

“I just thought you’d like to hear it from me; this is the Face, it's no great Mystery:”

Understanding Authority in Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood*.

by

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For Alyson. Without your patience, encouragement, and willingness to deal with my
insanity, I would not be here.

I am the third revelation, I am who the lord has chosen, because I'm smarter than you.
I'm not a false prophet you sniveling boy. I am the third revelation! I am the third
revelation! I told you I would eat you! I told you I would eat you up!

—Daniel Plainview, *There Will Be Blood*.

Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the concept of authority as it pertains to Paul Thomas Anderson's 2007 film *There Will Be Blood*. Referring to Roland Barthes' famous essay "The Death of the Author," I consider authority as the attempt "to give a text an Author[...]to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified" (1470). In applying this idea to the film, I explore the way in which Daniel Plainview's voice progresses towards absolute authority, as if his words have the power to signify with such finality.

I attempt to understand how exactly Daniel is able to assert such a strong authority. This line of inquiry leads to detailed scene analysis that suggests Daniel's language and physical gestures are essential in establishing such power. Understanding this success is important because the film continually implies, through moments of ambiguity and irresolvability, that attaining such absolute authority is, in fact, impossible. For this reason, Barthes is useful in framing my discussion because he reminds us of a critical tradition that attempted to champion the voice of what he labels the "author god," while at the same time demonstrating, as the film does with Daniel Plainview, the impossibility of achieving such a powerful and absolute way of speaking.

I conclude my thesis by exploring how *There Will Be Blood* extends its interest in authority beyond its filmic parameters. I believe that through the concept of authority, the film is confronting the academic discussion that so crucially relies on memories of what we have seen and felt. Ultimately, I come to view the ambiguity that surrounds the father/son relationship as one that, viewed through criticism's lens, reveals how easy it can be to slip into the tyrannical voice so forcefully embodied by Daniel Plainview.

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Introduction

“I took his story”: Adaptation Studies, *Oil!*, and *There Will Be Blood*

My initial intention with this project was to explore the transformation of literature into film, what is also known in academic discourse as adaptation studies. During my research, I found that one of the central concerns of the field is to, as Brian McFarlane notes, “permit the most objective and systematic appraisal of what has happened in the process of transposition of one text to another media” (23). McFarlane’s approach, similar to that of many other theorists, attempts to categorize the process of adaptation and define the way in which literature transforms into film. This approach speaks to the problem that plagues adaptation studies in general. As I argue, those working within the field aim to establish what I view as an authorial position over the language used to discuss the adaptive process. These critics tend to be overly concerned with the linguistic ramifications of the movement from literature into film, which I believe renders both film and text secondary to defining, in a mechanical way, the process of adaptation itself. Robert Stam, in his book *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, introduces three terms that haunt this critical field: “Charles aims at *fidelity*: ‘I want to be true to the New Yorker Piece.’ But he has to *translate* fact into fiction, find new forms and *equivalencies*” (2, Emphasis Added). Though these terms appear to be simple in meaning, they are in fact far too complicated to be used passingly, leaving us with questions such as: how are we to know whether a film and text converge on a point of equivalence? How is the concept of translation applicable to the convergence of these two media? Why is “fidelity” consistently viewed

as the measure for a successful adaptation? Moreover, in light of the impulse to employ such a word as “translate,” that which implies an inevitable change, is fidelity more simply understood as an impossible feat? I cannot help but think these questions arise out of my attempts to understand the meaning of these terms rather than a focus on the two mediums. Thus I argue that the study of adaptation can, in fact, more accurately be described as a self-reflexive study of its own language rather than the process which it purports to investigate.

Thomas Leitch discusses the term “fidelity” in his essay “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory.” Leitch suggests that fidelity is “a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation’s value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense” (161). Not only do I agree with Leitch that a goal of fidelity is an impossible one, but I also believe that the very impulse to measure the value of an adaptation is problematic, as it attempts to establish a very rigid and formulaic system of language into which the transformation can be placed. Of course, as an avid reader of fiction and spectator of films, to discredit this objective approach, all I must do is reflect on why I personally find a specific text or a film so moving. Such an abstract feeling, I believe, transcends systematic ways of understanding adaptation; feeling consistently undermines the idea of a predictable, simple, and faithful movement from one media to another, because there is no specific unit of signification that can explain affect. The field is too willing, I believe, to group all spectators and readers under one emotional, intellectual, and experiential umbrella.

Leitch asks: “given the indefensibility of fidelity as a criterion for the analysis of adaptations, why has it maintained such a stifling grip on adaptation study?” (163). One reason is that the field is so entrenched in this language that it becomes nearly impossible to rebel against it from within. Leitch inadvertently reaffirms its privilege by simply

acknowledging its firm and seemingly immovable position within the field. Another possible answer is directly related to what I believe to be a divide between a more general film-going public and adaptation theorists. It appears as though much of adaptation theory has been written in response to the all-too familiar phrase, heard often in the movie theatre, that “the book is always better than the film.” The problem here is that the practice of assessing an adaptation’s success based on fidelity is one that, I think it is safe to say, is generally accepted by the larger film going public. If it were not, then why would adaptation theorists continue to reference not only their divergence from this general statement, but also their frustration in never really being able to sway this large audience?

Thus it seems that adaptation theorists must define their terms in competition with an intelligent but non-academic film spectator, one who does not write articles exploring the subject, and who likely does not read such articles, and therefore does not participate in perpetuating these more critical definitions. Therefore, a small group of critics problematically takes on the impossible, and arguably misguided task of changing not only how they themselves employ such terms, but also how a larger public body who know little about the field, or its language, do as well. This approach is problematic because it shifts interrogation away from the potential benefits of reading adaptations in a way that I consider to be an interactive participation between both mediums. For example, if we view both film and text as critical commentaries on each other, then we can begin to use the text to illuminate new readings of the film and text. Initially, this interaction between film and text was the focus of this thesis. I was immediately confronted, however, with the fact that focusing on adaptation and returning to the film and text sublimates my unique experiences as both a reader and viewer, and effectively conflates both. To follow this initial path I would have had to shift from a focus on

adaptation to a type of cross-referencing that, although I do not think it is an extremely restrictive model, ultimately subordinates the unique questions that both works are asking their audiences to ponder.

To further prove my position, I turn to Kamilla Elliott's thorough survey of adaptation and the evolution of the word "fidelity" in her chapter, "Literary Film Adaptation and the Film Content/Dilemma." Elliott's survey exemplifies, more clearly, my argument that the field has become primarily a study of language and too isolated within the academy:

the official critical models of literary film adaptation are all formulations on the film's degree of fidelity to the literary text and have been used by critics both to foster fidelity maxims and to protest them. Geoffrey Wagner's three models of adaptation—so influential that they have formed the basis for all subsequent formal models—are valued and ranked according to their degree of *infidelity* to the original. In the 1980's scholars such as Dudley Andrew argued more often for a balanced translation model, in which fidelity to the novel and to the conventions of film are honored equally. In the 1990's into the 2000's fidelity emerges as the arch villain of adaptation studies. Robert Stam advocates resistance to the "elitist prejudices" of fidelity imperatives through Michel Foucault's demystification of the author, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogic exchange, Jacques Derrida's blasting of the original/copy differential, and Roland Barthes' semiotic leveling of literature and film alike as "texts." Some protest fidelity imperative on formal grounds as well. Narratologist Brian McFarlane declares the

fidelity preoccupation a “near-fixation,” “unilluminating,” and “a doomed enterprise.” (220)

Whereas Elliott’s interest in adaptation lies in relation to a question of form and content—that is whether content can be extracted from a form in a way that demonstrates its meaning is not then dependent on specific form—her survey conveniently verifies my view that adaptation studies has run parallel to the evolution of a problematic discursive structure. Additionally, the field gestures towards the ideal of an authoritative critical voice, one with the power to define precisely how “fidelity” or other such terms are to be used.

I turn now to Paul Thomas Anderson’s 2007 film *There Will Be Blood*, loosely based on Upton Sinclair’s 1927 novel *Oil!*, as I believe this film holds a substantial interest in the concept of authority and demonstrates an awareness of its relation to its ambiguous and tenuous role as an adaptation. Firstly, I turn to film’s very specific questioning of adaptation. Following Daniel’s murder of Henry, we may wonder why he has committed such a violent and devastating act. The most obvious answer relates to Henry’s confession to Daniel that he is not his brother, but rather that he “met a man in King city who said he was [... and] took his story, used his diary.” One of the film’s explanations of Daniel’s violence is related to Henry’s adaptation of the diary. Daniel immediately expresses his outrage at the deception involved in such an adaptation and therefore associates the act of taking one’s “story” as repulsive, and disconcerting. Even though Daniel has, in a way, adopted Henry as his brother, by killing Henry, the film suggests two possible comments on adaptation. On the one hand, fidelity persists as a point of measure because if adaptation is exposed to be unfaithful to its source material,

the audience immediately feels a sense, like Daniel, that we have been cheated or deceived. Throughout the film, however, the interaction between Daniel enjoys Henry's company and emotionally benefits from the interaction, thereby allowing the film to suggest that Henry, as an adaptation, has fulfilled a need for Daniel, suggesting that even a "false" adaptation, in this case, holds value.

The film confronts this paradox when Henry confesses to this fallacy, eliciting a potentially forgiving response from the audience. Our feelings are then repositioned, and enshrouded with a sense of fear as Daniel hovers above Henry with a gun, enraged at the realization that he has been deceived. The audience feels a sense of impending injustice as we realize that Daniel views this deception as meriting a violent reprisal. Finally, it seems as if the film's argument against fidelity comes most strongly in Daniel's refusal to allow Henry to persist as a seemingly genuine and influential character because Henry can never truly become Daniel's brother once the deception is revealed. In the end the film suggests that perhaps it is better to have an adapted brother than none at all, as Daniel moves further into his own dark and obsessive world after killing Henry.

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion of both the novel and the film, and because *Oil!* is a relatively obscure text, I would like to provide a short summary of the novel in order to better situate my reader. The novel is narrated from start to finish by Bunny, the son of the independent oil prospector J. Arnold Ross. Ross himself is described as a self-made businessman who continually moves towards the building of an oil empire. However, his son, who he consistently refers to as the "little idealist" (173), is depicted throughout in a struggle between the comfort of his life as paid for by his father's wealth, and his moral leaning towards the union-oriented and socialist politics

expressed by Paul, the brother of Eli Watkins (Eli Sunday in Anderson's film). This tension represents a moral struggle, one that pervades the text and asks those readers who exist in a privileged economic position to question the passive acceptance of a problematic, capitalist wealth. For example, when Paul and Bunny discuss the strike of J. Arnold Ross's workers, Bunny's struggle with this political dichotomy is clearly expressed:

There was a silence, while Bunny tried to face the appalling idea of opposing Dad...it seemed so right in the one case, and seemed so impossible in the other! At last Paul went on. 'I know how it is son. You won't do it. You haven't the nerve for it—you're soft. You've always had everything you wanted—you've had it handed to you on a silver tray, and it's made you a weakling.' (194)

Here the text represents Bunny's struggle as internal, and until both Paul and J. Arnold Ross are absent from his life, Bunny appears to be incapable of actively abandoning this privileged upbringing in favour of socialist politics. It is this struggle that I believe to be the central focus of the novel.

As J. Arnold Ross continues to have success in the oil industry, it becomes increasingly clear that this obsession with wealth is founded on corrupt political practices. For example, Ross eventually has to flee the country after his partner's attempts to bribe the government have been exposed, and Ross has been blamed entirely. He eventually ends up in exile, and married to a woman in Europe who helps him explore his spirituality. In the end, Ross's spouse turns out to be a con artist who takes the major share of his money after he has died. It is only after Ross's death that Bunny is able to

sever himself completely from capitalist intentions as exemplified by his final claim that there is “an evil power which roams the earth, crippling the bodies of men and women, and luring the nations to destruction by visions of unearned wealth, and the opportunity to exploit and enslave labour” (548). These final words end the novel, and we are asked to see capitalism as a selfishly destructive, oppressive political model that inevitably leads to suffering.

As the novel progresses, Bunny’s character evolves from a child who admires his father into a politically-minded teenager and college student. Throughout these years, Bunny continues to question how his father has gained such wealth at the expense of cheap labour. His school years are spent becoming more politically conscious, while his summers are spent reverting back to the right-wing political ideologies of capitalism. Most notably, he has a relationship with Vee Tracy, a movie star whose films are funded by his father’s partner Verne. The political message of these films aims at subverting the left-wing politics represented by Bunny and Paul Watkins. For example, Bunny’s eventual abandonment of this industry and this relationship is the result of attending the release of Vee Tracy’s film about the Russian revolution. Bunny thinks,

there was only one thing wrong with it, and that was a secret band of villains with twisted, degenerate faces, some of them with wild hair and big spectacles, others with ferocious black whiskers and knives in the boots. They met to concoct anarchist manifestoes, intended to seduce the sweet innocent peasants; and to make dynamite bombs to blow up noble-minded grand dukes.
(368)

Here, the text represents a competition, or war, between these differing political views,

and its emphasis is specifically on the wealth that separates the anarchists from the dukes. The result is that Tracy's film, because it was financed by the oil industry, represents the power over media that it gains through wealth, and therefore the power of the political right to more thoroughly convince a large film-going audience that their representation of the left is accurate.

Although Sinclair's text does not claim to be able to resolve this struggle, it ends by suggesting that the progressive forces of the left should win, and that they are the morally responsible party. The film adopts this struggle, represented by Daniel's relentless capitalist exploits. Following H.W.'s discovery of oil in Little Boston where he and Daniel sit overlooking the land, Daniel expresses, in a very businesslike manner, his plans to extract the oil and to set through a pipeline to the sea. When he is finished speaking, the camera cuts to a shot of H.W. whose facial expressions clearly demonstrate that he struggles with what his father has said. H.W. confirms this struggle as he asks "What are we going to pay them?" Daniel responds, "Who?" prompting H.W. to state "the Sunday family." The film makes it clear that, whereas Daniel had not the slightest thought of the land owners, that H.W. is struggling with the knowledge that his father will perhaps ruthlessly take over their land. As we hear him sigh heavily, we understand that questioning his father's motives is difficult, and yet he cannot help but feel a sense of unease. Here we see the world of the text ideologically collide with that of the film. This film's adaptation transcends simple fidelity, mining this moral struggle from the text and thereby continuing to express the novel's central concern without transcribing its words exactly.

Initially, I thought that the film's reference to *Oil!* in its closing credits was

enough of a connection to merit a simple comparison between the two works, and quite literally planned to sit down with the film in one hand and the text in the other in order to begin an exploration of their similarities and differences. My aim was to prove that the two works critically inform each other thereby demonstrating new interpretations of the film that are only possible if one has read the text, and vice versa. I wanted to show that the film and text speak to each other in a critical way, suggesting that the film's deviations from the novel begin to uncover new readings of both works that are only possible if the two are asked to work together. I originally wanted to suggest that the film, as an adaptation, purposely employs *infidelity* in order to shape its political commentary, one that deviates from the text to suggest that a violent, oppressive capitalist power will inevitably prevail. This reading of the film is, of course, utterly dependent on the novel, and I have come to conclude that before I follow such an interpretive path, I have to allow the film itself to more resolutely put the book back into my hands. Therefore, in following the lead of the more recent adaptation theorist Kamilla Elliot, I attempt to

step away from categorical models that divided the verbal from the pictorial, focusing instead on a critical rhetoric and aesthetic practices that place the verbal and pictorial inside each other...clearing a preliminary path through outworn, agenda-driven, and inadequate dogmas. (244)

In other words, I need to see if Anderson is clearly interested, with *There Will Be Blood*, in this type of filmic and literary interaction, in order to avoid creating my own “inadequate dogma.”

Unable to ignore the fact that I have both read the text and watched the film, I remain nonetheless struck by the drastic differences between Anderson's and Sinclair's

visions. Simple details of the text are altered or omitted from the film; the names of the characters, the position of the narrator, and most importantly, the political ideologies and sympathies so fervently expressed in *Oil!* appear, at first glance, to be absent from the film. For example, in Sinclair's text, the character J. Arnold Ross—who we could certainly say is the textual version of the film's Daniel Plainview—is not nearly as violent as Plainview is in his capitalist pursuits. One might even suggest that Ross, who is at times sympathetic to his son's politics, is a reluctant leftist sympathizer. He does not aggressively discourage the socialist political views of his son, and at times he even finances them.

This alteration in protagonists, I believe, reveals the film's deviation from the text in order to reinforce the idea that Daniel Plainview, unlike Ross, is resolutely violent, aggressive, and will not deviate from his economic and authoritative pursuits. Therefore, we are introduced to Daniel as he aggressively hammers, digs, controls, and manipulates the landscape. From the outset of the film he is represented visually as unwaveringly moving towards not only a financial, but a more ominous and competition-driven power. I believe that this comes through strongly even in the film's first few moments, regardless of whether one has read the novel and is able to make this comparison. What are we to do with this adaptation that claims this novel as its source, while consistently moving away from it? Anderson's film seems to problematize the concept of textual authority because he is able to create a world that deviates drastically from its source without ever having to reference it. Unlike the more clear definition of adaptation, for example, which demands the presence of source material, the film paradoxically divorces itself from the text while remaining bound to it (as evident by the credits at the end as well as other examples I will

discuss below). This strange interaction between film and text can perhaps be viewed as the novel's loss of authority over its potential adaptation. Thus I think the best thing to do is to investigate how *There Will Be Blood* persistently takes up the concept of authority as it relates to Daniel's language. The film reveals an obsessive progression towards economic power extending not only to his interaction with the landscape but also with Daniel's oppressive stance towards other characters in the film. This line of inquiry, as I plan to show, will not only yield its own valid and interesting results, but perhaps will bring us closer to understanding the film's strange and fraught connection to Sinclair's *Oil!*.

Fittingly, the idea of authority is related to the idea of text throughout the film. For example, Eli Sunday is a character who clearly reinforces his speaking voice with the culturally and ideologically powerful word of the Bible, and therefore the authority of the Old Testament. The film clearly links Daniel's will to power to his interactions with Eli, ones that are framed by his attempts to usurp Eli's position as a figure of authority in the community. For example, at one hour and twelve minutes into the film, the camera frames a pipe spewing oil into a human-made oil reservoir, one that looks almost like a lake. Its surface reflects the blue and clouded sky in such a way that makes it difficult to discern that it is a pool of oil, not water. One second after this image appears on screen, Eli enters the frame and, while the camera is stationary, begins to walk towards the reservoir. When he gets closer to the oil, the angle of the camera makes it look as though he is walking into the reservoir. The camera pans up cutting the shoreline and Eli's legs out of the frame. My first thought while watching Eli is that it looks as if he here walks not on water, but on oil. Eli then walks over to meet Daniel. Daniel grabs and drags him to what

looks like the shore of the lake of oil, pins him down, and begins to paint him black with oil. Here Daniel's control of the oil fields reframes the religious authority in the film by re-positioning Eli as a Jesus figure being pushed into the ground as though he were a piece of dirt. Thus Daniel renders religious authority just another piece of land that he can govern and control.

Immediately I think we are to feel the disconcerting affect elicited by Daniel's unnecessary violence. It is, moreover, not just that this authority affirms itself through violent oppression--once we understand that Daniel is capable of such violence, its possibility is consistently implied. Thus the threat persists throughout the entire film, even in scenes where no physical act occurs. In adopting an authoritative voice, Daniel participates in a type of conceptual violence as well, where an undemocratic, hierarchical dynamic is established and maintained through his power to speak. Daniel, as I will discuss throughout, privileges his own speech above others, granting himself the right to define his words as absolute. This raises the question of whether both Daniel and Eli naively believe in the power of their words, or whether they must consistently suppress the burden of maintaining such an image of power, one that the film suggests is both mentally and physically exhausting.

But what exactly is authority? The Oxford English Dictionary provides three interpretations of the word; it is the "power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command, or to give an ultimate decision." When I read these definitions I feel as if they reiterate my experience with Daniel Plainview and my attempt to understand why he takes such extreme measures to gain such supremacy and maintain it vigorously. To provide a more thorough understanding of the term, I consider Roland

Barthes exploration of the author/reader relationship in his famous essay, “The Death of the Author.” It is the belief that an author’s written words are perpetually under their control with which, following Barthes, I take issue. Barthes suggests that,

In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a ‘secret,’ an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law. (1469)

The film, I believe, acts out such a refusal through Daniel; although he attempts to create an authoritative author voice, the film, in the end, refuses to grant it to him. Daniel, in turn, refuses the audience the ability to know him absolutely—he keeps his past hidden, granting us little information that might explicitly enlighten our understanding of his violent and oppressive nature. In order to naturalize his authority, Daniel must speak as if he believes his words cannot be questioned. We must turn, then, I believe, to Daniel’s *unspoken* moments in order to more thoroughly grasp where the film leaves space for the interrogation of such corrupt and absolute power.

The film begins by framing Daniel, in isolated silence, aggressively pounding a hammer against the well. Daniel appears bestial here, with his lion’s mane beard and brute physicality. I find this scene to have a disconcerting atmosphere; I am glad he is in this cave, and I am at a safe distance from him. My fear of him is reinforced as I notice that there is little damage caused by each strike of his hammer, but that when the camera looks up I am shown how far into the earth Daniel has dug, and am shocked by his sense of determination, a final suggestion that Daniel does not let anything, or anyone, stand in

his way. Thus the process of climbing up through his hours, days, or even months of work, allows him to come to the earth's surface as a violent, forceful, determined, unwavering, repulsive yet attractive human being. It is this opening that immediately severs my connection to the text; this character is so visually stunning in his demonstration of force that he could not possibly be bound to the spine of book, or even the claims of the critic, but only by his own definition of who he believes himself to be. I move, therefore, into a more in-depth examination of Daniel Plainview in order to explore what motivates this uniquely excessive, enigmatic, and charismatic character.

Chapter One

Opening the Book on *There Will Be Blood*

This chapter will interrogate Daniel Plainview's obsession with authority, evident in his attempts to suppress not only his own emotional reality, but also the people and landscape that surround him. The film encourages its viewer to explore Daniel's obsession beyond the simple answer that it is founded upon, and motivated by, economic accumulation. Instead, I believe Daniel's quest for authority relates to a complex psychological struggle that is depicted in the film by two distinctly different representations of his character. On the one hand, Daniel is motivated by a ruthless pursuit of material wealth, and yet the film suggests that this comes at a great personal cost and portrays another side of Daniel as emotionally torn.

Although the film suggests there is a side of Daniel that could potentially relieve him of this violent and aggressive pursuit, instead we see him consistently reconfigure this other side. Perhaps the most poignant example of this follows his murder of Henry, and we encounter Daniel sitting, reading the diary. The camera cuts to a close-up of the book's pages, and we hear the sound of sobbing. The following shot depicts Daniel crying, and suggests the underlying emotional stress of his authoritative role as an oilman; momentarily, he appears to have lost control. The camera continues to focus on Daniel's face, and we see him slowly regaining control as he composes himself and stops crying. The scene fades out, and Daniel reappears as he startles awake to find William Bandy sitting over him. Daniel continues the process of suppressing this breakdown as he slips back into business mode and says "William Bandy, I'd like to lease your land." Here we see Daniel reposition his authority as he resumes his economic pursuit.

This emotional catharsis allows the film to suggest that this type of obsessive pursuit inevitably leads to self-destruction, and that carrying the belief that one's voice is authoritative is an obsession that no character can endure or maintain. For Daniel, the burden becomes too much to handle and, at numerous points in the film, we see him breakdown and descend into a state of violent chaos. For example, when we see Daniel sending his son away he appears anxious, suggesting that this is a difficult decision for him to make. He later demonstrates his inability to fully grapple with his ambivalence about this choice when he meets with H.M. Tilford. Tilford suggests that Daniel sell his land so he can "spend time with your boy," and Daniel immediately reacts in a threatening way suggesting that he is going to cut Tilford's throat. In this moment, we see this more emotional Daniel present himself during this meeting, a self that conflicts with Daniel's primary role as an independent oilman. Here his inability to detach himself from the child enters into a situation over which Daniel holds authority, and immediately begins to undermine not just Daniel's control of the situation, but his control of himself. Daniel's progression towards an economic dominance runs parallel to his attempts to hold absolute authority over himself; he constantly battles against any inner resistance that threatens this power.

Ultimately, I think Anderson's interests lie in understanding the limits of control. It is perhaps fitting, then, to turn to his position of authority in relation to this film. Taking notice of the film's opening credits as they flash on and off the screen, I find myself feeling anxious and disconcerted. It is not that the credits themselves say, or imply, anything extraordinary, but rather that before we see the film's environment and characters, we somehow feel them. Anderson creates a filmic atmosphere here through

silence and a lack of images, maintaining a firm hold on the emotional tenor of the film before it even starts. Perhaps the film, in employing this sense of dread, links the idea of control (here, the emotional manipulation of an audience) with danger, or peril. I believe that Anderson passes this directorial control over to Daniel Plainview, who is immediately framed as the ultimate figure of mastery even in the first few seconds into the film. As we shift from the credits to Daniel's relentless hammering, the force of these blows now carry with them Anderson's filmic authority.

The first time we see Daniel in the well, he is embattled with the landscape, inevitably taking from it exactly what he wants. The film presents the idea that there is no stopping his ability to manipulate and to command the environment. However, whether Daniel is aware of exactly what he wants from the landscape is perhaps a question that is not so clearly answered. Is Daniel's pounding and blasting more representative of an impulsive drive towards authority? Perhaps one that manifests itself without his thought. Daniel may clearly understand that he, in fact, is mining silver. However the violent force of his work in conjunction with the atmosphere of the film suggests that through the mastery of the land he will begin to ascend to position of powerful and eerie authority. We are left to wonder if Daniel himself is truly complicit in this ascent.

In his isolation from people, however, Daniel's control of the land remains unquestioned. I suggest that the idea of a more literal questioning is replaced with the perpetual resistance of the landscape against Daniel's control. Daniel beats and fights with the land in such a way that it consistently resists his aggression, an act that I think the film depicts in order to frame Daniel's power as accompanied by an underlying weakness, a nagging doubt, or insecurity. Finally, the film presents us an authority that is

always in question, and is never asserted without force, aggression, or a relentless determination. Thus this interaction signifies the beginning of Daniel's authority, while also suggesting that this authority will always exceed him.

At the end of this sequence, however, despite Daniel's air of conquest, we see that he has only managed to coax a small and seemingly insignificant piece of silver from the land, calling any sense of victory he has into immediate question. He has also broken his leg and is literally wounded in this struggle. As Daniel limps through the rest of the film while accumulating greater economic authority, we are constantly reminded of this fall. Therefore, Daniel's control is always in question; although on the surface his force appears extremely powerful, it is always undermined by this symbol of doubt. If we then examine the contract Daniel signs in order to exchange his silver for money, we find that what he has found has been tested and is, in fact, a "Copper Strain," not silver. Here, again, his most triumphant moment is cheapened.

But Daniel is able to exchange this copper for money, thereby shifting his attempt to control of the land to his authority over a small business and group of workers. Here, although Daniel's silver mining could be classified as a failure, in a way it is successful because it opens the door to a position of power. Because his limp remains quite visible, however, Daniel's ascent is always linked to his descent in the well, one that reminds us of the physical damage endured by his search for silver, and one that consistently implies a physical distress that will persist as a by-product of his gesture towards authority. As his quest for power is now focused on his management of people, the film suggests that this physical burden becomes more psychological. Thus the literal stress on his body becomes a figurative representation of his equally exhausting confrontations with characters who

resist him.

Whereas the landscape is able to resist Daniel's force, like the gusher in Little Boston that rejects the oil drill and destroys Daniel's derrick, when Daniel's aggression is applied to his personal relationships, we see this authority extend itself into a more abstract dynamic. The scene I am thinking of specifically is the one in which Paul Sunday enters Daniel's poorly lit office, asking "Are you Daniel Plainview?" By opening this dialogue with a question, the film is able to position Daniel as having ontological power; he is the figure to whom questions are directed. Paul enters the room, and we see Daniel sitting alone at a desk while the mechanics of the oil drill continue to operate behind his head. This not only reminds us of Daniel's rapid progression towards economic prowess, but the film also makes a connection between Daniel's manipulation of the land and the workings of his psychology. As the camera follows Paul into Daniel's office, it frames Daniel as if he is alone with his thoughts. When Paul walks in and sits down, however, we realize that his body has blocked Fletcher Hamilton from view. Moreover, as the camera cuts to a shot of Paul, behind his head we see H.W. begin to move to around, again putting into question the spectator's knowledge of who is in the room. Here the film links the evolution of Daniel's control more conclusively to his accumulation of people, or followers. As well, this act of accumulation is directly linked to a hierarchy that perpetually position these people as Daniel's subordinates. This chain of command is apparent when Paul asks Fletcher what he does, and Fletcher responds that he "works with Mr. Plainview." He refers to Daniel as Mr. Plainview suggesting that he grants Daniel a formal title, one that signifies authority and respect. Following this question, Paul asks "Is this your son?" Daniel responds "Yes," thereby reinforcing his privileged

position in the role of the father.

Daniel relies heavily on subtle implication in order to depict the physical threat that his authority poses. For example, when Paul is about to leave the office, Daniel shakes his hand in way that seems less like a friendly gesture, and more an attempt to reach out and to grab hold of Paul in a controlling manner. Daniel holds onto Paul's hand and states "Listen, if I travel all the way out there and find that you have been lying to me, I'm going to find you and I'm going to take more than just my money back. Is that alright with you?" The implication here is obvious, but I think that it is important to understand that the film reminds us here, with this forceful handshake, of what Daniel is capable of--the brute physical force and strength that we encounter at the beginning of the film. Daniel's restraint here is the product of his awareness that such violence cannot be so obviously enforced in this environment; it seems in this moment that he is in control of his more aggressive inclinations, though they remain in play. In asking Paul if this unspoken implication of violence is "alright," Daniel creates a verbal contract founded in the threat of physical harm.

This implied physical threat answers yet another important question about this authority because it allows us to understand that Daniel is aware of the effect his words have, and that he is very much in tune with the implications of his language. For example, when he makes his speech to the community in Little Boston, his use of language is precise, and specifically motivated. When he states "I dare say some of you might have heard some of the more extravagant rumours of what my plans are, but I just thought you'd like to hear it from me. This is the face, it's no great mystery," he is aware of the rhetorical strategies that his language employs. He presents himself as a voice of reason,

intentionally discrediting how he has been perceived in the community. The use of the adjective “extravagant” here allows him to imply that these rumours are incorrect—excessive—and by representing himself in this moment, his appearance works to authenticate his intentions. Bela Belaz believes that “no statement is as utterly revealing as a facial expression” (37), and with its constant return to Daniel’s face throughout the rest of the film, the camera works against Daniel’s intentions, revealing not the straightforward everyman he presents to the people of Little Boston, but a man constantly on the verge of implosion.

The culmination of this inner tension comes to a head at the end of the film, when Daniel and Eli have their final confrontation. Daniel knocks Eli unconscious, and the camera cuts to a shot positioned from Eli’s perspective on the floor of the bowling alley. Daniel begins to step slowly over to Eli. Because by this point we are never sure whether this volatile character will carry through with a specific threat, we are left anxiously waiting to see if extreme violence will result. Thus, when Daniel walks over to Eli, I find myself almost convinced that Daniel might just lean over Eli and look at him. But because violent implications always stay close to the surface of Daniel’s character, the scene is haunted by an atmosphere of insecurity. This aura is effective in reminding the viewer of Daniel’s authority because this threatening feeling suggests that like Eli, we are at the mercy of Daniel’s choices, held hostage by the knowledge that his willingness to commit violence is central to his insatiable quest for power.

As Daniel sits with his back to the camera, emanating an aura of exhaustion so great one can almost feel the thick and heavy air that blankets him, and utters a quiet “I’m finished,” the film suggests in a Shakespearian tone that the effort required to uphold such

power cannot, ultimately, be maintained. Finally, as Daniel's drive to power ends with him sitting in a bowling alley, we come to see that Daniel's authority is his own needless creation, his own burden to bear. Continually having to construct this intimidating image of oneself, it now appears, is devastating and self-destructive. My hope is that he stands over Eli, comes to this understanding, relinquishes control, and lets Eli live. But, of course, he returns to this violent power, raises the bowling pin, and proceeds to crush Eli's skull and with it, my hope that this film will not end in murder, but instead a type of salvation. This act echoes, quite clearly, the first scene in the film where Daniel's hammer strikes the land with relentless force; the difference here is that in treating a human being like the landscape he so willingly destroys, Daniel is forced to carry an emotional burden that he cannot, in the end, sustain.

The camera cuts to an overhead shot that captures Daniel stumbling around Eli's body, and we see a pool of blood accumulate around Eli's bludgeoned head. We are left with a shot of Daniel slumped, like a rag doll, on the floor of the bowling alley with his back to the camera. *There Will Be Blood* appears almost like an exclamation point at the end of a sentence, extending our feelings about what we have just witnessed into the simple, yet authoritative statement that constitutes the film's title. More specifically, the anguish and almost inexplicable dark and disconcerting intensity garnered during this scene reaches its climax with a blast of violins, which accompany us as we read the title, functioning now as a type of eerily fulfilled prophecy. Anderson taunts the viewer with the hope of some relief when this overbearing character falls to the floor, and yet we are left there with him, unable to escape this feeling of discomfort.

Whereas here the title is devastating in its intensity, when it appears in the

beginning of the film, I think it carries with it a more historically inflected sense of authority. The title is written with gothic lettering, a font that immediately references archaic text and the authority of the written word, or more specifically, the bible—that is, the authority of God. The film’s opening and unsettling atmosphere, then, works in combination with the power invested in these words to establish a focus on what I suggest is an oppressive, and prophetic, authority.

The type used to create the title was developed by typographer Kenneth Howard, who is currently employed by *MacKenzie and Harris Type* which, as their website states, was “established in 1915 [and] is the oldest and largest type foundry for letterpress printers in the United States.” This company maintains archaic printing practices and specializes in the use of poured lead typesetting and monotype composition in conjunction with modern digital technology. This typological reference allows the film to link itself directly to the history of textual publication, and therefore to the idea of the book. When the spectator is presented with the film’s historically infused title, it seems more than a simple connection to history. It alludes to a time when words more clearly expressed authority, a time that saw them resolutely linked to religious power.

According to a very brief article found on M & H’s website, Anderson’s choice to use gothic “black-letter type” was influenced by the 1979 Arion Press edition of *Moby Dick, or The Whale*:

[Daniel] Day-Lewis and director Paul Thomas Anderson recommended M & H to do the titles and credits after the two of them saw the 1979 Arion Press *Moby-Dick* and were taken with the typography. Last month, Howard was busy hand-setting the film’s main titles in Goudy Text and Goudy Modern, the typefaces used in the dedication to Nathaniel Hawthorne in the Melville

novel.

Certainly, one could quite convincingly argue that there are numerous ways in which the narrative of *Moby Dick* and *There Will Be Blood* are similar. Daniel Plainview is consistently linked to the ocean throughout the film, and it stands before him as yet another turbulent and dangerous landscape to dominate, and indeed, eventually his oil pipeline snakes all the way to the Pacific. Captain Ahab (who is after sperm oil, but oil nonetheless), remains one of the most single-minded and obsessive characters in all of literature. Daniel, too, participates in an unrelenting pursuit to master the land, consistently attempting to reposition himself in the role of absolute authority.

Yet perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Ahab's character is best summed up with Melville's term "monomaniac;" his obsession with Moby Dick functions in a way that, like Daniel is obsessive, narcissistic, and isolating. We may come to wonder if the film is questioning such obsessive pursuits and thus reinforcing the destructive nature of such unfounded and inexplicable obsession. At the end of *Moby Dick* we are left struggling to understand Ahab's willingness to lead the *Pequod* and its crew into an unbelievable carnage for the simple reason of slaying a notorious whale, just as the film leaves us puzzled by Daniel's obsession with wealth and inevitable self-destruction. Ultimately, I think film suggests that this obsession depends upon selling such pursuits to an audience: when Ahab nails the doubloon to the mast and Daniel speaks to the community in Little Boston about enabling them to "flourish," it is the promise of financial gain that is their leverage. Daniel and Ahab, in a sense, purchase their power over others. As the film ends, however, and Eli makes it clear to Daniel that he still owes the Church of Third Revelation money, the film leaves its audience wondering if Daniel

has in fact “blown gold all over the place” or if, like Ahab’s doubloon that ends up floating in the sea, he has ignored his promises, revealing his authority to have been bought on the credit of his charismatic speeches.

This link to literature brings us, again, to the question of adaptation. Anderson’s authoritative claim that the film is “Based on *Oil!* by Upton Sinclair,” however, is deceptive, as it would appear that the film is so loosely tied to the novel that one might easily forget that they have any connection at all. I think that with the film’s reference to *Moby Dick*, Anderson disrupts the authority of a “source” material by so definitely convoluting it with other perhaps more pertinent sources. Thus the film exploits the idea of the authority of “the original.” Furthermore, like the concept of fidelity, the idea of a source material establishes an authoritative narrative to follow, a method of construction from which the film appears to deviate, thereby referencing authority, it would seem, only to put it in question. Instead, I believe that Daniel’s relentless drive takes control over the film and its story, rendering him, and not Sinclair’s text, the ultimate source of the film’s narrative thrust.

According to Thomas Leitch in his essay “Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads,” “the field is still haunted by the notion that adaptations ought to be faithful to their ostensible source texts.”. Leitch goes on to quote Deobrah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan from *The Cambridge Companion to Literature Onscreen*, noting that

reviewing a few of the many taxonomies of adaptation that seek to measure how closely the film follows the book, they acutely observe: ‘Hidden in these taxonomies are value judgements and a consequent ranking of types, normally covertly governed by a literary rather than cinematic perspective.’ (2)

The view that the adapted novel is the authoritative, entitled source suggests that although an adaptation may gesture towards a type of equivalence, it is almost always ideologically subordinate to the text. This is a view the critical field has persistently struggled to eliminate and, as I suggest in the introduction, it seems that this struggle is perpetuated by a divide between adaptation theorists and spectators. But perhaps change can be found in the motivations of directors such as Anderson, who ask the audience to think about what it means to adapt a text. Anderson himself states that

quite honestly I never felt or realized that I was officially going to adapt the book. I kind of felt like I had this enormous amount of material, the book being one thing, other bits and pieces of a script I have been working on...and tons and tons of photographs of the oil fields in California. So I felt like I was pulling from all these different sources, my imagination as well.

In this interview with Elvis Mitchell, Anderson provides what seems like a straightforward explanation of his adaptation of Sinclair's novel. In the first sentence he distinguishes *There Will Be Blood* from what we might consider a more official transformation, one that is interested in using the book as the main source, therefore privileging its narrative by allowing it more specifically to guide the narrative of the film. But Anderson, while respecting the text, situates it amongst a group of sources, making it function like one writer amongst a team of writers. Again, if we think of Barthes' "The Death of the Author," here Anderson seems to de-privilege the authority of the source—of the author—by suggesting that "there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (1470). Interestingly, in this case, Anderson is both reader and author. *There Will Be Blood* ensures that *Oil!* is not

oppressive, but that it is part of the multiplicity of the whole, and that this multiplicity is unified in the reader, be it those in the audience or Anderson himself.

Taking this plurality into account, we can think of Anderson distinguishing his use of *Oil!* as uniquely adaptive in conjunction with the way in which he fractures the physical body of the film's protagonist. At four minutes and forty seconds into the film, Daniel climbs down the mineshaft and grabs onto a loose rung in the ladder. The rung detaches and he falls to floor of the mine; from this point on, as mentioned above, he is distinguished from J. Arnold Ross by a limp in his walk, one that perhaps makes his character more faithful to Melville's Ahab. Here, again, the sources are muddled. Does Anderson simply step in and harvest whatever he needs from *Oil!*? Considering the idea of authority at the forefront of this film, I believe that he is consciously stepping away from the text as a guide. It is not that Anderson aims to abuse Daniel, but rather that in the simple act of breaking Daniel's leg, the film suggests that we understand its conscious break from Sinclair's narrative.

After this point, it is Daniel who is in control of the narrative. In the first fifteen minutes of the film, there are two scenes in which we are presented with actual texts—the legal contract and Daniel's sketch pad. In both of these instances, Daniel's hands appear within the camera's frame. While Daniel signs his name to the Silver and Gold contract, or while he draws an oil drill in a notebook, the audience adopts his perspective; we look through the camera eye as though it were Daniel's. This perspective enlists us in Daniel's actions, including the processes of reading, writing, and drawing. It is as if we reach our arms into the screen and touch the paper of the contract and the notebook; we reach our arms inside the film and hold these texts as if to read them, as if we in some way *become*

Daniel Plainview.

The film's alignment of the spectator with Daniel contradicts, however, his position as a lone frontiersman following the American dream. He is, in some important sense, a solitary figure battling the landscape with nothing but a few tools by his side. Yet, because the spectator is positioned to, at times, look through Daniel's eyes, thereby rendering his isolation fictitious, the film begins to question the tradition of such an American pursuit. Once the title has passed, the screen fades to the opening shot of a desolate and unforgiving landscape. The camera then cuts to a shot of an unnamed character (Daniel) at the bottom of a mineshaft. Without a linguistic title, our first encounter with Daniel, I think, can more accurately be classified as an interaction with a shadow, a nameless silhouette capable of surviving the rigors of this territory. The sense here is that whereas many people could hammer the walls of the well, a fact proven as Daniel hands over the physical aspect of his job to the workers under his control, Daniel's survival alone in the face of this landscape distinguishes his authority as one that persists in conditions that others could not. His power is unique because he can endure the pain of a broken leg, he can push himself back to civilization over a mountain range, and this associates him with an epic determination, and an enormous will to power. The film aims to construct Daniel as an epic and heroic character, who demonstrates an innate ability to go above and beyond the ordinary. We cannot, therefore, ever truly become Daniel Plainview, because he does things we could never, and indeed in many cases *hope* never to be capable of doing.

Perhaps the film's slow and shadowed introduction to the physicality of Daniel links him, also, to a type of textual representation as we are introduced to the character in

pieces. We read the shape of his biceps, his beard, and the swing of his hammer as individual units that compile to inform our understanding of the man whom we are watching. More simply, we depend on reading the character in units that work to define a larger image. To better exemplify what I am suggesting here, Allan Spiegel in *Fiction and the Camera Eye: Visual Consciousness in Film and the Modern Novel* examines the process of reading as it was influenced by the advent of cinema in the early twentieth century. One of his central concerns is understanding how modernist literature asks the reader to employ a type of filmic reading. In reference to James Joyce's modernist classic *Ulysses*, he examines Stephen Dedalus's sight, quoting the narrator's claim that "'across the threadbare cuffedge he [Stephen] saw the sea'" (65). The importance here is not Stephen's attention to detail, but rather the fragmentary manner in which both he and the waterfront are described: we see Stephen standing in front of the waterfront when we're really only given his cuffedge. The reader is only presented with small fragments of these images, and yet we construct a larger, often more detailed image. Like Stephen, our sense of the visual is always a patchwork of not only what we are literally presented, but also what we use to fill in the blanks.

Unlike Joyce's scene, however, Anderson's milieu suggests that the landscape surrounding Daniel is part of his character, and its slow introduction shapes our perception, suggesting that Daniel can more accurately be read as he blends and melds with his surroundings. It is as if the film incorporates this blending in order to have us think of Daniel as we would think of the daunting height of a mountain, or the excessive force and pressure of gushing oil. The sheer magnitude, aggressive heat and sunshine, lack of water and dusty air become units by which we can read Daniel's force in this

paradoxically vague, yet powerfully assertive introduction.

While I wait to see Daniel's face, I find myself craving a more clear representation of him, and therefore at this moment I am riddled with a sense of anticipation. His face and body are eventually presented in full view, and the clarification for which I was looking arrives. However, it is unsatisfying because the character and his environment still exists without titles. By placing a pen in Daniel's hand and giving him the power to name himself by signing the contract, Anderson gives him the space to introduce himself to the audience. Here, Daniel takes on the role of author, and answers for himself.

Daniel's attempt to grasp authority most strongly plays out, perhaps, in his paternal control over H.W. As I hope to show, this may be because this familial connection is perpetually ambiguous and left irresolvable. Because we can never establish with certainty whether or not Daniel is H.W.'s biological father, their connection seems far more psychological. As Daniel severs himself from the title of father at the end of the film by disowning his son and repeatedly telling him "you're a bastard from a basket," the camera fixates on the silent struggle evident in his face, evidence that their connection is inseparable, and therefore is not necessarily dependent upon biological connection. Thus I explore how Daniel came to be a "Father," how this role is potentially linked to the concept of adaptation, and finally, how I view it more clearly as the beginning of Daniel's insatiable drive, and obsession with authority.

At the beginning of the film when Daniel and his colleague—the man who is potentially H.W.'s father—stand at the bottom of an oil well, they wear the same oil-soaked garments, their faces obscured by identical bandanas covering their chins. Both

are stained by oil in such a way that makes the two indistinguishable from one another. The two characters fill the pails that have been lowered with oil, and then send them back up the well. The camera then cuts to a perspective that looks down the well, framing both characters from a distance, a shot that more concretely establishes the difficulty of telling them apart. At this moment they are visually twinned, and the film situates Daniel as standing parallel to the character who thus far has been assigned the role of the father.

Although we are at this point unaware of Daniel's violent tendencies, in this moment we get a glimpse of Daniel partaking in what appears to be an equal partnership of labour; both characters work in the well sending up equal amounts of oil. In this moment, because Daniel stands *beside* this character who is assigned the role of the father, he is not yet authoritatively oppressive or abusive. When the beam of wood above detaches and falls down the well killing H.W.'s potential father, the camera cuts to a single shot that combines the two perspectives of both men looking up. When these two perspectives are joined and one man dies, it is Daniel who must, from this point on, assume the role of the father. It appears, therefore, as if Daniel's aggressive drive towards what I consider as an authoritative power over people is born out of his involuntarily adoption of this patriarchal role.

As the beam falls onto the face of this character, the camera immediately frames Daniel hiding his face in his arms, totally obscuring his identity as his oil-soaked body blends in with the wall. Because the characters look so similar, it is unclear at this point which one of them has died. The camera then cuts to a close-up of this character, only to reveal the whites of his eyes emerging from his blackened face, and of course it is Daniel Plainview who emerges. As a result, *There Will Be Blood* kills the character who appears

to be the biological father of H.W., the person I believe to be the filmic incarnation of Sinclair's J. Arnold Ross. In this moment the film destroys its role as offspring of the novel, suggesting that from this point forward, adapted fidelity is not Anderson's main goal. Though the theme of familial connection is initiated by *Oll!*, it is in no way copied from it.

Four shots after this death, Daniel and H.W. sit together on a train. At approximately fourteen minutes and thirty seconds, the film's first speech occurs. The language is heard as a voiceover, blanketing the image of Daniel and H.W. on the train. They sit silently for roughly thirty seconds, at the end of which the scene crossfades to an image, years later, of Daniel speaking to a crowd with a young and boyish H.W. standing slightly behind him on his left side. This moment is one of very few that actually quotes Sinclair's text. Daniel states, "Ladies and gentleman, I have travelled over half our state to be here." What I here suggest is that this speech is the final progression of Daniel's into the role of the father, and therefore he speaks the words of Upton Sinclair's J. Arnold Ross. As a result, the words function more like an act of appropriation than adaptation.

The first shot in this sequence is a close-up of Daniel's face. The camera then cuts to the perspective of the audience, and then back to a shot that frames him at a greater distance. However, this time we see H.W. standing behind him. It is at this point that I suggest that the camera movement speaks to the authority Daniel has gained because he is now positioned as H.W.'s father. At a very slow pace, the camera subtly moves towards Daniel's face. It then begins ever so slightly to veer to the left, to the face of H.W. It goes so far in the direction of H.W., in fact, that he clearly becomes its new point of focus, a point that is reinforced as Daniel's face begins to blur while the camera

moves slightly away from him. The camera moves towards H.W. standing silently and staring out into the crowd. The audience is given ample time to look into the face of H.W., a duration that creates a sense of intrigue, and one that perhaps introduces a longing to hear this child speak. Despite the fact that the camera slowly pans back to Daniel cutting H.W. out of the frame, this is the beginning of H.W.'s predominantly silent threat to Daniel's authority and control.

These opening fifteen minutes of the film, importantly, begin to establish Daniel's authority while at the same time opening a space for its gradual decline. What I hope to have demonstrated here is that Daniel's authority, while within his control, is also an entity that will eventually render him subordinate to its power. This opening also frames Sinclair's text in relation to the concept of the father, suggesting that the film's placement of Daniel in this paternal role is the source of his aggressive authority and quest for power. Thus his relationship to H.W., as I will suggest, begins to frame his every interaction with such power. Yet after Daniel begins to more thoroughly construct himself in this authoritative image, his role as H.W.'s father paradoxically induces a form of impotency as he starts to lose control over his language and, ultimately, his power to dominate others. In the following chapter I continue my attempts to understand this authority and its trajectory, and examine how Daniel attempts to control it resolutely through his use of language.

Chapter Two

Exponential Authority: Losing Control of the Written Word

In this chapter I will continue to look at the film's interest in authority by examining Daniel's relationships with Eli Sunday and Henry Plainview. I view Eli as a character who is as authoritative as Daniel, and Henry as a character willing to reinforce Daniel's authority through his attempts to construct himself in Daniel's image. I question whether Eli understands the threat his religious authority poses to Daniel, ultimately concluding that though he is unaware of this threat, he continues to usurp Daniel's power throughout the film. Eli remains, as I will argue, naive to Daniel's ability to commit malicious and violent acts in order to suppress such competing authority. I continue to demonstrate that Daniel is aware of the subtle and underlying implications of his language, consistently using his ability to manipulate others to his advantage. I conclude that though Daniel's authority manifests in a more explicitly violent manner, both characters are similar, as their authority depends on establishing a sense of unease in those around them, who are unable to anticipate when an outburst will occur. Whereas Daniel erupts into violence, Eli erupts into a shocking and perhaps even disconcerting religious performance, both of which are moving and demand attention. This behaviour generates a sense of anxiety that projects itself into the audience of the film. By evoking such feelings, the film suggests that while Daniel's authority is incredibly forceful and devastating, Eli's is more evangelical, as he manipulates his audience through the promise of salvation. It is the interaction of these two authoritative characters that is of interest to me, and thus in what follows, I examine their confrontations concluding that because Eli is perpetually naive about the violent potential of Daniel's authority, Daniel is given

reason to victimize him.

To begin, I examine more thoroughly the difference between Eli and Daniel's authority, focusing specifically on Eli's role in the Sunday household. I then turn my attention to Daniel and how he ventriloquizes characters, specifically Henry, to possess directorial control over his environment. This act enables Daniel to censor the film's characters, causing their voices to transition from what at first appears to be an echoing of his words, to a fully appropriated expression. The repetition of this process demonstrates how Daniel eventually encourages characters to align their identity with his own. However, when such characters transcend Daniel's construction, the framework of his authority is more clearly illustrated because we can see that his violence is governed by how well or poorly the characters whom he is trying to control respond.

To help frame my discussion, I turn to Jacques Ranciere's examination of language in his text *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*. Ranciere claims that overtly authoritative language is problematic because it does not account for the nuances of orality—the tones, inflection, volume, or emotions behind these spoken words. These factors can betray a speaker's intentions, and thus provide more in-depth and layered information to their listener or reader. Most importantly, however, they continue to remind us of the inability of words to carry meaning in a predictable way. He states that

it is not by describing that words acquire their power: it is by naming, by calling, by commanding, by intriguing, by seducing that they slice into the naturalness of existences, set humans on their path, separate them and unite them into communities. The Word has many other things to imitate besides its meaning or its referent: the power of speech that brings it into existence, the

movement of life, the gestures of an oration, the effect it anticipates, the addressee who's listening or reading it. (3)

Ranciere goes on to argue that the nuances of orality calls the authority of language into question. In other words, the mechanics of language paradoxically struggle to control the meaning that it has signified, which is by definition out of its reach. This is precisely the problem that Daniel and Eli face in asserting their authority. The film makes it abundantly clear that, while both characters can continually present themselves in a way that reinforces their power, they are always at the mercy of their orality and, relatedly, their body language. Thus it seems that their authority and their language are at once incredibly controlled and yet simultaneously uncontrollable. It is this personal struggle to remain in control (and the ultimate failure to do so), I believe, that consistently informs their relentless pursuit of authority.

While Eli craves religious celebrity in Little Boston, Daniel consistently progresses towards a fear-based and oppressive dominance that suggests he resents the public attention that he nonetheless requires. There are many moments in the film that clearly link power to public perception. For example, after Daniel has publicly humiliated Eli by physically accosting him and slathering the young preacher's face with mud and oil, the camera frames Eli sitting in his home across the table from his father, Abel. With his head angled slightly towards the ceiling, Eli stares down his nose into the camera which is positioned as looking from Abel's perspective. Here, Eli's body language suggests he is now the one in control of the situation. As he sits silently at the table, he casts a threatening and authoritative veil over his family. Although no words are uttered, this is perhaps Eli's most oppressive moment in the film. As well, it is the only moment in

which Eli's level of authority most closely resembles Daniel's; and indeed, a violent act does result.

But why after such a display of weakness is Eli still able to enter the Sunday household emitting such an air of confidence? Inside, Eli functions similarly to Daniel because we can feel the threat of violence that he projects while staring ominously at his father. However, because we have just watched Daniel expose Eli as physically weak, this silent force is undermined, despite the fact that Daniel is not present in the room. Eli eventually attacks his father, pinning him down in such a way that mimics the way in which he was attacked. Furthermore, because Eli's violence is less extreme than Daniel's, he remains a milder version of his more abusive counterpart. It would seem, therefore, that the film suggests that a willingness to take violence to an extreme end is the only way for a character to move closer to a more absolute authority. Interestingly, in resorting to violence Eli is able to control the Sunday household; yet when he leaves this space he is never physically violent, and therefore is quite easily abused and subordinated by Daniel.

Here Eli uses the Sunday household to reconstruct his deflated authority; he is able to rebuild himself by pinning his father to the ground in an act of sheer domination. No one in the family will look at him, or question his actions; it is clear that Eli instead of Abel, the patriarch of the household, is in this moment the unquestioned leader of the family. As the mud on his face begins to dry and flake away, a more powerful and controlling Eli is revealed beneath. Again, however, the film links this type of behaviour with unpredictability and surprise. Up until this point, Eli seems to have no violent tendencies, and thus when he jumps across the table and grabs hold of Abel it at once logically follows from his body language, yet at the same time is completely unexpected.

The film confirms, therefore, that this type of control is most effectively wielded when there is a sense that the character's intent is unclear; because Eli creates a sense that he may or may not erupt into violence, the characters around him wait in anticipation of his actions. Thus they are submissive to Eli, bowing down to the fact that the unpredictability of his movements govern their reactions.

Daniel's authority, too, relies upon this sense of unpredictability, and it extends itself into his speech. Daniel's words guide people, such as when he tells his workers what to do. The film makes it clear that it is not just this ability to lead that allows Daniel to speak in such an authoritative manner, but it is also his manipulation of tone. For example, when Daniel has finished buying the land in Little Boston, he makes his first speech to the citizens of its community. His tone is soft, yet confidently assertive and reassuring. Yet almost immediately after his speech the film cuts to a montage of the arrival of Daniel's workers, and the calmness of his voice runs parallel to this idea of epic change as the once empty train-station is now full of people. As a result, we see that Daniel's calm tone masks the large-scale change and authority he is about to wield over the community. Daniel's orality reveals his impulse to hide the eventual effect his business will have as it overtakes their land and he siphons resources from this already poor community. This montage depicts the rapid construction of the first oil derrick, and the film suggests that Daniel has to temper the crowd in the face of his insatiable quest for power. Whereas the physical markers of Daniel's business immediately present themselves, the tone of Daniel's speech softens his impact on Little Boston. Daniel must present an acceptable forecast of the future in order to limit public resistance long enough to build the business. Once Daniel is firmly entrenched in this community, he no longer

has to adopt such a linguistic tactic, and can begin to ignore the community. Incidentally, too, we never see the schools, the bread, or the wealth that Daniel promises to the people. Instead, the film shows his workers living in temporary camps, and Daniel living in a shack, sure signs that he aims to take the oil from the community, leaving them poor and disregarded.

Daniel's skilled verbal manipulation is also clearly exemplified with his first meeting with Henry. While the two characters stand outside of Daniel's shack, Daniel asks, "So...what do you want, Henry?" Henry responds, but the film suggests that Daniel does not listen to him because he interrupts Henry and dominates the conversation. For example, Daniel states, "Just answer me directly. If you say nothing then you say that you would like to stay and work. It's better. I'd just like to hear you say you'd like to be here." Henry's response is one that echoes Daniel's words; Daniel tells him what to say, and Henry repeats: "I'd like to be here." Here, Daniel's words fill the body of another character; his voice is transformed and adapted by Henry's. This act demonstrates Daniel's conscious attempt to control what Henry will say; his words function like a direction with their unapologetic, commanding, and authoritative tone and diction. Henry's willingness to speak the words that Daniel tells him confirms to Daniel that he in fact can mold and control what this character will do and say. The film presents this type of control, I believe, in order to demonstrate Daniel's need to consistently reaffirm his power to himself. It seems that to live with such power, Daniel needs to perpetually reinforce it—not only to us, but to himself.

Why, though, is Daniel so ready to grant Henry a position beside him? The most obvious answer is that Daniel's continual progression towards financial wealth and power

ironically surrounds him with people while at the same time leaving him more and more isolated. For example, following Daniel's first arrival in Little Boston, the train station is barren. Once he has established his business, however, we return to the station, which is now bustling and crowded with people. In juxtaposition to this huge following, Daniel isolates himself from these people by living in a shack that seems distant from them. Despite this impulse to hide away, Daniel is willing to accept Henry, revealing his need for some type of meaningful relationship with another human being. In this relationship, Daniel immediately attempts to hide this impulse by forcing Henry to speak his words, an act that, I believe, demonstrates his aim to transform Henry into a version of himself, thereby reestablishing the isolationist impulse discussed above.

Of course, Daniel's language cannot control Henry absolutely, and although Henry submits to Daniel, he inevitably remains an autonomous being. Perhaps it is more fitting to think of Henry as a silent being blanketed by Daniel's language, and that his silence will always paradoxically *speak*, despite Daniel's linguistic control. Like Roland Barthes's famous discussion of the masked nature of Greta Garbo's face, Henry remains inaccessible which, I believe, attracts Daniel to him. Barthes speaks of a cinema in which

the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced. (56)

Barthes's final claim speaks to the paradox of the face as an absolute yet unreachable entity, one that intrigues our gaze with its enigmatic qualities. Paradoxically, Daniel is only able to alleviate his isolation, therefore, by connecting with a human being who, in

some important sense, will always remain separate from him. Here, we can see the way in which Daniel is emotionally bifurcated; in one sense, he must keep everyone at bay in order to remain in control over them. In another sense, however, as is evident here by his complicated relationship with Henry, he longs for some type of connection with another human being that will transcend that control. In this constant struggle, however, Daniel's Hyde will always win out over Jekyll, and in the end, Henry poses too great an emotional risk, and must die.

In this exchange we get a glimpse of another side of Daniel, one that represents a fear of the isolation that his own authority so firmly establishes. Yet, it seems that he is only willing to place himself closer to another if the connection is framed by his illusionary control over them. In the end, Daniel constructs Henry. The film reinforces this idea by visually aligning the characters before they even meet. In the scene prior to their first interaction, the camera follows Henry as he walks through Little Boston's crowded train station. It then cuts to a shot that follows Daniel walking to his shack. The result is that both characters are framed in separate spaces, while looking proportionately the same in each distinct shot. The film garners a sense of continuity as it cuts from Henry to Daniel, and they appear, in this moment, connected.

This connection continues as we watch Daniel slowly mold Henry into who he wants him to be, and this most strongly emerges in his attempt to control Henry linguistically. His attempt to control other's words, of course, is not confined to Henry, and is most conspicuous in his interactions with Eli, interactions that are founded in the film's persistent and obvious interest in religion. In this case, however, Daniel comes up against a more worthy contender, as Eli has built his life around the ability to manipulate

others verbally. Of course Eli's control is based in Christianity, which obviously relates to the word of God as an ultimate and inhuman authority. Thus when the film presents both Daniel and Eli manipulating and controlling how others speak, it demonstrates their impulse towards a language of Adam. More specifically, this language is grounded in the belief that Adam was granted the power to *name* things, or the ability to connect the signifier to the signified in some essential way.

Throughout the film, however, Daniel continually distances himself from religion, and therefore his link to a type of sacred language seems unclear. However, the continued examination of the intent of his language suggests that part of his obsessive drive is related to a mastery of language that would render his voice into one of godly proportions. Creating such a voice would therefore displace religious authority allowing Daniel's words to be sacred. The film demonstrates Daniel's intent at such usurpation when he visits the Church of the Third Revelation following the death of Joe Gundha. Daniel and Eli talk, and Eli immediately suggests that if Daniel had let him bless the well this tragedy "could have been avoided." However, when Eli speaks these words Daniel talks simultaneously, and suggests that,

these men are working twelve hour shifts and they need their rest if they don't have they start to make stupid mistakes. We need these men well rested to bring in this well. They can't get that if they are up here listening to your gospel and then the well can't produce and blow gold all over the place.

Here Daniel's voice drowns out Eli, taking over the conversation and therefore dominating Eli's religious authority and ideas. But more specifically, the film places Christianity parallel to the terms of Daniel's business. As Daniel finally silences Eli he

repeats in an aggressive tone “and then the well can’t produce and blow gold all over this place.” Daniel implies, forcefully, that this doctrine of economic wealth is more powerful than religion, and that Eli does not have the force to compete with it. However, we cannot ignore Eli’s words, specifically his blessing of the well, which express that their inherent power could prevent such accidents—something Daniel’s words cannot, presumably, do. The ease with which Daniel is able to suppress Eli’s claims to power, however, ultimately suggests that without physical force, Eli’s words are impotent.

I believe the film’s interest in this competitive dynamic suggests that both characters potentially understand that the ability to speak with absolute authority would raise them to a god-like or superhuman status. Whether these characters clearly understand their quest to such a mythical status, however, is a question the film resists resolving. Timothy Huson discusses this type of mythical authority as it relates to the concept of “Truth” in his essay “Truth and Contradiction: Reading Hegel with Lacan.” Huson suggests that Lacan’s understanding of truth depends upon an unconscious understanding of its “essential other” as “the truth excluded by the social order but manifested in everyday life in the form of the dream, the joke, the slip, the mistake and the symptom” (56). Huson suggests this “other” presents itself outside of human control, that it is better understood as an uncontrollable twitch or reaction that simply appears without warning or request. Perhaps Daniel is aware that his language gestures towards a mastery of the “essential other,” yet his immediate aims to construct Henry’s language seem unplanned and instinctual, and therefore suggest that his will to power is potentially more symptomatic of an underlying, ultimately uncontrollable behaviour.

Huson also suggests, however, that one who believes in a concrete “truth” must

also understand the very impossibility of doing so. If this is the case, we can understand Daniel's bifurcation more clearly as the burden that comes along with his understanding the paradox that his control is, in some sense, always escaping his control. Daniel seems to know that his physical force is the very foundation of his power, but that it is an unexpected symptom, or reaction, that seemingly exceeds his control, thus forcing him to act violently in ways that I believe he never intended. The film reaffirms this idea as Daniel cries after he has murdered Henry, which reveals regret, perhaps, and a part of him is frightened by the violence of which he has found himself capable.

Constructing Henry, a different, but related act of violence, is also, of course, not completely within Daniel's control. Jacques Derrida discusses the archetype of power in relation to the idea of construction in his book *Economimesis*. Interrogating Kant's understanding of the poet philosopher, Derrida distinguishes between types of repetition, and suggests that the act of construction is always related to an awareness of an essential other:

That which speaks through the mouth of the poet as through the mouth of nature, that which having been dictated by their voice, is written in their hand, must be veridical and authentic. For example when the voice of the poet celebrates and glorifies the song of the nightingale, in a lonely copse, on a still summer evening by the soft light of the moon, the mouth to mouth or beak to beak of the two songs must be authentic. If a trickster simulated the song of the nightingale, 'by means of a reed or tube in his mouth,' no one would find it tolerable as soon as we realized that it was a cheat. If the contrary were the case, if you should happen to like that sort of thing, it must be that your

feelings are coarse and ignoble. (16)

Here, Derrida begins by suggesting that somehow a poet can most authentically speak the voice of a nightingale. He goes on to mimic a Keatsian voice and literally becomes the trickster he speaks of, thereby immediately undermining his original proposition that poets can, in fact, authentically reach the truth. This type of circularity works to reinforce the idea that no truth can escape its other. By making Henry echo his words, Daniel always at once reaffirms and undermines his own authority; every time Henry speaks he simply reminds us that Daniel's words cannot ever truly become his own. Daniel's implanted words function more like the trickster's "reed," referencing an authentic 'original' voice that is, nonetheless, also always inauthentic.

Eventually, Henry appears to speak independently as his speech progresses beyond Daniel's ventriloquism. Henry states, "I'm a good worker. I've worked cable tool rigs. Built railroads. I won't need any favors." The practice of repetition functions as a seed that, once planted, continues to evolve. In other words, I suggest that even though Henry no longer repeats Daniel, he is speaking autonomously, but in a referential way. Moreover, Henry proceeds to construct himself in the image of a submissive worker, one who works without complaint, and who is in need of no favors. The result is that these words become an extension of Daniel's initial command that Henry "stay and work." Henry thereby portrays himself in the image of a proletarian worker, a constructive act that affirms Daniel's position atop the Marxist superstructure, one that the film suggests is based on a very simple economic scale and is intertwined with, and dependent upon Daniel's control of language. In convincing himself of his own authority, the film suggests that Daniel needs to frame himself within straightforward structures of power.

However, the film suggests that because defining this power depends upon Henry paraphrasing Daniel's implied definition of a worker, Henry essentially takes Daniel's language away from him, simultaneously asserting and deflating Daniel's authority.

Within this Marxist framework, Henry functions as a representation of a proletariat. But of course, Henry's attempt to take on the role of a brother continues to disrupt Daniel's attempt to cast him so simply in the image of a worker. Of course, Daniel maintains a need to engage in a more personal or private relationship in order to satisfy the Jekyll aspect of his character. Though it remains hierarchical, he attempts a friendship with Henry. Here the film is suggesting, perhaps, that Daniel fulfills this need only under circumstances in which he is still able to exercise control. Characters such as Henry come to reflect Daniel's personal battle with such power as they present not only an opportunity to exercise that power, but also at the same time a potential threat to it.

Viewing characters in this way proves problematic for Daniel because Henry inevitably goes too far in his deviation from Daniel's language. After the two characters have finished plotting out the pipeline, they sit on the beach. Daniel is illuminated by the sun, while Henry, who sits in a position that mimics Daniel, is darkened by shade. The film suggests that Henry has become Daniel's shadow, and here, Daniel begins to give Henry very specific instructions as to how to play the part of his brother convincingly. Daniel jokes with Henry about taking some women to the "Peach Tree Dance." Yet, this personal information which demands that Henry demonstrate his knowledge of where Daniel has grown up, is unconvincing. We can see in Daniel's facial expression that he begins to question Henry's credibility, and that Henry's willingness to provide Daniel an uninterested response demonstrates his stepping outside of Daniel's construction; Henry

no longer responds immediately and resolutely, but rather slowly and unconvincingly. The film reinforces Henry's breaking out of Daniel's shadow as Daniel leaves the frame, and Henry literally lifts his head out of the shadows and into the sunshine.

Daniel's instant discontent with Henry's breaking out of his shadow becomes evident as the following shot frames him treading water in the ocean; his stare is fixated on what the film implies is Henry, his mouth is slightly open as if to suggest that Daniel is now Henry's predator. The film progresses to Daniel's leaning over a sleeping Henry with a humorously small gun. Henry wakes up, and Daniel questions him about his history, asking him to prove his knowledge of Daniel's childhood. Henry's failure to do so allows Daniel's obsessive and controlling personality to take over the scene. This aspect of his character then rises to point of extreme authority as Daniel listens to Henry explain himself and confirm, perhaps, the reason why Daniel was attracted to him; Henry states "I'm your friend Daniel." But Daniel's authoritative side is unrelenting and can easily suppress not only Henry's plea, but any effect it has on the side of Daniel that is perhaps looking to escape isolation, looking for a friend. As Daniel holds the gun over Henry, we see a close-up of its small size, suggesting that Daniel is, perhaps, not entirely committed to this murder.

Finally the film has built up to a moment that asks us to question why Daniel murders Henry. Although at this point in their interaction violence seems almost certain, the film infuses the sequence with a sense that there is some sort of resistance to it. Of course, Daniel easily overcomes this resistance. However, it seems as if Daniel's more authoritarian self taunts any inclination he may have had to be Henry's friend because while Henry resists death, Daniel is forced to reach out his hand and to restrain Henry's

convulsing head. I think that there is a part of Daniel that reaches out to Henry, but not in this oppressive and restricting manner. This act is at once overtly powerful because he physically controls the movement of Henry's head as he pushes it down, but because he seems to turn Henry's face away from both himself and the camera, it seems as if he wants to look away from such violent control as if he still, in a way, resists it. Thus he kills Henry because he cannot help himself; his violent side is, ultimately, uncontrollable.

Characters such as Henry function like a mirror, inevitably reflecting a version of Daniel back to himself. In this case we see that Henry reflects Daniel as a bifurcated character so overtly that Daniel kills Henry in an effort to suppress this more compassionate side of himself; a side that, instead of being associated with a devastating landscape, fondly remembers a celebration of fruit at the "Peach Tree Dance." If we think of Plato's mirror in *The Republic* we are reminded that these mirrored images are always reflected in reverse. This idea, therefore, help us to understand that Daniel, as author, constructs Henry as an image, one that appears within his control, but is always infused with a lingering sense of fallacy.

The way in which Daniel repeatedly attempts to control Henry's image is perhaps best exemplified with an examination of the camera's frame. Specifically, we can see how Daniel's language extends itself to the camera during the conversation that he and Henry have while sitting on the porch outside of his shack. During this sequence, the camera switches perspectives between Daniel and Henry; it is set up similarly to the shot-reverse-shot technique. Yet, a slight variation on this technique is presented because the two characters sit side-by-side rather than face-to-face, and only the person talking remains in the frame at any one time. Traditionally, the shot-reverse-shot technique frames the body

of the character whose perspective it is adopting. For example if, when the camera takes Henry's perspective we see his shoulder on the right or left hand side of its frame, this physical presence would signal to the spectators that the camera is positioned in such a way as to adopt his perspective. This suggests that we are, in fact, getting neither Daniel's nor Henry's true perspective, but something that pretends at both. If we examine the linguistic dynamics here, however, it becomes clear that in the absence of a clear visual cue, the audience becomes aware that Daniel's language allows him to take over complete control of the scene.

Because the conversation between these characters is dominated by Daniel who continually, by asking questions or making aggressive claims, provokes and controls their conversation, we learn that there is ultimately only one perspective accounted for in this scene. For example, Daniel asks Henry "Are you an angry man Henry?" Henry responds "About what?" as if he is willing to let Daniel fill in the blank. Here every perspective *is* Daniel's because he maintains control of Henry's language. As well, as mentioned above, because the camera has stepped back in the face of Daniel's authoritative stance, he is able to more easily take control of the entire scene.

Whereas Henry reflects a more compassionate side of Daniel, Eli, as I have suggested, mirrors Daniel's aggression. Although Daniel seems to be fully aware of what is at stake in their interaction, especially the fact that without Eli's support his endeavours risk failure, I come to question whether Eli knows, or is able to read, Daniel's threatening expressions and tones. I am thinking more specifically of the competition between the two. I believe Eli is a more obvious threat to Daniel's authority because he attempts to author Daniel's language, to make him speak, and therefore render him submissive. In

doing so, it at first appears that Eli aims to usurp Daniel's position of power. But upon further examination, this issue becomes more complicated, as it becomes increasingly evident that Eli is in fact unaware that he is positioning himself in opposition to Daniel.

Approximately forty-six minutes into the film, the camera follows Eli Sunday as he walks to Daniel's office, climbs a set of stairs, and then enters through its front door. Eli asks permission to enter, and Daniel grants it. It appears that Daniel has been talking to one of his workers, and that Eli's entrance interrupts them. The music is sombre, ambient, and persistent in the background until Eli sits down. The result is that the conversation is preceded by a somber atmosphere that asks its spectator to view Daniel and Eli's interaction as melancholy in some way. Eli breaks this mood, however, by speaking confidently in a voice that expresses no such sadness, and therefore his words and demeanor conflict with the film's musical prompt to the audience.

Daniel's demeanor is also in conflict with the score because he appears irritated, rather than saddened by Eli's presence. In this moment, it looks as if suppressing such distaste for Eli is physically challenging, and that holding in such anger renders his face and body tense. This tension is most evident as Eli tells Daniel, "I will bless the well. Before you begin you will introduce me." This command reveals Eli's attempt to position his religious authority quite literally in front of Daniel's well; Eli tries to superimpose the steeple of the church over the oil derrick. However, he does so not for oil, or even money, but to advertise himself as the most important figure in the community—that is, to position himself before Daniel's followers, and to imply that above oil (above everything, perhaps), is religion. The most important note to make, however, is that in his attempt to script Daniel's speech, Eli reveals an impulse to take over Daniel's words, a direction that

asks Daniel to clear a linguistic path for Eli, and one that would momentarily render him Eli's subordinate. Taking into account the melancholic music in the background, however, and as I explore below, I wonder whether we are meant to ask ourselves if Eli is a willing or inadvertent participant as he enters into this competition.

Eli's unwavering conviction is striking; both his tone and his focused gaze suggest that he believes his words, and that he is not, in fact, just trying to usurp Daniel's power. For example, when he states "it is a simple blessing, but an important one," his tone suggests that he is completely self-assured; although Daniel may question the need for such a blessing, Eli in no way questions its necessity. This suggests that Eli is only imposing authority over Daniel insofar as it is a religious authority; his power is routed through his devout Christianity. During their interaction in Daniel's office, therefore, because the minor tones of the film's score encourage the spectator to view Eli's direction of Daniel as a regretful act, the film implies that imposing authority over Daniel is, perhaps, an irredeemable, or tragic, mistake. Because Eli seems oblivious to the anger we see in Daniel's face, the film suggests that Eli is unable to sense, or to read, the physical threat associated with Daniel's authority. In this moment, Eli's oversight is the gateway for Daniel to forcefully drag Eli into his competition. Thus it seems that Daniel will not allow any threat, no matter how deliberate or unintentional, against his authority to exist. From this point on, Daniel acts repetitively like the forcefully monotonous oil drill taking every opportunity to reinforce his authority over Eli in order to reaffirm his own.

During this scene Anderson's use of the camera reinforces this power dynamic. Before Eli sits down across from Daniel, the camera is positioned in a way that implies it takes his perspective. However, the camera seems one step ahead of him as its perspective

looks across the table as if to imply that he will sit down, thereby preempting his actual physical presence in the chair. While Eli speaks, the camera cuts to a shot that looks over Daniel's left shoulder, suggesting that we are now looking at things from his perspective. The film establishes a shot-reverse-shot sequence; however, because Eli's body is omitted from the frame, it reinforces the idea that this interaction happens in a space that is controlled by Daniel, and that Daniel's perspective is more obviously pervasive and dominant. The camera then cuts back to Eli's perspective, and as he finally takes a seat, his shoulder enters the frame, thereby re-establishing his point of view. This entrance into the frame suggests Eli's persistence in penetrating Daniel's authority, and inevitably Daniel's inability to shut him out and keep him distant. As this shot-reverse-shot sequence continues, each time it takes a specific perspective, the subject of its gaze draws the camera slowly towards him therefore cutting the listener's body from the frame; because this pattern oscillates between both characters, it seems that both Eli and Daniel have the power to dominate the camera eye.

Because Eli connects his voice to the authority associated with the Christianity, reinforced by the bible he is often carrying, the source of his oral authority is found first and foremost in his belief in the written word. Whereas Eli suggests that he is a skilled reader and exegete, this skill does not appear to translate to reading and understanding the body language and physical cues of the people who surround him. Perhaps his belief blinds him to Daniel's repressed anger, somehow immunizing him from feeling the threat and force it entails. Eli seems conscious of his own body language, however, as he dramatically erupts into manic religious performances that make his physicality—that is, his grand gestures as he raises his hands to the sky, or pushes the devil out of church—the

centre of everyone's attention. It is this performative aspect that lends Eli's character credibility and that Daniel, in order to suppress Eli's authoritative position, must control. Thus when Eli attempts to put his body in front of the well, Daniel clearly understands that in order to maintain authority, he can let no such thing happen.

Of course Daniel could force Eli into competition purely based on the fact that they are equally powerful. Both characters present themselves as experts and can clearly be identified by the title of their employment: oil man, and preacher. Because both are often seen speaking convincingly to large numbers of people, the film suggests that their shared ability to wield language is responsible for a large portion of their authority in the community.

Daniel and Eli continually compete for power, attempting throughout the film to subordinate one another in the quest for more control over those who surround or listen to them. For example, Daniel consistently denies Eli's church money to potentially limit, or eliminate, the growth of his following, while Eli, approximately forty-five minutes into the film, walks with his followers to Daniel's oil derrick and proceeds to pin crosses on Daniel's workers. Here, Eli attempts to reposition Daniel's followers by pushing them to the church. Another example is the paralleled construction of their enterprises. At fifty-nine minutes and sixteen seconds into the film, the camera frames Daniel sitting on the porch of his construction office. In the top right corner of the screen, the building of Eli's church takes place within the camera's frame. Daniel then peers through a telescope (looking, here, much like a director on a film set), and the camera cuts to a shot of Eli standing inside of the half-built church. Here the church steeple and the oil derrick are visually twinned, suggesting this dual authorial competition is by capitalist *and* religious

ideological structures.

However, the idea that both Daniel and Eli are only motivated by a desire to outclass the other's authority seems a far too reductive way to view their complex intentions. Instead, the ambiguity surrounding their reasons for disrupting each other's authority encourages the audience to again focus on the implications of their words, and the meaning expressed in their faces. Following Daniel and Eli's interaction in the construction office, the camera frames Daniel standing in front of the oil derrick holding Eli's sister Mary's hand, with H.W. on his right side. Daniel's movements seem calm and deliberate, and he speaks in a tone that suggests that he is casually improvising. Yet, when he begins to speak the film elicits a feeling of anxiety because its spectator must wait to see if he will introduce Eli in the way that Eli has directed him to; the film creates a tension associated with the audience's anticipation. Because Daniel appears to have accepted Eli's instructions, the spectator in a way has already heard Daniel's speech, and it is not unreasonable to expect that Daniel will echo Eli's words. However, this act would force Daniel to step aside, placing Eli before the crowd and rendering his own authority secondary.

Whereas the film presents Daniel's friendly tone in contradiction to the way in which his speech undermines Eli, Eli simply stands back and stares silently at Daniel. Eli's silence suggests he clearly understands Daniel's implication, but that he is ultimately passive, demonstrating that he is willing do nothing about it. Eli's inaction indicates that his religious framework in no way demands that he dominate Daniel absolutely, while Daniel's speech suggests that, whether he wants to or not, his unspoken violent and capitalist ideology forces him into such acts of demarcation and

subordination.

Because Daniel's speech only insinuates his insulting Eli, however, the film depicts Daniel censoring himself in front of a crowd, and thereby suggests that public opinion influences this intimated subordination. Here the crowd unknowingly silences Daniel's voice thereby questioning his authority. Daniel may demean Eli in this moment, but the crowd gathered to hear him speak does not understand that he is doing so. In light of Daniel's insult, Eli remains a clearly authoritative figure, and begins to demonstrate how his public image will consistently resist Daniel's flagrant attempts to marginalize him. Ironically, Daniel's attempt to assert power over Eli, while successful in the sense that he silences the character, questions the very power he asserts.

During this speech, the anxiety established while we wait for Daniel to echo Eli is reinforced with the camera's focus, at length, on Eli's face. Eli is framed staring at what we are to assume is Daniel's face. My impulse is to say that Eli looks vacant, blank, or even empty, but though these words are clearly elicited by the image, somehow they seem insufficient. Unlike the moment in Daniel's office where it seems clear that Eli does not understand or read the anger so evident in Daniel's face, here I wonder if he begins to sense the beast within Daniel. Thus, when camera fixates on Eli's face, we can begin to sense that the spectator's anxiety aligns with his as we continue to confront the fact that the violent character within Daniel is growing exponentially.

I think this anxiety is driven by the fact that Daniel's violent character is, ultimately, outside of his control. For example, when Daniel spoons H.W. following the accident that has left the child deaf, we glimpse a moment where he is incapable of communicating with the boy. H.W. hums in repeated attempts to hear his own voice,

while Daniel fails to control him by stating “That’s enough now. That’s enough H.W.” Daniel’s voice is directed at the child, but of course it is incapable of reaching him. Here H.W. is linguistically impenetrable, acting like an abyss which the authority of Daniel’s language cannot penetrate. The child comes to represent the “other” that undermines Daniel’s consistently persuasive authority throughout the film; H.W. facilitates our ability to see that Daniel’s words are not fact, but rather a constant attempt to mask his inability to possess complete control.

The way in which Daniel undermines religious authority continues to be revealed through his careful use of language. This idea asserts itself most strongly during Daniel’s baptism. The camera frames him sitting amongst the church congregation, beside William Bandy. Eli asks, “Is there a sinner here looking for salvation?” This suggests, of course, that only he has the power to grant forgiveness. However, I think it is most important to note that Eli still remains dependent on Daniel’s response, and Eli’s ability to control that response as much as possible. Thus Eli’s question functions like a command that directs Daniel to label himself as a “sinner.” Again, the film makes it clear that this power, that is, religious authority, is always facilitated by this type of linguistic manipulation. In Eli’s case, the language of the church acknowledges the inaccessibility of God, and therefore attempts to summon people to those who, like Eli, are able to ascend the hierarchal structure of the church by implying that they are closer to such an unattainable presence. However, because we know that Daniel is not genuinely looking for salvation, but rather the permission to build a pipeline, his presence in the church appears at once to elevate and undermine Eli’s authority.

While Daniel sits beside Bandy in the church, his discomfort is most obvious

when the congregation repeats Eli's statement "rejects the blood." Daniel startles, but notably does not say the words; he stares down at the floor and continues to look incensed by the ritual. But in returning to Eli's question if there is a sinner amongst the audience, the film again suggests that Daniel is volatile and unpredictable because he does not immediately respond. Daniel's strained silence forces Eli to repeat the question, therefore suggesting that he is not without power in this interaction; the film suggests that the audience should not be certain that Daniel will appease Bandy's wishes.

However, this circumstance is telling because Daniel must respond in order to be able to build his pipeline through Bandy's property. Thus the unpredictability upon which his authority hangs, in this case, becomes more predictable, a fact that seems to induce a frustration as demonstrated by the cold and disgruntled look on Daniel's face. Because Daniel eventually follows Eli's direction, thereby suggesting he is willing to submit to the authority of the church, the film provides insight into his authority because it implies that he covets his economic power over that which is gained through violence and language. Thus Daniel demonstrates that he is willing to submit to another authority in order to maintain his economic empire.

Strangely, by forcing Daniel to go to the Church of the Third Revelation and to receive salvation for his sins, William Bandy at once actively respects and questions Eli's authority. Before this scene, Daniel wakes up the morning after he has killed Henry to find Bandy staring over him. Bandy states "God has told me what you should do...you should be washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. It's your only way to salvation, and your only way to what you want. Be baptized. Be forgiven, for the sin that you've done." Daniel responds "What sin are you referring to Mr. Bandy, my sin of drilling?" Bandy

then reaches into his pocket pulling out Daniel's gun. A silence pervades as Daniel acknowledges that he has been caught. They exchange looks that clearly imply Bandy is aware of Henry's murder. Therefore, during Daniel's baptism, an unspoken sin is being cleansed. Eli suggests that Daniel is a backslider, but that his real sin is his abandonment of H.W. The result is that Eli demonstrates that he is unaware of Henry's murder.

However, because Bandy helps Eli to pour holy water over Daniel's head, the film suggests that this unspoken sin concealed by Daniel and Bandy is in fact the one that is cleansed. In this moment, the way in which Eli's religious authority is used deceives him. Bandy thereby aids Daniel in undermining Eli's authority. Most importantly, however, the film demonstrates that this act of deception suggests that Eli, in comparison to Daniel, is easily manipulated. Thus, his unwavering conviction and belief in his words sets him apart from Daniel, because he seems convinced by religious authority, whereas throughout the film Daniel asserts, but shows signs that he struggles with, his role as oppressive authority.

Has Bandy put Daniel in a position where he must ultimately submit to Eli's authority? Visually, the film suggests so because Daniel is asked to the stage, and then shown kneeling before a large cross; Daniel's image projects that of submission not only to the audience of the film, but also to the community of Little Boston. Daniel then has to look up to Eli when he asks "What do you want me to say?" Again, the film suggests that Daniel is at the mercy of Eli's knowledge of religious ritual. However, their interaction becomes more complex than this visual subordination. As their dialogue progresses, we see Daniel regain control over the religious language that subordinates him to a Christian god. Specifically, when Eli asks Daniel to repeat the statement "I have abandoned my

child,” Daniel begins this process. The camera frames Daniel struggling to respond. As he struggles, his face begins to redden and a vein in his forehead protrudes, revealing the blood rushing to his head in extreme anger. Though Eli thinks he is cleansing Daniel for abandoning H.W., we along with Daniel understand that murder is the “sin” that has brought him to the church. However, because Eli is unaware of this murder, he naively inserts Daniel’s abandonment of H.W. in its place. Even though Eli induces further rage in Daniel, thereby cementing his role as Daniel’s competitor, the film suggests that he is not clearly aware of his participation, and that he only does so, sadly, by accident.

As Eli asks Daniel to repeat the phrase “I have abandoned my child,” Daniel disrupts the process of echoing Eli’s words by slowly and ominously staring up at him. His face again appears angry and volatile. Daniel surprises us, however, with his vigorous performance of the religious ritual. For example, the first time he repeats the phrase “I have abandoned my child,” he strains to speak the words as if they burn when they are projected out of his mouth. I think the trouble is that he is being forced to construct an image of himself in language other than his own; here he has to submit to another author. The first time he re-states this phrase it is a direct echo of Eli; however, following this first repetition, Daniel erupts and yells in a seemingly uncontrollable and manic state, “I’ve abandoned my child! I’ve abandoned my child! I’ve abandoned my boy!” Here, we see a shift in the process of repetition that resembles the Hegelian dialectic. The *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* states that this dialectic “entails the confrontation of any thesis with its opposite (antithesis) and the resultant synthesis of the two through a process of ‘overcoming’” (626). In the first sentence in this outburst Daniel repeats Eli exactly. With the second sentence, however, he echoes himself, and with the third he

transforms Eli's instructions and appropriates what is said into his own words, 'overcoming' Eli's opposition. By the third outburst Daniel has successfully re-claimed the statement. However, Daniel also finds the ability to elevate his public persona to the performative realm that makes Eli so successful. Thus, this scene is not only one that allows Daniel to question Eli, but also one that allows him to extract and use the quality that makes Eli's authority so effective.

The film, in turn, suggests that Daniel's act of triumph and reclamation is ironic. As we come to understand that Eli's question is in fact completely solicited by Daniel, it seems that Daniel already has control over Eli when Eli states the phrase. Therefore, Daniel's rage is in fact directed at himself, but because Eli is in a position in which he is inadvertently placed in competition with Daniel, Daniel is able to re-direct this rage away from himself and toward Eli, thereby convincing himself that he can never be subordinated. If we read Eli's participation in this competition as involuntary, then it becomes clear that his intentions are in fact directed by Daniel's, and that finally, the film suggests that Daniel understands that his authority is dependent upon an opposition to it that will never truly threaten his power.

Chapter Three

Adopting Authority: In the Name of the Critic, the Father, and the (Adopted) Son

During their last encounter, H.W. tells Daniel “I would rather keep you as my father than my partner,” illuminating the distinction between his role as Daniel’s son and as an adopted child serving as the foundation for a family-oriented business strategy. The film brings this distinction to a head as Daniel responds, “You’re killing us with what you’re doing. You’re killing my image of you as my son. You’re not my son. It’s the truth.” But because Daniel is obviously drunk and emotionally volatile, his words cannot be trusted. Why might he lie? Because he has consistently proven throughout the film his willingness to commit violence, or to use language, to subordinate his competition by any means necessary. Because H.W. is leaving to start his own company, and because Daniel acknowledges H.W. as a new piece of competition, it is doubtful that a character who has perpetually grown more obsessive and powerful throughout the film would suddenly decide to be honest in his expression. In this moment, honesty simply does not matter. Daniel’s answers are never true because they are always motivated by his obsession with power. In other words, the film provides the sense that he would say anything so long as it serves his power. Truth, therefore, is secondary, and always elusive.

Whether H.W. is or is not an orphan is a fact that the film refuses to resolve absolutely. Throughout the film this ambiguity serves to subtly question Daniel’s authority by persistently undermining his claims to paternity. His words, therefore, are always infused with a sense of irresolvability that works against his attempts at absolute control. Because H.W. has influenced seemingly all of Daniel’s decisions in his rise to power, it is only too fitting that the child is used, in the end, as a key player in Daniel’s

downfall; as H.W. leaves and Daniel's words fail to rid himself of an emotional connection to the child. This is a connection that transcends his attempt to linguistically break their bond by calling H.W. a bastard. Here the film proves that despite his best efforts, Daniel remains vulnerable to human emotion and connectivity, thereby suggesting that in the end his words fail; in some important sense he leaves us powerless and alone.

In this final chapter, I will examine how Daniel's authority extends beyond the camera's frame, thereby hovering its oppression over the film's spectator. Daniel's claims are so influential that they extend beyond the film, and, as I will suggest in the following pages, his control of language is displaced onto the spectator, thereby suggesting the possibility that the film covertly manages their words and interpretations. To provide evidence for this claim, I explore how the limited amount of criticism that surrounds *There Will Be Blood* too selectively accepts Daniel's statements as fact. Specifically, I focus on Daniel's paternal link to H.W. suggesting that although the film's beginning cuts together a sequence that implies H.W. is, in fact, Daniel's adopted son, it confuses this representation because the rest of the film presents Daniel as persistently re-stating his title as H.W.'s biological father. The spectator is then encouraged to forget, or suppress, this implication, and Daniel sufficiently confuses the audience's ability to answer such a question.

However, when reading, and talking to others about the film, it becomes clear that people are not shy in answering this question. While some accept that Daniel is the father, and others accept that he is not, my research suggests that most come to these conclusions because they have not noticed that the film represents both as equally viable possibilities. Without understanding this opposition, therefore, many critics take an

authoritative position because they understand that there is only one answer to the question. The voice of the critic then mirrors the convictions of Eli, or perhaps even the aggression of Daniel, in making their claims. I suggest that the film does so in a way that encourages the spectator to adopt an authority similar to that of Daniel and Eli; while we may understand that the behaviour of these characters is, at times, loathsome, the film frames the question of paternity with such ambiguity that it encourages the spectator to choose, or accept, that the matter is always, or can be, resolved absolutely. This, of course, ironically asserts the very authority *There Will Be Blood* so disparagingly represents. Inherent in this type of unwavering conviction is an authority similar to the power Daniel and Eli wield; the film extends its comment to the spectator, granting them authority, while simultaneously critiquing it. *There Will Be Blood*, is a cautionary tale that suggests the spectator, like Daniel, is in danger of imposing such a tyrannical authority.

The problem with answering this question of genealogy arises from the fact that the film positions the spectator in such a way that demands they verify Daniel's claim that H.W. was "a bastard from a basket" in order to maintain the belief that H.W. is adopted. They also must deny Daniel's claims throughout the film that H.W. is his son. Conversely, if the critic is to accept that H.W. is Daniel's son, they must then deny Daniel's claim that the child is adopted. Critics consistently accept Daniel's words as credible; in doing so however, they undermine their argument: no matter which position they take, they inadvertently establish that Daniel is also a character lacking credibility. By approaching the subject of paternity in this way the critic's argument is always at once confirmed and compromised. Creating this paradox for the spectator, it seems the film demonstrates how easy it can be for one to assert authority that mimics Daniel's—that is,

because the critic makes a choice on this matter, they assert an interpretive control that suggests that they have the right and the power to determine which of Daniel's claims are, in fact, credible.

Of course, it is this authoritative urge that the film speaks against, and therefore the critic who attempts to speak factually about the film is therefore also included in its critique. This trait is most poignantly represented when Daniel, after he has murdered Eli, sits on the floor of his bowling alley. The film's final statement seems to suggest that asserting such power is no different than playing an ultimately futile game. In the end, Daniel's obsessive quest for power leads to violence, isolation, and mental and physical exhaustion, and the film equates the awe-inspiring strength he embodied at the beginning of the film with the clashing and banging of the bowling alley. However, it is only too fitting that the final scene in the bowling alley, while confirming Daniel's statement "there is a competition in me," speaks to the superficial nature of his authority as he needlessly kills Eli. This murder suggests that Daniel's oppressive power will always lead to a senseless conclusion that, for the spectator, ends in a feeling of discomfort and anxiety. Daniel leaves the film with the statement "I'm finished" departing as a character who seems literally broken and whose voice and authority have lost all credibility. Why, then, are critics still choosing to let Daniel guide their decisions?

The way that critics deal with such authority, perhaps, shares an affinity with the way in which Eli Sunday is depicted as surprisingly naive and unaware of his own. For example, Richard Blake in his essay "After Sunset: P.T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood*," passingly accepts that Daniel,

adopts the orphaned son of a worker, who is killed working one of his rigs.

Neither altruism nor guilt motivates him. The boy functions as a useful prop to illustrate Plainview's family values in meetings with those whose land he wants to lease. (19)

Here Blake, without question, accepts that H.W. is Daniel's adopted son, and perfectly exemplifies the idea that he only does so because he is unaware that the alternative answer is, in fact, viable. In accepting the film's unspoken claim that H.W. is adopted, Blake ends up viewing H.W. too resolutely as a "prop" who serves a very simple purpose. Of course, one need only think about Daniel's inability to send H.W. away for anything longer than a very brief stint at a San Francisco private school, in order to understand that he has a deep emotional attachment to the child. If Daniel is as unfeeling as Blake suggests, then prior to the child being whisked away on the train, the film would not have framed Daniel sitting beside H.W. in a clearly agitated state. For Daniel, sending H.W. away is very obviously an incredibly painful task. This physically palpable struggle suggests that Blake's acceptance of the adoption narrative, supported by Daniel's linguistic confirmation that H.W. is a "bastard from a basket," represents a *plain-view* of the relationship, one that severely eliminates the need for a more nuanced reading of their relationship. Through the critic we can extend the film's comment on authority; it is limiting and constrictive and perhaps mirror's Daniel's struggle to suppress his strong emotional response to the child's leaving.

Deanna Boyd McQuillan's review of the film demonstrates that it is equally easy to believe Daniel when he states "this is my son H.W." In her article "There Will Be Blood," McQuillan accepts, in a very factual manner and tone, that H.W. is the true son of Daniel when she states "we see Plainview with his young son, H. W[...]With the young

child at this side, he plays on the vulnerabilities of his 'prey' by espousing support for family in his life and his business" (272). Interestingly, both Blake and McQuillan come to a similar conclusion as they argue that Daniel uses H.W. to help further his business. Strangely, McQuillan gives credit to Daniel's claim that H.W. is his son, but also to his claim that he used H.W. specifically to further establish his oil empire. What is so intriguing here is that in the film, Daniel's claim that he only used the boy to buy land is preceded by his claim that H.W. is adopted. McQuillan has more forcefully demonstrated the conflict of Daniel's credibility because she chooses to believe only sections of dialogue that appear in rapid succession; she believes him one second, and disbelieves him the next. Here, McQuillan mirrors Daniel's authority by suggesting that she has the right and power to state, without argument, which of Daniel's claims are acceptable and which are not. In doing so, she subordinates Daniel's suggestion that his words are elusive and unclear, while she simultaneously depends on the clarity of his language to reinforce her own claims. Thus, the film allows McQuillan to appear to assert such authority and yet litters this interpretive power with contradiction.

It is surprising that critics of *There Will Be Blood*, a film obsessed with the question and illegitimacy of such extreme authority, continually interact with authority in a such way that allows Daniel's words to undermine and control their interpretations. Julian Murphat considers a focus on surrogate fathers common to all of Paul Thomas Anderson's films in his essay "P.T. Anderson's Dilemma: The Limits of Surrogate Paternity," and is the only critic who accounts for the inability to systematically title H.W. as a son or an orphan. Murphat argues that the surrogate father is one that "stand[s] in for the flesh and blood person of the same name and resonates with a legislative symbolic

authority that its namesake has corrupted in the domain of the real” (70). Murphat asserts that the function of the surrogate father is to allow a person to assume the symbolic authority inherent in such a patriarchal position. However, Murphat goes on to argue that *There Will Be Blood* is “perverse” in its “will to have it both ways and [to] collapse the distinction between what is real and what is surrogate” (73). I think Murphat is correct and agree that the film establishes Daniel as both surrogate and biological father, but the idea that this aim is perverse is too limiting in that it insinuates that this type of ambivalence is impossible, and in need of a critic to step in and come to a clear resolution. Instead I believe this conflation is a rhetorical strategy set up to exploit the illegitimacy of such resolutions, and as a result to deny absolute interpretive authority to the critic. In the end, whether we view Daniel as a biological or surrogate father will only ever reassert our inability to concretely answer the question.

Because Daniel seems totally incapacitated by the end of film, we may ask if critics like Murphat, whose language reveals an inclination for absolute certainty, progress towards a similar state. We may ask if this type of authority is fruitful or if, in the end, it is ultimately destructive? For Daniel, it is both; he accumulates the fruits of his labour at the cost of his well being and sanity. Similar to my earlier argument about adaptation studies, which suggested its stagnancy is the result of its aim to authoritatively define words in the hopes of progressing the field forward, I think the film simply asks: must progress always be framed by authority, power, and control? The film ultimately concludes that this power is destructive, and this type of progression needs to be re-evaluated because absolute authority is always unattainable. Daniel is left to continue questioning the legitimacy of his power, as it seems the only absolute response in this film comes not from Daniel, but its prophetic title that authoritatively and prophetically

tells us: *There will, in fact, Be Blood.*

Following this claim, Murphat takes an authoritative position, and chooses to side specifically with the idea that Daniel is a surrogate father to H.W.. Murphat goes on to claim that H.W. is adopted, and does so in this strongly worded moment:

the cut from silence (at least verbal silence, Johnny Greenwood's eerie landscape evocations out of Penderecki being anything but quiet) to “public speaking” is a cut that masks the shift from surrogate to actual filiation. For the narrative burden of the opening sequence, captioned by numerical dates, is not only the inaugural discovery of oil and the first death in the hole, but above all *the fact of adoption*, as Plainview takes the orphaned infant under his wing and sets off into corporate liquidity. (74, emphasis added)

By refusing to leave the question of H.W.’s genealogy unanswered, Murphat links the impulse to solve such ambiguities with the ability to more accurately understand the film. However, Murphat’s willingness to be authoritative is puzzling considering where this type of voice leaves Daniel. Murphat’s claim that the adoption is factual functions similarly to Daniel’s infamous yelling “you’re a bastard from a basket!”; whereas both Daniel’s and Murphat’s statements are at once resoundingly clear in their messages, they ultimately fail to take an ontological hold. The film verifies this reading as H.W. leaves Daniel’s office. When H.W. is no longer within his sight, Daniel continues to yell “you’re a bastard from a basket!” However, Daniel’s words, although heard clearly by the audience, fail to penetrate the ears of the now-grown child, and therefore are ultimately ineffectual; they are lost in the cavernous hallways echoing in the abyss of Daniel’s mansion. Here the film emphasizes that, in the end, Daniel’s ability to assert authority grows less and less effective. The film seems to leave the viewer confused on the matter of paternity, thereby moving away from the possibility of absolute authority in relation to either Daniel’s or the critic’s power to control the outcome of the film.

Whereas Murphat's authority reflects a deliberate choice, I believe that it is also very possible for one to unintentionally be authoritative in this way. The film reflects this idea when Daniel kills Eli; he seems out of control as he crushes Eli's skull with a bowling pin, thereby demonstrating his ultimate dominance over him. Here, the film suggests that such an authoritative position is, at times, beyond one's ability to control it. Moreover, because it seems difficult for the spectator to at first notice the ambiguity of H.W.'s genealogy, the film allows the spectator to bypass the question—admittedly, I thought that H.W. was Daniel's son because I initially failed to notice the opening adoption sequence. As a result, I participated in perpetuating an authoritative position without understanding that I was doing so; I simply reacted to the film, and it made me choose. Whereas Daniel erupts into a seemingly uncontrollable state of violence thereby demonstrating his oppressive authority over the Eli, the film also forced me into a violent language of sorts by forcing me in my early discussion about the film to consistently suppress the possibility of H.W.'s adoption.

Many times in the film we see Daniel struggle to suppress the knowledge that such authority is beyond his control, but never so poignantly as in his final interaction with H.W. Prior to Daniel and H.W.'s last conversation, the camera frames the image of Daniel's mansion with the caption "1927" at the bottom of the screen. It is important to note this caption because it signifies that a substantial amount of time in Daniel's life has passed. Similarly, if we return to the beginning of the film, we will remember a cut from the image of Daniel and the infant H.W. on the train to a time years later as they stand before a crowd. The film's introduction and ending bookend the narrative with the absence of time. The beginning of the film then functions like Daniel's memory, and the audience is granted greater lucidity than Daniel here because it has only been a short time since we have seen H.W.'s potential adoption take place. The construction of the film reinforces this idea because, rather than flashing back to the moment where the infant

H.W. literally sits in a basket, the film cuts to a sequence in which Daniel and an adolescent H.W. playfully joke around with each other. Rather than confirming H.W.'s adoption, therefore, the film confuses the idea by representing what seems like Daniel's memory of a happy and playful interaction, one that opposes Daniel's scathing claims that precede it. Thus the film concludes that no matter how Daniel frames this child, he is incapable of viewing him with absolute separation and discontent.

To verify that the film intends this sequence to be viewed as Daniel's memory, prior to it, the camera focuses at length (approximately twenty seconds) on Daniel's face. The film cuts from a shot of H.W. leaving Daniel's house, while we hear in the background Daniel yelling "a bastard from a basket." The camera then cuts to a shot of Daniel's face in profile as he yells the phrase. Here the audience is given substantial time to examine Daniel as he sits in silence. We see the potential anger represented by his final yell at H.W. transform into a more complicated inner struggle concerned with letting H.W. leave. The atmosphere loses its aggression, and we see Daniel tremble and fidget as we watch and empathize with the anguish he feels in severing himself from H.W. It is Daniel's inability to be absolutely cold and to separate without feeling that again suggests that telling himself H.W. is not his son is an impossible task. Thus the film gives the spectator this sorrow-ridden face so we can empathize with Daniel, and the emotional pain born out of attempts to enforce, or to believe, such violent and authoritative claims.

The film then shows us Daniel's memory of the young H.W.; we are presented his playful interaction with the child. This is the only scene in the entire film in which Daniel expresses any sign of contentment, and it seems to poignantly suggest that the loss of the child closes the door on the side of himself that is not obsessively violent and oppressive. During the sequence Daniel sits amongst his workers, while H.W. and Mary Sunday approach them. The two children have clearly taken Daniel's hat and when H.W. goes to return it to him, at the last minute he jokingly removes it from his reach. Daniel

then roughhouses the child taking back his hat, placing it back upon his head. However, the sequence is not continuous because it does not show Daniel stand up, and instead inserts a barely noticeable cut that omits this action. Here the film reinforces that this sequence is Daniel's memory because it suggest it is a fragmented and incomplete vision. It also reflects Daniel's breaking or severing of the relationship he shares with H.W.--a point that is reinforced as the two children walk away from Daniel while he walks towards the oil drill, thereby resolutely abandoning this playful tone in favour of his obsession. In order to truly sever himself from H.W. Daniel must suppress this memory and others like it, because it questions the importance of his empire power with the suggestion that his relationship with H.W. is perhaps more important, and the only part of himself that is emotionally vulnerable. Only if Daniel is successful in doing so could he state more accurately that H.W. is not his son; however, because the cut in the middle of this sequence is almost unnoticeable, the film suggests that Daniel's authority, while presented in a way that seems absolute, is always an illusion that is fragmented and incomplete. In the end, the film reinforces the idea that even Daniel's authority is incapable of answering such questions.

Rather than picking sides, as we are so oft to do, the film provides another example that demonstrates Daniel's ability to state H.W. is adopted as a choice that transcends both his and the critics' authoritative choices. Following Daniel's baptism in which he is forced to state that he has abandoned H.W., the camera cuts to a tracking shot that follows the path of the newly built pipeline. Daniel then stands up and begins to approach a car that arrives in the distance. We see H.W. exit the vehicle, and Daniel immediately begins to walk towards the child. However, the camera remains bound to the trajectory of the pipeline and, as a result, Daniel and H.W.'s reunion is captured at a distance. Daniel hugs the child, inhales heavily as he smells the boy, and finally states "that does me good." Here, the film accentuates Daniel's inability to rid himself of the

child whether he is adopted or not. Unlike his relationship to Henry, Daniel demonstrates that he is incapable of eliminating H.W. from his life. This inability suggests that the strength of his connection transcends the truth or fallacy of their familial bond. The result is that this paternal connection is always peripheral to the way in which the film investigates the complex bond between these two characters. Here the film transcends the need to answer this question of paternity, and suggests instead that H.W. consistently offers Daniel a potential break from his obsession with power and authority. Yet, because this interaction is filmed at a distance, and because the camera continues to primarily follow the pipeline, the film suggests that this side of Daniel is so small that it stands little chance against the force of Daniel as oil tycoon.

Finally, perhaps this suppression allows the film to make its final and most poignant comment on authority; that a quest for power demands that one, in the end, become godly and inhuman. However, it seems that the only way for Daniel to do so is to impose deathly violence, intimidation, and economic control upon others. Yet Daniel cannot rid himself completely of emotion and feeling, and because of this H.W. functions as a symbol of his impossible direction. Thus, when H.W. grabs Daniel's mustache; when Daniel hugs the child; when he rescues H.W. from the oil well; when he fondly remembers the child taking his hat and the two of them smiling and playing; when he teaches H.W. about "earthquake oil;" when he sits uncomfortably on the train in what looks like moral despair at his choice to send the child away; when he tries to sedate H.W. with alcohol, we see Daniel's unspoken attachment to this child as one that perpetually reminds him that, no matter how hard he tries, his authority is always in question because the child elicits in him a sympathy that bars the ruthlessness of his authoritative and dominating other self. Daniel's attachment to H.W. consistently undermines his quest for godly authority thereby suggesting that, although he constructs his public image as one of absolute control, this paternal relationship finally guarantees his humanness, and that no

such authority exists.

Martin Heidegger discusses the urge to possess such power in his essay “On the Essence of Truth,” and I think it a fitting end to this thesis about the rise and fall of such claims to power. Heidegger writes: “even if some questioning concerning truth is necessary, what we then demand is an answer to the question as to where we stand today” (104). Thus Daniel does not tell us his personal history because it has nothing to do with his present moment. Instead, Daniel consistently sets out to present himself as the “answer.” He stands before the crowd in Little Boston presenting his “face” as “no great mystery,” a depiction that sounds more like a god graciously revealing himself to his followers. But by the end of *There Will Be Blood*, we understand that Daniel, like us, is incapable of upholding such power; his control is a facade, and he is left to accept that he is not the “answer” that we demand.

But perhaps the best way to truly end this thesis is to allow Daniel to speak for himself. The following is one of the most quoted lines in the film: “If you have a milkshake, and I have a milkshake, and I have a straw...and my straw reaches across the room and starts to drink your milkshake. I drink your milkshake!” Daniel is so emphatic and theatrical in his delivery of the speech that he travels at least ten paces with his finger pointed like a straw to emphasize the power of his reach. But the sense provided by the film is that Daniel has finally, might I say, lost his sanity. We are left to sit back and accept that we cannot prevent Daniel from abusing Eli, and we brace ourselves for what we now understand will likely be a violent tantrum. Daniel asks us to sit back, hands us a milkshake and bribes us into passively watching as he once again attempts to prove his superiority over others. Is this the truth that we, and Daniel are looking for? Is the film simply suggesting that such power can be bought with dramatic speeches and figurative language? In the end, Daniel’s speech holds onto a shred of attraction not because of its content, but more so because of his animated presentation. If Daniel presents himself as

the answer, as I have suggested, he nonetheless leaves us longing for truth. We are left only momentarily satisfied with a rapidly melting milkshake, one that does not last as Daniel finally falls to floor of the bowling alley; he is now limp and hunched over, suggesting that his body as well as his voice has been depleted. Daniel can no longer animate his claims, leaving us with a painfully submissive “I’m finished.”

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