

The Silence of the Lambs, Lecture 2: Deconstructing Hunting and Slaughter

1. Hunting and slaughter deconstructed (defamiliarized).

- a. Definition of "hunting": pursuit and killing of a lesser being ("prey") in order to use for survival (meat for eating, hides for clothing and shelter, bones for tools and ornaments, etc.). Once animals were domesticated, hunting became reduced to slaughter. Moth (see below) connected to this: "The old definition of moth was 'anything that gradually, silently eats, consumes, or wastes any other thing. It was a verb for destruction, too'"
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- i. In our daily lives, eating meat is nearly universal, as is using leather products. We do not think of this as killing. Yet logically meat-eating and flesh-using is serial murder of animals.
 - (1) Cut-up parts of animals euphemized with non-animal names: pork, beef, hamburger, meat, tripe, sweetbreads; leather, suede; "by-products," etc. Even Jello.
 - (2) Other examples:
 - taxidermy - trophies. Humans predate on less developed humans. Natural History museum contains anthropological specimens in museum; 40,000 mummies there 98; stuffed elephant in Museum of Nat History 97-98.
 - "animals have no souls"
 - hunting is "sport" and animals are "game."
- ii. In *Silence*, skin is the major object of predation - what is coveted. "Flaying" and leather references abound. Lecter descr recreational flayings; recommends Starling view Titian painting 149. Bodies are found missing their skins.
- b. Hunting is the natural activity of predators - top of food chain, killing to survive. Humans, however, are omnivores; voluntarily killing not only for survival ("meat," "leather"), but also for sport ("game").
 - i. In *Silence*, hunting humans = hunting animals: pursuit to the kill is legitimate, depending on your ultimate goal.
 - (1) For Hannibal Lecter and Jame Gumb - humans (especially women) as prey.
 - (2) For Starling and other members of her team - predators are the prey.

- c. Just as Clarice is taught by Lecter to think, Harris asks us to rethink our own ideas about hunting and slaughter. Ultimately, Harris concludes that some hunting is reasonable - but only the hunting of hunters in order to end all hunting - so that the lambs are silent.

2. The uses of skins

- a. Skin identifies us.
 - i. Clothing and skin (appearance) mark gender, race, and identity (museum full of examples of skin-decoration; Crawford asks doctor if sex-change operations should be termed cosmetic surgery 184; Lecter flays Pembry's face and uses it to disguise himself, then changes his face and hair to change his identity 275; Lecter later regrets the silicone's "palooka effect on his fine features" 365.).
 - ii. Barney and Ardelia defined by their skin color, unlike the white characters in the novel.
- b. Well-made leathers and other skin-covers (clothing) are desirable.
 - i. Skins:
 - (1) "Skins" a synonym for money.
 - (2) Leather quality linked to class standing: Lecter notices Clarice's good purse, bad shoes 18. Catherine Baker Martin's 23 pairs of good shoes, 7 of them Ferragamo 212. Clarice calls Frederica's cheap shoes, the "Achilles heel of the budget wardrobe."

Gumb works fine cabretta (baby goat) leathers; human "leathers" logical extension to him.
 - (3) "Shedding skin" a metaphor for transforming the self; the moth of the story the image of such metamorphosis. "The old definition of moth was 'anything that gradually, silently eats, consumes, or wastes any other thing. It was a verb for destruction, too' 106
- c. Skin protects - and fails to protect us.
 - i. Clothing an extension of skin:
 - (1) Nakedness a symbol of depravity (Raspail and Klaus, Gumb). We must cover ourselves (first response of Adam and Eve when they are expelled from Eden for committing original sin.)
 - ii. Skin/clothing designed to protect us.
 - (1) Clothing is theoretically worn to protect our "thin skin": Clarice tries to button up clothing to protect self in garage; Starling, in cobwebs, wonders "Was this how it felt to wear a veil?" 48.

- (a) Sewing of skins and clothing typically a woman's task, is key to the solution of the mystery: Lecter asks Starling "do you sew at all?" 226
 - Starling remembers the "darts" taken from victim Kimberly's back 320.
- (b) Sometimes clothing is designed to restrain and subdue: Lecter's protective garb - hockey mask, Kansas gallows vest 224.
- (2) Clothing (and decoration of skin) is ornamental. Old human tradition: museum contains displays of body-carving rituals 259.
 - (a) Women decorate their skins, but are then judged by them, pursued for them. "Don't you feel eyes moving over you every day?" Lecter to Clarice, re "coveting" 227.
- (3) BUT clothing and skin attract negative attention - when admiration becomes coveting.
 - (a) Chilton sees Starling as a beauty 176, but this leads him to treat her inappropriately. Senator Martin's power suit makes her "look good" and "breathes power" 199, but Lecter easily "flays" her of the suit and of her power over him by reference to breastfeeding, and ends his interview with her "love your suit" 202.

Irony: the cosmetics/ornamentations designed to attract men to women become liabilities. Fingernails, hair of first victim; Catherine Baker Martin's clothing. Also, Lecter's clothing fails to render him completely harmless.

- iii. Skin fails to protect the women of *Silence* because it is what is coveted by the male hunter-murderers.
 - Catherine, using lotion, suddenly recognizes "who has her" 156.
 - Fredrica has "good **skin**" in her high-school picture; then, in the shots of her flayed body, looks like "nothing human" 297. "All Fredrica needed was to meet Buffalo Bill, who considered her size a 'prized asset'" 317.
 - Starling is "too slender to be of great utility to" Gumb but he nonetheless covets her beautiful hair/scalp 346.

3. The predators (relate to teaching theme):

- a. Lecter murders for fun (Raspail) and wit; rips off Will Graham's face; tears out nurse's tongue; transforms his skin to transform his identity; understands the power of murder and consumption of others to transform the self. Consumes the flesh of others.
- b. Jame Gumb covets the skins (identities) of women, willing to kill them sacrificially in order to consume and thus become them: "he's making himself a girl suit out of real girls." Sympathetic magic.

- i. Irony: "Buffalo Bill," though a wrong name, refers to the western hero renowned for his indiscriminate killing of large numbers of buffalo; typically, only their hides and select organs (tongues, hearts) were "harvested." Killing for sport.
- ii. Passages dealing with Gumb, written in indirect discourse in his POV, reveal him persistently using hunting metaphors; Gumb slits Catherine's clothing, rubs spot on her **skin** 110-111; "he didn't want to field-dress her here" 111; CBM feels like hunted animal 153. "Harvest the hide" phrase 301 & passim.
- iii. Gumb a skilled tailor and leather-worker: worked for "Mr. Hide" leathers (double irony), trucked leather garments around the country - along with the body bag 359.

4. The anti-predators (relate to teaching theme):

- a. FBI "hunts" Buffalo Bill; Crawford hunts serial murderers 73. The museum entomologists dissect like Buffalo Bill 103; moth's skin helps them identify it 104.
- b. Clarice is a prey animal who hunts predators. "Is this what you do all the time - hunt Buffalo Bill?" asks Pilcher 106. "the knowledge [of the murderer's mind] would lie against her **skin** forever, and she knew she had to form a callus or it would wear her through" 117.
 - i. Starling threatened by the predators; catches just this one.
 - (1) Beginning: Crawford tells Starling "I figure you're game" to talk to Lecter 128; pun is ironic.
 - (2) Middle: Clarice's memories of the farm. Montana farm site of "feeding out" (fattening to kill) slaughter horses 228; Starling awakens to screams - they're slaughtering spring lambs 229. She is foster child - also "fed out"?
 - (3) End: BB hunts her. Afterward, Lecter asks: "Have the lambs stopped screaming?" Lecter: "it's the plight that drives you, seeing the plight, and the plight will not end, ever" 366.