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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BETWEEN APPREHENSION AND APPRECIATION: A QUALITATIVE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THOMAS HARRIS' THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

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Abstract

Psychoanalysis is a dominant field of social science that explores the complex layers of human psychology. In the novel *The Silence of the Lambs* written by Thomas Harris, psychoanalytic theory plays a significant role. The researcher's objective is to traverse the complex characteristics of Hannibal Lecter and Clarice Starling, who possess dichotomic attributes. Lecter's intellectual superiority and psychopathic attributes invite deep introspection into his personality, perceptions, and intentions. His idea is reproached by Clarice Starling's pragmatic nature. These psychological discrepancies between the characters underscore the element of Klein's Object Relations theory. As proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Lecter's idea of morality traces the concept of 'Perspectivism' which implies that the notion of good and evil transcends conventional beliefs and practices. The study also attempts to investigate the uncanny relationship between Lecter and Clarice. The two characters' shift from being apprehensive to becoming appreciative of each other is the focal point of the research paper. The paper applies psychological approach of Sigmund Freud's three sections of the human psyche: Id, ego, and super-ego. Freud's concept of 'Eros and Thanatos' gets enforced when Lecter's violent tendencies grapple with his refined tastes after encountering Clarice. Anna Freud's 'Defence Mechanism' aids in understanding the characters' responses to their traumas. While dealing with binary oppositions, the study examines the distinct dimensions of the characters' minds. The research also employs ethical criticism to analyze how their relationship challenges conventional moral boundaries and uses deconstruction to examine the blurring of moral and psychological aspects. The research paper ventures to inspect and comprehend the intricate webs of psychodynamics and the relationship arc of Hannibal Lecter and Clarice Starling.

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Introduction:-

Psychoanalysis aids in performing a metaphorical autopsy on individuals' conscious and unconscious minds. Though it does not have an axiomatic approach like mathematics, its empirical approach deciphers humans' cognitive processes through various tools of observation and experimentation. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian psychiatrist, first laid the foundation for psychoanalysis through his detailed study of human psychology. This new branch of psychology paves way to understand and empathize with fellow humans. The novel **The Silence of the Lambs** by Thomas Harris is an amalgamation of literature and psychology, through which two disparate characters are created. The novel mainly revolves around the distinctive characters, Dr. Hannibal Lecter and Clarice Starling. Lecter, a cannibalistic serial killer is willfully investigated by the young FBI trainee Clarice Starling. The characters' intriguing idiosyncrasies lay the groundwork and act as the linchpin of the research paper. Dr. Hannibal Lecter, one of the dual protagonists, is a seasoned psychiatrist turned cannibal serial killer whose psychopathic traits are evidenced by his glib and superficial charm, manipulation, lack of remorse, and nihilism. Being a vocational psychiatrist, Lecter utilizes his intellectual superiority and adroitness to cater for his perverse pleasure, making him indomitable. Lecter's manoeuvring skills allure people to credulously enter his labyrinth of inescapable traps, thus making his influence omnipresent.

Research Methodologies:-

'Perspectivism', as advocated by Friedrich Nietzsche in his book **Beyond Good and Evil**, is a concept that claims that the ostensible ethical and moral framework constructed by humans is merely subjective. Good and evil, according to Nietzsche, take shape from one's cognitive interpretation and perception. These perspectives could be molded by a person's environment and experience. Lecter, whose reclusion from the socially accepted standards of morality sets him apart from the majority of mankind. The theory of 'perspectivism' postulates that unless there is any concrete parameter to measure truth and reality, the preconceived ideologies in truth would be untenable. Lecter's absence of humanity and tenderness morphs him into an inept human whose every tiny move would turn his targets into scapegoats serving his purpose. His remorseless disposition is borne out of his internal reasons, which stem from his irreparable past. Lecter believes that truth is pluralistic and hence overlooks dogmatism.

Nothing happened to me, officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. (Harris 12)

The autonomy Lecter has over his own life is beyond doubt. This evidently shows a dynamic interplay between his inherent personality and external forces. Lecter's cannibalistic nature casts light on one of Sigmund Freud's three zones of the human psyche: the id. Id takes the lead when an individual capitulates to his intrusive thoughts. When these distressing thoughts refuse to bid farewell to one's consciousness, they totally encapsulate his/her mind and seal it away from being swayed by his/her superego (the pragmatic zone of the human psyche). Every human mind is characterized by Id, ego, and super-ego. Imagine yourself carrying a sack of fruits. As long as the quantity of fruits corresponds to the endurance of the sack's fabric, it is safe to carry. But once the sack bears weight beyond its capacity, the threads snap, ultimately tattering the sack beyond repair and letting the fruits tumble down the ground. And humans' minds are no different. Any incongruity in the stableness of the three zones of human psyche can lead to chronicle, infelicitous repercussions. Lecter shrewdly sets himself away from the mortal values cherished by the rest of the human race. He craftily contrives an invisible recess keeping his intentions enigmatic to the external world. Behind his eyes lies a vacuum of darkness hollow enough to engulf the sanity of the one facing against him. Lecter developed Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) after he was struck hard by his trauma.

A character of equal significance to Hannibal Lecter is Clarice Starling. Clarice Starling's persona is totally antithetical to Lecter's personality. Her spirit is configured by an allegiance to rationality and logic. She is an equipped FBI trainee assigned to interview the imprisoned serial killer Hannibal Lecter. Lecter and Clarice's first encounter sparks an unusual tension between them. Clarice is initially apprehensive about Lecter's credibility.

You'd like to quantify me, Officer Starling. You're so ambitious, aren't you? Do you know what you look like to me, with your good bag and your cheap shoes? Is it the West Virginia Starlings or the Okie Starlings, Officer? (13)

Lecter ridiculing Clarice's West Virginia accent and making denigrating remarks about her family background instil a fusion of vehemence and humility in Clarice. This gives Lecter an upper hand and a great deal of leverage to manipulate Clarice. His assertion of dominance can unmistakably be traced from his baleful sneer. In a metaphorical sense, like a parasite slowly draining its host's vitality before seizing complete control, Lecter drops sly doses of

persuasion into Clarice's mind. Through their conversations, the researcher notices a copious amount of manipulation, callousness, rusty empathy, and extreme sadism on Lecter's part. During Clarice's interrogation with Lecter, hints of Lecter's manipulative trait and Clarice's determinative trait surface on the shore.

Clarice: Let's hear the question.

Lecter: Yes or no? Catherine's waiting, isn't she? Listening to the whetstone? What do you think she'd ask you to do?"

Clarice: Let's hear the question.

Lecter: What's your worst memory of childhood? Quicker than that.

Clarice: The death of my father. (77)

These exchanges of dialogues apparently reveal how Lecter throws the questions back onto Clarice, accentuating his avariciousness for ascendancy. Whereas, Clarice's sheer tenacity exudes her keenness to reveal his past and shine a spotlight on his intricate psychology.

Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory 'Eros and Thanatos' is tactfully integrated into the characters' sketching. Eros is the life instinct which retains the mirth and joy of living, passion, and desires for love. On the other hand, Thanatos embodies hostile impulses and captivation with cruelty and death. Clarice inherits the attribute of Eros and Lecter symbolises both Eros and Thanatos. His ardent inquisitiveness about the intellectual pursuits and his interest in violence and death shows the undercurrent duality of Lecter's impulses.

Eros (Life Instinct): Clarice's pursuit to save Catherine, catch Buffalo Bill, and bring justice to light is the evident aspect of Eros. The shared intelligence of Clarice and Lecter also showcase hints of Eros.

Thanatos (Death Instinct): Lecter's cannibalistic nature and his morbid fascination account for Thanatos.

I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amaranone. Go back to school, little Starling. (14)

Anna Freud's popular hypothesis 'Defence Mechanism' is chipped in to get to the bottom of the complex characteristics of Lecter and Clarice. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, commonly called PTSD, lays the cornerstones for the evolution of the characters. Both Lecter and Clarice have been put through the wringer, carrying irremediable scars, and their assumed antidotes are different forms of defense mechanisms. Hannibal Lecter's loss of his family during World-War II and his experience of witnessing his sister being cannibalised coerced him to lose his grip on reality. His belief in the goodness of humanity faded into shadows of disillusionment, thus signing a devil's contract. His repugnance towards brutality ultimately turned him into a psychopathic and formidable figure. Lecter is a victim turned villain, whose post-traumatic grotesque murders bear no trace of human deeds. His ways of putting a veil on his traumas are through Rationalization, Intellectualization, and Projection. Lecter often justifies his acts of cruelty by alluding to noble causes. He feigns mental stability by concealing his grief with intellectual pursuits. To be precise, his manipulative behaviour is his only way out of his own psychological trappings. By cannibalizing his victims, he resigns supreme over his victims, therefore feeding his appetite for dominance.

Clarice Starling, in contrast to Lecter's personality, is a quintessential empathetic person. The untimely demise of her father and her helplessness in saving the slaughtered lambs have left a harrowing blister in her heart. Revisiting those times makes her feel like probing the scars, leaving them unhealable. Those haunting memories chase her and bring a jinx upon her, leading to persisting nightmares. She hears screams of lambs, leaving her distressed. This forbidden memory has in turn spurred a greater sense of responsibility and empathy within her, prompting her to make sure that no single creature's life is taken for granted. She blames herself for the lambs' death, hence she seeks redemption regardless of the ordeals she faces in the pursuit. But Clarice's mind enforces 'Denial' as a 'Defence Mechanism' to avoid facing her traumatic past, focusing on her occupational obligations instead. 'The Theory of Denial', as proposed by Anna Freud, stems from the conflict between accepting reality and the apprehension to face it. In the novel, several instances denote Lecter's intention to fish out her inner troubles and Clarice's struggle to deny his claims.

Lecter: You still wake up sometimes, don't you? Wake up in the iron dark with the lambs screaming?

Clarice: Sometimes.

Lecter: Do you think if you caught Buffalo Bill yourself and if you made Catherine all right, you could make the lambs stop screaming, do you think they'd be all right too and you wouldn't wake up again in the dark and hear the lambs screaming? Clarice?

Clarice: Yes. I don't know. Maybe.

Lecter: Thank you, Clarice. (118)

The defence mechanisms employed by Lecter and Clarice lay a magnifying lens on the contrasting directions they each pursued. Fire can emblemize warmth, divine power, and purification, catering to the needs of humans. On the contrary, Fire can also symbolise a substantial threat that ravages everything we cherish, leaving behind nothing but ashes. In that way, their traumatic experiences bore two distinct fruits, one being fruitful and the other being malignant. Clarice and Lecter, both their character frameworks have been heavily influenced by their childhood occurrences.

Object Relations Theory, posited by Melanie Klein, majorly prioritises the relationship between the behavioural patterns of humans and their early relationship, especially with the elderly who are involved in their upbringing. Clarice's bond with her father and the connections she made at the orphanage instilled in her a lasting sense of morality and compassion, even when faced with challenges. Her long-standing bonds with her peers since childhood drive her to lead a virtuous life. But Lecter's vulnerability following the death of his beloved family provokes indignation. Despite beginning with strange and unsettling encounters, Clarice and Lecter's mutual understanding deepened with each passing day. Initially apprehensive about Lecter, Clarice gradually becomes ensnared by his meticulously woven webs of deception, ultimately bartering her haunting memories for vital information on Buffalo Bill's whereabouts. Her complicated past once repressed resurfaces, letting her to confront her trauma and attain self-revelation.

Lecter: They were slaughtering the spring lambs?

Clarice: Yes.

Lecter: What did you do?

Clarice: I couldn't do anything for them. I was just a---

Lecter: What did you do with the horse? (117)

Research Gap

The question "How can a righteous officer like Clarice sympathise with a morally corrupt serial killer?" can be studied through 'Ethical Criticism'. Clarice is stuck in an ethical dilemma. The novel challenges the ethical framework. Many researchers have overlooked this aspect of relationship between Clarice and Lecter. By employing Ethical Criticism, the researcher has examined how far the moral and emotional understanding can go in literature. Though Clarice is committed to justice and uses Lecter's help to catch the killer, her growing respect for Lecter's intelligence complicates that. The reason why Clarice turned from being apprehensive to appreciative of Lecter's intelligence can be viewed under the lens of 'Deconstruction'. The binary opposition that once rendered a veil between them seem to dissipate as their binaries blur and collapse. When Clarice shares every single traumatising memory with Lecter, her inner locks that once imprisoned her heart slowly unlock and give wings to her individualism. By probing her buried traumatic pasts that she fears to face, Lecter helps her identify herself, thus liberating her mind from cobwebs. Lecter is drawn by Clarice's intelligence and spiritual stability, and during the due course of the investigation, he provides her with useful insights. They rely on one another spiritually as they have opened the least explored chest box of sensitive memories to each other. Like how the magnets with opposite poles get attracted to one another, Clarice and Lecter harbour a sense of mutual trust. While embracing the intellectual qualities of each other, they still stay loyal to their personal convictions. This is evidenced by Lecter's attempt to free himself from prison by manipulating and fooling the law enforcement with his tactical plan. Clarice's self-oath to catch Buffalo Bill remains undisturbed even when faced with Lecter's guileful remarks. This proves that her intellectual indulgence with the epitome of manipulation (Lecter) can't oscillate her determination. Lecter, who once appeared to be a monster out for blood, in fact, has only acted as a pole star that channelises Clarice's cluttered mind in the right path. Clarice's cognition kindled by Lecter makes her outlook on him turn 180 degrees. Every now and then, like a mentor, Lecter uses cryptic words to hint at something. And Clarice, like an enthusiastic kid, decodes his encrypted ideas, which ultimately impresses Lecter. The binary opposition slowly blurs and a transcendental spiritual relationship blooms between them. They blur the lines between them, forming a symbiotic relationship. They find a kindred spirit in one another and equally appreciate their intellectual similarities regarding human behaviour and psychology. This shared quality assuages the Binary Opposition that once curtailed them from trusting each other. Lecter fondly writes, "Some of our stars are the same, Clarice" (184) in his letter, alluding to

how their relationship arc has turned around over the period of time. Lecter, being a man who always belittles and perceives humans to be his subordinates, views Clarice as the only person deserving enough to enter his good books. Clarice, who once approached him with caution, becomes understanding of Lecter.

Lecter recurrently asks Clarice whether the screaming of the lambs has been silenced. This shows that he is concerned about Clarice and wants to make sure that Clarice attains redemption from her cursed past. Lecter writes a letter to Clarice mentioning his warm concern. The following line justifies his worry about her, "Well, Clarice, have the lambs stopped screaming?" (184). Clarice's internal turmoil and the screaming of the lambs in her dreams become silenced, finally letting her relish the sweetness of peaceful sleep. Clarice's mental peace is heavily contributed by Lecter. Clarice's initial apprehension towards Lecter has transformed into an appreciation of his intellect. Lecter identifies Clarice's zeal from their first encounter and is fascinated by her, giving her the necessary information. The exchange of emotions and wisdom has resulted in their cordial relationship.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the researcher, by incorporating various reliable tools of Psychoanalysis, has dissected and analyzed the cerebral and emotional disparities and similarities between Clarice and Lecter. The researcher has also found that the incidents and the environment of one's childhood mould them into what they become in their adulthood. Though Lecter seems like using Clarice's trauma as a pawn during the 'quid pro quo' game, he has in turn helped in her emancipation from the cocoon, thereby letting her soar high with strong wings. He might be a psychopath, but what happened to him is beyond cruelty. Intrusive thoughts reside in humans since they are a part of the human psyche. Lecter is highly driven by his intrusive thoughts, and we humans possess similar impetuous thoughts, but what makes us different is the conviction to not be governed by such destructive thoughts. Lecter and Clarice are like two peas in a pod when it comes to undergoing agonizing traumas. Lecter, being a troubled person drowning in the ocean of psychopathy, finds remnants of himself in Clarice.

Lecter: Good-bye Clarice. Will you let me know if ever the lambs stop screaming?

Clarice: Yes (118)

Lecter and Clarice's relationship can be consolidated in a single line. Lecter respects Clarice's intelligence and she reciprocates that respect. Though the true nature of their relationship is ambiguous, it is noticeable that they share a bond that transcends the usual boundaries.

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