



There Will Be Blood

Daniel Day-Lewis and Paul Dano star in a film written by Paul Thomas Anderson, based on the novel by Upton Sinclair, and directed by Anderson.

By Josef Woodard

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Oil, blood, and money — in various orders — make up the unholy trinity of forces beneath the surface of this compelling slow-brew epic. And “beneath the surface” is the operative phrase in a uniquely powerful film about forces out of view building up pressure — whether oil in the ground, bloodletting violence, or seething hatred — that are all fit to burst in the name of greed.

Chalk up another weird charmer for Paul Thomas Anderson, a fascinating odd bird who has only made four Hollywood films in the past decade. But each is a gem of a different color. His last, 2002's *Punch-Drunk Love*, was brilliant, colorful, bright, and compact. *There Will Be Blood*, by contrast, is long, slow, dusty, and hypnotic in fresh cinematic ways, thanks partly to the

astounding work of actor Daniel Day-Lewis and composer Jonny (Radiohead) Greenwood, whose largely string-oriented and smartly postmodernist music may be the best score of the past year.

At the heart of the story, inventively adapted for the screen from Upton Sinclair's novel, *Oil!*, is a character as forceful as he is enigmatic: Daniel Plainview, a slick and troubled "oil man" in the early 20th century, is anything but in plain view. As played with Oscar-worthy mastery by Day-Lewis, Plainview is stubbly, both in face and vocal timbre, and a devilish mix of manners and scheming. His identity is complex and translucent, and we spend much of the film in the grips of trying to get a bead on him and his motives. "I have a competition in me. I want people not to succeed," says Plainview in a rare confessional moment. "I see the worst in people."

Whether Plainview is a microcosmic model of American blind ambition, with its undercoating of toxic misanthropy, is open to question. During the course of the film, we do get comparative flashes of Charles Foster Kane and Howard Hughes, respectively: individualistic characters obsessed with the trappings of great wealth and escape from humanity and its rules of conduct.

Anderson has brought to the screen a great American gothic tale, slathered with gritty lessons of history—especially those of American avarice and California pipe-dreaming. The dream is half-nightmare, and Anderson's greatest filmic achievement here involves artfully wriggling in the cracks of the two.