

DIRTY BASTARDS  
AN EXAMINATION OF VILLAINS IN FILM

By  
FRANK MATEJ CERNIK, II

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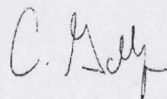
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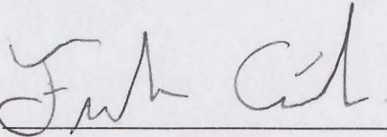
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**Dirty Bastards**

An Examination of Villains in Film

By Frank Matej Cernik, II

*Ah, little lad, you're staring at my fingers. Would you like me to tell you  
the little story of right-hand/left-hand? The story of good and evil?*  
- The Reverend Harry Powell, *The Night of the Hunter*

## **Introduction**

It is often remarked that every light casts a shadow. However, while every light maintains a similar form, the shadows that it creates are infinitely varied. Such it is with heroes and villains: as paragons of virtuous triumph,<sup>1</sup> most heroes are indistinguishable from each other, but villains have shapes of their own. As the far more versatile figures of folklore- and epic-based storytelling, then, it is on the figure of the villain that this essay will focus.

While the villain has a long and storied history, and while each villain is unique in its incarnation, there is one commonality of villainous history: just as shadows are always dark and can throw into relief the light around them, the villain is always supposed to inspire fear and revulsion in the listeners, readers and watchers of the story being told, and can inspire new strength in the hero. The latter of these, of course, is a simple function of heroes and of stories: when presented with an obstacle, protagonists adapt to surmount it.

The former, though, is a decidedly more complex interaction between the story and its audience, and is what attracted this humble narrator to the subject of villains in the first place. Because of their bland “goodness,” audiences are generally invited to identify with the hero of a story. The villain, by contrast, necessitates an engagement with the hero and, by association, which results in the aforementioned fear and repulsion. The question to be derived from that engagement, and the question which drives this examination of villainous nature, is thus: What about villains makes them frightening?

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the hero/villain binary presupposes moral judgment. This will be more fully developed in the introduction to Nietzschean thought, as it relates to the villain.

To answer that overly large question, a few restrictions had to be introduced. This examination will be limited first to Western villains, and secondly to villains in film. Six film villains in particular will be examined,<sup>2</sup> and special example will be made of two of the most successful of these for more in-depth investigation: the Reverend Harry Powell (*The Night of the Hunter*) and Daniel Plainview (*There Will Be Blood*). These villains will be approached primarily with the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, though reference will also be made to the literary studies of Vladimir Propp, Sigmund Freud, and Julia Kristeva.

Coming to the point, however, it will be the objective of this essay to show that villains become frightening when they threaten conventional power systems, and when the system of disciplines deems them frightening, including when they are products of that system.

*“Man is evil”—thus said all the wisest to comfort me. Alas, if only it were still true today! For evil is man’s best strength.*

*Zarathustra, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, §4.13.5*

### **Villains across History**

Of course, it would be folly to simply dismiss the history of the villain in its many forms, as that history informs and, indeed, still participates in modern storytelling and frightmaking.<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Propp<sup>4</sup> suggests that there are eight different spheres of action in the traditional folktale, the first listed of which is the sphere of the villain.<sup>5</sup> Within the actions of this sphere are

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<sup>2</sup> Including Anton Chigurh (*No Country for Old Men*), the Joker (*The Dark Knight*), “The Man with No Eyes” Boss Godfrey (*Cool Hand Luke*), and Max Cady (*Cape Fear*, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Essential though they indeed are, mention of non-filmic villains will be limited to this section.

<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Propp. *Morphology of the Folktale*. 2nd ed. Lawrence Scott, Louis A. Wagner. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968. First published 1928, Leningrad University.

<sup>5</sup> Other spheres of action include those of the *donor/provider*, the *helper*, the *princess*, *her father*, the *dispatcher*, the *hero*, and the *false hero*. Propp notes that these spheres aren’t necessarily constricted to one person each. It is fully possible for multiple spheres to converge into a single character’s actions, or, conversely, for a single sphere’s actions to be distributed across multiple characters. Propp does not explicitly note that these three possibilities can overlap (i.e. have a

“villainy; a fight or other forms of struggle with the hero; pursuit.”<sup>6</sup> Propp expands the decidedly ambiguous and circular first sphere into kidnapping, the ruining of crops, plundering, murder, imprisonment, and other such deeds.<sup>7</sup> Folktale villains, then, are primarily concerned with explicit destruction and violence, with a healthy smattering of restriction, the loss of freedom, and theft.

The organization of this sphere in specific tales, however, very strongly corresponds to class issues: as primary anxieties move further away from the immediate concerns of things like food and other basic necessities, the threat of the villain becomes more and more abstract. Early villains in agricultural communities, then, become anthropomorphized representations of crop failure, disease, and serial murder,<sup>8</sup> while the villains associated with the rise of the middle class are concerned more with things like theft, subjugation and control.<sup>9</sup> The upper classes, the least affected by such worldly concerns as famine, create a class of villains that has a threat that is equally removed from the mundane: upper-class villains commonly threaten peoples’ very

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hero with helper characteristics take on another helper, while opposed by a single villain without any other characteristics), but does give some examples in which they do.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 79

<sup>7</sup> The full list of “villainy” includes: the (forcible) seizure of a magical agent or helper, theft of daylight, maiming, mutilation, evocation of a disappearance (including the forgetting of a bride), demand for delivery or enticement, abduction, expulsion, casting into the sea, the casting of a spell, a transformation, false substitution, an order to kill, detention, the threat of forced matrimony (including between relatives), the threat of cannibalism (including among relatives), tormenting at night (vampirism), the declaration of war, and any of these accompanied by casting into a chasm or other such formation. The fight or struggle between hero and villain breaks down into a fight in an open field, a contest or competition, a game of cards, or weighing. The pursuit of the hero is categorized into flight through the air, demand for the guilty person, pursuit, accompanied by a series of transformations into animals or enticing objects, and an attempt to either devour the hero, destroy the hero, or to gnaw through a tree.\*

\* Ibid, pages 149-50, 152-3

<sup>8</sup> The representations of these different threats include witches, vampires, werewolves and angry gods, to name just a few.

<sup>9</sup> This particular category most commonly takes the form of the evil stepmother and associated family.

selves.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the middle and upper class villains all also contain threats here attributed to the classes beneath them, as even if a given group is relatively distant from a particular threat, it is still present. Likewise, the lower and middle class villains contain threats associated with the respective classes above them.<sup>11</sup> What differentiates between these categories is the emphasis given to different threats.<sup>12</sup> It should also be clear that the categories above constructed are not hard and fast.<sup>13</sup> As with all genre designations, they are merely suggested as a means of simplifying the historical development of the villain and its relation to different socioeconomic concerns.

While Propp is eminently useful in discussing the historical development of the villain, his Formalist emphasis on folklore commonalities declines to give any mention of possible motives that could spur a person to pursue evil deeds, and so, to further the understanding of villainous character, as well as the fear therewith associated, another theorist may now be of assistance.

*“Oh, Benson! I feel the power of evil coursing through my veins, filling every corner of my being with the desire to do wrong! I feel so bad, Benson!”*

*“Good! Good!”*

*“Yes, it is good, for this is the worst kind of badness that I’m feeling!”*

Evil and Benson, *Time Bandits*

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of this vary in their overtness and subtlety. For example, the Biblical character of Satan threatens the self with violence and pain, but, by contrast, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the primary threat posed by Bertilak and Morgan le Fay is one of corruption, shame and self-doubt.

<sup>11</sup> Propp’s list comes closest to including upper-class concerns with “the threat of forced matrimony,” which touches on a forced alteration of identity. The reason Propp’s list contains so few references to threats here categorized as “upper class” is because of the privileged status of written “literature” as something separate from and superior to primarily-oral “folklore.”

<sup>12</sup> E.g., the evil stepmother revokes Hansel and Gretel’s access to the house long before the witch threatens Hansel with cannibalism.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Beowulf, a warrior (only the high-born in Old Nordic societies were allowed to fight), faces three different monsters, but his struggle with faith is largely unemphasized.



### **Employed Theoretical Frameworks**

Enter Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>14</sup> As both a dedicated student of philology and rhetoric and a self-styled “AntiChrist(ian),” his works provide invaluable insight into the morality and motivations of evil.

The first of Nietzsche’s ideas that is of use to an inquiry into the nature of the villain is that of the Will to Power. The Will to Power<sup>15</sup> precedes and is an alternate theory to Sigmund Freud’s Will to Pleasure<sup>16</sup> and Victor Frankl’s Will to Meaning,<sup>17</sup> each of which seeks to explain the base motivators of human behavior.

Nietzsche describes the Will to Power first as a network of spheres of influence, each of which is attempting to consume (and therefore consolidate) all other spheres, such that eventually there is a sort of chain, where the largest and strongest spheres have power over those that are smaller and weaker, and that the latter spheres have power over the spheres yet smaller and yet weaker, so on and so forth. The different spheres would each rather die than give up the

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<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Portable Nietzsche. The Viking Portable Library.* 62, Walter Kaufman. Penguin Books, 1954.<sup>°</sup>

<sup>°</sup> Almost every reference to Nietzsche is drawn from this book. The sections on the Will to Power are mostly drawn from pages its translation and printing of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, §2.12, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §230, and *The Will to Power*, §776.<sup>†</sup> The sections on Master-Slave Morality are primarily derived from its translation and printing of *Beyond Good and Evil*, §212 and *Towards a Genealogy of Morals*, §10, §12-13, and §28, *The Will to Power*, §291, §776,<sup>†</sup> and §882. The sections on the Übermensch from are derived from its translation and printing of *The Dawn*, §97, §101, §164, §206, §297, §556, and §573, *The Gay Science*, §341, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, §0.3-0.5 and §4.13.

<sup>†</sup> As Kaufman does not present a full translation of this section, it was necessary, for understanding, to complete the passage. A fuller passage was found here: Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Will to Power.* I and II, Oscar Levy. Digireads.com, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Adler later adapted the Will to Power in his psychological studies. His interpretation, however, was markedly more optimistic than Nietzsche’s presentation of it.

<sup>16</sup> This states that people are motivated by a set of base pleasures, such as sex, eating, and violence, most often held in the Id and sometimes expressed by the Love and Death Instincts.

<sup>17</sup> This is more widely known as ‘existential torment,’ and describes efforts to pursue ultimate reasons for existence and identity, et c.

pleasure of their power over the other spheres, whence would derive the concepts of heroic sacrifice, et cetera.

Later in his life, though, he expanded the idea of the Will to Power into three primary categories: the will to escape the power of others (freedom), the will to overpower (ambition) or, alternatively, to identify with the powerful (justice), and the will to exercise power in the direction of aims that seem, at first glance, self-effacing (love, charity, et c). These three categories act in concert with each other through a constant, many-tiered struggle for power, in which each element vies to increase its sphere of influence, while also reducing or otherwise controlling the effects of other peoples' spheres of influence. Again, self-sacrifice is here an expression of power, though here it is a means of both the defense and acquisition of power.

It is difficult, however, to talk about power without also talking about morality, which regulates, approves, and, in some cases, disapproves of given power types and exercises. (This is to say that morality is a system of power whose object is power, itself.) Nietzsche groups most actions into two categories of morality: 'master' morality and 'slave' morality.

Slave morality, he says, is a purely cerebral invention and condemnation of the people and values that, by whatever means, originally bestowed slave status on the now-slave. It is to this domination that slaves say 'no,' and extend that negation into creation. If it was aggression that denied them their freedom, it will be kindness that the slave values. If egocentrism, then sympathy. If it was disparity of some sort, the slave will demand equality. Slave morality does not exist by itself; it is always a reaction to master morality.

Master morality, by contrast, comes from a void and asserts an affirmation. Masters see the world and focus on the things that give them pleasure. Rather than 'no,' they say first 'yes' to things like glory and beauty and, as evidenced by the existence of slave morality, conquest. To

the moral master, things that are ‘bad’ are exclusively an afterthought, unworthy of attention in comparison to their striving for that which they experience to be ‘good.’

Reacting to this, the moral slave first defines what they see as bad. However, for the slave, ‘bad’ is not a strong enough word. ‘Bad’ does not begin to describe how bad the master is. A new word is required. A word like ‘evil.’ ‘Bad’ only necessarily connotes that the master who experienced it did not find it to his or her taste, whereas ‘evil’ implies that someone or something is bad to everyone and could not be otherwise, even, most likely, to other ‘evil’ people and things. Finally, just as the moral master proceeds with the experience of his or herself as ‘good’ and has the afterthought of ‘bad,’ the moral slave begins with their experience of the master, of ‘evil,’ and defines the opposite of ‘evil,’ themselves, as ‘good.’

To determine good and evil, then, the slave first decides on the intentions of whatever is being assessed. That is, they evaluate a given action first for its potential to harm or to benefit his or herself, or a similar group (and thus its likeliness to harm or benefit his or herself), to determine its morality. Masters, though, act first and then evaluate their action, based on how much it benefited or harmed his or herself, to see whether it is good or bad. Slaves, then, are concerned with intentions and groups (so long as those groups are similar, in some respect, to themselves), while masters are concerned with outcomes and individuals.

Both of these, as systems, are flawed. ‘Intentions,’ as with the rest of the slave’s internalized construction of superiority, are totally imaginary, and thus have comparatively little effect on deeds, except through subtleties. Further, the way that the ‘group’ is defined is constrictive of the mass freedom that slave morality typically espouses,<sup>18</sup> the types of benefits

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<sup>18</sup> For an extreme example of this, consider the Borg in Star Trek. Keep in mind, however, that the Borg seek to be a universally inclusive group, while most other groups seek to be either selectively or universally exclusive (e.g. the ‘heroes’ of a film will often force exclusion upon

approved and available, and the ways the group could experience them.<sup>19</sup> Just so, the ‘outcomes’ emphasized by masters are impossible to predict with any reliability, as are the masters’ experiences of those outcomes. In addition, the individualized nature of experience, and thus of goodness and badness, makes it impossible to formulate or implement any sort of moral system, other than simply to advance one’s own power, which is hardly grounds for any system at all. This contrasts nicely with the general slave’s dual guideline to, first, eschew sources of power that inhibit oneself, and, second, to advance one’s neighbor’s (and all slaves are each other’s neighbors) power before one’s own.

Slave and master morality find their most extreme extensions in the *Letzte Mensch*<sup>20</sup> and the *Übermensch*,<sup>21</sup> respectively. The Last Man takes the above slave’s dual guideline and finds it too egocentric; the Last Man’s injunctive and, indeed, very identity is to advance the power and interests of the group with regard for neither his or herself nor any variation within the group.

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the ‘villain,’ or all whom they define as outside their group, as in the case of survivors/zombies), only permitting inclusion upon assimilation of some sort or another (e.g. Shylock must convert, the out-group must learn the ways of the in-group). The primary difference between villainous and heroic assimilation, though, concerns the issue of ‘diversity.’ Villainous assimilation demands total conformity, while heroic assimilation creates sub-groups, which maintain a set of stereotyped and generalized distinctions, and thereby allow the original group to mentally detach itself from the newcomers.

<sup>19</sup> In this way, a slave morality system normalizes its members. It seeks not to expand or enhance its participants’ spheres of power, but rather to reduce them; given that power is basically a zero-sum game,<sup>‡</sup> though, the power has to go somewhere, and the slave morality system relegates the excess power to itself. This is to say that a slave morality system, while originally effected to afford slaves the freedom of a superiority to their masters, actively enslaves those who apply it. This will be further explored in the introduction to Foucauldian thought, as it affects villains.

<sup>‡</sup> A zero-sum game is a system in which there is a bounded amount of resources. In some zero-sum games, such as the circulation of real-world currency or, as here, power, new elements and resources can be added or removed, but there is never a potential for infinite generation (as opposed to the circulation of currency in electronic games like World of Warcraft, which require ‘sinks’ that remove currency from the system, and thereby help to retain the currency’s value).

<sup>20</sup> Commonly translated as the Last Man, though a more accurate translation would be Last Human or Last Person. This essay will, in the spirit of solidarity, use ‘Last Man.’

<sup>21</sup> Commonly untranslated, as there is no English equivalent for the various connotations and implications of the preposition ‘über.’ This essay will also use ‘Übermensch.’

The Übermensch, by contrast, sees the master's guideline and finds in it too much potential corruption and codependency. The Übermensch's injunctive and, indeed, very identity is to follow one's own power to exclusion, seeking no objectives beyond his or her own ability and accepting no assistance from outside sources, lest the Übermensch find him or herself at all under the influence of another.

(Interestingly, the Last Man and the Übermensch, in addition to being opposing extremes of the master-slave moral dynamic, also roughly correspond to the two major kinds of fear. The Last Man, whose moral system compels him or her to emulate, in his or her total absence of a will of any kind and his or her indistinguishability from other Last Men, both the Automaton and the Doppelgänger, is the Uncanny made flesh.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the Übermensch, whose moral system relates everything first to the self, and whom Nietzsche defines to respond to the outside world with disdain and with laughter, is suffused with the Abject.<sup>23</sup>)

The flow between these ideas, from the Will to Power to Master-Slave Morality to the Übermensch and the Last Man, is one of establishment and progression. The Will to Power establishes three primary motives for all human action, which motives and actions are both then evaluated and alternately approved or disapproved by two dominant morality systems, specifically the Master and Slave Morality Systems. These two morality systems each have the potential to produce an extreme iteration of themselves, these being the Übermensch and the Last Man, respectively. The next question, then, is how all of this applies to villains.

The villain, as a rule, is primarily concerned with the second listed category of power, which, depending on the character, is expressed as the will to overpower or to identify with those

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<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud. *The Uncanny*. Penguin Classics. Penguin, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. *European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism*. Columbia University Press, 1982.

in power, the latter often either by enforcing what the villain feels to be justice or by pursuing the wills of those same identity figures (It should be clear that the difference between these last two is nebulous, at best.). While it is fully possible that the villain purport him or herself in a way that professes allegiance to the other two categories of the Will to Power, those of the will to freedom and the will to love, charity, et c, the villain's demeanor will always make clear that his or her ultimate motivations are aligned with either the direct acquisition of power or the identification with those whom the villain perceives to be in power. Further, the effects of the villain's actions are shown to be either deliberately or unknowingly harmful to other characters' bodies, autonomy, self, or communally-beneficial power exercises.

With the basic picture of villainous motivation essentially complete, and the audience, who, for the purposes of this essay, can be assumed to identify with the (dominant) slave morality, roundly denouncing the onscreen antagonist as both a villain and generally evil, the driving question remains. What about villains makes them frightening? To answer this question, a final theorist must be invoked.

The essay now turns to Michel Foucault.<sup>24</sup> Nietzschean, philosopher, social theorist, and historian of ideas, his works will make the end connections between the morality and fearfulness of villains, between the driving question and the ultimate conclusion.

Foucault's thought gives focus to two archetypal figures and the institutions associated with them: the madman and the criminal, as well as the asylum and the prison, respectively. Each institution is given a history, focusing on its interactions with its assigned class of person, and this history is then examined to expose the functioning ideologies that give each their drive. As

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault. *The Foucault Reader*. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.<sup>Δ</sup>

<sup>Δ</sup> All references to Foucault are drawn from this text, specifically the sections included from *Madness and Civilization* (pp. 123-166) and *Discipline and Punish* (listed in the compilation text as *Discipline and Sciences of the Individual*, pp. 169-237).

may be expected, the ideologies for each are remarkably similar, as, in some ways, are the histories. As the findings for the asylums lay the basic groundwork for those of the prisons, though, the asylums will be given the first treatment here.

Asylums were created and maintained as a means to remove the insane and other social undesirables<sup>25</sup> from the public eye. However, because of the strain on government coffers to keep and feed a group of totally idle people and the economic consequences of putting them to work, eventually asylums were repurposed to try and cure insanity, for the first time treating it as a mental illness. While the doctors hired to treat the inmates had no experience with or knowledge of insanity, their assessments and directives went totally unquestioned, unexamined, and, having the power of law within the asylum, were unfailingly obeyed.

Foucault later gives special consideration to the case notes made by prison wardens as evidence of a shift in the way vision was, as it were, perceived. In the preceding centuries, power was associated with displays of wealth and might. Kings would sit on horses and parade through cities, and they would be seen. As time had progressed, though, being seen changed from an expression of power to an opportunity for examination. Seeing became the new power, and kings increasingly stayed away from the public eye. The seer could judge, after all, and the seen increasingly became an object to be judged.

The change was no less significant in the asylums. The doctors, effectively given superior warden status, were able to observe their inmates and make notes about their respective oddities. Based on their notes, the doctors exercised scrupulous management over the everyday details experienced by the madmen under their control.

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<sup>25</sup> Though a culture may advertise its tolerance and leniency for all people, those collected for the asylums have generally committed one of what Foucault labels the three unforgivable sins of the bourgeoisie: theft, sacrilege (or general disobedience of religious dogma), and idleness. Madness, in particular, came to be seen as an unchecked obsession with the self.

Eventually the doctors turned that same sight and awareness against the madmen, by forcing the patients to confront themselves and their own insanity through a series of internalized ‘mirrors.’ When some patients acted particularly self-aggrandizing or especially contemptuous of others, they were asked the reason for their imprisonment. When others became violent or otherwise physically uncontrollable, they were given cold showers or compelled to wear straitjackets. After enough time and punishment, both groups were coerced to ask themselves the same questions: Why is this happening to me? Why am I here? After exhausting all other possibilities, every single patient would be forced to admit to him or herself that he or she was insane, and with that judgment would come a riptide of second-guessings and self-castigations that would tear them from the shallows of madness and bring them, at least in appearance, to the tortured seas of normalcy. Thus cursed with self-awareness, his or her behavior would quickly become docile, and the doctor-wardens would be perfectly happy to call them ‘cured’ and confidently send them away in the knowledge that they would now become productive members of society.

Following in the footsteps of his work on asylums, Foucault later turned his attention to the ideologies present in the penal system. As with the asylum system, the penal institutions were always intended to create an orderly citizenry. However, where the asylum system was meant to simply remove disorderly elements from the public, the penal system was always intended to effect control of the populace, directly or indirectly. Theories on the way for this ought to be implemented advanced through four primary stages, each concerned with the politics of the body: Torture, Punishment, Discipline, and Prison.

Torture is about what it sounds like. It was a direct act by those in power (usually the King) to take revenge on those who had wronged the law, which they considered extensions of



their own bodies. The public display of torture was intended to depict to the public the dangers of criminal trespass, but, through the magic of human sympathy, served better to highlight the cruelty of power and the injustice of rule. A new system was needed.

Punishment, then. More publicly gracious than direct bodily harm, it still incorporated physical pain through obligatory hard labor, often exhibited to the populace through chain gangs. The chain gangs would allow the public to dissociate themselves from the workers, while also projecting themselves into the place of the criminal and meditating on how unpleasant the punishment would be. However, while its new creation of the man-as-machine was essential to the penal paradigms that followed it, this phase of the penal system was quick in passing.

Discipline was a radical shift in penal measures. Departing from the traditional use of excessively forceful reactions to transgressions (levying-violence), as was the case with penal measures like torture and punishment, discipline sought subtly proactive means of populace control (mildness-protection-profit). Its first, and most important, development was the conceptualization of individuals as both objects and instruments of power. It does this by trying to define itself as a foothold for power along three axes: first, to create that foothold at the lowest possible cost (economically through low expenditure, politically through stealth, and also by facing a low amount of resistance), second, to bring the effects of social power to the greatest intensity and to extend those effects as far as possible, without failure or interruption, and, third, to link the economic growth of power (which is to say, the resources at its disposal) with the output of the apparatuses within which it is exercised (Said apparatuses include educational, military, industrial and medical institutions, among others.). The net effect of these three axes, when working in concert, is to increase both the docility and utility of all the elements (institutions and the people that comprise them) of the system.

How it accomplishes these things is through the phenomenon of the Panopticon.<sup>26</sup> The Panopticon, originally a design for a prison where all of the prisoners are isolated from each other and yet constantly visible from a central point obscured so that the prisoners are unable to see whether anyone is watching them or who that person might be, gradually became a societal institution, whereby all of society's elements are constantly under both surveillance and observation<sup>27</sup> through the incorporation and amalgamation of those elements into the Panopticon's eye, as well as extensive documentation of those elements' varied activities. The knowledge of the Panopticon, that one is constantly watched and seen, is actively promoted in order to instill a sense of paranoia, through which the fear of punishment is displaced to the now ever-present fear of apprehension. This fear of apprehension renders a person or institution much more docile than otherwise he/she/it would be, and heightens responsiveness to authority, for fear of documented disobedience.

This Panoptic discipline has another function, in that it normalizes the elements that it encompasses. The act of observation, coupled with the fear of transgression, imposes a sort of homogeneity on its subjects while simultaneously recreating them as individuals – after enough observation, the Panopticon defines a Norm,<sup>28</sup> through relation to which it is possible to measure differences in ability and interest.<sup>29</sup> Also, because every individual and institution knows that he/she/it is being evaluated with reference to the Norm, the previous marks that indicated status, affiliation and privilege were replaced by marks that touted the individual's obedience to the

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<sup>26</sup> Ancient Greek for “that which sees all”

<sup>27</sup> The difference between these two is that surveillance is an immediate seeing that alerts members of authority to disruptive activity, whereas observation is a long-term watching that creates a (clinical) knowledge of the object and its history.

<sup>28</sup> The Norm can take the form of either a minimum threshold to exceed, an average at which to be complacent, or an optimum for which to strive.

<sup>29</sup> The Norm also makes these differences useful to the system, by fitting one individual to another for maximum total production.

Norm, while still playing a part in classification. These individualization and homogenization techniques each provide additional footholds for discipline, and thus for power. As soon as these footholds are created, the power systems use them to reduce the bodies as a political force and maximize it as a useful, and therefore economic, force.<sup>30</sup>

These principles also describe techniques that make it possible to adjust the multiplicity of ‘men-of-production’ as well as that of the apparatuses they serve. While production in the industrial power apparatus is rather self-evident, in that it produces material products, the multiplicity of production is also present in medical apparatuses, which produce health, and in educational and military apparatuses, which produce knowledge and skill, in addition to destructive force in the military apparatus.

In addition, the disciplines maintain and aggravate power imbalances. By providing footholds for power in virtually every individual and institution within the system, those in power have more opportunities to shift yet more power to themselves, which power produces three things that further help the powered maintain and augment their controlling positions: the rituals of truth, the domains of objects, and the construction of reality. This imbalance of power is nowhere more evident than in the next and present stage of the penal system:

Prisons. In prisons, all of the apparatuses of power are combined to exercise maximum power over inmates, both in their time imprisoned and in the time after their incarceration. While it is true that examination and its associated documentation in society is omnipresent, it is total in the prison. Everything known by every power apparatus is collected to give a complete picture<sup>31</sup> of the criminal as a case study, as an absolute object of knowledge and hold for power, and it is

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<sup>30</sup> The installation of disciplines, then, while also an individualizing force, is inherently aligned with a slave morality system, as the efforts of each individual are forced into alignment with the interests of the group at large, which is to say with the system itself, rather than its members.

<sup>31</sup> Compare this with the incomplete but more focused case studies in the other institutions.

in the prison that said knowledge and power is brought most explicitly to bear. While the most overt of prison's functions, to restrain and to render docile, are qualitatively equivalent to those found in the larger social body, it has another function. This last function is the most effective of its kind in ensuring total systemic control of the prisoner-individual, and that is its ability, amalgamated from all the other individual apparatuses and in conjunction with the judicial system, to effect a separation and reformation of character from merely-criminal into something system-approved: the delinquent.<sup>32</sup>

The delinquent, to be clear, is not equivalent to the criminal. The criminal is the responsible offender and, by criteria of a free and conscious will, the author of the transgression against society and society's laws. The delinquent, however, is the object of disciplines and linked to the crime by a series of complex threads,<sup>33</sup> and finally bound to the crime by three 'biological' threads: psychology, social position, and upbringing. The background constructed by these three things establishes the delinquent's criminality<sup>34</sup> as existing prior to the crime, and even in the crime's total absence, and thus demands a yet stricter punishment and yet more control over the criminalinquent's<sup>35</sup> eventual fate.<sup>36</sup> This process of exaggerating the evilness of a deed and its guilty party serves to ensure that he or she will have the greatest exposure to the prison environment, along with its resident population of other career delinquents, opportunity

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<sup>32</sup> The idea of delinquency illustrates the disparity between the penal, which is a binary yes/no defined by the law, and the prison, which is not a legal institution but a disciplinary one. Accordingly, law defines the criminal, whereas the norm defines the delinquent.

<sup>33</sup> Such threads include instincts, drives, tendencies, and character.

<sup>34</sup> The identity of 'criminal,' as with 'prisoner,' is also a normalizing judgment.

<sup>35</sup> Though clearly not identical, the criminal is analogous to the madman – both are individuals undesirable to society, who enter a restrictive institution with the stated goal of healing but the actual function of expanding systemic control over individuals, in both cases through the application of the Panopticon, which is internalized in madmen and focused at delinquents.

<sup>36</sup> While the penal system has always been inextricably founded on the psychomoralistic, it is with the ubiquitous demands for the harshest possible punishment that penalty betrays its founding principle of revenge rooted in an identification with and seeming-ownership of a state.

for secret inter-criminal networking and warden-sponsored corruption, direct experiences of abuse by the powerful, and overriding sense of injustice. Under a long enough period, the influence of the prison environment cannot fail to produce delinquents, and the delinquent's experience of constant surveillance and his or her inability to escape the place of conviction to lead an 'honest' life guarantees recidivism, thereby cementing the disciplinary system's means and legal ability to maintain scrutinous surveillance, observation and control of yet another individual, and, by association, other potentially-scurrilous individuals, ultimately creating in delinquency another form of discipline. The disciplinary system then makes an example of the delinquent figure to offer negative encouragement for people to obey the dominant system of discipline and, through discipline, morality.

How Foucauldian thought refers to a film villain's frightening qualities is somewhat straightforward. Onscreen characters are given new status as delinquents, thereby giving the audience empowered warden status within the film's system of discipline. The audience has the opportunity to review all the relevant documentation concerning each individual immersed in the Panopticon of the camera, and then to judge those individuals. Some individuals, of course, respond to the Panopticism in acceptable ways, and though these individuals may stray from the acceptable parameters of discipline from time to time, they demonstrate ample will to follow the disciplines and can be forgiven. These are the heroes.

The villains, on the other hand, act as though in either ignorance or blatant disregard of their status as object of surveillance and observation, and their unawareness of and/or indifference to that status leads them to act against the disciplines and morality imposed upon them both through the film's presentation and approval of different power systems and by the audience's normalizing act of observation.

Villains, then, are perceived to inherently identify with at least one power apparatus, or to seek admission to that apparatus – that they belong to the category of morality defined by overpowering or identification with dominant power schemes has not changed (and neither has that category’s association with master morality). However, human villains<sup>37</sup> are generally assigned one of two character archetypes by the end of the movie: madman or criminal. This is again because of the disciplinary system, and its reevaluation of the master morality as something that directly threatens the existing system (and, by association, the audience), and its assertion that at least one of two things must be lacking in a person to drive them to threaten goodness, in the slave sense of the term. The things that a master could lack are thus their reason or their morals, or both. Either of these demands that the villain be sent to some sort of normalizing apparatus, and either assimilated into the system and made to depend upon it, or ejected completely (often through what is either literally or symbolically death).

*Evil be thou my Good.*  
 Lucifer, *Paradise Lost*

### **The Reverend Harry Powell, *The Night of the Hunter***

While the Southern Gothic masterpiece *The Night of the Hunter*<sup>38</sup> is a visionary work of lighting, cinematography, and folkloric plot, one of its most arresting features is the character of Harry Powell, a questionable preacher played by Robert Mitchum in one of the greatest

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<sup>37</sup> Beast and monster villains are much more difficult, if not outright impossible, to develop into complex characters, and thus do not attract analysis. While there are a few notable exceptions among such supernatural horror entities as vampires, werewolves, ghosts, and others, they are rare enough to be studied as anomalies in their own right, rather than with simple humans.<sup>∞</sup>

<sup>∞</sup> The conscientious reader may have also noticed a certain lack of female villains in the list to be analyzed. While the omission (and this admission’s site) may lack in equality and social grace, the film industry is underdeveloped in compelling female characters, villains or no, and many of those that do exist are of supernatural or non-Western origin, and thus outside the scope of this essay. The remainder of the exclusions stems from an effort, again, to limit scope. Apologies to Nurse Ratched, most of the cast of *Kill Bill 1 and 2*, and their cohorts.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Laughton. *The Night of the Hunter*. The Criterion Collection, 2010.

portrayals of unrepentant evil this side of Grendel. Unabashed applause aside, though, the characterization of Reverend Harry Powell is one of commanding charisma and dominating danger. He is patient, perceptive, possessed of harmful intent, and he participates, rather fully, in the folkloric history of villains, in a manner intended to evoke memories of the fear the audience may have felt when first experiencing those stories.<sup>39</sup> It is obvious that he is frightening, though, even beyond the association with memory. What is interesting is the manner of fearful application.

Preacher Powell is first introduced talking to his God, which is to say himself. The audience, then, is immediately given evidence of a certain self-absorption, an egocentrism to the exclusion of all other things; Powell doesn't even pay much attention to his driving during his diatribe to God. Further, the monologue, with its references to "a little wad of bills hidden away in the sugar bowl," a God who "[doesn't] mind the killings," and implication of a nomadic lifestyle,<sup>40</sup> implicates Powell with what Foucault defines as the three cardinal sins against the bourgeois (theft, blasphemy, and nonproductivity) and thereby permits the audience a carte blanche for his condemnation, and establishes him as a threat. This threat is reinforced during his time in jail,<sup>41</sup> becoming especially evident when he tells Ben Harper that he professes "the religion the Almighty and [he] worked out betwixt [them.]" Here again is the egocentrism that today defines madness, as well as, given Powell's vocal tone and inflection, a threat of violence, should this egocentrism be challenged. Powell's crime of sacrilege is furthered through his

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<sup>39</sup> Going down Propp's list of villainies, he associates himself with plundering, maiming, mutilation, the evocation of his new bride's disappearance, demands and enticement of the heroes, spellcasting (loosely speaking), murder, imprisonment and detention, nocturnal tormenting, and an attempt to destroy the hero(es).

<sup>40</sup> As a supplement to the Criterion DVD, a working screenplay for the film was accessed at [http://www.morethings.com/fan/night\\_of\\_the\\_hunter/script.htm](http://www.morethings.com/fan/night_of_the_hunter/script.htm)

<sup>41</sup> The instance of Powell's arrest will be remarked upon later.

prayer in thanks of the opportunity to murder and thief, which image is aggravated by the knife in his hands at the time of prayer. His adherence to the statement that “he [comes] not with peace, but with a sword” further demonstrates his rejection of commonly-held religious morality and values in the pacifying system of disciplines by showing his disregard for the slave ideal of nonviolence and an existence without struggle.<sup>42</sup>

After Powell’s release, he becomes closer associated with Freud’s construction of the Uncanny, specifically with the figure of the Automaton. Powell having been established to target widows, the shots of Icey Spoon advising Willa Harper to find another man to help raise John and Pearl make plain that their alternates, the shots of the impending train, are to be associated with the preacher. As Powell is not shown, the train can be understood to stand in for him; just as the train is imposing, so is Powell. Just as it is dark, so is Powell. As unstoppable, so Powell. As unreasoning, so he. As potentially motiveless, so, again, is Powell.<sup>43</sup>

Powell’s primary danger, though, does not come from the qualities he shares with the Golem, but rather from his sexual appeal. Four of the film’s five credited female characters<sup>44</sup> immediately find themselves drawn to him so fast and firm that two of them (Willa and Ruby)

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<sup>42</sup> Though possibly less relevant to the construction of fear, it is also interesting to note the role of prison in the film’s plot, and how exactly it conforms to the theories of Foucault: while one man, Ben Harper, was sent to prison for punishment (namely, to be executed), another, Harry Powell, was sent to prison with the effect of creating a delinquent; by putting Ben Harper in the same cell as Harry Powell and allowing the two to collude, the prison inspired another series of crimes, which ended in another execution, as well as the expansion of the system of orphans.

<sup>43</sup> The present author finds it highly unlikely that Powell understands why he wants with the \$10,000 hidden in Pearl’s doll. Powell’s statement to Ben Harper that he wanted to build a glorious tabernacle, while consistent with a master moral ideal of glory, ultimately conflicts with his preference for a nomadic lifestyle – it is uncertain what, exactly, what Powell would do with the money once he got it. In this way, Powell can be likened to a folkloric villain who comes from nowhere and has little agenda but destruction.

<sup>44</sup> These characters are specifically Icey Spoon, Pearl and Willa Harper, and Ruby. That Rachel Cooper is unaffected, in addition to her proficiency with a shotgun, could lead to an interpretation of her as a masculinized female character, despite her matriarchal strength. Even still, the film’s idealization of the male figure is rather self-evident.



are never shown to get past his influence, while the other two (Icely and Pearly) are only convinced of the danger he poses by a conviction of multiple murders. Powell, himself, can't get past his own sexual presence – he is apprehended for car theft in a burlesque theatre and punishes Willa for forcing him to face the sexual realities. Most disturbingly, even John is touched (if not as explicitly as the other characters) by the lechery, shown when he bites his finger<sup>45</sup> after Icely cajoles him and Pearl up and out of the basement.<sup>46</sup>

Part of Powell's sexual appeal is in his voice, which he uses to hypnotic effect throughout the movie. Whenever the audience sees Powell interacting with another adult (with a few often-male exceptions, such as the peach pickers Powell sermons while chasing Pearl and John down the river), Powell is seducing them, bringing them to serve his ends through his silver tongue. He even does this unconsciously, utterly enchanting Ruby at the ice cream parlor with a few questions and a glib response to compliment fishing. Even if Ruby's hypnotism was just to facilitate finding out John and Pearl's whereabouts, the effect was much larger than intended, or even welcome: having found out what he wanted, Powell reaches for his knife after Ruby follows him into the street. When he intends the seduction, though, it is absolute: Icely Spoon is more than willing to give up their trust and memories of Willa in favor of Powell, with Walt following shortly after her, and Willa completely abandons her will to live in favor of whatever she thinks would receive approval from Harry, or from the Harry that Powell has been presenting.

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<sup>45</sup> The script, before cited, says that he's just wondering what to do next, but its position next to Harry's question of whether the children were afraid "down there in the dark" allows for a somewhat different reading.

<sup>46</sup> While an extensive analysis of Harry Powell's sexual transgressions is largely extraneous to the point of this essay, it is notable that the one sexual relationship that Powell rejects with the most force is the one most socially acceptable: his marriage to Willa Harper.

There are moments, however, when Powell's hypnotic effects fail him, and these show a more highly multifaceted aspect to Powell's character. The three times when he is feeling the greatest surge of emotion (specifically pain, despair and rage), he acts not with his sultry words, but with whooping howls, moans, and screams. Chronologically, these three instances are when John drops the shelf of jars on Powell's head in the basement, when Powell realizes that the children are getting away on the skiff in the river, and when Rachel shoots him in her house. Preceding each of these animalistic noises he drops his social pretenses and acts with relieved laughter, intended violence, and pantherine threats, displaying his anti-slave efficiency for all to see.

Taken as a case study, then, the audience perceives Powell as a threat for a number of reasons, first among these that he commits the three unholy violations: blasphemy, idleness and theft. He displays no allegiance to disciplines, pursuing a nomadic lifestyle and exhibiting an unchecked and unaware self-ness. This self-ness is not only outside the control of the disciplinary system, but also threatens the power that the system already holds; all but a few of the people with whom Powell interacts shift their power exercises and morality from preexisting disciplines to ones that serve his aims and his control. Powell's discipline-disrupting nature is demonstrated through his sexual hypnotic power, and his independence from it through his animalistic nature. And so, predictable though uncontrollable, the audience condemns him with fear.

*There is no evil, only power and those too weak to seek it!*  
Lord Voldemort, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

**Daniel Plainview**, *There Will Be Blood*

Director Paul Thomas Anderson completely reinvented the filmic genre of the literary adaptation when he decided to bring *Oil!* to screen as *There Will Be Blood*. While the original

book focuses on James Arnold “Bunny” Ross, Jr, and his socialist worries about his capitalist father, the movie gives almost-exclusive attention to the father (now Daniel Plainview) and his various gambits for power. Again, the cinematography is fantastically beautiful, but the single most arresting element of the movie is again the villain protagonist, Daniel Plainview.<sup>47</sup> His construction of fear, though, is very interesting, because there is very little about him that is villainous at first glance – the story of his life is analogous to the stories of Horatio Alger, of rags to riches and the American Dream. Though it is more faithful to those stories than other movies claiming to explore the same cultural aims (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, for instance), it is also more bleakly terrifying than they, and the reason, once more, is Daniel Plainview, aptly named for the Devil in Plain View. The Foucauldian criminal to Harry Powell’s madman, Daniel Plainview instills fright through exploiting moral, disciplinary, and knowledge-power systems to accomplish his goals.

The first and most obvious aspect of Plainview’s villainy is his loyal and unwavering commitment to the master moral code, to advance his own power, which he does at any cost (and also to great profit). Indeed, his first appearance ends with his ignoring a broken leg to discern whether his latest dynamite blast has yielded any ore, and subsequently dragging himself through the desert in order to obtain a grant or advance loan, through which he is able to establish a basic drilling enterprise.

Thus outwardly established as independent and free,<sup>48</sup> Daniel moves to the next stage of his personal Will to Power, namely the will to overpower. While his initial motives for adopting

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<sup>47</sup> While Daniel is here noted as the villain protagonist, the film is notable in that it does not have any heroic characters. Almost any character, when transferred to another film, would be considered villainous, or, at the very least, morally suspect. The primary justification for Daniel’s designation as the film’s villain is the greater threat that he and his success pose.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel’s codependency issues will be dealt with shortly.

the baby that would grow up to be HW Plainview are unclear,<sup>49</sup> his first shown pitch of his company, in which he explains how the oil business works and what different kinds of people are employed in its work, quite unambiguously displays Plainview's view on power acquisition. He is quite confident in his financial state, and does not seem to be seeking power through finance at this point. He is, however, seeking a more direct sense of power, in that he is totally unwilling to deal with people who do not obey him immediately. At the first sign of argumentation and disagreement, he walks out, leaving across a river of oil flowing from a hill, and tells a councilman that he "wouldn't take the lease if [the town] gave it to [him] as a gift." The reason for this, quite clearly, is that he would have to deliberate with people, would have to compromise, and that would be an unacceptable breach of his power over the people around him. He is, at the very outset of the movie, unwilling to enslave himself to the moral-disciplinary system through a charitable act.

In his next scene, he also demonstrates his understanding, if not necessarily explicit knowledge, of the nature of what Foucault refers to as knowledge-power. Foucault, as earlier mentioned, refers to visibility as a trap through which knowledge can be accumulated about a person, and through this knowledge a certain measure of power and control is gained over the person. Understanding that visibility, by definition, affects peoples' perceptions, and thus their reactions, Plainview presents an image of himself calculated to dispose those around him towards his own aims; in this specific scene, he presents himself as a devoted father and brave widower in a successful attempt to convince a quiet couple that he is one to be trusted with land and business, and thereby gets a more potentially profitable version of the same lease he would

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<sup>49</sup> Given Daniel lack of reservation against mixing information and misinformation in his final confrontations with each HW Plainview and Eli Sunday, the reason that he gives for the adoption, to have "a sweet face to buy land," is somewhat suspect.

have made with the townspeople, and gets it with more controllable people than otherwise he would have been working with.

This awareness and emerging mastery of knowledge-power is a result from the previous scene. He interprets his failure with the townspeople as a result of his forthright dealings; by giving them all the available information, he gave them the means to raise control issues regarding the lease and, by extension, his business and himself. By only giving the couple the information that they absolutely needed to know as relating to themselves, and then a controlled depiction of himself, Daniel is able simultaneously maximize the chances of a favorable outcome and then instill a personal sense of control over whatever may result from that outcome.<sup>50</sup>

This control of business is given yet greater mastery when Daniel addresses the town of Little Boston. Not much has changed, except that he presents himself as a simple man, with “no mystery” and an affable front of “plain speaking.” Further, he makes a number of promises, about agriculture, education and employment, of very community-oriented things. However, this is not a submission to slave morality. In this case, Daniel is flaunting his own power, is saying that the result of his very presence will benefit all of them, and, by so doing, indebt them to him and thereby increase his own power. While he may be increasing their power as a community, he has effectively bought the community from under them, and so is linked to their prosperity.

Rather than being lord of the paupers, he will be king of the gentry.<sup>51</sup>

A simple story about a man’s rise to power would be uninteresting, though, if there were no conflict to it, and so Plainview’s struggle with Eli Sunday is essential to a complete

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<sup>50</sup> It is telling, here, that Daniel sends away or kills anyone who could interrupt his rise to power. The most prominent examples of this are HW, ‘Henry,’ and Eli.

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, the single point in the movie in which Daniel is angriest is when someone else uses misinformation and controlled image portrayal to his own ends. When Daniel finds out that the man claiming to be Henry is really an imposter, the sense of betrayal is heightened by the fact that Daniel was not in total control, and so he eliminates the source of the unforeseen.

understanding of his character. Equally ambitious and equally belonging to a master moral system, each representing a greater apparatus of power and each able to identify the other's nature, they would be equally matched throughout the movie, but for two measures of power that Daniel has over Eli: economic and physical power. Through Daniel's economic power, he is able to indebt Eli to him<sup>52</sup> and thereby achieve power over him, and through his physical power he is able to subdue and eventually eliminate Eli when the latter attempts, on his own power, to achieve a dominance over Daniel. It is only when Daniel finds himself relying on the permission of the Bandys that Eli achieves any sense of dominance over Daniel, and that only lasts for the one scene, after which Daniel presumably draws up a lease for the pipeline and gets William Bandy's signature.

This social aspect to power provides a very interesting texture to Daniel's plays for dominance. While extremely dangerous in private (to which both the man posing as Daniel's brother and Eli Sunday can attest), he is no less so in public. In fact, with very few exceptions, Henry, Daniel forces all of his confrontations with people to have a public element. He breaks off from a business conversation to slap Eli around and rub him around in the mud, he threatens HM Tilford with death at a negotiations meeting, and he disowns HW in front of his associates and HW's translator. Most interestingly, Daniel forces a public element on his final, otherwise private confrontation with Eli, convincing him to envision confessing to his congregation that he is a fraud and has been misleading them for his own personal gain.<sup>53</sup> It is only after Daniel has

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<sup>52</sup> Ironically, Eli's power debt to Daniel is achieved through Daniel's stated (but never actualized or, for that matter, taken seriously) monetary debt to Eli. In fact, Daniel makes a practice of promising things to Eli that he never intends to follow through. First is the matter of \$5000, followed by the blessing of the oil well, continuing until Daniel makes the show of promising Eli a business deal concerning the Bandy tract.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel's highly competitive nature in this scene is first depicted through the fact that he will not be roused from his sleep by a servant, but immediately wakes for the name of his enemy.

forced a sense of public humiliation onto Eli that he begins to emotionally and physically overpower him.

This eternally public element to Daniel's workings suggests a very different sort of personality than the one he shows to himself. He mentions in his revealing conversation with 'Henry' that "[he hates] most people," and dreams of amassing enough wealth to permanently separate himself from them. However, the public nature of his confrontations suggests a deep-seated codependency; while he may dream of success and domination, both of those are ultimately worthless to them unless someone else is there to watch. His exaltation of the self is not possible without the other, and the conflict between his need for supremacy and his need for recognition leave him in an awkward lurch between dominance and dependence.

Though Daniel may conceive of this solely in terms of dominance, he shows his codependency most strongly in the restaurant scene when he corners Tilford. He starts out by gloating over the incredible profits resulting from his pipeline to the coast, but quickly turns to a personal redress against Tilford's offensive suggestion that Daniel take better care of HW. While he may phrase his comeuppance in the terms of 'Ha ha ha I sure showed you,' the reality is that he is doing exactly what Tilford suggested he do, and uses Tilford's chastisement to demonstrate his self-perceived superiority to Tilford.

But for his codependency issues, Daniel Plainview may have been conceivable in terms of the Übermensch. He seeks his own power through the means in which he is most proficient, and so is certainly of master morality; indeed, he also controls the majority of the disciplinary system of Little Boston. However, his constant posturing and hunt for public approval also thrust the panoptic systems back on himself, and force him into a sort of slave morality that also approaches a sort of Last Man status. As both a ruler and a ruled element of the moral and

disciplinary systems, then, Plainview is extremely unpredictable and highly dangerous. He has an ambiguous yet ever-present drive and a seeming lack of outright allegiance to any specific moral system, and so, controllable though unpredictable, the audience shies away from him in horror.

*Compared to what, the Bubonic Plague? He's bad enough that you called me.  
He's a psychopathic killer, but so what? There's plenty of them around.*  
Carson Wells, *No Country for Old Men*

### **Other Villains**

Because it is not the aim of this essay to suggest that the only good villains in all of cinema are those portrayed in *Night of the Hunter* and *There Will Be Blood*, additional examples will be analyzed. However, due to their supplementary status to the primary figures, these will be treated more briefly.

The first among other recent villains, and almost as interesting as Daniel Plainview, is Anton Chigurh in the Coen brothers' *No Country for Old Men*. As a character utterly without any sense of reservation, Chigurh comes closer to the Übermensch than Plainview and closer to the Automaton than Powell. However, he has a much clearer set of motives than the Reverend, which are rooted in a sense of fate: the very core of Chigurh's persona is the belief that the people he encounters are destined to die,<sup>54</sup> which he confirms with games of chance. In terms of the disciplines, the uninhibited self-ness of his belief in himself as an agent of fate marks him a madman. He is blasphemous and technically idle, in that he does not contribute to general society, and his pursuit of the money Llewelyn Moss found additionally marks him a thief. The only time that he comes close to self-awareness is when Carla Jean Moss refuses to act within Chigurh's chance-based disciplinary system. Also similar to Plainview, he is shown to succeed at

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<sup>54</sup> There is a certain paradox here, where, as an agent of fate, Chigurh seems to identify as utterly without a Will of his own, though his dark sense of humor seems to indicate a sort of complicity.



the end of the film – every other character with which he has interacted, even from a distance (such as Ed Tom Bell), has either died at his hands or has been forced out of the narrative from despair at his actions. As with Plainview, part of the reason he is so frightening is that, given the opportunity to gain momentum, he is now unstoppable, as with the original Juggernauts in the streets of India, under the wheels of which the devout were crushed.<sup>55</sup>

Just as Anton Chigurh views himself as an agent of fate, the Joker in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* identifies as an agent of chaos. Again, there is the unexamined self-ness of the madman,<sup>56</sup> though in this case the madness seeks to be contagious; every one of the Joker's efforts explicitly attempts to instill his brand of master morality in the citizens of Gotham. His threat to the self, and the moral and disciplinary systems that it supposedly represents, is underscored by his struggle to corrupt the Batman and those associated with him. Eventually the Joker comes to identify with his struggle with the Batman, claiming that the latter "completes" him. This unwanted identification is an exercise in the third manifestation of the Will to Power, associated with love and other supposedly self-effacing power agendas that actually impose control on the object of their implementation. Thus, the Joker not only directly threatens the slave moral-disciplinary system, but also threatens the freedom and autonomy of the hero, the character with whom the audience identifies.

There are no villains more restraining, though, than those who are designed to represent the disciplinary system, itself, which brings to the fore the character of "The Man with No Eyes" Boss Godfrey, from Stuart Rosenberg's *Cool Hand Luke*. Only identified as Boss Godfrey in the credits, The Man with No Eyes represents the authority and anonymity of the panoptic power

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<sup>55</sup> However, contrary to the original meaning, "protector of the world," the Juggernauts here cited would be its dominators.

<sup>56</sup> A significant difference between Chigurh and the Joker is that the Joker strenuously objects to the idea that he is mad, whereas Chigurh does not seem to understand the idea in the least.

system. Through his eyelessness, he is at once without identity and without a clearly definable presence, as, though he sees, it cannot be immediately identified with what he sees. That does not, however, dilute the necessity for obedience: all of the prisoners fear him and do as he indicates<sup>57</sup> without question. The eponymous, anti-authoritarian Luke could not have a more effective opposite than the emotionless and estranged Godfrey, who never misses a shot with his rifle. Just so, the system of disciplines is made flesh in *Cool Hand Luke*, and the audience is encouraged, for a while at least, to identify and fear its Boss.

Perhaps more outright terrifying than all of these is Robert Mitchum's other great role: Max Cady, in J Lee Thompson's *Cape Fear*. While Boss Godfrey represents the disciplinary system, Max Cady directly represents its ultimate product, the delinquent. Produced by the prison system, Cady's terror stems from his total knowledge of the various tools of both the disciplinary and legal systems. He uses his experience in prison to find out exactly what will and will not be tolerated by each of these systems, and uses this knowledge to become an omnipresent threat of implication to Sam Bowden and his family. In addition, Cady's motive, revenge, belongs to master morality, and directly threatens Bowden's slave structure of family, and again this depiction of master morality is rendered offensively sexual, highly brutal, and animalistic. The audience fears the possibilities posed by the madman, the criminal, the delinquent, and aches for them to be taken away and kept from the gentler society.

*So, Lone Star, now you see that evil will always triumph, because good is dumb.*  
Dark Helmet, *Spaceballs*

## **Conclusions**

That villains are masters relegated and pejorated to villain and madman status should now be self-evident. Any separation from the moral-disciplinary order is now interpreted as a

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<sup>57</sup> Just as Boss Godfrey is without eyes, he is also without voice, never actually speaking.

threat to that order's hegemony, and the associated idea that one could exist without depending on the system and the normalizing benefits that it offers is one to be punished with greatest severity. These villains are frightening because of the threat they are seen to pose to the social order, even if they are direct products of that social order.

For this concluding section to be worthwhile as more than a simple reiteration of the thesis, however, a new deduction must be made from the preceding evidence and interpretations. However engrossing this humble narrator may have found the present research and the interpretations thence drawn, it is imperative to keep in mind the Marxist commandment that all critical thought have a real relevance to its audience.<sup>58</sup>

Considering the discussed texts and the theories with which they were evaluated, then, the ultimate conclusion to this paper is that the figure of the villain, in addition to its application in effective storytelling, also functions as a means of social control. Though in their variety they may well be more interesting than their heroic counterparts, their primary purpose in a story is to be judged and condemned as fearful and abnormal, and thus inspire action according to slave morality and disciplines. Such action, as previously mentioned, grants ever more power to the dominant power systems and furthers the self-replicating cycle of knowledge-powers. Again, the villain serves as a delinquent, constantly supervised by panoptic structures and audiences, and used as a scapegoat whenever necessary to deeper entrench the panoptic moral-disciplinary system.

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<sup>58</sup> An aggravated reader may well be justified in asking 'so what?'