveled corpse of Mrs. Bates that Norman had kept in the house. However, it is not until she hears the voice of Mrs. Bates coming, not from the corpse, but from a person behind her, that she finally gets to meet “Mother”: "I am Norma Bates,” said the high, shrill voice . . . Lila screamed again . . . Lila closed her mouth, but the scream continued. It was the insane scream of an hysterical woman, and it came from the throat of Norman Bates” (Bloch 163). This is when it is finally revealed to Lila and the reader that Norman has been dressing up and impersonating Mrs. Bates, acting as his alter ego “Mother”.

The new understanding of the story and the background brings to light new aspects of the story which we might have dismissed as not important. This corresponds with how the psychoanalyst aims to make the unconscious conscious. In psychoanalysis the patient gradually reveals more and more about himself to the analyst, eventually revealing crucial aspects of the unconscious. It is up to the therapist to analyse the information given by the patient. The reading process is similar to how the reader is gradually given more and more information from the narrator and is then responsible for analysing the symbols and events in order to understand the text. The fact that the reader has to engage with the text when trying to figure out what clues he has missed makes the reading experience feel more real. It is similar to when we experience something shocking in life and we ask ourselves “how could I have missed the signs?” For example, when the reader realizes that Mrs. Bates is dead and Norman has been posing as his mother, he starts to question how this could be? At several points in the story, Norman has described his mother’s physical presence. The reader has a distinct feeling of having “seen” Mrs. Bates and thus he might assume that Norman is hallucinating. However, looking back at the times when the narrator described the presence of Mrs. Bates, the reader would notice that Norman only sees his mother when he is looking in the mirror: “She was in the bathroom, she was getting dressed, she was putting on make-up … Her face was freshly powdered and rouged, she was pretty as a picture” (Bloch 107). Another example is that Norman hears her or feels her presence without actually seeing her with his own eyes: “Actually, he was aware of the footsteps without even hearing them; long familiarity aided his senses whenever Mother came into the room. He didn’t even have to look up to know she was there. In fact, he didn’t look up” (Bloch 11). What Norman is experiencing we can only assume to be a hallucination created by repression (which was previously discussed in section 4).
Returning to the beginning of the novel where Norman sat reading a book and his mother came in and started to criticize him, we realize that what would initially be interpreted as a way for the narrator to describe how Norman felt about his mother nagging him, would now be considered to be a pre-intention. Norman thought to himself:

No escape anywhere, from the voice that throbbed, the voice that drummed into his ears like that of the Inca corpse in the book; the drum of the dead … “Look at yourself!” she was saying (the drum going boom-boom-boom, and the sound reverberating from the mangled moth) … “It’s more than that, boy.” (There it was again, “Boy, boy, boy!” drumming away, out of the jaws of death). (Bloch 14)

By repeatedly referring to his mother’s voice as the voice of death this paragraph could be seen as a way of insinuating to the reader that Mrs. Bates is dead and is instead a part of Norman’s layered self.

Crucially, retrospection gives us a new understanding of Norman as a character. The reader, who has spent most of the novel thinking of Norman as the protagonist which we have felt sympathy for, suddenly experiences a feeling of betrayal, then comes the feeling of shock and horror. The person who we have felt sorry for, even willingly rooted for, has turned out to be a monster. His psyche’s use of repression as a defense mechanism has deceived us through the entire novel, tricked us into fearing a monster who did not even exist, while the real monster was right in front of us the entire time. It makes us terrified to think how easy it is for a monster who is not of a supernatural character to get close to us. The realization that all of our minds are arguably layered like Norman’s is also terrifying because it makes Norman’s monstrous character more realistic to the reader.

The act of retrospection combined with the reader’s established interrelations between past, present and future eventually expose the multiplicity of the connections in the text. These connections are the result of the reader’s imagination working on the actual text itself. Like Iser explains, the connections are what make the reader feel as if he is a part of the text, the dynamic process transfers the reader into the virtual dimension that has been created (298). It is the virtual dimension that transforms the reading into an experience for the reader (Iser 300). Through his skillful use of gaps, anticipation and retrospection Bloch has managed to create a reading experience which feels real to us as readers. Furthermore, at the end of the novel the
narrator says that “some of the write-ups compared it to the Gein affair up north, a few years back” (Bloch 165). By casually comparing the fictional events in the novel with the murders of a real-life serial killer, Bloch manages to make the story feel even more real. It makes us realize that Psycho is not necessarily a made-up horror story; Norman is not a monster of a supernatural character. He is a human, who due to his defense mechanisms working to protect him, has created a monstrous character - a psychopath with a dangerous alter ego. What separates him from a supernatural threat is that he could, in fact, be a real person living amongst us; Norman is a man no different from the rest of us, this realization is ultimately the main source of horror.

6 Conclusion

This essay demonstrates that both psychoanalytical notions, as well as patterns that activate processes relating to reception theory, were found helpful in analysing the novel. In the essay, I have presented and further developed Žižek’s idea that the house which Norman Bates live in symbolizes Freud’s structural model of the psyche. I have done this by arguing that Norman’s mother is also a symbol of the Super-Ego and discussed how the interior shows to the reader that Norman’s world is dominated by his mother (Super-Ego). Throughout the novel, there is a constant struggle of dominance between Norman and his mother which corresponds with Freud’s description of the power balance between the divisions of the psyche. This is important because it is the increasing dominance of the “Mother”-alter ego that makes Norman commit the brutal murders. Also, the attention to the psychological issues is what slowly makes the reader develop an understanding of Norman’s sick mind, which creates a source of horror in the novel. The psychological issues combined with the consequences of repression is what makes Norman the monster of the story. Because the change is brought on by psychological changes, there is a connection with the reader. The idea that the same could happen to us or somebody that we are close to makes the novel horrifying in a different way than could be achieved by fictional monsters.

The interior of the house is described as frozen in time. Because the furnishing is the content that defines each realm of the psyche, the décor indicates that Norman has not developed into a grown man. His psyche bare witness of his mother’s influence. The new insight into Norman’s persona portrays him as infantile, which makes the reader feel sympathy
for the grown man who is not in control of his own life. The feeling that Norman’s personal space is invaded by Lila and her ridiculing comments about the interior of his personal space increases the feelings of sympathy for Norman. Sympathy is important because it creates a connection between Norman and the reader which creates the sense that ‘we are on his side’. The sympathy is also a tool for the deception that the narrator uses to make us unsuspecting of Norman. Another aspect that deceives the reader is the repression. In this essay, I have exemplified that Norman successfully uses repression as a defense mechanism to protect himself from the guilt of having murdered his own mother. The repression is so powerful that it has effectively distorted Norman’s perception of reality, not only of the past but of the present as well. Because Norman is completely unaware of when “Mother” takes control and unaware of her not being real, the reader is also unaware of the split in personality because the narration stops when Norman drops out of consciousness.

When we finally learn that Norman dressed as his mother is the murderer, this unawareness of the split personality, as well as the former sympathy that we have felt, make the revelation come as more of a shock to us. It makes us feel betrayed and it increases the feelings of horror when the reader realizes that we unknowingly have been in the ‘presence’ of the monster the entire time. Freud’s psychoanalytical concepts proved to be fruitful in performing an analysis on how the psychological issues make Norman more sympathetic and recognizable to the reader. Furthermore, Iser’s reception theory showed to be useful when analysing how the reader's participation in the reading experience is crucial in producing feelings of horror. The two theories proved to complement each other well as they both address the process of revealing and realizing the hidden matter, in this case, the main source of horror. For further investigation, it would be interesting to study if other psychoanalytical concepts, such as projection or the Oedipus complex, can be traced in the novel.

There are plenty of gaps in the narrative, which forces the reader to use his/her imagination to fill in the blanks and help him/her to gradually realize Norman’s true nature. *Psycho* is a horror novel, but the murderer and the murders are not described in much detail. Instead, Bloch forces the reader to imagine the murder taking place, almost as if the reader is partaking in the murder and creating a dynamic reading experience. The reader is drawn closer to the text, thus the events in the novel feel more real to the reader. This is what creates a deeper, more lifelike reading experience and separates *Psycho* from other horror novels.
Furthermore, anticipation and retrospection are used to create suspense and horror in the novel as the reader actively changes his/her perception of Norman from an ordinary man to monster. The title itself starts to produce anticipation in the reader and the anticipation steadily grows stronger by the constant foreshadowing of the horrors that will take place once the other characters meet “Mother”. In that sense, the anticipation of “Mother” is more horrifying to the reader than the actual murders. Whilst anticipation is used to create suspense, retrospection is vital in producing horror in the reader. Retrospection makes the reader question and re-evaluate everything that he has learned about Norman’s character, it is crucial in helping the reader understand to what extent the Super-Ego and his use of repression have affected him. It is also through retrospection that we, to our horror, realize that we have successfully been deceived by Norman. By constructing a novel that forces the reader to engage in this matter, a greater reading experience is created.

In the novel *Psycho*, Bloch has presented a character who has become a monster due to the psychological functions we all share. Through his skillful use of gaps, anticipation and retrospection Bloch has also created a reading experience that feels more life-like and where the reader plays a crucial role in producing the horror. The attention to the psychological issues makes us sympathize and identify with Norman, leading us to position ourselves closer to the monster, which delivers the biggest horror of all, making us realize that we could all carry a “Mother” inside us.
Works cited


