

Silence of the Lambs (1991)

Director.....Jonathan Demme
Writers.... Thomas Harris & Ted Tally

Cast

Jodie Foster ... Clarice Starling
Anthony Hopkins ... Dr. Hannibal Lecter
Scott Glenn ... Jack Crawford
Anthony Heald ... Dr. Frederick Chilton
Ted Levine ... Jame 'Buffalo Bill' Gumb
Frankie Faison ... Barney Matthews
Kasi Lemmons ... Ardelia Mapp
Brooke Smith ... Catherine Martin
Paul Lazar ... Pilcher
Dan Butler ... Roden
Lawrence T. Wrentz ... Agent Burroughs
Stuart Rudin ... Miggs

Awards

Academy Awards: Won for Best Picture (1991),
Best Actress (Jodie Foster)
Best Actor (Anthony Hopkins)
Best Director (Jonathan Demme)
Best Adapted Screenplay;
Nominated for Film Editing & Sound
Golden Globes: Won for Best Actress
Nominated for Director, Picture, Actor & Screenplay
BAFTA: Won Best Actor & Actress
Academy of Science Fiction & Horror Films:
Best Horror Film, Actor, Writing, & Make-up
American Film Institute: named Hannibal Lecter as #1
Villain in Film History (2003)

Memorable Quotes:

"You know what you look like to me, with your good bag and your cheap shoes? You look like a rube. A well-scrubbed, hustling rube with a little taste. Good nutrition's given you some length of bone, but you're not more than one generation from poor white trash, are you, Agent Starling? And that accent you've tried so desperately to shed: pure West Virginia. What is your father, dear? Is he a coal miner? Does he stink of the lamp? You know how quickly the boys found you... all those tedious sticky fumbblings in the back seats of cars... while you could only dream of getting out... getting anywhere... getting all the way to the FBI."
-Hannibal Lecter to Clarice Starling

"The significance of the moth is change. Caterpillar into chrysalis, or pupa, and from thence into beauty. Our Billy wants to change, too."
-Hannibal to Clarice about Buffalo Bill

"You don't know what pain is!"
-"Buffalo Bill" to Catherine Martin

"Brave Clarice. You will let me know when those lambs stop screaming, won't you?" -Hannibal to Clarice

1) **Opening sequence:** Demme uses some familiar suspense film conventions in the opening credit sequence but quickly undermines those conventions as well. Consider his use of suspense film iconography in this opening sequence. Also, the first shot of Clarice depicts her running and climbing. What potential significance is there in this shot? Finally, right before Clarice leaves the obstacle course, there is a shot of "motivational" signs reading: "Hurt", "Agony", "Pain", "Love it". If this appears as a sort of "motto" for the FBI, what sort of emotional/psychological state does it promote? In what way are all of the characters in the film in agony and pain?

2) **Objectification:** Suspense & horror films often depict victims as objects to fulfill some twisted need on the part of the aggressor. Objectification (reducing a human being to a mere object/thing to be used for a menial purpose) is a recurring motif in this film as well. Hannibal Lecter objectifies his victims by eating them. Buffalo Bill objectifies victims for their skin. Agent Crawford uses Clarice as a means of getting to Lecter. In addition to that, notice how many times Clarice is ogled, stared at, or hit on by various characters (even extras/non-speaking roles).

3) **American iconography:** Many film critics have noticed the prevalence of American iconography in *Silence of the Lambs*. In many scenes there are flags, red-white-and-blue images, federal agents, and federal buildings. Watch for other references to America and Americana. What purpose do these serve in the message of the film? If suspense and horror films are about more than just the "spooky stuff", what is the purpose of these American references? Which segment of American society seems to be the focal point of much of this film?

4) **Transformation:** Butterflies and moths play a role in Buffalo Bill's murders, and they are a recurring motif throughout the film. Pay attention to the many dramatic details in the film which incorporate butterflies and moths. What is the significance of this motif to all of the characters in the film? Who is the one character who is not trying to change? Identify other elements of the film (dialogue, props, etc.) that reinforce this desire to transform identities, take on new roles, etc.

5) **General questions:**

- To what extent does this film fit or break the mold of the traditional suspense film?
- What is the central story in this film? Is it more about Lecter and Clarice or Buffalo Bill and his victims? If it is more about Lecter and Clarice, where does the suspense lie in their plotline/relationship? If
- why is Lecter so appealing?