

Hannibal Lecter Movies  
Clinical Psychology Term Paper

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Spring

In the following pages you will read my movie analyses of the movies “Hannibal Rising”, “Red Dragon”, “Silence of the Lambs” and “Hannibal”. After the brief summaries of these films you will find the detailed psychological analyses of character of Hannibal Lecter and a brief analysis of character of Clarice Starling.

I hope you enjoy your journey...

## **Summary of the Movies**

### **Hannibal Rising**

The first movie in terms of telling the childhood of Hannibal Lecter is directed by Peter Weber in 2006. The movie is very important in terms of answering the question of “How Hannibal became a cannibal?”. The movie starts in the years of World War II. We meet with Mischa, little sister of Hannibal. The parents of Hannibal die in a battle between German and Russian soldiers and later his sister cannibalized by Russian looters. After 5 years we see him in an orphanage, he never talks, but screams at nights because of frequent nightmares about Mischa. He escapes from orphanage and goes to France to his uncle’s home. In France he lives with his Japanese aunt Lady Murasaki and learns about Japanese culture and nobility, he starts medical school. We see his first murder and taking the revenge of his sister’s death by finding every single person in the group of Russian looters. We watch him to turning an emotionless serial killer step by step.

### **Red Dragon**

The “Red Dragon” is directed in 2002 by Brett Ratner. In the opening scenes of the movie we meet with Will Graham who is an FBI agent searching for a cannibalistic serial killer. To create an effective profile of killer he gets help from a successful psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter. However, after a while Graham realized the fact that the killer he was searching is the self of Hannibal and arrested him. After a few years FBI calls for Graham to arrest another serial killer named Tooth Fairy. This killer has a distinct type of killing that after he kills the families, he is placing mirror peaces to eyes of family members. To be able to solve the case Graham decides to go to Hannibal again and gets the benefit of his knowledge and experiences.

### **Silence of the Lambs**

The movie is directed by Jonathan Demme in 1991. It starts with scenes of Clarice Starling, an FBI agent trainee, training in the forest. Then, she is called for job of interview with a psychopath killer Hannibal Lecter (Hannibal the cannibal) in his jail. Hannibal Lecter is defined by the president of Baltimore State Forensic Hospital as “monster, pure psychopath”. The movie continues with regular meetings between Clarice and Hannibal to solve the case of Buffalo Bill who is a serial killer and killing young women. We see the tricks of Hannibal while giving cues about Buffalo Bill. He uses anagrams to play with FBI and also test Clarice’s intelligence. Additionally, in this first one of Hannibal series, we learn many things about Hannibal that he has an extremely sensitive sense of smell, curiosity to other people’s private life and detailed observations. Also, we meet with Clarice Starling a

young FBI agent trainee with a death police father and desire and intelligence to be a good agent.

### **Hannibal**

The second directed movie of the serial is “Hannibal”. It is directed by Ridley Scott in 2001. In this movie we first meet Mason Verger who is the fourth and the only survived victim of Hannibal Lecter. He is trying to reach Lecter and collecting anything about him obsessively. He wants revenge, because he lost his face as a result of fun night with Lecter many years ago. Then, we see Clarice as a real FBI agent this time. In subjected time we see Hannibal have run away from jail a few years ago and living with name of Dr. Fell in Florence. The case of Lecter in FBI files are opened again and given to Clarice. In following two hours we learn more about Hannibal, such as his taste, hobbies and intellectual knowledge. Also we learn about Clarice’s love of work and sense of duty and are testimony to their interaction once again, but for last one. In “Hannibal” their interaction smells some love, hate and even obsession. They always think about the other when they are apart and especially Hannibal’s way of looking and touching to Clarice is in a way “lovely”. And the movie ends with cutting of Hannibal his own hand to run away from Clarice’s handcuff. “Hannibal” is the last movie in terms of Hannibal Lecter’s life. We do not know about anything happen after he cut his hand and run away.

## **Hannibal Lecter**

Is he a genius mind or a simple serial killer?

He is only a fictional character of Thomas Harris novels, but also he is the most remembered one of all fictional serial killers. He has killed nearly 20 people, except one or two none of them was ordinary people, but people who were killed because of a reason. He has a very developed sense of smell and he is very good at catching details which are invisible to others. Before starting to talk about his abilities let's first talk about his life by the help of the 4 movies telling him.

### **Childhood and Adolescence**

Hannibal Lecter was born in Lithuania in 1933 to a wealthy aristocratic family (Wikipedia, 2007). As we learned in the movie of "Hannibal Rising", he was living with a sister named Mischa and a lovely father and mother in a castle during World War 2. The World War 2 has a very special meaning in his life because of its effect on Hannibal to become a serial killer. When Hannibal was 8 years old his family decides to move a lodge in the forest in order to escape war. The first movie telling us about his childhood (the last movie directed) and starts with this scene. They are moving a small house in forest, but this could not help them to escape. Because, a Soviet tank running away from German strike find their house in the forest and the parents of Lecter family die in a battle between German and Soviet soldiers. All the things start here. After Hannibal and Mischa were being witness to this scene, a group of Russian soldiers running away from German strike came to their house. They were tired and hungry soldiers in a big war. They looked in the house to find a food, but there were none. After a discussion between them, they decided to eat little Mischa. They thought she would die anyway, so there were no wrong to eat a weak little girl to survive. As a result the Russian men and Hannibal survived with the help of Mischa.

After 5 years we saw Hannibal in an orphanage while being subject to jocks of other kids and experiencing nightmares about Mischa every night. He was not obeying any rules of orphanage, never talks and showing aggressive behaviors to ones he did not love. One day he got the letters of his mother and run away from there to his uncle to France. He stayed there many years with his aunt (because his uncle died) and went to a medicine school. He learned about human anatomy. Also he learned many things about Japanese culture from his Japanese aunt. The first victim of Hannibal is a French butcher who misbehaved his aunt Lady Murasaki in bazaar. In the following years he found the men killed Mischa and killed them for revenge and we saw his first cannibalism toward them may be because of his curiosity about human flesh. After his murders, he arrested once in France but there were no evidence about

the murders. Therefore he was released and he moved to America, Baltimore to have the psychiatry education.

### **Adulthood**

In the opening scene of “Red Dragon” we saw Hannibal in the concert of Baltimore Philharmonic Orchestra. However, he was not able to get the pleasure of the music because of a flutist spoiling the concert. After the concert Hannibal killed the flutist, Benjamin Raspail, to save the music of the orchestra and serve liver of him to the directors of the orchestra. This was the first murder in his adulthood we learned, but it was not. In the years he spent in USA, he killed more than 10 people for several reasons. As a result of these murders he was wanted by police and FBI. Will Graham who is a FBI agent, investigating a cannibalistic serial killer in these days. However, because of the psychological aspect of these murders he was getting help from a psychiatrist named Hannibal Lecter. Later, he became the man caught Lecter. After arrested, Hannibal put to Baltimore State Forensic Hospital and stayed there for 8 years. In these years he caused to death of a nurse and another patient who is staying next room, but also helped FBI to catch two other serial killers. One of these helps took place a few years later from incarceration; Will Graham came to hospital to get the help of Hannibal to catch a serial killer called Tooth Fairy. Another one is the subject of “Silence of the Lambs” in which Hannibal helped Clarice Starling, a FBI trainee, to catch serial killer called Buffalo Bill. After the years had spent in a small room, he achieved to run away and went to Florence, Italy to have some rest. In Florence he killed a museum curator to be able to take his place and change his name to Dr. Fell and got the position in the museum. The days in the museum and Florence was in a way holiday for him, he was reading books and getting the pleasure of Italy. However, these good days did not last too long. An Italian detective Rinaldo Pazzi realized his real identity and tried to catch him to get the high prize suggested for Hannibal by Mason Verger. Mason Verger was the fourth and the only survived victim -if the survival is the true word to define his situation. Since, because of the removal of his skin in his face, he had a very disgusting looking and attached to a supportive machine to live. The realization of Hannibal about Pazzi did not take so long. After a few days, Hannibal invited Pazzi to his house for a tea and hang him from his balcony like had happened to Pazzi’s grand father. After this murder Hannibal went to USA to his beloved Clarice Starling and caught by the men of Mason Verger. Surprisingly, Lecter saved by Clarice Starling, but later he saved Clarice. At the end of the movie “Hannibal”, Clarice handcuffed Hannibal to prevent him running away, yet, Hannibal achieved to run by cutting his hand off. At the last scene, we saw Hannibal in a plane, but we do not know where he was going.

## **Traits and Abilities**

Hannibal Lecter as portrayed by Sir Anthony Hopkins is not very tall but strong person with an erect posture. He never blinks his eyes while he is talking and his voice has a hypnotic effect. His way of talk and stand give the grandiosity he feels to the viewer.

He is intellectually brilliant. He knows many things about art or literature. By the help of his education he has an extreme ability to analyze a person and follow the details. The over sensitivity of senses like smell and sound give him the ability to influence a person by the help of these senses (like he influenced Will Graham and Clarice Starling before). He is a talented artist. We can see his drawings of his victims in the movie of “Hannibal Rising” and the drawings of Florence of the other places he like in the “Silence of the Lambs”.

Different from other criminals who have problem with society, Hannibal is not a person experiencing problems in his occupational life. He was a successful man who is known in Baltimore as a psychiatrist and he was also appreciated in his short job in the Museum in Florence. As can be seen in the movies of “Silence of the Lambs” and “Red Dragon” he helped FBI to catch the serial killers of Buffalo Bill and Tooth Fairy. Although it was his own way to help –by using anagrams and deceiving sometimes -, the two killers were found in the last scene of the movies. However, it should be remembered that this help is a way of satisfying his ego by telling that “I caused FBI to find killers”.

Opposite to these, he never talks about himself and do not even think to self-analyze. He ignores the things told him about himself as he did after the things he said about Clarice to her and Clarice asked him if he could find the courage to analyze himself. Additionally, because he is far too sophisticated for psychological tests, there were only the words, but not the concrete data to analyze him.

## **Psychological Analysis of Hannibal Lecter**

### Diagnosis

Let's first list the facts about Hannibal to be able to analyze him;

- The extreme sense of smell, sound and interest in details
- An erect posture
- Cold and stable way of talking (even no talking for 5 years after Mischa's death)
- Being emotionless
- Lack of conscience
- Manipulative use of talking
- Grandiosity
- Lying to and cheating others

- Cannibalism
- Never talk about self and even limited use of “I”
- Lack of sexual interest

However, there is also presence of some positive features;

- Purposeful actions
- Communication features
- Ability to continue on a job or on a planned action
- High cognitive abilities
- Interest in arts, foods and books
- Drawing ability
- Successful psychological analyses

These features will help us in the psychological analysis of Hannibal Lecter. Now, we will move the DSM-IV criteria for antisocial personality disorder and Hare’s psychopathy criteria to move along in a categorical way.

The symptoms of antisocial personality disorder include a longstanding pattern (from age of 15) of disregard for the rights of others and at least 3 of listed below;

- Failure to conform to society's norms and expectations that often results in numerous arrests or legal involvement as well as a history of deceitfulness where the individual attempts to con people or use trickery for personal profit.

- Impulsiveness
- Failure to consider consequences of behaviors
- Irritability, and/or physical assaults
- Reduced ability to feel empathy for other people
- Inability to see the hurts, concerns, and other feelings of people often results in a disregard for these aspects of human interaction

- Irresponsible behavior often accompanies this disorder as well as a lack of remorse for wrongdoings

- Inability to continue on a job

The criteria of Hare’s psychopathy;

Interpersonal traits

- Glib and superficial talk
- Egocentric and grandiosity
- Lack of remorse or guilt
- Lack of empathy

- Deceitful and manipulative
- Shallow emotions

#### Antisocial life style

- Impulsive
- Poor behavior controls
- Need for excitement
- Lack of responsibility
- Early behavior problems
- Adult antisocial behavior

However, Hare states that to call someone as psychopath most of listed above should present not a few of them, because “criminal” and “psychopath” are different things.

When we come back to Hannibal features we can see many common points in the lists of antisocial or psychopath. However, there are differences between these criteria and only one of the diagnoses should be said for Hannibal. For instance, we can not say for Hannibal having inability to continue on a job as listed in DSM-IV or experiences anxiety while communicating with others as antisocial personality disorder mentions. Also, it seems that Hannibal knows the consequences of his behaviors but does not care about them or in a way thinks that “those people deserve that result”. In the list of Hare the presence of glib and superficial talk, grandiosity and being deceitful and manipulative are important criteria present in Hannibal, but lack in DSM. Therefore, it could be seen if compared that the diagnosis of psychopath is much more appropriate for Hannibal Lecter.

#### Etiology and Prognosis

In the etiology of disorder the role of Mischa is very important. As mentioned above the cannibalistic murder of his beloved sister when he was 8 years old nearly seems as only etiology of disorder. However, it should be stated that in terms of etiology of psychological disorders we could not say that there is only one cause of disorder. There is always combination of causes. In terms of this scientific way of thought the etiology of Hannibal’s psychopathy is in a way fantastic. Because, in the movie of “Hannibal Rising” the reflected picture of Lecter family is lovely. The parents are kind and behave in a lovely way to their children. Hannibal is playing with his sister and listen the words of parents. In other words, a modeling or early problems can not be seen in the case of Hannibal. A genetic base is not mentioned, so we do not know if there is someone with psychopathology in the family of Lecter but we know that he comes from an aristocratic family. On the other hand, it is accepted that early traumatic events play an important roles in the development of

psychopathology. A traumatic event like Hannibal experienced; being witness to death of parents and cannibalism of sister is an extreme event for a child, however, again we could not know if only a case like this could lead to a life long psychopathy going hand with serial cannibalistic murders.

The first symptom of a psychopathology seen in Hannibal is his muteness. He did not talk for 5 years after the traumatic events and show aggressive behavior to children bullied others. The most important difference of Hannibal from other criminals starts here; from his adolescence he never shows aggressive behaviors to ordinary people. He hurts only people who hurt others in some way. For instance, he killed the untalented flutist in them movie of “Red Dragon” because he was spoiling the excellent music of orchestra or he caused the suicide of Miggs who is another mentally ill criminal staying in the next room of Hannibal in the Baltimore because he humiliated Clarice Starling like he did to butcher in the France. Therefore, we can not mention a lack of purposefulness in the actions of Hannibal. There are only some exceptions like he killed the police officers to run away from jail or a tourist to take his clothes.

The cannibalism behavior starts with the cannibalistic behaviors of Russian men toward his sister. We learned from Russian looters that Hannibal himself consumed his sister after she killed, but Hannibal never accepted this. The cannibalism is in a way a revenge of murder of Mischa. It is known that serial killers usually collect something from their victims, some collect clothes, some collect bones and Hannibal collected their meat in himself by consuming them. However, he did this in a cultured way. For instance, he always preferred to eat good food with a good wine or champagne. This could be in a way answer to those cheap men that “I will eat you like you ate my sister, but I will do this in a noble way, because I am not a disgusting and cheap person like you”. So, humiliates all men like them. This way of thought can be seen his selection of victim. The victims of Lecter are always men. The men are in a way cheap, they are doing disgusting things. To illustrate, Mason Verger is a man convicted of child molestation, Benjamin Raspail was an untalented flutist, Miggs and Paul Krendler showed sexual insult toward Clarice and Rinaldo Pazzi was a corrupted police officer. Therefore, his prognosis is bad, but we can not say that he is an ordinary killer who kills anyone he confronted.

#### Role of Clarice

Clarice Starling is the only woman Hannibal contacted and the only one contacted to Hannibal. He met her in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of his prisoned in the Baltimore State Forensic Hospital. In the first meeting of two the aim was to applying some psychological tests and getting some

cues about serial killer Buffalo Bill. However, as opposite to other people come to see Hannibal, he accepted Clarice for the second meeting and always be polite to her. And even he killed the mentally ill neighbor of him because he insulted Clarice in the first of these meetings.

The role of Clarice is the one of the important ones in the life of Hannibal because he never regularly sees a person and tried to communicate when far away except Clarice. He started to interest her in the course of the finding Buffalo Bill and goes inside to her mind as a cost for giving information about Buffalo Bill. He talked about Clarice to Barney, one of the workers in the hospital, and said that he is finding Clarice charming and amusing.

In the movie of "Hannibal" he wrote letter to Clarice after he run away and said that he is watching things showed in the news about her. We saw him as playing piano by looking the photographs of Clarice. It can be seen that he is missing her, and also he mentioned this once in the same movie that he said "I came to America to see you while you are running". Later in the movie Clarice saved the life of Hannibal, but shot by a man of Mason Verger and this time Hannibal saved her life. He took care of her and ate the brain of the person who insulted her frequently, Paul Krendler. At the final part of the movie when Clarice handcuffed him to herself Hannibal asked that "Would you tell me to stop? If you love me, would you tell me?" and Clarice says "never", then Hannibal cut his own hand to not to cut hers, and runaway.

The relationship between the two is bizarre. In a way it is only a relationship between a thief and a police, but in a way it smells romanticism. As can be seen in the movie of "Hannibal" they frequently thought about the other. Clarice listens the tapes of their conversations over and over while Hannibal collects the pictures of her from newspapers. It is like both hate and love. Clarice is the second woman Hannibal shows his interest after Lady Murasaki. And in the both cases the most extreme sexual intercourse is the Hannibal's kissing of them.

According to another theory of mine, Clarice is important for Hannibal because she remembered him to his sister Mischa. He killed the men insulted Clarice like he did to men killed Mischa and care about her when she dismissed from FBI. Also according to summary of the books of Thomas Harris in Wikipedia, in the final part of the book "Hannibal", Lecter tried to brainwash Clarice and replace her personality and memories with Mischa, but it failed. However, it can be seen that Hannibal also showing sexual interest to Clarice and I am not sure if this fact can be supported by this theory.

## **Clarice Starling**

Clarice is an FBI agent who became popular after her regular meetings during training years with “Hannibal the cannibal”. Her mother died at early years of her life and father was a police and he died, too, because of a thief’s shot during job. She says in the analyses of Hannibal that she was very sorry when she lost her father because “he was everything for me”. During these analyses although Hannibal told her many bad things like she is being from village, trying to hide her accent and things about her cheap clothes and shoes, she never denied these and listened patiently.

She is a charming woman with the love of work. She was the most successful student in the class during FBI training years, and she is very careful about the things related to work as a real agent. We saw her in the movie of “Hannibal” as giving directions with a cold voice to the other polices during an operation and follow the rules strictly. She is very honest that in the same movie when a problem occurred in the operation, she accepted her fault and told the directors that she was very regretful. However, as a human being we saw her while crying in the night, though she seems very strong toward others. She does not sleep much, has a sense of duty and she has selected as a “female FBI agent who shot and killed most people” by Guinness Records Book.

The best fit label for the Clarice Starling could be “perfectionist”. She is very much interested in doing to best. She is always criticizing herself and others and because of her desire to be the best of her, she strictly follows the rules and even give up from her own life by sleeping less and lacking a partner. As Hannibal stated in the movie of “Hannibal”, she has the fear of shaming parents and being judged by others as bad or less then perfect.

Her relationship with Hannibal is in a way obsession. May be because of him being her first case or may be because he was the first one enter her mind or because of her perfectionist side; Hannibal’s representation of an unfinished work we can not be sure, but Clarice was watching and listening the tapes of Hannibal again and again. Hannibal may be filling the space of his death father or may be filling the space of lacking partner. She was going to visit him frequently in the movie of “Silence of the Lambs” and looking forward to him in the movie of “Hannibal”. Whatever the position of Hannibal for Clarice, we can see his importance at least in the final scene of “Silence of the Lambs” while she is repeatedly calling for “Dr. Lecter” after the finished conversation on the phone.

## References

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