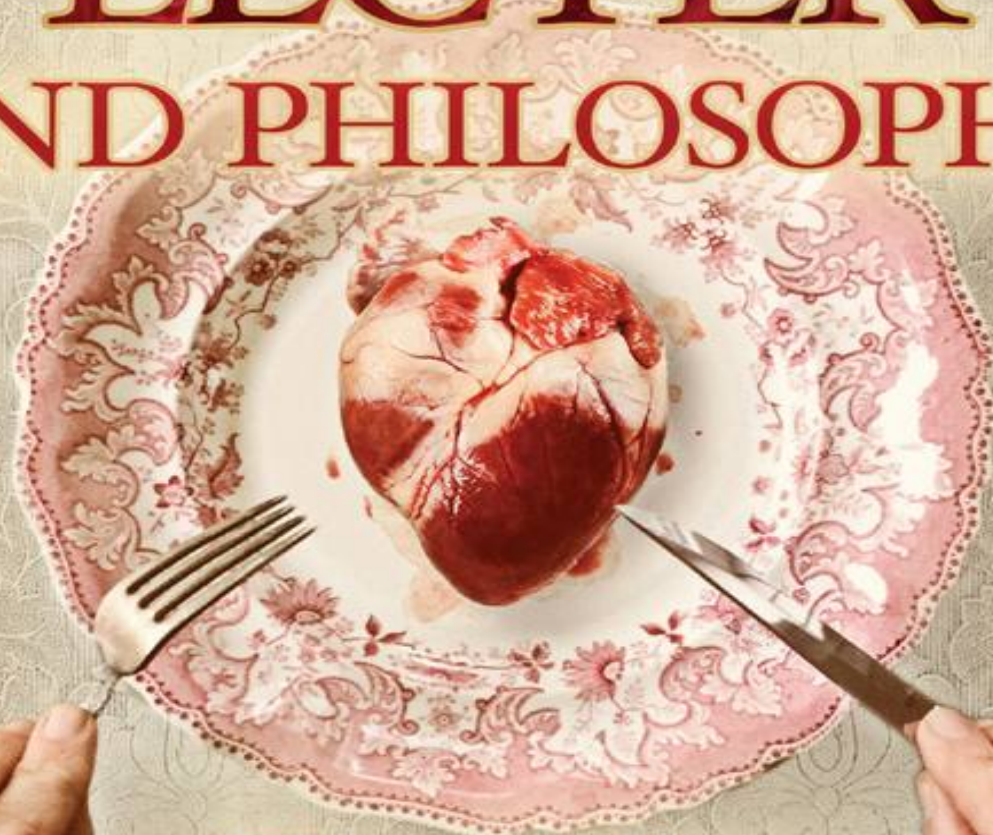


HANNIBAL LECTER AND PHILOSOPHY



*The Heart
of the Matter*

edited by

JOSEPH WESTFALL

Praise for *Hannibal Lecter and Philosophy*

“The eighteen essays in this smart and playful anthology address, among other subjects, the connections between psychiatry and empathy, aesthetics and haute cuisine, friendship, art, and the nature of desire. Get to know Hannibal Lecter; this book suggests, and you get to know what it means to live a life of the mind, as well as the flesh.”

—MIKITA BROTTMAN, Author of *Meat Is Murder! An Illustrated Guide to Cannibal Culture*

“Hannibal Lecter and Philosophy is a smorgasbord of dark delights. The menu offers a seared entree of our own empathetic responses as manipulated by facial close-ups, as well as an exploration of the morality of people-eating; main courses featured include a steamy analysis of sociopathic feelings of divinity and a chilled look at horror-pleasure. In servings that ponder the films, television series, and novels, this book will help anyone with a taste for intellectual blood sharpen her thoughts on the refined, sophisticated, and delicious Dr. Lecter.”

—SARA WALLER, Editor of *Serial Killers: Being and Killing*

“Hannibal Lecter refuses to be categorized and his multiple incarnations make any attempt nearly impossible, as well as dangerous (just remember the poor census taker). Thankfully, the contributors to this volume have not attempted to analyze Hannibal, as he cannot be reduced to a set of check marks, but instead have focused on what Hannibal reveals about various aspects and ideas ranging from aesthetics to friendship to the morality of cannibalism. More importantly, these essays explicitly and implicitly focus on why we are fascinated with Hannibal and what that fascination reveals about human nature. No matter which version of Hannibal the reader prefers, he or she will find all of the essays illuminating, perhaps frighteningly so.”

—MICHELLE GOMPF, Author of *Thomas Harris and William Blake: Allusions in the Hannibal Lecter Novels*

“On very rare occasions, an author will dream up a fictional character who steps from the book that first brought him to life and enters the realm of pop myth. Bram Stoker did it with Dracula, Arthur Conan Doyle with Sherlock Holmes, Edgar Rice Burroughs with Tarzan. And in a pair of now-classic horror-thrillers from the 1980s—RED DRAGON and THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS—Thomas Harris did it with Hannibal Lecter. Though Dr. Lecter informs Clarice Starling that he is a phenomenon that resists explanation, this rich and provocative collection proves otherwise. With penetrating insight and a sophisticated wit that the good doctor himself would surely appreciate, these essays shed consistently sharp light on the moral, psychological, and philosophical complexities of America’s most beloved cannibal killer.”

—HAROLD SCHECHTER, Author of *Man-Eater: The Life and Legend of an American Cannibal*

“Hannibal Lecter is suave, cultured, brilliant—and profoundly evil. Who is Hannibal, really—vampire, psychopath, artist, devil? Drawing upon philosophers from Plato to Foucault, and Augustine to Nietzsche, this book will engage any reader interested in this villain’s multiple incarnations on page and screen. By examining Hannibal in relation to numerous philosophical issues, including revenge, justice, evil, forgiveness, autonomy, empathy, and even humor, the authors in this collection provide subtle insights into one of our most fascinating fictional monsters.”

—CYNTHIA FREELAND, Author of *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* and co-editor of *Philosophy and Film*

“Like a savory multi-course meal prepared by chef cuisinier/serial killer Dr. Lecter himself, Hannibal Lecter and Philosophy stimulates the intellectual appetite, provides variety, cleanses the palate between courses, and concludes leaving the reader both satiated and wanting more. Within these pages will be found a sumptuous, complexly layered reading experience, covering in relation to the fiction, film, and television incarnations of Dr. Lecter philosophical topics as varied as the cosmopolitanism and classifications of cannibalism; natural law; moral virtues and professional ethics; the existence and nature of God; moral dualism and pluralism; corruption and incorruptibility; psychopathology, psychiatry, and psychology; neuroscience; the pitfalls of friendship, love, and empathy; the aesthetics of the culinary arts, the fine arts, and murder; behaviorism versus transcendental evil; the cruelty of wit and humor; and monstrosity and horror. All of this makes for a heady meal, to be sure; yet as is typical of the Popular Culture and Philosophy series, both the general and academic reader alike will find

something to please one's taste here. Come, let these writers show you to Dr. Lecter's table, where pity has no place but which can be far more engaging than theater. Prepare for a dark but illuminating feast."

—PHILIP L. SIMPSON, Author of *Making Murder: The Fiction of Thomas Harris*

"Poor Clarice—up against the greatest screen villain of all time! Poor Will—knowing the truth is not enough! Poor Hannibal—searching for his equal! . . . Or is it his next meal? This delectable six-course banquet cuts, peels, pulls, and savors every morsel at the table Hannibal has set before us. Chewing on the deeper meanings of the books, films, and TV series, the chefs . . . um, writers . . . in this book revel in a range of tastes that can help us better sample the world around us."

—JOSEF STEIFF, Editor of *Sherlock Holmes and Philosophy*

"Psychopath. Vampire. Devil. Monster. Hannibal Lecter's truly phenomenal popularity, homicidal though he may be, raises complex ethical and socio-philosophical issues, explored in this addition to the Popular Culture and Philosophy series."

—ROBERT CETTL, Author of *Serial Killer Cinema*

Popular Culture and Philosophy®

Hannibal Lecter and Philosophy

The Heart of the Matter

Edited by

JOSEPH WESTFALL



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For Mischa, and innocence recollected

*Before we begin, you must all be warned: Nothing here is
vegetarian.*

Bon appétit.

—HANNIBAL LECTER, MD

Le Menu

Apéritif

Hello, Dr. Lecter

JOSEPH WESTFALL

I. Having an Old Friend for Dinner

Amuse-Bouche

1. **Cosmopolitan Cannibal**

MANDY-SUZANNE WONG

Hors-d'oeuvre

2. **I, Cannibal**

JOSEPH WESTFALL

Potage

3. **What's So Bad about Eating People?**

BENJAMIN MCCRAW

II. What Does He Do, This Man You Seek?

Oeufs

4. Acts of God

TRIP MCCROSSIN

Farineux

5. Office Hours Are for Patients

DANIEL MALLOY

Poisson

6. The Psychiatrist as Sociopathic God

DERRICK L. HASSERT

III. They Say He's a Psychopath

Entrée

7. Psychopaths, Outlaws, and Us

RICHARD MCCLELLAND

Sorbet

8. Consuming Homicidal Art

JOHN MCATEER

Relevé

9. Not Knowing Serial Killers with Hannibal Lecter

JASON DAVIS

IV. I Gave You a Rare Gift, but You Didn't Want It

Rôti

10. The Light from Friendship
ANDREW PAVELICH

Légumes

11. A Rare Gift
SELENA K.L. BREIKSS

Salades

12. A Little Empathy for Hannibal Is a Dangerous Thing
TIM JONES

V. It's Beautiful in Its Own Way, Giving Voice to the Unmentionable

Buffet Froid

13. *An Aesthete par Excellence*
JASON HOLT

Entremet de sùcre

14. A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Dinner Party
JOSEPH WESTFALL

Savoureux

15. [The Art of Killing](#)
ANDREA ZANIN

VI. The Beauty and Art and Horror of Everything This World Has to Offer

Fromage

16. [Empathy for the Devil](#)
DAN SHAW

Dessert

17. [The Beguiling Horror of Hannibal Lecter](#)
WILLIAM J. DEVLIN AND SHAI BIDERMAN

Café

18. [Doctor, Heal Thyself](#)
RICHARD MCCLELLAND

[Ingredients](#)

[The Hannibal Lecter Canon](#)
[Works about Hannibal Lecter](#)
[Other Resources](#)

[The Psychopaths](#)

[Index](#)

Hello, Dr. Lecter

JOSEPH WESTFALL

Hannibal Lecter . . . is . . . our most recent version of Mephistopheles—erudite, omniscient, satanic, and out to seduce Starling’s very being with the promise of knowledge.

—NOËL CARROLL, “Enjoying Horror Fictions”

If Hannibal Lecter isn’t a Count Dracula for the computer-and-cellphone age, then we don’t have one.

—STEPHEN KING, “Hannibal the Cannibal”

In fact, there is no consensus in the psychiatric community that Dr. Lecter should be termed a man. He has long been regarded by his professional peers in psychiatry, many of whom fear his acid pen in the professional journals, as something entirely Other. For convenience they term him a “monster.”

—THOMAS HARRIS, *Hannibal*

Hannibal Lecter.

“A brief silence follows the name, always, in any civilized gathering” (Harris, *Silence*, p. 4). Dr. Lecter hates to be discourteous, but he is busy with a patient just now—apparently, he has something rather meaty to work through. You may await him in the waiting room. He’ll be but two shakes of a (silent) lamb’s tail—not a moment more. But while you wait . . .

Stephen King calls him “the great fictional monster of our time,” and it is a difficult point to dispute. With his suave appeal, his charm, his wit and intelligence,

his vast memory and encyclopedic knowledge, his ability to excel in apparently any field of endeavor, and his immaculate taste in clothes, wine, music, art, architecture, literature, and most of all *food*—it would be difficult to deny him greatness. And why would we? Denying the greatness of Hannibal Lecter is usually the first step in the direction of appearing at his next dinner party. Dr. Lecter does so appreciate having the willfully blind, the ignorant, and the rude for dinner.

Of course, in our denial, then, we would discover the monster. He can be seen from two sides, as Clarice Starling noted: “one showed his charm, the other his scales” (Harris, *Hannibal*, p. 302). Charm and scales, a cocktail suited only to the boldest of palates.

First Principles, Clarice

He is described as “a small, lithe man . . . Very neat” (Harris, *Dragon*, p. 58), with “a wiry strength” (Harris, *Silence*, p. 14). Until he amputates it himself, he has “six fingers on his left hand” (Harris, *Silence*, p. 13)—a perfect duplicate of his middle finger, described more than once as “the rarest form of polydactyly” (Harris, *Silence*, p. 20). His “cultured voice has a slight metallic rasp beneath it” (Harris, *Silence*, p. 14). Looking a little more closely, we see he has “small white teeth,” and perhaps most remarkably of all, his “eyes are maroon and they reflect the light redly in tiny points” (Harris, *Dragon*, pp. 58–59). He is regularly described as being characterized by an extraordinary stillness, and “His ego, like his intelligence . . . and the degree of his rationality, is not measurable by conventional means” (Harris, *Hannibal*, p. 136). He is an acute observer, and of his physical senses, his sense of smell is perhaps the most acute: “He could smell everything” (Harris, *Silence*, p. 22).

Dr. Lecter has appeared in several guises over the past forty years or so, in different contexts, and at different stages (not always chronologically ordered) along his life’s way. He has appeared as a character in four novels by Thomas Harris: in the first of these, he is but a brief, daring interlude (*Red Dragon*, 1981); in the last two, his is the triumphal melody that overtakes all (*Hannibal*, 1999; *Hannibal*

Rising, 2006); and in the middle, in *Silence* . . . he is the countermelody in a minor key that haunts us long after we've left the symphony hall (*The Silence of the Lambs*, 1988). And if Hannibal Lecter reminds us of music, we would be remiss not to mention the performers who have brought that music to life—the incarnations of Harris's literary specter, as it were. Brian Cox, Anthony Hopkins (yes, of course, Anthony Hopkins!), Aaran Thomas (if only briefly), Gaspard Ulliel, and, most recently, Mads Mikkelsen. In each case, a different take on our old familiar cannibal—who somehow, even as he ages, never grows old. Of course, not every Lecter is to every Fannibal's liking. But even when we find ourselves disappointed with one (or more) of his incarnations and interpretations, we never find ourselves thinking that Hannibal Lecter *himself* is not great, nor that Hannibal Lecter is *not* a monster. Somehow, Dr. Lecter survives even his many presentations, interpretations, and performances. The disappointing presentations are betrayals, we think, not only of the fans, but of Lecter himself. Somehow, despite the fact that he is a work of fiction, there is a "Lecter himself." Hannibal Lecter has a life of his own. Even Thomas Harris notes that, when writing *Red Dragon* and getting to know his characters in that novel, "I was not comfortable in the presence of Dr. Lecter, not sure at all that the doctor could not see me" (Harris, "Foreword" to *Red Dragon*, p. xi).

One thing every version of Hannibal Lecter shares, besides the cannibalism, is a capacity for driving us—his readers, his viewers, his witnesses, his fans—to think. We find in Lecter an unsettling combination of things we would like to be and things that horrify, if not utterly disgust, us. We like this man whom we do not, should not, like. And this raises a whole host of questions about human existence which, in the manner of a good psychiatrist, Dr. Lecter poses but never resolves. Like Socrates, he goads us to ask them—*What is the good life? What are our responsibilities to others, and to ourselves? What must we risk in order to live well? What must we preserve? What can we allow ourselves to become? What are we already?*—but he has no answers for us. Which is not to say that he has not answered these questions for himself, just that he cannot make his answers our own. If we're going to learn something from Dr. Lecter, we must—like Will Graham, like Clarice Starling—

discover the lesson for ourselves. He can give us that rare gift, but we have to want it. We have to take it.

It is generally considered rude to question the motives of a man offering a gift, and I would not want anyone—least of all, our dear doctor—to suspect me of *this* offense against courtesy. But it is impossible to encounter Hannibal Lecter without wondering who—and what—he is. How to classify the extraordinary, perhaps unique, individual who presents himself so well-attired (in a “very well-tailored person suit,” perhaps) to the world? Naturally, I hesitate to make the census taker’s mistake—to “quantify” Dr. Lecter, to “reduce [him] to a set of influences” (Harris, *Silence*, pp. 19–20). No, Hannibal Lecter is infinitely more interesting when he is unquantified, unquantifiable, immeasurable, mysterious. We shouldn’t try to understand him too much, to know him too well, to get too close to him. “We can,” after all, “only learn so much and live” (Harris, *Hannibal*, p. 484). But still . . . we can hazard some perhaps amateurish, admittedly incomplete, undeniably discourteous, but nevertheless well-meaning attempts at finding Lecter’s place in the world.

Certainly, the philosophical issues raised in the different chapters of this book weave through these various depictions, sometimes preferring one to the others, sometimes working two or more of them together. Hannibal Lecter prompts us to reflection, and the first thing he prompts us to reflect upon is himself. “First principles, Clarice. Simplicity. Read Marcus Aurelius. Of each particular thing ask: what is it in itself? What is its nature? What does he do, this man you seek?” (Demme, *Silence*).

The Psychopath

As we are told more than once, Dr. Lecter is considered—at least after his incarceration, at least by Dr. Frederick Chilton—a “pure sociopath” or a “pure psychopath,” although Will Graham cautions us that these terms don’t apply to Hannibal Lecter, strictly speaking. Strictly speaking, we don’t have a word for what Lecter is. In any case, one of the most common presentations of Hannibal Lecter is

as a psychopathic killer, in the fictional tradition of Norman Bates, and the real-life tradition of Ted Bundy and others. There was for many years much speculation about who might have served as the basis for Thomas Harris's creation, and Harris fed this speculation when, in his rare interviews, he would mention one or another serial killer as having inspired one or more of Lecter's attributes.

Only recently, however, did Harris reveal the primary source of his inspiration—a doctor whom Harris had met in a prison in Mexico while working as a crime reporter. The doctor “was a small, lithe man” who “stood very still and there was a certain elegance about him.” His “eyes were maroon with grainy sparks like sunstones.” Harris did not know the doctor was in fact a prisoner at first, but the prison warden reveals, shortly after Harris's conversation with the doctor, that, “The doctor is a murderer. As a surgeon, he could package his victim in a surprisingly small box. He will never leave this place. He is insane” (Harris, “Author's Note” in *Silence*, 25th Anniversary Edition, pp. xi–xiii). When Harris questions the warden's diagnosis of insanity, noting that poor people from the local community come to the prison freely and are treated by the doctor for their ailments, the warden responds, “He is not insane with the poor.” Throughout his discussion of the doctor, Harris refers to him as “Dr. Salazar.” It is a pseudonym, perhaps because, contrary to the warden's prediction, the doctor did get out of prison, eventually. “Dr. Salazar served twenty years in prison. When he was released he went to the poorest barrio in Monterrey to serve the aged and the poor. His name is not Salazar. I leave him in peace” (p. xiv).

Of course, journalism being what journalism is, journalists did not leave “Dr. Salazar” in peace. He was later identified as Dr. Alfredo Ballí Treviño, a Mexican physician who served twenty years in prison for murder, and died in 2009. He apparently knew he was the basis for Harris's character, and was teased by those close to him as a result thereof. Despite the man's crimes, one cannot help but recoil at such *rudeness*.

In any case, one presentation of Hannibal Lecter is as a psychopath, or something like a psychopath, in the manner and style of Dr. Treviño, and this deeply informs Brian Cox's performance as Hannibal “Lecktor” (as it is spelled somewhat inexplicably in the film) in *Manhunter*, Michael Mann's 1986 adaptation of *Red*

Dragon. Cox played Lecktor as a synthesis, he has noted, of the infamous Scottish serial killer, Peter Manuel, and Cox's own son (a teenager at the time; now an actor himself), Alan Cox. What comes through are a profound intelligence married to a sense of entitlement, a kind of merciless arrogance and unwillingness (or inability) to consider other people's needs or desires in making his own choices: classic signs of psychopathy. Beyond this, the limited portrayal of Hannibal Lecktor in *Manhunter* does not allow us to go.

The Anti-Hero

Another, much later, depiction of Hannibal Lecter has its origins in the novel, *Hannibal*, although it only comes to full fruition in *Hannibal Rising*. There, Lecter is no longer simply killing and eating his victims for the pleasure it gives, or out of some deeply rooted psychological urge, but instead as a means of accomplishing his otherwise sympathetic goals—in *Hannibal*, to overcome his psychological fixation on the murder and cannibalization of his sister, Mischa, and to win Clarice Starling's heart, and in *Hannibal Rising*, to avenge Mischa's death. Like Frank Castle ("the Punisher") or Batman, in his anti-heroic presentation Hannibal Lecter appears as something of a superhero, but one willing to do what more traditionally heroic individuals are not: to kill in order to get what he understands to be justice. While this interpretation of Lecter dominates in *Hannibal Rising*, and as one might expect, Gaspard Ulliel's performance as the Young Hannibal in the film version, it characterizes only the last third of *Hannibal*. That said, it's this anti-heroic take on Lecter that comes through most in Anthony Hopkins's performance in Ridley Scott's film adaptation of *Hannibal*.

The shift from villain to anti-hero seems to have come as something of a surprise to fans of the Hannibal Lecter franchise, and thus it's unsurprising that *Hannibal Rising* (book and film) and *Hannibal* (film) are the most controversial presentations of Lecter among Fannibals. While we take an inexplicable and morbid pleasure in giving witness to Dr. Lecter's criminal activities and culinary crimes, we don't want to root for him, exactly. Or, if we *do* want to root for him, we still want to feel like

it's wrong to do so. *Hannibal Rising* and, to a lesser extent, *Hannibal*, make Dr. Lecter seem like he's basically a good guy—and this is not, generally speaking, his appeal.

The Vampire

Probably the most famous and well-loved presentation of Hannibal Lecter yet is Anthony Hopkins's performance in *The Silence of the Lambs*, and later, in the film, *Red Dragon*. This is the Lecter—specifically, from *Silence*—that the American Film Institute ranked as the greatest screen villain of all time. This is the Lecter we see in the first two novels, as well, and he's incredible: not a psychopath, exactly, since psychopaths can be explained and understood; not an anti-hero, as he acts unequivocally on his own, twisted behalf without any sense of the rightness of his actions. He is evil, and mysterious, and powerful (despite the limitations of his imprisonment)—and a cannibal—and in these ways, he has a clear resonance with that cannibalistic arch-villain of old, Dracula. Like the vampire, Lecter bides his time, hiding among human beings as one of the most cultured and best educated of their number, awaiting his opportunity to strike—and then, brutally, bestially, killing and eating his victims. Hopkins captures this duality well, in the way he makes that sucking noise after mentioning the census taker's liver (“with some fava beans and a nice Chianti”), or in his brutal murder of the two guards in Tennessee (displaying the eviscerated body of one as a macabre angel of *liberté*), in *Silence*; and in the scenes with Edward Norton's Will Graham in Lecter's study (where Lecter tries to disembowel and murder Graham) and in the asylum exercise room (where he strains at his bonds like a wild animal) in *Red Dragon*.

Unlike an “ordinary” psychopath, however, a vampire isn't motivated by traumas and psychotic urges. A vampire is motivated by hunger. And his hunger is coupled with an understanding of himself as inherently superior to the human beings upon whom he feeds. It is not quite that he thinks of people as pigs—contrary to Will Graham's assessment in the early episodes of the television series, *Hannibal*—but, rather, that he thinks of himself as being as far above ordinary human beings as