Close Reading of as Scene: Lecter’s Escape: Part 1.

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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.

The camera then focuses on 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, which builds the tension further. Although the guards are not aware the “shootout” is imminent, this establishes the Lecter and the two guards as foes in a Western-esque fashion. Lecter pulling a small pin out of his mouth is the first direct clue of his escape.

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 his escape is foreshadowed, there are no immediate clues that it will happen at that moment, giving the audience a jump-scare. This is when Hannibal breaks his stoic demeanor for the first time in the scene. With a scream, he lunges at the other guard, mouth-open, with the ferocity of a starved wolf. While he mangles his mouth, 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.

When Lecter turns his attention to the other guard, his snout is 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 savage 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, then 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.