

Analysis on the Development of Hannibal Lecter's Psychology from a Teenager until an Adult as Depicted in *Hannibal Rising* and *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris

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Abstract

This paper is a form of analysis towards the psychology of fictional character Hannibal Lecter since he was a teenager until he becomes an adult. The aspect which becomes the very focus of this research paper is Self-Defense Mechanism that Hannibal Lecter is going through in his life. Furthermore, this paper has three important objectives; which are describing Hannibal Lecter's early childhood's background, presenting as well as analyzing the psychology of young Hannibal Lecter after getting through severe traumatic experience, and analyzing the psychology of mature Hannibal Lecter as a psychiatrist as well as a murderer. The approach used to complete this paper are qualitative and psychological approach. In addition, to collect the data, library research methodology is applied. The result of this study indicates that Hannibal Lecter undergoes several Self-Defense Mechanism in his teenage years which are Repression, Projection and Regression as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Lastly, it can be concluded that Hannibal Lecter still undergoes Self-Defense Mechanism which is Sublimation even though he has grown to be a mature adult.

Keywords: self-defense mechanism, repression, projection, regression, sublimation

I. Introduction

A very notorious psychopathic character, Hannibal Lecter, is depicted in the novel *Hannibal Rising* by Thomas Harris as a very highly intellect psychopath who has a manipulative ability as both psychiatrist and a serial killer. His character is absolutely very different from the other fictional serial killers that have ever been created, which are usually described unsophisticated; gross and uncontrolled. On the contrary, the character of Hannibal Lecter is absolutely distinguished as he is charming; elegant; sophisticated and smart.

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Earlier in the story, Hannibal Lecter is described as a brilliant kid who comes from a noble Lithuanian father; the 8th descendant of Hannibal The Grimm. With his sister, the boy becomes the only survivor of the cruelty of the second World War. Later, a group of Hiwi invaded their lodge and treated them as a hostage in their own property. As a brother, and as the only one taking full responsibility of his sister's life, little Hannibal cannot stand witnessing his sister being murdered and eaten by the armies since they cannot hunt due to extreme weather. Thus, such traumatic childhood experience of losing his parents and sister in a very awful way triggers his psychopathic behavior including the cannibalism which he practices later in his lifetime.

Moreover, this paper has three important objectives which are giving detailed background of Hannibal Lecter's childhood in order to help the readers understand his troubled psychology; presenting the development of Lecter's psychopathic behavior; as well as describing the trackback of previous mistakes which shape him to be mentally sick. This paper is also limited to only discuss the psychology of Hannibal Lecter from book 1 and 2 of the sequels.

Previously, there has been one existing journal which presents the analysis of Hannibal Lecter's psychology entitled "Psychoanalytical Analysis on Hannibal Lecter and Buffalo Bill Characters as seen in *Silence of The Lambs* and *Hannibal Rising* by Thomas Harris" (Putra, 2013). As a distinguished point from the previous analysis, I try to give stronger emphasis on presenting the development of the psychology of the main character (Hannibal Lecter) instead of contrasting him with another serial killer.

Furthermore, the character of Hannibal Lecter is shaped as a smart serial killer who has a manipulative ability for he often escapes from prison as also stated by DeLisi (2010) "He is also distinguished by his ability to escape ordinary legal punishments and restraints." Later, as discussed in the journal by Messent (2000) and by Janicker (2010), I am very much helped to conclude from book 2 *Silence of The Lambs* as a continuity of the analysis of Hannibal Lecter from book 1 *Hannibal Rising*; that Hannibal Lecter certainly owns a superior manipulative-psychopathic skills which develops without the

influence of others and it clearly differs him from common intellectual people. I also use a journal entitled *To Amuse the Mouth: Anthropophagy in Thomas Harris's Tetralogy of Hannibal Lecter Novels* as a material to help writing this paper (Ulyatt, 2012).

Inspired by this bloody story, I am very much keen to bring this writing entitled "Analysis on the Development of Hannibal Lecter's Psychology from a Teenager until an Adult As Depicted in *Hannibal Rising* and *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris". I specifically conduct a research towards Hannibal Lecter's profile on the first two books of the sequel, which are *Hannibal Rising* (I try to give specific details and the analysis of factors that shape Hannibal Lecter to be a psychopath; as well as presenting his psychology as a teenager who survives from a traumatic life journey) and *Silence of The Lambs* (Hannibal Lecter later becomes a counselor of FBI on murder, thus I aim to analyze his psychology of why he is willing to help the cops if he is a serial killer himself).

In examining this novel, Freud's conventional theory that contains conscious-unconscious mind, id-ego-superego, and self-defense mechanism is applied to disclose the complicated way of thought of the main character; Hannibal Lecter. Furthermore, in attempt to elucidate the character, I use the self-defense mechanism theory as the very tool to analyze the psyche of Hannibal Lecter. Therefore, presenting a discussion of self-defense mechanism (as a part of his troubled psychology) of character Hannibal Lecter becomes the very focus of this writing.

II. Research Method

This research paper entitled "Analysis on the Development of Hannibal Lecter's Psychology from a Teenager until an Adult as Depicted in *Hannibal Rising* and *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris" uses qualitative approach. The method of this research paper can also be said as a non-experimental research which is descriptive research paper. Thus, Case study is the very appropriate form of descriptive research

methodology used in this paper. Researcher Robert L. Yin defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yi, 1984).

To support this research paper, I use the first two books of the sequel which are *Hannibal Rising* (book 1) and *Silence of The Lambs* (book 2) by Thomas Harris. Furthermore, data are collected from library research which include studies; papers and books that have already existed previously.

Moreover, the method of data analysis used in this research paper is psychological approach. Psychological approach is an attempt to study someone's personality, not only on how they build their personality but also how the personality develops (Hurlock, 1980L 2). In this very case, I try to understand the background of Hannibal Lecter's psychopathic behavior from his childhood and past traumatic memories.

III. Result and Discussion

This part will present three important points which are: Early childhood of Hannibal Lecter and the psychology of teenage Hannibal Lecter (as depicted in book 1 *Hannibal Rising*), The psychology of mature Hannibal Lecter as a psychiatrist and a serial killer (as depicted in book 2 *Silence of the lambs*) and Trackback of several mistakes which shape Hannibal Lecter to be mentally wounded (concluded from book 1 *Hannibal Rising*).

A. Early Childhood of Hannibal Lecter and the Psychology of Teenage Hannibal Lecter

Hannibal Lecter was born from a noble Lithuanian father, known as Count Lecter and a noble Italian mother who was a Sforza on one side and a Visconti on the other side. Little Hannibal then grew up as a smart kid who was excellent on his

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academics. He also had a major curiosity in almost everything which drove the kid to have expanded knowledge. This was proven in *Hannibal Rising* that a boy of eight was capable of determining the height of his castle's through measuring its reflection's length by using the formula of Euclid's. (p.34). Little Hannibal was also very much educated about manners since both of his parents were nobles. Therefore, manners and good behavior which later shape him to become a public gentleman was always a priority to be taught since he was very young. I am firm to say that this is the very key factor that distinguish Hannibal Lecter from other serial killers who mostly are brutal, lack of manners and out of control.

In short, a group of Hilfswillige or Hiwi (foreigners who volunteered to serve Germany during World War II) consisted of five men later found the lodge where little Hannibal and his sister were surviving in after his parents had been accidentally murdered during the Nazi's attack. They made the two of the kids as their hostages "Grutas had a slender chain, freezing against the children's skin as he looped it around their necks." (*Hannibal Rising*, p.57). Since the weather was extreme, there were no animals to hunt and those soldiers became starving. They took Mischa who was suffering pneumonia at the time after arguing which one to pick between Hannibal and his sister. "We have to eat or die", the very words coming from one of them while looking at the children with his mouth full of blood became the only thing Hannibal Lecter remembered in his conscious memory as explained in *Hannibal Rising* page 62 "That was the last conscious memory Hannibal Lecter had of the lodge."

I believe that little Hannibal who was consistently taught about responsibility by his parents must feel guilty because he lost his sister out of hand despite the fact that he was the oldest who must take care of her. The boy must also feel anger because he was helpless, as well as sadness because he was all alone to protect his sister. I believe that these factors triggered Hannibal Lecter's mental troubles especially when he refused to talk about it with his closest ones later in his lifetime when he was founded by his uncle.

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After the incident which took his sister's life, Hannibal was found by the Soviet Armies in a very concerning condition. A teenage Hannibal Lecter was then put in a boy orphanage maintained by the Soviet. He was a loner and was a threat to bigger kids who liked to bully him. He would not hesitate to hurt them even though they were much bigger. It was explained in *Hannibal Rising* page 71 that 13 year old Hannibal attacked one of his friend who deliberately shot him with a stone coming from a slingshot and sank the boy's head in a pond while Hannibal kept on hitting the boy's head with the previously used slingshot. Later after the accident, Hannibal was explained to appear emotionless with a flaming furious eyes.

From that very point, we can see how young Hannibal Lecter was terribly wounded inside and already had a mental trouble. He was anti-social and emotionless. He also had no guilt in harming others. He never made friend and never talked to anyone as a teenager. These were his early stages of psychopathic behavior which later developed in a worst way after he succeed finding out the ones who had murdered his sister.

In daylight the boy appeared to be a loner and never talked to anybody, and in nights he would constantly have nightmares which always set upon the day in the lodge where his sister was taken away from him. He would scream at the top of his lungs in his sleep, and sometimes the boy accidently bit his own tongue to bleed. Teenage Hannibal Lecter was then finally adopted by his uncle; Robert Lecter and his wife, and was taken with them to France. In short, I assume that young Hannibal Lecter, besides showing early stages of psychopathic behaviors, also suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) where he showed several symptoms of it such as nightmares; sweating; stress-triggered and flashbacks before developing to be a serious mental problems.

The thirteen year old boy who was later nurtured by his aunt (since his uncle passed away in a few years after succeed finding him) still showed the very thing that his father taught him since very young, which was responsibility. Hannibal

Lecter was very fond of and protective to his aunt, proven with his way of killing the butcher who insulted his Japanese aunt even though it is wrong. I conclude that Hannibal killed his first victim; the butcher, because *he* reminded him of the soldiers : a cynical smile and a blood in which he could not cope to remember and it triggered his anger. In addition, it is also because he finally had the chance to show his superiority after years being undermined. I also conclude that young Hannibal decided to kill his first victim because, as a reflection of his failure to protect his sister, he did not want anybody to harm his beloved ones; which in this case was his aunt.

After having the background of Hannibal Lecter's childhood discussed, I aim to analyze his psychology as a teenager after having been through such a traumatic life journey. As stated in *Freud's Drive* (De Lauretis, 2008, p. 3) that Defense mechanism is an unconscious psychological mechanism that minimizes anxiety which is triggered from unacceptable or even harmful stimuli. Therefore, I firmly believe that Self-defense Mechanism by Sigmund Freud is very much appropriate to be applied to have Hannibal Lecter's psychology analyzed.

Teenage Hannibal Lecter suffers from repression. As goes with the name, the work of repression completely represses unpleasing memories from the conscious mind of the sufferers. This happens with young Hannibal Lecter as he forgets the details of the incident that took his sister's life in his conscious mind. He only remembers the bloody mouth of the soldiers but cannot remember the whole details as well as he cannot remember what exactly happened back there. In addition, the painful memory only comes in his dreams where he sees the faces of those soldiers and his sister. "We were living at the lodge. There was an explosion. I can remember being picked up by soldiers and riding on a tank to the village. In between I don't know. I try to remember. I cannot." (*Hannibal Rising*, p. 171).

Repression can be understood as a way to avoid anxiety or sadness. A person who is going through repression does not realize the impulses that trigger his/her

anxiety just as much as s/he naturally cannot remember the traumatic experience happened in the past. It is the work of the brain that tries to wash away painful memories from their conscious mind, because they cannot cope remembering such painful memories.

Hannibal Lecter as a teenager is also going through another type of self-defense mechanism which we know as projection. “One obvious way to defend against anxiety arising from failure or guilt is by projection of the blame onto someone else.” (Krench, 1974:580). The idea of projection itself is blaming someone else for the sufferer’s current condition with the thought that they truly deserve to be blamed. This happens to young Hannibal as he cannot cope with his earlier situation where his sister was being murdered and eaten because the weather was very extreme that they could not hunt animals. In fact, Hannibal Lecter ate his own sister just as the soldiers did because he also ate the soup that they served him. But Hannibal refuses to take this reality and blames it into the soldiers instead. He killed the five of them to release his guilt and anger with the thought that it was all their fault and they deserve to be punished.

Young Hannibal Lecter is also going through regression. There were two kinds of regression which are retrogressive behavior and primitivation. Hannibal Lecter is going through primitivation as he becomes brutal in killing all the five soldiers who murdered his sister. All the norms and laws are unconsidered anymore, instead he acts like an uncivilized person who is out of control and does not hesitate to execute the people who have done him wrong (primitivation).

B. The Psychology of Mature Hannibal Lecter as a Psychiatrist and a Serial Killer

Hannibal Lecter got into medical school, as depicted in *Hannibal Rising* and later in his lifetime he became a psychiatrist as depicted in *Silence of the Lambs*. Even though he had a great reputation as a keen doctor, and even though he had

executed those people who had done him wrong in his previous lifetime, still he could not stop killing.

In *Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal Lecter was locked in a prison for quite a long time. He was then becoming some sort of counselor for the FBI because there was another serial killer who constantly kidnapped and murdered girls. Hannibal Lecter appeared to be willing in helping the cops by passing several information about the murderer's identity. Yet, the true fact is that it was just his manipulative attempt to escape from prison as the answers were all twisted by him. He also killed the guards in order to be free. Therefore, Hannibal Lecter is never healed.

Hannibal Lecter still undergoes self-defense mechanism even though his painful memories of childhood has long gone. Adult Hannibal Lecter is going through sublimation. In short, sublimation is a process of distraction from unpleasant feelings to convert it into something else. Hannibal Lecter is troubled inside and he is well aware of that. Thus, in order to convert his unpleasant painful feelings, he gives therapies to his patients by becoming a psychiatrist.

Different from his psychology as a teenager who reached aggression, mature Hannibal Lecter as a doctor kills for his appetite. The answer of "why" he kills to fulfill his appetite is never preserved but I assume that it happens to Hannibal because cannibalism happened in the Eastern front during World War II and little Hannibal probably was very much aware of the situation. It also happens because he saw his sister being murdered and eaten. The worst is that he also ate the soup which means he also ate his own sister. He probably tried to cope with the reality that he once performed cannibalism, although it was not his intention. He was probably full of guilt, but he tried to go on with that. Therefore, killing for appetite becomes his relief as well as a custom.

The very important thing to notice is that mature Hannibal Lecter is capable of being decent in the public. He is also not a threat to common people because he does not attack people randomly just like a serial killer do. Hannibal Lecter is controlled and is able to empathize. Different as he was a teenager, mature Hannibal Lecter mingles very well, especially with the upper society. He is elegant, and is known as

a reputable person. He also performs his work very well as a doctor. It is just sometimes he kills then eats his victims by cooking them into appropriate cuisines.

C. Trackback of Several Mistakes which Shape Hannibal Lecter to be Mentally Wounded

In this very part, I try to analyze several mistakes which leads Hannibal Lecter to have developing psychopathic behavior even after he is found by his uncle to be taken care of. The first mistake is of his uncle's. Hannibal Lecter is presumed to suffer from major traumatic experience which makes his uncle brings him to a therapy. Nevertheless, he is not cooperative with his psychiatrist, therefore with the advice of the psychiatrist Hannibal is taken back home within the hope that the warmth of family can heal the child. The truth is, the boy needs to keep seeing a psychiatrist in order to speak of what truly bothers him, but with his uncle's way of stop taking him to see a psychiatrist; although with a good intention that Hannibal can heal with affection, is leading the boy to have developing mental problems.

Other mistakes come from Hannibal Lecter's aunt, Lady Murasaki. Since Hannibal's uncle passed away, he is then to live only with his young aunt. At first, she treats him passionately like a friend; a nephew and a family. However, after Hannibal kills the butcher, Lady Murasaki helps to cover Hannibal from the police. The head of the butcher was missing, and she places it just outside the police's office while Hannibal is taken to be interrogated. Thus, it creates such false perception that Hannibal is not the murderer. Although it is right and also wrong on the other hand; right because she is very fond of Hannibal and cannot see the boy being taken away, wrong because she helps the boy in committing crime; this leads to a perception of Hannibal's mind that guilty people deserves punishment.

Lady Murasaki treats Hannibal like her own lover, probably because she is lonely since her husband died and because Hannibal is only years younger than her, but then she leaves him after witnessing Hannibal executing Grutas brutally; a member of Hiwi who murdered his sister. Hannibal tells her that he loves her but she rejects him by saying that there is nothing left from him to love, despite the love

of a lover she has shown for him for years. She gives up on him, abandons him. Thus, there is nobody left to take care of him, and just like everybody else in his life, she is gone too (this is why Hannibal Lecter is not married or is attracted to anybody later in his life, I presume). The wounded Hannibal Lecter is well-aware that he needs to continue his life just as later he grows to be a nightmare.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing the first two sequels of Hannibal Lecter, which are *Hannibal Rising* and *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris, I have come to a conclusion that teenage Hannibal Lecter suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as early stages of psychopathic behavior. His PTSD sign can be concluded from the nightmare that he continually has in his sleep, despite his lack of remembering the past traumatic experience he once had in his conscious mind. His early stages of psychopathic behavior later develop into a serious mental problem especially since he stops seeing a psychiatrist and refuses to share his traumatic experience to anybody else. Young Hannibal Lecter is furious, guilty, confused, as well as troubled inside but he refuses to talk to anybody.

As young Hannibal Lecter tries to carry on with his life by going to medical school, he sees the very opportunity to have himself revenged to the people who have done him wrong in his past; the Hiwi soldiers. He then begins executing them one by one without any hesitation. I conclude that indeed, Hannibal Lecter is a psychopath since he has no mercy in killing people even though they deserve to be blamed, but what actually happens to Hannibal Lecter is far more complicated than just being a psychopath and a troubled person.

Hannibal Lecter remains as an enigma to all of us, to me regardless. He grows to be a reputable man, a reputable doctor but he still kills; only this time to fulfill his appetite which I believe happens because it has become some sort of his stress-relief and a custom. Finally, I personally conclude that Hannibal Lecter is severely traumatized. The incident where he sees his sister being murdered and eaten wounds his soul beyond anything we can imagine. He kills for the first time to revenge, but it seems

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to me like it has gotten into his soul that killing is a part of him. Just like cannibalism that he performs, Hannibal Lecter is well- aware that he was also eating his sister, therefore eating his own victim later in his lifetime as he grow older is becoming a part of him which he can get away from.

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