"On a Slow Boat to China, All to Myself, Alone": An Exploration of Control, Suppression, Repression, and Letting Go in Paul Thomas Anderson's Filmography

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Acknowledgements:

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Introduction:

Paul Thomas Anderson was not the first director I ever learned about. Even as I became more interested in film, Anderson still was not the first director that I watched in my own spare time. Paul Thomas Anderson was, however, definitely the first director praise for whom caught my attention. In the summer of 2017, as I was trying to watch as many films as possible, I found an interactive article in the New York Times online titled "The 25 Best Films of the 21st Century So Far."[1] Thinking it would be useful and insightful, I read it. On down the list were films made by some of the best international filmmakers of all time, ranging from Agnes Varda to Clint Eastwood, some of which I regrettably have not seen to this day. As I scrolled down to the bottom of the list I wondered which film could possibly be number one.

To be praised as the best film of the 21st century, I assumed it would have to be something incredible. It was *There Will Be Blood* (2007). In their explanation, New York Times

[1] Scott, A.O., et al. "Interactive." *New York Times* , 9 June 2017, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/09/movies/the-25-best-films-of-the-21st-century.html.

film critic A.O. Scott wrote, "While I am endlessly fascinated by what this movie is *about* – the dynamic, infernal spirit of American capitalism; the dialectic of faith and greed; the invention of California; the melodrama of modern masculinity – I am perpetually astonished by what it *is*. It is stranger than any of its themes, mightier than its influence and bigger than any of the genres it explores."[2]

With such high praise, I felt that I should watch the movie, which I did a few months later, and I was astonished. My initial reading of *There Will Be Blood* was that it was an epic, cautionary tale about the battle for America's soul between its two most powerful institutions: religion and commerce. I was also confused. I did not really understand what I had just seen. Watching *There Will Be Blood* was a completely new experience for me, one that pushed the boundaries of how I thought about and understood films unlike anything I had ever seen before. It had so many questions and only so many explicit answers. As I started to read and consume more pop-culture film criticism I continued to hear praise for Anderson, so I kept exploring his filmography. I watched *Boogie Nights* (1997), and then some time later I watched *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002). Each time I felt the same experience, a cascade of confusion and excitement that left me wanting more.

By the spring of 2019, as I started brainstorming ideas for what to write my thesis about, I kept coming back to Paul Thomas Anderson. There was something undeniably appealing about the challenge of analyzing such a well-known, yet difficult filmography. I then watched *Magnolia* (1999) and *The Master* (2012) in the same week. This only stoked my interest. What

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[2] Scott, A.O., et al. "Interactive." *New York Times* , 9 June 2017, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/09/movies/the-25-best-films-of-the-21st-century.html.

truly brought these films head and shoulders above the rest was that I could not fully articulate why I connected to them so strongly. This, to me, is the power of film that separates it from all other mediums. A movie can speak to people without them ever being able to fully understand or explain why. With this in mind, I decided that I wanted to write about the director whose films did that to me more frequently than any other filmmaker I had, and have, seen before.

When I first proposed my thesis, my intent was to explore the connection between sex and greed in Anderson's films. After rewatching Anderson's films, or watching a few for the very first time, I realized that both sex and greed fell under an even larger thematic umbrella: control. Frequently the protagonist in Anderson's films must battle for control over something or someone. As I began to research and read some scholarly analysis, I found a few more interwoven and interconnected themes or moments of significance across Anderson's filmography: a character's suppression or repression of trauma and the act of "letting out" or "letting go." In some cases, "letting out" can mean a dramatic release of emotions, whether it be rage or sorrow. In other cases, this act of "letting go" can refer more to the letting go of trauma or desires. Each character's attempt to gain control involves them dealing with some sort of trauma, which is sometimes fully explained and sometimes not (this will be explained in greater detail later). While either suppressing or repressing this trauma or letting go of it, the protagonists will let out their emotions.

While each of Anderson's films certainly involve control, suppression, repression, and a release of emotions and/or trauma, I felt that for the sake of quality over quantity it would be a good idea to narrow my scope. The four films that I think best encapsulate these ideas are *Magnolia* (1999), *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), *The Master* (2012), and *Phantom Thread* (2017).

These films will be the focus of this paper. Since they span multiple decades and make up half of Anderson's filmography, they will allow me, hopefully, to trace the evolution of Anderson as a filmmaker. I also hope to find a worldview that Anderson imparts through his films, and determine if that worldview changes over time.

Before continuing any further I find it important to add a few clarifying notes. First, I find it important to mention the lack of supplemental scholarly sources. Given Anderson's modernity it was difficult to find reliable sources to cite for this paper. Two texts are frequently cited in this paper: *Blossoms and Blood* by Jason Sperb and *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson* by George Toles. Sperb's book chronicles Anderson's career from its origin until *The Master*. While Sperb does analyze each film and look at key themes, he also contextualizes them by looking at Anderson's career with a postmodern lens. *Blossoms and Blood* discusses certain changes in the film industry that allowed Anderson to become a feature length film director at such a young age. The book also provides insights into Anderson's behavior as an artist, such as his fight with Rysher Entertainment over his first feature film, *Hard Eight*. If there is a sentence that could describe *Blossom and Blood*'s central argument it would be: "Anderson's persistent thematic and stylistic investment in the white-noise culture of celebrity, media, commodities, salesmen, patriarchy, and pop-leftist historicity reveals a consistently ambivalent history of postmodern America at the dawn of the twenty-first century."[3] There is nothing in that I have found in my research that makes me disagree with this argument. In fact, if I had more time I would have wanted to broaden the scope of this paper to discuss more of the "media" and "pop-

[3] Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 3.

left historicity" *Blossoms and Blood* mentions. This would have allowed me to contextualize Anderson's films by explaining personal and professional events that shaped his films and his career.

Toles' book is more narrow with its focus. *Contemporary Film Directors* gives in depth analysis of *Magnolia*, *Punch-Drunk Love*, *There Will Be Blood*, and *The Master*. Each section of the book focuses on one large idea in each of these films; for example the chapter on *The Master* is titled "Form and Formlessness in *The Master*."[4] The chapters for the most part will focus on the individual film, except on rare occasions when protagonists are compared. Despite this lack of comparison, Toles uses the end of his introductory chapter to trace Anderson's growth as a director. Toles argues that the openness of *Magnolia* pushed Anderson to recognize that people and characters are maybe a little more opaque, and we see this change in Anderson's next films.[5] This point will be a central argument for this paper, as I spend a significant portion analyzing the differences in Anderson's protagonists. These two books were useful resources for research and supportive analysis. Unfortunately I could not find any other great texts for analysis, which is an inherent flaw of this paper, but something I also find exciting, because it means that I am at the front of an academic study in a field I am passionate about. Since Anderson also has a tendency to implement biographical elements in some of his stories and I think it is important to have context for certain occasions, so I also refer to interviews from across Anderson's career to supplement my research and analysis.

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[4] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016.

[5] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 25.

Additionally, throughout this paper I describe scenes from Anderson's films. I have included images so that the reader can see what I am referring to as I describe it. If you look, many footnotes will have something that says "See Figure X." If you then go to the end of that section there will be a bank of images, titled "Images for Reference," and then go to the figure you are looking for, you will have an image to accompany my description and analysis.

Ultimately, the goal is that through this paper and looking at instances of control, suppression, repression, and release of emotions or desires we can ascertain some sort of core belief that guides Paul Thomas Anderson as a filmmaker. With all of this explained we begin with an analysis of *Magnolia*.

Magnolia:

Looking at Paul Thomas Anderson's oeuvre, no film makes more logical sense to begin with than his 1999 film *Magnolia*. It is a sprawling film that tells the story of eight different people living in the San Fernando Valley of California.[6] Upon examining both the film itself and the context around it, it is abundantly clear how *Magnolia* is a raw film, definitely Anderson's most directly open, and how each of its many protagonists fight for control so that they can shove down what pains them, only to be forced to let it all out.

While a director's biography is typically just context to support analysis, in this particular case it is so strongly tied to both the production and actual narrative of the film that it feels crucial to acknowledge. Many view *Magnolia* as Anderson's most personal film. When discussing *Magnolia*, Anderson once said, "It gets me. I put my heart--every embarrassing thing

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[6] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

that I wanted to say--in *Magnolia*."[7] Even John C. Reilly, who stars in the film, said that "a lot of the things that happen to the characters in the movie come directly out of his life."[8] Shortly before Anderson began writing *Magnolia*, his father, Ernie, passed away from cancer.[9] Looking at the Earl Partridge character, who dies from cancer, it is clear how the film draws on Anderson's real life.

More to the point, it is crucial to see how Anderson was able to create such an open film. After the success of *Boogie Nights*, and with Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise signed on, Anderson was given "final cut" of *Magnolia*.[10] This granted Anderson complete creative control over the film, meaning no executive of the studio could force any changes to the film. Anderson did not even test *Magnolia* with audiences, a common industry practice.[11] All this artistic freedom allowed him to pour each thought and desire that he wanted to, and the result was an magnum opus. At three hours and eight minutes long it is Anderson's longest film, and, depending on your opinion, should be either shorter or longer. On *Magnolia*, Jason Sperb writes, "Anderson's film is thematically and narratively schizophrenic, a jumbled mess of contradictions...And its indulgent length became, justifiably, a metaphor for Anderson's lack of

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[7] Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 115.

[8] Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 123.

[9] Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 123

[10] Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 118.

[11] Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 122.

restraint as a writer and director."[12] This quotation puts it best: Anderson's ability to have complete control led to the exact opposite, a film with no restrictions and moderation.

Much of the story of *Magnolia* involves a child trying to break free from their trauma caused by a parent and gain control of their life. First, Stanley, a child game show star, wishes to have more autonomy and more respect from the people in his life. Stanley is treated by his father as a burden at times and at others as an opportunity for revenue. As the "What do Kids Know" game show begins taping, we hear his father say, "Let's make some fucking money here."[13] Similarly, "Quiz Kid" Donnie Smith is still relying on what little celebrity he has left and is financially unstable because his parents withheld and spent all of his winnings from his run on "What Do Kids Know?" Claudia looks to get free from the horrific pain that her father, Jimmy Gator, caused her. Inversely, Jimmy, with his terminal prognosis, aims to repair his relationship with Claudia before he passes. Like Jimmy, Earl Partridge, on what will be his final day tries to reconnect, with his son Frank T.J. Mackey.[14]

Frank best represents *Magnolia*'s focus on control. First, Frank tries to project a personality of confidence and machismo through the persona of T.J. Mackey. His seminar and advertisements emphasize how much control is involved in what he practices; his method is called "The Seduce and Destroy," and his first words spoken not through a television are "Respect the cock and tame the cunt."[15] The "T.J. Mackey" character also allows Frank to

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[12]Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Pages 117-118.

[13] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[14] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[15] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

disassociate himself from his past and the trauma he faced, and assert power over his own narrative. Since the "T.J. Mackey" character is well-known for he his knowledge about seducing someone of the opposite sex, Frank can convince himself that he is a more of a real man than his absent father ever could be. Frank is performing a character and projecting confidence so that he can have some control over his identity.

Equally important to *Magnolia* is the opposite of control: coincidence. If control is having everything in order, then an inverse of control can be things happening for no reason at all. We believe that these moments of chance are sporadic and infrequent. However, the introduction of *Magnolia* shows that this randomness is actually much more present in our daily lives than we would expect. *Magnolia* opens with a narrator telling three tragic stories that all involve a unique coincidence. After the first story the narrator says, "And I would like to think this was only a matter of chance." Then after the second story the narrator states, "And I am trying to think this is only a matter of chance." By the time the narrator finishes telling the story of Sydney Barringer's homicide they say, "this is not just something that happened. This cannot be one of those things. This, please, cannot be that...This was not just a matter of chance. These strange things happen all the time."[16] All of these examples are chance happenings, and on their own they all seem ridiculously improbable, but compiled together they show that the improbable and absurd happen more frequently than we expect, emphasizing the importance of randomness in the film.

Despite these characters' attempts to move past their pain, many of these characters suppress their problems. It is important to clarify suppression and repression as it relates to

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[16] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

characters in Paul Thomas Anderson films, given that they frequently recur in his filmography. While the two are similar, there are some distinctions between them that are important. Suppression is defined as "the conscious intentional exclusion from consciousness of a thought or feeling," whereas repression is defined as "a mental process by which distressing thoughts, memories, or impulses that may give rise to anxiety are excluded from consciousness and left to operate in the unconscious."[17] Suppression suggests more of an active awareness and rejection of something, while repression implies that there are emotions or thoughts that are hiding in our subconsciousness, where we may not even be aware of them. As this relates to Paul Thomas Anderson's characters, if one is suppressing their emotions or trauma then they are aware of it and actively holding it down, but if they are repressing these feelings then one could argue that they are not consciously aware of the root of their problems.

The other difficult aspect of distinguishing between emotional suppression and repression is understanding the difference between character knowledge and audience knowledge. Anderson frequently uses techniques such as temporal jumps and cuts to help create the world his protagonists exist in. In those jumps characters will have experienced moments that we are not privy to, but our protagonists would know about these events. This could influences their emotions in ways we may not know. For example, in *The Master*, Freddie Quell, after returning from the war, bounces from job to job, but it is unclear to us the viewer if these jobs follow in quick succession from each other, or are spaced out over some period of time. But, one assumes,

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[17] "Suppression." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suppression. Accessed 29 Mar. 2020,
"Repression." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repression. Accessed 29 Mar. 2020.

Freddie and Anderson, know these things and withhold that information from us.[18] Anderson's films will also have protagonists mention certain things from the past, only for it to be not fully explained. No character highlights this better than Daniel Plainview in *There Willl Be Blood*. After he murders the man pretending to be his brother, he reads his real brother's journal and we start to see him cry.[19] This gives us the insight that Plainview has some sort of history with his brother and family, but we, the audience, get no further explanation. Plainview knows this past trauma and Anderson hides it from us the viewer, but that doesn't mean that Plainview is hiding it from himself. Given this lack of knowledge, though, it can be difficult to figure out if Plainview is repressing or suppressing his trauma and past mistakes.

Looking at *Magnolia*, it is clear that the characters have some understanding of the traumas that ail them and that they are trying to hold them inside. By creating the persona of "T.J. Mackey," Frank not only gains control of who he is, but in turn suppresses his past and his father. He rids himself of any nominal association with the man who left him and his mother. This becomes clear during the interview sequence. Frank starts off confident, standing practically nude in a superman pose, flexing his muscles.[20] As Gwenovier, the interviewer, begins to reveal information about Mackey's background his demeanor completely changes. Mackey goes from giving lengthy responses about his education and his early life to short, one-worded responses, while his facial expressions go from confident to menacing.[21] Stanley's act of suppression is best

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[18] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[19] Anderson, Paul Thomas, et al. *There Will Be Blood*. Paramount Vantage, 2007.

[20] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999. See Figure 1.

[21] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999. See Figure 2.

represented by his literal attempt to hold in his bladder. Right before the taping of, "What do Kids Know?" Stanley tells a producer, Cynthia, that he needs to go to the bathroom. Cynthia asks Stanley to wait until they cut to a commercial.[22] This may seem like a simple request, one parents ask of their children all the time, but it forces Stanley to continue to act as a prop for entertainment and for his father's financial gain. Rather than allow Stanley the slightest bit of agency, and let him perform a basic human function, he is forced to hold in both his urine and his freedom. Claudia also ignores her father's pleas, the man responsible for her trauma, and furiously kicks him out. It isn't necessarily fair to assume this is true, but one could also argue that Claudia's drug use could also be a symptom of her trying to cope with and suppress her trauma. Conversely, Jimmy, the oppressor, ignores his wrongdoing throughout the film. In the interactions with his wife, Rose, Jimmy is confused as to why Claudia will not speak to him. Towards the end of the film, though, we learn that this ignorance is a front as he admits to sexually assaulting Claudia.[23] Jimmy tries to repair his most damaged relationship without even fully acknowledging what he has done wrong.

As much as each character tries to hide their real feelings, the beauty of *Magnolia* is that each of the characters eventually end up letting their emotions out. On occasion, *Magnolia* will even break from conventional norms so that the characters can let out their emotions. The musical number in the middle of the third act is a great example of this. Given that *Magnolia* does not fit in the stereotypical musical genre, breaking out into song is far from what is expected to happen in this moment. After Phil gives Earl a dose of the liquid morphine, Aimee

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[22] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[23] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

Mann's "Wise Up" begins to play non-diegetically. The film then cuts to Claudia. With no clear indication that the song is now playing within the diegesis, Claudia begins to sing along. We then see the film go character to character, each of whom are singing along to the song, again without any visual indication that it is playing in the actual world of the film.[24] The lyrics that standout most: "You're sure/There's a cure/And you have finally found it/You think/One drink/Will shrink you 'til you're underground/And living down/But it's not going to stop/It's not going to stop/It's not going to stop/'Til you wise up."[25] By this point in the film, each member of the ensemble has been pushed to a breaking point, and here they all break into pieces, and spill everything out of themselves.[26] As the lyrics of Aimee Mann suggest, in order to push past this breaking point and move on from their trauma the characters of *Magnolia* must "wise up" and let all of their pain out.

Many of Anderson's stylistic choices in the "Wise Up" sequence contribute to this emotional downpour. First, the complete stop of the film amplifies the moment. *Magnolia* is constantly moving from character to character in order to connect all of their stories and complete their arcs, so to make that narrative come to a halt adds greater significance to this scene. Additionally, the least subtle part of this outpouring is the rain pouring down throughout it.[27] In a moment that is all about the release of emotions it would only make sense to have rain falling down from the sky.

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[24] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[25] Aimee Mann. "Wise Up." *Magnolia (Music from the Motion Picture)*. Spotify.

[26] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 8.

[27] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

Anderson does a great job of reinforcing the characters' dramatic outpouring emotions through the mise-en-scene of other scenes as well. The best examples of this involve Linda Partridge. When Linda goes to her attorney's office, we see her admit that she feels she is not deserving of what Earl is going to bequeath to her. The room is fittingly lit by high contrast white lighting.[28]A little later on Anderson uses the same lighting in the scene with Linda at the pharmacist. As Linda screams at the pharmacist, a bright fluorescent light shines down on her face, amplifying her pale complexion.[29] This does not only happen with Linda though; as Frank looks at his father and tells him that "[he] will not cry," only to then cry, a light from the lamp on the bed stand next to him shines down on his face.[30] Just like Linda and Frank's words and emotions, the lighting in these scenes are bright and hard to ignore. But the lighting also just makes these moments feel even more emotional. Anderson uses mis-en-scene to represent a release of emotions and help amplify the emotional intensity of these scenes .

Anderson references these ideas of letting out and letting go, just in case the viewer didn't already get it, when frogs rain down. After the rain has washed the streets of the San Fernando Valley clean, frogs begin to fall from the sky.[31] It is the apex in a long line of escalating, and at first glance, seemingly inexplicable moments of *Magnolia*. This, of course, speaks to the idea of randomness and chance that the film touches on from the beginning. Anderson himself even confirmed this, saying that, "My first introduction to (the frog

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[28] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999. See Figure 3

[29] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999. See Figure 4

[30] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999. See Figure 5

[31] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

occurrence) came from Charles Fort, who's a great turn-of-the-century writer and skeptic who wrote about odd phenomena, UFOs, this sort of thing."[32] However, upon further examination, one could equally argue that the film is also making a biblical reference that speaks more to the act of letting go. Throughout the film we see specific mentions of Exodus 8:2, most notably a fan at the taping of "What Do Kids Know?" is holding up a sign that says "Exodus 8:2." Chapter eight, verse two of Exodus reads, "But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs."[33] God is speaking to Moses about the ten plagues, saying that if Pharoah does not let the Jewish people leave Egypt they will be plagued with frogs. God told Moses that if Pharaoh did not let go of the Jewish people he would be punished with frogs, and in *Magnolia* the characters do not let go of their trauma, so they are punished with a raining monsoon of frogs. Similar to the "Wise Up" moment, the film breaks from conventional narrative expectation to emphasize the importance of letting go. It feels like the film is again trying to spell out the lesson for its characters, rather than fit a message orderly within typical confines of narrative.

What we see in the wake of the frog storm, which represents these character's letting go of trauma, could be a metaphor for what happens after we let all of our emotions out. When we let all of our emotions out it creates a ripple effect. If you tell a person how you really feel, or try to confront someone, there is a consequential fall out from that. In *Magnolia* it is the same. After the storm the streets are littered with frogs; Jim Kurring cannot even walk without stepping on them.[34] To see something as absurd as frogs raining down from the sky and then disregard it as

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[32]Caro, Mark. "Abundance of Symbols in 'Magnolia' Has Filmgoers Looking For Clues." *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Jan. 2000.

[33]*Bible Hub*. biblehub.com/exodus/8-2.htm.

[34] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999. See Figure 6

though nothing happened would be ignorant. An event of biblical proportions would be hard to just toss to the side. If a person confronted trauma that had been ailing them for much of their adult life, only to then ignore to the consequences of this confrontation, then we might argue that they are in denial. One should not rationally separate an action from its consequences, even if they are tangled and difficult to deal with. Frank may have gotten to say goodbye to his father, but he still has to go see Linda in the hospital. Donnie may be aware that his plot was poorly thought out, but he also acknowledges that his love has no place for it to be received. Stanley may confront his father, but his father seems to disregard his demand.[35] *Magnolia* shows that in the aftermath of the frogs and emotional confrontation there are still messes that need to be cleaned up and things that need to be addressed.

Ultimately, *Magnolia* concludes without definitive endings for its characters, but a number of things suggest that may be the film's underlying point. As mentioned, the characters try to claim power over their pain in a myriad of ways. In trying to control these ailments they push them down and refuse to acknowledge the pain that exists inside of them. The characters succeed in suppressing these emotions until the film goes out of its way to show the audience that it is in the characters' best interest to confront their trauma and let all of their pain out. By the end of *Magnolia*, practically all of the main characters have done this in some way or another. Frank has one final conversation with his father, as does Stanley. Claudia begins to open herself up to be loved, Jim in turn puts himself out there to love someone, Donnie recognizes that his braces plot was unnecessary, and even Linda spends much of the film confronting her past

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[35] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

sins.[36] However, we do not know if there is happiness at the end of this arc for the ensemble of *Magnolia*.

This messiness and uncertainty is reinforced by the final voiceovers of the Narrator and Jim Kurring. As hospice workers come to collect Earl's body, the Narrator says, "And it is in the humble opinion of this narrator that strange things happen all the time. And so it goes and so it goes. And the book says, 'We may be through with the past but the past ain't through with us.'"[37] This is a call back to both the opening prologue, voiced by Ricky Jay, and also to when Jimmy Gator says, "For we may be through with the past, but the past is not through with us" to Burt Ramsey, also played by Ricky Jay.[38] It connects two of the more overt themes of the entire film though as well: chance and past trauma. The narrator is reminding the viewer once again that despite all of what just occurred seeming absurd, it is actually rather typical. The narrator is also reminding us that as much as we might want to move on from our past, it cannot be ignored. A few minutes later, we hear Jim narrate over helping Donnie return the stolen valuables. Here, he says, "Sometimes people need a little help. Sometimes people need to be forgiven. And sometimes they need to go to jail...You can forgive someone. Well that's the tough part. What can we forgive? Tough part of the job. Tough part of walking down the street."[39] This connects to the past that is "not through with us." Many of the characters of *Magnolia* have been wronged by someone, and much of the film is their attempt to forgive and/or move past it.

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[36] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[37] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[38] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[39] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

Magnolia is both a mess of a film and about life's messiness. Looking at the final act of *Magnolia* it becomes clear that Anderson, in attempting to "pour his whole heart out," tries to say a lot of things: 1) life is messy and absurd 2) the things that haunt us will continue to hurt us if we do not try to deal with them and 3) even if we do deal with them life might not be perfect afterwards.

While *Magnolia* alone is an interesting film to analyze alone, how it shapes Anderson's future filmmaking is equally interesting. Toles writes, "Judging from increasingly taciturn, oblique, mysterious screenplays Anderson has written since...I think it is reasonable to argue that Anderson came to distrust remedies available to the free-swinging orators of hurt. Anderson decided that the art of truth telling was necessarily more oblique. Direct confrontations of psychological issues could perhaps only mine the surface. The huffing and puffing of outward grapple are often delusively theatrical; the harder truths of the inner life may well prove inexpressible."[40] This leads us nicely into Anderson's next film: *Punch-Drunk Love*.

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[40] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 25.

Images For Reference:

Figure 1:

Figure 2:

Figure 3:

Figure 4:

Figure 5:

Figure 6:

Punch-Drunk Love:

Following *Magnolia*, we begin to see a transition in Paul Thomas Anderson's filmmaking. Barry Egan shows how Anderson started to make his protagonists more withholding. Egan, played by Adam Sandler, is a toilet plunger salesman with seven overbearing sisters. Over the course of the film, Barry fights for love and against Mormons attempting to blackmail him, all the while holding in serious rage.[41] Barry, just like the protagonists in *Magnolia*, fights for control, attempts to suppress his trauma, and only once he repurposes his trauma is he able to overcome the obstacles he faces.

Barry's battle for control, and simultaneous lack of control, is centered around a fear of emasculation. Barry's relationship with his sisters, which is shown early in the film, is a window into this fear. Now, given the gender and power dynamics at play in *Punch-Drunk*, it is important to point out that *Punch-Drunk Love* and Barry are operating on the societal expectation that to be in control, both professionally and socially, is a masculine trait. Barry's sisters tear down his grasp of the most basic of masculine norms, such as his work and his sexual identity. The first time we see this is when Barry is being constantly interrupted in the middle of a sales pitch. The intercom screams out, "Barry your sister is on line one!...Barry your sister is on line two. "[42] Each sister distracts him from his business. His first conversation with his sister, Rhonda, is rather fast, but then his sister Karen talks with no sense of urgency, asking him what he is doing at the moment. Finally, when he talks to Kathleen, she reminds him multiple times to come to a

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[41] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[42] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

party that night .[43] Not only is this time spent talking to his sisters interfering with his work, but the tone and dialogue used by his sisters is quite humiliating as well. Karen ridicules Barry for using the word "chat" and then belittles him for trying to focus on his work, saying "get back to chatting with your precious customers."[44] Kathleen badgers him about coming to the party. First, she firmly tells him that he must be on time, and then follows it by saying "You can't just stay at your house," which directly acknowledges Barry's solitude, without there being any explicit need for it to be addressed.[45]

The climax of Barry being bullied comes shortly after. As Barry arrives to the party his sisters are reminiscing about how when they were children they once called Barry "gayboy" and he went into a fit of rage. When they ask Barry about it he has no recollection, but the barrage of multiple sisters calling him "gayboy" overpowers his dismissal of the incident. Here, Barry's sexual identity is called into question. This also ties back to his youth as well, a time identities are being shaped. To recall this humiliation and shut Barry down as they do, strips Barry of one of the more key elements of stereotypical masculinity: heterosexuality. Barry is completely outnumbered, and so he is called a "gayboy" with little defense. These two scenes highlight the loss of stereotypical masculinity, and therefore control, that Barry feels while interacting with his sisters.

The Mormons' blackmail attempt also removes Barry's autonomy to express himself sexually. It is necessary to establish that *Punch-Drunk* seems to working off the societal norm

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[43] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[44] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[45] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

that in heterosexual situations it is normal for the male to have control of the situation. Barry, sitting in his apartment alone, calls the number of a phone sex line. After giving his information, the camera shows Barry seated at a dining table with the phone turned over. The camera then quickly pans as he awaits his call to show the rest of the table empty.[46] Barry is physically alone as he waits for a moment of disconnected sexual intimacy.[47] Barry's empty real life pushes him to desperately seek romance in a way where he does not have control over the situation. The next morning the phone sex worker, "Georgia," calls Barry at home before he leaves for work. Barry is framed standing in front of a doorway, creating a frame within the frame. "Georgia" begins to explain that she is in need of money. Barry stammers in response and physically moves backwards, but the camera simultaneously moves forwards.[48] It's similar to, if not an adaption of, the famous dolly zoom shot popularized by Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958).[49] Barry is still framed within the doorway but begins to look smaller and smaller as he backs up. Barry's stature and containment speak to his anxiety over being blackmailed. Barry tries to back away from the camera and the threats but the camera sticks with him, only making him smaller and further emphasizing how little control he has over the situation.

This lack of control only escalates as the people behind the phone sex operation appear to be Mormons running a con. They repeatedly threaten him over the phone, and then travel from Utah to California so that they can corner Barry, and force him to give them cash. When the

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[46] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 1

[47] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[48] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 2

[49] Moynihan, Tim. "WTF Just Happened: How Do They Pull Off the Vertigo Effect in Movies?" Wired, 28 Aug. 2014, www.wired.com/2014/08/wtf-just-happened-vertigo-effect/.

Mormons explain their rational for their actions they say, "this is what you get for being a pervert."[50] Barry's attempt to have sex is met with brutal punishment and guilt. This sort of sexual desire, a crucial element of stereotypical masculinity, is not permissible. More importantly, Barry once again has no control over a situation involving sexual desires. The Mormons leverage Barry's sexuality against him so that they can benefit. With this upper hand of knowledge, not to mention them physically outnumbering Barry when they take his money, Barry is forced to give into their will. Simply put, Barry struggles for control of his sex life.

There is more than one occasion when Anderson frames Barry within a frame to express Barry's anxiety over his lack of agency though. After Barry takes Lena to the hospital, we see most of Lena's body laying down on a hospital bed while Barry is standing just off center in the frame. Again he is framed by the doorway behind him, creating another frame within the frame. This attracts our eyes towards Barry and not the injured Lena. Barry again starts to slowly back away from the room towards the door, but the camera moves fast enough stay with him as he exits the room. At first when we see Barry standing in the doorway the perspective of the camera makes Barry seem quite tall; the top of his head is touching the doorway. By the time the camera gets up close to Barry he appears to be much smaller, closer to his actual height.[51] Barry and Lena were ambushed by the Mormons and Lena sustained an injury. Barry, the man, was unable to protect Lena, the woman, and so he feels small. Thus the shift in Barry's stature that we see in

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[50] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[51] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 3

the hospital can be viewed as a representation of Barry's insecurity over the lack of control and strength he has to safeguard Lena.[52]

While Barry fights for control over many aspects of his life, his emotions teeter between suppressed and repressed. The existence of Barry's emotional scars are clear to the viewer; we are aware that something is wrong and eating at him inside. What marks this as a new step in Paul Thomas Anderson's filmmaking is the lack of information about the protagonist that the viewer receives. The dominance of his sisters over him gives some context to Barry's pain, but not its full origin.

Regardless of our own ability to comprehend Barry's trauma, it is unclear if Barry himself is aware his trauma and just simply ignores it, or has completely repressed it so that it cannot be accessed. Barry's own words feel most apt to describe this: "I don't like the way I am sometimes...I don't know if there's anything wrong with me because I don't know how other people are.....Sometimes I cry a lot.....for no reason."[53] Barry recognizes that he is sad and has issues with self-esteem, but he still doesn't know if something is wrong with him, and most likely, what is wrong with him.

Images and scenes throughout the film suggest that Barry has both suppressed and repressed his trauma. In the very first scene of the film we see Barry at a desk in his warehouse. It is framed as an establishing shot, yet Barry and his desk are dwarfed by the wall behind them. Additionally, Barry is positioned in the corner of a right angle, and so the two connecting walls

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[52] Brubaker, Philip. *Paul Thomas Anderson: Frames Within Frames*. *Paul Thomas Anderson: Frames Within Frames*, Fandor, 22 Jan. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWn7TkQ1hFE.

[53] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

lead our eyes to Barry seated at his desk.[54] Thanks to the combination of these two elements, Barry is at the center of the frame, but is contained in it at the same time. In one sense the image represents Barry's inner emotional state; Barry's emotions are these lingering minimized frustrations that are compressed to appear small. It is no different than the act of bottling up your emotions and pushing them down deep inside of you. This image could speak to Barry repressing his emotions as well. In this room, Barry is miniature and hidden from the outside world, just like how his problems have been minimized and stowed away from his conscious. The opening image *Punch-Drunk Love* shows that Barry both suppresses and represses his trauma.

Soon after we see another moment that can represent Barry's ignorance of his own emotional well-being. After the shot of Barry at his desk, he walks outside to take in the early morning when he sees a car suddenly flip over and roll violently until it is out of frame. In the same screech from the car rolling, a van suddenly drives up into the foreground and drops off a harmonium. The car flipping is completely unprompted, no accident is shown to have caused it.[55] The multiple flips and loud crashing sounds exaggerate the severity of the crash to an extreme level. The car then exits from our view and before we know it there is something else in front of Barry. Viewed as a metaphor for Barry's emotions and his handling of them, the car represents Barry's explosive emotions that he rarely shows. Often they are over the top and harsh, but they are quickly moved past and replaced by something else. As Toles writes, "The cab slides into place before us like a repression screen, blocking out the sight of flying debris from the still-in-

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[54] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 4.

[55] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

progress accident."[56] While Toles may call this repression, I would argue that is suppression. Barry sees the crash and chooses to ignore it and instead focuses on the shiny object in front of him.

Later on in the film Barry makes a similar choice that again indicates that he is consciously suppressing his trauma. Barry is in his office having a conversation with Lena and his sister Elizabeth in the foreground. Meanwhile, in the background we can see a forklift crash full speed into a shelf. [57] It is terrifying to watch and it seems lucky that no employees are injured in the incident. One would think that Barry, the manager, would be on hand to help or at least be paying attention, but he does not and his eyes remain focused on Lena. Lena and Elizabeth at least turn around and acknowledge the accident, but Barry's head does not even turn, he continues to look at Lena.[58] This is a moment of complete willful ignorance, one where Barry could and should easily notice the large violent incident happening nearby, but chooses not to anyway. If this moment is a metaphor for Barry's emotions, then it could be viewed as Barry suppressing his emotions rather than repressing them. Barry consciously decides to not pay attention to the thing that is more pressing and harmful.

All of these suppressive and repressive moments in sum suggest that Barry Egan's psyche is not either entirely repressive or suppressive, but most likely a mix of both. Barry has some awareness of the problems that haunt him, but not a complete understanding or acknowledgement of them.

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[56] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 51

[57] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[58] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 5.

Despite Barry's attempts, intentional or unintentional, to hold in his emotions, he frequently lets them out in fits of rage. A few of these moments easily come to mind: Barry smashing the sliding glass doors at his sister's house or assaulting the Mormon brothers with a tire iron.[59] Contextually, it is an interesting choice for Anderson to have Barry riddled with anger issues. As Toles points out, "Barry Egan is played by Adam Sandler, whose comic persona, in film after film, is strongly associated with mock outbursts of essentially harmless anger." Barry's anger is much more violent and real than the comedic anger of a character like Billy Madison or Happy Gilmore.[60] Albeit some of his rage is still humorous. Sadly, Barry isn't yelling at young children or fighting Bob Barker; his actions are one with real consequences for Lena and himself.

Barry, held to the standards of heteronormative masculinity, can only respond in a stereotypically masculine sense: not with empathy and humility, but with unadulterated rage. He also is rather unhappy. Barry's depression could be caused by a number of factors, but it's difficult to think his inability to express his emotions is not one of them. Remember, his crying spell and admission of self-hate to his brother-in-law only comes after he explodes and smashes the glass windows at his sister's house.[61] Without the knowledge or skills to properly say how he is feeling, Barry sinks into sadness.

Some of Barry's sexual interactions, another key component of stereotypical masculinity, are no praise for heteronormative masculinity either. Some might argue that paying for phone sex goes against societal norms and what is culturally accepted. However, one could also argue that

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[59] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[60] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 30.

[61] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. Punch-Drunk Love. Sony Pictures, 2002.

paying for sex over the phone is a sort of act driven by this stereotypical masculine desires and fantasies to have your sexual desires fulfilled in any manner possible. When he's talking to the phone sex worker he is not some aggressive man though. He's actually quite shy. The camera even turns away from him, making the act of phone sex seem shameful.[62] Barry is then blackmailed by Mormons and minimized by the camera for trying to have phone sex. Since Barry can only express himself in hyper-masculine ways, and is unhappy and unsuccessful in doing so, the viewer could see the flaws and fragility of stereotypical masculinity.

Barry pushes through these emotional, sexual, and literal barriers to get to the point of physical intimacy though. Lena calls Barry after their first date and admits that she hoped that he would have kissed her before he said goodnight. Barry, still in the lobby of Lena's apartment building, then goes running back up, down, and around the building to try and find Lena's apartment. Near the end of this quest we see Barry running, framed in a long shot through a series of doorways.[63] This connects to the recurring image of Barry framed within the frame of the film. In this particular case though it holds a different significance than to represent his anxiety. Here, these open doorways represent both the literal impediments Barry has faced find Lena's apartment and the psychological obstacles he has overcome to be vulnerable and express himself sexually to another real human being. We then see a hallway door closed this time, only to have Barry burst through it, ring Lena's door and then kiss her as soon as she opens it.[64] As Barry approaches the door the camera quickly pans into a close up and the score crescendos. It is

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[62]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 6.

[63]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 7.

[64]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 8.

a moment of sexual release. Barry, now in a romantic relationship, has a way to express himself sexually.

Barry seems to also rationalize his childish anger in the name of love. After the brothers hit Barry's car while he is driving Lena home, the film shows Barry seated in the driver's seat, stunned, and then a reverse shot of Lena. After a few seconds the viewer can begin to see drops of blood dripping down from Lena's forehead. Barry immediately proceeds to get out of the car and violently attacks the brothers. In Barry's last encounter we saw a much more cowardly tactic, him running away from the mormons, even though not many of Barry's circumstances were different.[65] The fact that Lena is wounded is the significant difference. Before Barry was just defending himself, but now with his love interest threatened, he uses his rage to protect Lena. As Toles explains, "Lena's wound as a trigger for his "calm" explosion allows his violence to be a spontaneous expression of love."[66] In other cases Barry's rage was seen as childish or emotionally inept, but now with Lena in his life his anger has a purpose.

Shortly after this, Barry goes to Utah and actually confronts Dean, played by Phillip Seymour Hoffman, face to face. Barry approaches and then plants himself right in front of Dean's face, and says, "So you tell me that's that, before I beat the hell from you. I have so much strength in me you have no idea. I have a love in my life. It makes me stronger than anything you can imagine."[67] Again, it seems like his rage has been repurposed for something greater: love. Barry shows that his rage is now channeled into strength, and it is all thanks to his love for Lena.

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[65] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. Punch-Drunk Love. Sony Pictures, 2002.

[66] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 40

[67] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002.

This is reinforced by the lighting of the frame where Dean and Barry stand face to face. In the foreground of the image we see Barry's back lit up by the sunlight coming through and in the background we see a streak of this light pointed down diagonally towards Barry's face, yet the light barely touches Dean.[68] The streak of light behind Barry and the power coming from it supports him, just as the power of love now supports him and gives him strength.

After watching *Punch-Drunk Love* and looking at how it addresses control, suppression, repression, and repurposing of trauma it is clear how one could critique stereotypical masculinity and praise love. Barry is held to a certain standard of masculinity: a strong businessman who is in control of every aspect of his life. Barry cannot control all these realms; he's chastised by his sisters, and tries to fulfill his sexual desires in socially unacceptable ways, and is clearly depressed because of it. Barry fails to live up to these standards of masculinity, nor is he able to fully understand or recognize how they affect him emotionally. These failures then condemn society's absurd ideals of masculinity. After Barry begins his romantic relationship with Lena, though, his anger becomes empowering, thus making Barry stronger. The film shows that love can give people the ability to channel their emotions into something greater. The film ends with Lena walking across Barry's warehouse to find him playing the harmonium, an instrument of expression, he found at the beginning of the film.[69] Now, with Lena's love supporting him, Barry is able to channel his anger, highlighting the power that love has on humans.

Paul Thomas Anderson's next film, *There Will Be Blood*, definitively touches on control, repression, and the release of emotions and trauma; however, it will not be covered in depth in

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[68]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 9.

[69]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Punch-Drunk Love*. Sony Pictures, 2002. See Figure 10.

this paper for a variety of reasons. Daniel Plainview is certainly a character obsessed with control. Much of the plot of the film is his attempt to buy up land so that he can own as much property and hold as much power as possible. Daniel also finishes the film by cathartically murdering his arch nemesis, Eli Sunday.[70] My own personal struggle with this film, which I have now watched several times, is trying to decipher how Daniel's past trauma affects his emotions and his relationships with his loved ones. It is still unclear to me if Daniel actively suppresses some past trauma with his family, as his interactions with the man posing with his brother and him crying as he reads his brother's journal may suggest, or if he subconsciously represses any sort of feelings of love, intimacy, or guilt he has over the course of the film. Toles' writing points to this duality as well, "In his next three feature films (*Punch-Drunk Love*, *There Will Be Blood*, *The Master*), there is no recourse available for impetuous, unfettered outpouring of this sort. Instead, one discovers a clamping down on both what is known about the self (of the protagonist, certainly, and in fact of everyone, as well) and what this besieged self has the capacity to articulate."[71] A few pages later Toles writes, "However, the choosing of the well's demands over H.W.'s demands is not the rational 'investment transfer' of a heartless man. Daniel instead strives, paradoxically, to keep his love for his son safe by forcing it back into hiding."[72] It is quite possible that Daniel is both suppressive and repressive, making it a perfect intermediary stop on Anderson's arc from characters completely aware to completely unaware of what ails them. It's simply that I am not able to work out which it is, or if it is both.

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[70]Anderson, Paul Thomas, et al. *There Will Be Blood*. Paramount Vantage, 2007.

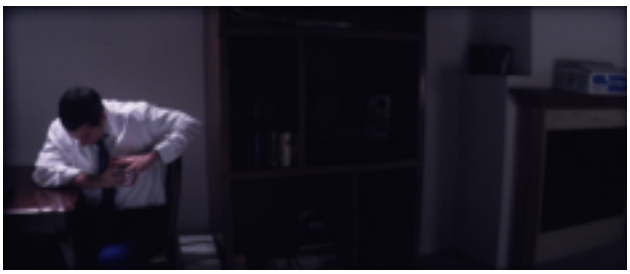
[71]Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Pages 76-77.

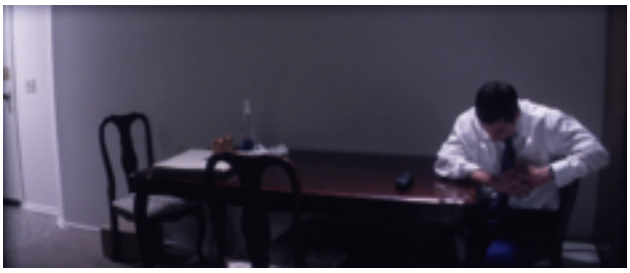
[72] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 88.

Regardless of all of this, I think it is easy to view *There Will Be Blood* as an antithesis to *Punch-Drunk Love.* Despite their differences, they ironically convey similar messages, albeit their divergences are what allow these similar messages to be expressed in differing manners. Daniel, unlike Barry Egan, continues to fight and control every aspect of his life, pushing out any person with any emotional connection to him. His quest for wealth puts any sort of love or family further at bay. Ultimately, Daniel, over the course of the film, grows into this titan of industry and wealth, but is completely alone thanks to his own doing. Barry, however, finds love, accepts that love, and becomes emotionally fulfilled. Rather than let go, cede control, and open himself up to the power of love, Daniel Plainview alienates himself, showing that a rejection of love and intimacy can lead to emptiness and apathy.

Images for Reference:

Figure 1:





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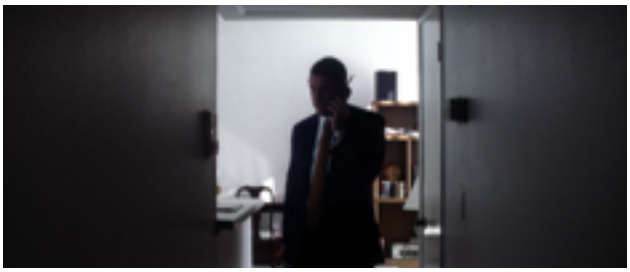

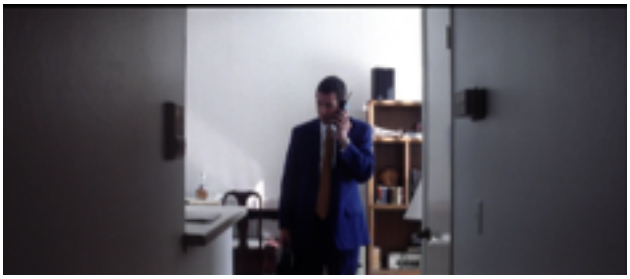

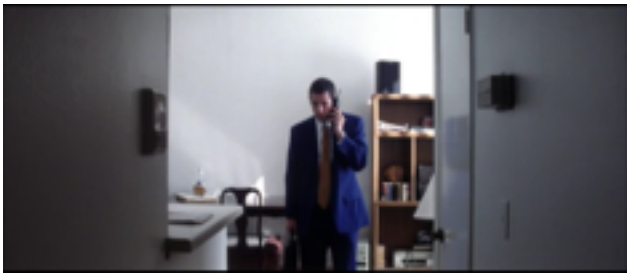

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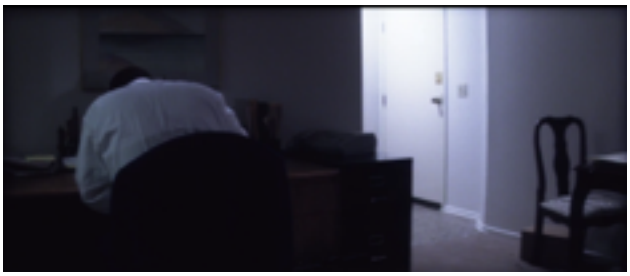
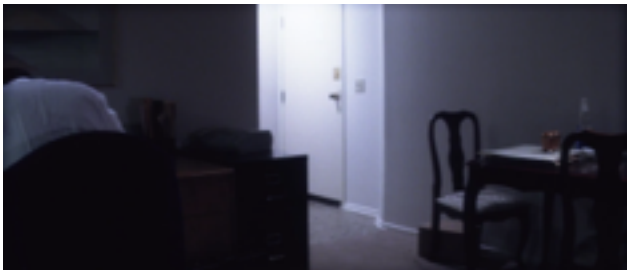
Figure 4:

Figure 5:

Figure 6 (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):





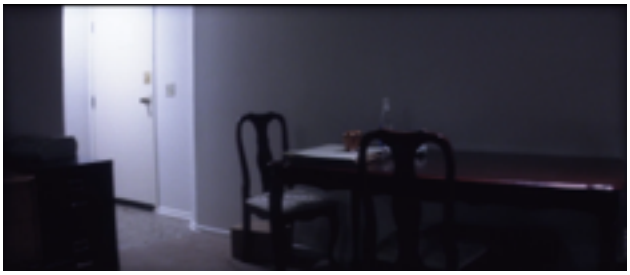
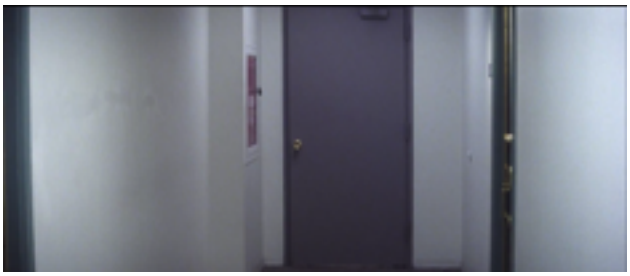


Figure 7:

Figure 8:



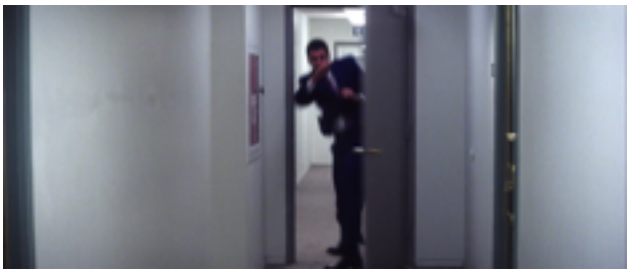


Figure 9:

Figure 10:

The Master:

This aforementioned struggle to discern suppression from repression becomes only harder with Paul Thomas Anderson's next film: *The Master*. Perhaps Anderson's most confounding film, *The Master* tells the story of a World War II veteran named Freddie Quell and his bond with a man named Lancaster Dodd, who leads a movement known as "The Cause."[73] Greg Toles best captures the film's confusing nature when he writes, "It is a relationship that ends without its issues having been fully understood by either of the participants, or, in any conventional sense, resolved. Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix) and the eponymous master Lancaster Dodd (Philip Seymour Hoffman), never articulate what they need from each other or what causes their peculiarly intense connection to thrive, for a time, and then fail. Moreover, the actual stakes of their messily conjoined spiritual quests are exceedingly difficult to determine."[74] What makes this film particularly intriguing in relation to the scope of this paper is how the themes of control and repression are as present as their opposites, freedom and releasing emotions, in much of this film. For as much as the film shows the repression of trauma it equally shows characters trying to release emotions in an attempt to gain freedom. It is clear that *The Master* focuses on control, repression, and the release of emotions and trauma through style and narrative.

The most obvious example of control is the main relationship of the film: that between Freddie Quell and Lancaster Dodd. This struggle for control is signaled in Quell and Dodd's first

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[73] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[74] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 112.

interaction. When they first meet their language is declarative; Dodd tells Freddie that "[he] was acting aggressive because he drank too much alcohol," to which Freddie shakes his head and retorts, "No I don't think so."[75] Their stances leave little room for compromise because they both want to be the assertive one, or at least Freddie does not want to be dominated. Dodd's attempt to mold Freddie is actually signaled in their first exchange. When they first officially meet, we see Freddie step into the doorway of the room from Dodd's perspective, but not his exact point of view. Rather than fully enter the room immediately, Freddie hesitates, standing in the doorway. Similar to Barry Egan, Freddie is framed by the doorframe.[76] However, the framing here does not express Freddie or Dodd's anxieties or repressive nature. Instead, in this particular case, the doorframe can speak to the threshold that Freddie is about to cross and the limitations placed on him once he does. Freddie is about to join a cult, "The Cause," a protective, insular group; he is an outsider joining their world. The frame of the doorway can also speak to the rules that Dodd, and his wife Peggy, will place on Freddie once he joins "The Cause," representing a sort of containment or control that Dodd tries to assert over Freddie. Dodd believes that Freddie is an animal, and tries to control him. During his speech at his daughter's wedding Dodd begins to describe the image of a dragon. He then goes on to say that he is able to tame this metaphorical dragon, so it follows his commands. During this speech, the film frequently cuts back and forth between Dodd, at the the wedding reception, and a close up on Freddie at the back of the room. This establishes a visual relationship between Freddie and Dodd, especially since we see only the

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[75] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[76] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 1.

duo, but can clearly hear the rest of the wedding party present through off camera laughter.[77] The combination of the editing and the dialogue foreshadows what is to come, with Freddie as the dragon and Dodd as its tamer. The doorway framing is referenced again later on. Dodd tells Freddie to stop doing an exercise where Freddie must walk back and forth from a window to the wall. The two embrace, block out practically everyone watching, and are framed by the doorway behind them.[78] After an exhausting period of following Dodd's exercises without any explanation, Freddie has begun to fit into the frame shaped by Dodd.

Looking at their final encounter, the idea of control is again at the heart of Freddie and Dodd's relationship. Dodd says to Freddie, "Free winds and no tyranny for you? Freddie… sailor of the seas. You pay no rent. Free to go where you please. Then go. Go to that landless latitude, and good luck. For if you figure a way to live without serving a master, any master, then let the rest of us know. Will you? For you'd be the first person in the history of the world."[79] Dodd doubts that Freddie can continue to live without serving anyone, and so while he recognizes Freddie's inability to be controlled, he also tells Freddie that true freedom is historically impossible. Dodd then sings a rendition of "On a Slow Boat to China."[80] The opening lyrics read, "I'd like to get you on a slow boat to China/All to myself alone/Get you and keep you in my arms evermore."[81] Applied to Freddie and Dodd's relationship it is clear how this song fits into

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[77] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 2.

[78] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 3.

[79]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[80] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[81] Bing Crosby. "On a Slow Boat to China." *El Rancho Grande*. Spotify.

Dodd's desire to control Freddie and keep him to himself. Freddie and Dodd's relationship is one of push and pull, with Dodd trying to contain and shape Freddie and Freddie slipping loose from Dodd's grasp.

Equally important to this film is how Lancaster's wife, Peggy Dodd, controls both Lancaster and Freddie. While at a dinner party Lancaster breaks out singing "I'll Go No More a Roving," a folk song about a young man gaining freedom from a woman.[82] As Lancaster sings, we see Freddie, half asleep. We then see a reverse shot of the party from Freddie's perspective, except now all of the women in the scene are naked.[83] Since we are watching this from Freddie's perspective, this could speak to Freddie's lack of discipline and his objectification of women. Similar to the sand woman on the beach in the opening scene, Freddie sees these women as sexual objects. Dodd's friendliness and comfort with the naked women could also hint at Dodd's attempt to "go a roving" with whoever he pleases.

Peggy Dodd responds to this performance. In the following scene we see Dodd hunched over the bathroom sink. Peggy approaches, only shown in the reflection of the mirror above the sink, and begins to touch him. As she engages in a sexual act, she tells Lancaster that he does not need to be faithful as long as it doesn't result in any sort of public embarrassment. She then goes on to tell Dodd that he needs to "stop with this idea" and "put it back in its pants." Just before he climaxes she makes one more demand, "No more of that boy's hooch," obviously referring to Freddie and his concoctions. In Toles' explanation of the scene, he writes, "Peggy's talk accompanying the hand job emphasizes Dodd's *freedom*, but she maintains utter control of him

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[82] Noel McLoughlin. "I'll Go No More a Roving with You, Fair Maid." *Home Is the Rover*. Spotify.

[83] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

throughout. His ashamed turned-away placement in the shot, his hungover rumpledness, and his confused acquiescence to Peggy's quiet demands accentuate our sense of his diminished authority since his impresario stance at the party…she sanctions his need to indulge himself as he sees fit, all the while retaining control of his penis."[84]Even Lancaster serves a master, his wife Peggy.

The framing of the camera and the staging of the scene further this point. While Peggy pleasures him, we see Dodd's hunched-over body in the center of the frame and his flushed, reddened face reflected in the mirror. In contrast, Peggy stands tall and firm, and we see part of her face when she turns her head perpendicular to Lancaster so that she can whisper to him. Peggy grips Lancaster's shoulder with her other hand, physically holding onto him as she psychologically and sexually manipulates him.[85] The viewer can look at either the foreground and see Dodd defenseless, or into the reflection in the mirror to see that Lancaster is at the mercy of Peggy's every word and stroke. In either case it is clear that Peggy is both physically and emotionally controlling Lancaster.

In the next scene, presumably that same night, Peggy wakes Freddie up while he is asleep to try and discipline him. Peggy presents Freddie with an ultimatum: either he must stop drinking or leave "The Cause."[86] Given that Peggy calls the beverages Freddie makes "that boy's hooch" in the scene prior to this, it is clear that Peggy understands the connection between Freddie's alcoholic concoctions and Lancaster Dodd, and believes it is a negative influence on Lancaster.

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[84] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016.

[85]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 4.

[86]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

Therefore, in this scene Peggy is trying to cover all of her bases and actually go so far as to try and control Lancaster by controlling Freddie's drinking habits. Unfortunately, this proves to be rather unsuccessful because in the very next scene we see Freddie drink and cause a scene as Dodd gets arrested.[87] Peggy asserts her control over both Freddie and Lancaster.

Anderson asserts his own sort of control over the viewer by making much of *The Master* somewhat incomprehensible. At the surface level, the film skips many basic structural conventions. Time is never clear; we rarely ever learn how much time passes during a montage and how much time has passed from scene to scene. For example, some of our only specific mentions of time are when we hear the voice on the radio announcing that the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II, which was in 1945. The next time we hear a date mentioned is when Dodd speaks into the microphone at the beginning of Freddie's first processing that it is March 5th, 1950.[88] In between these two scenes we really only see Freddie return home, go through some sort of psychological examination, work as a portrait photographer, and then work as a lettuce picker. Most conventional films would at least either show many more events occurring over this time period so that the audience would know that a significant amount of time has passed, or just explicitly tell the audience how much time has passed along on Freddie's wayward journey. Freddie's time as a photographer and lettuce picker, or the time between those two jobs, could have been a year, or it could have been four, we do not know.

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[87] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[88] Japan Surrenders, Bringing an End to WWII." *History*, 9 Feb. 2010, www.history.com/this-day-in-history/japan-surrenders, Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

Similarly related to these time jumps, the film will frequently have moments that go completely unexplained. The best example of this is when we see Freddie drive off with the motorcycle and in the next scene we see him in Massachusetts visiting Doris' childhood home.[89] We receive no explicit warning that Freddie is going to leave, nor do we fully understand that he has left until we see him in Massachusetts. Additionally, there is no explanation of where Freddie is going, or the logistics of how he got there. Getting from Phoenix, Arizona to Lynn, Massachusetts took a number of steps, none of which were shown. Equally unremarked upon is how Lancaster's son, Val, disappears for a portion of the film. After Freddie confronts Val, we do not see Val again until he greets Freddie at the new home of "The Cause" in England which, by the way, the film suggests that Freddie somehow knows how to find thanks to a dream.[90] Forty five minutes of run time passes between these two moments and not once do we see Val, even though we see the inner circle of "The Cause" and the Dodd family together during this time. Val's absence in these meetings would suggest that he has left "The Cause," but the film does not tell us explicitly if Val left or where he went to, so by the time he returns, we why he was absent.[91] The lack of answers for story events, compounded with the unhinged sense of time, can make *The Master* a perplexing film.

Perhaps the most important norm that *The Master* does not follow is connecting a character's motive, behaviors, and arc. In conventional films characters are motivated by some goal. Without a clear motive, audiences might feel that the protagonist has no purpose, and

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[89]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[90] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[91] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

consequently question the point of the entire film. *The Master* attacks this very notion with Freddie Quell. While we do hear about and see a bit of Freddie's backstory it in no clear way serves as an indicator for what Freddie is doing or why he is doing it. Freddie says at times he wants to go back to Doris, but ultimately does not return to her home for seven years, when he could have at any point after he returned from his service.[92] Many times it feels like Freddie's ultimate goal is to please and serve Dodd, but he also frequently rebels against Dodd.[93] We really do not know what Freddie wants or why he wants it.

Because Freddie lacks motive and consistent behavior, there is no greater arc to his story. By the end of many conventional films the protagonist would be either better off or would have completely failed in trying to achieve their ultimate goal. In the beginning of the film, we find Freddie returning from war. Upon coming home, Freddie sinks until he hits rock bottom, using chemically based substances as a source for alcohol, committing acts of violence at his place of work, and finally meandering through the streets and onto Dodd's boat. Freddie hitting such a low point, along with the introduction of Lancaster Dodd, would normally be a signal to the audience that Freddie will now begin to grow and conquer his psychological demons. *The Master* could also take the complete opposite route as well and show Freddie's resistance to change sinking him further into solitude and emotional pain. The film instead takes a little from the former and the latter; at times it seems like Freddie makes progress while following Dodd, but then he quickly reverts to the violent "scoundrel" that we see at the beginning of the film. Toles mentions this: "The atmosphere of scenes is regularly charged with a 'Now *they're* getting

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[92] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[93] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

somewhere/Now *we're* getting somewhere' urgency. But the language and experience of decisive connection are exposed as inadequate."[94] By the time the film ends, there is no holistic nor simplistic conclusion to Freddie's journey.

Normally, the audience expects a film to be in service to them. From their perspective, the point of a film is to be a consumable and comprehensive product. With this expectation, the viewer is in control of their experience or in their relationship with the film because the film is expected to serve them. *The Master* is the contrary. It's inconsistency makes it a confusing and difficult film to follow. Critics even found themselves confused by *The Master* when it was first released, wondering what was the message, or even if there was one.[95] Roger Ebert writes in his review of *The Master*, "Paul Thomas Anderson's "The Master" is fabulously well-acted and crafted, but when I reach for it, my hand closes on air."[96] This confusion and desire to understand the film might have been the point after all though. As Toles explains, "The most pressing feature of *The Master* that must be acknowledged and accounted for is its seeming determination to thwart our desire to get *inside* the narrative. The so-called dramatic action of the film is strangely reluctant to allow us to enter in emotionally and become fully oriented, comprehending participants...We are offered inducements to believe what we are seeing more fully...We partly fill in the gaps with inferences about character psychology, story logic, environment…The

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[94] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 120.

[95] Ebiri, Bilge. "What Is The Master Really About?: Five Interpretations." *Vulture*, 25 Sept. 2012, www.vulture.com/2012/09/what-is-the-master-really-about-five-readings.html, Reed, Rex. "The Master Loses Control of Its Flock: Underserved Cast Overacts in Paul Thomas Anderson's Pretentious Sermon." *Observer*, 18 Sept. 2012, observer.com/2012/09/the-master-rex-reed-philip-seymour-hoffman-joaquin-phoenix-paul-thomas-anderson/.

[96] Ebert, Roger. "A Magnificent Puzzlement." RogerEbert.com, 19 Sept. 2012, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-master-2012.

distance between watcher and spectacle in *The Master*, while reduced at times, is never entirely overcome."[97] By creating a confusing viewing experience for the viewer, the film is reclaiming the process of consumption from the viewer. Toles agrees, as he writes, "Anderson strives to revise the customary balance of power in movie narrative by placing a character who embodies formlessness as convincingly as any in film, decisively and relentlessly in the foreground."[98] As the viewer watches *The Master*, we are in service to the film because we are trying, and struggling, to follow along, so that we can find out if our expectations are met. *The Master* shifts the balance of control away from the audience back towards the film and the filmmaker.

The film's exploration of control is counterbalanced by story and images relating to a lack of control and a release of emotions. For starters, the name of "The Cause"'s ship, Alethia, which in Greek means truth or unclosedness.[99] No image speaks more directly to "unclosedness" and freedom than the opening frame of the entire film. After seeing the title card for a moment we cut to an image of the deep blue ocean with a giant wake rippling waves through the middle outwards.[100] This image alone could be interpreted in so many different ways. In one sense it could easily represent the forthcoming outpouring of emotions, as this large flowing body of water could symbolize the dramatic emotions experienced by Freddie and Dodd over the course of the film. It could also represent the film's protagonist himself, Freddie Quell. The massive

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[97] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Pages 114-115.

[98] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 177.

[99] Aletheia." *Definitions.net.* STANDS4 LLC, 2020. Web. 30 Mar. 2020. <https://www.definitions.net/definition/aletheia>.

[100] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 5.

waves are unkempt and untamed, creating ripples and affecting everything around it, similar to the actions of Freddie Quell and the consequences stemming from them. The dark blue ocean battling against the light blue wake pushing outward could represent Lancaster Dodd, fighting against the rocky waves that signify Freddie Quell. The image is then an epilogue, or a warning, for what is going to come. This reading is supported score for the scene: an up-tempo aggressive song titled "Baton Sparks" that feels like the musical version of a tornado warning.[101] The image could also represent the characters affected by Freddie over the film in another sense. With the boat outside of the frame, the ripples it causes could represent the consequences of Freddie's actions and those affected by them.

This is not the only time the image of the open sea is called upon in *The Master*. After Freddie answers a series of difficult questions about his past, Dodd asks Freddie to close his eyes. Immediately we are inserted into Freddie's memory; we see him back in his home state of Massachusetts with Doris and learn how they were separated. Freddie stumbles away from Doris' house and we go back to this ocean image. However, it is slightly different on this occasion.[102] First, the music is different. Here the song "Overtones" begins during the flashback and continues into the ocean scene.[103] A symphony of instruments creates an unsettling feeling as we first see the ocean, but within seconds we hear them harmonize like a sweet release from what just came. After what we just witnessed occur between Freddy and Doris, this deep harmony expresses feelings of anguish and nostalgia, feelings common with reflecting on and

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[101]Johnny Greenwood. "Baton Sparks." *The Master: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*. Spotify.

[102]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 6.

[103]Johnny Greenwood. "Baton Sparks." *The Master: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*. Spotify.

letting go of the past. Another key piece that both separates this moment from its predecessor is the camera movement. In the opening frame the camera stood still as we looked down on the ocean waves moving, whereas in this scene the camera tilts from looking downwards up to an eyeline level, eventually showing the ocean waves that have settled in the far distance.[104] Freddie's answers are explicitly honest; it's where we learn about his mother, his father, Doris, his troubling sexual history, and even that he's actually afraid that he killed that man on the lettuce farm. This is a brief, but quite open window into the convoluted mind of Freddie Quell. To then see an image of the open ocean with waves wrestling feels like we are seeing a metaphor for the outpouring that just came before it, with the body of water representing both Freddie's past and his openness. The camera moves up so that our depth of field gets deeper, showing us what is getting farther in the rearview, just like Freddie's traumatic past or relationship with Doris. As mentioned, the music coming together only adds to this outpouring of raw emotions in this moment. Ironically, the scene ends with Dodd saying to Freddie, "Release and return to me."[105] This processing sequence and the moment with the ocean waves is all about uncovering, looking back at, and letting go of the past, as expressed through dialogue, image, and sound.

The ocean image comes back one final time near the end of the film when Freddie travels to see Dodd. We again see the light blue wake with its whitecaps hitting the dark blue ocean. There again are differences that differentiates this moment from the other two, and these differentiations make it equally relevant to the conversation surrounding Freddie's lack of control. The music is different for a third time, with the song "Sweetness of Freddie" playing this

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[104] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 6.

[105] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

time. During this scene, the camera does not stay still, nor does tilt that heavily, it only slightly pans up.[106] Here, the image visually signifies Freddie traveling from the United States to England to visit Dodd. It also again speaks to Freddie's wild nature. To the best of our knowledge it appears as though Freddie decided to travel across the Atlantic Ocean, thanks to a message he received in a dream, so that he could visit Lancaster, who also received no warming that Freddie was coming to visit. Like the ocean waves, and as Dodd later says, Freddie "goes wherever [he pleases]."[107]

In the following scene Dodd points out Freddie's free-wheeling behavior and then demands Freddie to be subservient or never see him again. Freddie declines.[108] This ending of disagreement and separation begs us to question of the purpose of Freddie's visit in the first place. If Freddie is still this untempered wave then it is unlikely and unrealistic that he can fit into Dodd's world, so it makes the viewer wonder what Freddie possibly could have expected or wanted from this visit.

Although these two moments, Freddie making the effort of traveling across continents to mend fences and his failed reconciliation with Dodd, might seem purposeless, they could actually be representative of Freddie and Dodd's relationship. Freddie and Dodd, despite being so consistently enamored with each other, can never fully unlock the other person so to speak. Toles argues, "Freddie Quell and Lancaster Dodd manifest a perplexingly deep mutual need, but for all their striving and their sometimes overwhelming encounters, they cannot release each

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[106]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 7.

[107] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[108]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

other's secrets (in a freeing way), cannot find what they perhaps rightly intuit the other holds for them."[109] Freddie goes across the globe to try and reconcile with Dodd, yet the two are still not able to fix or adapt to each other. Neither of them ever comprehend each other enough to help the other reach a holistic, audience-satisfying completion to either of their journeys.

Freddie and Dodd's relationship comes to both a conclusive and inconclusive end. While Freddie and Dodd act as though this last meeting that we see in the film will be their final interaction, there is just as much evidence to believe that the two will cross paths again. Freddie and Dodd have already reunited once before. More to the point, as already mentioned their relationship does not lead either of them to a conventional end or goal, therefore making their relationship inconclusive in its effectiveness.

This inconclusiveness does not just apply to Freddie and Dodd's relationship; its the central message of the entire film. Recall, in Dodd's final words he says, "For if you figure a way to live without serving a master, any master, then let the rest of us know. Will you? For you'd be the first person in the history of the world."[110] Freddie's choice to leave behind Dodd could be a signal that Dodd is incorrect. Yet, by the end of the film Freddie is not much better off than when we first meet him, so it is not necessarily a convincing argument for freedom and aimlessness. In fact, the last frame, which shows a beached Freddie being comforted by the sand woman sculpture, could suggest that Freddie is still searching for something or someone greater than him.[111]

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[109] Toles, Greg. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Illinois Press, 2016. Page 117

[110] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[111] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012. See Figure 8.

All of this is to say that *The Master* is a film that seems to pose more questions to the audience than it answers. In not answering these questions *The Master* actually gives us a more complex resolution. *The Master* being "air" isn't a flaw as Mr. Ebert claims it is; it's just unclear. Sometimes, we are like Freddie Quell, we do not know what we are looking for or why we are after it. Similar to *Magnolia*, Paul Thomas Anderson uses *The Master* to tell us of life's unresolved complexities, such as our traumatic pasts, relationships, and desires.

Anderson's next feature film, *Inherent Vice*, definitely works in tandem with *The Master* in many aspects. *Inherent Vice* does have a similar meta-commentary on searching for meaning through an aimless narrative like *The Master*, and therefore speaks to the relevant theme of balance for control between a filmmaker and the audience. However, *Inherent Vice* is not part of the focus of this paper. This is because I felt that the four films being analyzed better captured the the themes and ideas covered in my argument. This leads us to Anderson's most recent film: *Phantom Thread*.

Images for Reference

Figure 1:

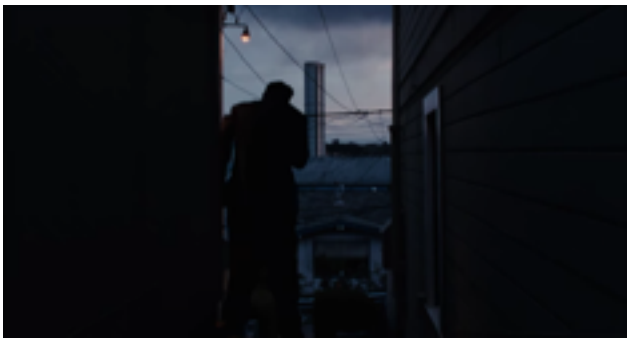
Figure 2:

Figure 3:

Figure 4:

Figure 5:

Figure 6 (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):



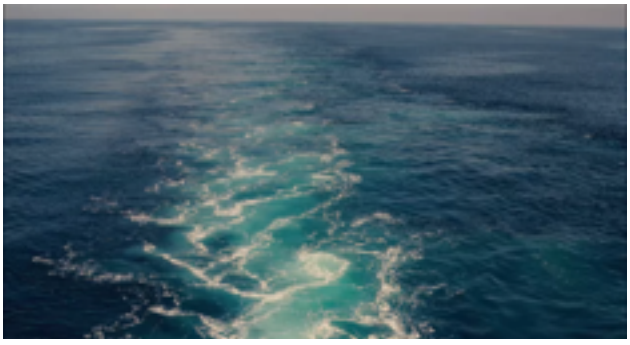


Figure 7 (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):

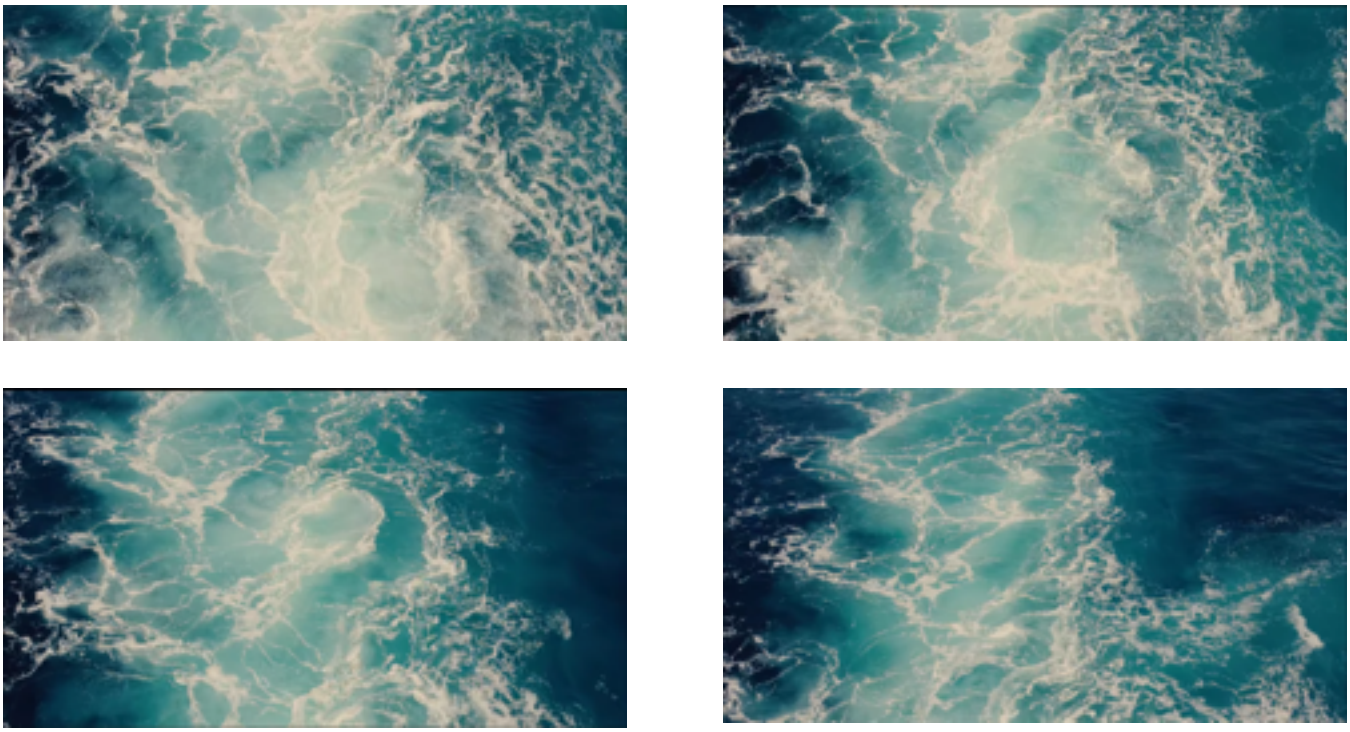


Figure 8:

Phantom Thread:

Phantom Thread is nothing if not a story about control, suppression, and letting go. The film shares similarities with *The Master* as it also centers around the battle for control between two strong personalities, but it also has a certain romanticism and optimism not seen in Anderson's films since *Punch-Drunk Love.* Watching Reynolds and Alma's affair unfold, it is abundantly clear that *Phantom Thread* touches on themes of control, suppression, and sacrifice.

Reynolds Woodcock is a man who needs to control everything, with each aspect of his life fitting his needs and routine. Anderson even admitted this in an interview. "Most important for the character of Woodcock, Anderson said, 'he was protective of his work.' Anderson pictured a man like that: complicated, unyielding, fanatical."[112]A good example of Reynolds' self-centered attitude is expressed early on in the shots of him driving through the English countryside. First, we get an overhead shot from the back of Reynolds' car when he is driving alone.[113] The camera is angled so that we see most of the car and only a bit of the road ahead. Then when Reynolds is driving Alma to dinner we see a shot from outside of the car of Alma and Reynolds.[114] As Reynolds races through dirt roads and cobbled streets the camera shakes and bounces, but never loses its focus. The camera, in a sense, puts us in the position of Alma or another person coming into Reynolds' orbit. We are basically riding along in the passenger seat with no agency as Reynolds drives wherever he pleases at the speed of his choice. Reynolds is in control and we are just along for the ride. Reynolds also sets the tone pretty early on in his

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[112] Baron, Zach. "The Dark Optimism of Paul Thomas Anderson." *GQ*, 20 Dec. 2017, www.gq.com/story/the-dark-optimism-of-paul-thomas-anderson.

[113] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 1.

[114] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 1.

relationship with Alma; after their first date he takes Alma into his studio and fits her for a dress. Alma even frequently tries to disrupt Reynolds' routine and he lashes out at her, such as when she tries to joke with him while she tries on a dress, or when she makes noise while eating breakfast.[115]

What makes *Phantom Thread* distinct from Paul Thomas Anderson's other films is how it does not just show a protagonist's, Reynolds' in this case, struggle for control with someone else, but also their opposition's attempt to gain control as well. In *The Master* Lancaster Dodd tries to assert his control over Freddie Quell, and Freddie resists, but I am not certain you could argue that Freddie is ever trying to control Lancaster Dodd. In *Punch-Drunk Love*, Barry's fight for control is with his own attitude and societal constructs of masculinity; he never has an intense conflict with Lena. By contrast, in *Phantom Thread* Reynolds tries to fit Alma into his world and Alma does not just fight for her own freedom, but she tries to reshape Reynolds' world so that she fits comfortably in it. Anderson also gave insight to this during a promotional interview with Vice, "What was more interesting was when somebody is that controlling of their life, and what happens when something is out of their control...What Woodcock is *really* after is somebody to punch him in the face."[116]

Alma certainly lands some blows that give her some leverage over Reynolds. The most clear and obvious examples are the two occasions she poisons Reynolds' food. Reynolds then falls ill, and rather than receive medical attention, and he seeks safety and help in the arms of

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[115] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

[116]Lunn, Oliver. "Paul Thomas Anderson on Perfectionism and Making 'Phantom Thread'." *Vice*, 1 Feb. 2018, www.vice.com/en_us/article/a34wza/paul-thomas-anderson-on-perfectionism-and-making-phantom-thread.

Alma.[117] Alma gladly welcomes it. No line of dialogue better shows Alma's desire to have Reynolds be dependent on her than she stares directly at Reynolds and says, "I want you flat on your back, helpless, tender, open, with only me to help." It is Alma's deliberate intent to have Reynolds need her, giving her control in their relationship. Alma uses more clever maneuvers to gain the upper hand though. After the couple argues over whether or not to attend a New Years Eve party, Alma furiously storms off upstairs. As she leaves, the camera shows her departing from Reynolds' perspective and then does a reverse shot, showing Reynolds seated alone at a table. In this image Anderson again uses his classic frame within a frame style. We see a doorway in the foreground, framing Reynolds. The width of the frame allows us to not just see Reynolds in the doorway but a small portion of the room where Reynolds is seated as well. Behind Reynolds is another doorway, to which we can barely see into the room behind him, creating depth to the frame.[118] This framing and spacing makes Reynolds feel contained, but not two-dimensional or flat as though there is no space or room for him to move. Reynolds is staying at home and isolating himself, both socially and romantically, but it is his choice. Consequently, he is confined to a space that he put his own limitations on, leaving enough space for just himself. After Alma leaves the frame the film cuts to the same exact setting. With this cut we hear footsteps and then see Alma, dressed for a party, walk down the stairs, past the camera, and out the door.

The difference between these two shots is the framing. In this second shot, the camera is now further away from Reynolds, creating more depth between Reynolds and the camera. In the

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[117] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

[118] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 2.

foreground of this shot is part of another doorway that does not fit entirely into the frame. The camera is placed to the left of the part of the foregrounded doorway but to the right of the back doorway near the kitchen. Consequently, the doorway in front cuts off our ability to see all of the doorway behind it. Thanks to the depth of the frame though we can then see a sort of combined frame within a frame, with the left side of the second doorway marking one boundary and the right side of the first doorway marking the other.[119] As Alma walks down the stairwell, Reynolds quickly peaks his head out but then goes back to hiding behind the doorway, but after the door closes he pops his head out again, signaling a sort of surprise that Alma actually went through with this act of defiance. In this moment he stares longingly towards the door and his face is framed by the two doorways.[120] Here, a new framing shows how Alma and her attempt to gain control complicates Reynolds' space and lifestyle. This new doorway, or person, has inserted a new boundary on Reynolds' life and influenced his line of sight and, metaphorically, his lifestyle. With Alma trying to gain leverage in their relationship, Reynolds is put into positions with less power.

Perhaps the best scene that shows not just one person's attempt for control, but the couple's emotional and psychological tug-of-war is when Alma models a dress during a fashion show. As Alma walks around showing off a dress to bidders, we see Reynolds backstage quickly turn around to look through a peephole in a door. Alma walks through the showcase room and twirls for a moment to make it seem as though she is only posing, but as the camera turns with her it is revealed that she is also positioned so that she can stop for a moment and stare directly at

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[119] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 3.

[120] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 4.

the other side of the same peephole. We assume it's the same peephole given the fact that the film first shows an insert shot of Reynolds' eye looking through it, then cuts to reveal Alma looking back at it, then again cuts back to another extreme close up shot of Reynolds' eye with the light of peephole shining on it.[121] This creates a visual association between Reynolds looking through the peephole and Alma, and so we assume that Reynolds is watching Alma. Alma continues to walk backwards, still showing off the dress, smiling and looking in the same direction as before.[122] The back and forth cutting and Alma's continued stare would suggest that not only is Reynolds watching Alma, but that Alma knows that Reynolds is watching her.

This scene is a powerful moment, one that speaks to the dynamics of Reynolds and Alma's relationship. Reynolds has power in their relationship because Alma can be used an object to showcase his true passion: his dresses. He creates something out of his ideas and then puts it on her. His power in this moment is expressed in his gaze, he is watching his work and can look at his muse showing it off in all its glory. On the other hand, Alma shares an equal amount of control. With her smirk and stare back at the peephole she is aware of the fact that she is wearing Reynolds' passion. Reynolds' part of the dressmaking process is over, he has done all that he can do, and now it is in Alma's hands to properly highlight the beauty of the dress so that it can be sold. Alma, if she wanted to, could completely humiliate Reynolds' dress and his public reputation when she walks out to the crowd. The slightest whiff of this threat gives Alma power, even though she never acts on it.

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[121]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 5.

[122]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 5.

This scene also speaks to the power that editing has on a viewer's understanding of a film. The images that a director decides to show us and the order of those images affects both how we understand a film and what we think about it, so the director has the control to shape our thoughts on a film through editing. Each of these images on their own, the two of Reynolds and the two of Alma, hold little significance, but put together they have meaning. Additionally, if you put these images in a different order, this moment could possibly have a completely different significance. Due to the order in which these images are assembled, we as viewers can then ascertain what is happening, that Reynolds and Alma are aware of each other despite this barrier between them. The stitching together of the images is what makes us understand what is happening, not any sort of dialogue; it is a prime example of showing and not telling. The close up shots of just Reynolds' eye feels like a not so subtle acknowledgment to how we, the viewer, are watching things and taking in information, just like Reynolds is watching the fashion show.

The link between filmmaking and Reynolds' profession runs even deeper. Reynolds is like the demanding filmmaker who uses their artistic vision to create something and oversees every step of the way. Like a director, Reynolds has a crew of helpers to execute this vision and make it into a reality. They come in day after day and are even on occasion asked to work long grueling hours to make sure their work gets done. Throughout the film there are extreme close ups on the fabric of Reynolds' work, showing each stitch.[123] It is as though we are seeing the sewing together of a film, being put together seam by seam. The narrative, its carefully crafted images, and the sequencing of those images show how *Phantom Thread* is a metaphor for a filmmaker and their difficult artistic process.

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[123] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 6.

Phantom Thread marks an interesting start of the pendulum swinging back in terms of protagonists either suppressing or repressing their emotions. Remember that beginning with Barry Egan, Anderson made his protagonists increasingly withdrawn. Anderson either withheld information from the viewer that would change our understanding of the protagonist and their actions or created characters who deeply repressed the emotional trauma that influenced their behavior. The peak of this was Freddie Quell, who as we discussed had to do rigorous mental exercises just to bring the most harmful parts of his past back up to the surface. However, with Reynolds Woodcock we begin to see, over the course of the film, Anderson transitioning back to a character more like Frank Mackey in *Magnolia*, one who is aware of the trauma that eats at them but consciously attempts to shove it down.

The lack of clarity surrounding Reynolds' relationship with his deceased mother makes it appear at first as though he is mostly a repressed character. On a few occasions we hear Reynolds mention his mother to both his sister, Cyril, and Alma.[124] One mention would be intriguing, but the repetitive mentioning of her makes it clear that she is influential and important to Reynolds. However, we get little further explanation about their relationship; we never even learn if or how well they got along. This information would be crucial to understanding Reynolds as a character and how it would affect his relationship with Cyril and Alma, yet Anderson withholds it from us. By not giving any further context or showing any flashbacks, we might expect that we will only penetrate a certain level of Reynolds' psyche and trauma, making it seem as though Reynolds has subconsciously locked away his pain.

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[124] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

Reynolds' trauma and emotional pain becomes more clearly expressed as he develops his relationship with Alma. While Reynolds is violently ill, Alma tucks Reynolds into bed, a classic act of motherhood, and then stays by his side to watch over him. When Cyril comes into the room to check on him, she assumes that both her and Alma will leave him alone, but Alma stays and closes the door behind Cyril. Here, Alma acts like a protective mother watching over her child.[125] All of these are Alma's actions though. What comes shortly after speaks great lengths to how Reynolds actively funnels his need for motherly care into his relationship with Alma. Still sick, Reynolds hallucinates that his mother standing in her wedding dress next to the door in his bedroom. Reynolds says to her, "I miss you. I think about you all the time...I just miss you, it's as simple as that. I want to tell you everything."[126] Here we see an explicit expression from Reynolds at what is ailing him: the death of his mother. He is at least somewhat aware that the death of his mother is the trauma that he wrestles with most. After he finishes speaking to her we see his mother still standing next to the door. The door then opens and Alma walks in. Alma walks to the bedroom closet to grab rags and we still see Reynolds' vision of his mother. We then see a reverse shot of Reynolds teary-eyed, and when we return to the image of Alma walking through the bedroom we no longer see his mother. Alma joins Reynolds at his bedside and checks his fever, which is then paired with a reverse shot close up of Reynolds staring deeply at Alma, with tears still in his eyes.[127] The following morning, Reynolds has recovered, and he

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[125]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

[126]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

[127] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 7.

walks downstairs, wakes Alma up, and then proposes to her.[128] Just after he sees a vision of his mother in a wedding dress and professes his need for her, Reynolds asks the woman who acted as his mother and took care of him to marry him. As we learn that Reynolds is conscious of his trauma, we see Reynolds use his relationship with Alma as a salve for his pain.

Reynolds quickly learns that loving Alma cannot be just a way for him to mask his pain, it also means making certain sacrifices. After going back and forth, battling for control with Alma, he makes a passionate cry for help to Cyril. Having already married Alma, he shouts, "I've made a terrible mistake. I need you to help me...I can't work. I can't concentrate. I have no confidence. [Alma] does not fit in this house...Now she's turning the whole bloody place upside down. She's turning me inside out… Her arrival has cast a very long shadow, Cyril."[129] Reynolds' tone is one of sorrow and exhaustion, as he is letting out all of his frustrations with how his relationship with Alma is affecting his work. Some of his speech matches this, such as when he says that he "has made a terrible mistake." This would make it seem as though in this speech he is letting out all of his frustration and pain from his relationship with Alma. However, an equal portion of his dialogue fits the cliches that we hear frequently in romantic films. Think how often we have seen a protagonist telling their lead partner some variation of how they cannot eat, sleep, work, that all they do is think about their love. Reynolds has conventional feelings of love that in other films, with different contexts, would signify a character confessing their love, yet in this moment it is contradictory due to the tone, body language, and other words.

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[128] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

[129] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

Through all of this conflicting language, we see Reynolds attempting to come to terms with the fact that he is in love, or that he is arguing that these feelings are a weakness.

While *Phantom Thread* does not have a number of moments where characters emotionally release all of their emotions and trauma, it is still focused on the idea of letting go. The scene following Reynolds' outburst is when he finally gives in to Alma, and knowingly eats the poisonous food that Alma made.[130] With this concession Reynolds is admitting that being in love with Alma comes at a price; he can no longer stick to his individualized routine, and therefore is letting go of the control that once ran his life.This is not to say that Reynolds gives over complete control. In fact, one could argue that by ceding control to Alma, Reynolds is in a sense continuing to assert control over how he wants to live his life. Giving into Alma allows Reynolds, a normal life that he may have always wanted. By giving partial control of his life to Alma, Reynolds has control over how he makes this normal ideal a reality.

Phantom Thread makes clear that its argument is not that love is not about complete and total sacrifice, but about compromise and sharing. At the very beginning of the film, Alma says, "Reynolds has made my dreams come true. And I have given him what he desires most in return...every piece of me."[131] Eventually, we learn that this opening scene actually takes place chronologically at the end of the film, so these words are not just a prophecy of what's to come, but a declaration of what has already taken place. Reynolds, by giving into Alma and letting go of some of his control and habits, still gets to keep control over his muse, the canvas onto which he can project his creative visions. In the final shot of the film we see the two working as a team,

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[130]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

[131]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

with Reynolds making adjustments to a dress and Alma offering Reynolds a box of pins as she models it.[132] *Phantom Thread* argues that love is not a complete sacrifice of self, but rather a letting go of pieces of you and your routine, so that you can ultimately become conjoined in a partnership.

[132]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017. See Figure 8.

Images For Reference

Figure 1:

Figure 2:

Figure 3:

Figure 4:

Figure 5 (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):

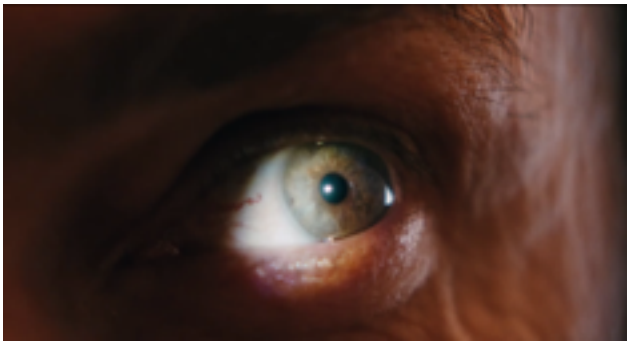

Figure 6:

Figure 7 (Top to Bottom, Left to Right):

Figure 8:

Conclusion:

Even beginning with Anderson's first and second feature films, *Hard Eight* and *Boogie Nights*, we see references to control, suppression, and release of trauma and emotions in each story. Both of these films focus on familial relationships and have protagonists focused on creating a family out of their community, which of course is still relevant in later films like *Magnolia* or *The Master*. Anderson's first four films represent his more energetic period of filmmaking. With a much more frenetic style, using significantly more camera movement and editing tricks such as his famous whip pans, these movies represent Anderson when he was known to the public as a cocky young director.[133]Anderson's honesty and arrogance that gave him this reputation was best reflected in *Magnolia*. At the spry age of 28, Anderson fought for final cut and arguably abused it with a three hour epic about a group of people whose lives are sparsely interconnected.[134] The film is so ambitious that it could only be the product of a young director, such as Anderson at the time, with so much energy and so many personal influences. *Magnolia* seems to say that much more of our messy lives are out of our hands than in them, and that our past trauma still affects us more than we are willing to admit. Only when we accept this and try to confront our trauma can we then move on, possibly.

With Anderson's next film, *Punch-Drunk Love,* we see a transition. Anderson even admitted that the epic reach of *Magnolia* took so much wrangling in that with his next film he wanted to limit himself. Sperb included this quote from Anderson: "'I was a madman making

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[133] Brooks, Xan. "'I Can Be a Real Arrogant Brat'." *The Guardian*, 27 Jan. 2003, www.theguardian.com/film/2003/jan/27/artsfeatures1.

[134]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

[*Magnolia*]'… 'I put too much pressure on myself and I was not the person I wanted to be. So with *Punch-Drunk Love* I forced myself to be more compact.'"[135] Compact he was; *Punch-Drunk Love* is roughly half the runtime of *Magnolia*. Along with this concise story came the beginning of a few changes in Anderson's storytelling and style. Anderson still employed much of his active camerawork, but his protagonist and their focus were slightly different. Barry Egan, unlike Frank Mackey or Donnie Smith (characters who share similarities), is not necessarily fully aware of his afflictions and their causes. Barry's focus isn't on the past like Frank and Donnie either. While in some sense the purpose for Barry's arc is to overcome whatever past trauma causes his emotional stuntedness, we do not see him grapple with the past in the same way that characters in *Magnolia* are forced to.[136] *Punch-Drunk Love* also focuses more on the protagonist's quest for love, which is clearly influenced by his family still, in a way that we had not seen in Anderson's films before. Thanks to all of these changes we see more of a romantic, optimistic vision than *Magnolia*, one where the power of love can push people through their trauma and serve as their greater power and purpose.

By the time we arrive at *The Master,* Anderson has taken some of these aforementioned changes and only continued to build off them. If *Magnolia* is at one end of the spectrum for divulging too much and being untamable then *The Master* is at the opposite end, for being extremely withholding, and yet it is still just as unconquerable. *The Master* is the most bewildering of the four P.T. Anderson films under scrutiny in this paper. That feels purposeful

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[135]Sperb, Jason. *Blossoms & Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson*. University of Texas Press, 2014. Page 153.

[136] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Magnolia*. New Line Cinema, 1999.

though, given that Freddie is as unruly as the ocean waves we see him travel on. Crashing into everything around it, Freddie and the waves wreak havoc on everything they pass, but continue on their path with no clear end destination. As Freddie battles with the leader of "The Cause," Lancaster Dodd, we wonder about the purpose of their relationship, especially as it ends with such little closure.[137] While it is Anderson's most control-centered work, its parting message is probably the least similar to the rest of the films in this paper. *The Master* does not paint the world as romantically as *Punch-Drunk Love* does, or as random as *Magnolia* does, but as murky and convoluted. Different people having different needs or desires, regardless of if they even understand what those desires are in the first place.

This brings us to our last film: *Phantom Thread*. It is most likely not Anderson's last film, but it serves as an interesting end chapter for his filmography to date. It shows the growth of a filmmaker who has consistently pushed boundaries for two decades and has now begun to play precisely with everything inside of them. Personally speaking, I find it to be the most comprehensive and complete film of Anderson's. It has the consistency that some of his earlier work, such as *Magnolia*, lacks, but it also brings much more clarity and resolve to its narrative than some of his other later films, like *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master*. Some would take this to mean that despite these achievements and growth *Phantom Thread* is simplistic and lacks complexity, but it is quite the contrary. Critic Adam Nayman, when comparing *Phantom Thread* to *The Master*, wrote, "Instead of looking for ways out, Anderson has taken his place as the American filmmaker who pulls us in the deepest."[138] The end of *Phantom Thread* does not

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[137]Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *The Master*. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

[138] Nayman, Adam. "How 'The Master' Untangles 'Phantom Thread.'" The Ringer, 29 Dec. 2017, www.theringer.com/movies/2017/12/29/16828404/paul-thomas-anderson-the-master-phantom-thread.

simplify Alma and Reynolds' relationship. In the second to last scene in the film we see Alma envision vision a "happily ever after"-esque future for her and Reynolds. Alma pushes a stroller, with a child presumably in it, and even assists Reynolds with his daily work. Reynolds brings Alma and the viewer back to reality though when he responds, "Yes, but right now we are here."[139] Anderson in *Phantom Thread* mixes the aspirational conventions that cinema has placed on love, such as crazy feelings or insane gestures, with the more nuanced, human understanding of it, like ideas of sacrifice and partnership.

If we look at all of the films discussed in this paper, I think we can trace a message throughout Paul Thomas Anderson's filmography. Starting with *Magnolia* we see each of Anderson's films focus on the attempt to control, suppress, repress, and let go of trauma. In certain films, *Magnolia* and *The Master*, Anderson takes a more cautionary approach, warning viewers that if they try to hold on too much to the thing that hurts them they will actually only hurt themselves more. In other films, such as *Punch-Drunk Love* and *Phantom Thread*, Anderson shows the beauty of letting go of control and falling in love. The approach and tone oscillates back and forth depending on the film, but Anderson's ultimate message as a filmmaker only grows with greater emphasis: if we are able to let go of what ails us, or repurpose it, and let love in we will find ourselves better off.

One could argue, as some have to me, that Anderson's films resort to twists due to an inability to fully grapple and unlock some of the more confusing elements of his film. In an essay for The Point, film critic Nick Pinkerton stated, "Where some see derring-do, however, I find a hint of desperation—I get the feeling that Anderson, having painted himself into a corner, is

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[139] Anderson, Paul Thomas, director. *Phantom Thread*. Focus Features, 2017.

turning to the grand gesture to make his escape…His career to date reveals a series of uneasy negotiations between the multiplex and the art house, an attraction to overly general, even abstract themes, counterbalanced by a lucid attention to detail in execution."[140] I think there is some truth to Pinkerton's argument. Many Anderson's earlier films rarely ever become everything that they set out to be, especially in a concise or clear manner.

In my opinion its actually this lack of clarity that makes Anderson's films so human and important. While doing research for this paper I came across an interview Anderson did on the promotional tour for *Inherent Vice*. In the interview Anderson is asked about his influences as a filmmaker and he says, "*2001: A Space Odyssey* makes my head spin in the same way. Every time I see it I don't understand what's going on or what the movie's about, and then there's this kind of flash; for like three or four frames I'll get this kind of epiphany about what it's all about, and it's fleeting—it'll just sort of whisk away. I couldn't tell you what that movie's about even if I tried right now. But when watching it, when I'm immersed in it, it's an enjoyable experience and that's a good feeling."[141] I can't help but think that is exactly how I feel about Paul Thomas Anderson's films. Each time I watch them, no matter how many times I have seen them before, they are still quite confusing. Then, for one brief moment, it'll all click into place and become clear. During *The Master* it was Freddie and Lancaster Dodd standing face-to-face, shouting at each other through their jail cells. During *Phantom Thread* it was Reynolds and Alma's silent stare at the New Years party. In those moments the whole film makes sense, and nothing else

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[140] Pinkerton, Nick. "The Master?" The Point, The Point Magazine, 15 Dec. 2017, thepointmag.com/criticism/the-master-paul-thomas-anderson/.

[141] Abraham, Amelia. "Paul Thomas Anderson on 'Inherent Vice,' Kubrick, and Hangovers." Vice, Vice, 12 Jan. 2015, www.vice.com/en_us/article/xd5ndn/paul-thomas-anderson-interview-2.

occupies my thoughts. Before I know it though that moment fades away and I'm back to being confused. I don't think Anderson does this to intentionally confuse the viewer though. I think this style actually reflects the complexities of life in many ways. I want to believe that I have a full grasp my life and understand myself fully, but the reality is that most of the time I do not. Except there will be these brief moments where everything makes sense; there's not a sliver confusion or doubt in my mind. But then it drifts away and I go back to pretending like I know what to do and how to do it.

I will admit, there are also definitely personal factors that may influence why I project so much importance on to Anderson. Much has been written about Anderson's parents, especially his father Ernie, and their influences on Anderson. I would say my parents have been quite influential in my life as well. Anderson's lineage being so well-publicized has allowed me to keep this information in the back of my mind and be aware of it as I watch his films. I can't help but notice the repeated impact of parents on Anderson's protagonists and not project my own relationships onto these characters. Anderson's films all seem like an exploration of a child trying to navigate the world with the effect of their parents looming over them. Each of his protagonist's are missing something and searching for something because of their parents or their family. Although I don't think I can put exactly it into words, it's this never-ending quest to feel complete and adequate that makes me so attached to Paul Thomas Anderson's films. Of course, much has been written about Paul Thomas Anderson's films and the fragile white male.[142]

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[142] Lodge, Guy. "How Phantom Thread Undresses Our Ideas about Toxic Masculinity." The Guardian, The Guardian, 2 Jan. 2018, www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jan/02/how-phantom-thread-undresses-our-ideas-about-toxic-masculinity.

There's also something to be said about tracing a director's growth and emotional maturity as I finish my time in college and look back and think about how much I've changed.

In summation, I am not certain of Paul Thomas Anderson's value to the global film world. The beauty of film in our globalized economy is that there are so many films that can mean so much to someone, but to someone else could be absolutely meaningless. The canon of great film directors is definitely still existent, but its a lot more fluid and relative than it used to be. To some, Paul Thomas Anderson's films may be overambitious works that fail to truly come together and cohesively say anything. However, to me, and I am certain others as well, Anderson is more than just a filmmaker that honors some of the great directors that came before him. Paul Thomas Anderson has taught me that life is incredibly complicated. Sometimes we and try to confront and our pain, and other times we channel it towards something with greater meaning. Either way, only once we begin to love and accept love from others do we start to find inner fulfillment. I'm finished! For now!

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