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"Everyone Has Thought about Killing Someone - One Way or Another": Cannibalism and the Question of Morality in Bryan Fuller's Hannibal

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“Everyone Has Thought about Killing Someone – One Way or Another”:
Cannibalism and the Question of Morality in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

by

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ABSTRACT

Popular criticism insists that violence in the media perpetuates violence in the real world. This is an especially relevant argument today as we witness on a daily basis the violence that is occurring in the United States through mass shootings, police brutality, and countless other forms of aggressive actions. While studies do show a correlation between violent media and real-world violence, there is no absolute conclusion that proves such. My thesis addresses the moral lessons that can be learned through violence on television, particularly through the creative adaptation of Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter series as reimagined by Bryan Fuller in his three-season NBC television series *Hannibal*. I argue that the blood and gore we witness in *Hannibal* is not simply a form of mindless entertainment, but a modernized fairy tale replete with moral lessons. It asks us to look into ourselves, what we are capable of, and why we must be constantly aware of ourselves and our surroundings. Furthermore, it addresses the growing problem of social and economic inequality in our world, and acts as a striking metaphor for the "haves" and the "have nots."

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“Everyone Has Thought about Killing Someone – One Way or Another”:
Cannibalism and the Question of Morality in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal*

“All television is educational television. The question is: what is it teaching?” asserts University of Iowa law professor and former commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Nicholas Johnson. In a 2003 essay titled “Forty Years of Wandering in the Wasteland,” Johnson admonishes the multitude of television corporations for ignoring what he feels is their responsibility to provide the viewing public with valuable educational content rather than the trash heap of commercialism that is thrust upon its viewers every day. “My complaints about television...,” he insists, “[are] not so much the harm that it continues to do (which is not trivial), but the good that it fails to do” (Johnson). Furthermore, he argues that “Entrepreneurs, capitalism, advertising, profit-maximizing—and yes, “greed”—have made their contribution to our economy and lives” by way of popular televised content (Johnson). So what is Johnson’s solution to this alleged intellectual corruption instigated by media oligopolies?: “...media education in particular, from kindergarten through college, may be one of the best long-term solutions” (Johnson). The problem remains, exactly *who* is to be given the authority to decide what is and isn’t considered “educational,” and to what end?

Education comes in endless forms, and as Johnson claims, televised entertainment holds within itself the capacity to utilize its creative spaces to counteract the commercialism that dominates it today. I present the argument that, in an era of such extreme social and economic inequality and civil unrest, writers, producers, and directors are beginning to take advantage of this public sphere to educate their viewers as to the current state of the world, and speak as a voice of civil unrest, especially during this era when the majority of people have long been under the economic and social control of the world’s elite. A growing number of television viewers are

unsatisfied not just with their status in today's society—despite the fact that they are the majority, the hardworking paycheck-to-paycheck norm—but with the control that has been exercised not only over their personal lives, but their entertainment choices, as well. Although it is still easier to sit on the couch and “veg out” to mindless entertainment at the end of a long work day, there is a growing number of television consumers who are seeking something much deeper than sitcoms and game shows. In response, and certainly due largely to their own artistic visions, television writers and producers have stepped up to act as a voice for the working class. Contemporary televised popular culture reacts and responds not just to the need of its viewers to escape from his or her daily hardships, but also to the need for a widely available public platform. What better or more accessible format than that of television?

A modern fairy tale – complete with a “Once upon a time” beginning, monsters and villains, and an unusual “Happily ever after” ending – one television show educates its viewers about the dangers of blind trust, the power of the elite over the masses, the influence of corruption, and the questions of morality. Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*, an adaptation of Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, surprised television viewers with more blood and gore than has ever been seen on primetime television in history. The show asks us to question our values, and question ourselves about our moral standards. If there is a true right or wrong, who defines it? Do we base our moral standards on what is popular opinion? Instead of making rash judgments on violent content in the media, I believe we should consider what it can do for us. Taking an immediate stance against gore and violence on network television without looking deeper into the content is, in my belief, too easy. We are often too hasty in our judgments, but should one take the time to look intimately into the plot of *Hannibal*, one might learn a few good lessons.

In the opening scene of the pilot episode, sirens scream in the background, and a deep pool of blood on the floor greets FBI agents scrambling in and out of a brightly lit foyer. Blood spatter paints the walls and the home security system, foreshadowing the revelations soon to be made by Special Agent Will Graham. Paramedics zip up a black bag containing the body of a middle-aged man, while his wife's body lies on the floor, eyes wide open, soaking in the blood that has spilled from her bullet-torn neck. Surveying the grisly scene, Special Agent Graham closes his eyes, and reenacts the murder in his imagination, allowing us in to watch the crime as it unfolds: shooting the first victim, Mr. Marlowe, "severing jugulars and carotids with near surgical precision," turning to Mrs. Marlowe and shooting her "expertly through the neck," leaving her paralyzed, watching herself die as her blood drains from her body (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Apéritif"). This four-minute opening scene contains enough blood and violence to warrant, at best, an R rating in a major motion picture, but it is not intended to be shown in theaters. It is intended for home viewing on NBC, immediately after the "family viewing hour" of 9:00 p.m. Eastern Time¹.

For more than thirty years, NBC reserved Thursday nights for its popular "Must-See TV" lineup, which included family-favorites and sitcoms such as *Cheers*, *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *30 Rock*, and *The Office*, winning nineteen Emmys for best series, more than half of the thirty-two awarded in that category between 1983 and 2014 (Barker). So how did such a gruesome adaptation of one of Thomas Harris's popular Hannibal Lecter novels land itself in a primetime position on network television? Does the series reflect an evolution of moral standards of entertainment in American society or a loosening of federal restrictions on network television programming? Could it be that NBC saw an opportunity to increase its dwindling ratings, or

¹ See the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Guide at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau.

could it reflect the need for network television to compete with cable networks and paid channels? And what does it say about American popular culture that so many are craving more blood and violence on their television screens²? My thesis will address these questions as centered around the imagery and storytelling of the NBC television series *Hannibal* and the question of morality in 21st century American popular culture.

In my first chapter, I introduce the nascent cannibal culture that is on the rise in pop culture today. Since *Hannibal*'s arrival on television lineups, the theme of cannibalism has increased in all types of popular culture outlets. Edgar Wright's 2004 hit horror comedy, *Shaun of the Dead*, instigated an enormous wave of zombie culture. Although a hilarious film with some of the most memorable one-liners ever delivered, *Shaun of the Dead* is a brazen comedic statement on the complacency and ignorance of a society that has fallen victim to the nine-to-five work-centered lifestyle. *Shaun of the Dead* was certainly not the first film to popularize zombies, but the movie spawned a host of copycats, who, although they could never recreate the genius of Wright's film, maintain the trope that we have all become mindless zombies. With the popularity of cable channel AMC's *The Walking Dead*, the zombie craze hit its peak. When *Hannibal* entered the scene in 2013, viewers were ready for something fresh. Recent civil uprisings all over the world, such as the worldwide Occupy movement, announced that our societies were tired of being mindless zombies, and were ready to fight back against the powers that put them in that position in the first place. Along with these uprisings came a great deal of violence, which is often the case in such situations. As a result, we were put in the position of questioning our moral

² Two popular violent television shows that fall into the Horror category today are *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-present), and *Ash vs. Evil Dead* (Starz, 2015-present). While both shows have garnered high ratings and possess a significant cult following, they are both aired on cable networks that are only accessible through a paid subscription or by individual purchase through iTunes, Amazon, or streaming devices.

standards: what are we willing to do, who are we willing to hurt if it means we protect ourselves and those we love? This chapter aims to explain cannibal culture and how it relates to our times.

In my next chapter, I will posit, despite previous research (which is often flawed or incomplete), that televised gore and violence in pop culture can act as a catharsis in the tumultuous world in which we live today. The most recent generation of young people have grown up in a world that has experienced violence like no other generation has before. While our fathers and grandfathers went to foreign shores to fight battles, the current generation has grown up watching war in their own homes, broadcast in real time – from the live televised bombings of Baghdad in 1992 to the current war and refugee crisis in Syria and elsewhere. Although many of this young generation have never experienced war firsthand, and most probably never will, they are subjected to broadcast violence in one form or another on a daily basis: from natural occurrences such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and tsunamis, to man-made problems such as global warming, starvation, poverty, deforestation, terrorism, and more. Try though we may, it is virtually impossible to shelter anyone from violence in today's world. In this paper, the discussion of violence steers away from any natural occurrence, but centers around the willful violation of one's peace or safety. While many would argue that the increase of violent or shocking television contributes nothing more than fuel to the flame of real world violence, others see it as an outlet for the pent-up aggressions and frustrations that are experienced by so many on a daily basis. Contrary to popular belief, current research shows that violence and gore in media presents an outlet for people to release their violent urges or tendencies without acting out on them in the real world, thereby rationalizing the positive aspects of violence in media. This second chapter will discuss why the shocking blood and violence in *Hannibal* endears us to its

storyline and characters, and why we should be willing to embrace its savagery rather than fear its presumed effects.

In my third chapter, I will explain the concepts of normative judgement, moral justification, and society-centered moral theories. This chapter contains the bulk of my thesis as the question of morality in relation to *Hannibal* is so important. Although this chapter is the longest and most thorough, I have intentionally placed it where I have as it works to support the arguments within the surrounding chapters. Presenting various characters from *Hannibal*, I will demonstrate the malleability of normative moral codes in relation to their respective audiences, as well as the economic and social climates of the time. How have our moral codes changed since Thomas Harris first published the Hannibal Lecter novels, if at all, and are we more accepting of mainstream gore and violence? If so, why? And what led to our changing concept of normative moral codes? While popular thinking tells us that Hannibal Lecter's murders and cannibalism are unethical and immoral, we must consider his reasons for doing so. Lecter does not choose his victims lightly—they are always people whom he sees as rude, useless or intellectually damaging to society, or as a mortal threat to himself or the people for whom he cares, particularly Will Graham. Therefore, normative moral theories must be taken into account before passing judgment on our dear Dr. Lecter.

Chapter four explains how Fuller's adaptation of the Hannibal Lecter story serves as a modern day fairy tale, warning us of the evils in our world and how, if we are not careful, they can consume us. Looking at the extremely close homosocial relationship between Lecter and Will Graham reveals how one can be manipulated even by somebody they love. In the case of Lecter and Graham, love in no way equals trust, and it certainly doesn't guarantee the right to life. To further the theme of the fairy tale or fable, Fuller strengthens his moral tale by

introducing a Wendigo, a cannibalistic creature of indigenous lore³ that occupies the psychic spaces surrounding Will Graham as a hint to viewers that Lecter's power over him may ultimately be more than he can handle.

Finally, as I conclude my thesis, I will return to the argument that violence and gore in mainstream popular culture, although widely presumed to promote violence in the real world, contains within itself a potential cathartic outlet for pent up feelings of anger and aggression. It also serves as an educational tool as it asks us to question our morals, from where they came, and if they could or should evolve. The increased acceptance of violence on television, particularly since the years following 9/11, demonstrates a psychological need in our society that warrants deeper study. *Hannibal*, apart from being what I believe to be one of the most well-written adaptations of a literary work in our time, may very possibly mark NBC as a pioneer in allowing artistic interpretation of social unrest on television. Is the world ready for it, yet? That is something that remains to be seen. *Hannibal* was only recently cancelled in the spring of 2015, so there has not been much time to determine what its effect on primetime televised entertainment will be. But as a former colleague and eventual victim of Dr. Lecter declares, "If the meat eater thinks it's superior, then belief determines value" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Buffet Froid").

³ "The Wendigo is a demonic spirit believed by Algonquin-based Native American tribes to possess humans and turn them into cannibals," <http://www.gods-and-monsters.com/wendigo-legend.html>. Wendigo (or windigo) can take various animalistic features such as a wolf or bear. In *Hannibal*, the Wendigo is portrayed as a large black stag. When the Wendigo is seen in its "monster" form, it is extremely tall, emaciated in appearance, with decaying or black skin. It is constantly on the hunt for flesh because its hunger is never satiated.

Chapter 1

“Most of what we do – most of what we believe – is motivated by death.”

Since *Hannibal*'s cancellation, a new wave of cannibal culture has begun to rise in popular entertainment. In 2013, a surge of cannibal films burst onto the silver screen: *We Are What We Are*, *Cannibal Diner*, and *The Butcher Boys* (based on Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*), to name a few. The same year, two plays revolving around cannibalism were staged: *feeling*, based on a woman's conversations with Jeffrey Dahmer, and *Kung Fu Zombies vs. Cannibals* (Piepenburg). In May of 2016, “No fewer than five film screenings at the [Cannes Film] festival feature[d] cannibal themes” (Siegel). The theme of cannibalism is nothing new, of course. Literary works such as *Metamorphoses*, *Othello*, *Moby Dick*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Time Machine*, *The Presidential Papers*, *Soylent Green*—the list goes on—discuss cannibalism in sometimes nauseating detail. Cannibalism has deep roots in pop culture, as well. Some of the earliest examples go as far back as 1912 when “husband-and-wife filmmaking team Martin and Osa Johnson” flew to exotic locations to film their documentaries *Cannibals of the South Seas*, and *Among the Cannibal Isles of the South Pacific* (Brottman 76). Exploitation and shock films surrounding cannibalism began as early as the 1940s, and have increased in number and popularity ever since. Large cult followings of 1970s slasher films and 1980s “shockumentaries” are well-known, and continue to draw audiences and fans. But, the cannibal craze of the 21st century is a different entity entirely. It's no longer simply about reveling in the voyeurism of the ultimate taboo. It has evolved into a reflection of our own society—a creative and aesthetic retelling of the biblical or classic fairy tale trope: beware your sins, for they will find you out.

Similar to the warnings issued us by stories such as *Hansel and Gretel* or *Jack and the Beanstalk* (beware of greed), *Little Red Riding Hood* (beware the false friend), or *The Boy Who*

Cried Wolf (beware of lying), today's pop culture cannibals offer insight into the dangers of our own world. In the case of *Hannibal*, whose main character lives by the motto "Eat the rude," it would be well-advised to mind your manners, and, most importantly, keep your ego in check. Yet, although today's pop culture cannibal stories hold important lessons, their true essence lies in their reflection of the violence and chaos that comprises our everyday lives. Especially in today's extreme divisive political climate and growing social inequality, cannibalism represents the division between the "haves" and the "have nots." Where the zombie craze spoke out against our growing apathy, cannibals narrate the end of our tolerance, both on the part of the cannibal and his prey.

"Even though the consumption of human flesh in fact or fiction has always held a gruesome fascination," argues *The Telegraph* contributor Amanda Craig, "it tends to rise during times of social unrest." Like the theme of cannibalism, social unrest is far from neoteric. Documented evidence of societies rising against power and authority goes back at least as far as the Helots and Spartans of ancient Greece, and a BBC report details that cannibalism is evident in human remains from 15,000 years ago⁴. In today's society, cannibalism is seen as the ultimate taboo. Barring extreme circumstances of starvation due to unfortunate occurrences (e.g., the Donner Party in the Colorado Rockies, the Uruguayan rugby team in the Andes), we only hear of incidences of cannibalism when they are performed by psychotic serial killers. Nonetheless, themes of cannibalism in pop culture have experienced a steady incline, particularly since the 1980s. Craig describes the phenomenon as "part of a critique of the widening gulf between the haves and have-nots. Ever since Bret Easton Ellis included the practice in his [novel] *American Psycho*, it has been a case not of "eat the rich" so much as the rich eating others. [...] the modern

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20150416-our-ancestors-were-cannibals>

cannibal is a predator who revels in the ultimate forbidden food as an act of supreme selfishness” (Craig).

Ever since the Great Recession of the late 2000s, the wage gap between middle- and upper-class workers has widened to the point that the middle-class is now almost completely dissipated. Since 1979, the middle-class has experienced a wage increase of only 6%, low-income workers have suffered a decrease in wages of 5%, and high-income workers have enjoyed a steady growth in income, with an ultimate increase of 41% over a period of thirty-four years (Gongloff). Unsurprisingly, as a result, tension between wage earners and corporations has hit a crescendo. Commonly known as “The 99%,” financially struggling men and women all over the world have staged enormous protests, closing down city streets while insisting their voices be heard. Pop culture responds to these efforts by giving an artistic voice to the complaints of inequality through visual and performing arts. *Hannibal*, more than just an admonition to mind your manners, acts as a metaphor for what happens when the upper-class gets the upper hand—we all get eaten. The 99% are “the rude” to the wealthiest 1%, and if the rules of dictated social and economic structures are not followed, risks being completely consumed.

Cannibal culture, what could have previously been described as a sub-culture, is evolving from its status as a cult-following to a mainstream outlet for civil unrest. Mikita Brottman studies cannibal culture in all its forms: anthropological, literary, cultural, and popular. Of contemporary cannibal culture, she ascertains,

“Prior to the twentieth century, literary evocations of cannibalism tended to hover on the outskirts of the story – both geographically, spiritually, and psychologically. In the twentieth century, however, it is fairly true to say that “cannibalism came to consciousness” when Western culture began to shift from a representational to an expressive concept of art. [...] Cannibalism was no longer a barbaric fantasy on the margins of “civilized” existence, but came to represent some very central aspect of the

human condition.” (Brottman 62)

As Amanda Craig’s article attests, “cannibalism is the symptom of irreparable social breakdown” (Craig). What is important to note in this argument is that cannibalism is not the *cause* of social breakdown, it is a *symptom*.

Like the biblical stories and fairy tales we all grew up on in Western culture, *Hannibal* sheds light on contemporary issues that are prevalent in our own modern world. Fuller’s version of the voracious doctor steps away from the predictability of serial killer stories, and guides its viewers to consider that there is more to *Hannibal*’s world than the obvious. Fuller’s deliberate use of sound, color, textures, and light produce an aesthetic quality that creates beauty out of the abhorrent. It wouldn’t be unusual to wish you were sitting at Lecter’s dinner table once you see the works of art he creates from the flesh of his victims – a response that will no doubt leave one questioning his or her morality. Yet when one considers that it is only the “rude” that Lecter consumes, would it be unheard of for any of us to obtain a twinge of pleasure knowing that the world has been rid of someone so toxic to our livelihood? Therein lies yet another matter that Fuller asks us to consider: just how difficult would it be for *any* of us to become Hannibal Lecter?

Chapter 2

“The farmer who hand rears lambs loves them, and sends them to slaughter.”

In June of 1994, my aunt and I took our daughters, aged two and four, to see the blockbuster hit of the summer, Disney’s *The Lion King*. After an exciting hour-and-a-half of songs and adventure, we took the girls back home, hoping they would settle down for a nap; they had other plans. For what felt like an eternity to every adult in the house, the two young girls got

down on all fours, and proceeded to reenact the vicious fight between the film's hero, Simba, and his traitorous uncle, Scar. They didn't try to perform any of the songs, they didn't pretend to be the loveable meerkat-warthog duo, Timon and Pumba, they didn't even pretend to be the lionesses. They were two ferocious, angry male lions bent on killing one or the other in order to survive. I have to admit that I was rather shocked to see two tiny little girls playing so violently; it was not at all what I expected. Being a young mother who grew up in the heyday of Tipper Gore's dramatic media censorship campaign and popular psychology telling us that everything we were doing was causing irreversible damage to our children, I started to panic—*Oh, no! What have I allowed my sweet little baby to watch!?* Years later, both girls grew up to be compassionate, loving people; one working as an EMT, the other working various jobs in hospitality and service. I can finally wipe my brow and take a deep breath. *The Lion King* did not turn them into vicious killers.

For at least the past forty years, researchers have spent a great deal of time studying the effects of media violence on children. The majority of the studies conducted, while not entirely conclusive, have demonstrated a pattern of increased violent tendencies in children exposed to media violence, as opposed to children whose violent programming is either limited or completely eliminated. All it takes is a simple Google search to come up with a seemingly endless list of studies to review. But should you search for studies that claim the opposite—that perhaps viewing violent media is not as psychologically harmful as many believe—you will be hard-pressed to find much. In my own research for this thesis, I have only been able to locate one such study, although I seem to continually run across quotes from people who oppose the popular claims made against violent programming. Even more difficult to find are studies on adult viewers of violent media.

One recent study conducted by Dr. Brad Bushman of Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, and Dr. L. Rowell Huesmann of the University of Michigan looks at the short- and long-term effects of violent media on adults as well as children. Responding to decades of research on media violence and its potential to cause aggressive behavior, the doctors tested their hypothesis that media violence would result in greater long-term effects on aggressiveness in children, but increased short-term effects in adult aggression. As our discussion is on *Hannibal*, I will do my best to focus my commentary on the data and results involving adult viewers of media violence. However, there being so little research done on the matter, this presents quite a challenge. Therefore, while I have little choice but to cite studies on adolescents, my goal is to redirect the focus onto adults as much as I possibly can.

In Dr. Bushman and Dr. Huesmann's article outlining the details of their study, they contest:

“Neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists posit that the human mind acts as an associative network in which ideas are partially activated, or primed, by stimuli that they are associated with. [...] Thus, an encounter with an event or object can prime related concepts, ideas, and emotions in a person's memory [...]. For example, the mere presence of a weapon in a person's visual field can increase aggressive thoughts or behaviors. Seeing people fight activates scripts for behavior related to fighting and other aggressive ideas. Any cognitions, behaviors, or emotions that have ever been linked to an observed violent scene will be activated within milliseconds when that scene is observed.” (349)

This statement fails to mention whether the person(s) described in this assertion are children or adults; therefore, I have a difficult time accepting it empirically. As it is written, it is “the human mind” that is activated by violence, which says to me that it is *all* human minds that experience this reaction to aggressive stimuli. If that is the case, am I to accept that after I watch an episode of *Hannibal* I will immediately think of butchering somebody when I see the chef's knife in my kitchen? Though the majority of their article focuses on children, as most of these studies do,

Drs. Bushman and Huesmann clarify that “short-term effects should be more pronounced for adults than for children because priming⁵ depends on the prior existence of a well-encoded network of aggressive scripts, beliefs, and schemas” (350). In other words, adults who do experience an immediate or short-term reaction to violent media are reacting based upon years of priming throughout their adolescence. As I interpret this, if an adult was raised in a violent home, experienced a significant amount of violence in their personal life outside of the home, or was exposed to a great deal of media violence without any adult supervision or guidance, that adult will be more likely to experience a short-term reaction to any violent imagery to which they are exposed. Would Jeffery Dahmer experience an immediate violent response to watching *Hannibal*? Possibly. Would I or somebody whose life experience has been very similar to mine – someone who has lived a relatively safeguarded life? Highly doubtful, especially considering the number of times I have watched the entire series without any ill affect.

Journalist and cultural critic Gerard Jones has spent years of his life deeply immersed in the research of media violence. Working closely with a variety of psychologists and educators, and extensive interviews with parents and observations of children, Jones laments:

“In our anxiety to understand and control real-life violence, we’ve tried to reduce our children’s relationships with their fantasies of combat and destruction to vast generalizations that we would never dream of applying to their fantasies about love and family and discovery and adventure. We don’t usually ask whether game shows predispose our children to greed, or whether love songs increase the likelihood of getting stuck in bad relationships. But when aggression is the topic, we try to purée a million games and dreams and life stories into statistical studies. We ask absurdly sweeping questions like, What is the effect of media violence on children? as if violence were a single, simple phenomenon of which sandbox play-fights and mass murder were mere variations....” (Jones 19)

⁵ Priming is defined in the scientific and psychological communities as “a nonconscious form of human memory concerned with perceptual identification of words and objects. It refers to activating particular representations or associations in memory just before carrying out an action or task.” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/priming>

Again, Jones' study revolves around children, not adults. Obviously we will never understand the true effects of media violence on adults until researchers decide it is a valuable topic to explore. I posit that we will never have truly accurate results on the subject at all until a thorough and extensive study is conducted on a combination of *all* age groups. Nonetheless, Jones brings up some excellent points. The knowledge we have gained from such studies on children is that there is indeed a correlation between media and real-world violence. The problem is, as Jones addresses, correlation is not a cause (30-33). We cannot definitively look back at television programming history and assert that violence on television begets violence in real life. To do so would ignore the fact that violence—often far more extreme (albeit without the firepower) than any violence we experience today—has occurred throughout human history. Perhaps, instead, we should consider that pop culture and television programming today does not instigate real-world violence, but that it reflects the violence that is already abundant. Let's consider how television programming has changed since the turn of the century, and whether or not violent programming has increased. Then, we need to ask ourselves why.

Hannibal first premiered on Thursday, April 4th, 2013 at 9:00 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST) on one of television's oldest major primetime networks, NBC. For years, NBC was well-known for its Thursday night lineup, usually family-friendly shows such as *Family Ties*, *Cheers*, or *The Cosby Show* (which now brings with it a whole new set of problems, but I digress). Memorably titled "Must See TV," parents could sit back and relax on Thursday nights, knowing that if their children walked into the room during an episode of *Seinfeld*, there would be little, if any, explanations or apologies needed to be voiced to their children—no need to tell them to leave the room as soon as the episode concluded and the late-night show began. In previous years, NBC's 9:00 Thursday night time slot offered "adult programming" such as *Hill Street*

Blues (1981-1986), *L.A. Law* (1986-1994), and *ER* (1994-2009), followed by four years of hit-and-miss shows such as *The Jay Leno Show* (2009-2010), and *Awake* (2011-2012)⁶. NBC was ready to tackle something grittier, and *Hannibal* made its first appearance on the famous Thursday night line-up... for half of one season. Bryan Fuller's creative adaptation of Harris's novels was moved to Friday nights at 9:00 CST for the second half of its first season, a night known as "the death time slot" (Acuna), and the show's ratings plummeted. But *why* the show's ratings fell so drastically is still unclear. Die-hard fans, affectionately known as "Fannibals," continued to bestow high praises onto the show. It has been questioned whether *Hannibal*'s ratings suffered due to competition with large-following draws such as the NBA finals, and with such a niche audience, *Hannibal* had little chance of survival.

One thing does seem to be clear: critical acclaim demonstrates it was not the gore and violence on *Hannibal* that led to its demise. Kirsten Acuna writes, "Critics have praised it as a smart, beautifully haunting adaptation of Thomas Harris' series with some going as far to call it the best horror show on TV. It has a huge cult following online ... and probably one of the most self-aware Tumblr accounts of any TV series." She continues, "There's just one problem. No one is watching it—at least when it airs—and the network heads don't seem to understand why." Despite the fact that viewership of *Hannibal* plummeted in half by the end of the second season, fans of the show bestowed the series with higher and higher ratings as each new episode aired (Acuna). This indicates that it is not the show itself that caused ratings to drop, so what exactly could be the cause of the series' ultimate cancellation? Perhaps, as Acuna suggests, it is NBC's notorious scheduling inconsistencies that drove viewers away. In a desperate attempt to compete with cable networks and remain relevant, it appears that corporate greed led to the premature

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Must_See_TV

cancellation of what could be argued as one of the smartest shows ever aired on primetime television. In an ironic reflection of *Hannibal*'s warning against greed, it appears that a hunger for power ended up swallowing the series, though it never managed to push away its fan base. Had NBC executives known what *Hannibal* was about to do to popular culture by ushering in a new wave of cannibal culture, they might have hung on just a little longer.

Chapter 3

“Morality doesn’t exist—only morale.”

The question of morality is challenging to address – especially when that question involves a bloodthirsty, man-eating psychiatrist. Throughout most of the world, we share a basic moral code that guides us in our decision-making processes: do not kill, do not steal, be kind to others. Although there are obviously those who choose not to follow these principles, most people on this earth do. Those who don’t often end up in one form of trouble or another, be it prison, loss of family, friends, jobs, or any number of negative repercussions. But what about those whose moral standards are different than those of the majority?

In Africa, there exists a Nigerian tribe that tortures, starves, and shuns from their community numerous children as young as one-year-old because the older tribe members believe the children to be witches⁷. Obviously, this is unfathomable to most of us in developed countries; it goes far beyond the awful witch hunts of 17th century Salem. But to the older members of this Nigerian tribe, they are doing what they feel is right for the rest of their community. It’s easy for the rest of us to point out how incredibly disgusting this practice is. How can anybody in this day and age think that there is ever a legitimate reason to starve or beat a child and throw it out into

⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/08/25/nigeria.child.witches/>

the world all alone? While I'm not here to condone the attitudes, beliefs, or actions of this tribe, I do wish to point out that its members genuinely believe in the moral standards they have developed and accepted for their community; in this instance, that moral standard involves removing the threat of evil, even if that "evil" has barely learned to walk or talk.

Similarly, Hannibal Lecter has developed his own moral code that sets him apart from the majority of contemporary humanity. Unfortunately for his victims, it involves eating those whom he deems as rude. Intriguingly, Lecter's conditions of behavior aren't dissimilar from most people's. Rudeness, to Dr. Lecter, typically involves an affront to his intelligence. Simply put, he loathes, particularly, any form of condescension directed towards him. The first unquestionable instance of Lecter's cannibalism in *Hannibal* does not occur until the seventh episode of season one. During a flashback, Lecter recalls a moment when he has blood drawn, presumably for insurance purposes. When the lab technician implies that Lecter doesn't understand the difference between infection and disease, and essentially accuses him of lying about his health, Lecter asks for the technician's business card. Later, as Lecter is preparing for a large dinner party, we witness him flip through his card catalog, choosing a variety of business cards of people who have insulted him in one manner or another. Beginning with the lab technician's heart and kidney (we are denied witnessing the actual murder of any of his victims in this particular episode), Lecter prepares an assortment of meat dishes with a multitude of organs including brains, lungs, livers, stomachs, pancreases, a spleen, and even intestines, out of which Lecter uses as sausage casing. Reveling in the applause of his dinner guests, Lecter announces, "Before we begin, you must be warned—nothing here is vegetarian. Bon appétit" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Sorbet"). The doctor's cannibalism, however, is reserved solely for the rude in Fuller's adaptation of the Hannibal Lecter story. Killing without consumption, an act unfamiliar

to Thomas Harris' Lecter, is employed as a tool for manipulating situations to evade capture or as a twisted attempt to strengthen his friendship with Will Graham.

When Will Graham is accused of committing the very murders he is investigating, Lecter is called to the stand in his defense. At the end of his defense testimony, he looks across the courtroom into Graham's eyes and declares, "Will Graham is and will always be my friend" (Season 2, "Hassun"). After cross-examination, the prosecuting attorney insists that Lecter's testimony cannot possibly rule out Graham as the murderer. With little thought, the judge dismisses Lecter's testimony, and orders it stricken from the records. The next morning, a custodial worker finds the judge's mutilated body in the courtroom, blindfolded, suspended from chains attached to the ceiling. His skull cap has been removed, and in his hand he holds the scales of justice; the lower scale holds the judge's heart, the other his brain, a clear indication that the murderer believes the judge's brain lacks heft. Soon after, Lecter is seen visiting Graham at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He alludes to Graham, "Not only is justice blind, it is mindless and heartless" (Season 2, "Hassun"). While this slaughter is unquestionably gruesome to the rest of us, Lecter sees the judge's killing not as murder, but as an apology letter to Graham for letting him down. Ultimately, the death of the judge results in a mistrial, thereby giving Lecter more time to devise a plan for Graham's eventual pardon.

In his research on society-centered moral theory, Dr. David D. Copp, Professor of Philosophy at Bowling Green State University, discusses the complex subjects of morality and normativity, and "the conditions under which our moral claims are true" (Copp 3). He explains the concept of normativity as a two-part idea:

"First, a moral claim is true only if a related moral standard or norm is justified. Second, society needs to have a social moral code as part of its culture in order to enable us to get along in our social life. [...] Normative claims include those regarding which things are right or wrong, virtuous or vicious, justified or unjustified, polite or rude. They contrast

with non-normative claims, such as the claim that the cat is in the cupboard and the claim that snow is white.” (3)

Lecter, on the other hand, twists this concept of normativity—right or wrong is defined differently in his own world, and justified by his own terms. Thus, any claim we make about Lecter’s morality will be a normative claim as there is no way we could ever make a non-normative claim about his actions. Disregarding the obvious non-normative claims that we could make about *anything* (such as clouds bring rain, or babies are small), there is nothing non-normative about Hannibal Lecter. We know he will eat the rude, and we know that his unconsumed victims are pawns in his games of manipulation, whether it be to control a person or a particular situation.

For example, in “Fromage,” the eighth episode of the first season, Lecter is visited by Franklin Froideveaux, a patient desperate for Dr. Lecter’s friendship. While Froideveaux is obviously annoying to Lecter, he is never rude to him. Therefore, Lecter has no reason to kill him. But when Froideveaux begins to follow him to social events such as the opera, Lecter becomes irritated with the unwelcome advances. Unaware of the dangerous waters he is treading, Froideveaux approaches Lecter at the opera, and introduces his companion, Tobias Budge, a cellist and string maker with the Baltimore Philharmonic. Inexplicably, perhaps through familiar gestures or attitudes, Lecter recognizes Budge as a fellow serial killer. After inviting him to dinner at his home, Lecter orders Budge not to kill the insecure Froideveaux as there is no justified reason for doing so; he is simply a man in need of a friend. But when Budge unexpectedly interrupts a counseling session between Lecter and Froideveaux, who confronts Budge about his since-exposed murders, the doctor snaps Froideveaux’s neck, killing him instantly, thereby saving him from the horror that would have befallen him had Budge had the opportunity to kill him as he planned. So, while Froideveaux’s only sin was his neediness, Lecter

saw no reason to kill him for any kind of pleasure or satisfaction. Instead, he killed him to save him from what he knew would be a much worse fate: Tobias Budge gutting him and using his intestines to make high-end cello strings. Given the option of death by mercy or death by evisceration, how then might we judge Dr. Lecter's decision to kill Froideveaux?

Considering this particular situation, we can apply Copp's theory of normativity to Dr. Lecter's actions. A moral claim may be made because Lecter's own moral standards dictate that the blameless need not suffer unnecessarily; therefore, his killing of Froideveaux spared the man from what he saw as Budge's immorality—needless killing. Secondly, we must not forget that Lecter's personal normative judgements – with *all* people he encounters – are based upon his own standards of right or wrong, virtuous or vicious, justified or unjustified, polite or rude. His world is different than our own, and therefore does not conceive of a world whose standards differ from his. Lecter's moral standards are likely not at all the same as yours or mine, but they do share similarities. For instance, if I consider some of my own moral standards, I can draw comparisons to Dr. Lecter's: I find condescension more offensive than any other attitude; Lecter despises *any* type of rudeness. The doctor and I both find willful ignorance to be appalling. We both hold high standards for ourselves, believe in keeping promises, and desire that others will strive to be the best person they can be, while also understanding that not everybody is willing to do that. The problem of normativity lies in what Lecter believes to be justified or unjustified. In Hannibal Lecter's eyes, murder and cannibalism can be justified for a number of reasons as I have demonstrated.

Lecter believes in his righteousness so deeply that he often goes so far as to compare himself to God. In Lecter's eyes, he is forcing Will Graham's true self to the surface, manipulating him by way of suggestion through their therapy sessions. After shooting and

capturing Eldon Stammets, a serial killer who created a mushroom garden out of his diabetic victims by burying them barely alive in the forest, Graham expresses his internal struggles about having to kill Stammets to Lecter. The doctor uses the therapy session and Graham's anxiety as a tool to lead Graham into considering the justification of killing:

Lecter – “If your intention was to kill [Eldon Stammets] it's because you understand why he did the things he did. It's beautiful in its own way – giving voice to the unmentionable. [...] It wasn't the act of killing [serial killer Garret Jacob] Hobbs⁸ that got you down, was it? Did you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?”

Graham – “I liked killing Hobbs.”

Lecter – “Killing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time. And are we not created in his image?”

Graham – “That depends who you ask.”

Lecter – “God's terrific. He dropped a church roof on thirty-four of his worshipers last Wednesday night in Texas, while they sang a hymn.”

Graham – “And did God feel good about that?”

Lecter – “He felt powerful.” (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Amuse-Bouche”)

Dr. Lecter obviously isn't providing sound therapeutic advice to Will Graham in this scene; rather, he is asserting his own power over Graham's emotional well-being and psychological stability while skillfully manipulating him into believing that not only is killing justified, but also brings with it an incredible sense of power over all other human life. Lecter believes that if he can persuade Graham to find justification in any killing, then he will begin to feel the same sense of power that Lecter does, thereby eliminating Graham's sense of guilt and creating a super-team of killers, seemingly, Lecter's ultimate goal.

⁸ Garrett Jacob Hobbs (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Apéritif”), is the first serial killer to be discovered and killed by Will Graham in Fuller's series.

In his enquiry into the principles of morals, philosopher David Hume discusses this concept of moral supremacy, which is demonstrated by Hannibal Lecter who holds “[...] a desire of showing wit and ingenuity, superior to the rest of mankind” (Schneewind 547). We can argue whether or not Lecter believes that what he is doing is right or wrong. It is true that he insists his murders are justified, but if he truly believes in the opinions he defends, if he truly believes in the rightness of his actions, then why does he keep such dark secrets? Why does he run from the police, or flee to other continents in order to evade capture? Hume asserts:

“There has been a controversy started [...] concerning the general foundation of MORALS; whether they be derived from REASON, or from SENTIMENT; whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense; [...] Moral distinctions, it may be said, are discernible by pure *reason* [...]. Truth is disputable; not taste: What exists in the nature of things is the standard of our judgment; what each man feels within himself is the standard of sentiment. Propositions in geometry may be proved, systems in physics may be controverted; but the harmony of verse, the tenderness of passion, the brilliancy of wit, must give immediate pleasure.” (548)

To put it more simply, there are those who believe morals are created on the basis of reason and logic; still, there are others who believe that an individual’s morals are a matter of a person’s feelings about a situation. To settle the argument, Hume insists that “[...] *reason* and *sentiment* concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions” (549). In other words, one does not hold primacy over the other.

Are Dr. Lecter’s moral standards, then, based on reason or on sentiment? As Hume declares about all moral reasoning, standards are founded on both. Lecter’s reasoning tells him that if he murders a person, he is doing a service to his world by eliminating someone rude or that is a threat to his own interests. Concurrently, he also makes the decision to kill in order to bring Will Graham closer to him. As Lecter sees it, his murders help to keep Graham near him at all times as the special agent will continually be on the hunt for the murderer (i.e., Hannibal

Lecter) until he finds him. It is important that Lecter keep Graham close to him in order to carry out his tactic of manipulation, and, probably more significantly, because his feelings for Graham go further than merely a professional interest. Furthermore, it is substantial to note that Lecter's moral reasoning involves only his own world – not the world around him in which all other people live. His motives are entirely self-serving. He does not kill to protect humanity; he kills to protect his own interests, and to retaliate against personal offense.

In earlier depictions of Hannibal Lecter, both in novel and film, the doctor is given a persona that commands fear and terror more than any other emotional response. But in Bryan Fuller's television adaptation, Lecter isn't nearly as terrifying as he is charming, at least initially⁹. Played by Mads Mikkelsen, Fuller's version of Hannibal Lecter exhibits personality qualities more akin to the biblical Satan than to a modern day real-life killer: he is tempered, yet charismatic; handsome and alluring; conniving, yet logical. Always poised and calm, Mikkelsen's portrayal of Lecter intrigues fans to desire to know more about what lies behind his piercing maroon eyes. Television fans see him more as the respected Dr. Lecter than as the feared "Hannibal the Cannibal" of book and movie fame. "For me," Mikkelsen explains, "he's the fallen angel: Satan on Earth, a man who sees beauty where the rest of us see horror. [...] that's what I based him on" ("Mads Mikkelsen Talks Hannibal"). And what is Satan if not the ultimate manipulator – a monster in disguise – or as Lecter's own therapist describes him, a

⁹ The first appearance of Hannibal Lecter in film (inexplicably spelled "Lecktor"), played by Scottish actor Brian Cox, was in the 1986 film *Manhunter*, based on Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* novel. The next, and the most recognized, Hannibal Lecter was played by Welsh actor Sir Anthony Hopkins in 1991's *The Silence of the Lambs*, followed by 2001's *Hannibal*, and 2002's *Red Dragon*. Both Cox and Hopkins portrayed Lecter as a devious, chilling killer – almost monstrous and unnatural. Eleven years after the last Hannibal Lecter film, Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen brought a new interpretation of Lecter to primetime television. Calm, calculating, charming, and handsome, Mikkelsen's Lecter commands more physical and intellectual attraction – one may go so far to claim that his friendly and engaging personality comes across as trustworthy.

meticulous construction of a physical and mental anomaly who is “wearing a very well-tailored person suit” (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Sorbet”)? Can a serial killer like Lecter morally justify his actions?

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, moral standards are malleable depending on cultural factors. For Hannibal Lecter, he views cannibalism as ridding the world of those he deems rude and useless. Recall that Lecter views himself as a supreme being; therefore, the moral standards that are adopted by the majority of human beings today do not apply. Yes, in our world majority rules. But Lecter lives in a world all his own. Cannibalism, to Lecter, is not an act of madness or depravity, but a form of population control. It is an assertion of his divinity. In stark contrast, it is also his way of keeping those he loves close to him. Mads Mikkelsen explains, “Cannibalism is different [than serial killing]. Cannibals think the only way to possess someone, to truly love someone, is to consume them, even though [Lecter] tends to eat rude people” (“Mads Mikkelsen Talks Hannibal”). So, even though he unsuccessfully attempts to kill and consume Will Graham in the third and final season of the series, he is not doing so because he feels Graham is rude. Instead, he reaches a point of desperation where he can no longer stand not having Graham in his life at all times. He wants to consume him, to absorb him, so that he will never be without him again. Surprisingly, it is revealed in the show that Lecter attempted the same thing, although successfully, with his sister Mischa when the two were very young children.

In his 2006 novel *Hannibal Rising*, the final book in the saga of Hannibal Lecter, Thomas Harris tells us that Lecter has a valid explanation for becoming the killer and cannibal that he is. At the height of World War II, Count Lecter, his wife Simonetta, eight-year-old Hannibal, two-year-old Mischa, and a few of the house staff escape to the family hunting lodge in the forests of

Lithuania. Attempting to avoid the coming Nazi invasion, the family lock themselves in, and hope for the best. Unfortunately, each of the adults are soon killed by an aerial attack, leaving the children alone to fend for themselves. It is not long until their hidden lodge is attacked and plundered by escaped Osttruppen, Eastern European citizens recruited into the German military. Hannibal and Mischa are given only bones and gristle to chew on after the starving looters kill a deer. When it becomes difficult to find even wild animals for food, one of the looters glares ravenously at the children:

“And then the smell of wood smoke in the lodge, the tiered smoke in the cold room, the cadaverine breath of the men crowded around [Hannibal] and Mischa on the hearth. They took them out to the barn then. Pieces of children’s clothing in the barn, stained and strange to [Hannibal]. He could not hear the men talking, could not hear what they called each other, but then the distorted voice of Bowl-Man saying, “Take her, she’s going to die anyway. He’ll stay freeeeeeaash a little longer.” Fighting and biting and coming now the thing he could not stand to see, Mischa held up by the arms, feet clear of the bloody snow, twisting, LOOKING BACK AT HIM. “ANNIBA!!” her voice—” (Hannibal Rising 228-29)

Young Lecter’s worst fears are confirmed after he later discovers some tiny human teeth in a stool pile. He immediately vows to himself that he will spend the rest of his life avenging his sister’s murder. This horrible incident sets out to validate why Lecter, in the novels, becomes a killer and a cannibal, and develops his own moral standards.

But what of television’s Hannibal Lecter? From where does his trauma come that leads him to murder and cannibalism? Unfortunately, because the series was cancelled after the third season, we will probably never know why Fuller’s Lecter is the way he is. In fact, after assumedly drugging and brainwashing his personal therapist, Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier, kidnapping her, and fleeing to Europe, Du Maurier questions, “Why can’t you go home [to Lecter castle in Lithuania], Hannibal? What happened to you there?” “Nothing happened to me,”

he answers. “I happened” (*Hannibal*, Season 3, “Secondo”). It is then revealed that it was actually Lecter who ate his sister Mischa, but we are denied any explanation as to why.

Inspired by his earlier research on the morality of people eating animals of other species, Lewis Petrinovich investigates the moral question of anthropophagy, humans eating members of their own species, more commonly known as cannibalism. He begins his research by lining out five different types of cannibalism:

1. Survival cannibalism – to satisfy hunger, provide a supplement to the regular diet (gastronomic cannibalism), or to survive under conditions of extreme starvation.
2. Medicinal cannibalism – to cure or ward off disease.
3. Mortuary cannibalism – to maintain continuity with one’s dead relatives.
4. Sacrificial cannibalism – to propitiate gods, enact revenge, or gain the strength of an enemy.
5. Political cannibalism – to terrify one’s neighbors or enemies by ruthlessly and publicly consuming those you capture and kill. (Petrinovich 6)

It’s not difficult to place Lecter in at least four of these categories: he consumes people to satisfy hunger, to create gourmet meals for himself; he eats his baby sister, presumably in order to keep her eternally near; he employs his self-perceived god-like characteristics to overpower and ingest his enemies; and he devours those who offend him by offering them up as the main course in one of his many lavish dinner parties. Where could we possibly find morality in *any* of Lecter’s acts of cannibalism?

Returning to the idea of Copp’s theory on normative claims and Hume’s enquiry into the principles of morals, we have already deduced that Lecter’s moral reasoning is founded on both logic and sentiment. He has developed his own sense of right and wrong, vice and virtue. Even

Petrinovich's study states, "In our research we have identified what seem to be two basic underlying dimensions that provide the foundation for human morality. The most important one is a nepotism factor that includes kinship [...]. A second factor promotes community adhesion—a tendency to cooperate with others, which includes an expectation of reciprocation" (9-10). In regards to the nepotism factor, kinship is not a sole determining factor, although it is an important part of it. The nepotism factor also includes those with whom someone has a close personal relationship. In the case of Hannibal Lecter, the most important people to him are his sister Mischa; Abigail, the daughter of serial killer Garret Jacob Hobbs; and the man he cherishes more than any other human being, Will Graham. As far as the community adhesion factor, there is no doubt that the negative component of community adhesion is replete in his actions: "to punish and exact revenge on those who violate explicit and implicit agreements between people—what is referred to as a social contract. People are able to detect [...] those who would harm us and ours" (9-10). As exhibited, Lecter consumes the rude, the personally threatening, the willfully ignorant.

Certainly, most of us will never develop the same moral standards as Dr. Hannibal Lecter. But have our morals undergone a significant negative change since the turn of the century? Orlando Sentinel guest columnist Tim Winter suggests so. Citing a new study conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, Winter writes, "[...] adults who repeatedly view scenes of extreme violence or sex [are] more tolerant of such content – and more lenient in allowing children to watch the same" (Winter). According to the study, adults become rapidly desensitized to televised content typically thought to be inappropriate for children under the age of seventeen. Winter asserts that this "is certainly cause for alarm," and that "one cannot help but believe that content becomes internalized, and subsequently, the person becomes desensitized"

(Winter). However, Winter's argument continually returns to studies of violent TV on children while paying little attention to parents or other adults. Only at the end of his column does he insist, "Parents need to be parents" (Winter). One fault in this argument, though, is the assumption that all parents hold the same moral standards. Furthermore, it must be taken into consideration that there are instances where violent or graphic television shows can benefit a viewer. It is without doubt, though, that despite our best efforts, there are some people whose tactics of manipulation are so skillful that their influence is hard to avoid.

Chapter 4

"This is my design."

It's lonely business being a cannibal, and nobody knows that better than Hannibal Lecter. In fact, during Lecter's first appearance in the television show, head of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, Jack Crawford, expresses his enthusiasm over having read Lecter's paper, "Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Apéritif"). To write and publish an academic paper about one's loneliness speaks volumes. Upon his introduction to Will Graham in Crawford's FBI Headquarters office, Lecter displays an immediate attraction to Graham. Bombarding him with questions about the way his mind works, Lecter touches a nerve with Graham who snaps, "Please. Don't psychoanalyze me. You wouldn't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed" (Season 1, "Apéritif"). This reaction intrigues Lecter. He sees a fellow outcast in Graham, and it quickly becomes evident that the doctor's primary goal is to develop a relationship with him. He is looking for a friend – something he has been without since the death of his sister during his childhood. He is seeking a comrade in arms – a partner with whom he can share his deepest secrets – be his true self without concealment. Graham's pure empathy

combined with his aversion to extensive human interaction makes him the perfect target for Lecter.

As the old saying goes, we are who we surround ourselves with every day. Having been assigned as an assistant to Graham in psychoanalyzing the series' various serial killers, there is nobody closer to him each day than Hannibal Lecter. The day after their first meeting, Lecter visits Graham's hotel room to bring him a home-cooked breakfast, eggs and sausage, which he delights in watching Graham devour. The previous scene indicates that the sausage is most likely made from the latest victim of the serial killer, the Minnesota Shrike, the second hint in the series that Lecter is the primary serial killer for whom the FBI is hunting. While conversing over breakfast, Lecter begins to alienate Graham from others in the FBI, demeaning Jack Crawford and planting negative thoughts into Graham's head. Casual friendship not being enough for Lecter, he arranges for Graham to find him in the hospital room of Abigail Hobbs, daughter of serial killer Garret Jacob Hobbs whom Graham has recently killed. Observing Dr. Lecter sleeping in a chair while holding the hand of Abigail, we see that Lecter's desire for companionship goes much further than originally thought: he is trying to create a family. The reality of witnessing Lecter's supposed concern for Abigail, for whom Graham feels a sense of obligation, cements Graham's appreciation for Lecter. Essentially, Lecter is the Big Bad Wolf to Graham's Little Red Riding Hood. He entices him into encounters, manipulates him into feeling a sense of security, and, ultimately, attempts to eat him alive, destroying all others in his path. This said, looking through the lens of the fairy tale, there is one character in particular in Fuller's adaptation to whom we should pay close attention—the Wendigo.

Algonquian legend holds that there are people who, for unknown reasons, perhaps psychosis, perhaps spiritual possession, begin to crave the flesh of their fellow humans. When

this craving for flesh begins to manifest itself, the person under the influence of such cravings begins to transform. Once human flesh is consumed, the cannibal morphs into a monster. Emaciated because he is never satiated, black and rotting due to his consumption of dead flesh, and hollow-eyed due to his blindness of widely held values of right and wrong, the Wendigo is born. Most often depicted as a creature with antlers, the Wendigo is the embodiment of the ultimate sin of cannibalism. In Fuller's adaptation, the Wendigo plays a vital part to the story of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. He acts as a conduit between the two souls, constantly striving to bring one closer to the other.

The Wendigo, or "stag man" as many know him, does not make his first appearance in the series until the last episode of the first season. However, he is foreshadowed in the first episode when we notice a small black statue of a stag displayed prominently in Hannibal Lecter's office, acknowledge the importance of deer antlers employed as a trophy display for a number of murder victims, and view an enormous black stag peering at a distance through the forest when Graham's shower curtains are pulled back. Each detail acts as a clue to viewers that the creature will play a very important part of the story of Lecter and Graham. In 1933, anthropologist Father John M. Cooper explained that "The cultural constellation of the Northern Algonkian peoples is such that it predisposes certain individuals to fall victim to a psychosis in which they are obsessed by a compulsive craving to eat human flesh. According to this theory these victims of "windigo psychosis" are often quite willing to kill in order to satisfy their ghoulish mania" (Marano 2). In opposition to the belief of the Algonquian people that the Wendigo is a spiritual manifestation, anthropologists of the twentieth century describe it as a form of mental illness. In the case of *Hannibal*, the presence of the Wendigo represents two things: in one sense, it does, indeed, portray the rapid decline of Graham's mental health; on the

other hand, it also embodies the control and influence that Lecter has over his dear friend. The appearance of the black stag, the pupal stage of the Wendigo, in the first episode indicates that Graham himself is not a monster, but that perhaps he is being hunted by one, or, possibly, that he holds within himself the propensity to become so. By the final episode of season one, the Wendigo becomes a blatant warning to Graham that he is walking a dangerous path, and that, should he wish to avoid becoming like Lecter, he must be at all times wary.

In a discussion regarding the influence of psychiatrists over their patients, Dr. Lecter asserts, “Someone who already doubts their identity can be more susceptible to manipulation. [Psychopaths and narcissists] rarely doubt who they are” (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Rôti”). Therefore, if Graham was indeed suffering a form of psychosis, according to Lecter’s belief, he would be less inclined to the command of exploitation. Yet Graham describes of himself, “I don’t know how to gauge myself anymore. I don’t feel like myself. I feel like I’ve been becoming different for a while. I just feel like somebody else” (“Rôti”). This is an appropriate reaction considering the psychic manipulation Graham has been enduring at the hands of Lecter. The Wendigo, always present but never seen in the physical world, embodies this manipulation and ties Graham to Lecter through spirit. In season two, we witness Will Graham, accused of Hannibal Lecter’s murders, as fighting the power of the Wendigo, rearing his head back and screaming as enormous black antlers thrust from his head. It is at this conjecture that we realize Will Graham cannot escape the forces of evil that are working so hard to overcome him.

The assertion here is that Fuller employs visual cues and storylines to warn his viewers that any one of us has the capacity to succumb to the forces of evil. Any one of us can become the Wendigo if we do not remain educated and aware of the forces that hold power in our world. The Wendigo of our world is not a mythical creature that devours the flesh of its prey—it is the

threat of complacency to our surroundings, our communities, and our world. *Hannibal*, therefore, crosses the line of violent entertainment, and stands as a social commentary, expecting more of its viewers than voyeurism.

Conclusion

Social and economic inequality and manipulation by the powers that be have, many would attest, gotten out of control since the turn of the century. The Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have done unto you,” seems as if it hasn’t helped a lot of us very much. I’m not arguing that we should retaliate by exhibiting the same uncompassionate behaviors or outright plays of power that have been exerted over the majority of the world’s population by the thimbleful of people who appear to hold all the control. If I fell into that temptation, I would have learned nothing from *Hannibal*. Of course, like any other normal human being, there are those whom I would love to see get their comeuppance. But the bigger threat than inequality is the threat of becoming that which makes us unequal – of becoming the monster. And while a fairy tale ending of happily-ever-after would be what most would hope to have, it is not the peaceful beauty at the end of the story that brings us happiness; it is the *survival* of the oppression, manipulation, and violence that brings the most rewards.

As outlined in the numerous debates regarding the effects of violence on television, many feel that television should be held accountable for the social effects of its content. I argue that behavioral responsibility lies not in television, but in its viewers. We are not changing our behaviors due to the content we see in media every day, but media, television included, is adapting to the behaviors and changes that are innate in the world. To place the blame of our behaviors upon popular culture outlets is to remove ourselves from any responsibility in our own

actions. Our moral codes may be in the midst of change. Consider, instead, that popular culture is simply mirroring who we are. Consider also that perhaps we need to turn that mirror upon ourselves, and understand that it is *we* who are at fault. Wars existed before military-themed video games. Murder and rape existed before “Grand Theft Auto.” Political corruption existed before Fox News. Terrorism existed before internet chat rooms. The problem lies within human nature. It’s a simple matter of understanding the human condition. If we allow ourselves to look past the blood and guts and human flesh on a platter, we can see that *Hannibal* reminds us that, as human beings, any one of us can become the next monster, or the next shocking headline. It begs the question: what are we going to do about it?

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