

Abeer Nusseibeh Ahmad

Professor Wood

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*Mise-en-scene as Theme in Lovefield*

*Lovefield* is a short film by Mathieu Ratthe that combines elements of suspense, surprise and horror. The film uses signs that mislead viewers into making assumptions about the situation and main character, resulting in a powerful message about the assumptions and the expectations of viewers. The *mise-en-scene* in this film contributes to the overall mood and tone of the film, playing on viewers' expectations and cinematographic experience, and is itself the central part of the movie's theme: our comfort with the codes and conventions we have become accustomed to influence our assumptions and beliefs about various situations.

The establishing shot in the film shows an open space: a cornfield. Viewers get the impression that the area is isolated. Such open isolated areas are a common convention of horror films as they make the viewers feel uneasy. A long road runs parallel with the field, but there are no cars or signs of people, which emphasizes the isolation idea. The use of pathetic fallacy increases tension and builds a negative atmosphere as the sky is dark and dull; this suggests that something bad may happen as the film continues. The signpost is swaying in the wind and creaking adds to the scary tone and emphasizes how the setting is miles from civilization. The viewers feel exposed and alone as they are away from society. The mobile phone lying on the ground and beeping with a "disconnected" tone indicates danger and implies that someone was trying to call for help, but couldn't finish the call. Each of these elements is framed so that they meet viewers' expectations of a horror film. The images of desolation, the suspenseful sounds, and the artifacts of tragedy create an

overwhelming feeling of suspense by playing on our knowledge of the codes and conventions used in horror films and sets up those expectations.

Additionally, the establishing shot at the beginning of the film is a high angle shot and shows the extent of how isolated the setting is, establishing the feeling of suspense. The camera gradually moves down toward the corn and through it to uncover the props, such as the mobile phone and the bag. These uses of low angles makes the viewers' feel trapped and are often used in horror films to make the viewers feel like the victim, increasing tension. The way the camera slowly uncovers each prop on the ground gives viewers time to digest what they are seeing and to form ideas about the situation. After the knife is slammed into the ground, the man looks around the scene for a few seconds, as if he weighs the situation; then he hysterically runs backward as if he is running away from something. The camera causes this effect by tracking him as he runs. A low angle point of view shot is used to look up at the man who comes at the camera with a pink sheet and tricks the viewers into believing he is covering up the face of the supposed victim.

Furthermore, viewers do not fully see the first character in *Lovefield*, and the close-up, tightly held shots contribute to the tension. In the first part of the film, viewers can only see a woman's foot struggling to be released, and they can hear her screams, which indicate pain. Shortly after that, they meet the second character; he is a man in his forties or fifties, and his hands covered with blood. Again, the signs of horror are present, and as viewers, we accept them at face value. Throughout the film, viewers are presented with signs used in horror films to suggest the man is trying to cover up for his crime. The man stabbing the knife into the earth and the silence of the bird makes the viewers jump to the conclusion that the woman is being murdered without even having seen a full shot of the characters or a long shot of the scene. By keeping the shots close after setting the scene, viewers naturally move toward assumptions based on the codes presented.

Finally, a large part of the tension in *Lovefield* is created by the sound that accompanies the images and adds another layer of horror conventions and codes. The film is frequently interrupted by shots of the bird cawing which builds up tension as it represents danger, and it is used as a symbol of death. The sound of the bird is uncomfortable, which makes the viewers feel nervous. The sound plays significantly in some scenes and causes viewers to draw certain conclusions about the plot. A good example of this is when the barefoot is struggling; the cawing of the bird and screams accompanied by the ambient buzzing raise the atmospheric tension. When the foot stops moving, the sound stops and everything is silent. This is a common sound technique to symbolize a dramatic moment and, in light of the other visual clues, emphasizes the idea of death. Another good example of effective sound occurs when the man runs back to his car and he looks around. The sound of the bird tapping on the roof of the car causes viewers hold their breath wondering what's next. The sound coupled with the symbolism of a black bird is another layer common horror codes used to play on viewers' assumptions.

In the final scene the tone of the film shifts, causing viewers to come face-to-face with their assumptions. The lighting in this scene is much brighter as the sun appears to be overhead. The scene has a golden tone about it, and the sun is shining on the characters' faces to emphasize the precious moment the two characters share. The viewers are completely surprised when the man lifts up a newborn baby; this unexpected twist in the storyline makes us realize that we subconsciously link certain things to death. The signs and codes used throughout the film mislead the viewers into believing that the man is a murderer when in fact he has just delivered a baby. Rathe uses this twist to make us understand how we pass judgement on certain things simply through codes and conventions we have become accustomed to.

Overall, the short film sets a misleading theme at the beginning by using certain sounds and symbols which we link to danger. The slow tracking shots, the isolated setting, and the use of props build up suspense and tension and lead the viewers to making assumptions about the characters. The ending of the film highlights the principle of never judging people by their appearance, and is effective because we naturally seek to make order out of chaos and search for well-known codes and conventions to establish our understanding of situations that don't offer a wide breadth of information.

Work Cited

Ratthe, Mathieu. *Lovefield*. *YouTube*. 25 April 2008, <https://youtu.be/4meeZifCVro>.