

"Hannibal: A Visual Feast of Philosophy"

"Hannibal" is a mesmerising Tv series that weaves a story around the iconic characters of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. The show has distinctive visual storytelling and unfolds through a lens of artistic genius, using cinematography, symbolism, and meticulous attention to detail to bring an unique and immersive viewing experience to the audience. "Hannibal" goes beyond the typical crime drama as the show ventures into many interesting philosophical themes that elevate its storytelling. Through the show's character developments and visual storytelling "Hannibal" delves into Freudian psychology, Nietzschean philosophy and Platonic ideals, which challenges the viewers to look into the blurred lines between good and evil.

In this essay I will explore the philosophical underpinnings within "Hannibal ", within this exploration are Sigmund Freud's intricate concepts, particularly the exploration of the unconscious mind and the nuanced complexity inherent in human psychology, as well as Friedrich Nietzsches Übermensch theory, unravelling how "Hannibal" embodies Nietzschean principles of self-overcoming, individualism, and the creation of personal values. I will also be exploring Plato's Divided Line, a theoretical construct delineating various levels of understanding and knowledge and how Will and Hannibal's characters evolve to match each other.

Hannibal's Psychoanalytic Depths: A Freudian Exploration

Sigmund Freud proposed a multifaceted view of the human personality, which is composed of three factors known as ID, The Ego, and The Superego. Suggesting that these factors work together in order to create a complex human behaviour. (Boag, 2014) According to Freud the "Id" is the only personality that is present within in person for birth, it sources all the psychic energy of a person. This personality is a part of the unconsciousness and includes instinctive and primitive behaviours. The Ego is both a consciousness and unconscious personality that develops from the Id, the ego is there to help manage the impulsive nature of the id according to the social norms of society, it is also the personality responsible for dealing with reality. The SuperEgo is a personality that begins to develop around the age of 5, it emerges from the moral standards and ideals that we are taught from our parents and society. The superego holds the guidelines that we use to make judgments. (Kendra Cherry, 2022)

Bryan Fuller's own character of Dr.Bedelia Du Maurier, Dr Alana Bloom and The Wendigo are used in the show to gather more information about Hannibal Lecter but they can also be seen as literal reflections of Hannibal's Id, Ego, and superego. (Edge, 2022)

- Bedelia, Hannibal's psychiatrist, serves as his ego, engaging with, analysing, and protecting him while acting as a mediator with the external world.
- Alana Bloom, representing the superego, functions as the series' moral judge, later becoming Hannibal's personal warden and punisher. Bloom even adopts modifications of Hannibal's signature wardrobe in an attempt to confine and control him.
- The Wendigo hovers over Hannibal and the telepathic Will Graham, symbolising the Unconscious as a non-verbal yet expressive representation of Hannibal's repressed homicidal id.

Fuller's clever use of Freudian characters in "Hannibal" offers fans a captivating peek into Hannibal Lecter's psyche. Through characters like Dr. Bedelia, Alana Bloom, and The Wendigo, Sigmund Freud's tripartite model is seamlessly integrated. Bedelia as Hannibal's ego, Alana as the superego, and The Wendigo as a symbol of his repressed id provide nuanced insights into Hannibal's conflicts and desires. This Freudian lens adds depth to the psychological exploration, enhancing the storytelling in this enthralling series.

Hannibal is Nietzsche's Übermensch

Friedrich Nietzsche constructed the idea of the Übermensch, also known as superman, which is the idea that humans create their own values based on their life experience. Nietzsche states that the Übermensch is someone who has overcome themselves, sublimating their impulses and passions, and owes nothing to anyone, not even God (Maden).

There are 7 main ingredients of a Übermensch;

- Self-determination
- Creativity
- Becoming
- Overcoming
- Discontent
- Flexibility
- Self-mastery
- Self-confidence
- Cheerfulness
- Courage

Across the 3 seasons of the show Hannibal's character shows Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch in several ways. Moral Autonomy; Hannibal Lecter exhibits a strong sense of moral autonomy, creating his own moral code that goes beyond conventional notions of right and wrong. He operates outside societal norms and traditional moral frameworks. Intellectual Superiority; Nietzsche's Übermensch is characterised by intellectual superiority and a capacity to transcend common beliefs. Hannibal, as a brilliant psychiatrist and cultured individual, exhibits intellectual depth that sets him apart from others. Self-Overcoming; The Übermensch is someone who continually engages in self-overcoming, transcending limitations and embracing personal growth. Hannibal is depicted as constantly evolving, both psychologically and intellectually, adapting to new circumstances. Individualistic Values; Hannibal rejects conventional morality and societal expectations in favour of his own individualistic values. He operates on a plane where personal desires and aesthetics take precedence over external moral standards. Creative Power; Nietzsche emphasises the creative power of the Übermensch, the ability to shape and create one's own values. Hannibal, through his manipulations and actions, asserts a creative power in shaping the world around him according to his own vision. (SOMAN & BASIL, 2018) It's important to note that while there are parallels, Hannibal is not a straightforward embodiment of Nietzsche's Übermensch.

Plato's Divided Line in a cannibal love story

Plato's Divided Line theory proposes that there are different levels of understanding and knowledge, ranging from mere sensory perception to higher forms of intellectual comprehension, with the latter being more accurate reflections of reality. (University, 2019)

Utilising Plato's Divided Line and Allegory of the Cave provides a compelling lens through which to analyse the main characters, Will and Hannibal. Will, with his innate intelligence and unique condition, appears to commence at an advanced stage of human development. In contrast, Hannibal is strategically positioned at the knowing stage, granting him a sense of superiority over others, yet fostering an isolating loneliness that seemingly justifies his morally ambiguous actions. As Season 1 concludes and Season 2 begins, Will endeavours to ascend to Hannibal's enlightened stature, a pursuit that ultimately falters, hinting at a potential discrepancy between imitation and authentic embodiment of Hannibal's knowing stage. Season 3 introduces religious discussions about feeling, thinking, and knowing, the overarching theme of God's role in Hannibal's actions and the potential improvement of Will through Hannibal's influence adds depth to the show's complexity. (reddituser, 2023)

Conclusion

In conclusion "Hannibal" skillfully intertwined cinematic brilliance with philosophical explorations of Freudian psychology, Nietzschean philosophy, and Platonic ideals. The show's use of characters like Dr. Bedelia, Alana Bloom, and The Wendigo being used to embody Sigmund Freud's personality model added a psychological depth to the show. As well as this the show draws inspiration from Nietzsche's Übermensch as Hannibal Lecter becomes a character challenging societal norms with principles of moral autonomy and intellectual superiority. To add to both of these Plato's Divided Line theory shapes the narrative's exploration of human development, with Will at an advanced stage and Hannibal at the knowing stage. Season 3 delves into religious discussions, connecting psychology and philosophy. "Hannibal" prompts viewers to reflect on the intricate interplay between psychology and philosophy, making it a visually rich and thought-provoking journey into morality and the human psyche. As well as this "Hannibal's" use of philosophical concepts shape both the characters and overarching narrative with a rich tapestry of intellectual depth and storytelling.

Part 2

Applying Philosophical Concepts In Practice

In this section of the essay I have stepped away from "Hannibal" and its characters, however I will still carry forth some of the concepts that I researched. For the second part of this essay I have written a short gothic drama series that I will use as a short case study in order to consider the challenges and opportunities that arise when applying philosophical concepts to visual storytelling.

In the town where shadows whisper secrets and the line between reality and illusion is blurred, a young woman named Evelyn finds herself haunted by hallucinations. As she grapples with her own inner turmoil, the hallucinations take on a life of their own, representing her subconscious in the form of distinct characters – the Id, the Ego, and the Superego;

(Eren)The Id: A seductive and impulsive figure, a whisper in the shadows tempting Evelyn to embrace her primal desires and untapped potential. With every encounter, Eren led her into uncharted territories of self-indulgence, urging her to break free from societal constraints and explore the depths of her desires. Through this alluring figure, Evelyn discovered the power within herself, a raw and untamed energy waiting to be harnessed

As Evelyn confronted the darkness within, Eren served as the catalyst for her liberation, challenging her to confront the suppressed aspects of her identity and break free from the chains of societal expectations.

(Bonnie)The Ego: In the midst of chaos and seduction, Bonnie emerged as the rational and composed character, a beacon of reason guiding Evelyn through the challenges of her daily life. With a pragmatic and thoughtful approach, Bonnie became Evelyn's anchor in the storm, helping her navigate the blurred lines between reality and illusion.

Bonnie's influence extended beyond the hallucinatory realm, providing Evelyn with the strength and clarity needed to face the external challenges of her existence. Through logical reasoning and calculated decisions, Bonnie became the stabilising force that allowed Evelyn to confront her demons and reclaim control over her life.

(Edward)The Superego: An authoritative and judgmental presence, representing the societal norms and moral standards that sought to confine Evelyn's spirit. As a manifestation of her superego, Edward pressured her to conform, pushing her towards a life dictated by external expectations. The clash between Eren's impulsive desires, Bonnie's rationality, and Edward's strict moral compass created a tumultuous internal landscape for Evelyn.

Despite the oppressive nature of Edward's influence, his presence served as a crucial element in Evelyn's journey. The struggle to balance the conflicting voices within her mind forced her to question the external forces that sought to shape her identity and paved the way for her ultimate transformation.

Visual elements; shadows, distorted reflections and dreamlike sequences

As she navigates through her everyday life, these characters influence her journey toward self-discovery. The show concludes with Evelyn's transformation into an Übermensch, breaking free from societal norms and internal conflicts. The triumphant synthesis of Eren's primal energy, Bonnie's rationality, and Edward's moral compass propelled her into a realm of self-empowerment, where she emerged as a liberated and authentic individual.

Challenges and Opportunities

Translating philosophical concepts into tangible storytelling provided a few challenges such as; Visualising the concept, as the ID, Ego and Superego are complex and subjective it was difficult to find easily identifiable characteristics that would ensure that the audience could easily connect the visual representations of Freud's theory. As Well as this I found that the consistency in my character designs became more challenging. The design of characters like Eren, Bonnie, and Edward was crucial, each character needed to embody their respective psychological traits consistently throughout the narrative. Changes in their visual representation could confuse the audience and dilute the impact of the story. I also found it challenging to create characters that didn't immediately tell the audience that they are based on already set characteristics. I do believe that I failed to do that during the outline of my idea, but this case study has given me a few ideas and concepts that I can continue to look at for other works.

Within Evelyn's psyche lies a realm of creative opportunities. The abstract narrative grants freedom for symbolism and unique visuals, allowing for unconventional storytelling. Evelyn's transformation presents a chance for a visually dynamic evolution. Some of the opportunities include the use of more symbolism and metaphors in storytelling. The abstract nature of philosophical concepts allows for a more creative use of symbolism and metaphors. Visual elements, such as shadows, distorted reflections, or dreamlike sequences, can serve as powerful metaphors to represent the interplay between the Id, Ego, and Superego. This provides an opportunity to engage the audience's imagination and lead them to find a deeper narrative. As well as that, using these concepts also allows for more artistic freedom within storytelling as the hallucinatory setting and abstract nature of the story provide artists and storytellers with artistic freedom. This allows for innovative and imaginative representations of Evelyn's internal struggles. The surreal environment opens the door to unconventional visual styles and storytelling techniques that can enhance the impact of the narrative. Additionally these concepts also allow for visual evolution: As Evelyn undergoes her transformation into an Übermensch, there is an opportunity for a visual evolution in the storytelling. The gradual shift in the visual representation of the characters and the overall environment can mirror Evelyn's internal growth. This not only adds depth to the narrative but also provides a visually compelling way to convey the character's journey.

In summary, translating Freud's concepts into storytelling posed challenges in visualising abstract elements and maintaining character consistency. However, it sparked creative opportunities, using symbolism and metaphors for unconventional storytelling. The abstract approach provided artistic freedom and the potential for visual evolution, laying the groundwork for future improvements in storytelling techniques.

Part 3

The Power of Philosophical Concepts In Filmmaking

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." (Nordmann, 2005, p154)

Wittgenstein believes that misconceptions happen when a person doesn't see what game they are playing, stating that a person must 'work out the game' in order to have good communication. Wittgenstein believes people often have the wrong picture compared to what they mean stating that this is why communication typically goes wrong. Considering that language is such a big part of how we understand things, it should be important within film.

Wittgenstein's quote emphasises the limitations of language when explaining complex concepts. In filmmaking the challenges lie in visually capturing certain abstract philosophical ideas.

The ability to express and discuss these ideas is crucial for filmmakers to translate complex concepts into compelling visuals and narratives, allowing audiences to engage with profound philosophical themes on screen.

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