

The Beauty is in the Eye of the Beheader. The Aesthetics of Murder in The Talented Mr Ripley, The Silence of the Lambs and Darkly Dreaming Dexter

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Beauty is in the Eye of the Beheader

The Aesthetics of Murder in *The Talented Mr Ripley*,
The Silence of the Lambs and *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*.

Travail de fin d'études réalisé par PEETERS Carla en vue de l'obtention du grade de Master en
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“Enough has been given to morality; now comes the turn of Taste and Fine Arts”

-- Thomas De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*

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Introduction

I have always been fascinated by tales of rebels, thieves, anti-heroes, murderers and complete maniacs; I cannot help it. Every time a new book, movie, or series come out, the best character is always the villain. They are intelligent, cunning, always two-three steps ahead of everyone, an incredible sense of style, simply much more developed and interesting than any Hero. The current society seems to be wired that way. Whether it pleases or not, violence, murder and mayhem are omnipresent in our daily lives. Everywhere we look, we are subjected to war, criminality, death and darkness. So why not stop and take a long hard look at those incredible fiends and at their incredible creations. Because those crimes, they are true demonstrations of intellect, skill and determination. From the planning to the accomplishment, passing by all the emotional stages that might exist in between those, it is an experience unlike any other. Especially in the realm of literature, where everything is possible, where it is possible to experience everything from the greatest emotions of passion and pleasure, to the most horrific experiences of death and suffering, all of that, from the comfort of one's home with a teacup in hand. To my heart, American crime fiction holds the title of the greatest villains and geniuses of all time. In their dedication to their work, their ever so complicated backstories and purposes in life. They are always more dramatical, complex and emotional than any other romantic protagonist. They are full of pride and showmanship. It is exquisite. This pride, this drama and showmanship always presents itself under their most cathartic work, murder. So of course, murder is going to be the focus of this work. Through different classical works and a few literary classics of American contemporary crime fiction, murder is going to be analysed in all of its layers to reveal every hidden sublime gem it might hide. All those layers are going to be aesthetically treated so it might become evident that just like any other beautiful thing, murder belongs to the realm of aesthetics because of everything it might make us feel.

In 2018, a teacher of mine during my Erasmus stay in Ireland, introduced the notion of “*attractive-bad*” (David F. Schmid in Ziomek 131) through the example of Hannibal Lecter in one of my literature classes at the time. The instant mixture of fascination and disgust that I felt in that precise moment, instantly changed my whole opinion about murder in crime literature. I have always been fascinated by crime fiction, but as I read *The Silence of The Lambs* and witnessed Lecter move, talk and kill, I had a realization. What if the true beauty of murder literature was simply lying in its capacity to supply us with the most sublime emotions ?

This in mind, I decided to dedicate this TFE to how witnessing the murder in crime literature, might be one of the most aesthetical experience of all, through sublime terrors and devastating

astonishments. Throughout this essay, there will be a study of three different approaches to aesthetics; the aesthetical concept, the aesthetical experience, and the aesthetical objects. Each and every one of those approaches is going to be argued through a theoretical analysis of the aesthetical murder, followed by a literary analysis of the aesthetical murder. Now, as Thomas de Quincey once said,

[t]hrough this great gallery of murder, therefore, together let us wander hand in hand, in delighted admiration, while I endeavour to point your attention to the objects of profitable criticism. (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 12)

1. A brief history of American Crime Fiction

Although murder literature is considered an acquired taste, the human perversion for tales of torture and pain was already present in the darkest ages. Such stories range from Poems of war and death in the Old English Period (The Battle of Maldon, A.D. 991), through the execution sermons accompanying judicial execution of seventeenth-century England, to the contemporary murder thrillers analysed later in this work. Tales of suffering make readers everywhere simultaneously quiver with horror and delight. Concurrently,

[n]owadays [...] real-life serial killers are ‘narrativized’ by the media by turning their killings into coherent patterns, or how they copy the murders of fictional serial killers; on the other hand we see how fictional serial killers copy the deeds of real killers or try to resemble them. (Baelo Allué 7)

Allué thus implies that murder and mayhem have become part of humanity’s daily routine. One cannot be impervious to its impact, it is everywhere in the Media, the arts, and literature. However, as much as crime literature is a worldwide favourite, American crime fiction differs from other crime literatures. Although English crime literature influences it, American crime literature continuously evolves in the opposite direction, creating a unique spin on criminals and criminality. This uniqueness can be observed in the murderers it created, more specifically “the fiend”, which will be studied in later chapters. Additionally, the drama, the gore, and the all-around Gothicism revolving around the American crime literature seem to mirror perfectly the rebelliously dramatic culture of the United States. It is essential to retrace its history, to understand where it comes from and how it became so fascinated by the intelligent murderer.

Seventeenth Century: The Birth of American Crime Literature

One could argue that it was so since the dawn of time, but unsurprisingly enough, it is in the periods where crime and murder were the most prohibited subjects that crime literature rose to fame. Taboos always create a perverted need to know more about them, and “*when pain was an intolerable aspect of human condition*” (Halttunen 77–78), readers became voraciously interested in tales of forbidden impulses. Ziomek formulates it beautifully by saying that “[t]his kind of literary trend was becoming more popular according to the principle that forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest” (Ziomek 131). During the seventeenth century, Americans could at first only indulge in crime literature through “execution sermons” (1675 – 1825), as there was theocratic censorship over “ [...] the ‘trash’ that

characterized the secular crime literature of England” (Crosby 8). These “executions sermons” were mainly used to discourage readers from committing those same crimes by specifically targeting “youthful disobedience and illicit sexuality” (Crosby 7). However, as the eighteenth century got closer, the crown of England steadied their control over the colony, and soon the crime literature became more and more “[...] one page ‘broadsides’ that claimed to be authentic autobiographies, final words and confessions, melancholy ballads, and eventually lengthier criminal stories” (Crosby 8). But more and more, the public wanted personal and historical context to social behaviour, and the need to understand the individual opened the door for the next generation of crime literature, the novel (Crosby 8)

Eighteenth Century: The Emergence of Popular Characters

For the next years to come, the focus of crime literature changed quite a bit. “[...] *[E]ighteenth century audiences devoured autobiographies of rakes, thieves and confidence men [...]*” and became obsessed with the character of the rogue (Crosby 9). Tales of adventure and rebels became much more fashionable, men and women with purpose, living on the fringe of legality or becoming criminals to fulfil a righteous goal. The rogue is not only thieving and fighting selfishly, but also for friends or family. There is a moral background to the crimes he commits, as he almost follows in the footsteps of Robin Hood. There is probably trauma, injustice, and loss behind his criminal activities. He is a fundamentally romantic character. This “righteous criminal” is a logical consequence of the seventeenth-century readers’ need to understand the personal and historical context of social behaviour. Everybody loves a rebel, and righteous criminals are extremely easy to understand and support. This narrative, where the criminal is a consequence of an unfair and violent society, is still used today in most crime fiction novels. At first, the rogue had tremendous success, but quickly enough, American readers became interested in another type of criminal, the fiend (Crosby 9). The readers were ever more interested in the grimy, realistic details of cold-blooded murders and searched truth over romanticization. This interest pushed writers to turn toward true-crime narratives based on “*actual rapes, seductions, and bloody mass murders*” (Crosby 9). Just as the ministers tried to discourage readers from becoming criminals through execution sermons, the true-crime writers tried to teach morals and virtues to theirs (Crosby 9). However, those morals and virtues seemed to also come in new ways, for example, through the emergence of the novels of seduction. These novels, which seem very gothic, revolve mainly around young, innocent women being sexually assaulted by malevolent males and dying while giving birth to the consequences of their carelessness. Most of the time, there was a redemption arc where the rapists finally atone for their

malevolence and cry over the innocent women they pushed to an early grave (Crosby 11). The gothic aspect of it is very consistent with the way crime fiction is going to evolve towards the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Nineteenth Century: Change in narration through Tabloids and Technologies

In the nineteenth century, the need for a better understanding of the criminal, the rise of “true crime” narratives, and the continuous craving for crime content culminated in the development of “[...] *the legal discourse into popular crime literature*” (Crosby 13). This development encourages mass media, the heavy coverage of criminality, massive first-page spreads of courtroom debates, new jobs as court reporters, and the rise of tabloids. “*These cheap dailies billed themselves as the papers for the ‘common man’, and the common man apparently sex and death – and lots of it*” (Crosby 13). It does not seem to be about inculcating values and morals anymore, and depravity and bloodshed became profitable. The turn of the century came with many new developments: modern technologies, forensic science, and the professionalization of crime, and the over-mediatization of criminality. Thanks to those novelties, authors created an ever more descriptive and complete experience of murder (Crosby 13), and crime fiction as we know it today was born. With the media coverage and the professions created at the time, the detective novel became one of the most sought-after genres of the time through authors like Edgar Allen Poe, influencing many writers worldwide and for the years to come. From there on crime fiction became a spectacle, and detective fiction combined with the media coverage opened the way for sensation fiction. The point of sensation fiction was to shock and delight the readers through harsh depictions of crime, vice, or immorality. The murderer became more and more defined, complex, and inherently fascinating. Writers started to investigate causes for criminality outside of the realm of the righteous criminal but more into the deterministic notion that race, environment, and society were shaping the criminals (Moudrov 135). Morals and values were now guidelines that the main character is supposed to break and tear apart. The writers presented the readers with murderous lunatics, sometimes with shocking backstories, who do not care for anything but themselves. The public was able to revel in the darkness and the scandal of such stories. They were living vicariously from the comfort of their own homes. Even though detective fiction is one of the most famous genres of crime literature, it is sensation fiction that paved the way for the type of contemporary crime literature analysed in later chapters. Just as the “novels of seduction” of the eighteenth century, sensation fiction is inherently gothic. The story frequently goes down in a bleak environment where innocent victims (or are they?) are attacked by charming predators, hiding their malevolence under

a very elaborate persona. These narratives are demonstrating the human struggle between vice or impulses and morality or rationality. The nineteenth century also saw the increase of popularity of the urban gothic novel, another form of sensationalism, which

[...] emphasized the negative aspects of city life' – such as rampant crime and prostitution – and relied on recognizable attributes of Gothic fiction: grotesque imagery, decadence, and vicious villains. (Moudrov 136)

Gothic fiction found in early American crime literature will later influence some contemporary works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Twentieth Century Onwards: Realism and Relatability through the Hard-boiled genre

One constant aspect of American crime fiction is its continuous evolution with the readerships. The twentieth-century American crime fiction understands the readers' seventeenth and eighteenth-century craving to learn about the crime and the criminal, as well as the nineteenth century craving to immerse into it. The most significant genre of American crime fiction at the start of the twentieth century was Pulp fiction, which in its turn gave birth to Hard-boiled fiction. Pulp fiction, born in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was riding the rise of new media, was being published in cheap magazines and printed on low-grade paper. The stories evolved with the turn of the century into rough, crude, photographically realistic narratives and inspired by the criminally charged culture that existed at the time, and authors "*were simply responding to the changing face of America itself*" (Rzepka 184). As America was going through one of the most famous and complicated times in its history, the American Prohibition, the Hard-boiled stories published in Pulp magazines became famous. The Magazine "Black Mask" (1920) became an ideal for other Pulp fiction publishers, and it soon "*[...] became a magnet for talented young writers, who soon began to take pride in being 'pointed out as a Black Mask man by their peers'*" (Rzepka 186). It introduced the Hard-boiled fiction through Dashiell Hammett's (1894-1961) "Fly Paper" story in 1929 (Britannica, 'Hard-Boiled Fiction'). "*Hard-boiled fiction used graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue*" (Britannica, 'Hard-Boiled Fiction'). Again, this modern American crime fiction seems almost inspired by the gothic tradition. The American culture is somewhat rebellious, as it seemingly proclaims its individuality as tradition, and yet, as much as Hard-boiled crime fiction is a parallel evolution of the Americans readership cravings, it is also a means of differentiation from other genres of crime literature.

American hard-boiled or 'tough-guy' crime fiction was conceived in part as a direct challenge to the Anglo-American classical tradition inspired by Holmes. Spurning the drawing-room diction of polite society [...] the tough guy-writers cultivated a brusque, clipped vernacular style. (Rzepka 179)

Hard-boiled fiction evolves throughout the twentieth century to be the favoured type of crime fiction. Not only is it the best-selling genre in America, but its protagonists have become some of the most fascinating and world-famous fictional characters in the world. The fame of Hard-boiled might be that it can be both thorough detective fiction and dark sensation fiction following a complex criminal. It introduces both characters to the narrative and not just a good detective searching for a dark criminal, its complicated characters intertwining with surprising ones. Hard-boiled fiction is an unlimited source of charismatic fiends. It engages with dangerously fascinating criminals and takes a deep interest in the social and political environment in which the characters grow. Even though tearjerkingly complex backstories are less a necessity than they were in the previous centuries, the criminal is so beautifully written, and his story is so well-rounded, that the readers cannot blind themselves from the corrupt world both he and the fiend are evolving in. The intricate storylines, the complex characters, and the brutal and realistic murders created helped Hard-boiled fiction to exceed almost immediately the realm of Pulp magazines and promptly becomes a book-published genre. Just as in the eighteenth century, the fiend quickly comes to share the spotlight with the rogue. The 1960s mark the return of the Anti-Hero, which is vastly different in motives and actions than the romantic rebel. Contrarily to the romantic rebel, the modern rebel does not use his backstory to excuse his actions, but he uses them as motivation. Also, he is more invested with societal issues than the romantic rebel, he often tries to be an agent of change to prevent society from creating the same traumas that tormented him.

2. The Enchanting Fiend and the Aesthetical Murder

The Enchanting Fiend

Other than a fascination for gruesome and bloody literature, there always was great empathy for the criminal. Going back to the seventeenth century, even the ministers declaiming "execution sermons" were humanizing the objects of their sermon and having "*sympathy for the condemned*" (Crosby 7). Over time, it is easily noticeable that the audience of crime retellings became more and more sensible to the criminal. Around the eighteenth century, the character of the fiend started to

grow in importance. At first, the fiend seemed to be the perfect character to discourage the readers from criminal fantasies and to inculcate morals and virtue into the readership. However, they did not know at the time that they would be creating a character that went against everything they were trying to encourage. First, the criminally gratuitous persona, where he seeks murder and crime for the thrill of it. Then, the society amending persona, who works for a total reshaping of society. Sometimes, the two overlap. Hannibal Lecter, the refined cannibal who only punishes the disrespectful, is the perfect representative of such an idea. Sometimes, the two overlap. Hannibal Lecter, the refined cannibal who only punishes the disrespectful, is the perfect representative of such an idea. As Thomas De Quincey wrote “[c]ooks have ever been *genus irritabile*” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 31), and Hannibal Lecter is *genus irritabile* indeed. As will be analysed in later chapters, Lecter while loving murder and mayhem, also does so in a disgusted attempt to rid the world of irritable people. The fiend, in his dual persona, is such an incredible character. Even in his malevolence, he can be searching for a deeper social purpose. Dexter Morgan, for example, tries to punish the murderers that the justice could not convict. But the fiend can be mysterious and incomprehensible as he seeks murder for its own sake, like Thomas Ripley, killing out of emotion and personal gain. As much as he generally does not care for family or friends, and there is no clear explanation for his crimes, the fiend is not a completely insane individual. Thus, when the eighteenth-century writers created the fiend, not only did they create a mysterious and sometimes incomprehensible character, but as they depicted him as “[...] *beyond the reach of human sympathy*”. (Crosby 10) they did not understand that they just created a character much more fascinating than the rogue by making the fiend a superhuman character.

When I say superhuman, I do not mean it positively or magically as in “someone who is endowed with supernatural power”, but in a perfectly neutral description of “someone who is above the moral and societal laws of humanity”. The fiend thus becomes a fascinating symbol of brilliance and superiority. The superhuman fiend is not motivated or influenced by old, dying values, but by a new appreciation of the world around him and a creation of new morals. He lives above the usual laws of society, and he does it with purpose. This "ideal" of social and human superiority is going to be a major international literary and philosophical notion from then until today. In philosophy, it is Nietzsche's “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” (1883) and its representation of the “Übermensch – Overman”, that captures this fiendish and mortal superhumanity the best. In this essay, Nietzsche prophesises through his character Zarathustra, that Mankind is decaying, if not mediocre. Without new meaning and new values, it is entering its last phases of decadence. These new values should not be found in God, who according to Zarathustra is dead, but in a mortal Übermensch who will transcend society, and lead it towards a new, better way to revive

humanity. From there on, meaning from 1883 to nowadays, the notion of *Übermensch* notion will deeply influence the creation of antagonists in literature and pop culture. In American pop culture, Superman's nemesis Lex Luthor can be understood as an *Übermensch*. He refuses to bow down in front of the supernatural and tries to save humanity by reshaping society to value the earth, nature, and the human intellect. In American cinema, Alfred Hitchcock's film "Rope" (1948) focuses on a murder motivated by both Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and Thomas De Quincey's essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827). Finally, many fiends in American literature were modelled after the *Übermensch*, such as Hannibal Lecter. Thomas Harris could not have created a character more prone to represent the *Übermensch* antagonistic superiority than through Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal Lecter is presented as superior from the get-go, through his incredible refinement, education, and intelligence. He creates his own morals, his own values, and he works at them, although murderously, to change society one person at a time. The fiend is an incredible character to study because he is mysterious, alienating and the readers cannot do anything but stand there in astonishment and amazement.

But such a philosophical and influential development of the fiend could only begin once the writers themselves decided to push the character further. So of course, as the writers mostly are at the readers' service, they started to write evermore evolved and fascinating criminals with evermore evolved backstories so, as the readership seemingly could not get enough of this new character. Stories that started as tales of horror and immorality quickly became stories about sympathetic "*misunderstood victims*" and "*mentally ill lunatics*" (Crosby 10). The influence of this sympathy started to spill into reality and could be sensed in actual convictions. Around the same time that godless and child-murdering-mothers began to be the main characters of crime fiction, "[...] *the 1730, New England juries suddenly began refusing to convict women suspected of infanticide*" and officials recognized that the source of this trouble came from "*sympathy – and not the right kind of sympathy for the 'Good' but the wrong kind of sympathy for the 'Bad'*" (Crosby 10). Crime literature was thus so popular and influential that it was one of the reasons law and morals were changing. It speaks volumes about the understanding that we have as humans for crime and darkness. However, even though romantic criminals like the rogue have always been favourites of literature and storytelling, as seen through characters like Robin Hood (1450), stealing from the rich to donate to the poor, the obsession for the fiend seems to be more an American creation.

This is why I chose to work on American crime literature. Their criminals are much more evolved and twisted than, to me, in any other English-speaking literature culture. It is certain that "America enjoys morally complex lead characters that challenge our notions of right and wrong" (Donnelly 16). The number of incredibly profound murderers created throughout American crime

fiction is incredible, and most of them became icons in popular culture. Other than complex character arcs and incredible intelligence, I find American fiends to be very enticing characters. Of course, they “[...] possess perverse traits; however, they are usually also depicted as charming and attractive. Smith calls them “attractive-bad” characters” (David F. Schmid in Ziomek 131). Fiendish characters are amazing to study because they represent the beautiful human trait of being paradoxically attracted to everything one should not be. They disgust and yet, they attract.

What also makes the fiend so interesting is his high propensity to create genius crimes. The skill, the planning, and the creation of the crimes studied in this essay are so perfect, or beautifully imperfect, that they could be considered aesthetic. The premeditation of the crime, the apprehension, the excitement the readers feel when they witness it through the pages, is a thing of beauty. Whether it is through emotional escalations ending in climactic murders as in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), through a punctual bloodthirst as in *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), or if it is a slow and steady hunt like in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004). The murders are always a matter of intellect, taste, skill, and sometimes, even twisted morality. In the source material chosen for this essay other than the aestheticism of the murders committed in them, there is a conscious sympathetic portrayal of the murderer through a twisted moral accompanying their actions. Young and handsome Thomas Ripley, through his emotional fog, punishes the ungratefully privileged Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Hannibal Lecter is a “*sophisticated aesthete who eats the rude*” (Ziomek 129) in *Silence of the Lambs*, and lonely and traumatized Dexter Morgan kills uncatchable killers to bring balance to justice in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. All three are either charming, sympathetic, or both and push the readers to find explanation and acceptance in the murders they will commit. However, more than explanation and acceptance, it is understanding that the readers seek. He hopes for a deeper connection with the fiend, a connection with this mysterious and challenging character. This understanding can only come from the study of murder. The creations that the fiend puts into the world, the murder, is his way of expressing himself, it is his art. The murder is the key to the murderer.

The Aesthetical Murder

Known as “*the philosophical study of beauty and taste*” (Britannica, ‘Aesthetics’), Aesthetics is a broad subject, containing many different approaches. It is, of course, sensible to the concept of art, but more than that, it can be considered as part of “*the realm of the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, and the elegant; of taste, criticism, and fine art; and of contemplation, sensuous enjoyment, and charm*” (Britannica, ‘Aesthetics’). Aestheticism is a study of art as a general term and a study of the emotions various

types of art can provoke. It is possible to present a subject as aesthetic through three different approaches: as a concept, an experience, or an object (Britannica, 'Aesthetics'). However, the three different approaches to Aesthetics combined are not evidence of certainty. They can be analysed separately or together, can be as dismissive or perfectly harmonious with one another. Morality and ethics aside, it makes perfect sense that the realm of criminality can also be one of its many branches throughout, and not only as an expression of the ugly. Although the aesthetical study of murder belongs to both the realm of reality and fiction, it is through the fictional murder that it becomes possible to understand the art, the beauty, and the thrill of it. The way crime fiction is written and experienced is also an expression of genius, dedication, art, charm, taste, and sensuous enjoyment. The next chapters of this essay will follow the three approaches of aestheticism, and each chapter will study murder either as an aesthetical concept, an aesthetical experience, or as a transformed aesthetical object. In each chapter, there will be a theoretical study of the aestheticism of fictional murders, motivated by the classical works of Thomas de Quincey and Edmund Burke. Aestheticism is a very broad philosophy, and murder will thus be considered as aesthetical through many different points of view and through many different secondary sources. This study of aestheticism should be considered theoretical to a certain extent. The tasteful and artistic approach of murder cannot be proven on purely logical and scientific argumentations. My arguments are without any doubt motivated by philosophical research and a personal taste for murder literature and documentary drama. As this is a literary study, it allows more room for interpretation and distance than a study of murder as concrete criminal action. This essay will only consider the aestheticism of fictional murders, and how it makes sense in the current society. To accompany my theoretical research, and as this is primarily a work about literature, there will be an analytical study of different murders and murderers of American literature. Through excerpts and analyses of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) by Patricia Highsmith, *Silence of the Lambs* (1988) by Thomas Harris, and *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004) by Jeff Lindsay, it will soon become evident that the entirety of their murderous creations can, and definitely should be, experienced as aesthetical events.

It helps tremendously that the murders analysed in this essay are works of fiction. Knowing that the deeds one reads about, are everything but real, creates an easy moral escape. The readers sits comfortably at home, witnessing Hannibal Lecter's aesthetic spectacle of horrors, without ever having to face the real-life consequences that murder might usually entitle. However, through the three approaches of Aesthetics, it becomes clear that the aesthetic study of murder does not only exist because of the security of fiction. It is relevant because of the current society, the emotions or the satisfaction that it awakes, and the atypical and yet beautiful concrete scene it creates.

The following analyses are primarily motivated by the aesthetical study of murder by Thomas de Quincey in “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1827). However, it is through Edmund Burke's “A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful” (1759), and more specifically through the notion of the Sublime, that the true aestheticism of murder will be argued. The Sublime, which will be a driving force throughout this analysis, is an experience born out of an immense surge of emotion such as terror, fear, and astonishment. This notion, which will be more thoroughly studied in later paragraphs, will be a dominant argument throughout the study of murder as an aesthetic experience and the study of the corpse as an aesthetic object. Both of those approaches rely vastly on the emotional response the readers encounter in the face of murder. The optics of this essay is not to forgive and encourage murderous desires in the readership, but to make it possible to recognize beauty everywhere, even in malevolence. It is a question of survival. Finding beauty in the smallest and darkest things is the only way to understand the twisted world the current society is evolving in.

3. Source Material and Object of Study

Thomas Ripley in *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1995) by Patricia Highsmith: The Man

Thomas “Tom” Ripley is the main character of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Tom is a young, charming, and incredibly intelligent American, who spends his life trying to fit in a society that constantly refuses him. He was orphaned at a young age and raised by his Aunt Dottie who made him repeatedly feel like an unloved, unwanted outsider with absolutely no abilities. This lack of belonging will be observable throughout the whole novel, as his talents at forgery and con come mainly from his desire to fit in by learning to pass for something he is not. Likewise, the lack of love that followed Tom throughout his whole childhood creates an emotionally unstable, deeply passionate young adult who will not be able to understand the difference between love and hate. This misunderstanding will lead him to the most violent actions in moments of desperation. In the book, Tom will kill two different men because of emotional outbursts and his need to keep up with the façade he has constructed for himself. The character of Thomas Ripley is not exactly a complicated one but maybe the most interesting of all of the three murderers chosen for this essay because of his faults and vulnerability. Contrary to the godlike status of Hannibal Lecter and Dexter Morgan’s almost angelic protection of society, Thomas Ripley is only a man yielding to his weaknesses. Hannibal Lecter and Dexter Morgan have origin stories as if they were pop-culture

superheroes. A big show is made out of their trauma to explain how they ever became monsters. It is almost as if their murderous nature is pardoned because of their traumas. There is no such thing in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. The unloved, unstable, and unfitting Tom Ripley exists, around any street-corner anywhere. He is a symptom of a society that shuns and disregards differences. His nature was not created through a big traumatic show but simply exists. He is a human being, subjected to his vulnerabilities, without anyone to help him.

The Aesthetics of Murder in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* will be studied through the murder of Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles. Those killings were committed out of an emotional turmoil or a need to keep up with the lies and the life he always desired. The beautiful thunderstorm of emotions that Tom feels as he plans and murders Dickie (*The Talented Mr Ripley* 114–20) combined with the cold practicality of Freddie's murder (*TTMR* 164–65), shapes a perfect aesthetical creation sweeping the readers of their feet from astonishment and awe. The Aesthetics of murder in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* surrounds the realm of emotion: the inability to control his feelings, his hypersensitivity, and the emotional whirlpool that the readers' experience.

Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) by Thomas Harris: The Devil.

Dr Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter is neither the main character, not the main antagonist of Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs*, and yet, he is the first thing that pops to mind when thinking about the novel. Hannibal Lecter is an incredibly charming, educated, refined, and bloodthirsty murderer, incarcerated in a high-security asylum in Baltimore. Lecter remains behind bars for most of the novel's events but manages to lethally drive another cellmate to swallow his tongue in the opening chapters (*The Silence of the Lambs* 45) and ingeniously escapes from imprisonment in a cruel double murder in the ending chapters (*TSL* 273–87). He remains, however, for the entirety of the stormy an incredibly manipulative and terrifying force driving the main character, Clarice Starling, in her investigation but even more in her manner of perceiving the people around her. In another book, "Hannibal Rising" (2006), Hannibal Lecter's childhood and adult traumas are revealed in an attempt to explain the origins of his deviance. However, in *The Silence of the Lambs*, the character of Hannibal Lecter is painted as a mysterious blend of cruelty and intellect. The unpredictability and the misunderstanding of his nature make it so much more frightening. It is very quickly made clear that Hannibal will never be understood by anyone else but him. "*A census taker tried to quantify me once. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a big Amaranone.*" (*TSL* 27). Lecter hates the idea of being treated like a common criminal, so he kills, eats, or more simply outwits and disarrays the professionals that try to examine him. He is not to be understood or

studied, he is to create astonishment and awe in everyone around him. He is described as something else, something emitting an aura of refined wickedness, impossible to comprehend or equal. Lecter is almost depicted as a God. He is above any form of social norm or law, follows a lopsided morality, and still manages to be a better human being, even though his monstrosity, than any other man in the novel. Besides Clarice who has to withstand the direct manipulation, advances, and disdain of every man in the book, he is the most cultured, educated and polite character throughout the whole story. Although all three murderers chose for this essay are beautiful fiendish specimens, it is Hannibal that seems to depict crime fiction's "*attractive-bad*" character (David F. Schmid in Ziomek 131) the best. The readers cannot possibly understand him or appreciate him as a man, and yet, they are paradoxically attracted and repulsed all at the same time. Just as he would the Devil. Hannibal "The Cannibal" beautifully represents the devilish through the perverse admiration of millions of readers he has gained over the years. As the Devil would be, he is tempting, manipulative, and always three steps ahead of everyone else, making everybody gravitate around his otherworldliness. And yet, similar to the Devil, he is repulsive, terrifying, punishing sinners (or at least of the rude), and making everyone dread the possibility of ever crossing his path. Hannibal Lecter seems to be the man above the man, free from society and its hypocritical judgment. He created his own normality where respect, knowledge and skill surpass anything else.

The Aesthetics of murder in *The Silence of the Lambs* become clear through his cannibalistic tendencies, his escape from imprisonment, and his hunt for the disrespectful. Even though his reasons for murder sometimes differ throughout the book, there always is one. The murder is always used to its fullest extent because Hannibal desires to honour every bit of the life he is taking. From the intelligent carving out of officer Pembry's face, the intelligent disposal of his body, to the terrifying display of officer Brook's remains in his cell (TSL 278), Hannibal works with purpose only. It is clear that there is incredible beauty in the works of Hannibal Lecter, not only because in his snob intellectuality he purposefully wants to create art, but also because through some twisted morality, he values the life that he takes. The study of aesthetics in *Silence of the Lambs* will thus focus on the realm of the arts: the art of seduction, the culture, the gastronomy of the flesh, and the visual art of the murder. It is all profoundly aesthetic and artistically educational read.

Dexter Morgan in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004) by Jeff Lindsay: The Angel

Dexter Morgan is the main character of Jeff Lindsay's *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. Dexter is a young, handsome, and extremely agreeable blood-spatter analyst for the Metro-Dade Police Department, but only when he is not a cold-blooded serial murderer. Dex's job provides a perfect

cover-up for his nightly activities and his instincts when it comes to murder investigations. The character of Dexter is the perfect representation of the readers' need to rationalize and understand the murderer. Dexter is beautifully complex because he challenges the readers into rooting for him, even on a moral level. Dexter was found as a 3-year-old toddler sitting in a pool of his mother's blood on the crime scene by police officer Harry Morgan, who promptly adopted him into his own family. His adoptive father very quickly noticed Dexter's peculiar behaviour. Dexter had no inkling of how to act in society, mainly with people his own age, seemed to lack empathy, and was obsessed with death and murder scenes. Additionally, after Harry discovered the remains of their neighbours' murdered family pet, along with many other animal bones (Darkly Dreaming Dexter 37), he understood that it was only a matter of time before Dexter might move on to something bigger. Harry Morgan realized that his son's unusual impulses most probably came from the horrible murder he witnessed as a toddler. Afraid that Dexter might never recover from it, his father decided that his blood-thirsty nature needed to be managed. Harry created a very severe and almost bullet-proof system, so that Dexter would be able to fulfil his craving for blood, use it to be a useful member of society, and escape the police's attention. This system, called "the code of Harry" contained a great many rules, but the three main ones were: "Don't get caught", "Never kill an innocent" and "Targets must be killer who has evaded the justice system". This last rule is bendable, as targets frequently are rapists and child predators. The idea of a code of conduct is not a fresh take on the murderer. Thomas Ripley and Hannibal Lecter both have some morality guiding them into murders, but "the code of Harry" is interesting, as it is supposed to almost fit with society's norms rather than completely rejecting them. Dexter is a full-functioning member of society, more than that, some might recognize him as some twisted protector of it. In his hunt for targets and through his moral code, Dexter almost seems to be an avenging angel. This side of Dexter is highlighted through his complete dissociation from his killer instincts. The murderous part of Dexter is mostly referred to, by himself, as "the dark passenger". It is the dark passenger that murmurs his dark desires to Dexter, which in turn controls them severely through Harry's code of conduct. Dexter seems to be a victim of his darkness. Almost as a modern *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), victim to a nightly murderous alter-ego violently unleashed on an unexpected target. Of course, contrary to Dr Jekyll, Dexter is not afraid of his dark passenger. He cares for his darkness as for a child, the code of Harry almost representing parental supervision. The "dark passenger" simply says out loud what Dexter silently thinks. Dexter is a complicated character because besides being a murderous angel, his character might not be as dark as one could think. His bloodthirst only seems to be directed at adult murderers, in what I would describe as an angry and unconscious attempt to avenge his mother's death. Indeed, Dexter adores children and feels

protective of them. For example, he cares enormously for his girlfriend's children whom he sees as damaged as he is because of their cruel and violent father. Throughout the novel, it becomes more and more evident that as much as Dexter is a blood-obsessed murderer, he may only be a 3-year-old toddler stuck in a bottomless pool of revenge. For all his analytical, cold-blooded, and predatory persona, Dexter is a deeply emotional character. Very much like Tom Ripley, Dexter kills because of emotion. It is only through Harry that he began to get a hold of his inner turmoil. He relies on blood and murder because not only does it bring control to his world, but it may help him focus on something bigger than himself. The only moment Dexter is completely at peace is when he cuts through a body. That does not come from him being a monster, but from finding solace in the only thing he remembers from his mother, blood.

The Aesthetics of murder in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* are present through the different murders of the undesirables and the awakening of the senses that it brings. However, it is also observable through the feverish hunt he does before killing the targets. Because of the code of Harry, Dexter has to research his targets thoroughly and make sure that they are undesirables before he even attempts at killing them. This search for certainty and the study of his cases create an atmosphere of excitement and thrill for Dexter and the readers. They might be looking at his next victim but Dexter first has to control the dark passenger before acting upon his bloodthirst. The hunt might even be more intense than the kill, as the preparation and the search slowly heighten the excitement for the actual murder, itching Dexter more and more until it culminates in the first ecstatic blade swipe. This excitement is why the murders in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* are part of the aesthetical realm of sensuous enjoyment: the strong discipline, the thrill of the hunt, and the blood that “sets [Dexter’s] teeth on edge” (DDD 21), all of it is a dark awakening of the senses.

Chapter 1

The Study of Murder as an Aesthetic Concept

In 1827, Thomas de Quincey wrote: “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” in which he illustrates what he sees as the “*art of Murder*” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 15). De Quincey believes it is possible to view murder as an artform as “[*he is*] for morality, and always shall be” but “[*e*]nough has been given to mortality; now comes the turn of Taste and the Fine Arts” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 6 and 11). The idea that genius artistry can also come from the most gruesome murders, coupled with the satirical tone of De Quincey, mirrors extremely well the criminal geniuses that are Thomas Ripley, Hannibal Lecter, and Dexter Morgan. De Quincey’s work is humorous and very analytical of concrete murders. It is thus necessary to find a more theoretical approach that would help understand how it is possible to find such horrendous actions aesthetical. To that end, one should look no further than crime fiction pioneer, Edgar Allen Poe. In his 1850 essay “The Poetic Principle”, he creates a divide in the

world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions [...] the Pure Intellect, Taste and the Moral Sense. [...] Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty (Poe 417–18).

This is extremely interesting as it makes it possible to understand the beauty and the artistry of murder without having to deal with it morally, as those two mindsets are not even related to one another. Poe, in the same way as De Quincey, creates a loophole where he makes it possible to both judge the crime morally, and find beauty in it at the same time.

However, although De Quincey and Poe’s essays are enlightening and thorough, they were both written in the nineteenth century. It is necessary to see his analysis in a modern context to portray the contemporary murders of Lecter, Ripley, and Morgan as aesthetic. Consequently, the best argument after understanding those two essays would be to understand murder as an aesthetic concept would be its position concerning the art culture since the nineteenth century.

1. Shock Culture and Murder, a Perfect Match

Even though De Quincey already perceives murder as an aesthetic concept in 1827 and traces its ingenuity back to the dark ages as “*these ages ought naturally to be favorable to the art of murder, as they were to church architecture, to stained glass, &c.*” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 15), the current society also fits beautifully with such an idea. Now more than ever, the idea that provocation is an artform, is consistent with the scoop society of today. As seen in the history of American crime fiction, the nineteenth and twentieth century came with the rise of media frenzy, shocking realism, and an all-around appreciation for the literary Fiend. Additionally, the twenty-first century saw the creation of an incredibly fast-paced culture of information and research. Everything is fact-checked, cross-referenced, and debated in the instant of its creation. The craving for truth has never been so sought out, attainable, and yet perpetually challenged. Therefore, it makes even more sense to consider crime fiction murders as aesthetic concepts nowadays than ever before because modern art is obsessed with shocking truth, reality, and provocation. One trip to the museum, the cinema, or the bookshop makes it clear that violence, gore, and trauma have nowadays become components of art. “*Of course, the major works of the twentieth-century art world are ugly. Of course, many are offensive*” (Hicks). The raw truth, the ugliness, and the difficult emotions that art creates are unanimously celebrated all over the world as high art. “*Art must be a quest for truth, however brutal, and not a quest for beauty*” (Hicks). This search for true understanding opens the door for many ethically challenging art pieces and happenings. Throughout the last hundred years, artists have been experimenting with the concept of art and its boundaries. The idea of shock-art is a consequence of the nineteenth-century modernist movement’s desire to show the world as it is, meaning “[...] *fractured, decaying, horrifying, depressing, empty, and ultimately unintelligible*” (Hicks). This idea evolved through the next hundred years and also became synonymous with disgust and shock around the middle of the twentieth century.

The recognition that art should be able to show the horrifying, or the decaying leaves a lot of room for murder, outside of morality, to be seen as something truly artistic and aesthetic. Some shock-artists have been tiptoeing around the notion of murder, like Hermann Nitsch¹, who integrates ritualistic slaughtering of animals, blood, and flesh into his happenings, or Marco

¹ Hermann Nitsch (born 1938) is an Austrian artist, and co-founder of the Viennese Actionism (“Wiener Aktionismus”). This art movement’s purpose was to create direct art. It was a merging of life and art through shocking performances that could not be understood and retold through documentation. They became known for those spectacular performances, in which they argued for a return to the body as the main canvas and the importance of all the senses to completely understand art. (Widrich 138–39)

Evaristti who displayed live gold-fishes into blender which the spectators were encouraged to ignite (“Helena: the Goldfish Blender” 2000), and yet they are publicly acclaimed as creator of art. Although Shock-art is a deeply modern movement, its core idea seems can also be found in the works of Edmund Burke as “*it is a common observation that objects which in the reality would shock are (...) the source of a very high species of pleasure*” (Burke 71). Shock-art has always been controversial, and the question that has often been asked is “where to put the limit?”. I shall argue that the limit does not always exist. It exists because of the idea of there being a “good” and a “bad”, and those are notorious moral and cultural constructs. I do not mean that I have no notion of “good” and “bad” or that I approve of murder and all that is harmful. What I am trying to explain is that the limit exists morally, not essentially. In that respect, this limit does not exist for everyone, or at least not in the same way. Social norms, ethics, questioning, and good conduct are the basis of modern culture, but they are always going to be crossed by some individuals. There is no preventing human nature, and human nature often leads to very dark, dangerous events. The worst thing to do would be to hide from it, keep it quiet, creates taboos. Thankfully, this is where crime fiction comes in. It does not hide from the darkest parts of human nature, on the contrary, it showcases it. Allowing the readers to witness beauty through difficult events helps them stay critical and intelligent about their world. It prevents marginalization and fear through education and understanding. Dexter Morgan from *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* is the perfect example of such an idea. Dexter is a sociopath because of his past but desperately tries to make good out of his killings. More than that, it is because he allows himself to kill other criminals that he can keep from savagely killing just anybody that crosses his path. His thorough and calm killing system creates very pure, clean, and disciplined murder scenes creating aesthetically fascinating murders. It is through taboos that deviance grows into danger. I find it much healthier to recognize the art into a punishable criminal act, for example, Tom Ripley's killing of Dickie out of heart-breaking emotional desperation (TTMR 114–21) than to create an unease about it and satisfy the borderline artistry like Nitsch. Thomas De Quincey's and Poe's essays are right on point when it comes to understanding murder. Once the crime is written and the horror and the illegality of the action understood, then the Pure Intellect should be able to understand that there is no problem dividing the Taste from the Moral Sense and let murder “*be treated aesthetically*” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 7). If anything, it makes much more sense to understand and see the beauty of a murder that has been recognized as punishable, rather than to encourage borderline happenings where powerless beings are harmed and killed by the artist or the assembly. If the creations of artists like Nitsch are all publicly accepted as art, then it makes little sense that murder could not critically be aesthetically studied.

This approach of murder as an aesthetic concept can be argued through the example of Hannibal Lecter, the crimes that he commits, and the possible reasons that he might act this way. Through his refined monstrosity, his absolute dislike of discourtesy, and his clever use of society's hypocrisy, it will soon become clear that Hannibal Lecter uses culture as a paintbrush for his murderous creations. He is a pure product of society and represents the concept of aesthetical murder, just by himself.

Hannibal Lecter 's Art of Murder in *The Silence of the Lambs*: Using Culture as a Tool for Violence

If one has to understand the aesthetics of murder as a concept, Hannibal Lecter is the perfect character to use as an example. Especially if one tries to understand why murder fiction has become such an aesthetic staple in today's society. In a typical fiend fashion, everything Hannibal Lecter does, he does because of the current society. Even though it is relevant in other novels, I won't dive into the specifics of his origins in this essay as the novel analysed here does not give such insight. Especially since the mystery about why he does what he does is one of the main interests in *The Silence of the Lambs* and adds to the fascination. Many points of interest make Hannibal Lecter a remarkably interesting subject to study murder as an aesthetic concept. The main one is without any doubt his love of art and his desire to create it in everything he accomplishes, his murders included. Hannibal is a complex character because he is mysterious in every way. Not only through his origins but also through his psychology. Hannibal Lecter has very complex psychology because it is surprisingly sane and self-aware. In his extreme complexity, he can recognize himself as a killer "*with a literal taste for gore, but also a cultivated man attracted to the artistic and sublime*" (Cámara-Arenas 80). Hannibal Lecter is not only a savage killer, as seen in his carving of officer Boyle who was "*partly eviscerated, his face hacked , [and] seemed to have exploded blood in the cell*" (TSL 278), but also a mindful and thoughtful one who cooks, reshapes, carves and displays his victims in ways that one could not ignore as a show of art. This terrifying refinement stems from his intelligent use of society standards, and his desire to reshape them in his image. Hannibal Lecter finds his artistry in the mockery he makes of society's hypocrisy, all the while murderously working on making it more refined and aesthetical. To understand Hannibal's refinement, it is first important to understand how he turns society's hypocrisy to his advantage.

Many sides of Hannibal are detectable as façades for or plays on society. Most notably his title, Doctor Hannibal Lecter. It participates in the incredibly dangerous aura he gives off. This title of doctor is synonymous with two things. First, and most importantly, it is a beautifully challenging

provocation towards the standards of society. In a sense, he makes a mockery of the title. A doctor should be someone in which one should have infallible trust, someone who cares, heals, and saves. Hannibal is all but unfailingly trustworthy, caring, healing, and above all, saving. He goes against everything the profession stands for. Under the mask of one of the most reassuring and heroic figures of society, he lures the reader and his own victims into a “*false sense of security [...] a smokescreen for his explosive violence and rage*” (Fahy 30). Hannibal Lecter shocks and bewilders the reader. The reader is astonished by such a possibility, and it terrifies him to the core. Hannibal Lecter is one of the most popular criminals of American crime fiction, ever. His terrifying presence perfectly represents Burke's terrible sublime as he simultaneously generates “*astonishment or admiration and [...] terror*” (Burke 98). Not only is his title supposedly a beacon of security and trust, but the same goes with Hannibal's cultured, sophisticated and polite persona. His exterior represents everything that is valued in society, all the while being one of its biggest predators on the inside. “*As a result, his brutal violence is shocking; it undermines our sense of security by making culture, like a knife or gun, a tool for violence*” (Fahy 34). His sophistication and education are the chloroform sedating his victims. They are unable to see the danger coming as his title and refinement are something they have always been taught to value and achieve. His culture and his refinement should be symbols of respectability and trust, because of “*our assumptions about art (classical music, literature, drawings) as a sign of civility also suggest another layer of security*” (Fahy 34). Hannibal is a wolf in sheep clothing. His exterior is a symbol of security and trust, while, his interior is ready to snap and kill at any moment. The fascination and the terror that he creates, more than inducing sublime feelings in the reader, demonstrates some of the hypocrisy of the current society. Everyone is so focused on titles, appearances, and leaving an impression, that they forget to trust their animal instinct and flee in the face of danger. By creating this character, Thomas Harris laughs in the face of a hypocritical society, whose morals and values are so easily fakable. This mockery of society through astonishment and murder perfectly represents the provocative shock art and Burke's shocking source of pleasure (Burke 71). Just as the art and beauty of murder scenes come from the raw descriptions and their shocking aspect, Hannibal's sophisticated violence has a typically shock-art aura and beauty in its quest to expose society's brutal truth.

However, Hannibal Lecter is not also an aesthetical genius in his fiendish purpose. As any well-written fiend would, he loves killing but he does so with reason and purpose. He aspires to reshape an aesthetic society, one person at a time, and his reasons for murder exist aplenty. Those reasons range from the most practical, escaping imprisonment, to the most utopian, ridding the world of its trash, as “*[...] [d]iscourtesy is unspeakably ugly to [him]*” (TSL 28). But in both cases, the murder is going to use to its fullest extent. For example, in the case of Miggs' death, the kill is

calculated to be perfectly symbolic. After apologizing to Clarice for his neighbour's disrespectful behaviour, Miggs is found a few days later dead by tongue swallowing in his cell. As Clarice accuses him of manipulating Miggs into it, Lecter laughs it off by saying it has "*pleasant symmetry though, his swallowing that offensive tongue*" (TSL 69). Hannibal does not work lightly nor pointlessly. For all he punishes, kills, and eats the rude, he also rewards the polite and the considerate. At the very end of the novel, as Hannibal enjoys his successful escape, he "*sen[ds] to Barney a generous tip and a thank you note for his many courtesies at the asylum*" (TSL 420). This appreciation of his former prison guard's civility and kindness reinforces the idea that Hannibal works on reshaping the world into his aesthetic. He craves a more respectful and educated world. It gives Hannibal Lecter a twisted sense of morality that reassures the reader and lowers his condemnation of him. The reader might, very literally, let him get away with murder. The reader needs to understand that Hannibal Lecter's refinement is not only a tool for violence but also his goal for all mankind. Only then, the reader might start to understand the murderer and his art. Hannibal Lecter in his disdain for society and through his incredible refinement creates a space where "*savagery becomes an "art" that reflects the violence, hatred, indifference, deceit, and depravity endemic to modern, capitalist society*" (Fahy 29). Hannibal creates a shocking exhibition of skill, emotion, and refinement by mocking society and using its faults against itself. His murders are essentially sublime. By humiliating modern society in such a way, Hannibal challenges the reader in his daily beliefs about the world he is living in, by showing him how ugly, decaying, and surprising it can be. "*In the hands of [this] aesthete-kill[er], beauty gets redefined in terms of violence, creating a tension between culture and barbarism*" (Fahy 28). The aesthetics of Hannibal's murder closely resemble the aesthetic of the nineteenth-century modernist movement and the shock-art by depicting an "*ultimately unintelligible*" (Hicks) world. Hannibal Lecter does not only dictate his persona and his work to aesthetics, he is aesthetics. Throughout his refinement, his actions, and his behaviour, he has attained some sort of unclassifiable, almost superhuman status. "*[H]e is impenetrable, much too sophisticated for the standard tests*" (TSL 13). Through the course of the novel, the reader is reminded that Hannibal Lecter is much too refined and educated to be human. "*[...] [D]on't ever forget what he is.' - 'And what is that ? Do you know?' - 'I know he is a monster. Beyond that, nobody can say for sure'*" (TSL 7). The reader constantly swings between two emotions: The fascination created by the unclassifiable status of Dr Hannibal Lecter and the terror created by the demonization of Hannibal "The Cannibal". What the reader cannot deny, however, is the refined aestheticism of each one of the murders and actions Hannibal Lecter commits during the novel.

Chapter 2

The Study of Murder as an Aesthetic Experience

If there is one indicator that the crime fiction readers find pleasure and beauty in the murderous experience, it is the fact that they will be disappointed if the murder they witness does not match their expectations. They want to witness a show. They want to be astonished by the murderous experience and will be critical if it does not end in murder or a spectacular twist. This entitlement to a good show is palpable in De Quincey's essay. He recounts S.T. Coleridge's disappointment after abandoning his place in a tearoom to go witness a fire where nobody perished: "“Oh sir’ said he ‘[i]t turned out so ill, that we damned it unanimously’ [...]” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 8). It is a disappointment comprehensible to De Quincey that he even goes to defend S.T. Coleridge by explaining that “*He had left his tea. Was he to have nothing in return?*” (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 8). This unsurprising taste for spectacles of horror is also representative of how humans have an innate comprehension of death and murder as an aesthetic experience. True crime and crime fiction readers enjoy it so much that they start developing preferences as if they were talking about any other art form. They have preferred murderers, preferred murders, and a critical opinion about what they think is a “good” or a “bad” murder. Later in his essay, De Quincey illustrates this criticism by posing judgment on the different techniques of killing.

Fie on those dealers in poison, say I: can they not keep the old honest way of cutting throats [...] I consider all those poisoning cases, compared to the legitimate style, [are] no better than waxwork by the side of sculpture [...] (De Quincey, *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. 39)

De Quincey can create a judgment about what his preferred manner of killing is because he developed a particular taste for murder experiences. The experience of murder can be studied as aesthetical through two approaches. To start, by following the idea of shock-art from the previous paragraph, it is possible to understand it as an emotionally challenging art piece. Those complicated emotions create an aesthetic experience from witnessing the pleasurable forbidden. Consequently, as demonstrated in the argument about murder as an aesthetical concept, the current society gives a lot of credit to provocative, shocking, and challenging art pieces, whether they are borderline ethical or not. It should be made clear that the love for raw and disturbing art pieces does not exist

only for the shock of it, but because it awakens emotions that the spectators might never feel otherwise and understand people he typically would not.

The thrill and horror evoked by murder narratives bring us close to these ‘others,’ who hold us in their thrall because, on the one hand, they are so like us, and on the other, so different (David F. Schmid in Ziomek 129–30)

It helps the readers understand who murders and why. More than that, it also encourages them to experience a life they would never on their own and live out the desires they would never dare to entertain. Indeed, more than triggering cathartic emotions, the aesthetic experience of murder exists because of the dark fantasies it might satisfy through the vicarious witnessing of murder. The gruesome descriptions of murder laid out on paper might be the only opportunity for the readers to experience malevolent reveries. If murder in literature can create a thunderstorm of emotions by shocking the readers, it can also make him feel reassured about such happenings as it allows him to find “[...] *the violence in the killer’s disorder, rather than in [himself]* [...]” (Allué 11).

There will thus be two arguments to understand fictional murder as an aesthetic experience. The first will be the cathartic need to feel for the terrible situations that the readers hope they will never experience. Equally, the second argument will be the vicarious experience of the deviant need to murder without having to commit a crime.

1. Cathartic Emotions through Raw Experiences

Murder fiction is so popular because reading about terrible and shocking events is one of the greatest human perversions. People adore going to a photography exhibition about poverty in third-world countries, listening to the saddest break-up songs, or going to see war and drama movies, and in the same way reading horrors one might never experience creates a feeling of security and relief about daily life. Crime fiction is most certainly not the only literary genre bringing this somewhat cathartic experience to the ordinary Joe sitting comfortably at home. Stephen King (*The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*, *IT*, ...) daily terrifies millions of readers through his horror novels that would never happen in reality, just like Nicholas Sparks (*The Notebook*, *Message in a Bottle*, *Dear John*, ...) makes readers weep over an impossible lover they will never live to encounter. Crime fiction is so popular because “[*t*]he ideas of pain, sickness, and death, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but life and health, [...] make no such impression [...]” (Burke 58). It is the strong emotions of

crime fiction, the idea that it can terrify, charm, and bring to tears, all at the same time. Thomas Ripley is the perfect bachelor, young, smart, and beautiful, his starting relation with Dickie is one of love and delight, all of that until he violently kills him in a somewhat anticipated, rage outburst. Hannibal Lecter, although deeply unsettling, can also be suave, polite, and charming; his treatment of Clarice makes him the most straightforward, respectful male throughout the whole book. All of that until he violently escapes his captivity by, beautifully intelligently, slaughtering two guards. Dexter is the picture-perfect good brother and professional, as he is caring, patient, sweet with his sister Deborah and frail girlfriend Rita, all of that until he becomes a predator by, somewhat thrillingly, hunting down unpunished criminals to slaughter them.

Although living by proxy has existed forever, it is arguable that “[a]n aesthetic experience derived from art is nowadays more difficult to define as pleasurable” (Ziomek 126). However, as I thrive on emotion and cathartic experiences, I think that the difficulty of those experiences is precisely the pleasure of it. Art is there to make the spectator think and feel. The role of art is to move the beholder, the beauty lies in the emotion, and emotion lies in the experience. The dark cathartic pleasure that emerges from violent or complicated artwork, is precisely why it is possible to recognize the aesthetics behind a murder. The troubling emotions that come from experiencing true darkness, whether it is the genius, the skills, the planning of the murder, or simply the final blow, all make it beautifully artistic. Murder in crime fiction can depict all of that. Murder becomes “[...] a spectacle and allows us to treat it purely “[aesthetically]” (Rabaté 2).. It is a powerful experience that can transform the morally challenging witnessing of murder “[...] into an aesthetic game that can be enjoyed as simple entertainment” (Baelo Allué 9), where morality does not need to be pushed aside. The cathartic experience of murder exists because the readers can understand the morally complex emotions they and the murderer feel at the moment of the crime. It is an experience that awakens emotions that are bigger than oneself. The more these emotions seem difficult, the more it is an experience of the sublime. It is an experience that the readers cannot comprehend or explain, but it awakens in them deep feelings. This aesthetic and emotional experience is perfectly expressed by British philosopher Edmund Burke as

[w]hatever is fitted in any fort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the Sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 58)

It is not about only seeing the beauty or the skill anymore, but about reacting to the kill, feeling the last blow, imagine the fear, the relief, and the pain of the victim and the victimizer. The aesthetic

experience exists in the sublime emotions the murder creates in the readers. This Thunderstorm of emotions shakes them to the core, creates an experience that they are generally not able to feel in their safe and boring little life.

This cathartic experience of murder will be argued through two very different examples: The murder of Dickie Greenleaf in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, as well as the murder of Officer Boyle and Officer Pembry in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Both cases are inducers of cathartic emotions but in two very different ways. The emotions awoken by the murder of Dickie Greenleaf in *The Talented Mr Ripley* are part of what I would designate as the realm of passion. Dickie and Tom share a complicated relationship, and in the face of such emotions, Tom is unable to understand what is happening to him. It is raw and pure. It is passion. In the case of the murder of Officer Boyle and Officer Pembry however, the emotions awoken by their murder are part of the realm of terror. Hannibal sees these officers as his ticket out of imprisonment. His killing of them is so cold and emotionless, that the readers cannot do anything but tremble in the face of such cruelty. Both examples, though extremely different in the emotions they create, are representative of the sublime emotions awoken by the aesthetics of murder.

However, in between the cathartic feelings awoken from witnessing a murder, the readers might find something much darker and scarier. They might enjoy it.

Thomas Ripley's Emotional Thunderstorm in *The Talented Mr Ripley*: A Little Bit of Love, a Little Bit of Hate

If the murder as an aesthetic experience is to be understood as a mainly cathartic experience, one should not look further than Dickie Greenleaf's murder in *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Thomas Ripley is a deeply emotionally unstable man as he was raised without love, support, or even any kind of care. This becomes very clear throughout the first half of the novel, as Tom's possessiveness of Dickie, and the jealousy he feels against anyone else in Dickie's life, is extremely powerful. Just like a child who was never taught to share his toys, Tom cannot understand that Dickie's attention can sometimes be diverted towards other individuals. Unfortunately for Tom, he could not have picked a worse recipient for his love when he set his sights on Dickie. Any other kind and patient person would have been able to understand and calm Thomas down. Dickie is, without any doubt, one of the most self-involved, uncaring, and underserving literary characters of contemporary literature. The passion Tom feels towards him is astonishingly strong. He is obsessed with Dickie, and the more he seems to be, the less Dickie wants him around. Dickie, much like

Tom, if only a little bit more controlled, reacts capriciously to disappointment, and every time he does so towards Tom, Tom is thrown in a never-ending spiral of rageful emotions. Sometimes angry at himself, regularly angry at Marge or Freddie for stealing his thunder, but always angry at Dickie for leaving or disappointing him. Tom cannot see straight in his relationship with Dickie, lying to himself, persuading himself that Dickie is fake with everyone but him, blinding himself to the truth of Dickie's selfish and uncaring character. Throughout the first part of the novel, Tom refuses to believe that Dickie might be in love with Marge. He blatantly refuses to pay attention to their obvious co-dependence. He only listens to Dickie's great discourse about freedom but muffles the sound of the intimate discussions Dickie seems to have with Marge except when they seem to concern him. He is completely ignoring the tell-tale signs of their slow-burning relationship. Until one day, he catches a glimpse of them together in a warm embrace, and through his bewilderment, his delusions become clear.

[...] [W]hat disgusted Tom was that he knew Dickie didn't mean it, Dickie was only using this cheap obvious, easy way to hold on to her friendship. [...] And Dickie –! Tom really wouldn't have it believed it possible of Dickie! (T^rTMR 89)

Tom refuses to recognize that Dickie's heart belongs to someone else. However, from there on, things seem to degrade. Not only is Tom disappointed in Dickie's behaviour, but he slowly begins to feel disregarded by Dickie. First, he begins to hate Marge more and more, even fantasizing about killing her,

Tom turned suddenly and made a grab in the air as if he was seizing Marge's throat. He shook her, twisted her, while she sank lower and lower, until at least he left her, limp, on the floor. (T^rTMR 90)

It is a coldblooded violent death, filled with hatred. It is the first time the reader understands that jealousy and emotion could drive Tom to kill someone in the novel. The atmosphere of the story becomes heavier and heavier, as Tom's emotions get even more jealous. The reader can feel the murder slowly coming up, not sure if it is going to be Marge or Dickie, but sure that Tom is going to snap. As Dickie slowly pulls away from him, Tom understands that his days with him are numbered. He does not feel loved, cared for, or even simply desired. This brings him back to his childhood. Tom starts to boil from the inside out. He cannot be triumphed by other people's selfishness and cruelty again; he cannot bear to be rejected one more time. And it is precisely what Dickie is doing to him at that point. Dropping hints about how Tom should go back home for Christmas, although knowing that Tom has no one and nothing to go back to, cancelling trips to Paris and Cortina d'Ampezzo, although having planned them excitedly with Tom for weeks. All of

a sudden, Dickie is trying to give Tom the boot. Faced with such a sudden change of heart, Tom cannot be anything but disoriented. He has been living with the sunshine of Dickie's love and appreciation for weeks, and all of a sudden, he finds himself in the dark. Tom, through confusion and disappointment, finds himself in emotional turmoil, feeling

[a] crazy emotion of hate, of affection, of impatience and frustration [...] He wanted to kill Dickie. [...] Now he was thinking about it for an entire minute, two minutes, because he was leaving Dickie anyway [...]. (TTMR 114–15)

Tom is confused. He is unable to think clearly. His vision is blurred by jealousy, rejection, and shame; he falls into the deepest pits of hatred. If he cannot have Dickie, why should Marge? Why should anyone? Thomas Ripley is such an incredible character in the way that he feels everything. From the most beautiful emotions of love and affection to the purest feelings of hatred and bloodthirst. Tom has only ever known rejection and humiliation. He never had anything to care for and had never had anything that cared for him. He cannot lose him. Everything is better than being rejected by Dickie, so why not simply kill him. The child inside of Thomas, the one that is whimsical and scared, is not able to rationally understand his emotions or even comprehend the consequences his actions might entail.

But Tom has made his choice, Dickie is already as good as dead. Tom in his incredible intelligence, knows how he is going to kill and when. The moment where Tom murders Dickie is surprising for many reasons. The manner of death, the violence, the emotions, all of it seem so raw and natural that the reader cannot escape the shock of it all. Although the reader apprehends this moment for a few chapters, he does not expect Tom to smash Dickie on the head with a boat oar so incredibly quickly. It happens so suddenly, one moment, Dickie is getting ready to take a swim, the next, Tom comes down with an oar on his head. The way Tom murders Dickie is surprising with determination and focus. The reader's surprise is mirrored in Dickie's reaction to the blow. "*Hey!*" Dickie yelled, scowling, sliding half the wooden seat. His pale brows lifted in groggy surprise" (TTMR 119). It is as if the reader is himself struck on the head by the oar. He cannot believe it is happening here, right now, in this manner. In contrast, Tom stands there a perfect picture of calm and determination, while inside of him everything is unravelling extremely quickly. He strikes Dickie once, twice, seven times before Dickie's "*body relaxed, limp and still*" (TTMR 120). Tom although extremely focused, is fumbling around. He is unsteady in the moving boat. Passionately striking Dickie again and again. Tom is terrified at the idea that Dickie might not be dead, wake up, and that he will have to face the consequences of what he just did. He is quickly moving about, focusing on the disposal of Dickie's body and getting his story straight once back to the shore. Tom is

terrified, he is determined, and in the middle of all that, he, who cannot swim, falls headfirst into the sea before intelligently finding a way to grasp onto the boat's side to save himself from drowning. This instant beautifully represents the whole novel. Tom's narrative is an incredible story of emotion as Tom loves and hates with such ease and passion. It is a story of focus and dedication, as Tom is determined to have the life, he thinks he deserves and works tirelessly to keep it once he gets it. But most of all, it is a story of consequences and survival. Tom will never be able to shake off the murder of Dickie, and he will find himself drowning in his lies again and again before intelligently finding a way to turn the situation back to his advantage.

The reader is struck along in this incredibly emotional and distressing journey. He was never in a place where he could feel such raw, pure, and unrationalized emotions. The anticipation of Ripley's killing of Dickie, the cold fumbling of it, the determination to live better. The reader can experience a whole new life. A life that goes against everything he thinks he knows about it. One where neither love nor determination can save the character from himself. But also, one where no one is safe from him. According to Thomas de Quincey, it is through such emotional distress that the best characters are created, as there should be raging in the murderer "*some great storm of passion jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look*" (De Quincey, 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth (1823, 1860)' 3). It is through such tormenting emotions that the reader can experience a true cathartic journey. Those emotions he feels in his everyday life such as love, joy, or even sadness, are nothing compared to the intensity of how Thomas feels them. Reading the murders, especially Dickie's, in 'The Talented Mr Ripley, is a true cathartic journey. More than giving the reader extremely intense emotions and terrifying him through Tom's cold and focused murders, it also shows him how quickly the average human being can snap.

The serial killer, arguably, is not simply someone that evokes our fears of being killed, but he/she also makes us fear the Otherness within ourselves as a society and as individuals. (Donnelly 19)

Everything that Tom currently is, was created by his environment and the society he was born in. It makes the reader shift his usual fears towards "[...] *the threat of that which lurked within their fellow citizens*" (Donnelly 20), but it mostly makes him fear what he could potentially become. Tom is essentially human, with his dreams, his flaws, and the beautiful feelings he can experience. Seeing Tom snap like that, reminds the reader that anyone could do it. Not only does Tom enables the reader to experience all of his emotions, but he also terrifies the reader into never forgetting what he could eventually become if he is left unchecked.

Thomas Ripley's murders, especially this one for sure, truly are an incredible source of cathartic emotions. Witnessing such a surge of conflicting and passionate emotions is a thing of beauty. The reader is propelled into a great intensity of feeling he might never experience otherwise. It is an incredibly aesthetic experience.

Hannibal Lecter's Terrifying Tranquillity in *The Silence of The Lambs*

There is the thoroughly cathartic witnessing of murder through Thomas Ripley's wild, uncontrollable emotions, and then there is the cathartically terrifying witnessing of murder through the academic calm of Hannibal Lecter. That is the difference between Lecter and the other two murderers studied for this essay. Throughout *The Silence of the Lambs*, Lecter does not get excited, does not feel the need to kill, or is overwhelmed by emotion and doubt. He is cold and surgical, making him the most dangerous and all the more terrifying. Even in his deviance, he is superior to every other serial killer analysed. Although both Dexter and Tom are intelligent, skilled, and focused, the lack of excitement combined with the cold practicality of his work makes him indefinitely more lethal. From the get-go, the reader is pushed into terror by the treatment Lecter receives and by the manner he needs to be addressed. There is nothing new in meeting fictional criminals for the first time in prison, but Hannibal is not just any fictional criminal in any fiction prison.

Firstly, Hannibal Lecter cannot be kept in any prison but is under 24/7 surveillance in an asylum. This environment, the asylum, is used to present two main ideas to the reader. The first is, without any doubt, the ridicule of having probably one of the most intelligent, refined, thoughtful, and surprisingly sane characters of literature locked away in a sanatorium, sharing his space with foul-mouthed, semen-throwing demented maniacs like Miggs. The second would be to underline the fact that, although this impressively intelligent monster is supposedly locked away from society, he still is the most dangerous person in the room, and the reader knows that from the minute he meets him. These bars will not hold him very long. The danger of his escape, of sharing a room with him, of simply talking to him, is implied from the instant where Clarice Sterling steps into the asylum. From the advice she gets concerning the distance she should keep, the manner she needs to address him, and the precautions to pass him a mere file, everything points out to the genius lethality of Hannibal Lecter. So, although he is imprisoned behind bars, no one is fooled. Hannibal Lecter is there because he accepts to be there. For now.

The finest example of his superiority is the murder of Officer Pembry and Boyle. As he finally decides that the right opportunity has presented itself for him to leave his captivity, Hannibal does not hesitate twice before putting in place an incredibly elaborate escape plan. This double murder is particularly terrifying because although Hannibal Lecter is on a schedule and cannot be exposed by the rest of the police in the building, he takes his time with the kill, he makes a big show out of it all. More than a show, he is making a point. Even when he is in a rush, he would not forget his values. The importance of these values can be understood through his continuous use of respectful conversation. Lecter never stops his polite conversation with the guards, before and during the murder. Starting with an amicable conversation about the methods of the Officer, “*Now that was pretty easy, wasn't it?*” Pembry said. *It was very convenient, thank you, Officer.*’ Dr Lecter said” (TSL 270), followed by a polite request for a little more time and privacy, “*Officer Pembry would you mind if I just finish up here? I'm afraid my trip's gotten my digestion a little out of sorts*” (TSL 270), and finally before and during the murder Lecter will be heard encouraging Pembry twice, by saying “*I'm ready when you are, Officer Pembry*” (TSL 271–73). The reason why these various, extremely polite, exchanges are relevant, is because while he is courteously discussing with Officer Pembry, the reader is privy to Hannibal Lecter's darkening thoughts and actions. For the whole duration of their exchanges, the reader can see everything Officer Pembry cannot. Through each new sentence, Hannibal becomes more and more dangerous. The reader sees him very slowly rise from his table, go sit on his barley private toilet, slide out a metal tube with tongue from the top of his gums, and from this tube, slide out a wire and create a makeshift handcuff key. The polite exchange is contrasting with everything Lecter prepares to do. Every sentence not only demonstrates Hannibal Lecter's immovable refinement but also serves as a purpose to extend his preparation time and distract Pembry from distrusting him too much. The more Hannibal Lecter speaks, politely requests, thanks, the more he is close to the kill. Yet again, Lecter does not rush, does not stress, meticulous and calm until the end. “*Dr Lecter took the tube from his mouth and dried it on a piece of toilet tissue. His hands were steady, his palms perfectly dry.*” (TSL 270). He is immovable and certain. He does not get overexcited like the murder-consumed Dexter Morgan, or emotionally chaotic like Thomas Ripley. He never doubts, never rushes. Through his calm and the witnessing of his preparation, the tension heightens with every word that comes out of his mouth. The reader knows that Lecter is about to pounce on the unknowing Officer Pembry as soon as he enters the cell, and yet, everything is so polite and seemingly amicable. The tension finally comes at an incredible high point when Lecter pronounces for the first time the sentence: “*I'm ready when you are, Officer Pembry*” (TSL 271). Ready he is indeed.

The reader's breath stops, almost wanting to scream at Pembry not to step inside the cell. Lecter accepts to be handcuffed to the bars, and it is Officer Boyle steps into the cell, followed by Pembry. In a flash, "[...] *[f]ast as a snapping turtle [...]*" (TSL 272), Lecter frees himself through his makeshift key, rises to his feet, and pounces on the guards. Boyle is handcuffed to the table, Pembry's nose and upper lip are caught in Lecter's teeth while he is "*sb[aking] his head like a rot-killing dog and pull[ing] the riot baton from Pembry's belt.*" (TSL 273). The riot baton is the ultimate tool Lecter needs as he uses it to beat up Pembry and kill Officer Boyle. Never once making a sound of fumbling, Hannibal Lecter is focused and calm. This incredible composure, once again combined with his polite habits, creates a truly terrifying picture for the reader to imagine. Finally circling back to the still alive Officer Pembry, Lecter malevolently encourages him one last time. "*Pembry has managed to sit up and was crying. Dr Lecter looked down at him with his red smile. 'I'm ready if you are, Officer Pembry,' he said*" (TSL 273). This image is a true nightmare. The blood-soaked teeth combined with the polite exterior are incomprehensible and thus terrifyingly alienating. In a classic Hannibal genre, the murder and the bodies will be used to their fullest extent. For example, Officer Boyle's body is going to be severely butchered, "*Boyle, partly eviscerated, his face hacked to pieces, seemed to have exploded blood in the cell, the walls and stripped cot covered with gouts and splashes*" (TSL 278), and this butchering has potentially two purposes. The first one is, without any doubt, Hannibal's little fun and curious experiment with the remains. In addition to that, it seems that cutting up Boyle in such a disgusting, cruel way would make the discovery of Pembry's still living body miraculous. By showing his worst, Lecter makes sure that Pembry's body will not be studied as bizarre by the police and the medics but seen as lucky and miraculous. No one will try to look further into his injuries if they are aghast about Boyle's state. It is what he needs to do to ensure that Pembry's body will be directly taken to the Emergency room, no questions asked. He takes the spotlight off of Pembry's bizarre-looking head as

[t]he meat above the uniform no longer resembled a face. The front and top of the head were a slick of blood peaked with a torn flesh and a single eye was stick beside the nostrils, the sockets full of blood. (TSL 278)

This face is so bizarre and horrendous because it is later revealed that Hannibal is the one lying there. He has a skin layer of Pembry's face lying on his own. Pembry's real and concrete body is intelligently used as a decoy, placed next to a gun, in transparency on top of the elevator ceiling to attract the attention of the police. The ingenuity of the plan highlights Lecter's preparation and the terrifying idea that to him such an ordeal can be prepared and done by taking his time, listening to music, even "*calling the ambulances himself before [...] so he wouldn't have to lie around too long*" (TSL 291).

He truly is something more than just a man. Always two, three steps ahead of everyone else. In his monstrosity, his cruelty, he is the picture-perfect image of the superior fiend.

Fahy argues that at this moment, the reader witnesses “Lecter’s transformation from gentleman to cannibalistic monster” (Fahy 31). However, I believe that Lecter does not transform from one or the other but is always both. He is continuously a gentlemanlike cannibalistic monster. Hannibal Lecter, as was theorized earlier in this essay, is not simply a man. Lecter’s way of living, his dedication to refinement, his purpose, and the serenity with which he achieves it. Lecter is something more. He is alienating and terrifying. He cannot be categorized; he is not a man. He has from the man only the shape and the mortality. He is the monster humans naturally fear. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the reader goes into the story knowing that Lecter is incredibly dangerous and should be feared. But the murder of Officer Boyle and Officer Pembry is the first and only time the reader witnesses him in action. After all, the whole first part of the novel follows a classic arc where

[...] we know that the monster we are watching is supposed to look normal—we recognize this as one of the things which scares us. But typically, his mask of normality slips, and we see him clearly for the monster he is. (Donnelly 21–22)

This recognition, although unsurprising, is terrifying as he exceeds all expectations. It is the moment where the reader can recognize the true monstrosity of Hannibal Lecter. I would even argue that he does not really have the appearance of a man, with his eyes glowing maroon-red, and his sixth finger so perfectly replicated from his left middle finger. He almost seems to be a cruel evolution of the normal man. A superior creation hell-bent on imposing his different values and morals on the society that created him. It is almost impossible to perversely and vicariously enjoy Lecter’s murders as he, and his murders are so different and alienating from the murderer and the murder the reader could eventually be and create. It is so impossible to self-identify with Hannibal Lecter that the reader automatically moves his identification to the closest thing after Lecter, his victims. The reader cannot help but put himself in the shoes of Pembry, with Lecter towering over him, the mouth red with fresh blood, smiling and getting ready to slice him up. This picture is very much the basis for anyone’s nightmare.

However, it is, in any case, fascinating and cathartic. The moment the reader lifts his eyes from the book, he has felt the most sublime emotions and “[...] excite[d] the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible [...]” (Burke 58). . He has lived through the terror, the tension, and the suffering of another life. A life he will most probably, or at least he hopes, never, ever live through. It has given him an unforgettable experience, made him feel impossible feelings,

and endowed him with a great sense of satisfaction and security in his own little life. He witnessed a show like no other, where murder and mayhem evolved into astonishing genius. He has witnessed art in its most shocking form.

2. Vicariously Living out Fantasies

The aesthetic of cathartic emotions can also be transformed into something much different when it is free from morality. Indeed, it is through the moral handle that the readers can experience the murder as a thunderstorm of conflicting emotions. However, if they free themselves from morality, their experience becomes much darker and yet as pleasurable. Similar to the experience of murder as a complex and emotional event, it is possible to comprehend the experience as a much more darkly satisfying event. It has been made abundantly clear in the history of American crime fiction that the readership has always had a craving for the gore and the deviant. Reading about murder helps the readers to understand the dark side of their desires. It also enables them to experience horror not as a cathartic experience but as a desirable one, because when

[e]ngaged in a fictional crime, one is allowed to discover feelings that otherwise would be inappropriate. Acting as a voyeur who observes the murderer from a sufficient distance, one may vicariously experience feelings which he/she would normally have to suppress. (Ziomek 134)

In every human in existence, there is a dark side to one's desires. These desires are palpable through the many contained impulses a person can feel in a day. How many times did one wonder what it would be like to keep driving instead of stopping the car at a crosswalk? What it would feel like to push someone way too close to a cliffside. Or even to jump from a bridge when walking too close to the ridge. These contained impulses are not proof that the average human is a murderer at heart, but simply his ability to wonder about what is outside of moral and societal norms, what it feels like to cross the line between "good" and "bad". Reading murder literature can sometimes play on those impulses and desires by giving the readers a possible answer to their wonderings through *"images of the culturally forbidden and invites readers to give free play to their illicit desires in the realm of the imagination"* (Halttunen 82). In addition to finding a way to satisfy in contained impulses, murder literature also gives the readers the possibility to entertain their voyeuristic tendencies.

Many "[...] *pleasing feelings of anticipation* [...]" (Baelo Allué 8) are reaped from knowing the murder is going to happen, but not when, how, or on whom, simply knowing that it will. It becomes

a secret between the readers and the murderer, and it creates a thrilling atmosphere. In one of his other essays on the sublimity of murder, “On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth” (1823), Thomas De Quincey argues that the experience of murder, more specifically the moment where the readers witnesses it, almost creates a parenthesis out of reality where

[...] the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested -- laid asleep -- tranced -- racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away [...] (De Quincey, ‘On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth (1823, 1860)’ 4)

There is a moment of connection between the readers and the murderer. This connection makes it possible for the readers to fully live out the experience. It is a secret and an almost sacred instant. This secret connection between readers and murderer exists only at the discretion of the readers. They do not have to confide in anyone their appetite for murder scenes and are free to enjoy it from the comfort of their own home without shame. In this short instant, it becomes possible for the readers to sense all the dark emotions that are created by the murder. Very much in the same vein as for the cathartic experience of the previous paragraph, Burke’s aesthetic experience of the sublime is consistent with the readers desire to experience “[...] *the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is any sort of terrible* [...]” (Burke 58) and yet not only in a cathartic need, but as a way to satisfy a dark impulse. Whether it is through the anguishing murderous spiral in which Thomas Ripley is indefinitely stuck in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, the suspense of Hannibal Lecter’s impending murderous evasion in *Silence of the Lambs*, or following Dexter Morgan stalking his next victims in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, the voyeuristic readers look onto the looming murders as through a peephole, “[...] *experience[s] the forbidden and remain guiltless*” (Ziomek 126).

Dexter's struggle for control against the Dark Passenger, and the feverish hunt for his upcoming targets, are used in this essay as examples of the vicarious experience of murder. The urgency, anticipation, and thrill of witnessing his bloodlust create an incredible experience for the readers. They can live through their darkest fantasies, witness vicious and hungry manhunts, and see the dying light in the targets' eyes without ever having to stick their neck out, getting their hands dirty or getting into harm's way.

Dexter Morgan's and the Dark Passenger in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*: The First Cut Is Always the Deepest.

"This night was the Night. This night felt different. This night it would happen, had to happen. Just as it had happened before. Just as it would happen again, and again" (DDD 2). From the first chapter on, it becomes clear that the whole novel of *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* oozes with anticipation and urgency. Following Dexter and his Dark Passenger in the research and the hunt of his next victim, is one of the most heart-pounding, exciting journeys one could read. This urgency is mainly oozing from Dexter's Dark Passenger's bloodthirst. Throughout the whole novel, his thirst continuously needs to be quenched or controlled. Dexter is in a continuous battle with himself to not act foolishly and kill anyone on his path. The control of such murderous desires only heightens the anticipation he and the reader feel. He knows it is coming, is itching to do it, can barely breathe anymore until finally, he takes the first swipe. From there comes ecstasy and relief, both shared by Dexter and the reader. They can take a deep breath as Dexter finally satisfies his hunger, and the Dark Passenger is finally silenced. *"So I was tired, but the tension of the last week was gone, the cold voice of the Dark Passenger was quiet, and I could be me again"* (DDD 13). All of a sudden, the reader's shoulder relaxes, the tension and the apprehension are finally over. Until next time. But more than simple relief, there is some perverse satisfaction that can be felt from the first swipe of Dexter's blade. After so much anticipation and expectation, the reader is ecstatic at seeing Dexter satisfy his hunger. As much as he would be if he was doing it himself. This relief and this satisfaction are also of course deeply influenced by how Dexter experiences it.

Going back to the previous quote, and circling back to the idea of *"[He] could be [him] again"* (DDD 13), it might be interesting to wonder who the real Dexter is, who he can be again. It seems more than possible that when he implies being himself again, he does not mean it as a return to some sort of normality, but back to the hunt of a new target, back to his predatory self, and not just consumed by the desire to kill. Contrarily to Hannibal Lecter and his punctual bloodthirst, Dexter spends weeks planning out his murders and moves on from one to the other without a breath. There is also a great difference between Thomas Ripley, who murders Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles brutally, coldly, then goes on with life afterward, and Dexter whose whole narrative and persona are woven around the act of murder. He thinks about it when he wakes up when he goes to work, as he analyses it all day long while making sure the police have no clue about his wrongdoings, and then he hunts for his targets at night. Blood reigns on Dexter's life. He never stops thinking about it. So, not only does the reader bathe in this infinite pool of dark desires, but he is just as relieved as Dexter when those desires are finally satisfied.

After all, it is through Dexter that the reader might experience his dark desires the best. Because of Hannibal's alienating refinement or because of Thomas's over-emotional response to everything, the reader cannot enjoy the moment of murder as much as through the murder-focused, bloodthirsty, socially caring Dexter. Dexter is a very peculiar killer in the sense that he might thoroughly enjoy the hunt while his Dark Passenger cries for blood, yet he also deeply loathes those desires he has, and he might try extremely hard to fit them in a use for society. The reader able to perversely peep into this little world darkness and experience the kill with vicarious pleasure, but that is not only it. More than that, everything about Dexter's Modus Operandi and his controlled thought process helps the reader into the idea that it is okay to enjoy Dexter's work. The basis of this acceptable satisfaction that rises from witnessing his murders comes from the fact that Dexter does not kill only for pleasure, he also kills to avenge the victims that did not get any justice. The reader can excuse Dexter's crimes as "*the moral code by which he dictates his own actions helps to establish a clear line between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" deviance*" (Donnelly 23). The reader is reassured about his dark desires because if Dexter's are acceptable, then there is no shame in following them so thoroughly. Dexter's code of conduct and the targets that result from it make all the murders so easy to accept. The reader can enjoy Dexter's work as if he was "*[e]ssentially enacting a revenge fantasy or wish fulfilment, Dexter is a serial killer preying on other serial killers*" (Aoun 148). It is as if, from now, the reader can pleurably experience the murders without any guilt. It is not about hiding it anymore, as it has become socially accepted. As was said in the presentation of vicarious experience of murder, it allows the reader to "*[...] experience[s] the forbidden and remain guiltless*" (Ziomek 126). Sure, it is not through Dexter that he is the reader is going to experience anything gratuitously cruel. However, it might just be as well. Every time a fictional murderer is made out to be gratuitously cruel or perfectly evil, he tends to quickly alienate the reader than giving him a pleasurable vicarious experience. The best example is Hannibal Lecter. Although it was made clear in previous chapters that Hannibal never does kill without motivation, he still is the most malevolent character of the three murderers studied. More than that, he is the only character who can frighten the reader. Characters of pure devilish like Hannibal Lecter are incredibly fascinating, they are written to impress, and sometimes even maybe inspire the reader in some twisted manner. But he is too intelligent, too refined, too otherworldly for the reader to be able to stand in his shoes and follow his deed without blinking. Meanwhile, Thomas Ripley is the total opposite. The reader's heart cries out for his emotional suffering, and the murders are difficult to enjoy vicariously as they are results of panic and confusion. Dexter is the only one whose murders are going to be celebrated by the reader, understood and thoroughly enjoyed. Dexter keeps the reader breathless and wanting more.

“Dexter invariably becomes the embodiment of our own dark impulses as he implicates us in the killings. We get to share his lust for blood and want him, literally, to get away with murder.” (Aoun 148)

Following Dexter into dark corners to catch dark criminals, is one of the darkest vicarious experiences out there. As much as murder is frowned upon outside the realm of literature, in it, it seems as if it is done with purpose and a pretence of morality, it is thoroughly acceptable.

However, this apprehension does not only come from the Manhunt and the excitement that his slow-burning stalk-out creates. It also through the hunger that emanates from the Dark Passenger every time he takes the wheel. “[...] *I thought, I’m not ready. And of course, that didn’t matter. Whether I was ready or not made no difference at all. It was ready*” (DDD 129). It is not simply about searching for the perfect victim and heighten the excitement of murder through preparation anymore, but also because of the urgent appetite that can be felt when Dexter struggles for control. The sudden violence with which the Dark Passenger takes over creates a deliciously deviant atmosphere where murder is the only option.

I felt weak, intoxicated, half sick with a combination of excitement and uncertainty and complete wrongness – but of course, the Dark Passenger was driving from the backseat now and how I felt was not terribly important anymore, because *he* felt strong and cold and eager and ready. (DDD 130)

Neither Dexter nor the reader has any choice in what he is going to feel from now on. The Dark Passenger decided that the only feeling that should be of importance is bloodlust. This bloodlust is beautifully described as a mixture of everything. The reader experiences Dexter's cathartic emotions of uncertain intoxication, yet he also experiences the determinate vicarious pleasure through strength, hunger, and excitement from the Dark Passenger. It is an incredibly new and exciting feeling for the reader. The reader is used to feel a great number of cathartic emotions through the experience of murder just as he is used to vicariously living out his dark fantasies, but in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, the reader is forced into feeling the dark and cathartic emotions that the Dark Passenger want him to feel, yet, these emotions are vicariously pleasurable. In *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, the reader is thus forced to experience vicariously pleasurable actions through terrifying cathartic emotions. This novel is a story about death that makes the reader feel incredibly alive.

Chapter III

The Study of the Corpse as an Aesthetic Object

Throughout the previous approaches, murder has been presented as a socially logical aesthetic concept, as well as an emotionally cathartic and perverse aesthetical experience. The third aesthetic approach will slightly change focus. The aesthetic object will not only focus on murder, but on the scene created by it. The murder alone is not an aesthetic object, but it is the creator of one. More specifically, it is the depiction of the murdered body that can be studied as such. It has been made clear that the pleasure and the aestheticism of the fictional murder, comes mainly from the idea that if morality is not a cathartic driving force, it should be disregarded once the readers delve into the depiction of the crime. As soon as the reader is free from mortality, he becomes open to the aesthetics of murder and the different realms of beauty it may involve. Through the different novels analysed in the next chapter, it will become abundantly clear. The murdered body in crime fiction is often described in manners of art. The aesthetical study of the corpse comes as no surprise, as the murder that created it has been extensively studied as such. The corpse is one of the most crucial tools of fascination in crime fiction. The reader has no choice but to identify himself to the body lying there, to its abnormal immobility, and to its wounds. He feels the knife cutting through his flesh, the candlestick bashing his head in, and hears the thudding sound when his body falls onto the floor. This fascination for the murdered body exists in literature from the nineteenth century onwards, where “*body-horror*” was extensively used in an “[...] *effort to arouse the reader’s repugnance (and excitement)* [...]” (Halttunen 73).. This is consistent with the reader's craving for vicariously living out his fears and contained impulses. However, just as there are different layers to the aesthetic concept and the aesthetic experience, there are different layers for the aesthetic corpse.

Two main ideas seem to define the corpse as an aesthetic object. The first approach to the aesthetic corpse, is without a doubt, it’s fascinating abnormality. In his terrible immobility, the corpse loses its original purpose, which terrifies and fascinates the reader. This approach showcases the idea that it is from this terrifying object that the terrifying experience evolves. It is through the astonishment and the fascination that reader begin experiencing the crime scene. Secondly, the study of the aesthetical corpse can be approached through its artistic transformation. Meaning that, whether it was premeditated murder or a crime of passion, the murdered body transforms into something more. Contrary to the first approach, this one highlights the idea that the aesthetic object would not exist without the aesthetic experience. It is through the beautiful murder that the

fascinating corpse emerges. Both of the approaches to the aesthetic corpse also share the same sublimity as the aesthetic experience. The corpse becomes an aesthetical object mainly because of the almost unexplainable blend of marvel and terror emotions it awakens in the readership. Those two approaches demonstrate the relationship between aesthetic experience and aesthetic object, more specifically how they cannot come without the other.

1. The Astonishing Corpse

Meeting the dead body in crime fiction is a very peculiar thing. Imagining the cooling, greying and decaying murdered body, is an experience close to the nightmarish. At least, that is what one would think. There is beauty through the bizarre and the unknown. The fascination for this bizarre body is heavily represented in crime fiction through

[...] specific details about the state and the fate of victim's corpse: dead bodies gnawed by wild creatures or infested with scavengers, dead bodies in an extreme state of putrefaction. (Halttunen 74)

The details of the body, its scenery, how it is rotting, create a context and a very vivid image in the mind of the readers. Readers, that for the most part have never witnessed a murder or encountered a dead body. The body, whether it is completely torn apart, or if it simply looks like it is resting, is a bizarre object to encounter because it simply always feels wrong in some way. The body is the recipient of life, it should be breathing, trembling, walking around, and living. The corpse, especially in crime fiction, is always an abnormality.

However, there is sublimity in this abnormality of the dead body. It is particularly enjoyable through the mysterious atmosphere it creates, creeping up onto the reader like fog on the Moorlands. It is mysterious, a little bit scary and yet, somewhat hypnotizing. This is so foreign to the reader, and it becomes a spectacle that needs to be understood and studied. The reader is so afraid of his death, and he cannot for the life of him turn away from the scene. He needs to understand the ins and outs of this corpse. He needs to understand what put it in such a state, and how. The wounds, the immobile positioning, the putrefaction, and the abnormality of it all, it is all part of the aesthetical realm of the mystical. The astonishment that this mystical realm creates, is sublime. In this case, in this astonished fascination, The experience faced with such an object has not only been lived through crime fiction but also through the "*fictional, visual and dramatic*"

sentimental art history, which “*focused on tableaux of pain and death*” (Halttunen 83). And even though sentimental art argued a depiction of unjust pains while the crime fiction openly recognized their sadistic voyeurism, the effect on the masses stayed the same: witnessing a spectacle for death through a depiction of the murdered body. The reader approaches this spectacle with astonishment and then he is washed over by an emotional turmoil. Whether it is through the terrifyingly beautiful aspect of the resting corpse, through the emotional complexities that the tortured flesh provokes, or through the reminder of the transience of life, the corpse becomes a spectacle evoking the readers' deepest and darkest emotions. This triggering of emotions, which are “*conversant about terrible objects*” (Burke 58), more specifically the corpses, are perfectly representing Burke's terrible sublimity. This sublimity can be observed through the macabre fascination the reader expresses when witnessing a corpse. For Burke, it is clear, “[*t*he passion caused by the great and sublime [...] is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” (Burke 95). This astonishment in crime literature can be observed through the cold and bloodless corpses left by the Tamiami killer in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. As the reader does not get to experience the murder of this killer, he is only left with the description Dexter gives of them (DDD 21–25). The astonishment felt by Dexter, is the same felt by the reader. More than astonishment, it evolves into an uneasy awe, a sublime emotion stemming from “[...] *astonishment and amazement, point[ing] out [...] the kindred emotions which attend fear and wonder*” (Burke 98). The sublime aesthetic of the corpse cannot be argued. As experience derives from the deep emotional response to an object, and as deep emotional responses simply are art, this object is art. Aesthetical experiences and aesthetical objects cannot be split from one another. Both exist through the cathartic emotions they bring to the readership who fears death, pain, and cruelty, but also through the vicarious living of creating such an object through the same cruelty, pain, and murder.

To exemplify this idea of the bizarre body, the corpses of Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles in *The Talented Mr Ripley* are a perfect choice. Their bodies own a more bizarre and astonishing feel than, for example, Hannibal's victims. Meaning that, through their simplicity, they become truly surprising. Hannibal's victims' corpses in *The Silence of the Lambs* are grandiloquent and revolting. They do not correspond to the idea of the bizarre and the astonishing but only lead to the desire to forget as they are simply a big show of the horrors Hannibal can create. In the same way, Dexter's victims cannot be studied as bizarre bodies as the reader never actually get to see them as corpses. However, Dexter's creative handiwork with his victims can be understood in the keepsakes he makes of them, which will be analysed in later pages. This transformation of the corpse represents the second layer of the aesthetic object. It is the transformation from a mere human body to perfect aesthetical creation.

The Limp Bodies of Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles in *The Talented Mr Ripley*

The evolution of Dickie's dead body in *The Talented Mr Ripley* is extremely interesting because it presents to the reader an astonishing vision of the recently very lively, light, adventurous Dickie, as a limp, heavy, and immobile, lifeless pile of flesh. Accompanying this terrifying and surprising picture of Dickie's body, is the evolution, play by play, of Thomas's realization of the murder he just committed. So, not only does the reader get to witness the brutal and passionate murder of Dickie, but every little detail about his blood-covered body, his blood-covered clothes, blood-covered face, as well as the messy disposal of his corpse, are told with cold and excruciating attention to detail. After the depiction of the violent and bloody murder of Dickie, where he is agonizing at "*the bottom of the boat, twisted, twisting*" (TTMR 119), bleeding through his chopped neck, sliced forehead, and scuffed knuckles, the reader finally discovers the first description of his corpse through the eyes of Tom.

He looked at Dickie. Was he dead? Tom crouched in the narrowing prow of the boat, watching Dickie for a sign of life. He was afraid to touch him, afraid to touch his chest or his wrist to feel a pulse. (TTMR 120)

Almost as if he fears that Dickie's body is going to wake up and jump right at him, Tom barely wants to be in his vicinity. Strangely, the corpse seems at first threatening and dangerous. He is not to be touched and not to be approached. Thomas almost treats as if it was a sleeping tiger, ready to pounce if disturbed. But the more he lies there, untouched and unapproached, the more it seems to sink into his death. Although the narration is more focused on how the anxious Thomas is going to get rid of his body, it becomes clear through Tom's fumbling that Dickie's body now became a concrete representation of the abstract consequences it has on Tom's conscience. A burden. Dickie's body seems to become heavier and heavier. Tom killed Dickie in a hazed rage, passionately hitting him again and again with the boat oar without really thinking of what it was doing to him. Although not in denial about what he just did, he cannot directly wrap his head around Dickie's death and half of Thomas expects him to soon attack in return. But as the realization of what just happened settles in, and Tom is faced with the decisions on how to act next, Dickie's body seems heavier with the choices he begins to make.

At first, Tom needs to pick Dickie's ankle to tie a rope around them, and in his reluctance at touching his former friend, Tom refuses to reflect too long about what he is about to do. "[...] *[H]e looped it four times around Dickie's bare ankles before he had time to feel afraid, and tied a huge, clumsy knot, overdoing it to make sure it wouldn't come undone [...]*" (TTMR 121). Tom does things in a rush, clumsily, and with the only objective that Dickie does not get loose. But as he is calming down

from the adrenaline of the murder and slowly getting his thoughts together while working on getting away with murder, he makes the mistake of starting “*feel[ing] cooler, and smooth, and methodical*” (TTMR 121). It has been made clear throughout the first part of the novel that Thomas is unable to feel cool, smooth, and methodical. He is a chaotic character with chaotic emotions. The only thing making him feel a bit lighter, Tom is his sudden freedom from the control Dickie had over him until he died. Contrarily to what could be believed, this freedom is not going to lead to relief, but to the incredible guilt and paranoia of having killed an innocent. This means that the more Thomas is going to feel relieved from the incredible pain Dickie pushed him into, the more he is going to realize what he just did.

“[...] Tom had lifted the ankles over the side and was pulling now at an arm to lift the heaviest part, the shoulders, over the gunwale” (TTMR 121). Dickie’s body starts to be pushed, pulled, lifted, and the more Tom touches it, the heavier it seems to become “*Dickie’s limp hand was warm and clumsy*” (TTMR 121). As Tom touches more and more parts of Dickie’s body he slowly starts to realize the state of it. It’s simple humanity of it. The innocence of those hands. Through those slow realizations, the reader is met with chilling pictures of a real, motionless, and abnormal dead body.

The shoulder stayed on the bottom of the boat, and when he pulled, the arm seemed to stretch like rubber, and the body did not rise at all. [...] He pulled the dead body towards the stern [...] Now he began with Dickie’s head and shoulders, turned Dickie’s body on its belly and pushed him little by little. (TTMR 121)

It is so incredibly heavy. Not only the body but also the picture of it all, and the ambiance. It is penance for Tom to do, and it is penance for the reader to witness. It creates such an abnormal picture. Dickie’s limp and heavy body, half over the stern, bent in half, his whole body lifeless and being pushed into the water at an excruciatingly slow pace. The reader can hear Tom’s heavy breathing, almost turning into frustrated and panicked moans as he pushes, the thud of the body when it hits the side of the boat, the clapping of the water getting louder and louder with each passing minute. Tom’s actions which had been somewhat fearful but quick at the beginning, start to become ever more tiring and unnerving as the minutes fly by. “[...] [N]ow the legs were in dead weight, resisting Tom’s strength with their amazing weight, as his shoulders had done, as if magnetized to the boat bottom” (TTMR 122). Thomas slowly begins to be crushed by Dickie’s weight. Both physically and mentally. He is tired, frustrated, and scared. There is nowhere else to go, nothing else to do. Tom is stuck with this dead body, which he cannot get away from and cannot seem to throw out of the boat. It sticks to him and is immovable, until finally, “*Tom took a deep breath and heaved. Dickie went over, but Tom lost his balance and fell [...] He was in the water*” (TTMR 122).

The whole ordeal, whether it is the long, bloody killing, the disposal of the heavy and immovable body, or the final terrifying plunge into the sea, all of it, are glimpses of Tom's state of mind in specific moments. But the tumble into the sea is the most telling example of all. As he was previously crushed by Dickie's weight, Thomas is now drowning with him. Dickie is disappearing, sinking into the sea, while Thomas battles for survival, to find something to hold on to so he can keep living. It is the moral struggle inside Thomas, the representations of him drowning in his lies. He is crushed under by the weight of his culpability and his loss. But then, "[...] *with unpremeditated energy [...]*" he holds onto something and "[...] *hauls himself into the boat [...]*" (ITMR 122), he saves himself. As Tom comes out of the water, resting in a pool of Dickie's blood, with Dickie's rings, cigarettes, lighter, wallet, and Marge's gift in his pockets, Dickie now lies to the bottom of the Italian sea. As one sinks, the other emerges. Dickie's life is there, waiting to be lived, and Tom, the gentleman that he is, is not going to let her wait too long.

The creation, the contemplation, and the disposal of Dickie's body is a painfully long, heavy, miserable process. The reader is faced with Tom's realization and growing guilt, but also with the painfully realistic limpness of Dickie's body. The depiction of Dickie's corpse in *The Talented Mr Ripley* is not supposed to be a show, like in *the Silence of Lambs*, or even a surprising transformation as Dexter's bloodstained glass strips. It reads like a textbook description of what a brutally murdered dead body might look like. It is so much worse than Hannibal's little show of horrors or Dexter's aesthetically pleasing transformations. It is painful to behold, so easy to imagine, and yet so difficult to comprehend. Especially in Dickie's case. His limpness, his heaviness, his immobility, it all seems so out of character that the reader half expects him to be faking it. A few seconds before his death, Dickie was manning the boat and excited about jumping in the water. It is such an astonishing sight to behold. It leaves the reader stumped and open-mouthed in his chair. It is the most bewildering feeling of all, and the way Thomas slowly and painfully disposes of it elongates this astonishment for pages. It feels like it is never stopping. The reader is baffled by the very complicated emotions he feels emerging from Thomas and cannot make sense of what is happening as Dickie is slowly sinking in the water. He was such a central character in the novel that it seems so sudden and unreal. Thomas's emotions and slow realization about what just happened simply heighten the whole process. As he slowly takes in the dead weight of Dickie's corpse and almost pointlessly tries to get rid of it, the reader feels queasy, as if he should not be there. It should never have happened. It is unnatural and chilling to behold, but most of all, it is baffling to understand. Also, it is incredibly different from Freddie Miles' demise and disposal.

Freddie Miles is a very short-lived character, who's personality could be summarized in two words: judgment and obnoxiousness. Meaning that seeing Freddie die does not fill the reader with sadness, but only with some surprise. His death is exactly like his character if he was to be compared to Dickie. Less exciting and barely present. However, it is interesting in its relation to Thomas' character. Thomas changes his approach at the moment where he kills Freddie. He does not think twice about it and does not especially care for it. No second thoughts, no passion. Implying that, as Thomas settles in his life as a Dickie Greenleaf impersonator, he also picks up his worst traits, a hard heart and great ease at detaching himself from anything or anyone. Freddie dies in a split-second decision. He is about to expose Tom as a fraud, and potentially realize the dark truth about Dickie's disappearance. To protect his cover, to protect himself, Thomas picks up an ashtray, and as Freddie comes into his room, ready to accuse him of the unspeakable, Thomas bashes his head in before repeatedly slamming the ashtray into his neck. "*He bit the neck again and again, terrified that Freddie might be only pretending and that one of his huge arms might suddenly circle his legs and pull him down*" (TTMR 164–65). Although still clumsy and violent, Thomas' Modus Operandi has changed. He does not let anything up to fate. This time, even though Freddie already seems dead and gone, Thomas makes sure that he will never be able to get up by hitting repeatedly the dead, limp, and soft body. Pursuing his new methodology, and with confidence mirroring Dickie's, this time, Thomas is not scared to approach the body in his newly deceased state.

He ran and got a towel from the bathroom and put it under Freddie's head. Then he felt Freddie's wrist for a pulse. There was one, faint, and it seemed to flutter away as he touched it as if the pressure of his own fingers stilled it. In the next second he was gone. (TTMR 165)

Again, Thomas is getting confident, organized, and thoughtful. He is not impersonating Dickie anymore, he became him. Although it still surprises the reader, the murder of Freddie almost seems created to prove to which extent Thomas has changed in the weeks that separate the two murders. The description of the kill is so different, more detached, and quicker. Similarly, the description of Freddie's body is much more judgemental and annoyed, just as Dickie would have described it. "*Tom looked down at Freddie's mountainous form on the floor and he felt a sudden disgust and a sense of helplessness*" (TTMR 165). From there on, the depiction of the corpse and the things are done to it in the process of its disposal, is truly astonishing, if not disturbing to the reader.

"*He [...] nearly smiled because it was so simple [...] He suddenly knew what he was going to do*" (TTMR 165). Thomas is becoming more at ease with killing and covering it up, and this confidence and organization is a true change in character. Thomas, set on not concealing Freddie's murder but

rather on pointing it away from him, starts arranging the room as if Freddie had spent the night at his place, drinking. He starts by “*bringing out the gin and the vermouth bottles from his liquor cabinet and on second thought the Penrod because it smelled so much stronger*” (TTMR 165–66), fixing multiple drinks, some that he drinks, he touches and puts back on the table, then

pours some of it in another glass, t[akes] it over to Freddie and crushe[s] his limp fingers around it [...] He prop[s] Freddie against the wall and pour[s] some straight gin from the bottle down his throat. (TTMR 166)

Freddie did not only die by Thomas's hands, but has now his body desecralized by him too. This direct, disgusting handling of the dead, limp body of Freddie is astonishing as well as the ease with which Thomas is doing it, is terrifying. He repeats those actions a few times, scatters glasses and Freddie's cigarettes around the apartment, and then plans to drop Freddie behind the headstones at the cemetery, faking a robbery that turned bad. He waits out a few hours and then smuggles him out of his apartment and into Freddie's convertible at nightfall. Again, every time Thomas describes Freddie's body, it is with judgment and boredom.

That mountain on the floor! [...] He stood looking at Freddie's long, heavy body [...] and thinking how sad, stupid, clumsy, dangerous and unnecessary his death had been., and how brutally unfair to Freddie. Of course, one could loathe Freddie too. A selfish stupid bastard [...]. (TTMR 168)

Through Thomas's eyes, Freddie's corpse is an annoying hiccup that should never have happened. It is not Freddie's death that annoys him, although he still recognizes the unfair and unnecessary aspect of it, the problems it might create in his new life. For the following pages, Freddie will barely be described as man anymore. From there on, he is mainly described as an impractical heaviness and even as a “*flaccid weight*” (TTMR 169). He is never mentioned as Freddie, a person, anymore, but only as “Freddie's body”. More than that, he is barely mentioned at all. Only in case, Thomas cannot bear the weight of him, or when needs to vent about the impracticality of it. Freddie does not seem to exist anymore; it is a vaguely annoying meat vessel that needs to be taken care of. It is only when Thomas finally drops him at the cemetery that the reader gets one last good look at Freddie's bashed-in forehead and strong figure while Thomas finally snaps, and his emotional turmoil rises again. “*Freddie was limb as a rubber doll. [...] Tom cursed his ugly weight and kicked him suddenly in the chin*” (TTMR 173). Yet again, Freddie is compared to an inanimate object, his humanity slowly dying away, only leaving behind it a heavy, smelly, and banged up a piece of meat. Every time the reader can take a peek at it, Freddie Miles' body always seems to be used as a source of boredom and unnecessary. Yet this judgmental, uncaring description of it, the disruption, and the

desacralization of his corpse are truly frightening, if not completely revolting. It makes the reader's skin crawl.

Through this abnormality, the reader becomes queasy about death, what his own body might become once he will not be able to control it anymore, and realization about how revoltingly disrespectful humans can treat their dead. It is highlighted by the lack of spectacle made about it, how it remains perfectly recognizable as a human body. Something the reader might identify to. The more the body is going to be broken, deformed, and exposed during the murder, the less it is going to have an impact on the reader. At least not in such an astonishing way, as it has in *The Talented Mr Ripley*. The more it is alienating, the less the reader will understand the queasy abnormality of the corpse. The abnormality is going to be lost in the spectacle of horrors and passed as impossible, so it matters less. This is not the case for both Dickie Greenleaf and Freddie Miles' bodies. Although both are described and disposed of in very different manners, both have the same effect on the reader. He is surprised, astonished, and completely terrified by the abnormal, limp, immobility of corpses. He is faced with such real and heavy depictions of death that he automatically identifies to these corpses. If the disposal of Dickie's corpse is extremely difficult for him to behold, because of Thomas's slow realization of what he has done, the evolution of Dickie's heaviness, and his excruciating slow descent into the water, it's Freddie Mile's dehumanization that puts the final nail in the coffin. The reader is aghast of what is done to those bodies and watches these scenes play out in front of him without being able to stop them. He is subjected to the sublime emotions of fear, pain, and total astonishment. The dead body in those descriptions, accompanied by the slow unravelling of their fate, are expressing such a variety of sublime emotions as easily as if they were painted canvases in a museum. For a few pages, these corpses become the representation of life, of the dreams, and the possibilities that will never be. Through their unnecessary, their tortured flesh, and their slow dehumanization, these bodies are an endless source of dread and complex emotions. They evolve into aesthetical objects, pushing the reader into deep reflection about the transience of life and all its missed opportunities.

2. The Transformation of the Corpse

Something is enchanting about the corpse as a creative object. What is certain, is that the body cannot continue to be seen as one after the murder took place. Once the astonishment and the identification have passed, the body becomes more than the human recipient for life. Through the experience of murder, the human body transgresses its original form and becomes something more. In the same way, any other work becomes art through the action of painting or sculpting, the body becomes art through the act of killing. After being deeply astonished by the human body so similar to his, a body that was torn apart and decaying, the readers slowly become alienated by it. He slowly begins to be unable to understand it as a body, but a creation of meat and bones that remind him of death and suffering. No matter if he lives it out in a cathartic manner or a vicarious one.

The corpse as an aesthetical object is a complex creation. It alienates, terrifies, or may satisfy the readers at the same time. The corpse becomes a pure vessel of terror and death. It is a symbol for what the readers might one day become or fantasizes about doing, and everything they apprehends about that moment of death. So as much as the readers cannot see the rotting body as a human vessel anymore, they still feed their fears, or his desires, with very real and graphic descriptions of it. For both the cathartic readers and the vicarious ones, the corpse transforms into a “*prolong[ation] [of] the violence of the murder beyond death*” (Halttunen 73). The human flesh became the symbol for death and violence. It becomes an extension of the experience of murder. It elongates the sublimity of the emotions felt by the readers by giving them information about the resulting actions of the murder. It is not about just the killing anymore, but about everything that the killing creates. The aesthetical corpse exists as the consequence of violence. It is all fun and games until the readers face the result of what they just witnessed. He was a willing accomplice of the killing, but he is now unable to move his eyes from the macabre scene that plays out in front of him. The complexity of this approach lies in the relationship between the alienating corpse creation and its raw and realistic description. The sublimity that results from the power that these descriptions hold over the readers' emotions is incredible. As much as they cannot afford to recognize the corpse as a human vessel, they cannot turn away from the vision those descriptions present them. As Burke argues when he explains the effects of tragedy on the sublime and the beautiful, “[t]he nearer it approaches the reality, and the further it removes us from the idea of fiction, the more perfect is its power” (Burke 76). Through the terrifying symbolism of the corpse and the hypnotizing reality of the description, the readers become enchanted. More than any other scene in the crime novel, more than Dexter’s

hunt, Hannibal's warning signs, and Thomas' emotional escalation, it is the description of the crime scene and the transformation of the body that chills the readers. It is witnessing the meaty, explosive transformations of Officer Pembry and Officer Boyle from man to piles of flesh under Hannibal's knife (TSL 278), or even as mentioned earlier, Dickie and Freddie's bizarre body and their limp heaviness. The horror, the chills, or the astonishment, all of those emotions trigger the sublimity of it all. The readers created a picture of the body in their mind, and whether or not they still recognizes it as a human vessel, the sublimity around the symbolic corpse moves the readers away from fiction and into contemplation. The deed is done, the readers are left with the result of the murder and his own emotions to consider the consequences of what just happened.

The best example of this incredibly aesthetical transformation is, without any doubt, the bloodstained glass strips that Dexter keeps from his victims. Their actual physical bodies are scattered in pieces around the bay in Miami, but their essence, their true identity, those still exist, neatly put away in a box in Dexter's apartment. More than just droplets of blood on glass strips, these souvenirs, are vessels of truth, sublime emotions, and death. Through this example, it will become clear that under Dexter's expert work, the Corpse transforms into a testimony of a dark, hidden society as well as a symbol for every hidden truth.

Dexter Morgan's Delightful Droplets in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*: A Life in a Drop

Although not directly corpselike, the transformation of the murdered human in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* perfectly represents the aesthetic transformation of the murdered body into a symbol of death, and maybe even much more. This transformation of the corpse takes the concrete form of bloodstained glass strips. Each strip is stained by one singular drop of the blood of one of Dexter's targets. What is so incredible is that the transformations do so on many different levels. If anything, it is an aesthetical creation, but mostly it is a symbol of two things: a symbol of violence or remembrance of it, and it is a symbol of truth. The true violence and the death that gave birth to those symbols simply represent the reality behind them. The first time the reader is made aware of Dexter's little keepsakes is after the murder of a child-molesting priest.

I took the slide from my pocket, a simple, clean glass strip – with a careful single drop of the priest's blood preserved in the centre. Nice and clean, dry now, ready to slip under my microscope when I wanted to remember. I put the slide with the other, thirty-six neat and careful very dry drops of blood (DDD 14).

At first, it becomes abundantly clear that this creative transformation of the Corpse is in essence, an aesthetical object. Through its purpose, it is an object that is going to be able to awaken sublime desires, emotions, and memories. It is Dexter's little artwork in addition to the murder he just realized. They are mirroring Dexter's world. Neat little slices of blood stored into an organized box hidden away, an echo to his neat, organized life, keeping his deviant needs and desired hidden away from view. Additionally, they demonstrate different layers of symbols which the corpse went through as Dexter transforms it into those eternal souvenirs of violence. Because that is what they are, souvenirs.

One layer of symbolism that those glass strips represent, is a symbol of remembrance and enjoyment. It is used as a "*prolong[ation] [of] the violence of the murder beyond death*" (Halttunen 73), where Dexter can re-experience his murders by simply placing the little slip of glass under a microscope.

[T]he memory still pulsed in me. Of course, is still had that first dry drop of blood on its slide. [...] I could call up that memory any time by taking out my little slide and looking at it. I did so often (DDD 161).

These strips of glass create in Dexter a whole range of deep and passionate emotions. The excitement, the satisfaction, and the relief. All of those emotions are so incredibly consistent with Dexter's usual experience of murder, that it becomes fascinating. How does such a small strip of glass encourage Dexter to feel such powerful emotions? He contemplates these bloodstains like he would do a masterpiece at the Louvre. More than that, to him, these bloodstains are without any doubt much more aesthetically pleasing and emotionally stimulating than any other art piece. It awakens every sense in him. As he touches it and observes it through the microscope, he can almost hear the screams, the sounds of the metal instruments sliding on the table, the smell of sweat, of the blood dripping down his victim's body. It is a very deep experience. These little drops of his target's corpses and identity seem almost able to put him in such a trance that it would make it possible for Dexter to sometimes hold back the Dark Passenger by giving him such excitement through those memories. It keeps Dexter in check longer and helps him to, and through his trip down memory lane, it never lets him forget why he killed these people make sense of why he killed these people.

However, following this idea of remembrance and prolongation of death, it also becomes clear that those beautiful little slides of blood, also a clear sign of deviance. Dexter is extremely calm, organized, and has somewhat of a social persona which can, with time, confuse the reader. Everything he does seems so understandable. Following Dexter in his murders and

manhunts, although thrilling, seem ever more normal. He is such an incredible actor and has learned so well from his father, that he has successfully convinced the only person who can read inside his head, that he actually might be. These little aesthetical strips, these little souvenirs, are the only things that remind the reader that something is not right. Especially, in the moments where he desperately needs to open the box, touch them and observe them, or worse, in the moments where he forgets to make them. “*Which now that I thought of it, I had not collected [...] I needed that slide. Jaworski’s death was useless without it. [...] it was incomplete. I had no slide*” (DDD 161). He becomes fidgety, nervous, his calm and organized façade slowly slipping to reveal the maniac behind it. Those glass strips are a symbol of truth and reality behind the lies and façades that Dexter puts out for the world. They exist to remind the reader that although more or less socially acceptable, Dexter’s murders are still the actions of a blood-obsessed deviant. Thanks to them, the reader can stay critical of Dexter’s criminal work. Dexter first and foremost kills for himself, for his addiction to murder. Not to protect society. Similarly to Hannibal during his preparation and murder of Officer Boyle and Pembry, it is in this moment, that the reader can take a peek under the façade, “*his mask of normality slips and we see him clearly for the monster he is*” It screams to the reader to open his eyes and see him for what he is, deep down inside. In no case is Dexter a true vigilante as he is not doing this out of duty but out of pleasure. As much as he seems convincing, to be an actual carer of society and someone the reader could, in a twisted way, look up to, he is not. Dexter almost made the reader believe that what he was doing was the right thing, but this anguish at forgetting a slide makes it clear as day, his behaviour is deviant. This slide reminds the reader that “*Dexter is different—he is not like us and we are not like him*” (Donnelly 23), and that he should not forget it.

However, more than simply reminding the reader of his original deviance, these glass stripes might reveal something much darker about their creator. Of course, keeping souvenirs of murders, is the first clue in the mystery of Dexter’s true nature, but as he starts to panic at the idea of forgetting to make one after his last murder, the reader has to wonder, is it simply a keepsake. I would argue that those stripes are the only thing that connects Dexter to his victims, a reminder of whom he kills and why he does it. By keeping those stripes, he can keep tabs on who he kills, and remind himself how he does it and why. It might be the only thing that helps Dexter keep an organized and logical life. It is extremely important to note that the stripe that he forgot to create, should have originated from a target that was barely researched. The target, Jaworski, is killed in almost a haze, where Dexter is unable to control his Dark Passenger. This victim was barely stalked and looked into. Dexter himself even admits that “[*He*] *was almost certain he was the one, but only almost, and [he] had never been almost certain before*” (Lindsay 130). Even though Dexter fulfilled a part of the

code by targeting an undesirable, he did not make sure of it. He admits to the novelty that this represents. He was always sure before. Dexter is slipping. He could not control the Dark Passenger and submitted to his will. This particular murder is rushed, unsatisfying and dangerous. He almost got caught and debated the idea of killing the potential, innocent witness. But the panic he gets into when he realizes that he forgot to make a glass strip, I would argue that this proves that Dexter is using those strips to keep tight control of his actions. In his constant struggle with his Dark Passenger, the glass stripes might be a reminder that he needs to stay focused and neat. Forgetting these stripes might be a *“suggestion that our anti-hero might either be in the process of losing contact with reality or is literally being possessed by a dark force driving him to kill”* (Aoun 148). Either way, Dexter is in a constant struggle for control. He could very easily stumble into some sort of murderous autopilot, where he kills anyone who stands in his way. He knows that if he starts to forget his victims, he might just so easily start to forget why he kills and how he should do it. Those strips are not only a tool of remembrance or a reminder of his deviance, they are also his safety net, a way to stay on track.

By using them to keep track of who he kills, and why he kills them, Dexter also creates a powerful picture of the dark side of society. These glass strips would not exist if those targets would not have been killing, raping, torturing, and trying to get away with it. They keep such secret and such truth in their singular drops of blood. As Dexter creates these, very neat, smooth, memory-filled, and all-around aesthetically pleasing keepsakes, he reminds himself and the reader that there are extremely dangerous people out there trying to live a normal life while doing dark deeds in the dark. These little droplets of dried blood create a bond between him and the target. Both artists and canvas were or are lying to society, trying to hide their true self and pass for something they are not. These slides contain the truth about society, they essentially are the inside, the true self of these Undesirables. And they are the only existing proof of that. Death does not lie, and these people died because of what they truly are through the hands of someone like them. Early on in the novel, Rita explains to Dexter that *“[e]verything is really two ways, the way we all pretend it is, and the way it really is.”* (DDD 60), but by creating these strips, Dexter was able to align the two into the only drop of blood. It is the essence of their identity. It is the people they were trying to pass off as, it is the people they truly were, and it is the reasons their victim died. These transformed corpses, these strips are mirrors of the soul. A testimony to society the reader should be happy to ignore.

Those little pieces of truth, deviance, and identity are probably the most aesthetical corpse transformation of the three novels analysed in this essay. They are pure murder, yet purely sublime and aesthetical. Hannibal Lecter's use of both Officer's corpses is astonishingly genius and demonstrates a true intellectual superiority all the while rendering the reader speechless. Thomas

Ripley's reaction to both his victims' bodies as well as his disposal of them is an incredibly emotional journey, his transforming Dickie's essence into a new life for him is masterful and a true picture of passion. But they are nothing compared to the meaningfulness of those glass strips. In this tiny little rectangle of smooth glass, under the form of a very neat little droplet of dried blood, lies a whole life, with all of its secrets and dark desires, its death. There lies the ultimate truth. Dexter's little box of droplets contains the whole life of thirty-six individuals, along with his dark truth. These are nothing if not a collection of emotions, dreams, and memories. One little rectangle of glass contains every information a great artist would dream of representing in painting, sculpture, or song.

Conclusion

Through the many different sources used in this essay, whether it was classical literary and philosophical works like Burke's or De Quincey's, historical guides about crime fiction, or scientifically researched literary articles, one thing became clear, the fascination for the criminal is timeless, the aestheticization of his murder, debated. Excluding researchers whose job it is to create a discussion, readers worldwide who cannot keep their hands from crime fiction and constantly rave about it, are for most of them unable to recognize the different realms of beauty and sublimity in their favourite fiend's murders. Morality, Ethics, Social norms and fear of their own desires makes it impossible to publicly recognize murder as aesthetical, unless it comes from a position of literary authority. This debate, in essence, already creates the aesthetic.

More than that, it is a purely aesthetical debate. As it has been going on for centuries, it opposes two different types of defenders of beauty: critics that only swear by the omnipresence of beauty in everything and everyone, including the darkest affairs of man, criminality, death and murder, and the critics that argue a presence of beauty where there is humanity, excluding the darkest affairs of man to only find harmony, life, and humanity. It is the most, and I mean it literally, beautiful debate that exists out there. However, through my research and through the different approaches I argued throughout this paper, I believe that I was able to create a common ground.

As the first chapter presented murder as an aesthetical concept, it became clear, that murder, at least in literature where it is safe and cosy, was without any doubt matching with the modern society. This society's desire to find beauty in truth through the most shockingly dark themes and exhibitions, created the monster that is Hannibal Lecter. It created a monster who's only purpose is to re-insert the refinement, art and aesthetics into a society that seems to have forgotten its way back to them. The readers witnessing Hannibal's work combined with their ability to understand and almost defend Hannibal's quest, creates in itself incredible beauty. Hannibal's work is the work of humanity. It is the way Thomas Harris's way at telling his readers to wake up. You are letting your society be crushed under old, rotten values and morals that incapacitates your ability to see where true respect, refinement and art still exist. In the end, Hannibal Lecter's murderous work is a Hymn to art and aesthetics, it is an Ode to the best of humanity. It is creating beauty and art through the shocking and the gore. It is calling to society the only way it can, through artful terror and astonishment. The two next chapters studying the aesthetics of murder take a similar approach concerning the astonishment and terror. They will both present the aesthetical experience of murder, as well as the aesthetical object of the corpse, as vector of incredible emotions, catharsis, vicarious living and symbolism of the transience and the fragility of life. In the second chapter,

namely the analysis of the aesthetical experience through of catharsis and vicarious living, it will become abundantly clear that it through the emotions that rise from the witnessing of murder that the aestheticism can be felt.

For it is the emotional reaction to anything that we encounter that creates the beauty in life; It is feeling Thomas Ripley's panic as he kills Dickie. It is the feeling of terror felt through the cries of Officer Pembry when the blood-soaked Lecter overlooks him. It is the feverish hunger felt in the pit of Dexter's stomach as he let the Dark Passenger take the wheel. It is through the terror, the sublime passion, panic, cries, perversity and satisfaction that the reader understands that he is alive. Because yes, it reminds him that HE is alive. And should that not be most beautiful thing of all ?

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