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## Erraticism in the Cannibal – A Study of the Work of Thomas Harris

### Abstract

*Literature is the key to human life that resurrects and gives space for introspection, retrospection and various remembrances which are hued by overjoy, pain and trauma. Nowadays crime literature became one of the most popular genres in this era which centers mostly on murder and violence. It started from Edgar Allen Poe's most famous fictional character Auguste Dupin, whose first appearance was on The Murders in the Rue Mogue, considered to be the first crime fiction, followed by Dr. John Watson, Sherlock Holmes and the like. The genre crime fiction has contributed innumerable number of works in both fiction and non-fiction. Thomas Harris's Hannibal Rising is one such fiction which tells about the life of a serial killer who is a psychiatrist as well as a cannibal. It is a series of novels about the famous character Hannibal Lecter. Cannibalism and Psychiatry are two extremes which rarely meet. This novel is intertwined with a mix of violence, emotions and childhood trauma. Trauma studies nowadays became a key aspect in literature. In this specific work of Thomas Harris, he describes how the centralized character is affected with psychological trauma, in particular, Acute and Separation trauma. Trauma theory became popularized in 1980s and played major role in Atwood's novels. This study tries to explain how childhood shapes a person and how behaviorism plays a vital element in one's life and it also tries to analyze the psychological issues, trauma and defense mechanism through the central character of the novel.*

*Keywords:* Crime, Childhood Trauma, Psychology, Behavior, Cannibalism.

### Introduction

Early American literature begins with the Native Americans. People from Spain, England, Russia and other European countries started settling in America. Native American literature started with oral traditions, especially story telling. Their oral traditions include songs, series, stories and the like. American literature is one of the vast literatures produced from the United States of America, which comes under the genres of naturalism, romanticism, dark romanticism, gothic fiction, crime fiction, puritanism, transcendentalism, etc., Captain

John Smith could be considered as the first American writer and Anne Bradstreet was considered to be the first American poet, who was a woman.

Crime Literature or crime fiction usually describes a serious crime, which end up mostly on murder; investigated by a professional or an amateur detective. It has many subgenres including legal thrillers, detective fictions, hard boiled fiction, courtroom drama, etc. Suspense and mystery are linchpin in this genre. The genre became popularized in 1841. The oldest murder

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in the world is considered to be in a Neanderthal Society around 430,000 years.

Thomas Harris is an American writer, known for his quadrilogy of suspense novels about his famous character, Hannibal Lecter. He currently lives in Florida. He was an introvert till high school and he did not give any interviews except for *Cari Mora*. He was born in Tennessee, sooner he moved to Mississippi with his family when he was a child. He majored in English and graduated from Baylor University. Thomas Harris was working as a reporter for a local newspaper, the *Waco Tribune-Herald* which inspired him to write crime fictions. He remained close to his mother Polly even after his marriage. Almost he met her everyday till her death and he often discussed some scenes from his novels with Polly.

Thomas Harris' other works are *Red Dragon*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Hannibal*, *Black Sunday* and *Cari Mora*. The novel *Red Dragon* focuses on the central character Hannibal Lecter, who was captured by William Graham who works in Federal Bureau of Investigation. It was first published in 1981. The *Silence of the Lambs* is a sequel to the *Red Dragon*, was published in 1988, followed by *Hannibal*. *Hannibal* was published in 1999 and it is the third novel in the series. It takes place almost seven years after the events of the second novel, *Silence of the Lambs*. *Hannibal Rising* was published in 2006, but the events in this particular novel acts as a prequel to all these three novels. *Black Sunday* was published in 1975, it is a thriller novel about terrorists who plans to perpetrate mass murder in New Orleans during the Super Bowl. The annual championship game of the NFL, commonly called as National Football League is known as the Super Bowl. *Red Dragon* is his first novel and *Cari Mora* is his last novel till now. His novels have been adapted into films and series. Thomas Harris was really upset when *Red Dragon* movie was released in the name of "Manhunter". He didn't want to watch the "Silence of the lambs" till the movie had been awarded with five Academy Awards.

"Sometimes you really have to shove and grunt and sweat," Harris says. "Some days you go to your office and you're the only one who shows up, none of the characters show up, and you sit there by yourself, feeling like an idiot. And some days everybody shows up ready to work. You have to show up at your office every day. If an idea comes by, you want to be there to get it in." (Alter)

### 1) Operation Barbarossa

Operation Barbarossa was pioneered by Adolf Hitler on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1941 during the World War II. Hitler gave an open statement that Soviet

Union was his enemy, which made him to destroy its military, armed forces and the German forces that set fire to a village in the Soviet Union during 1941. Hitler proposed the crusade to be the 'war of annihilation'. The term "Operation Barbarossa" was the cryptonym used while the Axis invaded the Soviet Union. The ultimate goal of Nazi Germany was to repopulate the Soviet Union with Germans by conquering it. They encountered around 150,000 Soviets during the first week and they were advance in using tanks, stukas, flamethrower, etc., By the end of the Operation Barbarossa, around 800,000 Soviets were killed by the Nazi Germans and this operation was considered to be the largest operation in the history. This operation plays a vital role in this novel which creates basement for the entire ideology of the characterization of Hannibal Lecter. The novel begins with the second day of Operation Barbarossa while Hannibal Lecter and his family escaping from Germans to their family lodge in the forest. The family survived in the woods for three and a half years hiding themselves in the lodge. After three years the Germans came by the lodge and killed Hannibal Lecter's father and mother brutally with tanks, leaving Hannibal and his little sister, Mischa. This incident deeply saddened Hannibal, later became a trauma.

### Review of Literature

There are several articles in *Hannibal Rising* which open out new ideologies and perspectives. Thomas Harris is a well-known author for his most famous works. Some journalists and scholars had previously analyzed his background and his works. In Alexandra Alter's "Hannibal Lecter's Creator Cooks Up Something New (No Fava Beans or Chianti)", she discusses about Thomas Harris' personal life. Thomas Harris talks to her about his last published book and gave very first interview in 13 years. She says Thomas Harris is the creator of terrifying monsters and he always prefers to let his work speak rather than he does. Harris is a nature lover and he has brought orphaned squirrels and he even took part in wildlife rehabilitation workshop.

"The fact that Harris, a conjurer of psychopaths and serial killers, has a soft spot for ailing animals might seem incongruous to those who only know him through his work, but it wouldn't surprise anyone who's met him". (Alter).

David Sexton, in his work "The Strange World of Thomas Harris", he compares Hannibal Lecter with Sherlock Holmes and Edgar Allen Poe's the most famous character, Dupin. By analyzing Harris' works, he says Lecter is a reader as well as a writer and he loves to live in literature. He talks about Harris' works as well in this extract. Harris once recorded his relationship

with Lecter, and he also mentioned “He’s immensely amusing company. I work in this little office and I’m always glad when he shows up. He can be difficult company and I’m glad when he leaves too” (Sexton).

“One of Lecter’s most obvious precursors is Sherlock Holmes and before him, therefore, Poe’s Dupin. Many of Lecter’s observations are pure Holmes in style, if not content.”(Sexton).

“Becoming Hannibal Lecter” by Richard Corliss is about the journey of Lecter from a normal individual to the most monstrous cannibal. It is portrayed in “*Red Dragon*” that Hannibal had tortured animals but in *Hannibal Rising*, he seems kind to animals, especially to a flock of swans and his horse. Richard Corliss says Hannibal recalled everything when he returns to their royal castle. Mischa’s last image encourages him to raise sadism. Hannibal had slashed an X on his first victim’s stomach. Richard Corliss compares Hannibal with Nabokov’s *Lolita*.

“Each is a well-born lad cruising through an idyllic youth that is capsized when he is separated from the girl he loves. But whereas Humbert gets locked in a time warp, incapable of loving any female older than his childhood sweetheart Annabel Leigh, Hannibal transfers his love to Lady Murasaki.” (Corliss).

Apart from these, this study tries to bring out the psychology of a serial killer by applying Bandura’s Social learning theory and Freud’s Psychoanalytic theory. It tries to normalize the murders of young Hannibal Lecter as a part of revenge, not for his smugness or complacency. This study is an exploration of the struggles of Hannibal Lecter and his journey is ridden with wars and murders.

## Methodology

In the light of analyzing the characterization of Hannibal Lecter, the present study requires an analytical methodology to explore the characters in *Hannibal Rising*. It comprises close reading of the text which leads to a detailed analysis of the text. By implementing theories of Bandura and Freud provides basement to construct the characterization of Hannibal Lecter in a sanguine way. These theories facilitate a better understanding of the characters in this novel and also reconstructing it. It delivers a theoretical framework and enables a multidisciplinary understanding of the novel. This study tries to analyze the characterization of Hannibal Lecter by incorporating Social learning theory and Psychoanalytic theory to magnify Hannibal Lecter.

## Childhood Trauma

Trauma can be mainly divided into three types namely Acute, Chronic and Complex. Acute trauma upshots from a single incident, it can be emanated from a crime, a disaster, etc., Chronic trauma emanates from prolonged incidents such as violence and abuse, whereas Complex trauma is vulnerable to multitudinous traumatic events. Soon after the vanquish of Nazi panzers, the royal Lecter Castle became “people’s orphanage cooperative kitchen garden” (Harris).Lecter stayed in his own castle as an orphan for. Years after the brutal murder of Lecter’s family, he was taken to France when he was thirteen by his uncle Robert Lecter to live with him and his wife devoted Lady Murasaki. At the orphanage, Robert Lecter was informed about Hannibal’s violent behavior to the bullies by his headmaster. He also added “Hannibal can be dangerous to persons larger than himself. He’s fine with the little ones” (Harris).Hannibal moved to France and he continued his studies over there. Robert Lecter and Lady Murasaki took him to a psychiatrist for his inability to recall the past memories. The psychiatrist said “he follows several trains of thought at one, without distraction from any, and one of the trains is always for his own amusement” (Harris). At first, they both had no idea about the doctor’s statement. As days passed, he started going to school. On his second day of school, he saw a lout from upper grade spitting in the hair of a first-grade student. Hannibal couldn’t control himself and he broke the person’s coccyx and his nose as well. After this incident he was sent home.

In a next few weeks, Hannibal and Lady Murasaki went to a local market. When they reached Momund’s stall, Lady Murasaki was insulted and verbally harassed by the local butcher, Paul Momund. Hannibal engaged himself again in combat after coming to France. He assaulted Paul Momund publicly and it ended up in police station. When Robert Lecter learned about this conflict, he attacked Momund again and he eventually got hurt by Momund. In next few days, Robert Lecter died from heart attack. One fine day Hannibal Lecter goes to the river with his lute case, where Paul Momund usually goes for fishing. At first, Hannibal asks him to write an apology letter for verbally harassing Lady Murasaki. When he refuses to write and ready to attack Hannibal, Hannibal took a sword out of his lute case and slashed the local butcher across his belly. He decapitated Paul and his head was missing. He kept his head in Robert Lecter’s artistry but unfortunately Lady Murasaki saw it and finds that his cheeks were missing. This was the first act of Cannibalism in Hannibal’s life.

The novel later reveals the truth about his sister’s death which Hannibal couldn’t recall for

years. He was taken to psychiatrist by his uncle and aunt and with the help of Sodium thiopental, Hannibal was able to recollect Mischa's murder and the deserters faces from his memories. She was killed by six deserters during the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union. Hannibal Lecter and Mischa were left when the Nazi Germans killed their parents. The group captured Hannibal and Mischa, led by Vladis Grutas. Hannibal remembered how Mischa was killed. After some months of starvation, the deserters had no source of food. They killed Mischa and cannibalized her, they fed some of her remains to Hannibal. This remained as a trauma in his life perpetually which provoked him to take revenge on everyone who cannibalized Mischa.

### 1). *Acute Trauma*

In this novel, Hannibal Lecter is psychologically affected by his sister's death. During his childhood, Mischa was his only source of joy. He loved to be with her all the time. They both were together, sharing bond till the death of Mischa. After he witnessed the brutal murder of his parents, he started to take care of his sister, Mischa, who became his world. Hannibal was so kind to her; she didn't know how to pronounce her brother's name. She used to call "Anniba" instead of Hannibal. After his parents' death, the deserters started to stay at their family lodge. Every day they used to give them a piece of meat which Mischa couldn't eat since she was a baby, so every time he mashes the meat in his mouth and fed her. He tried his best to save Mischa but he couldn't. Acute Trauma basically emanates from a single crucial incident which would last incessantly. In the case of Hannibal Lecter, he is severely traumatized by that particular incident.

### 2). *Attachment Trauma*

Attachment trauma emanates when a person actually starts missing something that is really close to them which they never want to get rid of. It can either be an object or a person. If the person loses that object/a person, they will start missing it for some days which results in prolonged attachment trauma. For Hannibal Lecter, he shared a precious bond with Mischa. But suddenly when she was killed, he couldn't accept the fact that she is no more alive. This trauma in Hannibal can also be called as "Early Attachment Trauma".

"Early attachment trauma is a distressing or harmful experience that affects a child's ability to form healthy interpersonal relationships. It includes abuse, abandonment, and neglect of an infant or child prior to age two or three. These traumas can have subtle yet long-lasting effects on a person's emotional health". (Stines)

### 3). *Erraticism in the Cannibal*

The novel *Hannibal Rising* revolves around the central character Hannibal Lecter. Cannibalism is the act of consuming flesh of the same species whereas, Human Cannibalism is the act of humans consuming the flesh and internal organs of other humans. Cannibalism is broadly divided into two types- Endocannibalism and Exocannibalism. Endocannibalism is the act of cannibalizing people from their own locality, whereas, Exocannibalism is cannibalizing people who doesn't belong to their society or community. In recent studies, it is described that criminal cannibalism can be divided into four types. They are Aggression cannibalism, Sexual cannibalism, Ritualistic cannibalism and Nutritional cannibalism. The novel *Hannibal Rising* is highly associated with exocannibalism and Aggression cannibalism. In Hannibal Lecter's life it was motivated when he encountered the first act of cannibalism in his life when he was a child.

Hannibal was severely traumatized after his sister was cannibalized and he didn't talk about her death to anyone. When he was given sodium thiopental by the psychiatrist, he was able to remember the faces of the Germans who cannibalized Mischa. When Hannibal turned eighteen, he started searching for people who killed his beloved sister. Hannibal goes back to his castle and he finds the dog tags of the team who exterminated his family. He finds Ernikas Dortlich first and everything reminded him of his sister and he eventually ended up killing Dortlich. Dortlich's cheeks were missing. He killed almost all the deserters who killed Mischa. He killed Milko and carbonized his head. After he started cannibalizing, he continued to cannibalize the people who cannibalized his sister.

### Personality Theories

In this study, psychological theories based on crime can be divided into two theories. They are psychoanalytic theory and social learning theory. Psychoanalytic theory was proposed by Sigmund Freud, who intertwined psychodynamics with psychology to discover the consciousness and unconsciousness of the human mind. Based on the ideology of converting heat into mechanical energy, Freud converted psychic energy into behavior. Freud strongly believed that an individual's temperament is predominated by the bitter childhood experiences. Freud developed three structures which creates basement for personality, i.e., the id, the ego and the superego.

1. The Id- It drives for instant pleasure and gratification, despite the prevailing circumstances of external world;

2. The Ego- It acts in order to meet the demands and needs of the id, adhering to the environment;
3. The superego- It instills societal norms and rules, thus the demands of the id and ego to be met morally.

According to Freud, the id drives for pleasure, caused by unconsciousness. It is innate and disorganized, seeks instant pleasure both sexual and aggressive drives, without any concern about the environment. The ego is developed in the early stage of life and when the wishes are not gratified, they'll start throwing tantrums and demands for the things, preceded by the id. The ego seeks to fulfill the demands of the id's in a realistic way. The superego is about ethics and morality. The ego interposes between the id and the superego. It is the personification of parental ideals incepted during childhood. Whenever the wishes and demands are not fulfilled in the id and ego, it demands superego to fulfill it. But superego relies on morality. The psychodynamic theory suggests that the aggravated criminals are often taken by the bitter incidents in the past which motivates them to involve in crimes.

Behaviorism theory states that human behavior is expanded through learning experiences. The approach used to scrutinize the behavioral aspects are considered to be behavioral theories. Social learning theory is a branch of behaviorist theory, which can be often related with criminology. Albert Bandura is an American psychologist and social learning theorist, was born in Mundare Alberta and graduated from the University of British Columbia. Bandura was famous for his "Bobo doll experiment". While he was experimenting the cognition theory, he recorded a video with a college student and a bobo doll. The student kicked and verbally abused the doll. Bandura showed the video to a group of kindergarten children who were ready for their play time. Inside the play room, they saw bobo dolls and hammers. A group of children started beating the doll with hammer. This is the best example of observational learning. In his social learning theory, he suggests that the motivation of violence is learnt through the frustration and aggressiveness by observing others. Learning is occurred through the peer observance and behavioral consequences. Bandura describes that no individuals are born innate with an ability to attack someone. It can either be acquired from environmental experiences or by the aggressive caretaker within the family.

Both psychoanalytic theory and social learning theory tends to deliver that crime is not innate but inspired by the environment and also by the people they meet. Mass media helps people to develop their personality in both good and evil ways. For example, if a person is

exposed to watch violence and physical abuse for a prolonged period, the person will eventually do the same and try to normalize it. Everyone has aggression and violence within themselves, in a certain point it is triggered by an external force, either by observance or by being in the act. In *Hannibal Rising*, Hannibal Lecter observed the act of cannibalism through his childhood experience when his sister was cannibalized. According to Freud, there are two biological instincts that determine the id. They are Eros and Thanatos. He alludes Eros as the instinct to survive, whereas, Thanatos is the death instinct that drives for violence and aggressive behavior. Hannibal Lecter doesn't know about cannibalism until he came across the act. By implementing psychoanalytic theory and social learning theory, the cannibalism in Hannibal's characterization is a reflection of his childhood experience when he was exposed to observe the act.

### 1). *Revenge Literature*

Revenge has become one of the most controversial genres in today's world. It comes under theoretical genre and its utmost prime aspect is revenge. It is the act of harming others in response to an outrage. The term was established in 1902 by Ashley H. Thorndike in his article "The Relations of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays". Some of the well-known revenge works are *Hamlet*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* by Thomas Middleton. This genre started proliferating in the late Elizabethan era. Mostly revenge is enunciated through aggression and in the form of violence. In the characterization of Hannibal, revenge is not innate. The particular incident which he witnessed, made him to take revenge on the deserters who cannibalized Mischa. Hannibal was psychologically traumatized after his sister's death. He wasn't aware of her death and he couldn't even remember how she died. He was severely traumatized and with the help of a psychiatrist he was able to recall the death of Mischa.

The ultimate goal in Hannibal's life is to take revenge against the deserters. Revenge in Hannibal's life is very intricate and it's a fire that burnt him alive. Mostly people who are affected severely by someone tend to develop vengeance against the person and expect for the right time to attack them again for the same. It shows how an individual develops an intricate grievance and attacks them. When Hannibal killed the local butcher, he didn't intend to cannibalize him. He wasn't sure about Mischa's death then. When Hannibal realized about his beloved sister's death, it rendered him a creed that revenge is not a crime. He started cannibalizing as a part of revenge. He didn't do the act for his pleasure. In

terms of Hannibal Lecter, cannibalism is not a crime but its just the backscattering of the crime he was in.

Psychoanalysis: A Brief History of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory. *Positive Psychology*, 2020.  
<https://positivepsychology.com/psychoanalysis/>

## Conclusion

The general objective of the study was to investigate the psychological and mental well-being, abnormal behavior and the interpersonal values of the central character. Psychological well-being is the most important aspect in one's life, but end up getting disturbed. Inferiority in adolescents likely to be correlated with aggression. It usually begins in early adulthood and takes sometime to get over it. Generally, abuse, genetics and other factors tend to develop personality disorder. Psychological trauma collapses entire behavioral system and thus results in an abnormal behavior. Anxiety, guilt and shame are the major symptoms that causes trauma.

In this novel, the central character Hannibal is an anti-hero, hence this study tries to normalize cannibalism as responding to the act that had taken place when he was a teenager. Thomas Harris demonstrates the history of Operation Barbarossa and represents the same along with the fictionalized crime history. The act of cannibalism in Hannibal's life is completely to emancipate repressed emotions buried within Hannibal. Thomas Harris' *Hannibal Rising* is a hate crime novel, in which this study attempts to probe that cannibalism takes place in this novel is not for complacent but for revenge.

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