

## Hegel's *The Master*

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Before performing a Hegelian reading of Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master*, we should acknowledge that it *first demands* a reading. A *treatment*. A *session*. An "informal recording." To be sure: an analysis.

Let us keep this analysis short (and, thus, cheap):

1. In the first analysis, we confront a simple, if not perverse, rendition of the master-slave dialectic: Master Lancaster Dodd encounters (to-be-"slave") Freddie Quell.<sup>1</sup> Freddie finds meaning through his labor; just after halfway through the film, in an "exercise" (labor) he touches the window and says, "I am here, but can leave if I want." Eventually, he does leave on a motorbike, after finding a "point." Dodd eventually calls him back. Freddie returns, but leaves again, for which Dodd declares them eternal enemies.
2. Upon the second analysis, we have the tendency to invert this. Note all the scenes in which we find Freddie outside of Dodd's movement: coherent, thoughtful, intelligent. Freddie, the *bricoleur*. Freddie the master—or as Dodd puts it, "pays no rent, does as he please"—and Dodd the slave, in need of Freddie. A simple inversion; they still remain declared eternal enemies.
3. The third and final analysis says neither, and both: "two secret messages carried by pigeons" (in a past life). Which pigeon reaches first does not matter. What does matter, as emphasized by Dodd: there were only *two*. Two secret messages, orbiting their own poles. Two masters: two slaves. The only coded dialectic from a past life to ever survive the future.<sup>2</sup>

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1 I use "master-slave" instead of "lordship-bondage" for convenience sake, considering the title of the film.

2 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).