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America and Hannibal Lecter: A Psychoanalytical – Political Reading of Harris’s Serial Killer

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Abstract

This paper argues that Thomas Harris’s Quartet draws detailed parallelism between the character of Hannibal Lecter and America as a political entity. Previous research has neither elaborated nor provided precise examples, from real-life American politics or psychology, highlighting this parallelism. In fiction, Simpson (2000) asserts, the serial killer character can be a political and ideological code in the midst of the post-war evolution of the serial killer fiction genre. Drawing on Zimbardo’s psychoanalytical theory and Danner’s political testimonial insights, this paper explains that both Hannibal Lecter, and America, as a political entity, are evil. After September 11, Bush administration has rationalized extreme measures to combat terrorism in Afghanistan, has established a detention camp at Guantanamo, Cuba, and has settled a torture site in Abu Gharib in Iraq. Danner’s political insights prove that there have been systematic killings and torture committed by the American troops in Iraq, which have been officially documented in the Schlesinger report, General Taguba’s report and Red Crescent reports. All of these documents can be fully accessed through Danner’s book whose political testimonies act as the backbone for assessing any claims of evil, narcissism, or psychopathy attributed to the character of America. Narcissism and psychopathy are studied as two main personality disorders of the character of Lecter and America as a political entity in the light of the psychoanalytical theory, mainly Kernberg’s and Ronningstam’s. Hence, this interdisciplinary paper highlights evil, narcissism, and psychopathy in the characters of Lecter and America, with reference to fiction, psychology and politics.

Key words: America; Hannibal Lecter; Thomas Harris; Serial Killer; Psychoanalytical theory.

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1. Introduction

This paper argues that Thomas Harris’s Quartet draws detailed parallelism between the character of Hannibal Lecter and America as a political entity. Thomas Harris is renowned for his novels about Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the forensic psychiatrist, who is himself a cannibal serial killer, and his novels: *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and *Hannibal Rising* (2006) are all international best sellers and have been adapted into captivating movies, featuring Anthony Hopkins in the role of Hannibal Lecter. Previous research has neither elaborated nor provided stark examples, from real-life American politics or psychology, highlighting this parallelism. Previous research has only referred to how the serial killer is a symbol of a violent, fractured American society that tries to define itself against a background full of violence (Seltzer, 1998); and how the serial killer stands for many vices in the American society, including the force of racism in 1980s America and its flawed political power (Donnelly, 2018). Simpson (2000) also explains that the portrayal of serial killers in the popular culture of the 1980s serves as a critique of the political power held by white men in America, particularly targeting the Reagan/Bush Administration. Hence, in fiction, Simpson asserts, the serial killer character can be a political and ideological code in the midst of the post-war evolution of the serial killer fiction genre.

This paper elaborates on Simpson’s suggestion that a serial killer can be a political code and an ideological code of the serial killer fiction genre. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill in a gap in the analysis of modern and contemporary fiction portraying serial killers. It is an analytical study of the character of Lecter, the Lithuanian-American, as portrayed in Harris’s four novels: *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), *Hannibal* (1999), and *Hannibal Rising* (2006) in the light of Zimbardo’s psychoanalytical theory of evil and Danner’s political theory. Drawing on Zimbardo’s psychoanalytical theory and Danner’s political testimonial insights, this paper explains that both Hannibal Lecter, also known as Hannibal “the Cannibal” and America, as a political entity, are evil in a similar way. Both are active perpetrators of evil and passive contributors of evil. During the war on Iraq, and according to Watson Institute, there have been 280,771 - 315,190 Iraqi

civilians killed by direct violence since the U.S. invasion. The worst part is the fact that the war has been based on unreliable intelligence and false allegations of existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. After September 11, Bush administration has rationalized extreme measures to combat terrorism in Afghanistan, has established a detention camp at Guantanamo, Cuba, and has settled in Abu Gharib in Iraq. This revengeful attitude parallels with Lecter who has taken revenge of the killers of his sister, but has also chosen, based on his realization, to kill many innocents who have never been involved in her murder. Moreover, America, as political leader, has chosen to be a gazer at the genocide taking place in Gaza in 2024. In fiction, Lecter has chosen not to disclose the name of the kidnapper of Catherine, the daughter of Senator Ruth Martin, when he has been consulted about the expected soon to come murder of Catherine. In the light of psychoanalytical theory, mainly Kernberg’s and Ronningstam’s as well as others, narcissism and psychopathy are studied as two main personality disorders of the character of Lecter and America as a political entity.

There is a justification for drawing such a parallelism between the fictional character Hannibal Lecter and America as a political entity: both have held a rationalization to kill based on a delusion of fighting evil and purifying the world when they themselves have also been perpetrators of evil; and both exhibit traits of narcissism and psychopathy. The definition of the serial killer provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in terms of committing murders of a series of three or more killings, regardless of the motive, upon a will and a rationalisation to do so befits America as a political entity and Lecter. *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* by S. Hersh about Vietnam War and the terrible events and massacres that took place during this war have been summed up by Zimbardo: an estimated 504 Vietnamese civilians have been rounded up and killed in Son My Village (My Lai 4) by American soldiers, and Hersh’s book includes photos of innocent unarmed civilians murdered in cold blood (Zimbardo, p. 474, p. 531).

Moreover, there have been systematic killings and torture committed by the American troops in Iraq, and these regrettable events have been officially documented in the Schlesinger report, General Taguba’s report and Red Crescent reports; these documents have been fully furnished by Danner. Danner (2004) has built up his political stand based on these reports as well as many memoranda,

asserting that all crimes in Iraq have been orchestrated by American officials and have not been the fault of a number of bad apples as metaphorically suggested by President Bush after the break of the scandal in 2004. Danner (2004) believes that the United States has shown itself as a strange hybrid creature, partly “a military giant” and partly “a political dwarf”; Danner has been an eyewitness, during the weeks he spent in Iraq in late October and early November of 2003 of incidents in Iraq which have proved the political mal-practices of the American troops and America’s complete failure in providing a democratic Iraq or finding any nuclear weapons (p.58, p. 62). The series of killings by Lecter have been also committed by a rationalized will which is: revenging the death of his sister and disciplining the unmannered people he encounters in his life. America’s killings and Lecter’s killings are motivated, but are still evil.

The digital photographs at Abu Ghraib, the depositions of thirteen Abu Ghraib prisoners that were taken by the US Army’s Criminal Investigation Command that were released, the full texts of the Red Cross report, the Taguba report, the Jones and Fay report and the Schlesinger report have constituted Danner’s (2004) published book. These political testimonies represent the factual argument about some of America’s violations in terms of killing and torturing, which make the hypotheses of evil, narcissism and psychopathy of both America and Hannibal Lecter more credible and crystallize the parallelism between both. Narcissism is a personality disorder linked to some American politicians according to certified psychologists, and this personality disorder also appears clearly in Lecter’s character, as explained in section 3. Another important personality disorder which clearly shows in the American political entity and Lecter is psychopathy, and it is addressed in details in section 3.

The American public and media are fascinated with the icon of the serial killer; it is a paradoxical relationship which embodies “admiration and resentment, envy and contempt” at the same time (Schmid, 2005, 25). Donnelly (2018) explains that the heavy presence of the serial killers before the mid-1980s was always understood as the perfect morality of the American versing the amoral Other which gave the Americans “superficial scapegoats to fear” and found made - up “monsters” for the Americas to blame; the Other always stood for the abnormal, the evil, and the immoral (p.89). After the mid-1980s, a new Other was making his

way to the screen and novels in the form of a serial killer, who “is not simply someone that evokes our fears of being killed, but he/she also makes us fear the Otherness within ourselves as a society and as individuals” (Donnelly, 2018, p.88).

Reagan’s America had serious issues as: oppressive discourse, systematic racism, economic gaps between people, unemployment, and imprisonment of young men of color (Donnelly, 2018). Therefore, the serial killer novels and films have suggested the existence of darkness within the society as well as the struggle between the right and wrong within the individual as the gothic tradition has always advocated; however, the serial killer works of the 1980s have created a crucial shift for the Americans from “a fear of foreign enemies and outsider threats to the threat of that which lurked within their fellow citizens” – the fears Americans have about themselves (Donnelly, 2018, p.89, p.90).

2. Zimbardo’s Theory of Evil and Danner’s Theory of American Politics

Dahy and Karam (2021) propose that the two works: Danner’s *Torture and Truth* (2004) and Zimbardo’s *The Lucifer Effect* (2007) have the power through their testimonial narratives to address the reader’s empathy through provoking horror at the violations of justice and human rights; the study also claims that an “empathic response” to the “human conditions” signalled in the life narratives of these two books about human rights “can generate a global, communal attachment and a positive desire to make change in society and politics (p.7). However, nothing more than such a naïve claim of changing politics could be further from the truth because the character of the America as a political entity has proved at many times over the years to be incapable of any empathy towards violations of human rights. America is not in need of testimonial narratives which cause any kind of emotional empathy. America has been the acting agent in the unspeakable horrors that took place in Iraq and Afghanistan, and these regrettable horrors have been documented by many American and non-American writers. Moreover, America has witnessed aired catastrophic stories of crushed civilian Gazans and has listened to thousands of appeals, from all over the world, which called for an immediate cease fire in Gaza after Palestinians have been bombarded for months in 2024 following the 7th of

October, but America has chosen to leave human beings to be crushed on a daily basis.

Philip Zimbardo is a renowned psychologist, who has been famed for his daring Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) and his psychological theory of evil in each human being. Zimbardo had carefully constructed a mock prison in 1971 in the basement of Stanford’s Psychology Department. He has done a crucial, terrifying research in the psyche and mind of humans through the SPE. An advertisement was put in the newspapers calling for students who want to earn fifteen dollars a day to participate in a two- week experiment on the psychology of imprisonment, and the research was supported by a government grant from the Office of Naval Research to study antisocial behaviour (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 28, p. 30). Zimbardo (2007) expresses his astonishment of the proceedings and conclusions of his experiment. Through only five days, there was verbal and physical aggression; there was sexual humiliation of prisoners when all young men knew that it was a simulated prison experiment, and when all began the experience as seemingly good people and all were randomly assigned to play the roles of guards and prisoners. Guards were fully aware that they could have been prisoners but for the random flip of a coin. Yet, some guards were transformed into “perpetrators of evil”, and other guards have become “passive contributors to evil” through their failing to act to stop the evil they have witnessed (p. 172).

Zimbardo himself admits his mistakes when he has thought nothing was wrong with his experiment; he confesses that he has been carried away by the experiment, and that the experiment reveals that he himself is capable of evil. In ‘The SPE: Ethics and Extensions’, Zimbardo (2007) condemns his own experiment as “Absolutely Unethical” on the grounds that an ethical standard supports the idea that because human life is sacred, it must not in any way be demeaned; however, in the SPE, Zimbardo has caused human beings to suffer an anguish that they did not foresee when they volunteered for the academic study that was conducted at a prestigious university (p. 233).

Zimbardo’s theory about evil, which is the fruit of the SPE, is that “situations matter” and can have “profound effects” on the behaviour and mental functioning of individuals and national leaders more than might be ever believed possible.

Hence, Zimbardo (2007) professes that America has committed evil in Iraq because it is simply capable of doing evil and has had the situation to kindle evil, and some of these situations matter to the extent that their “powerful influence” can lead good people to act in unpredictable evil ways which can be “irrational”, “self-destructive”, and “antisocial”. Sometimes the total situation challenges the human’s “stability” of character and “morality”, which still does not excuse evil, Zimbardo asserts, but it simply shares “its blame among ordinary actors rather than declaring it the province only of deviants and despots – of Them but not Us” (2007, p. 211, p. 212).

Mark Danner, is an American writer and a specialist in U.S foreign affairs, war and politics. His political theory relies on his own personal experiences in Iraq since he has been an eye-witness of the aftermath of attacks in Falluja and has managed to have an access to a number of political documents regarding all that happened in Iraq. Through an analysis of these official reports and his experiences in Iraq, he has come to the political verdict that all of the abuses that the senior U.S. officials orchestrated in Iraq and other U.S. detention facilities have been deliberate political measurements. His book *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* includes a number of documents which lead a careful reader to one conclusion, which Danner highlights, and that is the whole war on terror was a “bureaucratic war” (Danner, 2004, p.73-74).

Danner (2004) highlights that behind the “exotic brutality” in Abu Ghraib lies a “simple truth” which is: since the attacks of September 11, 2001, officials of the United States have been torturing prisoners; this torture has taken place at various locations around the world from Bagram in Afghanistan to Guantanamo in Cuba to Abu Ghraib in Iraq (p.10). Moreover, this torture has been practiced with the approval of the United States government and in accordance with the memoranda from the President’s counsel asserting the no applicability of the Geneva Conventions in Afghanistan and Guantanamo; furthermore, in case of Iraq, there have been at least three different sets of interrogation policies, two of them modelled on earlier practice in Afghanistan and Cuba (Danner, 2004, p.11).

Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the overall commander in Iraq, who on October 12, 2003, signed a classified memorandum, published later in The

Washington Post, asking interrogators at Abu Ghraib to work with military police guards to “manipulate an internee’s weaknesses” (Danner, 2004, p. 12, p. 24). The underlying meaning of the instruction of course was to torture and humiliate which has poured out of photographs of Iraqi detainees, who were paraded naked down the cellblock with hoods on their heads, were forced to masturbate and participate in forced homosexual activity (p.17, p.18). Out of the political implications and consequences of torture at Abu Ghraib, there has been a complete doubt of “what was left of America’s moral power in the world” (Danner, 2004, p.23).

America has arrested thousands of Iraqis using the cordon and capture tactic which led to a US military detention system that approached ten thousand, and this system has resulted in the fact that almost every Iraqi had a family member or a friend arrested; all of these practices were documented in many reports among which is the Fay Report and the Red Cross Report (Danner, 2004). Danner (2004) asserts that it has been very clear that President Bush and his officials made a series of decisions about methods of warfare and interrogation as they confronted the world on September 11, 2001 which included withholding the protections of the Geneva Convention and employing methods to extract actionable intelligence which officially transformed the United States to a nation that tortures. These decisions have not been kept a secret; they have been known to officials of the government, then have reached the public after the break of the scandal. The final document of Danner’s book belongs to Major General Geoffrey D. Miller, the commander of Guantanamo, who travelled to Abu Ghraib in August 2003 to review the Iraqi ability to rapidly exploit internees for actionable intelligence (p. 76, p. 205).

In *Hannibal Rising* (2006), Harris presents for the first time Lecter’s situational trauma during childhood: during WW II, Lecter was eight years old, his family’s castle was overrun by Nazi military forces and he fled with his family to a lodge in the forest. They stayed there for three years until one winter’s day in 1944 a Soviet tank stopped by their lodge asking for water, only to be bombed by a Nazi aircraft. He witnessed the death of his parents who were killed by this strike and he and his younger sister, Mischa, were kept captives by a group of former Lithuanians led by Vladis Grutas, the Nazi collaborator who took charge of the lodge. Worse than all, he witnessed the soldiers eating Mischa with no other source

of food available. This war and this cannibalism are pure evil and have been presented as Lecter’s motive for becoming Hannibal the Cannibal. However, Lecter takes revenge from the perpetrators of these crimes when he grows up, but he also turns into a killing machine, killing many innocents who have never harmed him or his family all through his life. This is the exact political stand of America after the act of violence in 11 September: America has not been satisfied by punishing the guilty and has chosen collective punishment. In fact, the American attitude and deeds in Afghanistan, Cuba, and Iraq, as well as the present political stand gazing at the genocide of the Palestinians parallel Lecter’s attitude towards the world around him. Both America and Lecter act in unpredictable evil ways as Zimbardo explains in his theory; the situation extracts the evil which is irrational and antisocial in each.

Harris (2006) highlights the motive of Lecter’s revenge as Lecter’s nightmares replay the bitter incidents he has witnessed: he describes the scary entrance of war criminals “THE DOOR BURST OPEN then and Grutas came in with Milko and Dortlich,” Kolnas ate Mischa’s porridge and “slipped Mischa's bracelet off her wrist and put it in his pocket” (p. 24). The repeated dreams about the Bowl-Man's distorted voice: “Take her, she's going to die anyway,” and Mischa being suspended in the air by her arms, twisting to look back at him end up with Hannibal, waking up and screaming his sister’s name "Mischa, Mischa!" (Harris, 2006, p. 48) highlight the extent of Lecter’s dilemma which has been carved in his consciousness.

The definition and nature of evil is an open end issue in Harris’s quartet. In *Hannibal Rising* (2006), Lecter kills Dortlich by choking him; he ties his neck to a rope that is attached to the horse, and pulls the horse. Hannibal makes Dortlich tell him the whereabouts of his former friends who have also participated in eating Mischa. He hunts them one by one and partially quenches his thirst for revenge. Harris raises the awareness of the reader into why Hannibal has become a serial killer. Lecter also punishes Dr. Chilton, Head of the Baltimore hospital, because he gets on his nerves. Readers understand that Dr. Chilton is a villain because he obstructs Starling’s investigation and gives her a hard time when she does not respond to his sexual advances. At the end of *The Silence of the lambs* (1988), it is implied that Lecter eats him for dinner as a punishment. However, the reader can

not but ask: does this justify his murder at the hands of Lecter? When Paul, the butcher, calls Lecter’s aunt, Lady Murasaki, names and verbally harasses her, Lecter takes revenge. He can not tolerate the derogatory statements addressed to his aunt, so he curved the sword from the case and slashed Paul low across the belly saying: “Crossways like that?” (Harris, 2006, p. 69- 70). In *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Lecter breaks out of his cage in Tennessee and disappears from the authorities by murdering the two officers guarding him, and the two EMTs, carrying him to the hospital. As a killing machine, Lecter kills here four innocent people who have neither done him nor the society any wrong.

The way Hannibal takes revenge from the members of the society to discipline them parallels the American way in disciplining wrong doers and innocents alike in the whole world. Hence, it becomes collective punishment and torture rather than punishing the offender per se. It is a particular kind of political evil. Danner (2004) explains that since the attacks of September 11, American officials have been “torturing prisoners” (p.10). Danner’s theory is based on smashing Bush’s theory of some ‘bad apples’ acting wrongly during the war in Iraq, and establishes the idea that America has been orchestrating what the political authorities have agreed on even though it is ethically unacceptable. Danner (2004) refers to many methods of physical and psychological coercion as cited in the Red Cross Report: hooding, handcuffing, beating with hard objects (including pistols and rifles), slapping, punching, kicking with knees or feet on various parts of the body, parading the prisoners naked outside cells in front of others, hooding prisoners and exposing them to loud noise or music, or exposing them to the sun over several hours, including the hottest time of the year when temperatures could reach 122 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Danner hopes that his readers go beyond his account of Abu Ghraib and the general issue of terror to look at the primary documents themselves to understand politics and the goal of his book because the investigations and “the leaks that occasioned them” explain that what happened at the prison has “derived from decisions made in Afghanistan, Guantanamo, and, ultimately, Washington, D.C.”, and this makes Abu Ghraib a “peculiarly contemporary kind of scandal” because what is even worse than the shameful revealing of what has been concealed is the “failure of politicians, officials, the press, and, ultimately, citizens to act” (2004, p. xiv, p. 6).

Red Dragon (1981) opens in the year 1980 in Graham’s residence in Marathon, Florida where Will Graham, who has previously worked as a brilliant, former FBI profiler, is on retirement because of the physical serious injuries and psychological trauma he has suffered from after his confrontation with Lecter. It is true Graham captured him, but he is one of the victims of Lecter as readers come to know. *Red Dragon* opens with agent Jack Crawford, Graham’s mentor, trying to convince Graham to help on a case in which two families had been killed. The murderer is nicknamed “the Tooth Fairy” later to be revealed as Francis Dolarhyde who believes that he is governed by the power of a supreme being, namely the “Red Dragon”. Graham learns who the murderer is and authorities find his house in flames and assume his death, only to discover later that he is still alive and attempts to murder Graham’s son before Graham manages to shoot him. Red Dragon, as a serial killer, kills white, upper-middle class families who are “symbolic of those living the American dream” and this exposes the “vulnerability of the privileged”, not just the poor, and questions their so-called stability which is a direct reference to the weakness of all Americans at the hand of holders of governmental power positions in America (Donnelly, 2018, p.92).

Agent Graham has a flashback to a visit he has paid to Shiloh, which witnessed a major battle during the American Civil War, after capturing Garrett Hobbs, a serial killer he was in charge with before Lecter. The reference to the American civil war is a reference to the evil embodied in human beings in general and the Americans, in particular. There is parallelism between Lecter choosing to punish Rinaldo Pazzi by lynching in *Hannibal* (1999), and how white Americans have chosen to punish African American at a certain period in history. When Graham states that men are haunted, there is a great chance he means they are haunted by their evil deeds. The Civil War has not been the final war: The First World War, the Second World War, the war in Afghanistan, Cuba, Iraq, the war in Gaza, and many more have followed.

Lecter admires Clarice’s talent and ambition in serving the less fortunate as her father, a small- town lawman, who has been killed by criminals and gives her clues to help her save Catherine Baker Martin, the daughter of an American senator, so she can sleep and enjoy the silence of the lambs instead of the screams of the lambs being slaughtered which deafened her as an orphan in her uncle’s farm. Moreover, he supports her with clues on the case of Buffalo Bill in a patriarchal

society where she is constantly treated with less respect. Hannibal convinces Miggs to kill himself and Lecter kills Dr. Chilton for Clarice’s sake. It is a bizarre cocktail of evil which is judged by Lecter’s whims and personal preferences with respect to who is to be saved and who is to be punished and in which way. Clarice and Aunt Murasaki are saved but others are not. This is definitely evil but also narcissistic and psychopathic as will be clarified in section 3 of this paper.

3. Narcissism and Psychopathy: Two Core Personality Disorders of Serial Killers

The term ‘serial killer’ is ascribed to the FBI agent Robert K Ressler who founded the Vi-CAP (Violent Criminal Apprehension Program) as a unit of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (Schmid, 2005). In *Serial Murder: Multidisciplinary Perspectives for Investigators* (2008), the US Department of Justice: Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) presents the 1998 federal law definition of “serial killings” as: “a series of three or more killings . . . having common characteristics such as to suggest the reasonable possibility that the crimes were committed by the same actor or actors”. FBI (2008) asserts that regardless of the motive, serial murderers commit their crimes because they want to, and the exception to this would be those few killers suffering from a severe mental illness. In other words, serial killers use their rationale and choose accordingly. Scott (2000) explains that in rational choice theories, individuals are understood as motivated by their goals which reflect their preferences; hence, they “act within specific, given constraints” to achieve their goals and individuals understand that they must make choices in relation to both their goals and the means for attaining these goals” (p. 127, p. 128).

FBI (2008) highlights certain traits which are common to some serial killers, including “a lack of remorse or guilt, impulsivity, the need for control, and predatory behavior” and these traits are consistent with the psychopathic personality disorder which is: “a personality disorder manifested in people who use a mixture of charm, manipulation, intimidation, and occasionally violence to control others, in order to satisfy their own selfish needs”. Serial killers possess another personality disorder which is narcissism. Palermo (2008) asserts that

narcissism is “typical” of serial killers (p.86), and narcissists tend to exploit other people around them: “It is as if they feel they have the right to control and possess others and to exploit them without guilt feelings and behind a surface which very often is charming and engaging, one senses coldness and ruthlessness” (Kernberg, 1975, p. 228). In an interview with Wolfe (1978), Kernberg explains that a pathological narcissist is often an attractive person who may have a talent or has active capacities that make him applauded by others. Kernberg asserts to Wolfe that narcissistic personalities can be found in political life, industry, or academia as well as many other fields.

Lecter exhibits traits of a narcissist. He is a distinguished character, who manifests talent, but embodies an inflated sense of ego and displays copious acts of arrogance. Lunbeck (2012) highlights how narcissists are “dangerously charismatic creatures who entice us into glorious submission before viciously turning on us” (p. 210). In *Red Dragon* (1981), Lecter attends orchestra and opera regularly and has his own circle of high class acquaintances whom he invites at times for dinner. He is above suspicions. He also lectures in the Palazzo Vecchio and Professor Sogliato asks him to give a lecture on Dante, praising him as “an expert on Dante” (Harris, 1999, p.86). Besides Lecter’s high intelligence and charisma, he has an elite taste in music and literature. He also has other unique traits such as an outstanding sense of smell when he identifies which lotion Starling wears or when he asks her if she is hurt because he smells blood on her and it turns out she scraped her leg. Lecter’s unequivocal intellectual abilities are highlighted: he could read when he was two; he is great at math and science; his father found that his son determined “the height of the castle towers by the length of their shadows, following instructions which he said came directly from Euclid himself” (Harris, 2006, p. 14). He is also portrayed as the number 1 forensic psychologist, who is consulted by the FBI profilers and other psychologists. This portrayal of Hannibal juxtaposes with the portrayal of America in many points. The USA’s military power is also exceptional; for the annual GFP (Global Fire Power) index for 2024, the USA is ranked number 1 out of 145 countries considered for the annual GFP review. Fordham (2004) explains how the USA’s military capabilities is a very sharp sword with a huge influence on American decisions to use force.

As a typical narcissist who is always arrogant, Lecter can not by any means accept the insinuation that he can be quantified. Kohn (2021) explains that

“narcissism and competitiveness bespeak profound self-doubt or even self-loathing” because the less a person is at ease with himself/ herself, the more he/ she reveals more arrogance, and the most dangerous men on earth are those who are worried they are “wimps”. (p. 535). Lecter’s inflated ego hurts him at the idea of being quantified like others. Hence, as a psychopathic narcissist, he cooked the quantifier’s liver; Lecter warns Clarice not to follow the same course: “A census taker tried to quantify me once. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amarone” (Harris, 1988, p. 14).

Lunbeck (2012) refers to a number of American social critics who have painted a portrait of America as a nation “in cultural and characterological decline” and as a nation “of self-involved navel-gazers adrift in a culture of narcissism” because the “empty” American culture cherishes a mindless consumption and “produces the figure of the narcissist” whose poor moral sensibility reflects the depths to which the American culture has fallen (p.199). Palermo (2008) explains how the American society which stresses individualism and self-indulgence may create confusion and frustration and, at times, drive the society’s members to a moral crisis. This is because this type of society reduces reason to a calculation of limitless pursuit of pleasure and an immediate gratification of desires even if these desires are criminal or immoral; hence, this “social panorama” triggers behaviours “of some individuals” who then become serial killers (p. 85).

Ronningstam (2010) discusses some of the risks proposed by people with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), as the person “can present with psychopathic or antisocial characteristics ranging from inconsistent and contradictory moral standards (moral perfectionism vs. moral compromises and dishonesty) to specific criminal behavior” (p. 69). These risks can be seen clearly in the psychopathic characteristics of Lecter and America. Both Lecter and America wear the mask of sanity, which Cleckley discusses in his book, *The Mask of Sanity* (1988); it is a mask that shows intelligence, charm, and sincerity, but underneath this mask lies a psychopath. McMillan (2022) sums up 16 features that characterize the psychopath, as presented by Cleckley, among which are: “superficial charm and good intelligence”, “lack of remorse or shame”; “Untruthfulness and insincerity”; “Inadequately motivated antisocial behavior”; “Poor judgment and failure to learn by experience”; “Pathologic egocentricity and incapacity for love”; “General

poverty in major affective reactions”; “Unresponsiveness in general interpersonal relation” (p.13).

Palermo (2008) highlights the attention that has been given to the psychopath over the years and explains that many scholars such as: Lombroso, Cleckley, Kernberg, and Hare have all agreed on describing the psychopath as “a selfish, impulsive, aggressive, loveless, remorseless, callous, two-dimensional person—a person able to use emotions when it is to his advantage”; psychopaths, Palermo explains, are two types: the ordinary psychopath whose crimes are related to pursuing materialistic gains and the malignant type of psychopath who is a violent predator whose goal is “the gratification of vengeful or sexual fantasies (p. 86). Lecter displays some of the mentioned features of the psychopath and so does America, and both fit with the description of a psychopath.

Lecter exhibits traits of a psychopath: apart from the superficial charm and good intelligence that he exhibits, he is a manipulator with no sense of moral conformity. He also demonstrates extreme violence, criminal behaviour and lack of emotions. His inconsistent moral standards are seen when he chooses to help Agent Starling and Aunt Murasaki, by killing their annoyers, but he himself enjoys teasing and embarrassing the Senator Ruth Martin, asking if she has breast-fed her daughter. In *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Dr. Chilton is in contact with Senator Ruth Martin, Catherine’s mother, and he promises Lecter a real deal if he cooperates with Buffalo Bill’s case. Dr. Chilton takes Lecter to Tennessee to meet Senator Ruth Martin, but Lecter lies to the Senator and gives a fake name about the kidnapper of her daughter, Catherine. Lecter has known the identity of Buffalo Bill early enough during his meetings with Starling. He could have pointed him to Starling or to the Senator who was devastated by the disappearance of her daughter, who is herself kind - hearted and was in Bill’s hands in the first place because she thought she was helping an injured man in a cast. However, Lecter chooses to hold the information and even mislead all because he enjoys the bargaining card with every bit of information he discloses and because he is a psychopathic narcissistic character with no moral conformity.

Lecter attacks the female nurse who checks him after he complained of chest pains. Lecter attacked her tearing out her eye, dislocating her jaw and eating her tongue: “He broke her jaw to get at her tongue. His pulse never got over eighty-five,

even when he swallowed it” (Harris, 1988, p. 7). This is the “general poverty in major affective reactions” that characterize a psychopath (McMillan, 2022, p. 13). Moreover, in *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Lecter breaks out of his cage in Tennessee by murdering the two kind guards, Pembry and Boyle, and manages to pass the metal detector with a piece of metal in his mouth, and he uses it later to unlock the handcuffs. Lecter poses in one of their uniforms on the floor as one of the injured officers by using Pembry’s face off after carving it using a pocket knife. Then, he calls an ambulance for himself and allows himself to be carried out by EMTs. Lecter then kills the EMTs and manages to escape from the authorities.

Lecter enjoys feeling smarter than others and serves several dishes prepared from his victims’ organs to dinner guests who are fascinated by his charm; moreover, his sense of knowing better than others and being in power tickles him and gives him an immense portion of satisfaction. Lecter’s victims are sixteen: two in *Red Dragon* (1981), five in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), two in *Hannibal* (1999) and seven in *Hannibal Rising* (2006). Lecter’s enjoying cannibalism reveals an extra dimension of his psychopathy: his playing a musical instrument or singing while killing and his intensified enjoyment when serving or eating dishes of his victims reveals his lack of affective reactions and lack of guilt. He cooks human organs as livers, brains and lungs. In *Hannibal* (1999), Lecter listens to a classical piece of music, Glen Gough, while dissecting Agent Kendler’s skull and enjoying a piece of his brain. He also plays a lute before he slashes Paul Momund into pieces in *Hannibal Rising* (2006). Danner (2004) refers to the Schlesinger report that states that there were five cases of detainee deaths as a result of abuse by U.S. personnel during interrogations and other 23 cases of detainee deaths that were still under investigation (p. 48). The torture of these five prisoners to death by U.S. personnel reveals a level of psychopathy which parallels with how Lecter deals with his victims.

Parallel to Hannibal, the narcissist, is America, the narcissist, led by political narcissists. Goodman (2023) calls America “the culture of narcissism” and explains that in today’s American economy, “a handful of people are at the top of the social, economic, and political ladder; most people are buying a status symbol, like a new cell phone, but are driven by narcissism to gain more” (p. 210). Charles Krauthammer, a former psychiatrist, explains in an interview with Mccalmont that

President Barack Obama is not manic but a narcissist who “talks like the emperor, Napoleon.” Moreover, Krauthammer highlighted that Obama’s speeches often refer to himself and his accomplishments; he always has a sense of being the centre of a drama, and everybody else is part of the stage.

America acts as if it is above the global law and exhibits a sense of entitlement; this is manifested in the violations that have taken place in Guantanamo and Abu Gharib prison. Danner (2004) refers to the dilemma registered in the Red Cross report which states that between 70 percent and 90 percent of the persons deprived of their liberty in Iraq were arrested by mistake and he poses a logical question: “Which of the naked, twisted bodies that television viewers and newspaper readers around the world have been gazing at these last weeks were among them?” (p. 3). The leaked pictures from Abu Gharib prison demonstrate the lack of affective reactions or regret which characterise psychopathy. Danner (2004) asks his readers to consider one case of the many cases that have been tortured among whom is the hooded, naked body that Pfc. Lynndie England of the famous leash has chosen to clasp his hands above his head and to frame “the body like a car salesman displaying next year’s model, grinning back at the camera, pointing to its genitals with her right hand, flashing a thumbs – up with her left” (p. 3).

Jurjako and Malatesti (2022) explain that individuals with psychopathic traits stand out as they possess lack of remorse and do not exhibit empathic reactions to other people’s suffering. Moreover, psychopathy is characterized by a penetrating social behaviour underlined by “extreme forms of reactive and instrumental aggression towards people who get in their way” as well as a pervasive interpersonal style which involves cheating and lying to achieve their selfish goals (p. 225). This lying trait can be seen clearly when Lecter lies about the identity of Bill, and his aggression and lack of sympathy are crystal clear in the way he handles his victims, showing no remorse or the least trace of empathy. This parallels with America’s lying about the claims of the existence of destructive weapons in Iraq and holding this claim/ lie as the motive for the war on terror. After a blunt fiasco, America has not shown any remorse or empathy for the atrocities documented in the Schlesinger report, General Taguba’s report and Red Crescent report as Danner (2004) has asserted. Moreover, at the present, and as a

leading country, does not show empathic reactions, except for lame declarations about the importance of stopping the horrors and genocide of Palestinians taking place in Gaza after the 7th of October 2024.

Goodman (2023) explains that Trump has been identified as a person suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) by professional experts in mental health, and narcissists are known for their prejudice against anyone who judges them for the slightest insult or criticism. “The narcissist’s foreign policy will strive for dominating nationalism and blind patriotism”; therefore, there will be exaggerated perceptions of threats by any foreign criticism. (Goodman, 2023, p. 212). Pinto (2018) explains that Trump’s foreign relations approach relies on violence: “For him, nationalism needs to be aggressive to be respected”; moreover, Trump’s ideology about the definition of the world, Pinto quotes Trump, is based on America being in conflict with everyone else. Hence, Trump wanted a wall built on the Mexican border; ended a treaty with Iran to limit its nuclear weapons; commenced trade wars with several countries; terminated trade agreement between Canada, Mexico, and America; used obscene language to describe several countries among which are Haiti and African countries; and limited immigration of Muslims to America in a foreign policy that can be best described as “worrying traditional allies and challenging USA enemies and competitors” (p. 215).

Murray (2018) explains that Trump has continued what Bush and Obama have already practised. This applies to the present President Biden. Hence, we can deduce that it is not a matter of a president, it is a matter of a whole line of narcissists being in control. Pinto (2018) asserts that Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is not restricted to Trump only, for it is unlikely that Trump is “the first or last president or world leader with a narcissistic personality” and narcissists will always vote for narcissists because they want to be attached to someone who brings about a heightened sense of self-worth (p.219). Kohn (2021) understands that America is a sick society because “in a healthy society”, a man like Trump, would be considered “a cautionary tale or as someone who needs help”; however, he is widely admired in the American society and his need to be number one attracts people to him which proves that Trump is “just a symptom of a broader cultural ill that all of us need to acknowledge and address” (p. 535, p. 536).

Akande and Kellner (2023) have expressed their fear that if Trump ever regains the presidency after Biden (he lost the US presidency to Biden in 2000 and failed to overthrow the election with the January 6, 2021 Insurrection), there is a possibility that Trump will use the nuclear weapons under his control and there will be an unknown massive amount of destruction. This scenario may take place because he is a narcissistic character whose “winning” as a “one-dimensional Trump” is the very sole purpose in life that is worth pursuing; hence, there will be a danger to the global peace (p. 20).

Bush, Trump, and Biden are symbols of politics, and politics finds its way in fiction. In fiction, the serial killer character can be a political and ideological code in the midst of the post-war evolution of the serial killer fiction genre and the killers are coded as monsters but are humanised to some extent through the narrative to make them capable of the audience’s sympathy (Simpson,11). The character of Lecter stands for the serial killer who takes revenge from a postwar society that has never punished war criminals for their deeds and has allowed them to reunite with the society. In *Hannibal Rising* (2006), the brutality of the Second World War is graphically depicted through the narrative so that the reader sees through the eyes of Lecter and realise why a person can change into a serial killer and take matters into his/her own hands. Hannibal witnesses the consumption of his own sister, and Lecter Castle becomes a Soviet orphanage.

Ng (2004) explains that contemporary narratives show how the space “shields” the monster when he “camouflages” with his society, becoming unrecognized and at other times “the simulacral world” is the very perfect scene for the creation and existence of the serial killer, asserting how the contemporary narratives are capable of presenting the ideal, privileged white male of the American society for what he is: “a monster” – a serial killer (p. 65, p.106). This is very applicable to Lecter who camouflages as an excellent forensic psychologist among a circle of elite persons in the society. The American police have also camouflaged as an ideal entity, but they have dealt harshly with the American protestors who have peacefully for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza. YouTube has provided the world with unbelievable documentation of how a peaceful expression of opinion can turn into a suppression of freedom. Furnham (2010) explains that self-aggrandizers tend to punish those giving a negative feedback because their “brittle ego” makes them support bad decisions based on distorted views of the

world (p.113). Therefore, instead of buying a stress ball or a punching bag to vent their anxiety, stress, and anger at their own failure of having things their own way, they opt for crushing their opposers. Narcissism-arrogance is the major cause why CEO fails; it is the vision that “you are right, but everybody else is wrong” (Furnham, 2010, p. 125).

Danner (2004) has asked important questions about how the world sees America after the Abu Gharib scandal. The same question can be re-asked today. Names as Reagan, Bush, Trump and Biden simply change, but the political stand persists. The American society is admitted as a sick society by some psychoanalysts and sociologists; they admit that Trump, for example, is a poster child for the pathology of low self-esteem that finds in competition a way to prove oneself, and he does so “at other people’s expense” (Kohn, 2021, p.535, 536). Dahy (2022) exemplifies how a narcissist’s cognitive and behavioral standards tend to overlook religion, laws, and principles. This overlooking of crucial criteria in life is the core reason of the dilemma of fictional characters and real – life people. Akande and Kellner (2023) emphasize that “democracy and human rights are very important areas of global politics” but are attacked by “global forces of autocracy, populism/ neofascism, and authoritarianism” (p.3).

4. Conclusion

Many critics have suggested that there is a relationship between the fictional serial killer and America in the sense that the serial killer in fiction often symbolizes racial, political and cultural dynamics in America. Simpson (2000) has suggested that the serial killer character can be a political and ideological code in the midst of the post-war evolution of the serial killer fiction genre. This paper has highlighted that there is a parallelism between the character of Harris’s Hannibal Lecter and America. With reference to Zimbardo’s psychological theory of evil and Danner’s political theory, both Lecter and America have proven to be capable of evil and have orchestrated evil actions because of a situational trigger. Moreover, each of them has intentionally taken the evil measure to the furthest. Zimbardo and Danner have written testimonial narratives, condemning how America has been the acting agent in the unspeakable horrors that took place in Afghanistan, Guantanamo, and Iraq. Similar to America, Lecter has also applied the policy of collective punishment to the guilty and innocent alike.

Narcissism and psychopathy are two personality disorders crystalized in the characters of Lecter and America. Lecter is portrayed as the number 1 forensic psychologist, who is consulted by the FBI profilers and other psychologists, and America is ranked number 1 out of 145 countries considered for the annual GFP review. Both embody an attractiveness in character on the surface level, but on a closer look prove to suffer from an inflated sense of ego and arrogance which does not tolerate the least criticism or objection. Both customise morals according to their needs; Lecter chooses whom to punish and whom to let go, and America does the same. Both exhibit ruthlessness and lack of affective reactions towards the victims they torture and refuse to accept the blame for their deeds. Both show no remorse at the consequences of their decisions and are completely convinced they are doing the right thing.

Danner (2004) has expressed his concern at how the world sees America after the Abu Gharib scandal, and the same question can be re-asked today about the Gazan scandal. Some see America, as a political entity, a reminder of Lecter: a narcissist; a ruthless and void of any affective reaction entity; an active perpetrator of evil in Afghanistan, Guantanamo, and Iraq; and a passive patron of evil who is

sufficed by being a gazer. Today, there are no leaked photos as with Abu Gharib scandal, but there are thousands of photos and thousands of videos documenting the horrors of genocide in Gaza. The theory of the bad apples does not fit anymore. The narcissism and psychopathy that drive these actions are inexcusable, as the evidence is overwhelming and undeniable. There are images, videos, and voices that will haunt the world for ever and remind us of this human scandal. The American police’s harsh response to protesters calling for a ceasefire in Gaza provides stark documentation of how peaceful dissent can be met with brutal suppression, challenging the nation's claim as a defender of freedom and democracy.

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أمريكا و هانييل ليكتر: قراءة نفسية - سياسية للقاتل المتسلسل لدى الكاتب هاريس

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المستخلص

تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة لرباعية الكاتب توماس هاريس وترسم خطوطاً متوازية بين شخصية هانييل لكترو أمريكا (ككيان سياسى) ، و هو ما يميز هذا البحث حيث لم تقدم الأبحاث السابقة شرحاً مسهباً أو أمثلة بعينها من واقع السياسة الأمريكية أو السيكولوجية الأمريكية توضح هذا التوازي بين الشخصيتين. يؤكد سيمبسون (2000) أن فى فن الرواية من الممكن أن تكون شخصية القاتل المتسلسل كوداً سياسياً أو أيولوجياً، ويعد هذا جزءاً من تطوررواية القاتل المتسلسل. تعتمد هذه الورقة البحثية على نظرية زيمباردو النفسية ونظرية دينير السياسية لتوضيح أن كلاً من شخصية هانييل لكترو أمريكا (ككيان سياسى) تنطوى على شراً بداخلها ، حيث قامت إدارة بوش باتخاذ إجراءات متعسفة فى أفغنستان ، ومعسكر غوانتانامو بكوبا ، وسجن أبو غريب بالعراق. و تؤكد الرؤيا السياسية الخاصة بالكاتب دينير أن عمليات القتل و التعذيب التى قامت بها القوات الأمريكية فى العراق كانت ممنهجة و هذا ما أكدته تقارير شلسنجر و الفريق أول تاجوبا وتقارير الهلال الأحمر، والتي يمكن الاطلاع على جميعها من خلال كتاب دينير والذى تعتبر شهادته السياسية العمود الفقرى كدليل لصفات الشر،والنرجسية، و السيكوباتية المشار إليها فى الشخصية الأمريكية (ككيان سياسى). يتم دراسة النرجسية والسيكوباتية كنوعين من الاضطرابات الشخصية فى شخصية ليكتر و أمريكا فى ضوء نظرية التحليل النفسى و خاصة عند كل من:كيرنبيرج و رونينجستان. ومن هذا المنطلق، فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تسلط الضوء على الشر والنرجسية والسيكوباتية فى شخصية ليكتر و أمريكا وذلك فى كل من: الرواية و علم النفس والسياسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أمريكا; هانييل لكترو; نظرية التحليل النفسى; توماس هاريس; القاتل المتسلسل