**Uncanny Adaptations: Revisionary Narratives in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal***

**Abstract:** This article examines the prevalence of the uncanny in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal* (2013-2015), the television adaptation of Thomas Harris’s Hannibal Lecter novels and their subsequent film versions. While Linda Hutcheon has proposed the concept of ‘knowing’ and ‘unknowing’ audiences in relation to adaptations, popular awareness of Hannibal Lecter and representation of the character as psychopathic complicate this dichotomy, allowing Fuller to play with a broader familiarity with character, incident, and context within a relatively unfamiliar prequel setting. Analysis of individual scenes and details from the final shooting scripts demonstrate the uncanny destabilizations created by the series’ forensic adaptations of crime and untraditional family structures, as well as Hannibal’s complex characterization. I argue that as we as viewers experience our pre-established familiarity with Hannibal in this unsettlingly unfamiliar context, and as we come to know the doctor within the world of the series, this evolving familiarity is repeatedly challenged in a way that also challenges our conceptions of empathy.

**Key words:** Hannibal, empathy, psychopath, uncanny, adaptation

**Short title:** Uncanny Adaptations

In recent years, adaptations have gone through considerable conceptual and perceptual changes. Not only has the definition of the term ‘adaptation’ been widened to include a greater variety of media, but traditional questions of fidelity and the implicit privileging of source texts have been side-lined to an extent in an effort to refocus critical appraisal in a way that does not immediately devalue adapted works. A fundamental aspect of this dual shift is the idea that duality itself is problematic when considering adaptations of works that have prominent places in popular culture, partly because a single source-text/adapted-text relationship is often difficult to identify. Furthermore, the experience of a work, adapted or otherwise, necessarily expands into further creative possibilities, as the collaborative efforts of production, as well as audience response, function as ‘interlocking networks of cultural creators’ that can generate levels of narrative awareness in tandem with those of the narrative of the work itself (Grazian 6). In this article, I want to consider the impact that popular perceptions of well-known plots and characters have on viewer experiences of adaptation. Through a consideration of Bryan Fuller’s television series *Hannibal* (2013-2015), the most recent adaptation of Thomas Harris’s Hannibal Lecter novels, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which adaptations can destabilize these popular notions of character at the level of story, as well as in terms of understanding of contemporary psychology.

In Harris’s 1981 novel *Red Dragon,* forensic psychiatrist Alan Bloom attempts to explain the investigative methods of criminal profiler Will Graham by saying:

What he has […] is pure empathy and projection. […] He can assume your point of view or mine—and maybe some other points of view that scare and sicken him. (179)

Bloom’s tentative exploration of Graham’s gifted but deeply troubled mind is itself intensely empathic. It is interesting then that in the opening episode of Fuller’s series, a near-verbatim version of these lines is put into the very dangerous mouth of Hannibal Lecter (‘Apéritif’ 00:26:56-:27:04). This simple transference is of vital significance as from the outset, empathy—a quality that many would see as a virtue—is presented as fundamentally problematic: unsettling *for* Will Graham and unsettling coming *from* Hannibal Lecter. This is heightened by the fact that unlike Bloom, whose incarnations in both the novel and the series are uncertain as to whether Will should continue his work for the FBI at all, Hannibal follows his analysis with the confident assertion that he can ‘help good Will’ with the investigations, in spite of his awareness of Will’s precarious mental state (00:27:18-20). I would argue that it is in this curiously unfamiliar version of something familiar—not just the narrative transference but the appearance of an almost threatening kind of empathy which tests the boundaries of commonly accepted definitions of the word—that the power of Fuller’s adaptation lies.

Of course, the ‘peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar’ is what we might describe as uncanny, an aesthetic and psychoanalytic concept that was most famously examined by Sigmund Freud (Royle 1). In his 1919 essay on the subject, Freud acknowledges the link between the uncanny and ‘all that arouses dread and creeping horror’, but his subtler distinction between what is frightening and what is uncanny hinges on his examination of the term *unheimlich,* which literally means ‘unhomely’ but is translated as ‘uncanny’ (1). He concludes by identifying opposing definitions of the base word *heimlich* through its connections with the concepts of home and family. It can refer both to ‘that which is familiar and congenial’, or associations *within* the family, and to ‘that which is concealed and kept out of sight’, such as associations between the family and outsiders in which the family attempts to maintain a level of internal privacy (4). In other words, *heimlich* can also be *unheimlich,* depending on the context.Freud uses this observation, along with F.W.J. Schelling’s claim that ‘everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light’, to begin to consider the uncanny in the more explicitly psychological terms of the divided drives of the psyche and repressed memory (4).

I would like to argue that adaptations—the ‘deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works’, the textual embedding of the familiar within the unfamiliar—are inherently uncanny, as is the experience of them (Hutcheon xvi). Furthermore, this uncanniness is something separate from, or in addition to, the horrifying content of a given adapted text such as *Hannibal.* Although the series is an ‘autonomous [work] that can be interpreted and valued as such’, a purely ‘unknowing audience’, in adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon’s terms, would be somewhat difficult to come by in this case (6, 120). The stories surrounding Hannibal Lecter are not just familiar but pervasive, so much so that even those who haven’t read the four novels or seen the five films in which he’s played a part usually know very well what the doctor likes to consume with his Chianti (or Amarone). While John Ellis’s discussion of ‘narrative image’—‘the promise’ or pre-knowledge of a media event—focuses on the experience of cinema, there is a level of relevance here, as the narrative image of the series *Hannibal* is unavoidably shaped by the intermixed exposure to the Hannibal novels and films, their textual influences, the texts they influence (from other novels and films to spoofs and satires), and the audience responses to these (30, 91). Indeed, the influence does not always limit itself to fictional narratives. A 2010 article for the *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioural Assessment* titled ‘The Hannibal Lecter Myth’, which argues against the perception that psychopaths generally have high levels of verbal intelligence, emphasizes the influence that Harris’s fiction and Hannibal in particular have had on wider conceptions of abnormal psychology (DeLisi et al.). Charles Gramlich even contends that while Hannibal Lecter is an atypical representation of a psychopath if we choose to categorize him as such, he has perversely become the basis of ‘the developing myth of the super predator, the serial killer’ (213). The fiction and films have a resonance that has secured a definitive place for Hannibal within popular culture; it is this placement that makes it difficult for the majority of readers or audience members to escape the experience of most Hannibal works as anything but adaptations, even if specific levels of textual awareness vary.

Fuller’s *Hannibal* is chronologically positioned (in terms of the timeline of the novels rather than the order of publication) between *Hannibal Rising* (2006), which provides an account of Hannibal’s childhood and early adulthood,and *Red Dragon*, by which point Hannibal is already a convicted murderer*.* As such it functions largely as a prequel, a narrative that ‘offers new creative possibilities to explore characters and story-worlds within the constraints of an already-established narrative framework’ (Loock 90)*.* But aspects of this adaptation of *Hannibal* make it a more intricate combination of prequel, sequel, and intentional reimagination of the novels’ characters and events—a text that forges a complex and intimate doctor-patient relationship between Hannibal and Will, as well as developing Hannibal’s connection with the FBI in an advisory capacity prior to his arrest, before adapting *Red Dragon* itself in the last several episodes of the third and final season. The association between past and present is further complicated by the shifting of this pre-*Red Dragon* story roughly three decades into the future to the early 2010s. From a practical standpoint, this immediately disrupts a variety of storylines for the knowing viewer due to the introduction of newly available technologies in criminal investigation and everyday life, simultaneously distancing this new version of Hannibal Lecter from his traumatized source-text roots in the aftermath of World War II. The sense of the uncanny as also heightened as somewhat familiar plotlines unfold in a near-past that is more immediately familiar to us, but unfamiliar in the context of the original narrative.

According to the credits, the series is ‘based on the characters from the book *Red Dragon*’ (‘Apéritif 00:06:38); the more flexible affiliation with the source text allows for the cannibalization of characters and situations from all of the novels and films. This results in complex moments of recognition for the more knowing Harris reader and viewer, such as the shifting of Bloom’s line to Hannibal that I mentioned previously. Fuller himself describes the approach as a ‘”DJ mashup” style that not only reinvents the universe of the novels but also fit[s] neatly […] with the “Harrisian” theme of transformation’ (McLean 8). Fuller’s musical metaphor for his production style is also suggestive of the wider postmodern cultural phenomenon of ‘mixing’: essentially, the uncanny embedding of the familiar within the unfamiliar occurs not only within *Hannibal* but throughout popular culture, as David Grazian explains, because ‘creators […] rely on an endless repository of past work to inform their development of new and future projects’ (6). The sense in which the series is past functioning in present, as well as specific adaptation working within a popular culture trend, is itself indicative of the uncanny layers of the narrative. What I want to focus on in this article is the series’ temporal placement as a prequel with a backdrop of Hannibal cultural awareness: this allows for a base level of dramatic irony throughout the first season in that most viewers know what Hannibal is even if the characters within the series do not. Richard Lodgson has addressed the inherent narrative power of this device, arguing convincingly that the series provides ‘a significant contribution to the body of novels and films’ *because* ‘the viewer’s assumed familiarity with the Hannibal of *The Silence of the Lambs* […] allows Fuller to create conflicting impressions of this insidious character’ (50). I agree with Lodgson’s assessment and would also like to explore the ways in which ‘conflicting impressions’ created via ‘assumed familiarity’ link more specifically to adaptation theory, the uncanny, and contemporary conceptions of psychopathy.1 Finally, I will argue that as we as viewers experience our pre-established familiarity with Hannibal Lecter in an unsettlingly unfamiliar context, and as we come to know the doctor within the world of the series, this evolving familiarity is repeatedly and disturbingly challenged in a way that also challenges our conceptions of empathy.

**Forensic Adaptations**

Given the centrality of empathy to the series, it is no surprise that we begin not with Hannibal but, as Harris himself did, with Will Graham, as the effect that Will’s profiling process has on the narrative is crucially important to how the audience is prepared for the experience of Hannibal within the series. The pilot opens with a series of slow-zoom shots of a crime scene before cutting to Hugh Dancy as Will, standing motionless amongst the chaos (‘Apéritif’ 00:00:35-44). The series makes use of a device mentioned briefly in the novel *Red Dragon*, ‘a pendulum swung in darkness’, in order to wipe away aspects of the crime to a point before the murders, essentially ‘decriminalizing’ the scene (Harris 11; ‘Apéritif’ script 1). This allows Will to re-enact the double murder as the murderer. Thus in a sense, this adaptation of *Hannibal* begins with its own forensic adaptation: having already seen the aftermath of the event, we are given a potential storyline by which it may have happened with another ‘leading actor’, and the initially unfamiliar final scene shown to us first is impressed upon our memories and made uncannily familiar by the end of the re-enactment.

Regardless of our level of background knowledge of Will as a character, there is something shocking about the images of this man, whose initial appearance would make many assume he was more victim than violent criminal, coldly carrying out two brutal murders. The fact that Will often narrates his re-enactments is just as significant, if not more so, than the physical actions. Organized around Will’s repeated declaration of a killer’s intent, ‘This is my design’, the narration enhances the sense of how effectively he has managed to get inside a killer’s head—saying what the murderer may not have been able to say himself (00:02:15-16). The end result of this empathic projection is Will’s ability to help solve these cases and prevent further death. In a broader sense, it also mimics the usual experience of the prequel audience: as Kathleen Loock expresses it, we must ‘take an almost “forensic” interest in references and clues that join the “puzzle pieces” of the prequel with’ the rest of the Hannibal Lecter narratives (92).2 The fact that this initial case is never solved for us as viewers and has no definitive link to any of the crimes in the source texts, helps to establish what will be the destabilizing nature of the series as a whole within the opening moments. It is not enough to watch a man who doesn’t look like a murderer commit two murders, to witness the disturbing de- and re-criminalization of the scene, and to have the infamous title character in no way involved (in fact, we’ll wait roughly twenty-two minutes into a forty-three-minute episode for Hannibal Lecter’s first appearance). Resolution is lacking, not only because the knowing viewer must accept that these events from the adaptation are not directly connected to the novels or films, but also because of the unrevealed identity of the murderer and the motiveless origin of the act itself. The unresolved narrative links to Lodgson’s claim that the series engages with nihilistic philosophy—that *Hannibal,* like other works that are heavily influenced by postmodernism, represents a response to ‘an existence that seems to have no meaning’ (51, 59-60). This is only reiterated by the fact that every re-enactment reminds the viewers and Will that the attempt to return to the origin is always ‘necessarily belated’, in Freudian critic Andrew Barnaby’s terms (978). Just as Freud ‘locate[s] the uncanny in the vexed experience’ of this belatedness, revelations relating to the origins of a murder can only come too late for the victims (Barnaby 978).

Over the course of the first season alone, Will re-enacts a crime on ten occasions, and each re-enactment has an unmistakable effect on his sense of self. Will wants ‘to know’ but is also burdened with an understandable ‘revulsion at knowing’ (Barnaby 978). As early as episode five, he admits to Jack Crawford, the Head of the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI, ‘It’s getting harder and harder to make myself look. […] And you know what looking at this does’ (‘Coquilles’ 00:33:56-:34:03). Rather than being told explicitly, ‘what looking at this does’ is dramatized for the audience through the later re-enactments. In the sixth episode, Will recreates the violent murder of a psychiatric nurse at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. A more knowing audience will recognize combined details of an assault and a murder from the source texts. In the novel and film versions of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988 and 1991, respectively), the assault, committed by Hannibal, is described after the fact. Furthermore, the nurse in the television series is murdered using the ‘Wound Man’ method adopted by Hannibal and described in the novel *Red Dragon*—significantly the very modus operandi that helped Will to catch Hannibal within the specific world of that novel. In the series, Hannibal’s crimes are combined and placed in the hands of a different murderer. Thus for the knowing audience, uncanny destabilization has already begun, and it continues while commencing for the unknowing audience with the presentation of Will’s re-enactment.

Rather than working in reverse from the crime scene within Will’s imagination, the audience actually sees the real murderer feigning illness, waiting until he is alone with the nurse, and then standing threateningly in front of her before the camera cuts away (‘Entrée’ 00:01:06-:02:29). What Will’s similarly chronological re-creation adds is the horrifying violence: he hits the nurse in the throat, presses ‘his thumbs into her eye sockets’, and stabs her in the back with one of the medical stands as she attempts to crawl away; throughout Will’s facial expression communicates nothing so much as boredom (‘Entrée’ script 7; 00:05:57-:07:51). The unfamiliar details of what we imagined are fleshed out in the extended and now disturbingly familiar scene for both knowing and unknowing audiences, just as the now familiar face of Will Graham is warped by the most unnervingly unfamiliar presentation of him in the series thus far.

There is no narration in this case, perhaps highlighting Will’s decreasing distance and perspective in re-enacting the murders. It is as if he lacks the self-control to describe and act simultaneously, and we the audience *need* the tearful look of horror on his face—the twenty seconds of anguished silence—as we watch him figuratively awaken from his re-enactment (00:07:52-:08:12). It reminds us that what we saw is not indicative of who we believe Will is. Later re-enactments raise similar troubling issues. During the examination of the body of a trombone player in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, whose murderer turned him into a form of a human cello with exposed vocal cords that can be played, Will mutters scathingly, ‘Had to open you up to get a decent sound out of you’ (‘Fromage’ 00:11:59-:12:02). In episode ten, Will figuratively wakes in the middle of a re-enactment and, due to his taking the murderer’s perspective within it, momentarily believes that he has committed the crime: as he explains to Hannibal, ‘I can’t remember seeing the crime scene before I saw myself killing her’ (‘Buffet Froid’ 00:11:34-39). Whether taking the emotions of the killer away with him or practically feeling himself commit murder, Will is clearly getting ‘lost in the reconstruction’, and in doing so, forcing us to acknowledge the inherent dangers of the ‘pure empathy’ that Hannibal described as Will’s gift and burden in the first episode (‘Buffet Froid’ 00:09:38-41).

Put simply, empathy is understanding of another person’s feelings and point of view, but much like the uncanny, the conceptualization of empathy has complex aesthetic and psychological ramifications. In psychological terms, empathy is considered to be multifaceted, with both cognitive and affective features. Elisa Aaltola describes cognitive empathy as perception ‘of the mental state of another individual’, while acknowledging that affective empathy moves beyond recognition, triggering an emotional response which demonstrates that ‘one resonates with the phenomenal aspects of another individual’s mental state’ (76-77). Aaltola’s explanation reminds us that empathy is not simply a quality or an act but a process. Mairead Dolan and Rachael Fullam draw on a previously established definition of empathy as an even more subdivided ‘staged process’, debatably not unlike Will’s re-enactments themselves, involving emotion recognition (‘the ability to accurately discriminate the emotional state of another person’), perspective taking (‘the ability to put oneself in the observed person’s place’), emotion replication (‘the replication of the emotional experience of the target person’), and response decision ‘(‘the observer’s decision to act on the basis of their feelings’) (35).3 There are two important issues here. Firstly, because the staged process of empathy requires not just recognition and understanding but a re-creation of emotion and commitment to action based on the observer’s forged connection of his or her own familiar experiences with the unfamiliar experiences of the one observed (in other words, because it is not only cognitive but also affective), empathy itself is arguably an uncanny experience—one that for all its benefits, requires a willingness to delve into potentially painful familiar memories in order to better comprehend the unfamiliar memories of another. In the case of Will, the series’ repeated dramatization of perspective taking from circumstance, rather than direct contact with another human being, leads belatedly to emotion recognition. It is in his resulting complex engagement with the final two stages that his trouble arises, for in terms of the series, viewers are forced to ask themselves, to what extent is Will replicating the killers’ emotions and how is this shaping his response decision?

In his examination of empathy in the Harris texts, Tim Jones reminds us that ‘[t]he ability to withdraw back to our own moral positions and emotions is an absolutely key ingredient to any empathic encounter’ (147). However, Will is not always managing to withdraw or, in Dolan and Fullam’s terms, Will has increasing difficulty turning off, so to speak, the emotion replication which affects his response decisions. As the narrator of *Red Dragon* explains, ‘There were no effective partitions in [Will’s] mind. What he saw and learned touched everything else he knew’ (18). In the series, a version of these lines is adapted into dialogue and again given to Hannibal Lecter (‘Apéritif’ 00:26:12-15). If Will’s empathic re-enactments are uncanny on multiple levels, so too is the transformation that is happening as the unfamiliar thoughts of the murderers become intricately connected with Will’s familiar ones, and he is left ‘struggl[ing] to distinguish [his] actual experiences from what is imagined after the fact’ (Barnaby 977). The emergence of the confusingly familiar unfamiliar memories is even more dangerous because it is not the result of a single experience but repeated exposure. As Will tells Jack, ‘It’s not this one. It’s all of them. It’s the next one. It’s the one I know is coming after that’ (‘Coquilles’ 00:34:13-17). Yet Jack reminds Will of the overwhelming responsibility that comes with his ability, coercing Will into continuing the re-enactments, just as Hannibal reminds Will that he is subjecting his mind to ‘repeated abuse’ (‘Trou Normand’ 00:06:05-06).

**Psychopathic Empathy**

The first several episodes of *Hannibal* focus so heavily on Will’s psychological predicament that Hannibal’s apprehensions on his patient’s behalf, which emerge more forcefully as the initial season progresses, almost become vocalized expressions of the viewers’ anxiety. But the rather surreptitious emergence of this empathic collusion, as Lodgson terms it, is troubling because of what we as viewers know of Hannibal (50-51). As I have intimated previously, this is perhaps the most uncanny experience of all: witnessing Hannibal’s ostensible concern for Will’s welfare. Early critics of the series seemed perplexed when considering Hannibal’s deeper emotional intentions, but many cited examples of what appear to be genuine interactions with a variety of characters—in particular, Abigail Hobbs (the daughter of a serial killer caught by Will and Hannibal) and of course Will himself.4 Hannibal’s well-established perceptive skill—a finely tuned cognitive empathy that is necessary to his success as a psychiatrist—is showcased from the outset, as it also is in the novels and films, but his potential need for reciprocity is one of the defining aspects of this particular version of the character, portrayed by Mads Mikkelsen. This need becomes strikingly evident in episodes seven and eight of the first season.

In many ways, the Hannibal of ‘Sorbet’ (episode seven) is a grotesquely grandiose version of popular ideas of the character, as the audience is presented with the most complete version yet of his process of victim choice coupled with the careful preparation of meals for his elaborate dinner parties. Midway through the episode, a black-and-white flashback shows Hannibal’s encounter with a rude medical professional; Hannibal seems nonplussed by the man’s lack of courtesy, but he does request his business card. A sharp return to colour and the narrative present reveal Hannibal selecting the man’s card from a Rolodex and pairing it with a handwritten recipe from his recipe box. After a brief scene of confrontation between Hannibal and his victim on a dark road, which cuts away before the murder, the frame shifts to shots of Will and the forensics team, studying the body and discussing the crime, intercut with Hannibal back in his kitchen, preparing the man’s kidneys and heart (00:20:44-:23:35). This whole process is intensified and made ‘uniquely, hilariously, deliciously dark’, as critic Sian Cain expresses it, later in the episode by a more extensive montage of similar selection and preparation processes, scored with energetic opera music and interspersed with Hannibal searching for storage space in an increasingly full refrigerator (00:26:56-:27:54). Considering that most of the novels and films provide us with a version of Hannibal either in captivity or in hiding as a wanted criminal, we could view the episode as a kind of twisted wish fulfilment on the part of the audience—the Hannibal we have always imagined but never seen at any great length. Of course, there are subtle differences. This Hannibal is not bitingly aggressive and occasionally unnervingly charming; he is guardedly friendly and charismatic. He speaks not with the ‘vaguely Southern’ or even mild British accent of previous portrayals, but with a heavier continental European accent that links the character more convincingly with his Eastern European roots, which are revealed in the later novels (Fallon). Even for an audience whose knowledge of the character is limited to pop culture references, I would argue that what is produced is a powerfully familiar and yet unfamiliar series of images.

But if this palate-cleanser of an episode shifts the series’ focus to the cannibal psychiatrist and presents us with an uncanny version of what we always expected, culminating in Hannibal standing before his elaborately laid table and applauding dinner guests as he lifts a glass and says with a charming smile, ‘Nothing here is vegetarian’, it also provides us with a surprising glimpse of this seemingly self-possessed character’s vulnerability and isolation, what critic Kevin Fallon describes as Hannibal’s ‘understated humanity’ (00:40:30-:41:06). Perhaps fittingly, this emerges through a series of therapy sessions. After rebuffing a needy patient’s clumsy attempts at friendship, Hannibal visits his own psychiatrist, Bedelia DuMaurier, where the positions are starkly reversed. She intimates that he must be lonely; he responds with, ‘I have friends. And the opportunities for friends. You and I are friendly’ (00:17:24-32). Dr DuMaurier then calmly reminds him—just as he did his own patient—that the dynamics of the doctor-patient relationship are decidedly not that of friendship. While Hannibal looks mildly pained by this, the true significance becomes apparent only afterwards: during an appointment with Will, he asks, ‘Am I your psychiatrist or are we simply having conversations?’ (00:18:35-39). His enthusiasm for Will’s boundary-blurring response is matched by his disappointment when Will misses an appointment later in the episode. Hannibal opens the door to his waiting area with an expectant smile, but his face falls as he peers inside. The ‘Lacrimosa’ from Mozart’s *Requiem* plays in the background as the camera pans slowly around the empty room, and the music swells as Hannibal closes his door and moves to sit at his desk. His typical poise is infiltrated by an obvious restlessness: he reaches for the phone but puts it aside reluctantly after a brief pause, checks his appointment book, and then stands abruptly and strides out of the room, clearly determined to search for his missing patient-friend (00:32:10-:33:10). What is most important when considering both this scene and the gruesome culinary montage I described earlier is that in each case, Hannibal is alone. In their sessions, Dr DuMaurier accuses him of ‘wearing a very well-tailored person-suit’—one that we as viewers know is necessary for him to function in everyday society (00:16:57-59). If we posit that he sheds this version of the self when alone as there is no need to perform for anyone, then how do we reconcile what we have seen in these Hannibal-only scenes: the self-assured cannibal chef and the slighted psychiatrist who seems to have surprised both the audience and himself with his longing for Will’s company?

Mikkelsen has famously said that it was his intention for his incarnation of Hannibal Lecter to come ‘as close as you can come to the devil, to Satan’ in human form (Labrecque). Of course, Mikkelsen is not the only one to make this association: critics Brian Baker and Joseph Westfall, amongst others, have noted that there are clear links between the character and Satan throughout the novels and films (Baker ‘Gothic Masculinities’ 168-72, ‘Man of Wealth and Taste’ 122-34; Westfall xviii-xiv). This alignment of Hannibal and Satan could be viewed as the ultimate othering in that it identifies Hannibal with the epitome of all that is monstrous, but to do so would be to ignore the Romantic reading of Milton’s Satan ‘not as a figure of evil, but as a heroic figure […] for Romantic self-assertion’ and ‘freedom’ (Baker ‘Man of Wealth and Taste’ 125). Baker argues that the trajectory of Hannibal in the novels and films is similar to the Romantic development of the most famous literary version of Satan, as ‘[f]rom the position of the monstrous Other, Lecter increasingly becomes stabilized at the centre of the narratives as the Self, offered for identification (and perhaps sympathy)’ (ibid). Along with this conception of Hannibal as the ‘fallen angel’, Mikkelsen has admitted that he sees Hannibal as someone who wants to connect with others and that certain characters, especially Will and Abigail Hobbs, ‘[mean] a tremendous amount to him’ (Labrecque, Dibdin). He has also described Hannibal as ‘a lonely character’ who is ‘genuine with his emotions’ (Jeffrey). Again, this could be seen as problematic, but we need only think of the isolation and longing of Milton’s Satan on first seeing Adam and Eve: they are beings who ‘[his] thoughts pursue/ With wonder, and could love’, even as he plots against them (Milton iv.360-1). Essentially, Mikkelsen’s performance forces viewers to experience an unfamiliar version of Hannibal who has his roots in the familiarity of the simultaneously ‘heroic’ and ‘diabolic’ Satan of *Paradise Lost*, as well as in the familiarity of our human selves (Baker ‘Man of Wealth and Taste 125).

Lodgson, who also calls Hannibal ‘a prototype of the devil’, has picked up on some of the humanizing nuances of Mikkelsen’s performance, claiming that this version of Hannibal seems to be ‘capable of a gentleness, a sensitivity, a compassion, even a loyalty that make him admirable’ (50). Eric Goldman goes so far as to say that Hannibal is capable of ‘deep empathy’, and this is arguably the case, at least in a selective sense (‘Review’). Hannibal’s admission that he finds Will’s presence ‘reassuring’ because Will ‘can assume [his] point of view’ demonstrates that he is beginning to experience the connection between cognitive perspective taking and the affective comfort it can provide, and with this comes his desire to bond emotionally with and even protect the person who is the source of this comfort (‘Fromage’ 00:27:30-40). For instance, late in the first season, a frantic Will finds himself in Hannibal’s office with no memory of how he came to be there. The camera switches between the two characters as they speak, panning in disorienting circles after each shift as Hannibal and Will engage in a heated discussion about Will’s welfare. The fact that the revolutions of the camera stop as Hannibal accuses Will of ignoring the damaging effects of the investigations emphasizes the potentially stabilizing outcome if Will were to heed the warnings, as well as the dramatic irony of who is doing the warning. When Will protests that he must keep working, Hannibal’s response quiets him: ‘I’m your friend, Will. I don’t care about the lives you save. I care about your life’ (‘Trou Normand’ 00:05:31-:06:34). I would contend that in this moment, and in many others throughout the series, there is potential evidence of a full empathic response on Hannibal’s part. Having recognized Will’s emotional turmoil and immersed himself in Will’s troubled point-of-view, Hannibal replicates the emotion and makes the response decision to speak and allow for emotional engagement. More importantly, it is from this possibility that the uncanny aspects of Mikkelsen’s characterization of Hannibal come to the fore.

There are, of course, two glaring issues here: first, Hannibal’s seemingly protective ‘heroic’ impulse works alongside a secret ‘diabolic’ willingness to leave his friend in a precarious medical situation. Will is suffering from encephalitis—something that Hannibal diagnoses and then conceals from Will for quite some time. Thus while Hannibal does have a point in claiming that the investigations are affecting Will’s mental health, he is also putting Will’s life in danger and knowingly intensifying the effects of the investigations: his concern about the progress and damage caused by the disease is tempered by the instinct that often drives him to the exclusion of all else—curiosity. He trusts that he will reveal the diagnosis to Will when he must, but until then, he is compelled to mould Will into someone who is ‘worthy of his friendship’ through a manipulation of his empathy (‘Fromage’ 00:28:00-01). It is no accident that one of the simple mental exercises that Hannibal suggests as Will feels himself ‘fading’ and the encephalitis progresses, is to draw a clock face and, in doing so, to remind himself where, when, and who he is (‘Buffet Froid’ 00:05:36-:37, 00:06:00-:07). Will draws his ‘Dali-esque’ clock without any awareness that it abnormal as he states, ‘My name is Will Graham’, and we as viewers are reminded that the ‘loss of time’, ‘hallucinations’, and ‘altered consciousness’ that are all ‘tell-tale signs’ of Will’s physical illness are more than capable of causing an intensification of his empathy disorder and a further blurring of his fragile boundary between self and other (‘Buffet Froid’ script 3; 00:06:19-:21, 00:05:39-:42, 00:15:15-:27). It is exactly why Hannibal is so willing to ‘set [Will’s] mind on fire’ by not offering treatment (00:32:58-:59).4 Over the course of the series, Hannibal’s selective management of risks to Will’s health and sanity escalates to more overt attempts on Will’s life and, as the series and Hannibal’s manipulation progresses, Will’s attempts on Hannibal’s life as well. But the most striking of Hannibal’s contradictory actions are jarring not simply because Will could die and Hannibal knows that, but because Hannibal’s concern for Will is paradoxically evident throughout.

Consider the episode ‘Fromage’, which follows the character-defining ‘Sorbet’: Hannibal suggests that Will investigate Tobias Budge, a dangerous murderer who has told Hannibal he will kill any law enforcement officers who attempt to catch him. The stage directions within the script describe Hannibal as ‘innocently sending Will into the lion’s den’ just before Will and then Hannibal each have their own violent confrontations with Budge, ending with Hannibal killing him (‘Fromage’ script 31). In the aftermath, we get Hannibal’s point of view as Jack Crawford walks into the room; Jack’s suspicious stare pinpoints the doctor. The camera shifts back to Hannibal’s pained and anxious face before returning to the previous shot, with Jack still staring at Hannibal and blurring in the foreground as Will steps inside the room and comes into focus (00:37:37-:38:00). The slow movements are accompanied by the aria from Bach’s *Goldberg Variations,* a piece strongly associated with Hannibal Lecter: indeed, Carlo Cenciarelli describes it as his ‘signature tune’—an intricate work that mirrors Hannibal’s own ‘intellectual complexity’ (108). It is only used four times throughout 39 episodes of the series, including during our first glimpse of Hannibal in episode one. In this particular case, the music is first presented diegetically as the camera focuses on Hannibal’s fingers on the harpsichord keys at the end of the previous scene; Hannibal’s solo performance then becomes the nondiegetic accompaniment for the FBI’s investigation of the death scene and Jack and Will’s entry (00:37:28-57). The ‘intellectual complexity’ of Bach, coming from Hannibal himself, is significant for its use in scoring what is a highly emotional moment—a poignant combination of cognition and affect.

Perhaps even more telling though is the script itself. The stage directions, which Mikkelsen executes brilliantly through eyes brimming with tears, state that ‘Hannibal is visibly relieved to see Will alive and well’ (‘Fromage’ script 42). The most significant word here is the simple ‘is’. I would argue that the third-person present form of the usually passive ‘to be’ verb is vitally active: the implication is that rather than performing, Hannibal actually *feels* relief, and perhaps even a potential for genuine remorse if Will had been seriously harmed, and that the modifying adverb then stresses that this feeling is clearly shown. The relief stems from the comfort of Will’s presence: as Hannibal tells Will openly, ‘I appreciate the company’ (00:39:19-21). Moments such as these highlight the fact that the script and Mikkelsen’s performance imply a level of honesty in at least some of Hannibal’s responses. But if the first glaring issue I noted—Hannibal’s alternately cavalier and careful handling of Will’s welfare—can be explained somewhat by his twisted value system and inherent narcissism, there is still the second concern: how can any of this be possible when Hannibal Lecter is a psychopath, and psychopaths are fundamentally lacking in the ability to form deep connections with others?

**Psychopathy and Fiction(s)**

Psychological, criminological, and even popular interest in psychopathy has been high in recent decades, but clinicians were identifying some of the key aspects of psychopathy as early as the nineteenth century (Prins 19). Hervey Cleckley’s *The Mask of Sanity* (1941) is widely viewed as the seminal text for current conceptions of the disorder; Robert Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R) was developed as a result of Hare’s readings of Cleckley as well as his own extensive research, and has become the most frequently used ‘formalized tool for the assessment of psychopathy in adults.’ (Hare 28, Blair et al 7). Hare identifies a cluster of symptoms of the disorder, including egocentricity, deceitfulness, superficial charm, and a deficient sense of remorse (34). But as the use of a checklist itself implies, psychopathy is measured on a spectrum: there are threshold scores, but there are variations in scores overall, as well as variations in relation to clusters of measured traits. Numerous studies have probed the boundaries while admitting to the current limits of knowledge regarding psychopathy, such as its specific causes, the relationship between individual symptoms, and potential treatments, even calling it a psychological ‘Gordian knot’ (Guay et al 713). Yet Hare identifies ‘a frightful and perplexing theme that runs through the case histories’: namely the psychopath’s ‘deeply disturbing inability to care about the pain and suffering experienced by others’ (6). What seems to persist is not a complete lack of recognition or cognitive empathy, but a distinctly emotional deficit: an impaired capability to experience affective empathy. When, as in the case of Hannibal, cognitive empathy is quite advanced, the result is arguably what Alexandra Carroll describes as ‘a monstrous empath […] who can imitate the humanity surrounding him for manipulative and destructive purposes’ (50). The reason that this is so disturbing is that, as Hannibal himself tells one of his patients, ‘Psychopaths are not crazy. They’re fully aware of what they do and the consequences of those actions’ (‘Fromage’ 00:06:06-11). It is not simply that they cause harm but that they are cognizant of the fact and perhaps even stimulated by it.

Of course, Hannibal cannot be categorized as a psychopath in the strictest terms because he does not exist, but to dismiss the significance of Hannibal as a potentially psychopathic *fictional* creation would be to ignore the fact that literature is often analysed in psychological terms—both in the hands of psychoanalytic literary critics and even at times by psychologists themselves. After all, Freud draws heavily on E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ in his explanation of the uncanny, and Cleckley dedicates an entire chapter of *The Mask of Sanity* to ‘Fictional Characters of Psychiatric Interest’, briefly discussing the possibly psychopathic ‘personality reactions’ of William Shakespeare’s Iago, Emily Brontë’s Heathcliff, and Margaret Mitchell’s Scarlett O’Hara, amongst others (344). What is of value here is what the consistent conception of Hannibal as psychopathic within fiction and film says about popular understanding of the condition. Hannibal is first identified as a psychopath by the narrator in the novel *Red Dragon* (7). Later in the same text, he is described by Will as a ‘sociopath’, a term that is often used almost interchangeably with ‘psychopath’ although there are subtle differences; shortly thereafter, Will says that Hannibal is not a typical psychopath/sociopath and instead opts to label him a ‘monster’ (64).6 Hannibal continues to defy categorization throughout novels, films, and especially the television series: indeed, Fuller has claimed that Mikkelsen’s Hannibal is ‘not a psychopath’ specifically because of his potential to feel ‘empathy’ and ‘regret’, and Mikkelsen has reiterated this in multiple interviews (Vine).7 But the association between Hannibal Lecter and psychopathy is decades older than the series itself. In his *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us,* Hare feels the need to address the issue of the fictional Dr Lecter’s potential psychopathy directly: after admitting that Hannibal has some of ‘the characteristics of the psychopath’, he then says simply that the character ‘seems more than a little bit crazy’ (74). Here we have one of the experts in psychopathy research positing that Hannibal is not a pure psychopath, and yet later within the same text, he discusses Clarice Starling’s disadvantaged state in interacting with Hannibal in *The Silence of the Lambs* by saying, ‘Agent Starling was a novice at dealing with psychopaths’, and all that this implies (148).

In spite (or perhaps in part because) of this kind of fluctuation, Hannibal is still popularly seen not just as a psychopath, but as a widely accepted standard by which non-specialists understand the concept of psychopathy. I have already noted a study that attempted to disprove certain myths about psychopathy that have their source in conceptions of Hannibal, but this is not the only case of psychological and criminological professionals engaging with the way in which fiction can stand in for fact. Indeed, there is some evidence that Hannibal-based representations of psychopathy are also propagated by professionals. When citing cases of what ‘most people can easily conjure up’ as an example of a psychopath in *The Psychopath: Emotion and the Brain*, James Blair, Derek Mitchell, and Karina Blair mention Hannibal Lecter before any other fictional potential psychopaths and, significantly, before real people who might score high on the PCL-R (1). Kevin Dutton’s *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* repeatedly uses Hannibal Lecter as a casual and recognizable example of a psychopath, either by direct mention of his name in lists that include Ted Bundy or Peter Sutcliffe, or through the humorous if somewhat trivializing hyphenate ‘Chianti-swilling’—for instance, when describing someone as being in the ‘Chianti-swilling danger zone’ in terms of the psychopathic spectrum (v, 10, 8, 31, 175, 229). Furthermore, the central image of the cover of some versions of Dutton’s book is a classical-style bust wearing the mask that *The Silence of the Lambs* film made famous.

Of course, such comparisons should be taken, at least in part, with the humour with which they are meant, but they are also an important attempt to connect with popular interest in the disorder. Adrian Furnham, Yasmin Daoud, and Viren Swami explain that ‘lay theories of mental illness’ are ‘predicated on the belief that lay individuals’ understanding of mental disorders’ can encourage greater empathy (464). However, the researchers’ ironically titled ‘How to Spot a Psychopath’ goes on to highlight the prevalence of misconceptions, demonstrating that non-specialists have limited understanding of the complexities of psychopathy especially when compared to other mental conditions. They suggest that ‘the skewed understanding of psychopathy’ is linked to ‘the manner in which the disorder is portrayed in popular culture’, going on to note that this can lead to stigmatization as opposed to sympathy (470). Furthermore, in their study of Jon Ronson’s *The Psychopath Test,* Beata Pastwa-Wojchiechowska and Márta Fülöp consider the ways in which the media and popular culture have contributed to problematic conceptions not just of psychopathy, but also to a gross overconfidence in the general public regarding the possibility of using tools such as versions of the PCL-R to ‘diagnose’ the disorder. The *Hannibal* series plays with the prevalence of this approach, as one of Hannibal’s patients attempts to diagnose a friend by Googling ‘psychopath’ and going through the checklist (‘Fromage’ 00:05:44-56). Interestingly, in the case of the series, the implication is that the patient’s instincts and use of the checklist are correct.

While research into the misunderstandings surrounding psychopathy still constitutes a growing field, it seems that public interest, media representations, and academic and clinical responses have all contributed in some way to a potentially detrimental oversimplification of psychopathy for non-specialists. Non-specialists’ misconceptions can include a tendency to equate serial killers with a particular ‘psychopathic personality’ type, a ‘monological belief system’ in relation to the disorder, and the extreme ‘stereotype of psychopath-as-monster’ (Pastwa-Wojchiechowska and Fülöp 12, Furnham et al 470, Luckhurst et al 83). These stigmatizing beliefs can often lead to those suffering from personality disorders being ‘denied the prospect of treatment and recovery, especially within the justice system’ and even labelled as ‘evil’ (Sheehan et al 11). Joseph Grixti explains that these conceptions can even be troublingly self-protective, as turning the psychopathic serial killer into a monster creates a psychological version of the other, thus helping ‘to preserve the preferred contours of our own identity’ (90). My intention is not to correct the misconceptions (indeed, I am well aware that as a non-specialist myself, I am not qualified); however, I want to highlight their disconcerting presence while considering their immediate effects on the experience of the series. If we think back to Hutcheon’s conception of a ‘knowing’ audience in relation to adaptation, I would suggest that knowledge of the psychological context, however distorted it might be, is just as significant as knowledge of source texts here. This is what facilitates the uncanny destabilization of Mikkelsen’s complicated performance in which compassion and cruelty seem disturbingly intermixed.

Lodgson has pointed out that within the television series, ‘actions that appear to confirm what the viewers have learned (or think that they have learned) about Hannibal from Harris’s novels, and from the films based on these novels, may simultaneously suggest something different about the man’ (51). In this particular case, Lodgson cites scenes from the closing moments of the first episode, during which Hannibal demonstrates a level of compassion that makes Mikkelsen’s version of the doctor ‘seem to bear little resemblance to the monster on which the character is based’ (53). Lodgson looks to the final produced version of the episode, but it is worth noting that the script also hints at a more complex, and thus more uncanny, version of Hannibal. Will has just shot and killed serial murderer Garrett Jacob Hobbs as Hannibal enters the room; Hobbs’s daughter Abigail is in danger of becoming his last victim, as her father’s final act was to cut her throat. The stage directions note that Hannibal’s usually ‘inscrutable expression suddenly register[s] genuine pity and regret’ when he sees Abigail gasping and bleeding (‘Apéritif’ 00:38:35-37, ‘Aperitif’ script 46). In a sense, the script confirms what might otherwise be viewed as a false sense of compassion being presented by a skilfully deceptive psychopath as he helps to save Abigail’s life; follows her into the ambulance, holding her hand; and falls asleep in her hospital room doing the same (00:38:45-:39:23, 00:40:31-40). This ‘genuine pity’ is not unlike the visible relief at seeing Will alive later in the season: in fact, it is made even more definitive through the adjective ‘genuine’. And again, what we are arguably seeing here is a level of emotional concern and engagement that suggests affective empathy—an unsettling manifestation given popular conceptions of Hannibal and psychopathy. It continues as Hannibal’s relationship with Abigail becomes distinctly fatherly. At various points throughout the first season, Hannibal is described through the stage directions as ‘a paternal shield’ for Abigail that protects her from swarming reporters; his voice in addressing her is ‘gentle, fatherly’; he watches her ‘with a sense of paternal pride’ (‘Potage’ script 38, 40; ‘Œuf’ script 31). Even when a season-three flashback shows Hannibal and Abigail discussing the need for him to bleed and mutilate her in order to simulate her death, he ‘takes her hands gently, fatherly’ (‘Clothed with the Sun’ script 6). These subtle cues, buried within the script, give an uncanny insight to what is enacted—a deeply troubled relationship in which Hannibal can attempt to nurture and shape the young woman who can ‘[mean] a tremendous amount to him’, as Mikkelsen put it, but whom he eventually kills; like her father, he cuts her throat.

**Family Dynamics**

Hannibal’s connection with Abigail is significant not just for what it means to him, but for the way that it binds Will to them both. Various shots throughout the first season frame Hannibal, Will, and Abigail as a kind of reconstructed family, from Will and Hannibal keeping vigil at the comatose Abigail’s bedside, to their slightly heated but implicitly paternal discussion of her intention to publish her story in episode nine—an episode which culminates with Hannibal telling Will, ‘We are her fathers now’ (‘Apéritif’ 00:40:59-:41:04; ‘Trou Normand’ 00:18:18-:19:46, 00:34:29-31). This shared near-fatherhood is indicative of the more broadly liminal space in which Hannibal and Will function, both as individuals and as a couple. We have already seen that Will is prone to a blurring of self and other through his empathic approach to forensics, but as his doctor-patient, co-parenting relationship with Hannibal twists and progresses, there is ‘a breach of individual separateness’ so penetrative and unbreakable that Will eventually describes Hannibal and himself as a single ‘conjoined’ being that could not ‘survive separation’ (‘Kaseiki’ 00:14:25-27, ‘Dolce’ 00:22:05-17). Even after Hannibal is incarcerated and he and Will experience the lengthy separation once feared, their eventual reunion is indicative of their continued intense connection. Hannibal tells Will, ‘You just came here to look at me. Came to get the old scent again. Why don’t you just smell yourself?’, and Will’s glazed stare and embarrassed drop of his head indicate a level of uncomfortable truth in the decidedly passionate, lover-like language (‘Clothed with the Sun’ 00:02:56-:03:11). Late in the series, the overt cues emerge fully in the dialogue of others. Journalist Freddie Lounds refers to the pair as ‘murder husbands’, and Bedelia DuMaurier, who is at points Hannibal’s lover as well as his therapist, tells Will, ‘We have both been his bride’; she also refers to Hannibal as Will’s ‘old flame’ and suggests that Will’s wife would be unsettled by Will and Hannibal’s unconventionally expressed intimacy (‘Clothed with the Sun’ 00:25:23-24; ‘Clothed in Sun’ 00:09:41-43, 00:30:24-45). The implication is that when Will asks Dr DuMaurier in the penultimate episode, ‘Is Hannibal in love with me?’, he already knows the answer (‘Number of the Beast’ 00:03:12-18).

To an audience that has accepted Hannibal as a psychopath, the primary focus of the Hannibal-Will dichotomy is the damaging transformation of Will himself. Hannibal begins to push Will towards that transformation by encouraging him to embrace ‘the urges [he has] kept down for so long’, and Will is left fighting the murderous impulses that are ethically wrong to him, even as they begin to seem increasingly attractive (‘Savoureux’ 00:33:13-16). While Hannibal’s perception of many other human beings is admittedly morally repellent, what is interesting is his approach to mitigating the offensiveness of this viewpoint with which both Will and, to a lesser extent, Abigail struggle. Hannibal comforts Abigail shortly after the death of her father by telling her, ‘One cannot be delusional if the belief in question is accepted as ordinary by others in that person’s culture or subculture’ (‘Potage’ 00:23:44-51). Significantly, he follows this statement with the short addition, ‘Or family.’ Remember that Freud’s conception of the uncanny is rooted in a blurring of the German words *heimlich* and *unheimlich—*a blurring which occurs through conceptions of family and the home, what is familiar within and made secret to those without. It is thus fitting that the aforementioned claim of shared fatherhood emerges only when Hannibal, Will, and Abigail have something to hide: namely, the fact that Abigail has killed someone, arguably in self-defence, and that Hannibal has helped her dispose of the body. Will’s moral outrage is subsumed by his concern for Abigail and Hannibal, so much so that he is forced not only into a silent acceptance of the need for the lie, but also into a necessary distortion of his own conception of morality. ‘We can tell no one’, Hannibal instructs him; he then moves to Will, and the camera focuses closely on his hand gripping Will’s shoulder as he says, ‘What we are doing here is the right thing’ (‘Trou Normand’ 00:35:17-:18, 00:35:28-:35). Thus as the new family forms, their *heimlich* is made *unheimlich* to others; their secret-keeping becomes the ethical choice because it is essential for the protection of the family itself. The physical and emotional connection of the family, visibly represented by Hannibal’s grip on Will’s shoulder, persists symbolically into the latter half of the third season, when Abigail is dead and Hannibal imprisoned: Hannibal insists that he still considers Will family, in spite of the fact that Will has married and at least temporarily established a more traditional family of his own (‘Clothed with the Sun’ 00:03:56-58). It is a connection that Will denies even as he must silently acknowledge its veracity. As Hannibal told Will and Abigail at the end of season two, ‘A place was made for all of us. Together’ (‘Mizumono’ 00:35:03-06). While the place had a necessary but (to the audience) unknown physical specificity *because* of Hannibal’s value system, it functions simultaneously as a psychological space in which Hannibal hoped Will and Abigail could accept that value system. This uncanny family connection is what Abigail once helped to encourage and validate, and it is exactly what Hannibal attempts to preserve through his attempted destruction of Will’s new family.

The near-death of Will’s wife and stepson in season three, and the implication that Will’s marriage crumbles even though they survive, is juxtaposed with the physical near-obliteration of the Hannibal-Will-Abigail family at the end of the previous season. The three are reunited only briefly before Hannibal nearly eviscerates Will and kills Abigail. It is a brutal punishment for what he sees as Will’s betrayal. Throughout the latter half of the second season, Hannibal revealed himself to Will, who he felt had accepted him while welcoming his own murderous impulses; however, Will had been conspiring with Jack as well, attempting to orchestrate Hannibal’s capture. The emotional confrontation between the two men involves Hannibal gently placing one hand on Will’s face, followed by a quick shot of his other hand holding a knife that he plunges into Will’s abdomen, then pulling his friend against him in a perverse embrace that foreshadows their blood-soaked plunge over the side of a cliff, wrapped in each others’ arms, at the end of the series (‘Mizumono’ 00:34:22-:35:22, ‘The Wrath of the Lamb’ 00:40:36-:41:30). The script describes Hannibal as ‘heartbroken’, and the heartbreak begins to seep into Hannibal’s expression and voice more definitively as he releases Will and tells him, ‘I let you know me, see me. I gave you a rare gift. But you didn’t want it’ (‘Mizumono’ script 33; 00:35:30-45). Hannibal is incensed but also near tears as he reproaches Will for what he sees as their failed empathic connection. Yet it is a failure that Will himself denies. Broken and bleeding, and in spite of their moral disagreements, Will claims a level of emotional reciprocity, influence, and love, however incomplete:

HANNIBAL. Do you believe you could change me, the way I’ve changed you?

WILL: I already did.

Hannibal studies Will a moment, realizing he’s right. (‘Mizumono’ script 34)

The silent admission on-screen, and the subtle cue of realization embedded in the script, present us yet again with an uncanny version of the psychiatrist and serial killer—namely, one who is beginning to accept his powerfully emerging desire for both an intellectual and emotional affinity with other human beings.

**Conclusion**

As Lodgson has argued, Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal* has ‘pushed the viewer to the ﬁnal realization that this Hannibal is not, and may never have been, entirely what or who the viewer thought he was’ (64). What the series depicts, and the details of the script reinforce, is the persistence of psychological anomalies in Mikkelsen and Fuller’s adaptation of the ‘psychopathic’ doctor. The question here is not whether or not Mikkelsen’s Hannibal is an accurate representation of a psychopath; this is an image that psychiatric professionals still struggle with, and it is further complicated by non-specialist misconceptions, as well as Mikkelsen’s persistent claim that his version is not meant to be psychopathic. Instead, what is key is the subversive effect of Hannibal’s uncanny presence, one which, as Carroll expresses it, challenges the ‘assumption of rigid boundaries between monster and human’ (41).

But the challenge was a particularly difficult one. In an interview after the series had concluded, Mikkelsen addressed the problem of communicating Hannibal’s sincere emotions; while discussing Hannibal’s interaction with another character—a character he claimed that Hannibal ‘respected’ and felt bound to, even as he manipulated her—he explained that there was always the chance that ‘as an audience member you can turn and say, “Oh, that’s just a role he wants to play”’ (Goldman ‘Hannibal’). The repercussions of this admission of the inherent assumption of superficiality and subterfuge in the character are twofold. In terms of the series’ status as an adaptation, Hutcheon has noted that in the current critical climate, one of the only times that ‘”fidelity” is invoked at all in adaptation studies’ is ‘in the context of fan-culture loyalty’ (xxvi). *Hannibal* the series has developed an intense ‘fan-culture loyalty’ through its ‘Fannibals’, but the primary concern here is the extent to which widely accepted beliefs about characters can form their own kind of subconscious standard of ‘fan-culture loyalty’. Mikkelsen’s creative choices were always going to force him to battle against the widely held conception of Hannibal as ‘the world’s most famous psychopath’ (Herbert). While this raises questions of the extent of the effect of subconscious fan culture in relation to other adapted works, it also resonates in terms of the intersection of fiction and scientific discourse. It is not just that Fuller and Mikkelsen must assert that their Hannibal is not psychopathic *because* of what he feels; it is *why* they feel the need to engage with this idea of the mutual exclusivity of psychopathy and genuine feeling.

Thus the second and perhaps more pressing concern is the popular conception of psychopathy itself. Specialists are increasingly aware of the stigma, as I have highlighted previously. Philip L. Simpson’s *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer through Contemporary American Film and Fiction*, which equates the psychopath with the serial killer in its title, discusses the development of an overarching cultural narrative through which serial killers (and by extension violent psychopaths) are transformed into ‘mytho-apocalytic guises of the murdering Other’ (15). Popular texts on psychopathy, such as the aforementioned *The Psychopath Test* by Jon Ronson, while maligned by some psychological professionals, manage to raise crucial points regarding this monstrous othering. Late in the book, in an interview with psychopath expert Robert Hare, Ronson notes that Hare seems to discuss ‘psychopaths almost as if they were a different species’ (282). Hare counters by explaining the dimensional aspects of the disorder, but the impression gleaned from Ronson’s rendering of the conversation is that Hare’s sympathy for the victims of psychopaths leaves little room for sympathy for psychopaths themselves (ibid).8 Hare’s understandable concern for the victim aligns to an extent with that of FBI special agent John Douglas, who argues that for all the benefits of the psychological profiling techniques he has developed, by the time he has the chance to apply them ‘to catch the criminals, […] the severe damage has already been done’ (389). But M.E. Thomas insists that our conception of psychopaths ‘is not as simple as [we] have been led to believe’ (297). Her *Confessions of a Sociopath* is the autobiographical account of a self- and clinically identified sociopath/psychopath that aims to address misconceptions of the disorder. Thomas claims that she functions well within everyday society and that she has ‘wanted to feel love, to feel connection’ (201). She also warns that sociopathy/psychopathy

is not a synonym for evil. Hearing people say that we are irredeemable should give you great pause. I hope that you hesitate upon hearing the suggestion that sociopaths [psychopaths] should have microchips implanted in their brains, or be institutionalized indefinitely, or be shipped off to an island somewhere, and remember that the history of man is marked by similar acts of hubris and cruelty. (297)

The controversial emotional debate raised by these texts has both the safety and the sanctity of humanity at its core. Resolution is out of the scope not only of this article but arguably of this discipline in isolation. However, what Fuller’s *Hannibal* and Mikkelsen’s Hannibal have done so successfully is interrogate the boundary between psychopath and serial killer, pop culture and scientific discourse, ‘heroic’ and ‘diabolic’, human and other, without offering a simple reconciliation of any of these dichotomies. By adapting and deconstructing these boundaries, just as Will and Hannibal deconstruct the boundaries between the self and other throughout, this particular revision of the Hannibal narrative, which allows for a more affectively empathic version of the cannibal psychiatrist, suggests the need for a revision of our own beliefs by highlighting the possibility of the ironic failure of our own empathy.

**Notes**

1Interestingly, Lodgson himself describes Graham’s profiling process as ‘uncanny’ on two occasions but does not explore the implications of the word choice any further. See Lodgson, p. 52.

2 Loock cites the work of Jason Mittell in discussing this ‘forensic’ engagement. See ‘Lost in a Great Story: Evaluation in Narrative Television (and Television Studies), in *Reading* Lost: *Perspectives on a Hit Television Show,* ed. by Roberta Pearson, London: Tauris, 2009, pp. 119-38.

3 Dolan and Fullam reference W.L. Marshall, S.M. Hudson, R. Jones, and Y.M. Fernandez’s ‘Empathy in sex offenders’, *Clinical Psychology Review* 15 (1995): 99-113, as crucial to the shaping of their ideas.

4 See, for example, Lisa Elin’s reviews of ‘Amuse Bouche’, ‘Coquilles’, and ‘Sorbet’, *We Got This Covered*, accessed at http://wegotthiscovered.com/; Laura Akers’s reviews of ‘Coquilles’, ‘Sorbet’, and ‘Fromage’, *Den of Geek*, accessed at http://denofgeek.com/; and Eric Goldman’s reviews of, ‘Entreé’, ‘Sorbet’, and ‘Fromage’, *IGN UK*,accessed at <http://uk.ign.com/>.

5 This phrase is reminiscent of a line from John Douglas and Mark Olshaker’s *Mindhunter.* Douglas, the FBI special agent largely responsible for the development of criminal profiling techniques, as well as the model for Harris’s Jack Crawford and (to an extent) Will Graham, suffered from a life-threatening brain infection during his career. Doctors at the time told his colleagues, ‘his brain has been fried to a crisp.’ See *Mindhunter,* London: Arrow Books, 1995, p. 7.

6 For a discussion of the differences between the terms *psychopath* and *sociopath*, see Hare pp. 23-24.

7 For example, see previously cited interviews by Dibdin, Jeffrey, Goldman, and Labrecque.

8 Hare’s *Without Conscience* is addressed to potential victims of psychopaths. The subtitle is openly polarizing—*The Disturbing World of* Psychopaths *Among* Us (emphasis mine)— and the final chapter is ‘A Survival Guide’ for those who interact with psychopaths. However, Hare does address the dangers of labelling and stigma as well. See pp. 207-18 and 180-91 respectively.

**References**

Aaltola, Elisa. ‘Affective Empathy as Core Moral Agency: Psychopathy, Autism, and Reason

Revisited’. *Philosophical Explorations* 17.1 (2014): 76-92.

Baker, Brian. ‘A Man of Wealth and Taste: The Strange Career of Hannibal Lecter’. *The*

*Lure of the Dark Side: Satan and Western Demonology in Popular Culture.* Ed. by

Christopher Partridge and Eric Christianson. London: Routledge, 2014, pp.

---. ‘Gothic Masculinities’. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic.* Edited by Catherine

Spooner and Emma McEvoy. Routledge: London, 2007, pp. 164-73.

Barnaby, Andrew. ‘”After the Event”: Freud’s Uncanny and the Anxiety of Origins’. *The*

*Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 84.4 (2015): 975-1006.

Blair, James; Derek Mitchell; and Karina Blair. *The Psychopath: Emotion and the Brain.*

Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Cain, Sian. ‘Hannibal: farewell to the best bloody show on TV’. *The Guardian.* 27 August

2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/aug/27/hannibal-finale-bryan-fuller-best-show-on-tv>.

Carroll, Alexandra. ‘We’re *Just Alike*’: Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, and the Monstrous-

Human’. *Studies in Popular Culture* 38.1 (2015): 41-63.

Cenciarelli, Carlo. ‘Dr Lecter’s Taste for Goldberg: or, the Horror of Bach in the *Hannibal*

Franchise’. *Journal of the Royal Music Association,* 137.1 (2012): 107-34.

Cleckley, Hervey. *The Mask of Sanity: An Attempt to Clarify Some Issues about the So-*

*Called Psychopathic Personality.* 2nd edn. Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing,

2015.

DeLisi, M.; M.G. Vaughn, K.M. Beaver, and J.P. Wright. ‘The Hannibal Lecter Myth:

Psychopathology and Verbal Assessment in the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study’. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioural Assessment* 32.2 (2010): 169-77.

Dibdin, Emma. ‘Mads Mikkelsen: “Hannibal Lecter is not a psychopath in the classic sense’.

*Digital Spy,* 15 September 2014,

<http://www.digitalspy.com/tv/hannibal/interviews/a592671/mads-mikkelsen-hannibal->lecter-is-not-a-psychopath-in-the-classic-sense/#~oQ22UHlEVy9qUx.

Dolan, Mairead, and Rachael Fullam. ‘Empathy, antisocial behaviour, and personality

pathology’. *Empathy and Mental Illness*. Edited by Tom F. D. Farrow and Peter W. R. Woodruff. Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 33-48.

Douglas, John, and Mark Olshaker. *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI Elite Serial Crime Unit.*

London: Arrow Books, 1995.

Dutton, Kevin. *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: Lessons in Life from Saints, Spies and Serial*

*Killers.* London: Arrow Books, 2012.

Ellis, John. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Fallon, Kevin. ‘No Chianti Needed: Mads Mikkelsen on Playing the Tasty New Hannibal

Lecter’. *The Daily Beast*, 4 April 2013, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/mads->

mikkelsen-on-playing-the-tasty-new-hannibal-lecter.

Freud, Sigmund. ‘The Uncanny’. 1919. Translated by Alix Strachey. MIT, Cambridge, MA,

<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/ww/freud1.pdf>.

Furnham, Adrian; Yasmine Daoud; and Viren Swami. ‘How to Spot a Psychopath: Lay

Theories of Psychopathy’. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 44

(2009): 464-72.

Goldman, Eric. ‘*Hannibal*: Mads Mikkelsen looks back on season 3 and ponders whether the

show will continue’. *IGN UK,* 4 December 2015, <http://uk.ign.com/articles/2015/12/04/hannibal-mads-mikkelsen-looks-back-on-season-3-and-ponders-whether-the-show-will-continue>.

---. ‘Review of “Entreé”’. *IGN UK,* 2 May 2013,

<http://uk.ign.com/articles/2013/05/03/hannibal-entree-review>.

Gramlich, Charles. ‘Mythmaker’. *Dissecting Hannibal Lecter: Essays on the Novels of*

*Thomas Harris.* Edited by Benjamin Szumskyj. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and

Company, Inc., 2008, pp. 212-16.

Grazian, David. *Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society.* 2nd edn. New York: W.W.

Norton, 2017.

Grixti, Joseph. ‘Consuming Cannibals: Psychopathic Killers as Archetypes and Cultural

Icons’. *Journal of American Culture* 18.1 (1995): 87-96.

Guay, Jean-Pierre; John Ruscio; Raymond A. Knight; and Robert D. Hare. ‘A Taxometric

Analysis of the Latent Structure of Psychopathy: Evidence for Dimensionality’.

*Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 116.4 (2007): 701-16.

*Hannibal: The Complete Season One.* Created by Bryan Fuller, performances by Hugh

Dancy and Mads Mikkelsen. Gaumont, 2013.

---. ‘Apéritif’. Directed by David Slade, episode 1, disc 1.

---. ‘Buffet Froid’. Directed by John Dahl, episode 10, disc 3.

---. ‘Coquilles’. Directed by Guillermo Navarro, episode 5, disc 2.

---. ‘Entrée’. Directed by Michael Rymer, episode 6, disc 2.

---. ‘Fromage’. Directed by Tim Hunter, episode 8, disc 3.

---. ‘Potage’. Directed by David Slade, episode 3, disc 1.

---. ‘Savoureux’. Directed by David Slade, episode 13, disc 4.

---. ‘Sorbet.’ Directed by James Foley, episode 7, disc 2.

---. ‘Trou Normand’. Directed by Guillermo Navarro, episode 9, disc 3.

*Hannibal: The Complete Season Two.* Created by Bryan Fuller, performances by Hugh

Dancy and Mads Mikkelsen. Gaumont, 2014.

---. ‘Kaiseki’. Directed by Tim Hunter, episode 1, disc 1.

---. ‘Mizumono’. Directed by David Slade, episode 13, disc 4.

*Hannibal* Final Shooting Scripts. Living Dead Guy, 2013-15,

<http://livingdeadguy.com/shows/hannibal/#more-scripts>.

---. Alexander, Jesse, and Bryan Fuller. ‘Sorbet’. Season 1, episode 7.

---. Black, Andy; Chris Brancato; and Bryan Fuller. ‘Buffet Froid’. Season 1, episode 10.

---. Fuller, Bryan. ‘Apéritif’. Season 1, episode 1.

---. Fury, David; Chris Brancato; and Bryan Fuller. ‘Potage’. Season 1, episode 3.

---. Lightfoot, Steve, and Bryan Fuller. ‘Mizumono’. Season 2, episode 13.

---. Schuur, Jennifer. ‘Œuf’. Season 1, episode 4.

---. Schuur, Jennifer, and Bryan Fuller. ‘Fromage’. Season 1, episode 8.

---. Vlaming, Jeff; Helen Shang; Bryan Fuller; and Steve Lightfoot. ‘…And the Woman

Clothed with the Sun’. Season 3, episode 9.

---. Wu, Kai Yu, and Bryan Fuller. ‘Entrée’. Season 1, episode 6.

*Hannibal Season 3.* Created by Bryan Fuller, performances by Hugh Dancy and Mads

Mikkelsen. Gaumont, 2015, *Amazon Video*.

---. ‘…And the Woman Clothed in Sun’. Directed by Guillermo Navarro, episode 10.

---. ‘…And the Woman Clothed with the Sun’. Directed by John Dahl, episode 9.

---. ‘Dolce’. Directed by Vincenzo Natali, episode 6.

---. ‘The Number of the Beast is 666’. Directed by Guillermo Navarro, episode 12.

---. ‘The Wrath of the Lamb’. Directed by David Slade, episode 13.

Hare, Robert D. *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us.* New

York: The Guildford Press, 1993.

Harris, Thomas. *Red Dragon.* London: Arrow Books, 2009.

Herbert, Wray. ‘The Cluelessness of the Psychopath’. *Association for Psychological Science*,

8 September 2011, <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/were-only-human/the->cluelessness-of-the-psychopath.html.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation.* 2nd edn. London: Routledge, 2013.

Jeffrey, Morgan. ‘Mads Mikkelsen talks *Hannibal*: “I am attracted to Will”. *Digital Spy*, 29

August 2013, <http://www.digitalspy.com/tv/hannibal/interviews/a510270/mads-mikkelsen-talks-hannibal-i-am-attracted-to-will/>

Jones, Tim. ‘A Little Empathy for Hannibal is a Dangerous Thing’. *Hannibal Lecter and*

*Philosophy: The Heart of the Matter.* Edited by Joseph Westfall. Chicago: Open Court, 2016, pp. 147-57.

Labrecque, Jeff. ‘*Hannibal:* Mads Mikkelsen on Playing Hannibal Lecter’. *EW*, 4 April

2013, https://ew.com/article/2013/04/04/hannibal-mads-mikkelsen/.

Lodgson, Richard. ‘Merging with the Darkness: An Examination of the Aesthetics of

Collusion in NBC’s *Hannibal*’. *The Journal of American Culture* 40.1

(2017): 50-65.

Loock, Kathleen. ‘”The past is never really past”: Serial Storytelling from *Psycho* to *Bates*

*Motel*’. *Literatur in Wittenschaft and Unterricht—Theme Issue: Serial Narratives*

47.1-2 (2014): 81-95.

Luckhurst, Cherie; Elaine Hatfield; and Claire Gelvin-Smith. ‘Capacity for Empathy, and

Emotional Contagion in Those with Psychopathic Personalities’. *Interpersona* 11.1 (2017): 70-91.

McLean, Jesse. *The Art and Making of Hannibal: The Television Series.* London: Titan

Books, 2015.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. 1667. *Project Gutenberg*, February 1992,

http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26/pg26-images.html.

Pastwa-Wojchiechowska, Beata, and Márta Fülöp. ‘Is current knowledge of psychopathy

reflected in Jon Ronson’s book *The Psychopath Test: A Journey through the Madness*

*Industry*?—controversies around psychopathy’. *Current Issues in Personality*

*Psychology* 4.1 (2016): 11-17.

Prins, Herschel. *Psychopaths: An Introduction*. Hook, Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2013.

Ronson, Jon. *The Psychopath Test: A Journey through the Madness Industry.* London:

Picador, 2011.

Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny.* Manchester UP, 2003.

Sheehan, Lindsay; Katherine Nieweglowski; and Patrick Corrigan. ‘The Stigma of

Personality Disorders’. *Current Psychiatry Reports* 18.1 (2016): 1-11.

Simpson, Philip L. *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer through Contemporary*

*American Film and Fiction.* Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

Vine, Richard. ‘Hannibal: a bloody steak with the man who brought Lecter to the small

screen’. *The Guardian*, 4 May 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-> radio/2013/may/04/bryan-fuller-hannibal-lecter.

Thomas, M.E. *Confessions of a Sociopath: A Life Spent Hiding in Plain Sight.* London: Pan

Books, 2013.

Westfall, Joseph. ‘Hello, Dr. Lecter’. *Hannibal Lecter and Philosophy: The Heart of the*

*Matter.* Edited by Joseph Westfall. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2016,

pp. xi-xx.