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Hannibal Revived: an Aestheticized Portrayal of Hannibal Lecter in NBC's TV Series *Hannibal*

Abstract. This article is an analysis of the portrayal of Hannibal Lecter as presented in NBC's television series. The research focuses on the techniques employed in order to aestheticize, humanize and present the title character in a positive light for the audience to sympathize with him. Apart from the process of aestheticization, the paper also discusses the metamorphosis which Lecter depicted in the show has undergone. The article describes particular aspects of the character's construction and the tools used to influence the audience's perception of the cannibal.

Keywords: Hannibal Lecter, aestheticization, art, humour, food porn.

1. Introduction

In 1981, Thomas Harris's published *Red Dragon*, his first novel in the Hannibal Lecter series. Harris's killer, the sociopathic mastermind, soon became the icon of crime fiction. Jonathan Demme's film adaptation of Harris's next novel *The Silence of the Lambs* has been widely recognized by critics and won many awards, including five Oscars. One could wonder what the reasons behind such an enormous success are.

Thomas Harris provides his readers with a murderer and a cannibal who in addition to being evil is also an aesthete, a highly intelligent and eloquent scholar, a connoisseur of art, music and cuisine as well as a person with an exquisite sense of humour. Surprisingly enough, Hannibal is a killer with a moral code, who prefers to "eat the rude." Compared to the previous fictional incarnations of serial killers such as Robert Bloch's Norman Bates, Hannibal is a killer whom the reader may actually like and engage with, which is achieved by means of aestheticization.

In order to explain the concept of aestheticization, one has to understand what the words "artistic" and "aesthetic" mean. In *The Aesthetics of Murder* Joel Black states that any object, idea or act can obtain artistic status, as long as it meets at least one of the two requirements (Black: 1991: 12). Thus, if an object, idea or act is created by an artist with the aim of creating art, as widely as

“art” and “artist” can be understood, it achieves artistic status. On the other hand, an object, idea or act can be subjectively perceived by the beholder as a work of art, even if it was not aimed to be art. In this case the beholder is the one that decides on attaching an artistic status to it. When it is an artist that produces an artefact, one can describe it with the word “artistic.” However, if it is the beholder that considers something an artefact, it is proper to use the word “aesthetic” (Black: 1991: 12). There is usually no distinction between “artistic” and “aesthetic,” as often something that is artistic (a painting created by an artist) is perceived as aesthetic by the beholder. As regards the process of aestheticization, in some cases aestheticization may be isomorphous with beautification. Asbjorn Gronstad describes the process of aestheticization of violence as follows:

As a result of specific stylistic machinations, the segments that contain the violence have become more visually and viscerally attractive than all the segments that do not contain any violence. In this usage, the concept of aestheticization is isomorphous with the concept of beauty. (Gronstad 2008: 40–41)

One could say that, according to the abovementioned definitions, the process of aestheticization that will be discussed in this article manifests itself in all the techniques applied by the writers, film directors and, in this case, TV series creators in order to evoke an aesthetic experience in the recipient of the narrative.

2. Hannibal Revived

The portrayal of Dr. Hannibal Lecter depicted by Bryan Fuller is even more mysterious than the character presented in the novels and films. The revived murderer comes back as the embodiment of antithetical merits. He is an artist and a cannibal. A friend and a foe. In one of the reviews Libby Hill emphasises precisely those contradictions:

He is something unnatural. Uncanny. He is the danger. He is the unknowable presence lurking in the shadows. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient (...). Devil as god, manipulation as love, feminine as masculine, these are how Hannibal crafts a story and re-imagines a known quantity. And in doing so, Fuller et al. have succeeded in making not just a cogent adaptation but one of the finest dramas on television, all by tapping into the inherent terror of being made over not in God’s image, but in Lucifer’s. (Logsdon 2015)

Hannibal is no longer a cannibal who kills only the rude. Frequently he serves justice to those who, one may claim, deserve it, yet he also murders the innocent just to goad the FBI or get rid of someone who gets in his way (Pavelich 2016: 132). He is ruthless and callous, unlike Harris’s doctor who at least acts according to his own distorted code of practice.

Fuller’s Hannibal is a restrained and distant version of the killer, always in control over his feelings and instincts. Lecter strikes the viewers as a melancholic doctor seducing the audience with

an introverted personality and a peculiar sadness in his eyes. The tension that the viewers feel is not associated with a physical danger but rather a psychological horror, since “Hannibal’s main source of satisfaction is not the killing and consuming of human beings, but rather his ability to use his superior intellect to manipulate people in twisted ways” (Fuchs 2017). During the conversation with Dr. Chilton, Lecter says: “if force is used, the subject will only surrender temporarily. Once the patient is exposed, the method of manipulation becomes much less effective (...). The subject mustn’t be aware of any influence” (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Rôti”). This is the essence of his philosophy. He does not use physical power unless he eventually wants to kill someone. He is not the kind of person who would attack a nurse on the spur of the moment, as Harris’s Hannibal does in the novel.

The show’s creators present Lecter as a figure of awe; he commands respect as far as both his professional and private relationships are concerned. Owing to his social status, he is virtually beyond any suspicion. Moreover, he even works as a consultant *for* the FBI. While helping the Bureau, he can devote his attention to killing and manipulation with impunity (Łuba 2014: 169). Apart from other characters from the TV show, it is also the audience that is prone to Hannibal’s manipulation. The viewers can never be sure whether Hannibal’s emotions and feelings are honest or whether they are just a part of his diabolical game (Fuchs 2017). In conversation with Jack, Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier says: “If you think you are about to catch Hannibal, it is because he wants you to think so. Don’t fool yourself into thinking he’s not in control of what’s happening” (*Hannibal*, Season 2, “Tome-wan”). Thus, Hannibal presented in the TV show is a figure of power, who treats other characters and the spectators like puppets (Łuba 2014: 170). According to Dan Shaw, it is precisely Hannibal’s power that makes us empathise with him: “It is his absolute control over every person and situation which he confronts that is the fundamental ground of our empathy with him” (Shaw 2016: 216).

3. The Artist and the Savage

As far as art is concerned, Dr. Lecter does not confine himself to being a passive onlooker; he is an artist who specialises in many fields. He draws meticulous sketches of architectural monuments, composes his own pieces of music and creates tableaus from the corpses of his victims. The opus that certainly draws anyone’s attention is the body of the councilman interwoven in a tree. By creating this artistic representation, Lecter does not only produce art for art’s sake. He obviously hunts for food but also provides the audience with food... for thought. The manner in which the official has been murdered and the place where his corpse has been placed are not random. Sheldon Isley is thought to have been responsible for having a forest, which was the habitat for endangered birds, cut out and replacing it with a car park. It comes as no surprise that the place which Hannibal chooses for the display of Sheldon’s body is precisely the car park. Lecter puts a lot of effort into presenting the body as a piece of art in such a way so as to underscore Isley’s lack of morality.

JACK: The time that he devotes to his work... He really takes pride. Belladonna for the heart. Chain of white oleander for the intestines. Ragwort for the liver.

JIMMY: These flowers are all poisonous.

JACK: Yes. This is a judgment. The Ripper believes that his victim was... Toxic, somehow, a poisonous man. (*Hannibal*, Season 2, "Futamoto")



Figure 1. The body of Sheldon Isley intertwined with a tree.
(NBC "Photo Galleries")

Angela Ndalianis dubs Lecter a bricoleur deconstructing and reassembling the world. This reconfigured and unique piece of art has been created to tell a story about life and death (2015: 281). She also points out that even though one may call Hannibal an artist, his art "is an art that disgusts" (2015:282).

As stated at the beginning of this article, Hannibal is a person full of contradictions. Although Lecter presented in the TV show appears to be even more cultured and sophisticated than the one portrayed in the novels and films, his figure is not completely devoid of savagery. It is indisputable that his way of preparing meals, which would be later on discussed in detail, is remarkably artistic and aesthetic, yet the ingredients remain roughly the same. Fuchs writes that Hannibal is at the same time "a connoisseur of fine art and a brute driven by instincts and neither of the two" (2015: 99). Lecter's psychiatrist, Bedelia Du Maurier, during one of their conversations says: "you are wearing a very well-tailored 'person suit.' (...) Maybe it's less of a person suit and more of a human veil. That must be lonely" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Sorbet"). Indeed, Lecter wears a mask which is always appropriate for the role he is playing. He may behave like a friend or a foe, a connoisseur of art or a cannibal, a worried psychiatrist or a ruthless psychopath, yet the audience can never tell which one is real, since he is both and neither.

Dagmara *Luba* uses two terms to describe the duality of Hannibal's personality. She argues that he is an embodiment of perversion and obscenity, in other words, a socially unacceptable "abject," while being an "object" of fascination and desire. Therefore, he exists at the intersection of the two notions and may be perceived both as an object and an abject (2014: 172). Regarding Hannibal's humanity, it is also difficult to define him as either a human or a non-human. One may say that Hannibal is a negation of everything that is human, while being a human. It is difficult to place Hannibal into any category, since he is characterised by excess. Calabrese writes that "excess describes overcoming of a limit in terms of an exit from a closed system" (1992: 49). While describing Hannibal, the borders do not matter (*Luba* 2014: 172), as he is always outside any closed system, being on the verge, beyond limits. Michael Fuchs writes: "there is no 'real' Dr. Hannibal Lecter (...). Lecter disappears in a world of simulacra, where his subjectivity forever remains liminal (2015: 107).

4. Hannibal's Sense of Humour

The trait of Hannibal's personality which particularly appeals to the readers as well as the viewers is his sense of humour. Westfall distinguishes three kinds of joke employed by Hannibal Lecter: mockery, expressions of power and inside jokes (2016: 174). Whereas in the novels and films the author and directors employ mainly the first and the second type of humour, the TV series is full of jokes expressing power and, even more frequently, inside jokes.

The scene in which Hannibal is held captive by Manson Verger, which is present both in the books and the adaptations, is also re-enacted in the TV series. The viewers can hear Hannibal establishing his superiority while being tied up: "I take it Matteo didn't make it. Did he foul himself? I imagine he smells worse than you by now" (*Hannibal*, Season 2, "Tome-wan"). A similar sense of humour is applied when Hannibal is attacked and incapacitated by the orderly, Matthew Brown. With his wrists slit, noose around his head, standing on a wobbling bucket Hannibal, once again, resorts to his sense of humour saying: "you're a nurse at the hospital (...). Are you setting a new standard of care?" (*Hannibal*, Season 2, "Mukōzuke"). It is essential to mention that whenever he jokes, Fuller's Hannibal is devoid of any emotions, which only makes the jokes sound more sarcastic and sophisticated.

The third type of humour distinguished by Westfall is omnipresent in the TV series. Inside jokes, which are precisely for the audience's benefit, establish the bond between the viewers and Dr. Lecter (Westfall 2016: 181). In the seventh episode of the first season, during the party, Hannibal says: "before we begin, you must all be warned: nothing here is vegetarian," and then he almost dares to look into the camera continuing: "bon appétit" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Sorbet"). Many a time does he interpose inside jokes referring to food, for instance while having a conversation with Jack: "well, next time, bring your wife. I'd love to have you both for dinner" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Amuse-Bouche"), or before killing Tobias: "I didn't poison you, Tobias. I wouldn't do that to the food" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Fromage"). He also jokes during the conversation with Dr. Chilton. Answering Chilton's comment that the Romans used to eat flamingos' tongues, Hannibal says:

“don’t give me ideas. Your tongue is very feisty” (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Sorbet”). Another instance of an inside joke appears during the conversation with Chilton who informs Hannibal that Will calls Lecter a monster; Hannibal replies: “well, in that case, you are dining with a psychopathic murderer, Frederick” (*Hannibal*, Season 2, “Kaiseki”). The series is packed full of inside jokes, therefore it is impossible to quote them all. The humour employed in the series is definitely one of the aspects that aestheticize Hannibal’s portrayal.

5. The Aesthetics of Food

It is not an exaggeration to say that food is an essential part of the TV show. The way in which Hannibal’s culinary masterpieces are presented truly influences the viewers’ senses and makes them forget about the ingredients. Scenes of consumption last long enough for the audience to almost smell and taste the dishes. The bottles of fine wines, expensive tableware and dim candle light present the setting in an appealing manner, allowing the spectators to relish the scenes and diverting one’s attention from cannibalism. To emphasise the significance of the cuisine the episodes have been named after the fares; the first season refers to French haute cuisine, the second to Japanese and some of the episodes from the third season have been titled after Italian cuisine (Shaw 2016: 204). Dan Shaw writes that Hannibal’s culinary sensibilities and the aesthetics of the courses:

... attract us to him as a man of enviable discernment. We want to feel with a man of such taste, to experience the delicate sensations that only someone with such a degree of discernment can appreciate (...). Hannibal’s artistic and culinary proclivities appeal to us emotionally, drawing us even further under his spell. (2016: 204-205)

In “Sorbet,” Hannibal prepares dinner for the Baltimore elite and the way in which he does it was aptly described by one of the guests who said that Hannibal’s food preparation is “an entire performance” (*Hannibal*, Season 1, “Sorbet”). Tim Jones writes: “his world, and the steps he’s taken to bring it into being, looks truly... delicious. It’s quite the effort to remember what’s actually underlying all the luxury spread before us” (2016: 152). One could notice that while cooking Lecter, indeed, resembles an artist working on his masterpiece. In the mentioned episode, he looks genuinely proud of the courses he has meticulously decorated.

Referring to Lecter’s cannibalistic nature, Selena Breikss argues that “his cannibalism has transcended the taboo” (2016: 139). Even though the spectators are aware of the anthropophagy, they decide to separate the ravishing images they see on the screens from the fact that the courses’ main ingredient is human flesh. They acknowledge the violation of a corpse, yet they marvel at the splendour of the meals. As Dagmara Łuba points out, in the TV series cannibalism is presented as a ritual, a culinary art that overshadows the murder itself. The viewers do not see Hannibal hunting for meat, but they almost always see the act of food preparation before the dish is served (Łuba 2014: 170). The associations that one may have with anthropophagy are completely distorted

by the series creators. Hannibal the cannibal is not stigmatised because he preys on human meat; instead, his cannibalism makes him outstanding and extraordinary. Hannibal's anthropophagy is a celebration of being beyond, being above others. It is a combination of epicurean cannibalism, based on sensual feelings, and a cannibalism rooted in domination (2014: 171).

Hannibal's culinary art is undoubtedly a means to aestheticize the killer, as, even though the viewers know where the ingredients come from, the artistic cookery allows them to ignore the cannibalistic nature of the protagonist. In the series, Hannibal spends a lot of time on dining with different characters from the show. If a character is at least remotely significant to the narrative, Hannibal has probably invited them to dinner. It would be a painstaking job to count the scenes which present food, in one way or another, since they are ubiquitous. However, every dinner gives the opportunity to get to know Hannibal better and empathize with the character on different levels. The guests whom Lecter invites to his humble dwelling are, most frequently, Will and Jack, yet he also shares a meal with a few other characters, which play essential role in the viewers' perception of the doctor.

In "Relevés," Hannibal visits Will at the hospital and brings him silkie soup (*Hannibal*, Season 1). One might say that the sheer act of bringing the meal does not justify the fact that it is Hannibal who actually may be held responsible for Will's worsening health condition. However, in fact, it makes Lecter look more sympathetic for a viewer. For one thing, the viewers are shown that the doctor cares about Will, even though he has been playing with Graham's psyche for the entire season. He provides him with a simple dish that is a stereotypical meal prepared by a family member for a sick person. It is possible that such a gesture makes the viewers, at least for the time being, forget about Lecter's own agenda and fall for his deceit. Moreover, the spectators may, by means of affective mimicry, feel the grief which Hannibal seems to experience seeing Will at the hospital. Therefore the expression that Hannibal is sympathetic has a double meaning: the doctor sympathises with Will, thus he is sympathetic towards him; additionally, he is sympathetic for the viewers, in other words, he is likeable for the audience.

Another aspect of the scene which makes the spectators like Hannibal even more is its humour. Lecter prepares a meal that for Will appears to be just a chicken soup, whereas, judging by his displeased response, Hannibal would not call his masterpiece using such simple words. The dialogue between the characters reads as follows:

WILL: Smells delicious.

HANNIBAL: Silkie chicken in a broth. A black-boned bird prized in China for its medicinal values since the seventh century. Wolfberries, ginseng, ginger, red dates, and star anise.

WILL: You made me chicken soup?

HANNIBAL: Yes. (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Relevés")

While watching the scene, the viewers can clearly see Hannibal's discontentment. Even though Mikkelsen's face does not express it, his tone of voice speaks volumes.

The second scene that, paradoxically, aestheticizes Hannibal is the dinner with Abel Gideon, during which Lecter serves Gideon's leg as a main course, politely, as always, encouraging Abel to taste it (*Hannibal*, Season 2, "Futamono"). The scene bears resemblance to the dinner described in the novel, when Hannibal treats Krendler with the detective's brain. The similarities do not end here. Abel Gideon for sure classifies as "the rude," thus it is difficult for the audience to feel empathy towards him. Nonetheless, the emotion that perhaps is prevalent among the spectators is curiosity, whether Gideon will consume his own leg, which, obviously, looks delicious. Having watched previous episodes the viewers know that it is not sense of morality that convinces Hannibal to slowly, cutting all possible members of his victim, kill Abel. This time, Lecter does not help out the FBI in delivering justice. He has his own vendetta against Gideon, who pretended to be the Chesapeake Ripper and took credit for Lecter's crimes. Yet, all in all, Hannibal does not torture an innocent person, the ambiance is, as usual, atmospheric, the food looks appetizing, the soothing classical music accompanies an interesting conversation between the characters:

HANNIBAL: Your legs are no good to you anymore. (...) This is a far more practical use for those limbs. (...) You were determined to know the Chesapeake Ripper, Dr. Gideon. Now is your opportunity.

GIDEON: You intend me to be my own last supper?

HANNIBAL: Yes.

GIDEON: How does one politely refuse a dish in circumstances such as these?

HANNIBAL: One doesn't. The tragedy is not to die, Abel, but to be wasted.

(*Hannibal*, Season 2, "Futamono")

Another scene that aestheticizes Hannibal's image is the scene of consuming "breakfast for dinner" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Œuf"). After the traumatic events that Abigail Hobbes experienced, she puts her trust in Hannibal, who, together with Will, saved her life. Lecter, despite his cannibalistic and psychopathic nature, appears to have sincere fatherly feelings towards her. Fuchs writes that "it seems too simple a dinner for Hannibal's refined taste, but he has a good reason for choosing this exact meal, which goes beyond the boundary-defying gesture of having breakfast for dinner" (2015: 104). Sausages and eggs – breakfast – was the last meal Abigail had with her family. By saying: "it's also the first meal you're having with me" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Œuf"), Hannibal attempts to take her late father's place. The scene presents Abigail sitting at the table together with Hannibal and Alana Bloom. The image truly resembles a portrayal of a typical family, which is confirmed by Abigail saying: "I see family" (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Œuf").

Surprisingly enough, the scene in which Hannibal kills an innocent person on-screen may also serve as a means to aestheticize the character. The comical aspect of the scene and the humour employed in the dialogue diminish the horrific aspect of the narrative and distance the audience so that it can vicariously enjoy the killing without feeling guilty. Being in Florence, Hannibal and Bedelia are having Professor Sogliato over dinner (*Hannibal*, Season 3, "Secondo"). The man despises

Hannibal and tries to humiliate him at a banquet that takes place the day before, saying that Lecter would not recognize Dante Alighieri's work, since he is a foreigner. After presenting his broad knowledge about Dante by reciting his sonnet to the public, Hannibal appears to give another chance to the professor and invites him to dinner. Nevertheless, the dinner does not end happily for the guest, since Lecter stabs him with an icepick. However, he does not kill him instantaneously. Sogliato seems not to feel any pain, but mutters and stutters that he went blind. The grotesque nature of the scene is emphasized by Hannibal's indifference to the whole situation. It is even more ridiculous when Bedelia decides to pull the icepick out, killing the professor. Hannibal seems to enjoy the run of events and ends his meal telling Bedelia that it is her who killed their guest... technically:

HANNIBAL: That may have been impulsive.

BEDELIA: You've been mulling that impulse ever since you decided to serve Punch Romaine (...).

HANNIBAL: Technically, you killed him (...).

BEDELIA: Two men from the Capponi are dead.

HANNIBAL: I can only claim one... technically. (*Hannibal*, Season 3, "Secondo").



Figure 2. This is probably the first murder that Hannibal committed, presumably, on the impulse, yet the dialogue between him and Bedelia as well as their attitude to the whole situation make the killing ridiculous. (NBC "Photo Galleries")

The significance of food is not as explicit in the novels and films, as it is in the series. The TV show transforms depictions of food into visual spectacle. Tom Gunning claims that the spectacle evokes curiosity, and incites shock and surprise (Fuchs 2015: 106). This visual spectacle of food depiction has been recently named as the phenomenon of "food porn." According to Signe Rousseau it denotes evocative depictions or even descriptions of food both in literature and visual media (Fuchs 2015: 107).



Figure 3. The images of food are omnipresent in the TV show.
(NBC “Photo Galleries”)

Aesthetic representations of food inspired *Hannibal*'s fans to prepare courses based on the dishes from the TV show. Probably the most well-known food blog about the cuisine from *Hannibal* is the one created by the food stylist, Janice Poon. Fuchs argues that such attempts toward recreating the meals from the series exceed the boundary between reality and fiction: “NBC’s show indicates that the repeated spotlighting and excessive visualization of food may spur viewers to transform textual traces into lived experience. In this way, images of Hannibal’s dishes cross the borderline between fiction and reality” (Fuchs 2015: 108).

Crossing the borderline only proves that food functions as an aesthetic means to create an artistic image both of the series and of Hannibal. It influences our senses and makes us forget about the cannibalistic aspect of the performance. Employing the previously mentioned theory of excess, *Hannibal* exceeds cannibalism by its aesthetic celebration. Encouraged by the show, the viewers prepare similar courses at their homes, crossing the boundaries between fiction and reality.

6. Techniques of Aestheticization

The television series employs a number of techniques in order to aestheticize the title character. In the TV show, Hannibal is presented as an upper class aesthete always elegant and sophisticated. Cinematographic frames are focused on texture details, accentuated lighting and foregrounding silhouettes, which provide the viewer with a painting-like image (Wise 2013). During the scenes of dialogues between Hannibal and other characters, the protagonist is granted a noticeable number of close-ups. Shaw claims that it is also the way in which the series is shot that has an impact on our perception of the main character, creating a more sympathetic portrayal of the villain: “close-ups of Hannibal help to secure our empathy for his character independently of our cognitive evaluations of his actions” (Shaw 2016: 201).

In the show, rarely do the viewers witness Hannibal's acts of murder, which also plays a key role in the process of aestheticization of the main character. The audience does not see Lecter kill anyone on-screen up until the eighth episode of the first season (*Hannibal*, Season 1, "Fromage"). Even then, Hannibal kills Tobias seemingly in self-defence, since it is the doctor who is attacked. According to Fuchs, the clues, not the evidence that Hannibal truly is the cannibal, construct an enchanting monster whom the spectators fear but also desire (2015: 100). Even if later on the audience witnesses Hannibal during the carnage, the viewers never see Hannibal kill as the Chesapeake Ripper. Pavelich claims that for the spectators it would be too much to "maintain anything like sympathy for the character" (2016: 129). He argues that the spectators can turn a blind eye to the fact that he is a murderer and a cannibal, yet seeing him rip the organs out while his victims are still alive "would be harder for audiences to swallow" (2016: 129). Therefore what the viewers do see on the screens are "only the stylish results of Lecter's crimes" (Shaw 2016: 203).

Taking techniques of the shooting into consideration, one may notice that the way in which the scenes are framed, the dark and cold colours, and finally, the expositions of the corpses resembling artistic tableaux (Łuba 2014: 171) clearly result in creating an artistic product. Pas claims that taking a closer look at the tableaux one can find "traces of Goya, Redon, Ensor, Gunther von Hagens Körperwelten, Joel-Peter Witkin, Andres Serrano, Sally Mann and many more" (2015). Not only can we find artistic elements in the crime scenes, but also we may appreciate the artistry when the setting seems ordinary. It does not matter whether Dr. Lecter is having a therapeutic session with his patients or enjoying an exquisite course at the table, an aesthetical aspect found in every scene presents the final product "as a work of art, embodying class, beauty and grandeur" (Wise 2013).

Nevertheless, it is the artistic aspect of murders that allures the audience. The television series like *Hannibal* tend to depict violence in such a way so as to attract their viewers and make them even more interested in the scenes which contain violent elements rather than the ones that do not depict cruelty. Therefore, one may find it difficult not to agree with Gronstad who claims that sometimes aestheticization is isomorphous with beauty (2008: 41). The creators of the TV show beautify the horrific aspects of the series by means of aestheticization. Clarke argues that *Hannibal's* narrative and form are thus constructed "around the aesthetic appreciation of murder, (...) render[ing] murder into art" (2016). In *Hannibal*, both violence and murder are presented "through the lens of art (Clarke 2016).

While discussing the theory of aestheticization employed in the television series, one has to remember that apart from showing a beautifying aspect of murder the viewer has to feel distant from the gory scenes. The role of aestheticization is also to let the audience enjoy the violence by reminding them it is not real. Bryan Fuller points out that this is exactly what the creators attempted to do:

If it's too real it's no fun for me. I'm very sensitive. The horror that we do on the show has a heightened quality to it and I kind of need that vibrating above reality-sense in order to enjoy the work, and have fun with it. If it's too real, then it's not as much fun. (Wise 2013)

Gwyn Symonds argues that by image-rendering open wounds or body parts can be depicted in great detail, depersonalizing violence and “fetishiz[ing] physical damage” (Clarke 2016). He thereafter claims that the viewers are able to detect details which are imperceptible to a human eye. By doing so, the spectators experience hyperreal representation of violence. In *Hannibal*, techniques such as manipulation of depth or close-ups give us the impression of a hyperreal aesthetics (Clarke 2016).

Angela Ndalians asserts that *Hannibal* is undoubtedly “one of the most powerfully affect-driven shows to ever grace the television screen” (2015: 279). She claims that the audience is influenced by a “cacophony of sensory assaults” (2015: 279). The show employs synaesthesia, since it stimulates our sense of smell by the visual representations of food. Apart from evocative depictions of food enabling us to almost smell and taste the courses, *Hannibal* refers to our senses by displaying corpses like pieces of art and influencing our emotions with the classical or psychedelic music. Ndalians writes that all of this “collaboratively work[s] to absorb the ‘viewer’ on the level of the sensorium” (2015: 279). She also adds that while watching *Hannibal*, the viewers get immersed “in a disturbing feast of the senses that simultaneously makes us, as much as the show’s characters, co-victims of Hannibal’s machinations” (2015: 280). Influencing our senses, *Hannibal* invites us to his “mad surrealistic world” (Logsdon 2015), and encourages us to look into our deeply hidden sinister nature.

7. Conclusions

The TV series employs various techniques to aestheticize the title character. The creators of the show present Hannibal as a clever manipulator, who remains mysterious and mesmerizing. They depict him as a figure of awe and power, commanding respect and attention. The viewers become prone to his hypnotising personality and are, as the characters of the show, victims of his manipulation. Just as in the novels and films, Lecter is an aesthete who is devoted to art and music. He creates artistic tableaux from the corpses and delicious masterpieces of culinary art from his victims’ flesh. What is more, the show does not diminish the role of humour as an intrinsic element of the character, employing jokes expressing power and inside jokes by means of which Hannibal appears to be even more sympathetic. Finally, the omnipresent images of food make the viewers even more engaged with the character and engrossed in watching the show.

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