

*Moby-Dick* and Thomas Harris's *Hannibal*:

The Representation of the National Crisis of the United States

OHCHI Shinsuke

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The September 11 attacks in 2001 have considerably changed the politics, economy, and culture of not only the United States but also the rest of the world and suggested that the 21st century is quite different from the last. I think that the novel *Hannibal* (1999) by Thomas Harris, one of the most popular novelists in the world today, is closely related to the attacks.

*Hannibal* is, in my opinion, modeled on the novel *Moby-Dick*. At first glance, they may seem to have nothing to do with each other. *Moby-Dick*, one of the best examples of American literature, was written 150 years before *Hannibal*. Unlike *Hannibal*, it drew little attention when it was published. Also, broadly speaking, it is a sea adventure novel, whereas *Hannibal* is a psychological horror one. The central theme of these novels, however, is the same: a very powerful man who hunts all over the world for the legendary "monster" that disabled him is defeated a second time. In *Moby-Dick* the very powerful man is Ahab and in *Hannibal* it is Mason Verger; the respective legendary "monsters" are Moby Dick and Hannibal Lecter. Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* and Clarice Starling in *Hannibal*, both compelled to come to the aid of a powerful man, both survive in the end while the powerful

man does not. In my paper, after demonstrating these parallels in detail, I have shown that *Hannibal* also employs *Moby-Dick*'s themes of cannibalism and the search for a parent.

The analogy between the wreckage of the Pequod in *Moby-Dick* and the national crisis of the United States has frequently been made. If the death of Ahab and the wreckage of his Pequod embody the crisis of America, the death of Mason, a major influence on the American government, and that of Paul Krendler, the virtual head of the FBI and Mason's puppet, must also represent America's national crisis, since *Hannibal* is a parallel to *Moby-Dick*. Just before the Lecter trilogy, Harris, who had a thorough knowledge of the situation in the Middle East, wrote *Black Sunday*. This is a story where Islamic terrorists try to massacre the new American president and numerous American civilians with a bomb attached to an airship that is likened to "a great silver whale." Consequently, Lecter, who again defeats Mason and Krendler, the symbols of America, is suggestive of Al-Qaeda, which is said to be the Islamic terrorist organization that shook America again. At the end of the last century, then, *Hannibal* implicitly predicted that the United States, which was riding on a crest of prosperity, would soon face a national crisis.