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Untitled Document - 8/21/2026

Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho is considered one of the landmarks of cinematography as it gave a start to the slasher genre as one of the earliest examples of depicting graphic violence on screen.

When the movie first came out, it ripped the cinema of the twentieth century in half.

Before Psycho, there was a movie culture in which viewers huddled together in the darkness of the cinema to be thrilled, moved, or frightened, with the promise that they were all in it together and that a happy ending awaited them on the other side.

The reassurance that a horror movie would end well was a given, facilitated by the Hollywood approach to movie-making.

Even such movies as Frankenstein and The War of the Worlds reinforced the feelings that the nature of the universe was for any horror to end and for good to prevail over evil.

Yet, Psycho went against that principle from the very beginning.

Its infamous end scene causes extreme shock among viewers, with the heroine being slaughtered in front of their eyes.

By picturing this murder, the movie transformed the entire philosophy of the horror film genre (French, 2022).

While the ending "Shower Scene" is the most popular and revealing of Hitchcock's approaches to the horror film genre, the "Parlor Scene" also deserves attention since it is also illustrative of the director's intentions of going against the established traditions of the horror genre.

However, the artistry in lighting, the angles of the camera, and the mise-en-scene make it easier for certain details to hide in plain sight and create a world that is abundant in its duality.

The "Parlor Scene" starts with the seemingly innocent invitation from Norman to Marion Crane, the naïve Bates Motel guest, to come into the parlor.

This invitation is an allusive reference to Howitt's fable "The Spider and the Fly":

"Will you walk into my parlor?" said the Spider to the Fly,
said the Spider to the Fly

Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy

The way into my parlor is up a winding stair.

For who goes up your winding stair can never come down again para.

1.

This reference establishes the tone of the scene creating a juxtaposition between the hunter and the prey.

The lines significance becomes even more apparent toward the end of the film when Norman's mother who has by then consumed Norman's mind and soul gives a direct look into the camera and says that she would not even hurt a fly Hitchcock 1960.

As the scene progresses Hitchcock creates a further narrative of the movie.

The parlor room appears small with barely enough room for two chairs a coffee table a lamp and a chest.

The choice of lighting is especially important because the only source of light in the room gives hints for the characterization of its participants.

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For example Marion sits close to and a little behind the lamp which allows for the good lighting of her face helping the viewers to generate the radiation of glowing warmth of her expression.

Even though she has embezzled money from her boss the director intentionally does not hide her in the shadows to show the darkness of her character Hitchcock 1960.

Choosing to leave Marion in light suggests that she remains capable of atonement and redemption.

Even though Norman is oblivious to the details of Marion's intentions the audience knows that she plans to return what she has stolen.

The overall pool of soft lighting that encapsulates the young woman in the scene creates an atmosphere of calmness suggesting that her actions are redeemable.

In contrast Norman is positioned far from the light source compared to Marion slightly bending to one side.

The effect is that of a harsh line with an almost imperceptible contrast between light and shadow across his face.

The increased duality of light emphasizes the clash of his personality and character validating the juxtaposition between a host and a murderer as well as mother and son.

Shot in low key lighting the scene is set so that Norman is depicted in an unnatural status indicating that he has some secrets to hide which is a typical feature in Hitchcock's movies Belodubrovskaya 2023.

Both fill and backlighting are minimized resulting in a sharp and angular shadow that is being cast ominously on the ceiling and the wall above Norman.

The scene is notable for Hitchcock's use of camera angles to reveal everything that the audience needs to know about the issues that trouble the character's mind.

Similar to what he did with the lighting the director shapes the scene in terms of contrasts.

On the one hand Marion sits in her designated chair with comfort with her posture leaning slightly forward eating a sandwich that Norman made.

The camera is placed at eye level making the viewers feel as if they were also sitting in front of the characters in the scene and talking to them.

This positioning of Marion feels natural and the audience feels a sense of normalcy when interacting with the scene.

On the other hand the movement is out of the viewers comfort zone with Norman being shot from an unnaturally low perspective.

While the camera angles themselves do not have any significant value it is their juxtaposition and contrast that allow for creating some meaning.

The change in the way in which Norman is being shot is a suggestion that his world is skewed and off balance.

The audience is expected to feel uncomfortable when seeing the character from this position because the view is unnatural making it more difficult to extract meaning.

The mise en scene is also instrumental in capturing the intentions of the characters.

The duality created in the Parlor Scene exists not only in the character of Norman Bates but also inside every person.

For example the scenic details are such that Marion can be perceived by viewers with sympathy despite her flaws.

After all she did steal some money but no one could judge her too harshly.

Behind and above Marion there are curved lines that are seen in the picture frame such as the Tiffany lamp with the rounded shade glowing.

Similar to this the walls behind her are soft and brightly lit.

The color of Marion's dress the curves of her hairstyle and the softness of her posture emphasize her vulnerability encouraging the dawning realization that she will ultimately become the victim.

An essential piece of the Parlor Scene is the stuffed owl mounted in the corner of the room.

The graphic nature of the stuffed bird represents Norman's twisted mind and his intentions toward Marion.

His phrase I like to stuff things becomes clearer at the end of the film Hitchcock 1960.

Moreover the stuffed bird adds to the overall sinister and tense environment in the parlor as it hovers over Norman similar to a threatening and dark angel pushing him to make harmful decisions in the future de Souza et al 2023.

The bird continues the narrative of the spider and the fly analogy hinting that the force of strength will prevail in the juxtaposition between the two characters involved in the scene.

To conclude the Parlor Scene from Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho allowed for opening a conversation about the aspects of the dual nature of humanity that manifest themselves with the help of different factors throughout the scene.

These factors include the setting the lighting the angle and the mise en scene all of which contribute to the complete concept of duality.

The combination of the factors is consistent in the scene with each shift being justified coming to a culmination in order to make a differentiation between Norman and Marion.

While the young woman is bathed in abundant light and the shadows that surround her are softer the man is depicted in a much sharper setting which transfers his character.

The interest in looking at the scene in the parlor is that it allows making connections between the nature of the characters and their role in the story.

Looking at what is in front of them directly the viewers become able to decipher the intentions of the director and his innovative approach to horror storytelling.

FAQs

What is GPTZero?

GPTZero is the leading AI detector for checking whether a document was written by a large language model such as ChatGPT. GPTZero detects AI on sentence, paragraph, and document level. Our model was trained on a large, diverse corpus of human-written and AI-generated text with support for English, Spanish, French, German, and other languages. To date, GPTZero has served over 17 million users around the world, and works with over 100 organizations in education, hiring, publishing, legal, and more.

When should I use GPTZero?

Our users have seen the use of AI-generated text proliferate into education, certification, hiring and recruitment, social writing platforms, disinformation, and beyond. We've created GPTZero as a tool to highlight the possible use of AI in writing text. In particular, we focus on classifying AI use in prose. Overall, our classifier is intended to be used to flag situations in which a conversation can be started (for example, between educators and students) to drive further inquiry and spread awareness of the risks of using AI in written work.

Does GPTZero only detect ChatGPT outputs?

No, GPTZero works robustly across a range of AI language models, including but not limited to ChatGPT, GPT-5, GPT-4, GPT-3, Gemini, Claude, and AI services based on those models.

What are the limitations of the classifier?

The nature of AI-generated content is changing constantly. As such, these results should not be used to punish students. We recommend educators to use our behind-the-scenes [Writing Reports](#) as part of a holistic assessment of student work. There always exist edge cases with both instances where AI is classified as human, and human is classified as AI. Instead, we recommend educators take approaches that give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in a controlled environment and craft assignments that cannot be solved with AI. Our classifier is not trained to identify AI-generated text after it has been heavily modified after generation (although we estimate this is a minority of the uses for AI-generation at the moment). Currently, our classifier can sometimes flag other machine-generated or highly procedural text as AI-generated, and as such, should be used on more descriptive portions of text.

I'm an educator who has found AI-generated text by my students. What do I do?

Firstly, at GPTZero, we don't believe that any AI detector is perfect. There always exist edge cases with both instances where AI is classified as human, and human is classified as AI. Nonetheless, we recommend that educators can do the following when they get a positive detection: Ask students to demonstrate their understanding in a controlled environment, whether that is through an in-person assessment, or through an editor that can track their edit history (for instance, using our [Writing Reports](#) through Google Docs). Check out our list of [several recommendations](#) on types of assignments that are difficult to solve with AI.

Ask the student if they can produce artifacts of their writing process, whether it is drafts, revision histories, or brainstorming notes. For example, if the editor they used to write the text has an edit history (such as Google Docs), and it was typed out with several edits over a reasonable period of time, it is likely the student work is authentic. You can use GPTZero's Writing Reports to replay the student's writing process, and view signals that indicate the authenticity of the work.

See if there is a history of AI-generated text in the student's work. We recommend looking for a long-term pattern of AI use, as opposed to a single instance, in order to determine whether the student is using AI.