

***The Portrayal of Serial Killers in Thomas Harris' Novel Red
Dragon***

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to deeply examine the character of serial killers in Thomas Harris' novels and focuses on his novel *Red Dragon*. The Study searches in these complex and deep characters through the use of Erich Fromm's concepts about the destructive nature of the human psyche and what are the factors affecting serial killers in all social psychological, and biological aspects. This study Concluded: Thomas Harris portrayed the characters of serial killers in a professional and complex and made the reader go on a contemplative journey in the mind and soul of the serial killer, thus reaching the climax of artistic perfection.

Keywords: *Thomas Harris, Erich Fromm, killers, Hannibal Lecter, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*

1.1 Introduction

Thomas Harris is an American author born on April 11, 1940, in Jackson, Tennessee. He is best known for his thriller novels, which often feature complex and compelling characters. Harris has written five novels to date, including four featuring his most famous character, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Harris received a degree in English from Baylor University and then began working as a journalist, covering crime stories for various newspapers. He eventually moved into the world of fiction writing, and his first novel, *Black Sunday*, was published in 1975. The book was a bestseller and was subsequently adapted into a successful movie. Harris' next novel, *Red Dragon*, introduced Dr. Hannibal Lecter to the world, a brilliant but terrifying psychiatrist and serial killer (Fuller, 2015). . The character proved to be incredibly popular, and two more novels featuring him (*The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*) were published in the following years.

The Silence of the Lambs is Harris' most famous work and is widely considered one of the best thriller novels ever. The book tells the story of FBI agent Clarice Starling as she attempts to track down a killer known as Buffalo Bill with the help of Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Harris' other novels include *Black Sunday*, which tells the story of a terrorist plot to attack the Super Bowl, and *Hannibal Rising*, which explores the origins of Hannibal Lecter. Harris is known for his brilliant characterization and attention to detail, which make his novels compelling to read (Magistrale, 1996). His stories are often dark and disturbing, but they also delve deeply into the

complexities of human nature, making them both thought-provoking and deep.

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) was a German social psychologist, philosopher, and humanistic psychoanalyst. Fromm was known for his emphasis on the importance of social relationships and humanistic values, including the pursuit of individual freedom and social justice. Fromm's most famous works include *Escape from Freedom*, *The Art of Loving*, and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. In *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm explores the psychological roots of fascism and totalitarianism, arguing that people who feel lonely or powerless may resort to authoritarianism as a way of regaining a sense of control. *The Art of Loving* is a best-selling volume that explores the concept of love through Fromm's humanist perspective (Funk, 2003). Fromm argues that mature love requires a willingness to grow and change, and that love is not just an emotion, but also a skill that can be developed over time.

In *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Fromm delves into the roots of violence, aggression, and destructiveness in human behavior. He argues that humans have a natural impulse toward creative and productive behavior, but that these impulses can be repressed, leading to destructive actions such as war. Overall, Fromm's work emphasizes the importance of human relationships, personal growth, and social justice in leading a fulfilling life (Fromm, 2013). His work continues to inspire scholars in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and sociology.

2.1 Erich Formm's concepts

Erich Fromm's book, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, is a profound work that explores the fundamental nature of human beings and how it manifests itself through destructive behavior. Fromm's aim in this book is to understand why individuals engage in destructive behaviors that endanger their lives and other people, and how these destructive tendencies can be overcome to create a better world. The book delves into various aspects of human destructiveness such as violence, aggression, sadism, and necrophilia.

Given the dual organization of the brain, the crucial question arises: What are the factors that disturb the balance and produce manifest rage and corresponding violent behavior? (Fromm, 2012 P 95)

Fromm argues that these tendencies are part of the human state, and they are not merely pathological or deviant behaviors. He believes that all individuals have the potential to engage in destructive behavior depending on the circumstances they find themselves in. Fromm identifies two main types of human destructiveness: biophilic and necrophilic. Biophilic behavior is an expression of love and respect for life, while necrophilic behavior involves a fascination with death and destruction. Fromm argues that biophilic tendencies are present in most individuals, and they are essential for the preservation of life. However, he also notes that these tendencies can be overridden by necrophilic tendencies in circumstances where individuals face threats that they cannot overcome through peaceful means (Fromm, 2013, p 365-366).

One of the most compelling arguments in the book is the idea that the destructive tendencies of human beings are social and cultural. Fromm believes that individuals are not inherently violent or aggressive but are conditioned to behave in certain ways by their social environment. According to Fromm, the norms and values of a society shape individuals' understanding of themselves and their place in the world. When these norms and values promote violence or aggression as necessary for survival or success, individuals are more likely to engage in destructive practices (Fromm, 2013, p 211).

Furthermore, Fromm argues that the rise of capitalism and industrialization has contributed to an increase in necrophilic tendencies in society. He contends that capitalism promotes a culture of consumerism where the acquisition of material possessions is the primary goal. This focus on material wealth leads to an objectification of human beings and the natural environment, which leads to destruction and exploitation. Fromm believes that the solution to this problem is the creation of a society that values human beings and the natural world over material possessions. The book concludes with a call to action urging individuals to take responsibility for their actions and work towards creating a society that promotes biophilic behavior. Fromm believes that individuals must overcome their fear of death and embrace life fully to engage in biophilic behaviour.

2.2 The Development of Serial killer's Portrayal in literature.

Gothic literature and serial killers have a long-standing relationship in English and American novels. The Gothic genre often explores themes of darkness, horror, and supernaturalism, while serial killers are real-life figures who commit gruesome crimes repeatedly. The melding of the two can create a chilling and disturbing atmosphere that captivates readers. One of the earliest examples of this relationship can be seen in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), where the titular character is essentially a serial killer who murders those closest to him. Other examples include *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1897), where the Count is a vampire who feeds on the blood of his victims. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886), where the dual identity of the main character raises questions about the duality of good and evil in the human psyche (Varma, 1972). *The Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris (1988), where the serial killer Hannibal Lecter is a terrifyingly intelligent and cunning figure who preys on women and has a twisted relationship with the protagonist, Clarice Starling. *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis (1991), where the main character, Patrick Bateman, is a wealthy investment banker who excels as a sadistic killer (Messent, 2015). These examples reflect how Gothic literature can be used to explore the darker aspects of human existence and how it can intersect with the very real and horrific phenomenon of serial killers.

2.3 Serial Killers in History

The United States of America has been home to some of the most notorious serial killers in history. These individuals have committed heinous crimes that have stunned the nation, and some have even gained cult-like followings. Here are some of the most famous serial killers in US history and the impact they had on society. Theodore Bundy is perhaps one of the most well-known and infamous serial killers in American history. He confessed to killing over 30 young women during the 1970s, across seven states. Bundy was a charismatic and handsome man, which allowed him to charm women into letting him abduct and murder them. Bundy's trial in Florida in 1979 was one of the first to receive national attention, and his death by electric chair in 1989 brought the end to a chapter of horrific crimes in US history (Estep, 2021).

Jeffrey Dahmer, also known as the Milwaukee Cannibal, was a notorious serial killer and cannibal who murdered and dismembered at least 17 young men and boys between 1978 and 1991. He would often lure his victims to his apartment, where he would sedate them, sexually assault them, and then kill them (Tithecott, 1997). His crimes were so gruesome that they shocked the nation, and he was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment.

John Wayne Gacy, also known as the Killer Clown, was a convicted serial killer and rapist who murdered at least 33 young men and boys between 1972 and 1978. Gacy would lure his victims to his home, where he would sexually assault and strangle them before burying their bodies under his house. He was eventually caught and sentenced to death, and his execution in 1994 brought closure to the families of his victims. Richard Ramirez, known as the Night Stalker, terrorized the Los Angeles area during the mid-1980s. He was responsible for murdering at least 13 people and committing several other violent crimes. Ramirez was known for breaking into people's homes in the middle of the night and brutally attacking them. He was eventually caught and convicted, and he died of natural causes in prison in 2013. Ed Gein is one of the most bizarre and disturbing serial killers in history (Vronsky, 2005). He was a grave robber who would dig up corpses and use their body parts to make furniture and clothing.

2.4 Serial Killers in Literature and Real life

Serial killers have been a significant source of interest and fascination for people long time ago. Over the years, the popularity of serial killers has grown, due to their portrayal in literature and media. They are usually seen as individuals who engage in gruesome murders that are difficult to explain, grasp or even comprehend. It is not obvious whether literature and real life are similar to each other or contradict each other in their point of view toward serial killers' characters. This study will examine the differences between serial killers in novels and those in real life. The first difference is a Psychological one, while authors often create serial killers as larger-than-life characters in their novels, in reality, serial killers are people with a psychological condition that drives them to kill. Most

serial killers display psychopathic behavior that is responsible for their actions. These behaviors include a lack of empathy, aggression, and the propensity to manipulate those around them to get what they want. In contrast, however, authors create serial killers who have skills in profiling, and cunningness that are not often seen in real life (Abe, 2021). These literary serial killers are highly intelligent, able to evade the authorities, and are very successful in carrying out their murders.

Secondly, differences in motivation; Serial killers portrayed in novels and movies usually have a clear motive and goal for their actions. This is different in real-life cases, as serial killers often act on impulse or out of anger, resulting in a lack of a specific motive. Many literary serial killers kill for revenge or derive pleasure from causing pain to others, while most real-life serial killers have a combination of motives that range from sexual gratification, a desire for power or control, and an inability to cope with past traumas. In the case of literature, however, authors often create serial killers who are motivated by revenge, lust, or a desire for power in their specific way. The third difference is the Physical Characteristics, Authors often portray serial killers as striking individuals with specific physical characteristics that make them stand out. They might have a specific look or personality feature that sets them apart from others. Such physical characteristics may also include mannerisms or a distinctive way of speaking that allows them to display their genius in evading the authorities. However, in real life, most serial killers display average physical characteristics that allow them to blend into society and avoid detection easily. Finally, in the Killing Methods in literature, authors tend to create imaginative and elaborate killing methods that add suspense to their novels unlike real-life serial killers (Abe, 2021). One of the main characteristics of serial killers' characters in real life and literature is Cannibalism, which is the act of humans consuming the flesh or internal organs of other human beings, has been a widely debated and taboo subject throughout history. It has been portrayed in various forms of media such as books, movies, and even harsh news headlines. Cannibalism isn't just the horror movie trope that is seen to exaggeratingly create tension and push boundaries in mainstream media, there is documented proof worldwide that human beings have practiced cannibalism, sometimes as religious rituals, though sometimes as a means of survival. It is an act that is widely condemned and considered to be a crime against humanity, and it is punishable by law in many countries. However, in some societies and cultures, particularly in Africa, Melanesia, and parts of the Amazon, there are still traces of this practice as a form of ritual, particularly in some tribes where it is considered a divine act (Askenasy, 1995). On the other hand, there are cases where cannibalism has been done as a means of survival, particularly in situations of war or natural disasters where food is scarce.

In a time of extended war or famine, various cultures have practiced cannibalism to survive. The Donner Party, a group of 87 Americans traveling to California in 1846–47, were stranded by snow in the Sierra Nevada and forced to resort to cannibalism to survive. This group had

already properly died, and what remained alive were only of few. During World War II, the survivors of the planes crashed in the Andes mountain resorted to human flesh to survive due to severe cold and hunger. Cannibalism has been documented in the modern era in North Korea, where people have allegedly eaten the flesh of humans who starved to death during food shortages. Cannibalism has been mentioned in a few ancient texts, including the Bible. It is said that during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, people resorted to eating children. In one account, a woman cooked her son and shared the meat with another woman. The practice is still prevalent in some remote tribes where they view it as an act of worship, and their belief is deeply rooted in their culture. In some parts of the Amazon rainforest, it is believed that consuming an enemy's flesh would lead to acquiring their courage and strength (Sagan, 1993). This belief is used as a justification for a warrior to eat parts of their slain opponent.

3.1 Red Dragon

Red Dragon is a masterpiece thriller that Thomas Harris wrote in 1981. The novel introduces a fascinating character, the Tooth Fairy, who is a central figure in the story's plot. The Tooth Fairy, also known as Francis Dolarhyde, is a psychopath who struggles to suppress his murderous impulses. Through Dolarhyde, Harris delves into the complexities of human nature, psychology, and the role of families in shaping individuals. The Tooth Fairy's character is intriguing, not only due to his gruesome murders but also because of his history and motivations. This study provides an analysis of the Tooth Fairy's character in Harris's novel. The character of the Tooth Fairy is a complex study of obsession and compulsion. Francis Dolarhyde is portrayed as a man with a dark past that is riddled with abuse and neglect. The story shows that he was abused as a child and frequently ridiculed for his cleft palate as well as his speech impediment. This abuse caused him to retreat into himself and withdraw from society. He developed a fantasy world of his own and spent a lot of time imagining himself as a powerful creature, the "Great Red Dragon," capable of anything. As he grew older, Dolarhyde developed a fascination with William Blake's painting "The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun," which he saw as a representation of his aspirations for a higher power (Harris, 2007, p 50).

Dolarhyde's obsession with the "Great Red Dragon" eventually led him to become a serial killer, who murdered young families in their homes. Harris uses Dolarhyde's character to show how past traumas can shape individuals' present actions, leading them down dark paths. In this case, we see that Dolarhyde's childhood abuse contributed significantly to his current behaviors. His violent fantasies, however, were initially repressed until he found himself in a job that involved scanning and printing old crime scenes for a company known as Gateway Film. His job exposed him to violent images that rekindled his obsessions and fueled his homicidal tendencies.

One other thing," Commissioner Lewis said. The detectives sank back in their seats. "I have heard officers in this command referring to the killer as the 'Tooth Fairy.' I don't care what you call him among yourselves,

I realize you have to call him something. But I had better not hear any police officer refer to him as the Tooth Fairy in public. It sounds flippant. Neither will you use that name on any internal memoranda. (Harris, 2007, p19)

Moreover, it is essential to recognize that Harris portrays Dolarhyde as a character who subverts the dominant stereotypical notions of psychopathy. The audience sees a character who is tortured by his inner demons and seeks solace in his delusions of being the Great Red Dragon. In contrast to most psychopathic characters, Dolarhyde is portrayed as vulnerable (Fuller, 2015). He is lonely and seeks connection and intimacy.

3.2 The Portrayal of Serial Killers' Characters in Thomas Harris' Novels

Serial Killers' Characters in Thomas Harris' Novels definitely fascinating, deep and complex. Harris creates intricate and multi-dimensional characters in his novels, each with their unique personality traits, motivations, and methods for carrying out their crimes. Harris doesn't simply write about killers; he delves into their psychology, their life experiences, and the events that led them to become the person they are.

One of the most prominent and intriguing serial killers created by Thomas Harris is Hannibal Lecter. Lecter is a brilliant forensic psychiatrist and a cannibalistic serial killer who becomes a central figure in Harris' novels, starting with *Red Dragon*. Lecter is a cultured and refined character with a deep, dark side. He is manipulative and cunning, always one step ahead of those trying to catch him. Lecter represents a shifting dynamic in Harris' novels as the main characters begin to identify and sympathize with him, even though he is a murderer.

He's a monster. I think of him as one of those pitiful things that are born in hospitals from time to time. They feed it, and keep it warm, but they don't put it on the machines and it dies. Lecter is the same way in his head, but he looks normal and nobody could tell. (Harris, 2007, p 37)

Interestingly, while Hannibal is the main focus of Harris' novels, he is not the only serial killer in the narratives. Other killers in the novels are equally complex, from Francis Dolarhyde, "The Tooth Fairy", to Jame Gumb, Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*. In particular, Jame Gumb, aka Buffalo Bill, is another character that Harris expertly develops in *The Silence of the Lambs*. One of the most notable aspects of Gumb is his gender dysphoria and the fact that he kills women to create a skin suit to fulfill his desires. Buffalo Bill is not just a monster; he is a product of his experiences and societal pressures. Many serial killers introduce their trauma as a means of excusing their murderous dispositions, but Harris explores the essential nature versus nurture debate more expertly than any other serial killer in a novel.

Harris also expertly uses point of view to humanize his killers to a certain extent, which adds depth and complexity to characters who would otherwise be one-dimensional monsters. For instance, in the first novel in the Hannibal Lecter series, *Red Dragon*, a significant portion of the story is told from the perspective of Francis Dolarhyde, a serial killer with a cleft

pallet and emotional scars. The chapters has been taken from Dolarhyde's perspective go deep into his psyche, exploring his struggles with his demons and the motivations for his actions, making for truly terrifying, gruesome, but undeniably compelling confronting reading. Hannibal Lecter is a highly intelligent and sophisticated psychiatrist who is also a cannibalistic serial killer. He is a complex character who operates on multiple levels, able to emote a sense of charm and refinement while simultaneously indulging in gruesome acts of sadism and narcissism. Throughout the novel, Lecter manages to maintain an aura of mystery, despite being a central character.

He did it because he liked it. Still does. 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, 2007, p 36)

He is not only a murderer but also a puppeteer, manipulating the mind of the killer named "The Tooth Fairy" in create chaos and manipulate the FBI into handling the case and catching him. However, despite his manipulative personality, Lecter is also a man of great taste, keenly interested in fine art and the professional achievements of others. He also possesses a unique sense of morality, despite his propensity for extreme acts of violence. He values intelligence and refinement and is quite fond of making use of his intellect to route out the weaknesses of others.

Lecter is also an expert in human psychology, knowing how to read others and seeing through their facades. He is also a skilled cook, able to make exquisite dishes that involve human flesh as an ingredient. In conclusion, Hannibal Lecter is a multifaceted character who evokes multiple emotions and reactions in readers. He is the epitome of a dangerous and charming killer, which is what makes him one of the most interesting and memorable characters in all of literature.

Thomas Harris' most important novels, including *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Red Dragon*, and *Hannibal*, have become iconic not only because of the thrill and horror they bring to readers but also due to the unforgettable character of Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal, as depicted in the novels, is a disturbing yet fascinating character that has captured the imagination of countless readers. This study seeks to delve deeper into Hannibal Lecter's character, motivations, and impact on Harris' novels.

Psychopathic Genius: At the center of Hannibal's character is his brilliance, which is offset by his malicious and manipulative personality. His intelligence and keen insights, coupled with his sociopathic tendencies towards sadistic violence and cannibalism, make him a formidable antagonist throughout the series. One of the intriguing aspects of Hannibal's character is how he uses his intellect to control and dominate others. From serving as a psychologist to manipulating the FBI and the other characters in the novels, Hannibal's intellect is a significant aspect of his character.

The Narrative: Thomas Harris' novels depict Hannibal Lecter as a wicked, cultured, and refined individual who is simultaneously a monster with a penchant for violence and cannibalism. Despite this, Harris provides readers

insight into Hannibal's inner workings, motivations, and emotional landscape, creating an intriguing character that readers can't help but find fascinating.

In the green machine there is no mercy; we make mercy, manufacture it in parts that have overgrown our basic reptile brain. There is no murder. We make murder, and it matters only to us (Harris, 2007, p 231-232).

The narrative often shifts focus between Hannibal and the other characters, balancing the horror of his deeds with the insight he provides into his psyche.

The Moriarty: Another key aspect of Hannibal's character is his role as a foil to the protagonist. As an antagonist that possesses an intellect comparable to the protagonists, Hannibal often serves as a Moriarty-like character that is always one step ahead of the protagonists. He is an intelligent, cunning psychopath that pursues his desires even when they are at odds with the societal norms of human decency. Throughout the novels, Hannibal presents an enormous challenge to the protagonists, forcing them to confront their moral compass and question their battles with good and evil.

Hannibal's Motivations: Although Hannibal's motivations are often mysterious and difficult to pin down, the reader can derive insight into his psyche from the way he processes his motivations for his brutal acts. He justifies his actions as providing spiritual enlightenment to those he victimizes or by punishing individuals he believes have wronged him or society. While these motivations are twisted and self-serving.

Conclusion

There are several possible links between Erich Fromm's concepts in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* and Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter, a character in several of Harris' novels, including *Red Dragon*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, and *Hannibal*. Firstly, we can say; Hannibal Lecter as an embodiment of human destructiveness. Fromm's book is a study of the nature of violence and destructiveness in human beings. He argues that human beings have a natural inclination towards destructiveness, which can manifest in various forms, such as aggression, sadism, and the desire for power and control. Hannibal Lecter is a character who embodies many of these traits, as he is a highly intelligent and sophisticated psychopath who derives pleasure from inflicting pain and suffering on others.

The second point is the role of childhood experiences in shaping violent behavior: Fromm argues that childhood experiences play a crucial role in shaping a person's personality and behavior, including their propensity towards violence. Hannibal Lecter's backstory, as revealed in later novels in the series, suggests that he had a traumatic childhood, including witnessing the murder of his younger sister and being abused by his uncle, which may have contributed to his violent tendencies.

Thirdly we can call it the psychology of serial killers. Fromm's book explores the psychology of serial killers and other violent offenders, examining the factors that may contribute to their behavior and the reasons

why they are so difficult to rehabilitate. Hannibal Lecter is a serial killer who is portrayed as highly intelligent and calculating, with an ability to manipulate others to his advantage. He is also depicted as having a deep understanding of human psychology, which he uses to his advantage in his interactions with law enforcement officials and other characters in the novels.

The fourth one is the concept of evil. Fromm's book explores the concept of evil and how it manifests in human behavior. He argues that evil is not something that exists independently of human beings but rather is a product of their actions and choices. Hannibal Lecter is a character who is often portrayed as evil, given his history of violence and sadism. However, his intelligence, sophistication, and ability to appreciate beauty and culture also add complexity to his character and raise questions about the nature of evil and the role of human agency in its creation.

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تصوير القتل المتسلسل في رواية توماس هاريس التنين الأحمر

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المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحليل العميق لشخصية القتل المتسلسل في روايات توماس هاريس والتركيز على روايته التنين الأحمر. دراسة هذه الشخصيات المركبة والمعقدة من خلال استعمال مفاهيم إريك فروم عن طبيعة النفس البشرية التدميرية وماهية العوامل المؤثرة في القتل المتسلسل من جميع النواحي اجتماعيا ونفسيا وبإلوجيا. توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى النتائج الآتية، إذ قام توماس هاريس بتصوير شخصيات القتل المتسلسل بصورة احترافية ومعقدة وجعل القارئ يذهب في رحلة تأملية في عقل ونفس القاتل المتسلسل ليصل بذلك إلى ذروة الكمال الفني.

الكلمات المفتاحية: توماس هاريس، إريك فروم، القتل، هاننيل لكر، تشريح التدميرية البشرية