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Sympathy for the Devil

Defending his decision to deal with the dark side of human nature and the consequences of evil actions in the Afterlife, Dante sets out his methodology in the opening canto of *The Divine Comedy*:

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
 What was this forest savage, rough and stern,
 Which in the very thought renews the fear.
 So bitter is it, death is little more;
 But of the good to treat, which there I found,
 Speak will I of the other things I saw there. (*Inf.* I)

The sinners who are permanently residing in the *Inferno* are responsible for many of Dante's more celebrated poetic verses. It is also undeniable that several of Scorsese's unforgettable protagonists are killers and/or double-crossers, and that one of the most significant topics in his films is betrayal. On the printed page Dante reveals 'the depths of depravity and self-willed flight from the light of which we are capable' (Royal 1999: 42); and, over seven centuries later, Scorsese has illuminated commensurate murky dimensions in human behaviour.

Scorsese explains that he finds 'the antagonist more interesting than the protagonist in drama, the villain more interesting than the good guy. Then there's what I guess is a decidedly Christian point of view: "who are we to judge, to point out the speck in our brother's eye, while we have a beam in our own eye"' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 78). He admits that he presents people who are 'doing bad things. And we condemn those aspects of them. But they're also human beings. And I find that often the people passing moral judgment on them may ultimately be worse' (in Christie 1999: 225). Scorsese explains that the central character Teddy in *Shutter Island* 'was literally taking the weight of the cross, that character, the guilt that he had, what he did, what he experienced in his life, and if he did experience it, even, we don't even know, because some of

it was in his head, but that guilt was real, and that is interesting to me' (in Aftab 2013). Teddy's last words are: 'Which would be worse – to live as a monster, or to die as a good man?' It is a dilemma that links to the paradoxes of Plato's *Gorgias*: "to escape punishment is worse than to suffer it" (474b); to suffer punishment and pay the penalty for our faults is the only way to be happy' (Ricoeur 1967: 43).

The upper circles

In the upper levels of the *Inferno* Dante finds room for a number of lustful, gluttonous, avaricious and wrathful personalities (who are guilty of four of the Seven Deadly Sins that he also addresses in *Purgatorio*). Reynolds points out that 'Dante speaks so seldom of marriage that the slightest reference to it is intriguing' (2006: 267). In Canto V are the famous Italian lovers Paolo and Francesca, whose passion leads to their death. (Scorsese's equivalent couple are Newland Archer and Countess Ellen in *The Age of Innocence*, but as their infidelity is curtailed through a sense of duty, they are placed in Chapter 6 of this book.) When Francesca falls in love with her handsome brother-in-law, the couple are killed by Francesca's husband on discovering the affair. 'To medieval eyes the relationship was thus doubly illicit, incestuous as well as adulterous, since a married couple became one flesh' (Shaw 2014), so that 'Dante's art lies in this complexity, the impossibility of categorising [Francesca] as purely good or purely bad' (Shaw 2014). There are a few examples of long-lasting marriages in Scorsese's filmography (most notably with the focus on his parents in *Italianamerican*) but many more instances of blazing marital arguments about infidelity, such as Henry Hill and Karen in *GoodFellas*, and Jordan Belfort and Naomi (Margot Robbie) in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. When the boxer Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro) suspects that his brother Joey (Joe Pesci) has had an affair with his wife Vickie (Cathy Moriarty) in *Raging Bull*, the fraternal bond increases the rage; and the 'blood brother' relationship between Sam and Nicky adds an extra *frisson* to the latter's adultery with Ginger in *Casino*.

Scorsese regards *Casino* as offering a well-known narrative: 'Gaining Paradise and losing it, through pride and through greed – it's the old fashioned Old Testament story' (in Christie 1999: 224). He explains, 'Ultimately it's a tragedy. It's the frailty of being human. I want to push audiences' emotional empathy with certain types of characters who are normally considered villains' (in Christie 1999: 225). Evidently, the Bible is filled with the narratives of people

‘doing wrong’ in the Old Testament – such as the story of King David, in which Scorsese has expressed an interest. Hans Urs von Balthasar remarks: ‘Guilt or sin is contrary to right, and because it is the disruption of that ordered right or right order (*recitudo*) implanted by the Creator in the nature of things, it contains within itself its own punishment’ (1986: 83). In *Casino*, Sam has large signs bearing the words ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ in his office. Balthasar points out: ‘Indeed, the order perverted by the creature still affirms itself in its very perversion: when No is said to God, the louder Yes resounds; in the pain of chastisement, the unity of goodness and pleasure is acknowledged’ (1986: 83).

Below the lustful are the gluttons, the greedy and the prodigal – notable examples being found in *GoodFellas*, *Casino* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. When Karen asks her husband Henry for money for shopping in *GoodFellas* the amount is measured by the thickness of the wad of cash; and despite the warnings from the local mafia boss, Paulie Cicero (Paul Sorvino), Henry earns money from selling drugs and buys a new home whose décor speaks of excess. When Henry and his friends carry out the Lufthansa robbery, the stolen money leads to visible extravagance (one gangster spends the money from the ‘Biggest Heist’ on a pink Cadillac and a fur coat for his wife) that would attract unwanted attention from the authorities. Scorsese explains that a gangster’s job is not to commit murder but to make a lot of money: ‘Someone gets out of line, and it ruins making the money for everybody, and he’s got to go’ (in Ebert 2008: 110–11).

However, the rows of suits and dresses in the wardrobes in *GoodFellas*, and the expensive jewellery that Sam lavishes on Ginger in *Casino*, are outdone by the immoderation in *The Wolf of Wall Street* – from money, to clothes, to drink, to drugs:

The soul thinks first that it can find this goal in all the paltry little good things of life; what is nearest seems to be the pinnacle of all that is worth striving for, while he who is truly the most high, God, seems far away. This false evaluation leads to the vice most severely censured by Dante, the ‘thirst for more and more’, avarice and *auri sacra fames*. (Balthasar 1986: 78)

In the words of Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*:

For all the gold that is beneath the moon,
Or ever has been, of these weary souls
Could never make a single one repose. (*Inf.* VII)

Howard Hughes is obviously caught up in the lure of riches in *The Aviator*, with Juan Trippe (Alec Baldwin) acting as a tempter. Annette Wernblad points

Figure 2.1 The devil at work: Trippe toys with his prey in *The Aviator*.

out the first time that the audience sees Trippe ‘is the precise moment when Scorsese chooses to go from the abstraction of two-color to the heightened reality of three-strip Technicolor’ (2011: 198) – an artistic decision that reflects the historical development of colour film at the same time as making Hughes’s devilish nemesis more vibrant. As Trippe toys with Hughes, puffing on his pipe as he sits outside the screening room in which Hughes has incarcerated himself, he takes on a satanic aura. (**Figure 2.1**)

In Ps. 73 the psalmist writes of ‘the happiness of sinners secure in their good fortune. ... The world appears to be so perverse that the only rational course is to live like them, to have done with God and to make common cause with the cynical potentates of the earth, the successful people, those human “gods” who seem hardly mortals at all’ (Ratzinger 1988: 88). Yet Dante ‘sets himself out to refute the opinion that nobility is derived from wealth and possessions. Riches, being base, are the very opposite of what is noble. To begin with, there is no justice in the distribution of wealth. It can be acquired by chance, by inheritance or by unlawful means’ (Reynolds 2006: 83). Several of Scorsese’s films underline this point, from the world of the Italian Mafia to Wall Street.

Further below in the *Inferno* are those who have been malicious, including the heretics – a label that was applied to Dante, whose publication *De Monarchia* remained on the Index until 1881, as well as to Scorsese when he brought Kazantzakis’s once ‘Indexed’ novel *The Last Temptation* to the screen. There were orthodox clerics who burnt and banned Dante’s work and saw him as a radical, so that it became dangerous to possess *De Monarchia*, just as cinemagoers found it to be perilous to attend a screening of *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988 when the cinema on St Michel Boulevard in Paris was set on fire in protest.

Lower hell: The violent

The seventh circle of the *Inferno* is the home for those who have committed violence in one of three ways: against one's neighbour, one's self or God:

All the first circle of the Violent is;
 But since force may be used against three persons,
 In three rounds 'tis divided and constructed.
 To God, to ourselves, and to our neighbour can we
 Use force; I say on them and on their things,
 As thou shalt hear with reason manifest.
 A death by violence, and painful wounds,
 Are to our neighbour given; and in his substance
 Ruin, and arson, and injurious levies;
 Whence homicides, and he who smites unjustly,
 Marauders, and freebooters, the first round
 Tormenteth all in companies diverse. (*Inf.* XI)

Here is the abode of the murderers – and there are plenty of those in Scorsese films who have broken the commandment 'that forbids direct and intentional killing as gravely sinful. The murderer and those who cooperate voluntarily in murder commit a sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 2268).

However, one of the criticisms aimed at Dante was that he had created some rather 'sympathetic sinners' so that the reader's task is to make the distinction between the narrator of *The Divine Comedy* and the Pilgrim. Rather than offering moralizing judgements, Dante 'uses irony to undercut the alluring words of sinners who present themselves rather as victims than as perpetrators of outrage in the eye of God' (Hollander 1998) and queries whether it is wrong to feel pity for the damned:

Who is a greater reprobate than he
 Who feels compassion at the doom divine? (*Inf.* XX)

Indeed, Scorsese has explained his own dilemma when filming stories about the gangster community, as he was familiar with such an environment as a child: 'I can't make a picture where they're bad guys. They can't be bad guys to me' (in Ebert 2008: 111). Many of his characters are multidimensional murderers who would reside in the *Inferno* but have odd loveable quirks: in *Casino*, Nicky is a man who will hurry home to make breakfast for his son after committing

a crime. This is the world that Scorsese grew up in, as represented by Charlie's uncle in *Mean Streets*, who is based on a gangster whom the director once knew: 'The way he moved, what happened when he came out of his doorway – it was the parting of the Red Sea' (in Schickel 2013).

In taking on the role of Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, Robert De Niro aimed to never let the audience know he was crazy, and his additions to the script were intended to 'win over the audience's sympathies' (Tait 2015: 308). Scorsese once described the role as a cross between Charles Manson and Saint Paul (see Cieutat 1986: 115), an idea reflected in the fact that Travis carves a cross into his bullets as if he is on a sacred mission.

In applying for a job as a taxi driver, Travis tells his potential boss that his licence is 'clean. Real clean, like my conscience.' He smiles as he apologizes for his 'joke' and looks down at the man he calls 'sir', who does not look like a successful man himself. Here is a twenty-six-year-old former marine with an honourable discharge (or so he claims), appearing to 'honour his father and mother' by sending a card for their wedding anniversary. Yet he lies about his life and omits his address, consoling his parents with the words: 'Don't worry about me. One day there'll be a knock on the door and it'll be me.' He evidently does not keep the Sabbath (as he sometimes works seven days a week) and he admits to dishonesty by not using the meter.

When Travis shaves his head and sports a Mohawk (as favoured by the Special Forces in Vietnam), there is no doubt that he intends to kill. 'All through the *Commedia* there is a personal agenda of vendetta' (Reynolds 2006: 276), and the theme of 'revenge' clearly echoes through *Taxi Driver*, both in the actions of the central protagonist and in the cameo role of a taxi passenger (played by Scorsese by accident rather than design when the nominated actor was unavailable), who utters some of the vilest dialogue heard in any of his films. Anger, misogyny and racism combine when the passenger explains that his wife is with 'a nigger' and that he is going to exact retribution by killing and mutilating her. 'You must think I'm pretty sick?' is presumably meant as a rhetorical question, although the passenger would not realize that his listener has violent plans of his own. Illuminated by a red glow, Travis will explain to his colleague Wizard (played by Peter Boyle, an actor who had studied theology himself), 'I just want to go out and really, really do something' and 'I've got some bad ideas in my head.' Wizard's onscreen advice is 'get laid, get drunk' but off screen Peter Boyle commented on the Calvinist script: 'It's predestination. In Calvinism, you're predestined, and human nature is so hopeless that it can

only be saved by grace. So it's a triumph of faith over works and of grace over nature' (in Kelly 1980: 98).

Scorsese admits that 'Travis wants to clean up the sin, and yet he's immersed in it himself. What he really wants to do is to clean *himself* up' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 101). Roger Ebert compared the film to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and explained: 'The existentialist hero wonders if life is worth living. The ironic hero is greatly amused by people who wonder about things like that. And there you have the difference between the work of Paul Schrader and Quentin Tarantino' (in Raymond 2015: 33). Schrader, who describes Travis's personality as 'built like a Protestant church' (in Wilson 2011: 10), identifies both Catholicism and Calvinism as being 'infused with the sense of guilt, redemption by blood, and moral purpose – all acts are moral acts, all acts have consequence' (in Kelly 1996: 90).

The film offers the audience a subjective view of New York through the eyes of a psychotic man. When Travis tries to flirt with the unresponsive cashier (Diahnne Abbott, De Niro's own wife at the time) at a cinema showing 'Adult movies', the soundtrack of the porn film can be heard in the background, undermining his romantic overtures. He asks for Jujubes but has to settle for Goobers – there is obviously no wish fulfilment at the confectionary counter in this Hell – and his bloodshot eyes stare at the screen without emotion. Beside his bed are bottles of pills, presumably to help him sleep, but he exists in a 'waking nightmare'. 'Whenever I shot Travis Bickle, when he was alone in the car, or whenever people were talking to him, and that person is in the frame, then the camera was over their shoulder. He was in everybody else's light, but he was alone,' explains Scorsese (in Kelly 1996: 92). The celebrated scene when the camera pans away from Travis in embarrassment as he telephones an unresponsive Betsy is a case in point. Scorsese notes the focus on the deserted corridor and asks, 'Is it about the emptiness of his heart or his soul?' (in Wilson 2011: 57).

Jesuit James Martin mentions the famous quotation from St Augustine: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in thee'; and he continues: 'In their drive to fill this hole, some are pulled toward addictive behaviors, anything to fill them up: drugs, alcohol, gambling, shopping, sexual activity, compulsive eating. But those addictions lead only to a greater sense of disintegration, a more cavernous emptiness and, eventually, to loneliness and despair' (Martin 2010a). As Travis lies on his bed in his room, the camera places Travis under a celestial gaze – an approach that Scorsese will also adopt when Rodrigues is praying at night in *Silence*. In fact, Travis's inner

thoughts could be a form of daytime prayer (there is light through the blinds) as he ponders the fact that he needs 'some place to go', and articulates his own kind of Creed in which he offers his personal articles of faith: 'I don't believe that one should devote his life to morbid self attention. I believe that someone should become a person like other people.' However, Scorsese describes Travis's actions as relating to the kind of person 'who will level a village because its inhabitants don't believe in the God that he believes in' (in Schickel 2013). Travis will come to the help of a shopkeeper named Melio, who is attacked by a robber, but this Good Samaritan narrative is undermined by the excessive violence in this scene, as Melio beats up the black gunman whom Travis has already shot. These actions add to the horror of this Hell in which the pain is ongoing, as in Dante's vision of the *Inferno*.

Several commentators make an intertextual link between the script of *Taxi Driver* and the writing of Dostoyevsky, given that the Russian writer was 'a deeply religious artist with an apocalyptic vision of suffering. He perceived the criminal as having a twisted relationship – an affinity – with the saint' (Horsley 2005: 75). Scorsese explains that he wanted to make a film out of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (see Kelly 1996: 90), and Travis has been compared both to Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and to the narrator of *Notes from the Underground* because of 'the way he twists everyone and everything to fit his own sordid vision of the world, and slowly turns his madness into a kind of divine inspiration, and finally, a demonic calling' (Horsley 2005: 76).

When Travis meets Easy Andy (Steven Prince), a travelling salesman with guns and drugs, he buys the weapons but not the dope, showing that there are some distinctions in this Hell – notably, drugs are also 'no go areas' for some members of the Mafia in *GoodFellas*. Scorsese points out that 'the dealer lays [the guns] out one at a time on the velvet, like arranging the altar during Mass' (in Ebert 2008: 45). Preparing to assassinate Senator Charles Palantine (Leonard Harris), Travis turns his body into a temple but for an evil deed – not 'a temple of the holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6.19). He goes into training and (as Max Cady does in *Cape Fear*) exercises with pull ups, using the door frame for support. He has toned muscles and practised gun skills (although he blinks and flinches as he shoots) for his vocation of vengeance, and the DIY gadgets that he constructs for his many weapons turn him into a walking arsenal. Michael Bliss argues that 'Travis views Hell as a purgatorial prerequisite to salvation' (1995: 51), a rather muddled theology that may well be in his mind. One of the key dates in the narrative is 29 June – the Feast of St Peter and St Paul in honour of their

martyrdom. There is a 'tension between sacred violence, as adopted and negated in the sacrificial crucifixion of Christ, and the profane violence of man, which is an attempt at divine power' (High 2015: 388).

In the celebrated 'You talkin' to me?' scene, the mole on Travis's cheek helps the spectators to identify whether or not they are looking at a reflection: are they looking directly at his face or do they 'see indistinctly, as in a mirror' (1 Cor. 13.12). Mirrors, which evidently are a repeated feature in Scorsese's mise en scène, also have an important role to play in *The Divine Comedy*: 'Virgil's second parallel is that of a body and its image in a mirror, which he offers as comparable to the relation between a soul and the body it represents' (Reynolds 2006: 300):

And wouldst thou think how at each tremulous motion
Trembles within a mirror your own image;
That which seems hard would mellow seem to thee. (*Purg.* XXV)

Dante argues that 'the soul possesses in potential both the human and divine faculties' (Reynolds 2006: 302) and he rejects determinism: 'Whatever the conditions into which we are born, our souls are the direct creations of God and we are responsible for our deeds' (Reynolds 2006: 282).

Indeed, Travis might be regarded as the saviour of the young prostitute Easy, who is 'born again' as Iris. Therefore, the most complicated aspect of Travis's personality is his 'saviour' role when he decides that he must enter Hell to rescue Iris, whose first audible words are: 'Get me out of here' – a command that he will eventually obey when he kills her pimp Matthew (Harvey Keitel) and she is returned to her family home. The crumpled \$20 (the sum that will impress Henry in *GoodFellas* and cause Paul such trauma in *After Hours*) that the pimp throws at Travis to 'forget about it' is not enough, and he will use that tainted blood money (like the thirty pieces of silver in the New Testament narrative) to gain entry to the brothel.

In *Silence* there is a rate for betrayal, including 300 silver pieces for a priest. In *Taxi Driver* there is a monetary scale for illegal acts: \$15 = fifteen minutes for sex with a child; and \$25 dollars = thirty minutes. At one moment Matthew calls Travis 'a funny guy' – the very words that cause extreme tension in *GoodFellas* when Henry makes the same claim about Tommy. However, there is no escalation of violence at this point as Matthew gives Travis an encouraging farewell: 'But looks aren't everything. Go on, have a good time.' Dante had an interest in astrology (Beaup 2014: 109) and might have taken note that Iris and Matthew are Librans – the sign of balance – if he had ever had the opportunity to watch *Taxi Driver*.

When Travis first talks to Matthew there are church bells ringing in the background, but when Iris takes Travis into the brothel, the police sirens are audible, so that there is an intermingling of the sacred and the profane. The room is illuminated by candles of different sizes and colours, so that it has the aura of a shrine. Travis wants to help Iris rather than exploit her ('This is nothing for a person to do') and to persuade her to return home and attend school, as Jesus will also encourage Magdalene to follow a new path in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. When they go for breakfast together in the afternoon, her straightened hair and plastic sunglasses make her look like a child rather than a prostitute, although the fire engine passing in the background is a warning sign that this environment is dangerous.

There is both threatening and romantic music as Travis leaves \$500 for Iris in what is effectively a suicide note – an action that would be condemned by Dante, who turns those who have killed themselves into gnarled trees in the Wood of Suicides. In Scorsese's filmography, the act of suicide – which goes against the teachings of the Catholic Church – plays only a small part. His short film called *The Big Shave* (1967) is one dramatic example of self-destruction when the protagonist slits his own throat through excessive grooming with a razor blade – supposedly a comment on Scorsese's state of mind at the time of filming (the song 'I Can't Get Started' accompanies the image), as well as a critical observation on the involvement of the United States in Vietnam (see Cieutat 1986: 51). Groppi shoots himself in the mouth in *Mean Streets*, with the moment of impact replaced by a white screen; the demise of Marcy – presumably by her own hand – happens off screen in *After Hours*; and an employee of Stratton Oakmont slashes his wrists in *The Wolf of Wall Street* – a death that Jordan Belfort recounts with the same glib tone that he adopts for many events in his life. In *The Last Temptation of Christ* the suicide of Judas (as recorded in the New Testament in Mt. 27.3-10) does not take place at all – indeed, in the 'dream sequence' it is Judas who comes to stir Jesus up, although his actions have the same effect as his biblical betrayal of his Master for money: he helps to ensure that the Messiah is crucified.

Some elements of Dante's poem were censored. For example, the verses in which 'Dante has the corrupt popes stuffed head down in holes in the rock' were scraped away from the manuscript in the British Library (Shaw 2014). Scorsese also had to make adjustments to *Taxi Driver*: the shoot-out scene is desaturated in order to get the right rating, toning down the image without removing the horror. Reflecting on the mayhem at the end of *Taxi Driver* Scorsese explained,

'I think those things should be shown as being ugly and awful. At least that's how I see them and how I must, therefore, present them. ... Also, many of Bobby's close-ups aren't at the usual 24 frames per second. They're at 36, which makes them a little slower, more deliberate and off-kilter than the rest' (in Amata 2005: 67). Scorsese explains that he wanted De Niro 'to look almost like a monster' (in Ebert 2008: 46).

After shots are exchanged, Travis is bleeding from his own wounds and sprayed with the blood of his victims. Having run out of bullets, Travis sits on the sofa in Iris's room, having transformed the brothel into a killing ground. Three policemen arrive (an interesting number in itself, given Dante's penchant for the number three) and point a gun at Travis, who aims his finger at his head and makes the gesture of shooting himself three times with his eyes open. The camera tracks back over the carnage, looking down from above, following the trail of blood. It is a scene of sacrifice that might be viewed as 'a purification' (in Keyser 1992: 83).

Here death could be treated on film as 'a thrilling spectacle tailor-made for alleviating the general boredom of life' (Ratzinger 1988: 70). However, speaking about the spectators' reactions to the final shoot-out, Scorsese himself clarified, 'The idea was to create a violent catharsis, so that they'd find themselves saying, "Yes, kill"; and then afterwards realize, "My God, no"' (in Raymond 2015: 27), so he was shocked that people were actually quite enthused by the act of murder on screen. In relation to the case of John Hinckley, who reportedly tried to assassinate President Ronald Reagan because of his obsession with Jodie Foster in *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese responded: 'Well, I'm Catholic. It's easy to make me feel guilty' (in Goodwin 2005: 64).

Three men are dead in the brothel scene, but the subsequent newspaper reports hail Travis as a hero, as Iris's family (represented in a photograph by Scorsese's own parents) express their gratitude at the safe return of their daughter to Pittsburgh. However, the purported saviour remains a danger to society, as indicated by Travis's expression in the rear-view mirror in the final scene when he drives away from Betsy: 'I wanted to use it to show that the time bomb is ticking away,' confirms Scorsese (in Wilson 2011: 60). An appropriate intertextual reference would be Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, with a quotation from Bernanos's novel: 'Hell, my dear lady, is not loving anymore' (in Balthasar 1988: 56).

The famous sermon about Hell and damnation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is reportedly based on Jesuit preaching that James Joyce heard when

he was a student in Dublin (see Turner 1993: 90). "The Jesuits ousted demons, too, or nearly so. They weren't needed in a Hell of "other people" (Turner 1993: 174). In Scorsese's films the 'other people' may be trapped together in a toxic relationship, as with Sam, Nicky and Ginger in *Casino*. Nicky squeezes a man's head in a vice before suffering his own painful demise that would have been in keeping with the Florentine statutes in Dante's day, which 'stipulated that the punishment for murderers was to be buried alive, placed head down in a hole' (Shaw 2014). Nicky's former associates beat him savagely before throwing him, still breathing, into a grave dug out in the Nevada desert. Scorsese explained his thinking behind the scene and why he did not make 'short shrift' of the murders: 'I didn't feel we should have. I think it was terrible, and sad. He kind of took for everybody' (in Ebert 2008: 150).

In the world of Italian gangsters, there is a mixture of outright evil and moral control: 'Street muggings, burglaries, purse-snatchings, and rapes were almost non-existent in mob-controlled areas,' explains Pileggi in *Wiseguy* (1985: 49). 'For most of the guys the killings were just accepted. They were part of every day. ... Murder was the only way everyone stayed in line. It was the ultimate weapon' (in Pileggi 1985: 159).

There is a kind of terrestrial fiefdom that St Augustine identifies: 'What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms? A gang is a group of men under the command of a leader, bound by a compact of association' (*City of God*, IV:4); and some of Scorsese's male protagonists fit Augustine's description of the robber who 'is anxious, of course, to be at peace in his own home, with his wife and children and any other members of his household; without doubt he is delighted to have them obedient to his beck and call' and, if displeased 'he scolds and punishes' (*City of God*, XIX:12).

The actor Paul Sorvino (whose character Paulie in *GoodFellas* was based on a real gangster called Paul Vario) explains the 'weird bifurcation of character' of family men who were also murderers (in Philips 2015). He said, 'I think there are wiseguys who make moral decisions. I don't think all the people are the same in that walk of life, if you can call it a walk of life. It's more like a kind of descent into hell' (in Kelly 1996: 264). Nicholas Pileggi talks about one of the hit men he knew named Danny Jack Parisi, who 'took communion every day' and made a special pilgrimage every year by walking barefoot from Brooklyn to Our Lady of Mount Carmel church. When asked how he could make sense of following his daily Mass attendance by killing people, he replied: 'I go to church every day and I pray to God to give me the strength to rob again' (in Kelly 1996: 268).

Henry and Karen (via their voice-overs) guide the audience through the Underworld in *GoodFellas*. As Dante's Pilgrim interviews characters in Hell to learn their stories, Henry and Karen give their version of their own lives. The mob also breaks the fourth wall and acknowledges the audience in the Bamboo Lounge, where the red glow of the shades echoes the atmosphere of Volpe's bar in *Mean Streets*. The 'Funny how?' scene with Tommy is all about keeping one's nerve when faced with a genuine threat of violence.

When the young man named Spider (Michael Imperioli) stands up to Tommy, he pays for his bravery with a bullet in the foot. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, 'And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna' (Mk 9.45). Initially, it appears that Spider will be entering the Afterlife with a limp, but it is not clear whether his act of defiance is a rejection of the gangster code or just an (understandable) reaction to ill treatment. However, the subsequent killing of Spider by Tommy demonstrates the abnormality of the latter's violent outbursts.

The trick in *GoodFellas* 'was to sort of ignore that danger, make it a rollicking road movie in a way – like a kind of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby picture, with everybody on the road and having a great time' (in Schickel 2013). This is a world where men sit down to eat a meal with a body in the boot of the car outside the house. Famously, in the role of Mrs DeVito, Catherine Scorsese provides this very repast for her onscreen son Tommy and his friends. She discusses her desire for Tommy to find a nice girl, not knowing that her offspring has come to borrow a shovel to dig a grave for his most recent victim. In the Italian family, the 'meals were a "communion" of the family, and food was "sacred" because it was the tangible medium of that communion' (Gambino 2011: 17). Mrs DeVito sits in front of a reproduction of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, not realizing that Billy Batts has already enjoyed his last meal, thanks to her son. It is an improvised scene as Scorsese explains: 'That's what I've often tried to get at – that kind of raw, unforced feeling when the actors lose the sense of artifice and the barriers between fiction and reality break down' (in Donato 2017).

In *GoodFellas*, Henry wants to be 'somebody' and for people to treat him with respect because of his associations. He does not suffer from the lack of ambition that affects those in the first rings of Dante's Hell. But he also faces moral conflicts. As a boy, he tries to help a man who has been shot, and he is criticized for wasting clean aprons on mopping up the blood – turning himself into a Veronica figure from the Catholic Stations of the Cross. Henry does not find killing as easy as Tommy, and while he is prepared to beat up Karen's

aggressive neighbour in broad daylight on his front lawn, he has some qualms about throwing a man to the lions in a Florida zoo. Ebert notes that this is the type of lifestyle that 'fills the soul with guilt and the heart with dread, and before long Henry Hill is walking around as if there's a lead weight in his stomach' (2008: 121) – and swallowing a lead weight is the kind of punishment that would be at home in Dante's *Inferno*.

Far more committed to the cause of violence is Max Cady in *Cape Fear*, based on a book called *The Executioners* (1957) by John MacDonald. The film is replete with religious references and an emphasis on blood and water. There is also a notably Hitchcockian atmosphere, given the incorporation of work by artists once employed by the Catholic Master of Suspense, from the credit sequence created by Saul Bass to the arrangement of Bernard Herrmann's score (taken from *Cape Fear* (J. Lee Thompson 1962), an earlier adaptation of MacDonald's novel) by Elmer Bernstein. In Cady's prison cell there are several recognizable images and publications: Nietzsche holding a sword; General Patton; Stalin; General Lee; Black Bolt; Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* and *Thus spake Zarathustra*, and Dante's *Inferno*. Interestingly, given Scorsese's later adaptation of *Silence*, the picture of San Felipe de Jesus impaled on spears was chosen because Max 'sees himself as a victim' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 169).

'To be punished, even justly, is still suffering,' explains Ricoeur (1967: 43). Having completed a fifteen-year jail term for rape, Cady sets out for revenge on his lawyer Sam Bowden, who had buried a report about the promiscuity of Cady's female victim that might have altered the verdict. Sam's one-time illiterate client has learnt to read and now understands the deception. Carrying out his retribution, Cady seduces Sam's assistant, Lori (Illeana Douglas), declaring that he is 'one hell of an animal' before proving that he is a man of his word by handcuffing her, breaking her arm, biting her face and hitting her with his fist. Lori decides not to press charges because she believes that the cross examination at the trial would 'crucify' her – a choice of verb with religious connotations that relates to public humiliation rather than physical suffering in this case.

Vengeance is certainly the theme of *Cape Fear* in which 'Cady is an illustrated man, or a personification, if you like, of revenge, and an instrument of salvation' (Stern 1995: 184). Among the tattoos that adorn his flesh is 'Vengeance is mine' (Rom. 12.19). The verse from St Paul's epistle reads: 'Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his

head' (Rom. 12.19-20). Although it is clear that the whole quotation would make a rather lengthy tattoo, it seems that Cady has not accepted the biblical verse in context. He has definitely decided not to wait for God to intervene on his behalf. 'My time is at hand' is a reference to Cady's own timing rather than to that of Jesus (Mt. 26.18), although a bumper sticker on his car indicates that he has hopes for a better Afterlife: 'You're A V.I.P. on EARTH, I'm a V.I.P. in HEAVEN.' When he overcomes the three men whom Sam has sent to beat him up, he emerges victorious to declare: 'I am like God and God like me. I am as large as God. He is as small as I.' The quotation comes from Silesius, a seventeenth-century Lutheran who converted to Catholicism and was a priest and physician, but Cady's adoption of the phrase is to underline his superiority over Sam (who is cowering behind a dumpster) rather than to stress any communion with the Divine.

Cady is represented as a typically devilish figure surrounded by smoke (from his cigar) with a forced laugh, accompanied by flashes of red (to signal passion, danger and blood). On one occasion he is dressed in a Hawaiian shirt (a touch of paradise) for his meeting with Sam; but he is also wearing a wire – an act of deception to deceive the deceiver. 'I'm going to teach you the meaning of commitment,' he warns his former lawyer. He quotes from the Bible and gives Sam a riddle to decipher ('Look between Esther and Psalms'), which is a reference to the Book of Job. Presumably, Cady could see himself in the role of Job (the good man who has been unfairly persecuted); whereas Sam might see himself as Job and Cady in the part of Satan, who is 'roaming the earth' (Job 1.7).

Scorsese admitted that he 'Catholicized' the script of *Cape Fear*, turning Cady into 'the malignant spirit of guilt, in a way, of the family – the avenging angel. Punishment for everything you ever felt sexually. It is the basic moral battleground of Christian ethics' (in Keyser 1992: 216). So Cady carries out his evil plan to corrupt Sam's daughter Danielle (Juliette Lewis), earning her trust by pretending to be her new drama teacher. As he speaks to her on the telephone, hanging upside down from his exercise bar, the camera, which is mounted on a panatote, turns 360 degrees (Keyser 1992: 218) so that Cady appears upright but with the distorted features of a monster. (**Figure 2.2**) (Viewers of *Silence* may be reminded of the contorted face of Ferreira when he is shown hanging over the pit when he is tortured.)

Having lured Danielle into his lair (a 'Hansel and Gretel' forest setting on a school stage), Cady addresses her in a gentle voice ('I'm not going to hurt you'), talks to her about sex and encourages her to read Henry Miller – the author whose work got Paul Hackett into trouble in *After Hours*. In his guise

Figure 2.2 Max Cady: the avenging angel with evil intent in *Cape Fear*.

as Professor Do-Right, he carries out his 'search for truth', telling Danielle that her parents have punished her 'for their sins'. He advises her, 'Just forgive them, for they know not what they do' without any intention himself of turning Jesus's words at the Crucifixion (Lk. 23.34) into action. 'Every man carries a circle of hell around his head like a halo,' is his rather pessimistic view of humankind.

The stability of the Bowden family in *Cape Fear* has already been undermined by the flirtatious reputation of 'Slippery Sam', and now Cady is beguiling Sam's young daughter with his understanding smile: 'You know, I think I might have found a companion. A companion for that long walk to the light.' When he gently places his arm around the bashful young girl's shoulders, puts his thumb into her mouth and kisses her, he is committing an act of sacrilege.

In *The Divine Comedy* the Pilgrim is carried from the seventh to the eighth circle by Geryon, who has 'three forms in one body, human, bestial and reptilian. He is the representation of fraud, having the face of a just man, a body dazzling with bright colours, the paws and forearms of an animal and a serpent's tail with a poisonous sting' (Reynolds 2006: 157). On the one hand, the image evokes the beast in the Book of Revelation. However, in reading the description of Geryon, the tattooed body of Max Cady may also come to mind. In addition to the little Lacoste crocodile trade mark on the cardigan that he wears, Cady proves his reptilian features with his snake-like charm. Scorsese admits that he was 'playing on the idea of evil being attractive and dangerous' and 'Max uses logic and emotion and psychology very much in the way Satan speaks in the Bible' (in Christie and Thompson 2003: 166). As Dante records in *The Divine Comedy*, one of the Devil's vices is that 'he's a liar and the father of lies' (*Inf.* XXIII).

Having infiltrated the Bowden house as if he were 'the Holy Ghost', bypassing all the defences that Sam had erected and committing two murders, Cady demonstrates superhuman strength when he travels strapped to the undercarriage of Sam's car, so that he can pursue the family to the appropriately named Cape Fear. The religious references continue in the climax that takes place on a river with a storm on the horizon. As the boat scenes were also filmed with the panatate that enabled the camera to rotate through 360 degrees (see Grist 2013: 149), the sense that the Bowden family and their enemy are circling down through the vortex of a Dantean Hell is visibly conveyed.

Religious antagonism

Max Cady appears to be an evangelical antagonist in an atmosphere of Catholic guilt. Andrew Greeley points out that Catholicism arrived 'after the establishment of the American republic as a basically Anglo-Saxon Protestant society. Thus, Catholicism was not only an immigrant religion but an immigrant religion coming into a culture which, for a number of historical reasons, was antipathetic to Catholicism' (1967: 19). It is this atmosphere that Scorsese captures in *Gangs of New York*, in an era when the Catholic Archbishop John Hughes 'had the background and personality intended for a leader of warriors rather than a compromiser' (Greeley 1967: 108)

St Augustine bemoans the fact that the world is divided against itself by wars and 'the pursuit of victories that bring death with them or at best are doomed to death' (*City of God*, XV:4). Scorsese remarks on the tribes emerging from their underground lair in *Gangs of New York*: they have a god but he is a 'Celtic god of war' rather than a loving Jesus (DVD commentary). It was a time when 'Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants were often regarded as less than white, ethnic others incapable of assimilation' (Ennis 2015: 175).

The Protestant ministers drive out the Irish homeless from the brewery building 'to make way for a mission to "serve" the same people' (Lohr 2015: 197). *Gangs of New York* has been criticized for emphasizing an antagonism between Christians, with the anti-papal observations of Bill 'The Butcher' Cutting (Daniel Day-Lewis) being an obvious example: at one point he rails against the 'king in a pointy hat what sits on his throne in Rome'. 'Priest' Vallon (Liam Neeson) is a kind of warlord who wears a clerical collar to protect his throat, but he and his son Amsterdam pray for 'success on the earthly battlefield and potential deliverance

of *their enemies* into another, much hotter place' (Lohr 2015: 205). The prayer to St Michael that they say together is actually an anachronism, as it was composed later in the nineteenth century to assist the Church in its confrontation with cosmic forces of evil (see Blake 2005). Before Vatican II, it was the prayer said at the end of Mass, so Scorsese would have known it well.

Amsterdam claims that he 'was about [his] father's business' but his actions bear no resemblance to Jesus in the Temple (Lk. 2.49). The battle offers 'the movement and the creation of a kind of confused, futile, primeval world, everything, just the futility of the fight itself' with its medieval atmosphere (in Gross 2017). The battlefield action at the Five Points would certainly befit Dante's *Inferno*:

They smote each other not alone with hands,
But with the head and with the breast and feet,
Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth. (*Inf.* VII)

Scorsese also depicts racism in *The Departed*, in which footage of the school integration riots in Boston is followed by Frank Costello commenting in voice-over about discrimination against Irish Catholics: 'Years ago we had the Church. That was only a way of saying we had each other'; and twenty years after an Irishman could not get a job, 'we had the presidency (may he rest in peace)'. Costello explains: 'I don't want to be a product of my environment. I want my environment to be a product of me.' However, his desire to escape from his heritage is mired in criminal activity.

The audience sees the young Colin Sullivan as an altar server as Costello continues his criticism of the Catholic Church and harangues his protégé: 'Kneel. Stand. Kneel. Stand. You go for that sort of thing, I don't know what to do for you. A man makes his own way. No one gives it to you. You have to take it. Non serviam.' The Latin phrase comes from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which a priest gives a sermon on the Garden of Eden and the fall of Lucifer who 'was hurled with his rebellious angels into hell. What his sin was we cannot say. Theologians consider that it was the sin of pride, the sinful thought conceived in an instant: NON SERVIAM: I WILL NOT SERVE. That instant was ruin' (Joyce 1992: 126). It is a quotation that the young Colin recognizes – and the question of who will be his master, for good or ill, is at the heart of the film. A subsequent scene of Costello at the opera, in which the red illumination highlights his devilish demeanour, is another reminder that Colin has chosen the path of evil.

While Scorsese's audiences will have their own ideas about distinguishing 'the saints and sinners' from among his protagonists, Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915–68) rightly points out: 'People who look like saints to us are very often not so, and those who do not look like saints very often are' (1998: 186). The theme is underlined in *Silence* where Rodrigues fails to recognize an elderly Samurai as Inoue, the Governor of Chikugo, who is reputed to be 'the devil' responsible for the execution of Christians. When the Japanese soldiers appear through the mist like ghosts, Inoue (Issei Ogata) is among them, but the audience would not realize that the smiling elderly man struggling through the mud is the powerful Inquisitor who will bring death to the village.

There is an evident decision to 'humanize' Inoue in his dealings with Rodrigues as they discuss the Jesuits' unwelcome efforts to spread their faith. In his first onscreen conversation with the prisoners, Inoue arrives with his entourage, waving his fan to swat away the insects, and reproaches the Christians for making him travel so far in the dust at his age: 'Just make a little effort to understand our point of view. We don't hate you. You've brought it on yourselves. And you can rid yourselves of it, too.' Addressing Rodrigues, Inoue admits that he is not infallible and has learnt from earlier mistakes: 'Killing the priests and killing the peasants makes it worse. If they can die for their god, they think it only makes them stronger.'

Faced with Rodrigues's early self-righteousness ('If you feel you must punish someone, punish me alone!'), Inoue responds: 'If you were a real man, a truly good priest, you should feel pity for the Kirishitan.' He utters the devastating words: 'The price for your glory is their suffering.' However, he then has to ask a guard to help him to his feet, underlining his aged status. Confused by appearances, Rodrigues later asks for the 'real challenge' of facing the Grand Inquisitor to test his faith, not realizing that the old man sitting there in front of him is Inoue himself. The other Samurai burst out laughing at this turn of events, but Inoue looks serious before making his own introduction: 'I am the Inquisitor.' He sighs, and then he has to be assisted in order to rise from his stool.

In a further 'interrogation' conducted over a cup of tea, Inoue states with conviction: 'Padre, you missionaries do not seem to know Japan'; and Rodrigues responds, 'And you, honourable Inquisitor, do not seem to know Christianity.' At this moment, Inoue appears to physically deflate, as if he were a punctured balloon, providing a memorably comical moment. 'There are those who think of your religion as a curse. I do not. I see it in another way

but still dangerous,' Inoue explains, before struggling to his feet and using his fan to bat away the servant who tries to help him. 'I'd like you to think of the persistent love of an ugly woman. And how a barren woman should never be a wife,' are his parting words. However, there is no doubt that 'the highly intelligent and informed inquisitor Inoue, with his polite manners and saccharine but sinister smile, [does] not mask his intent to break the resolve of the Christians' (Pacatte 2016).

The fraudulent

The eighth circle of the *Inferno* is the final destination for those people who are guilty of fraud, which can affect loved ones or strangers:

Hypocrisy, flattery, and who deals in magic,
Falsification, theft, and simony,
Pandors, and barrators, and the like filth. (*Inf.* XI)

Dante places the fraudulent below the violent: 'Violence is something we share with wild beasts, but fraud requires human reason and therefore is a graver sin against our nature' (Royal 1999: 72).

Obviously there are some characters in Scorsese's films who manage to combine violence and fraud, most notably the Mafia men who will 'send the boys round' if payment is not received. Michael (Richard Romanus) is an example in *Mean Streets*, when he takes revenge (via a gun fired by Scorsese himself) on Johnny who has failed to pay his debts, saying: 'Now is the time.' The phrase evokes 'Now is the time for judgement on this world' (Jn 12.31); or the words of St. Paul: 'Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6.2) (see Deacy 2012: 81).

In the eighth circle of the *Inferno* are the panders and seducers who are punished by a demon. Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull* is prosecuted because he introduces underage girls to men in his club, although he openly expresses remorse for his way of life in a later scene. Matthew in *Taxi Driver* would certainly earn condemnation for his exploitation of a twelve-year-old, although even he has his boundaries ('No rough stuff but anything else') and there is one scene when he dances with Iris to a romantic record that shows his affection for her. However, their embrace is interrupted by the sound of gunfire as Travis practises his skills, foreshadowing the fate that awaits Matthew. Harvey Keitel, who plays

the role, explains the dichotomy: 'There is a great humanity in a pimp. I don't mean humanity in its benevolent sense. I mean humanity in its suffering sense. They come out of a place of great need, usually of poverty, of broken homes, of never having opportunity' (in Kelly 1996: 93). Later, the audience see that Matthew has to pay a man in a suit, so that he, too, has a master.

Scorsese considered himself to be 'a political virgin' in 1965 when he went to Mass and heard a priest give a sermon on Vietnam as a 'holy war' (in Occhiogrosso 1987: 100), although he rejected organized religion as a result at that time. However, there are some memorable allusions to politics in his films. In *It's Not Just You, Murray!* the titular protagonist's reference to politics is illustrated by a man with a knife in his back; and Scorsese made a contribution to the student film *Street Scenes*, shooting a group of angry students (including Harvey Keitel) having a heated discussion in a bedroom (see Cieutat 1986: 65). There are socialist ideas in *Boxcar Bertha*; the Senate hearings in *The Aviator* and dodgy dealings at Tammany Hall in *Gangs of New York*. The golden dome of the Capitol building shines brightly in *The Departed*, overlooking the dirty deeds in the city below.

Dante gives flatterers – among whom are politicians – a harsh punishment because of the way that they have misused language, immersing them 'in a ditch full of human excrement (not animal dung; the point is made explicitly)' as Shaw (2014) points out. Senator Palantine in *Taxi Driver* would presumably find his home there. He spreads his arms wide – adopting a Christ-like pose that matches the sculpture behind him on the USS Maine monument at the Southwest corner of Central Park opposite Columbus Circle – but he is presented as 'a pompous, hypocritical phony who feigns interest in Travis's inane opinions when riding in his cab' (Blake 2005). When he goes to Palantine's rally, Travis applauds the slogans but the sound of his hand claps is distinct from that of the crowd, as if he is aware of the disjunction between empty words and actions.

Malebolge, the eighth circle of the *Inferno* which is the home of the fraudulent, is made of 'stone and iron to reinforce the notion of a prison house' (Royal 1999: 79) – perhaps the tower blocks in the Financial District of New York might now play that role. In Scorsese's treatment for the uncompleted *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* there is a reference to C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, (1942) which contains epistolary advice from a Senior Demon to his nephew Wormwood. There are echoes of this devilish education strategy in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, when Scorsese presents Mark Hanna in the role of an experienced Prince of

Figure 2.3 'A warm welcome to the Inferno!' in *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

Darkness who introduces his young colleague Jordan Belfort to evil ways in the (appropriately satanically numbered) Top of the Sixes Restaurant (666 Fifth Avenue). (**Figure 2.3**) Hanna would certainly have found like-minded friends among the demons in Dante's *Inferno*:

Ah, how ferocious was he in his aspect!
And how he seemed to me in action ruthless,
With open wings and light upon his feet! (*Inf.* XXI)

Jim McDermott (2014) argues that both *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* are important in their different ways because they 'take temptation seriously. ... Real temptation is a lot more attractive; it hides its victims and its consequence, and for a long time it's usually a lot more fun'. Balthasar reminds his reader that the devil has 'made a radical decision against God, or absolute love' (1988: 145) and 'unrecognizableness is his real strength' (in Balthasar 1988: 146).

St Ignatius claimed that the devil works 'first by tempting people to desire *riches*, which leads to *honors*, which often leads to an overweening *pride*, the gateway to a gamut of sinful behavior. As any Jesuit will tell you, the shorthand phrase is "riches to honor to pride"' (Martin 2010a). The three temptations offered by Hanna (money, cocaine and hookers) are clearly accepted by Belfort; and he successfully passes his Series Seven exam – suitably named as it appears to qualify him to commit the Seven Deadly Sins. For Dante, there are three wrong paths: 'the desire for pleasure, the desire for fame, and the desire for material possessions' (Reynolds 2006: 85). Boethius, the philosopher who influenced Dante, 'had said that a man burning with greed for other men's possessions was like a wolf' (Reynolds 2006: 85), and the poet calls the monster Plutus

the 'accursed wolf' (*Inf.* VII) when he puts him 'in charge of the souls of the avaricious' (Reynolds 2006: 140). Given that Jordan Belfort has that appellation, he would find suitable companions in the *Inferno*. Perhaps potential clients should have taken note of the fact that there is a lion in the advertisement for Stratton Oakmont, strolling between the desks, in light of the biblical warning that 'Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour' (1 Pet. 5.8).

In *City of God*, St Augustine discusses disability, including humans 'whose height is only a cubit' (*City of God*, XVI:8) and argues: 'For God is the creator of all, and he himself knows where and when any creature should be created or should have been created. ... The observer who cannot view the whole is offended by what seems the deformity of a part, since he does not know how it fits in, or how it is related to the rest' (*City of God*, XVI:8). Jordan Belfort is evidently unable to see 'the bigger picture', and he has no compunction about tossing dwarfs at a target for his own amusement. 'Dante's fear is that by telling everything he has seen in this journey, he will anger many' (Royal 1999: 208); and Scorsese certainly upset some viewers with his vision of Wall Street.

In his discussion of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Robert Hollander (1998) explains that the poet's 'risky technique was to trust us, his readers, with the responsibility for seizing upon the details in the narratives told by these sympathetic sinners in order to condemn them on the evidence that issues from their own mouths'. It is an assessment that also has relevance for Scorsese and his audience – in particular with regard to *The Wolf of Wall Street*, which met with some hostility from those observers who felt that the director had glamorized the outrageous behaviour on display. His editor, Thelma Schoonmaker, argues that Scorsese 'really wanted to immerse the audience and make you really feel that greed and excess. Not to stand back and judge it, but make you feel it and make you decide, "is it right?"' (in Tartaglione 2014). Readers must work out their own reactions to the sinners in *The Divine Comedy*: 'That readers have always been divided in their responses to such episodes is a testimony to the undogmatic quality – the tact, the indirectness, the obliqueness – of Dante's narrative strategy' (Shaw 2014). A similar comment could be made about Scorsese's undogmatic approach, given the range of reactions that his films arouse. He is successful because he entertains rather than sermonizes. In many cases, he also leaves space for the viewer to contemplate the significance of the ending of his films and the fate of his protagonists.

However, there are occasions when the characters themselves understand that they have gone awry. 'If, through God's power, the spirit will have before

its eyes the history of all the offenses committed by it in shame and godlessness, then its conscience will be stung by its own barbs: it will be its own accuser and witness' (in Balthasar 1988: 51–2). In the Litany of the Saints there is the petition: *A subitanea morte, libera nos Domine* ('from a death that is sudden and unprepared for, deliver us, O Lord'). Ratzinger points out: 'To be taken away suddenly, without being able to make oneself ready, without having had time to prepare – this is the supreme danger from which man wants to be saved' (1988: 71).

In Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, there is a famous image of 'a sinner realizing for the first time that he really is, finally and irrevocably, going to Hell' (Turner 1993: 156) and this image finds its counterpart in the frightened reaction of Donnie (Jonah Hill) in *The Wolf of Wall Street* when Jordan Belfort's yacht is caught in a storm and death by drowning is a serious possibility: 'I did a lot of bad shit. I'm going to hell, Jordan!' Hans Urs von Balthasar asks: 'Might the fire meant by Christ be a "spiritual" one, consisting of the tortures of conscience in the sinful soul that knows itself to have fallen away from God's order forever?' (1988: 51). In *The Divine Comedy*, the story of Manfred, the son of Frederick II whom the Pilgrim meets in Canto III of *Purgatorio*, 'makes the fundamental theological point that turning to God even at the moment of death is enough for salvation' (Shaw 2014).

Of the reasons that are put forward to reject the idea of Hell, three relate to 'human estimations of the way God ought to behave: (1) Eternal punishment contradicts the goodness, love, and compassion of God and makes him a tyrant; (2) Eternal punishment contradicts the justice of God because it is in no way proportionate to the sin in question; and (3) Eternal punishment that is purely punitive and not remedial has no apparent value' (Burk et al. 2016: 17). However, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus warns, 'And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna' (Mt. 10.28).

In St Augustine's *City of God*, the history of the world is divided into two figurative cities:

I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil. (*City of God*, XV:1)

Figure 2.4 A poignant question in *Cape Fear*.

St Augustine explains that no one can identify who belongs to the 'City of God' and whether bliss or damnation awaits. In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Judas asks Jesus if he is afraid of dying, and the latter replies, 'Why should I be? Death isn't a door that closes. It opens. It opens and you go through it.' The question for Scorsese's characters is: What is on the other side? In *Cape Fear* the family drive past a roadside wooden cross bearing the message: 'Where will you spend eternity?' (**Figure 2.4**) Ratzinger argues that 'Heaven reposes upon freedom, and so leaves the damned the right to will their own damnation' (Ratzinger 1988: 216). Some of Scorsese's protagonists appear to have made that choice.