
Scrutinizing the Traits of Male Characters in Select Crime Fiction

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Abstract:

Literature has contributed to our understanding of the complexity of the human mind through its myriad depiction of characters. Understanding the temperament of the hero and the anti-hero is made interesting through the thrilling stories of crime novels. Crime fiction has enhanced the dissection of the psyche of the criminally inclined characters. This study attempts to highlight the traits of the male characters in the novels *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides and *The Silence of The Lambs* by Thomas Harris. The PEN model of personality propounded by Hans Eysenck is applied to reveal the traits of the male characters. These two novels feature a variety of male characters, all of whom exhibit the traits given by Eysenck in his theory. The superior traits of these characters serve as the main reason for them to involve in crime. This study establishes the notion that the traits of a person directly affect their actions and choices in life.

Keywords: Crime fiction, Traits, *The Silent Patient*, *The Silence of the Lambs*

One of the most basic ways to comprehend human nature is through literature. In order to study the roots of human creativity, literary works serve as concrete representations of cultural and artistic legacy. Literature offers a variety of topics and ideas regarding emotions, responses, tensions, concerns, motivations, wants, and many more events relating to man and existence. In earlier crime novels and films, the male protagonist is mainly portrayed as a masculine man who is humble, outright, meticulous, and a loner. Men in crime fiction novels are stereotyped at the core due to certain labels imposed on them by society. According to the famous philosopher Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... (gender) identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (25). In contrast to being only an observation of natural behavior, society's conception of gender defines human conduct by establishing a set of standards and expectations. As stated by her theory of gender performativity, the reason men are less expressive emotionally is that they have grown up believing this is the norm, not because they are innately stoic.

Theoretically, the ideal man is a man who exemplifies immaculate and unwavering masculinity. This made-up concept is used to describe the masculine gender and is crucial to how males see their gender.

The Big Sleep, a novel written by Raymond Chandler, portrays the character Detective Marlowe, whose interest and passion is detective work. A lack of emotion prevents him from becoming vulnerable to the outside world and all its people. Like the character Detective Marlowe, Dashiell Hammett introduces Samuel Spade as a detective in the novels *Too Many Have Lived*, and *They Can Only Hang You Once*. Both characters have dedicated their entire life to solving crimes, catching killers, and protecting the people. They present themselves to be serious in outer appearance and show neither sympathy nor emotion to the world. However, in recent popular culture novels, which have become a more promising reading genre, the male characters have undergone serious character development. Initially, in the novel, the men are found to be coarse and rough in nature, but in the end, they transform into subservient and sympathetic. The cut-throat attitude seen in the beginning softens its core with the development of the plot. Men are respectful, dignified, and virtuous in nature and thought.

In the twentieth century, Hans Eysenck was one of the most disputed and creative psychologists, and with the publication of nearly eighty books and

the production of numerous papers, Eysenck significantly contributed to this discipline, and he also served as the founding editor of the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*. Many psychologists have developed many theories on traits, but one of the most influential theories ever made is Hans Eysenck's PEN model of personality. His biologically based personality theory contends that people inherit a certain sort of nervous system that impacts their capacity for learning and environmental adaptation. Psychoticism, extraversion, and neuroticism are the three psychophysiological-based personality qualities that make up the PEN model. It works in a bipolar dimension making each personality quality have an opposite personality like Extraversion-Introversion, Neuroticism-Emotional Stability, Psychoticism-Normality. The salient features of the theory are discussed in the article "Eysenck's PEN Model of Personality," published on the website *Psychologist World*.

EXTRAVERSION – INTROVERSION: Individuals with high levels of extraversion engage more in social activities. They tend to be more talkative, outgoing and feel more at ease in groups. Extraverts enjoy being the focus of attention and often accumulate a larger social network of friends and associates. Introverts, however, tend to be quieter, shy away from large social gatherings and may feel uncomfortable interacting with strangers. As a result, they maintain smaller groups of close friends and are

more likely to enjoy contemplative activities (par. 8).

NEUROTICISM – EMOTIONAL STABILITY: Individuals scoring highly on neuroticism measures tend to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety. They worry about relatively insignificant matters, exaggerating their significance and feeling unable to cope with life stressors. A focus on the negative aspects of a situation, rather than the positives can lead to a person adopting a disproportionately negative outlook. They could experience jealousy or envy towards those who, in their opinion, are in a better situation. Low neurotic individuals are more likely to be understanding of others' shortcomings and to maintain their composure under pressure (par. 15).

PSYCHOTICISM – NORMALITY: According to the PEN model, high levels of traits such as psychoticism reduce a person's responsiveness to conditioning, meaning that they do not adopt the social norms that one may learn through reward and punishment. As a result, the theory suggests that individuals may be more prone to criminal behavior as they seek to fulfill their own interests whilst violating the rules of behavior accepted by others (par. 21).

The novel *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides has many male characters, and the most notable among them are Theo Faber, Christian West, Gabriel Berenson, Max Berenson, Jean Felix Martin, and Lazarus Diomedes. The

novel is told in the first person by Theo Faber, a talented psychotherapist whose voice dominates the story. Even though he is first portrayed as the protagonist, his actions leading up to Gabriel's murder and following the revelation indicate him to be more of an anti-hero or even antagonist.

According to the PEN model theory, the main protagonist of the novel, Theo Faber, displays the three personality factors. The Extraversion-Introversion dimension is seen in Theo prominently and subserviently throughout his personality. Generally, introverts shy away from the public, remain confined to their spaces and avoid excess community gatherings. Theo states, "Immobilized by fear, I was unable to go out, socialize, or make any friends. I might as well have never left home. It was hopeless. I was defeated, trapped. Backed into a corner. Any way out" (Michaelides 19). Theo fails to negotiate himself with the public, excludes himself from gatherings, is unable to socialize, and feels left out in a corner. Another line in the novel that shows Theo's Introversion is: "My instinct was to refuse—I had never been one for socializing with work colleagues. And I doubted Yuri, and I had much in common" (Michaelides 47). Theo refuses to get involved in any conversation with Yuri and expresses his disinterest in talking to his work colleagues; this proves his Introversion in him and how he tries to stay away from stimuli that can excite him too much.

The second trait mentioned by Hans Eysenck, High Neuroticism, is also evident in Theo's behavior when he experiences higher levels of stress and anxiety when he learns about Kathy's infidelity. Due to these traits, he takes steps to keep Kathy from leaving him. His stress and frustration are evident in the following lines:

I became conscious of the clock ticking. It seemed louder now, somehow. I tried to focus on it and anchor my spinning thoughts: tick, tick, tick—but the chorus of voices in my head grew louder and wouldn't be silenced. She was bound to be unfaithful, I thought; this had to happen, it was inevitable—I was never good enough for her; I was useless, ugly, worthless, nothing—she was bound to tire of me eventually—I didn't deserve her, I didn't deserve anything—it went on and on, one horrible thought after another punching me. (Michaelides 103)

The third dimension, High Psychoticism, is exhibited in Theo's behavior. According to this dimension, people may be more likely to engage in illegal activity as they try to further their own interests while going against the norms of behavior expected by others, and Theo clearly does it. Theo crosses both professional and personal lines in his quest to understand Alicia by getting in touch with Alicia's previous acquaintances and family members, even though Professor Diomedes had advised

him not to do it. This is in the following lines in the novel:

A few hours later, I was on my way back to Cambridge. On the train, I made another phone call—to Max Berenson. I hesitated before calling. He'd already complained to Diomedes once, so he wouldn't be pleased to hear from me again. But I knew I had no choice.

Tanya answered. Her cold sounded better, but I could hear the tension in her voice when she realized who I was.

I don't think—I mean, Max is busy. He's in meetings all day.

I'll call back.

I'm not sure that's a good idea. I—

I could hear Max in the background saying something, and Tanya replied: I'm not saying that, Max.

Max grabbed the phone and spoke to me directly: I just told Tanya to tell you to fuck off.

Ah.

You've got a nerve calling here again. I already complained once to Professor Diomedes.

Yes, I'm aware of that. Nonetheless, some new information has come to light, and it concerns you directly—so I felt I had no choice but to get in touch. (Michaelides 262)

The sign of obsessive love is evident in Theo's personality.

Instead of leaving Kathy when he finds her cheating, Theo holds onto her, which later results in the death of Kathy's lover Gabriel. Theo develops manipulative, possessive, and nervous behaviors as a result of his obsessive love. These qualities prompt him to take steps to keep Kathy from leaving him. Another supporting character of the novel is Christian West. He was a psychiatrist at The Grove, the leader of Alicia Berenson's care team, a friend of Gabriel Berenson, and a co-worker of Theo Faber. Instead of discovering the true reason for Alicia's mental condition, Christian West treats her with an excessive reliance on medications. Christian is revealed to be the enigmatic Dr. West, Gabriel's psychiatrist friend who saw Alicia in the weeks before Gabriel's murder. This is one of several instances in the book when dishonesty is displayed, and Christian hides this information. His false statement, along with his aloof manner, makes it simple for Theo to accuse Christian of trying to kill Alicia.

You're a selfish son of a bitch, Christian, you know that?

Christian stared at me with an increasing look of dismay.

. . . . Listen—it's not what it looks like.

Isn't it?

What else does it say in the diary?

What else is there to say?

Christian didn't answer the question. He held out his hand.

Can I have a look at it?

Sorry. I shook my head. I don't think that's appropriate.

Christian played with his chopsticks as he spoke. I shouldn't have done it. But it was entirely innocent. You've got to believe me.

I'm afraid I don't. If it were innocent, why didn't you come forward after the murder?

Because I wasn't really Alicia's doctor—I mean, not officially, I only did it as a favor to Gabriel. (Michaelides246)

When Alicia was in dire need of a psychologist, Christian West treated her by breaking the rules of professionalism. His motives in doing so were his greed for money and doing a favor to his friend. He had personal motivations and went against professional ethics, which can be associated with the display of psychoticism in the PEN model.

Another character in the novel is Max Berenson who is Alicia's lawyer and Gabriel's adopted older brother who outwardly appears to be honorable, helpful, and kind, but later, he engages in immoral activities like falling in love with his brother's wife, and he also tries to kiss Alicia without her will. This stands in stark contrast to the character's behavior, which is demonstrated to be entirely distinct. Even though he directs

Theo to Dr. West and provides him with information about Alicia's relationship with Gabriel, Max is one of the first people to publicly call Theo out to cross professional boundaries.

Jean Felix is Alicia's gallerist and oldest friend. However, in the weeks preceding Gabriel's murder, Alicia makes an effort to end her professional relationship with Jean-Felix in order to find a better gallerist by telling him that she believes he is taking advantage of her because of her artistic fame. Jean-Felix, however, ignores her and accuses Gabriel of putting them at odds.

It's time for a fresh start. For both of us.

I see. He lit another cigarette. And I suppose this is Gabriel's idea?

Gabriel's got nothing to do with it.

He hates my guts.

Don't be stupid.

He poisoned you against me. I've seen it happen. He's been doing it for years. (Michaelides 173)

Jean Felix also shows signs of neuroticism when Alicia tells him that he is using her only for her art's sake, and she wants to cut ties with him as her gallerist. Upon hearing this, Jean Felix becomes angry, anxious, and insecure, unable to cope with the conversation. He feels that Gabriel is the reason for this decision, and he accuses Alicia of acting like a good friend all this time towards him.

The next novel, *The Silence of the Lambs*, by Thomas Harris, has a plethora

of male characters. However, the main and most important characters are Dr. Hannibal Lecter, Buffalo Bill, Jack Crawford, and Dr. Chilton. Hannibal Lecter is one of the antagonists of the novel. He is also called "Hannibal the Cannibal" (Harris 7) as he kills his victims and cooks them. In addition to being brilliant, cunning, and proficient at taking his enemies by surprise, Hannibal Lecter is also imaginative and inventive in his tactics. When Hannibal is committing crimes, he does not show any remorse. In addition, he is not mindful of the injuries and harm he causes to his victims, and he has an extreme sense of arrogance in his conversations. Using these antics, Hannibal intimidates those around him and instills fear in his victims.

With extremely serious schizophrenia symptoms, he is both a savior and a slayer. The world around him is judged according to his own peculiar criterion, and anyone who deviates from it is subject to punishment. According to him, rude people are his favorite food. He was simultaneously composed, controlled, logical, and courteous. He was becoming more and more aware of the conflicting aspects of human nature. He appeared to know everything, so he was perplexed by his inability to exert complete control. Under this dual picture, Hannibal's kind and kind demeanor and the demon essence in his heart challenge people's perceptions of the image, creating a contrast that highlights the suspense and horror

components in this work. He is also a guy of paradoxes; he is endearing, humorous, engaging, and really lovely to be around, yet he also has a ruthless, amoral, and psychopathic drive that leads him to commit several murders.

According to the Pen Model Theory, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the main antagonist of the novel, shows signs of the first personality dimension, extroversion. He is very outward in nature, and he talks to Clarice in a very friendly way in their first meeting itself. Even though he looks amiable in his outward way of talking, deep down, he is manipulative.

Dr. Lecter considered; his finger pressed against his pursed lips. Then he rose in his own time and came forward smoothly in his cage, stopping short of the nylon web without looking at it as though he chose the distance.

She could see that he was small, sleek; in his hands and arms, she saw wiry strength like her own good morning," he said, as though he had answered the door. His cultured voice has a slight metallic rasp beneath it, possibly from disuse.

Dr. Lecter's eyes are maroon, and they reflect the light in pinpoints of red. Sometimes the points of light seem to fly like sparks to his center. His eyes held Starling whole." (Harris 17)

Hannibal Lecter is also a person with exceptional emotional stability. It is

the dimension of low neuroticism that is exhibited when he handles every situation without stress and with calmness, even though he is a cold-blooded killer.

Senator Martin doesn't entrust any lead solely to the FBI. Jack Crawford never plays fair with the other agencies. It's such a game with those people. He's determined to have the arrest himself. A 'collar,' they call it.

Thank you, Dr. Lecter.

"Love your suit," he said as she went out the door. (Harris 184)

Dr. Hannibal Lecter was strict in composure and remained confined to his chair. His face was obscured by a hockey mask; he kept his calm straight and uttered the above lines. This shows his capacity to handle situations with perseverance and patience.

Buffalo Bill is the real antagonist of the novel, even though Hannibal Lecter is introduced as the evil character in the beginning. Bill is a serial killer who targets fat women and skins them to create a suit for him to wear. He is a serial murderer who kills women and skins them to dress in a woman's costume. Bill is presented as a damaged person with a history of mental illness. He is regarded as a predator who is perceptive, smart, and manipulative and who can avoid capture for a while. Many people have used his persona as an example of the perils of toxic masculinity and the effects of abuse and trauma inflicted on children. Hannibal Lecter describes him as someone who was

changed into a killer through the systematic abuse he has gone through.

You should try to obtain a list of people rejected from all three gender reassignment centers. Check first the ones rejected for the criminal record--- and among those, look hard at the burglars. Among those who tried to conceal criminal records, look for severe childhood disturbances associated with violence. Possibly internment in childhood. Then go to the tests. You're looking for a white male, probably under thirty-five and sizeable. He's not a transsexual, Clarice. He just thinks he is, and he's puzzled and angry because they won't help him. (Harris 154)

Buffalo Bill also shows signs of Introversion in his behavior. Being the exact opposite of Hannibal Lecter, he lacks all the social skills and brilliance, making him shy away from society. He also does not have any friends in the novel, making him a complete anti-social psychopath.

Another character in the novel is Dr.Chilton. He is the director of the Baltimore State Hospital for the criminally insane. He considers himself to be a genius, just like Hannibal Lecter, and he also becomes jealous of Starling's success in talking to Dr.Lecter. He also tries to hinder her mission of finding Buffalo Bill and his victims by providing false information. Additionally, he is exceedingly ambitious, and his success is

valued more highly than the safety of Buffalo Bill's present and potential victims. This is seen when Clarice provides Lecter with a fictitious transfer to help him identify Buffalo Bill before killing his current victim.

There never was a deal for you with Senator Martin, but there is now. Or there could be. I've been on the phone for hours on your behalf and for the sake of that girl. I'm going to tell you the first condition: you speak only through me. I alone publish a professional account of this, my successful interview with you. You publish nothing. I have exclusive access to any material from Catherine Martin if she should be saved. (Harris 162)

He frequently disregards the potential risk of working with such a dangerous person because he is eager to take advantage of Lecter's knowledge and insights for his own personal and professional benefit. In an attempt to gain money and attention, he even goes so far as to try to give a tabloid writer Lecter's personal information. He does not care about the life of the senator's daughter at all; he just must be the one who obtains it.

While analyzing the main male protagonist Theo Faber in *The Silent Patient*, it is deduced that he has a high degree of neuroticism, a personality trait linked to emotions like anxiety, instability, and self-doubt. In the central male characters in *Silence of the Lambs*,

Dr. Hannibal Lecter is a cunning psychopath, and JameGumb is a disturbed serial killer with sadistic tendencies. The psychotic personality trait, which is linked to characteristics like aggression, impulsivity, and unconventional thinking, is highly present in both figures. While the general characteristics shared by the two sets of male characters support the PEN model theory, there are differences in the particular characteristics shown in the two novels. High levels of neuroticism are displayed by the male characters in *The Silent Patient*, whereas high levels of psychoticism are displayed by the male characters in *Silence of the Lambs*. Thus, the male psyche is seen to be controlled by their superior traits.

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