*The Wolf of Wall Street*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perf. Leonardo DiCaprio, Jonah Hill, Matthew McConaughey. Paramount Pictures, 2013. DVD.

In recent years, Martin Scorsese has become a very different filmmaker than he used to be. In his early films—from *Mean Streets* (1973) to *Raging Bull* (1980)—his Catholicism and scrutiny of Italian-American masculinity led to a reductionist view of the human experience, confined to the streets of New York City. In recent years, with films such as *Shutter Island* (2010) and *Hugo* (2011), Scorsese has taken his decades of filmmaking expertise and applied it to subjects of far greater interest: How does the Holocaust haunt human experience? What is the legacy of Georges Melies for our experience of contemporary cinema?

In his newest film, *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), Scorsese combines these two traditions. On the one hand, the film explores class and masculinity via Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio), an unctuous stockbroker crook pursued by the FBI for his fiscal debauchery. On the other hand, the film ranges across film references, from Scorsese's own *Raging Bull* (Belfort beats up his wife in their bathroom in a virtual reconstruction of Jake LaMotta's abuse of his wife) to two intertexts I find endlessly fascinating. In fact, in a world where Quentin Tarantino and the Coen Brothers are accused of post-modern excesses, Scorsese's film gives *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000) and *Django Unchained* (2012) a run for their money.

In fact, I am not convinced that *Django Unchained* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* are significantly different films. Both films were released on Christmas Day as Oscar-worthy attempts to capture the tragic nature of American history. Both feature DiCaprio chewing up scenery as an out-of-control master of the universe. Both feature Jonah Hill in an absurdly comic role. However, *Django Unchained* is the least interesting film to which Scorsese draws our attention during the sprawling three-hour run of *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

There's a moment when Jordan has fled the FBI, taking his yacht to the Mediterranean Sea. He is informed that his wife's Aunt Emma has died; this is a problem because she was laundering his $20M through a Swiss banker, who tells Jordan he must rush to Geneva to secure access to the money. Jordan tells his yacht's captain to set sail for Monaco, so that he can drive over the border into Switzerland from there. Jordan pressures

the captain to sail through "chop" in order to make the deadline. However, chop turns into a full-blown maelstrom, as massive waves toss the yacht throughout the night. Suddenly, a huge wave swamps the boat, capsizing it. Jordan and friends have to be rescued by the Italian coastguard.

The shots of the waves and the capsized boats invoke, of all things, *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), in which a "rogue wave" in the Mediterranean Sea inverts a massive cruise liner. An Irwin Allen spectacular, *The Poseidon Adventure* is the greatest disaster film of the 1970s. By invoking this tradition, Scorsese positions what Belfort does to the nation as a similar disaster. At various times, the significance of the events is linked to Greek tragedy. As Jordan decides not to succumb to the FBI investigation, he leads his stock broker acolytes in a ritualistic chant that his father, Max (played by Rob Reiner) links to the goat song that is the literal definition of Greek tragedy.

But my favorite shot in all of *The Wolf of Wall Street* is when Jordan is filming an infomercial for his get rich quick seminar. As he lands in a helicopter to shuck his illegal nonsense to the camera, the FBI arrives to arrest him. The camera falls to the ground, coming to rest on its side. The moment is a direct quote from *The State of Things* (1982), another disaster film, this time by the New German Cinema mastermind, Wim Wenders. In the first third of the film, survivors of a nuclear apocalypse wander around a desolate landscape. In the second third, we come to meet the filmmakers struggling to hold the production together. In the final act, the director comes to America to secure more financing for the film from gangsters. He films his parking lot encounter with them; when they shoot him dead, the camera falls out of his hands onto its side.

*The State of Things* is bleak: when the film stock runs out, the film is over. However, Scorsese repurposes the quotation: unlike Wenders, his tragedy does not end when the camera falls to the ground. In Wenders, tragedy results when his German director Friedrich Munro (Patrick Bauchau) comes to America; in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, get rich quick Americanism contaminates both Europe and New Zealand, and continues unabated as the film comes to a conclusion.

This intertextual panoply of cinematic mayhem—*The State of Things*, *The Poseidon Adventure*, and *Django Unchained*—is the post-modern genius of *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Scorsese attempts to grasp the massive disaster

that the American economy has become via the seemingly individualistic tale of Jordan Belfort. It is clearly not a tale of an individual, as DiCaprio within the past year has played the same character three times, in this film, *Django,* and *The Great Gatsby* (Baz Luhrmann, 2013). Instead, *The Wolf of Wall Street* argues that the most invisible collapse of the American Dream is the one overseen by Belfort. Unlike the Wagnerian destruction of the slavery plantation, "Candieland" in *Django Unchained,* Belfort plays tennis in prison, and leaves a rich man. The FBI agent who triumphed over him is seen riding home alone on the subway, exactly as Belfort predicted earlier in the film. In *The Wolf of Wall Street,* Scorsese has found his own Candy-land [*sic*], a rich palette of intertextual references. But, the joke is on the typical American: the Belforts of the world have ensured that the rest of us, the 99%ers, are not even allowed to play the game.

## Works Cited

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