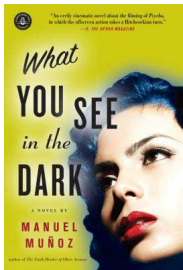


Bakersfield: The backdrop for ‘Psycho,’ both real and on celluloid

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Friday, 23 March 2012 09:15



The small town of Bakersfield, California, is the setting for Manuel Muñoz’s debut novel, “What You See in the Dark.”

In addition to telling the story of four people whose lives are headed toward a violent collision, the book’s backstory delivers Muñoz’s version of what happened prior to the filming of Alfred Hitchcock’s classic, “Psycho,” including a trip by the Actress (Janet Leigh) and the Director (Alfred Hitchcock) to Bakersfield to scout inspiration for the Bates Motel.

Teresa Garza, an aspiring singer, works a menial job at a small shoe store. She’s in love with bartender and man-about-town Dan Watson, much to the chagrin of Candy (no last name), Garza’s co-worker.

Dan’s mother, Arlene, works at the local diner and owns a motel that ultimately becomes the centerpiece of Hitchcock’s film.

The author is especially good at putting his reader in dry, dusty, small town America right at the turn of the century. After closing the book every night, I felt the need for a shower to wash off the grit and grime.

Muñoz uses several points of view in the book, which I suppose he meant to be a clever device, but the shifts left me a little confused. I wish he would have telegraphed the changes with a header or some kind of road map. Any kind of hint would have been helpful.

The one part of the story that is perfectly – and just a little too graphically – clear is how the Actress approached the role and the famous shower scene that haunted all of us for so long. I

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admit, I flipped through the last few pages of that chapter.

The author never really reveals Teresa and Dan's secret, except through Candy's perspective. Since Candy was nowhere around when the violence went down, who's to say her version is the truth? Or does the truth not matter?