

Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance

The literal translation means, “revenge is mine”. It is the second film in the Oldboy trilogy written and directed by Park Chan-wook in 2002—a Korean trilogy of three vengeful stories that, though the situations are extreme, are brought so close to us we can comprehend the immense sympathy.

The story begins with the reading of an apology letter by a radio DJ, who immediately begins to feel sympathy, left behind by a pathetic, pitiable deaf young man with sea green blue hair named Ryu—a desperate and emotional kid who dropped out of art school and began work at a factory to help his sister, who is slowly and painfully dying of kidney failure, and Ryu is not a suitable kidney donor.

From this very moment, we immediately get a huge sympathetic feeling for our main character.

It’s when Ryu is fired from his job at the factory that catapults us into the mess of the movie. Ryu turns to the black market—a kidney for a kidney and his life’s savings—but Ryu is cheated and left without a kidney for his sister. So Ryu’s tattered, politically radical girlfriend Yeong-Min convinces Ryu to kidnap his former boss’ 4-year-old daughter for ransom. “Uncle” Ryu and “Aunt” Yeong-Min fall in love with the precious little girl, but when Ryu’s sister kills herself upon discovering this all this madness, deaf and distracted by grief, Ryu doesn’t realize when the 4yr old girl falls into a river just 20ft behind him crying for help. She drowns.

In that poor little girl’s death scene, when the poor, misunderstood Ryu drags the child’s dead body from the water and holds her in his arms and weeps, and we watch the utter pain that overcomes Ryu...this was a huge moment when we further sympathize with Ryu—we know Ryu would never hurt that little girl and we share in his grief and spiral into madness with him.

As the English title suggests, the vengeance trilogy revolves entirely around sympathy, which justifies the second theme of vengeance—Ryu’s vengeance, his former boss’ vengeance, the vengeance carried out on the former boss... It’s the trashy, sleazy, dirty, offbeat tone of the flick, it’s the emotions we feel in every scene for all the characters involved.

Sympathy is the frumpy, oversized clothes and faded sea blue green we see on Ryu when we first meet him. It’s his personality when we watch him pull up the pants of the same crazy old hobo everyday while walking home from the factory, and it’s Ryu’s always sorrowful, quiet expression on his tired face—it’s sympathy telling us that Ryu is just a good kid in a crappy situation.

Though, most likely, none of us would ever sell our kidneys on the black market or kidnap our boss’ kid for ransom, writer/director Chan-wook did an amazing job giving Ryu, his sister, his girlfriend, his boss such real characteristics that, despite their poor choices, we can sympathize with them all.

Real characteristics such as Ryu’s love for his sister—though deafness kept him from hearing the surrounding neighbors of their cheap little apartment fighting violently on one side, and knocking boots on the other side noisily all night every night, the noise still bothered Ryu because he could see it bothered his sister. That is sympathy, and sympathy is contagious.

This film is an amazing example of tone, character development, and really using the theme to the fullest extent to describe the movie, the locations, the characters, their clothes and actions...every detail is perfectly thought out. And not just this film but the whole trilogy—three movies that I will always refer to and look up to as a perfect example and inspiration for these movie traits.

Yeh Jaawani Hai Deewani

“These Kids are High on Life” is a Hindi film directed by a young Ayan Mukerji released in 2013.

Naina is a young woman, scholar student, pushed by her parent’s to become a doctor. So she’s a bit of a shy bookworm who doesn’t have that much excitement in life. And after being offered the opportunity to venture on a cross-country hiking trip with three friends, she realizes this sad truth about her life during a conversation with her parents one boring night at home.

School work. Focus on your education. Study study study. But once in her life, Naina wants to do something crazy! So she sneaks out to the train station with her ticket where she is reunited with her old guy friend, Bunny—a charismatic schmoozer, vagabond and aspiring director.

During the 3-month trip through the southern mountains of India, the four young friends learn what it means to experience this wonderful, beautiful thing called life. Life! It’s why we are all here, not just a state of being, but *doing*. Life is constantly pushing us forward. It’s why we’re watching a Bollywood movie in the middle of the night, because if anyone can see the beauty in life, it’s the Indians with their passion for singing and dancing and art, the colored powder thrown into the air during Holi, painting friends, family, strangers who pass love and care from one another, genuinely happy to be alive. This being a moment in the movie marking the new Naina who finally found her happiness.

The theme and tone in this movie goes hand in hand—the beauty of life—and could not have been better achieved if made by *anyone* else. And what is a large characteristic of life? Love.

The love story between Naina and Bunny is a roller coaster that never quite peaks—when one begins to feel something for the other, their hopes are suddenly crushed before they grow too big. And when the young friends to finally admit their love for each other—Bunny got accepted into film school in America. Though it’s painful, the kids understand life isn’t all fun and games forever, and Bunny leaves to the America.

Then 5 years later, Naina is in school, studying to become a doctor, and Bunny just offered his own travel show, our characters unite for the wedding of their fourth friend, and Naina and Bunny are given a second chance.

Yes! We love Naina and Bunny—Naina, the shy bookworm who grew into this beautiful and happy young woman, and Bunny, a young man who followed his dream and realized his dream is with Naina. These are two young kids, just like us at one point in time, whom we watched develop and learn and find their happiness, and when we leave the movie, you swear you found your happiness.

You don’t need some grand, dramatic storyline to make a good movie. Yeh Jaawani is a coming of age story, really, about nothing more than real life, and then moment in life we look to the future almost discouraged. It’s a simple thing, but terrifying and mysterious, and something everyone experiences. It’s life.

The Hateful Eight

The game of lies—no one is ever who they say they are. That is the theme. This film is all about the characters, possibly more so than their situation or anything else that happens in the story, because everything that does happen is directly related, responsible, due to the characters.

And it's the damn blizzard's fault for why our characters are trapped together in a haberdashery atop a mountain with a mystery of the owner's disappearance nagging at the back of Major Marquis' mind. This nagging keeps the Major always suspicious of their new found acquaintances they come to join it the haberdashery.

Constant conversation, investigating, learning about each character that continually pushes the story, and by nightfall, in less than a day, had reaches dramatic conclusions of murder and a plot to kill Hangman Ruth to free his warrant.

Classically recorded in film, not digitally, gives an immediate feel and look to the movie. And the 70s music and titling adds onto the style typical of director and writer Quentin Tarantino.

The hateful eight—each of our characters holds a little spite for something or other, of which we learn throughout the movie. The Major's hate for the racist white General (the hate equally reciprocated), Hangman Ruth's hate is shown through his abuse toward his \$10,000 reward Daisy Domergue, who, at the end, spews out lies to save her life. And everyone else, well, they just mean, angry and hateful.

Tarantino's work always contains amazing dialogue. Conversations are genuine, creating real, unique and relatable characters. Slang, swear words and slurring are all important attributes—concise diction is for amateurs.

As well, it's the character's actions. In *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, we bonded with the character through *what* he did. In *The Hateful Eight*, we bond with characters through *how* they do it. Such as when O.B. busts in through the front door after bracing the cold—he doesn't just go sit by the fire, he marches over, wraps himself in a bear fur and plops down on the floor in front of the fire child-like.

All in all, I learned how to create a real character.

Ju-On: The Grudge

Ju-On has always been a favorite series of mine. Not too traditional in the way the story unfolds with flashbacks, flash-forwards, reversal in order of chronological events...

Ju-On: The Grudge begins in present time when the social worker first arrives to the house, works its way back to the family before, jumps back to the investigation in present time... it can get complicated, especially in some of the other movies in the series, because they're more than just flashes in time, and there is no thrifty transition to give the impression of a deviation in the continuous timeline.

This particular movie is not as prominent in the mystery department, but it does exist in the investigation of the ghosts who haunt the house.

This story is unique in that anyone can be victim of the Grudge as it latches onto anyone who comes into its path. And each victim experiences the hauntings differently—the daughter of the former investigator of the hauntings felt guilt for abandoning her friends in the house. And some don't have time to react to the haunting before they disappear, such as the confused sister of the possessed man who lastly lived in the home.

I already took much inspiration from this story in the sense of the haunting to move from person to person. In my story, it is not a grudge as much as a parasite, following the weakest soul it comes across, feeding off the sorrow and "negative energy".

Sound is one of the greatest attributes of the movie. Though the cat's meow doesn't always sound natural in the scene, the shuffling of feet down the hall, the scratching on the wall, the iconic groan of the Grudge ghost completes the senses. It's an attribute commonly overlooked in many movies, and always carries the most power in the horror genre.

The look of the film is simple and serene and peaceful. Empty hallways, spacious rooms, even the elevator lacked a feeling of horror though we could see the ghost boy right outside the window.

Oldboy

The first in the Sympathy trilogy, starring one of my favorite all-time actors Choi Min Sik, and one of the most famous films in Korean history. It's one of a few films that molded the new Korean industry, setting a new standard and inspiring many new filmmakers.

Unlike the two succeeding films in the trilogy, Oldboy isn't as grounded in sympathy. Instead, self-atonement is the road we take, fueled by the vengeance of a stranger's wrath fuels our character, Dae Su.

At the end of the film, Dae Su has come to understand the wrong in his ways, but instead of punishing himself, he forgets his guilt with the help of a hypnotist. This is a huge decision, one reflecting the development of the persistent, unchanging character through the story of his humbling journey. And though he does not change greatly, that is simply due to who the character is.

The action sequences are so spectacularly done. Long, wide shots. One, constant fight with no fancy camera tricks to create an illusion of a fierce fight, but instead relies on, and beautifully frames, compliments and enhances the stunning choreographed fighting.

I adore long, wide shots. They feel like you are watching the scene in person versus jumping around watching the scene at various distances. So it creates this real mood of action, suspense, fear, awkwardness, drama—whatever is being portrayed.

And coupled with those long wide shots is this gritty lighting that perfectly mirrors Dae Su's personality. Especially during the fight scenes, every drop of blood and dirt stain pops, exaggerating the action.

Devil's Backbone

A beautiful film. Fortunately, I speak Spanish, so I was able to watch the film without subtitles, which always takes away from the cultural beauty of a film as subtitles can never fully convey what is being said, how it's being said, double meanings...

Just hearing the Spanish accent (which does sound different than accents of other Spanish speaking countries) was alone so powerful in creating the mood and upholding the style of the film. It complements the scenery of this orphanage in the middle of nowhere, the fashion and furniture of the 1930s, the architecture of traditional Spanish style...it's a completed puzzle. If one thing was to be changed, one piece missing, the image is incomplete and worthless, and the movie would fall apart. That is usually the error when foreign movies are remade to conform into other cultures and languages.

Del Toro's style has always remained constant no matter the genre he writes—horror, *Los Ojos de Julia*, action, *Pacific Rim*, adventure, *The Hobbit*, or something with more of a comic book feel like *Hellboy*, each film is easily recognizable as being his work because in every film, no matter what, Del Toro strives to include, at the least, just a little bit of himself, be it a clock or cross on the wall, to recreating himself in every character.

The big key elements are the colors—red, blue and gold—some sort of fantastical element—*Hellboy*, the magical creatures in *El Laberinto del Fauno*, the ghost in *Devil's Backbone*, the magical golden machine that kept an old man young in *Cronos*, and of course the *Book of Life*...these all are made up of a child's beautiful and wondrous dreams.

Another obvious constant style of his is the Spanish culture, the Catholic religion, and clocks or time. His movies range from Spanish to English and take places everywhere throughout the world, yet his style creates such a unique vision that can transcend cultural divides.

In *El Espinazo del Diablo*, young Carlos is left at an orphanage. One location and a small cast, both of which we quickly grow fond of. Each character possesses his or her own interior conflict as well as butting heads with each other—love and jealousy, an inferiority complex coupled with greed, missing legs, the increasing pressure of the Spanish War...and of course the ghost boy haunting the orphanage.

We were all children once. Some of us still are. We all can relate to these young boys who have been abandoned at the orphanage and their feelings of confusion, fear and ghost stories. But at the same time, being children, they easily forget the horrors of the world and can find mystery and joy anywhere. They are lost in the mystery of the ghost child, blind to the growing drama among the adults.

All of Del Toro's works are iconic, no matter how greatly they differ from one another. It gives me a good sense and inspiration in what I need to do to market myself as myself with a constant and easily recognizable style, which spans from color, to theme, to characters, to language. I now have a better idea as to how to better direct myself into what I write.

American Horror Story

A phenomenal series that has changed modern day story-telling dramatically.

AHS pushes us to the edge of sanity to reveal the darker side hidden in all of us who are too afraid to admit they exist, and use it to create such extreme, unbelievable drama we secretly crave that only unique characters can bring out.

Not all characters are bold with strong personalities, just unique, like us all, and real—emotions, suffering, guilty-pleasures, nervous ticks, pet peeves—the AHS writers blow out of proportions those characteristics to create symbolic characters we all recognize.

There have been many cheap knock-offs of AHS that attempted the same taboo, darkness and sex for their show, but they fall short. Why? AHS is far more than dark drama (though it is pretty important).

Fashion sets AHS apart from the herd. Fashion is so often overlooked in everything we watched, or is approached cautiously and with fear.

A gamer t-shirt or Dolce and Gabbana socks define the character. The moment we see a character on screen, we know who they are by their clothes before they even speak.

As well, the 50s-90s inspired fashion places our characters in their own world, a clique segregated from society, from us, with their own set of shared interests, personalities, slang, stories, experiences...and we love it.

This show is all about the visuals, used to suck us in as is the purpose of film and television. This show is just like Twin Peaks, only AHS really emphasizes the aesthetics to really set them apart.

The theme of the first season is infidelity. Infidelity is the constantly urging desire haunting our characters, challenging them and pushing them to their limits. Infidelity affects most of humanity, so many can relate to the pained characters.

This show takes reality and exaggerates it to create stories with morals, something I'm interested in. This show is always a great inspiration and model for all.

Twin Peaks

So many shows and movies have been made throughout the years mimicking many of the characteristics in Twin Peaks. TV shows such as *Psych* make mock episodes all the time. Twin Peaks is so iconic from the theme music to the characters, dialogue, the drama, the typical 80s fashion, camera shots, even the credits. It's a quirky mystery thriller.

Immediately after the opening credits, we are started in the drama of a murder in small town. We're intrigued. And then we begin to meet the characters who tend to be unique and a bit strange as they are in small town.

Ed's crazy wife obsessed with drapes, an abusive truck driver husband with a bloody t-shirt, a dumbass high school kid, the crazy vindictive daughter of a business owner with uncertain intentions other than creating havoc, a chatty unconventional FBI Detective—nothing is mainstream. In fact, these characters inspired the new mainstream.

And being in a small town, everyone knows everyone, and for a long while. So this, of course, means there are all sorts of secrets, past conflicts and hidden relationships between all sorts of characters we don't know about, but are hinted along the way, creating more suspense and intrigue.

And I have noticed the dark drama and strange happenings seen in *Twin Peaks* to be replicated in *American Horror Story* and *Bates' Motel*, something I definitely can use in my work as well.

Babadook

In my old art class, students always hated being told by the instructor to redo their work. Redraw it. Repaint it. Come up with a better idea. Do this instead of that. But though they loathed it, their work always comes out better in the end. That is the instructor's job—push students out of their comfort zones, get them to stop being lazy, piss them off a bit and they will turn a simple doodle into a masterpiece. I know, I have experienced the same thing.

This art class story relates to the movie in the sense that the makers of this film worked really hard to make what could have been an easy, low-budget film into phenomenal story telling.

One house. A handful of characters. Perfect angles and lighting. This is another film in which the director and writer were pushed to get the most out of what resources they had. I always envy this as it relies on creativity, and the push always brings out the best in the creators as well.

A mother, stressed out, depressed, frazzled, lives alone with her over-zealous, hyper, creative 8yr old son, in their old house, withdrawn from society. Both grieve over the loss of the father and husband of the family, the mother blaming her confused, loving little boy for her pain. And these strong emotions of conflict between the two lead to the manifestation of a boogey man—the Babadook.

The sound effects were very important in the film. It's commonly overlooked, but in the Babadook, we could hear the creepy crawly bugs, the scratching at the door, and the eerie voice on the phone, "babadook, dook, dook!". Very well done.

And the details! Everything was important. When stressed, the mother massaged her jaw, which was injured in the car crash her husband died in while driving her to the hospital to give birth. The Babadook's clothing are the same as the father's clothes hanging on the wall of the basement. The book warned the more you ignored the Babadook, the stronger he becomes, which is directly related to the mother ignoring her grief and pain and refusing to move on, which is what causes the stress on the small family to grow stronger.

Details and metaphors and the external conflict being the same as the internal conflict is very unique in this film. After watching this film several times already, that is what I envy and take into consideration when I think about my characters and how their internal conflicts relate and affect their environment.

Bates' Motel

Immediately, we open up inside a home. A young man, Norman Bates, finds the place in a mess, his father is dead and his mother, Norma, not too saddened by the situation. And then they leave—

A new home at a creepy old motel, and then we experience this horrible tragedy of a break in, attempted rape and murder with Norma. We watch it happen, we feel her fear and pain and desperation. And when her son, Norman, enters, well, we feel the pain he does of this disgusting, cruel person trying to hurt his mother. And we feel the bond between these two characters.

This quick thrust into a bad situation pulls us in close with our characters. And then we're given a shock when Norma decides to cover up what happened, starting a whole train wreck of disasters to come.

This action and reaction immediately shows us who these characters really are, what we have been suspecting since the opening of the pilot.

Norma is controlling, vindictive, overbearing and too emotional while her peculiar son Norman seems to be a bit off, lacking in emotion other than his love for his mother, and does everything she asks of him, but he's slowly growing confused and feeling smothered by Norma, leading to all sorts of internal problems as well.

This combination of a strong character who we see is just trying to make things work, trying to make a life for her and her son, and we sympathize with her, and fall victim to her just like Norman does.

This series also uses light to create a grim and gritty look with blue hues and dark contrasts to up-play the dark the drama.

This series is an instant classic. It does a great job integrating the 60s feel from the original Psycho while still maintaining the story as being of present time. It also contributes to distancing Norman and Norma Bates from today's society, lost in their own world at the motel.

Bates' Motel is an entire world with a set of amazing characters, a small group of outcasts in a small town, wonderfully told with skilled, traditional storytelling.

Alfred Hitchcock Presents

The first episode is a simple story of revenge. A woman is assaulted while home alone and is left utterly traumatized. Then, not too long later, while driving with her husband, she sees the man who assaulted her in a hat and coat.

Dying for vengeance, the traumatized woman's husband follows the man in the coat and kills him.

Simple, short and to the point. Almost boring how typical the story is. But then the next day, while driving down the road with her husband, she sees the man who assaulted her in a hat and coat.

Boom. It hits us like a semi-truck. The husband did not kill the assailant. He killed an innocent man his wife confused to be the assailant due to her traumatic state of mind, recognizing merely the coat and hat in a thoughtless fear.

Simple, short, to the point and damn dramatic. This traditional story telling is a prime example of how to perfectly execute a dramatic twist and climax with quickly relatable characters in about twenty minutes. That, my friend, is skill.

This ability to write a "boring" story, and then suddenly add some dramatic twist or revealed truth at the end, anything that makes the audience say to themselves, "wtf?!", is the ability to control the story, know the story, and feed the audience the perfect amount of information to create the exact desired reaction when the story creator wants. That is true talent.

M. Night Shyamalan has mastered this talent, and I have seen the same in a few, great movies and shows, mostly in the horror drama. And every movie in this 12 paged essay is a product of this talent, namely American Horror Story and the Tale of Two Sisters.

The look of these short stories that differ every episode is nothing too spectacular. Simple, easy, black and white. But the black and white grows more * throughout the constantly advancing years. It is a classic, old-fashioned look of horror. No special effects, so original film makers back in the day had but a few aspects they could control and utilize in order to create their desired looks.

This black and white and grayscale look creates shades of shadows and darkness perfect for horror, and is taken advantage of, always, by Hitchcock in all his works, including the famous Psycho. And of course, his use of lighting has influenced many, revolutionizing cinematography. You can see this in work in Bates' Motel, where the lighting and shadows are very key, and are only further emphasized with dreary color. It also has influenced me and how I imagine my stories in my head, guiding the direction of the mood always.

Tale of Two Sisters

Directed by one of my favorite directors, Kim Jee Woon, the Tale of Two Sisters is a remake of a very old Korean story, and not the first movie by Woon, but one of his greatest, a real passion piece that exemplifies hard work and attention to detail.

This movie was remade, with the same director Kim Jee Woon, in English—the Uninvited. Personally, I thought the movie was horrible. It's a perfect example that proves how important culture and language is to a movie, and how a script written in one language cannot work in another language.

The story follows a small family in a lovely house in the countryside. A crazy stepmother, a sad and quiet father, and two daughters who just returned from the hospital after their mother died. Of the sisters, the youngest is shy and terrified of the stepmom. The older sister, Su Mi is protective of her sister, and loathes their step-mother, sensing a dark secret.

And then creepy things begin to occur in the house—ghosts and scratching noises and nightmares. As well as the external conflict, issues arise between the sisters and the crazy step-mother, their hate growing louder and the father growing even more quiet.

But as the story climaxes, we learn the horrible truth halfway through the film in a confusing array of character switches—the shy, younger sister is dead. The step-mother left. And the traumatized Su Mi had gone crazy, that is why she was in the hospital.

And then we end with a flashback explaining the truth. This last half of the film literally left me speechless, and very, very few movies have been able to achieve that. And not only was it a shock, after watching the film a few times I saw the hints and the materialized metaphors—

The ghost hiding under the sink. The hair clip she leaves behind. The dead bird. The ghost girl standing over the older sister while she sleeps, and a hand reaching down her leg as if another creature is being born. Both sisters and the stepmother start their periods the same day. Why the younger sister is silent...

Depressed about her husband's secret affair, Su Mi's mother hangs herself in the dresser in the younger sister's room. When the sister wakes up and sees this, she desperately tries pulling her mother out, only causing the dresser to fall on her and crush her. Unable to scream, she scratched at the floor desperately until she finally died terribly. And in the accident, the sister's hairclip fell out.

The original title translates directly into Rose Flower, Red Lotus, which refer to the sisters. Jee Woon made it important to relate the house directly to the family, and theme. Flower wallpaper. Everything that starts out beautiful to slowly grow grim and dead to represent the sisters—flowers that died before they bloomed.

All these clues and metaphors and psychological horror had me raving mad for months! This is a movie to which I always hold myself a standard.