

Psycho Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Psycho is the horror story of Norman Bates, his strange relationship with his mother, and the motel he runs on the side of a deserted highway.

The novel opens with an image of forty-year-old Norman Bates reading in his office. His mother approaches and chides him for reading filthy material. The two get into a vicious fight as Mother lambastes Norman and he is too weak, too afraid to stand up to her. She challenges everything about Norman, from his social skills to his sexual predilections while he silently takes the abuse. In his head, however, he imagines the release he would feel if he killed his mother, but the buzzer ringing at the front door breaks him from his thoughts. Someone needs a room in the motel.

The woman who needs a room, Mary Crane, has just driven across several states in the pouring rain. Norman doesn't know that Mary Crane has just stolen \$40,000 from her real estate boss. She hopes to meet Sam Loomis, her fiancé with whom she's been having a long distance relationship, settle his debts, and start married life together. After getting lost on the highway, Mary pulls into the Bates Motel and asks for a room. Norman, who has clearly never interacted with young women, shyly asks Mary up to the house for dinner. She accepts, and when she hears of the horrific, and seemingly abusive, relationship Norman has with Mother, gently suggests that Norman put his Mother in an institution. This idea outrages Norman, who shouts and screams that Mother is normal: "She's not crazy!" Mary quietly excuses herself, returns to her motel room, and vows to return the money she's stolen so that she doesn't end up tortured by guilt. Moments later, an old woman enters Mary's room while she's in the shower and beheads her.

In the moments before Mary was murdered, Norman had been watching her undress through a peephole in his office. He was drinking at the time, and passed out in his chair. He awoke to find Mary's corpse and immediately suspected Mother to be the murderer. He momentarily considers letting Mother go to prison, but the thought of being separated from her is too much. He knows he must protect her, help cover up her crimes. Norman methodically cleans up the murder scene, just as he remembers cleaning up the scene with Mother and "Uncle Joe" all those years ago. He deposits Mary's corpse and car into the sinkhole behind the motel and assumes he has just gotten away with murder. Meanwhile, Mary's old boss, Mr. Lowery, has hired a private detective to search Mary out and return the \$40,000 to him. That detective, Mr. Aborgast, has traced Mary to the motel and now stands knocking at the door, demanding to speak with Norman, and with Mother. Moments later, the same mysterious figure, who appears to be an old woman, attacks Aborgast and slits his throat. Norman deposits Aborgast's body and car in the same sinkhole.

Unfortunately for Norman, Mary Crane's little sister has grown suspicious of her sister's disappearance and meets up with Sam Loomis to search for her. They too trace Mary back to the Bates Motel, and Lila, Mary's sister, is convinced that something terrible has happened to Mary here. She notifies the local sheriff, but he insists that she is wrong.



Norman Bates is harmless, and his mother has been dead for years (after poisoning herself and her lover, "Uncle Joe"). Unconvinced, Lila arranges for Sam to distract Norman while she explores the house searching for clues. Although Sam does his best to distract Norman, he drops his guard and Norman smashes a whisky bottle over Sam's head, knocking him unconscious. Meanwhile, as Lila explores the house, she finds a tiny shriveled woman whom she assumes is Mrs. Bates. As she approaches, she discovers that the woman is actually a taxidermal corpse. Norman appears behind Lila, dressed in his mother's clothes and speaking in a high, affected voice saying, "I am Norma Bates" (Page 190). He raises a butcher knife and lunges at Lila, but Sam, who has woken from his stupor, manages to wrestle Norman away from her and hold him there until he can be arrested. In the weeks that follow, it is discovered that Norman murdered his mother and her lover, "Uncle Joe." To mask the guilt he felt over the murders, Norman developed a split personality in which Mother became his alternate self. At trial, Norman is found to be insane and is institutionalized for life.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

The novel opens with a scene of Norman Bates sitting in his library, reading a copy of *The Realm of the Incas*. A knock at the windowpane startles him from his intense reading. He thinks, for a moment, that the wind against the pane sounds like the Inca warriors in his book: stretching the skin of their dead enemies to form a drum. Grotesque, he thinks, but effective. In the distance, Norman hears his mother approaching, but he doesn't look up from his book. Almost immediately, the two begin to bicker. Mother wants Norman in the motel office in case anyone comes looking for a room, but they haven't had a customer in months, and Norman gets bored down there. The bickering breaks into a full-fledged fight, with Mother speaking condescendingly, even abusively, to her son. She screams about how he is a filthy, disgusting person for wanting to read about psychology, and mocks him for never having any gumption. He doesn't even have the gumption to kill her, no matter how badly she treats him.

Chapter One Analysis

When the novel opens, three things are immediately set up: the main character (Norman Bates), his relationship with his mother, and the setting. Norman Bates is described as a pale, fat, balding man in his mid-forties. He lives at home with his mother (in a house attached to the motel they run), has no friends, and explores the world through his books. Today, he is reading about the Incas, who killed their enemies and stretched their skins onto drums. Norman finds this practice "grotesque but effective" (Page 5). When his mother enters the room and starts a fight with him, Norman can hear drumbeats in his head. This signals to the reader that Norman views his mother as an enemy and may even fantasize about killing her. The way Norman and his mother fight is also indicative of their relationship. She is a conniving, calculating, emotionally abusive woman who, for no apparent reason, despises the man her son has grown into. She speaks down to him, calling him "boy," and rattles off a laundry list of character traits she despises in him: his fear of the outside world, his fascination with "filth," his apparent laziness; the list goes on-and-on.

The novel's setting is also established in this opening chapter. The novel takes place in the Bates Motel, a creepy, old-fashioned motel off the side of a deserted highway. The torrential downpour outside, and the wind knocking at the windows, should signal a horror-style setting to the reader. The Bates Motel is not a safe place to visit, and this is made clear from the novel's very first pages.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

The customer looking for a room at the Bates Motel is Miss Mary Crane, a beautiful twenty-seven year old woman on the run after stealing \$40,000 from her boss. After driving for hours in the pouring rain, Mary Crane is lost, tired, and desperate to find a room for the night, which is how she came across the Bates Motel. Just yesterday, Mary had been sitting at her desk at Mr. Lowery's real estate office. One of his regular customers, Mr. Tommy Cassidy, had come in to purchase a house as a wedding gift for his daughter. He slapped \$40,000 in cash onto Mr. Lowery's desk like the money didn't even faze him. When Mr. Lowery had asked Mary to go home early for the weekend, depositing the cash in his bank account on the way, Mary realized that this was the opportunity she'd been waiting for. A year earlier, Mary's sister Lila had sent her on a weeklong cruise, as thanks for dedicating her life to helping raise her. On that cruise, Mary had met a man named Sam Loomis and had become engaged. The only problem is that Sam has inherited quite a large debt and is working tirelessly to clear it. Although he has proposed to Mary, he says he cannot actually marry her for two more years, a lifetime in Mary's eyes. Mary hopes that by stealing this money, she can wipe away Sam's debts and push up their wedding date.

Mary rushes home from the office, packs a few belongings in a bag, and drives away. She feels terrible about leaving her sister behind, without any explanation, but she hopes that in time, once everything has settled down with Sam, she can send some money to Lila. She knows that by stealing this money, she is saying goodbye to Lila forever - she can never return home - but for once, Mary wants to embrace her own future. She drives for a few hours before trading-in her car. A few hours later, she does the same thing, hoping to stall the police trace. When she arrives in Fairvale, Sam's hometown, she'll simply explain that she suddenly inherited the money. Lila has taken her half and ran off to Europe, and Mary has rushed up here to see him. She and Sam will elope and soon, Mary will have his last name: the police will never find her, or so she hopes. Mary looks in the rearview mirror of her car and is startled by her reflection. She knows she must pull over and freshen up before meeting Sam, or he'll know something is up. She pulls into the Bates Motel and rings the bell.

Chapter Two Analysis

For Mary Crane, opportunities to change her life haven't come along very often. Her opportunity to go to college disappears when she is seventeen, and her father is killed in a car accident. Mary is then sent to work to support the family, and sends her sister, Lila, to college with her earnings instead. When her mother falls ill and dies, Mary becomes the sole provider for her sister, and she works tirelessly to create a nice life for her. As a result, Mary is twenty-seven years old, unmarried, and uneducated. Like many women in the middle of the century, Mary's real aspiration in life is to get married and



start a family. She doesn't want to work: she wants a husband to support her. Sam Loomis offers Mary a chance at that future, but he says he wants a nice house, nice things, and a nice income before he can marry her. He hopes to have that in two years, when Mary is twenty-nine. Mary simply cannot wait that long. She feels entitled to her future faster. She's spent her entire life working for other people. She watches Mr. Lowery make shaky deals, buy up cheap property and sell it for a huge profit, and she hates him for it. She also has had run-ins with Tommy Cassidy. The text suggests that Cassidy even paid Mary for sex in the past. As far as Mary is concerned, no one is reputable. Everyone is looking out for themselves, so why shouldn't she?

Mary's actions, stealing the money and running away from her sister, are completely out of character. For her entire life, Mary has looked out for others, and put their needs ahead of her own. When she steals the money, Mary isn't thinking clearly. She makes a snap decision and runs with it. She never stops to think her actions through. Mary justifies abandoning her sister with the thought that it's time for her to embrace her own future. She doesn't think about what will be Lila's confusion, frustration, or fear. Once Mr. Lowery discovers what has happened, the police will certainly come to interview Lila, but Mary feels certain that after supporting her sister, Lila will lie for her: "Lila owed her that much" (Page 26). Mary also assumes that Sam will simply accept her story about the money, without question. Because Mary isn't thinking clearly, she can't possibly understand the legal danger she's put herself in. Unfortunately for her, jail time isn't the only danger Mary Crane now faces. By entering the Bates Motel, Mary Crane has put herself in physical danger as well.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Norman Bates answers the door to the motel and lets Mary Crane in. He apologizes for making her wait, "Mother isn't very well," he tells her (Page 29). He shows Mary to her room - the one closest to the office - and surprises himself by inviting her up to the kitchen for a bite to eat. When Mary accepts, Norman is flabbergasted; he isn't sure he was expecting that. He leaves to ready the meal and Mary laughs in her bedroom. She's surprised to see a grown man so embarrassed, so flustered at the thought of dinner with a woman. She's sure he's harmless and sets about getting ready for the evening. When she's ready to eat, Mary walks up to the house, where she hears murmured voices upstairs. She knocks, and Norman lets her in. He explains that Mother isn't well and won't be joining them for dinner. When Norman hardly touches his meal, he explains that an argument with his mother has put him off his meal. Through the course of the conversation, it becomes clear to Mary that Mrs. Bates has a strong hold over her son - refusing to let him date, smoke, or drink, despite the fact that he's in his forties! Mary gently suggests that Mother is holding Norman back. If she's mentally unwell, as Norman claims, maybe it would be best for everyone if Norman put her in an institution so he can get on with his life. When he hears this, Norman snaps. He sweeps the plates off the table, leaps from his chair, and shouts that, "She's not crazy" (Page 38). Horrified, Mary excuses herself from the dinner table and returns to her room.

Back in her room, Mary prepares for bed. She can't stop thinking about her conversation with Norman, and the way he's caged by guilt. She decides that if she truly wants to enjoy her future, she must return the money. Invigorated, Mary starts a shower, strips naked, and does a joyful naked dance in front of the mirror. Despite being twenty-seven years old, she thinks her body looks great, and Sam will love it on their wedding night, even if it's two years away. She steps into the steaming shower with the water beating around her. The sound is so deafening, she doesn't hear the footsteps approaching. When the shower curtain is pulled back, Mary sees the terrifying face of an old woman, powdered deathly white with two hectic spots of rouge on the cheeks, and a headscarf framing "glassy eyes [that] stared inhumanely" (Page 45). The chapter ends with the old woman beheading Mary in the shower.

Chapter Three Analysis

In this chapter, Mary gets her first impression of the Bates Motel and its proprietor. She is surprised to see that the motel has not been renovated in many years and as a result, looks like a museum. It's clear to her that Norman Bates is somewhat disturbed, but she believes him to be harmless - he's so embarrassed at the thought of dining alone with Mary that he blushes! How could he cause any trouble at all? While Mary prepares herself for dinner, she feels "seven feet tall" when comparing her life to Norman Bates' sad existence. This feeling of superiority, that she finally has her life under control,



grows as Norman describes his unhealthy relationship with his mother. In comparison, Mary Crane's life is a dream. When she suggests that Norman, too, embrace his future by putting his mother in an institution, Norman completely loses control. As he screams and shouts, Norman blames his mother's jealousy, her control, even her abuse on the way he treats her. He says that he isn't very good at taking care of her, that she deserves better, that he's the one who should be locked away. He turns on Mary saying that she has no idea what she's talking about, and that "perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times" (Page 39).

After Mary excuses herself from the kitchen, Norman's final words, that everyone goes a little crazy, stick with her. She thinks about the money she's just stolen and decides then-and-there to return it. She's afraid that if she doesn't, she'll go crazy with guilt, much like Norman has done, and she won't be able to enjoy her life. Once again feeling seven-feet tall, Mary prepares for bed. Unfortunately, Mary isn't able to make things right with Mr. Lowery because she is murdered in the Bates Motel, presumably by mad Mrs. Bates.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

After his dinner with Mary Crane, Norman storms back to the office in search of a drink. Even though he told Mary that Mother forbade him to drink, he keeps a bottle of whiskey in his desk drawer for just such occasions. He closes all the blinds, turns off the "Open" sign, and takes a long pull from the bottle. He remembers going upstairs to tell Mother that a young woman would be joining him for dinner. Mother exploded screaming, "If you bring her here, I'll kill her! I'll kill the bitch!" (Page 47). Rather than fight back, Norman pushed Mother into her bedroom and locked the door. He hoped she wouldn't start screaming during his meal with Mary, and he knew that she would be listening to everything the two of them said. As Norman sits in the office now, he knows he can push back the license hanging on the wall and watch her through the peephole he created all those years ago. He hears the shower turn on, and he can no longer resist. With shaking hands, he pushes the license to the side and watches, with excruciating delight, as Mary undresses in front of the mirror. Mary disappears from sight for a moment and Norman nearly cries out, "Come back here, you bitch" (Page 51). His emotions are a mixture of excitement and fury as he watches Mary perform an amateurish strip tease for herself in the mirror. He's outraged by her perversion; watching Mary has confirmed in his mind that all women are "whores" and "bitches."

He realizes that he's drunk as he's sliding off the chair. He hears footsteps and knows that Mother must be approaching. He thinks, "There was nothing to be afraid of. She'd come to protect him from the bitches. Yes, that was it. She'd come to protect him. Whenever he needed her, Mother was there" (Page 53). A few hours later, Norman wakes to hear the shower still running in the room next door. He immediately sees that the water pouring from the shower is lightly tinted pink. He grabs his keys, runs to the room, and pulls back the shower curtain. He is horrified to see the twisted, hacked remains of Mary Crane lying in the water.

Chapter Four Analysis

As Norman searches for the whiskey bottle, he thinks, "There were times when you had to drink, even if you knew you had no stomach for liquor, even if a few ounces were enough to make you dizzy, make you pass out. There were times when you wanted to pass out" (Page 46). It's clear to the reader that he's entering a manic state, that he knows something terrible is going to happen and he wants to prepare his psyche by blacking it out.

From the moment he had seen her, Norman had known he could fall in love with a girl like Mary Crane: beautiful, intelligent, and brave enough to travel on her own. But he knows in the back of his mind that Mary Crane would never go for him, a thought that infuriates him. He thinks about everything he should have done: entertain Mary, offer



her a drink of whiskey, pick her up and smoothly carry her to the bed, but he knows he never could have done any of that. And if he had tried, surely Mary would have laughed, because "that's the way girls were - they always laughed. Because they were bitches. Mother was right. They were bitches" (Page 49). Norman's fury continues as he watches Mary undress. His anger, constantly calling Mary a "bitch" or "perverted" shows what a dysfunctional relationship Norman has with women. Readers may recall his obsession with the Oedipus Situation in the first chapter. It's clear that Norman's relationship with his mother has deeply affected the way he views all women, particularly women to whom he is sexually attracted. Norman drinks as a way of blocking out the voices in his head - arguably Mother's voice - telling him that he's not good enough, and reminding him that he's impotent. Readers should be encouraged to remember each time in the text that Norman hears Mother's footsteps approaching. He typically hears this when he is reaching a point of psychotic break, or before a major event (like a murder) happens.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

As Norman begins to clean up the murder scene, he realizes that he has to put Mother away to keep her, and the rest of the world, safe. He races up to Mother's room to find that nothing has changed, "nothing ever changed," but Mother isn't there (Page 56). He sees her headscarf on the floor and one of her dresses, covered in blood. Right then, he knows that Mother is unwell. She couldn't help herself. He can't turn his back on her and turn her in to the police. She needs him to protect her, as she has protected him for so many years. He calmly gathers an oilcloth, and few other supplies, to help him transport Mary Crane's body. He has a violent conversation with himself as he gathers the courage to re-enter Mary's room. One voice in his head is telling him to hurry up, there isn't much time, while the other voice reminds him how horrible the body will look covered in blood. Taking a deep breath, Norman surges into the room and works quickly picking up Mary Crane's lifeless body, the decapitated head, and all her belongings, including clothing, Kleenex, and hairpins. He drops everything in the backseat of Mary's car, puts the car in neutral, and tows the car to the swamp behind the motel. He watches with horrified fascination as the swamp swallows the car whole. Now, there's no sign of Mary Crane anywhere. Norman returns to the bedroom and scours for any detail he might have overlooked. He finds a single gold earring, but he cannot locate the partner. He assumes it must still be in Mary Crane's ear at the bottom of the swamp. Then, he scrubs the entire room, searching out even the tiniest speck of blood. Mother still hasn't returned, but Norman can't bring himself to think of that. He simply hopes she hasn't been picked up, and that she hasn't babbled the story of the murder to anyone. Exhausted, Norman falls asleep and has a terrifying dream of Mother's body sinking into the swamp. He is reviled and excited as he watches the muck creep in between Mother's thighs and cover her breasts. He awakens with a shout, "Mother - save me!" and she is there, sitting beside his bed, telling him that she is there to protect him (Page 71).

Chapter Five Analysis

Norman's inner conflict is highlighted in this chapter as he struggles to decide whether Mother is a monster. He knows that murder is wrong, but he justifies Mary Crane's murder, and his decision not to turn Mother in, by saying that Mother couldn't help herself. She's sick: "Cold-blooded murder is one thing, but sickness is another. You aren't really a murderer when you're sick in the head. Anybody knows that" (Page 57). Keen readers may realize that whenever Norman is justifying one of Mother's behaviors or actions, he is also justifying an action of his own: he doesn't want to be alone, so he doesn't want to turn Mother in to the police. Norman has a sick, strange relationship with Mother, and the two are far more intertwined in each other's lives than even the text describes. Norman continues his strange sexual fantasies about Mother as, in his dream, he watches her body sink into the swamp behind the motel. He grows sexually



excited watching the muck cover her inner thighs and breasts, but knows he shouldn't be thinking these thoughts. The parallels between Mother and Mary are definite: he is sexually attracted to both women but can have neither. He views their sexuality as perverse, and therefore, he views both women as "whores" or "bitches" who need to be punished for awakening such unclean thoughts in him. It's also clear that he wants to punish Mother for the way he feels about himself as a result of her abuse, but his fear of being alone in the world stops him from killing her (and arguably, she is the one person in the world he wishes to kill most), so his violence and anger is turned on other women, women like Mary Crane.

It is also interesting to note that before Norman enters Mary Crane's room for the second time, he has an argument with himself, or with the voices in his head. One voice is vulnerable and afraid - the voice of a little boy - while the other is confident and in control of the situation. This scene highlights the split personality Norman suffers from. One half of his personality is represented by the little boy, Mother's boy, while the other half is the adult Norman. Adult Norman wants to turn Mother in to the police, but little boy Norman doesn't want to be alone. The two personalities are at war with each other in Norman's mind throughout the text, but this scene most clearly highlights the distinction between them.



Chapters Six & Seven

Chapters Six & Seven Summary

Sam Loomis listens to music in the tiny room he's set up for himself in the back of his hardware shop. He's clearly lonely, but good music keeps him company. He's had a good year thus far, and hopes that he can pay off his debt more quickly than he anticipated. He thinks about Mary, and how happy she'll be if they can move up their wedding date. She's been having a rough time of it lately, and he would love to do something to cheer her up. Sam's thoughts are interrupted by harsh banging at his front door. It's pouring rain and the middle of the night, so he can't imagine who would be paying him a visit. When he opens the door, he's overjoyed to see Mary there. Without even saying hello, he pulls her into his arms and kisses her greedily, but she stiffens, pulls back. The woman introduces herself as Lila, Mary's little sister. She's come to say that Mary is missing, and she wonders if Sam had anything to do with it. Sam insists he doesn't know anything about it. He's outraged that Mary has been missing for an entire week and no one notified him.

As the two share a hasty conversation about what could have happened to Mary, or where she could be, a man in a grey Stetson hat approaches. His name is Milton Aborgast and Mr. Lowery has hired him for the safe return of his \$40,000. He explains to a shocked Sam and Lila that he believes Mary is on the run with the money, and that she planned to meet up with Sam to share her takings. Aborgast has traced Mary from her hometown to Fairvale, and discovered both car trade-ins. It takes a long conversation and much persuasion, but eventually, Sam convinces Aborgast that he knows nothing about Mary's whereabouts. Lila is in tears and Sam is close: where could Mary be? Aborgast decides to take a sample of Mary's handwriting to every motel within an hour's drive of Sam's store to see if Mary has signed in anywhere. He asks Sam and Lila to wait until he returns before they alert the police. This way, if he finds her, the money can be returned without criminal prosecution. Reluctantly, Sam and Lila agree.

Chapters Six & Seven Analysis

In these two short chapters, all the major players of the novel have been introduced. The reader meets Sam Loomis, a boring, hapless hardware store owner who lives in the back of his shop; Aborgast, the private detective hired by Mr. Lowery for the safe return of his stolen money, and Lila, Mary's determined and feisty little sister who has driven for eighteen-hours to confront Sam Loomis about his relationship with her sister. At the time that these three characters meet, Mary has been missing for an entire week. No one has called the police because they're afraid that if Mary is found, she'll be arrested. They would rather handle the missing person's case themselves, however risky. Now that a week has passed, however, Lila is beginning to worry. It's out of character for her sister to leave without saying where she is going, and of course it's extremely out of character for her to steal money. Now that her suspicions of foul play have been raised,



Lila wants to notify the authorities, but Aborgast asks her to reconsider. If he can locate the money himself, he'll get a tidy reward and Mary can escape criminal prosecution. Lila fears something terrible has happened to her sister, but clinging to Aborgast's hope of a safe return, she agrees to handle the issue in-house.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Lila and Sam eat a nervous lunch together while they wait for Aborgast to return from his motel search. As he eats, Sam realizes that he actually knows very little about Mary, despite the fact that he's engaged to marry her. Perhaps Mary did steal the money, although if he admits that to himself, Sam has to admit that he is engaged to a thief, which is a very bitter pill to swallow. Lila, however, seems in better moods than Sam, sure that Aborgast will find a lead and Mary will be returned safe and sound. It's four o'clock in the afternoon before Aborgast calls. He says that he's found Mary's handwriting in the guest book at the Bates Motel, but she's signed in under a fake name. When he pressed Norman Bates about it, he said that Mary (or Jane Wilson, as she signed in) only stayed for one night, and that she left early in the morning on her way to Chicago. Aborgast says he going to stay at the hotel a little while longer, to speak to Norman's mother, whom he saw staring out the window when he pulled in. Norman doesn't want Aborgast going near his mother, but Aborgast insists.

Chapter Eight Analysis

Through Aborgast's story, the reader sees Norman Bates' cover story beginning to take shape. He had the whole thing planned out, what he would say, what lies he would construct. He hadn't expected so many people to come searching for Mary, but his plan seems to be working. He is extremely hesitant for Aborgast to speak with Mother. The reader probably thinks this is because Mother is so deranged that she may well tell Aborgast the truth about Mary Crane's death. In reality, there is a much darker, more sinister reason why Norman doesn't want anyone to speak to his mother. The novel's suspense is beginning to build, and readers have likely reached a point where they struggle to put the book down, which is exactly what Bloch intended.

It's interesting to note that as Sam is considering his relationship with Mary, he thinks it's "funny ... how we take it for granted that we know all there is to know about another person, just because we see them frequently or because of some strong emotional tie" (Page 92). Not only does this speak true to his relationship with Mary, it also speaks true to Norman's relationship with Mother. Norman is unwaveringly loyal to Mother despite her constant abuse and violent behavior. This quote calls every reader to reconsider their own relationships and whether they know their loved ones as well as they think they do. Throughout the novel, Bloch is cleverly calling each reader's sanity into question, particularly with the resonance of Norman Bates' line, "I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times" (Page 39).



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

It's Saturday morning, and Norman wakes to shave. He hates shaving because he hates to look at himself in the mirror. The reflection always looks wavy and unfocused. He wishes he was as handsome as Uncle Joe Considine, the only man Norman remembers Mother having a relationship with. Norman doesn't like thinking about Uncle Joe because he has been dead for twenty years now. As he shaves, Norman reminds himself to hide the razor well. It's very sharp and he wouldn't want Mother to get hold of it; she's been so unpredictable these days. When he finishes shaving, Norman walks down to the office and starts drinking, even though he promised himself he would never drink again after the girl's death. He nearly falls out of his seat when he sees a car with a Texas license plate (the girl had been from Texas!) pull into the motel parking lot. A man with a grey Stetson hat enters the building and says that he's looking for a missing girl. Norman can barely breathe. The man describes the missing woman and her car. Panicked, Norman says he's never seen anyone like that before. Immediately, the man is suspicious and asks to see Norman's guest book. He quickly scans the pages and locates Mary's handwriting, although she's signed in under a different name. Aborgast questions Norman hard, trying his best to trick the nervous man into giving away information. He accidentally lets it slip that he ate dinner with Mary on the night that she disappeared. When he hears this, Aborgast demands to speak with Mother. Norman begs and pleads, but Aborgast is adamant. While Norman goes upstairs to prepare Mother, Aborgast phones Sam and Lila. Upstairs, Norman and Mother engage in another altercation. Norman begs her to protect him, and she slowly, methodically, gets ready for the visitor; she powders her face, puts on her best dress, smiles, and waits. When Aborgast walks into the room, Mother leaps on him with Norman's shaving razor and kills him.

Chapter Nine Analysis

When Norman is thinking about Uncle Joe, he forgets that the man is dead, and has been dead for over twenty years. Norman explains away this slipped memory by thinking about the ways time is relative. He loves reading about philosophy and science, but Mother hates it, claiming it goes against religion. Norman loves reading the books because they expand his mind, and because when he's reading them, he's no longer Mother's little boy. He's a grown man: "He was a grown man, a man who studied the secrets of space and mastered the secrets of dimension and being. It was like being two people, really - the child and the adult" (Pages 105 - 106). Again, this thought process highlights the split personality Norman Bates suffers from. It's interesting to note that on page 106, Norman acknowledges the voices in his head and questions whether he has schizophrenia.



When Aborgast arrives to interview Norman, he is not nearly as calm as he had hoped. He sweats, fidgets, and stumbles over his words. It's clear to Aborgast that something strange is going on. He assumes the strangeness has to do with Norman's mother, and in a way, he's right. The description of Norman's mother getting ready to meet Aborgast is particularly interesting. Bloch goes into great detail about the way she gets ready; she dresses and puts on her makeup slowly, almost methodically. It is described like a woman putting on a costume. Although the reader doesn't realize it yet, descriptions like these are carefully constructed to show the strange relationship between Norman and Mother. The reality hasn't been revealed yet, but it will soon become quite clear, giving moments like this extra resonance. Readers should be encouraged to mark passages like this in the text, so once the full mystery is solved, they can go back and trace Bloch's seamless storytelling.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

Norman finds himself back at the motel lobby, checking out another guest. He looks at the clock and is dumbfounded that four hours have passed since the detective was killed. Where did the time go? He has taken several drinks from the whiskey bottle, but he doesn't feel drunk. He knows that he must take care of Aborgast's body up at the house, regardless of how the blood makes him feel. He's locked Mother in her room and told her to stay silently there until he knows it's safe again. Norman methodically disposes of Aborgast's body and car, the same way he disposed of Mary Crane's. The entire time he works, Norman goes over his story in his head; Mary Crane came to stay one night in the hotel. He barely spoke to her. The next morning, she left, saying she was headed toward California. A week later, the detective arrived. When he heard Mary had headed toward Illinois, he went after her. Norman doesn't know anything else. Norman also knows that he cannot afford any more run-ins with Mother; he needs to move her somewhere safer. When he returns from the swamp, he tells Mother his plan; he is going to move her to the fruit cellar until all this has blown over. Mother begins to laugh, a horrible cackling, which boils Norman's anger. He shouts, "Shut up!" before ordering Mother into the cellar. Even though he locks the door and doesn't look back, Mother's laughter echoes in his mind as he marches away.

Chapter Ten Analysis

When it's time to clean up the mess of Aborgast's murder, Norman feels himself breaking into two halves: the little boy and the man. He no longer wants to be treated like Mother's little boy, and for the first time in his life, wants to embrace his independent manhood. He convinces himself that by taking care of this mess, without Mother's help, he's acting like a man. In an unprecedented act of bravery, Norman stands up to Mother by ordering her into the fruit cellar. It's clear that Norman is reaching some sort of psychotic break. Mother's laughter drives him insane, so insane that he shouts for her to shut up, an act he wouldn't have dreamed of a week ago. When Mother refuses to move from her bed, Norman picks her up to carry her downstairs. He is shocked by how little she weighs. It feels as if she weighs only a few pounds. In the upcoming chapters, the reader will learn that Norman has not actually been conversing with his mother, but with her corpse, which he has dug up from its grave and mummified. The reason her body is so light is because Norman has removed all her internal organs, through the process of taxidermy, to keep her "alive" forever. However, this realization hasn't yet been revealed in the text, but the clues are everywhere. It's also interesting to note that at the end of this chapter, Norman suggests that his mother should be put in an institution, to which she cackles, "But I wouldn't be there alone" (Page 133). Statements like this, along with the constant voices in Norman's head, should act as strong clues about Norman's mental state.



Chapters Eleven & Twelve

Chapters Eleven & Twelve Summary

Sam and Lila sit in the back of Sam's hardware shop, waiting for Aborgast to return. Lila is worried that Aborgast hasn't come back, hasn't even called, and she wants to alert the local sheriff. She accuses Sam of caring more about himself than Mary. To prove Lila wrong, Sam drives down to the Bates Motel to find Aborgast, but returns when he can't find Aborgast's car in the parking lot. He tells Lila that Aborgast has probably located Mary and that they'll likely hear the news in the morning. Lila wants to phone the sheriff now, but Sam tells her to wait patiently until Aborgast returns. The next morning, they still haven't heard from Aborgast and they still can't get hold of him. Sam finally agrees to phone Sheriff Chambers. Sam contacts the sheriff, tells him the entire story, and waits for his response. Sheriff Chambers has known Norman Bates his entire life, and while he's a bit strange, Sheriff says, he's harmless. To prove it, he phones Norman to get his side of the story. Norman says that yes, Aborgast came looking for the girl, but once he heard Mary had taken off to Chicago, he had gone after her. Norman swears he doesn't know anything else about it. Sheriff Chambers is obviously satisfied with this story, but Lila isn't so sure. Mary doesn't know anyone in Chicago; why would she travel there? But Sheriff Chambers is convinced Aborgast is the liar. In his last phone call, Aborgast had said that he was going to interview Norman Bates' mother, but Sheriff knows that's a lie: Norma Bates has been dead for over twenty years.

Chapters Eleven & Twelve Analysis

In this section, it is finally revealed that Mother is dead, and has been dead for over twenty years. Although this revelation shocks the characters (and likely the reader) it doesn't solve the mystery of who Norman has been living with in his home, or who murdered Mary and Aborgast. Sheriff Chambers is sure that Mother is dead because he handled the case and had even been a pallbearer at her funeral. He claims that Mother and Joe Considine poisoned themselves in some kind of lovers' suicide pact. It was young Norman Bates who had discovered the bodies. The sight had been so disturbing to Norman that he actually had to be sent away to a mental institution. According to Sheriff, when Norman was let out, he became a recluse, rarely leaving the motel for anything. While Lila and Sam are surprised by Sheriff's explanation, she isn't fully convinced. Sure, Aborgast might have lied about Norman Bates living with his mother, but why would he lie about seeing a woman in a window? Maybe Aborgast had seen the woman and assumed it was Norman's mother. Maybe Norman Bates is the liar. Maybe, Lila thinks, the woman Aborgast had seen in the window was actually Mary! After leaving the Sheriff's office, Lila convinces Sam to drive up to the Bates Motel with her so she can investigate for herself.



Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen Summary

Norman is prepared for the sheriff, Sam, and Lila's arrival before he even sees them drive into the parking lot. Seeing the Sheriff is particularly strange for Norman, since he hasn't seen the man for twenty years, when the first "nightmare" happened. Knowing that Mother is safely tucked away in the fruit cellar, Norman bravely gives Sheriff the keys to his house and lets him search the premises: "How he'd fooled him the first time! Yes, and he fooled him just as easily again, because the Sheriff came back and he hadn't noticed a thing" (Page 155). Even though the Sheriff has been easily convinced that nothing is wrong, Norman knows that the worst of it isn't over. Someone is looking for the girl, and they won't stop searching until they find her. When he thinks about this, Norman begins to panic. He longs for Mother to comfort him, to tell him everything is going to be alright, but then he remembers that he's the adult now. He's in charge.

Norman walks back to the office and pulls out his bottle of whiskey. Shaking, he begins to drink. His nerves have just begun to settle when Sam and Lila pull in. He sees Lila in the parking lot and thinks, for one fleeting moment, that it's the dead girl risen from the swamp. Almost immediately, he realizes it can't be the dead girl and that it must be her sister. As he realizes this, the sun slips behind the clouds "surrendering its splendor" (Page 158). He smiles as the young couple requests a room. Norman watches silently as the couple scans the registry and the girl's finger rests momentarily on the name "Jane Wilson," the name of the dead girl. Norman puts the couple in room 6, the same room Mary Crane had had, so he can watch them through the cubbyhole. He knows he scrupulously cleaned the room, that there's no chance they'll find anything, so he's flabbergasted when the girl finds Mary's missing earring. Lila even notices a speck of dried blood. Terrified, she insists that they call the sheriff. Of course, Sam is hesitant.

Angrily, Lila says she's going to fetch the sheriff herself and bring him back here.

Chapter Thirteen Analysis

In this chapter, Norman finally admits to himself, and to the reader, that he was somehow involved in Mother's death twenty years ago. He admits that he fooled the sheriff into believing Mother had committed suicide even though it was a lie. At this point, the reader still doesn't know exactly what Norman lied about; had Mother been murdered rather than committed suicide, or was Mother still alive (not dead), as Norman insisted. Either way, it's clear that Norman has manipulated the situation, and that Sheriff is an inadequate detective at best. The reader may recall this line from Chapter Eight: "Funny, Sam told himself how we take it for granted that we know all there is to know about another person, just because we see them frequently or because of some strong emotional tie" (Page 92). Sheriff is positive that Norman had nothing to do with Mary Crane's disappearance because he had handled Mother's death twenty years ago.



Sheriff allows his preconceptions of Norman to cloud his judgment in the Mary Crane case.

Meanwhile, Norman struggles to keep his emotions under control when he realizes that the young couple renting a room is somehow related to the dead girl. Although he had promised himself that he would never let Mother resort to murder again, he fears what will happen if the couple does too much digging. When Norman sees the couple for the first time in the parking lot, "He saw the sky darken as the sun surrendered its splendor" (Page 158). Students who have been noting the play between light and shadows should immediately recognize the significance of the sun "surrendering." Light, or good, has given up - "surrendered" - and evil will now take over.



Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen Summary

Wearily, Sam enters Norman's office. He says that his wife, Lila, has just driven into town for some cigarettes. Immediately, Sam can tell that Norman is drunk. Norman offers him a glass of whiskey, which Sam accepts, and the two begin to talk. As they talk, Sam notices the lack of light in the room: "[Norman's] face was only a gray blur in the growing darkness. The thunder sounded overhead again, but there was no lightning" (Page 168). Sam notes that it must get lonely for Norman living up here on his own. Norman says the place belongs to "both of us. My mother and me" (Page 170). Sam nearly chokes on his whiskey. Aborgast hadn't been lying. Suddenly, Sam realizes that he is in a very dangerous position. Something terrible has happened to Mary and likely to Aborgast as well. Norman Bates should not be trusted. A drunk Norman Bates begins telling his story: Twenty years ago, Mother and Uncle Joe Considine drank poison and he found them. After, he was very, very sick and had to be taken to the hospital. When he was released, he managed. Managed to go back to the cemetery where Mother was buried and dig her up: "She'd been shut up in the coffin for such a long time that at first I thought she really was dead. But she wasn't of course. She couldn't be. Or else she wouldn't have been able to communicate with me when I was in the hospital" (Page 171). Norman explains that his mother had been in a trance state, "suspended animation." He had stopped her life and now he could start it up again. After he tells his story, Norman lifts the whiskey bottle and smashes it over Sam's head, knocking him unconscious. Some time later, Sheriff Chambers shakes him awake. Sam quickly tells the sheriff everything he learned, and they run into the storm. In the distance, they hear Lila screaming.

Chapter Fourteen Analysis

In this chapter, Sam realizes that Norman is a terrible threat. Aborgast hadn't been lying about seeing Norman's mother, which means that Norman had managed to fool everyone, for twenty years, that Mother was dead. Norman's explanation of the events is particularly interesting. He truly believes that Mother is alive, even though it would be scientifically impossible. Mother was buried after her death, and remained in her coffin underground until Norman exhumed her body. Norman had been hospitalized for a few months after Mother's death, and it would have been impossible for her to survive underground that long with no food, water, or oxygen. Norman acknowledges that Mother "communicated" with him while he was in the hospital. Although it's not explicitly stated, it's clear that this is when Norman first began hearing voices in his head, further proof of the schizophrenia Norman mentioned in chapter nine. If readers needed any further proof that Norman is insane, he believes that he can stop and start life, like magic, or like a god. He has lost what little grip he had left of reality, and this is reflected in the complete lack of light in the chapter. Everything is "lost in the darkness" (Page 173).



Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fifteen Summary

The narration now follows Lila from the moment she left the Bates Motel. Rather than find Sheriff Chambers, as she said she was going to do, Lila marches to the Bates house hoping to speak with the mystery woman in the window herself. When no one comes to the door, a strange anger overtakes Lila. Using an old skeleton key, Lila manages to break the lock on the front door and walk inside. Quickly but carefully, Lila takes stock of the Bates home. Everything is very old, as if it's been preserved for a museum. She notices Bates' bedroom immediately: nothing but a single mattress on the floor, small enough to be a child's bed, certainly not a grown man's. On the floor of his bedroom, Lila notices a soiled woman's handkerchief - the type an old woman might tie around her head. She also notices shapeless nightgowns, like an old-fashioned woman might wear, but she does not think much of it. She quickly surveys Norman's bookshelves, overflowing with scientific textbooks and notebooks filled hand-drawn, graphic scenes of pornography. She quickly moves on to the next bedroom, Mother's room. As soon as she walks through the door, Lila feels as if she's being transported back in time. Everything is pristine and antique, as if the room hasn't been touched in 100 years. An eerie feeling creeps over Lila and she must remind herself that ghosts don't really exist. Immediately, Lila notices the strange brown flecks on the bedspread, heavily concentrated at the center of the pillow.

Certain that Mary is not being hidden in one of the bedrooms, Lila continues to search the house. The next best hiding place for a body, she decides, would be in the basement, the fruit cellar perhaps. Quickly, Lila rushes down the stairs and begins to search the cellar. Lila holds back her gag reflex when she sees the collection of taxidermied animals, and the piles of rotten fruit. There is a blanket hanging from the ceiling, clearly hiding something from view. Bravely, Lila yanks the blanket from the ceiling and screams; behind the blanket is a wrinkled, brown corpse. "Mrs. Bates!" Lila screams. A high-pitched voice answers behind her. Lila turns to see a fat, shapeless body standing behind her, butcher knife raised. "I am Norma Bates," the shrill voice says, but it's clear that the voice comes from the throat of none other than Norman Bates.

Chapter Fifteen Analysis

In a novel heavily characterized by strong gender roles, it's interesting to note that Lila is a strong, independent woman determined to find out what happened to her sister. The men in her life, most notably Sam Loomis and Sheriff, have made repeated errors and seem to be more worried about their egos than solving the case. Lila makes all the big moves - calling the Sheriff, renting a room at the Bates Motel to search for clues, and demanding that the Sheriff come back to the Motel to investigate after she finds the earring. She fears that no one really cares what has happened to Mary. Lowery simply



wants his money back, and neither Sheriff nor Sam seem to truly care if Mary is alright. It's clear that Lila is the true hero of the story and the bravest detective on the case.

Much about Norman's living situation is revealed as Lila ransacks the house. First, it becomes clear that, even though he has free reign of the house, Norman's entire life is contained to the tiny bedroom in which he has slept since he was a child. Even as a grown man, Norman sleeps in his same childhood bed, symbolizing his inability to grow up, to embrace life as an adult, which is why throughout the text, Norman reminded himself over-and-over that he was the grown-up now. Mother's room is quite disturbing, particularly the strange flecks of brown on her bed, concentrated at the pillow. When Mother's corpse is found in the fruit cellar, it becomes clear that Norman has kept Mother's dead body in her bed for the past twenty years, and the brown flecks on the bed are bits of her rotted flesh. When Norman descends into the fruit cellar dressed in Mother's nightgown and handkerchief, the truth of the mystery is revealed. Norman Bates suffers from a split personality disorder and has been impersonating his mother for the past twenty years.



Chapters Fifteen & Sixteen

Chapters Fifteen & Sixteen Summary

It takes a week from the time Sheriff and Sam save Lila from Norman's murderous rage before the cars and bodies are pulled up from the swamp, but in that time, much about Norman Bates and Mother is discovered. Norman is taken to the mental institution he had feared for so long, where he is heavily sedated and made to talk. Eventually, he tells the doctors everything, and it leaks out in the hundreds of papers covering his case. It appears Norman had been a transvestite for years before Mother's death. Perhaps as a result of the abuse, Norman had always wanted to be like his Mother, "and in a way, he wanted his mother to become a part of himself" (Page 195). When Mother had begun dating Joe Conidine, Norman had been sick with jealousy. After accidentally walking in on the couple in bed together, something in Norman had snapped, and he had poisoned the pair of them. After her death, Norman had realized he couldn't live without her: "he wanted her back. As he wrote the [suicide] note in her handwriting, addressed to himself, he literally changed his mind. And Norman, or part of him became his mother" (Page 198).

While interviewing him, the doctors quickly note three distinct personalities: Norman, the little boy who needed his mother and hated anyone who came between them; Norma the Mother; and Normal, the adult Norman Bates who had concealed all his secrets from the outside world. The adult Norman had literally brought Mother back to life by digging up her body, preserving it through taxidermy, and setting her up in her old bedroom. He had hoped the living presence of Mother in the house would quell the guilt he felt over killing her. In the asylum, Mother's personality finally overtakes the other two, silencing little Norman and "Normal" forever, as Norman literally becomes his mother.

Chapters Fifteen & Sixteen Analysis

In this final section of the novel, all the mysteries of Norman's complex psychology are explained in black-and-white for the reader. This section casts the entire novel into a new light, and many readers will be anxious to flip back to the beginning and read the whole thing again. If they do, they will see a carefully constructed mystery that painstakingly, and cleverly, leads the reader precisely to the end. The revelation about Norman and Mother is surprising, yet many readers will slap their foreheads and say, "Of course! Why didn't I think of that?" Many scholars believe Bloch is making a strong argument that in society, evil wins over good. Mary, who arguably represents good, is murdered before redemption, and at the end of the novel, Mother, who represents evil, takes over what little good is left in Norman as he slips into full insanity at the asylum.



Characters

Norman Bates

Norman Bates is the main protagonist of the novel, which traces his struggles with insanity, particularly split personality disorder. Norman is described as mid-forties, overweight, pale, and balding. As a child, Norman had an extremely dysfunctional, even abusive, relationship with his mother that forever changed his ability to relate normally in society. As an adult, Norman lives alone with Mother and runs the Bates Motel. When the novel opens, Norman is reading about the Oedipus Situation with the hopes of understanding more about his strange relationship with Mother. It's clear that Norman's relationship with Mother has deeply affected the way he views all women, particularly women to whom he is sexually attracted. Norman drinks as a way of blocking out the voices in his head - arguably Mother's voice - telling him that he's not good enough, and reminding him that he's impotent. When he is forced to face his own sexuality, Norman reacts violently. He kills Mary Crane after witnessing her undress, and it is later revealed that he killed Mother and her lover, Uncle Joe Consideine, after discovering their sexual relationship. From chapter three, Norman spends the entire novel trying to cover up the murders he's committed, although the reader believes it's actually Mother who's committed the murders. When all Norman's crimes are discovered, including the exhumation and taxidermy of Mother's body, Norman is sentenced to life imprisonment at a mental institution. There, Mother's voice takes over his split personality, and Norman descends fully into his madness, literally becoming his mother.

Mary Crane

Mary Crane is the unlikely heroine of the novel, although she is only alive for the first three chapters. Mary Crane is twenty-seven-years-old and knows exactly what she wants from her life; mainly, she wants to get married and start a family, no matter the cost. Unfortunately, Mary's life has been marred by a series of unfortunate events, starting with her parents' untimely deaths leaving her the sole custodial caretaker of her younger sister, Lila. As a result, Mary had been unable to finish school, start a social life, or find a suitable husband. Instead, Mary is forced into the workplace to support what is left of her family, and she is miserable. When the novel opens, Mary faces the first real opportunity of her life. Mr. Lowery, the real estate agent for whom she works, asks her to deposit \$40,000 into the bank from a recent sale. Rather than deposit the money, Mary decides to steal the money and run to her fiancé, Sam Loomis, a hapless shop owner drowning in debt. It's a risky, dangerous plan, and it's clear Mary hasn't thought it through properly. On her way to visit Sam, however, she stops over at the Bates Motel, and after sharing a meal with the tortured Norman Bates, Mary decides that rather than live a life riddled with guilt, she will return home and return the money. In a novel exploring the balance of good and evil in the world, Mary is a basically "good" person who momentarily resorts to evil when she steals the money. Mary's lapse into evil is momentary, and eventually, she decides to return to good. She even plans to take a



shower before returning the money - a literary symbol for washing away her sin: "Come clean, Mary. Come clean as snow" (Page 44) - representing her redemption. Unfortunately, Norman's evil wins over Mary's good when he murders her before she can redeem her sins.

Mother

Mother is the horrific figment of Norman's imagination, and one of the three personalities that force a split in his mind. In real life, Mother had been a puritanical, abusive parent who belittled and deeply scarred her only child, Norman. For his entire life, Mother had preached that all women are "whores" and "bitches" and that any sexual thought or action is deeply perverse. Her sermons had so affected Norman that when Mother started a romantic relationship with Joe Conside, Norman couldn't handle it and had murdered Mother and Joe as a way of punishing them for their sins. Months later, however, Norman couldn't cope with his extreme loneliness, so he had exhumed and taxidermied Mother's body so she could always keep him company. Norman had even begun to speak for Mother - having entire conversations with himself in her voice - and dressing like her to keep her memory alive. Eventually, these behaviors form into a fully-fledged split personality and Norman can no longer tell where his personality ends and Mother's begins. All of the murders in the novel happen when Norman is under the spell of Mother's personality, but it is Norman who commits the crimes. At the end of the novel, Mother's personality completely takes over Norman's body, as Norman slips fully into his insanity.

Sam Loomis

Sam Loomis is Mary Crane's hapless fiancé. Sam owns a hardware store in Fairvale, but when he had inherited it from his father, he also inherited a large amount of debt. When Sam meets Mary on a cruise ship vacation, he knows he wants to marry her, but tells her she will have to wait to move in until he can provide the life she deserves with a beautiful house, nice things, and no debt. He has worked tirelessly to clear his debt, but he simply isn't working fast enough for Mary's liking. When Sam hears that Mary has stolen \$40,000 from her boss, he realizes that despite being engaged to Mary, he knows very little about her. Whether it is fear or laziness, Sam is relatively weak during the search for Mary. He bumbles along, trusting others to make big moves for him, rather than heading the search himself.

Lila Crane

Lila Crane is Mary Crane's feisty and independent little sister. When Mary goes missing, Lila begins piecing together the clues that eventually lead her to Mary's killer. With a feeling of guilt for all Mary has sacrificed for her, Lila refuses to alert the police when she hears Mary has stolen the money, and sets out to bring her sister, and the money, home herself. When Mary realizes that the job is too big for her to complete on her own,



and that involving the police might be a good idea, Aborgast and Sam Loomis silence her. Eventually, Lila traces Mary's clues to the Bates Motel and she confronts Norman and Mother about Mary's disappearance herself.

Milton Aborgast

Milton Aborgast is the private detective hired by Mr. Lowery to find Mary Crane and the missing \$40,000. He is a keen detective, carefully gathering evidence and clues, and is characterized by the grey Stetson hat he always wears. Aborgast traces Mary to the Bates Motel but is murdered by Mother/Norman before he can discover what truly happened to her.

Mr. Lowery

Mr. Lowery is Mary's boss at the real estate agency. He is described as a slimy, somewhat dishonest boss, which is why Mary feels justified stealing \$40,000 from him.

Tommy Cassidy

Tommy Cassidy is the real estate customer who purchases the house for \$40,000. The home he purchases is meant to be a wedding gift for his daughter, a thought that reviles Mary Crane. It is insinuated in the text that previously, Mary had prostituted herself to Tommy to make ends meet.

Sheriff Chambers

Sheriff Chambers is the local sheriff in Fairvale. Chambers is a typical local cop, believing he knows everything about his townsfolk, including Norman Bates. After handling Mother's murder twenty years ago, Chambers believes Norman is a slightly disturbed but harmless individual. He is shocked to learn that Norman has exhumed and taxidermied Mother's body, and that he had been involved in both Mary and Aborgast's murders.



Objects/Places

The Oedipus Situation

The Oedipus Situation is what Norman is reading about in the novel's opening. The situation discusses the classic Oedipus Complex - the ancient Greek king Oedipus who fell in love with his mother. Mother chides Norman for reading about such filth, but he says, "I thought if both of us could just look at the problem reasonably and try to understand it, maybe things would change for the better," signaling to the reader that Norman's relationship with Mother is unhealthy (Pages 11 - 12).

The S.S. Caledonia

The S.S. Caledonia is the cruise ship where Mary and Sam meet. Although they only spend a week together on the cruise, they decide to get married.

Taxidermy

Taxidermy is Norman Bates' favorite hobby. He has a taxidermied squirrel in the hallway of his house, which he clearly used to practice preserving the dead. It is insinuated in the text that Norman Bates also taxidermied his mother, which is how he has preserved her remains for this long.

The Bates Motel

The Bates Motel is the old, rundown motel on the side of a deserted highway that Norman runs with Mother. The actual structure appears to be a single-floor unit with an office and hallway of motel rooms, connected to the old-fashioned house where Norman and Mother live. The house itself has been scrupulously kept in the exact state in which it was left when Mother died, meaning that nothing has been updated and it sits like a museum on the grounds. It also means that Mother's room has been absolutely untouched. Everything, from the cream jars to her dirty laundry on the floor have laid unmoved for the past twenty years. In a way, this is symbolic of the way Norman's emotional growth has been paralyzed since Mother's death. He clings fiercely to the past, unable to progress emotionally or socially. In the first chapter of the novel, Norman thinks, "Here, everything was orderly and ordained; it was out there, outside, that the changes took place" (Page 4).

Fairvale, Texas

Fairvale, Texas is the city where Norman and Mother run their motel. This is where Mary Crane stops over for the night before she plans to visit Sam Loomis in the morning.



Phoenix, Arizona

Phoenix, Arizona is where Mary Crane was born and where she grew up. Mary lives in Phoenix with her sister, Lila, until she steals the \$40,000 from Mr. Lowery and begins her life on the run.

\$40,000

\$40,000 is what Mary Crane steals from her boss, Mr. Lowery. After stealing this money, Mary begins her life on the run, which inadvertently leads to her murder. The \$40,000 is also the reason Aborgast is inadvertently murdered - he was hired by Lowery to track the money down, which led him straight into Mother's murderous grip.

The Buick

The Buick is the car Mary drives to the Bates Motel, after trading in her own car twice in an effort to cover her tracks as she flees Phoenix. The car is characterized by its smashed left fender, but Mary doesn't mind it. Before entering the motel, Mary stashes the stolen \$40,000 in the glove compartment of the car. After Norman Bates murders her, he stuffs her body in the car trunk and drops the whole thing into the swamp behind his motel, \$40,000 and all.

The Razor

The Razor is what Mother uses to kill Aborgast. Earlier in the chapter, Norman had been shaving himself with the straight-edge razor and thought to himself, "he had to be careful to put it away when he finished shaving, to lock it up where Mother couldn't get hold of it. He couldn't trust Mother with anything that sharp" (Page 106).

The Gold Earring

The Gold Earring is what Lila finds in Mary's motel room, and is how she knows that something terrible has happened to Mary. Lila knows the earring is Mary's because she bought it at a one-of-a-kind jewelry store in Dallas for Mary's birthday.

The Fruit Cellar

The Fruit Cellar is where Norman hides Mother's body when it becomes too dangerous to house her in her bedroom any longer. He knows that the police will arrive soon, and if they find Mother's corpse, they'll know what he did; he killed Mother, exhumed her body, and stuffed it. They'll know that Mother is "still alive" and that Norman is a killer.



Suspended Animation

Suspended Animation is the magical power Norman Bates believes he possesses. This allows him to turn life on and off, like one might handle a light switch, which, in his mind, is how he was able to bring Mother back from the dead.

The Unholy Trinity

The Unholy Trinity is the name the asylum doctors come up with for Norman's three distinct personalities: Norman, the little boy who needed his mother and hated anyone who came between them, Norma the Mother, and Normal, the adult Norman Bates who concealed all his secrets from the outside world.



Themes

Insanity

Inarguably, *Psycho* is a study of insanity, particularly the insanity of its main character, Norman Bates, who has developed a split personality in order to cope with his extreme emotional issues. Norman's insanity is characterized by gruesome violence, voices in his head, and a complete loss of reality. Yet the defining element of Norman's insanity is his split personality - the young boy (Norman), the adult man (could be called "Normal"), and of course, Mother (Norma). Each of these personalities encompasses a different aspect of the main character's psyche, and throughout the novel, Norman Bates struggles to balance the three. The novel seems to suggest that Norman's insanity comes as a result of his puritanical mother's abusive control. Mother taught Norman - through physical and verbal abuse - that all things sexual (from nudity to impure thoughts) were perverse, disgusting, and evil. As a result, Norman failed to mature normally. The fully-grown man had sexual needs and desires, but the voice of the little boy, the boy terrified of his mother's punishments, refused to let the adult man explore. Additionally, after Mother's death, Norman's already fragile psyche adopts her strong personality. Her words have stuck so strongly with Norman that even after her death, they echo through his consciousness, so much that it is as if she's in the same room with him. These three personalities battle it out for control over Norman's mind, and at the end of the novel, Mother's personality wins.

While Norman suffers from a literal split personality, Mary Crane also suffers from a mild form of split personalities. Stealing Mr. Lowery's money is completely out of character, and something Mary Crane never would have imagined herself doing before the opportunity presented itself. Because theft is not normally part of Mary's personality, it could be argued that when she steals the money, Mary is suffering from a temporary bout of insanity. Mary realizes this about herself when, over dinner, Norman states, "I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times" (Page 39). The novel's message about insanity is particularly bleak. None of the characters overcome their condition. Mary is murdered and Norman loses his grip on reality while he is in the asylum. With no characters to sympathize with, Bloch hopes that the reader will turn their gaze, and their sympathy on themselves. Lines like, "I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times" and, "funny ... how we take it for granted that we know all there is to know about another person, just because we see them frequently or because of some strong emotional tie" (Page 92), call every reader to reconsider their own relationships and whether they know their loved ones as well as they think they do. With no characters left to condemn, Bloch cleverly ensures that readers questions themselves: am I sane or not?

Good Versus Evil

In direct relation to Norman's split personality disorder, the novel focuses on the divide between good and evil in the world, and in each character's soul. This conflict is clearly



seen in the characters of Norman Bates and Mary Crane. Norman constantly battles against the good in him (arguably the adult Norman who knows that murder is wrong, even though he helps cover the crimes up) and the evil in him (the personification of Mother who brutally murders at will). Norman's struggle is physically represented in the arguments he has in his mind - sometimes with all three of his personalities screaming at once - and symbolically with the text's play between light and dark. Whenever Norman resorts to evil, when Mother's personality takes over, he literally blacks out, meaning all the light has left him. Norman disposes of the bodies in a dark, murky swamp and the narrator reminds the reader over-and-over how dark the scenery is. The murders both happen on stormy nights when there are dark clouds in the sky, blocking out the sun. Readers should be encouraged to carefully comb the text for the many scenes in which Bloch carefully constructs the balance between light and shadow to highlight Norman's emotional state, particularly after Norman says, "All at once that was the most important thing - to get out of the dark" (Page 61).

When discussing the balance between good and evil, it is also important to mention Mary Crane's character. Mary is a basically "good" person who momentarily resorts to evil when she steals the money. Mary's lapse into evil is momentary, and after meeting Norman Bates, Mary decides to return the money and therefore, return to good. She even plans to take a shower before returning the money - a literary symbol for washing away her sin: "Come clean, Mary. Come clean as snow" (Page 44) - representing her redemption. Unfortunately, Norman's evil wins over Mary's good when he murders her before she can redeem her sins. Many scholars believe Bloch is making a strong argument that in society, evil wins over good. Mary, who arguably represents good, is murdered before redemption, and at the end of the novel, Mother, who represents evil, takes over what little good is left in Norman as he slips into full insanity at the asylum.

Sexuality

Many of the relationships in the novel are marred by strange sexual predilections, or moral indiscretions. The most obvious of these is the strange relationship between Norman Bates and Mother. At the opening of the novel, Norman is reading about the Oedipus Situation, - the ancient Greek king Oedipus who fell in love with his mother. Mother chides Norman for reading about such filth, but he says, "I thought if both of us could just look at the problem reasonably and try to understand it, maybe things would change for the better," signaling to the reader that Norman's relationship with Mother is unhealthy (Pages 11 - 12). Throughout the novel, there are many moments in which Norman views his Mother sexually, although these moments are always followed by disgust or extreme guilt. In Norman's mind, sexuality should be punished. The first person he punishes is Mary Crane. Although Norman doesn't know it, Mary Crane has been living a life of indiscretion, with the text even insinuating that she prostituted herself to Tommy Cassidy in Chapter Two. On the night that Mary is murdered, she privately strips off all her clothes and performs a sexy dance for herself in the mirror, an act Norman finds to be particularly perverse. Mary's dance is actually celebrating her sexuality. Norman's rage comes not only from his extreme moral views, but also from his impotence. Because Norman is unable to engage in his sexuality - either physically



or emotionally - the physical response to sexuality has morphed into a destructive anger. Mary Crane is punished for her sexual indiscretions with murder. Similarly, Norman killed his mother and her lover (Uncle Joe Conside) for their amorality. The ending of the novel is rather bleak: Norman's moral crusade against illicit sexuality is discovered, but he is not necessarily punished for his crimes. He is sentenced to life in an asylum but he is never truly punished for the murders, which leaves the reader with the message that Mary, Aborgast, Mother, and Uncle Joe have died in vain.



Style

Point of View

Psycho is told from third-person omniscient point-of-view with different chapters adhering to different characters' perspectives. Omniscient narration means that the narrator has access to the thoughts and emotions of each character, but the perspective fluctuates. Sometimes the reader is held closer to Mary's thoughts, for example, and it is as if they are experiencing the story through her eyes (although the narrator dips into the thoughts of other characters). Other times, the reader is held closely to Norman's thoughts, or Sam Loomis' thoughts, or Lila's thoughts. Despite the fact that the unnamed narrator has unlimited access into each character's mind, the reader is somewhat manipulated by the narration. The events form a beautiful mystery, filled with intrigue, suspense, and revelation, so there are many questions that remained unanswered for large portions of the novel. Most readers do not know, for example, that Mother is dead until the very end of the novel. Despite the manipulation, the narration is reliable. The information given is truthful if not complete. Information is withheld rather than manipulated.

The novel is told almost entirely in exposition, with rare moments of dialogue between the characters, particularly as they search for Mary after her disappearance. The heart of the novel is Norman's struggle with insanity, so a majority of the novel takes place in his head as he struggles to balance the various personalities that split his attention. This struggle forms the crux of Norman's emotional journey, and is integral to the overall success of the novel.

Setting

Psycho is set in Fairvale, Texas at the Bates Motel. The Bates Motel is an old, rundown motel on the side of a deserted highway. The actual structure seems to be a single-floor unit with an office and hallway of motel rooms, connected to the old-fashioned house where Norman and Mother live. The house itself has been scrupulously kept in the exact state it was left in when Mother died, meaning that nothing has been updated and it sits like a museum on the grounds. It also means that Mother's room has been absolutely untouched. Everything, from the cream jars to her dirty laundry on the floor have laid unmoved for the past twenty years. In a way, this is symbolic of the way Norman's emotional growth has been paralyzed since Mother's death. He clings fiercely to the past, unable to progress emotionally or socially. In the first chapter of the novel, Norman thinks, "Here, everything was orderly and ordained; it was out there, outside, that the changes took place" (Page 4). It's also important to note that the novel is set during the mid 1900s, somewhere between 1950 - 1960, when strict gender roles (working man versus stay-at-home woman) were the norm. These expectations are at the heart of Mary Crane's unhappiness, which leads to her theft, which inadvertently leads to her murder. The setting can also be seen in the strict morality of the time. Mary



and Sam would never live together before marriage, for example, and single children (like Norman Bates) were expected to stay at home and care for their aging parents. The time is also reflected in the representation of insane asylums, which still practiced lobotomies and shock therapy, for example. Because the conditions were so horrific, Norman refused to send his mother (or, in actuality, himself) there for treatment.

Language and Meaning

Because the novel is set in the mid-1900s, the language is somewhat dated. Many of the characters use outdated terms and phrases that may be foreign to modern readers, but that can still be understood contextually. Phrases like "in a pig's ear" (Page 16), "the gay Nineties" (Page 33), and to "have hysterics" (Page 47) all occur in the first few chapters of the novel. That said, the novel's language is relatively straightforward, with few analogies or metaphors to contend with. There are, however, beautiful moments of symbolism, particularly when describing light and shadows, which symbolically represents good and evil. Whenever Norman resorts to evil, when Mother's personality takes over, he literally blacks out, meaning all the light has left him. Norman disposes of the bodies in a dark, murky swamp and the narrator reminds the reader over-and-over how dark the scenery is. The murders both happen on stormy nights when there are dark clouds in the sky, blocking out the sun. Readers should be encouraged to carefully comb the text for the many scenes in which Bloch carefully constructs the balance between light and shadow to highlight Norman's emotional state, particularly after Norman says, "All at once that was the most important thing - to get out of the dark" (Page 61). Also, since the novel is written as a mystery (even a detective mystery with the short appearance by Milton Aborgast), the novel prescribes to the detective noir style, complete with "hardboiled" detective, Aborgast. "Hardboiled" - like a hardboiled egg, for example - essentially means tough. He not only solves crime, the detective also confronts danger (like demanding to interview Mother) and has a characteristically tough attitude (as seen in his emotionless grilling of a weeping Lila). However, Bloch is simply nodding at the hardboiled genre - he has Aborgast killed a few chapters after introducing him - and holds tighter to the characteristics of noir. The most important characteristics of noir fiction are the woman of questionable virtue (Mary Crane) and the crime committed, motivated by sexuality (Mary Crane's murder). Noir films always feature heavy shadows, which can also be noted in the text.

Structure

This novel is composed of 17 chapters of relatively equal length, ranging from 4 - 17 pages. The chapters tend to be short and full of action, each adding further clues and mystery, which propels the reader through the novel. Often, chapters end on a cliffhanger moment, forcing the reader to turn the next page and start the next chapter. This intense action, combined with the very short chapter lengths may entice readers to read the entire novel in one or two sittings. The plot of the novel is fairly simple with no subplots. It's interesting to note that the physical conflict (and action) of the novel surrounds Mary Crane's murder and her loved ones' search to discover the truth about



what happened to her, but the emotional heart of the novel focuses almost solely on Norman's struggle with insanity. The climax of the novel inarguably occurs in Chapter Three, when Mother / Norman murders Mary Crane in the shower. This singular event sets the rest of the novel into motion: Aborgast's murder, Lila's visit to Fairvale, Sam and Lila's encounter with Mother at the Bates Motel, and the eventual revelation that Norman and Mother are one and the same. The novel is quite easy to read and the plot is engrossing once the reader is immersed in the story being painted in its pages. The story line is relatively linear with no flashbacks or long sections of back-story to contend with. The only exception to this is when Norman battles with memories of Mother and Uncle Joe. In the text, it seems as if the events Norman recalls happened only a few months ago, but in reality, they occurred almost twenty years ago. He addresses this time continuum by saying, "Mother didn't approve; she claimed these things were against religion, but that wasn't the real reason. It was because when he read the books he wasn't her little boy anymore. He was a grown man, a man who studied the secrets of space and mastered the secrets of dimension and being. It was like being two people, really - the child and the adult" (Pages 105 - 106). Overall, the novel is quite easy to read and entertaining in its entirety.



Quotes

"Here, everything was orderly and ordained; it was out there, outside, that the changes took place" (Page 4).

"I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times" (Page 39).

"There were times when you had to drink, even if you knew you had no stomach for liquor, even if a few ounces were enough to make you dizzy, make you pass out. There were times when you wanted to pass out" (Page 46).

"You could lock Mother up, but you couldn't keep her from listening" (Page 48).

"Cold-blooded murder is one thing, but sickness is another. You aren't really a murderer when you're sick in the head. Anybody knows that" (Page 57).

"Funny, Sam told himself how we take it for granted that we know all there is to know about another person, just because we see them frequently or because of some strong emotional tie" (Page 92).

"Mother didn't approve; she claimed these things were against religion, but that wasn't the real reason. It was because when he read the books he wasn't her little boy anymore. He was a grown man, a man who studied the secrets of space and mastered the secrets of dimension and being. It was like being two people, really - the child and the adult" (Pages 105 - 106).

"Life is a force, too, a vital force. And like electricity, you can turn it off and on, off and on. I'd turned it off, and I knew how to turn it on again. Do you understand me?" (Page 171).

"He probably believed in spiritualism every bit as much as he believed in the preservative powers of taxidermy. Besides, he couldn't reject or destroy these other parts of his personality without rejecting and destroying himself. He was leading three lives at once" (Page 200).

"To be the only one, and to know that you are real - that's sanity, isn't it?" (Page 203).



Topics for Discussion

How does Bloch use the balance of light and shadow to symbolize the emotional state of his main characters? Choose two examples from the text to support your argument. In your opinion, is Bloch's symbolic use of light successful? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the relationship between Mary and Sam Loomis. Do you think the couple was truly in love? Why or why not? Do you think Sam reacted appropriately to Mary's disappearance? What does this tell you about his character? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Do you think Norman's insanity could have been avoided? What reasoning does the text give for Norman's strange behavior? Do you think it's fair to fully blame Mother for Norman's behaviors? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does the setting of the novel, particularly the era, influence the events of the novel? In particular, how do gender roles affect the lives of Mary and Lila Crane? Do you think the story would have had the same outcome if it were set in modern times? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Mary Crane. In your opinion, is she a "good guy" or a "bad guy"? How can you tell? What message is Bloch sending to the readers by having Mary Crane killed before she can be redeemed of her sins? In the end, would you say this novel's message is depressing or uplifting? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Was the ending of the novel - the realization that Norman suffers from a split personality disorder - believable? If so, how did Bloch manage to fool you for so long? If not, where was the truth given away? Did the ending affect your overall enjoyment of the novel? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the character of Milton Aborgast. Why do you think his character was included in the story? Do you think his character was necessary, or could his actions have easily been performed by another character, Lila, for example? How does the inclusion of Aborgast's character lend itself to the noir and hardboiled genres of the time? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.