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The Essence of Film Narrative: A Metatheoretical Rhetorical Analysis of the Antihero Film as Moral Equipment for Living

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The Essence of Film Narrative: A Metatheoretical Rhetorical Analysis of the Antihero Film as

Moral Equipment for Living

by

Clayton L. Terry

This thesis completed as a partial requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication Studies
at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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CHAPTER I

EQUIPMENT FOR LIVING, PUBLIC MORALITY, AND A METATHEORETICAL
RHETORICAL CRITICISM FRAMEWORK

Rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke argues that art forms such as tragedy, comedy, satire and the like should be treated as "equipment for living," societally classifying situations "in various ways and keeping with corresponding attitudes" (*Literary Form* 304). These art forms of tragedy and comedy also serve as narratives in society, thus allowing for an extension of narrative rhetoric as equipment for living. Since the inception of Burke's equipment for living, a door has opened for rhetorical critics of all art forms, including cinematic art. Stephen Dine Young explicitly offers film as a form of "symbolic activity" or "equipment for living" (452). By adding this aspect of rhetorical theory to film, movies can be analyzed as separate "containers of meaning" in which audiences make conscious connections between what they decipher on-screen and the experiences and meanings they acquire in the real world (448-449). It is not only the rhetorical critic's job to take a theoretical approach to uncovering textual cues that lead to a film's offered meaning (449), but also to examine whether those offered meanings extend to the larger society.

Barry Brummett and David Payne moved in this critical direction when they, respectively, established haunted house films as "equipment for living" and analyzed *The Wizard of Oz* as contemporary media ritual. Brummett declared horror films as "equipment for living" because they reveal the audience's subconscious fears (*Electric Literature* 250) and utilize the house as a form of common human experience between rhetor and audience. Payne named *Oz* a "contemporary fairy tale" (26), applying the societal and mythical aspects of equipment for

living in order to bring the film up from a traditional narrative to that of a societal narrative socialized "toward particular roles with particular rhetorical purposes" (33). As was the case for these rhetorical critics, the challenge for all rhetorical critics is not only *what* symbols are being presented in a given film narrative, but *how* those symbols are presented in order to evoke the many levels of meaning potentially involved (Gronbeck 240).

In the aforementioned examples, and others, rhetorical critics do a good job of examining how film narratives help us make sense of the real situations we experience, have experienced, or may experience in the future. However, as Tony E. Adams justly points out, if stories are being used in order to understand, negotiate, and make sense of these experiences, "then a discussion of narrative ethics is a relevant, if not required, endeavor" regarding the concept of equipment for living (175). However, Adams simply has a discussion—not an analysis—regarding culturally dominant messages in film (180-181), the relationships between structure, plots, genres and accompanying morals (182-183), the ethical demands of authors and expectations of the audience (185), and oral histories (185-187). There is no introduction of rhetorical theories, critical approaches, examination of rhetorical morals, or any form of rhetorical criticism. Adams makes clear that the relationship between the medium and its depicted morals should be considered, but does not clarify possible moral approaches or specific critical steps of doing so. He does explain that a story should be shared using narrative conventions such as the use of characters, plots and genres, and a developmental structure under which scenes and events in the story make sense, but the mere observation of these conventions does not ensure moral assessment. The goal of my study is to contribute a moral extension of narrative as equipment for living via the evaluation of competing rhetorical theories, analysis within various critical approaches, and the applied use of specific tools of rhetorical criticism.

The set of messages in question regarding the goal of my study is an overlooked set of filmic narrative texts that feature morally-complex lead characters. More specifically, the antihero character is one of depicted moral complexity deviating from that of the traditional hero. Since antiquity, traditional hero characters have been presented with the requirements of being good, appropriate, life-like and consistent (Aristotle 242), all while revealing a moral purpose (232). While substantial research exists regarding the role of the conventional hero, "there is a neglect of understanding how antiheroes may contribute and reshape [a narrative's] moral boundaries" (West 139). Furthermore, although research shows that audiences enjoy the antihero narrative (Shafer and Raney 1030), there has yet to be any remotely profound rhetorical analysis of *how* the narrative is exactly presented to these audiences. The messages presented in the antihero narrative are far too morally multifaceted and distinctive to be ignored by rhetorical critics and theorists. In addressing this gap in analysis and the moral goal of my study, a research problem is proposed: In what ways does the antihero narrative invite classifications of understanding, negotiating or making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs?

The framework for my study comprises a metatheoretical approach assessing five competing rhetorical theories, including: doxastic theory (McKerrow), the bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality (Condit, *Beyond Rhetorical Relativism*), objective knowledge (Fisher, *Narration, Knowledge*), intersubjectivity (Brummett) and absolute truth (Plato, *Republic*). In evaluating these competing theories my study takes a theoretically critical orientation, directly pursuing the core of my aforementioned research problem. Throughout the history of rhetorical studies, "ideologically-oriented critics have produced the most substantive and coherent body of value-laden criticism to date" (Rushing and Frentz 403). By integrating a

theoretical emphasis with narrative criticism, not only does the critic become positioned to be an agent of moral change due to the combination of theoretical orientation and text-level symbol interpretations, it also becomes the critic's responsibility "not only to diagnose, but also to assist the culture in understanding its options" (401) In allowing the critic to offer depicted options, the audience's invited "moral values may emanate from inner, as well as outer, ideals" (403). This makes the critic's job, and the theoretical approach in general, imperative to the study of rhetoric. Although a theoretical perspective alone cannot provide a complete set of moral standards for a specific piece of rhetorical criticism, integrating theory with criticism bridges the internal and external worlds of human experience and invokes morality as a facet of rhetorical criticism (386, 403). In other words, this integration combines the abstract and morally constitutive areas of human experience, such as belief and philosophy, with more pragmatic areas such as reason and action, resulting in an all-encompassing theoretically oriented rhetorical criticism approach.

Throughout its history, rhetorical theory has had debates over the link between morality and rhetoric (Condit, *Crafting Virtue* 79). In the days of antiquity, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Quintilian and others focused a large portion of their work in the area of rhetoric's moral function in the community; and more recently, those same functions have resurfaced as rhetoric's influence on public morality has regained social significance (79). Due to this resurgence, Condit offers and defends a theory of public morality, and although she does so via her own theoretical orientation, she illuminates that, through "particular applications, public discourse thus creates and requires the general or universal element that constitutes the core of morality" (82). Rhetoric plays a significant part in shaping public morality, and the age-old discussions concerning rhetoric and morality are being readdressed. Ancient discussions concerning narrative rhetoric and morality will be mentioned later chapters, and my study

readdresses these prominent conversations en route to revealing the core of film narrative's equipment for living cultural moral function.

Rushing and Frentz provide an example of the contemporary focus on morality in relation to rhetorical theory by applying an integration of theory and criticism to narrative rhetoric and criticism. In their analysis, they explain how authors have described narrative text as a paradigm under which people understand the world, a rhetoric that demands interpretation, symbolic communication that both reveals compromised historical gratifications and hides historical truths, is a rhetoric of vast possibility, a text that symbolically works to ideologically protect the status quo, and serves not only a rhetorical, but cultural moral function (394-397). The explication of the relationship between morality, theoretical orientation, narrative rhetoric and rhetorical criticism invokes a clear justification for study: considering the rhetorical critic's position as an agent for moral change and understanding that theoretically-oriented critics fulfill an unparalleled role in providing morally focused criticism, it is important to identify how film narrative serves its rhetorically moral function via a theoretically oriented criticism approach, as rhetoric's discussion of the relationship between messages and public morality is increasingly regaining attention. As a critic integrating theory, I aim to assist future critics and the readers of my study in recognizing a specific source of standardized film narrative morality that transcends Rushing's and Frentz's perspective allowing for "a rich diversity of moral judgment" that analyzes separate films as "morally superior to others," relative promotions of cultural moral action, or relationships "between the current state of the psyche and its potential" (397).

My analysis will conjoin five prevalent narrative criticism approaches with the five aforementioned rhetorical theories in order to pass through the surface-level aspects of narrative film criticism and arrive at the essence of film narrative and moral film criticism. These critical

approaches include: polysemy (Fiske), polyvalence (Condit, *Rhetorical Limits*), narrative paradigm (Fisher, *Narration as Human*), narrative possibility (Kirkwood) in combination with narrative identification (McClure) and multivalence (Stroud). A metatheoretically-lensed critical approach is important to my analysis because, although these approaches are of the most prevalent in narrative rhetorical criticism, they do not provide approaches to actual moral criticism. Therefore, my study attempts to fill a void of coherent moral judgment in the realm of narrative criticism en route to answering my proposed research problem. My study does this by aligning the most prominent critical approaches in the field with some of the most perennial rhetorical theories, passing through each theoretically oriented critical approach until a transcendent, moral approach is reached.

Although Condit admits that the age-old conversations regarding rhetoric and morality have reemerged, not one of the previous rhetorical theories or critical approaches provide comprehensive moral judgment to narrative rhetoric on their own. Thus, it is imperative that my study passes through each theoretically oriented critical approach until an absolute destination is reached, so that future studies of moral criticism can be done from a grounded, straightforward approach. The complex nature of my metatheoretical analysis will be done in an attempt to cut through the critical variations, competing theoretical lenses, and moral relativity of rhetorical study and narrative criticism in an effort to solidify an extension of equipment for living grounded in moral truth.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTIHERO FILM AS A CASE STUDY

In identifying film narrative's rhetorically moral equipment for living function, my study focuses on two selected antihero films. To do this, a justification for this film-subgenre is considered. Television shows such as *Dexter*, *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*, *House of Cards* and *Boardwalk Empire* (to name a few) have taken front seats in prime-time broadcast slots and as Netflix sensations. Despite television's recent rise of the popular antihero (*Dexter* is the oldest of the aforementioned group—it first aired in 2006), Hollywood cinema has been pushing this type of narrative with much more long-term success with films such as *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Godfather* (1972), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Scarface* (1983), *Wall Street* (1987), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Fight Club* (1999), *American Beauty* (1999), *American Psycho* (2000), *Kill Bill* (2003), *The Departed* (2006), *The Wrestler* (2008) and *True Grit* (2010). Not only have some of these films made splashes as box office record breakers, they also feature award-winning actors (Kevin Spacey, Bryan Cranston, Marlon Brando) and cultural significance (*Scarface*, *Breaking Bad*, *Taxi Driver, Pulp Fiction* and *Breaking Bad* and others have been re-adapted and reenacted in multiple media realms).

The films *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) are the examined artifacts in my analysis. Actor Daniel Day-Lewis won an Academy Award in 2008 for "Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role" as Daniel Plainview of *There Will Be Blood*, an ambitious early twentieth century oilman and ruthless businessman who is depicted taking the town of Little Boston, California with him on his obsessive journey for oil and power. In an

article published in the *New Yorker* on 17 December 2007, popular critic David Denby explains

the film's loose adaptation of the 1927 novel *Oil!* by Upton Sinclair as well as director Paul

Thomas Anderson's work on the film "that bears comparison to the greatest achievements of

Griffith and Ford" (Denby). *Rolling Stone* described the film as a "bloody and brilliant *Citizen

Kane*," and a "gusher" that "hits with hurricane force" (Travers, *There Will Be Blood*). The film

even reached the cultural realm of *Saturday Night Live* in a parody titled "Daniel Plainview's I

Drink Your Milkshake."

Actor Leonardo DiCaprio won a Golden Globe for "Best Performance by an Actor in a

Motion Picture" in 2014 for his leading role as Jordan Belfort of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, a wild

and wealthy 1990s stockbroker who is depicted using financial corruption and persuasive

strategies to attain followers and take his company, Stratton Oakmont, to tremendous economic

success. *Rolling Stone* described the film as one that is "pushing the limits" via the continued

success of the DiCaprio/Martin Scorsese actor/director duo (Travers, *The Wolf of Wall Street*).

The publication also named the film one of the ten best movies of 2013 (Travers, *10 Best*). *The

New Yorker* led a review of the film headlined "The Wild, Brilliant 'Wolf Of Wall Street'"

(Brody). The film is also based on the true story of Jordan Belfort. After the film was released,

multiple media outlets ran stories on his life; including *Time*, which reported that Belfort was set

to make $100 million in 2014 (Luckerson).

As noted prior, the current available research on the antihero narrative concerns how

audiences *enjoy* the antihero narrative, not how it is rhetorically *presented* to audiences. Some

analyses come close to doing so, with one in particular classifying the "trickster" character in

The X-Files as an ambiguous performer, with 'ambiguity' in this case suggesting a resistance to

typical character definition, unstable movement across narrative stages, and abnormal behavior

en route to typical character resolutions (Dorsey 144-148). This serves as a nice jumping-off point for simple rhetorical analysis of the antihero, but still does not get to the essence of the antihero's rhetorical, societal or moral function.

Some definitions have been provided that help bring us closer to the impact of the antihero narrative in rhetorical criticism. First, understanding the traditional hero in narrative is important before analytically approaching the antihero character. The depicted motifs associated with the professional hero (the depicted professional antihero will be considered in my analysis) include ultimate triumph, a struggle toward that triumph, perseverance, the possession of special attributes or skills, the competent use of those skills en route to triumph, and a battle against an adversary (Ekdom 50). Sometimes the narrative is elaborated to include depicted motifs such as a less skilled or less competent adversary, a hero anticipating his or her obstacles, a cooperation with others to defeat the adversary, superior efforts by the hero in that cooperative success, and a society rescued from danger and celebratory over the hero's success to the point of reward for the hero (50). These motifs may occur in different sequences, although most begin with combatting an adversary, leading to struggle, perseverance and eventually triumph (50). However, each of the core depicted motifs are "essential to the narratives; they provide the necessary explanation of the difference between the beginning situation—the problem to be solved, the adversary to be dealt with, the unsatisfactory situation which must be remedied, the danger to be removed—and the ending situation—the victory over the foe" (51). The traditional hero in narrative has clearly been analyzed closely, but the antihero narrative has not yet been examined at this level.

The antihero has been recognized in a few studies as closely similar to the conventional hero and described as "distinguished from the norm by his superior abilities" and "his superior

abilities inspire admiration, just as much as do those of the hero," yet "his individuality is condemned as a negative example for that society" (Buck 255). However, this definition does not address any moral ambiguity attached to the character, or the fact that a morally complex antihero could simultaneously serve as a positive or negative example for the established social order. Brad West addresses this by acknowledging the antihero's shared characteristics with the hero, but also by illuminating the characterized ambiguity and the problems for interpretation involved with the figure (139). As noted prior, the neglect in fully understanding this morally complex character needs to be addressed. Considering this—and the fact that very little rhetorical analysis has been done despite the popularity and cultural significance of the antihero film—my goal in extending the concept of equipment for living to include a moral component starts with examining the prevalent, yet morally multifaceted antihero film in an attempt to examine its potential invitations of moral or amoral classifications of understanding, negotiating and making sense of corresponding human experience regarding societal situations, attitudes or beliefs. In other words, the antihero film could either function as *moral equipment for living* or *amoral equipment for living*. My study attempts to decipher the core of this character's rhetorically moral function while ascertaining the antihero narrative's just position in the relationship between narrative film rhetoric and cultured morality.

Prior studies that inform the selection of my study's method analysis steps include a borrowed combination of adapted theoretical lenses and critical approaches. In integrating these approaches and lenses, the steps of my analysis include a unique movement across five theoretically oriented critical approaches of analysis. These five method analysis parts will now be described first, one by one, followed by the exact critical tools that were used within each segment for analysis, and ending with examples of precisely how these films were analyzed

under my given conceptual focus and critical tools.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCING THE THEORETICAL LENSES AND CRITICAL APPROACHES OF
ANALYSIS

Doxa/Polysemy

The first theoretical lens implemented in my analysis is the doxastic one, a critical

approach providing "an avenue—an orientation—toward a postmodern conception of the

relationship between discourse and power" (McKerrow 109). The doxastic lens is one "divorced

from the constraints of a Platonic conception" that an unchanging absolute truth exists as the

essence of all things (91). Instead, the doxastic approach recognizes a relativized world

comprised of dimensions of domination and freedom. Under this theoretical orientation, symbols

of domination and power are seen as pervasive and accessible to analysis, and the performance

of critique is that which "seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to

understand the integration of power/knowledge in society—what possibilities for change the

integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to

effect social change" (91). This theoretical lens opens up the potential for polysemic

interpretation, an approach that "uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the

seeds of subversion or rejection of authority, at the same time that the primary reading appears to

confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms" (108). This fusion of doxastic theory and

polysemic criticism is the first theoretically oriented critical approach under which my rhetorical

analysis of the antihero film's moral or amoral equipment for living function is examined.

The critical approach of polysemy argues that television texts express existing

relationships to power dynamics and structures—the "notion that all television texts must, in

order to be popular, contain within them unresolved contradictions that the viewer can exploit in order to find within them structural similarities to his or her own social relations and identity" (Fiske 392). Under this critical perspective, the viewer is invited to cooperate with a text tailored to the ideology of the dominant group, and the subordinate group is met with the pleasure of recognition in a way that "produces a subject position that fits into the dominant cultural system with a minimum of strain," therefore leaving the viewer who associates with the subordinate group, by default, to identify with the loser rather than the hero (403-404). Polysemy aligns with doxastic theory by examining the relationship between discourse and power, including features such as hegemony, capitalism, subcultures, the dominant class's power in creating and controlling their own culture via popular texts and the subordinate culture's depicted resistant relationship with the dominant. Under this critical approach, it is assumed that the dominant cultural group has "the power to make [its] own culture out of the products of the culture industry, which means that such excorporated culture cannot be defined in terms of its own essence, but only in terms of its (resisting) relationship to the dominant" (400). This is not to say that polysemic criticism is able to predict any actual resistive reading by an audience or audience member, but it does allow for an analysis of the relationship between a text and existing power dynamics and social structures. By examining the two aforementioned artifacts under this integrative, theoretically oriented critical approach of doxastic polysemy, the first way in which the antihero film will be analyzed as a moral or amoral extension of equipment for living is through its invited moral or amoral classifications of understanding, negotiating and making sense of the corresponding societal relationship between discourse and power.

Relative Truth and Objective Reality/Polyvalence

The second theoretical lens, a bounded network theory of relative truth and objective

reality, is paired with the polyvalent critical approach. This is a natural theoretically oriented

criticism pair because both the theory and critical approach are brought forth by Celeste Condit.

Polyvalence is her response to John Fiske in highlighting the rhetorical limits of polysemy. This

gives my study's movement across methodological parts a fluid, evolutionary element. Condit

explains that polyvalence occurs when audience members share understandings of a text, but

"disagree about the valuation of those denotations to such a degree that they produce notably

different interpretations. . . . It is not that texts feature unstable denotation patterns, it is that the

viewer judgment varies due to their value systems" (*Rhetorical Limits* 106-107). Condit

acknowledges that producers still attain a great amount of control as dominant groups in creating

these texts, and the messages disseminated by them do favor certain groups over others, but she

insists that rather than "describing a text as good or bad, critics need to develop judgments of

better or worse. . . . such an evaluation process will lead not to a condemnation or simple praise

of a program but to a calibrated understanding of the particular role it played in introducing

certain limited pieces of information" (115-116). In other words, narrative texts under this

approach provide cultural rhetorical codes that are not only dominant or oppositional, but relative

to particular audiences belonging to particular codes, adding "additional vector[s] to our

understanding (116). This moves beyond Fiske's idea of texts providing pleasure for dominant or

subordinate groups and toward a process of analyzing the particular rhetorical understandings

behind specific dominant and subordinate messages within a text.

Condit's "better or worse" approach is no surprise considering her corresponding theory,

a bounded network theory that places objective truth as a combination of objective reality and

relative human language structures and values (*Beyond Rhetorical Relativism* 353). Condit

argues that it is impossible to reach a true description of objective reality due to the limits of

material reality and set language structures (354-357). Therefore, rhetoric is a process of

"adjusting the language structure to new material conditions. A rhetor uses a piece of discourse

to change the language structure by strengthening the intensity attached to some terms and

weakening others. . . . Reciprocally, rhetoric also adjusts material conditions in response to

linguistic conditions or related material conditions" (360). Under this lens, the relationship

between objective reality and relative human truth is negotiated in a way that makes them both

inter-related and dialectically fluid: "Truth is in this way relative to the language and purposes of

the persons using it. We cannot access truth on an eternal basis, but only with relationship to a

given language and interest framework" (358-359). This theoretical framework views morality as

dependent on the relative language structures bounded by our material objective reality. In

combining this theory with the critical approach of polyvalence, the antihero film will be

analyzed a step beyond doxastic polysemy—as inviting many "better or worse" moral

classifications of understanding, negotiating and making sense of corresponding societal

situations regarding discourse, power, and values under a fluid and relative human language

structure.

<u>Objective Knowledge/Narrative Paradigm</u>

The third theoretical lens, objective knowledge, is paired with Walter Fisher's narrative

paradigm approach. Fisher's narrative paradigm insists that human beings are inherent

storytellers—"homo narrans"—who communicate symbols "ultimately as stories meant to give

order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in

common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one's life"

(*Narration as Human* 6). In other words, under the narrative paradigm, narration itself is

equipment for living regardless of the rhetor's rhetorical responsibility because human beings are

living out narratives in the process of socialization (10). Some stories are better than others

because of good logic and reasons predominantly falling under social values. This makes the

narrative paradigm both argumentative and literary, revealing "truths" about the human condition

(2). Human beings are rationally value-driven under this paradigm according to their cultural

myths. This value aspect attaches specificity to Condit's approach when Fisher describes the

moralistic versus materialistic myths of the American dream that, "when taken together,

characterize America as a culture" (Fisher, *Reaffirmation and Subversion* 160). The materialistic

myth is grounded in the ideas of work ethic, effort, persistence, self-reliant achievement and

success, and a "rags-to-riches," "to do" mentality; while the moralistic myth is grounded in the

idea that "all men are created equal," involving the values of compassion, tolerance and

individual dignity under a "to be" mentality (Fisher 161-162). All in all, "the narrative paradigm

as a worldview of human communication does not provide a specific method of analysis, [but] it

does propose a precise perspective for critically reading texts" concerning "the reliability,

trustworthiness and desirability of the message as determined by the tests of narrative

rationality" via the analysis of values as the "principal ingredient" (Fisher, *Elaboration* 357).

Thus, under this critical approach, narrative rationality derives from the symbolic presentation of

value messages that align with either the moralistic or materialistic aspect of the American

dream.

     Walter Fisher aligns this critical approach with his theoretical lens of objective

knowledge. According to Fisher, only true objective knowledge is of real rhetorical

consideration, and philosophical and rhetorical discourses are one and the same in concerning and exploring truth, reality, reason, rationality, wisdom, and justice (Fisher, *Narration, Knowledge* 180). For Fisher, this is not knowledge of *knowing how* to do things, or *knowing that* a certain action will result in a specific consequence, it is one of *knowing whether* something *ought* to be done. It is an ethical view of knowledge, and one that Fisher explains as having origins in Aristotle's concept of practical wisdom and the enthymeme (172). In this way, philosophy and rhetoric become one, allowing narrative to be analyzed under a moral scope via the narrative paradigm: "The narrative paradigm and its attendant logic, narrative rationality, are designed to reveal the roles of values in reason and action in order to restore a consciousness of *whether* in our conceptions of knowledge. . . . Without a sense of whether, knowledge of how and knowledge of that will continue to dominate, stifling the humane concerns of happiness, justice and wisdom" (188). By pairing the theoretical lens of objective reality with the narrative paradigm's design to reveal whether the values within the paradigm are just, wise, and moral, my study will methodologically travel thirdly through an analysis of how antihero films portray moral or amoral classifications of human experience deriving from the value structures of the moralistic and materialistic American dreams in correspondence to societal situations, attitudes or beliefs.

Intersubjectivity/ Rhetoric of Possibility and Narrative Identification

The fourth theory to consider is that of intersubjectivity. Barry Brummett argues that if objective reality exists, then "people will never know it" (*Intersubjectivity* 27). Therefore, under intersubjective theory, reality is meaning defined by contexts, and meanings are constantly changing under the participatory process of human language construction (29-30). Brummett

discounts the idea that knowledge, reality or truth exist outside of people, and instead asserts that the discovery and operation of knowledge takes place *through* people (30). In turn, "because [language] is ambiguous and because it creates reality it is the responsibility of the user of language to choose between the reality that his/her language will advocate. This choice is ethical, and it is also rhetorical. It gives rhetoric itself an ethical ground" (39). Brummett calls this the "ethical responsibility" of the rhetor, and claims that if "more people recognize and accept grounds for ethical responsibility the more ethical human life will be" (38). Like Fisher, Brummett creates a theory that allows morality to be rhetorical and rhetoric to be morally grounded; however, Brummett's theory places full responsibility on the human being as the moral catalyst, rather than emphasizing the rhetorical formation of messages in facilitating morality.

Two critical approaches that fall under this intersubjective theoretical scope are the rhetoric of possibility and narrative identification. Both extend Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, but do so in intersubjective fashion. Under William Kirkwood's rhetoric of possibility, rhetors have the responsibility and power to create realities through narrative that "acquaint people with new and unsuspected possibilities of being and acting in the world. . . . Such stories can expand an audience's moral responsibility by showing them they are freer and more capable than previously imagined and inviting them how to decide how they will exercise their newly realized freedom" (31-32). In this way, a rhetoric of possibility places explicit responsibility on the rhetor to invite new and liberating ways of experiencing the un-experienced beyond the familiar shared values of a culture (31-33). A rhetoric of possibility critical approach is intended to examine how rhetors reach and expand the audience's own capacity for virtue and moral decision making in their own lives, thus inviting potential rhetorical and moral freedom

previously overlooked or untapped by the minds of audience members. The moral responsibility

aspect of this approach aligns with intersubjective theory. One way this approach can be

pragmatically applied is via narrative identification, and my study accomplishes such within this

fourth theoretically oriented critical approach.

Under his narrative identification critical approach, Kevin McClure argues that narratives

"can be critically analyzed via the symbolic process of identification" with a critical emphasis on

how a narrative rhetorically achieves social and individual correspondence (201). This process

refers to Kenneth Burke's theoretical process of identification, which occurs precisely because

division exists between people (Burke, *Rhetoric* 22). The motivation to identify with others is

thus natural and inherent. Through strategies of identification, a rhetor can seek to find common

ground in order to eliminate division and convey an identity that aligns with an audience.

Moreover, audience members can use identification as a critical tool, which is what McClure sets

to accomplish through the implementation of the narrative identification critical approach.

According to Burke, when a human being is aware that his or her identity does not align with a

current social structure, that person loses faith in the structure's reasonableness, in turn becoming

economically or spiritually alienated (Burke, *Literary Form* 306). Burke argues that people

prefer to make peace of the world that they live in, but when the reigning symbols of authority

do not align with a person's personal or spiritual identity, he or she is forced into some degree of

alienation and the motivation to throw off the existing deceptive modes of internalized symbol-

systems and take on a new orientation (307-308). Thus, identification is viable as a critical tool, a

challenge to the reigning symbols of authority and an alleviator of alienation. Many strategies are

involved with practically using identification as a critical tool, and McClure addresses these

intertextual "processes of analogy, allusions, metaphor and so on; the textual aspects of the

narrative are important but so too are the sociological and psychological identifications that are associated with any particular narrative" (207). Although he explains narrative identification as "a symbolic process of association that provides for consubstantiality with preexistent narratives," he also explains narrative identification's role in extending and transforming a generation of new narratives via the consideration and examination of narrative's traditional elements (201).

Overall, re-conceptualizing identification and extending its theoretical range as part of narrative criticism—narrative identification—enables not only the narrative paradigm as a critical tool, but also enables the potential for narratives to be analyzed, interpreted or created as a form of social critique, providing "greater flexibility for the critical use of narrative" and enriching "understanding of how narratives foster beliefs, attitudes and actions by accounting for the full range of the symbolic resources and processes of identification" (191). By adding the critical practicality of narrative identification to the rhetoric of possibility under an intersubjective theoretical orientation, this study will fourthly analyze the antihero film as presenting the possibility of inviting moral critique of corresponding societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs.

Affliction/Multivalence and Absolute Truth

The final critical approach to consider is the concept of multivalent narrative texts. Scott Stroud argues that texts can be polysemic, polyvalent, but also function as multivalent. This notion of a multivalent narrative is similar to the polysemic approach in that narrative texts present contradictions; however, under a multivalent lens, contradictory value structures and statements are presented in order to entice the auditor to "understand and reconstruct how these

values, some of which may be familiar and desirable, can coexist without cognitive dissonance or contradiction" (379). Therefore, the task "becomes finding how these disparate value statements can be reconciled in one's understanding of the text, not simply finding what one desires in the text (polysemy) or evaluating the text based upon one's held values (polyvalence)" (379). Under this approach, the audience or rhetorical critic must sift through contradictory messages in an effort to discover an emergent inclusive, all-encompassing message of a narrative.

Through this process, a critic may have to decide on "a suitable permutation" of depicted contradictions in reconstructing what can be labeled "*transcendental dissolutions*" within a text (385-386). The transcendence of presented contradictions goes beyond choosing the identified dominant value structure given and analyzing its appeal or suppression of subordinate groups; instead, the transcendental dissolutions disseminated throughout a text are met with a reconciliation subsequent the recognition of "lower" and "higher" levels of a text. "The 'lower' levels involve the textually significant arguments and assertions in favor of one value structure or its opposite; the higher levels involve statements that see those contradictions as not a true description of the values and issues" (386). In other words, under this approach, narratives are not defined by their contradictions or value relevance. Instead, narrative texts can be reconstructed as all-encompassing, higher-level rhetorical works that transcend opposing perspectives and allow for a critical reconstruction and integration of approaches, meanings, interpretations and, ultimately, morals. This multivalent approach is the final critical approach that my study passes through, and it is the foundation of my study's methodological originality. In implementing the multivalent critical approach to narrative, my study transcends the disparate critical approaches of polysemic, polyvalent, narrative paradigm, possibility and narrative

identification readings in relation to the antihero film. Furthermore, my study transcends the competing theoretical lenses of doxa, bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality, objective knowledge and intersubjectivity. My study reconsiders the differences shown in critical analysis by each approach, followed by a series of "lower-level" similarities and one core "higher-level" similarity that renders the antihero film multivalent. In doing so, an original analysis is constructed by bringing every critical vector together under one inclusive critical approach. Finally, a corresponding theoretical lens is offered.

The corresponding theory is Plato's theory of absolute truth. This may not seem plausible considering McKerrow's aforementioned disagreements with Plato concerning the constraints of universal truth; however, Plato's concept of *affliction* within this theoretical lens allows for a metatheoretical perspective of narrative rhetoric, including McKerrow's and the others'. In Plato's *Republic*, a dialogue occurs between Socrates and Glauco contemplating the admission of tragedy, poetry and the like into their just city and whether the rhetors of these art forms "do say something to any real purpose, and whether the good poets in reality have knowledge of those truths which they seem, to the multitude, to express with elegance" (189). The dialogue begins with describing producers of these art forms as imitative, coloring "over with his names and words, certain tones and shades of the several arts, while he understands nothing himself" (192). As the dialogue progresses, Socrates claims that these messages cause either pain or pleasure, reaching the "passionate and multiform part of the soul, as it is easily subject to imitation" (198). Thus, Socrates does not admit these messages into the city, claiming that they cultivate the "lower" part of the soul, satisfying and strengthening the foolish passions of it and weakening the rational part that guides the soul to truth (198).

However, as he normally does in Plato's dialogues, Socrates is eventually depicted

reaching a dialectical reconciliation. Although he acknowledges the contrast and deceiving nature of the passions and still believes that the imitative narrative "is able to corrupt even the good," Socrates admits that the imitative narrator (of poetry, tragedy, etc.) fills and gratifies the higher parts of the soul as well:

> But, if you consider that the better part of us which, in our private misfortunes, we forcibly restrain, and we keep from weeping and wailing, although by nature, desiring to give way to these obsessions; that is the very part which the imitative poets fill and gratify. And that part in us, which is naturally the best, being not sufficiently instructed, either by reason or habit, grows remiss in its Guardianship, by over-attending to the sufferings of others. . . . By this, he or she gains vicarious pleasure, which it would not choose to be deprived of, by despising the whole of the imitative poem. For, I think, it falls to the core of a few of us, to be able to consider what we feel with respect to the fortunes of others must necessarily be felt with respect to our own (199).

With this, Socrates concedes and allows these forms of narrative rhetoric into the city on the condition of 'good reasons' and under the honest confession that they charm the people. In this way, Plato addresses narrative rhetoric itself in a multivalent fashion, addressing the contradictions in the medium's negative and positive halves of pleasure in relation to the soul's higher and lower halves. As the dialogue shifts from the topic of poetry, tragedy and the like, it moves to the topic of philosophy. Once again, Socrates engages in a multivalent-esque dialogue after explaining his definition of the soul:

> The pure, just soul then, is immortal. . . . But, in order to know the kind of Being the soul is, in truth, one should not try to contemplate it, as it is damaged, both by

its conjunction with the body, and by other evils. . . . For, in our reasoning, we have already sufficiently determined that our soul is full of a thousand such contraries existing in it. . . . And what are the consequences of blending together such ingredients . . . whether natural belonging to the soul or accidentally acquired by it? So as to be able to form a judgment from all these combined data and, with an eye steadily fixed on the nature of the soul, to choose between the good and the evil life. . . . But we must know how to select that life which always steers a middle course between such extremes, and to shun excess on either side to the best of our ability. . . . For, the majority of those who came from earth did not make their choices in this careless manner, because they had known affliction themselves, and had seen it in others" (206-217).

In other words, Plato's theory of absolute truth contends that in knowing affliction in ourselves and seeing it in others, we learn of what is good and what is bad. Universal truth, then, is reached through *learned judgment* via affliction. It is not a constrained or marginalized model, as McKerrow would suggest. It is a feasibly accessible, multi-leveled theoretical lens that considers the good and the bad as well as middle course between the extremes. It is a lens that considers the dualism between relativist linear dimensions and the nonlinear eternity of absolute truth. Balancing the extremes that Socrates is depicted illuminating is learned and, ultimately, the good or bad life is chosen. But the good life can only be recognized and chosen once good judgments are formed. These good judgments develop from the recognized contradiction between the higher and lower selves. Only from affliction can the pure, just soul be recognized. This concept of affliction will be combined with a multivalent critical approach in an attempt to reconcile the competing theoretical lenses and critical approaches of this study in contribution to

the recognition of a specific source of standardized narrative film morality and the ultimate

moral extension of equipment for living in narrative film rhetoric.

The last step of my analysis is to, in Platonic fashion, gather the extremes that separate

the theories of doxa, the bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality, objective

knowledge, and intersubjectivity as they pertain to my analyzed antihero film artifacts. In

combining these competing theoretical orientations, my study identifies the contradictions

between them, recognizes the overall afflictions, shuns excess, and ultimately comes to a

reconstructed, balanced, inclusive, transcendent, metatheoretical analysis of the antihero film.

This is done in conjunction with a critical multivalent lens and the analysis of the antihero film

under this theoretically oriented critical approach is conducted.

Since the afflicting aspects of the narratives are sifted through via a Platonic, absolute

truth theoretical lens and critically analyzed under a multivalent approach, the 'higher-level'

good, transcendent and just reading is reconciled, allowing for the emergence of 'good reasons'

as to why the antihero invites *moral* classifications of understanding, negotiating and making

sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs. Furthermore, I provide popular

cultural implications for this study beyond the antihero's moral equipment for living function

and offer a reconciliation of critical approaches in contribution to the study of narrative rhetoric.

Moreover, I extend my study's implications to include a reconciliation of theoretical lenses in

contribution to the solidified *essence* of film narrative and the potential future study of narrative

and rhetoric that it inspires. Lastly, I note my study's challenges and direction for future study.

CHAPTER IV

STEPS AND TOOLS OF ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE, DEPICTED
IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES, AND CHARACTERIZATION

The 'good reasons' behind film narrative's cultural moral rhetorical function are given

via the critical analysis tools of characterization, identification and narrative structure. These are

the three core modes of critical analysis for my study. Narrative structure is most important in

guiding the analysis and maintaining a cohesive pattern across differing theoretically oriented

critical approaches. This is due to the fact that, in the realm of rhetorical criticism, the notion of a

general and consistent plot pattern in film narrative has already been established. Kristin

Thompson demonstrates that Hollywood rhetors, whether unintentionally or deliberately,

construct narratives into four evenly divided large-scale parts consisting of a setup portion,

complicating action, development and climax (21-36). Although the particulars within these

parts change from film to film, Thompson demonstrates through extensive analysis that a

majority of Hollywood films from the 1920s to the 1990s present these four discernible portions

of narrative progression and meaning.

Shifts in protagonist goals are the most frequent facilitators in progressing film narrative

and changing direction across these large-scale parts (Thompson 27). Frequently, protagonists

communicate their goals through dialogue—verbal signs of identity, meaning and narrative

causality coming physically from characters in the story's diegetic world (Kozloff 35-37). Most

of the time, dialogue is the primary means under which themes, plots, contexts and

characterizations take place. Chief goals are usually never expressed in just one scene, but

instead through various pieces of dialogue from one part to the next. The significant areas in

which these aspects tend to take shape are in what can be known as *pivot points* at the cusp of each large-scale shift, as well as the climax. Therefore, character dialogue contributes greatly to Thompson's narrative structure—one that has been proven many times over to be the dominating arrangement of Hollywood film (Thompson 36). Through this structural pipeline, not only is character dialogue imperative, but so is the full package of characterization traits that invite both narrative and societal meaning.

Since dialogue is so important to protagonist shifts across large-scale parts, depicted Burkean identification strategies by antihero protagonists are critically analyzed in my study. A main reason for this stems from the societal concerns regarding the "doubts regarding the impurities of identification" in connection to "questionable motives" that "underlie the leader-follower relationship" (Sinha and Jackson 241-242). This provides a specific mode of depicted dialogical criticism for my rhetorical analysis. Furthermore, applying the strategies and concerns regarding real-world leader-follower identification strategies in the current scholarship to these films allows for the potential discovery of offered societal meanings of the antihero film.

As Sally Riad makes clear, narrative texts play major roles in shaping our understandings of leaders, leadership, and society's approach to leader practices (33). Film as a narrative text is capable of amplifying these understandings through explicit auditory, dialogical means. This makes the criticism of depicted identification strategies a viable analytical tool in my study. In investigating these offered meanings via depicted Burkean identification strategies, my analysis lifts the antihero character to a societal level of offered meaning in contribution to the extension of Burke's equipment for living. Moreover, Sinha and Jackson explain an overriding concern regarding leader-follower identification: that although followers may identify with a leader in order to reach a higher state of existence (237), identification has the potential to

operate as a manipulative rather than moral behavior (242). In light of this, my analysis will lift

the antihero character to higher levels of offered meaning in contribution to a moral extension of

equipment for living. Before explaining how depicted identification strategies supplement

offered characterizations of the antiheroes in my analysis, it is important to first explicate the

specific depicted strategies under investigation.

In my analysis, the character portrayed communicating the identification strategies (the

antihero) and depicted audience identifying with these strategies (supporting character or

characters) are pictured on-screen. This is not an analysis of the relationship between characters

on-screen and the viewing audience off-screen. Several depicted fundamental identification

strategies are considered in my study: abstraction, consubstantiality, identification through

antithesis, the assumed or transcendent "we," common sympathy, and the tactic of terminology.

Abstraction literally means a "drawing from," or classifying common strains together through

dissimilar events (Burke, *Permanence* 104). Metaphor and analogy are common forms of

abstraction. When an empirical or sensory image is abstracted to the ideological, it creates a

vague common ground, thus justifying abstraction as an identification strategy (Crable, *Distance*

221).

The perennial strategy available when identifying from the empirical to ideological is

known as "consubstantiality," a strategy under which common ground is communicated through

shared sensations, concepts, ideas, attitudes, values or goals (Burke, *Rhetoric* 21). Defined

succinctly by Crable, "ideas and images serve as the necessary materials for the creation of

identification, the demonstration of consubstantiality. To say that rhetoric is 'communication by

the signs of consubstantiality' is to say that rhetoric, *more broadly*, involves the strategic,

imagistic presentation of the ideal" (*Distance* 226). In these ways, consubstantiality is a way of creating common ground, alleviating the ambiguity of division.

Identification through antithesis involves a rhetor uniting with the audience against a common enemy (Burke, *Dramatism* 148). In interaction, this common enemy is seen as a threat not only to the rhetor's identity, but also to the combined identity of rhetor and audience (Crable, *Rhetoric, Anxiety* 15). Even more powerful than identification through antithesis, according to Burke, is the unnoticed, assumed or transcendent "we" (*Dramatism* 28, Cheney 149). Using the pronoun "we" as a strategy of identification is a subtle way of performing inclusion and common ground. Identification through common sympathy occurs when a rhetor identifies with another through their common plight (Crable, *Rhetoric, Anxiety* 15). This stems from the mutual need for confirmed identity and audience acceptance from a third party. This is a highly interactional approach that considers the rhetor, the audience, and the assumed reigning symbol-system.

The "tactic of terminology" identification strategy involves creating a new vocabulary for interpreting a situation, and the audience is left with no other way of describing that situation besides the vocabulary given by the rhetor (15). This strategy is essential in both dispelling the anxieties tied to ambiguity and the eventual transcendence of that ambiguity. It is possible that not all of these identification strategies will surface during my analysis, but they will all be considered in the analysis process, which will be explained. Once again, all of these identification strategies are analyzed as being depicted on-screen. This is not an analysis of viewing audiences and how they identify with the antihero character.

The last critical tool, characterization, allows the antihero character to be amplified in societal and mythical proportions for the goal and purposes of my study. Gronbeck places diverging acting types at three levels of meaning—the mythic, social and artistic (233). Each

level of meaning is dependent upon an actor's performed role of a character. At the artistic level—also known as the script level—actors use the talents they have at their disposal to simply shape the aesthetics of a rhetor's intended script character. This is simply called *acting* (237). Actors at this level do not try to represent anything more than what is in the designed script beyond minor performance styles.

At the social level, "actors do more than act. Rather, they *transact*" (237). This acting form embodies a more generalizable character representing someone who is recognizably occurring, has occurred, or will occur at the societal level. An example of this would include a female character representing herself as a powerful woman but also as a counter-hegemonic symbol for women empowerment in society.

At the third level—the mythical level—actors neither act nor transact. Instead, actors *enact* at this level, personifying beliefs such as the opposition between good and evil, friends and enemies, and other abstract "timeless truths" (238). At this level, characters represent implied virtues, wisdom, morals and other abstract terms that cannot be tangibly described until they are encoded from performed behaviors.

In describing these levels of characterization, Gronbeck refers to Burke. Abstraction and the mythic image are both Burkean terms that Gronbeck seems to imitate or reproduce, but the most important concept he pulls in is "symbolization" or "symbol-systems" (238). Using this Burkean terminology, Gronbeck is able to tease out the assumed polysemy of television or film messages and successfully present the *how* involved with creating and communicating media characters. He argues that both the form and content regarding these characters can only carry meaningfulness when stemmed from existing social or mythic constructs (234). Therefore, when actors characterize a focal character or protagonist to that of the mythic or societal level, either a

commonality is rendered between rhetor and viewer (societally transacted), or a set of symbols is interpreted in a way that summons some sort of existing knowledge (mythically enacted) (241). In this character analysis, message cues inviting the symbolization of a societally transacted character include depicted dialogue offering the scholarly examined charismatic leader-follower identification process, which is headlined by identification strategies appealing to what the follower considers valuable (Sinha and Jackson, 235). Message cues inviting the symbolization of a mythically enacted character include depicted identification dialogue offering what has been examined in charismatic leadership scholarship as impure or manipulative rather than moral behavior in the leader-follower relationship, such as creating the appearance of crisis, exaggerating achievements, "creating the appearance of miracles," "using staged events with music and symbols to arouse emotions and build enthusiasm," "covering up mistakes and failures," or "blaming others for the leader's mistakes" (Yukl 296).

As Gronbeck explains, characters and their dialogues should also reflect real-life character traits and reasoning patterns (233). In these ways, depicted identification strategies shape the societal characterization of the antihero protagonist in my my study by representing generalizable characteristics via the portrayed and current real-world forms of leader-follower communication strategies and concerns. The portrayals of both an ambitious early twentieth century oilman and a wild and wealthy 1990s stockbroker also add to the generalizable societal characterizations of these characters, inviting the viewing audience to identify with these embodied characters as representative of people currently occurring at the societal level. Furthermore, a rhetor's knowledge of characters and thought serves as "knowledge of a culture's social reality" (Gronbeck 233). In my criticism, observation and analysis of depicted identification strategies identify the offered societal characterizations of these protagonists, and

eventually lifts characters to the mythical level in order to explain the antihero narrative's role in extending Kenneth Burke's equipment for living to include a moral component.

Since my study aims to analyze the antihero film in regard to its depiction of dialogically shaped protagonist characterization, the rhetorical analysis tools of mise en scene, camera angles, lighting and many others do not apply to the overall structure and objective of my analysis of these films. Due to Thompson's confirmation that protagonist goals are the primary catalysts in moving film narrative across large-scale parts, Kozloff's argument that protagonists primarily communicate their goals through dialogue, and the implementation of identification dialogue in these narratives in shaping the antiheroes of my analysis as depicted leaders over their followers, my study tactically investigates the antihero film under three clear rhetorical analysis tools: narrative structure, characterization, and depicted identification dialogue. This does not mean that supplemental narrative analysis tools may appear in these films within large-scale parts. However, these additional areas of potential analyses will not be the primary means under which my analysis focuses.

Since protagonists communicate their goals through dialogue and protagonist goals effectively move film narrative across the aforementioned four large-scale parts, the depicted identification dialogue occurring just prior to or directly during projected pivot points of Thompson's narrative structure are examined in my analysis. Considering Thompson's argument that turning points usually come at the end of a large-scale portion (30), and the fact that protagonists typically illuminate their goals through dialogue before the goals actually occur at depicted pivot points, my analysis examines the precise dialogue occurring either antecedent or directly during the setup/complicating action pivot, complicating action/development pivot, development/climax pivot, and culminating in the final scene of the climax. This gives my

analysis a specific set of dialogical text for direct analysis in relation to Thompson's large scale

pivot points, and also allows for the analysis of the same sections of dialogue across each

theoretically oriented critical approach in my study. Effectively, this allows my analysis to be

coherent, consistent and appropriate in reaching its final absolute truth multivalent destination.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DEPICTED LEADER-FOLLOWER IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES IN
THERE WILL BE BLOOD: AMORAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ANTIHERO
PROTAGONIST

The Setup/Complicating Action Pivot

According to Kristin Thompson (28), the setup portion of a film establishes initial

circumstances, characters and protagonist goals. In the complicating action, the protagonist

begins directly pursuing his or her goals and must cope with a new situation in some form or

fashion. In *There Will Be Blood*, this pivot occurs at the 41-minute mark, almost exactly at

Thompson's predicted pivot toward complicating action (the film is approximately 158 minutes).

This scene serves as a turning point in which antihero protagonist Daniel Plainview is portrayed

giving a speech to the townspeople and prospective oil field workers of Little Boston, California.

He is portrayed preparing the town for a new beginning – one comprising vast opportunity under

his leadership as an oilman. Prior to this scene, the people of the town have not yet been depicted

meeting Plainview, as Plainview is depicted being new to the town as an incoming oilman. In

communicating his goals, Plainview is portrayed using the Burkean identification methods of

consubstantiality, the assumed or transcendent "we," abstraction via metaphor, and common

sympathy to eliminate the division between himself and his newly acquired followers.

The first instance of Plainview's depicted identification strategies appears when he says,

"I like to think of myself as an oil man. And as an oil man I hope that you'll forgive just good

old-fashioned plain speaking." With this statement, Plainview is portrayed immediately

establishing a displayed common ground between himself and his followers via the depicted

strategy of consubstantiality. By sharing a depicted plain-speaking oilman identity with the plain-speaking folk and oil field workers of a small town, Plainview exhibits shared sensations and attitudes with his followers that were previously absent, deleting the ambiguity between himself and the followers he is just depicted meeting. He then expresses a shared, consubstantial identity through the concept and value of family:

> DP: Now this work that we do here is very much a family enterprise. I work side by side with my wonderful son H.W. I think one or two of you might have met him already. I encourage my men to bring their families as well. Of course it makes for an ever so much rewarding life for them.

By bringing forth the concept and value of family in his speech, Plainview is able to extend the common ground between himself and his depicted followers in ways beyond the shared sensations of the individual. He then introduces his second depicted identification strategy, the assumed or transcendent pronoun "we," in combination with consubstantial shared sensations, concepts, values and goals:

> DP: Family means children; children means education. So wherever we set up camp, education is a necessity, and we're just so happy to take care of that. So let's build a wonderful school in Little Boston. These children are the future that we strive for and so they should have the very best of things.

By bringing in the pronoun "we" amidst the shared concepts and values of family and education, as well as shared goals of building a better future for their children Plainview is depicted evoking one of the unnoticed major powers of identification—the "we" pronoun—in combination with depicted strategies of consubstantiality (Burke, *Dramatism* 28). Using this pronoun does two things in the film. First, it creates the depicted shared identity between himself

and his followers that Plainview is now a member of the community. Second, he is portrayed offering what is valuable to the people in doing so, not only making him a member of the community, but a member of greater hierarchical stature. As Sinha and Jackson argue via charismatic leadership studies, "when a leader represents what a group of followers consider valuable, those followers will likely identify with that leader" (235). Plainview does this by representing portrayed shared sensations, concepts, goals, values and ideas, and begins to depicted societally transacted characterization.

The next set of dialogue worth noting in this depicted speech includes the Burkean identification strategy of common sympathy. More specifically, Plainview identifies with his audience through their portrayed and assumed common plight, further creating common ground between him, his audience, and the depicted reigning symbol-system of the film. He does so by combining portrayed common sympathy with the identification strategies of abstraction, the pronoun "we," and consubstantiality:

> DP: Now, something else, and please don't be insulted if I speak about this: bread. Let's talk about bread. Now to my mind, it's an abomination to consider that any man, woman or child in this magnificent country of ours should have to look upon a loaf of bread as a luxury. We're gonna dig water wells here, and water wells means irrigation. Irrigation means cultivation. We're gonna raise crops here where before it just simply wasn't possible. You're gonna have more grain than you know what to do with. Bread will be coming right out of your ears, ma'am. New roads, agriculture, employment, education. These are just a few of the things we can offer you and I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that if we do

find oil here, and I think there's a very good chance that we will, this community

of yours will not only survive, it will flourish.

By identifying with his depicted audience's common sympathy, Plainview is able to tap

into the displayed reigning symbol-system of economic struggle that his audience is experiencing

in the story world. He is shown doing this in combination with strategies of consubstantiality,

generating common ground through the created shared goals of irrigation, cultivation, new roads,

agriculture, employment and education. He is also portrayed doing this under the transcendent

"we," creating inclusion in achieving this goals with the audience. Lastly, Plainview is depicted

using the metaphor form of abstraction by telling an audience member that bread will be coming

right out of her ears. This creates a displayed abstracted common ground from the sensory to the

imaginary, putting into perspective a vague yet telling idea of what Plainview has to offer his

depicted audience. Once this portrayed speech is over, the complicating action portion of the film

is underway, and oil drilling is depicted as ensuing the following day.

The Complicating Action/Development Pivot

Just before the projected shift to the development portion of *There Will Be Blood*,

Plainview is shown meeting his brother Henry for the first time. Little does Plainview know,

Henry eventually confesses to not being his real brother in a later scene. Nevertheless, before he

is depicted knowing this, Plainview allows Henry to work for him and takes him in as one of his

followers. Just minutes following the projected large-scale shift from the complicating action

portion to the development, Plainview is displayed using Burkean identification strategies in a

conversation with Henry. This occurs at the 85-minute mark when Plainview is depicted saying,

"I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed. I hate most people." Henry then

explains that all his failures have led him to not care about the success of hard work. Plainview then follows with depicted identification strategies of consubstantiality through shared sensations, concepts and values, as well as identification through antithesis against a threat to the depicted shared identity between Plainview and Henry:

> DP: Well, if it's in me, it's in you. There are times when I look at people and I see nothing worth liking. I want to earn enough money, I can get away from everyone. . . . I see the worst in people, Henry. I don't need to look past seeing them to get all I need. I've built up my hatreds over the years, little by little. Having you here gives me a second breath of life. I can't keep doing this on my own. With these . . . people [laughs].

Here in the pivot from complicating action to development, Plainview is depicted using consubstantiality with Henry through the shared sensation, concept and value of family when saying "If it's in me, it's in you." This is a strategy aiming to create instant depicted common ground between the valued family blood of Henry and Plainview. Furthermore, Plainview is depicted using the identification strategy of antithesis, uniting Plainview with Henry against the common enemy of "these people." When he says he wants no one else to succeed, hates most people, and sees the worst in people, he is depicted invoking 'us versus them' rhetoric, with Henry and himself as the 'us.' He makes it clear that the depicted common enemies are simply any people who he does not want to succeed, and that any enemy success would be a threat to Plainview and Henry's family identities.

In the following scene, Plainview's son is depicted accidentally setting Henry's house on fire. In the scene subsequent this, Plainview abandons his son on a train. In a later scene, Plainview is depicted killing Henry after finding out he is not his real brother. Just ten minutes

prior to the two-hour mark of the film, Plainview is depicted waking up in the middle of a man's property where he wants to build a pipeline through to expand his oil business. This character's name is William Bandy, and he is portrayed consenting the lease of his land to Plainview on the condition that he is "washed in the blood of Jesus Christ" for the sin of killing. This leads the film to the next significant textual pivot point.

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The Development/Climax Pivot

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According to Thompson, the development puts the final touches on revealing all goals, situations, characters and obstacles, with struggles toward the protagonist's main goals serving as the turning point (28). In the climax, "action shifts into a straightforward progress toward the final resolution" (29). In the shifts between these large-scale parts, the protagonist traditionally hits a low point that he or she must escape in order to avoid despair or achieve his or her goals. In the case of this film, the antihero is depicted using Burkean identification strategies in order to escape despair and take a direct route to goal achievement.

By the 108-minute mark of *There Will Be Blood* (the projected pivot point according to Thompson would occur around 118 minutes), Plainview is already portrayed to the audience as an abandoner of his son (he leaves him in a train when he finds out he has become deaf from an oil rig accident) and a killer (he murders an impostor who Plainview formerly thought was his long-lost brother). When characters in the story world discover this, he hits his lowest moment of despair. He is asked to be forgiven and baptized at the church he promised the road would lead to, and is depicted agreeing to do so in order to relieve himself of struggle, remain a leader over his followers and continue pursuing his goals. This shift happens at approximately the 112-minute mark, when the priest, Eli Sunday, asks him to repeat these words in a hysterical scene:

DP: I am a sinner.

I am sorry lord.

I want the blood.

I have abandoned my child.

I will never backslide.

I was lost but now I am found.

I have abandoned my child.

I have abandoned my child!!! (x2)

I have abandoned my boy!!!

Sunday is depicted finishing the baptism in exorcism fashion as he screams, "Get out of here, demon!" [while slapping him over and over] and shrieks and groans come from the crowd. Plainview is portrayed accepting Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior to achieve consubstantiality in shared concepts, ideas and values with his followers, but subsequent his baptism he is depicted uttering, "Where is the pipeline?" under his breath. This is an example of depicted manipulative charismatic leadership behavior, as Plainview is portrayed creating the appearance of a miracle in order to cover up his mistakes and failures. When this is over, the townspeople in the church are depicted commending and thanking him, as they remain followers of Plainview despite his use of the circumstance to maintain identification in inauthentic fashion, as he sheds his struggles toward goal achievement and continues his previously portrayed patterns.

The Climax

Despite achieving his goals, Plainview's dialogue resists depicted moral closure in the film's climax. Kozloff argues that, as a general rule, dialogue in a film's final scene either reinforces an ostensible moral message or resists closure (58). In the climax of *There Will Be Blood*, Plainview is shown reuniting with his son years later and fervently rejects him. In the film's final scene, when Eli is depicted revisiting Plainview after a long hiatus, he is desperate for money and asks Plainview to begin drilling again. He is so desperate that Plainview is depicted asking him to vehemently repeat the words, "I am a false prophet. God is a superstition," and proceeds to tell Eli that there is no work left to be done and that all the areas have been drilled and drained of oil. He is then portrayed telling Eli that his brother gave him the money to drill those areas. Thus, he is depicted tricking Eli, then entertains him in a metaphorical monologue before brutally killing him:

> DP: If you have a milkshake, and I have a straw – there it is, that's a straw, see, watching? My straw reaches across the room, and starts to drink your milkshake. I drink your milkshake! I drink it up! Did you think your song and dance would help you Eli? I am the third revelation! I am who the lord has chosen!

Although this dialogic piece is metaphorical and metaphor is considered a strategy of abstraction under Burkean identification, the dialogue in the climax of *There Will Be Blood* provides no moral closure and portrays a final resolution under which Plainview reaches his goals through the use of manipulative rather than moral identification strategies throughout the film. Plainview is depicted achieving his goals, exaggerating his achievements through manipulative charismatic leader-follower abstraction by calling himself "the third revelation," and commits murder. According to Shafer and Raney, message cues embedded in the narrative

plot structure of the antihero narrative provide guidance toward moral disengagement (1043). Furthermore, as Kozloff argues, audience interpretation of thematic and societal significance is based on the connections between diegesis, dialogue, characterization, and the associations between those filmic features and the wider social, cultural, political or moral climate (59). Therefore, the encoded portrayal of manipulative identification strategies render Daniel Plainview a uniquely enacted mythical character in *There Will Be Blood*, representing a separation from virtues, wisdom, morals and other abstract terms that personify beliefs such as the opposition between good and evil, friends and enemies, and other "timeless truths" (Gronbeck 238). He is portrayed doing so through identification strategies that manipulatively create the appearance of miracles and exaggeration of achievements. The rhetors of this film portray an antihero who begins his journey as an identifiable leader in the setup (through identification dialogue), and ends it as an amoral mythic character in the climax (ultimately through characterization). Instead of being the model for good as a hero protagonist, he is portrayed as the mythical model for bad as an antihero protagonist. He also remains a generalizable, societally transacted character through the depiction of a recognizably occurring and scholarly examined leader-follower identification process portraying the societal concerns regarding manipulative charismatic leadership communication strategies. In these ways, character analysis of the Daniel Plainview antihero protagonist in *There Will Be Blood* extends offered meanings of amoral characterization to the larger society, making the character portrayal of this antihero amoral equipment for living.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS OF THE AMORAL ANTIHERO CHARACTER WITH A
METATHEORETICALLY ORIENTED CRITICAL APPROACH

Although the narrative analysis tools of depicted identification dialogue, characterization and narrative structure are imperative in recognizing the Daniel Plainview antihero *character* in *There Will Be Blood* as amoral, this does not assume amoral equipment for living concerning the antihero *narrative*. The antihero protagonist's lack of dialogical moral closure does tell an audience much of what needs to be known about the character and its contribution to a film's final resolution, but it does not necessarily depict the film's invited moral or amoral extensions of understanding, negotiating or making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs. According to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, characters exhibit moral qualities, but the depicted actions that lead to a narrative's conclusions supersede these qualities: "In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action" (231). The fundamental research problem of my study examines the antihero film narrative, under which the lead character is important, but does not fully invite moral or amoral classifications of understanding, negotiating and making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs on its own.

In transcending this analysis beyond mere character examination, the aforementioned metatheoretical approach is necessary in order to bring the antihero narrative to an analytical level worthy of association with Adams' discussion of narrative morality, Rushing's and Frentz's claim that narrative serves not only a rhetorical but moral function, and Condit's claim that the discussion of rhetoric's influence on public morality has regained significance in ways similar to

those held in the prominent days of antiquity. In incorporating my analysis of the amoral antihero

character with a metatheoretically-lensed critical approach, the core of my research problem can

now be directly pursued and invited moral classifications of the antihero film can be assessed.

<center>Doxastic Polysemic Analysis</center>

Under the doxastic polysemic approach, depicted identification strategies by the antihero

protagonist at large-scale pivot points of *There Will Be Blood* are analyzed regarding the film's

depicted societal relationship between discourse and power. Under this approach, this film

portrays the power of the dominant class in creating and controlling its own cultural norms as a

primary reading. Although it is not possible to predict the precise reading by any one viewer

when watching this film, it is important to identify "the relation between textual structure and

social structure that make such polysemic readings necessary" (Fiske 394). The key cultural

norm considered for analysis in this film is the hegemony of capitalism, an area of critique

illuminated by Fiske (392). In this film, Daniel Plainview is depicted as a dominant capitalist

figure.

In the setup/complicating action pivot he is depicted as an oilman—a societally classified

capitalist figure in corporate America. As a depicted oilman, he consubstantially creates depicted

shared capitalistic goals with the citizens of Little Boston, California. By invoking the common

sympathy of economic struggle in this first pivot, Plainview is depicted using the transcendent

"we" and the strategy of abstraction ("Bread will be coming right out of your ears, ma'am") in

order to create depicted consubstantial economic goals of irrigation, cultivation, new roads,

agriculture, employment and education with his followers. Economic goals are at the forefront of

capitalism in American society, and the rhetors of this film first portray these dominant cultural

practices within the film's first large-scale pivot point. Furthermore, the rhetors simultaneously portray Plainview offering the achievement of shared goals regarding shared family values with his followers in Little Boston, California. In offering what the depicted audience views as valuable, Plainview is depicted as a member of greater hierarchical stature, thus enhancing the character's depicted relationship to power dynamics and dominant American structures. This depicted hierarchical status and structure also allows for potential subordinate and dominant readings. As explained in chapter three, the subordinate culture can only be defined in terms of its relationship to the dominant. This subordinate reading in relation to the dominant becomes much more apparent in the climax portion of this film; however, Plainview's goal pursuit across large-scale parts before the climax are important in terms of depicted relationships between power, freedom and the capitalistic dominant ideology. As the lead character and power figure of the film, Plainview is depicted using leader-follower identification strategies in order to set forth and eventually achieve his depicted capitalistic goals of economic success, and these specific goals become much more apparent in the following pivot points.

In the complicating action/development pivot, Plainview is depicted creating a common enemy for himself and Henry. Once again, he is depicted using these identification strategies under the common goal of making money and the common value of family. However, a subordinate reading begins to become available by this segment of the narrative structure when Plainview's depicted dialogue shrinks the amount of people invited for inclusion within the related dominant ideology primary reading. The Plainview character begins to depict greed in this dialogical segment when he is depicted saying he wants to earn enough money to get away from everyone and wants no one else to succeed. Ultimately, when Plainview is depicted communicating his capitalistic goals of economic success in this pivot, the rhetors open up a

subordinate reading consisting of "a wide range of social groups and subcultures with different senses of their own identity, of their relations to each other and to the centers of power" (Fiske 392). In other words, the Plainview character is depicted creating such a vast common enemy for himself and Henry that any other conceivable supporting character capable of succeeding in the film inherently invites an alignment with Fiske's argument that the "reader, who statistically is almost certain to be one of the culturally subordinate, is invited to cooperate with the text" (403). Correspondingly, in scenes following this pivot, Plainview is depicted abandoning his son and killing Henry. At this point of the film, an even greater potential subordinate reading is offered and the dominant reading is solidified as an amorally characterized one within the film's narrative structure.

After Plainview is depicted continuing amoral qualities in order to achieve consubstantiality with his followers and sheds struggles toward goal achievement in the development/climax pivot, he is ultimately portrayed as an amoral character in the climax, exhibiting leader-follower identification strategies in order to achieve his goal of economic success under a related, capitalistic, ideologically dominant reading. Moreover, the climax portion of this film achieves the fundamental notion of polysemy in that "all television texts must, in order to be popular, contain within them unresolved contradictions that the viewer can exploit in order to find within them structural similarities to his or her own social relations and identity" (392). As noted prior, dialogue in the climax of *There Will Be Blood* provides no depiction of moral closure. Plainview is portrayed as an amoral character using manipulative leader-follower identification strategies in order to reach his hegemonic capitalistic goals; however, the narrative plot structure leaves the dominant reading with no moral closure, revealing what Fiske would call a gap or instability in the text that can only be realized by

deconstructing it (400). The climax allows the moral meanings within this film to "escape the control of the dominant" and provide pleasure for the subordinate reader (402-403). Therefore, under a doxastic polysemic approach, the invited moral pleasure of this film belongs to the subordinate reader.

Thus, pleasure in viewing achieved protagonist goals via amoral characterization qualities belongs to the dominant ideological reading, and the moral pleasure of viewing a narrative plot structure belongs to the subordinate ideological reading. In doxastic fashion, this unmasks the discourse of power within this film and uncovers a secondary reading consisting of a morally pleasurable subversion of dominant cultural norms. As McKerrow explains, "*absence* is as important as *presence* in understanding and evaluating symbolic action" (107). In this case, the absence of moral narrative closure is as important as the presence of amoral characterization, and *There Will Be Blood* needs both in order to allow the polysemy of contradictory desired readings and "different discursive practices and ideological frames of different subcultures to be used in the reception and decoding of the text" (Fiske 400). Therefore, under a doxastic polysemic lens, *There Will Be Blood* serves as moral *and* amoral equipment for living by inviting the viewer to cooperate with amoral characterization tailored to the ideology of the dominant group via characterization, yet subverting the ideology of the dominant group via narrative plot structure. In these ways, not only does this approach balance both moral and amoral extensions of Burke's equipment for living, it balances the fundamental notion of polysemy that all narrative texts must contain contradictions rendering dominant and subordinate readings.

Bounded Network Theory of Relative Truth and Objective Reality/Polyvalence Analysis

Under the bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality polyvalent approach, depicted identification strategies by the Daniel Plainview antihero protagonist at large-scale pivot points are analyzed regarding the portrayed "better or worse" societal relationship between discourse, power, human values, and the intensity attached to some depictions and weakened in others in *There Will Be Blood*. In other words, under this approach, it is not enough to say that this antihero character offers the contradiction of both moral and amoral extensions of Burke's equipment for living. Although an audience may share these dominant or subordinate readings, their judgments of the valuations of these separate readings can differ. This approach admits that texts are polysemic, yet a polysemic reading does not account for the relativity of invited textual meanings due to new material conditions and shifting language structures.

It may seem obvious that, in the case of *There Will Be Blood*, that the "better," moral reading is the subordinate one and the "worse," amoral reading is dominant. However, Condit admits that truth is not only something that human beings have historically striven for, but something that is "relative to the language and the purposes of the persons using it" (*Beyond Rhetorical Relativism* 356-359). Furthermore, under this approach, discourse is limited by material objective reality and rhetors present this discourse by intensifying or weakening some aspects of a text in response to related material conditions (354-361). As was analyzed in the previous approach, *There Will Be Blood* is a narrative text presented in response to the dominant material conditions of hegemonic American capitalism. In moving this interpretation across approaches, this dominant reading aligns with what Condit would describe as a relative human experience or relative truth based on current societal language structures and material conditions. This perspective would effectively assume the amoral, dominant reading as the "better" or more

"true" reading. However, Condit admits that, reciprocally, "rhetoric also adjusts material conditions in response to linguistic conditions or related material conditions" (361). This would mean that the moral, subordinate reading is doing its part in shifting the language structures to a "better," more "true" reading. Herein lies the abyss of relativity.

One way to predict a "better or worse" evaluation of disparaging readings under this bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality polyvalent approach would be to conduct an audience study of this film every time a dominant language structure shifts. This, of course, is unfit for my analysis. Objective reality in Condit's theory exists but constraints rhetoric because it is not tied to language structures. Therefore, in order to develop judgments of "better or worse" readings without audience analysis and the burden of infinite relativity, the critic must be equipped with much more concrete analysis tools regarding a language structure containing specific value denotations and terms. In this way, Condit's argument that viewer judgment varies due to their value systems can be analyzed more closely and specifically. Moreover, analyzing the antihero narrative under a tangible value system preserves the critic as a moral agent. Thus, analysis of *There Will Be Blood* under this theoretically oriented critical approach is dependent on the value systems in which it was is created. Without a specific value system in place for analysis, *There Will Be Blood* still serves as moral *and* amoral equipment for living under this approach, as it is both an amoral text tailored to the ideology of the dominant group via characterization, yet also a moral text subverting the ideology of the dominant group via narrative plot structure, with the "better" or "worse" reading left up to the relative language and value structures in place and the people who use them. The following theoretically oriented critical approach provides specific value terms for "better or worse" analysis.

Objective Knowledge Narrative Paradigm Analysis

Under the objective knowledge narrative paradigm approach, depicted identification strategies by the antihero protagonist at large-scale pivot points can now be analyzed regarding the film's portrayed societal relationship with the materialistic and moralistic American dreams. This gives the previous approach tangible American value structures to refer to in my analysis. It also allows my study to maintain a cumulative movement, as Condit's relativity arguments sustain importance when potentially assessing both depictions of the American dream and the intensity attached to the messages in each. As noted when analyzing this film under the appropriate narrative analysis tools within a doxastic polysemy approach, Daniel Plainview's depicted identification strategies render an amoral, yet ideologically dominant hegemonic reading of *There Will Be Blood*. This interpretation stems from Plainview's portrayed manipulative leader-follower identification strategies in pursuit of hierarchical status and economic goal achievement.

This reading aligns with Fisher's materialistic American dream, one grounded in the "values of effort, persistence, 'playing the game,' initiative, self-reliance, achievement, and success" (*Reaffirmation and Subversion* 161). Under this version of the American dream, competition is "the way of determining personal worth, the free enterprise system, and the notion of freedom" (161). This freedom is "defined as the freedom from controls, regulations, or constraints that hinder the individual's striving for ascendency in the social-economic hierarchy of society. . . . it promises that if one employs one's energies and talents to the fullest, one will reap the rewards of status, wealth, and power" (161). When Plainview is shown communicating the identification strategy of common sympathy in the setup/complicating action pivot, he not only taps into the depicted audience's reigning symbol-system of economic struggle, but offers

materialistic values of effort, persistence and initiative as solutions to alleviate the struggle within the depicted reigning symbol-system. He is shown doing so through the assumed "we," bringing his depicted audience along with him in this goal of achieving success and mutual worth. The tangible attainments Plainview is portrayed offering along with these materialistic values include irrigation, cultivation, roads, employment and education. This depicts the quintessential "rags-to-riches," "to do" mentality of the materialistic American dream, as Plainview is shown bringing his followers along with him in his pursuit of social-economic ascendance.

The complicating action/development pivot of *There Will Be Blood* depicts this "rags-to-riches" materialistic American dream of competition when Plainview is shown saying, "I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed. I hate most people." This reflects the materialistic American dream and its competitive foundation in advocating achievement as a route toward freedom. In the climax portion of the film, Plainview is depicted communicating his reaped rewards of status, wealth and power when he abstracts himself metaphorically as "the third revelation" and the one "who the lord has chosen" just before he is depicted killing Eli. In this scene, he is portrayed reaching the peak of the materialistic American dream while concurrently depicting the peak of amoral characterization.

According to Fisher, in "naked form, the materialistic myth is compassionless and self-centered; it encourages manipulation and leads to exploitation" (161). Analysis of the portrayed identification strategies by the Daniel Plainview antihero character in *There Will Be Blood*—under the objective knowledge narrative paradigm approach—quite clearly makes Fisher's argument. This version of the American dream, along with its depiction in *There Will Be Blood*, is "not a representation of the 'ideal' life," although there is "an actual community existing over

time, that practices, even if it does not celebrate, the values of pleasure, expediency, self-aggrandizement, courage, strength, political acumen and success, and the will to power" as the ideal life under the materialistic American dream (Fisher, *Elaboration* 363). As Fisher makes clear, although "the American Dream is two myths and a person may exemplify or strongly prefer one over the other, it is important to recognize that no American can entirely escape the whole dream" (*Reaffirmation and Subversion* 163).

In analyzing *There Will Be Blood* under this theoretically oriented critical approach, it is obvious that the amorality of the materialistic American dream has much more Condit-termed "intensity" attached to it than any morally subordinate reading. In fact, it leaves no characterized version of the moralistic American dream to be analyzed. This is where Fisher's objective knowledge of *whether* applies. This also overlaps with Condit's "better or worse" approach. Under this approach, it is essential to ask whether the depiction of the Daniel Plainview antihero character stifles potential readings of happiness, truth justice, wisdom, or, more specifically for this analysis, morality. Although this film portrays relative truths concerning ideologically dominant language structures in society, it stifles any reading including the moralistic aspects of the American dream, such as "the good, beauty, health, wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, harmony, order, communion, friendship and a oneness with the Cosmos – as variously as these values may be defined or practices in 'real' life" (Fisher, *Elaboration* 362). Therefore, under an objective knowledge narrative paradigm approach, the rhetors of *There Will Be Blood* offer the Daniel Plainview character antihero as a depicted amoral classification of human experience extending to the corresponding societal situations, attitudes or beliefs within the value structure of the materialistic American dream.

Intersubjective Possibility of Narrative Identification Analysis

Under the intersubjective rhetoric of possibility and narrative identification approach, depicted identification strategies by the Daniel Plainview antihero protagonist at large-scale pivot points are analyzed regarding the portrayed societal relationship in *There Will Be Blood* with a possible critique of corresponding societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs. This takes a step beyond the argument under the objective knowledge narrative paradigm approach that the Daniel Plainview antihero character is amoral equipment for living based on depicted materialistic American dream values, and takes on the possible reading that the amoral equipment for living function of this film is created as a way of explicitly illuminating amoral ideologies, value structures, language structures, material conditions, negotiations, understandings or attitudes as a form of social critique. This follows Barry Brummett's theoretical philosophy that the rhetor has a moral responsibility because, like Condit, Brummett argues that truth and meaning are defined by constantly changing language structures and contexts, therefore empowering the rhetor to advocate a reality that "*urges* choice rather than complete and necessary acceptance on the part of the audience" (40). According to Brummett, truth is determined by how people and contexts change (33). This renders a combination of both Condit and Fisher's philosophies, bringing the narrative paradigm to an intersubjective, critical level under a "process" view of reality (30).

Thus, an intersubjective reading under a narrative identification critical approach can illuminate the possibility that the rhetors of *There Will Be Blood* created a text that allows for the critique of the societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs attached to the film. As mentioned in the doxastic polysemy analysis of this film, depiction of the Daniel Plainview character in *There Will Be Blood* leaves open the possibility for a much larger

subordinate audience than the dominant one. This is important to Kirkwood, who argues that "stories that help people discover their capacity to become what they are not have important consequences for moral argument. Such stories can expand an audience's moral responsibility by showing them they are freer and more capable than previously imagined" (32). By showing the majority subordinate audience what it is *not* in *There Will Be Blood*, an intersubjective reading places the rhetor in the responsible position of offering an amoral, dominant reading of "factual or invented stories about what others have done, then calling upon auditors to actualize these possibilities" regarding the antihero narrative and its amoral protagonist (Kirkwood 38).

The possibility of the antihero character inviting newly realized freedom and possible expansion in the audience's feelings of moral responsibility beyond the initial given context allows the intersubjective narrative identification approach to be a significant, possible reading. Therefore, in using the narrative identification critical approach, there is no need to look any further than the depicted identification strategies portrayed by antihero Daniel Plainview across large-scale pivot points that have already been mentioned. First, he is shown communicating ideologically dominant, amoral identification strategies in alignment with amoral materialistic American dream values in order to directly pursue depicted goals of freedom, status, wealth and power in the setup/complicating action pivot. He does so through the exhibited value appeal of family, the transcendent "we" pronoun, shared goal of building a better future, and abstracted metaphor. These are all identification strategies used and analyzed by people in society today, inviting coherence and fidelity in the narrative extending beyond the text.

Second, Plainview is shown using amoral identification strategies to create a vast common enemy with his follower—one aligning with a subordinate yet majority reading—when depicted saying he "hates most people," wants no one else to succeed and wants to earn enough

money to get away from them in the complicating action/development pivot. This is yet another real-world identification strategy depicted in this film. By continuing to reveal these amoral yet societally realistic identification strategies in opposition to a majority subordinate viewing, the possibility emerges of the story world slowly becoming unaligned with the common viewer's personal identity, especially as the protagonist continues a portrayed path toward goal achievement. This begins to open up *There Will Be Blood* as an antihero film worthy of social critique.

Third, Plainview is depicted communicating the consubstantiality of shared concepts, ideas and values with his followers by accepting Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, but does so in manipulative fashion by creating the appearance of a miracle while also saying, "Where's the pipeline?" under his breath, shedding his struggles toward goal achievement and continuing his previously portrayed amoral patterns. Under the depicted reigning symbol-system he is portrayed in, Daniel Plainview is portrayed using real-world manipulative identification strategies as an amoral character to successfully shed depicted struggles toward goal achievement. These depicted charismatic leadership identification strategies in combination with the film's portrayed religiosity, ideologically dominant ideology of hegemonic capitalism, and materialistic American dream values invite a reigning symbol-system within the film that corresponds with the audience's classifications of American societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs. It is also important to keep in mind the possible aforementioned invited response toward the story world slowly becoming unaligned with the common viewer's personal identity. This film, therefore, not only invites the narrative identification possibility of a viewer rejecting the depicted symbol-system of the film, but the societal symbol-system that the film represents.

In the climax portion of *There Will Be Blood*, Daniel Plainview is portrayed achieving his goals and using the Burkean identification strategy of abstraction when communicating to Eli before he is depicted killing him. By the time this pivot occurs and the film is over, the common audience is invited to a degree of alienation with both the reigning symbol-system of the story world and the cultural Burkean symbol-system it represents, therefore revealing the film as a form of social critique devoid of moral elements or closure. The invitation of alienation supplies a standard to which a viewer can compare his or her invited moral alienation with the offered morality in the film. This allows the viewer to not only analyze the film's moral or amoral representations of the culture it extends to, but to analyze his or her society as it pertains to the amoral and alienating narrative identification created in the film. This not only places the audience in a position of moral responsibility, but the rhetor as well, as the rhetor's knowledge of characters and thought should represent the knowledge of a culture's societal reality. Therefore, under the intersubjective narrative identification possibility approach, *There Will Be Blood* is actually interpreted as presenting amoral equipment for living—an antihero film inviting the critique of its corresponding morally alienating societal situations, attitudes or beliefs. Furthermore, by inviting alienation, the audience is invited to feel compelled to throw off existing modes of understanding, negotiating and believing in the world and take on an expanded moral responsibility in a freer and more capable way than previously imagined.

<div align="center">Afflictive Multivalent Analysis and Absolute Truth</div>

Under the afflictive multivalent approach, my analysis moves from a series of disparate approaches containing within them contradictions available for criticism to a transcendent analysis of reconstruction and reconciliation of the depicted contradictions. In this way, my study

effectively passes through the contradictive, lower-level appearances of film narrative in order to arrive at the essence a narrative's moral foundation. As mentioned in the affliction/multivalence and absolute truth section of chapter three, the lower levels of a narrative involve the analysis of a narrative's depictions favoring one value structure over another, while the higher levels of a narrative involve the reconciliation of contradictions as a true description. This is not to say that the lower levels of a text should be discounted; but from a standpoint of moral analysis, the higher levels are to be at the forefront of analysis. In order to reach these higher levels of the current *There Will Be Blood* exemplar, this final theoretically oriented critical approach must invoke affliction. This means sifting through and assessing the lower-level contradictions within the text and reconstructing them in a way that transcends ideological contradictions of perceived power, relative "better or worse" valuations, engrained value structure appeals, or possible invited societal critiques.

The goal at this stage of my analysis is to reach a common, higher-level, transcendental dissolution among the aforementioned approaches via an afflictive analysis of the lower levels of the text. By analyzing the lower levels of the text and reaching an afflictive multivalent reading, a judgment of the higher levels of the text can then be learned, recognized, formed, and also seen in other texts—just as Plato acknowledges of the soul in his *Republic*. Herein my analysis offers an original contribution to rhetorical narrative analysis. Reaching this higher level includes steering a middle course between the extremes of each approach, reconstructing contradictions, shunning excess and, ultimately, reconciling the antihero film's moral equipment for living foundation. Only from knowing this textual affliction can a Platonically pure, just reading of a filmic narrative text be recognized.

The first and most imperative area to consider in this analysis is balancing the extremes of each approach. The first and fourth theoretically oriented critical approaches are vastly different in characterized moral or amoral equipment for living outcome, albeit the cumulative development from one approach to the next. These contradictions are much too divergent to reconcile. The doxastic polysemic approach embraces contradictions in order to discern dominant and subordinate readings. In *There Will Be Blood*, this means balancing the dominant, amoral characterization of the Daniel Plainview character and the subversive narrative plot structure. The intersubjective possibility of narrative identification approach acknowledges the narrative structure's function in revealing the reigning symbol-system of the story world in *There Will Be Blood* and the overarching societal symbol-system it extends to, but analyzes the film itself as a form of amoral social critique due to the antihero protagonist's portrayed characterization in relation to the depicted symbol-system. The objective knowledge narrative paradigm approach acknowledges the narrative structure's function revealing Plainview's depicted peak of amoral characterization, but *There Will Be Blood* is considered amoral equipment for living under this approach mostly because it stifles the opposing moralistic American dream reading. Under the bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality polyvalence approach, the narrative structure carries a function similar to the doxastic polysemy approach by revealing contradictions and the discernment of dominant and subordinate readings, but the film can only be considered moral or amoral equipment for living if individual "better or worse" value interpretations are considered. In these ways, these theoretically oriented approaches contradict one another at the characterization level and ultimate moral or amoral equipment for living level.

To balance these extremes, it is important to reconcile the common foundation that these approaches share, amid their extremes, in reaching their moral or amoral equipment for living functions. This common foundation is the narrative structure. Despite the distinct moral or amoral equipment for living conclusion of each approach, the narrative plot structure serves as the foundation on which these approaches reach their characterized moral or amoral extensions of understanding, negotiating or making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs. First, the narrative structure ubiquitously brings the film to a climax portion that each approach shares. Second, the narrative structure remains foundationally unchanging amidst the relativity of each approach's characterized moral or amoral equipment for living conclusion. Third, without the fixed consistency of Kristin Thompson's recognized narrative plot structure in this film, the characterized moral or amoral equipment for living functions under each approach would not come to fruition.

The doxastic polysemy approach would not apply to *There Will Be Blood* if there were not a subversive plot structure to contradict the amorally dominant characterization portrayed in the film. The bounded network theory of relative truth and objective reality polyvalence approach would not render the film moral or amoral equipment for living based on individually relative value positions if the narrative structure were absent, because no "better or worse" discernment between relative value orientations can be made without a climax portion coherently revealing the film's overall invited vectors of viewer judgment or the particular roles portrayed by those vectors in relation to differing viewer value structures. A successful amoral equipment for living analysis of *There Will Be Blood* under the objective knowledge narrative paradigm approach would not be reached if there were not a climax portion driving the antihero character's depicted amoral peak of opposition to the lack of portrayed moralistic American dream qualities.

The intersubjective possibility of narrative identification approach would not reach its amoral equipment for living analytical conclusion if the narrative structure were absent, because without a plot progression inviting a reigning symbol-system as becoming progressively unaligned with the common viewer's possible identity across large scale parts, the antihero protagonist's characterization would not invite a possible feeling of alienation from the audience. Ultimately, analysis of morality under these theoretically oriented critical approaches could never be conducted without the foundation of the film's narrative structure underlying each approach's varying reading of amoral antihero protagonist characterization and its invited extension of understanding, negotiating or making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs.

Thus, under an afflictive multivalent approach, narrative plot structure emerges as the inclusive, all-encompassing, "higher-level" aspect of moral or amoral equipment for living analysis of the antihero narrative, transcending the disparate critical approaches of my study. Without a fixed narrative structure in place, *There Will Be Blood* could never be analyzed as moral or amoral equipment for living under any of these disparaging approaches, because without a narrative plot progression ending with a climax portion, a character could never portray the enforcement, or resistance, of moral closure. Hearkening to Aristotle, although characters may reveal "the moral purpose of the agents, i.e. the sort of thing they seek or avoid," a narrative "is impossible without action, but there may be one without character" (231). In other words, characters portray lower-level characterization qualities for the sake of the higher-level plot progression driving their actions and bringing the film to a resolution of either moral closure or resistance. Furthermore, under this approach, the contradictory metatheoretical characterization analysis my study has passed through regarding disparate theoretically oriented

critical approaches is not a true approach in examining the moral or amoral extension of

equipment for living offered in *There Will Be Blood*. Instead, a true approach is defined not by

its contradictions but by its reconciliations. Therefore, although narrative structure has been

recognized as the foundational critical tool in analyzing the antihero film as moral or amoral

equipment for living, the transcendental reconciliation of theoretical lenses is necessary in order

to pair the lens with the appropriate critical approach to this film and moral film criticism. To do

this, it is important to move on from Plato's concept of affliction to his overarching theory of

absolute truth.

In Plato's *Gorgias*, a dialogue occurs between Socrates and Callicles regarding pleasure

and goodness. Callicles is depicted as a hedonist, arguing for what is pleasurable and desirable as

the most good. This view obviously does not align with the reconciled nature of an afflictive

multivalent approach, because simply finding what one desires in a text is a feature of polysemic

analysis (Stroud 379). As mentioned in the affliction/multivalence and absolute truth section of

chapter three, Plato's theory of absolute truth contends that truth and the recognition of goodness

is reached via knowing affliction and learning of what is good and bad. The dialogue between

Plato and Callicles in the *Gorgias* captures this idea by placing arbitrary pleasure in juxtaposition

with arranged goodness. Once Plato talks Callicles into admitting that pleasure and goodness are

not identical (94-95), Callicles is led to say that there are some rhetors "who care about the

citizens when they say what they say, and there are also such [who only try to please them]"

(99). Socrates is then depicted explaining how the good rhetor should construct his messages:

> Well then, won't the good man, who speaks with a view to the best, say what he
>
> says not at random but looking off toward something? Just as all the other
>
> craftsmen look toward their work when each chooses and applies what he applies,

not at random, but in order that he can get this thing he is working on to have a

certain form. . . . see how each man puts down each thing that he puts down into a

certain arrangement, and furthermore compels one thing to fit and harmonize with

another, until he has composed the whole as an arranged and ordered thing (100-

101).

After Socrates is depicted explaining the goodness of arranged and orderly messages, he

draws a comparison of those messages to the soul by asking, "And what about the soul? Will it

be useful when it happens to have lack of arrangement, or arrangement and a certain order?"

Callicles is depicted responding, "From what preceded, it is necessary to agree on this too"

(101). Socrates is then portrayed solidifying his argument that arranged goodness contrasts

arbitrary pleasure, providing a standard for forming good or bad judgments:

That rhetor, then—the artful and good one—will look toward these things, when

he applies to souls both the speeches that he speaks and all actions . . . always

directing his mind toward how he may get justice to come into being in the

citizens' souls and injustice removed, moderation to arise within and

intemperance to be removed, the rest of virtue to arise within and badness to

depart (101-102).

In other words, under Plato's theory of absolute truth, a standard of morality is reached

once arbitrary pleasure is recognized as the worst thing, and arrangement, orderliness and

moderation as the best. Granted, conceptions of arbitrary pleasure can be outlandishly extreme

and Callicles is depicted as "an exaggerated form of hedonism" in the *Gorgias* (Klosko 130), but

Plato does illuminate here the greatest potential moral danger of rhetorical message creation. In

connecting this with narrative rhetoric, a film constructed to simply please the viewers does not

balance extremes and instead runs the risk of appealing to "nothing other than flattery" (112) at its most benign level—like inviting a sick man to indulge in pleasurable foods rather than consume the good nutrients necessary to make him healthy—and to the dangerous invitations of violence, housebreak, the enslavement or exiling of others, "or any injustice whatsoever," including kill, at its most extreme hedonistic level (106-107).

Plato argues, through Socrates' dialogue, that the goodness, virtue, and morality of each thing comes by moderate arrangement (104). I argue that the morality of film narrative comes by the moderate arrangement of a narrative plot structure. This is because the narrative structure is the most orderly and moderately arranged aspect of a film, along with its feature as an inclusive, all-encompassing, "higher-level" aspect of moral or amoral equipment for living analysis under an afflictive multivalent approach. Viewing narrative plot structure as the absolute truth of film narrative prevents the possibility of extreme, amorally hedonistic viewings potentially invited by films portraying a dangerously arbitrary structure. Furthermore, whether unintentionally or deliberately, critics unconcerned with narrative structure create the possibility for analyses only concerned with dangerously amoral hedonistic viewings at a film's lower levels. As drawn from my analysis of *There Will Be Blood*, the Daniel Plainview antihero character offers dangerously hedonistic viewings at the characterization level, such as manipulative identification strategies at one level and child abandonment and murder at the most extreme. If a viewer or critic were to ignore the narrative structure's role in resisting this character's moral resolution in the climax, then that viewer or critic is subject to a potentially dangerous, hedonistic and ultimately amoral reading of the Daniel Plainview character as pleasurable, valuable, or praiseworthy in extension to the larger society.

Therefore, I argue that if a film displays a clear four-part narrative plot structure (Thompson's) or, at least, a beginning, middle and end (the old Aristotelian structure) consisting of a climax resistant to an antihero, or resolute toward a hero, then a film is inherently moral in depiction and should be recognized as such first and foremost. I argue that these traditional plot structures are too moderate and orderly to demonstrate the opposite, and that morally appropriate resolution or resistance is inherent in their arrangements. An amoral protagonist is highly unlikely to portray antihero character qualities in all but the climax portion, and a moral protagonist is highly unlikely to portray hero character qualities in all but the climax portion, considering film narrative's moderately arranged and pervasive plot structure. This does not mean that all lower-level analyses of invited pleasure are bad. In the *Gorgias*, Callicles is forced, based on his position that all pleasure is good, out of differentiating between good and bad pleasures (Klosko 129). Although outer qualities, such as characterization, create pleasure or displeasure in a film and potentially offer amoral depictions in dangerously hedonistic ways, viewing a film through the theoretical lens of plot as its absolute truth prevents those potentially hedonistic readings because it is not an extreme lens; it provides a moral stance in which a film's outer qualities of pleasure can be recognized as good or bad, not simply analyzed as pleasurable or its opposite. As Socrates is depicted arguing in the *Gorgias*, one "must therefore do both other things and pleasant things for the sake of good things, but not good things for the sake of pleasant" (96). In this way, my study contributes a moral extension for analyzing film narrative, including its invited pleasures, value appeals, possibilities for social critique, and classifications for understanding, negotiating and making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes or beliefs.

Thus, the "soul, so to speak," or *essence* of narrative, is plot (Aristotle 232). By

examining a narrative text through an absolute truth lens of plot structure first and foremost, a film's morality can be analyzed before ever examining characterization, mise en scene, dialogue, or any other lower-level narrative analysis or theoretically oriented critical approach. This means that characterization and the like serve as the lower levels of a narrative text in service of the higher, moral level—the narrative plot structure. The inherent morality of narrative plot structure is the essential "life and soul" of film narrative, as "characters come second" (Aristotle 232) to the arrangement, moderation, and essence of narrative structure. I will now demonstrate that this filmic structure is not only pervasive, but the essence of narrative film rhetoric and its depiction of morality in the antihero film. This can be done by reconstructing the contradictions and shunning excess among the theoretically oriented approaches employed in this film analysis. Just as Plato said of the soul, once a film's lower and higher-level contradictions have become purified and its essence recognized, then it can be, by reasoning, fully contemplated (*Republic* 206).

CHAPTER VII

THE ESSENCE OF FILM NARRATIVE: RECONCILING *THERE WILL BE BLOOD* AS
MORAL EQUIPMENT FOR LIVING

The first theoretical contradiction to reconstruct is McKerrow's argument that Plato's

service of truth in the art of rhetoric is an "attack marginalizing rhetoric" (91), when, in fact,

Plato's concept of affliction under his absolute truth lens should be considered at the heart of

elevating the investigation of invited rhetorical and narrative morality. McKerrow assumes that

the doxastic lens is "divorced" from an absolute truth lens because it analyzes and deconstructs

dimensions of domination and freedom in a relativized world. This runs parallel with Fiske's

critical approach that the critic's job is to look for contradictions and openness, not unity and

closure. However, under an absolute truth, afflictive multivalent approach, contradictions can be

examined and dimensions of domination and freedom analyzed without sacrificing

reconstruction, unity or closure. In these ways, unresolved contradictions can still exist alongside

the plot's moral closure. This maintains aspects of McKerrow's views as viable in the narrative

criticism of a film's lower levels, such as invited possibilities for social change or transformation

or the principle of critique as performance. It is excessive to say that a doxastic approach is

divorced from a Platonic one when analyzing a film from a moral stance, as an analysis of this

kind would be impossible without analyzing a film's absolutist narrative structure first and

foremost. Furthermore, Fiske's views remain viable, such as textual contradictions allowing for

film popularity, film deconstruction to reveal gaps in a film's lower levels, and the potential

meanings residing in the instability of lower-level depictions. Under an absolute truth lens, those

potentially invited meanings and deconstructed dimensions of domination and freedom can be specifically analyzed as good or bad, moral or amoral.

In broader terms, the relative dimension of narrative analysis can exist amid the absolute. For example, as was analyzed earlier in this analysis, the deciphered primary contradiction under the doxastic polysemic approach in *There Will Be Blood* was the ideologically dominant protagonist versus the subversive, subordinate narrative plot structure. This reading can still be made in unity with narrative plot structure's inherent morality. Accordingly, in the climax of *There Will Be Blood*, the Daniel Plainview antihero protagonist depicts amoral qualities in reaching his ideologically dominant chief goal, yet the film is depicted resisting moral closure. I argue that, in resisting moral closure, the climax portion of the film actually renders the film *moral equipment for living* because the amoral protagonist's depicted amoral qualities do not bring the film to depicted moral closure. This demonstrates that even when a film's plot is depicted resisting moral closure, it is still foundationally moral throughout its progression. This is a fundamental morality that transcends the analysis of mere pleasure in doxastic polysemy, as a reading of moral or amoral pleasure can be fully analyzed. Thus, amoral characterization is depicted for the sake of moral narrative action and plot structure. Ultimately, the "lower level" of this film analysis (amoral characterization) offers the societally transacted and mythically enacted equipment for living dimension, but it is the "higher-level" essence (moral plot progression) that makes this film *moral* equipment for living. This, as I will demonstrate throughout the rest of my study's analysis, is ubiquitous across reconstructions of *There Will Be Blood*, and the same should hold true across other antihero films.

It seems as though Condit's theory of relative truth and objective reality stoutly contradicts the idea of an absolute narrative truth; however, as stated prior, relativity can exist

alongside the absolute. Condit argues that truth is something that humans strive for, discounting an intrinsically existing truth. However, both are true. Importantly, I argue embracing an inclusive duality consisting of both the relative and absolute dimensions. Bringing this to the level of my analysis, a plethora of "unstable value denotation patterns" (Condit, *Rhetorical Limits* 107) of viewer judgment can arise from a polyvalent reading of *There Will Be Blood*, yet only one stable narrative plot pattern can arise. Condit argues that truth cannot be accessed on an eternal basis without relationship to a given language framework, yet the essence of narrative lies in the absolute truth of its fixed structure—a canvas on which relative language frameworks and value system depictions are painted over. In other words, Condit is correct in saying that rhetoric, objective reality and objective truth are "completely inter-related" (Condit, *Beyond Rhetorical Relativism* 362) but it is excessive to say that they have no direct responsibility to each other. It is possible to analyze a film as equipment for living, societally classifying situations in various ways, without acknowledging the film's narrative structure. However, it is impossible to analyze a film as moral without recognizing the narrative structure in place. In other words, a Quentin Tarantino film exuding no discernible narrative plot structure can be analyzed at a lower level, critiqued for its societal classifications, exceedingly artful depictions, or invited pleasure, but it is amoral—akin to a painter creating as freely as she pleases without the restrictions of a conventional canvas. Plato metaphorically explains, in corresponding fashion, rhetoric's absolute truth in his *Republic*:

> Are there not then these three types of beds? One which exists in nature, say of leaves or moss for example, and which we might say, God made; and one which the joiner makes, and one which the painter makes. Now, the painter, the bedmaker, and God, these three preside over three types of beds. But God,

whether because He was not willing, or whether there was some necessity for it, that He should not make just one bed in nature, made this one only, which is truly a bed; but two, exactly the same, have never been produced by God, nor ever will be produced by Him. Because, if He had made two, again one would have appeared, the form of which both these two would have possessed, and that form would be that which is Real Bedness, and not the other, which is an imitation. God then, knowing this, and willing to be the maker of Bedness, and really existing, but not any particular kind of bed, nor to be any particular bed-maker, produced what was in nature one (187).

I argue that it is necessary for narrative critics to recognize a film's rhetor, depicted invitations of various classification of societal situations, and plot in the same way that Plato acknowledged the painter, the bedmaker and God in philosophical rhetorical studies. In this way, *There Will Be Blood* remains moral equipment for living, regardless of the array of possible relative value denotation permutations a viewer may extract from watching the film. The morality lies in its narrative structure, and equipment for living may derive from any viewer's "better or worse" language or value structure reading based on the film's depicted relationship with the societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs a particular viewer's value structure shares. Under an absolute truth, narrative essence approach, those varying "better or worse" value readings can be specifically analyzed as good or bad, moral or amoral.

Walter Fisher's principal theory and critical approach merge with an absolute truth, narrative essence approach to film in reconcilable fashion, as Fisher himself argues that "philosophical discourse is rhetorical," as it explores "truth, reality, reason, rationality, wisdom, and justice" (*Narration, Knowledge* 180). The "philosophical discourse" concerning the essence

of narrative in my analysis is a narrative's inherent absolute truth plot structure. Therefore, Fisher's objective knowledge position and narrative paradigm approach can be utilized in moral narrative criticism as counterparts to a narrative essence approach. Even Fisher's approach that human beings are inherent storytellers can be analyzed in combination with a narrative essence approach, including the storied contexts, good reasons, fidelity, or rationality of the materialistic or moralistic American dream value principles. In *There Will Be Blood*, the climax portion of the film portrays Plainview reaching the peak of his depicted amorally characterized materialistic American dream values and goal achievement, yet the film resists moral closure. In this way, just as with the previous approaches, reconstructing Fisher's approach from the standpoint of absolute truth demonstrates that even when a film's plot appears to resist moral closure, it is still foundationally moral throughout its progression and is chiefly revealed as moral in the climax. Amoral characterization invites equipment for living analysis in relationship to the materialistic American dream in this film, and the plot resists amoral characterization from guiding moral closure. I argue that a narrative essence approach to film complements Fisher's theory and approach nicely, especially considering his attempt to a restore a moral sense of *whether* in our conceptions of knowledge and, in this case, narrative criticism. This is a way in which the essence of film narrative serves as an analytical avenue for examining portrayals of American values as moral or amoral, and ultimately contributes to equipment for living analysis and the moral criticism of film narratives.

Lastly, an intersubjective, narrative possibility or narrative identification approach can be utilized in conjunction with a narrative essence approach to film in a moral narrative critique. In similar fashion to Condit, Brummett argues that truth "will be determined by the changing contexts in which people move" (33). This argument is partially applicable to moral narrative

analysis and is partially excess. Just as with Condit's position, it is important to emphasize here the acknowledgment of an inclusive duality consisting of both the relative and absolute dimensions. Changing contexts can exist amid the unchanging absolute. If absolute truth is the chief moral position by the people in motion, just as plot is the chief moral foundation for depicted characters in progress, then Brummett's view belongs within the space of absolute truth. However, it is necessary to shun the excess of Brummett's view if he believes that morality moves, even beyond the point of the absolute, in relation to the contexts in which people move. If this is truly Brummett's view, then a rhetor or rhetorical critic's moral responsibility is void of any moral foundation, making moral rhetorical responsibility dangerously arbitrary. Under a view of truth that arbitrarily moves with either the majority, a powerful few, or other influential means, underrepresented or subordinate ideologies are inevitably vulnerable to degrees of moral alienation. Instead, absolute truth in conjunction with this approach equips the critic with an arranged and orderly foundation of moral responsibility, instilling in the critic the capability to morally analyze a film's social critique of invited societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs, yet allowing the critic or viewer the freedom to expand or create new modes of understanding, negotiating or believing in relation to a film's invited societal contexts.

The prior analysis showed that, in the climax portion of *There Will Be Blood*, Daniel Plainview is portrayed as an amorally characterized antihero protagonist achieving his goals in a way that invites a possible audience to a degree of alienation with both the reigning symbol-system of the story world and the cultural symbol-system it extends to. This invitation can possibly place the audience in a position of moral responsibility in relation to its knowledge of the culture's social reality, and the film in a place of amoral equipment for living under a lower-

level, intersubjective possibility of narrative identification character analysis. However, to reconcile *There Will Be Blood* as moral equipment for living under this approach from a narrative essence standpoint to film, it is important to emphasize that an audience throwing off existing modes of understanding and freely pursuing new ones does not guarantee ultimate alleviation of moral alienation. From a narrative essence of film approach, the plot provides guidance of moral responsibility for the critic and a critical approach grounded in moral truth. In resisting moral closure, the plot disallows the depicted amoral antihero protagonist from depicting the film's moral resolution. In this case, the portrayal of an amoral reigning symbol-system and the protagonist that accentuates the portrayed symbol-system's societal qualities and extensions are given for the sake of moral narrative action and plot structure. This transcends the intersubjective narrative identification analysis of *There Will Be Blood* beyond a depicted critique of morally alienating societal understandings, negotiations, situations, attitudes or beliefs, and examines the film as moral equipment for living, providing the critic or viewer with an arranged and orderly narrative plot structure as the foundation of a moral responsibility to transcend depicted modes of understanding, negotiating and believing in the culture.

Under an afflictive multivalent approach in recognition of absolute truth and the essence of film narrative, all scenarios outlined in my study render *There Will Be Blood* moral equipment for living. Now that my analysis has sacrificed affliction in discovering the absolute truth of film narrative, moral film criticism can be conducted from a narrative essence approach to film. By demonstrating moral film criticism from this approach, future studies of moral film criticism can be conducted without the process of afflictive multivalence. Instead, future moral film critics are free from affliction in analyzing film narrative, as the recognition of an absolute truth theoretical lens provides an *essence approach* to moral film criticism. Now that future rhetorical and

narrative film critics can see the affliction and reconciliation of this analysis, future moral critiques can begin with the examinations of narrative structure in film. I will now provide an example of what this analysis should look like, for both the provision of future studies and solidification of the antihero film as moral equipment for living.

CHAPTER VIII

NARRATIVE ESSENCE ANALYSIS: *THE WOLF OF WALL STREET* AS MORAL
EQUIPMENT FOR LIVING

The first step of a moral film analysis is to analyze a film narrative's plot structure. This
immediately gives the analysis its moral foundation, arriving at the essence of the narrative
before analyzing potential societal or mythical levels depicted in the film. This way, a rhetorical
critic is free and capable of combining a polysemic, polyvalent, multivalent, or other appropriate
method of critical analysis with the morally foundational, absolute truth-oriented critical tool of
narrative plot structure. In demonstrating this original moral equipment for living analysis, I
analyze *The Wolf of Wall Street* as another example of an antihero film portraying the essence of
narrative through its inherent plot structure. Moreover, I analyze this film as an example of moral
equipment for living via my study's original approach to film criticism.

The Setup/Complicating Action Pivot

Antihero protagonist Jordan Belfort is portrayed communicating his goals through
dialogue in the scene antecedent the precise setup-complicating action pivot in *The Wolf of Wall
Street*, at the 31-minute mark (the film is approximately 180 minutes). At this point of the film,
Belfort has already exuded his depicted salesmanship prowess and recruited members of his
stockbroking team. This large-scale pivot closes with a depiction of Belfort as a clear leader of
his team of stockbrokers, as his company begins to thrive and celebrating and partying ensues.
At this point of the film, Jordan Belfort's depicted goals as a protagonist are directly being

pursued. However, Belfort's complications begin to run parallel with his portrayed goal pursuit

in this pivot toward complicating action. *Forbes* magazine is depicted doing a profile on him,

dubbing him in the headlines as "The Wolf of Wall Street" and the FBI is portrayed investigating

him, all while the company concurrently grows exponentially. By this point, the film is at its 40-

minute mark and the complicating action is underway.

<u>The Complicating Action/Development Pivot</u>

At the 80-minute mark of the film, ten minutes prior to Kristin Thompson's projected

complicating action/development large-scale pivot, major footwear CEO Steve Madden (the

character is based on the real-life Steve Madden) is portrayed coming to Stratton Oakmont to

give a speech and fails to engage the large crowd of Belfort followers. Belfort is then depicted

stepping in to regain his followers' interests and continue pursuing the overall goals shared

between the protagonist and his supporting characters. At the 89-minute mark—just one minute

prior to Kristin Thompson's precise projected complicating/action development pivot according

to this film—Belfort is depicted having a meeting on his yacht with character Agent Patrick

Denham of the FBI, and the antihero protagonist's powerful status begins demonstrating

vulnerability. He is portrayed almost getting arrested for bribing a federal agent, realizes

firsthand that the FBI is directly pursuing him, and struggles toward this antihero protagonist's

overall goals begin. He is then depicted taking several Quaaludes and the development portion of

the film begins.

The Development/Climax Pivot

At the 130-minute mark of the film (Thompson's projected development-climax shift would have occurred at 135 minutes), just after his dad talks him into leaving the company due to a series of dangerously hedonistic acts by Belfort including substantial drug use, the near death of his best friend Donnie in a scene depicting excessive drug use by the characters, and the imminent threat of the FBI arresting him if he stays with Stratton Oakmont, Jordan Belfort is portrayed giving a speech to his followers that he is leaving the company. Normally, this would serve as the scene that shifts action directly toward the final resolution and overall moral message. However, the narrative's continuity in depicting Belfort's dangerous actions persists in this large-scale pivot, as he is portrayed changing his mind and deciding not to leave the company, despite the depicted consequences he faces in making the decision. Once the depicted speech is over, the climax begins, and it becomes clear that Jordan Belfort is far from a moral agent.

The Climax

Belfort's continued depicted hedonism occurs throughout the climax portion when subpoenas keep coming in and he continues to ignore them; takes his yacht overseas to recover money from a Swiss bank account and almost dies in a violent sea storm; is asked to wear a wire to work in cooperation with the FBI and slips a note to supporting character Donnie to save him from incrimination; and snorts an inordinate amount of cocaine after his wife asks for a divorce and proceeds in attempting to flee with his daughter by backing his car into a pillar at full speed, injuring himself and almost injuring his daughter in the process. He is depicted being arrested when the FBI finds his note to Donnie; and when he gets out of jail, he becomes a sales trainer.

The inherent plot structure of this antihero narrative restricts the Jordan Belfort protagonist in *The Wolf of Wall Street* from qualities portraying a moral resolution. He is depicted characterizing a climatic resistance to moral closure by simply asking his sales trainees to "sell him this pen," a strategy Belfort is depicted using when recruiting his followers early in the film, just preceding the aforementioned setup/complicating action pivot. Rather than communicating an overall moral message for the film, Belfort is portrayed searching for a follower already equipped with the answers he received from depicted followers when core goals and initial hedonistic character qualities were being introduced in the setup. In this final scene of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, it is clear that the climax of the plot resists moral closure, and that the film includes a hedonistic character for the sake of a moral plot progression. Now that it is clear that this film resists moral closure, it is important to bring this morality to a societal or mythical level in order to analyze specific characterization qualities in relation to the film's narrative essence. This directly aims toward answering my study's research problem by analyzing what moral classifications of understanding, negotiating, or making sense of corresponding societal situations, attitudes, or beliefs are invited by *The Wolf of Wall Street*. This will be done via analysis of depicted Burkean identification strategies by the Jordan Belfort antihero character in contribution to this protagonist's societal and mythical characterizations.

Moral Equipment for Living Analysis

Once Belfort is depicted deciding to start taking the company from a small penny stock exchange to a legitimate competitor on Wall Street, he is portrayed communicating potential leader-follower identification strategies in order to directly pursue his depicted goal in the setup/complicating action pivot. Through internal-diegetic dialogue ostensibly coming from his

thoughts, Belfort is depicted deciding how to start training his members and leading his

company:

> JB: "What person with a college education would trust these bunch of jerkoffs?
>
> But what if they didn't sound like a bunch of jerkoffs? What if I could teach them
>
> how to sell to people with money? *Real* money. So I decided to reinvent the
>
> company."

According to Kenneth Burke, it is "natural" for Americans to identify themselves with a

company (*Attitudes* 140). In this scene, Belfort is first portrayed using the Burkean identification

strategies of abstraction and the tacit of terminology as he presents a proposed reinvention of his

company via character dialogue. Not only is he depicted using dialogue in this scene in an

attempt reinvent the company, he is also depicted using identification strategies in an attempt to

ensure his followers identify with the company:

> JB: Gentlemen, welcome to Stratton Oakmont. You schnooks will now be
>
> targeting the wealthiest 1% of Americans. We're talking about *whales* here. Moby
>
> fuckin' Dicks. And with this script, which is now your new harpoon, I'm going to
>
> teach each and every one of you to be Captain fucking Ahab. Get it?

In this piece of dialogue, Belfort is depicted using the tacit of terminology identification

strategy by inventing a new naming vocabulary for the company, "Stratton Oakmont."

Immediately in the dialogue, Belfort is portrayed communicating this strategy to his followers in

a way that creates a new lexicon for his followers to interpret the situation of the company's

public image, allows for the transcendence of any possible prior ambiguity of the company's

identity, and leaves his followers no other choice for describing the moniker of the company.

Furthermore, he is depicted using metaphorical abstraction strategies in order to accentuate this

new terminology by describing the newly targeted wealthiest one percent of Americans not only

"whales," but "Moby fuckin' Dicks." He continues the depicted metaphor by offering his

followers a script as their "new harpoon," which will teach them to be "Captain fucking Ahab."

This invites an abstracted common ground under which Belfort's depicted followers can become

the storybook-level heroes they previously never imagined identifying with while targeting

larger-than-life clients with the overall goal of making more money than ever previously

imagined. This portrayal is an example of Belfort using nonliteral comparisons as dangerously

manipulative charismatic leadership strategies, such as exaggerating potential achievements and

creating the appearance of miracles (Yukl 296). The script is offered as a miracle creator akin to

Captain Ahab's harpoon, and achievements are offered as consequences to the targeting of

"Moby Dicks"—the wealthiest one percent of Americans. He is then shown continuing the

speech:

> JB: We're a new company with a new name. A company that our clients can
>
> believe in. A company our clients can trust. A firm whose roots are so deeply
>
> embedded into Wall Street that our very founders sailed over on the Mayflower
>
> and chiseled the name "Stratton Oakmont" right into Plymouth fucking Rock.

In this portrayed continuation of the speech, Belfort emphasizes the created terminology

and identity of Stratton Oakmont and also invokes the assumed "we" as well as the

corresponding pronoun "our" in an attempt to evoke inclusion between himself, his newly

reinvented company, and his followers. Furthermore, he is depicted using an abstraction to

glorify the company's trustworthiness and dependability via the metaphor that the "founders

sailed over on the Mayflower and chiseled the name 'Stratton Oakmont' right into Plymouth

fucking Rock." This abstracts Belfort's depicted new terminology from the empirical to the

ideological, opening up portrayed opportunities for identification with his followers for the rest

of the film. It is also an exaggeration of the company's past achievements, despite the depiction

of Stratton Oakmont never existing prior to this scene. In the last significant segment of dialogue

in this scene, Belfort is depicted using these identification strategies in pragmatic ways in order

to identify his followers with the overall goal of making money:

> JB: What we're gonna do is this. First we pitch them Disney, AT&T, IBM, blue
>
> chip stocks exclusively. Companies these people know. Once we've suckered
>
> them in, we unload the dog shit. The pink sheets. The penny stocks, where we
>
> make the money. Fifty percent commission, baby.

In this piece of depicted identification dialogue, Belfort is bringing the assumed "we" to a

transcendent level, creating a common ground for his followers under pragmatic selling tactics in

combination with the shared identity of the company. He expands his communicated

identification prowess in these proposed tactics through the depiction of an abstracted metaphor

in which he mentions the end strategy of "unloading the dog shit." In this case, the "dog shit"

nonliterally means the penny stocks under which Belfort's agents are depicted being most

successful in selling. Furthermore, he admits that suckering in clients is key to achieving success,

portraying qualities of manipulation and attempts to create a following with common

manipulative character qualities. This not only implies the depicted manipulation Belfort

advocates and attempts to evoke in his clients' selling tactics, but meshes with the depicted

consubstantial identification of shared sensations and goals with his followers. The "dog shit" is

concurrently the penny stocks under which "we make the money. Fifty percent commission,

baby." This portrayed appeal to the shared goal of making money under an identifiable American

company is combined with the inclusive and transcendent "we," as well as the aforementioned

abstracted metaphor implying client manipulation, in order to pursue a consubstantial goal.

In the complicating action/development pivot, Belfort is depicted giving a speech to

regain his followers' interests, maintain identification, and continue pursuing the overall goals

shared between the protagonist and his supporting characters:

> JB: See these little black boxes? They're called telephones. I'm gonna let you in
>
> on a little secret about these telephones. They're not gonna dial themselves, okay?
>
> Without you, they're just worthless hunks of plastic. Like a loaded M16 without a
>
> trained marine to pull the trigger. And in the case of the telephone, it's up to each
>
> and every one of you. My highly trained Strattonites. My killers! My killers who
>
> will not take "no" for an answer. My fuckin' warriors, who will not hang up the
>
> phone until their client either buys or fuckin' dies!!!

In this section of dialogue, Belfort uses the "loaded M16 without a trained marine to pull

the trigger" metaphor as an abstraction to create a depicted vague common ground between his

followers and the foundational goals that they share with him. In using this metaphor along with

others such as "killers," "warriors," and the extended version of tacit terminology in the word

"Strattonites," Belfort is portrayed using identification strategies in ways that invite "symbols to

arouse emotions and build enthusiasm" (Yukl 296) under the nonliteral sensory image of battle

or war. He transitions from this depicted abstracted language to direct consubstantial attitudes,

values and goals:

> JB: There is no nobility in poverty. I've been a rich man and I have been a poor
>
> man, and I choose rich every fuckin' time. Because at least as a rich man when I

have to face my problems I show up in the back of a limo wearing a $2,000 suit
and $40,000 gold fuckin' watch.

By this point, the depicted audience of Belfort followers is portraying early signs of primal fervor for Belfort's message. In the aforementioned dialogue, Belfort is depicted communicating the shared goal of making money, shared values and attitudes towards wealth, and the connections between those goals and values and their power in alleviating the ambiguities tied to the faced problems within the assumed reigning symbol-system. Belfort is depicted parlaying these identification strategies in the following set of dialogue:

> JB: If anyone here thinks I'm superficial or materialistic, go get a job at fuckin' McDonalds, 'cause that's where you fuckin' belong! But before you depart this room full of winners, I want you to take a good look at the person next to you, go on. 'Cause sometime in the not-so-distant future, you'll be pullin' up to a red light in your beat-up old fucking Pinto, and that person's gonna be pulling up right alongside you in that brand new Porsche. With their beautiful wife by their side who's got big voluptuous tits. And who are you gonna be sitting next to? Some disgusting wildebeest with three days of razor-stubble in a sleeveless muumuu, crammed in next to you in a car loaded full of groceries from the fuckin' Price Club! That's who you're gonna be sitting next to!

Key leader-follower identification strategies are depicted by this antihero protagonist in the aforementioned dialogue. First, Belfort is portrayed using identification through antithesis in inviting the solidification of consubstantiality with his audience concerning the shared value of wealth and goal in attaining wealth. His depicted communication asserts that those who do not agree with him or align with his orientation deserve a job at McDonald's, further creating

specific consubstantial attitudes regarding the wealth value goals of the company's leader and its followers. Second, when Belfort is depicted asking his followers to look at each other and envision the other being more successful than they are, he is creating an invited threat to the audience's consubstantial identity orientation concerning wealth and success. Although this strategy of antithesis is depicted in a way that envisions the audience's peers as potential threats to their wealth identities, it simultaneously invites galvanization under the abstracted threats of driving a "beat-up old fucking Pinto," seeing a peer pull up in a "brand new Porsche" with his wife by his side with "big voluptuous tits" while the evoked audience members imagine sitting next to a "disgusting wildebeest with three days of razor-stubble in a sleeveless muumuu, crammed next to you in a car load of groceries from the fuckin' Price Club"—an ostensibly low-end grocery store where people of lower socioeconomic status and wealth value orientation go shopping. These proposed threats are depictions of Yukl's charismatic leadership manipulations, as followers are to blame for portrayed potential failures, not the leader (296). This depiction of an abstracted and imagined potential symbol-system allows for the portrayal of Belfort's transition toward a set of common sympathy strategies, inviting the mutual need for confirmed identity:

> JB: So you listen to me and you listen well! Are you behind on your credit card bills? Good! Pick up the phone and start dialing. Is your landlord ready to evict you? Good! Pick up the phone and start dialing. Does your girlfriend think you're a fuckin' worthless loser? Good! Pick up the phone and start dialing. I want you to deal with your problems by becoming rich!

By transitioning from the audience's common enemy to the audience's common plight, Belfort is depicted inviting an assumed threat to identity via potential alienation from in the

assumed symbol-system of wealth values, goals and attitudes (unpaid credit card bills, eviction, rejection) atop the threat of common competitive opposition. This invites an imagined distortion of future identity orientation for the depicted audience. Furthermore, it is a portrayal of manipulative charismatic leadership by "creating the appearance of crisis" (Yukl 296). In communicating the alleviation of these potential alienations, identity threats, and crises, Belfort is depicted giving his followers one solution—to pick up the phone and start dialing. This is shown as the direct action connected to the highest consubstantial goal of becoming rich. Under Belfort's depicted identification dialogue, identity threats—whether they be from imagined common enemies, common plights, or threatening sensory images—are alleviated when the overall consubstantial goal of being rich is met:

> JB: All you have to do today is pick up the phone and speak the words that I have taught you and I will make you richer than the most powerful CEO in the United States of fuckin' America. . . . You be relentless! You be telephone fuckin' terrorists! Now let's knock this motherfucker out of the park!

With this depicted rhetoric, Belfort guarantees to his followers that his training as the leader of Stratton Oakmont will directly result in the attainment of their highest possible consubstantial goal. He is also shown as a charismatic leader manipulatively creating the appearance of an attainable miracle. In essence, he is depicted as fully serving the ideas, images and necessary materials for the creation of successful Burkean leader-follower identification and the demonstration of consubstantiality in this complicating action/development pivot. Moreover, he tacks on the abstraction strategy of metaphor by asking his followers to be "telephone terrorists," and capping off the depicted speech by saying that it is time to "knock this

motherfucker out of the park!" By the time this scene culminates at the 85-minute mark of the

film, Belfort's followers are shown frantically dialing their phones.

Normally, the development/climax pivot would serve as the large-scale part that shifts

action directly toward the film's final resolution and moral message. However, this antihero

protagonist depicts amoral characterization qualities when giving another speech in this pivot—

the same way Daniel Plainview is portrayed in the development/climax pivot of *There Will Be*

Blood:

> JB: I don't care who you are or where you're from, whether your relatives came
>
> over here on the fuckin' Mayflower or an inner tube from Haiti, this right here is
>
> the land of opportunity. Stratton Oakmont is America. All of you know Kimmie
>
> Belzer, right? What you probably didn't know is Kimmie was one of the first
>
> brokers here, one of Stratton's original twenty. Most of you met Kimmie – the
>
> beautiful, sophisticated woman she is today. A woman that wears $3,000 Armani
>
> suits, drives a brand new Mercedes Benz. A woman who spends her winters in the
>
> Bahamas and her summers in the Hamptons. That's not the Kimmie that I met.
>
> The Kimmie that I met didn't have two nickels to rub together. She was a single
>
> mom on the balls of her ass with an eight year-old son. Okay, she was three
>
> months behind on her rent. And when she came to me and asked me for a job, she
>
> asked for a $5,000 advance just so she could pay her son's tuition. What'd I do,
>
> Kimmie? Go on, tell them.
>
> KB: You wrote me a check for $25,000.

JB: That's right. And you know why that is? It's because I believed in you. It's because I believed in you, Kimmie. Just like I believe in each and every one of you.

KB: I fuckin' love you, Jordan.

JB: I fuckin' love you too! (x2) (Crowd claps and cheers) And I love all of you! I love all of you from the bottom of my heart, and I mean that.

In this segment of dialogue in the development/climax pivot of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Belfort is depicted using the leader-follower identification strategies of consubstantiality, abstraction and common sympathy. First, in using depicted consubstantiality strategies, Belfort communicates the American "land of opportunity" ideal and combines it with an abstracted, nonliteral comparison in saying Stratton Oakmont *is* America. In doing this, he is portrayed aligning the audience's common ground with that of the greater society. He is then shown using Kimmie Belzer's story to elicit Stratton Oakmont's foundationally shared value of wealth attainment. Her former depicted plight as a single mom with an eight year-old son on the abstracted "balls of her ass" without two metaphorical "nickels to rub together" becomes the entire audience's common plight when Belfort consubstantially announces that he believes in each and every one of his followers in the same way he believed in Kimmie. Furthermore, it is a depicted manipulative charismatic leadership strategy, as Belfort creates the appearance of a miracle with Kimmie's story. This allows his depicted audience to share the same sensations, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about plight and wealth attainment as Belfort and Kimmie. It also manipulatively invites Belfort's depicted audience into his feelings of love and belief in his followers. Belfort is then shown using these shared sensations to communicate a significant shift

in protagonist action, exhibiting amoral character qualities en route to directly achieving his

depicted goals in the climax:

> JB: For years I've been telling you guys to never take "no" for an answer, right. . .
> . I'll tell you what [choosing to step down] is: It's me taking "no" for an answer.
> It's them selling me not the other way around. It's me being a hypocrite is what it
> is. So, you know what? I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving. I'm not fuckin' leaving!
> The show goes on! This is *my* home! They're gonna need a fuckin' wrecking ball
> to take me outta here! They're gonna need the National Guard or fuckin' SWAT
> team, 'cause I ain't going nowhere!!! Fuck them!

In this portion of dialogue, all shared sensations are met between Belfort and his

followers, depicting the continuation of Burkean identification strategies alongside amoral

character qualities across large-scale pivot points. Despite all depicted struggles presented to him

in the development portion, Belfort chooses to stay with his company and share the sensations of

not taking "no" for an answer with his followers. He uses abstracted metaphors by saying

Stratton Oakmont is *his* "home," and that only a wrecking ball can take him out. Moreover, when

Belfort's speech is over, the audience is depicted at its peak of primal fervor for Belfort and the

company, chanting along with him and pounding their chests, exhibiting the use of "music and

symbols to arouse emotions and build enthusiasm" (Yukl 296). All in all, the narrative deters the

Jordan Belfort antihero protagonist from exhibiting traditional hero movement across this

development/climax pivot point, just as the Daniel Plainview antihero protagonist is portrayed in

There Will Be Blood.

In the climax of the film, Belfort is portrayed being arrested by the FBI, convicted, and

sentenced to 36 months in prison. Belfort's final dialogue is portrayed post-prison, when he

becomes a sales trainer, and simply asks his sales trainees to "sell him this pen," exhibiting a continued search for an audience evoked by manipulative Burkean leader-follower identification strategies. Rather than morally teaching his audience how to sell or displaying learned lessons in a deviation from amoral characterization, he asks his audience this one question in a depicted attempt to rediscover identification with new followers. Therefore, the continued portrayal of manipulative strategies and character qualities in the film's final scene render Jordan Belfort an amorally enacted mythical character in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, representing a separation from virtues, wisdom, morals and other abstract terms that personify beliefs such as the opposition between good and evil, friends and enemies, and other "timeless truths" (Gronbeck 238). The continuity of the narrative structure portrays Jordan Belfort as a character that continuously portrays amoral qualities throughout the film, despite his depicted dangerously hedonistic acts of follower manipulation, excessive drug use leading to the near death of his best friend and near injury to his daughter, an attempt to recover money from a Swiss bank account and nearly dying in a sea storm, and incrimination evasion, as the narrative offers an FBI investigation as an indication of social judgment. In similar fashion to the Plainview antihero character, Jordan Belfort remains a generalizable, societally transacted character through the depiction of recognizably occurring societal concerns regarding the morality of charismatic leadership communication.

Under this narrative essence approach to moral criticism, transacted and enacted character qualities can be analyzed as inviting: good or bad pleasure in the form of moral or amoral dimensions of power (polysemy), amorally "worse" or morally "better" value orientations (polyvalence), moral or amoral representations of the American dream (narrative paradigm), or invitations for the critique of societal morality or amorality (narrative

identification). Gronbeck's characterization is imperative to this particular moral equipment for living film analysis, as any of the aforementioned critical approaches can be applied to an antihero protagonist's reflection of real-life character traits and reasoning patterns. More importantly, the depicted amoral character patterns in these films are reflected for the sake of a plot structure that resists moral closure. These amorally transacted societal and enacted mythical characterization qualities depicted by the Jordan Belfort antihero character—as a force for bad using manipulative charismatic leadership identification strategies in a depicted, recognizably occurring, corporate, organizational communication setting—are portrayed in the film as amoral for the sake of a climax portion that resists moral closure. Therefore, *The Wolf of Wall Street* antihero film serves as moral equipment for living, as the moderate, orderly, consistently arranged moral essence of the film's plot structure inherently prohibits an amorally characterized antihero protagonist from manifesting moral closure in the film, all while inviting multiple potential classifications for understanding, negotiating and making sense of corresponding mythical or societal situations, attitudes or beliefs.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

Based on my study's analyses and narrative essence discovery, the antihero narrative in film should now be considered moral equipment for living—analyzed as a container of offered moral meaning extending to the larger society. Despite the concept's significant feature as an avenue toward a film's offered meanings and its connections to what audiences experience off-screen, equipment for living analysis should be recognized as a lower level of examination when done from a moral standpoint, as the plot structure serves as film's higher-level narrative essence. Future moral equipment for living analysis is not limited to the analysis of dialogue at a film's lower levels. Some future directions for study include: an analytic example featuring a film without a clear and consistent plot structure as amoral equipment for living, potential analysis of a film resisting moral closure featuring a hero, or a film reaching moral resolution featuring an antihero. The purpose of my study is to recognize these rhetorical possibilities of future study and assess them from a moral stance.

Thus, recognizing the essence of narrative and the antihero film as moral equipment for living offers a clear, newfound definition of the antihero: an amorally characterized protagonist who shares characteristics and depicted motifs with the traditional hero, yet is prohibited from manifesting moral closure in the film's climax, as the plot structure inevitably resists moral closure in any antihero narrative. This expands on Ekdom's explanation of depicted hero motifs (50) by allowing for an explanation of antihero motifs, and gives continuity to the examination of the antihero in ways Dorsey attempted to do with the "trickster" character (144-148).

Recognition of this definition and the morality of the antihero narrative allows for future moral awareness and critique of the societal situations, attitudes, beliefs, symbol-systems or structures that the antihero film invites, bringing morality to the forefront of not only narrative awareness and critique, but societal awareness and critique.

The films analyzed in this study serve as exemplars for invited moral social awareness and critique. Although *There Will Be Blood* director Paul Thomas Anderson differed in his approach by intending to portray the film as "a horror film and boxing match first" and not much more (Modell), director Martin Scorsese was aiming for social awareness and critique in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, as he wanted the audience "to feel like they'd been slapped into recognizing that this behavior is encouraged in this country, and that it affects business and the world, and everything down to our children and how they're going to live, and their values in the future" (Fleming Jr.). Lead actor Leonardo DiCaprio echoed this approach when saying, "We very consciously wanted this to be an analysis of the temptation and intoxication of the world of money and indulgence and hedonism. We wanted to take the audience on that journey, and so we don't ever see the wake of that destruction until the very end, where they implode" (Miller). These key connections between the rhetor, lead actor, American culture, and this academic study bring forth significant cultural implications and merit for analyzing the antihero film as moral equipment for living. These films have strong connections regarding current issues of hedonism and monetary greed in American business and the corporate world and the large cultural and political influences they have in present day or may have in the future. Moral equipment for living analysis not only taps into the dangerously hedonistic qualities of Scorsese's and DiCaprio's portrayed protagonist, but the dangerous hedonism of the society and people they intentionally represent. Although not every film is created with this these intentions, these viewer

interpretations are still possible with a film like *There Will Be Blood*, which portrays much of the same characterization qualities as *The Wolf of Wall Street*, as was demonstrated in my analysis. These possibilities for interpretation create avenues for moral rhetorical analysis beyond the antihero film.

My study illuminates that any film can now be analyzed at a moral level if done from its narrative essence as an analytical foundation, considering the pervasiveness of a general and consistent plot pattern in film. Recognition of this moderately arranged plot structure is the underlying groundwork for all future moral narrative film analysis. I argue this is a viable area of future study considering Kristin Thompson's demonstration that Hollywood rhetors routinely construct narratives into four-part plot structures, Kozloff's argument that protagonists communicate their goals across plot structures and reinforce or resist moral closure in the climax, Aristotle's argument that plot is the "soul" of narrative, Plato's moral argument of moderate, orderly arrangement of the good versus the amorally hedonistic dangers of arbitrary pleasure, and my argument that narrative film critics should recognize a film's rhetor, depictions and plot in the same way Plato acknowledges the painter, the bedmaker and God in rhetorical philosophical studies. This is vital considering the historic debate over the link between morality and rhetoric.

My analysis has demonstrated that postmodern analysis tools and approaches can be employed in combination with the recognition of film narrative's moral essence; thus resurrecting Plato's theory of absolute truth in a contemporary age and inviting a postmodern-classicist view that mitigates postmodernism's abyss of relativity and lack of moral foundation while critically augmenting the groundwork that rhetoricians such as Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian and others have laid for the field of rhetorical study. Since, as Condit argues, rhetoric's influence

on public morality has regained social significance, my study provides clear grounds for

enhancing, accelerating and legitimizing that significance in the area of film criticism. It allows

for an area of "participation in the ebb and flow of human morality," yet mitigates the potential

of dangerous intemperance involved with advocating an arbitrary "morality as a collective craft"

without "an architectural blueprint, but with a traditional knowledge of the way the tribe has built

in the past and through daily assessment of the probabilities involved in a local outcome"

(Condit, *Crafting Virtue* 94-95). Instead, collective morality can be assessed and crafted from a

foundation of arranged, moderate and balanced inner temperance, wisdom, justice and courage,

preventing collectively crafted morality from reaching dangerous levels of arbitrary inner or

outer pleasure untapped by "the legacies of the past" (95). Furthermore, although it is the critic's

"ethical responsibility" to "choose between the reality that his/her language will advocate"

(Brummett 38-39) and "to assist the culture in understanding its options" and the inner and outer

ideals that form moral human values (Rushing and Frentz 401-403), an arranged and moderate

moral foundation prevents the potential of a dangerously hedonistic critic taking full and

arbitrary control in being the moral agent that shapes a facet of a culture's morality simply with

critical tools. A moral foundation also prevents the arbitrary formation of cultural morality from

creating what Kenneth Burke would call "spiritual alienation," or a loss of faith in a structure's

moral reasonableness (*Literary Form* 306). Just as a moderately arranged inner plot progression

morally reveals a film's outer qualities, our moderately arranged inner essence should morally

reveal our outer criticisms, actions, ideals, values, qualities, pleasures, and collective rhetoric.

Although my study addresses moral criticism under just one aspect of rhetorical study, it

readdresses the age-old conversations regarding morality and rhetoric, restores morality as the

essence of a culturally significant category of narrative, and brings awareness to the amorality

and possible arbitrary, manipulative or dangerous messages that narratives may portray and invite if constructed, analyzed or viewed without a morally foundational essence in place. It is my hope that this thesis study not only revives the absolute truth of narrative rhetoric, solidifies the recognition of a narrative essence in film and continues the discussions concerning rhetoric and public morality, but inspires a restoration of morality as it pertains to all rhetorical areas, bringing morality not only to the surface, but to the forefront of rhetorical study.

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