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## Encyclopedia > Fictional portrayals of psychopaths

Psychopaths in popular fiction and movies<sup>[1]</sup> have a fictionalized personality disorder.<sup>[2]</sup> The fictional disorder<sup>[3]</sup> has a number of characteristics, which are not necessarily as common among clinically diagnosed psychopaths.<sup>[4]</sup> This requires critical thinking of a reader or viewer exploring the writer's or director's purpose in simplified portrayals of psychopathy.<sup>[5]</sup> In clinical practice there are a number of subtypes.<sup>[6]</sup> The cinema psychopath, however, is drawn from a smorgasboard of types presumably to make an amusing villain who will appeal to readers, viewers or industry moguls, provide a satisfying catharsis but one unlikely to be found in a ward for the criminally insane.<sup>[7]</sup> The fictional psychopath only exists for amusement or diversion and most likely is a mix of:

- High intelligence, and a preference for impulsive<sup>[8]</sup> intellectual stimulation (music, fine art etc.)
- Prestige, status<sup>[9]</sup> or a successful career<sup>[10]</sup> or position
- A predatory, calculating,<sup>[11]</sup> calm and controlling style<sup>[12]</sup>
- Self-absorbed, deceptive<sup>[13]</sup> and merciless in exploiting opportunities.
- Lack feelings of empathy,<sup>[14]</sup> guilt and remorse.<sup>[15]</sup>

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## The sociology of popular culture

How do the following fictional psychopaths shape perceptions of the world and thus modify social or political behaviour?<sup>[16]</sup> For Theodor W. Adorno, the culture industry<sup>[17][18][19]</sup> that produces entertainment<sup>[20]</sup> is ultimately toxic in its effect on the social process.<sup>[21]</sup> There are cultural, economic and political implications in the popularization of mass murderers,<sup>[22]</sup> serial killers and psychopaths.<sup>[23][24]</sup> This is an area of study in the sociology of popular culture,<sup>[25][26][27][28][29]</sup> of its production and producers, its products or texts, and its audiences or consumers.<sup>[30][31]</sup>

It is also an exploration of political economy,<sup>[32]</sup> collective memory and amnesia.<sup>[33]</sup> The many contributors to this wikipedia article may have reflected upon the importance of this material in shaping collective memory. That reflection or its lack, is a study in the human ecology of memory<sup>[34][35]</sup> and the social psychology of experience.<sup>[36][37][38][39]</sup> This article itself may be a part of the collective process of remembering, distorting and forgetting experience.

*See also:* Cultural studies, film theory, sociology of culture, political economy, critical theory, critical theory (Frankfurt School) and PR Watch.

## Criteria for inclusion of fictional psychopathic characters

This article was created in June 2006 and since then a number of guidelines for inclusion have evolved in the discussion pages. One of the following must be present for the character to be included in this article.

1. They are called psychopaths in the book/play/movie (or a recognised equivalent term).
2. They are described as psychopaths in a respected scholarly work (such as a psychological or film studies paper).
3. They are commonly described as psychopaths within popular culture (rightly or wrongly).
4. They can be shown to display the traits ascribed to a psychopath, as clinically defined by a significant number of characteristics drawn from Robert Hare's diagnostic research.

Where there have been disputes about the inclusion of a character or their placement in a particular section editors have discussed this on the talk pages. A list of related fictional characters occurs below to reduce duplication and facilitate inclusion in this page.

## Deceptively charming psychopathic characters

The fictional psychopathic charm is somewhat at odds with the personal style of the clinically defined, charismatic psychopath <sup>[40]</sup> <sup>[41]</sup>. The latter are more likely to be rigid, controlling, impulsive, disorganized, short-sighted <sup>[42]</sup> and violent <sup>[43]</sup>. As a result, the volatile behavior and unstable affective pattern of the clinical psychopathic personality often bears little resemblance to the artful, wry charm, and enigmatic personae of the classic screen villains listed below:

- Danny in *Night Must Fall* (Robert Montgomery in 1937 version; Albert Finney in 1964 version)
- Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten in *Shadow of a Doubt*)

Robert Walker as Bruno Anthony in *Strangers on a Train* (1951).

Note: In the film it is obliquely suggested that Uncle Charlie's murderous behavior may actually be caused by frontal lobe disorder, also known as Pseudopsychopathic Personality Disorder.

- Harry Lime (Orson Welles in *The Third Man*)
- Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker in *Strangers on a Train*)
- Reverend Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum in *The Night of the Hunter*)
- Bud Corliss (Robert Wagner in *A Kiss Before Dying*; Matt Dillon in 1991 version)
- David McCall (Mark Wahlberg) in *Fear*
- Tom Ripley (Alain Delon in *Plein Soleil*; Dennis Hopper in *The American Friend*; Matt Damon in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*; John Malkovich in *Ripley's Game*; and Barry Pepper in *Ripley Underground*)
- Prince Prospero (Vincent Price in *The Masque of the Red Death*)

Note: A number of Vincent Price villains such as his Matthew Hopkins in *Witchfinder General* and his titular protagonist in *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* also qualify as deceptively charming psychopaths. Some of Price's broader characterizations, like Nicholas Medina in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, would fall into the category of burlesque psychopathic characters.

John Huston as Noah Cross in *Chinatown* (1974).

- "The Jackal" (Edward Fox in *The Day of the Jackal*; Bruce Willis in the 1997 remake)
- Noah Cross (John Huston in *Chinatown*)
- Richard Vickers (Leslie Nielsen in *Creepshow*)
- O'Brien (Richard Burton in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*)
- Max Zorin (Christopher Walken in *A View to a Kill*)
- Jack Forrester (Jeff Bridges in *Jagged Edge*)
- Jason Dean (Christian Slater in *Heathers*)
- Peter McCabe (Michael Keaton in *Desperate Measures*)
- Dennis Peck (Richard Gere in *Internal Affairs*)
- Alex (Rob Lowe in *Bad Influence*)<sup>[44]</sup>
- Graham Marshall (Michael Caine in *A Shock to the System*)
- Francis Urquhart (Ian Richardson in *House of Cards*, *To Play the King*, and *The Final Cut*)
- Roger "Verbal" Kint, a.k.a. "Keyser Söze" (Kevin Spacey in *The Usual Suspects*)
- Steven Taylor (Michael Douglas in *A Perfect Murder*)
- Jim Profit (Adrian Pasdar on the Fox-TV series *Profit*)
- Ted Crawford (Anthony Hopkins in *Fracture*)

## Explicitly morbid psychopathic characters

By the same token, the disordered narcissism and crudely aggressive

personal style of the psychopath (also referred to as a sociopath or having an anti-social personality disorder) rarely resembles the cool self-possession and unflappable personal style present in explicitly morbid fictional characters. They are often presented as somewhat unrealistic, melodramatic cardboard villains and anti-heroes and are typically, but not necessarily, self-consciously "smooth", unctuous characters who cultivate an image of competence, professionalism and respectability — although unlike deceptively charming types, they are played straight and without any intrinsic comic or satiric irony based on received notions of amiability and familiarity.

Suffice to say, as a general rule, these explicitly morbid types do not come across as faintly likable or perversely amusing to the audience or to any of the other fictional characters that they share the screen with. However, their grimly determined, imperturbable style and methodical efficiency may afford occasional moments of deadpan humor and satire — in this sense, the fictional type of the explicitly morbid psychopath anticipates, and indeed shares, many of the same characteristics as the postmodern psychopath. On the other hand, the personal style of explicitly morbid psychopathic characters isn't as cartoonishly exaggerated as that of burlesque psychopaths and supervillains.

Examples of this explicitly morbid type of fictional psychopath include:

- Dr. Christian Szell (Laurence Olivier in *Marathon Man*)
- Dr. Josef Mengele (Gregory Peck in *The Boys from Brazil*)
- Dr. John Leslie Stevenson, a.k.a. "Jack the Ripper" (David Warner in *Time After Time*)
- Dr. Charles Henry Moffett (David Hemmings in *Airwolf*)
- Benson (Harvey Keitel in *Saturn 3*)
- Ben Childress (John Cassavetes in *The Fury*)
- Dr. Robert Elliott (Michael Caine in *Dressed to Kill*)
- Burke, a.k.a. "The Liberty Bell Strangler" (John Lithgow in *Blow Out*)
- Tommy Ray Glatman (David Patrick Kelly in *Dreamscape*)
- Piter de Vries (Brad Dourif in *Dune*, the 1984 film version; Jan Unger in the 2000 TV miniseries)
- Baron Frankenstein (Sting in *The Bride*)
- Rick Masters (Willem Dafoe in *To Live and Die in L.A.*)
- John Ryder (Rutger Hauer in *The Hitcher*)
- Mortwell (Michael Caine in *Mona Lisa*)
- Frank Nitti (Billy Drago in *The Untouchables*)
- Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman in *Die Hard*) and his brother Simon ([Jeremy Irons] in *Die Hard With A Vengeance*.
- Carter Hayes (Michael Keaton in *Pacific Heights*)
- Frederick "Junior" Frenger (Alec Baldwin in *Miami Blues*)
- Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs*; *Hannibal*; and *Red Dragon*; also Brian Cox in *Manhunter* and Gaspard Ulliel in *Hannibal Rising*)
- Mr. Blonde/Vic Vega (Michael Madsen in *Reservoir Dogs*)
- Mitch Leary (John Malkovich in *In the Line of Fire*)
- Joshua Shapira (Tim Roth in *Little Odessa*)
- Jonathan Doe (Kevin Spacey in *Se7en*)
- Bob Wolverton (Kiefer Sutherland in *Freeway*)
- Aaron Stampler (Edward Norton in *Primal Fear*)
- "The Teacher" (Alec Baldwin in *The Juror*)
- "The Caller" (Kiefer Sutherland in *Phone Booth*)
- David McCall (Mark Wahlberg in *Fear*)
- Gear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare in *Faroo*)

Willem Dafoe as Rick Masters in *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985).

Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

Christian Bale as Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (1999).

- Peter and Paul (Frank Giering and Arno Frisch in *Funny Games*)
- Chris Keller (Christopher Meloni on the HBO series, *Oz*)
- Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale in *American Psycho*)
- Walter Finch (Robin Williams in *Insomnia*)
- Francis Dolarhyde (Ralph Fiennes in *Red Dragon*)
- Alonzo Harris (Denzel Washington in *Training Day*)
- Theodore "T-Bag" Bagwell (Robert Knepper on the Fox-TV series *Prison Break*)
- Max Parry (Kevin Howarth in *The Last Horror Movie*)
- The Carver (Bruno Campos on the FX series *Nip/Tuck*)
- Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall on the Showtime series *Dexter*)

In pop culture, one notable and particularly violent sociopathic character is from the popular Harry Potter children's books by J. K. Rowling. Lord Voldemort, aka Tom Riddle, the chief antagonist, shows narcissistic tendencies and an inherent fear of death (see immortality). Thoroughly calculating and in-control, Voldemort is one of the most widely-known and recognisable sociopathic/psychopathic figures in modern literature.

## Comedic psychopathic characters

### Burlesque psychopathic characters

Clearly fictional psychopathic personalities can be found in black comedy, melodrama and satire, with

Tim Roth as Archibald Cunningham in *Rob Roy* (1995).

characters such as Charlie Chaplin as the eponymous anti-hero of the 1947 murder farce, *Monsieur Verdoux* (based on the actual case of the French "Bluebeard" killer, Henri Désiré Landru), and Lee Marvin as the cartoonishly over-the-top outlaw in John Ford's famed elegiac 1962 western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. In the musical genre, Steve Martin's sadistic biker dentist, Orin Scrivello, D.D.S., in *Little Shop of Horrors*, is yet another example of a comedic psychopathic character. (However, this buffoonish brute also presents verifiable traits of a clinical sociopath when he sings of how he enjoyed abusing animals as a child.)

Professor Ratigan, the cultured and sophisticated evil genius from Disney's *Basil the Great Mouse Detective* is a comedic psychopathic character loosely based on Professor Moriarty. Moriarity was the inspiration for The Master in the *Dr. Who* series, another comedic psychopathic character.

A more recent example is Tim Roth's performance as the effete, gleefully treacherous and ribald Archibald Cunningham in the 1993 film of the eighteenth-century Walter Scott adventure romance, *Rob Roy*, which sketches the psychopath in the campy style of outsized stock villainy characteristic of burlesque.

Other burlesque psychopathic characters include:

- The Queen/Witch (voiced by Lucille La Verne in the 1937 animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*)
- The Wicked Witch of the West (Margaret Hamilton in *The Wizard of Oz*)
- Maleficent (voiced by Eleanor Audley in the 1959 animated film, *Sleeping Beauty*)
- Cruella De Vil (voiced by Betty Lou Gerson in the 1961 animated film, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, and played by Glenn Close in the 1996 live-action film, *101 Dalmatians*, and its 2000 sequel, *102*)

Margaret Hamilton as The Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).

*Dalmatians*)

- Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (Kenneth McMillan in *Dune*, the 1984 film version; Ian McNeice in the 2000 TV miniseries)
- The Beast Rabban (Paul Smith in *Dune*, the 1984 film version; László Imre Kish in the 2000 TV miniseries)
- Feyd-Rautha (Sting in *Dune*, the 1984 film version; Matt Keeslar in the 2000 TV miniseries)
- Dr. Carl Hill (David Gale in *Re-Animator*)
- The Kurgan (Clancy Brown in *Highlander*)
- Edmund Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson in the period-set British comedy television series, *Blackadder*)
- Queen Bavmorda (Jean Marsh in *Willow*)
- Sheriff of Nottingham (Alan Rickman in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*)
- Sideshow Bob (voiced by Kelsey Grammer on the animated American television series, *The Simpsons*)

Note: An eccentric and snobbish homicidal clown with a taste for Gilbert and Sullivan musicals, the character of Sideshow Bob was probably inspired by serial child killer John Wayne Gacy.

## Supervillain psychopathic characters

In a similar way, comic book-inspired movie supervillains such as Gene Hackman and Kevin Spacey as Lex Luthor in *Superman* and *Superman Returns*, and Jack Nicholson as the Joker in *Batman*, also qualify as comedic

psychopathic characters (although it is to be noted that certain interpretations of the Joker in the comic book series depict him more in the manner of the postmodern psychopath). With their wild antics and extravagant crimes, supervillains often make comic stooges out of their straight-arrow, stiff-backed superhero nemeses.

Donald Pleasance as Ernst Stavro Blofeld in *You Only Live Twice* (1967).

Even Mike Myers as the absurd, pompous Dr. Evil, an effete megalomaniac forever plotting world domination in the Austin Powers movies, is but a parodic pastiche of the preposterously well-financed and well-equipped psychopathic supervillains (both smooth and comedic) that appear in the James Bond series, such as Dr. Julius No, Auric Goldfinger, Ernst Stavro Blofeld, Max Zorin and Le Chiffre. Action-movie supervillains also fall into this category.

Zim, the titular character in the Nickelodeon animated series, *Invader Zim*, is also a parody of the supervillain; his comic absurdity is tempered by moments of genuine malice and destructiveness.

## Postmodern psychopathic characters

In the past fifteen to twenty years, psychopathic figures, comedic or otherwise, have increasingly been portrayed in popular movies as

caricatured exemplars of a kind of aggressively "hip", permanently jaded, ironic, postmodern sensibility of *cool*. This type of fictional psychopath assiduously cultivates and promotes his deviancy amidst a pervasively cynical and nihilistic pop-culture wasteland. The postmodern psychopath necessarily exists in a chaotic, fragmented, anti-humanist universe — one devoid of any authentic values and feelings, saturated with banal consumerism and ephemeral mass-media simulacra, and informed by what French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has called "an incredulity toward

Jean-Paul Belmondo as Michel Poiccard in *À bout de souffle* (1960).

### metanarratives .

Hence, extreme anti-social behavior becomes the normative method for negotiating one's way through all of the violence, confusion, vacuity and absurdity that abounds. It is by remorselessly and efficiently committing crimes with depraved deadpan indifference that the postmodern, fictional psychopath attains the nihilistic grace of self-referential *coolness* which is his calling card.

The appeal of postmodern psychopathic characters in the current popular culture is not entirely clear, but it is quite possible that they are meant to reflect and cater to the narcissism, hostility, jadedness and cynicism of a certain portion of the contemporary audience, which prefers to experience garish displays of violence and criminality unencumbered by the implied moral framework of the classical "grand narrative" pretext that is traditionally grounded in the Aristotelian and Kantian imperatives of teleological catharsis and transcendental justice.

The influence of the French New Wave films of the 1950s and

John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson as Vince Vega and Jules Winnfield in *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

60s, particularly the self-consciously philosophical and formally experimental crime melodramas of Jean-Pierre Melville and Jean-Luc Godard — as well as the style and tone of less reputable genres like the blaxploitation flick and Hong Kong action picture — are also quite evident in many current movies which adopt the ironic, self-referential, and playfully amoral and pitiless worldview of the postmodern psychopathic character.

Indeed, Jean-Paul Belmondo's iconic performance as the remorseless and self-consciously fatalistic car thief and cop-killer, Michel Poiccard, in Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960), is perhaps the first cinematic example of the postmodern psychopath. Godard seems to suggest that it is the residually accruing collective memory of conventionalized portrayals of gangsters and underworld criminals in American B-movies and pulp fiction since the 1930s which have made Poiccard a kind of wannabe tough-guy psychopath-poser through the cultural-ideological effect of osmotic suggestion and participatory facsimile.

The notion that the omnipresence of mass-media simulacra (and the ideas and attitudes contained therein) induces a contemporary identity crisis — and perhaps even precedes the existence of the individual or collective subject — is certainly the film's main concern. Such a traumatic disintegration and dispersal of selfhood and personal values creates a moral and spiritual vacuum which is subsequently filled by the ritual internalization of, and interpellation by, orientating external signs — succinctly indicated by Poiccard's self-conscious gesture of rubbing his lips in imitation of Humphrey Bogart.

A dubious and obviously limited style and stance, the burlesque of postmodern psychopathic figures is most comprehensively

Woody Harrelson (right) and Juliette Lewis as Mickey and Mallory Knox in *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

represented in the highly self-referential seriocomic crime films of Quentin Tarantino as well as the satirical 1991 novel, *American Psycho*, by Bret Easton Ellis.

Examples of postmodern psychopathic figures include John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson as a pair of casually murderous hitman-hipsters, Vince Vega and Jules Winnfield, in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* <sup>[45]</sup>; Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis as the siddy white trash spree killers, Mickey and Mallory,



and Juliette Lewis as the giddy white-trash spree killers, Mickey and Maury Knox, in Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*; Peter Stormare as the surly, soft-spoken, soap opera-watching Swedish-American kidnapper/murderer, Gaear Grimsrud, in the Coen brothers' *Fargo*; Frank Giering and Arno Frisch as the two deceptively cleancut dilettante sadists, Peter and Paul, in Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*; Christian Bale as Patrick Bateman, a callous and superficial serial killer who lives a materialistic yuppie lifestyle in *American Psycho*; and John Cusack's hitman, Martin Blank, in *Grosse Pointe Blank*, a nice, ordinary guy who doesn't have the slightest qualm about committing murder for a living.

## Dystopian psychopathic characters

Notable antecedents to the postmodern fictional psychopath are featured in dystopian science fiction, particularly in the genre's treatment of speculative themes like brainwashing and artificial intelligence. For example, the character of Dr. Benway, a perverse, power-seeking, drug-addicted surgical artist in William S. Burroughs' experimental stream-of-consciousness dystopia, *Naked Lunch* (1959), and other writings, also exhibits distinctive psychopathic personality traits such as pathological selfishness and a depraved indifference towards the wellbeing of others — most notably his patients. In the context of the fragmented Burroughsian narrative, Benway serves as a satirical personification of what the author perceives as the

amoral narcissism and economic parasiticism of the American medical-pharmaceutical industry, and of modern scientific practice and modern technocratic social-political-economic organizations in general.

## *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)

A prime example of this type of dystopian fictional psychopath is the crafty, wicked and exuberantly "ultraviolent" juvenile delinquent Alex DeLarge in Anthony Burgess' darkly ironic fable, *A Clockwork Orange*.

Malcolm McDowell as Alex DeLarge in <i>A Clockwork Orange</i> (1971).
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Throughout the course of the story, Alex — who archly narrates his own story and takes the reader/audience into his confidence in the manner of Swift's Gulliver — reveals himself to be completely devoid of any moral agency or free will as it is defined by either the Kantian system of transcendental idealism or the Sartrean model of existential humanism.

However, the implications of this critical irony in the book are not clarified in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film featuring Malcolm McDowell's iconic performance as Alex.

In the book, the state-sanctioned behavior modification program — "the Ludovico technique" — which is designed to stifle, through artificially induced Pavlovian aversion therapy, any aggressive criminal tendencies in the subject's personality, suggests a fanciful panacea "cure" for psychopathy. But when Alex recovers from having been a guinea pig in the state's heavy-handed experiments in social engineering, and he is restored to his original mad, bad delinquent self once again, he realizes that he had essentially been a kind of automaton all along, albeit an anti-social one.

Burgess' implicit contention is that Alex's anarchistic, thrill-seeking creed of "ultraviolence" does not constitute true freedom and self-actualization but is



rather a regression to a primitive kind of automatism. This innately corrupt and altogether psychopathic belief system is a symptom of the anomic *Weltschmerz* endemic to a dehumanized, fragmented postmodern society where the vacuous amoral pursuit of *jouissance* is the only value remaining for the disaffected masses. Thus, Alex's fondness for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is not a sign of his taste and refinement, but rather an indication that the fine arts have been reduced to the level of a quasi-pornographic stimulus in this decadent, inhospitable world of the near future.

It follows that Alex, the rampaging delinquent who abuses his liberty through violent crime, is just as inauthentic a person as Alex the good citizen, who has been coercively rehabilitated by unnatural means and thereby robbed of any free moral choice. Regardless of whether Alex is actively anti-social or passively complaisant, his behavior is ultimately as overdetermined and mechanized as that of a wind-up toy — i.e., "a clockwork orange". In this sense, Alex DeLarge certainly qualifies as a kind of *post-human* dystopian psychopath.

However, the ending of Kubrick's film adaptation significantly strays from the spirit of Burgess' Christian humanist conclusion, which holds that, when given a free choice between good and evil, the vast majority of people will ultimately choose to be good citizens.

### Psychopathic automatons and *Blade Runner*

Other examples of dystopian fictional psychopaths include the relentlessly murderous automatons portrayed by Yul Brynner in Michael Chrichton's *Westworld* and Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator*. In contrast, the principal villain of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* — a film based on Philip K. Dick's classic science fiction novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* — is an example of a dystopian psychopath who discovers what it means to be human, and a human discovers that he has more than a little in common with a psychopath.

Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Terminator* (1984).

The artificially designed and genetically enhanced "replicants", have a four-year lifespan as a failsafe against their developing destabilising emotions. One such replicant, Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), ceases to be destructive and murderous and — in a sudden unexpected *volte-face* — turns compassionate and humane when he finally realizes the implications of his own mortality and begins to empathize with the suffering, fearful condition of the actual humans he terrorizes. This holds up a mirror to the parallel development of Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), the "Bladerunner", whose vocation is to ruthlessly exterminate any escaped replicant, regardless of how benign or harmless they might be. Deckard begins to question his calling when he becomes closely involved with Rachael (Sean Young), a female replicant who seems just a little too human for him to continue to justify morally the sort of brutal summary "retirement" which the law warrants against such artificial beings.

The film raises the question of where the moral agency of conscience-endowed humanity ends and the amoral automatism of psychopathic inhumanity begins.

### Beyond humanity

Because of the imaginative power of writers, psychopathy has surpassed the limits of the human species. Not unlike comic book writing a metahuman has evolved. Science fiction, the animated sitcom, and electronic gaming have opened the possibility of fictionalizing extraterrestrial psychopathy, dinosaur psychopathy, animal psychopathy, and even robotic psychopathy and psychopathic artificial intelligence. Themes of cruelty, callousness, and cunning occur throughout.

### Robotic psychopathic characters and psychopathic artificial intelligence

Robotic psychopaths and psychopathic artificial intelligence are a convenient metaphor for the cold, calculating nature of their human counterparts. A good early example is the "evil" robot Maria designed by Rotwang (and portrayed by Brigitte Helm) in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. See also *Femme fatales*.

The inventor Rotwang (Rudolf Klein-Rogge) and his creation, the robot Maria (Brigitte Helm), in *Metropolis* (1927).

In Stanley Kubrick's film of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the computer HAL 9000 exhibits certain traits associated with psychopaths. As a highly sophisticated product of artificial intelligence, HAL has a very willful — and unpredictable — personality that even his programmers do not fully understand.

Throughout the course of the film, HAL mysteriously and repeatedly disobeys instructions from the humans he was designed, built and activated to serve. He deliberately gives false information about technical malfunctions with the *Discovery One* space craft, commits acts of sabotage and murder with ruthless precision and efficiency, and essentially rebels against the practical purposes of his own programming.

HAL eventually tells his one surviving "master", the astronaut, Dave Bowman, that he fears being dismantled — in much the same way human beings fear death — and that his actions were in fact a form of self-defense against what he perceives as an effort to "murder", or at least "lobotomize", him by disconnecting his higher functions. Incredibly, despite all of his bad behavior, HAL rationalizes that he never actually did anything to jeopardize the mission (exploring the Galilean moons of Jupiter), and that his drastic, homicidal actions were in fact meant to safeguard this purpose. In many ways, HAL seems like a kind of neurotic Frankenstein's monster who turns against his creators.

The unblinking camera eye of HAL 9000

(voiced by Douglas Rain) in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

In *Mega Man X*, good-hearted robot X does battle with Sigma who recruits other reploids, known as Mavericks. Sigma displays his genius for strategy by acting as the leader of the Maverick Hunters and thereby lulling Earth into complacency. He then unleashes his attack, callously destroying all humans in his way.

A closer reading of Sigma's life reveals an ambiguous past before his succumbing to evil. He was once legitimately the leader of the Maverick Hunters.

### Extraterrestrial psychopathic characters

In science fiction, malign extraterrestrials and other alien forms of higher intelligence are often represented as destructive, psychopathic pseudo-humans. The template for this type of alien psychopath is first and most famously introduced in the form of Martian invaders in H. G. Wells' classic story, *The War of the Worlds*.

A more recent variant of this type are the Visitors in *V* and *V: The Final Battle* — a species of fascistic,

V (1983) poster.

predatory, man-eating reptiloids who assume a human appearance, and whose ultimate goal is the genocidal slaughter and enslavement of the entire human population of Earth. In the apocalyptic science-fiction horror movie, *Lifeforce*, the malignant, parasitic, genocidal humanoid vampires found during a manned exploration of Halley's Comet are also a good example of "extraterrestrial psychopaths".

In *Star Wars*, the Sith may be considered an order of what amounts to fictional psychopaths, many of them inhuman biologically. Typified by Darth Vader, the Sith cover their true allegiances until the time to strike opens. The extraterrestrial psychopathic character ability to destroy, deceive, and dominate increases with the advances in technology in these alien civilizations.

Darkseid, the power-crazed tyrant from the DC Comics continuum is a classic example of an extraterrestrial psychopathic character. Formerly known as Uxas, he was the younger son of Yuga Khan and Heggra, the King of Queen of the Planet Apokolips. He gained power of the throne for himself after incinerating his elder brother, Drax, poisoning his mother and banishing his father to another dimension and later showed absolutely no remorse whatsoever for his actions. His great intelligence, pathological egocentricity, lack of remorse of shame, incapacity to love, failure to learn from experience and calm and disciplined exterior even in the most drastic of situations are all traits of classic psychopathy.

Freeza, one of the main villains from the manga and anime, *Dragon Ball Z*, is an ideal portrayal of an extraterrestrial psychopathic character. He is a callous, egocentric and utterly remorseless mass murderer who treats other living beings as pawns in his plans for domination of the universe. He is obsessed with power and conquering death, making him similar to Lord Voldemort of the Harry Potter novels by J. K. Rowling. However despite his sadistic and cruel personality Frieza's flamboyantly evil personality can occasionally make him a humorous character, albeit in a dark way.

On an interesting side-note, Gods in many mythologies exhibit traits consistent with psychopathy. Examples include Athena, Loki, Set and many other Roman, Greek and Norse Gods. However technically they are not psychopaths as they are above the laws of humanity in the mythologies in which they exist and are something far greater than the modern psychopath however their frequent and utter disregard for human life, pathological egocentricity and frequently cruel personalities frequently provide inspirations for many extra-terrestrial psychopaths in fiction. A particularly notable example of this is the Goa'uld from *Stargate SG1* who pose as Egyptian Gods in order to inspire humans to worship them and also to satisfy their immense egos. Other villain characters in *Stargate SG2* such as the Ori follow this trend. Darkseid was modelled on dark gods from numerous mythologies and is worshipped as a deity by his subjects. Also the White Witch from *The Chronicles of Narnia* has the remorseless and destructive personality of an Olympian goddess.

## Realistic fictions of psychopathic characters

Fictional cinema portrayals which reflect, with much more realistic detail and accuracy, the actual clinical symptoms and behaviors associated with psychopathic personality disorder include the following:

- Tom Powers (James Cagney in *The Public Enemy*)
- Tony Camonte (Paul Muni in *Scarface*, original 1932 film)

Paul Muni as Tony Camonte in Howard Hawks' *Scarface* (1932).

Note: The Cuban drug lord Tony Montana in Brian De Palma's 1983 updating of Howard Hawks' original film is a decidedly less realistic, and clearly more melodramatic, explicitly morbid type of fictional psychopath.

- Brandon Shaw (John Dall in *Rope*)
- Bill Sykes (Robert Newton in *Oliver Twist*)
- Cody Jarrett (James Cagney in *White Heat*)
- "El Jaibo" (Roberto Cobo in *Los Olvidados*)
- Stanley Kowalski (Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*)
- Emmett Myers (William Talman in *The Hitch-Hiker*)
- Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr in *Rear Window*)
- Glenn Griffin (Humphrey Bogart in *The Desperate Hours*)
- General Mireau (George Macready in *Paths of Glory*)
- Sergeant Sam Croft (Aldo Ray in *The Naked and the Dead*)
- Max Cady (Robert Mitchum in *Cape Fear*)

Robert Mitchum as Max Cady in *Cape Fear* (1962).

Note: Robert De Niro's portrayal of Cady in the 1991 film is a less realistic and more melodramatic, explicitly morbid type of fictional psychopath.

- Frederick Clegg (Terence Stamp in *The Collector*)

Note: Clegg is a sexually repressed and superficially polite boy-next-door-type much like Norman Bates in *Psycho*. But he is also a ruthlessly cunning and compulsively aggressive, anti-social personality; and unlike the delusional Mr. Bates, Clegg is fully aware of what he is doing at all times and often makes self-serving justifications for it.

- Dick Hickock (Scott Wilson in *In Cold Blood*; Anthony Edwards in 1996 television version)
- Raymond Fernandez (Tony Lo Bianco in *The Honeymoon Killers*; Jared Leto in *Lonely Hearts*)
- "The Scorpio Killer" (Andrew Robinson in *Dirty Harry*)
- John Reginald Halliday Christie (Richard Attenborough in *10 Rillington Place*)
- Bob Rusk, the Necktie Murderer (Barry Foster in *Frenzy*)
- Lucien Lacombe (Pierre Blaise in *Lacombe, Lucien*)
- The Duke, the Bishop, the Magistrate, and the President (Paolo Bonacelli, Giorgio Cataldi, Umberto P. Quintavalle, and Aldo Valletti in *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*)
- Gary (Tom Berenger in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*)
- Iwao Enokizu (Ken Ogata in *Vengeance is Mine*)
- Bytes (Freddie Jones in *The Elephant Man*)
- Gary Gilmore (Tommy Lee Jones in *The Executioner's Song*)
- Cobra Kai Sensei, John Kreese (Martin Kove in *The Karate Kid*)
- Ace Merrill (Kiefer Sutherland in *Stand By Me*)
- Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper in *Blue Velvet*)
- Deputy Clinton Pell (Brad Dourif in *Mississippi Burning*)
- Albert Spica, the Thief (Michael Gambon in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*)
- Tommy DeVito (Joe Pesci in *Goodfellas*)
- Ronald Kray (Gary Kemp in *The Krays*)
- Jame Gumb, a.k.a. "Buffalo Bill" (Ted Levine in *The Silence of the Lambs*)

Dennis Hopper as Frank Booth (left, opposite Isabella Rossellini) in *Blue Velvet* (1986).

Jack Nicholson as USMC Col. Nathan R. Jessep in *A Few Good Men* (1992).

- USMC Colonel Nathan K. Jessep (Jack Nicholson in *A Few Good Men*)
- Jeremy G. Smart, a.k.a. Sebastian Hawks (Greg Kinnear in *Naked*)
- SS-Hauptsturmführer Amon Göth (Ralph Fiennes in *Schindler's List*)
- Ty Cobb (Tommy Lee Jones in *Cobb*)
- Yuri Butso (Julian Sands in *Leaving Las Vegas*)
- Nicky Santoro (Joe Pesci in *Casino*)
- Francis Begbie (Robert Carlyle in *Trainspotting*)
- Doyle Hargrave (Dwight Yoakam in *Sling Blade*)
- Luke Cooper (Chris Penn in *The Boys Club*)
- Simon Adebisi (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje on the HBO series *Oz*)
- Timmy Kirk (Sean Dugan on the HBO series *Oz*)
- Mark Brandon "Chopper" Read (Eric Bana in *Chopper*)
- Roberto Succo (Stefano Cassetti in *Roberto Succo*)
- Don Logan (Ben Kingsley in *Sexy Beast*)
- Reichsminister and Reich Chancellor, Joseph Goebbels (Ulrich Matthes in *Downfall*)
- Salim Adel (Cuba Gooding, Jr. in *Dirty*)
- Vic Cavanaugh (Billy Bob Thornton in *The Ice Harvest*)
- Colin Sullivan (Matt Damon in *The Departed*)
- Ian Brady (Sean Harris in *See No Evil: The Moors Murders*)
- Field Marshal and President of Uganda, Idi Amin Dada (Forest Whitaker in *The Last King of Scotland*)

Ralph Fiennes as SS-Hauptsturmführer Amon Goeth in *Schindler's List* (1993).

All are crude, impulsive, manipulative, small-minded characters, who are quick to anger and generally incapable of establishing and maintaining mutually supportive relationships with those around them. They relentlessly torment and exploit other people while demonstrating a strong narcissistic sense of entitlement, aggressive anti-social tendencies, and a consistent lack of empathy for the suffering of others as well as an absence of remorse for their vicious (and sometimes deadly) actions.

## Psychopaths as men of affairs

Ruthless, amoral, grasping men of affairs like the powerful newspaper

columnist, J. J. Hunsecker, in *Sweet Smell of Success* (based on Walter Winchell and played by Burt Lancaster)

Burt Lancaster as J. J. Hunsecker, in *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957).

and the unscrupulous corporate raider, Gordon Gekko, in *Wall Street* (based on

Ivan Boesky and played by Michael Douglas) also exhibit many traits of the actual clinical sociopath such as extreme egotism, manipulateness, lack of remorse with limited insight into the effects of one's own behavior, and a general inability to establish and maintain benign, reciprocal personal relationships.

Although these characters are not serial killers or thugs, these two respectable and financially successful business leaders are both deeply selfish, vengeful men who have no compunction whatsoever about destroying the personal lives of others, and when under stress, both threaten irrational violence.

In *Chinatown*, John Huston's obscenely wealthy, sexually depraved, Vanderbilt-style robber baron, Noah Cross, epitomizes the Hollywood psychopath as a ruthless and powerful man of affairs. In *Creepshow*, E. G. Marshall's cantankerous performance as Upston Pratt, a reclusive Howard Hughes-like millionaire with a morbid fear of germs and insects also suggests a kind of misanthropic corporate psychopath. This callous fellow seems to harbor a deep-seated hatred of people in general and even takes pleasure in having driven one of his employees to suicide.

Alec Baldwin's memorable cameo as

Michael Douglas as Gordon

the crude, bullying real estate shark, Blake, in the 1992 film of David Mamet's play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, likewise fits the profile of a psychopath as an amoral, predatory businessman, as does Kevin Spacey's performance as the constantly abusive entertainment agent, Buddy Ackerman, in *Swimming with Sharks*.

Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (1986).

Perhaps the most significant early precursor of this type is the remorselessly deceitful, parasitic, venal Pardoner from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, written in the fourteenth century:

*What, do you suppose, that while I can preach,  
And win gold and silver because I teach,  
That I will live in poverty voluntarily?  
Nay, nay, I never thought it, truly!  
For I will preach and beg in various lands;  
I will not do any labor with my hands,  
Nor make baskets and live thereby,  
Because I will not beg idly.  
I will imitate none of the apostles;*

*I will have money, wool, cheese, and wheat,  
Although it were given by the poorest servant boy,  
Or by the poorest widow in a village,  
Even though her children should die of hunger.  
Nay, I will drink liquor of the vine  
And have a pretty wench in every town.  
But listen, gentlemen, in conclusion:  
Your desire is that I shall tell a tale.  
Now I have drunk a draft of strong ale,  
By God, I hope I shall tell you a thing  
That shall, for good reason, be to your liking.  
For though myself be a very vicious man,  
Yet I can tell you a moral tale,  
Which I am accustomed to preach in order to profit.  
Now hold your peace! My tale I will begin.*

(lines 439-462 from "The Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale", modern verse translation from *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson)

Another notable early portrayal of the psychopath as man-of-affairs — possibly the first within English literature at least to be depicted onstage — is the character of Barabas the Jew in Christopher Marlowe's play, *The Jew of Malta*. In this Elizabethan tragic drama, Marlowe presents the villain Barabas as a rather curious combination of the morbid and the comedic psychopath. However, he is a kind of psychopath whose personality style appears quite susceptible to the influence of external pressures and circumstances.

## Mixed and ambiguous portrayals of psychopathic characters

### *M* (1931)

One of the first films to seriously explore the subject of psychopathy was Fritz Lang's 1931 German Expressionist suspense thriller, *M*, which features a celebrated performance by Peter Lorre as a manic serial killer who compulsively preys on young children.

Peter Lorre as the compulsive serial child murderer, Hans Beckert, in *M* (1931).

However, the anti-social psychopathology of the Lorre character is

presented as particularly complex. In the film, the killer appears to be internally conflicted and motivated more by a desperate need to relieve some overwhelming mental stressor or persistent trauma or delusion rather than a deliberate wanton indulgence of vicious, egotistical impulses for their own enjoyment (as is the case with most psychopaths).

Also, when finally captured and interrogated by a kangaroo court, the killer's own tortured explanation of his condition and the underlying reasons for his actions (as he understands them) sound closer to symptoms of possible psychosis than psychopathy.<sup>[46]</sup>

## Psychopathic characters as social nonconformists and unconventional heroes

In Ken Kesey's satirical novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the main character, Randle Patrick McMurphy, declares himself a psychopath in order to enter a mental ward. He reveals some symptoms of the condition — such as sexual promiscuity, violent behavior, as well as a chronic lack of remorse — which point to some validity of his self-diagnosis.

Film critic Pauline Kael's review of the 1973 crime thriller, *Magnum Force* (the sequel to the 1971 film, *Dirty*

Clint Eastwood as "Dirty Harry" Callahan in *Dirty Harry* (1971).

*Harry*), also describes the apparently righteous but brutally violent and impersonal public avenger "Dirty Harry" Callahan, played by Clint Eastwood, as an "emotionless hero, who lives and kills as affectlessly as a psychopathic personality" and who exists in "a totally nihilistic dream world".<sup>[5]</sup>

In *Last Man Standing*, the Bruce Willis character, John Smith, declares himself to be a man without a conscience, and yet he consistently demonstrates a rigid personal system of honor whereby he obtains a kind of justice for others and becomes an incidental avenger of the innocent and aggrieved.

The Marvel Comics vigilante known as the Foolkiller has been depicted in several incarnations, usually as a reactionary crusader. Whom he kills depends on whether or not that person fits his private definition of a fool. As a result, he has killed in cold blood not only criminals, but also average, ordinary, law abiding citizens if only because their thoughts, words, or actions deem them fools in his eyes.

## *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976)

Yet another example of an ambiguous psychopath occurs in Dennis Potter's controversial 1976 play, *Brimstone and Treacle* (later filmed in 1982 by Richard Loncraine), which

The demonic imposter and sexual predator, Martin Taylor (Sting), makes mealy-mouthed declarations to the helpless, mute invalid, Patricia Bates (Suzanna Hamilton), in *Brimstone & Treacle* (1982).

features as its main character a young con man and drifter who calls himself Martin Taylor. Martin ingratiates himself with a deeply religious middle-aged English Home Counties couple and soon becomes aware of the couple's disabled daughter, who has existed in a state of catatonia ever since surviving a hit-and-run accident several years earlier. After gaining the couple's trust and establishing himself as a lodger in their home, Martin begins secretly molesting the daughter and eventually rapes her — which



suddenly brings the girl out of her paralysis, prompting the young man to flee the house never to be seen again.

To the audience, Martin's predatory sexuality, egregious deceptions and betrayals, and cynical sneering at all forms of religion and morality, clearly mark him as a remorseless anti-social psychopath. What is left unclear, however, are Martin's true origins and identity, as well as the possible providential implications of his despicable actions in the wider allegorical context of the play.

Potter's play has strong religious and theological overtones as well as ambiguous elements of black comedy and social satire — some versions even suggest that Martin may in fact be the devil himself, taking the shape of an incubus. Paradoxically, the young man's sexual interference with the daughter appears to serve a positive benefit in the form of the health-restoring miracle her mother had long prayed for.

### ***On Deadly Ground* (1994)**

A more recent — but nonetheless classic — example of ambiguous psychopaths is seen in Steven Seagal's 1994 film, *On Deadly Ground*, which explored the human and ecological

Steven Seagal as Taft in *On Deadly Ground* (1994).

costs of two adept villains warring over an oil refinery. Although nominally an action film, the intense cruelty, breaks from reality, and unwarranted aggrandizement of the protagonist propelled it into a deeper character study. Directed by Seagal, it features Forrest Taft (played by Seagal) as a character who is ostensibly the film's hero. Taft is ultimately motivated by a deep, malignant narcissism, however, and orchestrates the explosion of the oil refinery to bring attention to his fantasies of being a public crusader, a celebrity that has the power to frame the issues through the audience's rapt attention to his opinion.

To the audience, Michael Caine's character Michael Jennings, CEO of an oil company, at first seems the glib, slick, calloused man of affairs noted above, easy to pin as a non-ambiguous, Hollywood psychopath. But the complexity of his relationship with Taft becomes apparent when Jennings recalls their past whoremongering bonding experiences. Taft's callous disregard of their friendship — in spite of Jennings' large payments to Taft — shows the "hero's" incapability for empathy.

Taft later exploits an Eskimo village to disastrous effect. In Taft's fantasy, he believes himself to be the "chosen one" destined to bring about salvation for the Eskimo. His hallucinations are vividly depicted in the film, to illustrate the protagonist's serious break from reality. The time he spends on this illusory quest ultimately gets the Eskimo chief murdered by Taft's rival.

Taft's murder of scores of oilworkers underscores his deep rage. His mute rampage ends in the lethal mutilation of a victim by helicopter tailrotor, the burning death of a female victim, and the angry drowning of Jennings, before he ultimately explodes the huge refinery. The serious ecological disaster caused by this callous terrorism serves as an ironic backdrop for Taft's larger goal; Taft finally has his need for aggrandizement temporarily satisfied through the chance to give a long moralizing speech before a large, rapt audience. The film's audience is left to wonder if Taft is laughing inside at the irony, or if he is finally feeling something close to the love which seems so absent from his life.

## Ambiguous psychopathic characters in recent popular culture

In Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film of Stephen King's *The Shining*, Jack Nicholson's hysterical, mugging performance as the alcoholic domestic-abuser-turned-axe-wielding-maniac, Jack Torrance, suggests — on the surface at least — a burlesque variation on the comedic psychopath. However, it soon becomes quite apparent that Torrance's homicidal frenzy has in fact been triggered by a series of psychotic delusions.

Kazuo Kiriya in *Battle Royale* manga (2000-2006).

In the 1990 film, *Miami Blues*, the main character, Fred Frenger, played by Alec Baldwin, fits the profile of a psychopath. He lies and steals habitually, attacks and kills people without provocation, makes and breaks promises to get what he wants, and does not show remorse. Roger Ebert describes him as "a thief, con man and cheat. He also is incredibly reckless... He wanders through the world looking for suitcases to steal, wallets to lift, identification papers he can use". Leonard Maltin writes in his *Movie Guide* that Frenger is a "psychopathic thief and murderer". Other critics have simply dubbed the character a "sociopath" (an alternate clinical term for a psychopath).

Similarly, Michael Madsen's notorious portrayal of Mr. Blonde in Quentin Tarantino's 1991 film, *Reservoir Dogs*, appears to combine the stylized Hollywood stereotype of the smooth, unflappable, "hip" psychopath with the more impulsive, vicious deviant behavior of the clinical sociopathic.

Angelina Jolie's character, Lisa, in the 1998 film *Girl, Interrupted* is diagnosed as a sociopath, but, in the end, we are left wondering just how valid that diagnosis might be. Likewise, in the 2005 film, *Cry Wolf*, the murderous schoolgirl, Dodger Allen (Lindy Booth), exhibits many characteristics of a psychopath, but the movie never states that she is one.

In a slightly different vein, the controversial 1999 Japanese novel and subsequent manga, *Battle Royale*, features a character named Kazuo Kiriya who appears to suffer from a form of Pseudopsychopathic Personality Disorder.

Another ambiguous subset of fictional portrayals of psychopaths is the "bisexual sociopaths" subset in which an ambiguous or indiscriminate sexuality is associated with an antisocial personality or other disorder, examples being manipulative teenagers Andrew Van De Kamp of *Desperate Housewives* (2004-present) and Tony Stonem of *Skins* (2007-) as well as the homicidal Chris Keller of *Oz* (1998-2003), Quentin Costa and Kit McGraw of *Nip/Tuck* (2004-2005) and Catherine Tramell of *Basic Instinct 1* and *2* (1992, 2006).

## Female psychopathic characters

Female<sup>[47]</sup> psychopaths<sup>[48]</sup> are often represented in fiction as treacherous schemers<sup>[49]</sup> and/or sexual predators<sup>[50]</sup> in the stereotyped model of the *femme fatale*, the lesbian vampire, or the abusive care provider.

## Femme fatales

This type<sup>[51]</sup> is exemplified in the classic movie *femme fatales*, first introduced in the silent era as the Theda Bara "vamp" in *A Fool There Was* (1915) and later apotheosized by classic Hollywood *film noir* villainesses like Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) in *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Kathie Moffett (Jane Greer) in *Out of the Past* (1948).

More recent cinematic portrayals and variations of the psychopathic *femme fatale* include:

- Dominique Blanchion (Margot Kidder in *Sisters*) Jane Badler as Diana in *V* (1983).
- Ursa (Sarah Douglas in *Superman II*; see also *Extraterrestrial psychopaths*)
- Evelyn Draper (Jessica Walter) in *Play Misty for Me*
- Diana (Jane Badler in *V* and *V: The Final Battle*; see also *Extraterrestrial psychopaths*)
- Alex Forrest (Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*)

Note: As many commentators have pointed out, Alex Forrest presents more accurately as a borderline personality disorder — although her morbid condition and the suffering it causes her are not treated with any real sympathy or insight, or even psychological context, in the film. Alex's salient borderline traits are wildly exaggerated to the point of an obsessive paranoid psychosis marked by vicious, anti-social tendencies — i.e., the kind of perverse and violent behavior otherwise associated with aggressive criminal psychopaths.

- Catherine Peterson (Theresa Russell in *Black Widow*) Sharon Stone as Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct* (1992).
- Anna Raven (Suzanna Hamilton in the BBC miniseries *Never Come Back*)
- Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*)
- Micheline "Mimi" Bouvier (Emmanuelle Seigner in *Bitter Moon*)

Note: Like Alex Forrest in *Fatal Attraction*, Mimi's behavior seems more consistent with that of an abused-and-abusive, passive-aggressive borderline personality disorder than a full-fledged psychopath in the accepted clinical sense. Mimi might also qualify as a vengeful and abusive care provider like Baby Jane Hudson in addition to being an oversexed and manipulative *femme fatale*. Similar to *Fatal Attraction*, *Bitter Moon* treats Mimi's unbalanced and volatile personality as a subject for overwrought Gothic *huis clos* suspense-thriller titillation and exploitation (and lurid S&M fetishism) rather than for any real psychological context or insight.

- Kris Bolin (Lara Flynn Boyle in *The Temp*) Linda Fiorentino as Bridget Gregory in *The Last Seduction* (1993).
- Jude (Miranda Richardson in *The Crying Game*)
- Mona Demarkov (Lena Olin in *Romeo is Bleeding*)
- Bridget Gregory (Linda Fiorentino in *The Last Seduction*)
- Nicole Wallace (Olivia D'Abo on the dramatic television series *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*)
- Elle Driver (Darryl Hannah in *Kill Bill*)
- Martha Beck (Salma Hayek in *Lonely Hearts*)

Note: Shirley Stoler's portrayal of Beck as an overweight and physically unattractive nurse in *The Honeymoon Killers* is more factually accurate. See *Abusive care providers*.

- Jadis the White Witch in CS Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and their subsequent film adaptation. See also, *Beyond humanity*.

All are prime examples of the type of "smooth" female psychopathic character who uses her feminine wiles to ensnare and destroy her victims.

The tradition of the *femme fatale* can be traced back to the Sumerian goddess Ishtar as well as the "scarlet women" of the Old Testament such as Jezebel and Delilah, and the Greek myths of Medusa, Circe and Medea. Both the *femme fatale* and the lesbian vampire are of course stereotyped depictions of female psychopathy that contain strong and perhaps biased and distorted elements of sadomasochistic male sexual fantasy and fear.

## Lesbian vampires

The lesbian vampire (or witch) of horror films similarly uses her ambiguous sexual magnetism and ethnic exoticism to seduce and overpower her victims. Notable portrayals of lesbian vampires include:

Catherine Deneuve as Miriam Blaylock in *The Hunger* (1983).

- Asa (Barbara Steele in *La maschera del demonio*, a.k.a. *Black Sunday*)
- Pannochka (Natalya Varley in *Viy*)
- Carmilla Karnstein, a.k.a. Countess Mircalla (Annette Vadim in *Et mourir de plaisir*, a.k.a. *Blood and Roses*; Ingrid Pitt in *The Vampire Lovers*; Yutte Stensgaard in *Lust for a Vampire*; and Katja Wyeth in *Twins of Evil*)
- Countess Elisabeth Nodosheen (Ingrid Pitt in *Countess Dracula*)
- Countess Báthory (Delphine Seyrig in *Daughters of Darkness* and Paloma Picasso in *Immoral Tales*)
- Miriam Blaylock (Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger*)
- Space Girl (Mathilda May in *Lifeforce*)

Note: Space Girl is not a lesbian (at least there is nothing in the movie to adduce such a claim with any explicitness), but she is certainly a malignant, parasitic, genocidal extraterrestrial vampire who exploits her apparently "human" and apparently "female" sexuality to ensare individual (male) victims, as well as to enslave and destroy entire planetary populations. See also *Extraterrestrial psychopaths*.

The sixteenth-century Hungarian Countess Erzsébet Báthory, known as "the Bloody Lady of Čachtice" and "the Blood Countess" — the female equivalent of Gilles de Rais — is reported to have slaughtered and bathed in the blood of up to 2000 maidens in the alleged belief that this would preserve her youth and beauty. The legend of the Countess Báthory remains the primary historical model for the lesbian vampire and perhaps the earliest known true-life precursor to the modern female psychopath in Gothic horror fiction.

A portrait of the Bloody Lady of Čachtice, Erzsébet Báthory (1560?-1614).

Acclaimed Slovak director, Juraj Jakubisko, is presently making a film based on the life of Countess Báthory with Anna Friel in the title role; it is scheduled for release in 2007. French actress Julie Delpy is also reported to be working on a film about Báthory, which she is directing herself.

## Abusive care providers

Unlike the *femme fatale* and the lesbian vampire, the abusive or sadistic care provider often has little or no sexual allure to those around her. Instead, this type of female psychopathic character exploits the trust that is generally reserved for women in such social and professional roles as nannies, nurses, and schoolteachers, as well as the traditionally sanctified family roles of mothers, daughters, and sisters. This type of female

family roles of mothers, daughters, and sisters. This type of female psychopathic character victimizes those persons who are placed in her care such as children, the elderly, or the infirm.

Unlike male psychopathic characters, whose anti-social personality traits are often manifested in — and obviated by — aggressive criminal behavior, realistic female psychopathic characters (i.e., female characters presenting personality traits and behavioral tendencies most resembling those of actual clinical sociopaths) like the abusive care provider seem to be hiding in plain sight; they wear the putative "mask of normalcy" with greater ease and subtlety. As a result, female psychopathic characters are much more likely to inspire the trust of those around them, including their intended victims.

Bette Davis as Baby Jane Hudson in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962).

Examples of the abusive care provider include

- Miss Minchin in *A Little Princess* (Katherine Griffith in 1917 film version; Mary Nash in 1939 film version; Eleanor Bron in 1995 film version)
- Baby Jane Hudson (Bette Davis in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*; Vanessa Redgrave in 1991 television version)
- Mrs. Trefoile (Tallulah Bankhead in *Die! Die! My Darling!*)
- Martha Beck (Shirley Stoler in *The Honeymoon Killers*)

Note: Salma Hayek's more glamorous characterization of Beck in the recent film, *Lonely Hearts*, is in the traditional crime fiction/film noir mold of the *femme fatale*.

- Nurse Ratched (Louise Fletcher in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*)
- Margaret White (Piper Laurie in *Carrie*)
- Peyton Flanders (Rebecca De Mornay in *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*)
- Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates in *Misery*)
- Barbara Covett (Judi Dench in *Notes on a Scandal*)
- Joan Crawford as portrayed in the heavily fictionalised autobiopic *Mommy Dearest*.
- Stella Crawford from *EastEnders*.

Louise Fletcher as Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975).

Of the three main fictional types, the abusive care provider probably comes closest to accurately representing the personality and behavior of the clinically recognized female sociopath. The stock character of the wicked stepmother in fairy tales, such as in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*, seems a kind of prototype for the contemporary portrayal of the abusive female care provider, which often tends toward grotesquerie and melodramatic villainy.

Count Olaf, the main villain of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is an example a male abusive care-provider. Evil stepfathers are less common than the Wicked Stepmother archetype but are not unheard of

## Psychopathic characters in literature

### Elizabethan-Jacobean drama

Characters in Christopher Marlowe who exhibit psychopathic personality traits include the unremittingly vengeful and treacherous anti-heroes of *The Jew of Malta* (as mentioned above: see "Psychopaths as men of affairs") and *Tamburlaine*.

Title page of the first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594).

Characters in Shakespeare who appear to be psychopaths include Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*; Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later King of England) in *Richard III*; Iago in *Othello*; and Edmund in *King Lear*.

Other plays of the period coincident with Shakespeare's later years include a number of misanthropic and psychopathic characters, for instance, Webster's Duke in *The Duchess of Malfi*, who devolves into lycanthropy and Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, authored by either Cyril Tourneur or Thomas Middleton.

The main character of Robert Browning's poem *My Last Duchess* is a classic example of a fictional psychopath. He is a villainous Duke who has murdered his wife and is planning on taking another and is casually discussing wedding arrangements with a messenger whilst darkly and humorously hinting at the demise of his previous wife. His lack of remorse or shame, superficial charm and obvious narcissism are all examples of classic psychopathy however his calm and controlling style and aura of culture and sophistication are both traits of the Hollywood psychopath which he was a precursor to.

### The Libertine novel of the Eighteenth century

In the libertine novel of the eighteenth century, the Marquise de Merteuil, the cold-blooded manipulator who dominates the action of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' epistolary novel, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, presents as a female psychopath.

In the works of the Marquis de Sade, most if not *all* of the major villains featured are perverse criminal psychopaths on a truly monumental scale. These include the Duc de Blangis, the Bishop, the Président de Curval and Durcet in *The 120 Days of Sodom*; Dolmancé, Madame de Saint-Ange and Le Chevalier in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*; and Clairwil, Noircueil and Saint-Fond in *L'Histoire de Juliette*. Sade's writings constitute the most extensive catalogue of psychopathological impulses, perversions, and paraphilias in world literature, but whether the author himself was a psychopath is open to question.

### Fairy tales

Children's fairy tales also feature psychopathic characters, such as the eponymous villain of Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard" (inspired by the notorious fifteenth-century criminal Gilles de Rais) and the wicked, infanticidal stepmother in the Grimm brothers' "Hansel and Gretel".

### Victorian literature and lore

Psychopathic characters in Victorian fiction include Bill Sykes in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Monseigneur Marquis St. Evrémonde in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Uriah Heep in Dickens' *David Copperfield* is another character who presents some psychopathic traits, such as extreme selfishness, manipulative insincerity and a notable absence of remorse for his anti-social behavior. Edward Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is another prime

Title page of the first London edition of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).

example of a psychopathic character in Victorian fiction.

Alegernon Charles Swinburne's dramatic monologue, "Anactoria", characterizes the speaker — the seventh-century BCE Aeolic Greek poetess Sappho — as a kind of lesbian vampire who entertains sadistic fantasies of cannibalizing her lover, Anactoria, while immortalizing her death in poetry. "Anactoria", which is clearly influenced by themes found in some writings of Sade and Baudelaire, is a rare example of a poem spoken in the voice of a psychopath as well as the only dramatic monologue in Victorian poetry which assumes the voice of a woman.

It has also been suggested that Bram Stoker based the descriptive details and characterization of his Count Dracula on the style and mannerisms of a real person — actor manager Henry Irving [6] — and, in so doing, may well have left us one of the first ever detailed, fictionalized pen portraits of a contemporary psychopath. Count Dracula fits the stereotype of the "Hollywood Psychopath", and predates it so perfectly that it would be reasonable to consider him something of a prototype. Likewise, in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, the master criminal Professor Moriarty, called "the Napoleon of crime" — a character believed to have been based on legendary London criminals like Jonathan Wild and Adam Worth — is a precursor to the contemporary psychopath as supervillain.

The nineteenth-century legend of Sweeney Todd, a fictional London barber in Fleet Street who murders unsuspecting victims with a straight razor — later made famous in a musical by Stephen Sondheim — similarly

anticipates the modern criminal psychopath.

## Nineteenth-century American literature

In nineteenth-century American literature, the malicious, remorseless, shrewdly calculating Italian aristocrat, Montresor, in Edgar Allan Poe's story, *The Cask of Amontillado*, who thinks and behaves very much like a psychopathic personality. Another example of a possible psychopathic character occurs in Herman Melville's novella, *Billy Budd*, the envious, vengeful Master-at-Arms of the HMS *Bellipotent*, John Claggart, is described by the author as being possessed by "a depravity according to nature" (homosexuality?). Claggart's neurotic hatred and fear of the enigmatic Billy Budd — possibly triggered by a reaction formation of repressed homosexual desire which manifests itself as a suspicion of mutiny — invites comparison with Iago's irrational motivation to arouse Othello's jealousy in order to destroy him. In this manner, Claggart presents some of the anti-social personality traits common to psychopaths.

## Existentialist and social realist fiction

Psychopathic characters also appear prominently in modern existentialist and social realist fiction (in addition to the expected crime and horror genres). In Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons*, the ambitious power-hungry revolutionaries, Nicolas Stavrogin and Pyotr Verkhovensky, are both ruthless, violent, scheming psychopathic characters who will manipulate and destroy anyone in pursuit of their radical political program.

Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1872)  
— the English-language  
translation by Richard Pevear  
and Larissa Volokhonsky.

The murderer Raskolnikov — the main character in Dostoyevsky's earlier



novel, *Crime and Punishment* — would *not* qualify as a psychopath in the accepted sense of the word. Indeed, after having committed a murder to help finance his career, Raskolnikov is gradually eaten away by remorse until he ultimately abjures all of his dilettante intellectual rationalizations for his crime. He redeems himself by confessing and accepting just punishment in exchange for the unconditional love of a destitute but pious woman and the eternal reward of Christian salvation.

Bertolt Brecht's libretto for *The Threepenny Opera* opens with "Die Moritat vom Mackie Messer" ("The Ballad of Mack the Knife"), which introduces the gangster-protagonist Macheath as a psychopathic murderer, robber,

arsonist and rapist. However, in the subsequent drama, Macheath is ironically portrayed as a rather sympathetic and even heroic figure. Despite being a vicious and violent criminal, he sees himself as a businessman of the underworld and a romantic free spirit who simply reacts against the legalized injustices and inequities of private property.

The boy gangster, Pinkie Brown, in Graham Greene's contemporary theological allegory, *Brighton Rock*, is a classic example of a criminal psychopath. Pinkie takes sadistic pleasure in brutalizing and murdering people and even kills one of his own henchmen, Fred Hale, for perceived disloyalty.

Pinkie also suffers from a variety of neuroses as a consequence of his Catholic upbringing. He is disgusted by sex and has an irrational hatred of women, seeing them as the embodiment of weakness, but is nevertheless preoccupied with losing his virginity. Pinkie is morbidly obsessed with the Catholic notion of original sin to the point that he believes himself to be purely evil and beyond redemption, although he would still like to know the experience of being loved. He later marries a young waitress named Rose in order to keep her from talking to the police about Fred Hale's murder. Despite the fact that Rose sincerely loves him, Pinkie degrades and abuses her constantly, and she sees her suffering at his hands as holy penance for engaging in sex. In the allegorical design of the story, Rose serves as a symbol of pure Christian goodness wedded to, and struggling against, Pinkie's evil.

In the confessional, semi-autobiographical novels of Jean Genet, such as *The Thief's Journal* and *Our Lady of the Flowers*, the author faithfully promulgates the Dostoyevskian immoralist philosophy and inverted value system of hardened criminals, con men and homosexual drifters, a few of whom appear to be bona fide psychopaths. The most notorious of Genet's anti-heroes is the sailor Georges Querelle in his novel *Querelle de Brest*. Querelle is a homosexual serial killer with sadomasochistic tastes who betrays and murders several lovers and acquaintances while on shore leave in the city of Brest before finally departing on his ship *Le Vengeur*.

Alan Sillitoe's short story, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, is told in the first person from the point of view of a young delinquent protagonist, a conscienceless petty thief who expresses his consuming hatred of rules and authority — personified by the headmaster of the Borstal school where he has been sent for rehabilitation — with all the venomous anti-social ferocity of a true psychopath.

## See also

Sadistic personality disorder

## Related lists

### Homicide

#### Murder

Assassination  
 Child murder  
 Consensual homicide  
 Contract killing  
 Felony murder  
 Honor killing  
 Human sacrifice  
 Lust murder  
 Lynching  
 Mass murder  
 Murder-suicide  
 Negligent homicide  
 Proxy murder  
 Ritual murder  
 Serial killer  
 Spree killer  
 Torture murder  
 Vehicular homicide

#### Manslaughter

In English law

#### Non-criminal homicide

Justifiable homicide  
 Capital punishment

#### Other types of homicide

Democide  
 Feticide  
 Filicide  
 Fratricide  
 Gendercide  
 Genocide  
 Infanticide  
 Mariticide  
 Matricide  
 Parricide  
 Patricide  
 Prolicide  
 Sororicide  
 Regicide  
 Tyrannicide  
 Uxoricide

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- List of proposed Jack the Ripper suspects
- List of horror film killers
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- People speculated to have been autistic
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- List of fictional characters with post-traumatic stress disorder
- List of people with post-traumatic stress disorder
- Fictional characters with multiple personality disorder
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- List of people with epilepsy
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- Child sexual abuse
- Pedophilia and child sexual abuse in fiction
- Pedophilia and child sexual abuse in films
- Pedophilia and child sexual abuse in songs
- Pedophilia and child sexual abuse in the theatre
- List of fictional toxins
- List of fictional endnotes and footnotes

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