Human Bonding and Hannibal Lecter: The relationship between a Sociopath and his Criminal Investigators (Will Graham, and Clarice Starling) as Presented in Thomas Harris' Novels

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In the works of Thomas Harris, there are three main characters who each add something different to a story that is full of sociopathy, empathy, and moral ambiguity. Hannibal Lecter, the famous serial killer whose polished exterior hides a bad nature, is the main character of this story. His complicated relationships with Will Graham and Clarice Starling, two smart FBI agents, are the main focus of the books, starting with *Red Dragon* and continuing through the tetralogy. This paper analyses the complicated relationships between these characters using the principles of mimesis, fluidity, and doubling, which question the idea that there are only two kinds of moral choices.

In Harris's writing, the lines between humanity and monster are blurry, and the difference between social and monstrous traits becomes less clear. Even though Lecter is a personification of society's fears and hatred, he does things that show empathy, blurring the line between morals and immorality. His willingness to help Graham and Starling catch crooks is a strange contrast to the rest of his monster-like personality. This study carefully looks at character profiles and important parts of the book to find subtle ways that the main characters mirror each other and change who they are. Also, it asks the readers to rethink the ideas about what is monstrous and what is human based on how these literary works show them.

The tragic and sudden end of Hannibal Lecter's once-peaceful family life resulted from the deaths of those closest to him. It is significant, nevertheless, that his trauma was caused by the permanent loss of his family rather than their absence. Lecter retreated from society after these upsetting incidents, becoming a recluse who hardly ever interacted with close people. He soon comes into contact with two crucial FBI agents, Will Graham and Clarice Starling, in this isolated setting that brings a change in his attitude towards life and society.In Lecter's life, Graham and Starling take on significant roles, and their interactions with him are distinguished by a complexity that goes beyond the ordinary dynamic between a prisoner and a law enforcement official. When analysing Hannibal Lecter's character and the complexities of his identity, their positions in the story are of utmost significance.

It is crucial to go into social and psychological theories in order to fully comprehend the complexities involved in the interaction between FBI agent Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter. René Girard's theory of mimesis, also known as the theory of imitations, is essential for understanding this dynamic. According to Girard's theory, people have a

fundamental lack of confidence in their own desires, which leads them to seek what other people want or what they believe other people want.

When one person, known as the subject (person A), craves an item coveted by another, known as the mediator (person B), this imitation takes place. Goal-oriented distance, or the distance between these people, is a critical variable affecting the possibility of disputes emerging between subjects. The tendency of the individuals to imitate one another increases as they get closer to one another, finally causing the phenomenon of doubling. In this phenomena, the distinctions between the two people become muddled as they start to display the same characteristics. The mediator transforms into a monster double of the subject as a result of the collapse of distance and the consequent doubling process, signifying a horrifying imitation of humanity (Girard qtd. in Carroll 43–44).

The complexity of the relationship, especially between Lecter and Graham, can be clarified by the previously mentioned theory. Lecter is viewed as Graham's evil double, representing the blurred lines between humans and monsters. Monsters coexist both within and outside of society, embodying secret desires. Girard's doubling and imitation mechanism, which emphasises similarities over differences, leads to the conclusion that the monster is a component of mankind (Girard qtd. in Carroll 44). By taking into account these elements—fluid boundaries, existence both within and outside of the group, and the quest of similarity—analyzing the connection between Lecter and Graham is made easier. In *Red Dragon*, the evidence favours their mimicry or imitation rather than portraying Hannibal and Graham as radically different beings at the extremes of the monster-human continuum.

Alexandra Carroll suggests that the analysis of the following scenes will shed light on the complexity of their relationship: The first conversation is between Graham and the Atlanta Chief of Detectives that says how Graham caught Lecter. The second conversation is between Graham's and Dr. Frederick Chilton in the hospital for the Criminally Insane, and the third conversation is between Graham's and Lecter at the Chesapeake Hospital. (45)

In examining the intricate relationship between Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, and Clarice Starling, it's crucial to dissect key moments from Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* that illuminate their complexities. Firstly, when Graham meets Crawford to discuss the murder of two families, it becomes evident that Graham possesses a remarkable ability to mirror others, even unconsciously adopting their speech patterns. This observation is supported by Harris, who notes, "Crawford heard the rhythm and syntax of his own speech in Graham's voice ... often in intense conversation Graham took on the other person's speech patterns" (Harris, *Red Dragon* 3). This quality highlights Graham's empathic nature, emphasizing how easily he merges with others emotionally, blurring the boundaries of personality.

Moreover, in a restaurant scene, Graham's sensitivity is palpable as he absorbs and reflects the emotions of those around him, particularly a quarreling mother and daughter. Carroll aptly describes Graham as an "empty, sensitive individual capable of feeling, absorbing, and reproducing the emotions of others" (Carroll 46). His empathic capacity serves as a cornerstone of his investigative prowess, notably evident in "The Tooth Fairy" case.

In the hospital setting, Springfield dehumanizes Lecter, labeling him as "crazy" and a "monster." In stark contrast, Graham refrains from such categorizations, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of Lecter's behavior. Graham emphasizes that Lecter's actions are not the result of insanity but rather a sadistic enjoyment, asserting, "Dr. Lecter is not crazy, in any common way we think of being crazy. He did some hideous things because he enjoyed them. But he can function perfectly when he wants to" (Harris, *Red Dragon* 46-47). Graham's refusal to pigeonhole Lecter within conventional psychological labels highlights his commitment to seeing beyond the surface.

In the broader context of societal perceptions of monsters, Lecter embodies both perspectives. Ingebretsen's viewpoint suggests that the monster reflects society's fears and hate, essentially created in society's image and likeness. Conversely, Grixti argues that the monster rebels against societal control and order (qtd. in Carroll 42). These dual aspects manifest in Lecter's behavior, presenting a character who blurs the line between human and monster.

As we scrutinize Lecter's actions, the temptation to label him as insane arises. However, his precise awareness of his actions precludes such a diagnosis. Finkel's legal criterion affirms that a person is not responsible for criminal conduct if they lack the capacity to appreciate its criminality due to a mental disease or defect. Hannibal, although undoubtedly responsible for his actions, remains acutely aware of them, rendering the insanity defense untenable.

A pivotal moment in their relationship occurs when Graham visits Lecter's apartment and discovers an old medical book featuring the image of the Wound Man. It is here that Lecter deduces Graham's knowledge of his true identity, symbolizing their profound connection. Graham may insist that recognizing Lecter was mere coincidence, yet he acknowledges that no one else made the same discovery. This realization underscores the striking similarities between Lecter and any ordinary person, blurring the line between monster and human. Carroll aptly notes that Graham's investigative approach centers on recognizing these similarities rather than differences (Carroll 47-48).

Ultimately, Lecter himself acknowledges the profound likeness between him and Graham, stating, "The reason you caught me is that we're just alike" (Harris, *Red Dragon* 85-86). Carroll raises a thought-provoking question in response: "If monsters and their pursuers can be mistaken for one another, and monsters double their human counterparts, who should we fear: the monster or his pursuer? Lecter or Graham?" (53). This inquiry highlights the complex interplay between good and evil, suggesting that while Graham and Lecter share similarities, Graham's engagement with the monstrous is primarily driven by fascination and understanding, while Lecter's actions stem from traumatic compulsion.

In the exploration of the intricate dynamics between Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, and Clarice Starling, it's essential to analyse the pivotal moments from Thomas Harris' novels, especially *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*. These moments reveal the complex interplay of identities, relationships, and blurred lines between good and evil.

Hannibal Lecter defies easy categorization, transcending the conventional boundaries of good and evil while aiding both Graham and Clarice in their quests to apprehend criminals. His relationships with them, while undoubtedly professional, bear a personal and, at times, intimate dimension (Leigh Gompf 1). His willingness to assist in their pursuits serves to humanize him, as suggested by Simpson, particularly in his connection with Clarice (Paxton 3).

Clarice Starling, upon her initial encounter with Lecter, experiences an unsettling sensation. As Harris puts it, she feels as though "an alien consciousness [is] loose in her head" (Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* 24). This palpable connection between them is intertwined with an aspect of association, manifesting within Lecter's memory palace. Gradually, Lecter's rescue of Clarice from certain death and his nurturing of her psychological well-being replace the haunting memory of his sister, Mischa, in his mind (Gregory 113). Their relationship, however, extends beyond the professional realm, becoming increasingly private and erotically charged. Leigh Gompf notes a pivotal moment in *The Silence of the Lambs* when Clarice receives the case file from Lecter, marking the first physical contact between them. This moment is laden with symbolic significance, representing the intersection of good and evil, while also carrying a distinct erotic undertone (Leigh Gompf 1).

As their connection deepens, particularly in the third novel, *Hannibal*, it becomes evident that Clarice harbors profound feelings for Lecter. Harris explicitly states, "Here she had the most remarkable encounter of her life," and Clarice comes to understand that "Death and danger do not have to come with trappings. They can come to you in the sweet breath of your beloved" (Harris, *Hannibal* 78-79). Their relationship evolves into a genuinely romantic and overtly sexual one. A defining moment occurs when Clarice handcuffs herself to Hannibal, who is willing to amputate his own hand if necessary. This act symbolizes the transition into an explicitly erotic phase of their connection, and Clarice's transformation from a heroine fighting evil to someone who succumbs to it (Leigh Gompf 2).

This profound mirroring between Lecter and Clarice is further evident in their shared experiences of childhood trauma. Clarice's trauma emerges from her father's murder when she was ten, leading to her enduring animosity towards criminals. The haunting memory of lambs being slaughtered amplifies her psychological distress (Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* 263-264). In her pursuit of emotional freedom, she embarks on a path that includes killing several individuals, raising questions about the boundaries of justice and morality (Mohanan 22).

Remarkably, Lecter is the sole individual aware of Clarice's childhood trauma, and she trusts him implicitly, despite his dangerous reputation and manipulative tendencies. Her memories manifest as fears lurking in her subconscious, with older memories representing past experiences and more recent ones representing emerging triggers (Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs* 111). Paxton interprets this as Clarice's journey toward confronting and healing from her past trauma, with Lecter acting as a catalyst for her self-discovery (5).

Hannibal employs his psychiatric abilities to help Clarice confront her trauma, a testament to his genuine care for her. This is particularly evident when he orchestrates a therapeutic encounter with the skeletal remains of her father (Harris, *Hannibal* 447). According to Paxton, Hannibal recognizes that Clarice's subconscious harbors trapped memories of her father, and by associating these memories with tangible objects, he seeks to transform her emotions into manageable and destructible entities, ultimately helping her to heal (7-8).

The complexity of Hannibal's character extends to his sexuality and relationships with women. Gregory delves into the intricate dynamics, particularly highlighting Hannibal's association of Clarice with his sister, Mischa, leading to questions about the psychological implications of this connection (113).

In the world of Harris' novels, character profiles are meticulously crafted, revealing the intricate doubling and fluid identities among main characters. Graham, although a dedicated investigator, grapples with thoughts of murder and risk to his family. In contrast, Clarice's upbringing with relatives after her father's murder exposed her to psychological trauma rooted in the relentless slaughter of lambs. Simpson astutely notes that characters like James Gumb, Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*, and Hannibal Lecter himself share common traits and motivations with the detectives

pursuing them, blurring the boundaries between justice and criminality (92). These blurred lines between monstrous and human traits underline the prevailing themes of fluidity and doubling in Harris' narrative.

In essence, the complex interplay between Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, and Clarice Starling unveils a profound examination of identity, morality, and the coexistence of good and evil within each individual. Their interconnectedness, mirroring, and shared traumas underscore the fluid boundaries that transcend traditional definitions of monstrosity and humanity, offering a nuanced portrayal of the human condition in the face of darkness.

In conclusion, the intricate relationships between Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, and Clarice Starling, as portrayed in Thomas Harris' novels, serve as a compelling exploration of the multifaceted nature of human identity and the blurred lines between good and evil. These characters, each with their unique complexities and vulnerabilities, challenge traditional notions of heroism and villainy, delving into the depths of the human psyche.Through the lens of sociological and psychological theories, particularly Rene Girard's theory of mimesis and the concept of doubling, we have dissected the mirroring and imitation that underpin these relationships. Will Graham's uncanny ability to empathize and merge with others, Hannibal Lecter's enigmatic presence straddling the line between monstrous and human, and Clarice Starling's journey of self-discovery and trauma healing all contribute to a narrative rich in psychological depth and complexity.

Hannibal Lecter's role as a central character exemplifies the intriguing interplay between good and evil. While he commits heinous acts, his willingness to assist Graham and Clarice in their pursuits humanizes him to some extent. This transformation challenges preconceived notions of morality and the capacity for change within individuals.Furthermore, the shared traumas experienced by these characters, from Graham's contemplation of murder to Clarice's childhood horrors, highlight the fluid boundaries between heroes and villains. In their pursuit of justice, they often grapple with their own moral ambiguity, further underscoring the theme of doubling and the capacity for both good and evil within people.

The Hannibal Lecter tetralogy offers a thought-provoking exploration of the human condition, emphasizing the duality of the nature and the ever-present potential for transformation and redemption. It reminds the readers that the lines between hero and villain are not fixed but malleable, and that the capacity for empathy and understanding can bridge the gap between the monstrous and the human. Thomas Harris' masterful storytelling invites the readers to contemplate the complexities of our own identities and the depths of shared humanity.

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