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“The Plain View on Daniel”

_There Will Be Blood_ (2007) directed by Paul Thomas Anderson focuses on protagonist Daniel Plainview’s journey from a simple miner to self-proclaimed oil man. The main time period for the film occurs when Daniel wants to acquire a piece of land in California which proves both plentiful for oil and problematic for his personal life. One of the most important scenes from the film transpires when Daniel speaks to Henry, who he believes is his half-brother whom he had never met. In this scene, Daniel and Henry sit outside in the night keeping warm by a fire speaking to one another while nursing some presumably alcoholic beverages. Daniel, after avoiding the question of why he left his parents and Henry, speaks about his hatred for people and a certain feeling of “competition” and envy he feels towards all of man (Anderson). During this proclamation, the camera is fixed on his face as he speaks about his adopted son, H.W., who has recently lost his hearing due to an explosion and his need for a partner, presumably Henry, to deal with the people he can no longer stand. It closes with Daniel laughing to himself about his contempt for people.

The portrayal of Daniel Plainview’s character within this scene is what makes it important. The director uses the close-up view to emphasize that the audience is now getting personal with Plainview and at the heart of this character. Alongside this camera work, is an accompanying dialogue which is mostly led by the protagonist describing himself. It is here that Daniel shows his true self. This is highlighted by the mentioning of H.W. and the lack of concern from Daniel
for his general health and care only for his ability to hear. Emphasizing how Plainview’s one meaningful relationship is not based on love, but instead on the advantage H.W. gave him when dealing with other people. He used his adopted son as a veil to hide the fact that he was not as he once claimed a “family man” (Anderson). This combines with the fact that soon after this mentioning of H.W., Plainview immediately addresses how Henry “gives him a second breath,” meaning he is his second shot at a partner who can hide his misanthropy (Anderson). He cares not that Henry is supposedly is half-brother, but instead for the opportunity it gives himself to separate further from the people he disdains. His hate is centered on this previously mentioned “competition” he has within himself (Anderson). He states to Henry “if it is in me then it is in you” (Anderson). This suggests that Daniel sees himself in others. And in reality he does not hate other people but hates the qualities that he sees within himself. The scene featuring Daniel and Henry speaking is pivotal in the film for the audience in that it shows the true nature of the protagonist as a manipulative man who strives to use those close to him to separate himself from society and the reflective qualities he sees in it. Word Count: 506
Works Cited