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# *Tasting the Truth: The Role of Food and Gustatory Knowledge in Hannibal*

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*The paper provides a philosophical analysis of the role of food and eating in Hannibal. In the classical epistemological paradigm of detective fiction knowledge is linked with the sense of sight. This means that knowledge required for solving a detective mystery is objective and intersubjective in its nature. I argue that in order to understand Dr. Lecter's motives, it is necessary to adopt the different epistemological model whereby valuable information is acquired through the senses of taste and smell. The protagonist displays mastery of the two senses through the use of his culinary skills. This fact explains how Lecter can control over the whole intrigue through the series.*

**Keywords:** Gustatory knowledge, philosophy of food, lower senses, epistemology, detective fiction, Hannibal Lecter.

## 1. Introduction

*Hannibal* (NBC 2013—2015) is a TV series that few viewers can afford to ignore. The story is drenched in cruelty, manipulation and over-the-top, visual, fatigue-inducing aesthetic. Many viewers appreciate memorable dialogues, complex intrigue, and superb acting skills of the actors playing main characters. But what arrests the viewer's attention the most is, firstly, a rather peculiar way in which the protagonist—Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikklesen) exercises control over all the scheming that goes on, and, secondly, highly intense scenes—in terms of both quantity and quality—involving cooking and eating. The aim of this article is to show, by applying philosophical framework, how these two characteristics of *Hannibal's* combine and interact. Thus, the article offers a detailed philosophical discussion on the role of food and gustatory knowledge in *Hannibal*.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that, in order to un-

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of this paper, I assume that at least some of serial narrative dramas have aesthetic and artistic qualities which make them works of art, see e.g.

derstand Lecter's motives, it is necessary to adopt the epistemological model whereby valuable information is acquired through the senses of taste and smell. The protagonist displays mastery of the two senses through the use of his culinary skills. It is also suggested that *Hannibal* interestingly illuminates issues that are currently under scrutiny within philosophical aesthetics.

The story, simplifying greatly, traces a rather peculiar relationship between Dr. Hannibal Lecter and FBI special agent Will Graham (Hugh Dancy).<sup>2</sup> Graham is a profiler whose job is to help FBI retrace the motivation, emotions and steps taken by serial killers. Unfortunately, his work takes a toll on Graham leading to a gradual decline of his mental health. Enter Dr. Hannibal Lecter, who is tasked with helping Graham regain control. Lecter is a renowned psychiatrist, food connoisseur, art lover, and of course a serial killer. In a total of three seasons, viewers gain an insight into the complicated relationship between Lecter and Graham. The pair solve murder mysteries together, eat, cook and discuss art and morality. The viewer forms an awareness of Lecter's true nature starting from episode one. Lecter is unquestionably highly intelligent, has a refined palate for food and is a talented cook; he is moreover an experienced anatomist and surgeon, a lover and student of a number of art forms, and a person with fixed ideas about the way he dresses. He is also a schemer, liar and a ruthless killer. Lecter applies his formidable skills to manipulate Graham and the whole of the FBI, Jack Crawford (Laurence Fishburne), Graham's boss, in particular.

The article is structured in the following way. In §2, I briefly sketch out the classic model of the epistemology of detective fiction and the role visual experience plays in it. Next, §3 provides an analysis of Will Graham's working methods and the nature of operational knowledge he acquires. This part also highlights the doubts Will Graham has about the effectiveness of the classic epistemological paradigm. After that, in §4, I take a close look at Dr. Hannibal Lecter's motives and actions intended to help him take control over the web of intrigue throughout the series. In particular, I focus on the role of food and gustatory knowledge which is twofold: they incite murder and they are a catalyst for the assertion of an alternative epistemological model. I suggest as well that this model should be also understood in aesthetic terms. The conclusions I reach help me examine the possibility of an epistemological paradigm shift by Will Graham and the potential consequences of his actions for his identity (§5). The article ends with a brief summary (§6).

Nannicelli (2012; 2016). In particular, I treat *Hannibal* as a token of audiovisual work of art. However, I leave aside the question of what *kind* of art this TV series is — high, low or mass art since it remains irrelevant for the purpose of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The series is an adaptation of the so-called Hannibal's Universe, i.e., it is loosely based on the characters in the novel *Red Dragon*.

## 2. *Epistemology of Detective Fiction*

In detective fiction, the investigator's principal aim is to find the murderer and thus to restore order in a world which the murder threw out of balance. This aim is achieved by rational detection (in particular, deduction) and scientific methods (Smajić 2010, Dechêne 2018). Detective deduction, as a rational procedure, is not a result of instinct or mere coincidence (Jenner 2016: 18). That is, it is vital for the detective to be able to isolate (and, have good *reasons* to do so) a "piece" of reality from a given sequence of events and objects which is relevant to the case at hand. This "piece" represents a clue which must be thought of as an effect (or at least part of an effect) of an as yet unknown cause (i.e. the murder). It does not have to be a physical object (e.g., a blood-stained knife). The overall atmosphere obtaining at the murder scene may well do (we'd be dealing with a situation then) or the behaviour of the people suspected of the murder (in which case we'd refer to a process or event). In detective fiction, a clue is equated with information (Weiss 2014: 2). Relying on what can be observed and measured (the effect), the detective forms a hypothesis which explains how the current state of things has come about (the cause). A clue alone is not enough to solve a mystery. A wider context is needed for it to become meaningful, i.e., to become reliable evidence. In Nancy Horowitz's words: "the problem of what to look for, how to direct the inquiry, which clues are important and which are irrelevant, what 'truth' is being sought after" (1984: 194). What it is, is a kind of normative epistemological approach showing us which information scattered in the story is relevant to solving the mystery. To put it another way, which of the information we have been presented with can be dignified with the label *knowledge*. Thus, detectives are "inevitably concerned with the problem of knowledge" (Hutter 1983: 235).

Getting to the truth itself is a kind of process whose essential part is the process of seeing. Vision has traditionally been treated as the most objective of all senses (Korsmeyer 1999: 11–37). This is because of the distance that must exist between the organ facilitating vision (the eye) and the object it experiences (hence acquires knowledge about). Hans Jonas describes three characteristics which make it an "objective" sense (1954: 519). These are: (1) simultaneity in the presentation, i.e., vision's ability to capture the object of its cognition instantaneously, (2) dynamic neutralisation, i.e., vision's ability to learn about the object without interfering with the object,<sup>3</sup> and (3) distance. It is no coincidence that vision is traditionally connected with the notion of knowledge, i.e., the most perfect knowledge comes from the information supplied by visual perception and vision itself is a metaphor for knowledge (see e.g. Jay 1993, Merleau-Ponty 1993). Traditional epistemology of detective fiction is based on the ability of the detective to *see*

<sup>3</sup> Jonas believes that the lower senses interfere with the objects which are perceived through them (1954: 515).

facts which others cannot see, and to expose them. The detective's job then is to pick up clues in the reality in which they are embedded and to objectively reconstruct the chronology of events as they took place (e.g., the murder method and the motives behind it). So detection is to make the invisible visible.

### 3. *Will Graham: Erring ocularcentrism*

By far the most important ocularcentric component in *Hannibal* is the way in which the deductive method is presented. The series begins with a scene in which Will Graham establishes the cause and the course of the murder of a married couple.<sup>4</sup> Graham closes his eyes, then opens them and sees the sequence of events he is interested in uncovering. (The events, however, are in a reverse chronological order, i.e., "from last to first".) In this way, not only does Graham reconstruct the events as they happened, the kind of weapon used in committing the murder, the temporal relationship between each stage of the murder, but he also discovers the motives and intentions of the murderer. The effect is enhanced by the fact that in the course of his deduction Graham steps into the murderer's shoes, as it were, (itself a consequence of his being endowed with 'pure empathy' and 'having a lot of mirror neurons' (1.1; 1.10).<sup>5</sup> At this juncture, the very presentation of the deduction process reasserts the primacy of vision as a cognitive sense. Thanks to vision, the FBI profiler's mental processes take on a palpable quality. (The camera does frequent close-ups of Will Graham's eye movements before showing a scene in which he reconstructs the events.) In many novels, TV series or detective movies, we are regaled with portrayals of exceptionally talented detectives. As viewers or readers, we often marvel at very convincing analyses of the main characters. However, the stages of this process are presented in the form of an account of the detective's reasoning (such as that of Sherlock Holmes's, to take one example). Will Graham's case is fundamentally different. Visualisation of the deductive process is not an illustration of Graham's reasoning; it is in fact the reasoning process itself, which in our eyes turns the profiler into a person possessing extraordinary powers (see Casey 2015: 556).

The deductive method described above allows Graham, and other famous detectives, to obtain more information that is key to the investigation, which ultimately leads to solving many mysteries. It is worth noting too that ocularcentrism in Graham's deduction is sharply reflected in his (and more generally in Jack Crawford's and the rest of the

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the very first scene introducing a fictional character usually tells viewers a lot about his/her identity as well as allows the viewers to learn how to approach and understand the character. Cf. Pearson (2008), Smith (1995), and Elder (2010).

<sup>5</sup> All references to primary sources in the series follow the following convention: the first number refers to the season, the second to the episode in that season, e.g., "1.2" refers to Season One, Episode Two.

FBI's) way of interpreting evidence of the crime. In Graham's world, evidence explains everything (1.1). A clue represents evidence and becomes relevant to the solving of the mystery. It is noteworthy that for Graham evidence is a physical and observable element of reality.<sup>6</sup> (This does not mean, however, that in his reasoning Will does not use other elements, i.e., motivation, etc.). Adopting this kind of epistemology allows Will to discover the truth about Abigail (Kacey Rohl) and her role in the murders committed by her father Garrett Jacob Hobbes (Vladimir Jon Cubrt) (1.9).

Trusting his eyes and the process of deduction as well as prioritizing the visual aspect of the evidence make Will Graham a modern equivalent of the Great Detective. What marks him out from other Great Detectives though is his ability to see the limitations of his ocularcentrism. Reflecting on Hobbs's murder and on his powerlessness to save Melissa, Graham says: "I tried so hard to know Garrett Jacob Hobbs. To *see* him. Past the slides and vials, beyond the lines of the police report, between the pixels of all those... Printed faces of sad, dead girls." (1.4). In much the same way, while examining the body of the nurse murdered by Dr. Abel Gideon (Eddie Izzard), Graham finds that, based on the effect (the evidence before his eyes), he is able to *see* The Chesapeake Reaper, but he is not able to feel his presence (1.6). Graham knows that, despite his regular use of the deduction method, he is not able to fill in all the details of the event by relying solely on visual evidence. The deduction method itself becomes a double-edged sword for the profiler. An attempt to step into the shoes of the murderer to better understand his motives and his actions fails to the extent that Graham loses the ability to distinguish his own actions from those of the murderer (1.10).<sup>7</sup>

Ocularcentrism, which is at the heart of the epistemology of criminal investigation, also becomes the cause of the accusation leveled at Graham for being the Copycat Killer and of his being committed to a mental health hospital for criminals in Baltimore (1.13). Throughout the entire series and in particular Season One, Dr. Hannibal Lecter tampers with the evidence in such a way as to throw Jack Crawford and the FBI off the scent. This specifically concerns Will Graham himself. In diagnosing the cause of the profiler's ill health, Lecter destroys or conceals all existing evidence that might point to Graham's encephalitis (1.10). As long as there is no visual evidence (e.g., in the form of an

<sup>6</sup> This is also evident in numerous scenes showing visual analyses of whatever evidence has been gathered.

<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of simplicity, my discussion is limited to *mainly* the so-called "rational-scientific" methods of detective detection such as deduction or scientific examination. Thus, I am not much focused on other methods of detection sometimes presented in detective fiction genres — novels, movies or TV series — that are "irrational-subjective" methods such as "gut feeling". See Jenner (2016: 14–38). However, it seems that both kinds of methods are, at least in *Hannibal*, equally linked to the sense of sight.

MRI scan), it is impossible to establish the cause of Will's feeling unwell. The manipulation culminates in depositing the body parts of the Copycat Killer's victims in Graham's home and in making the profiler (by means of narcosis) swallow Abigail Hobbs's ear. When, in the presence of Lecter, Will loses his memory after a spell of fever, he begins to doubt his sanity and his identity. (He is apt to accept that he is guilty of the murders blamed on the Copycat Killer.) While examining Graham, FBI agent Beverly Katz (Katharine Isabelle) says, having found Abigail's blood under Will's fingernails, that: "[c]ertainty comes from the evidence" (1.13). This echoes Graham's own claims of the importance of the visual aspect of the evidence (1.1).

As we can see, Dr. Hannibal Lecter is fully aware of the epistemological paradigm which is at the bottom of Will Graham's deduction method, and which underpins the *modus operandi* of Jack Crawford and the FBI. During the FBI's search of Lecter's house, brought on by Will's claims that Hannibal is the Chesapeake Reaper / Copycat Killer, Dr. Lecter turns to agent Katz saying that any evidence they find at his place will lead them to Graham (2.1). Then, realizing that the whole justice system is effectively based on the primacy of vision and its role in interpreting the clues, Lecter uses this fact to his advantage trying to (obtain the) release (of) Will Graham. This can be seen in particular when the court is presented with the ear of one of the profiler's purported victims. This helps set in motion the process of exonerating Will Graham. In passing a comment on the turn of events which affirms Lecter's embroilment, the hapless man says to him: "I know there is no evidence against you" (2.3). Graham voices similar doubts about traditional epistemology while inspecting the place of agent Katz's murder, saying that the murderer has left no "visual evidence" (2.5).

To sum up, Will Graham, unlike Jack Crawford and the FBI, is a character who abides by the epistemological paradigm based on the primacy of vision. However, as the events in the TV series unfold, he realises that this paradigm is not sufficient to prove Lecter's guilt. In other words, Graham gradually accepts admissibility of information from the lower senses and, as we shall see next, an attempt to understand and come to terms with the reality (or at least some of its aspects) in which Lecter operates.

#### *4. Dr. Hannibal Lecter: non-ocularcentrism, concealment of the truth, cannibalism*

I shall now turn to the role of culinary dishes and the process of eating in the story of *Hannibal*.<sup>8</sup> Before saying more about that, it is worth noting that philosophical tradition holds that the so-called lower sens-

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that only 6 out of 39 episodes are not named after culinary dishes. What is more, Hannibal Lecter is firstly introduced to the viewers in the scene presenting food preparation.

es, i.e., taste, smell, touch, are not credible sources of knowledge and as such they are not particularly relevant to epistemological and aesthetic theories.<sup>9</sup> Unlike vision and hearing, these senses are too closely tied to the body, which implies that they are more likely to be subjective and prone to error (see e.g. Scruton 1975: 303; 2010). However, it seems that nowadays aesthetics is more and more open for including taste, smell and touch within a philosophical theory (Diaconu 2006). Such a movement is rooted, I think, in two tendencies.

Firstly, the growing field of everyday aesthetics constantly reminds us about the importance of the so-called lower senses into our everyday life — with special attention to everyday aesthetic choices, experiences and judgments (see e.g. Saito 2007, 2015; Leddy 2012; Melchionne 2013). Secondly, emerging art forms and newly establishing artistic practices quite often rely on factors that are bodily and experience-oriented. That is, they try to question the aesthetic and artistic irrelevance of taste, smell and touch in art and beyond. As Carolyn Korsmeyer says:

Challenging the clean distinction between the mental and the physical and recognizing the impact of somatic responses to art also pave the way for blurring the distinction between distal aesthetic and proximal nonaesthetic senses, for it legitimizes bodily sensation as an aesthetic response. (2017: 25)<sup>10</sup>

Successfully challenging the above distinction seems to be essential not only for the aesthetics of food, but most importantly to the process of acquiring gustatory knowledge. By “gustatory knowledge” I understand simply propositional knowledge of food. That is, knowledge *that* something tastes like this or that (see Meskin and Robson 2015). This kind of knowledge is a necessary basis of formulating (critical) judgments and having arguments over cuisines’ and spirits’ properties and values.

Taken the purpose of this essay, the most interesting case is when gustatory taste is not only a mere metaphor for aesthetic one, but rather a bodily sense that should be granted aesthetic and cognitive standing (Meskin and Robson 2015: 24).<sup>11</sup> I argue that, contrary to the traditional epistemology of detective fiction, food and the lower senses are a key interpretative tool in trying to understand Dr. Hannibal Lecter’s actions, especially in how they affect his relationship with Will Graham, the FBI, and the victims that are eaten. I shall propose to distinguish three areas where food plays a crucial role: anti-ocularcentrism, concealment of the truth, and cannibalism.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of the history of the hierarchy of senses see Korsmeyer (1999).

<sup>10</sup> Quite similar on that point: Brady (2012: 73).

<sup>11</sup> See also: Telfer (1996); Perullo (2016); John (2014).

#### 4.1. *Non-ocularcentrism*

A viewer who avidly follows Hannibal's story will rack his brains over an interesting yet puzzling question: *Why* are Will Graham and the FBI not able to find out the truth about Dr. Hannibal Lecter? After all, representatives of the Behavioural Science Unit have extensive experience, skills, access to a whole range of technologies, and money. Despite that, they often find themselves very far from discovering the truth.

The answer is that the way in which Lecter operates is motivated by a different epistemological paradigm. I propose to call this paradigm *non-ocularcentrism*. Non-ocularcentrism does not rank the sense of vision above the other senses but promotes the latter as a valuable source of acquiring knowledge (Le Gu  rer 2002; Press and Minta 2000). It must not be thought of, however, as an outright denigration of the sense of vision. (Lecter frequently uses information coming *also* from this sense). Non-ocularcentrism does not break the hierarchy of senses in itself but rather reconfigures the relations between the senses within the hierarchy.

Thanks to the lower senses such as taste and smell, Lecter is able to acquire information which is critical to how the events unfold throughout the entire series.<sup>12</sup> Such is the case when, from the smell of Phyllis "Bella" Crawford's breath (played by Gina Torres), he is able to detect that she suffers from lung cancer (1.5). This allows him to gain control over Bella's mind, then nudge her towards a suicide attempt, in order to ultimately save her life. The whole exercise is intended to help him get closer to Jack Crawford and gain his trust. Something of the same kind happens when Will Graham contracts meningitis. Hannibal observes that meningitis smells of "a fevered sweetness" (1.10). Knowing so much and keeping it secret allows Lecter to convince Jack Crawford and the FBI that Graham's problems are of a psychological, not physiological, nature. This then becomes grounds for declaring Graham a psychopathic murderer (The Copycat Killer). His ability to acquire information from other sources than visual perception ultimately helps Lecter avoid capture in the last episode of Season Two. Having detected the smell of copper on Dr. Alana Bloom (Caroline Dhavernas), an FBI psychiatrist and consultant, Hannibal figures out that the journalist, Fredericka "Freddie" Lounds (Lara Jean Chorostecki), allegedly killed by Graham, is alive. Armed with this information, Hannibal can see through the whole set-up which Graham and Crawford have put together (2.13). It is worth noting too that Hannibal has been acting very cautiously for some time, ever since he detected the smell of gunpowder on Dr. Bloom's hands, which indicated that Bloom had been doing shooting practice before a large FBI operation (2.11).

The non-ocularcentrism described above clearly departs from the paradigm based on the higher sense, that is, vision. Lecter cleverly

<sup>12</sup> There are over a dozen scenes like this one in the whole series. Here, I focus only on a few—those I consider most relevant.



manipulates the evidence and the expectations which characterize the traditional epistemology of Will Graham and Jack Crawford. Ocularcentrism focuses on the objective and inter-subjective properties communicated by things. Non-ocularcentrism plumbs the subjective, hard to describe impressions such as taste and smell. However, it does not mean that these senses lack any sort of normativity. To the contrary: taste and smell could be cultivated through time and practice and this—as well as suitable categories—allow for critical judgment over food's and spirits' flavours.<sup>13</sup> Lecter masterfully harnesses the lower senses thanks to his culinary skills. He is also able to put knowledge about how food and drinks taste into a broader (not only culinary) context and gain important information about non-gustatory facts. On numerous occasions during the whole story, Hannibal can be seen smelling or tasting food ingredients, finding out about their origin or state of decay in the process. As Will Graham and Dr. Alana Boom remark, Dr. Hannibal Lecter has a very refined palate and a talent for describing his olfactory and gustatory sensations (2.10; 3.4). Of some interest is also Jack Crawford's appreciation of the role played by the taste and smell of food. When dining with Hannibal Lecter, Crawford is often shown smelling food and alcohol. Unlike Lecter though, Crawford is not able to obtain any useful information from his smell and taste perception. Lecter alone has the ability to turn ostensibly subjective, physical, fleeting and hard to describe olfactory and gustatory experiences into information that helps him take control over the whole intrigue.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.2 *Concealment of the truth*

The dishes served by Lecter are characterized by high artisanship both in terms of their presentation and taste. They provide an insight into life's finer pleasures and the personality of the eponymous character of the series, Lecter. I believe they also play a different yet equally important role. They help Lecter conceal the truth about himself. I propose to distinguish two levels (or forms) of this "concealment", i.e., physical and personal.

The physical level is the more direct and literal of the two. It concerns concealing the evidence of the murders. As mentioned earlier, the epistemological tradition relies to a large extent on visual (physical) evidence. The lack of such evidence points to a gap in the cause-effect chain being the basis of the process of deduction. Lecter eats the evidence of his deeds. Throughout the entire series and in particular Season One and Season Two, Lecter prepares dishes from his victims (e.g.,

<sup>13</sup> For a philosophical account for such aesthetic appreciation see Skilleås and Burnham (2014).

<sup>14</sup> The character of Abigail Hobbs may be a small exception here. Judging by the taste of the dishes served by Hannibal, the girl realises that Hannibal eats human flesh (1.9). Abigail can recognise the taste of human flesh because she was fed human flesh by her father Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

1.1; 1.3, 1.5, 1.6; 2.1, 2.5, 2.10, 3.1, 3.4). He does so also in the presence of Will Graham and Jack Crawford. Frequently he serves them body parts of the victims whose murders the FBI has been investigating (e.g., 2.2; 2.5). It could be said—pun intended—that Lecter serves the evidence of his guilt to the investigators “on a plate”. They, in turn, are responsible in a way for his “exoneration”. (Whichever way we look at it—they eat the evidence of Lecter’s guilt.)

The personal level is somewhat more complex. It has to do mainly with building relationships and trust of the people Dr. Hannibal Lecter wants to get close to. Lecter loves inviting friends and acquaintances over to dine with him. It is equally evident that his guests enjoy Hannibal’s cooking immensely. (The whole thing has an air of the macabre about it given that human flesh is often an ingredient of the dishes being served.) Take for example one of Lecter’s friends who insists on him hosting a dinner party. She craves the show as much as the dishes. (“It’s an entire performance.”) The psychopath says: “I cannot force a feast. A feast must present itself.” (1.7). Indeed, watching the scenes of preparing, serving and consuming the food, we get the impression that Lecter follows a kind of logic and cohesion which is unfamiliar to others. The dishes reflect the main character’s moods and the situations he finds himself in (e.g., 1.10, 2.1; 3.3). The purpose may be to achieve some sort of “mirroring” of everyday reality in the dishes he prepares.<sup>15</sup> Cooking for others and for himself is a way of indulging his passion. When Will Graham, somewhat surprised, asks Lecter why he has changed his job from a surgeon to an amateur cook, Hannibal replies: “I transferred my passion for anatomy into the culinary arts” (1.7).

Hiding the truth by means of culinary dishes is especially evident in the process of restoring Will Graham’s memory. Locked in a small cell at the Baltimore State Hospital for The Criminally Insane, the profiler experiences a vision where one of the dishes on the sumptuously laid table at Lecter’s dinner is Abigail Hobbs’s ear. Lecter himself appears as a deformed horned creature.<sup>16</sup> In the same episode, while eating a simple prison meal, Will remembers being put in a state of altered consciousness and then force-fed Abigail’s ear (2.1). At this moment, Will begins to realize that the meals served by Hannibal were a clever tool for manipulation. The intention was to hide the truth about the origin of the ingredients (most dishes are prepared according to traditional recipes, e.g., human leg is prepared in the same way as a veal shank), as well as implicating the people sharing meals with Hannibal in the murders he has committed. (Cannibalism is a crime after all.) The process culminated in force-feeding Abigail’s ear to Graham. In this way,

<sup>15</sup> This nicely matches a point made by Kevin Melchionne (2013) that food and cooking is one of the basic dimensions when we encounter everyday aesthetic qualities and attitudes.

<sup>16</sup> It is a common image of Hannibal-the murderer appearing in Will Graham’s visions.

Will was made to take the blame for the murders committed by Hannibal, which led to the FBI bringing charges against him.

Eating prison food cures Graham of his malady and restores his self-confidence. He is no longer deceived by Hannibal's sophisticated dishes, which are in fact the processed evidence of Hannibal's crimes. The stark contrast is apparent in the scenes showing Will eating his breakfast and Hannibal and Jack eating theirs. Graham eats a simple dish while Lecter and Crawford are savouring a multiple-course English breakfast. As Will reassures himself in his conviction about Lecter's guilt, Jack Crawford remains completely in the dark—he even pronounces Hannibal a “wonderful friend” (2.5).

### 4.3 *Cannibalism*

There is little doubt that one of the main themes concerning eating in *Hannibal* is the cannibalism of the eponymous character. For the sake of analysis in this work, I propose to use the classification of types described by William E. Arens (1979). He distinguishes three basic types of cannibalism: gustatory cannibalism, which involves eating human flesh for its taste; magical or ritual cannibalism, which endows the cannibal with the spiritual / physical powers of the victim; and survival cannibalism. *Hannibal* is peppered with scenes depicting all three types of cannibalism. Our attention is first drawn to the so-called classical cannibalism, i.e., magical or ritual cannibalism, involving the assumption that the spirit of the victim is being eaten.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs has an irresistible urge to kill his daughter Abigail. The only way he can hold himself back from doing so is to systematically kill girls who resemble his daughter and who are the same age as her (1.1). Hobbs executes his murders (with Abigail's help) with undisguised relish, but he also feels he owes respect to his victims. Each part of their body must be “treated with respect”; otherwise he'd be committing common murders (1.3). Hobbs is convinced that by eating the girls' bodies he acquires special powers, which help him resist his murderous urges towards Abigail.

A somewhat different kind of cannibalism is involved in the case of Mason Verger (Joe Anderson), who seeks to eat Hannibal Lecter in revenge for having been maimed by him. To Verger, the style in which he wants to eat the serial killer matters as much as the act of eating itself. He wants to eat Lecter “piece by piece”. Verger hires Dr. Cordell Doemling (Glenn Flesher) whose job is to prepare, season and serve a variety of dishes from parts of Hannibal's body (3.6). Verger believes that eating Lecter will make him an “alpha male”, and that the act of eating will not be simply consumption of human flesh but a form of “transubstantiation”. Mason Verger is clearly motivated by his desire to take revenge. This is most apparent in the scene depicting the roasting of Hannibal. The making of the “roast” and the presentation of the “dish” bear close resemblance to the closing scene in the movie *The*

*Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Peter Greenway, 1989) where Albert Spica (Michael Gambon) is forced by his wife Georgina (Helen Mirren) to eat the roasted body of her lover Michael (Alan Howard). Verger's motives contain a homoerotic element as well. Being aware of the close relationship that has developed between Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter, Verger wants to eat Hannibal while wearing Will's face transplant (3.7). Such a perverse fantasy can be explained by Lecter's rebuffing of Verger's advances (2.10).

In the entire series, there is only one example of cannibalism intended to sustain life. It involves Dr. Abel Gideon, who was fed by Lecter on dishes prepared from his own flesh (2.6). Hannibal "fattened" Gideon with oysters, sweet wine and acorns to improve the taste of the meat. The fact that Dr. Gideon often complimented Hannibal on his culinary skills and the exquisite taste of the dishes he dined on adds a certain perverse piquancy to these macabre goings-on (3.1).

I shall now focus on the types of cannibalism Dr. Hannibal Lecter indulges in. The first thing to note is that Lecter almost never eats human flesh for reasons of magical cannibalism. There is only one instance of such cannibalistic practice and it concerns Dr. Roman Fell (Jeremy Crutchley). After eating him, Hannibal assumes his identity (3.1). The incident is not provoked by some sort of metaphysical transformation but by a desire to dispose of the body. Moreover, Lecter does not make much of his new identity. In the series, Lecter travels around Europe under many names and surnames, which he often changes.

An entirely different attitude is evident in the case of gustatory cannibalism, i.e., cannibalism which explores the gustatory and nutritious properties of human flesh. Lecter obtains the macabre ingredient of his dishes in two ways. The first involves collecting as many calling cards as he can get hold of, e.g., from doctors, lawyers, people working in services (1.7; 2.6). Hannibal keeps them in a special catalogue beside his cookbook. Whenever he wants to make a dish, he chooses a recipe and a calling card. (The process of choosing a card that suits the recipe seems almost automatic.) Next, using the contact details on the card, he tracks down his victims and kills them. The other method involves harvesting organs from victims that have been killed by Lecter or another killer (2.1; 2.2; 2.4). This method is rather more spontaneous than the first one but is used only for obtaining selected body organs. This is because in the latter case the victims' bodies are displayed for public view (they are intended to get across some message from the killer), while in the former, they are only a food source.

Most murders committed by Dr. Hannibal Lecter are rooted in his culinary pursuits. Analysing the murder pattern of the Chesapeake Ripper, Will Graham conclude that he kills in quick succession up to 3–4 people at a time, "[b]ecause if he waits too long, then the meat spoils" (2.6). It is apparent that Hannibal's desire to have a steady supply of fresh "meat" has a direct bearing on the frequency with which he

kills. Moreover, in one of the episodes the viewer is treated to scenes of Hannibal laying up supplies in a very professional manner—he quarters a body, places the parts in vacuum packs, and freezes the lot (1.7). Just before her ill-fated face-off with Hannibal, agent Beverly Katz discovers a well-stocked larder in the basement of his house (2.5). It’s worth noting that, unlike magical cannibalism, gustatory cannibalism does not prescribe any particular rules in handling the body, attaching any metaphysical qualities to it, etc. The direct consequence of such an approach is that Hannibal treats human bodies in a very matter-of-fact way. He is able, for example, to separate the “best” cut from a human leg and discard the rest as “waste” (2.2).

Lecter’s flippant attitude to the human body is apparent in his views. Talking to Jack Crawford, he admits that “he does not feel any guilt regardless of what he eats” (2.1). When he forces Mason Verger to eat parts of his own face, Hannibal proclaims that “[t]aste is housed in parts of the mind that precedes pity. Pity has no place at the table.” (2.12). According to Lecter, “people are like pigs” (1.7). Lecter shares his most interesting observation perhaps in his conversation with Dr. Abel Gideon, when the former is serving Able’s own leg to him in the form of an elaborate dish (3.1):

*Gideon:* And with these verified dishes you so carefully prepared, do we all taste different?

*Lecter:* Everyone has their flavour.

*Gideon:* Cannibalism is a standard behaviour in my ancestors; a missing link which is only missing because we ate them.

*Lecter:* This isn’t cannibalism, Abel. It’s only cannibalism if we are equals.

*Gideon:* It is only cannibalism if you eat me. But you just feel it’s a natural order of things. Everybody gets eaten.

As can be seen, Lecter’s cannibalism is purely of the gustatory nature. It is an important, though not the only, motive for the murders he commits. It is not an exaggeration to say that, with Lecter, at least some criminal choices are determined by his culinary choices.

## 5. *Will the Cannibal: A Metamorphosis*

I shall now look at two consecutive scenes (2.10) which are of the utmost relevance to the role of food in the *Hannibal* series. They illustrate, in the most striking way, the role of gustatory knowledge and aesthetics in trying to understand the world presented in the series. They also show that it is impossible to change the paradigm with reference to the epistemology of criminal investigation. The first of the two scenes shows Will Graham coming into Hannibal Lecter’s kitchen. He puts a packet of meat on the table and says:

*Graham:* I provide the ingredients; you tell me what we should do with them.

*Lecter*: What's the meat?

*Graham*: What do you think?

*Lecter*: Veal? Pork, perhaps.

*Graham*: She was a slim and delicate pig.

*Lecter*: I'll make you *lomo saltado*. We will make it together. You slice the ginger.

When the meal is ready, they proceed to the dining room. The scene is largely made up of long close-ups of particular parts of the dish and Graham's facial expressions, while Mahler's Adagietto is playing in the background. Lecter tries the meat and passes his verdict:

*Lecter*: The meat has an interesting flavour. It's brazing. Notes of citrus.

*Graham*: My palate isn't as refined as yours.

*Lecter*: Apart from humane considerations, it's more flavourful for animals to be stress-free, prior to slaughter. This animal tastes frightened.

*Graham*: What does frightened taste like?

*Lecter*: It's acidic.

*Graham*: The meat is bitter about being dead. (*Smiles*)

*Lecter*: (*Smiles*) This meat is not pork.

*Graham*: It's long pig.

We must remember that in the above scenes Will Graham is desperately trying to prove Lecter is guilty. His previous experience suggests that the epistemology he has chosen and which is based on the primacy of vision and visual evidence is not proving very successful. (Strictly speaking: it has failed.) That is why Graham has decided to adopt some of Lecter's ways. He does so for two reasons. First, to win Lecter's trust and, second, to understand him better. Graham has reached the conclusion that the best way to achieve his aims is to copy Hannibal's culinary practices. He mimics his gestures and his way of speaking. In other words, Will Graham adopts some elements of Hannibal Lecter's style, which involves a change of the epistemological paradigm, i.e., de-autonomisation of vision and greater reliance on information supplied by the lower senses.<sup>17</sup>

The most important point though is that the two scenes combine all three roles of food, gustatory knowledge and aesthetics I have discussed here. First, they illustrate non-ocularcentrism. The taste of the dish provides information about the circumstances (*or* situation) in which the victims lost their lives. It also supports my claim that Hannibal's criminal choices are determined by his culinary choices. (Victims must be killed in such a way as to ensure the desired taste of the meat.) Secondly, the theme of preparing food in the company of others

<sup>17</sup> We could say as well that Graham tries to adopt Lecter's attitude to the everyday. As Ossi Naukkarinen points it out: "[...] everyday consists of certain *objects, activities, and events*, as well as certain *attitudes and relations* to them. Everyday objects, activities, and events, for me and for others, are those with which we spend lots of time, regularly and repeatedly." (2013: § 2). Italics in the original.

must involve concealment of the truth. Graham wants to make Lecter believe that the meat comes from the body of Freddie Lounds (in fact, it is part of the body of Randall Tier (Mark O'Brien)). The profiler is successful to the extent that Lecter refers to Freddie's red hair. Thirdly, it is pure and simple cannibalism. In Graham's case, it manifests itself twofold. On the one hand, it is the gustatory type of cannibalism, as Graham savours the meat which is part of a culinary dish. On the other, the experience puts him in a kind of liminal state whereby he is able to get close to Lecter.

Adoption of Lecter's dining habits gives Graham a better insight into his mind. It makes the two men similar. In other words, it will not be going too far to say that Graham decided to copy some of Lecter's ways to prove the protagonist's guilt. Adopting another's style (or strictly speaking: "the parts" that make up the whole) automatically leads to the assumption of their personality. This theme is flagged up in the last few seconds of the episode. In a scene showing him eating, Will's face turns into Hannibal's. This is the price Graham is prepared to pay for adopting Lecter's culinary paradigm (as is the case, also his epistemological paradigm), hoping this will help him apprehend the killer. Will nearly manages to do so.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, as we know from the season, Lecter has seen through Graham and Crawford's plan, not least thanks to his anti-ocularcentrism.

## 6. Conclusion

In the article, I have sought to show how food and gustatory knowledge find their embodiment in *Hannibal*. I have argued that the intrigue which forms the backbone of the series does not lend itself to easy interpretation in the light of the traditional epistemology of detective fiction because it categorically rejects the primacy of vision. Indeed, the whole series can be seen as a conflict between alternative epistemological models. In the end, the approach I have referred to as "non-ocularcentrism" assumes dominance. It is an approach that ranks all senses equal. This alternative epistemological paradigm manifests itself most strikingly in the attitude of the main character to culinary dishes and eating as such. Dr. Lecter, an eminent food connoisseur and cook, has the knack of transforming the ostensibly irrelevant stimuli experienced during cooking and eating into full-blown, legitimate knowledge. This point is interestingly similar to issues touched by the contemporary aesthetics — for example, the cognitive status of touch, smell and taste or the aesthetic dimension of food and drinks. Of course, the discussed television drama cannot be treated as providing a philosophical argument on behalf of the role of lower senses or gustatory knowledge in

<sup>18</sup> One could say — using the framework of everyday aesthetics — that adopting someone's attitude to the everyday without fully making it our *own* always brings some kind of inauthenticity.

aesthetics (or philosophical inquiry in general).<sup>19</sup> However, philosophical aesthetics here is a tool that enables us to understand this particular audiovisual work. What is more, it seems that the arts (here, *Hannibal*) emphatically illuminate the problems that are currently under scrutiny in aesthetics and suggest that also popular culture is gradually more concerned about the role of food and gustatory cognition in our lives. By a detailed analysis of *Hannibal's* plot and dialogues I have tried to show that the process of eating in the series is not only an aesthetic *mise-en-scène* but a key to Dr. Hannibal Lecter's inner self—it speaks of his style of comporting himself, refinement, deviation and his attitude to other people.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Livingston (2009).

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