

## Tribute to a Legend: Daniel Day-Lewis' Finest Hour

As Daniel Day-Lewis retires, [Michael Maitland-Jones](#) looks back at the magnificent *There Will Be Blood*

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Image: Miramax

### **10/10**

Perhaps one of the reasons that *There Will Be Blood* could never find success through word of mouth is because explaining it in a sentence isn't exactly straightforward. Is it a think-piece on the psychological effects of ambition and avarice? A scathing look into the murky origins of capitalism? A horror film centred around the fallacy of the American dream? The fact that it could comfortably conform to all these descriptions and more is perhaps the reason that it stands as one of the most complex, challenging and downright jaw-dropping films of the century so far. With the recent announcement that Daniel Day-Lewis will be retiring from acting for good after the upcoming Paul Thomas Anderson-directed *Phantom Thread*, the time couldn't be better to revisit their provocative former collaboration and what is arguably the actor's best performance to date.

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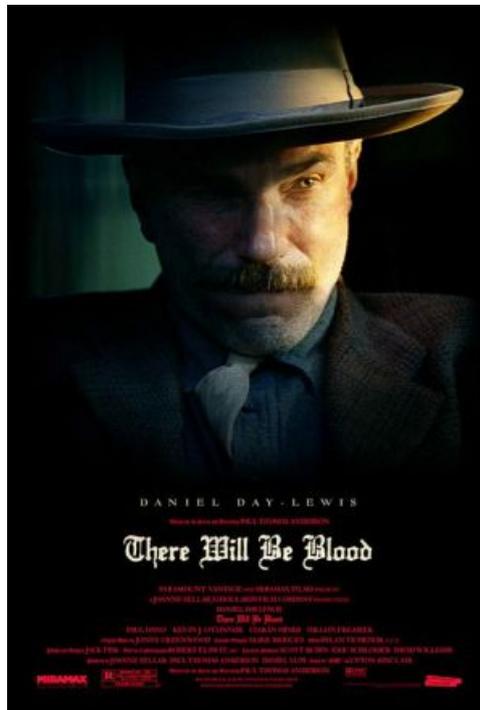


Image: Miramax

The somewhat bare-bones narrative set-up of Day-Lewis' oil prospector Daniel Plainview chasing his liquid fortune in the scorched Texan Badlands leads to a plethora of fascinating ideas, character moments and striking images that are all marshalled by Anderson's unwavering faith in the power of visual storytelling. The first twenty minutes are completely dialogue free yet we are shown all we need to know about our unusual central character; put simply, his ambition dwarves every other emotion in his body, and a literal crawl across a hellish desert with a shattered leg ultimately equates to nothing when put next to the pursuit of his fortune. The tone of the film likewise makes itself blisteringly apparent before the opening credits have even finished via the use of Johnny Greenwood's ear-drum piercing orchestral score; it portends a film that will live up to its title with terrifying conviction. With the addition of Robert Elswit's breath-taking camera-work the film could have comfortably drifted into being a technically brilliant but ultimately shallow piece of Oscar-fodder; not so with the explosive duo of Anderson and Day-Lewis at the helm.

The tales of Daniel Day-Lewis' commitment to living his characters both on and off the screen have long since passed into Hollywood lore; from maintaining his character's disability off set in *My Left Foot* to disposing of all modern conveniences in preparation for *Lincoln*, it'd be tempting to slyly dismiss him as being something of a prima donna if it weren't for the undeniably astonishing results of his method. His performance in *There Will Be Blood* is one of the most chilling portrayals of insanity ever put to screen. Visually resembling an oil-coated stick-insect in the film's opening movement we watch with fascinated horror as he warps into the hunch-backed, moustache-stroking husk of a human being that brings the film to its crimson-splattered close. Plainview is not simply the film's antagonist, he's an embodiment of an ice-cold business ethos that is more relevant today in Trump's America than the filmmakers could ever have anticipated; as a frontrunner for capitalism, Plainview is as far from the desired history-book role model as it's possible to get. At one point bluntly confessing his hatred of 'people' he lays bare the disease of greed and competition that pervades his very existence to the point where we feel almost a twinge of sympathy; he is a monster but one whose humanity we can occasionally glimpse, none more so than through his occasionally fatherly interactions with his surrogate son, H.W., played by a mute but effective Dillon Freasier.

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Image: Wikimedia Commons

Similar to the almighty oil derricks of the film, *There Will Be Blood* has a scale and chilliness that will leave a potently sinister and long-lasting impression on the viewer. Despite its numerous Oscar nods, however, it never quite found the mainstream success it deserved; perhaps this isn't surprising. In the tradition of many classics it has an almighty running time as well concepts that are perhaps initially a little inaccessible, but it's ultimately the rare film that legitimately deserves the label of an 'experience'. It's a vitriolic sting of pure cinema that cleaves squarely through filmmaking convention and is quite unlike anything else ever put to celluloid; go see it and be awestruck, infuriated and incapable of looking at a milkshake the same way ever again.



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