Unit 3 Paper

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English 105

For the purposes of this paper I will be treating the sequence from when the tape player starts until the words “Ready when you are, Sergeant Pembry” as a separate scene from the remainder of his escape. While the two can be seen as one scene, there is a significant shift of perspective between the two, which warrants them being treated separately. Together, they easily comprise the most exciting action sequence in the movie, placed directly after the equally exciting, final face-to-face face exchange between Lecter and Starling, which is riveting for a completely different set of reasons.

The scene starts by panning over some of Lecter’s belongings, first a cassette player. The first Aria from Bach’s Goldberg variations, a calm and pleasant melody, softly echoes through the room, setting the stage for an equally vicious battle to come. The next item we see is a sketch of Starling holding a lamb, a reference to the previous scene, where Starling tells Lecter the story of a screaming lamb she tried to save from the slaughter as a child. Still in the same shot, the camera pans to Lecter, perfectly still behind a curtain. All these build up the tension, as does the silence in the eye of a hurricane. Lecter’s perfect stillness once again emphasizes his meditative and controlled demeanor of a resting lion. Lecter’s reference to Marcus Aurelius in the previous scene should also not be overlooked; the awaiting slaughter has already played out many times in his mind.

The camera then jumps to a plate of lamb chops two guards are transporting to his temporary cell. The camera jumps back and forth between close shots of the guards and Lecter, still behind a curtain, which builds the tension further. Although the guards are not aware a “shootout” is imminent, this establishes the Lecter and the two guards as foes in a Western-esque fashion. While Lecter remains still, the camera finally pans to an angle where we can see Lecter’s face unoccluded. Getting ready to enter the cell, one of the guards mocks his request for a second dinner, “lamb-chops, extra-rare.” This serves two purposes: first, it creates a sense of dramatic irony, as the knowledge of their impending doom continues to be foreshadowed with increasingly obvious hints of his escape. Second, it relieves some tension with the morbid humor of Lecter having requested lamb (once again referring to the previous scene), and extra rare at that (referring to his not-necessarily-cooked cannibalism).

We then return to the close-up of Lecter, who proceeds to pull a small pin out of his mouth. Then as the guards proceed with their normal routine of preparing to handcuff him, a close-shot from behind, focused on Lecter’s hand, shows him expertly palming the pin, after which he closes his hand and allows the guards to handcuff him to the cage, all the while maintaining a façade of respect and deference. As the guards then proceed into his cell, preparing to serve his meal, we see Lecter beginning to unlock his handcuffs. The guards prepare to place his tray upon the table, when the aforementioned sketch serves a purpose: presumably in need of time to pick the lock, Lecter instructs the guards to watch out for his sketches, which buys him a couple seconds as they reluctantly oblige. All this is done in one close shot, which pans from the sketch to one guard, to the other who is in the process of locking the door, which adds to the tension.

All the while, Lecter maintains a perfectly stoic countenance, until the moment the guard once again reaches for the tray, which he had placed next to Lecter. Suddenly, he handcuffs the guard to the cell, and the music shifts from the in-scene Bach to a much more dramatic, edited-in classical track (*“Lecter Escapes,”* Howard Shore). While the After giving the guard he locks an utterly predatory stare yet emotionless stare, Hannibal breaks his stoic demeanor for the first time in the scene. With a scream, he knocks the door into the other guard, and lunges at him mouth-open, with the ferocity of a starved wolf. He tears and mangles one side of the guard’s mouth, as his prey’s eyes show only a terrified surrender. Once he has had enough blood, he withdraws, and generously discharges a bottle of pepper-spray (the role of which was foreshadowed in an earlier close-up on one of the guards’ belts) on his eyes. All the while, the camera cuts back and forth between this and the other guard hopelessly struggling to get free of the handcuffs. This constant cutting partially alleviates the gruesome violence of the vampiric bite, while engendering a sense of anguish.

Then Lecter turns his attention to the other guard, his snout painted in blood. As he clubs the man’s head in, we only see Lecter swinging, the camera slowly zooming in on his mouth. With each swing and consequent spurt of blood, Lecter heaves a mix of euphoria and exhaustion, almost suggestive of a sexual pleasure, but all in the motif of a Viking warrior. Then the violence stops, and with it the dramatic theme.

In a style similar to the beginning of the scene, the unsteady camera first pans over the untouched lamb chops, the plate now decorated with drops of blood, the over the carnage of one the guards, all the way to Lecter’s hands, now elegantly swaying in the rhythm of Bach, this time the 7th Goldberg variation. This and the rest of the scene is all a single shot, as we experience the inevitable return to tranquility in the wake of calamity. As the camera zooms above Lecter’s head, his mouth still painted red and his shirt stained with sputtered blood, we see his closed eyes, and it is clear he savors every second of the dwindling rapture.