



The Lady in the Van and the Challenge to Psycho; On the political uses of psychoanalytic imagery in film

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Abstract

This paper explores the strikingly similar use of psychoanalytic imagery in the films *Psycho* and *The Lady in the Van*. The paper argues that the latter film is a deconstruction of the former's political aims. Where *Psycho* uses psychoanalytic imagery to warn of the danger that strong female autonomy poses to normal psychic development, *The Lady in the Van* uses the same tropes to expose the mendaciousness of such thinking. The paper concludes by demonstrating how *Psycho* represents a counter challenge to the political pretensions of *The Lady in the Van*. Bennett's film is on the face of it a critique of middle class attitudes to homelessness. However, this paper demonstrates that by offering a psychological explanation for Miss Shepherd's alterity, *The Lady in the Van* mimics the psychiatrists detailed diagnosis of Norman Bates's perversion at the end of *Psycho*. This is argued to be problematic because the repeated explanation of the alterity of the strong voice of the mother reduces the uniqueness of the character to a symptom rather than an expression of autonomy. Ultimately the paper makes a case for the cultural significance of these films for exploring the political use of psychoanalysis to promote different social ends.

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