Dangerous Talk

Modern representations of psychopathy portrayed through language use in three 21st century motion pictures

Master's thesis

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Tiedekunta – Faculty	Laitos – Department
Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos

Tekijä – Author
Sormunen, Antti Juhani

Työn nimi – Title
Dangerous Talk – Modern representations of psychopathy portrayed through language use in three 21st century motion pictures

Oppiaine – Subject	Työn laji – Level
Englanti	Maisterintutkielma

Aika – Month and year	Sivumäärä – Number of pages
Marraskuu 2024	74

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Psykopatia on ainakin vielä toistaiseksi yleiseen tautiluokitukseen kuulumaton antisosiaalinen persoonallisuushäiriö, johon liitetään mm. psykopaateille ominaisten tunne-elämän puutteiden, luonnehäiriöiden sekä näistä usein seuraavien sosiaalisten vaikeuksien ja rikollisten toimintojen lisäksi myös jonkintasoista aivotoiminnallista ja hermostollista poikkeavuutta. Psykopatia on ollut 1800-luvulta lähtien vahvasti esillä niin julkisessa keskustelussa, kriminaalipsykologiassa kuin populaarikulttuurissakin. Erinäisiä tulkintoja psykopaattisista hahmoista on nähty jo yli vuosisadan ajan myös elokuvissa, ja monista näistä fiktiivisistä henkilöistä on muodostunut ikonisia populaarikulttuurin kulmakiviä. Maisterintutkielmani keskiössä on kolmen psykopaattisen elokuvahahmon representaatio.

Tutkimukseni aineistona on kolme vuonna 2014 julkaistua amerikkalaista elokuvaa: *Gone Girl* (ohj. David Fincher, käsik. Gillian Flynn), *Nightcrawler* (ohj. ja käsik. Dan Gilroy) ja *The Guest* (ohj. Adam Wingard, käsik. Simon Barrett). Jokaisessa näistä elokuvista esiintyy keskeisessä roolissa hahmo, jonka voidaan selkeästi tulkita ilmentävän kliinisesti psykopaattisia persoonallisuuspiirteitä ja käyttäytymismalleja. Tutkimukseni pyrkii selvittämään, millä tavoin näiden hahmojen psykopaattisia piirteitä on pyritty tuomaan esiin heidän vuorosanojensa ja kielenkäyttönsä kautta. Hahmojen kielellistä representaatiota on tarkasteltu kriittisen diskurssintutkimuksen menetelmin käyttäen pääasiallisena aineistona elokuvien kirjoitettuja dialogeja, joita on analysoitu myös huomioiden niiden kontekstit elokuvien narratiiveissa. Tutkimuksessani on määritelty viisi keskeistä psykopaattisten yksilöiden kielellisessä ilmaisussa usein esiintyvää ominaispiirrettä, ja nämä viisi kategoriaa muodostavat perustan tekemälleni analyysille ja johtopäätöksilleni.

Analysoidun aineiston pohjalta on pääosin viittä yllä mainittua psykolingvististä kategoriaa tarkastellen tehty päätelmiä siitä, millä tavoin psykopatiaa on esitetty kielenkäytön kautta *Gone Girlissä*, *Nightcrawlerissa* ja *The Guestissä.* Psykopaattisten hahmojen dialogeista löytyy useita samankaltaisia, psykopatiaan usein yhdistettyjä kielellisiä piirteitä ja toiminta-malleja, mutta nämä piirteet esiintyvät jokaisen hahmon kohdalla huomattavan eri tavoin.

Asiasanat – Keywords
Representation, language, critical discourse analysis, cinematic discourse, psycholinguistics, psychopathy

Säilytyspaikka – Depository
JYX

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 Introduction

Throughout the history of cinema, various kinds of film characters have, at least to some extent, portrayed people's perceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward various groups of individuals in that particular culture, time and age. Without exception, these representations are compositions of several different constituents and factors, constructed by multiple contributors. The representation of a film character consists of the views and performances of, for example, writers, directors, actors/actresses, editors, casting agents, costume designers, makeup artists and, ultimately, also the viewers, who form their own interpretations and conceptions on how the characters could, and should, be perceived and understood. Thus, cinematic characters can be considered to function as certain types of mirrors, reflecting the ways various groups of people are both portrayed and viewed by their surrounding societies at specific points in time.

The objective of this thesis is to take a closer look at how individuals from a very distinctive group of people are represented in three American motion pictures released in the year 2014: *Gone Girl*, *Nightcrawler* and *The Guest*. I have always been intrigued by distinctive, characteristic linguistic traits, lexical choices and verbal output of different people, and what these specific features might tell about them. My interest in psychology and the human mind is the reason why I thought it would be fascinating to select characters representing a group of people that is generally considered mentally deviant as the main focus of this thesis. Therefore, I have chosen to observe and analyze three different psychopathic characters in contemporary cinema, especially focusing on the ways they are represented through their language use. I have decided to choose relatively recent movies as my data, as I wanted a chance to get a somewhat comprehensive understanding of how contemporary film makers perceive psychopaths and individuals personifying these kinds of mental and behavioral abnormalities. Thus, this research can be considered to be comparatively cross-sectional in design, examining three different ways in which film makers viewed, understood and decided to represent and convey the concept of psychopathy in the year 2014.

As for the methods of my research, I am using critical discourse analysis to examine how the characters are represented in the three motion pictures in question. The analysis will focus on

the verbal output and linguistic choices of each of the three psychopathic main characters, as well as the potential similarities and distinctions between these three linguistic representations of psychopathy. Thus, the main data of this thesis will be the written dialogues of the three movies, which I will examine by analyzing the lines of the psychopathic characters in relation to the lines of other characters, as well as the narratives of the films.

2 Background

2.1 The concept of psychopathy

2.1.1 Psychopathy – a brief history

As long as the concept of psychopathy has existed in some of its forms, its unambiguous definition has been evading the scientific communities, as well as puzzling, frustrating and dividing clinicians all over the world (Dinwiddie, 2015). Arrigo and Shipley (2001a) mention that even in contemporary research the status of psychopathy has been diagnostically uncertain and constantly changing. What is commonly considered the initial approach toward the concept of modern view of psychopathy is the 19th century French phycisist Philippe Pinel's notion of *manie sans délire* or *mania without delirium* (Pinel, 1806, 150). Pinel (1806, 150-156) describes this condition as "madness independent of any lesion of the understanding", giving examples of three individuals committing acts of seemingly irrational, frantic violence, yet still being able to fully understand their own actions and surroundings, as well as adequately function in their everyday lives. Another theory widely considered a landmark in the history of psychopathy, J.C. Prichard's concept or *moral insanity* coined in 1835, can be interpreted very similarly to Pinel's definition of *manie sane délire*, and summarized into as simple a category as "non-delusional disorders of affect and volition" (Berrios, 1999, 111-115). However, as Berrios (1999) claims, neither Pinel's nor Prichard's theories can be seen to have basically any relation with how psychopathy is viewed today, as they both simply acknowledge and describe various mental disorders without the presence of psychosis or other symptoms affecting one's intellectual processes, or distorting one's view of reality.

The term *psychopathische* was first used by German phychiatrists in the mid-19th century. It seems unclear who originally came up with the term, but at least Feuchtersleben (1847) and Koch (1891) were among the first to use the term *psychopathy* in their publications. However, as Gutmann (2008) mentions, the concept of the newly established term *psychopathy* was originally quite broad and undefined, referring mainly to long-term behavioral disorders or "dysfunctional approaches to life" (Horley, 2014, 96). However, Koch (1891) also associates

criminal behavior and the absence of any so-called actual mental illnesses to certain varieties of psychopathy.

Karpman's (1941) definition of psychopathy includes dividing the concept into two distinct categories: *primary* and *secondary* psychopathy. These subtypes portray behaviorally similar traits, but differ substantially in the ways an individual has come to possess these traits. The primary type of psychopathy stems from early developmental deficits leading to abnormal neurological functioning, whereas the secondary type can originate from one's undesirable cognitive and behavioral adaptation to one's environmental circumstances, for example, trauma and/or abuse (Karpman: 1941). As Karpman (1941) mentions, individuals considered to belong in the primary group are often also able to portray various highly competent interpersonal functions, such as manipulation via superficially pleasant, even charming behavior, whereas psychopaths of the secondary subtype usually seem to be more impulsive, anxious, threatening and socially incompetent.

In today's field of psychiatry and medical science, the concept of psychopathy often involves first an foremost a neurobiologically discernible origin that results in some form of antisocial behavior and an individual's inability to feel empathy or concern for others (Horley, 2014). Personal traits such as egocentricity, irresponsibility, superficial social attractiveness, insincerity and heightened impulsivity have also been associated with the disorder (Poythress and Hall, 2011). As Krishnan (2011) mentions, these psychopathic traits often manifest themselves as criminal activities caused by what appears to be a complete lack of, or the absence of a behavioral response to, moral or a conscience. These behavioral traits often result in some type of criminal activity, and according to Hancock et al. (2013), psychopathic individuals are estimated to constitute only about 1% of the general population, but as large a portion as 15-25% of male offenders in federal correctional facilities in the United States.

Regardless of the numerous researches and definitions, the nature of psychopathy is still widely under debate globally in both psychiatric and legislative communities. However, as Arrigo and Shipley (2001a) state, the absence of apparent psychoses and a strong connection with reality, as well as the untreatable, neurobiological nature of psychopathy have remained relatively stable throughout the existence of the concept, and are also crucial aspects to

consider when diagnosing the condition. Furthermore, as mentioned above, certain behavioral attributes are considered to strongly correlate with the presence of psychopathy, and various criminal activities have been associated with the disorder since its discovery.

2.1.2 Psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder

Today, the term *psychopathy* is commonly (and often incorrectly) considered a variety of *Antisocial Personality Disorder* (ASPD), which comprises various diverse personality disorders (Horley, 2014, 102). As Arrigo and Shipley (2001b, 407-408) mention, several forms of ASPD often cause "inappropriate interpersonal behaviors" that are usually considered abnormal and harmful. However, while psychopathy may manifest itself as behaviors similar to those present in ASPD, there is a crucial distinction between the two concepts that should be taken into account when addressing them, and especially when diagnosing these disorders.

Arrigo and Shipley (2001a) state that ASPD diagnosis is often solely based on an analysis of the individual's behavioral traits. However, as more comprehensively addressed in the following chapter *2.1.3 Psychopathy vs. sociopathy*, psychopathy cannot be considered a purely behavioral disorder because of its much deeper psychological and neurobiological nature. Therefore, as Arrigo and Shipley (2001b) mention, although about 90% of criminals diagnosed with psychopathy can be considered to suffer from a variety of ASPD, only 30% of criminals with ASPD can be seen to clinically qualify as psychopaths. Furthermore, distinguishing psychopathy from ASPD can have major judicial relevance, as unlike some forms of ASPD, psychopathy is usually considered to be untreatable due of its neurobiological nature, and therefore, it is also associated with extremely high rates of recidivism (Arrigo and Shipley, 2001b). Thus, psychopathy and ASPD may clearly overlap in some areas, but be substantially different in others.

2.1.3 Psychopathy vs. sociopathy

When defining psychopathy, it is essential to differentiate the concept from another disorder commonly associated with ASPD and often used when discussing criminal offenders with violent mental disorders: *sociopathy*. As Pemment (2013) states, when talking about antisocial personality disorders, psychopathy and sociopathy are often used interchangeably. However, just as with psychopathy and ASPD, although both conditions often portray similar behavioral symptoms, psychopathy and sociopathy differ fundamentally in their psychological and neurological natures, as well as the criteria for their diagnosis.

As Pemment (2013) points out, regardless of their behavior, sociopaths tend to possess a sense of morality and a concept of right and wrong, as well as a rather well-developed conscience; these conceptions just often seem to differ greatly from the ones adopted by their surrounding cultures and societies. Contrarily to this, psychopathy stems neither from any shortcomings in essential sociocultural experiences, nor an individual's challenges in internalizing the moral, social, behavioral or legal norms imposed by their surroundings, but rather from a person's innate inability to access the psychological processes required for what is generally considered normal social behavior, resulting in a seemingly complete absence of conscience and empathy (Lykken, 1996). Furthermore, as Lykken (1996) mentions, psychopaths often also appear to be relatively unconcerned about any potential repercussions they might face for their actions.

As briefly addressed in chapter *2.1.1 Psychopathy – a brief history*, the diagnosis of psychopathy requires confirming a certain discernible neurobiological origin. This includes concrete neurological findings substantiating specific structural and developmental abnormalities, asymmetries and deformities, for example, in the frontal lobes and hippocampus, and often also an atypical functioning of the autonomic nervous system (Pemment, 2013). Furthermore, as Pemmett (2013) states, these deviations often originate already as early in one's developmental cycle as the fetal stage, and are therefore innate. Thus, these specific physiological attributes cannot be acquired later in life, either. Because of these abnormalities affecting psychopaths in a neurological level, they are basically devoid of any empathy or a sense of morality, and are often also unable to understand their own emotional

experiences, as well as the emotions of others (Pemmett, 2013). This can be seen as one of the main cognitive distinctions between a psychopath and a sociopath.

Sociopathic behavior can also stem from neurobiological abnormalities, but it is possible to acquire these defects later in life, as they can result from, for example, physical trauma or other circumstantial factors. However, as Blair (2003) mentions, when examining aggressive behavior often characteristic to both psychopaths and sociopaths, it seems that individuals with acquired sociopathy tend to display aggressive behavior mainly in a reactive fashion, e.g., in response to frustration or threat, etc., whereas the violence of psychopaths is often deliberate, calculated and strongly goal-oriented.

Due to the developmental, neurobiological foundation of psychopathy, Karpman's (1941) division to *primary* and *secondary* psychopathy addressed in chapter *2.1.1 Psychopathy – a brief history* could be seen quite obsolete, as only the so-called primary subtype of psychopathy stemming from heritable deficits can be considered to meet the requirements for a clinical diagnosis by today's standards. Therefore, it could be claimed that the concept of secondary psychopathy that might result from, for example, unfavorable living conditions during one's early developmental stages, could in fact be defined as sociopathy in today's field of psychology. However, when considering the division between the primary and secondary subtypes to be solely based on their distinctive behavioral attributes (high interpersonal capabilities of the primary type, increased anxiety and impulsivity of the secondary type, etc.), the distinction is still often seen as valid and helpful, and is widely used in today's research.

2.1.4 Defining a psychopath

As mentioned in earlier chapters, psychopathy can be defined and categorized in various different ways, and there is not a singular, unequivocal concept of psychopathy that is globally shared or widely accepted by the scientific community. Guay et al. (2018) even suggest that, according to their research on incarcerated female offenders, the psychological nature of psychopathy could, and perhaps even should, be considered dimensional rather than categorical. Their results seem to support the theory that instead of regarding psychopaths as a

discrete group possessing distinctive psychological traits qualitatively different from non-psychopaths, they simply portray "configurations of extreme scores on personal traits, affective and cognitive competences, or neurobiological processes" that could be viewed as excessive forms of normal psychological processing (Guay et al., 2018, 565). According to this view, the psychological processes of psychopaths do not essentially differ from those of non-psychopaths; psychopaths only seem to operate at the far ends of these spectrums. However, as previously addressed in chapter *2.1.3 Psychopathy vs. Sociopathy*, clinical psychopaths in fact do seem to differ substantially from non-psychopaths in their neurobiological constitution and competence in psychological processing.

Regardless of the various theories and definitions of the disorder, it is generally accepted that all psychopaths do share similar, clearly identifiable cognitive and behavioral traits that separate them from sociopaths or individuals portraying other forms of ASPD symptoms. Furthermore, in this thesis neither the distinctions between the categorical and dimensional, nor the primary and secondary natures of psychopathy are relevant, as these differences are not clarified or directly addressed in the narratives of the three movies that provide the data for my analysis. Hence, in this thesis the concept of psychopathy is approached along the lines of Hancock et al. (2013, 103), who define the term *psychopath* as a person who exhibits "a wholly selfish orientation and profound emotional deficit" and "a diminished capability of moral sensibility" or, simply put, a person who seems to have *little or no conscience*. All of the fictional main characters presented in the three movies analyzed in this thesis clearly portray these types of attributes that extend well beyond any realms of typical social behavior, and even what could be considered non-psychopathic ASPD or sociopathy, and can therefore be considered psychopathic.

2.2 Portraying psychopathy

2.2.1 Linguistic representation

Humans express themselves constantly in various diverse ways, and use these operations daily when communicating with one another. The human race can be seen to have started

exchanging messages utilizing some forms of communication about a hundred thousand years ago (Heyer and Urquhart, 2018). Communication is an activity always occurring between two or more parties, and its central status in the evolution, as well as the social and intellectual development of the advanced human civilization cannot be understated. As Cobley (2008, 660) points out, the underlying meanings behind the word *communication* originate from such concepts as *sharing, being in relation with* and *bringing together*. Throughout history, communication has taken many diverse forms and inhabited various media, and as Heyer and Urquhart (2018, xi) mention, communication history has traditionally been chronologically divided into three eras: the periods of *oral, printed* and *electronic* interaction. All of these forms of communication are commonly used in today's society, and each of them utilizes language in its various forms as a means of symbolic interaction, creating *systems of meaning* that enable us to observe and understand the world (Heyer and Urquhart, 2018, x). These systems can be described as *semantic* constructs, i.e., the connections and analogies between linquistic structures and our internalized representations of knowledge (Johns, 2021, 1).

The common term *representation*, although firmly established in our interpersonal communication and regularly present in our daily language use, is a concept that is considerably more ambiguous and multifaceted than one might first consider, and dismantling it requires a rather methodical and analytical approach. There have been various conflicting theories, interpretations and conceptions of representation, but as my research focuses on linguistic representation of a specific group, i.e., how a group of people sharing similar characteristics is represented through language use, I will examine representation as a means for individuals to convey *meanings* to one another.

When unraveling the complex topic of representation, Rosenberg (1974) approaches the subject matter by pointing out that representation is an active, intersubjective human procedure which requires the participation of both the party producing the representations, as well as the party interpreting and constructing the meanings behind them. Therefore, the concept of representation is always fundamentally communicative. Representation also requires a meaning to convey, i.e., something that is represented. Pitkin (1967) approaches the definition of representation from a more practical point of view, referring to actual representatives speaking and acting on behalf of other people. Pitkin (1967) mentions that

three factors could be argued to be necessary for representation to exist: the one being portrayed, the one carrying out the portrayal, and lastly, the one perceiving and interpreting it. However, as Pitkin (1967) points out, it could also be considered possible to reduce the minimum number of necessary parties in this meaning-conveying procedure to two if, for example, the one being represented was also the one perceiving this representation. Similarly, it could be argued that it might be possible for one to represent oneself. However, in practice these kinds of speculations can be seen as fairly irrelevant, as the interpersonal, communicative nature of representation remains irrefutable, and the meanings conveyed always depend on both the ones producing the portrayals and the ones interpreting them.

In relation to linguistic representation, Rosenberg (1974) remarks that although portrayals using language are in their essence to be considered a form of symbolic representation commonly used to convey states of affairs, as well as how things are and how they are not by the means of symbol usage (in this case written or spoken words), these discourses are never equal to their real-life counterparts that they aim to portray. In other words, when forming meanings from linguistic representations, these meanings are always altered by the party carrying out the portrayings, as well as the party interpreting them. Therefore, representations and the meanings behind their interpretations are always subjective, never fully corresponding to the actual entities they portray.

2.2.2 Analyzing cinematic discourse

When addressing film as a medium for representation, one must consider the fact that since the invention of moving picture, it has been mainly utilized in forming various types of *narratives*. As Cobley (2008) states, narratives can be seen to have originally developed as stories communicating information, such as facts or ideas. Similarly, Herman (2009) defines narratives as representations situated in a specific discourse context, depicting either sequences of events or, for example, conscious experiences of individuals. Cobley (2008) also acknowledges that since the development of narratives, these stories have often been retold, thus sharing and further transmitting the knowledge and ideas they have contained. Oral, and especially written narratives have also made it possible to preserve and record data, and

therefore, narratives have been historically used to pass on, for example, cultural knowledge and practices (Cobley, 2008). When approaching the subject area from the point of view of *cinematic discourse*, Androutsopoulos (2012) mentions that motion pictures can be straightforwardly regarded as audio-visual narratives. Because cinematic narratives are multimodal by design, it is necessary to be able to adequately represent them in a textual form in order to examine this complex media through the lens of critical discourse analysis.

Androutsopoulos (2012, 140) defines the term *cinematic discourse* as "a contextualised approach to film as a site of sociolinguistic representation" which includes various forms of so-called *film-to-text* content. This content can be seen to comprise many variable levels of linguistic substance, such as written dialogue, nonverbal forms of communication, plot narrative, description of imagery, musical cues, sound effects, cinematography, etc., that can be depicted in a textual form, and that are all interrelated in quite a complex manner. This makes cinematic discourse a topic that is challenging to define and analyze sociolinguistically, and often also requires limiting one's focus to only select few aspects of the film-to-text content in order to be able to analyze this content by the means of critical discourse analysis (Androutsopoulos, 2012).

However, cinematic discourse does not only consist of this film-to-text content, but also includes the interpersonal, communicative aspect mentioned in chapter *2.2.1 Linguistic representation*, i.e., the diverse processes of a motion picture's production and the circumstances affecting its consumption, as well as the interaction of these two factors (Androutsopoulos, 2012). This means that in order to proficiently explore a film's sociolinguistic content and the meanings and concepts it strives to convey, one must also consider the processes of its meaning-making systems, acknowledging the communicative relation between the film's production team and its audience, which Androutsopoulos (2012) refers to as *double framework*. In other words, a motion picture's sociolinguistic content not only consists of the various representations collectively constructed by the writer, the director, actors, editors, etc., but also the objectives and motives behind these representations, as well as the audience's understandings, interpretations and mental constructs of these portrayals, in addition to their previous experiences and knowledge about the subject matter and, for example, their linguistic capabilities.

2.2.3 Representations of psychopathy in cinema

As mentioned in chapter *2.1 The concept of psychopathy*, the disorder has intrigued the minds of individuals from all walks of life since the term was coined by the scientific community in the 19th century. Keesler (2013) points out that following the public's growing interest in psychology and mental disorders such as psychopathy and sociopathy in the 19th and 20th century, the subject matter has also become increasingly prevalent in mass media, lifting its profile from footnotes to headlines. Early on, the media's portrayal of psychopathy was mainly focused on newspaper articles reporting on various real-life criminal cases, describing and scandalizing the acts of the offenders (Keesler, 2013). As Keesler (2013) mentions, today's articles about psychopathy can often be vastly different in their content, informing the reader about the possibilities of, for example, the presence of morally devoid individuals thriving in the corporate world.

As the public's interest in personal disorders and the entertainment value they carry became more evident during the 20th century, the concept of psychopathy also began to have its footing in popular culture and various types of entertainment media (Keesler, 2013). Thus, it comes as no surprise that cinema, which has been one of the most popular forms of entertainment for over a century, has had its fair share of portrayals of psychopathy. According to Leistedt and Linkowski (2013), the earliest representations of film characters portraying psychopathic traits can be considered to have appeared in cinema as early as 1915, in D.W. Griffith's motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*, only a few decades after the invention of the first examples of technology involving projected moving picture. In *The Birth of the Nation* the character Silas Lynch (performed by George Siemann) can be interpreted to portray classic, primary-type idiopathic psychopathy, i.e., a heritable form of the disorder often manifesting as overt narcissism and manipulative behavior disguised in charming interpersonal demeanor (Leistedt and Linkowski, 2013). This definiton of primary type psychopathy is still commonly acknowledged in today's society.

The most iconic and memorable portrayals of cinematic psychopaths include Anthony Perkins' character Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller *Psycho* (1960), the cannibalistic psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter masterfully performed by Anthony Hopkins in

Jonathan Demme's five-Oscar masterpiece *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Christian Bale's portrayal of a deranged, morally corrupt investment banker Patrick Bateman in Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000) and, for example, Heath Ledger's cartoony antagonist Joker in Christopher Nolan's 2008 chapter of the Batman saga: *The Dark Knight*. As Hesse (2009) mentions, psychopathic characters often occupy the role of villains in motion pictures, introducing some form of dissonance and conflict into the story. However, as Keesler (2013) acknoledges, the ways in which cinematic media views and portrays psychopaths have become increasingly complex, and there are numerous instances in which a psychopathic character can be seen as the protagonist, or at least the main character of the story, especially in the 21st century cinema. In these cases the plot often explores the dichotomy between the actions and thought processes of the psychopathic character and the so-called normal society around them (Hesse, 2009). This kind of social examination of a psychopath's operation in a modern western society is clearly present, for example, in Mary Harron's *American Psycho*, as well as Dan Gilroy's *Nightcrawler* (2014), which is one of the three motion pictures that comprise the material for my analysis in this thesis.

2.3 Recognized features in the language use of psychopaths

2.3.1 The relation between one's language use and personality

As stated above, language is the basis for various types of interpersonal communication, as well as a crucial element in constructing linguistic representations. As Hancock et al. (2013) mention, language is also the most powerful and direct tool for humans to express their thoughts and feelings to one another. Everyone has their own ways of conveying these inner processes to others, and although one's charasteristic traits of language use might evolve and vary greatly in different circumstances, Pennebaker and King (1999) state that it is possible to identify distinctive, relatively stable linguistic styles in which individuals express their thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, these characteristic linguistic styles can offer valuable insight into the way different individuals perceive and understand the world (Pennebacker and King, 1999). Hancock et al. (2013) also suggest that, due to the often automatic and nonconscious nature of language production, various patterns in one's language use can be

very revealing when examining one's underlying emotional and cognitive processes. In this process of psychological evaluation, the observer forms interpretations and judgements on the characteristics of an individual or a group, thus constructing a certain type of narrative on their identities (Bigazzi and Nenzini, 2008).

Pennebaker and King (1999, 1296-1297) address the concept of *linguistic fingerprints*, i.e., individuals' characteristic styles of producing speech and written text, by pointing out that the linguistic strategies one uses when producing spoken or written language are often based on one's potential underlying constructs, such as motives or emotions. Furthermore, based on their research, Pennebaker and King (1999) conclude that these linguistic fingerprints can also be considered to offer information about one's more permanent and stable, long-term personality. These characteristic linguistic traits, such as individuals' tendencies to frequently use or not use words associated with emotions, recurringly utilize specific verb tenses when forming narratives or, for example, continuously incorporate a high persentage of articles in their linguistic output, can be considered to be deeply connected with their inner psycholinguistic processes, which in turn can offer insight into their perceptions of the world or, for example, their social attributes (Pennebaker and King, 1999).

2.3.2 Shared psycholinguistic traits between psychopaths

As mentioned above, the so-called linguistic fingerprints of individuals can be relatively stable and long-lasting, and also remain recognizable in vastly differing situations and sociolinguistic activities. Furthermore, analyzing these characteristic linguistic traits can be a useful method of examining and interpreting the inner psychological processes behind one's linguistic output. In addition to this, as Hancock et al. (2013) state, according to psychopathological research, analyzing frequently occurring words and patterns in one's language use can be very helpful in identifying and examining any potentially abnormal psychological processes behind one's linguistic output.

The logical following question to ask is whether a group of people sharing similar psychological traits might also produce language in a relatively uniform manner. As

Beukeboom and Burgers (2019) state, it is essential for us to construct various conceptions of groups and categorize individuals into them in order to understand the world and, for example, achieve a sense of predictability about our surroundings. Hence, language being our primary means of interpersonal communication, we group individuals into different categories by analyzing their sociolinguistic traits on a daily basis. This chapter addresses the topic by considering psychopathic individuals as a singular group, and providing examples and deductions on the distinctive linguistic traits that have been generally associated with psychopathy.

De Almeida Brites (2016) lists various traits and patterns of verbal output commonly attributed to the language use of psychopaths, recognized in studies conducted in the late 20th and early 21st century. Compared to the language use of non-psychopathic individuals, these traits include such commonalities as, for example, the more frequent use of the past tense when forming narratives, strongly persuasive and misleading word choices, clever usage of emotionally charged words aiming to gain attention and admiration, shallow verbal expression of emotions they are, in fact, often basically unable to experience, and many other traits implying a strong psychological detachment from their discourse, as well as an underlying aspiration to deceive and manipulate (de Almeida Brites, 2016). As de Almeida Brites (2016) mentions, psychopaths also seem to be generally more verbose than non-psychopaths, and often speak in a slower than average pace. This can be regarded as a means of achieving dominant roles in social interactions.

Hancock et al. (2013) address the topic of the shared, distinctive linguistic features and common psycholinguistic attributes connected to psychopathy by analyzing the verbal narratives that 52 convicted homicide offenders, 14 of which are clinically diagnosed psychopathic, have formed to describe the events and circumstances of their crimes. Examining the narratives of the 14 psychopaths and comparing them to the narratives of the control group of 38 non-psychopathic offenders, Hancock et al. (2013) state that the psychopathic murderers' narratives seem to feature an abnormally frequent incorporation of such words as *because, as* and *since*, describing strong cause and effect relationships. In addition to this emphasized significance of causality, Hancock et al. (2013) also recognize the psychopaths' frequent incorporation of the past tense in their narratives, similarly to de

Almeida Brites' (2016) findings. Emphasizing causality and utilizing the past tense can both be seen as examples of the psychopaths' distinctive, often nonconscious psycholinguistic efforts in striving to psychologically detach themselves from their criminal actions, and ultimately, also from their victims (Hancock et al., 2013). According to Hancock et al. (2013), the psychopathic convicts also tend to use approximately twice as many words for describing their physiological needs, such as eating and drinking, as well as material and monetary needs, as the non-psychopathic offenders. Contrarily to this, non-psychopathic individuals generally use significantly more words associated with social and emotional needs, such as family or religion. Thus, as Hancock et al. (2013, 107) conclude based on their study, psychopathic individuals seem to focus more on bodily needs than the so-called "higher level needs".

In conclusion, based on a number of studies, there is strong evidence indicating that psychopathic individuals seem to have various common, distinctive features regarding their verbal output and linguistic choices that differentiate them from non-psychopaths. Hancock et al. (2013) state that psychopaths are often highly skilled conversationalists who use language to lie, charm and manipulate others in order to achieve material or sexual gain, power, or other direct personal advantages, but that they also seem to commonly exhibit generalized difficulties in their abilities to both interpret the emotions of others and express emotions of their own. Similarly, de Almeida Brites (2016) points out the often creative, skillful and alluring verbal abilities of psychopathic individuals, while also underlining the noticeable difficulties and shortcomings in their cognitive and linguistic operations, that prevent them from learning from sociolinguistic experiences or recognizing and understanding emotions and connecting their meanings to their corresponding linguistic units. In addition to interpersonal relations, these impairments also affect the psychopaths' inner speech processes that regulate their behavior and impulse control, diminishing their capacity for self-restraint and, ultimately, often resulting in antisocial, irresponsible, aggressive and/or exploitative behavior (de Almeida Brites, 2016).

2.3.3 Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use

As addressed in earlier chapters, the neurobiological, behavioral and psychopathological traits commonly associated with psychopathy often also seem to manifest as various psycholinguistic attributes distinctive to the language use of psychopaths. When aiming to compile a comparatively comprehensive list of essential, characteristic linguistic traits of psychopaths, one must also consider the psychological processes behind these traits. As Dobrow (2016) points out, higher levels of psychopathic traits often lead to lower levels of sincerity and responsibility in an individual's interpersonal relations, and a central characteristic in psychopaths' behavior is that they often strive for some type of personal gain when communicating with others. In earlier chapters, I have given multiple examples of the different linguistic actions that psychopaths often utilize in their discourse in order to achieve these advantages, and I will mainly focus on five of these traits in this thesis. I have chosen these traits based on how frequently they have been identified and acknowledged in earlier research, and also how proficiently they can be analyzed by the means of critical discourse analysis solely based on the written verbal output of film characters in the context of cinematic discourse. The five distinctive linguistic characteristics I consider to be pivotal in the psycholinguistic processes and actions of psychopaths are *manipulation, lying, superficial politeness, psychological detachment* and *threatening/coercion.*

As Blair (2003) mentions, the social actions of psychopaths are commonly instrumental, i.e., goal-oriented toward achieving some kind of personal gain. This also applies to the interpersonal communication of psychopaths, which often utilizes various linguistic stagies by which psychopaths strive to benefit from other people. *Manipulation* is a psycholinguistic action that is fundamental among these strategies, and often also the desired outcome when using other linguistic tactics common for psychopaths. Nagler et al. (2014) characterize manipulation as a strategic, exploitative tactic used to influence and control others, as well as their thoughts and emotions, in order to achieve self-beneficial agendas. *Impression management*, i.e., the desire to influence and control the way others perceive someone or something, is a central concept in manipulation strategies and a common motive behind them (Dobrow, 2016, 5). *Gaslighting* is another psycholinguistic tactic that can be used as a form of manipulation, focusing on undermining other individuals' experiences and/or perceptions of

reality in order to gain power and control over them (Stark, 2019). In addition to the motives and strategies mentioned above, as Kosson et al. (2016, 28-36) argue, psychopaths may often manipulate others for the sheer *contemptuous delight* of it, i.e., the joy and pride they feel when succesfully deceiving and controlling others, resulting in a subjective conception of personal superiority.

Lying is a deceptive linguistic trait deeply connected to manipulation. Phillips et al. (2011) establish various distinct motives commonly behind lying, such as some kind of personal gain, avoidance of disclosing personal information, strive for a dominant position in interpersonal relations or, for example, impression management. Dobrow (2016) states that psychopaths tend to lie more frequently and for a wider variety of reasons than non-psychopathic individuals, and furthermore, their lying can often be compulsive and pathological, even seeming to lack any conceivable reason. Just as with manipulation, this pathological form of deception can stem from the enjoyment it brings the deceiver, i.e., the so-called *duping delight* a psychopath experiences when successfully deceiving others (Dobrow, 2016, 69). In conclusion, in addition to the utilization of deception for the common instrumental, self-centered motives mentioned above, lying is a psycholinguistic operation that seems to be pathologically connected to the neurobiological nature of psychopathy (Dobrow, 2016).

Superficial politeness is a psycholinguistic tactic psychopaths commonly use in their interpersonal relations in order to control and deceive others. As Dobrow (2016) mentions, psychopaths often may appear to be unusually charming and socially skillful, but this is merely a facade for them to conceal their underlying motives and exploitative nature. Utilizing superficially charming, courteous language and shallow politeness can be seen as yet another strategy for psychopathic individuals to manipulate others and lure them in vulnerable positions by appearing seemingly trustworthy and respectful, thus getting others to lower their guard. As Hare et al. (1989) state, psychopaths often implement these kind of interpersonal actions skillfully, identifying and exploiting the weaknesses of others in a highly elaborate manner. Because of this, people in a psychopath's sphere or influence are often unable to recognize the malicious motives behind their seemingly charming demeanor (Hare et al., 1989).

One's *psychological detachment* from one's linguistic output is a concept that I will examine from two distinct points of view: firstly, as the forming of narratives of seemingly emotional experiences without any credible linguistic expression of these emotions, and secondly, as a tactic of deception that includes utilizing superficial, emotionally shallow and often "textbooklike" language in one's discourse. The first type of psychologically detached verbal output stems from psychopathic individuals' innate inabilities to identify and express their feelings or recognize the feelings of others, as addressed in chapter *2.1 The concept of psychopathy*. As de Almeida Brites (2016) mentions, these inabilities also affect psychopaths' linguistic expression of emotions, often resulting in a shallow discourse which implies that even though psychopathic individuals might fathom the various meanings of emotional vocabulary on a conceptual level, they do not have an understanding of the actual emotions behind them. The second type of psychologically detached language differs greatly from the first, as it can be regarded as a conscious, calculated tactic of manipulation or deception, rather than a psycholinguistic disadvantage. As Hare et al. (1989) acknowledge, in addition to the psychopaths' characteristic linguistic actions of direct manipulation and lying, there is another, more peculiar form of deception in which psychopaths utilize superficial, inflated technical jargon and pseudoscientific concepts in their verbal output, often also using these terms and concepts in an incorrect manner. The aim of this strategy is to impress and/or confuse others and dominate interpersonal relations, and it is often used for diversion, obfuscation or assertion while striving to accomplish, for example, avoidance of disclosure or impression management.

Threatening and *coercion* differ rather substantially from the other common psycholinguistic operations of psychopaths mentioned above, in that they are invariably overt and explicit. Furthermore, when utilizing them, it is evident that an individual neither makes any effort in constructing or maintaining an impression of a seemingly charming persona, nor displays any visible concern of potential repercussions. As Kosson et al. (2016) mention, psychopathic individuals generally seem to be noticeably less responsive to threatening stimuli, and are even able to tune them out in some occasions. However, psychopaths often seem to be well aware of the psychological effectiveness of personal threats, as the disorder has been commonly associated with aggressive and violent linguistic behavior. Marsh and Cardinale (2014, 6) state that probably due to the diminished amygdala activity common to psychopaths,

they are often less responsive to threatening stimuli and less capable of identifying fearful emotions in others, but also that potentially because of this "fear blindness", they often consider it more acceptable to use fear-inducing language toward others. Hildebrand et al. (2004) also mention that in the case of forensic psychiatric patients, psychopathic individuals utilize verbal threats noticeably more frequently in their discourse than non-psychopathic patients. Furthermore, individuals with higher levels of psychopathic traits seem to consider the usage of this kind of aggressive discourse more acceptable than individuals with lower level traits of the disorder (Marsh and Cardinale, 2014). *Coercion* is a specific subtype of threatening discourse, and as Harris et al. (2007) state, a psycholinguistic strategy commonly utilized by male psychopaths especially in their sexual relations. Sexual coercion seems to be a fundamental, prevailing element in the behavior of male psychopaths that differentiates them from other male groups, and research suggests that it could be considered a distinctive behavioral indicator of psychopathy when trying to identify individuals with the disorder (Harris et al., 2007).

Each of the five psycholinguistic operations characteristic to psychopaths mentioned above–manipulation, lying, superficial politeness, psychological detachment and threatening/ coercion–indicates a deep-rooted, insincere and exploitative nature of an individual's persona, and the motives behind these operations are often connected with a strong aspiration for personal gain. A psychopath may utilize these linguistic actions when striving for, e.g., material or sexual gain, highly regarded social status or power over others. However, as mentioned above, many of these psycholinguistic traits can also be considered to be pathological in their nature and strongly intertwined with the neurobiological disorder of psychopathy. Therefore, at least some of them might be utilized customarily by psychopaths in some instances, even without any perceivable motives.

3 The present study

3.1 Research aim and questions

Psychopathy is a condition that is unanimously recognized and frequently discussed amidst the scientific community. As mentioned in chapter *2.1 The concept of psychopathy*, the disorder has been widely studied as a behavioral, psychological and neurobiological, as well as a criminal phenomenon. Furthermore, during the past decades, the scientific community has also begun to acknowledge and display interest in the distinctive psycholinguistic aspects of psychopathy. The linguistic traits of psychopathic individuals have been researched by examining the verbal output of, for example, incarcerated homicide offenders or patients in forensic psychiatric institutions, comparing their discourse with the language use of non-psychopathic control groups. Based on the findings of these studies, it has been established that psychopathy does affect one's psycholinguistic processes in several distinctive ways, and that psychopathic individuals often incorporate shared linguistic features in their discourse.

As addressed in chapter *2.2.3 Representations of psychopathy in cinema*, the disorder has also been an enduring, highly visible element in popular culture, and also strongly represented in cinema since the early 20th century. These portrayals depict psychopaths in various diverse ways, ranging from deranged, uncontrollable serial killers to extremely intelligent, cunning and seemingly charming individuals aiming to thrive in the corporate world. There is, however, little research on the psycholinguistic portrayal of psychopathy in cinema. As stated in chapter *2.3.1 The relation between one's language use and personality*, one's linguistic output can be seen as the most effective way of portraying one's underlying psychological processes, and therefore, when examining the representation of psychopathic individuals in cinema, their language use can be considered a crucial factor in the matter. The purpose of this research is to answer the question of how the psychological and neurobiological condition of psychopathy is portrayed through characters' language use in contemporary cinema, and more precisely, three motion pictures released in the year 2014: *Gone Girl*, *Nightcrawler* and *The Guest*. I will examine the linguistic output of each of the three psychopathic main characters individually, and also conduct a comparative analysis of these discourses in order to identify any similarities and/or distinctions between the linguistic portrayals of the characters.

3.2 The three motion pictures chosen for this research

3.2.1 Gone Girl

Gone Girl, released in September 2014, is a psychological crime thriller/drama that is based on Gillian Flynn's 2012 novel of the same name. Directed by David Fincher and written by Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* was an immense box office success during its release, and has also received worldwide critical acclaim. As the story offers quite a unique take on the subject of psychopathy, it was an obvious choice for my analysis in this thesis. *Gone Girl* introduces an apparently psychopathic central character named Amy Dunne, played by Rosamund Pike who was also nominated for an Oscar for her performance. Right in the beginning of the movie, Amy goes missing from her home. The story follows her husband, a writer called Nick (played by Ben Affleck), trying to find out her whereabouts and, together with his twin sister Margo (played by Carrie Coon) and members of law enforcement, reconstruct the events and circumstances leading to her disappearance.

At about halfway in the film, it is revealed that Amy has, in fact, staged her own murder and is trying to frame her husband for this homicide that never actually took place. This proves to be a cunning revenge plot covertly orchestrated by Amy, who has been feeling increasingly neglected by Nick in their marriage for a long time. She and Nick have been drifting apart emotionally, and she has also learned that Nick has been having an affair with Andie (played by Emily Ratajkowski), a 23-year-old student in Nick's writing class. Nick's infidelity, combined with the couple's declining relationship and Nick's generally indifferent character, has driven Amy to conceive a complex scheme aiming at his husbands murder conviction, and a following death sentence carried out by the state of Missouri. The majority of the story of *Gone Girl* follows Nick trying to find ways to prove his innocence both to the authorities and the national press which very quickly labels him as Amy's murderer. Obviously, the most effective and indisputable way to accomplish this would be to locate Amy, thus providing definite proof that the assumed murder, or even a possible kidnapping, never took place.

Amy personifies many unquestionably psychopathic personal characteristics during the film, but she is still very different from the stereotypical portrayal of a psychopathic criminal, as

she seems to, in fact, display a variety of notably strong emotions. The entire motivation behind her highly calculated and malicious scheme to frame her husband simply appears to be a feeling of having been hurt, neglected and taken for granted. Also, although Amy does commit a homicide during the film, it is clear that her innate aspirations do not include herself killing or even physically harming others, but that she rather strives to pursue what she understands as justice and retribution on those who she conceives to have wronged her.

3.2.2 Nightcrawler

Nightcrawler, written and directed by Dan Gilroy and also released in September 2014, is a psychological thriller/drama focusing on a character named Louis Bloom, played by Jake Gyllenhaal. Louis is a novice freelance news videographer who documents various crime scenes and accident sites, and tries to sell his video material to news agencies. During the film, Louis decides to gradually take his profession as a videographer to highly questionable and often illegal levels, as he begins interfering with the scenes he is documenting, as well as orchestrating situations where crimes and human casualties are likely to occur. Louis' motive for these actions is to obtain increasingly shocking, scandalous and, therefore, profitable video material which he considers to be essential for his primary, long-term objective of advancing his career.

Nightcrawler was nominated for an Oscar for its original screenplay, and has received conciderable critical acclaim since its release. The central character of Louis Bloom, although portraying various traditional sociopsychological and behavioral attributes often associated with psychopathic individuals, can be considered a rather unique, modern and innovative take on the cinematic portrayal of a psychopathic character, as his actions merely strive to achieve social acceptance and occupational recognition in today's highly competitive society. In *Nightcrawler*, this process is both benefited and impeded by Louis' underlying condition, and therefore, the narrative of the movie can also be considered to offer the audience a view into the various challenges and disadvantages attributed to psychopathy as a disorder.

3.2.3 The Guest

The Guest is a psychological action thriller directed by Adam Wingard and written by Simon Barrett, released in January 2014. The movie centers around a character called "David Collins", which appears to be an alias used by an enigmatic young man whose actual identity is never actually revealed during the movie. David, played by Dan Stevens, arrives uninvited to the front door of the home of the Petersons, a family who has recently lost their son, Caleb, to the armed conflict in Afghanistan. Presenting himself as a soldier in the U.S. Army, David introduces himself to the mother of the family, Laura (played by Sheila Kelley), claims to have been friends with Caleb, offers his condolences for the family's loss and tells Laura that the reason for is arrival is that he had been with Caleb when he passed, and had promised him to see how his family is coping with their loss, and also individually tell each of them that Caleb loved them.

Throughout the narrative of *The Guest*, David presents himself as an unusually calm, respectful and polite individual, acting in a very humble and unassuming manner. David's psychopathic characteristics begin to appear rather gradually, starting with his involvement in various social conflicts and physical altercations, as well as him giving highly questionable advice to the family's remaining son, Luke (played by Brendan Meyer), introducing and encouraging him to aggressive and even criminal behavior. Later on in the narrative, a number of disturbing facts about David emerge, and eventually, he turns homicidal and starts to hunt down the members of the Peterson family, as well as other people close to them. For the entire duration of the *The Guest*, David is portrayed as an unusually well composed, reserved and seemingly thoughtful individual. This, in addition to his superficially charming demeanor, his often emotionless exterior and his intrinsic tendency to resort to extreme violence, makes David Collins a great example of a modern cinematic portrayal of a homicidal psychopath who is extremely competent in concealing his true nature from others.

3.3 Data and methods

The focus of this research is to observe and examine the ways in which psychopathy is portrayed through the language use of characters in three motion pictures released in the year 2014: *Gone Girl*, *Nightcrawler* and *The Guest*. This analysis is conducted by the means of critical discourse analysis, focusing on the verbal output, linguistic traits and lexical choices of the three psychopathic main characters of these movies. In order to be able to clearly specify and therefore identify the types of discourse that can be considered to qualify as so-called psychopathic language use, the analysis will mainly be centered on the five psycholinguistic categories often associated with psychopathy addressed in chapter *2.3.3 Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use*: manipulation, lying, superficial politeness, psychological detachment and threatening/coercion.

In order to be able to achieve sufficient, discernible results and keep the scope of this research effective, I have chosen to limit the focus of the critical discourse analysis strictly to the actual written dialogues of the films, disregarding many other forms and categories of the film-to-text content the movies contain. These omissions include such aspects of the characters' interpersonal communication as volume and tone of voice, pauses, disfluencies, laughter, as well as other nonverbal vocalizations. However, many of the linguistic traits commonly associated with psychopathy are often challenging or even impossible to recognize only by analyzing one's verbal output by itself, as lying, for example, cannot be identified solely by observing one's speech outside of its context, unless one's discourse is in direct contradiction with itself. Therefore, in order to be able to recognize these psycholinguistic operations in cinematic discourse, the psychopathic characters' lines are analyzed in relation to the lines of other characters, while also considering the context of the dialogues, i.e., the films' narratives.

Each psychopathic character's linguistic output is examined separately by the means of critical discourse analysis, after which observations and interpretations of the linguistic representation of the individual characters' psychopathic traits are made. These portrayals are subsequently surveyed concurrently by conducting a comparative analysis on the potential similarities and/or distinctions between the representations of these characters. Ultimately, this thesis aims to provide insight into the linguistic representation of psychopathy in contemporary cinema.

4 Analysis

4.1 Distinctive features in the language use of individual characters

4.1.1 Amy Dunne – Justifying the role of a vengeful victim

The dialogue in *Gone Girl* differs from the other two movies analyzed in this thesis in that a substantial part of the psychopathic character Amy Dunne's verbal output is in the form of monologues written in her diary, forming retrospective narratives of various events preceding her so-called disappearance. These narratives seem to be solely based on her subjective experiences and interpretations of events, and therefore, initially the audience really has no way of telling how truthful her diary entries are. However, this changes at about halfway into the movie, when it is revealed that a great portion of the stories in Amy's diary are mostly, if not completely, fictitious, fabricated by her in order to make the narrative presenting Nick as her murderer believable in the eyes of law enforcement and other third parties in the movie. Amy reveals that she is alive at 01:06:08-01:06:45 in *Gone Girl* when she, yet again, has a monologue in which she can be considered to either talk to herself or in a sense break the fourth wall, i.e., interact with the audience by addressing them directly. In any event, this means that it is not until over an hour into the movie that the audience can be expected to realize that they should, in fact, question everything that Amy has been saying thus far. This portrayal of Amy's deceitful and manipulative nature can be seen as quite an imaginative and unique way of linguistically representing a psychopath, as one of the main parties subject to her manipulation ends up being the film's audience itself. Amy's monologue, partly cited below, is also a clear example of the many occasions in which she justifies her manipulative, dishonest and often criminal actions, thus providing a strong sense of causality in her linguistic output.

> *I am so much happier now that I'm dead. Technically "missing." Soon to be presumed dead. Gone. And my lazy, lying, cheating, oblivious husband will go to prison for my murder. Nick Dunne took my pride and my dignity and my hope and my money. He took and took from me until I no longer existed. That's murder. Let the punishment fit the crime.*

Further on in the same monologue, Amy portrays a strong subjective sense of superiority over others on multiple occasions when she refers to other people with such degrading phrases as *a local idiot*, *the unwitting*, *pregnant idiot* and *clueless husband*. She also expresses her disdain for motherhood, as well as the high regard in which American society generally holds it, when saying that *America loves pregnant women. As if it's so hard to spread your legs*. When referring to Nick and their marriage, she uses such discourse as *I inspired him to rise to my level*, and *He actually expected me to love him unconditionally*, depicting a feeling of superiority over her husband, but also her inability to experience unconditional affection, as well as portraying her understanding of marriage as a strictly transactional relationship. These kinds of excerpts of Amy's dialogue can be seen as ways for the film's makers to give the audience an unobstructed view into her inner speech and thought processes, as when she is not interacting with other characters or quoting her diary entries, there seem to be no usual manipulation or deception strategies utilized in her linguistic output.

In *Gone Girl*, there is a character named Desi Collings (played by Neil Patrick Harris), a man who has had a romantic relationship with Amy in the past. The conversations between Amy and Desi are potentially the clearest examples of Amy's desire and ability to twist and alter facts and manipulate other people in order to achieve some kind of personal gain, and because of this, several examples of their conversations are included in this analysis. In *Gone Girl*'s narrative, it is revealed that Desi has a history of mental disorders of some kind, and it also becomes quite apparent that he is still in love with Amy and, frankly, obsessed with her to some extent. Desi has been sending Amy multiple letters after their separation, even after Amy and Nick have gotten married, and because of this, Amy and Nick have deemed it necessary to file a restraining order against him. In the film's narrative, after having staged her own murder, Amy has assumed a completely different identity while keeping a low profile living in an extended-stay motel. At a certain point Amy gets robbed of all of her money and decides to contact Desi, who she apparently knows of being of considerable wealth. The following dialogue between Amy and Desi takes place at 01:41:58-01:43:05 in the movie, when they meet for the first time in years.

Amy:	*It's you!*
Desi:	*It's you.*
Amy:	*I'm sorry. I'm sorry.*
Desi:	*Good God.*
Amy:	*Last week I threatened to leave, and he said he'd find me and he'd kill me. So, I disappeared. I lost the baby. I couldn't even tell my parents. I'm so ashamed and I'm so afraid.*
Desi:	*Well, he is looking for you. He showed up on my doorstep three days ago. He tracked me from my letters to you. You saved them.*
Amy:	*Knowing you were out there was the only thing that's kept me going these past few years.*
Desi:	*Let's go to the police. You can explain everything.*
Amy:	*No, I can't turn up now. I'd be a pariah. Everyone would hate me. Is it wrong to want Nick to go to prison?*
Desi:	*He should go to prison for what he's done. I'm setting you up at my lake house. It's utterly secluded.*
Amy:	*Why are you so good to me?*
Desi:	*You know why.*

As Desi acknowledges, his letters have indeed been saved, although based on a conversation taking place earlier in the movie between Nick and her sister Margo, it is unclear if the letters have been saved by Amy or Nick. In any case, considering the restraining order the couple has filed against Desi, it is obvious that the motives for saving Desi's letters have not been the ones mentioned by Amy. Nevertheless, she seems to know exactly how to use the letters as an effective device when forming a narrative that could help her take advantage of Desi. In *Gone Girl*, Desi's character can be seen to function as Amy's provider, protector, and also someone with whom Amy can be herself, at least to some extent, although she is obviously not truly honest with him at any point of the story. Desi accommodates Amy in his luxorious villa, feeds her, buys her brand new clothes, promises to keep her being alive a secret, and also offers her companionship and a possibility to speak her mind about the ongoing events. Early on, Amy deliberately uses discourse that portrays herself as wary and frightened, further constructing her narrative and her role as a traumatized victim that has barely escaped from an abusive marriage. With this behavior, Amy also gets Desi to rationalize why she would not yet be ready for any intimate relations with him, although she also pretends to be romantically

interested in him. This kind of behavior is clearly portrayed in the dialogue between Amy and Desi in a scene occurring at 01:49:13-01:49:49 in *Gone Girl*, when Amy has spent the night in Desi's secluded lake house. In this scene, in addition to acting startled, further dramatizing the fictitious circumstances of her narrative, Amy also uses the social power dynamics between Desi and herself to undermine, deny and downright dismiss Desi's experiences of her controlling and dominant conduct in their earlier relationship. This can be seen as a highly typical form of yet another manipulation tactic; gaslighting (Graves and Spencer, 2022).

Desi:	*Good morning!*
Amy:	*Don't do that! I'm sorry. I need to feel safe.*
Desi:	*You are very safe. What have you been up to?*
Amy:	*Nothing.*
Desi:	*Amy, I'm not Nick.*
Amy:	*It's hard for me. After so many years under someone's thumb...*
Desi:	*I know just what that feels like.*
Amy:	*You were never under my thumb.*
Desi:	*On your leash.*
Amy:	*Never.*

It becomes clear very quickly that Amy experiences Desi's compliant and submissive nature, as well as his expectations of a romantic relationship with her, seemingly frustrating and oppressive. It is also revealed that Amy has conducted a role for Desi in her plan to eventually be able to return to her married life with Nick without any legal repercussions. Therefore, in addition to continuing to act in a timid manner in order to keep Desi at an arm's length, she strives to further gain Desi's trust by starting to introduce a more submissive, even obsequious type of discourse around him. At 01:56:00-01:56:16 in the movie, when Desi expresses his continuous long-term commitment to Amy, as well as his frustration with Amy's nonreciprocal attitude toward his enthusiasm in a swift rekindling of a romantic relationship, Amy responds with *I understand what you're saying, Desi. I do. I've just been... I've been so mistreated for so long. I've forgotten how to behave.* The last sentence paints Amy's superficially vulnerable and compliant position in regard to Desi, but because of the peculiar usage of the term *behave*, she could also be interpreted to try to mediate a deceptive

impression of wanting Desi to attain a distinctly dominant role in their relationship.

After having noticed Desi's growing frustration when having spent more time with him, Amy aims to make him more comfortable around her in order to get him to lower his guard by beginning to verbally appeal to his pride and sense of self-worth. In the following excerpt from a dialogue occurring at 01:59:14-01:59:47 in the movie, Amy aims to accomplish these things by initiating reminiscences of their shared experiences during their earlier relationship, as well as insincerely praising his cultural sophistication and personal superiority over Nick. Desi reacts to this calculated charade exactly as Amy has anticipated.

Amy: *More coffee?*

Desi: *I'd love it.*

Amy: *Remember that time we skipped school and drove to the Cape?*

Desi: *God, yeah. Lobster right from the ocean.*

Amy: *This reminds me of that. Never-ending holiday.*

Desi: *You're not bored?*

Amy: *Desi, how could I be bored? You can discuss 18th-century symphonies, 19th-century impressionists, quote Proust in French. Nick's idea of culture was a reality TV marathon with one hand down his boxers.*

Amy's ability to manipulate Desi and exploit his weaknesses and his trust in her eventually lead to Desi's final scene in *Gone Girl*, in which Amy appeals to his ego once again, using his feelings for her against him. Amy greets Desi by saying *Hello, Mr. Collings. I've missed you. I've been thinking... I don't wanna be without you. Stay with me. And when all this dies down, we'll go to Greece, like you said.* With this discourse, regardless of the fact that its content and tone are vastly conflicting with Amy's earlier, highly reserved sociolinguistic behavior toward Desi, she succeeds in getting Desi to trust her completely by using a form of romantic and sexual manipulation, luring him in a situation which eventually leads to him becoming the only character whose life Amy actually claims during the story.

Amy's psychological detachment from her verbal discourse is clearly noticeable especially in the scene taking place at 02:06:59-02:10:28 in *Gone Girl*, occurring after Amy has returned

home to Nick and is interviewed by the authorities in a hospital after having been treated for her rape injuries that are, unbeknownst to the medical examiners and law enforcement, self-inflicted. In this dialogue cited below, Amy explains her disappearance with a fabricated narrative in which Desi Collings had kidnapped her from her home, held her captive and continually abused and raped her, and in which she had to eventually resort to killing him in order to be able to escape and save her life.

Doctor:	*She's on fairly heavy painkillers.*
Amy:	*It's okay. I want to help.*
FBI agent:	*Ms. Dunne, I know what you've been through, so we'll keep this very brief. Can you walk us through what happened?*
Amy:	*That morning, the doorbell rang. So normal. I opened the door. So strange. Since high school, he won't ever go away. And I've just tried to be nice to him. Answer his letters. Keep him calm. Oh, my God. Oh, I've encouraged him.*
FBI agent:	*You can't blame yourself.*
Amy:	*He pushed inside. And he grabbed me. But I got away, and ran to the kitchen. And he clubbed me. I collapsed.*
Det. Boney:	*That club was actually the handle to a Punch and Judy puppet.*
Amy:	*Right. Treasure hunt. I... I'd hidden some puppets at Go's...*
Det. Boney:	*Then how did Desi have that handle?*
Amy:	*I'd just found it. It must have fallen off. I was holding it when Desi pushed in. So, he got it from me.*
Det. Boney:	*About that woodshed...*
Amy:	*He took me to his lake house. Tied me to his bed.*
Det. Boney:	*Back to the woodshed real quick. Real quick. When you went to place the puppets there, did you notice that it was packed...*
Amy:	*Lots of stuff.*
Det. Boney:	*Corresponding to purchases made on credit cards in your husband's name.*
Amy:	*Nick and credit cards. He buys, I nag. I don't know, probably. He hid a lot of stuff at Go's. They're very close. Now, may I go back to where I was being held prisoner by a man with a history of mental problems?*
FBI agent:	*Please continue, Ms. Dunne.*

Amy:	*Desi assaulted me that night. Every night. He tied me up like a dog. And then, he'd punish me. Starve me. Shave me. Sodomize me. There were cameras everywhere. Please find this. Please find the tapes.*
Det. Boney:	*Amy, we found your diary. It contains many concerning allegations of mental and physical abuse.*
Amy:	*Well, it's the ugly truth. Nick didn't want a baby. He has a temper. We had money problems. But I love him.*
Det. Boney:	*Then why did you try to buy a gun?*
Amy:	*I'm sorry, I feel myself fading.*
Det. Boney:	*If I could just clarify one thing...*
Amy:	*If this case had been left in your deeply incompetent hands, my husband would be on death row, and I'd be tied, still, spread-eagle...*
FBI agent:	*Ms. Dunne, you've been very brave. We're finished. Now, I have to ask you, do you feel safe going home with your husband?*

In this scene, Amy describes events that would be highly traumatic, trying to utilize strongly loaded emotional vocabulary that she seems to deem psychologically effective. Interestingly, Amy's emotional detachment from her discourse becomes evident when she, probably inadvertently, combines strongly loaded emotional vocabulary with glaringly shallow, neutral and almost formal language. The incorporation of such phrases as *tied me up like a dog*, *he'd punish me. Starve me. Shave me. Sodomize me*, and *I'd be tied, still, spread-eagle* in her discourse can be seen as a means for Amy to dramatize her experiences in order to help support her narrative depicting Desi as a deranged, mentally ill sadist obsessed with her. However, such discourse as *Now, may I go back to where I was being held prisoner by a man with a history of mental problems?* and *That morning, the doorbell rang. So normal. I opened the door. So strange* could be considered to disrupt the image of a kidnap and rape victim verbalizing deeply sensitive, traumatic experiences, and suggest more toward an individual forming a narrative of events in which they have not been personally involved. In addition to trying to dramatize the events in her untruthful narrative of kidnapping and abuse, Amy also utilizes this kind of superficial, emotionally loaded vocabulary in trying to divert and mislead the interrogators in order to avoid disclosing any information that might incriminate her. Whenever it seems that she is presented with questions she cannot answer or asked for

clarifications on occurrences she cannot explain, she aims to distract the authorities by switching to another subject, often utilizing heavily loaded vocabulary. This linguistic activity is clearly noticeable when detective Rhonda Boney, played by Kim Dickens, asks Amy about the various items in the woodshed or the gun she had allegedly purchased, and also before she is even able to form a proper question at the end of the interview.

Amy's threatening and coercive persona is portrayed at various points in *Gone Girl*. Especially at the end of the movie when Amy has returned home to Nick, who is already well aware of her actions and her dangerous, psychopathic persona. During these events, Amy seems to abandon every affectation and communicates with Nick very openly and honestly, perhaps for the very first time, without even trying to conceal her true nature. In the scene occurring at 02:13:02-02:13:24 in the movie, after Nick reveals he is planning to leave Amy, she responds with *You really think that's smart? [...] Wounded, raped wife battles her way back to her husband and he deserts her. They'll destroy you. Neighbors will shun you. And I'll make sure that no one forgets the pain you caused me.* With this discourse, Amy is coercing Nick to abandon his thoughts of leaving her by giving an example of an untruthful account of events that she could construct if he refuses to stay in the relationship. Furthermore, she tells him that if if he leaves her, she will, again, fabricate narratives portraying him in a bad light, thus further contributing into his disreputation.

The coercive strategies utilized by Amy are also clearly present in the following conversation that takes place between Amy and Nick at 02:20:39-02:22:17 in *Gone Girl*. In the scene, following Amy's return and the mixed, contradictory press coverage, the couple has scheduled an interview with Ellen Abbot (played by Missi Pyle), a hostess of an entertainment news television show, in order to control the overwhelming media attention surrounding them. Before the interview, Amy gives Nick a so-called present, which turns out to be a used pregnancy test showing a positive result.

Nick:	*She's downstairs. What is it?*
Amy:	*It's for you. Open it.*
Nick:	*I don't need any more gifts from you.*
Amy:	*Open it.*

Nick: *I didn't touch you.*

Amy: *You didn't need to.*

Nick: *Bullshit. That notice of disposal. I have that. You threw it out.*

Amy: *The notice, yes.*

Nick: *I want a blood test. I want a paternity test.*

Amy: *I love tests.*

Nick: *Amy, you can teach those people to hate me all you want. I don't care. I am leaving you.*

Amy: *I won't have to teach your child to hate you. He'll do that all by himself.*

Nick: *You fucking cunt!*

Amy: *I'm the cunt you married. The only time you liked yourself was when you were trying to be someone this cunt might like. I'm not a quitter. I'm that cunt. I've killed for you. Who else can say that? You think you would be happy with a nice Midwestern girl? No way, baby. I'm it.*

Nick: *Look, you're delusional. You're insane. Why would you even want this? Yes, I loved you. And then all we did was resent each other and try to control each other and cause each other pain.*

Amy: *That's marriage. Now, I'm getting ready.*

In this scene, Amy appears to have gotten pregnant with Nick's child by having used Nick's sperm sample that has been stored at a fertility clinic the couple has visited in the past. Amy has had Nick believe that she has told the clinic to dispose of the sample, but in fact, she only seems to have gotten rid of the notice of disposal the couple has received in the mail, while instructing the clinic to preserve the sample. Amy tells Nick that if he decides to leave her, their child will grow up without him, surely ending up hating him. This is a strategy that Amy utilizes in order to coerce Nick to continue the relationship with her even after all of her previous actions, appealing to his sense of paternal responsibility and moral integrity, as well as his values relating to family. Based on Amy's actions during *Gone Girl*'s narrative, both Nick and the audience could be seen to have strong basis for scepticism about the validity of the pregnancy test, but regardless of whether Amy is yet again lying or not, it is easy to imagine how a person in Nick's situation could be very concerned about the possibility of Amy raising their potential offspring alone, quite possibly manipulating the child into hating

his father. Furthermore, it is clear that the thought of their child growing up alone with Amy would seem absolutely frightening to Nick in any instance, now that he has some kind of an idea about what kinds of acts Amy is capable of committing.

In conclusion, *Gone Girl'*s Amy Dunne portrays several distinctive linguistic traits commonly associated with the sociopsychological behavior of psychopaths. These traits include all of the five central characteristics defined in chapter *2.3.3 Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use*; various forms of manipulation, lying, psychologically detached discourse, threatening and coercion, as well as the strategy of appealing to the pride and self-worth of others by utilizing insincere social submission and superficial politeness in the form of compliments. Therefore, *Gone Girl'*s rather unique, distinctive take on the subject matter of psychopathy does not necessarily derive from highly original linguistic traits portrayed by the psychopathic character, but rather the motives behind Amy's discourse, as well as the fact that the audience is able to experience the effects of this kind of language use firsthand.

4.1.2 Louis Bloom – Ceaseless strive for occupational success

Louis Bloom is the main character in *Nightcrawler*, a 2014 psychological crime thriller/drama that presents a compelling story exploring the thought processes and actions of a psychopathic individal operating in today's typical Western surroundings. *Nightcrawler* is a great example of a modern take on non-homicidal psychopathy that approaches the topic from a sociopsychological view, such as described in chapter *2.2.3 Representations of psychopathy in cinema*. Louis differs from the traditional psychopathic movie characters, and the other two characters analyzed in this thesis, in that he seems to have no real interest in directly causing others any harm, as he merely tries to accomplish a financially and socially established, successful and appreciated status in his life, and especially in his occupation. At the beginning of the movie, Louis seems to have neither a clear idea nor a preference of what this accupation even might be; he just wants to be successful at something. The story of *Nightcrawler* begins with Louis stealing some copper wire and other building materials and trying to sell them to the owner of a scrapyard. While negotiating with the owner, Louis also decides to ask him for a job or an internship in order to take the first steps toward some kind

of a career path. The following dialogue excerpt is from this conversation, taking place at 00:04:21-00:06:13 in the movie.

Louis: *I guesstimate that I have about 50 pounds of copper wire, 100 pounds of chain-link fence and two manhole covers. The nice thick ones.*

Owner: *I'll give 50 cents a pound for the wire, 15 for the fence, and 10 for the covers.*

Louis: *That's below market value.*

Owner: *Market value? You know the cops came by asking about manhole covers?*

Louis: *I'd like to counter at a dollar a pound for the copper, 30 cents a pound for the fence, and 20 cents per for the covers.*

Owner: *Sell them somewhere else.*

Louis: *I'd feel good at 75, 25, and 15.*

Owner: *I'm not negotiating with you.*

Louis: *I think we're close.*

Owner: *I'm done.*

Louis: *I'm willing to take less to establish a business relationship. If that's your last best offer, then I guess I accept.*

Owner: *All right. Drive around back and unload them.*

Louis: *Excuse me, sir? I'm looking for a job. In fact, I've made up my mind to find a career that I can learn and grow into. Who am I? I'm a hard-worker, I set high goals and I've been told that I am persistent. Now, I'm not fooling myself, sir. Having been raised with the self-esteem movement so popular in schools, I used to expect my needs to be considered. But I know that today's work culture no longer caters to the job loyalty that could be promised to earlier generations. What I believe, sir, is that good things come to those who work their asses off. And that people such as yourself, who reach the top of the mountain, didn't just fall there. My motto is if you wanna win the lottery, you have to make the money to buy a ticket. Did I say that I worked in a garage? So, what do you say? I could start tomorrow, or even why not tonight?*

Owner: *No.*

Louis: *How about an internship then? A lot of young people are taking unpaid positions to get a foot in the door. That's something I'd be willing to do.*

Owner: *I'm not hiring a fucking thief.*

This conversation, occurring very early in the movie, already portrays several distinctive, characteristic features in Louis' language use. Firstly, this is the primary scene of the many occasions in which Louis introduces various negotiation tactics in his verbal discourse. Negotiation is commonly considered to be a specific type of conversation, or rather a context for a conversation, but in *Nightcrawler,* Louis can be seen to start negotiating also in many casual conversations where there is no actual reason or demand for bargaining, and where the other party often does not even want to partake in this type of interaction. Provoking negotiations in his interpersonal communication and striving toward "a good deal" can be considered to be an essential part of the character's language use and his incessant endeavors to obtain some type of personal gain.

Secondly, Louis often expresses himself in a superficially polite manner, and also frequently adjusts his demeanor according to the situation and the reactions of the characters to whom he is talking. For example, when negotiating with the scrapyard owner, Louis tries to establish a polite tone in order to appear agreeable and considerate by using the modal verb *would*, thus forming a conditional tense in phrases such as *I'd like to*, *I'd feel good at*, and *I'd be willing to*. When Louis decides to ask the scrapyard owner for a job, he increases the level of his politeness by starting to address the owner formally as *sir*. To appear even more courteous and respectful, he also compliments the owner of having reached *the top of the mountain*, pleading to his ego and his possible susceptibility to flattery. Unfortunately for Louis, the owner does not fall for his antics, and these strategies do not end up having the effect Louis has desired.

Thirdly, later in the conversation, the audience gets the first glance into Louis' lengthy, highly self-reflective and apparently confident, but emotionally severely detached "sales pitchy" monologues that occur quite frequently during *Nightcrawler*. These sections of Louis' dialogue usually consist of him describing his personal traits, ambitions and abilities in a highly positive and cleary exaggerated manner, and often also resorting to direct lying. In the dialogue excerpt above, Louis uses terminology generally considered favorable in working life, such as *a hard-worker*, *high goals* and *persistent*, but also incorporates his knowledge about society, as well as quite possibly made-up, retrospective stories of his earlier life, career

and experiences into his discourse. All of the conversational tactics mentioned above can be considered to be evident forms of manipulation.

Another clearly distinctive feature in the language use of Louis Bloom is that he frequently addresses other characters by their names when having conversations with them. There often seems to be no apparent reason for this, as most of the conversations he has are private, involving only Louis and one other party. There is a central character in *Nightcrawler* called Rick, played by Riz Ahmed, that ends up working with Louis, assisting him in navigating to accident sites and crime scenes, and also helping him with the actual filming process. When Louis first meets Rick to interview him for an internship in his "organization", he repeatedly addresses Rick by his birth name, Richard, although Rick can be considered to indirectly ask Louis to call him by his nickname right at the beginning of the interview. The following excerpt is from this conversation, taking place at 00:23:58-00:25:20 in *Nightcrawler*.

Rick:	*Hey. I'm sorry I'm late.*
Louis:	*Are you Richard?*
Rick:	*Rick.*
Louis:	*I'm Louis Bloom.*
Rick:	*Hey, Lou.*
Louis:	*Louis. Sit down. The situation is that I lost an employee, and I'm interviewing for a replacement.*
Rick:	*Okay. The ad didn't say what the job was.*
Louis:	*It's a fine opportunity for some lucky someone.*
Rick:	*Okay.*
Louis:	*I'd like to know about your prior employment and hear, in your own words, what you learned from each position.*
Rick:	*My old jobs? I did landscaping for a couple months. Like, mow, blow, and go. I learned that I had hay fever, so I quit.*
Louis:	*Other jobs?*
Rick:	*I don't know. Like, a week here, a week there.*
Louis:	*Why hire you? Sell yourself.*
Rick:	*Okay.*
Louis:	*Go.*

Rick:	*Okay. I'm Rick. Of course. I... I took three buses to get here. I finished high school. I need a job. I'll do pretty much anything. That's me. Hire Rick. So...*
Louis:	*What's your address, Richard?*

In this conversation, in addition to repeatedly calling Rick by his birth name, Louis also instructs Rick to refer to himself as Louis instead of Lou, which can be seen as a means of establishing a position of an authoritative employer in their relationship, as well as maintaining a strictly formal, professional tone. This upholding of a professional facade is also evident when Louis completely evades Rick's indirect question about what the job actually entails, thus avoiding the disclosure of any information he cannot provide. Louis also lies to Rick about having had previous employees, utilizing exclusively formal language in his verbal output in trying to portray his imaginary company as highly successful. Furthermore, Louis asks Rick multiple concise questions about his employment history before telling him a single thing about the job for which Rick is applying. Later on in the same conversation when Rick asks about the salary, Louis responds with *I'm giving you a chance to explore career options and get insight into my organization. It's not at all unusual for me to make full-time job offers to my interns*, hereby fabricating a history for his non-existent company and stating that the job is an unpaid internship in order to not have to pay Rick for his work.

Louis' formal tone and his addressing of Rick by his birth name changes drastically at about half an hour into *Nightcrawler*. After Rick has made his first mistake in navigating, Louis stops calling him Richard and addresses him as Rick for the first time, not once reverting to using his birth name again during the rest of the movie. Thus, using Rick's birth name could be interpreted as Louis trying to maintain a more respectful, professional attitude toward Rick, and contrarily, when having been disappointed in Rick for the first time, he starts calling him by his more casual nickname, which could be seen as him trying to assert his dominant role over Rick in their relationship. In addition to this change of tone toward Rick in Louis' discourse, at the end of this conversation, he also resorts to using his customary, emotionally detached and "textbooklike" discourse when trying to resolve an emerging conflict situation, vaguely quoting studies on the importance of communication. The following excerpt is from this scene, taking place at 00:28:33-00:30:41 in the movie.

Louis:	*Seat belt. Seat belt. Seat belt. Where are we going?*
Rick:	*We're taking the next right coming up. Slow down, man. That's too fast!*
Louis:	*Talk to me, Richard. Talk to me, Richard. What next?*
Rick:	*Next left, coming up. Fuck!*
Louis:	*I need more warning next time. Where are we going? Talk to me! What's next?*
Rick:	*Okay. Keeping on this five... No, six blocks. Then a right.*
Louis:	*On what?*
Rick:	*I made a mistake! It's a right five blocks back. It's just five blocks.*
Louis:	*I bet I wasted five dollars of gas just getting here, or don't you think that's a lot of money?*
Rick:	*I'm sorry. I couldn't see the screen, you were driving so fast.*
Louis:	*Okay, first of all, Richard, don't answer me by telling me a problem. I have enough of those already. Bring me a solution, and then we can make a decision together.*
Rick:	*Okay. Maybe if you didn't rush me.*
Louis:	*Don't rush you. Okay. I can use that. See, Rick, they've done studies and they found that in any system that relies on cooperation from a school of fish, say, or even a professional hockey team, for example, these experts have identified communication as the number one single key to success.*

The following dialogue excerpt is from a scene occurring at 00:58:32-00:59:02 in *Nightcrawler*. In the scene, Rick has made yet another mistake in navigating and Louis is verbally scolding him. When Rick tries to defend himself, Louis explains and justifies his linguistic choices by stating that, in fact, his harsh discourse stems from the potential he sees in Rick, as well as his positive perception of him. As Ozturk (2023) mentions, this kind of rationalization of abusive discourse by claiming that the motives behind it are actually well-intentioned and beneficial for the person being abused is a distinctively characteristic method of gaslighting as a manipulation strategy.

Louis:	*Since when did Coldwater become faster than Laurel? Huh? What was the thinking there? I didn't ask that to hear myself speak.*

Rick: *Because, you know, Coldwater only has six lights.*

Louis: *Yeah, but Laurel has places to pass. I can't get around this person until Ventura.*

Rick: *It's the same argument, man. I said this route. If you wanted to take Laurel, you should have said something.*

Louis: *I thought that you worked in other factors. If I didn't think that you could do better, I wouldn't ride you so hard about the routes. I think you know that, Rick. I think it may just be possible that I have a higher opinion of you than you have of yourself.*

Based on *Nightcrawler*'s narrative, it seems that after having spent more time with other characters and succeeded in building what he considers to be somewhat familiar relationships with them, Louis has no problem with gradually unveiling his aggressive, coercive nature by beginning to utilize verbal threats in his discourse. At 01:35:05-01:35:39 in the movie, when Louis and Rick are outside the *Chinatown Express* restaurant, planning to film an imminent, potentially violent confrontation that Louis has cunningly orchestrated between officers of the LAPD and two homicide offenders at large, Rick is hesitant to get out of Louis' car and go filming on the street, fearing for his personal safety. Frustrated and disappointed in Rick once again, as well as concerned about the possibility of not being able to get the best possible video footage, Louis pressures Rick to obey his commands, hinting at the possibility that he might have to hurt Rick is he does not comply. Although phrased in an indirect manner, this can be considered an explicit threat that, again, contains a specific variety of gaslighting in which Louis blames Rick for the prospect of his own aggressive behavior, stating that he would be ”obliged” to hurt Rick because of his actions, thus rejecting all responsibility of the violence to which he might resort. Louis also bluntly incorporates his general dislike of people into his threat, openly disclosing the antisocial characteristics of his persona. The following dialogue excerpt is from this scene, quoting Louis' threat in its entirety.

What if my problem wasn't that I don't understand people, but that I don't like them? What if I was obliged to hurt you for something like this? I mean, physically. I think you'd have to believe afterwards, if you could, that agreeing to participate and then backing out at the critical moment was a mistake. Because that's what I'm telling you. As clearly as I can.

Another pivotal character in *Nightcrawler* is Nina Romina (played by Rene Russo), a middle-aged woman who works as the director at Channel 6 KWLA News in Los Angeles. KWLA is the news agency to which Louis sells his very first piece of video documentary, shot at a crime scene following a carjacking. During the film, Louis has numerous conversations with Nina in order to build and maintain a stable, ongoing business relationship with her, i.e., to be able to sell his tapes to KWLA also in the future. After having sold many of his videos to KWLA, Louis begins hinting at his underlying romantic interests in Nina, also implying that he expects Nina to reciprocate his feelings. The following dialogue excerpt is from the scene in which Louis first voices his non-platonic interests in Nina, occurring at 00:42:55-00:44:15 in *Nightcrawler*.

Nina:	*We're leading with it. That's your third start this week.*
Louis:	*I'm focusing on framing. A proper frame not only draws the eye into a picture but keeps it there longer, dissolving the barrier between the subject and the outside of the frame.*
Nina:	*Is that blood on your shirt?*
Louis:	*I don't think so. You know, I recently heard of a Mexican restaurant called Cabanita. Have you heard of it?*
Nina:	*It's also on your sleeve.*
Louis:	*I didn't see that. What I'm asking is, do you like Mexican food, Nina?*
Nina:	*Yes.*
Louis:	*Cabanita has been called "an authentic taste of Mexico City." Do you wanna go with me? I think we could have fun together.*
Nina:	*Thanks, but I'm busy.*
Louis:	*Saturday is your night off, isn't it?*
Nina:	*I have a rule, Lou. I don't date people I work with. And I'm twice your age.*
Louis:	*I like older women. Besides, I don't work with you. You're someone I sell to.*
Nina:	*And I don't wanna fuck that up.*
Louis:	*What if by saying no, you fuck it up?*
Nina:	*Is that what you're saying?*
Louis:	*I didn't say that.*

Nina: *Well, I don't know what to say.*

In this dialogue excerpt, Louis uses the sociolinguistic tactic of diversion whenever Nina inquires him about the blood stains on his shirt. Louis swiftly disregards Nina's questions, changing the topic to a Mexican restaurant, *Cabanita*, to which he wants to invite Nina for an apparently romantic dinner. With this diversion, Louis is trying to distract Nina in order to avoid disclosing any information that might indicate his involvement in illegal activities, and also to explicitly convey an impression of his persistence in pursuing a romantic relationship with her. In addition to this, when Nina does not answer Louis' first question about the restaurant *Cabanita*, he tries to get her attention by addressing her by her name. Furthermore, Louis seems to be virtually unbothered by Nina's apparent reluctance to join him for a romantic date, and by voicing the question *What if by saying no, you fuck it up?*, he also begins incorporating coercive tactics in his discourse in order to continue his pursuit for an intimate relationship with her.

Louis' romantic interests in Nina, as well as the abnormal, harmful sociolinguistic behavior he portrays due to these interests, become increasingly apparent further on in the narrative of *Nightcrawler*. The following three dialogue excerpts are from a lengthy conversation between Louis and Nina, taking place at 00:47:04-00:53:10 in the movie, when Nina has eventually agreed to join Louis for a dinner at the restaurant *Cabanita*. The first excerpt portrays first and foremost the challenges and deficiencies in Louis' interpersonal communication skills, as his comparing of Nina's appearance to that of a KWLA news anchor Lisa Mays, as well as pointing out that he likes the way Nina smells, could be considered highly tactless, or at the very least, strange and questionable social conduct. Furthermore, Nina is obviously suprised when Louis tells her that he knows a lot about her history and has watched "all the videos" of her from her earlier career as a reporter. When Louis mentions that "everything" about Nina is online, he logically also reveals having searched every bit of information on Nina he could find, as otherwise he could not know about its availability. As Deirmenjian (1999) states, this kind of gathering of another individual's personal information can be seen as a form of *cyber stalking*; a specific type of harassment that is often used in order to establish a close personal relationship with said individual.

Nina:	*I didn't wake up until five. My body is so off, I feel like it's time for breakfast.*
Louis:	*I bet you're beautiful any time of the day. In fact, I'd say you're much prettier than Lisa Mays. I like the dark makeup on your eyes. I also like the way you smell.*
Nina:	*So, where you from, Lou?*
Louis:	*The north end of the Valley. Some of the calls sometimes take me over there, but nobody I know still lives out there. You're from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*
Nina:	*How did you know that?*
Louis:	*It's online. Everything about you is online. Not everything, but definitely a lot. I've watched all the videos from when you were a reporter. I'm sure you look at those, of course.*

The next dialogue takes place further on in the scene. Louis keeps on addressing Nina by her name and voicing his desire for an intimate relationship with Nina, who in turn continues expressing her complete lack of interest in this kind of relationship with him. Interestingly, following Nina's direct refusal, Louis begins his reply with *Thank you*, which can be seen as a means for him to completely disregard Nina's response in a superficially calm, formal and polite manner, portraying his total reluctance and apparent inability to accept her rejection. At this point, Louis also decides to suddenly bring up the positive contribution that his video material has had to the news agency's increasing ratings, and begins using this as leverage in his so-called negotiation strategies. This kind of sociolinguistic conduct, regardless of its indirect, implicative form, is yet another example of coercive discourse utilized by Louis.

Louis:	*Thanks for coming out to talk. The place I'm in now is that I want a relationship with someone I can team up with and share, like we share, the same job and hours and whatnot. I could go down a laundry list, but you get the idea.*
Nina:	*Yes. Well, I hope you find someone.*
Louis:	*Here's the thing about that, Nina. I'm quite certain I already have.*
Nina:	*Okay. Let me put this politely. I only came out to dinner with you, Lou, purely as a professional courtesy.*
Louis:	*Thank you. I don't think it's any secret that I've single-handedly raised the unit price of your ratings book.*

Nina: *Our ratings book price? Whoa.*

As the conversation between Louis and Nina continues, Louis eventually renounces all linguistic ambiguity and his suggestive, seemingly polite tone and begins to directly coerce Nina to start a romantic, physical relationship with him in order to keep him selling his video tapes exclusively to her agency. Louis incorporates both explicit demands such as *I want that. With you* and *I want you*, as well as indirect threats like *Like you want to keep your job and your health insurance*, and *There are many places I could go* in his discourse, and yet, repeatedly claims merely to "talk" and "negotiate" with Nina, who rightfully feels that Louis is threatening and sexually coercing her, and also outright accuses him of this. This kind of abusive interpersonal communication clearly portrays Louis' distorted conception of morality, as well as his views on what is considered normal and acceptable social conduct.

Louis: *There's certain good things about being alone. You have time to do the things you wanna do, like study and plan, but you can't have dinners like this or be physical with a person. I mean, outside of flirtationship.*

Nina: *Where are you going with this?*

Louis: *I want that. With you. Like you want to keep your job and your health insurance.*

Nina: *Look, just for starters, I don't need you to keep my fucking job.*

Louis: *You're the news director on the vampire shift of the lowest-rated station in Los Angeles. We have what could be considered an almost-exclusive relationship. There are many other places I could go. I have to think that you're invested in this transaction.*

Nina: *Wow. Where did you get the balls to even suggest something like this?*

Louis: *We're still talking.*

Nina: *No. There's nothing more to say.*

Louis: *You can leave.*

Nina: *Okay, look. You've done well. Okay? And we pay you well, very well. We always have. If you like, I could get you an exclusive retainer. That would be on top of your segment fees. I could maybe even get you a job at the station starting as a production assistant, so that you could learn the business from the inside. That's where you said your interests lie.*

Louis:	*You're not listening, Nina. I happen to know that you haven't stayed at one station for longer than two years at a time, and you're coming up on two years soon. I can imagine that your contract is for that length of time. And that next month's ratings directly affect that.*
Nina:	*So, you're threatening that if I don't...*
Louis:	*I'm negotiating.*
Nina:	*You're threatening to stop selling to me.*
Louis:	*That's your choice. The true price of any item is what somebody's willing to pay for it. You want something. And I want you.*
Nina:	*To fuck you.*
Louis:	*And as a friend.*
Nina:	*Jesus Christ, friends don't pressure friends to fucking sleep with them.*
Louis:	*Actually, that's not true, Nina. 'Cause as I'm sure you know, a friend is a gift you give yourself.*

Based on Louis' dialogue with Nina, it seems that he is completely nonchalant about Nina's lack of romantic interest in him, as well as the high likelihood of her discovering the deviant, abusive persona behind his composed and polite appearance. As mentioned in chapter *2.1.3 Psychopathy vs. sociopathy*, this type of indifference to other people's perception of oneself and one's relative unconcern about any potential repercussions for their exploitative actions are commonly acknowledged features in a psychopath's demeanor. Louis keeps addressing Nina by her name apparently whenever he feels that she is not complying with his demands, and makes no effort in trying to defend himself or deny Nina's accusations when she confronts him about his sexually coercive conduct, merely adding that he *also* wants Nina "as a friend". This, in addition to Louis' earlier comparison of the pros and cons of being single in relation to having an intimate relationship with another person, conveys his distorted perception of interpersonal relations as strictly transactional affairs, as well as his view of other people as commodities. He even directly refers to his relationship with Nina as a "transaction" in which he expects Nina to be invested. Louis' closing remark in this interaction; *A friend is a gift you give yourself*, can be seen as an ambiguous, ornate rhetoric summarizing these views in which Louis considers friends comparable to consumable goods that he may use as he pleases.

Louis' pathological lying and his seeming indifference to any potential repercussions for his actions is distinctly portrayed in his conversations with members of law enforcement. The following excerpt is from a dialogue occurring at 01:50:15-01:51:31 in *Nightcrawler*, in which detective Frontieri (played by Michael Hyatt) interrogates Louis after the violent encounter at the *Chinatown Express* restaurant. This confrontation has eventually led to multiple human casualties, including Louis' colleague, Rick. Earlier in the interrogation, Louis has told a completely fictitious narrative of the series of events leading up to the incident, denying any participation in the occurrences, thus also evading all responsibility for their outcome.

Frontieri:	*That's your story?*
Louis:	*That's what happened. That's why I'm sitting here with you. I think that the men saw my footage and they tracked me down.*
Frontieri:	*You want to know what I think?*
Louis:	*Yes, please.*
Frontieri:	*I think you withheld information. I think you saw the two men in the murder house in Granada Hills and you saw the car and you sat on it to get something you could film. What do you think about that?*
Louis:	*I think that would be a very unprofessional thing for me to do in my business.*
Frontieri:	*It would be murder.*
Louis:	*I can understand why you're looking into it, but I didn't do anything like that. Nothing that could be considered wrong.*
Frontieri:	*You don't fool me for a minute.*
Louis:	*I'm glad.*
Frontieri:	*I think everything you said is a lie.*
Louis:	*I wish my partner was here to back up what happened.*
Frontieri:	*You left your dead partner.*
Louis:	*No, the ambulances arrived. They're trained professionals.*
Frontieri:	*Yeah, and you seem real broken up about that.*
Louis:	*No. He died doing what he loved.*
Frontieri:	*You filmed him dying.*
Louis:	*Yeah. That's what I do. It's my job. I like to say that if you're seeing me, you're having the worst day of your life.*

In the dialogue between Louis and detective Frontieri, he yet again utilizes his shallow, polite demeanor and formal, emotionally detached responses in his discourse in order to avoid disclosing any information on the actual events that, if revealed, would incriminate him in the multiple losses of life. Many of Louis' linguistic choices in sentences such as *Yes, please*, *I think that would be a very unprofessional thing for me to do in my business*, and *I can understand why you're looking into it* express his seemingly courteous and objective, professional stance in the situation, as well as his blatantly insincere cooperative attitude toward the investigation that he, in reality, solely tries to misdirect. Louis states that he has done *nothing that could be considered wrong*, which could be interpreted as him either continuing to deceive detective Frontieri, or sincerely telling her that he sees nothing wrong with his actions, although still withholding all information about these actions. Furthermore, when detective Frontieri confronts Louis by telling him that she is not fooled by his rhetoric, he interestingly replies with *I'm glad*, portraying his unwavering self-confidence and arrogance toward law enforcement, as well as his indifference to any potential repercussions.

As demonstrated above, the character of Louis Bloom depicts each of the five central psycholinguistic traits of psychopaths addressed in chapter *2.3.3. Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use*. The overarching central theme of the story of *Nightcrawler*; Louis' pursuit of a successful career, is entirely founded on his untruthful narratives and deception of other people, as well as his ability to manipulate others in order to gain control over them. Throughout the film, Louis strives to achieve these goals by utilizing his superficially polite and composed demeanor combined with his shallow, psychologically detached discourse teeming with vague terminology. However, in addition to this, Louis also portrays a thorough indifference to any potential repercussions by appearing to be virtually unaffected by the numerous situations in which others see through his charade. Furthermore, in these circumstances he often resorts to verbal threats, also in their extreme, highly abusive form of sexual coercion. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of Louis' linguistic output aims to achieve some kind of personal gain, which is a highly typical phenomenon amongst psychopathic individuals. On the other hand, *Nightcrawler* approaches the representation of a psychopath by not only portraying Louis as a stereotypical, skillful and cunning manipulator, but also displaying the severe deficiencies in his interpersonal communication skills, as well as his incompetence in building any lasting relationships with other people.

4.1.3 David Collins – The unassuming self-preservationist

The story of *The Guest* begins with a man arriving at the house of the Petersons, introducing himself as "David Collins" to Laura, the mother of the family. David states to have known Laura's eldest son, Caleb, who served in the U.S. Army until apparently killed in action in Afghanistan. The following dialogue excerpt is from this scene, taking place at 00:02:36-00:03:44 in the movie. The dialogue immediately portrays a distinctive characteristic feature that persists in David's linguistic output throughout the entirety of the narrative; his unusually humble, polite and formal demeanor. David repeatedly addresses Laura as *Mrs. Peterson* or *ma'am*, thus establishing a courteous, respectful tone, as well as a seemingly compliant role in their interpersonal relationship. In addition to this, David also adheres to etiquette by thanking Laura when she invites her in and when she offers him a glass of water. David also formulates his wish for the glass of water in a fairly cautious and polite manner, minimizing the importance and urgency of his request by starting it with the adverbs *maybe* and *just*, as well as using the modal verb *would*. This type of highly courteous and seemingly respectful language use can be seen to, at least partly, originate from David's military background, but it also becomes apparent that by continuously utilizing such discourse, he aspires to earn the trust of other people and give them a reliable and harmless impression of himself.

David:	*Mrs. Peterson?*
Laura:	*Yes. Can I, help you?*
David:	*My name is David, Mrs. Peterson. I... I knew your son, Caleb. We trained together and served together and, well, we came to be good friends.*
Laura:	*Oh. Would you like to come inside?*
David:	*Thank you, ma'am.*
Laura:	*So, are you sure I can't get you anything?*
David:	*Maybe just some water would be nice.*
Laura:	*How did you get here?*
David:	*I ran. Needed the exercise. From the bus station, I mean, in town.*
Laura:	*You ran that whole way?*
David:	*Yes, ma'am.*

Laura: *Here you go.*

David: *All right. Thank you, ma'am.*

A moment later, David points out a photograph in which he is seen alongside Caleb. Noticing Laura's strong emotional reaction to this remark, David expresses his regret for having evoked these feelings and suggests that he should leave, after which Laura invites David to stay for a while longer. David's sociolinguistic conduct in this situation could be regarded as seemingly normal, even portraying a level of compassion. However, it eventually becomes clear that David is remarkably well acquainted with the social conventions and behavioral etiquette generally shared by his surrounding society, and also highly capable of exploiting these norms to induce desired reactions from other people. The dialogue excerpt below is from a scene occurring at 00:06:11-00:06:50 in *The Guest*, and the first instance of David utilizing this manipulation strategy by skillfully using his insinuations of leaving to his advantage. Furthermore, after Laura has objected to David's suggestion of leaving, David also mentions that he does not expect her to invite him to stay merely out of courtesy, thus indirectly implying that not letting him stay could, in fact, be considered impolite.

David: *It wasn't my intention to upset you, ma'am. I probably should have called first, but I don't own a cell phone yet and, I guess, I just wasn't thinking. I'm going to be on my way now, but I'd like it if we could exchange e-mails...*

Laura: *Wait, wait. No! Anna, Caleb's sister, she works nights, and she sleeps late. And I know she would love to meet you. Would you stay a little while longer?*

David: *Oh, you're not just saying that to be polite now? 'Cause you don't need to be.*

Laura: *No, I'm not. Please, stay. It's... It's nice having you here, and I would love to hear more about you and Caleb.*

David: *Well, all right.*

The dialogue excerpt below is from a scene occurring at 00:07:37-00:08:09 in the movie, in which, after the initial conversation between David and Laura, she introduces him to her 20-year-old daughter, Anna, played by Maika Monroe. David continues incorporating his customary formal and respectful tone in his discourse by also addressing Anna as *ma'am*,

much to her amusement. When Anna asks him about where he is planning to stay. David, again, replies with an insinuation of leaving and going to stay in a motel, thus cunningly prompting Laura to invite him to stay overnight. David responds to this invitation in his usual, overtly polite manner, voicing his superficial reluctance with *Oh, no. I couldn't put you all out*. When Laura expresses her persistency by stating that the family insists David to stay, he finally accepts her invitation, although seemingly agreeing to only spend one night at the family's home.

Anna:	*You knew Caleb?*
David:	*Yes, ma'am.*
Anna:	*"Yes, ma'am."? Okay. So, where are you staying?*
David:	*Well, I noticed a motel off the highway on the way here...*
Laura:	*No, no, no, no, no. You will stay with us while you're here.*
David:	*Oh, no. I couldn't put you all out.*
Laura:	*Nonsense. We would love to have you. We have plenty of room. In fact, you can stay in Caleb's old room. We insist.*
David:	*Well, I won't argue. Just for tonight, though.*

After having invited David to stay overnight, Laura shows him to Caleb's room in which he will be staying. David continues his superficial seeking for reassurance that his presence is welcome and that he is not imposing on the family's hospitality by voicing the question *Mrs. Peterson, are you sure you're comfortable with me staying in here?*, also further solidifying his unassuming portrayal of himself. David's enduring, seemingly polite and formal sociolinguistic demeanor is further established in the narrative of *The Guest* when he first meets the father of the family, Spencer Peterson, played by Leland Orser. Spencer mentions that he is going to have a beer before dinner, and also asks David if he wants one, to which David replies with *Well, no, thank you.* After this, Laura asks David if she could get him anything, to which David, yet again, responds by respectfully declining with *Oh, no, thank you, Mrs. Peterson, I'm fine.*

David's seemingly modest, undeserving demeanor and especially his continuous suggestions of leaving could be considered to approach a form of *reverse psychology* or *persuasive*

strategic self-anticonformity; a manipulation tactic in which one strives to achieve a desired outcome by suggesting actions leading to the opposite end result, counting on the other party to disagree with one's initial suggestion (MacDonald et al., 2011). In *The Guest*, instead of predicting the Petersons to be generally disagreeable, David utilizes the strategy of persuasive strategic self-anticonformity by exploiting the family's friendliness, sense of responsibility and social values. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, David seems to be well aware of the so-called *positive politeness*, i.e., one's desire to act in a generally thoughtful, considerate and supportive manner toward others, stereotypically associated with North-American culture (Culpeper et al., 2019), using this to his advantage. Throughout *The Guest*, David's superficially unassuming behavior seems to assist him in gaining the very things he claims to deem not necessary, as his seemingly reluctant and humble attitude toward accepting the Petersons' hospitality results in a constant increase of said hospitality.

The manipulation tactic utilizing persuasive strategic self-anticonformity is also present in the following excerpt from a dialogue between David and Spencer that takes place at 00:15:57-00:16:57 in the movie. In this conversation, David keeps addressing Spencer as *sir* to the point of Spencer getting noticeably annoyed with this overtly formal discourse. When asked about his future prospects, David can be considered to tell about his plans in a deliberately vague manner, diversely utilizing terminology expressing uncertainty, such as *figured*, *or something* and *I'm sure I'll find something* in his discourse, thus giving Spencer an impression of having no actual plans regarding his near future. In response to this, Spencer, expectedly, invites David to stay at their home for the immediate future and, respectively, David continues portraying his superficial reluctance to "impose on" the family's hospitality. At the end of the conversation, the dynamic between David and Spencer makes it seem like it is David who eventually agrees to Spencer's request, although in reality, Spencer and his family are the ones doing David a significant favor by accommodating him at their home for several days.

Spencer:	*But I know Laura, I know she's worried. She wonders if I'm ever, ever going to make any money.*
David:	*Your wife seems to respect you, sir.*
Spencer:	*What about you, though? What about you? What are your plans?*

David:	*Figured I'd get on a bus tomorrow, head down to Florida or something and start looking for work. I've done construction work before. So, I'm sure I'll find something.*
Spencer:	*No, no, no, no, no. That's crazy. That's crazy. You don't know where you're going. Stay here for a couple more days.*
David:	*No. No, I can't. I couldn't impose on your hospitality any longer, sir.*
Spencer:	*You're not... Impose on our... And "sir"? You're calling me "sir" now? You gotta stop with the "sir," my name's Spencer. You gotta call me Spencer, for God sakes.*
David:	*Okay.*
Spencer:	*Okay.*
David:	*All right.*
Spencer:	*Okay. So you're sticking around, right? You stick around at least till you know where you're going.*
David:	*Well, maybe just a couple more days, all right.*

In stark contrast to David's superficially charming and unassuming presentation of himself, he also frequently portrays various aggressive and extremely violent personal characteristics during the narrative of *The Guest*. These characteristics manifest themselves in multiple different forms that vary in their appearance and magnitude. One of the more subtle instances of David revealing his underlying violent nature is a scene in which he gives advice to Luke, the remaining son of the Petersons, who is bullied at school by a group of students. The following dialogue excerpt is from this scene, taking place at 00:51:50-00:52:19 in the movie.

David:	*Do you want some advice, Luke?*
Luke:	*Sure.*
David:	*Never let anyone pick on you. Otherwise, you'll carry it with you the rest of your life. Those kids at school, they're bigger than you?*
Luke:	*Yeah.*
David:	*Then bring a knife to school. If they take it off of you and beat you up, you go around their houses at night and burn them down with their families inside. What's the worst they can do?*
Luke:	*Yeah. Okay.*

David:	*Here. You keep it.*
Luke:	You're giving this to me?
David:	*Yeah, man, it's yours. I've got others.*

As mentioned above, David constantly addresses both Laura and Spencer in a strictly formal and highly respectful manner, using such terms as *Mrs.*, *ma'am* and *sir*. However, in the case of their teenage son, Luke, David can be considered to try to level with him by either calling him by his name, or addressing him casually as *man*. When offering Luke his advice on how to deal with bullying, David begins by formulating his discourse in a rather normal, calm and supportive manner, acknowledging the lasting psychological effects of this kind of abuse and telling Luke he should not submit to being bullied. However, after asking Luke if the bullies are physically larger than him, David suddenly suggests that Luke should bring a knife to school and resort to intensely violent behavior in order to defend himself and stand up to his abusers. David's further advice of burning down the bullies' houses with their families inside is so extreme, preposterous and conflicting with his customary well-composed demeanor that it could be easy to imagine how Luke might consider it a joke. However, this seems to not be the case, as at the end of their conversation, David ends up giving his butterfly knife to Luke.

David also utilizes verbal threats in his discourse at certain points of the narrative. When meeting Anna's friend Craig (played by Joel David Moore) at a party, David asks him if if he knows how one might be able to acquire a gun. Further on in the story, Craig arranges a meeting between himself, David and an arms dealer with whom he is familiar. While inspecting the wide selection of firearms the dealer has brought with him, David has a brief conversation with him. The following dialogue excerpt is from this conversation, taking place at 00:44:22-00:45:46 in *The Guest*.

| Arms dealer: | *Let's get started. Let's start with this. I mean, it's a standard Beretta. I'm sure you're familiar with it. In my opinion, if you've seen one of these, you've seen them all. But this baby, this here is a 9-millimeter Witness Elite. It's a very similar weapon to the Beretta, but I prefer the recoil. I mean, it's got absolutely no kick at all. You army?* |
| David: | *Yes, sir.* |

Arms dealer:	*I'm navy, myself.*
David:	*Yeah, that's fine.*
Arms dealer:	*You want the Elite?*
David:	*Oh, I'll take 'em all.*
Arms dealer:	*All the handguns?*
David:	*No. Everything. All your guns.*
Craig:	*Shit.*
Arms dealer:	*That's what I was thinking. Look, man, if you've brought money for all of them, I'll cut you a deal. You can take 'em all off my hands.*
David:	*No, I'm going to kill you.*
Craig:	*Hey, what the fuck, David?*
Arms dealer:	*Now, you listen to me one fucking second...*

When the arms dealer asks David if he is enlisted in the army, David responds in his usual, formal manner with *Yes, sir*. After having inspected some of the guns, David announces that he will take them all, to which the dealer, seemingly positively surprised, replies by stating that he is willing to sell all of the guns, as long as David is able to pay for them. At this point, David declines to pay the dealer and threatens him by calmly stating *No, I'm going to kill you*, thus also portraying a strong emotional detachment from his discourse. Although this part of David's dialogue could be regarded more as a straightforward announcement of his immediate actions than an actual threat, he really has no other reason to use this type of discourse than to intimidate the dealer and Craig, considering he has obviously planned to murder both of them all along. In any case, this discourse clearly portrays David's underlying psychopathic thought processes, and eventually, at the end of the scene, David shoots both the gun dealer and Craig.

The following dialogue between David and Anna occurs at 00:58:39-01:00:27 in *The Guest*, portraying David being threatening toward her in a very specific, indirect way. The first part of David's discourse is, yet again, highly courteous and seemingly compassionate, as he offers Anna his condolences for the unfortunate occurrences involving her friends, although, in fact, David is the very person responsible for both murdering Craig and framing Zeke for this homicide. When Anna remains completely silent after David's lengthy, shallow rhetoric, his

strategic usage of the single word *okay* could be regarded as a threat, indirectly instructing her to respond amenably, to which Anna, who could be considered to be anxious and even afraid at this point, reacts by complying and repeating the word *okay.* After this, David notices the mix cd Anna has burned for him and casually, even cheerfully, thanks her for it. This kind of a sudden fluctuation in David's psycholinguistic portrayal of emotions, rapidly shifting from sympathetic to aggressive to seemingly joyful, can be seen to represent his apparent ability to control his visible emotional responses, but also to indicate the very plausible possibility of him being unable to genuinely experience such emotions as concern or regret at all.

Anna:	*What?*
David:	*Hey. I just wanted to say... I just wanted to say how sorry I am about Craig. He seemed like a really cool guy. And Zeke getting arrested... Again, I'm... I'm very sorry. I know you don't need me here at this stressful time. I'm not helping, which is a shame, because I promised Caleb I would do anything I could to help your family. But just so you know, I'll be moving on in a couple of days. So, you don't need to put up with me much longer, okay?*
David:	*"Okay."*
Anna:	*Okay.*
David:	*Good. What is this? Is this the CD you made me?*
Anna:	*Yeah.*
David:	*Is it done?*
Anna:	*Yeah.*
David:	*Well, thank you. I can't wait to listen to it.*

Further on in the narrative of *The* Guest, it is revealed that David has been a subject of some kind of a medical experiment conducted by *KPG*, which appears to be a secretive government organization connected to covert military operations. This experimentation also seems to have involved some kind of neurological conditioning. At this point of the story, David's behavior turns extremely violent and homicidal, as he tries to conceal his identity and stop the spread of any knowledge of his whereabouts by eliminating the people who have met him or who might have information on him. Eventually, David also ends up targeting the members of the Peterson family. After having been tracked down by a squad of armed KPG soldiers, David is

hiding inside the Petersons' residence together with Laura. In the following dialogue between David and Laura, occurring at 01:13:17-01:14:38 in the film, Laura is evidently confused by the chaotic and violent situation in which she finds herself, and asks David for an explanation.

Laura:	*David, what... What is happening, David? Who are those men?*
David:	*I really am sorry about this, Mrs. Peterson. I'm afraid I haven't been fully honest with you.*
Laura:	*What do you mean?*
David:	*It would take too long to explain. I wanted to help. I considered it my mission to assist you all while I was here. There were just too many complications.*
Laura:	*What are you talking about? David, why are those men trying to kill you?*
David:	*It doesn't matter.*
Laura:	*Did you... Did you even know my son?*
David:	*I did. Yes. We were in the same program. And he would understand what I have to do here.*
Laura:	*He's here in the...*
David:	*I'm sorry.*

Regardless of the extreme circumstances of the actual armed conflict around them, David, in his usual manner, presents himself in a highly polite and composed fashion by calmly stating *I really am sorry about this, Mrs. Peterson. I'm afraid I haven't been fully honest with you.* He continues to address Laura formally as *Mrs. Peterson*, shallowly expresses his regret for the situation by saying *I really am sorry about this*, and politely admits to having deceived her by stating *I'm afraid I haven't been fully honest with you.* In the end, he offers no explanation for the situation, merely telling Laura that he got the family involved in these highly perilous circumstances because he considered it his "mission" to assist the Petersons while staying at their home. David also justifies his imminent actions, i.e. murdering Laura, by telling her that *he would understand what I have to do here*, referring to her deceased son, Caleb. With this statement, David also declines all responsibility for his homicidal actions, portraying himself as having no choice in the matter. Eventually, when Laura tries to yell to the soldiers in order to alert them to David's location, David stabs her and, lastly, apologizes to her once more.

After taking Laura's life, David proceeds to kill most of the members of the KPG squad, and leaves the Petersons' residence by car. On his way, he notices Spencer approaching him from the opposite direction, unknowingly driving straight toward the bloodshed David has left behind at their house. David intentionally collides into Spencer head-on, walks up to him and says *I'm really sorry about this, sir*, after which he executes Spencer. Therefore, interestingly, David maintains his formal and polite tone with both Laura and Spencer, even when murdering them. He keeps addressing them respectfully, and also expresses regret for his actions in his customary, shallow and emotionally detached manner. The motives for this psycholinguistic behavior remain unclear, as it can no longer be regarded as a manipulation strategy. It could be considered that either David has become so accustomed with this learned demeanor that it has become entirely habitual for him, or that this deceptive behavior is truly pathological and intertwined with his psychopathic condition, from wherever it may originate.

At the end of *The Guest*, David goes after Anna and Luke, who have already been informed of their parents' deaths. At 01:29:12-01:29:51 in the movie, while trying to locate the siblings, David proclaims in an obviously insincere manner *I'm really sorry about this, guys. I tried to think of another way to do it. Any other solution.* A moment later he shouts *Luke! Come on out, buddy! I'm not going to hurt you.* These sections of David's dialogue can be seen as his final, futile efforts to deceive and manipulate the members of the Peterson family in order to gain their trust. After expressing his regret for his actions with *I'm really sorry about this, guys*, David continues evading the responsibility for these actions by, again, telling Anna and Luke that he had no choice in the matter. When David realizes he last lost their trust, he tries to appeal to Luke once more, knowing that Luke is the one who has considered him a rather close friend. He attempts to lure Luke out by deceptively claiming that he is not going to harm him, and also by affectionately addressing him as *buddy*. These tactics no longer work in David's advantage, and in the end, Anna and Luke survive their encounter with him.

The psycholinguistic portrayal of David Collins can be considered rather binary, as for the majority of the narrative of *The Guest*, David's language use consists of a fairly small number of distinctive, recurring elements depicting his seemingly unassuming nature. These elements include such discourse as his humble and polite, although often obviously superficial interpersonal communication, his generally courteous conduct and formal addressing of

others, and his apparently thoughtful and compassionate, but in actuality, shallow and psychologically detached linguistic expression of emotions. At the total opposite end of the spectrum, there are instances when David's verbal output is highly aggressive, direct and threatening, and these sections of David's dialogue can be seen to offer the audience an uninhibited view to his underlying psychological processes. This duality of David's discourse could be considered rather incoherent and even contradictory, but as addressed in the analysis based on the various dialogue excerpts introduced in this chapter, virtually the entirety of David's respectful, unassuming discourse can be regarded as a specific, covert form of deception and manipulation based on persuasive strategic self-anticonformity and impression management. In conclusion, David Collins can be seen as a fairly typical portrayal of a superficially charming, homicidal modern-day psychopath in contemporary cinema, depicting each of the five central traits often present in the linguistic output of psychopaths defined in chapter *2.3.3 Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use.*

4.2 Comparative analysis of the three character portrayals

As addressed in the previous chapter *4.1 Distinctive features in the language use of individual characters*, each of the three psychopathic main characters of the motion pictures examined in this thesis offers a distinctive representation of psychopathic language use that differs rather substantially from the other two portrayals. This chapter explores the differences and similarities between these three linguistic representations of psychopathy by analyzing and comparing the ways the psychopathic characters utilize various linguistic strategies in relation to the five psycholinguistic traits defined in chapter *2.3.3 Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use.*

Manipulation in its various forms can be regarded as one of the most essential factors of psychopathic language use in each of the three movies observed in this thesis, as all psychopathic main characters frequently use this psycholinguistic strategy in order to achieve their goals in the narratives. Interestingly, in *Gone Girl*, the initial intended victim of the damage caused by Amy Dunne's manipulation, her husband Nick, is also the only person in the movie who is not expected to fall for this deceptive strategy. Instead, Amy's goal is to

manipulate everyone else–their friends and neighbors, law enforcement, the press, and eventually, the whole American public–thus turning them against Nick. Amy also manipulates her earlier partner, Desi, by displaying insincere romantic interests in him in order to take advantage of him and lure him in a highly vulnerable situation, as well as undermining his experiences by gaslighting him. Furthermore, the film's audience could also be considered to be targeted by Amy's manipulation, as her dialogue during the first half of *Gone Girl* is proven to mostly consist of deceptive, fictitious descriptions of events that have never actually taken place in the story, thus potentially leading the audience astray when they are forming conceptions of the film's narrative. Comparatively, in *Nightcrawler*, the character Louis Bloom customarily uses various manipulation tactics on several other characters in order to advance his career, mostly by the means of impression management, and also by appealing to the egos of other people by complimenting them. Similarly to *Gone Girl*'s Amy, Louis also applies certain gaslighting strategies, especially after having used abusive language with his business partner, Rick. In *The Guest*, the character David Collins almost exclusively strives to manipulate others by the means of persuasive strategic self-anticonformity, presenting himself as a very unassuming individual. This strategy is used by David for many types of direct personal gain, as well as impression management, as David continuously aims to portray himself as a highly trustworthy and harmless person in order to earn the trust of others.

Lying is strongly related to the psycholinguistic strategy of manipulation, and each of the main characters in the three movies tend to lie frequently in order to control others and achieve various types of personal gain. In *Gone Girl*, the entire story arc is founded on the character Amy Dunne's deceptive, fictitious narratives of the circumstances leading up to her own murder, most of which are represented as her written diary entries. As mentioned above, the central motive for Amy's lying is to form highly cunning and calculated, comparatively believable narratives of her murder, framing her husband Nick as the perpetrator. When Amy's plan does not reach its intended goal, she also ends up fabricating additional narratives, blaming her disappearance on her earlier partner, Desi, in order to deceive law enforcement and the press. In *Nightcrawler*, Louis Bloom utilizes various deception tactics mainly for impression management, i.e., presenting himself, his "organization" and his professional abilities in a highly exaggerated and overtly positive light. With these strategies, Louis aims to control the way other people perceive him, thus gaining higher occupational status and social

power over others. Similarly to *Gone Girl*'s Amy Dunne, Louis also systematically lies to the authorities, fabricating stories of, for instance, the circumstances leading up to the altercation at the *Chinatown Express* restaurant, that also results in the death of his colleague, Rick. The motive for this deception is the avoidance of disclosing incriminating information, as he tries to divert the authorities by denying his participation in the events in order to evade any legal repercussions. In the case of *The Guest*, it often remains unclear whether the narratives David Collins tells the Peterson family are truthful or not, so it is difficult to unequivocally define the frequency in which David lies during the story. It is clear that David is untruthful about at least some of his history and his military career, and he also tries to deceive the Petersons' children by claiming that he does not intend to hurt them, after having killed their parents and friends. However, the main deception tactic used by David Collins is his illusory, unassuming portrayal of himself, as well as his unwillingness to disclose any personal information.

The *superficial politeness* of the three characters can be seen to be represented in a rather consistent manner, as each character uses this psycholinguistic conduct as a distinctive manipulation strategy. *Gone Girl*'s Amy Dunne portrays this type of behavior especially when interacting with Desi Collings, exploiting his affection for her by complimenting him and verbally expressing her insincere romantic interests in him. In *Nightcrawler*, Louis Bloom utilizes superficial politeness frequently throughout the movie in order to appear seemingly formal, professional and courteous, often resulting in a blatantly shallow, overtly flattering discourse. The distinction between Louis and the other two characters regarding this type of psycholinguistic behavior is that Louis' is clearly portrayed as severely incompetent in using charming and friendly discourse in any credible manner, and because of this, several characters in *Nightcrawler* are able to see right through his charade and seem to regard him as a socially challenged and generally unlikable individual. Contrarily to this, *The Guest*'s David Collins is extremely adept in using deceptively pleasant, respectful, courteous and humble discourse, and few people in the story are able to question the sincerity of David's portrayal of himself and recognize the underlying exploitative motives behind his charming facade.

The psychopathic main characters' *psychological detachment* from their discourse is clearly noticeable at certain points of each of the three movies. In *Gone Girl*, Amy Dunne's discourse can be generally considered quite emotional, as she frequently describes the negative feelings

caused by the decline of her marriage in quite a diverse manner. However, Amy's shallow, cold and emotionless linguistic output is also visible at times, especially in the scene in which she describes the fictitious events of Desi Collings having kidnapped her and held her captive, repeatedly assaulting and abusing her. Amy describes these hypothetically traumatic and extreme experiences by utilizing strongly loaded, emotional discourse in her narrative, but can be considered to fail in using this discourse in a fully credible and cohesive manner. Unlike Amy Dunne, Louis Bloom of *Nightcrawler* can be seen to constantly have major difficulties in expressing any kind of emotions in his discourse, as a considerable part of his language use consists of glaringly shallow, often lengthy rhetoric in which he either describes his personal attributes in a highly exaggerated manner, or uses some type of technical jargon as a device for persuasion. *The Guest* portrays David Collins as an extremely calm and composed individual who, aside from his generally friendly and courteous appearance, barely displays any emotions at all in his discourse. David often presents himself as compassionate or regretful, but his discourse rarely corresponds with these emotions. Even when he murders the people who have welcomed him to their home and provided for him, David only apologizes to them in a strikingly shallow, emotionless manner when claiming their lives.

Threatening and *coercion* are psycholinguistic tactics that are also utilized by all of the three psychopathic characters. *Gone Girl*'s Amy Dunne reveals her aggressive, threatening nature to her husband, Nick, at the end of the movie, when she coerces him to continue their marriage by threatening to fabricate additional fictitious narratives if he decides to leave her, thus ruining what is left of his reputation. Amy also claims to be pregnant with Nick's child, unscrupulously using their potential unborn offspring as leverage when coercing Nick to stay in the relationship. In *Nightcrawler*, Louis Bloom directs his verbal threats especially at two central characters: his colleague Rick, and the director of the KWLA news agency, Nina Romina. Louis repeatedly threatens Rick when getting disappointed in his unsatisfactory job performance, and also when Rick refuses to obey Louis' commands. The most noticeable portrayal of Louis' abusive and exploitative persona is his behavior toward Nina. Louis tells Nina about his desire to build a romantic relationship with her, and when Nina politely rejects his approaches, Louis resorts to explicit sexual coercion by threatening to stop selling his video tapes to Nina's agency, thus implying that her options are either to lose her job, or agree to begin a nonconsensual, intimate relationship with him. Because of this, Louis can be seen

as the most coercive of the three psychopathic main characters examined in this research, frequently introducing his various "negotiation tactics" in several casual interactions with others. Contrarily to this, *The Guest*'s David Collins only utilizes threatening language in his discourse in a few occations, and the motives for these threats do not seem to be associated with coercion or personal gain. In one instance, David calmly informs two other people that he is going to kill them, right before he does. This can be regarded as a very simple form of intimidation, potentionally only meant for David's own delight, as he cannot be considered to gain anything substantial by making this statement. The other type of David's threatening discourse is very subtle and indirect, and its only motive seems to be to get the other person, Anna Peterson, to respond to his discourse in a compliant manner, without any further demands or expectations. Therefore, although David Collins can perhaps be regarded as the most dangerous and violent of the three psychopathic characters, the absence of threatening language in his discourse does not correspond with his homicidal actions.

As stated above, each of the three psychopathic main characters portrays all of the five psycholinguistic traits addressed in chapter *2.3.3 Defining five central categories of psychopathic language use*, but in vastly differing ways. Manipulation can be considered the central characteristic in each of these linguistic representations of psychopathy, and depending on the character, this strategy of deception and social control includes various forms and degrees of lying and superficial politeness. *Gone Girl*'s Amy Dunne can be regarded as a prime example of a deceptive, manipulative psychopath that systematically uses lies to manage and control people's impressions of others, as well as herself. *The Guest*'s David Collins, on the other hand, exclusively utilizes his unassuming, courteous and humble demeanor to earn people's trust, and this manipulation strategy enables him to use others for personal gain, as well as conceal his homicidal nature. Psychologically detached discourse is also a part of each character's language use, either depicted as a psycholinguistic tactic mostly used for avoidance of disclosure or impression management or, especially in the case of Louis Bloom, as a portrayal of the psychopaths' often underdeveloped interpersonal communication skills. The presence of threatening and coercion in the psychopathic characters' discourse varies greatly as well, as David Collins barely utilizes this psycholinguistic strategy at all, Amy Dunne uses it to merely keep her marriage intact, and Louis Bloom actively coerces others to comply to his demands strictly for his personal gain, regardless of any repercussions.

5 Conclusion and discussion

The objective of this thesis has been to examine the ways in which the psychological and neurobiological condition of psychopathy is portrayed through characters' language use in contemporary cinema. These cinematic portrayals of psychopathy could be observed and analyzed in various distinct ways, by focusing on different aspects of the vast and multidimensional film-to-text content present in motion pictures. As the focus of this research is strictly on the written dialogues of the three movies from the year 2014 addressed in earlier chapters, all observations and conclusions are based on the verbal output of the psychopathic characters, as well as the interpretations of the potential psycholinguistic processes behind these discourses.

As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the linguistic representations of psychopathy in *Gone Girl*, *Nightcrawler* and *The Guest* are rather varied and multifaceted, as each of the three psychopathic main characters portrays multiple psycholinguistic traits often associated with psychopathy, utilizing these discourses in various differing ways. In this thesis, I have chosen five central aspects of psychopathic language use–manipulation, lying, superficial politeness, psychological detachment and threatening/coercion–as the basis of my analysis, founding this categorization on earlier research. All of the psychopathic characters observed in this research–Amy Dunne, Louis Bloom and David Collins–can be considered to frequently use highly manipulative language in its many forms in order to achieve their goals, often also incorporating lying and other strategies of deception in their discourse. All of them also tend to practice impression management and avoid disclosing any incriminating information by implementing superficially polite and charming discourse, as well as various types of psychologically detached language in their verbal output. At specific points of the narratives, each of the three psychopathic characters also momentarily lets go of their shallow, insincere facade and displays their underlying, abusive and exploitative persona by resorting to threatening discourse, often using it to coerce others for some type of personal gain.

As mentioned in chapter *4.2 Comparative analysis of the three character portrayals*, the psycholinguistic representations of the three characters differ quite substantially from each other. *Gone Girl*'s Amy Dunne can be seen to be portrayed as a vengeful, cold and calculating,

yet arguably fairly emotional manipulator, whose actions may seem rather stereotypical in comparison to various other cinematic portrayals of psychopaths, but whose marital motives and lengthy monologues depicting her inner speech processes offer quite a unique take on the subject matter. *Nightcrawler*'s Louis Bloom can be considered a modern portrayal of a socially incompetent and financially struggling psychopath trying to build a successful career and gain an established social status, and who eventually seems to achieve these goals, greatly benefiting from his apparent absence of empathy, conscience and moral values. Amy Dunne and Louis Bloom are represented as psychopaths who mainly seem to avoid direct homicidal actions, but contrarily to this, *The Guest*'s David Collins can be regarded as a relatively classic portrayal of a superficially unassuming, polite and charming serial killer who is extremely competent in earning people's trust, yet customarily resorts to extreme violence without any credible expression of remorse or genuine display of compassion toward others.

Interestingly, based on the results of this research, the psycholinguistic portrayals of psychopathy in *Gone Girl*, *Nightcrawler* and *The Guest* seem to correspond fairly well with the findings of earlier studies conducted on actual psychopaths, which have recognized and defined distinctive, shared linguistic features often present in the discourse of individuals suffering from the disorder. Unlike some of these studies that have examined real-life psychopathic language use rather methodically and in great detail by observing, for example, word patterns and frequencies, affective tones, as well as such nonverbal communicative aspects as pauses and disfluencies, this thesis has mainly focused on using critical discourse analysis to examine and interpret the underlying psychological processes and motives behind the language use of psychopathic characters in contemporary cinema, especially in situations involving interpersonal communication. The low sample size of this research has made it possible to analyze the language use of each of the three psychopathic characters in a fairly detailed manner, but these linguistic representations cannot even remotely be considered to offer a comprehensive view of the general concept of psycholinguistic portrayal of psychopathy in cinematic discourse. Therefore, further research could be conducted on the matter by examining both the film-to-text content and the various linguistic aspects of characters in even greater detail, and also by widening the scope of research by increasing the number of analyzed movies.

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7 Appendix

I certify that artificial intelligence was not used in any way in the writing of this thesis.