Character's Analysis in Ego Defense Mechanism due to Trauma and Revenge on *Hannibal Rising*

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Abstract. This study explores the ego defense mechanisms exhibited by the main character in Peter Webber's film Hannibal Rising, particularly in response to trauma and revenge. Rooted in psychoanalytic theory, the analysis focuses on how the protagonist, Hannibal Lecter, employs various defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, and sublimation to cope with the traumatic events of his past. These mechanisms help him channel his psychological distress into acts of revenge. The study delves deeper into the implications of these defense mechanisms on Hannibal's personality development, examining how trauma shapes his moral descent and fuels his violent tendencies. Additionally, the complex interplay between trauma, psychological defenses, and the protagonist's relentless drive for retribution is explored, offering a nuanced understanding of his transformation into a morally ambiguous figure. The analysis aims to shed light on how trauma influences not only behavior but also deep psychological processes.

Keywords: Ego Defense Mechanism, Trauma, Revenge, Psychoanalytic Theory, Hannibal Rising

1. INTRODUCTION

Most people who undergo a traumatic event will react with feelings such as shock, anger, anxiety, fear, and sometimes guilt. These responses are typical and usually subside over time for most individuals. However, in some cases, these emotions persist and intensify, making it difficult for the person to live a normal life.

In Peter Webber's film "Hannibal Rising," an example of traumatic behavior is illustrated. The story centers around the main character who undergoes psychological trauma due to war crimes he experienced during his early years. He witnessed severe violence that subsequently resulted in him developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The researchers intend to analyze traumatic behavior or PTSD from a psychological perspective within the framework of Peter Webber's "Hannibal Rising." The film is loosely based on a novel by Thomas Harris, which Harris also adapted for the screen. According to David T. Holland in the Encyclopedia Americana, a film can be viewed as a form of literature as it follows a narrative structure, develops characters, and establishes atmosphere [1].

Similar to paintings, films showcase two-dimensional images within a frame. Like music, they manipulate material over time. Like dance, films use space choreographically to create aesthetic appeal. Comparable to literature, films are founded on narratives and develop characters and moods. Like theater, they predominantly feature human actors performing roles. And like poetry, films can express multiple layers of meaning simultaneously. In "Hannibal Rising," the psychological aspect highlighted is the traumatic behavior exhibited by the character Hannibal Lecter.

This study provides a unique contribution by specifically focusing on the interplay between trauma and ego defense mechanisms in the character of Hannibal Lecter, which has not been explored extensively in previous literature. While earlier studies have focused on the general depiction of trauma in cinema, few have delved into how specific defense mechanism such as repression, denial, and sublimation are portrayed within the framework of a character's psychological development in response to trauma and revenge. This research not only highlights the psychological depth of Hannibal's transformation but also examines how his experiences align with Freud's theories of ego defense mechanisms, thus offering new insights into the narrative structure of the film. Furthermore, this study adds to the growing body of literature on psychoanalytic film criticism by incorporating recent

theoretical advancements in trauma psychology and character development [2], [3]. By exploring the relationship between trauma and moral decay in such detail, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the long-term psychological impacts of war crimes and how they influence both individual and societal perceptions of justice [4], [5]. Therefore, the study will observe how psychological background of the character that influence the story setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Theory

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, developed a theory of ego defense mechanisms to explain how individuals unconsciously protect themselves from anxiety and emotional pain [6]. According to Freud, these mechanisms are strategies employed by the ego to manage internal conflicts and external stresses, helping individuals cope with reality and preserve their self-esteem. Freud identified several keys defense mechanisms, each serving a distinct function in alleviating psychological distress [7].

Kinds of keywords of Ego Defense Mechanisms by Sigmund Freud are [6]: repression, denial, projection, rationalization, and displacement. Repression is the unconscious process of blocking out painful or anxiety-inducing thoughts, memories, and experiences from conscious awareness. This defense mechanism helps individuals avoid facing distressing realities by keeping them buried in the unconscious, denial involves refusing to accept reality or facts that are distressing. This mechanism helps individuals avoid acknowledging unpleasant truths or emotional pain by rejecting the existence or significance of the threat; projection is the process of attributing one's own unacceptable thoughts, feelings, or impulses to other. This defense mechanism allows individuals to avoid recognizing their own undesirable attributes by perceiving them in other people; rationalization involves providing logical or reasonable explanations for behaviors or actions that are actually motivated by irrational or emotional factors. This mechanism helps individuals justify their actions and maintain a positive self-image; and displacement is the redirection of emotions from a threatening or unacceptable one. This mechanism allows individuals to express their emotions in a safer context.

Psychology in Literature

Based on Freud's Psychoanalytic Theories. He developed a theory of ego defense mechanisms that explores how individuals protect themselves from emotional distress and psychological conflicts. According to Freud, these defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies employed by the ego to manage anxiety and maintain psychological equilibrium. Freud identified several key defense mechanisms, including repression, denial, projection, rationalization, and displacement, each serving a specific function in dealing with internal and external stressors [6] [7].

Freud's psychological theory provides valuable tools for analyzing characters in literature. By applying his concepts of defense mechanisms to literary characters can gain deeper insights into their motivations, conflict, and development. This approach allows to explore how character cope with trauma, navigate Hannibal internal struggles, and justify Hannibal's actions within the narrative. This is how antagonis play the role as crazy as the narative due to the background [8], [9].

Psychoanalysis

According to Psychoanalysis and Psychological Research: New Directions by Mark Solms, psychological research is categorized into various branches, such as cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, biological psychology, abnormal psychology, and quantitative psychology [10]. Psychoanalysis and Psychological Research: New Directions by Mark Solms further explains that abnormal psychology and personality psychology are used to assess whether someone's behavior is abnormal. Abnormal psychology aims to understand, predict, explain, and modify abnormal behaviors. Personality psychology, on the other hand, examines individual personalities, focusing on psychological patterns in attitudes, emotions, and thoughts [10], [11]. In psychology, there are various theories of personality, one prominent example being Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freud, an Austrian neurologist, is renowned for developing this theory, which posits that the mind contains unconscious processes and functions that are not easily accessible[12].

According to Freud, psychoanalysis is founded on several key principles: it involves the assumption of unconscious mental processes, recognition of the concepts of resistance and repression, and an understanding of the significance of sexuality and the Oedipus complex [13]. Furthermore, Freud,

outlined three formal structural models in psychoanalysis: 1) the Id, 2) Ego, and 3) Superego [14], [15]. These models represent different aspects of human psychological functioning.

(1) Id

The id is the core of human biology, driving our energy through life and death instincts. The life instinct, called eros, motivates humans to seek necessities like food. The death instinct, known as Thanatos, drives aggressive impulses towards destruction, tending to be harmful. The id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification and avoiding pain without regard for reason, values, logic, morals, or ethics.

(2) Ego

Ego's primary objective is to navigate reality. It works to gratify the id's desires in a practical manner, taking into account the expectations of the superego. Operating on the reality principle, the ego strives to attain maximum gratification while minimizing adverse outcomes.

(3) Superego

The superego is the moral component of our psyche, encompassing our values and the guilt we feel when violating our ethical standards. It regulates behavior according to internalized, rulesreinforcing positive behavior with feelings of pride and discouraging negative behavior with feelings of guilt, contingent upon the circumstances [14], [16].

War Crimes

War of crimes hold importance in international humanitarian law, exemplified by international tribunals like the Nuremberg Trials and the Tokyo Trials itself. War of crimes involve breaches of the laws or conventions governing warfare. Before delving into the war of crimes definition, it's important toward briefly explain the customs and laws that regulate warfare [17]. A Companion to Military History, war crimes encompass actions that contravene both national and international laws and customs regulating warfare, as well as other activities related to armed conflict, these laws are basic rules widely accepted for combat situations. Despite the perception that war is a free- for-all, these laws exist to prevent conflicts from escalating unnecessarily. The laws of war include:

1. Hospitals, ambulances, doctors, and medical personnel marked as such should not be targeted. These places, vehicles, and individuals must not be armed.
2. Combatants must wear uniforms identifying their allegiance and carry weapons openly.
3. Individuals displaying a flag or plain white cloth signify surrender or intent to negotiate and should not be attacked.
4. Enemy soldiers who have been captured must receive humane treatment.
5. Places of worship, such as churches, temples, and morques are safeguarded from military targeting[18].

In simpler terms, war crimes are actions carried out during war that violate international rules. Another definition from the *Political Dictionary* explains war crimes as holding individuals responsible for breaking the laws or customs of war [18], [19]. War crimes are further defined as major breaches of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocol I of 1977.

Meanwhile, the *Law Encyclopedia* defines war crimes as actions that break the laws, treaties, customs, and international standards that govern military conflicts between nations or groups [19]. In essence, war crimes involve violations of legal protections during wartime and failure to follow established procedures and rules of engagement, such as: Types of War Crimes

According to The Military History Companion, international law has recognized war crimes to encompass three primary categories since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials in 1945: Crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity are specified as three distinct categories in Article 6 of the Nuremberg Trials Charter of August 1945.

Crimes against peace involve actions like planning, preparing, starting, or conducting wars of aggression that violate international treaties, agreements, or assurances. They also include participating in a conspiracy to achieve these ends [20], [21], [21]. Traditional war crimes, as defined in the Nuremberg Trials Charter, include acts such as "murder, mistreatment, or forced displacement of civilians in occupied territories, harming or killing prisoners of war or individuals at sea, hostage-taking, looting of public or private property, and indiscriminate destruction of urban areas, towns, or villages without military justification." Violations of the laws of war may also include improper use of prohibited weapons or misuse of the surrender flag [17], [22] . Crimes against humanity, as defined in the Nuremberg Trials Charter, consist of acts like murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and

other inhumane acts committed against civilian populations during war or as part of systematic persecution based on political, racial, or religious motives [17] [23], [24].

In essence, the three main categories of war crimes, according to the Wikipedia page on war crimes, are conventional war crimes (such as killing, mistreating, or deporting civilians in occupied territories), crimes against peace, and crimes against humanity (which involve systematic persecution based on political, racial, or religious grounds against civilian populations). These offenses refer to violations of established laws or customs of warfare and can include a broad range of actions, from killing and mistreating civilians in occupied areas to abusing prisoners of war, taking hostages, and destroying cities, towns, and villages without military necessity. From the provided definition, it is clear that actions such as mistreating civilians in occupied areas, establishing forced labor camps, abusing or killing prisoners of war, executing hostages, and indiscriminately destroying urban and rural communities are classified as war crimes. These actions violate established norms and laws governing warfare.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The main focus of this final project is the film *Hannibal Rising,* directed by Peter Webber and released by MGM Entertainment in 2007, using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods aim to understand the underlying meanings, themes, and dynamics of a given subject by analyzing non-numerical data. In the context of film analysis, qualitative methods involve a detailed examination of narrative elements, dialogue, visual style, and character interactions to interpret psychological themes and mechanisms. This approach is particularly effective for analyzing complex psychological phenomena, such as ego defense mechanisms within *Hannibal Rising.*

Qualitative film analysis has been widely used in various studies to explore deeper psychological or sociocultural meanings embedded in visual media. For example, previous studies have employed similar methods to analyze psychological themes in film characters, emphasizing the importance of close reading and thematic analysis to unpack subconscious elements portrayed in films [25] [26]. These methods are particularly relevant in psychoanalytic film studies, where understanding characters' mental processes is crucial [27]. By focusing on both narrative and visual elements, qualitative film analysis offers insights into how films represent psychological defense mechanisms, contributing to a richer interpretation of characters and their motivations [25].

In this study, qualitative methods allow for a comprehensive examination of Hannibal Lecter's ego defense mechanisms. Through a detailed analysis of scenes, dialogue, visual and auditory elements, character development, and thematic patterns, researchers can gain a deep understanding of how Freud's defense mechanisms are represented and how they influence the character's behavior and the film's narrative. This aligns with similar methodologies used in psychoanalytic film criticism, where textual and visual data are analyzed to reveal the underlying psychological and symbolic structures [28]. The qualitative approach thus provides valuable insights into the psychological dimensions of Hannibal Rising, enhancing our understanding of its complex characters and themes, as noted in studies of other films with psychologically intricate characters [29].

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence of Ego Defence Mechanisms in Hannibal Rising

Repression

Hannibal's repression is evident in his refusal to directly confront his traumatic past. A key moment occurs when Lady Murasaki encourages Hannibal to discuss his history, only for him to deflect the conversation, focusing on the future instead. This moment illustrates his suppression of painful memories:

Lady Murasaki: "You must talk about your past. It will help you."
Hannibal Lecter: "What is important is the future. We must focus on what lies ahead."

Through this dialogue, Hannibal's repression becomes clear as he distances himself from his trauma, choosing to focus on forward momentum rather than revisiting the emotional pain of his past. Freud (1915) argued that repression is a defense mechanism where individuals unconsciously block distressing

memories, consistent with Hannibal's behavior [28]. This mechanism often appears in individuals suffering from PTSD.

Denial

Denial manifests in Hannibal's inability to accept the immorality of his violent acts. Instead, he rationalizes these actions as necessary corrections to societal flaws, avoiding the ethical implications of his behavior:

> Victim: "You can't just kill people and expect it to be right."
> Hannibal Lecter: "I am restoring balance. The world is flawed, and I am correcting it."

Hannibal's denial allows him to sidestep the moral consequences of his violence, framing his acts as justified responses to corruption rather than admitting his moral failure [30]. Freud (1924) described denial as a way to refuse reality that causes anxiety [31]. In cinematic characters, denial often serves as a narrative device to illustrate moral conflict.

Rationalization

Hannibal uses rationalization to justify his violent actions, presenting them as means to restore justice. His dialogue with Lady Murasaki demonstrates how he constructs logical reasons to excuse his behavior:

> Hannibal: "The world is a corrupt place, and sometimes, we must take drastic measures to cleanse it."
> Lady Murasaki: "You don't believe this is wrong?"
> Hannibal: "Sometimes, to bring about true justice, one must become an instrument of that change."

This dialogue showcases Hannibal's complex reasoning to justify violence as a morally righteous act, thus providing a psychological escape from accountability. Freud (1933) argued that rationalization is a way for individuals to justify actions that conflict with societal norms [32]. In Hannibal's case, rationalization allows him to maintain his self-perception as a force for justice, similar to characters analyzed in moral disengagement studies (Rao, 2023) [6].

Projection

Projection is apparent when Hannibal attributes his own dark impulses to his victims, viewing them as embodiments of the evil he seeks to eradicate. His interactions often reveal this psychological displacement:

> Hannibal: "You represent everything that is vile and corrupt in this world. I am simply purging the filth."
> Victim: "You think you're so righteous?"
> Hannibal: "I am simply the hand of retribution against those who perpetuate evil."

In this exchange, Hannibal projects his internal corruption onto his victims, justifying his actions as a necessary purge of societal decay. Freud (1920) defined projection as a defense mechanism where undesirable traits are attributed to others [31]. This theme is often explored in characters who externalize internal conflicts.

Displacement

Hannibal's displacement of anger is reflected in how he channels his unresolved trauma into his fight against broader societal injustices. Rather than confronting the individuals responsible for his family's death, Hannibal displaces his rage onto those he perceives as symbols of corruption:

> Hannibal: "I can't bring back my family, but I can rid the world of those who contribute to its darkness."
> Lady Murasaki: "You are targeting people who have nothing to do with your past."
> Hannibal: "I am fighting a greater evil."

Here, Hannibal's displacement is clear, he redirects his unresolved grief and anger onto broader societal ills, using violence to process his trauma. Freud (1936) noted displacement as a defense mechanism where emotions are shifted to less threatening targets, consistent with findings from trauma studies [33].

Causes of Hannibal's Ego Defence Mechanisms
Traumatic Childhood Experiences
Hannibal's traumatic childhood, especially the murder of his family, is a primary driver behind his ego defense mechanisms. His reluctance to discuss his past with Lady Murasaki reflects his use of repression:

Lady Murasaki: "You carry such pain within you. Tell me about your past."
Hannibal: "The past is gone. What remains is what I choose to become."

Hannibal's repression shields him from confronting the overwhelming pain of his family's death, allowing him to continue functioning without addressing his trauma directly. Trauma-related studies show similar patterns of repression as a defense against overwhelming emotional pain [34], [35], [36].

Unresolved Grief and Anger
Hannibal's unresolved grief over his family's murder leads him to adopt denial and rationalization, particularly in his violent actions:

Victim: "Why are you doing this? You can't justify murder."
Hannibal: "The world is unfair. Sometimes, to restore balance, drastic measures are required."

Hannibal's denial of the immorality of his actions reveals the depth of his unresolved grief, which drives him to rationalize violence as a means of restoring balance to an unjust world. This is supported by studies on grief and denial [37].

Desire for Control and Justice
Hannibal's distorted sense of justice, coupled with his need for control, leads him to project his moral failings onto others and displace his trauma onto societal symbols of corruption:

Hannibal: "The ones I target are symbols of the corruption that plagues society. My actions are a response to the greater evil."
Lady Murasaki: "You are focusing on those who have no part in your suffering."
Hannibal: "They are representations of the evil I fight."

Through projection and displacement, Hannibal externalizes his trauma and justifies his actions by perceiving his victims as personifications of societal corruption. This behavior reflects the psychological dynamics often present in individuals who seek control after trauma [38] .

Psychological Need to Justify Actions
Hannibal's extensive use of rationalization is driven by his psychological need to align his violent behavior with a sense of moral righteousness. His dialogue reflects his internal struggle to justify his actions:

Hannibal: "My actions are necessary to restore the order that was disrupted by those who live without honor."
Lady Murasaki: "Do you not see the harm in what you are doing?"
Hannibal: "I see it as a means to correct a world that has gone astray."

This rationalization allows Hannibal to maintain his sense of control and purpose, reinforcing his belief that his violence serves a higher moral purpose, which is consistent with moral disengagement theories [39], [40], [40].

5. CONCLUSION

In *Hannibal Rising,* Hannibal Lecter employs several ego defense mechanisms, as conceptualized by Sigmund Freud, to manage the profound trauma he experiences and justify his violent quest for revenge. Central to these mechanisms is repression, as Hannibal unconsciously blocks out the traumatic memories of witnessing his family's murder, preventing him from confronting the full emotional weight of these experiences. Additionally, denial allows Hannibal to reject the moral implications of his violent acts, convincing himself that they are justified and necessary. This shields him from feelings of guilt and preserves his sense of righteousness. Rationalization plays a significant role, enabling Hannibal to construct logical explanations for his revenge, framing his actions as retributive justice. Projection is evident when Hannibal externalizes his violent impulses onto his victims, viewing them as embodiments of the evil he despises, while displacement allows him to redirect his unresolved anger from the original perpetrators of his trauma onto symbolic figures of injustice. By examining Hannibal Lecter's psychological journey, readers gain insights into the real-life implications of trauma, particularly in the context of war crimes and their psychological aftermath, offering a framework for understanding how profound trauma can shape not only individual behavior but societal perceptions of morality and justice. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the link between trauma and moral decay, highlighting how unresolved grief and psychological defense mechanisms can lead to violence, ultimately shaping the iconic character known throughout the *Hannibal Lecter* series as a complex figure of vengeance and emotional isolation. These findings offer valuable reference points for future research on the psychological impacts of trauma and the moral consequences of extreme defense mechanisms in response to suffering.

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