Machine and Murder: The Seduction of Thomas Harris’s *Red Dragon*

by Feng-shan Tsai

Abstract

This paper discusses Thomas Harris’s *Red Dragon* in terms of psychoanalytic theory as expounded by Jean Laplanche and Richard Boothby, who, each in his own way, build on Freud’s and Lacan’s theory of sexuality and the death drive. The aim is to demonstrate that literature, canonical or popular, thrives on the processes of identification and that reading, insofar as it rehearses those processes, is seductive and dangerous. A general theory of seduction is, in this sense, also a theory of reading in which the death drive returns to undo the ego as a fictitious construction, i.e., the subject’s identification with an imago. In addition, the theory of seduction also addresses the metaphorical operations (as evinced by the novel’s thematic of the man-machine analogy) that facilitate the identity formation.

Key Words: body; death drive; fantasy; identification; imagination; machine; murder; primal scene; seduction theory; sexuality
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Our very notion of the person, of dignity, depends on the separation of face from body, on the possibility that the face may be exempt, or exempt itself, from what is happening to the body.

Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors*¹

Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon* is a hybrid of detective and crime story. As a detective story, it concerns itself with traces and evidences of every sort that may help track down the guilty party, and as such it leans heavily not only on state-of-the-art apparatuses and gadgets to establish the identity of the criminal but, more importantly, on the criminal's motives as a guideline for detecting and sieving the traces. Harris's logic is that it takes a like-minded detective to expose the culprit, and that the best way to decide the criminal's motives is to assimilate his point of view, to think not only like a criminal but *as* a criminal or, preferably, to *be* the criminal. It is therefore very much in the grain of the novel to give criminal psychology a full play, to indulge in representing the brutality of serial murder, and not least significantly for Will Graham, the best serial killer buster in FBI, to consult the most knowledgeable serial killer, Dr. Hannibal Lecter.²

Indeed, what is particularly intriguing (or thrilling?) about *Red Dragon* as a detective-crime story is the detective's identification with the criminal. In characterizing Graham as having a "criminal mind" (44), Harris problematizes the distinction between the detective and the criminal or, what amounts to the same thing, pathologizes the detective as on a par with the criminal. Hot in his pursuit of the
Tooth Fairy, Graham decides to see Lecter, who points out their elective affinity, by way of suggestion that "we're just alike" (67). In providing a criminally minded detective in Graham, moreover, Harris radicalizes the representation of the criminal mind and deeds. For Graham is not only possessed, like Lecter, by an urge to see and know the working of a criminal mind, but also repeatedly compelled to possess, and hence to shun that working and perhaps that mind-set as well. According to Dr. Alan Bloom (the "good forensic psychiatrist" in the novel), "one of [Graham's] strongest drives . . . is fear" (153-4). With such a panics of identification, he has to stand at once outside and inside the frame, representing and occupying the site of represented. A framework that seeks to frame itself, a representation that strives to represent itself, such a representation thus assumes a psychotic structure, a self-other (or chicken-egg) circularity not unlike the specular and tautological relationship between perception and projection. According to Jack Crawford, who always "wants another point of view," Graham is an expert with evidence precisely because he has "[i]magination and projection" (7). In Bloom's opinion, however, he is not a psychic but an "eideatcher," that is, he has not only a "pure empathy and projection" but also a "remarkable visual memory" (152). Bloom (or Harris) is perhaps at his most Romantic (sublime and somewhat Wordsworthian) moment when he equates visual retention (perception) with imagination, empathy, projection, and then with subliminal fear as a drive, which for him is "the price of imagination" (154).

Of course, projection as a psychical mechanism tropes upon the mechanical and physical process of throwing something forward or outward. Inversely, visual perception is empirically understood as analogous to the functioning of a camera. But shall we then grant ontological primacy to the machine? To radicalize the representation of the criminal mind is not merely to criminal-mindedly depict the criminal mind, nor merely to represent the other as the self. It resolves its functioning in terms of a metaphorsics of the machine process and then, more importantly, return it to the root and to "plug" it onto the life process. It is in this sense that Harris invariably sexualizes the death machine, links it up with the
technology of representation, treats both as an extension of the body and, ultimately, conceives of the bodily as an arena of life and death.

The "curious embarrassment" Graham always feels when people look at his "pistol" (82) strongly suggests not only the weapon's penetrating, lethal power but also its sexual connotation and gendering effect. If he is embarrassed by feeling of nakedness, he is even more so by being looked at, precisely because he is preoccupied with looking (at) himself, that is with (self-) representation. He spends most of his time, in the novel, poring over the victims' films—made by the victims themselves, too—or inspecting the blood-smeared rooms and their surroundings, like a murderer revisiting the scenes of his own crime. A similar self-reflexivity can be discerned in Francis Dolarhyde's serial murder and serial representation of murder, precisely because the art erotica of murder is totally bound up with the technology of representation, both hinging on the notion of perception and its intimate relation with its reverse, projection, in many senses of the word. For one thing, Dolarhyde's method of killing is putting bullets into his victim's bodies and burning the scene of gore onto movie films. The in-out procedure of the double shooting, furthermore, serves an (auto)erotic purpose. Crawford classifies Dolarhyde as a "secretor" (2), that is, one who eroticizes murder by leaving behind semen and saliva. On top of that, the triple shooting also pornographically triggers masturbation when Dolarhyde re-views his own life work, while at the same time projecting his masterpiece. (Compared with movie camera, camcorder is definitely an improvement by the simple fact that recorder and projector are built into the same machine and can operate at the same time. It virtually obliterates the distance between presence and representation, and certainly intensifies the sense of immediacy and prolongs duration. Envision a home video to be entitled Sex, Videotapes, and Deaths, a jouissance par excellence.)

The technology of representation radicalizes the psychical processes. It reconceptualizes them as analogous to the machine process on the one hand, and returns them to their biological base on the other. If Harris may seem to assert the primacy of mind over matter, man over machine, psyche over soma, and Graham
over the technocracy of the FBI, it is nevertheless evident how the latter terms of the opposition infiltrate and subtend the former. Toward the end of *Red Dragon*, Harris brushes up the Dolarhyde case, in a naturalist finishing stroke that harks back to Stephen Crane's "Open Boat" and perhaps also to the shipwreck episode in Byron's *Don Juan*, with an account of the indifferent nature called the Green Machine. His face mangled and his body lacerated, Graham is put to sleep by a shot of Demerol in the ICU room. Before drifting into narcotic sleep, he recalls (or fantasizes?) his visit to Shiloh, where he, out of mercy, had to kill a writhing chicken snake that had been run over by a car. That scene of suffering and death, with the beautiful but indifferent Shiloh as its backdrop and witness, is re-recognized, apres coup, as revealing the fictive nature of the human world *vis-a-vis* the natural world, here equivocally conceptualized as the "Green Machine":

In the Green Machine there is no mercy; we make mercy, manufacture it in the parts that have overgrown our basic reptile brain. There is not murder. We make murder, and it matters only to us.

Graham knew too well that he contained all the elements to make murder; perhaps mercy too (354).

The indifference of nature and its vicissitudes in literary history notwithstanding, Harris's parting shot invokes a metaphorics that thrives on the opposition, not between nature and culture but, perversely, between two machines. On the one hand, there is the amoral Green Machine, aloof and inscrutable, that embodies a general economy of pure production. On the other hand, if nature is postulated as a machine, this "mechano-morphism"--to borrow the term from Jean Laplanche--also applies to the "great body of humankind" that manufactures "vaccine," in addition to the alliterative categories of mercy and murder (354). Such a metaphorics, at once positing and problematizing (or problematizing by positing) a series of oppositions--mercy/murder, inside/outside, normal/pathological, nature/culture, mind/body, and what not,--depends for its efficacy on an analogy that equates the body--individual and/or collective, natural and/or artifactual--with the machine. With
the Green Machine, Harris introduces a concept of nature which is itself modeled on machine culture—a "miscegenation of the natural and the cultural" that produces what Mark Seltzer characterizes as the "unnatural Nature of naturalism."4

What such a metaphorics problematizes, above all, is the autonomy of the subject and the privilege of human agent, a point of view that in a very peculiar sense Harris himself endorses. Indeed, with the so-called psychical apparatus and its various mechanisms, the mind itself is now modeled on the machine. Machine as a metaphor transforms or re-presents the human subject as a function of machine and physical processes that underpin the psychical and remain unconscious, autonomous, and deterministic (or over-determining). Machine as a metaphor, in short, re-writes the problematic of the human subject in terms of the agency of the body and the machine. Consequently, the subject is autonomous in an uncanny sense, that is, it functions like an automaton with forces and operations that are beyond the subject’s knowledge or control.

To say that Harris more or less privileges the human agent, of course, does not merely mean that he chooses as protagonist of his novel a special FBI agent, nor that his narrative, especially in chapters 25-28, tends to psychologize Dolarhyde’s serial killing. Graham as a serial killer buster is unique in that he can feel and think in the place of the killer, an ability that stands above even the best technocrats with their hi-tech apparatuses. Graham’s case, that is, seems to favor the mind over the matter, as do psychological explanations in general. Indeed, almost all the major characters in the novel are equipped to psychologize, either by profession (Dr. Bloom, Jack Crawford and, perhaps, Graham) or by culture (Dr. Lecter, Graham and, of course, Dolarhyde). But then again, it is easy to see how such a psychologism is itself made possible and therefore conditioned by the machine and physical processes.

Consider, for example, the manufacture of vaccine and the thematic ramification of this defence mechanism. In his closing theorization of civilization and its discontents, Harris makes Graham’s drugged mind to reflect whether,

in the great body of humankind, in the minds of men set on
civilization, the vicious urges we control in ourselves and the dark instinctive knowledge of those urges function like the crippled virus the body arms against (354, italics added).

Harris's uncharacteristically tortuous syntax nevertheless characteristically blurs or darkens the distinction between virus and vaccine, that is, between crippling and being crippled. If crippling the virus is a way of making vaccine, it is doubtful whether or not the "dark instinctive knowledge" proves an adequate "vaccine." In other words, can knowledge "cripple" the vicious urges and bring them under "control"? Since the homeopathic model presupposes a homogeneity of the "vicious urges" and the "dark instinctive knowledge," it makes dubious the power of control and renders futile any claim to knowledge.

Understood either in terms of the discipline of the body (individual or collective) or in terms of the defence mechanisms of the ego, the concept of control or knowledge as control also problematizes the normal/pathological distinction. As a matter of fact, it is precisely the urge to control and to know that is pathologized in the novel as the most distinct trait of the "criminal mind" (44), which Graham suspects he possesses or is possessed by, and which Dr. Lecter suggests he (Graham) has. The logic that criminal minds think alike is highly disturbing and seductive (seductive precisely because disturbing) in that it stages the reader's identification, through Graham, with Dolarhyde and ultimately with Dr. Lecter, who is in the final analysis the subject supposed to know and the master of control.

Also blurred is the distinction between inside and outside. The idea of the virus, crippled or not, attacking the body from within does not problematize the inside/outside distinction so much as does that of the "vicious urges" beleaguering the "minds of men" (354), supposedly from within. For the virus does attack from inside the body, that is, after its invasion from the outside and after the so-called latency period. Before its introduction, however, it lacks the violence or viciousness that commonly characterizes the diseases or their symptoms. Urges or dark instincts, on the contrary, suggest violence and viciousness but at the same time lacks any
substantial status as entities having an outside origin. The vicious urges thus become a psychologized version of original sin.

Inasmuch as Harris takes a great editorial pain, in chapters 25-28, to incorporate Dolarhyde’s autobiographical account to justify his way to men, women, and children, the urges seem to have been derived from the outside, and as such can be understood in terms of Freud’s seduction theory, the abandonment of which incurs Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson’s assault on the Freudians on the one hand and, on the other, Jean Laplanche’s effort at redeeming a theory so necessary for understanding the vicissitudes of human sexuality.\(^5\)

Freud’s original elaboration of the theory involves a primal scene of seduction complete with its set of dramatis personae: a child who is by nature innocent and sexually immature, an adult who is by definition pervert, and the child in the adult who has been perverted. The drama of seduction is the unequal match between the child and the adult who seduces the child, usually a father or male relative and occasionally a mother or a female who happens to be in charge of the child, thus creating in him or her the first trauma. Such a trauma becomes pathogenic nachträglich, that is, after a latency period when its memory is reactivated, during the transformation of puberty, by a second trauma which may be insignificant in itself. As the saying goes, “it always takes two traumas to make a trauma” (Laplanche 1989, p. 88).\(^6\) Given the fact that there is a hiatus between the two traumatic events and that what is reactivated is only the memory of the first trauma, a certain literalism is unmistakable in Freud’s earlier formulation, which attributes the ontogenesis of hysteria to actual seduction in the hysterics’ childhood.\(^7\)

Without wishing to participate in the controversy, I want to point out that there are some profound ambiguities in Freud’s original formulation of the theory which at once account for the seductiveness of the seduction theory and facilitate its abandonment. For one thing, the so-called primal scene of seduction is always already derivative in the interminable relay of perversion and seduction. Where is one then to attribute the original perversion and the first seduction, if not in primary narcissism of the infant and, ultimately, in the Narcissistic Father of the
infantile humanity? Furthermore, the dubious status of memory as a form of representation and/or reproduction makes slippery the distinction between the original and its copy, a Platonic demon lurking in any mimetic theory. The concept of Nachtraglichkeit, finally, adds little to clarify the issue. In fact, it does nothing but further blur the distinction between memory and fantasy, which, as a form of representation and/or reproduction, mixes memory and desire. Although Freud’s alleged abandonment of the seduction theory does not merely shift the focus of attention from "real" physical and/or sexual abuse to fantasy of seduction but also, much more significantly, turn the seducee into the seducer, it does nothing but carry the theory to its logical conclusion.

In distinguishing differance from differentiation, Jacques Derrida specifies as a major motif of Freud’s thought a "diaphoristics," that is, "an energetics or economics of forces [that] commits itself to putting into question the primacy of presence as consciousness." Given that, for Derrida, such a diaphoristics is fundamentally differential, it is easy to see how Freud’s theory of seduction in general and Nachtra lichkeit in particular may well add the temporal aspect of deferral or retroactivity. Under the sign of differance, then, Freud’s theory of sexuality and its intimate relationships with the death drive may be said to consist of a diaphoristics and a diachronics of psychic formations. This, indeed, is the main trend in recent interpretations of Freud’s theory of the mind which emphasize the somatic foundations of the psychic, especially in Jean Laplanche’s and Richard Boothby’s studies of the death drive.

Although they represent different routes of returning Freud to himself—Laplanche via Sandor Ferenczi and Boothby via Lacan,—they manage to bridge a gap in Freud’s theory allegedly caused by his abandonment of seduction theory, that is, the gap between actual seduction and fantasy of seduction, between the physical and the psychical. Whether or not this abandonment amounts to a breach of faith on the part of Freud is still open to argument, particularly from the vantage point of new feminism. For Laplanche and Boothby, however, it is not merely possible but also necessary to predicate the psychical on the biological
without resorting, as did Freud, to a phylogenetic hypothesis of primal fantasy. What Laplanche and Boothby attempt to achieve is to ground psychoanalysis on the foundations of sexuality and death drive, i.e., life and death or death and desire. Both posit an energetics as the basis for their mechano-biological model of the mind, with perhaps only this major difference: while Laplanche meticulously distinguishes instincts from drives, which are derived from and "propped" by the former, Boothby tends to use the term death drive interchangeably with death instinct, though he sometimes speaks of the "somatic substratum of the drive" (Boothby, 57). Otherwise, the energetics underlying their hydraulic model distinguishes "free energy" in the primary process, governed by the "principle of neurotic inertia" or "complete discharge" (Laplanche 1976, 57) from "bound energy" in the secondary process, governed by the principle of "damming" or "constancy" (Boothby, 51-5). With the secondary process, moreover, the bound energy is invested on or attached to partial objects as if they were machine parts, and can be pathogenic when it is trapped in what Boothby calls "formal stagnation" (Boothby, 25), i.e., when the human subject is fixated, captured, or fascinated by an image (imago). Such is the price the subject has to pay for his imaginary ego as a "projection of a surface" or "body-ego" or, more relevant to our discussion of Dolarhyde, the "skin-ego" (Laplanche 1989, 49). Energetics is economy, and nothing is got for nothing.

Nevertheless, such an energetics with its conspicuous biologism makes a strict distinction between the ego and the subject as an organism or a "totality of the body," of which the flux of vital energies is called the id (Freud) or the real (Lacan). The imaginary ego, according to Boothby's reformulation of Freud, is merely a "bounded and specialized portion of the id, split off under the influence of perceptual mechanisms from the larger mass of drive energies" (Boothby, 66). The birth of the ego is made possible by the repression of a great portion of the id. Understood in this context, the death drive represents the return of the repressed (the real of the body), and finds its target in the imaginary ego rather than the organism. The death drive, then, seeks as its objective the death of the imaginary
ego, rather than the organism. Or, as Laplanche puts it, it is "at the level of ideational representatives alone, and not in the functioning of a living organism that this model of a complete evacuation of psychical energy is discovered" (Laplanche 1976, 58). But this is not to say that such an iconoclastic drive does not impinge on the functioning of the organism. Laplanche cites examples of anorexia—whether "neurotic," "oedipal," or "psychotic"—and the dysfunction of perceptions (Laplanche 1976, 83). In extreme cases, literal death of the organism may occur when such iconoclasm is directed in self-aggressivity at the organism (suicide) or, through a projection of aggressivity, at other organisms (murder).

This rough sketch of life and death in psychoanalysis, based as they are on the hydro-electric model of the psychical mechanisms and its accompanying energetics, is tailored to foreground the link between representation and reproduction and, in the case of Red Dragon, between representation and serial murder as a means of reproduction. What draws the link is the specular identification with an imago that produces identity, unity, and totality for the ego. The criminal minds in Red Dragon, it is easy to see, are the products of their varying tendency to identify with visual image. The difference among them, however, is that of quantity rather than quality. For Dolarhyde, life begins again when he is "seized" by William Blake's painting, The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun (223). The specular identification is so intense that it reproduces Dolarhyde's body in the forms of tattoo and body-building (224). In addition, he re-structures his face by "work[ing] on his jaw in private moments," and replacing his grandmother's denture with a new set he purchases in Hong Kong, together with the tattoo of the Red Dragon (224). Visual identification, above all, becomes oral incorporation when he literally ingests the original copy of Blake's painting (298). In fact, all the toils and troubles he undertakes account for urge to become one with the image of the Dragon, so strong that it transgresses what Theodor Adorno considers as the most important taboo in aesthetics:

Perhaps the most important taboo in art is the one that prohibits an animal-like attitude toward the object, say, a desire to devour it or
otherwise to subjugate it to one's body. Now the strength of such a taboo is matched by the strength of the repressed urge.\textsuperscript{11}

A similar "formal stagnation"—to use Boothby’s phrase again—can be discerned in Dr. Lecter's identification with the \textit{Wound Man}, an old medical textbook illustration that "shows different kinds of battle injuries, all in one figure" (55). At first sight, Lecter's identification with the image of the Wound Man appears to be drastically different from Dolarhyde's self-fashioning identification, the one with a deadly, the other with a deathly, image. Dolarhyde's Red Dragon, that is, is as castrating and would-inflicting as Lecter's Wound Man is castrated and wound-ridden. But the \textit{fact} remains that Dolarhyde's almost absolute power not only to control his own body and mind but also to manipulate those of others is second to no one except Lecter's. It seems that, together, the two images represent the two faces of the same coin, exercising the same power to fascinate, capture, and fixate. Flip the coin as one may, it always winds up showing the same enigmatic face, be it sadistic or masochistic.

The two faces represent less the transvaluation between sadism and masochism—that is, as the two phases of a single process of sado-masochistic becoming—than two forms of aggressivity. In Boothby's Lacanian reading, all aggressivities are in the final analysis, self-aggressivities directed at the imaginary ego by the libidinal bodily energy or the real that has been foreclosed in the formation of the ego—foreclosed precisely because it is beyond the representational binding of specular identification with an imago. Self-aggressivity, then, is the return of the repressed real that worries at the imaginary ego, threatening to traumatize the formal integrity (\textit{Gestalt}), the projected surface of the skin-ego. One can of course defend the contours of the ego by projecting such self-aggressivity onto the other, turning it into an aggressivity to an alter(ed) ego. A Lacanian ego psychology? It is precisely at this juncture, it should be noted, that Lacan's vehement attacks on ego psychology draws blood. For Lacan, the "corporation mentality" of ego psychology falsifies and misrepresents the human subject by subjecting it to adaptation or adjustment, all in the name of a unitary, single
bounded ego. As a result, the greater the effort at defense, the greater the compulsion to repeat; or, what amounts to the same thing, the harder the repression of the urge, the stronger the return of the repressed, as Adorno’s discussion on taboo makes clear.

The seduction of the Red Dragon lies in its captivating power or "nightmarish charge of sexual energy" (223), and Dolarhyde’s phantasmatic identification with such an image gives him a new life and sexuality in the process of Becoming, making him a Sadean monster of pure aggressivity doing serial murder as a pure production of corpses, and in the mode of Kantian mathematical sublime as well. Behind that fascination, however, there is the helpless child subject to various abuses that can be understood in terms of both what Laplanche calls the special and the general theory of seduction. Born of an illicit marriage and with hereditary drawbacks, Dolarhyde was deserted by an embittered mother and brought up by a castrating grandmother. The fact that Dolarhyde (reads sad-skin) was born with "bilateral fissures in his upper lip and in his hard and soft palates" made him look, in the eyes of obstetrician, "more like a leaf-nosed bat than a baby" (195). Taking his face at its face value, the supervisors of the hospital categorized him as an eyesore, leaving him at "the rear of the infant ward and fac[ing] him away from the viewing window" (195, italics added). Having to wear his face "as it was," he was shipped away to an orphanage where he was formally called a "harelip" (197, italic added) but informally a "Cunt Face" (199), a sexual identity he gladly embraced to please the bigger boys. If, according to Laplanche, sexuality is propped by life instincts, Dolarhyde is doomed to go propless because he cannot suck. However, he can bite, and bite he does, thus earning himself the name of "Tooth Fairy." Notably, sucking and biting are made possible for him by coupling artificial "rubber stopper" (196) and his grandmother’s false teeth to his natural body. Orality and its accompanying drives are, therefore, literally "component drives" (Laplanche 1989, 128).

Moreover, if Dolarhyde is not abundantly favored in the oral stage, he fares even worse in the phallic stage. Once again, he has to go propless because
sexuality, which attaches itself to the life process (urination), is twice threatened with literal castration: the one time when he peed in bed at night, his grandmother actually held his penis between a pair of scissors, "clos[ing] the scissors until they began to pinch him" (205); the other, he was caught red-handed when he was literally seduced by a "red-haired listless child," who asked to see his private parts and showed him her own (209, italics added). Detachable, the penis itself thus becomes an objet a (a lost part-object not unlike a machine part), the loss of which incurs a return to an "objectless primary narcissism" (Laplanche 1989, 76-7). Of the four characteristics of autoerotism according to Laplanche, the most pertinent one (in relation to Dolarhyde's case) is that "auto-erotic activity cannot be defined without reference to fantasy, or to the fantasy object." Since the fantasy object as a supplement is incurred by object-loss, the dimensions of "fantasy representation" and "memory" of pleasurable experiences become the most important support of autoerotism: "no one masturbates without having fantasies, and the thing about masturbation that interests the analyst is the fantasy" (Laplanche 1989, 70). Dolarhyde's "fantasy life," by which he is "seized" in his forties, reads like an Immortality Ode, with the "brilliance and freshness and immediacy of childhood" (224, italics added). The same brilliance and immediacy also characterize his childhood fantasy (or memory of childhood) in which he stands in the "brilliant night, face upturned, gasping as though he could breathe the light" (211). Here, the highly ambivalent "Love" (or love-hate ambivalence) finds it expression in a strange mixture of ocular, oral, and olfactory incorporation, invoking at the same time the Romantic metaphor for inspiration ("inspirare" for "flow in" and "breathe," and "breath" for "asthma" and "gasping." When the intake becomes too much, the Love finds its outlet in killing chickens. The intimate link between autoerotism and murder is unmistakable when he washed himself, "scrubbing himself at the chicken-yard pump" (211, italics added). Moreover, it is in this childhood fantasy representation or memory that he retrieves his penis like a lost object: "What Grandmother kindly had not cut off was still there like a prize when he washed the blood off his belly and legs" (212). Fantasy representation, memory, and
represented scene of murder are totally bound up with energetics of (auto)eroticism and overdetermine Dolarhyde’s serial killing in psycho-aesthetic terms.

Admittedly, the autobiographical notes in Chapters 25-8 is Harris’s representation of Dolarhyde’s self-representation. Given Laplanche’s caution against the limits of anthropomorphisms,\textsuperscript{12} there is still this question to be answered: what makes a thriller—I’m far from using the term in the derogatory sense—thrilling? Why, that is, is the representation of murder, actual or imaginary, so disturbingly absorbing, i.e., seductive? Isn’t it precisely because the death of the imaginary ego, whose fictitious totality is deflected, deflated, and punctured by images of lacerated, mutilated bodies, is so darkly fulfilling for the subject who appears to go beyond the pleasure principle? In this sense and this sense alone, the dark pleasure that is associated with representation of murder is homogeneous with the pleasure we take in the sublime, the terrible, the tragic, the grotesque, or even the enigmatic. And as such it is perhaps only a facet of the multifarious visiting of the death drive, at the expense of the imaginary ego. Coming from and returning to the real, the death drive as such does not lend itself to representation, except vicariously through bungled actions (\textit{Fehlleistungen}), jokes, slips of the tongue or feet, symptoms and, what concerns us here, fictional making-and-breaking of imagos.

In bringing it to bear with the aesthetic categories, I am far from attempting to aestheticize serial murder (or representation of serial murder or serial representation of murder) but rather to link its propensity to mathematically reproduce itself with repetition compulsion of the death drive and the anxiety it produces in the imaginary ego. If Graham’s strongest drive is fear, it is precisely because his power to conserve Gestalts in general and his obsession with the unitary image of the self in particular are constantly besieged by images of fragmentation and mutilation forced upon him by his position and, in the final analysis, by the return of the death drive. For him, the totality of the body image is twice violated by the serial murders he is after. In this sense, he is a product of his victims. But the wounds in the abdomen he receives from Lecter are nothing compared with those Dolarhyde inflicts on him, some of which \textit{happen} to be focused on the face. By
the end of the novel, Graham has become the literal and complete Wound Man, to whom Lecter sends a *sympathetic* note of get-well-soon, hoping that he "won't be very ugly" (349). Think-alikes also become look-alikes. It is at this juncture that the psychical and the somatic assume the mechanical mode of production over against the *natural*, biological mode of reproduction.

Lecter's speculation on the world as "neither savage nor wise" but "primitive" echoes almost point for point Graham's closing reflection on civilization. In an earlier letter to Graham, he questions, in terms very much like those of Charlie Chaplain's Monsieur Verdoux's, the distinction between serial murder and mass murder, either by the State or by a God unknown who drops "a church roof on thirty-four of His worshipers" (271). It is as though, when confronted with the unexplainable, they had to posit a superhuman, supernatural entity to ground the seductiveness of the real as the ineffable and the enigmatic. Over against the text of the novel itself, however, we must point out that what is indifferent is not nature, but Man and his Machine: Man as both manufacturer and product of the Machine. For it is not Shiloh as the Green Machine but a "tourist's automobile" (353) that runs over the chicken snake and breaks its back. In a relay of murder in the name of mercy, Graham kills the snake by "crack[ing] it like a whip" (353), spilling its reptile brain into the Bloody Pond, a killing field during the Civil War. With the image of the grass, Harris at once invokes and inverts Whitman and Sandburg, who share a penchant for the Machine as the emblem of technology that empowers human emancipation on the one hand, and aestheticize battle fields by *smoothing* them over with green grass on the other. Interestingly, it is in the so-called naturalism of Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* that the grass penetrates corpses like the shards of glass with which Dolarhyde perforates the bodies of his victims.

In a novel shot through with machines and machine parts, men are *treated* accordingly: faces can be fixed, as in Graham's case (353), or improved, as in Dolarhyde's case (222); body parts can be removed like Graham's spleen (348), "augmented" like Wendy's breasts (150), and *operated* on like Bloom's (250). In
contrast, the natural world has very little part to play, except perhaps in explaining Dolarhyde's fixation with the tangible brilliance of the moon. But then again, that part is at best supportive, engaged to provide the prop and scenario of a psycho-somatico-mechanical process. Otherwise, it is generally mute and submissive, subjected to a metaphorsics of the machine process, echoing Pascal's frightening "eternal silence of infinite space," which Laplanche interprets as "the silence of death . . . of the surface of the moon . . . [in] a Cartesian-style macro-mechanics" (Laplanche 1989, 51-3).

Notes


3. Jean Laplanche, New Foundations for Psychoanalysis, trans. David Macey, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 51-4. In discussing Freud's anthropomorphism in both first and second topographies, Laplanche argues for the "as if" mode of knowledge: "The obvious objection is of course that Freud speaks in the mode of "as if," whereas the ideal of science is to find a language which does not have to use that mode. The only way to parry that objection is to ask whether human beings might not be constructed in an "as if" mode. What if "as if" were not merely a stylistic device to be used at the level of interpretation (You are behaving as if the mother inside you were someone who could make absolute prohibitions'); what if human beings really were constructed in the "as if" mode? What if all personalities, and not only "as if" personalities were constructed in that mode?" (46-47). Having said this, he nevertheless proceeds to fault Freud's and Lacan's borrowings from such disciplines as physics, biology, anthropology, mechanics, and linguistics. For
Laplanche, these borrowings constitute the false foundations for psychoanalysis. But then again, he himself also discusses the drives in terms of mechanomorphism, with this qualification: "its position is certainly primal, but it does not lie at the origins of human beings, or even at their psychological origins. It is a corollary to a highly specific founding moment: the origin of the drive and... the origin of the so-called sexual part-function, which has as its object the so-called part-objects" (52, italics added). All further references to this work appear in my paper and are identified by the author's name, year of publication, and page numbers in parentheses.


6. See also Jean Laplanche's *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 38-44. All subsequent references to this work are identified by the author's name, publication year, and page numbers, included in parentheses.


9. See Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York: Routledge, 1991), especially chapters 3 and 4. The subsequent references to this work appear in the text. Although Boothby acknowledges his debts to Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*, the concept of energetics, as Derrida makes clear, is a major motif in Freud's analytical theory. See also Jean Laplanche's *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* and *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*.

10. See Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), pp. 15-17, for a discussion of the bodily ego. Laplanche's notion of the "skin ego" is borrowed from Didier Anzieu: "This surface is a skin, the skin of the ego, and it originates in the skin of the other. But if that skin should be missing, anything can be used as a substitute skin; as Anzieu demonstrates, words, themselves can be used as a skin" (Laplanche 1989, p. 49). Words as a substitute for skin apply perfectly to Dolarhyde. The supplementation incurred by his hereditary drawbacks gives his face attributes of animals (leaf-nosed bat and harelip) and female genital ("Cunt Face"). These word-skins, it should be noted, also originate in the skin of the other.


12. In *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche makes clear the distinctions between the person and the imago of a person: "These internalized figures are not persons; does the Traumdeutung's censor, who is part of the psychical apparatus, have a psychical apparatus? Does he have an unconscious? At this point we come up against the limitations of anthropomorphism: these human forms or "morphisms" are imagos of ourselves, and imagos have neither a psychical apparatus nor an unconscious. Imagos have no depth and no transcendence" (47). To subject fictional characters to a psychoanalytic explanation is definitely not to analyze them as if they were real persons. They do not have an unconscious, but the author and the reader do. It is
therefore plausible to analyze the (re)construction that both engage in in the process of the novel. Harris's case is particularly interesting in that he seems to have written the novel with psychoanalysis behind him, Freudian or French Freudian.

Works Consulted/Cited


