

GRACIE TORREZ 2021

*Phantom Thread* is a film about power and the struggle in relationships to maintain that power. The dinner scene in *Phantom Thread* depicts the intense, messy, and even comical boiling point in the relationship between Reynolds and Alma by effectively utilizing camera distance, sound, and shot duration and rhythm to make the audience feel as confronted as the characters are by the argument that unfolds as well as emphasize the complexities of the relationship between the couple.

The utilization of camera distance is integral to the general feel of this scene. As an audience, the first thing we notice about this scene is how it's framed. Reynolds is on one side of the table and Alma is on the other. A detail to take note of is that the couple is never shown fully together in the same frame in this scene. They're shown in the same frame in over-the-shoulder shots only. The implication of them being close to separating is there from the start of the scene, but the distance the camera creates between them only shows them to be farther and farther apart.

An instance of the camera distance coming into an active role in the scene is right after the first exchange of verbal blows between the two. Presented in a series of quick shots, about one sentence per shot, Reynolds and Alma are both shown in close-ups. They're close to each other in the sense that their emotions are running into and bouncing off of the other. Showing them at this distance from each other makes the whole ordeal feel very personal, but it shifts when Alma says the word "distance" in the scene, referring to the distance between them emotionally. The shot cuts to Reynolds, both leaning back into his chair and in a much wider shot than a close-up. The emphasis on this distance is captured incredibly well in the dialogue

and, more importantly, in the camera placement. If Reynolds and Alma had remained in the close-ups as she mentions the emotional distance, there would have been much less of an effect. The audience would have been left with the sense that they're closer than they think they are.

The overall most effective utilization of camera distance is also the turning point for the scene as a whole. Immediately after Reynolds describes how he's "admiring his own gallantry" about how he is eating the asparagus Alma prepared, the shot switches from Reynolds at a medium shot to Alma, in tears, in a close-up. The cut and the switch from a more wide shot on Reynold's arrogance or lack of awareness to Alma truly being hurt for the first time in this scene is only further emphasized by the line "I don't know what I'm doing here,". Alma's expression of pure heartbreak in this close-up makes the whole scene dissolve into emotional overflow for Alma and an offensive and insulting stance by Reynolds through the argument that unfolds.

The final example of camera distance being effectively utilized in this scene is when Alma takes the offensive role in the argument. Before she begins her monologue about despising Reynolds' rules and likes and dislikes, he's shown in the same framing as Alma, a close-up. The emphasis is on the words Alma is saying and the juxtaposition of their positions in the argument and the relationship up until this point. Reynolds is being targeted for his sort of OCD habits and is thus forced to be defensive in the argument. It's the one time in the argument where he is actually hurt by Alma instead of him hurting her by comparing her to a spy or an assassin in the previous section. It's integral to his character up until this argument that he's very closed off and particular about every little thing and if he doesn't get his way, the one who's responsible is often shoved out of his life and his relationships as well. Alma playing the offensive here foreshadows her role in Reynolds' life later in the film, being the dominant party in their relationship. The decision to keep both Reynolds and Alma in this close-up shot in comparison to letting one of

them breathe in a medium is incredibly substantial to the development of their relationship moving forward from this scene into the remainder of the film.

The usage of sound in *Phantom Thread* as a whole is perfect, The soundtrack by Jonny Greenwood in the film as a whole is incredibly well suited to the atmosphere and the tone in the film. The sound editing and application in the dialogue-heavy scenes are just incredible in the emphasis on their power dynamics, especially in this scene.