



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Silence of the Lambs

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

What marks out *The Silence of the Lambs* [from other serial killer films] is that it is a profoundly feminist movie. For women I know, most of whom have seen it more than once, the film is as exhilarating as it is harrowing. *The Silence of the Lambs* is to the psychological thriller-horror combo what the stories in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* are to gothic fairy tales such as 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Bluebeard'. It takes a familiar narrative and shakes up the gender and sexuality stuff. It's a slasher film in which the woman is hero rather than victim, the pursuer rather than the pursued.

Fledgling FBI trainee Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) has been chosen by her boss Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn), head of Behavioural Science – the FBI unit that investigates serial killers – for a special task. A serial killer nicknamed 'Buffalo Bill' is murdering women and doing something terrible with their skin. Tacked up on Crawford's wall is a tabloid clipping with the headline 'Bill skins Fifth', and below it, polaroids of flayed female corpses. Clarice stares intently but she keeps her distance – as does Demme's camera. 'Do you spook easily Starling?', Crawford enquires.

Crawford believes that the brilliant psychiatrist and psychopath Hannibal Lecter, whose ferocious oral impulses find their release in language and, less acceptably, in human flesh, may know the killer's identity. Since Crawford has helped to confine Lecter for life in a hospital for the criminally insane, he doubts that the doctor will have much interest in helping him. He decides to use Clarice as a lure, sending her off to Lecter armed with a fake survey questionnaire. If Lecter is intrigued by Clarice, he won't be able to resist playing the omniscient analyst – leaking clues. And if Clarice is really lucky, Lecter might even tell her what to do. 'Whatever you do Clarice, don't tell him anything about yourself', Crawford warns. It's a bit of paternalistic advice that demands to be ignored, especially by this hero, intent on finding her own way. Besides, time is running out. 'Anytime now, our Billy Boy is going to start looking for that next special lady', Lecter taunts.

Faithful to the plot and incident of Thomas Harris' bestseller, Demme shifts its tone and meaning. The film makes Clarice even more central (and more isolated) than she was in the novel – a narrative fact that the mainstream media, infatuated with Hannibal the Cannibal, is doing its best to ignore. Harris' Clarice, for all her courage and desire for independence, was still the good daughter who needed to be valued by the men in her life. She was emotionally tied not only to her real father – the policeman who left her an orphan at age 11 – but to the substitute fathers: Lecter (the bad) and Crawford (the good). Harris' Clarice became romantically involved with Crawford, an unconsummated, guilty, Oedipal attachment since he was married and his wife was dying.

Demme's and Foster's Clarice is remote in a way that signals something more complex than a novice's attempt at a professional attitude. Demme shoots the scenes between Lecter and Clarice in extreme close-up, shot-counter-shot, with the actors looking almost directly into the camera. You can see the tension in Clarice's face, her concentrated struggle not only to get the

information she needs from Lecter, but also not to be overwhelmed by him – to maintain her separation from him.

And to get it right. And to do it all herself. When Lecter points out her limitations and her failures, there's no doubt she feels ashamed and angry. But it's because she hasn't lived up to her own expectations, not because he thinks less of her. Crawford gets in her way too and his paternalism annoys her. He never gets it more wrong than when he congratulates Clarice by saying, 'Your father would have been proud of you'. She doesn't care about that.

In terms of the frightening fairy-tale world that Demme's Grimm gothic imagery suggests and Lecter's locutions zing home, Clarice's mission is not to marry the prince but to rescue the maiden (actually the Senator's daughter who has become Buffalo Bill's 'next special lady'). On that reversal her identity rests. It's also what fascinates Lecter and what wins him to her cause: unlike most heroes of either sex, she's more moved by vulnerability than she is attracted to power.

In its aching romanticism, Howard Shore's score is reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann's for *Psycho*. In the opening scene, where Clarice, alone in the woods, is running an FBI school obstacle course, it is tied to her yearning and terror and sense of loss. Demme punctuates it with sound effects that have enormous threatening presence. There are the piercing bird calls of the opening and the clanging gates as Clarice descends into the dungeons where Lecter is locked away. And there are the whirring death-head moths that Buffalo Bill breeds in his oozing basement, the way the US, as Lecter puts it, breeds serial killers.

Amazingly fluid, *The Silence of the Lambs* shifts back and forth from gothic fantasy to police procedural drama. Demme knows how to map psyche and history on to landscape and objects. The film is packed with 300 years of relics – of white America. Every time Lecter sends Clarice on a treasure hunt – to a storage warehouse, for example – she finds a flag or two tucked away with the rusty rifles, dressmakers' dummies and the odd severed head preserved in a jar. The flags look as if they've seen better days.

Detective stories and psychoanalysis both investigate traumas of the past. Here the two (Clarice's search for Buffalo Bill and Lecter's unorthodox analysis of Clarice) are mixed against a background of government buildings, chicken farms and lonely airports where everyone is walking around looking bewildered – as if they'd just noticed that they'd lost everything.

Near the end of the film, in the aftermath of Clarice's battle with Buffalo Bill, the camera lingers for a moment in a corner of the killer's lair, now lit with a shaft of light from a window broken in the struggle. First, there's a medium shot of a child's-size American flag leaning against a dusty army helmet and then a close-up of a sea-blue paper mobile with a butterfly design – a bit of Chinatown interior decoration or a trophy from Vietnam, Bill's inheritance and his legacy.

Which is why the final image of Lecter after his murderous escape, sauntering down a crowded main street in Haiti resplendent in his creamy tourist suit, is more disturbing than anything that has come before. The serial killer, an American gift to the third world, a fragmentation bomb, ready to explode.

Amy Taubin, *Sight & Sound*, June 1991

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Director: Jonathan Demme
©: Orion Pictures Corporation
A Strong Heart/Demme production
An Orion Pictures release
Executive Producer: Gary Goetzman
Producers: Edward Saxon, Kenneth Utt, Ron Bozman
Associate Producer: Grace Blake
Unit Production Manager: Kenneth Utt
Stage Manager: Paul Giorgi
Financial Representative: Thomas A. Imperato
Production Auditor: Vicki Dee Rock
Assistant Production Auditor: Steven Shareshian
Location Manager: Neri Kyle Tannenbaum
Post-production Supervisor: Marshall Persinger
1st Assistant Director: Ron Bozman
2nd Assistant Director: Kyle McCarthy
2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Gina Leonetti
Continuity: Mary A. Kelly
Casting: Howard Feuer
Screenplay: Ted Tally
Based on the novel by: Thomas Harris
Director of Photography: Tak Fujimoto
Camera Operator: Tony Jannelli
Steadicam Operator: Larry McConkey
1st Assistant Camera: Bruce MacCallum
2nd Assistant Camera: Tom O'Halloran
Gaffer: Rusty Engels
Key Grip: Bill Miller
Still Photographs by: Ken Regan
Special Effects: Dwight Benjamin-Creel
Editor: Craig McKay
Associate Editor: Lisa Bromwell
Production Designer: Kristi Zea
Art Director: Tim Galvin
Art Department Co-ordinator: Francine Byrne
Set Decorator: Karen O'Hara
Storyboard Artists: Kalina Ivanov, Karl Shefelman
Property Master: Ann Miller
Construction Co-ordinator: S. Bruce Wineinger
Costume Designer: Colleen Atwood
Wardrobe Supervisors: Mark Burchard, Hartsell Taylor
Make-up Created by: Allen Weisinger
Special Make-up Effects Created by: Carl Fullerton, Neal Martz
Hair Styles Designed by: Alan D'Angerio
Main Titles Designed by: M & Company
Titles/Optical Effects: R/Greenberg Associates
Music: Howard Shore
Orchestrations by: Homer Denison
Music Supervisor: Sharon Boyle
Music Editor: Suzana Peric
Recording Engineer: Alan Snelling
Sound Design: Skip Lievsay
Sound Recording: John Fundus
Production Sound Mixer: Christopher Newman
Boom Operator: Dennis Maitland II
Sound Re-recording: Tom Fleischman
Re-recordists: Douglas L. Murray, Sean Squires
Dialogue Editors: Fred Rosenberg, Jeffrey Stern, Marissa Littlefield, Phil Stockton
Effects Editor: Ron Bochar
ADR Recordist: David Boulton
Boom Operator ADR: Kay Denmark
ADR Editors: Gail Showalter, Deborah Wallach
Foley Artist: Marko Costanzo
Foley Editors: Bruce Pross, Frank Kern, Steven Visscher
Stunt Co-ordinator: John Robotham

Cast

Jodie Foster (*Clarice Starling*)
Anthony Hopkins (*Dr Hannibal Lecter*)
Scott Glenn (*Jack Crawford*)
Ted Levine (*Jame Gumb*)
Anthony Heald (*Dr Frederick Chilton*)
Brooke Smith (*Catherine Martin*)
Diane Baker (*Senator Ruth Martin*)
Kasi Lemmons (*Ardelia Mapp*)
Charles Napier (*Lieutenant Boyle*)
Tracey Walter (*Lamar*)
Roger Corman (*FBI Director Hayden Burke*)
Ron Vawter (*Paul Krendler*)
Danny Darst (*Sergeant Tate*)
Frankie Faison (*Barney*)
Paul Lazar (*Pilcher*)
Dan Butler (*Roden*)
Chris Isaak (*SWAT commander*)
Lawrence A. Bonney (*FBI instructor*)
Lawrence T. Wrentz (*Agent Burroughs*)
Don Brockett (*friendly psychopath*)
Frank Seals Jr (*brooding psychopath*)
Stuart Rudin (*Miggs*)
Masha Skorobogatov (*young Clarice*)
Jeffrie Lane (*Clarice's father*)
Leib Lensky (*Mr Lang*)
Red Schwartz (*Mr Lang's driver*)
Jim Roche (*TV evangelist*)
James B. Howard (*boxing instructor*)
Ben Miller (*Mr Brigham*)
Chuck Aber (*Agent Terry*)
Gene Borkan (*Oscar*)
Pat McNamara (*Sheriff Perkins*)
Kenneth Utt (*Dr Akin*)
Darla (*Precious, Jame Gumb's dog*)
Adelle Lutz (*TV anchor woman*)
Obba Babatundé (*TV anchor man*)
George Michael (*TV sportscaster*)
Jim Dratfield (*Senator Martin's aide*)
Stanton-Miranda (*reporter 1*)
Rebecca Saxon (*reporter 2*)
Cynthia Ettinger (*Officer Jacobs*)
Brent Hinkley (*Officer Murray*)
Steve Wyatt (*airport flirt*)
Alex Coleman (*Sergeant Pembry*)
David Early (*spooked Memphis cop*)
André Blake (*tall Memphis cop*)
Bill Dalzell III (*distraught Memphis cop*)
Daniel Von Barga (*SWAT communicator*)
Tommy Lafitte (*SWAT shooter*)
Josh Broder (*EMS attendant*)
Buzz Kilman (*EMS driver*)
Harry Northup (*Mr Bimmel*)
Lauren Roselli (*Stacy Hubka*)
Lamont Arnold (*flower delivery man*)
George A. Romero (*walkie talkie detective in Memphis*)*

USA 1990©

119 mins

* Uncredited

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