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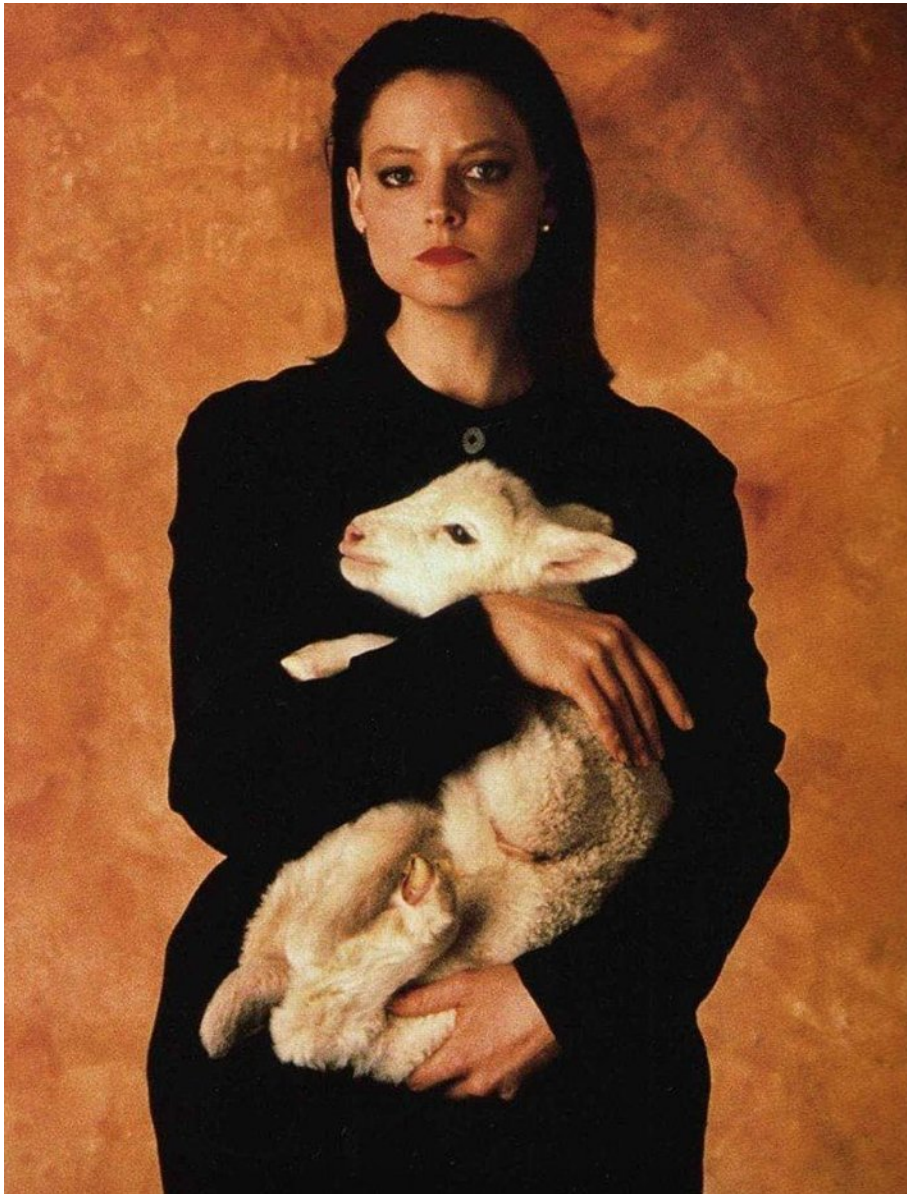
Module: M4X01560

Tutor's Name: Ryan Moule

Tasks & Word Count:

- 1) Semiotic Analysis (Ryan task) = 477
- 2) Manifesto (Julia Task) = 742
- 3) Reflexive Writing (Jon Task) = 540

Task One: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan's task)



(Unknown, promotional still for *The Silence of the Lambs*, 1991)

Barthes and Heath, when writing of the “code of connotations” (with *connotations* referring to the non-literal, culturally-conceived meanings, or alternate interpretations, of signifiers, in lieu of denotations, typically their literal meaning), spoke of how “its [the code’s] signs are gestures, attitudes, expressions, colours or effects, endowed with certain meanings by virtue of the practice of a certain society” (Barthes, R. & Heath, S.,

1977, p.27). Bearing this in mind, regardless of whether or not one knows the film *The Silence of the Lambs* or the character of Special Agent Clarice Starling (portrayed by Jodie Foster; shown in the promotional still above), its depicted signs can easily be understood due to the connotations attached to them. As a result, this first task will examine said connotations, with reference to semiotics and photography theory.

The aforementioned promotional picture shows Foster as Starling, dressed in black, clutching a white lamb. Firstly, according to Barthes and Heath (1977), it is important to look at the pose, as they say "it is the very pose of the subject which prepares the reading of the signifieds of connotation" due to the "'historical grammar' of iconographic connotation" it can hold (Barthes and Heath 1977, p.22). As a result, one should focus on her pose: twisted subtly away from the camera (right shoulder pushed further forward than the left as her torso twists, though she remains central and front-facing, looking out at the viewer), right arm wrapped around the lamb while her left supports it. These subtleties of the pose imply a possessiveness / protectiveness on her part as she holds the lamb away from the camera and the observer behind the camera.

The signifiers of the contrasting colours, black and white, and their position in the image as being juxtaposed with one another, emphasise their contrasting connotations. Black is often associated with death and mourning, formality and authority; white is seen as its antithesis, a signifier of goodness and innocence (doubly enforced by the lamb itself, as they are seen as signifiers of innocence, partly due to the religious connotations associated with them. However, taking into account the pose and allowing this to influence the reading of the signifieds and connotations, one could see the focus on the dualities of black and white (authority / power and innocence) as an emphasis

on the former's duty to protect the latter, emphasising the in-film decision and beliefs of Starling. The inclusion of the lamb itself in the photograph a notable sign, as "the interest [in an object, such as the aforementioned lamb] lies in the fact that the objects are accepted inducers of associations or ideas" (Barthes and Heath 1977, p.22). As said before, the lamb is a sign with religious connotations, associated with innocence; it is also an animal commonly used in sacrifices, adding weight to the connotations of death derived from the colour black.

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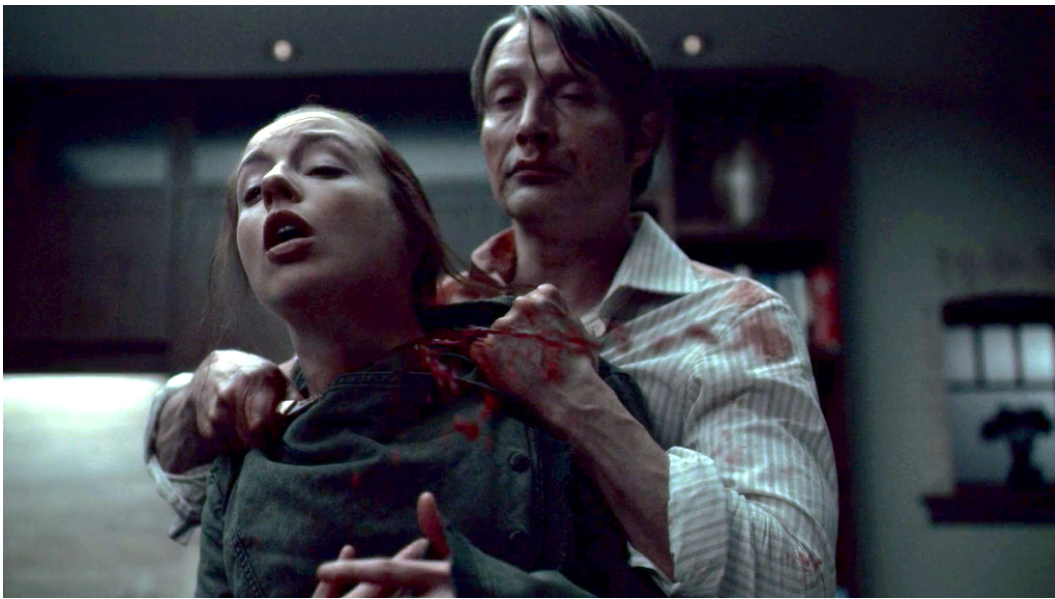
Task Two: Manifesto (Julia's Task)

- 1) Female characters are not plot devices and should not be treated as such; never 'fridge' female characters.
- 2) Always remember and avoid use of the Male Gaze.
- 3) 'Tropes', in the sense of recurring plot devices, need only be sparingly utilised, unless in self-awareness and/or parody.
- 4) Always consider: does this pass the Mako Mori Test?
- 5) If so, does it pass the Bechdel Test?
- 6) Harmonic utilisation of audio and visuals to aid narrative and exposition is key.

- 7) Emotional attachments to characters are valid; rage over their mistreatments and cry over their sorrows.
- 8) Never neglect character development for the sake of plot.

Keywords & Images

Keyword: 'Fridge'



(Hannibal, Mizumono, Bryan Fuller, 2013-15)

- 1) Female characters are not plot devices and should not be treated as such; never 'fridge' female characters.

To 'fridge' a female character, according to comic book author Gail Simone, is to harm her in some way (be it by harming, maiming or killing them) in order to further the story arc of a male character, typically by providing him with a motivation for revenge over her treatment/death. (Fanlore, n.d.) Though Simone's initial observation was of events in comic books, people have since used the term to describe events in other media forms. One prominent and recent example of the trope is Abigail Hobbs' death in

the tv series Hannibal; Hobbs, who was believed dead since season one's finale, is revealed to be alive in the season two finale, *Mizumono*, only to be killed by the titular character within the same episode. This is done in front of the show's protagonist Will Graham in order to inflict significant emotional harm on him (given his emotional connection to Hobbs) and give him a reason to follow Hannibal to Europe in the proceeding season. (*Mizumono*, 2014) This example is particularly distinctive, as the 'fridging' of Hobbs is done consciously *within* the narrative. She is 'fridged' by the showrunner, Bryan Fuller, who revealed in an interview she had been brought back solely for the purpose of killing her: "...So we just thought, 'Well, let's just bring her back and kill her on-screen'," (Bryant, 2014); she is also 'fridged' by Lecter within the narrative, who kills her while deliberately keeping Will Graham alive, aware her death will cause him more pain and provide him with a reason to pursue him.

Keyword: Male Gaze



(*Wonder Woman* promotional picture)

2) Always remember and avoid use of the Male Gaze.

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female”, said Laura Mulvey in her essay *‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’*, featured in her collection of essays entitled *‘Visual and Other Pleasures’* (1989, quoted in Chaudhuri, 2006, p.35). She describes the female character as typically being “coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (1989, quoted in

Chaudhuri, 2006, p.35) who is observed by the *man* behind the camera, the *male* character within the film and the viewer, the latter of whom assuming a traditionally *male* role of power as they are given the ability to observe rather than *being* observed.

The male gaze, as proposed by Mulvey, is visible in the recent controversy surrounding the prevalence of the “headless women of Hollywood”, an advertising trope brought to attention by Marcia Belsky. Belsky points out how it has almost become “standard practice” to, in advertising material, specifically still-images such as film posters, decapitate or otherwise fragment female character; Belsky notes how “it’s the face that makes us individuals” (Headless Women of Hollywood, n.d.), therefore through presenting her as no more than an assortment of depersonalized parts, the trope robs her (the depicted woman) of her individuality, reducing her to no more than a sexualised object and the passive subject of Mulvey’s male gaze. (Headless Women of Hollywood, n.d.) Many posters that employ this trope are for comedy and horror films, though the above image is a poster for Wonder Woman (2017), depicting the titular character without showing her eyes (often obscured to hide one’s identity and thus depersonalise them), presenting her, ironically a *superhero*, as little more than an object of the male gaze.

Keywords: Mako Mori Test & Bechdel Test



(*Killing Eve*, *Smell Ya Later*, 2018-Present; featured as an example of a television series that passes both the Mako Mori and Bechdel tests)

- 4) Always consider: does this pass the Mako Mori Test?
- 5) If so, does it pass the Bechdel Test?

There are many fan-constructed tests one may apply to media and literature to attempt to gauge the analysed work's presentation of female characters, with two of the most known being the Mako Mori and Bechdel tests. Their criteria are simple, yet once one is aware of them, it is shocking how few (relatively speaking) would meet them.

To pass the Bechdel Test:

- "1. It has to have at least two named women in it
- "2. Who talk to each other

“3. About something besides a man” (Fanlore, n.d.)

To pass the Mako Mori test:

“1. There must be at least one prominent female character

“2. Who has her own narrative arc

“3. Which is not about supporting a man’s story” (Fanlore, n.d.)

Many critics and fans of the test emphasise that the tests give an idea as to the level of representation of female characters in the media in question, not the quality of said representation. As a result, YouTuber Rowan Ellis explains that the best way in which they can be utilised is in combination: “looking at the tests, looking at their criticisms, and how they can be applied, I’d actually say the strongest way that they work is together.” (Rowan Ellis, 2015)

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Task Three. (Jon’s Task)

An immediate reaction to the sexualisation of Bedelia Du Maurier in *The Wrath of the Lamb*, Season 3 Episode 13 of Bryan Fuller’s Hannibal.



(Above) (*Hannibal*, *Antipasto*, Bryan Fuller, 2013-15)

(Below) (*Hannibal*, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, Bryan Fuller, 2013-15)



The television series *Hannibal* is filled with intriguing imagery and though many scenes are striking, none have rooted themselves more firmly in my mind than its final scene. Dubbed as the series' '*stinger*', a term for a post-credits scene (Fanlore, n.d.), the scene shows a drugged Bedelia Du Maurier wearing an extremely low-cut dress, sitting at a table laid for four with her own cooked leg as the centrepiece, the song '*Love Crime*' by Siouxsie playing in the background. Given little is known as to the scene's context within the show (who is responsible for what is being done to Du Maurier, when it happens, etc) as such details are intentionally obfuscated so as to keep the ending relatively

ambiguous, I will focus on what struck me when first watching it: the blatant hyper-sexualization of Du Maurier. The scene in question is similar to a previous scene in the season, in which Abel Gideon is made to dine on a meal made of his own leg, however there is a notable distinction between the two – he was not overly sexualised (he, unlike Du Maurier, was not dressed scantily) and was thus, to my mind, less objectified. To my mind, this was a dismaying note to end the series on, given its other strides in the representation of female characters.

The show successfully addressed the lack of female characters in the source material by changing the gender of characters Fredrica “Freddie” Lounds (in lieu of Fredrick “Freddy” Lounds) and Alana Bloom (in lieu of Alan Bloom), and even added an additional female character in the form of Bedelia Du Maurier, as well as rectifying the homophobic overtones. These deviations from, and improvements upon, the source material show the headway made by the show, however they make what happens to Du Maurier all the more odious, especially when one considers Bryan Fuller (the showrunner’s) own comments on the audience base, which he states as being “largely female”, and his statement that “if something feels exploitative or unnecessary, I’ll try to avoid it” (Hibberd, 2015).

To some the latter statement’s validity would seem questionable, given the show’s final ‘stinger’ scene’s blatant use of the male gaze, which in and of itself is inherently exploitative and unnecessary: explaining a common tendency of cinematographic shots that comply with the male gaze, Shohini Chaudhuri states “the camera fetishistically isolates fragments of her [the female character in question’s] body (face, breast, legs) in close-ups... [these shots] have the quality of a ‘cut-out or icon’, temporarily halting the

flow of the narrative to invite erotic contemplation” (Chaudhuri, 2006, p.37). Though due to the narrative implications, the shot of Du Maurier’s exposed leg (or lack thereof) was necessary, the lengthy shot lingering on her near-exposed chest undeniably complying with the concept of the male gaze.

In this sense, Du Maurier shares the same fate as many other female characters, spread across various visual media; disempowered and at the mercy of the viewer, she is reduced to little more than a victim of the exploitative perspective of the male gaze. The lingering and pervasive prevalence of this typical fate for female characters influences my work, as I strive to work against the male gaze by complying only with its antithesis.

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