VISIONS OF THE PRESENT

Nostalgias in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film

Mary Towers

Department of English

McGill University, Montréal Quebec

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To Lovely Chloe.

Abstract

Although generally understood to denote a wistful desire for the past, nostalgia may assume a variety of forms. This dissertation explores *nostalgias* (i.e., diverse nostalgic modes and expressions of nostalgia) in twentieth-century American fiction and film. Specifically, it interrogates the critical functions of nostalgia in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Elliott Nugent's *The Great Gatsby* (1949), Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962), Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953), and Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). Attending to narrative and formal expressions of nostalgia in these novels and films, as well as readers' and viewers' experiences of nostalgia in response to these works, *Visions of the Present* scrutinizes both the role of nostalgia in such works and how artists employ nostalgia to articulate various social critiques. Chapter one examines conflicted impulses toward the past and future in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, clarifying how Fitzgerald engages contemporaneous debates by using nostalgia as a trope to satirize resistance to progress even as he uncovers a fundamental American paradox: efforts toward self-making are also often about trying to recover an irretrievable past. Chapter two considers the ways in which Nugent's *The Great Gatsby* expresses and nostalgically responds to different cultural anxieties of the 1940s. It illustrates how Nugent's film puts nostalgia to use in a national allegory that warns of repeating past mistakes. Chapter three addresses *mis*readings of nostalgia in Nabokov's *Lolita* by interrogating Nabokov's ironic employment of nostalgia in the novel. It identifies nostalgia as fundamental to Nabokov's censure of the commodification of childhood. Arguing that Nabokov's concept of aesthetic bliss conjoins *Lolita*'s aesthetics and ethics, chapter three concludes that readers may experience aesthetic bliss by carefully observing the functions of nostalgia in *Lolita*. Chapter four analyzes the significance of subverting and perverting nostalgia in Kubrick's *Lolita*, revealing how the film condemns the sort of suburban pretense that potentially fuels multiple forms of discrimination. Chapter five details how Chandler uses the motif of nostalgia in *The Long Goodbye* to denounce mid-century American culture as inferior to his nostalgic view of nineteenth-century England. It attends to tensions between reflective and restorative nostalgia in the novel that expose Chandler's social critique as highly problematic. Chapter six investigates competing nostalgic drives in Altman's *The Long Goodbye*. It shows how the film questions nostalgia for the tough-guy figure of classic Hollywood crime genres to parody hypermasculinity and thereby challenge what it means to be a (male) hero in 1970s America. This chapter also demonstrates how Altman's complex treatment of nostalgia validates the male antihero embodied by the hard-boiled detective as a man of integrity, hence illuminating the film's simultaneously nostalgic and anti-nostalgic qualities. *Visions of the Present* thus elucidates how nostalgia is mobilized in numerous and unique ways within and across the novels and films under consideration. Explicating the ways these works often simultaneously elicit and reject nostalgia, this dissertation argues that nostalgia plays a central—and often overlooked—role in expressing artists' critiques of their own sociohistorical moments, their visions of the present.

Résumé

Bien que généralement comprise comme un désir mélancolique du passé, la nostalgie peut prendre diverses formes. Cette thèse explore les *nostalgies* (c'est-à-dire divers modes et expressions de la nostalgie) dans la fiction et le cinéma américains du XXe siècle. Plus précisément, cette thèse interroge les fonctions critiques de la nostalgie dans *The Great Gatsby* (1925) de F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1949) d'Elliott Nugent, *Lolita* (1955) de Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1962) de Stanley Kubrick, *The Long Goodbye* (1953) de Raymond Chandler et *The Long Goodbye* (1973) de Robert Altman. S'intéressant aux expressions narratives et formelles de la nostalgie dans ces romans et films, ainsi qu'aux expériences de nostalgie des lecteurs et des spectateurs en réaction à ces œuvres, *Visions of the Present* examine à la fois le rôle de la nostalgie dans ces œuvres et la manière dont les artistes emploient la nostalgie pour formuler diverses critiques sociales. Le premier chapitre explore les impulsions conflictuelles vers le passé et l'avenir dans *The Great Gatsby* de Fitzgerald, clarifiant comment Fitzgerald engage des débats contemporains en utilisant la nostalgie comme un trope pour satiriser la résistance au progrès même s'il découvre un paradoxe américain fondamental : les efforts pour devenir « self-made » consistent aussi souvent à essayer de récupérer un passé irrécupérable. Le deuxième chapitre examine comment *The Great Gatsby* de Nugent exprime et répond avec nostalgie aux différentes angoisses culturelles des années 1940. Ce chapitre illustre comment le film de Nugent utilise la nostalgie dans une allégorie nationale qui met en garde contre la répétition des erreurs du passé. Le troisième chapitre traite des interprétations erronées de la nostalgie dans *Lolita* de Nabokov en questionnant l'emploi ironique de la nostalgie par Nabokov dans le roman. Ce chapitre identifie la nostalgie comme fondamentale à la censure de Nabokov de la marchandisation de l'enfance. Arguant que le concept de « aesthetic bliss » de Nabokov rejoint l'esthétique et l'éthique de *Lolita*, ce chapitre conclut que les lecteurs peuvent expérimenter le ravissement esthétique (comme Nabokov l'entend) en observant attentivement les fonctions de la nostalgie chez *Lolita*. Le quatrième chapitre analyse l'importance de subvertir et de pervertir la nostalgie dans *Lolita* de Kubrick, révélant comment le film condamne le genre de prétention de banlieue qui alimente potentiellement plusieurs formes de discrimination. Le cinquième chapitre détaille comment Chandler utilise le motif de la nostalgie dans *The Long Goodbye* pour décrier la culture américaine du milieu du siècle comme étant inférieure à sa vision nostalgique de l'Angleterre du XIXe siècle. Ce chapitre s'attarde aux tensions dans le roman entre nostalgie réflexive et réparatrice, lesquelles exposent la critique sociale de Chandler comme étant très problématique. Le sixième chapitre étudie les pulsions nostalgiques concurrentes dans *The Long Goodbye* d'Altman. Il montre comment le film questionne la nostalgie de la figure de « dur à cuire » des genres criminels classiques d'Hollywood pour parodier l'hypermasculinité, remettant en question la signification du héros (masculin) dans l'Amérique des années 1970. Ce chapitre illustre également comment le traitement complexe de la nostalgie par Altman endosse l'anti-héros masculin incarné par le détective « dur à cuire » comme un homme intègre, mettant en lumière le caractère à la fois nostalgique et anti-nostalgique du film. *Visions of the Present* élucide ainsi comment la nostalgie est mobilisée de façon différente et unique dans et à travers les romans et films considérés. En expliquant la manière dont ces œuvres suscitent et rejettent souvent simultanément la nostalgie, cette thèse soutient que la nostalgie joue un rôle central — et souvent ignoré — dans la formulation des critiques des artistes sur leurs propres moments sociohistoriques, leurs visions du présent.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

> Nostalgia then is a distinctive, although only one among several,
> way we have of relating our past to our present and future.
> —Fred Davis

Expressions of nostalgia feature persistently in twentieth-century American fiction.[1] In Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918), for instance, Jim Burden nostalgically sentimentalizes the Nebraska of his youth and its inhabitants. Whereas Burden's nostalgia is tempered throughout the novel with an understanding that, as appealing as it may be, the past is past, many other early twentieth-century novels include characters whose nostalgia signals an opposition to social change. In the face of his family's declining fortune, George Amberson of Booth Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918) nostalgically idealizes a time characterized by respect for his aristocratic lineage and resists the cultural and technological developments precipitated by rapid industrialization and other socioeconomic changes at the turn of the century. Exploring similarly reluctant attitudes toward swift social transformation and its consequences, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1921) presents a world in transition whose tensions are divided between yearning and anticipation. Bound by custom and tradition, members of Old New York society long for a presumably simpler past and its clearly demarcated social classes, a past at odds with the independent and unconventional Madame Ellen Olenska and the bohemian values she embodies. Like Tarkington's and Wharton's novels, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) offers a conflicted view of aristocracy in decline. The frustrated and self-absorbed

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[1] Although this dissertation addresses a fifty-year period in the twentieth century, the ubiquity of nostalgia in American literature is not limited to the twentieth century. In *Novel Nostalgias: The Aesthetics of Antagonism in Nineteenth-Century U. S. Literature* (2015), John Funchion observes that within "nineteenth-and early-twentieth century novels imbued with nostalgia, we can find a long queue of protagonists—runaway slaves, impressed sailors, drafted soldiers, orphaned children, Confederate sympathizers, dispossessed farmers, besieged radicals, and disaffected Brahmins—waiting to reclaim estranged images of a place, a past, or a people that may have never existed" (xiv).

longings of the Compson family for a bygone era mark a waning Southern aristocracy. The novel explores moral corruption and its consequences in a temporal context, implicating Quentin Compson's obsessive fixation with time as precipitating his suicide.

Later twentieth-century American novels seem as equally invested in expressions of nostalgia as these early examples. Survival, not suicide, is at stake in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Driven from their Oklahoma farm, the Joad family migrate to California in search of economic security. In doing so, they each confront the profound sorrow of forsaking the past in an effort to survive. Although class tensions inform the novel, in *The Grapes of Wrath* the past does not represent class structure but *home* as both a physical place and a metaphysical connection to the land. The novel thus sharply contrasts agrarian nostalgia with capitalist greed. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) also offers a nostalgic view of the American land, albeit toward different ends. Traveling across America, Sal Paradise often feels displaced and is nostalgic for a time when his friends were children and life was "full of promise" (59). He crosses the country multiple times, propelled, in part, by his fascination with American pioneer history and his desire to feel connected to a national, distinctly American history. Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1972) also offers a nostalgic view of a specific moment in American history as it laments the failure of the 1960s countercultural movement. The object of nostalgic longing in Thompsons's novel is politically charged innocence: a belief in the possibilities of social change and a sense that youthful vitality is connected to some benevolent universal purpose. Although Thompson mourns the passing of a specific cultural moment, he implies that its energy lingers in the collective memory of those who were a part of it.

While this very brief review suggests a preoccupation with nostalgia in twentieth-century American literature, the question of how this preoccupation critically operates within novels and their cinematic adaptations has only recently begun to be explored.[2] Consider standard readings of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, for example. Scholarly discussions of the novel most often address its political themes, arguing that it offers a radical critique of capitalism and promotes a socialist agenda. When critics note the novel's expressions of nostalgia, they typically do so in passing (e.g., Burns; Miltner; Railton).[3] Likewise, though many critics writing on John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) acknowledge the film's nostalgic emphasis on "the family as the basic unit of community,"[4] they often do so to suggest that this emphasis softens Steinbeck's political themes (e.g., Howarth; Millichap; Sobchack).

Even those who recognize *The Grapes of Wrath* as a political film nevertheless overlook the importance of nostalgia to Ford's politics. Joseph McBride, for instance, considers *The Grapes of Wrath* a socially conscious film that represents "the climax of Ford's Popular Front period" (309), yet he does not comment on the relationship between the film's nostalgia and Ford's political engagement. Michael Rogin and Graham Cassano perhaps come closest to offering such an analysis. Rather than "welcoming a modern industrial proletariat," Rogin argues, "*Grapes* mourns a lost agrarian community" that is "entirely composed of old-stock

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[2] I will address recent work on nostalgia and film later in this chapter.

[3] Although Alan Gibbs and Henry Veggian may both be considered exceptions to this tendency in that their arguments rest upon interpretations of nostalgia in *The Grapes of Wrath*, they each nevertheless only mention nostalgia once in their respective discussions of Steinbeck's novel. Equating nostalgia with sentimentality, Gibbs argues that, in celebrating disillusion, Steinbeck's novel denies "romantic nostalgia" (701). Veggian offers a more nuanced argument, suggesting that although the novel "attempts to represent the outward, spatial reorganization of the migrant's inner life, that same representation is often ambivalent, divided between nostalgia for the past and a criticism of the future" (358). He considers how this tension between past and future operates "along a distinct visual axis" in the novel without further interrogating thematic or aesthetic expressions of nostalgia.

[4] Sobchack 615.

white Americans" (97).[5] Cassano similarly suggests that "Ford equates community displacement with the dispersal of [white] male authority" to advance a radical critique of capitalism that is not grounded in a future-oriented socialist vision but in "an almost reactionary, labor-oriented traditionalism" (102, 100).[6] Though both Rogin and Cassano offer implicit discussions of restorative nostalgia in Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, neither scholar refers to nostalgia as a particular dynamic or even once uses the term nostalgia in their respective essays. As the present study will demonstrate, investigating whether or how expressions of nostalgia shift from novel to film tells us a good deal about how objects of nostalgia change over time and thus reveals how twentieth-century Americans made sense of the past, understood their own historical moment, and envisioned the future.

   This dissertation examines expressions of nostalgia in twentieth-century American fiction and film. Specifically, I interrogate the critical functions of nostalgia in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Elliott Nugent's *The Great Gatsby* (1949), Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962), Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953), and Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). In pursuing this research, I have sought to address a series of interrelated questions. What are the objects of nostalgia in these novels and films? How are objects of nostalgia in cinematic adaptations similar to and/or different from those of their source texts? What do expressions of nostalgia reveal about a novel's moment of production? What do changes to expressions of nostalgia between a source and adapted text reveal about a

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[5] Like others, Rogin observes that Ford's film visually and narratively shifts from the novel's concern with "class relations on the land to extended family ties" and "from radical history to timeless archetype"; yet, instead of reading these shifts as softening Steinbeck's political themes, he claims that the film "remains unreservedly pro-union" (97).

[6] In Cassano's view, "Ford builds his critique of capitalism by mobilizing the symbolic energies produced by the disruption of two traditional modes of symbolic domination: gender and race" (103).

film's moment of production? What influences on nostalgia do adaptations incorporate that are not found in the source texts, and what additional explorations do they allow for?

Although generally understood to denote a wistful desire for the past, nostalgia may assume a variety of forms. Given the diversity of nostalgic modes and expressions I identify in *The Great Gatsby* (1925, 1949), *Lolita* (1955, 1962) and *The Long Goodbye* (1953, 1973), I have chosen to pluralize *nostalgia* in my title. Indeed, this dissertation does not explore twentieth-century American *nostalgia* but twentieth-century American *nostalgias*.[7] Attending to narrative and formal expressions of nostalgia in selected novels and films, as well as readers' and viewers' experiences of nostalgia in response to these works, I question both the role of nostalgia in selected text and how artists employ nostalgia to articulate various social critiques. I argue that nostalgia plays a central—and often overlooked—role in expressing artists' critiques of their own sociohistorical moments, their visions of the present. Nostalgia is mobilized in diverse and unique ways within and across the novels and films I consider, works that often simultaneously elicit *and* reject nostalgia. Before addressing the significance of this tension and detailing how I approach *The Great Gatsby*, *Lolita* and *The Long Goodbye*, I offer a genealogy of nostalgia and an overview of recent trends in the disciplines that have most informed my thinking while completing this work: cultural memory studies, adaptation studies, and nostalgia studies.

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[7] My preference for *nostalgias* is consistent with recent work in nostalgia studies. Katharina Niemeyer, for instance, speculates that categorizing different types of nostalgia may be unnecessary and suggests it potentially "more useful to grant nostalgia its plural meanings by using the notion of *nostalgias*; especially when it comes to the question of media, where different nostalgias interact" ("Media and Nostalgia" 6).

From a Disease of the Imagination to a Historical Emotion: A Genealogy of Nostalgia

Tracing the origin and conceptual transformations of the term *nostalgia* reveals its complexity as an emotional experience and a social condition.[8] Early modern medical discourse classified nostalgia as a pathology, assuming that an unhealthy fixation on home prevented one from functioning normally (Ritivoi 18-19). Swiss physician Johannes Hofer coined the term *nostalgia* as a nineteen-year-old student in his 1688 dissertation, which sought to explain, in medical terms, the "Wasting Disease" that afflicts "certain youths" far from "their native land" (380). According to Hofer, he could think of no more suitable or concise a term than *nostalgia* to describe the condition with which he was concerned: "Greek in origin and indeed composed of two sounds, the one of which is *Nostos*, return to the native land; the other, *Algos*, signifies suffering or grief" (381). In Hofer's view, nostalgia is a malady of "an afflicted imagination" that somatically manifests as loss of appetite, palpitations, sleep disturbances, nausea, fever, delirium, and/or mania (381, 386, 388, 390). Because nostalgia was thought to be a curable, nervous disorder during the seventeenth century, doctors sought to treat its physical symptoms.[9]

When his dissertation was reprinted as "De Pothopatridalgia vom Heimwehe" in 1710, Hofer addressed reported outbreaks of nostalgia among Swiss soldiers stationed in France and Belgium upon hearing familiar music reminiscent of home: the "Kühe-Reyen," a "rustic cantilena, to which the Swiss drive the herds to pasture in the Alps" (qtd. in Illbruck 79).[10] Hofer

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[8] For a detailed history of nostalgia see Starobinski; Boym 1-18; and especially Illbruck.

[9] Among the methods attempted to treat nostalgia's symptoms, Svetlana Boym lists "[l]eeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, [and] opium" (4).

[10] Scholars have often misattributed Hofer's discussion of nostalgia among Swiss soldiers stationed in foreign lands and the significance of Kühe-Reyen to Theodore Zwinger, also a seventeenth-century Swiss physician (e.g., Anspach 376; Fuentenebro de Diego and Valiente Ots 405). In fact, Jean Starobinski erroneously identifies Zwinger as the author of Hofer's revised and reprinted dissertation (90). Noting others who also confuse Hofer and Zwinger, Helmut Illbruck explains that errors concerning authorship have occurred because Hofer's reprint appeared in Zwinger's *Fasciculus Dissertationum Medicarum Selectiorum* [*A Collection of Selected Medical Dissertations*] (256-257n2).

speculated that the "profound impression" of home triggered by the music provoked nostalgic

symptoms (qtd. in Illbruck 79). During the eighteenth century, the work of John Locke and

Francis Hutcheson confirmed that the "associated recollections" of the nostalgic "can attain a

degree of intensity comparable to that of actual feeling" (Starobinski 91). Thus, first assumed to

be an affliction of the imagination, nostalgia came to be understood as an affliction that involves

memory as well.

By the mid nineteenth century, nostalgia became a "fashionable" complaint among the

creatively and romantically inclined, thereby signaling a shift in the term's meaning from a

medical condition to an emotional response (Ritivoi 25). This shift corresponded with an

interpretation of nostalgia as indicative of a longing for *time* rather than *place*, which originated

with Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic View* (1798). Kant states that while

"*homesickness*" seemingly appears to be "the result of a longing for the places" of one's youth, it

is, in fact, a response to an inability to restore youth itself (71). Certainly, critics now widely

understand nostalgia as a reaction to the irreversibility of time, as a yearning for a different time

rather than place. Nonetheless, associations between time and place remain relevant to the

experience of nostalgia for the ways in which they impact our sense of individual and cultural

identity. In fact, contemporary social scientists and philosophers most commonly explore

nostalgia in terms of its potentially beneficial or adverse effects on identity.

Current trends in sociological research recognize nostalgia as both a social phenomenon

and a personal experience owing, in part, to Fred Davis's *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of*

Nostalgia (1979). In this seminal work, Davis draws a distinction between *collective* and *private*

nostalgia, thus allowing for a more nuanced understanding of nostalgia's functions. As his

categories suggest, groups with shared experiences may feel collective nostalgia, whereas private

nostalgia remains an individuated response to personal recollections of the past. More specifically, Davis defines collective nostalgia as "that condition in which the symbolic objects are of a highly public, widely shared and familiar character," and he defines private nostalgia as involving "those symbolic images and allusions from the past which by virtue of their resource in a particular person's biography tend to be more idiosyncratic, individuated, and particularistic in their reference" (*Yearning* 222). Regardless of whether nostalgia is experienced collectively or privately, of primary importance to Davis is its role in establishing a stable sense of identity.

Arguing that nostalgia results from experiences marked by discontinuity and transition, Davis views it as a means to construct, maintain, and reconstruct our identities (*Yearning* 31). For Davis, nostalgic experiences "cultivate appreciative stances to former selves" that diminish the threat of present circumstances by promoting an assimilation of past and present (*Yearning* 36). Following Davis, a number of current researchers attend to the role of nostalgia in sustaining a coherent identity. For example, Andreea Deciu Ritivoi's work on nostalgia among immigrant populations reveals that nostalgia may undermine or facilitate adjustment in the face of cultural transition. In her analysis, nostalgia "can express alienation, or it can replenish and rebuttress our sense of identity by consolidating the ties with our history" (39). A "cured nostalgic," according to Ritivoi, is one who "reconciles change with identity" (9). While Ritivoi attends to the ties between nostalgia and self-identity, Jan Willem Duyvendak underscores the role of nostalgia in identity politics by positing that times of national crises compel a collective "look backwards" with the aim of strengthening communal identity (2). Nostalgia for Svetlana Boym likewise represents "an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world" (xiv). In her view, it is "a symptom of our age, a historical emotion" that concerns the relationship "between personal and collective memory" (xvi).

In her highly influential *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Boym usefully distinguishes between *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia (though she stresses that these forms are not absolute binaries). As she defines them, anxieties about continuity, truth and tradition drive restorative nostalgia, whereas reflective nostalgia dwells in sentiments of distance, longing, and loss (41). Restorative nostalgia, Boym explains, emphasizes "*nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps"; it responds to a sense of lost community and cohesion, provides "a comforting collective script for individual longing," and "manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past" (41-42). Reflective nostalgia, however, accentuates *algia*, pines for an irrecoverable past, and resides in "the imperfect process of remembrance"; it does not purport to reconstruct "the mythical place called home" because *distance* rather than the referent itself captivates the reflective nostalgic (Boym 41, 50).[11] In other words, restorative nostalgia strives for continuity with the past in the form of repetition,[12] while reflective nostalgia is more interested in "the irrevocability of the past and human finitude" (Boym 42, 49). Hence, while these two types of nostalgia may share frames of reference, they differ in "their narratives and plots of identity": "[r]estorative nostalgia evokes [a] national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory" (Boym 49). As Boym puts it, "they can use the same triggers of memory and symbols […] but tell different stories" (49).

The different stories told by restorative and reflective nostalgia are both politically and ethically significant. While each nostalgic mode characterizes our relationship to the past and concerns "the ways in which we make sense of our seemingly ineffable homesickness and how

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[11] Boym borrows from Susan Stewart here, writing that reflective nostalgia "is 'enamored of distance, not of the referent itself'" (50). See Stewart 145.

[12] Boym asserts that understanding restorative nostalgia requires differentiating "habits of the past" from "habits of the restoration of the past" (41-42). Drawing on the work of Eric Hobsbawn, she identifies habits of the past as *customs*, which are variable and not inherently conservative; and habits of the restoration of the past as *invented traditions*, which are typically ritualistic and/or symbolic, governed by rules, and directed toward inculcating values and norms via repetition that inevitably suggests "'continuity with the past'" (42).

we view our relationship to a collective home," Boym cautions that restorative nostalgia may become nationalistic in its conspiratorial tendency to imagine home as "forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy" (41, 43).[13] Conversely, she proposes, "the ethical dimension of reflective longing consists in resistance to paranoiac projections characteristic of nationalistic nostalgia" (337). Thus, like Ritivoi, Boym, considers nostalgia's favourable and unfavorable possibilities. In fact, although the tendency to pathologize nostalgia has not entirely disappeared, most contemporary scholars acknowledge both the potentially positive and negative functions of nostalgia.[14]

As the work of these various researchers indicates, nostalgia is a dynamic and historically dependent concept whose meaning has not only shifted over time but also remains fluid in contemporary sociological and psychological theory. Regardless of its multifaceted complexity as both an emotion and a concept, all current understandings of nostalgia recognize it as a response to transition that engages collective and individual memory. *Visions of the Present* demonstrates how twentieth-century American writers and filmmakers uniquely and diversely mobilize nostalgia to investigate times of change, social upheaval, and crises in national identity. As cultural artifacts, films and novels communicate ideological perspectives. I maintain that

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[13] In addition to the "restoration of origins," "the conspiracy theory" serves as the second of restorative nostalgia's "two main narrative plots" (Boym 43). That is, Boym argues, restorative nostalgia is driven by "anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition" (45).

[14] In his editorial introductory chapter to *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion* (2021), Michael Hviid Jacobsen observes that "nostalgia is still surrounded with an aura of the somewhat strange and world-weary" ("Different Faces" 10). He cites the work of Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies (i.e., "Editorial: Nostalgia and the Shapes of History," *Memory Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2010, pp. 181-186) to illustrate how, for some, "nostalgia is still somehow seen as an obstacle to development […] or as a hindrance to action in the 'real world'" ("Different Faces" 10). This position is far outweighed by those like Jacobsen who recognize the diverse functions of nostalgia and its positive and negative potential. See, for example, Kennedy-Karpat; Niemeyer, "Media and Nostalgia" and "Media Studies"; Pickering and Keightly; and Walder.

examining their expressions of nostalgia affords access to such perspectives in a unique manner given the confluence of nostalgia's individual and communal functions.

Cultural Memory Studies

One of the guiding assumptions of this dissertation concerns the fact that nostalgia is an especially powerful device by which to articulate a social critique because it engages individual, collective, and cultural memory. Within memory studies, *individual memory* may refer to *autobiographical memory* as it is understood within the domain of neurosciences. That is, Harald Welzer explains, it "is a functional system" that integrates "procedural memory, priming, perceptual memory, semantic memory, and episodic memory" (290). Autobiographical memory may also be understood as socially constructed, a view first proposed in the early twentieth century by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. For Halbwachs, "the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society" (51). To describe social influences on the development of individual memories, he coined the term *mémoire collective*. The translation of Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory* (1925) into English in 1980 is widely acknowledged to have inaugurated the study of collective memory. Scholarly discussions of collective memory over the past four decades have generated a somewhat confusing (albeit productive) plethora of new terms, divisions, and subdivisions.[15] Astrid Erll suggests that transdisciplinary interest in cultural

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[15] Jan Assmann, for example, introduced the term *communicative memory* to delineate his understanding of cultural memory from Halbwachs's concept of collective memory. "Cultural memory," he writes "is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity" ("Communicative" 110). While Halbwachs differentiated collective memory from "traditions, transmissions, and transferences," Assmann subsumes these concepts under the term *cultural memory* while still preserving "Halbwachs's distinction by breaking up [Halbwachs's] concept of collective memory into 'communicative' and 'cultural memory'" ("Communicative" 110). In doing so, Assmann does not argue for replacing Halbwachs's notion of *collective memory* with *cultural memory* but distinguishes between these forms as two different ways of remembering ("Communicative" 110). Building on Assmann's work, David Manier and William Hirst propose a cognitive taxonomy of collective memory, subdividing collective memory into *collective episodic memory* and *collective semantic memory*, which they further subdivide into three types: 1) *lived semantic*

memory accounts for both its terminological richness and disjointedness, and she implies that *cultural*, *collective*, and *social memory* are interchangeable terms: "'Cultural' (or, if you will, 'collective', 'social') memory is certainly a multifarious notion, a term often used in an ambiguous and vague way. Media, practices, and structures as diverse as myth, monuments, historiography, ritual, conversational remembering, configurations of cultural knowledge, and neuronal networks are nowadays subsumed under this wide umbrella term" ("Cultural Memory" 3, 1).

For my purposes, I find Erll's and Jeffrey K. Olick's respective designations of *cultural memory* and *collective memory* most useful. According to Erll, "'cultural memory' can serve as an umbrella term which comprises 'social memory' (the starting point for memory research in the social sciences), 'material or medial memory' (the focus of interest in literary and media studies), and 'mental or cognitive memory' (the field of expertise in psychology and the neurosciences)" ("Cultural Memory" 4). Olick likewise clarifies that

> collective memory is merely a broad, sensitizing umbrella, and not a precise operational
>
> definition. For upon closer examination, collective memory really refers to a wide variety
>
> of mnemonic products and practices, often quite different from one another. The former
>
> (products) include stories, rituals, books, statues, presentations, speeches, images,
>
> pictures, records, historical studies, surveys, etc.; the latter (practices) include
>
> reminiscence, recall, representation, commemoration, celebration, regret, renunciation,
>
> disavowal, denial, rationalization, excuse, acknowledgment, and many others. (158)

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memories, 2) *collective distant semantic memory*, and 3) *collective procedural* or (*implicit*) *memory* (257-259). Astrid Erll notes that the "host of different terminologies" within memory studies indicate "the challenges faced by those who are searching for a conceptual foundation for the field" ("Cultural Memory" 2). For further examples of memory studies' diverse terminology, see Erll, "Cultural Memory" 2-3.

Although I do not often explicitly refer to cultural/collective memory in this dissertation, when I do I use the term *cultural memory* to denote both Erll's and Olick's hypernyms with an understanding that cultures are comprised of diverse groups who may each share unique collective memories; thus, *cultural memory* as I employ it encompasses the diversity, production, and transmission of intragroup memories. Recent scholarship on the importance of media to cultural memory is most significant to my argument concerning the centrality of nostalgia to visions of the present in the novels and films I study.

The last two decades have witnessed increased scholarly interest in the relationship between cultural artifacts and cultural memory. In her contribution to *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008), Birgit Neumann notes that examining "literary representations of collective memory remains a relatively recent development within cultural memory and literary studies" (333). Contributing to the same collection of essays, Ann Rigney maintains that the "current interest in the dynamics of cultural remembrance provides a new perspective on the role of art, including literature, in the formation of collective memory" (348). She suggests that this new perspective has been made possible, in part, by a significant "shift from 'sites' to 'dynamics' within memory studies [that] runs parallel to a larger shift of attention within cultural studies from products to processes, from a focus on cultural artifacts to an interest in the way those artifacts circulate and influence their environment" (346). Rigney attributes this shift to, among other things, the influences of New Historicism and post structuralism and their respective notions that "individual products are part of the social circulation of meanings" and that "meaning as such is never fixed once and for all, but is something that happens in the way events, texts, and other cultural products are appropriated (over and over again, always with a difference)" (348). Influenced by such ideas and aligned

with critical developments within memory, film and literary studies, this project considers how novelists and directors deploy nostalgia to engage with various national and generic myths that inform American cultural memory. In choosing to study both novels and films, I have situated this dissertation within what Erll deems "the strongest and most striking studies in cultural memory"[16] as well as current scholarly discussions that emphasize the importance of media to cultural memory.[17]

While I acknowledge the importance of diverse media to cultural memory, *Visions of the Present* focuses solely on the media of literature and film adaptations. Whereas literature is widely recognized as a valuable medium of cultural memory,[18] Erll posits that "'film' seems to have become the leading medium of popular cultural memory" ("Literature" 395). "Literature and film," she writes, may influence "both levels of cultural memory: the individual *and* the collective ("Literature" 395). As she explains:

> On a collective level, fictional texts and movies can become powerful media, whose versions of the past circulate in large parts of society, and even internationally. […] On an individual level, media representations provide those schemata and scripts which allow us to create in our minds certain images of the past and which may even shape our own experience and autobiographical memories. ("Literature" 396-397)

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[16] In her editorial introduction to *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008), Erll identifies cultural memory studies as a "fundamentally […] interdisciplinary project," noting that "the strongest and most striking studies in cultural memory are based on interdisciplinary exchange" ("Cultural Memory" 3). This exchange, she specifies, occurs "between media studies and cultural history" [i.e., the sort of interdisciplinary exchange I concern myself with throughout *Visions of the Present*]; "history and sociology"; "neuroscience and social psychology"; "cognitive psychology and history"; "or social psychology and linguistics" ("Cultural Memory" 3).

[17] "The relevance of the media for individual and social forms of memory," Martin Zierold observes, "is widely acknowledged by representatives of memory studies" (399). For discussions on the importance of media to cultural memory, see Assmann, "Canon" 99; Böhn, esp. 145; Erll, "Literature," esp. 389, 396-397; and Schrey 29.

[18] For discussions on the importance of literature to cultural memory, see Erll, "Cultural Memory" 13; Grabes, "Value" 39-40; Irimia, "Literature" 4; Lachmann 301; and Troy et al. 11.

Given this dual influence of literature and film on cultural memory, and given that the novels and films I investigate aesthetically, thematically and sociohistorically engage with interactions between the past, the present and possible futures, I take nostalgia to be a powerful critical device and an important concept to study in twentieth-century American fiction and film.

Narratives that address and/or elicit nostalgia often illuminate the complex negotiations between individual and shared understandings of the past and present because, like memory itself, nostalgia may be experienced individually and collectively.[19] Indeed, according to Boym, "nostalgia remains an intermediary between collective and individual memory" (54). In her discussion of literary representations of memory, Neumann maintains that "the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present, his or her desire and denial, than about actual past events" — an especially likely possibility with regard to cultural memories because they are intentionally fashioned to a greater degree than individual memories (333). Thus, she proposes, "literary fictions disseminate influential models of both individual and cultural memories as well as of the nature and functions of memory" (333). Although Neumann speaks of memories in a broad sense, she alludes to the functions of nostalgia in her emphasis on desire and denial in the present.

Considering Neumann's observations in light of nostalgia's widely accepted function as a coping mechanism (i.e., as a means of coping with distress and/or dissatisfaction in the present)—and the fact that, as Dennis Walder puts it, "nostalgia is deeply implicated in the political life of people, it is a part of their historical sense of themselves" (3)—I suggest that fictional renderings of nostalgia, be they literary or cinematic, reveal especially valuable insights into creators' (writers and directors) and audiences' (readers and viewers) individual and cultural

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[19] For more on collective nostalgia, see Davis, "Nostalgia, Identity," esp. 419-422 and *Yearning*, esp. 222; and Jacobsen, "Different Faces" 4.

memories that shape understandings of the present. Assuredly, as Davis observes, "nostalgia may tell us more about present modes than past realities" because, although "what occasions us to feel nostalgia" derives from the past, it "must also reside in the present, regardless of how much the ensuing nostalgic experience may draw its sustenance from our memory of the past" ("Nostalgia, Identity" 416). The centrality of the present to nostalgia is one of the reasons I have chosen to specifically consider adaptations (rather than films generally), a choice I address in the next section of this chapter.

Adaptation Studies

Like memory studies, the discipline of adaptation studies is characterized by debates over terminology.[20] The texts from which adaptations derive their material (i.e., the texts that have been adapted) have most commonly been referred to as *source texts*; however, in an effort to avoid the loaded implications of this term, some scholars have employed alternate terms, such as "adapted texts," "hypotexts," "originary texts," and "pre-texts" (Leitch, Introduction 14). "Each of these terms," Thomas Leitch rightfully notes, "is freighted with its own baggage"; therefore, he suggests that rather than "seeking the most precise terms possible, we might ask instead what is at stake in the choice of any particular term" (Introduction 14). I employ *source text(s)* throughout this dissertation with an understanding that, while *source* designates *origin* (and thus signals the text from which a director begins to fashion an adaptation), source texts are not more "pure" or valuable than adaptations. Nor are adaptations necessarily the product of a single source text. As James Naremore puts it, "a single film can weave together multiple prior texts" ("Film" 12). Like Naremore, Elisa Pezzotta lauds the possibilities of an intertextual approach to

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[20] For a comprehensive history of adaptation studies, see Thomas Leitch, Introduction; and Kamilla Elliott, "Adaptation."

adaptation, claiming that a cinematic adaptation is not only the "child of its two parents [i.e., director and source text], but also of its mode and context of production and of the cinematic tradition that precedes it" (6). Though I refer to novels as source texts in *Visions of the Present*, I do not privilege literature over film but recognize source texts and their adaptations as equally valuable artistic creations, as unique cultural artifacts located within complex webs of contextual and intertextual relations.[21]

In addition to disagreement over labels assigned to source texts, the field of adaptation studies is also characterized by debates concerning how to define the term *adaptation* itself. As Timothy Corrigan observes, *adaptation* has most often been defined as a process or product ("Defining Adaptation" 23).[22] The former (adaptation as process), he explains, "describes how one or more entities are reconfigured through their engagement with or relationship to one or more other texts or objects"; the latter (adaptation as product) designates "the entity that results from that engagement or the synthesized result of a relationship between two or more activities" ("Defining Adaptation" 23). More recently, Corrigan notes, adaptation has been recognized as "an act of reception" in which enjoying and understanding a work is viewed as form of active adaptation on the part of readers and/or viewers ("Defining Adaptation" 23). My chapters on Nugent's *The Great Gatsby*, Kubrick's *Lolita*, and Altman's *The Long Goodbye* engage all three understandings of adaptation Corrigan outlines. I rely on the notion of adaptation as process by attending to formal techniques (e.g., mise-en-scène, cinematography, and shifts in narrative perspective); I consider the adaptations under review as products by examining similarities and

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[21] For an overview of the "aesthetic and social relationships between film and literature" throughout the twentieth century, see Corrigan, "Literature" 38-67.

[22] Although Corrigan does not refer to Sarah Cardwell, Elliott credits Cardwell with "pioneering a key distinction between adaptation as product and adaptation as process" ("Adaptation" 691), a distinction advanced in Cardwell's *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (2002).

differences between novels and films; and I acknowledge adaptation as an act of reception by

attending to intertextual influences (e.g., marketing strategies and allusions to other texts and/or

genres).

Different views regarding what constitutes adaptation logically bear upon how scholars

approach the study of adaptation. Broadly, when adaptation is understood as an interpretive

process, scholars often concern themselves with medium specificity and questions of how

filmmakers "translate" written texts to the visual and aural domains of cinema; when adaptation

is understood as a product, matters of fidelity (e.g., so-called faithfulness to a source text) are

often central; and when adaptation is understood as a cultural practice inseparable from reception

issues, interrogating sociohistorical context often prevails.[23] Although the very earliest film

theorists appear to have been more interested in medium specificity than questions of fidelity,[24] a

medium-specific approach to adaptation has most often been associated with George Bluestone

and his *Novels into Film* (1957). In fact, Naremore defines the "Bluestone approach" as attending

to "the problem of textual fidelity" with the goal of identifying "the specific formal capabilities

of the media," an approach, he suggests, that implicitly relies on the metaphor of translation

("Film" 7-8).[25] Following Bluestone, scholars have continued to view "adaptation as an instance

of translation" that entails "intersemiotic transposition" (Komporaly 178) and increasingly

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[23] Mireia Aragay defines adaptation as "a cultural practice" and argues that "specific adaptations need to be approached as acts of discourse partaking of a particular era's cultural and aesthetic needs and pressures"; "such an approach," she writes, "requires both 'historical labor and critical acumen'" (19).

[24] For a discussion of the views of early critics (i.e., those writing in the 1930s and 1940s) like Rudolph Arnheim, Sergei Eisenstein and André Bazin, see Corrigan, "Literature" 32-33.

[25] Many scholars adopting a medium-specific approach explicitly use the translation metaphor. For example, in *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (1985), Joy Gould Boyum (a medium-specific advocate) refers to adaptation as Hollywood's "practice of translating books to film" and observes "striking parallels" between translation and adaptation: "Like the translator, the filmmaker who adapts is bent on a double task" that entails demonstrating "some sort of allegiance to a previously existing work of art" while also creating "a new work of art in his own particular language, the language of film" (3, 70).

question the impact of industry conditions and technological constraints upon adaptations (e.g., Cardwell, "Adaptation").

Since the inception of adaptation studies, fidelity has perhaps been the field's most contentious issue. According to Leitch, debates regarding the relevance of fidelity and "the responsibility of adaptations to communicate or evoke some essential features associated with the texts they are adapting" remain central to the field (Introduction 7). Kamilla Elliott, however, asserts that adaptation studies has *not* been primarily concerned with issues of fidelity, contrary to widespread assertions that it has ("Adaptation" 691). While a comprehensive review of the history of adaptation studies and where and how questions of fidelity figure in this history is beyond the scope of this chapter (and not relevant to my larger project), a brief discussion is nevertheless warranted because my film chapters do consider issues of fidelity.[26]

How *fidelity* is understood determines scholars' positions regarding the adoption of a fidelity approach (i.e., fidelity criticism). As David T. Johnson defines it, fidelity refers to "the idea that a given aesthetic object—traditionally, in adaptation studies, a film—reflects a faithful understanding of its source — traditionally, a literary text, especially a novel, play, or short story" (87). Scholars typically denounce fidelity approaches when fidelity is assumed to signal value judgements based on adherence to or departure from a source text's so-called essence, judgements based on an adaptation's "faithfulness" to its source (e.g., Andrew; Ray; Stam). However, when fidelity is understood as only one question among others, scholars recognize how interrogating similarities and differences between a source and adapted text may be very productive.

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[26] For recent discussions that trace the issue of fidelity in adaptation studies, see Elliott "Adaptation," especially 691-694; and Johnson.

Although Dudley Andrew advocated for a contextual approach to adaptation in the early 1980s, it was not until the mid to late 1990s that such an approach appears to have gained traction. In his 1984 essay "Adaptation,"[27] Andrew acknowledges the existence of a "complex interchange between eras, styles, nations, and subjects" that demands "the aesthetic system of the cinema in a particular era and […] that era's cultural needs and pressures" be taken into account when studying adaptations (37). This demand went largely unheeded until Brian McFarlane's 1996 declaration that

> [t]here is clearly more at stake in the intertextuality of a film derived from a novel than the precursor novel itself. Contextual matters, whether relating to other films made by the directors involved in the case-study films chosen, or to the characteristic products of the studios or periods from which they emanated, or the phenomenon of the star system's influence on how we read films, to suggest but three variables beyond the narrowest novel-film comparisons, are always important — and tend to defy easy quantification.
> (*Novels* 34)

Three years later, Corrigan advanced his support for addressing how "textual features change [in the adaptation process] and depend on the cultural and historical conditions and other pressures that surround books and movies" (*Film* 7).

These calls for contextualizing adaptations were eventually met with an understanding that questions of fidelity might compliment a contextual approach. In fact, although McFarlane condemned fidelity criticism until at least 2000,[28] by 2007 he conceded that fidelity is not "a

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[27] According to Elliott, Andrew's essay was first published as "The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory" in *Narrative Strategies: Original Essays in Film and Prose Fiction*, edited by Syndy M. Conger and Janet R. Welsch, Western Illinois UP, 1980, pp. 9-17.

[28] In his 2000 essay "It Wasn't Like That in the Book," McFarlane explains that his "dissatisfaction with [the fidelity] approach" concerns "a failure to distinguish between what one might reasonably expect to find transferable from one medium of display to another" (165). "Fidelity," he writes in the same essay, "is obviously very desirable in marriage; but with film adaptations I suspect playing around is more effective" (165).

wholly inappropriate and unhelpful criterion" ("Reading" 15). In the same year, Leitch

acknowledged that it is important to consider what an adaptation "leaves out" ("Literature" 32).

Growing acceptance for integrating contextual and fidelity approaches is exemplified by David

Kranz's suggestion to change "the name of fidelity criticism to comparative criticism […]

making the issue of fidelity (still important for economic, audience-response, and hermeneutic

reasons) only one of several related questions in the comparative equation" (99). In sum, while

adaptation scholars continued to denounce comparisons based on value judgements until the

millennium at least, they increasingly began to recognize that exploring fidelity issues may be a

valuable methodological approach when combined with intertextual, contextual, and interpretive

considerations. It is precisely such an approach that guides my film discussions in this

dissertation.

Chapters two, four and six offer contextual, comparative and intertextual analyses of

Nugent's, Kubrick's, and Altman's adaptations. In each case—and to varying degrees—I focus

on commercial and sociopolitical influences; the functions of classic Hollywood genres and

cinematic techniques; and the ways in which objects and expressions of nostalgia are modified

from novel to film. Which is to say that my film chapters incorporate some elements of fidelity

criticism insofar as I consider what changes have been made in adapting novels to screen, an

important consideration given that the films I study are not contemporaneous to the novels they

adapt and may thus express nostalgia for things nonexistent when their source texts were

published.[29] I do not question whether the films are "faithful" to the novels *tout court* but

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[29] Although Kubrick's *Lolita* was released only seven years after Nabokov's novel was published (as opposed to the two decades that separate the other source texts and their adaptations in this study), Nabokov wrote *Lolita* during the late 1940s. The film may thus be understood as distanced from the novel by almost fifteen years.

compare specific treatments of nostalgia and how such treatments are heuristically and socioculturally relevant.

Moreover, I build on the suggestions of film scholars like Pam Cook and Colleen Kennedy-Karpat regarding the relationship between fidelity criticism and nostalgia. In Cook's view, fidelity criticism is in itself a nostalgic response that harkens back to the literary original, which is often "perceived as more authentic" (14). I find the issue of fidelity as it appears in reception discourse of interest for the manner in which it suggests audience nostalgia for different eras, authors, and source texts. For Kennedy-Karpat, a "fixation on fidelity—whether seen as an object of scorn or an essential part of the field—echoes Boym's notion of restorative nostalgia, which idealizes the past and attempts to reconstruct it in the present" (284-285). Discussions that concentrate on fidelity, however, do not necessarily signal restorative nostalgia. A "fixation on fidelity" may only be characterized as restorative nostalgia if it assumes (or promotes) value judgements that prioritize source material. Questions of fidelity motivated by a desire, for example, to contextualize differences between an adaptation and its source(s) may serve critical functions far removed from restorative nostalgia. Though I slightly disagree with Kennedy-Karpat's provocative claim, I agree with her contention that "[a]daptation studies can help elucidate the study of mediated nostalgia by echoing the question 'fidelity to what?' in the questions *whose nostalgia?* and *nostalgia for what?*" (285). In fact, scholars appear increasingly interested in such questions given the recent rise in studies of nostalgia and adaption (e.g., Bevan; Leitch, "There's No Nostalgia").

A number of scholars have suggested that adaptations, in their efforts to rewrite and/or renew source material, are in and of themselves nostalgic gestures. Kennedy-Karpat, for example, writes that "at their core, both adaptation and nostalgia involve the impossibility of

return: adaptation to its source(s), and nostalgia to inaccessible space(s) and time(s). Both

emerge and exist in the present, yet they also remain fixated on prior experience" (283). Like

Kennedy-Karpat, Alex Bevan considers the issue of intertextuality to be particularly relevant to

adaptation and nostalgia. He suggests that intertextuality "presents a new dimension of

nostalgia" in that "remakes foster a nostalgic anticipation, that is, a building towards and

satisfaction of certain narrative, aesthetic, and ideological expectations based on familiarity with

the original [text]" (308). Likewise, Kennedy-Karpat proposes that "audiences can reject new

intertexts whose changes upend their nostalgic relationship to existing text(s)" (286). My

research demonstrates that viewers' nostalgic relationships to source texts (and their authors) is

particularly pronounced in the reception histories of the films I study. Responses to Altman's

The Long Goodbye upon the film's release, for instance, reveal critics' nostalgia for both

Chandler and 1940s adaptations of his novels — nostalgias that I address in chapter six. Given

the intersections between the concepts of adaptation and nostalgia, I venture that adaptations of

nostalgic works appear doubly invested in the past. *Visions of the Present* interrogates the

features and critical agendas of such *double exposures*, to borrow from both Boym and Joy

Gould Boyum.[30]

    Conceptually, an analysis of nostalgia is timely given current trends in adaptation studies.

As my brief survey has demonstrated, the field has historically often been divided between

formal theorists interested in issues of fidelity and medium specificity on the one side, and

cultural studies scholars concerned with sociological and political questions on the other.

However, building on the work of those like Krantz who suggested considering both formal and

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[30] Writing on nostalgia but not adaptation, Boym asserts that a "cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images — of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (xiii-xiv). Writing on adaptation but not nostalgia, Boyum titles her study *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* to signal adaptations as uniquely involving complex interactions among novels and films, readers and viewers.

contextual issues nearly two decades ago, more recent adaptation scholarship has moved toward

a synthesis of these two methodological approaches (e.g., Elliott, "Theorizing"; Hutcheon). My

study of adaptations of (and adaptation as) nostalgia builds on this synthetic approach, for—as

Elliott notes—"tracing conceptual threads across disciplines […] suggests a way to bridge the

formal/cultural divide of adaptation studies, as we allow concepts to travel between sides"

("Theorizing" 36). In addition, as I have suggested, the relation of novels to their adaptations

also tells us a great deal about how and when nostalgic impulses vary between mediums and

across time. Finally, like the contributors to *Next Generation Adaptation: Spectatorship and*

Process (2021), I am interested in how adaptations raise political and ethical questions specific

to their moments of production. Attentive to questions of class, race, gender and genre, my work

builds on current trends in adaptation studies by highlighting ideological, ethical, and political

concerns in the films under review and suggesting how directors' treatment of nostalgia

encourages audiences to critically consider the implications raised by expressions (and

rejections) of nostalgia in their adaptations.

Nostalgia Studies

This dissertation offers ways of reading nostalgia that respond to the texts themselves and

is thus not limited by a rigid theoretical framework. That is, I draw upon different theories of

nostalgia and a variety of disciplines and theoretical approaches in responding to the manifold

nostalgias that are both expressed and denied in the works under consideration.[31] While I often

address Boym's especially useful restorative/reflective dyad, my close readings identify various

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[31] In adopting a fluid methodological approach, I follow Jacobsen's mandate that "to capture its diversified and multifaceted nature, nostalgia should be researched [by] drawing on insights from various different disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives" ("Different Faces" 22).

nostalgic modes, including (but not limited to) melodramatic, ironic, subverted and perverted nostalgias — each of which I detail in my individual chapters. Having already offered a brief genealogy of nostalgia, here I would like to highlight recent trends in nostalgia studies as they relate to literary, cultural and film studies to both situate my project and clarify my methodological approach.

Many contemporary commentators observe that nostalgia has been gaining attention as a research topic for decades.[32] Editor of two interdisciplinary collections on nostalgia, Michael Hviid Jacobsen writes that "besides its recent rise to prominence and attention, nostalgia has been there all along, it has never disappeared and it is not a new invention — but it does seem as if the emotion has gained momentum in the post-millennial decades, in society and academic circles alike" ("Different Faces" 20).[33] That nostalgia has gained critical momentum since the millennium may account for the slightly inaccurate views of some that it has been an overlooked area of inquiry within the humanities generally and literary and media studies specifically.[34]

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[32] According to Andreas Böhn, nostalgia is a cultural phenomenon that has attracted increasing attention as a research topic since the 1970s (144). Writing on nostalgia and literature specifically, Niklas Salmose and Eric Sandberg maintain that "academic interest in the topic has exploded since the year 2000" ("Literature and Nostalgia" 198).

[33] For more on the so-called recent (i.e., twenty-first century) nostalgia boom, see Jacobsen, "Different Faces" 17-22; Niemeyer, "Media and Nostalgia" 1-3; Salmose and Sandberg, Introduction, 6; and Sandberg, "Double Nostalgia" 114-115.

[34] In his introductory chapter to *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (2005), John J. Su claims that "despite the surging interest in topics relating to memory within the humanities over the past two decades, the analysis of nostalgia has largely been neglected" (2). Walder offers a similar observation in the opening pages of his *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (2010). "Memory," he asserts, "has for some considerable time now been the focus of a large and growing area of literary and cultural study," though "nostalgia has been relatively neglected" (4).The assertions of both Su and Walder are slightly misleading, given that a number of monograph-length studies and collections on nostalgia in the humanities appeared prior to Su's and Walder's works. See, for example, Wright Morris's *The Territory Ahead* (1957, 1963); Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993); Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001); Roberta Rubenstein's *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction* (2001); *Nostalgia or Perversion? Gothic Rewriting from the Eighteenth Century until the Present Day* (2007), edited by Isabella van Elferen; and Alice Ridout's *Contemporary Women Writers Look Back: From Irony to Nostalgia* (2010).

In her editorial introduction to *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* (2014), Katharina Niemeyer writes that "nostalgia has always been an affair of mediated processes, within both literature and the arts," yet there exists "a lack of profound reflections on nostalgia and its relation to media" ("Media and Nostalgia" 7). However, some very important "reflections on nostalgia and its relation to media" were offered prior to the publication of *Media and Nostalgia*.[35] Certainly, the purported absence Niemeyer detected in 2014 no longer exists as numerous studies over the past decade have considered relations between nostalgia and media,[36] a fact Niemeyer acknowledges in her recent contribution to *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion* (2021).[37] As Jacobsen puts it, "nostalgia is currently very much a hot topic within the disciplines of the social sciences and humanities" ("On Nostalgia" 241). While I therefore do not claim that this dissertation addresses a scholarly gap by exploring nostalgia as its central topic, each chapter does address analytical oversights regarding the diverse and critical functions of nostalgia in the selected texts under review.

Numerous recent studies and essay collections provide insightful analyses of nostalgia as it is expressed, elicited, and employed by artists of diverse backgrounds (e.g., Walder) in different eras (e.g., Funchion; Murphy), genres (e.g., van Elferen, ed.), regions (e.g., Engles;

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[35] See, for example, Vera Dika's *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (2003); Pam Cook's *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (2005); Christine Sprengler's *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (2009); and Jennifer K. Ladino's *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (2012).

[36] See, for example, John Funchion's *Novel Nostalgias: The Aesthetics of Antagonism in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature* (2015); *Dwelling in Days Foregone: Nostalgia in American Literature and Culture* (2016), edited by Weronika Łaszkiewicz et al.; Matthew Leggatt's *Cultural and Political Nostalgia in the Age of Terror* (2017); Tim Engles's *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North American Literature* (2018); *Reinventing Childhood Nostalgia: Books, Toys, and Contemporary Media Culture* (2018), edited by Elisabeth Wesseling; *Once Upon a Time: Nostalgic Narratives in Transition* (2018), edited by Niklas Salmose and Eric Sandberg; Adam R. Ochonicky's *The American Midwest in Film and Literature: Nostalgia, Violence, and Regionalism* (2020); *Nostalgia Now: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Past in the Present* (2020) and *Intimations of Nostalgia: Multidisciplinary Explorations of an Enduring Emotion* (2021), both edited by Michael Hviid Jacobsen.

[37] "For several years now," Niemeyer writes, "we have seen an increasing interest among researchers from different cultural and scholarly backgrounds regarding the relation of media and communication with nostalgia, retro and vintage cultures" ("Media Studies" 156).

Ochonicky), and media (e.g., Niemeyer, ed.). These works often consider the ideological and

sociopolitical implications of nostalgia. In *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North*

American Literature (2018), Tim Engles builds on critical whiteness and masculinity studies to

offer "a preliminary taxonomy of particular forms that American male nostalgia has recently

tended to take" (2). Focusing specifically on U.S. cultural productions, Adam R. Ochonicky's

The American Midwest in Film and Literature: Nostalgia, Violence, and Regionalism (2020)

reveals "how film and literature have been—and remain—vital forums for illuminating the

complex interplay of regionalism and nostalgia" and argues that "the manifold properties of

nostalgia have continually transformed popular understandings and ideological uses of the

Midwest's place identity" (2-3). Like Ochonichy's multimedia approach, the contributors to

Media and Nostalgia variously consider a vast range of media to demonstrate, according to

Niemeyer, that "media do not only produce nostalgic narratives" but may, in themselves, be "the

creative projection spaces for nostalgia, as well as acting as the symptoms and triggers of

nostalgia. They can also act as tools to manipulate nostalgia or to render it impossible" ("Media

and Nostalgia" 11).

  Aligned with such works, *Visions of the Present* is eminently interested in associations

between nostalgia, ideology, and sociopolitical context — particularly as these associations are

relevant to questions of class, gender, and race. Though I do not adopt a single theoretical

perspective, my critical approach may be broadly characterized as a cultural studies approach in

its focus on larger sociohistorical phenomena. In reading selected novels and films as

interventions in analyses of the present, I attend to the ways in which they responded to and

reworked the issues, anxieties, and ideas that animated their sociocultural moments. My

discussions thus often shuttle between text and context as I consider how novels and films reflect

and refract the historical realities of their time via their multifarious nostalgias. In doing so, I inquire into the nostalgic narratives, symptoms, triggers and tools (to borrow Niemeyer's terms) of these novels and films, showing the multitude of ways literary and cinematic texts may be thematically and/or aesthetically nostalgic.

My understanding of how texts may "be nostalgic" has been informed by the work of many literary and film scholars, including—but not limited to—Niklas Salmose, Eric Sandberg, Jennifer K. Ladino, Pam Cook, Christine Sprengler, Andreas Böhn, and Vera Dika. In "Art About Nostalgia or Nostalgic Art?" (2018), Salmose addresses a fundamental distinction between art *about* nostalgia (i.e., art that may induce nostalgia in readers or viewers via its inclusion of nostalgic content) and art that is *aesthetically nostalgic* (i.e., art that relies on formal and stylistic strategies to engender nostalgic responses and/or experiences). Writing specifically on literature, Salmose and Sandberg astutely observe that "it is possible that an author's meditations on nostalgia will make readers nostalgic, but there is also a sort of nostalgic poetics that leads to another kind of elusive and personal experience in which literature itself triggers nostalgic sensations" ("Literature and Nostalgia" 202). Ladino similarly suggests that nostalgia may operate as both a narrative device and an emotion in literary texts: as a narrative device, nostalgia offers authors a means to "manipulate language, drive plot, develop characters, and influence readers"; as an emotion, it may be "felt by readers and characters (and sometimes, the authors themselves), shared by groups, perpetuated by institutions, and instilled by both texts and lived experience" (7). Writing on nostalgia and film, Cook considers how films that engage memory and deploy nostalgic aesthetics (i.e., different formal and stylistic strategies for screening nostalgia) may confront established notions of history. Sprengler also focuses on "nostalgia that relies primarily on the creation of *visual* pastness" to interrogate how films

mediate our connection to history (2). While not ignoring such matters, Böhn and Dika both address the nostalgic possibilities of alluding to and/or reappropriating older cinematic styles and genres. Accordingly, *Visions of the Present* examines thematic and aesthetic nostalgias in American fiction and film as responses that are deliberately or inadvertently prompted, experiences that are elicited and denied, and devices that are variously employed.

Literature and film may provoke and signal nostalgia in a multitude of ways. Both may be thematically nostalgic insofar as they engage with memories of the past, particularly to convey a relationship between the past and present. To communicate this relationship and characters' nostalgia, novels and films may, most obviously, use dialogue. They may also rely on nostalgic tropes, intertextuality, and narrative structure to express the thematic centrality of nostalgia. Salmose defines *universal nostalgic tropes* as "tropes that recur in nostalgic contexts in different times and cultures," such as time markers (e.g., seasons, ruins, and representations of time's destructive processes) and childhood ("Nostalgic Art" 132). Although universal nostalgic tropes may be differently conveyed in literature and film, they may nonetheless similarly affect readers and viewers. Salmose and Sandberg refer to such tropes in literature as "nostalgic imagery" that, they posit, "has the capacity to induce nostalgic sentiments in the reader" by activating "readers' sensations and emotions through descriptive prose or by carrying nostalgic weight in their capacity for allusion and symbolism. Many of these images derive from the rich repository of historical literary tropes, which can be endlessly reused for nostalgic effect" ("Literature and Nostalgia" 204). Film possesses the same capacities by visually depicting nostalgic tropes that may derive as much from a rich repository of cinematic tropes as from "historical literary tropes." That is, while universal nostalgic tropes include those things that conjure the passage of time, nostalgic tropes can also function as a property of intertextuality.

Sandberg suggests that "many intertextual relationships are predicated upon a connection between another text referring backwards to an older one in a manner that can, at least in some cases, be characterised as nostalgic" ("Double Nostalgia" 118). He thus concludes that nostalgia may operate as a way in which literary texts might "relate to each other across time" ("Double Nostalgia" 123). Of course, the same may be said of film. Nostalgic intertextuality in film may concern allusions to older films, styles, or genres. "A movie can create nostalgia," Böhn writes, "by means of film history in general, certain periods of film history, or by making use of old-fashioned genres"; that is, by nostalgically imitating historical styles and genre traditions (147, 150).[38] As Sandberg rightly notes, however, "[n]ostalgic intertextuality only works […] if the audience is able to recognise the object of a text's nostalgia, and thus share in the desire for an older literary [or cinematic] form" ("Double Nostalgia" 118). The probability of such recognition is likely high in the case of film adaptations, especially adaptations of texts central to cultural memory (e.g., canonical works and those that occupy a significant place in popular culture). In other words, nostalgic intertextuality need not be limited to intertextual relations among the same media but may also be an intermedial phenomenon, as I suggested earlier when discussing adaptations as nostalgic double exposures that may signal nostalgia for source texts.

Film adaptations are not alone in their doubly nostalgic potential. As Sandberg observes, "literary nostalgia can be seen as a dual process, as the yearning for the past operates both as a theme of the content of literary works, and as a structuring principle" when a text "looks to previous works of literature for its narrative model" ("Double Nostalgia" 118, 123). He further suggests that when a literary text reconstitutes an absent past and evokes a physical and social

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[38] In his discussion on how "the cinema [may] reflect on its own history," Böhn argues that films may either "play with the emotions associated with [older] forms or […] create a historical distance from them" that may induce "a nostalgic longing for their restoration" (150).

reality that is already disappearing at the time of its publication, it may be understood as "doubly nostalgic," inducing both first-hand and second-hand nostalgia ("Double Nostalgia" 120). By first- and second-hand nostalgia Sandberg intends that such a text's "writer, narrator, and original readership experienced it as a text nostalgic for a vanishing world […] still readily imaginable and comprehensible," whereas contemporary readers "encounter in it not a *vanishing* but *vanished* world, remote in sentiment, thought, and habit," a nostalgic response that remains "very much part of the text's effect" ("Double Nostalgia" 120).

Films, too, may express collective nostalgia for past eras. Such nostalgia may be accomplished, Sprengler argues, not by promoting viewers' identification "with characters who wistfully long for past times" but by deploying the formal capabilities of film to recreate an era on screen (25). As Dika explains, while "period objects" in a film's mise-en-scène may "create the 'look and feel' of pastness," these qualities may also be emitted "from the sensual surface of the images themselves": "the lighting, the choice of colors, and the grain of the film, as well as its composition and framing, may all be manipulated to refer to past images" (10). Analyzing the use of period objects, music, mise-en-scène, and other cinematic devices in Nugent's and Altman's films, my work reveals how, rather than wholly recreating the look and feel of the past, the formal strategies Sprengler and Dika identify as capable of eliciting nostalgia may also operate to complicate collective nostalgia.

Using different formal techniques, literature and film may also both employ analeptic narrative structures, relying on flashback and/or flashforward to signal nostalgic thematics. As Salmose puts it, "the actual time" of a narrative is not crucial to nostalgic aesthetics but "*when* it is narrated"; that is, "a narrative structure that is divided into a now and then" may express or engender nostalgia ("Nostalgic Art" 134). Whether in literature or film, to borrow from Salmose

and Sandberg, "the restructuring of temporal units in omniscient narration can also provide strong commentary on the relations between present and past ("Literature and Nostalgia" 203). This commentary may be especially evident in films that use voice-over narration to signal a spatiotemporal difference between the character viewers see and the one they hear — a strategy I explore in my discussion of Kubrick's *Lolita* to establish narrative unreliability.

Closely related to the issue of analepsis is the concept of *fictions of memory*. Fictions of memory are texts that depict the workings of memory and that are characteristically "presented by a reminiscing narrator or figure who looks back on his or her past, trying to impose meaning on the surfacing memories from a present point of view" (Neumann 335). All fictions of memory, Neumann explains, operate according "co-present time perspectives" within which "the past and the present intermingle in manifold and complex ways" (336). This sort of temporal concurrence is notable in each of the novels and films I study and underwrites the complex ways they simultaneously elicit and reject nostalgia. In fact, my choice of texts for this project was influenced by whether they are fictions of memory, a point I will elaborate on momentarily. While my three film chapters offer close readings of how directors deploy formal cinematic strategies to establish nostalgic tensions, all six chapters of this dissertation interrogate conflicted longings for the past and visions of the present by variously considering narrative structure and offering close readings of nostalgic content, nostalgic tropes, and nostalgic intertextuality.

A Note on Selected Texts

In selecting which novels to analyze, I considered both their status as fictions of memory and their authorship. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* all offer explorations into protagonists' pasts; they are works about personal memory,

which is necessarily grounded within cultural memory. I therefore speculated that exploring their treatments of nostalgia might prove especially productive. That Fitzgerald, Nabokov, and Chandler are all canonical authors and thus occupy an important place within cultural memory also influenced my selection. While not insensitive to recent debates centered on the literary canon and the historical silencing of marginalized voices, I recognize that the canon represents "actively circulated memory that keeps the past present" (Assmann, "Canon" 98). "The collective canon widely determines," as Herbert Grabes observes, "what remains in a society's cultural memory, and this again influences the view of the present and the future" ("Cultural Memory" 312). Fitzgerald and Nabokov are commonly understood as central to the American literary canon, whereas Chandler is more often relegated to a no less important popular culture canon. "To neglect pop culture texts like those of […] Chandler," Megan E. Abbott rightly notes, "is to miss the crucial insight into mid-twentieth-century American attitudes toward whiteness, blackness, masculinity, and femininity, and especially the constantly shifting relationships between these constructions" (5). The frequency with which Fitzgerald's, Nabokov's, and Chandler's works have been adapted also factored into my selection of their works as objects of study.

When I first conceived of this project, I imagined offering paired chapters of source novels and their cinematic adaptations, plural.[39] I soon, however, realized that my research aims were too broad. Analyzing each novel's multiple adaptations, while still approaching the films as artifacts in their own right, proved a gargantuan task that exceeds the scope of this dissertation. Consequently, I offer paired chapters that consider expressions of nostalgia within the

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[39] Although Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* has only been adapted to screen once, eleven films have been made based on Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels. I thus initially debated engaging with multiple adaptations based on different novels about the same character.

sociohistorical context of each novel and one of its adaptations. In choosing which adaptations to

discuss, I considered the interrelated issues of whether there are significant differences in plot

between the source material and films and when the adaptations were produced. The question of

plot differences, in my view, gets to the heart of adaptation as an interpretive process and proves

a more interesting avenue of exploration than that of reviewing so-called faithful adaptations, an

approach that ran the risk of regurgitating observations made in the novel chapters. Considering

contextual influences on fidelity is directly related to the question of *when*. Having decided on

source texts published in 1925, 1955 and 1953, I opted to analyze films made after 1925 but

before 1975 so as to ensure a manageable research scope and—even more importantly—because

doing so presented me with an opportunity to trace representations of nostalgia over a fifty-year

period in American history by considering how the same stories are retold at different

sociocultural moments. That said, many of the works I discuss are clustered around the early-

post-WWII period because this period was one of particularly significant social change in U.S.

society. Nevertheless, to consider the functions of nostalgia in a historically wider context,

Visions of the Present is bookended by a novel and film that were, respectively, created

approximately twenty years before and after the immediate postwar period my other chapters

address.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter one explores conflicted impulses toward the past and future in Fitzgerald's *The*

Great Gatsby. Observing tensions between tradition and progress that run throughout the novel, I

identify how Fitzgerald uses nostalgia to reflect (and reflect upon) different social concerns and

intellectual debates characteristic of postwar 1920s America. Employing Boym's categories of

restorative and prospective nostalgia and drawing on Susan Stewart's discussions of nostalgia, souvenir and kitsch, I first address how, in his treatment of the Buchanans, Fitzgerald mobilizes nostalgia to facilitate his social satire of upper-class elites antagonistic to progress who desire to preserve class distinctions. I then turn to a consideration of Jay Gatsby as a prospective nostalgic who imagines a future wrought by his dreams of the past. Tracing the ways Gatsby's continual self-reinvention aligns with historical shifts in American ideals and expressions of self-making, I show how Fitzgerald skillfully makes use of nostalgia as a trope to uncover a fundamental American paradox: most self-made aspirations are also often about trying to recover an irretrievable past. *The Great Gatsby*, I argue, reveals the way American visions of the future are ineluctably structured by nostalgic visions of the past, a revelation made possible, in part, by Fitzgerald's own struggle with the question of how to balance the influence of tradition with a desire for progress. While Fitzgerald did not pretend to have an answer to this question, he presents Nick Carraway as an intermediary figure metaphorically navigating between the Buchanans, for whom the present is (or should be, in their view) defined by the past, and Gatsby, for whom the future lies in the past. In his conflicted backward- and forward-looking nostalgia, which is embedded in the novel's spatiotemporal symbolic order, Nick ultimately recognizes that because the future is inescapably connected to the past, our actions in the present must necessarily be guided by efforts to harmonize the simultaneous appeal of tradition and progress.

Chapter two focuses on Nugent's 1949 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, paying particular attention to how the film's generic elements—specifically, the conventions of noir and melodrama—express different cultural anxieties of the 1940s, and how the film nostalgically responds to such anxieties. Borrowing from Cook's useful discussion of *suspended time* in cinema as a function of formal strategies that simultaneously recall the past and represent the

present, I analyze how the film formally and narratively sustains a confluence of past and present. This suspension of time encourages audiences to consider sociohistorical similarities between the postwar 1920s and postwar 1940s, and it operates to question notions of linear progress. I demonstrate how this line of questioning in Nugent's *Gatsby* promotes restorative nostalgia for a past that never was but should have been. I then explore this nostalgic conception of *should have been* by addressing how Nugent's film offers a corrective of sorts to the postwar present by recasting World War I as an effort to preserve American values. Toward this end, I reveal how the melodramatic space of innocence, as theorized by Linda Williams, is central to the film's symbolic rewriting of the past in order to right the present. I conclude chapter two by discussing the intersections between genre and gendered social norms at play in Nugent's *Gatsby* that yoke a vision of how the past *should have been* with a vision of how the present *ought to be*, a vision that implies the nation's future depends on the nostalgic reinstatement of traditional gender structures. This discussion explains how the film navigates postwar anxieties by repressing the trauma of war and punishing female characters who violate traditional institutions, thereby revealing the stakes of its nostalgic impulse to restore a stable domesticity that never was. Chapter two illustrates how, instead of offering nostalgic images of the Roaring Twenties, Nugent's film puts nostalgia to use in a national allegory that warns of repeating past mistakes.

Chapter three addresses *mis*readings of nostalgia in Nabokov's *Lolita* by interrogating Nabokov's ironic employment of nostalgia in the novel and the ways it serves to indict complicity. Offering a close reading of Humbert Humbert's supposed nostalgia for Annabel Leigh in light of the narrator's well-established unreliability, I first expose Humbert's nostalgia for childhood as suspect to argue that he employs nostalgia as a rhetorical appeal to pathos in an effort to excuse his cruelty, an appeal that baits inattentive readers into believing that he loves

Lolita. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's work on irony, I address an incongruity between Humbert's expressions of nostalgia and his actions that, I contend, renders Humbert's nostalgia as an ironic expression of his attraction to vulnerability. I then analyze how Humbert's ironic nostalgia facilitates Nabokov's parody of the romantic child, arguing that this parody serves to highlight the role of innocence in the exploitation of children. Building on this suggestion, I detail a correspondence between Humbert's nostalgic modes and the postwar period's accelerated consumerism to illustrate the novel's concerns with how child desire may be manipulated for adult gain and explain why nostalgia is a particularly apt trope by which to critique consumer culture's exploitation of children. I next draw on the work of Daniel Thomas Cook to address the commodification of childhood as a historical process, revealing how innocence makes children vulnerable to exploitation. This review of vulnerability is followed by an examination of the novel's engagement with contemporaneous concerns regarding the effect of consumer culture and mass media on children to elucidate how nostalgic and marketing ideals may subjugate children. I then consider Humbert's genuine nostalgia, asserting that it does not reflect a longing for an autonomous Lolita but for *his* Lolita, his solipsized creation. In making this argument, I describe affinities between Lolita and Rita (the woman with whom Humbert is involved after Lolita escapes him) to clarify how Humbert attempts to relive his subjugation of Lolita with Rita and explicate how Humbert—like consumer culture—limits Lolita's freedom by preserving her apathy and homogenizing her. Chapter three concludes with a discussion of Nabokov's concept of *aesthetic bliss*, which, I argue, readers are capable of experiencing by critically questioning the functions of nostalgia in *Lolita*. It is aesthetic bliss, I maintain, that conjoins Lolita's aesthetics and ethics.

Chapter four analyzes the significance of what I refer to as *subverting* and *perverting* nostalgia in Kubrick's *Lolita*. I first present a brief discussion of the film's analeptic narrative structure, revealing its significance to establishing Lolita as the object of Humbert's nostalgia. I then consider the issue of Humbert's unreliability, which significantly differs from that in Nabokov's novel. Whereas Nabokov's Humbert is an unreliable narrator who feigns nostalgia for childhood innocence to deceive readers, Kubrick's Humbert, I assert, is unreliable *because* he is nostalgic. Through a close reading of formal cinematic strategies that work to establish Humbert's unreliability (especially voice-over and narrative perspective), I demonstrate how Kubrick subverts nostalgia by marking the gap between Humbert's nostalgic fantasies of the past with the actual past presented to viewers. I suggest that this subversion of nostalgia facilitates a parody of Hollywood melodrama, which rejects moral legibility to advance Kubrick's social satire of postwar suburban America. Drawing especially on Robert Beuka's excellent study of suburban landscapes in twentieth-century American fiction and film, I first establish how suburban places have historically been understood as nostalgic spaces even as critiques of suburbia have been underwritten by nostalgia. Adopting Isabella van Elferen's useful discussion of the ways *perverting nostalgia* renders home uncanny, I then detail how home is made uncanny in *Lolita* via Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia for the idyllic qualities of home that suburban spaces embody: wholesomeness, tradition, and stability. Toward this end, I consider how Kubrick satirizes cinematic and televised narrative tropes that bolster whitewashed depictions of the mid-century American suburban ideal. Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia, I argue, critiques the underlying hypocrisy of this ideal by ironically destabilizing social conventions regarding normalcy and deviation that endorse discrimination and underwrite postwar anxieties about presumed subversives. These assumptions and anxieties, the film subtly but repeatedly suggests,

make possible the injustice of *misrecognition*, as Nancy Fraser defines it. My careful attention to nostalgia in *Lolita* reveals how the film condemns the sort of suburban pretense that potentially fuels multiple forms of discrimination.

Chapter five explores tensions between reflective and restorative nostalgia in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, illuminating how the author's own nostalgia inspires a social critique of mid-century Los Angeles that is executed through the motif of nostalgia in the novel. Briefly reviewing Chandler's transatlantic upbringing, I first establish his idealistic image of nineteenth-century England and corresponding longing for a so-called age of taste to contextualize how *The Long Goodbye* deploys nostalgia to condemn the (mid-century) present as morally, aesthetically, and intellectually vulgar. Through a combination of close reading and reliance on extratextual material—namely Chandler's non-fiction and the writings of mid-century cultural critics like T.S. Eliot, Clement Greenberg, and Dwight Macdonald—I reveal how the novel pits Chandler's nostalgic fantasy of Victorian English culture against a depreciatory vision of mid-century American mass/middlebrow culture and its presumed inauthenticity. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's work, I argue that *The Long Goodbye* denounces middlebrow culture by satirizing those who lack embodied cultural capital but nevertheless endeavour to wield objectified cultural capital toward *appearing* cultured. I then consider how concerns with inauthenticity are connected to the novel's gender dynamics and expressions of reflective nostalgia that actually signal Chandler's own restorative nostalgia. Considering how Philip Marlowe's nostalgic longings initially make him imperceptive to Eileen Wade's and Terry Lennox's performances of decorum and civility, I demonstrate how *The Long Goodbye*: 1) reproduces a postwar collective nostalgia for the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, and 2) signals a longing for the sort of homosocial bonds forged in wartime. With the foreclosure of characters' nostalgic fantasies, the

novel suggests that disillusion is as painful as loss. The ways in which this disillusion is signalled, however, exposes Chandler's restorative nostalgia as misogynistic and racist. Building on Engles's study of white male nostalgia, chapter five concludes by addressing the racist dimensions of Chandler's restorative nostalgia and how *The Long Goodbye* engages Eliot's problematic notion of cultural levelling. I argue that the novel exhibits a restorative nostalgia for whiteness that is imagined to be under siege by increasing ethnoracial difference in mid-century L.A. In using the motif of nostalgia to denounce mid-century American culture as morally bankrupt and lacking in taste, Chandler ironically discloses much of his own nostalgia as morally bankrupt and tasteless.

Chapter six considers how Altman's *The Long Goodbye* may be characterized as both nostalgic *and* anti-nostalgic. I open by briefly addressing the 1970s nostalgia wave and tracing important trends within Hollywood filmmaking during this time to situate my subsequent analysis of Altman's revisionist approach to *The Long Goodbye*. I establish the critical potential of genre revisionism by relying especially on John Cawelti's useful summary of the ways genres may be transformed and his assessment of successful nostalgia films as those that provide a simultaneous sense of contemporaneity and pastness by situating conventional generic content in a somewhat unconventional context. I then explore how Altman mixes signifiers of the past and present to provoke viewers' into contemplating their nostalgic desires. While Altman's *The Long Goodbye* is often assumed to offer a valediction to the hard-boiled noir genre, I demonstrate that the ways the film paradoxically encourages and discourages nostalgia for Old Hollywood calls into question whether this valediction is regretful or satirical. This question, in turn, invites careful reflection on the film's Hollywood allusions and its intricate exploration of genre. Noting that the film's generic allusions all share the tough-guy hero in common, I then consider how

Altman parodies the hypermasculinity paradigmatic of this figure in classic crime dramas. My analysis reveals that Altman demythologizes the hard-boiled tough guy's machismo via parody while underscoring the issues of unstable masculinity and moral ambiguity typical of noir, thus nostalgically affirming the noir antihero figure. To further support this reading I first address the conservative impulses that underwrite the romantic subplots of 1940s adaptations of Chandler's work and then consider how Altman's film revises the narrative closure of such adaptations. I suggest that Altman's Marlowe offers an ironic counterpoint to bureaucratic inefficacy and political corruption, thereby reaffirming the importance of integrity and nostalgically romanticizing such integrity as likely only among nonconventional heroes in 1970s American society. I conclude chapter six by observing that Altman's film offers an understanding of masculinity distinct from that of 1940s noirs and many 1970s neo-noirs. That is, while Altman's *The Long Goodbye* is characteristic of New Hollywood productions in challenging what it means to be a (male) hero, it differs from many films of the era in its complex treatment of nostalgia that concurrently repudiates one vision of the male antihero while validating another.

While nostalgia may no longer be regarded as a disease of the imagination, it is often imaginatively put to use to signal far more than a yearning for the past. This dissertation reveals how various nostalgias are crucial to key twentieth-century American novels and films. Inquiring into the nostalgic operations of *The Great Gatsby* (1925, 1949), *Lolita* (1955, 1962) and *The Long Goodbye* (1953, 1972) tells us much about the cultural work these texts performed in their respective historical moments. Expanding our understanding of how nostalgia shapes these works by attending to the aesthetic possibilities and critical functions of nostalgia, the following chapters uncover a range of previously overlooked political and ethical implications in selected novels and films.

Out of Place & in between Time:

American Identity and Janus-Faced Nostalgia in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

> I must hold in balance […]
> the contradiction between the dead hand of the past
> and the high intentions of the future.
> —F. Scott Fitzgerald

F. Scott Fitzgerald seems to have spent the majority of his life enamored with dreams of the past *and* future. In his 1932 essay, "My Lost City," he recounts his enthralling first impression of "that new thing—the Metropolitan spirit"—as a twenty-year-old Princeton undergraduate in New York city and his sense of overvaluing the city so that "[o]ne by one [his] great dreams of New York became tainted" (*Crack-Up* 24, 26). This passage juxtaposes Fitzgerald's hope for what lies ahead and his longing for what has been lost, a tension that runs throughout his non-fiction and fiction. Fitzgerald's preoccupation with balancing the authority of the past against expectations of the future perhaps assumes its clearest and most profound articulation in *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

Although *The Great Gatsby* is widely recognized as deeply informed by Fitzgerald's "acute sense of the irrecoverable passage of everything into the past" (Mizener 67), few scholarly analyses of the novel explicitly address nostalgia as such. Instead of *nostalgia*, terms such as *elegiac*, *pastoral*, and *romantic* tend to dominate critical discussions of *The Great Gatsby*.[40] When nostalgia is overtly noted in such discussions, it is typically mentioned only in

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[40] Many critics have approached the novel as a pastoral elegy that laments the loss of either an irrecoverable natural world (e.g., Westbrook 83; Eble 96; Samuels 793) or an irrecoverable moral order (e.g., Mizener 78; Chase 165). Also noting the sense of irrecoverability that pervades the novel, Robert Ornstein asserts that *Gatsby*'s theme is "the unending quest of the romantic dream, which is forever betrayed in fact and yet redeemed in men's minds" (139). John Keuhl goes one step further, asserting that Fitzgerald situates *The Great Gatsby* as both a "romance and realistic study of a nation's values and their effect on an individual" (416). His reading echoes that of Malcom Cowley who praises Fitzgerald for his ability to bridge romance and realism (150).

passing. John Berryman, for example, identifies the novel's theme of disillusion as existing

within an atmosphere of "desperate or ecstatic nostalgia" (107), yet he offers no critical

commentary concerning the expressions or functions of nostalgia in *The Great Gatsby*.[41] Also

neglecting to elaborate on the role of nostalgia in relation to the novel, Wright Morris goes so far

as to suggest that with *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald "made of nostalgia […] a work of art" (158).

Fitzgerald's nostalgic aesthetic is, however, uniquely addressed by Niklas Salmose who

concludes that *The Great Gatsby* is not simply a novel about nostalgia but a nostalgic novel (84).

Salmose offers a sustained and cogent discussion of nostalgia and *The Great Gatsby*.

Providing detailed formal analysis and drawing on theories of textual memory, he argues that

Fitzgerald creates "both a textual nostalgia and evoke[s] a phenomenological nostalgic

experience in the reader" (83). He convincingly establishes how *The Great Gatsby* generates a

nostalgic experience in readers by way of its thematic concerns, style and form, while also

underscoring the fact that Fitzgerald's "structural and stylistic approach to nostalgia in *Gatsby*

[…] are not unique" but "part of a more general nostalgic inclination in modernist writing" (83,

153). This inclination, according to Salmose, was engendered by a combined sense of

"transcendental homelessness," "nihilism and universal grief" heightened by the First World War

that "necessitated a literary style that both confronted the whole project of progress as well as

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[41] Like Berryman, others allude to the importance of nostalgia in *The Great Gatsby* without interrogating its function. Keuhl, for example, notes Fitzgerald's "interweaving of pastoral nostalgia and cultural history" (416) but comments no further on the meaning of "pastoral nostalgia." Robert Beuka provides a more detailed description of this nostalgic mode, arguing that "Fitzgerald creates both a yearning remembrance of a vanishing pastoral terrain and a bustling, protosuburban narrative that chronicles the commodification of the natural landscape" ("Love" 68). Elsewhere he asserts that *The Great Gatsby*'s "deep nostalgia for lost, Edenic landscapes is […] a function of its setting in a modern environment that is in the process of transforming away from the natural and toward the manmade" (*American Icon* 127). Despite mentioning nostalgia, Beuka neither discusses the concept nor elaborates on its significance in the novel. Perhaps most surprisingly, David C. Stineback does not include a chapter on *Gatsby* in his book-length study, *Shifting World: Social Change and Nostalgia in the American Novel*; instead, he makes passing reference to the novel's treatment of social change as "a private crisis of experience or age, even if that private crisis has a larger, metaphorical significance" (14).

provided a space for emotions that were not considered desirable in a world moving distinctly

forward" (84). Salmose's astute observation regarding how this nostalgic aesthetic depends on a

"dichotomy between future and past, now and then, here and there" (84) provides a foundation

for my own reading of *The Great Gatsby*, which highlights and addresses a significant critical

oversight in discussions of the novel.

       Critical readings of *The Great Gatsby*, typically overlook Fitzgerald's harmonizing

efforts to balance the past and future. John F. Callahan, for example, maintains that in *The Great*

Gatsby, Fitzgerald's central theme concerns the American idealist's failure "either to integrate

himself with or change the course of American history" (*Illusions* 24).[42] This dichotomous view

denies the possibility of simultaneously drawing on the past and building a future — a

possibility, I will argue, that lies not only at the heart of *The Great Gatsby*'s narrative but also at

the heart of the American myth of self-making. Standard analyses of the novel as an allegory of

American experience often tacitly assume the superiority of the past in addressing the novel's

presumed social criticism of twentieth-century materialism and its attendant moral anarchy.

Emblematic of such analyses, Marius Bewley maintains that "*The Great Gatsby* is an exploration

of the American dream as it exists in a corrupt period" (126). In his view, the novel's theme is

the "withering of the American dream," the essence of which "lives in a past and a future that

never existed, and is helpless in the present that does" (125, 137). Although Bewley alludes to

the fact that the past is a nostalgic construction in *The Great Gatsby*, he nevertheless supposes

the existence of an uncorrupted period in American history in which the dream of upward

mobility unproblematically flourished (versus "the American dream as it exists in a corrupt

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[42] Callahan also identifies this theme as central to *Tender is the Night* (1934) and Fitzgerald's unfinished, posthumously published *The Last Tycoon* (1941) (*Illusions* 23-24).

period"). That is, he reproduces the terms of the American dream—the myth of self-making—while arguing that the novel suggests the passing of this dream.

This chapter contributes to the sizeable body of scholarship focused on the American myth of self-making embedded in *The Great Gatsby*[43] by considering nostalgia as the nexus of the novel's thematic concerns. Attending to the complex work of nostalgia in the novel, I demonstrate how *The Great Gatsby* suggests that, far from withering under the weight of an impossible past or future, the American dream of self-making is actually motivated by the nostalgic project of self-recovery.

A tension between past and future in *The Great Gatsby* bears witness to national anxieties particular to 1920s America. Centered around "the great debate on 'civilization'" (Berman, "Fitzgerald's Intellectual Context"),[44] such anxieties were partially driven by disputes over reconciling national identity with increasingly diverse populations (Berman, "America" 39-41; Bourgeois and Clendenning 105).[45] Issues of identity are central to the novel's conflicted impulses toward the past and future, which reveal how the American myth of self-making is fundamentally paradoxical: aspiring to self-made success requires relying on historical models of behavior while simultaneously imagining oneself free from history. That is, although the myth of

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[43] Generations of scholars have explored *The Great Gatsby* as a "tragic pastoral" that contrasts "urban sophistication and corruption" with "simple virtue" (Mizener 78); a novel that laments an "irrecoverable" natural world (Westbrook 83), and the "loss of a rural paradise" (Eble 96) as America "grows from wilderness to civilization" (Samuels 793). Discussions of the pastoral elements of the narrative often intersect with those that explore its mythic national dimensions, frequently attending to the character of Gatsby as a mythic symbol of America itself (e.g., Trilling; Troy; Fussell; Will).

[44] The debate concerning "American 'civilization' and its synonyms like 'culture' and 'society'," according to Ronald Berman, constituted "a set of opposing arguments about two connected subjects. First, how was the United States, after the Great War the world's most powerful nation, going to prove its right to preeminence? How would it surpass Europe in the sciences, industries, and arts? Second, how was it going to retain those aspects of life that originally made the United States what it was" (*Fitzgerald's World* 34; "Fitzgerald's Intellectual Context" 72).

[45] Writing on the supposed decline of American civilization, 1920s intellectuals were concerned with eroding order and stability as a consequence of warfare (Meredith 201), the development of a wasteful, futile American national character, as well as immigration (Berman, "America" 39-41) and its resulting ethnic diversity (Bourgeois and Clendenning 105).

self-making seems to protest against nostalgia in its insistence on progress, *The Great Gatsby* reveals the manner in which it actually operates within the terms of nostalgic longing. Further, the novel's conflation of spatial and temporal geographies upsets regional binaries of tradition and progress that assume the former's moral legibility and the latter's corruptive influence. These dislocations, in turn, highlight nostalgia's intricate role in driving characters' restlessness.

"Nostalgia," writes Svetlana Boym, "is not a property of the object itself but a result of an interaction between subjects and objects, between actual landscapes and the landscapes of the mind" (354). The actual and imaginative converge in Fitzgerald's novel as Fitzgerald evokes contemporaneous debates on the state of American civilization and draws on historically shifting conceptions of success and the American myth of self-making. He offers a satirical portrait of what George Santayana condemned as America's "genteel tradition"[46] in his (Fitzgerald's) characterization of Daisy and Tom Buchanan. Opposing the Buchanans' nostalgia for a waning social order that defined *upper class* according to inherited wealth and privilege, Jay Gatsby—as a successful criminal intent on repeating the past—variously embodies a digest of American self-made archetypes: colonial settlers, western pioneers, industrial robber barons, and prohibition entrepreneurs. That Gatsby stands as a veritable avatar of these historical models of self-making signals Fitzgerald's interest in connecting Gatsby's nostalgic project to that of national myth-making.

In *The Great Gatsby*, nostalgia works to censure a dogmatic adherence to outmoded principles that reject progress, and it simultaneously inverts the American cultural precept that the past may be discarded in the name of progress by situating self-recovery as the paradoxical goal of national ideals of self-making and the telos of the novel's major characters. Drawing on

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[46] See Santayana, "Genteel Tradition" 4.

diverse understandings of nostalgia, I interrogate its function as a trope that symbolizes both the threat of discontinuity and the corresponding search for continuity in the narrative. In doing so, I attend to how nostalgia stages oppositions between the past, present, and future in Fitzgerald's treatment of national anxieties, the ideology of self-making, and geographic dislocation to show the novel's thematic concerns as deeply implicated in each other. While I address material from the entire novel throughout this chapter, each section of my argument largely focuses on particular characters' relation to nostalgia: Tom and Daisy Buchanan's restorative nostalgia; Jay Gatsby's nostalgic self-making; and Nick Carraway's geographical and rhetorical ambivalence toward nostalgia. As I will demonstrate, these characters' private nostalgia invokes collective nostalgia (and vice versa), and each appears symptomatic of displaced nostalgia for differing mythological national pasts.[47]

Nibbling Stale Ideas: Class Privilege & Preserving the Past

The Great Gatsby most explicitly engages its cultural moment in the figure of Tom, who vehemently complains that "[c]ivilization's going to pieces" (13). His complaint echoes contemporaneous concerns regarding civilization, the idea of which, Ronald Berman observes, "was characteristically in dispute in the twenties" ("America" 39). Denoting advanced social and cultural development, *civilization* is a broad term that both encompasses all elements of a society and connotes value judgements concerning the nature of such elements.[48] Late-nineteenth- and

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[47] Fred Davis does not believe it possible to feel nostalgia "for places one has never seen or events one did not live through" because he insists that "the concept applies only to memories of lived experience" (Panelas 1426). To Davis's definition, Arjun Appandurai adds collective historical memory as an important feature of genuine nostalgia, and he refers to "nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory" as "ersatz nostalgia" (qtd. in Boym 38). Contra Davis and Appandurai, Tom Vanderbilt does not delineate between genuine and artificial experiences of nostalgia, and he terms nostalgia for that which we have not known firsthand "displaced nostalgia."
[48] By "elements of society," I intend things such as religion, art, customs, morals, philosophy, politics, and social arrangements.

early twentieth-century American social critics diagnosed varied and interrelated problems contributing to the presumed decline of civilization. *The Great Gatsby* stages contemporaneous debates through the figure of Tom to depict an especially suspect and dangerous form of restorative nostalgia. Often centered around issues of race, immigration, social order and youth culture, discussions about the state of civilization at the time of the novel's publication were underwritten by Americans' conflicting views regarding tradition and progress.

On the one hand, Lawrence W. Levine explains, "Americans during the 1920s exhibited a national urge to turn backwards in an effort to recapture the images and meaning of their country's youth"; on the other, the country was governed by new moral codes and standards that were galvanized by technological advancements, mass media, and mass consumption (189, 195). Some commentators put their faith in tradition and lamented the loss of old orders, some felt that the values of the past were unsuited to the concerns of the present and called for reform, and others called for balancing tradition and progress. Writing in 1921, Syracuse University chancellor James R. Day, for example, believed that "in order to preserve the national character and institutions the people must grow, retaining the old by creating the new" (vi).[49] In *The Great Gatsby*, the possibility of this sort of growth does not simply elude the Buchanans, it contradicts their very way of life as members of an upper class for whom lineage bestows class privilege and presumed cultural superiority.

In short, Tom and Daisy are old money. They possess and wish to maintain the power and prestige accompanying this title. Their elite class status, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terms, is defined not only by the economic capital their inherited wealth provides but also by their cultural

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[49] In 1925, historian Harry J. Carman similarly declared that "[t]he future of the American commonwealth is written in its past" (3).

and social capital, which has been passed down through generations.[50] For the Buchanans, *civilization* and *old money* are synonymous. While Tom has "gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things" and laments the decline of civilization in racist and nativist terms, Daisy mourns her "white girlhood" and the carefree innocence of privilege that heralds her careless, "sophisticated" cynicism "about everything" (20, 18, 17). Largely underwritten by anxieties about shifting class dynamics, the Buchanans' discordant attitudes toward their social environment amount to restorative nostalgia for Anglo-Saxon cultural supremacy and class privilege. In his characterization of Tom and Daisy, Fitzgerald deploys nostalgia to satirize upper-class elites who, like the Buchanans, are entirely oriented toward the past, concerned only with preserving their social status and power, insensitive to the suffering they inflict, and antagonistic to progress.

Noting that 1920s Americans molded their dreams to an ever greater extent "upon the patterns of the past," Levine maintains that this "nostalgic yearning" was nowhere "clearer than in the national attitude toward immigration and acculturation" (193). The product of an increasingly xenophobic era,[51] *The Great Gatsby* emerged from a historical context in which debates about national identity were often informed by racist eugenic theories. Arguing for a relationship between white, Anglo-Saxon heritage and American identity, eugenicists such as Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard propagated racist, pseudo-scientific theories that

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[50] Bourdieu argues that "the major classes" within socially stratified societies are primarily distinguished by "the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers — economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital. The distribution of the different classes (and class fractions)," he continues, "thus runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are most deprived in both respects" (108). That is, capitalist societies are stratified not only according to the financial assets members of different groups possess but also according to group members' cultural and social assets (e.g., distinctive forms of knowledge, tastes and competencies as well as social connections that may be inherited or acquired with time, which often requires freedom from economic necessity).

[51] Like many others, Charles R. Geisst observes that "[i]ntolerance and xenophobia" were on the rise" in America during the 1920s (147).

implicated miscegenation in the assumed decline of civilization. In *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), Grant presumes the superiority of Nordic culture, which he views as externally threatened in America by southern and eastern European immigrants, and internally jeopardized by the northern migration of African Americans (Currell 22-23).[52] As Susan Currell notes, Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920) presents a similar argument that "expand[s] on the threat to white supremacy" by attending to "the rise of non-white races in all parts of the globe" (23). In conjunction with the increasing numbers of those emigrating from southern and eastern Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, racial theorists' nationalistic beliefs influenced public policy in the implementation of restrictive immigration mandates, such as the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Reform Act of 1924. Tom's implicit support of such policies is evident in his nostalgic attitudes.

In many respects, Tom is an outmoded character who longs for a bygone era. However, instead of displaying reflective nostalgia moored in sentimental thoughts of longing and personal loss, Tom expresses nationalistic sentiments typical of restorative nostalgia. As Boym defines it, restorative nostalgia risks promoting the sort of selective forgetting and xenophobic scapegoating that underlies discrimination, racism, and violence because of its predisposition toward viewing *home* as in need of protection from an imagined, strategizing enemy (43). In Tom's view, the enemy includes non-Nordics and those not belonging to his social class — a social class based on lineage and inherited privilege, not self-acquired wealth. Because "the family is the essential form of nativist identity," according to Walter Benn Michaels, Tom's invocation of family life in an effort to dissuade Daisy's interest in Gatsby functions as more than a jealous husband's attempt to make his wife feel guilty (11). In nativist terms, Gatsby represents a threat that

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[52] I refer to those Grant writes of as *African Americans* rather than *Black Americans* because The Great Migration during the early decades of the twentieth century was predominantly undertaken by former slaves native to Africa.

extends beyond Tom's nuclear family and resides in the ambiguity of his past and the problem of ethnic uncertainty that he poses. Like many of the cultural theorists of his day who viewed diversity as a sign of weakness, Tom purportedly imagines ethnic ambiguity as the root cause of cultural decline.[53] For Stoddard, whom Tom misidentifies as "Goddard" (13), American citizenship and American identity are not synonymous (Michaels 9).[54] As a rival, Gatsby thus destabilizes Tom's notion of what constitutes a proper American more than he upsets the balance of an already unhappy marriage because of his enigmatic, and hence malleable, past.

Fitzgerald frames the revelation of Gatsby's past with ethnic comparisons, revealing the supposed scandal of Gatsby's success by way of ethnoracial analogies that upset Tom's nativist conceptions of American and class identity. Indeed, a number of contemporary scholars associate Gatsby with the figure of the ethnic outsider.[55] Meredith Goldsmith, for example, asserts that, in Gatsby, the "ostensibly biological imperatives of 'race' and the supposedly more fluid boundaries of class are complexly and ambiguously intermingled" (185). Although class membership distinguishes new-money Gatsby from the Buchanans, he is "persistently understood by them as belonging to something more like a different race" (Michaels 7). In fact, Tom implicitly compares Gatsby's romantic pursuit of Daisy to "intermarriage between black and white" (130).

Peter Gregg Slater maintains that Tom's attempt to use ethnicity as a weapon against Gatsby is "part of his haphazard search for something to fill the gap that results when at the age of thirty his sense of personal worth can no longer be sustained on the basis of his physical prowess" (54). I, however, read Tom's allusion to miscegenation as symptomatic of class

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[53] Tom believes in the "scientific stuff" of eugenic theories that assume a racial basis for cultural degeneration (13).
[54] Stoddard argues that immigrants may become "American citizens but not Americans" (qtd. in Michaels 9).
[55] See Slater; Bourgeois and Clendenning; Mallios; Will; and Goldsmith.

anxiety. That is, miscegenation operates as a metaphor of class contamination — the idea that the

aristocratic class risks corruption by lower classes, which supposes a distinction, à la Stoddard,

between proper Americans and (un)American citizens (e.g., immigrants). *The Great Gatsby*

suggests that Tom's arrogant sense of personal worth is a product of his inherited social status,

not that it depends on his physical prowess. In actuality, Tom's imposing physical form is central

to symbolizing his elitism and restorative nostalgia.

The "anti-climax" of Tom's middle age does not symbolize a longing for his football

days at New Haven but the perceived threat of a classless democracy in which his breeding and

wealth will no longer distinguish him as culturally superior. In short, Tom is nostalgic for a pre-

Civil War America, a historical period Irvin G. Wyllie identifies as one that "favored an elite that

was born, not made, a genteel aristocracy of breeding, manners, and learning" (133).[56] Longing

for such an age, Tom nostalgically emulates the antebellum South of genteel aristocracy signified

by his "cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion" (7). In asserting himself a member

of the "dominant race" duty-bound to ensure that "other races" do not assume "control of

things," Tom endeavours to reaffirm his position among the culturally elite (14). That is, he

scapegoats ethnoracial others to maintain his haughty sense of authority, which once required no

explanation beyond that of his being a Buchanan.

Tom does not just verbalize his restorative nostalgia, he embodies it. His first appearance

in *The Great Gatsby* subtly establishes him as a man belonging to another era. Although Nick

has already provided readers with the name of Daisy's husband, he uses Tom's full name when

recounting his first sight of Tom since having known him in college: "Tom Buchanan in riding

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[56] By the mid 1800s, the notion of business triumph was already made popular in the public imagination by men like Timothy Shay Arthur for whom "the most prominent and efficient men [in America] were not those who were born to wealth and eminent social positions, but those who have won both by the force of untiring personal energy. It is to them," Arthur claimed, "that the country is indebted for unbounded prosperity" (qtd. in Wyllie 19).

clothes was standing with his legs apart on the front porch" (7). By introducing this image using

Tom's first name and surname, Fitzgerald evokes an aura of genteel authority that is underscored

by Tom's riding clothes and powerful stance on the porch of his Colonial mansion. Tom's

demeanor is one of imposing authority that reflects his cultural capital,[57] as further illustrated by

Nick's first description of Tom as

> a *sturdy* straw-haired man of thirty, with a rather *hard* mouth and a *supercilious* manner.
>
> Two shining *arrogant* eyes had established *dominance* over his face and gave him the
>
> appearance of always leaning *aggressively* forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his
>
> riding clothes could hide the *enormous power* of that body — he seemed to *fill* those
>
> glistening boots until he *strained* the top lacing, and you could see a *great pack of muscle*
>
> shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of *enormous*
>
> *leverage* — a *cruel* body.
>
> His speaking voice, a *gruff husky tenor*, added to the impression of *fractiousness*
>
> he conveyed. There was a touch of *paternal contempt* in it. (7, emphasis added)

In this passage, Nick amasses adjectives denoting Tom's haughty features that culminate with

the noun *dominance*. His description then oscillates between qualified verbs ("the appearance of

always leaning aggressively forward," "he seemed to fill") and nouns, symbolically conveying a

sense of inaction, of inertia (a point to which I will return at the end of this section). Nick's

concluding oxymoron ("paternal contempt") couples kindness with disdainful scorn and signals

the paradox of Tom's patrilineal entitlement. That is, while patrilineage situates Tom as a

member of so-called civilized society, Tom's contempt is not justified because he is *un*civilized.

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[57] In asserting that Tom's imposing authority reflects his cultural capital, I am suggesting that, among the distinctive competencies Tom has acquired as a consequence of his upper-class upbringing, Tom has learned how to conduct himself so that he commands respect.

While *civilized*, as upper-class elite such as the Buchanans intend it, is meant to signal intellect and refined manners, Tom is both ignorant and unrefined. He parrots what he has read in "Goddard's" (i.e., Stoddard's) "fine book," betraying his weak intellect and lack of originality with both his misnomer and racist understanding of cultural decay (13). Stoddard's ideas are of interest to Tom insofar as they justify his contemptuous arrogance. Tom will not abide being called "hulking" (i.e., clumsy, uncivilized) because he doubtlessly imagines that he represents civilization (12). However, his complaint that civilization is going to pieces is ironic because he is the one that "smash[es] things up": he bruises Daisy's finger; breaks Myrtle Wilson's nose; gets into a car accident shortly after his honeymoon, ripping a wheel off his car and breaking the arm of the woman with whom he is already being unfaithful to his wife; and is arguably indirectly responsible for Myrtle's death, Gatsby's murder, and George Wilson's suicide (182, 12, 37, 77, 123-125, 181).

As Nick realizes by novel's end, Daisy is as destructive as Tom in her careless disregard of others (182). Although Daisy mocks Tom's reading habits and racist anxiety, she does so with "unthoughtful sadness" and is as equally—and ironically—cynical about the state of American civilization as her husband (13-14). Ascribing to the beliefs of "the most advanced people" who think "everything's terrible" (18), Daisy, like Tom, is concerned with the state of civilization only insofar as social transformation threatens her sense of entitlement. Her unreflective concern reveals both her intellectual disengagement from the world at large and an insincerity that underwrites Fitzgerald's satire of upper-class etiquette.

That Daisy is originally from Louisville is significant to her understanding of social comportment, which both signals and informs her restorative nostalgia for time and place.[58]

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[58] Berman offers a similar (but broader) claim, suggesting that "Fitzgerald's Southern characters are important because their minds and manners have been shaped by time and place" ("Fitzgerald: Mapping Progress" 22).

While Tom's nostalgia is overtly racist, Daisy's nostalgia is subtly racialized: when

sentimentalizing her "white girlhood," Daisy, rather than signaling lost innocence, signals her

longing for the social conventions of the Old South that define her privilege according to race as

much as class. Although Daisy does not explicitly mention race when reflecting upon her

girlhood, *white* is symbolically associated with her social advantages: eighteen-year-old Daisy

Fay lived in the largest house on her street, was "by far the most popular of all the young girls in

Louisville," "dressed in *white*, and had a little *white* roadster" (75, emphasis added). The colour

of Daisy's roadster may seem to be a small detail; however, the very fact that she owned her own

car as a teenager in 1917 arguably connects Daisy's repeated association with the colour white to

her privileged status as inseparable from race. This association is further supported when Daisy

begins to tell Nick of the "white girlhood" she and Jordan Baker passed together but is cut off by

Tom:

> DAISY. Our beautiful white—
>
> TOM. Did you give Nick a little heart to heart talk on the veranda?
>
> DAISY. Did I? I can't seem to remember, but I think we talked about the Nordic race.
>
> (20)

Though Daisy is being facetious here, Fitzgerald's juxtaposition of metaphorical whiteness and

the Nordic race implies a connection between race and Daisy's privileged upbringing that

suggests she is—at the very least—complicit in Tom's white supremacist nostalgia.

Like Tom, Daisy embodies the past for which she longs. During Nick's first dinner at the

Buchanans, Daisy is variously portrayed as vivacious, charming, romantic, and captivating; she

has a knack for making others feel special in the way she radiantly casts her lovely face upon

them and speaks in whispers and murmurs (9-18). "I've heard it said," Nick confides, "that

Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her" (9). While Nick finds this possibility

"an irrelevant criticism that made [Daisy's murmur] no less charming" (9), it subtly intimates

that Daisy's charm is but an affectation. As we learn when Daisy first attends one of Gatsby's

parties, she prefers gestures over emotions (108). Complimenting her husband's Antebellum

nostalgia, Daisy yearns for the "artificial world" of "snobbery" she belonged to as an eighteen-

year-old Southern belle (152).[59] It is this world that defines the "rather distinguished secret

society" of which she and Tom are members (18). That the Buchanans imagine this secret

society as jeopardized by social developments is indicated by their paradoxical longing for youth

and opposition to youth culture.

The matter of social class distinctions between old and new money intersects with the

discourse of generations that was tangential to the period's civilization debate. "Fitzgerald,"

writes Glenway Wescott, "stood as the outstanding aggressor in the little warfare which divided

our middle classes in the twenties — warfare of moral emancipation against moral conceit,

flaming youth against old guard" (19). Linked to the alleged dignity and refinement of American

gentility, the older generation was assumed to adhere to moral standards and social conventions.

Comparatively, the younger generation was associated with those adjectives applied to new

money: 1920s American youth were reckless and uninhibited in the view of some, while others

considered them "more independent, energetic and resourceful" ("Modern Girl").

Unsurprisingly, youth culture was a subject of pronounced concern during the decade (Curnutt,

"Youth Culture" 104). Dominated by queries over the status of the younger generation,

newspaper headlines in the 1920s employed the rhetoric of deterioration used in arguments

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[59] Johnathan Barron suggests that the stereotype of the Southern belle is "at the center of Gatsby's story," noting that traits associated with the Southern belle include "submissiveness, hospitality, and concern with outward, social appearance" (65), all of which Daisy embodies.

regarding cultural decay. Nonetheless, anxieties over the postwar generation were met with

regular and fervent rejoinders ("National Humanities Center" 1).[60] In Fitzgerald's novel,

outlooks on youth and senescence indicate conflicting responses toward sociocultural change.

Tom and Daisy have not yet even reached the prime of their lives, yet they appear to long

for their youth even as they simultaneously reject 1920s youth culture. While thirty-year-old

Tom declares himself "old-fashioned," twenty-three-year-old Daisy believes she is "getting old"

(104, 128). Allan Hepburn eloquently observes that Fitzgerald frequently "eulogizes youth

before it ends" (59). In the Buchanans' case, this premature eulogy appears to be driven by

restorative nostalgia that metaphorically designates the Buchanans as old. Despite their

chronological youth, Tom and Daisy belong to an earlier era organized according to an

outmoded set of social parameters. As such, they embody a resistance to progress.

The Buchanans' resistance to progress is notably expressed via their symbolic association

with inertia that depends on an understanding of youth and forward movement as representing

the future and, thus, progress.[61] In the Buchanans' sunroom, for instance, Nick finds Jordan and

Daisy "buoyed up" on the "only completely stationary object in the room" "as though upon an

anchored balloon" (8). When Tom enters, he immediately "shut the rear windows" so that "the

caught wind died out" (8). While the women presage a later image in which they are likened to

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[60] Emblematic of the era's conflicting views regarding youth culture, a 1926 issue of *Forum* magazine presents point-counterpoint essays of two young women asked to address the question of whether Youth has deteriorated. Answering in the affirmative, Anne Temple claims her "quarrel with the young people of today concerns […] the loss of a thing which some call innate refinement"; conversely, Regina Malone argues that the youth of her generation possess "new 'mores' better adapted to the age than those it has discarded" ("National Humanities Center" 6). Temple's and Malone's responses illustrate the tension between tradition and progress identified at the beginning of this section (i.e., 1920s Americans' tendency to look backwards in their efforts to recapture a national past while also embracing new moral codes and standards). Of particular significance is the sense of cultural transformation that each woman's response indicates.

[61] Noting that a "great change in thinking about the self within time had come about early in Fitzgerald's life," Berman details how "'forward' movement became a metaphor of intellectual and even moral advancement" ("Fitzgerald: Time" 35). According to Berman, this associative tendency partially accounts for the importance of "future" to the American mindset because "it can so easily be confused with progress" ("Fitzgerald: Time" 35).

"silver idols weighing down their own white dresses against the signing breeze of the fans," Tom purposefully impedes natural momentum (115). In Jeremy Reed's analysis, "stagnation and complacency" pose the "real threat to the social structure" in *The Great Gatsby* (168). Accordingly, he writes, Tom represents "a type of stagnation that is incompatible with an American economy, and more importantly, a sense of national identity, that is predicated on change and innovation" (174). The sense of identity to which Reed alludes rests on the notion of self-making, which requires endless activity. Conversely, the Buchanans belong to an old order that is preserved through nothing happening.

Actual and symbolic images of the Buchanans' motionlessness indict the social order that Tom and Daisy symbolize, an order in which their authority is inherited and thus secured without their having to do anything. The Buchanans' inertia, in other words, marks their restorative nostalgia: they cling to the past and its hierarchies by metaphorically refusing to move. While their symbolic stasis marks their resistance to progress, the Buchanans' superficial concerns with aging, morality, and decorum emblematize their unease with shifting social dynamics that increasingly mark them as passé.

Tom admits to his "old-fashioned" ideas when he complains "women run around too much these days to suit [him]" (104). That he is one of the "crazy fish" so-called loose women like Myrtle are attracted to underscores, yet again, the irony of his complaints concerning contemporary society (104). This irony is further emphasized when Tom insincerely laments the erosion of traditional values such as "family life and family institutions" (130). Given Tom's history of extramarital affairs, his derision of those who sneer at family conventions does not bespeak a yearning for a lost moral compass, as he intimates; rather, it conforms to a nativist view of American identity that prioritizes family heritage and old money over acquired

citizenship and new money. Populated by young men seeking business ventures and young women who wear their "hair bobbed in strange new ways" (42, 40), Gatsby's well-attended parties are a source of irritation to Tom because they serve as reminders that his sense of social order is growing increasingly out of date. Following his comment about interracial marriage at the Plaza Hotel during the novel's dramatic climax, Tom sardonically attributes his unpopularity to his not throwing "big parties," which he disparages by suggesting that "you've got to make your house into a pigsty in order to have any friends — *in the modern world*" (130, emphasis added). In doing so, he implies a connection between uncouth parties and the present state of society to suggest that civilized gatherings are something of the past. On the surface, Tom's concern identifies diminishing innate refinement as problematic; however, his complaint lacks substance because in many ways, as I established earlier, Tom is unrefined.

Daisy appears as superficially conservative as Tom when she declares "the home influence" will be good for Jordan (20). The influence to which Daisy alludes concerns Victorian domesticity; the home she offers Jordan is of two adulterers whose daughter is cared for by servants. Her "commitment to Tom's world," in John W. Aldridge's assessment, "involves much more than just money: it is a whole philosophy and tradition of life belonging to those who have always had money and marking them as a separate breed superior to those who have not" (55). Thus, like Tom, Daisy rejects the new ideas promoted by youth culture because they threaten her sense of social superiority. She is offended by Gatsby's party because its "casualness" affronts the class-based façade of social propriety by which she conducts herself (110). That is, while casualness is offensive to Daisy, insincerity is not. Fitzgerald's censure of such insincerity is unambiguous when, at novel's end, Daisy betrays Gatsby: first, by allowing him to assume

responsibility for Myrtle's death; second, by leaving Long Island without so much as a good-bye; and third, by not even bothering to attend his funeral.

A nuanced relationship between the Buchanans' inauthenticity and their opposition to youth culture further establishes their restorative nostalgia as motivated by class anxieties. The burgeoning "fetishization of youth,"[62] to which the Buchanans simultaneously contribute and object, was largely the result of a growing mass culture and a consumerist boom — a boom that also precipitated the rise of a so-called *new* middle class. Furthering his social satire, Fitzgerald juxtaposes the inauthenticity the Buchanans embody with the presumed inauthenticity made possible by consumer society that those of the upper class snobbishly denounce.

As many scholars have noted, the 1920s saw the rise of a new American middle class.[63] Although an American middle class had emerged long before the Jazz Age,[64] the consumerist boom of the early 1920s blurred previously distinct social class divisions between upper-class elites, middle-class professionals,[65] and working-class individuals. Despite the escalating "disparities between rich and poor" during this time (Geisst 147), the postwar consumerist boom opened new avenues of class mobility for many Americans. For the Buchanans, class mobility represents social disorder and the threat of being absorbed by the masses.[66] Disconcerted by new

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[62] This "fetishization of youth" during the 1920s, Curnutt observes, "proved endemic to twentieth-century popular culture" ("F. Scott Fitzgerald" 29).

[63] While many scholars writing on social transformation in the 1920s assert the period was significant for the emergence of a "new" middle class, they often fail to qualify what they intend by *new* and thus misleadingly imply that the middle class was a new phenomenon in 1920s America (e.g., Geisst, p. 148; Levine 202).

[64] Historians generally agree than an American middle class emerged during the mid nineteenth century. See, for example, Blumin, esp. 4-5, 297; Mahoney, esp. 356; and Schutz, esp. 13.

[65] The term *middle class* was not understood as a reference to the "average American" in the early 1920s. Instead, as defined in the *Pocket Phrase Book of Economic and Industrial Terms in Common Use* (1920), *middle class* (i.e., *bourgeoisie*) designated "small merchants and property owners," "professional people considered to have their sympathies with the capitalist rather than with the labor group" (Federal Council 21).

[66] Berman notes how the theme of breeding "constantly and consciously plays against that of classless democracy" in *The Great Gatsby* (*Fitzgerald's World* 62). According to Berman, the "pleasure-seeking crowd was a new kind of subject [in the 1920s], often invoked as a symbol of 'modern' America, and especially of rudderless democracy" (*Fitzgerald's World* 77). For more on the implication of crowds and democracy in Fitzgerald's text, see Berman, *Fitzgerald's World*, esp. chapters three and four.

expressions of "dignified homogeneity" and the abating importance of his class, Tom begins to "nibble at the edge of stale ideas" (21). He nostalgically conflates nationalist aims toward the restoration of Anglo-Saxon cultural supremacy with his desire to conserve an antiquated social hierarchy presumably threatened by the social mobility consumer society makes possible.

Tom's views regarding social mobility are clearly signalled the first afternoon he takes Nick to New York. In Tom's estimation, models of self-making are no more significant than the "grey old man who bore an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller" selling puppies "of an indeterminate breed" on the street corner (27). This allusion to Rockefeller signals Tom's disparagement of the self-making values to which Gatsby subscribes, while the dogs' status as mongrels hints at the motif of lineage central to Tom's restorative nostalgia. Throughout the novel, Tom's contempt for the "newly rich" (109) underwrites his insecurities regarding the future of class structure in America. Tom conforms to what Wyllie, in another context, has termed an "aristocratic criticism" of social mobility that dogmatically insists on the inequality between self-made men and those of "breeding and culture," and he insinuates that an expanding class of self-made Americans jeopardizes "the security of the older privileged classes" to which he belongs (140, 154). In an effort to undermine Gatsby, Tom declares that "[a] lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers" (109). Although in Gatsby's case this may be true, Tom's suggestion that economic success and criminality go hand in hand for the *nouveaux riches* works to condemn those not born into privilege to the status of illegitimacy. Of course, Tom's comment also demonstrates his hypocrisy, as he ridicules those who deal in alcohol while regularly imbibing himself. His hypocrisy, like his ironic complaints about civilization as well as the Buchanans' general insincerity, is relevant to the influences of consumerism at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The "changes wrought by consumerism in the early twentieth century," Curnutt maintains, "were writ most visibly in conceptions of identity" ("Fitzgerald's Consumer World" 91). The "dominant model of self-expression and identity" in this century is that of "the culture of personality" (Thompson 155). *The Great Gatsby* reproduces a cultural shift from defining selfhood in terms of character to prioritizing expressions of personality (Curnutt, "All That Jazz" 40). Whereas the discourse of *character* emphasized moral imperatives, that of *personality* underscored "the mechanics of performance and display," presumably to counter "the growing threat of anonymity in mass society" (Curnutt, "All That Jazz" 41). The expansion of the consumer market offered increased means for projecting one's personality, while also directing the mode of that projection toward acquiring "the right things" (Berman, *Fitzgerald's World* 56). In his resemblance to "the advertisement of the man," Gatsby encapsulates the decade's consumer ideal (119). His likeness to the advertisement, not the man, identifies him as a product (personality) first and an individual (character) second.

In the novel, the motif of sight symbolizes concerns over how one is perceived by others as well as anxieties about impersonation that underlie a tension between old and new money. Owl Eyes, for example, recognizes Gatsby's library as an index of his constructed personality and is impressed by the "thoroughness" and "realism" of Gatsby's persona. By not cutting the pages of his books, Gatsby impersonates a cultured version of wealth that can afford first-edition texts for the sake of ownership, not the pleasure of reading. Susan Stewart proposes that "the collection can serve as a metaphor for the individual personality" and "the *social* relations of an exchange economy" in replicating Marx's account of commodity fetishism (164). In this view, Gatsby's library metaphorically denotes his status as an imposter and symbolically reproduces the terms of exchange value that characterize his social relations. In sum, his library

emblematizes how consumer culture offers a means of self-making that breaks with earlier models, and thus threatens the worldview of people like Tom.[67]

Myrtle also evinces how consumer commodities presented a way to project a desired personality (i.e., a desired class identity), and she reveals how this ability is central to the tension between the past and future in *The Great Gatsby*. The old and new collide in Myrtle's small apartment with its "entirely too large" French provincial furniture and "scandal magazines of Broadway" that litter the coffee table (29). Tapestried with "scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles," Myrtle's furniture is tacky in Nick's appraisal. For Stewart, "[k]itch objects are not apprehended as the souvenir proper is apprehended, that is, on the level of collective identity. They are souvenirs of an era and not of a self" (167). Understood as such, Myrtle's living-room set symbolizes her attempt to emulate Tom's class by appealing to his sense of nostalgia for an earlier era, whereas her collection of magazines firmly situates her in the present moment of celebrity culture and consumer fetishism. The significance of kitsch, in Stewart's estimation, "lies in [its] exaggerated display of the values of consumer culture" (168). As emblems of consumption, kitsch potentially implies imitation, inauthenticity, and impersonation (Stuart 168). Issues of authenticity dominate the novel to establish the importance of consumer culture to shifting notions of selfhood in early-twentieth-century America.

The motif of authenticity in *The Great Gatsby* gestures toward the contradiction of consumerism (i.e., consumer culture both generates the threat of anonymity and promises a solution to this threat), and it is also central to Fitzgerald's social satire of the Buchanans. Though the Buchanans do not impersonate class privilege, neither are they authentic selves.

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[67] While Tom rejects all models of self-making, he finds the new means of social mobility afforded by consumerism particularly threatening because they make performing personality (i.e., impersonating an elite class) much easier, even among those of limited financial means.

While Gatsby and Myrtle both personify how consumerism makes projecting a desired class identity possible, the Buchanans personify the hollowness of an upper class that is no longer tenable — a class concerned only with maintaining its privilege and thus stubbornly resisting progress. The Buchanans' anxieties about racial contamination, youth culture, and social mobility are driven by their desire to preserve the class distinctions that endow them with the power and privilege to be nothing better than careless. Fitzgerald assigns them fully backward-looking restorative nostalgia to facilitate his satire of careless privilege that opposes progress. Conversely, he assigns Gatsby a forward-looking nostalgia driven by efforts to contend with the question of social identity as a function of consumer culture. While the Buchanans respond to this dilemma with restorative nostalgia, Gatsby's response, as I will demonstrate, signals a paradoxical relationship between nostalgia and the ideologies of self-making.

On a Fairy's Wing: The Paradox of Self-Making & Locating the Future in the Past

The quintessentially American character—the self-made man—is a figure of European descent insofar as its mythos may be traced to the travel writings of seventeenth-century explorers. Colonialists often employed the rhetoric of self-making in their accounts of the so-called New World as a means of advocating its potential for settlers, which served to establish a providential image of America in the minds of Europeans. Perhaps the most renowned of these early advocates, Captain John Smith, extolled moral character as integral to success in America. In *A Description of New England* (1616), Smith relies on a number of now-familiar self-making tropes. Appealing to those of "small means," he suggests that one may "advance his fortune" through "merit," "virtue," "magnanimity," and "industry" (54). Articulating this earliest sketch of self-making in Janus terms, Smith considers both the "honor and honesty" inherent in

"discovering things unknown" as well as the value of "gain[ing] to our mother country a kingdom to attend her" (54). Smith's comments reveal that a propensity to look both forward (e.g., to a "new" land) and backward (e.g., to a place of origin) assumes an implicit position in the American myth of self-making, which may partially explain Americans' conflicting desires toward the past and future.[68]

While Smith's dual purpose is to build a future that will serve his past in some sense, the rhetoric of self-making at the heart of *The Great Gatsby* is nostalgic in that Gatsby's efforts toward self-invention culminate in his view of a future that lies in the past. In Boym's terms, Gatsby is a prospective nostalgic because he envisions a future shaped by his fantasies of the past (xvi). Though the myth of self-making seems logically anti-nostalgic in its progressive resolve, *The Great Gatsby* exposes how it functions within the conditions of nostalgic longing. It does so by demonstrating that nostalgia and efforts toward self-reinvention share an ahistorical tendency: whereas Gatsby (as a nostalgic) imaginatively negates the passage of time with the aim of reinstating the past, he also (as a self-made individual) negates his personal history in order to begin anew. Strikingly, the various models of self-making upon which Gatsby draws from adolescence to adulthood, and the different figures he is identified with, allude to the concept's evolution from the Colonial period through to the 1920s. As such, they not only reveal the particulars of what Gatsby desires but also a yearning for specific periods of national history and a shared communal past.

The American myth of self-making and nostalgia share an often-overlooked affinity. The rhetoric of self-making assumes that liberation from one's past is both desirable and possible. Consequently, the so-called American dream, as Scott Loren puts it, is "based in a cultural

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[68] Smith's comments also suggest a nascent conflation of temporal and spatial landscapes, which is made explicit in the labelling of continents *Old World* and *New World*.

tendency toward ahistoricism" (378);[69] it is, Boym writes, "the dream of transcending history

and memory" (17). Nostalgia, too, dreams of transcending history — the history of "*lived*

experience*," to borrow from Stewart (145). Stewart posits that memories connect material

objects of the past (e.g., photographs) to the past itself; that is, through memory we perceive a

resemblance between objects and their referents, between things present and moments past that

would otherwise share no continuous identity (145). Lived experience, she explains, is necessary

to closing the "gap between resemblance and identity" upon which nostalgic desire depends

(145). In other words, first-hand and immediate involvement in the world, as opposed to

(unreliable) memories, furnishes us with knowledge that allows us to see things as they are rather

than as they seem(ed) to be.[70] Thus, denying lived experience is necessary to sustaining

nostalgia, just as transcending history—liberating oneself from the actual past—is purportedly

essential to self-making.

    The Great Gatsby illustrates this ahistorical correspondence between self-making and

nostalgia: on the one hand, as Harold Bloom notes, Gatsby's "sense of being self-begotten" is

"centered in an escape from history" ("Afterthought" 234); on the other hand, so too is his belief

in the repeatability of the past. That is, his nostalgic desires are centered in an escape from the

history of *lived* experience, as evidenced by his refusal to acknowledge changes brought about

by the passage of time. Gatsby most explicitly seeks to maintain the gap between his memories

of the past and the realities of the present when he demands that Daisy tell Tom she never loved

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[69] In his identification of American ahistoricism, Loren does not assume that "the United States has no cultural history"; rather, he defines "a *cultural tendency* toward ahistoricism [as] the tendency toward ahistoricism at the individual level as one of many cultural constituents" (378).

[70] In clarifying Stewart's position, I draw from an understanding of *lived experience* as "[p]ersonal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people"; more specifically, in the phenomenological sense, lived experience refers to "our situated, immediate, activities and encounters in everyday experience, prereflexively [i.e., prior to conscious evaluation] taken for granted as reality rather than as something perceived or represented" ("Lived Experience," def. 1 and 2) — or representations constructed by our own memories.

him. "After she had obliterated four years with that sentence," Gatsby believes he and Daisy will

"go back to Louisville and be married from her house — just as if it were five years ago" (111).

However, although Gatsby projects his longing upon Daisy, she is not the object proper of his

desire.[71]

Gatsby's longing is nostalgic precisely because it has no object,[72] as signalled by young

James Gatz's Platonic conception of himself. As a young man, Gatsby—then Gatz—was

invested in Platonic idealism. Indifferent to notions of universal good, fantasies of "ineffable

gaudiness" motivated his belief in the power of self-invention (99). Dissatisfied with his

prospects as the son of "unsuccessful farm people […] Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island,

sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (99). Santayana defines Platonic idealism as that

"in which the ideal is something *better* than the fact," and he likens it to a romantic yearning "to

pursue the unattainable and encounter the unforeseen" (*Egotism* 16). "Platonic idealism," writes

Santayana, "requires a gift of impassioned contemplation, an incandescent fancy that leaps from

the things of sense to the goals of beauty and desire" (*Egotism* 16). The incandescent fancy of

which Santayana speaks finds expression in Gatsby's adolescent dreams, which "were a

satisfactory hint at the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded

securely on a fairy's wing" (100). Gatsby's Platonic conception, then, amounts to an impossible

ideal that he does not recognize as such.

As Bloom suggests, "'Jay Gatsby' is the manifestation of an ideal projected by a

seventeen-year-old boy desperate to be glamorous and from another place and time" (*Guides* 54).

Gatsby's desire to repeat the past may thus be understood as a nostalgic craving to re-experience

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[71] "The greatness of Gatsby," writes Bloom, "is that there was no authentic object for his desire. […] Like every true quester in Romantic tradition, Gatsby is both subject and object of his own quest" ("Afterthought" 236).
[72] "Nostalgia," as Stewart defines it, "is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience" (23).

a sense of unbounded optimism particular to his youth; to relive a time when he believed in the potential of the future, in his own "glorious" future (150). Gatsby willingly abandons his Platonic conception of himself when he falls in love with Daisy, making Nick's claim that "to this conception he was faithful to the end" less straightforward than it appears (99). Upon meeting Daisy, Gatsby resolves to "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath," aware that "his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (113). His fidelity to his adolescent dream is accurate to the extent that he longs to reinstate the fantasy, "to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (111). Impossible self-recovery, then, motivates Gatsby's nostalgia because Daisy promises the fantasy of boundless possibly even as she forecloses that fantasy. As noted, however, Daisy is not whom Gatsby desires to recover.

Gatsby, in fact, wishes to retrieve something that never existed: a conception of himself that does not partake of lived experience but the cultural myth of self-making. Engaging the tension between tradition and progress characteristic of 1920s discourse, Fitzgerald maps Gatsby's evolution from North Dakotan farm boy to New York gangster onto a chronicle of American models of self-making. The remainder of this section offers a reading of Gatsby's paradoxically future-oriented nostalgia by tracing how his repeated fresh starts align with historical shifts in American ideals and expressions of self-making, which suggest that Gatsby's project is a quintessentially American one.

Colonial models of self-making inform Gatsby's Platonic conception of himself and implicate the role of nostalgia in the novel's narrative. As suggested, the "self" Gatsby longs to recover belongs to his youth — not James Gatz per se but the driving sense of optimism that made possible Jay Gatsby's incarnation, which was shaped by individualistic models of self-

making. While eighteenth-century America saw an increasing enthusiasm for individual autonomy and the pursuit of material wealth, self-discipline remained an important metaphor for the construction and governance of the newly formed nation. Chief among the proponents of individualism, Benjamin Franklin viewed individual destiny as a matter of personal responsibility because he regarded success as dependent on the cultivation and restraint of impulses. He advocated self-improvement and socioeconomic advancement as virtuous so long as such goals also serve the public good through acts of philanthropy. Widely recognized as the premier articulation of the American myth of self-making, Franklin's *Autobiography* (1791) outlines thirteen virtues that link moral perfection to monetary gain.[73]

Evocative of Franklin's program for moral perfection, the time schedule of self-improvement and list of general resolves that Gatsby draws while living on his parent's farm in 1906 reflect the concerns of a teenaged boy that accord with the virtues Franklin promotes.[74] Whereas young Gatsby appropriates Franklin's tenets as a prototype for economic success and as a means to an impossible end (i.e., his idealistic self-conception), adult Gatsby systematically overturns each of the virtues outlined in the *Autobiography*,[75] which effects his rejection of Franklin's system and underlies his sense of loss.

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[73] Franklin lists temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility as virtues necessary to success (96).

[74] While Gatsby's aim to be more respectful of his parents is typically adolescent, his resolutions to stop wasting time, refrain from tobacco use, bathe regularly, and save money correspond to Franklin's endorsement of industry, temperance, cleanliness, and frugality.

[75] To Franklin's call for temperance, Gatsby answers by abstaining from liquor although he is a bootlegger whose parties promote excessive alcohol consumption. Gatsby subscribes to Franklin's endorsement of silence insofar as he has "little to say," much to Nick's disappointment (64); however, he finds the rumors that circulate about him "a source of satisfaction" (98). In promoting order as a virtue, Franklin writes: "let all things have their place; let each part of your business have its time" (96). Gatsby sense of order belongs to that of organized crime, which does not "have its time" but intrudes haphazardly at any given moment, as indicated by the regular interruption of phone calls from cities such as Chicago and Detroit. Whereas resolution for Franklin assumes a moral quality, resolve for Gatsby takes the distorted form of his obsessive pursuit of Daisy. In a novel dominated by the motif of waste, examples of Gatsby's failure to abide by the principle of frugality are numerous, chief among them: his parties, his house, and his vehicles. The motifs of boredom and restlessness undermine the importance Franklin places on industry. While Franklin views it necessary to "be always employ'd in something useful" (96), Gatsby often drifts

Underscoring the symbolic significance of Franklin to Gatsby's sense of loss, Fitzgerald includes Myrtle's errand list, which invites comparison with Gatsby's boyhood list. Whereas Gatsby's list proposes ways of acting in the world with an eye toward the future, Myrtle's list details items she wishes to buy, which are symbolically associated with submission and death: a dog collar, an ashtray, and a graveside wreath. In determining to "make a list of all the things [she has] to get […] so [she] won't forget all the things [she has] got to do" (36-37), Myrtle conflates *getting* with *doing* in the same way that a mature Gatsby assumes material acquisition will fulfill desires born of his nostalgic idealization of the past.

Myrtle's purchasing power, made possible only by way of her affair with Tom, is as empty a gesture as Gatsby's ostentatious displays of wealth. Assuming that Daisy will return to him once he has acquired a significant fortune, Gatsby, in effect, attempts to purchase his past and those feelings associated with it. Stanley Brodwin proposes that longing for youth may allegorically represent a longing for specific periods of national history (188). In this view, Gatsby's nostalgia for the idealism of his youth may also be understood as a nostalgia for an idealized epoch — specifically, that of the American frontier.

In fact, two American frontiers significantly influence Gatsby's early models of self-making: the Western Frontier and the so-called New Frontier. While the term *Western Frontier* generally refers to the migratory wave of pioneer settlers and the westward expansion of the

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"here and there" (67). Gatsby does not possess the virtue of sincerity; rather, he lies about everything — his past most of all. Gatsby's status as a criminal effectively denies the virtue of justice. More importantly, he is willing to conceal Daisy's responsibility for Myrtle's death. Gatsby's death ultimately results from the injustice of Daisy committing manslaughter without consequence. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle is testimony to the fact that moderation is not a virtue he ascribes to. His concern for his appearance corresponds to Franklin's advocating cleanliness; however, he allows his house to fall into a dusty state of disrepair once his affair with Daisy begins. Although often composed, Gatsby's near attack of Tom at the Plaza and the drunken disharmony that characterizes his parties at nights' end refute the virtue of tranquility. The multiple extra-marital affairs in *The Great Gatsby* (Gatsby and Daisy's not least among them) make a mockery of chastity. Finally, Franklin's valuation of humility finds no expression in Gatsby, whose parties are not acts of generosity but arrogant demonstrations of financial status intended to impress Daisy.

nation from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, *New Frontier* denotes a period of post-Civil War industrialism. (Of course, these are conceptual rather than historically exclusive categories.) Both of these frontiers become accessible to Gatsby by way of cultural memory in the form of national mythologies. "Cultural practices, rituals, and representations," Tom Panelas suggests, "create powerful collective archetypes which put the individual in close emotional contact with her or his cultural history and evoke feelings of attachment to these periods which may be experienced as vividly personal" (1427). In popular representations of the Old West, the cowboy embodies a romanticized American archetype of the outsider hero who possesses the essential qualities of self-making (e.g., hard work, self-reliance, and perseverance). In the context of the New Frontier, the captain of industry stands as a positive archetype of the self-made man, whereas the robber baron represents a less reputable version of the same archetype.

That Gatsby penned his Franklinesque routine and rules of conduct in a copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* suggests his attachment to the frontier period and reveals that his idea of self-fashioning was initially based on a glamorized adolescent fantasy. A fictional account of pioneer life grants a teenaged Gatsby a myopic vision of the frontier as characterized by abounding opportunity and adventure. Feeling confined by the drudgery of his Midwestern farm life, Gatsby dreams of the excitement Cassidy represents and thus desires to identify with him. Callahan observes that "Hopalong Cassidy has no family either, no continuous identity beyond hat and horse, no responsibilities other than to preserve law and order and keep crime rates low in the Wild West" ("Fitzgerald's Use" 100). Callahan's description makes clear Gatsby's identification with Cassidy, his admiration of the cowboy's individualism and courage, and his reverence for Cassidy's vagrant status. In Dan Cody, the fictional figure of Cassidy assumes tangible form for Gatsby. Callahan suggests that "Fitzgerald means Dan Cody to be a true and historical version of

Hopalong Cassidy" ("Fitzgerald's Use" 100). However, Cody more accurately embodies what a young Gatsby *imagines* a historically updated version of Cassidy to be: a robber baron of America's second frontier.

In the growing industrial economy of post-Civil War America, conceptions of the self-made man once again began to shift. At this time, evolving definitions of success that privileged novel means of economic growth overshadowed traditional virtues such as hard work. Consequently, according to Reed, the narrative of the self-made man adapted to the narrative of progress whereby "progress and innovation [became] virtuous in and of themselves" (170). In some sense, this shift added an exploitative dimension to the concept of self-making in that it became less a matter of creating opportunities for oneself and more a matter of exploiting already existing opportunities and/or resources. As the derogatory title *robber baron* suggests, a symbolic association between criminality and aristocracy was often presumed of nineteenth-century American businessmen to suggest that their claims to social status were achieved by shady or unprincipled means. Although not entirely unfounded, such assumptions were at least partially motivated by the sort of elitist anxieties about class mobility that I addressed in section one.

Having made his fortune in silver and copper—that is, the exploitation of natural resources—Cody stands as a figure of the robber baron who has little else to do other than sail the world in his yacht, *Tuolomee*.[76] The yacht's name alludes to the Tuolomne River, which flows west from the Sierra Nevada Mountains through Yosemite National Park in California. It thus symbolizes the means of Cody's success. To a young, impressionable Gatsby, the *Tuolomee*

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[76] Cody's involvement in "every rush for metal since seventy-five" (100) also implicates him in the exploitation and disenfranchisement of Native American populations for whom the land that prospectors pillaged had been home for generations.

and, by extension, Cody "represented all the beauty and glamour in the world" (100-01). From

Cody, Gatsby receives "his singularly appropriate education" (102). In other words, "he learns to

value the ends over the means, further distancing himself from his boyhood adherence to

Franklin's tenets of improvement that linked virtue with monetary gain" (Brauer, "Jay Gatsby"

55). Cody, "the pioneer debauchee," is wasteful vice personified (101).[77] Stephen Brauer

therefore argues that "the 'appropriate' education that Gatsby receives seems to be a preparation

for succeeding in a culture in which ethics and morality take a backseat to the acquisition of

money and the conspicuous display of consumption" ("What Makes Him" 88). For Gatsby, this

preparation comes first in the form a new wardrobe purchased by Cody days after their initial

introduction, suggesting that Cody teaches Gatsby the art of playing the role, so to speak.

Gatsby learns how to project a desired persona, yet he remains authentic insofar as he

values friendship. Although his photographs of Cody and himself in "yachting costume[s]" (94)

gesture toward the construction of identity, they more significantly signal Gatsby's nostalgia as

souvenirs of origins.[78] "The nostalgia of the souvenir," writes Stewart, "plays in the distance

between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience" (139). A narrative discourse

supplements the souvenir "that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to

those origins" (Stewart 136). Gatsby's photos, then, are tokens of his beginnings. They serve as

nostalgic reminders of the time he spent sailing with Cody that transformed "the vague contour

of Jay Gatsby" into "the substantiality of a man" (102). In Stewart's view, the narrative of

origins offered by the souvenir is a "narrative of interiority and authenticity" belonging to the

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[77] An aging alcoholic incapable of taking care of himself, Cody employs Gatsby "in a vague personal capacity" to keep his own drunken "lavish doings" in check (101).

[78] In her discussion of the souvenir, Stewart maintains that it "speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia" (135).

possessor not the object (136). While Nick sees only "a grey, florid man with a hard, empty face" in the image of Cody, Gatsby sees his guide and "best friend [of] years ago" (101, 94).

Applying Stewart's logic to Fitzgerald's novel suggests that Gatsby's pictures enhance his personal narrative. Desperately nostalgic, this narrative is a utopian vision of a young man's adventures that omits the exigencies of his lonesome mentor "on the verge of soft-mindedness" (100). In keeping these old photos on display, Gatsby again reveals his nostalgia for an idealized sense of youthful promise. This nostalgia is both personal and symbolically national in its desire for the lost—albeit very problematic—"opportunities" that were presumably afforded pioneers, opportunities that no longer exist for Gatsby in the post-industrial boom of 1920s America. As Wyllie puts it, the fortunes of early industrialists that were "carved out of a new and undeveloped continent" were made "under conditions that no longer existed" (164) for Gatsby's generation.[79] The conditions of a Prohibition-era America, however, presented unique opportunities for the aspiring self-made individual.

The eighteenth amendment to the United States Constitution took effect on 17 January 1920, marking the beginning of the Prohibition. Instead of fostering temperance, banning alcohol only increased consumer demand. Thus, the black market opened by Prohibition presented economic opportunities otherwise unavailable to an emerging class of self-made individuals: criminal entrepreneurs, bootleggers, and gangsters. "Prohibition," writes Katherine Long, "gave birth not only to the bootlegger class, but also to gangster capitalism and modern organized crime. In the broad sense of entrepreneurship, the Prohibition bootlegger was a value creator, exploiting environmental change and responding innovatively to business operation challenges to

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[79] The North American continent was, of course, not "new" and had long been inhabited by Indigenous peoples. The so-called opportunities of early industrialists were only made possible by land theft and genocide against the Indigenous inhabitants of the American frontier.

capitalize on profits." According to Brauer, some of the biggest names in organized crime during

1920s "came from humble origins and rose to make a fortune" ("Jay Gatsby" 57). Brauer's

observation illustrates the manner in which Prohibition gangsters and bootleggers came to

epitomize the self-made myth in a manner nearly identical to the robber barons who preceded

them.

The Great Gatsby, Brauer argues, captures a cultural shift that saw gangsters as

"contemporary emblems of the ideology of socioeconomic mobility that Benjamin Franklin had

once tied to virtue and self-improvement" ("Jay Gatsby" 67). In his nostalgic drive to recapture

the legendary spirit of American frontiersmen, Gatsby positions himself as a frontiersman of the

Prohibition: a racketeer involved in everything the black market has to offer, including

bootlegging, bond fraud, gambling, and bribery. Like Cody before him, Meyer Wolfshiem[80]

meets Gatsby at a time when he is financially destitute and claims to have "raised him up out of

nothing, right out of the gutter" (173). Just as Cody was a mentor to young Gatsby during a time

when the latter romanticized the American frontier cowboy as a model for self-making,

Wolfshiem comes to serve as Gatsby's mentor in an age when the gangster is the new cowboy,

figuratively speaking.

In its catalogue of self-made archetypes, The Great Gatsby situates nostalgia as a

contradictory impulse that motivates the national project of self-invention in American culture.

Gatsby's poignant demise at novel's end is fitting not because he is a criminal but because he has

reached the end of a supposedly limitless myth. The paradox of his nostalgia is made complete in

his death: with no further past from which to recreate himself following Daisy's rejection,

Gatsby has no future.

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[80] Although "Wolfshiem" is commonly spelled "Wolfsheim," I have maintained the spelling used in the version of the novel I cite throughout this dissertation.

Within and Without: Symbolic Geography & Balancing the Future with the Past

Though Gatsby has exhausted the national past for prototypes, Nick represents a contemporary mode of individualistic self-making in the shifting social climate of 1920s America even as he struggles with a desire for community. Whereas the upper-class Buchanans represent an inherited American past, and financially successful Gatsby a self-made American future, middle-class Nick straddles both cultural mythologies. These differing class positions and their varying connections to notions of the past and future are symbolized in the conflation of spatial and temporal geographies in *The Great Gatsby*. Microcosmically, Long Island's East Egg and West Egg symbolically distinguish characters according to a time-based understanding of class: old and new money. Macrocosmically, the novel's various geographic demarcations correspond to competing American mythologies of a golden past and a golden future.[81]

These polarities between old and new, past and present, east and west are central to understandings of American identity in the novel, which Nick establishes in the opening paragraphs of his narrative when he introduces himself by outlining the prominence and tradition of the Midwest Carraway clan to which he belongs. Nick, however, is an unreliable narrator conflicted about his class status and place in the world. Fitzgerald formally reproduces the conflicted nature of Nick's character in the frequency with which Nick contradicts himself and his regularly oxymoronic descriptions of people, places, and events. As a purported member of the upper class working as a bond broker, Nick embodies a multitude of oppositions between class, place, tradition, and progress. At the heart of such conflicts is a confused and dissatisfied experience of the present couched in different expressions of nostalgia that manifests as restlessness, which is a quality that Nick shares with all of *The Great Gatsby*'s key figures.

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[81] For more on this distinction, see Berman, "Fitzgerald's Intellectual Context" 82 and "Fitzgerald: Mapping Progress" 24.

Figuratively located somewhere between the Buchanans' aimless wandering and Gatsby's repeated fresh starts, Nick's ambivalent restlessness corresponds to his status as an intermediary figure who embodies the tension between tradition and progress that runs throughout the novel.

Nick appears to share the Buchanans' classism when, in the novel's opening paragraphs, he associates inherited financial advantage with "fundamental decencies" that are "parceled out unequally at birth" (2). That is, he implies that cultural capital cannot be bought by suggesting that those born into wealth are somehow qualitatively different than those who make their fortunes by their own means (i.e., that those of old money are morally, intellectually, and socially more refined than *nouveaux riches*). This snobbish assumption is further evident in Nick's changing assessments of Gatsby. Perhaps because Nick assumes that he will only be introduced to people of consequence during his summer on Long Island, his "first impression" of Gatsby leads him to believe that the latter "was a person of some undefined consequence" (64). As his first impression gradually fades, Nick sees Gatsby as "simply the proprietor of an elaborate road-house next door" (64), making clear that he does not view money and status as synonymous. Ostensibly critical of Gatsby's social mobility, Nick claims that Gatsby "represented everything for which [he has] an unaffected scorn" (2). Qualifying his scorn as genuine, Nick subtly hints at its irony: he purports to disdain social affectations and then immediately praises Gatsby's *personality* and "extraordinary gift of hope" (2).[82] By ironically expressing his admiration for Gatsby, Nick reveals his own efforts to project class status. That is, he condemns the supposed inauthenticity of the newly rich according to the conventions of an upper class to which he does not belong.

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[82] Immediately following his proclaimed scorn, Nick explains: "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, […] an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again" (2).

Although Nick attended Yale, his family's status lies somewhere between that of the elite Buchanans and the illegitimate Gatsby. Nick rather pretentiously shares that he descends from "prominent, well-to-do people" who are "something of a clan" with "a tradition" (2). Because he is more concerned with the projection of propriety than with its substance, the fact of his family's "Middle Western" prominence extending only "three generations" is not of consequence to Nick; nor are the illegitimate strands of its "tradition,"[83] or his great-uncle's buying his way out of serving in the Civil War (3). Gatsby unwittingly parodies Nick's family tradition when he declares his "family tradition" — that is, his Oxford education that he shares with "all [his] ancestors" (65). The lie of Gatsby's lineage offers a counterpoint to the self-made "founder of [Nick's] line" (i.e., Nick's Civil War deserter of a great-uncle who "started the wholesale hardware business that [Nick's] father carries on" [3]). Effectively, Nick's posturing is not so much different than Gatsby's. Like Gatsby, Nick desires upward social mobility and aspires to get rich quick.

Nick's get-rich-quick aspirations are evidenced by his chosen profession. Touted as an act of patriotism, purchasing war bonds during WWI was a popular form of investment; after the war, according to Charles R. Geisst, "bonds still dominated the markets" (153).[84] Speculation in the bond market, Geisst explains, remained "the centerpiece of the American Dream in the 1920s. Tales abounded of professional traders accumulating vast fortunes in short periods, and everyone wanted a piece of the action" (160).[85] Some social commentators of the era, such as Harry W. Laidler, bemoaned the fact that the younger generation was increasingly turning "from

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[83] Nick claims that the Carraways "have a tradition that [they are] descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch (3) — an allusion to the Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles II.

[84] "Prior to 1927," Geisst explains, "bonds accounted for about 75 percent of all new securities coming to market" (153).

[85] "The Vanderbilts and Goulds," Geisst writes, "had been replaced by a more modern version of industrialist-speculator" (160).

useful trades […] to [a] more or less socially useless industry that offers a gambling chance for wealth" (36). This gambling chance for wealth largely motivates Nick's move East.

In his emphasis on the Caraway clan's prominence, Nick betrays a paradoxical class anxiety that, Reed observes, leaves him "torn between an aristocratic, European notion of inherited privilege and a middle-class, American notion of perpetual upward mobility" (173). That he wavers between traditional notions of hereditary privilege and contemporary notions of social mobility is geographically symbolized: in "the consoling proximity of millionaires," Nick lives in "a weather-beaten cardboard bungalow" (5, 3). He is both a literal and figurative middle-man who occupies a contradictory position as a member of a socially distinguished family who is attempting to amass his own fortune.[86] The dual nature of his character further positions Nick as an intermediary figure between divergent attitudes toward tradition and progress as embodied by the aristocratic Tom and self-made Gatsby.

Fitzgerald lays the foundations of his symbolic geography in *The Great Gatsby* by individuating East Egg from West Egg along class lines. The contemptuous and exclusionary sensibilities of the old money East Eggers opposes the "raw vigor" of the newly rich who reside in West Egg, "with its own standards and its own great figures" (105). When Nick describes West Egg as "less fashionable" than East Egg, he admits to relying on "a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them" (5). In doing so, he implicitly condemns the existent social hierarchies between those of inherited wealth and self-acquired wealth. Nick's implied commentary is not driven by a humanitarian yearning for social equality but by his paradoxical class anxiety.

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[86] Nick is a literal middle-man as an intermediary between bond sellers and bond investors, and he is a figurative middle-man with regard to his class status.

As if to implicate an unstable social order, Fitzgerald presents an unstable spatiotemporal symbolic order that both inverts and confirms standard associations of the American West with tradition (e.g., community, democratic ideals) and the American East with progress (e.g., industrial progress, capitalism). On Fitzgerald's Long Island, tradition resides in the East and progress in the West. Considering the nation as a whole, however, complicates small-scale links established between Eastern tradition and Western progress and reaffirms prevailing spatiotemporal myths underlying American history. Berman outlines "two myths of American history" central to Fitzgerald's work: "the idea of the Old South, rooted gracefully in time," and "the idea of the New North, advancing into the future" ("Fitzgerald: Mapping Progress" 24). In *The Great Gatsby*, the myths of a golden past and future are oriented along a West-East axis whereby, generally speaking, the West represents the past and the East signifies the future.

Despite Gatsby's West Egg residence, his living on the east coast positions him as oriented toward idealistic progress. For Gatsby, moving to New York presents another opportunity of self-reinvention, which he figures will guarantee his future with Daisy. For someone like Tom, however, Long Island is simply a place to reaffirm his elite status. Tom does not remake himself in the East; rather, he imports his established sense of pedigree, as symbolized by the string of polo ponies he has transported from Lake Forest to East Egg (6). He additionally confirms his sense of privilege when he makes a point of telling Nick that his mansion "belonged to Demaine, the oil man" (8). Subtly, Tom implies that in purchasing his house he repossessed land from an unworthy, *nouveau riche* proprietor.

Scholars frequently approach the novel's opposition between East and West from a somewhat conservative perspective that positions the East as ethically vacant and the West as morally superior. Jonathan Barron, for instance, associates ethics in *The Great Gatsby* with "a

deep sense of heritage and history" belonging to the Midwest, which he juxtaposes with monetary motivations that presumably govern social bonds in the East (64, 63). This dichotomy supposes that divergence from established cultural patterns implies corruption, whereas tradition and moral value go hand in hand. As Berman notes, evocations of tradition unconsciously assume "that embodying the past is a value" ("Fitzgerald: Mapping Progress" 20). Hence, the frequent and rather reductive supposition that the East symbolizes a lack of values in *The Great Gatsby*.

As an unreliable narrator, Nick suggests a propensity toward misrecognition and confusion that complicates assumptions regarding regional moral value (or lack thereof) and presumed orientations toward tradition or progress. In Barron's view, Nick "condemns Tom for his failure to recognize [Western values] and laments Gatsby for his inability to understand them" (65). Such an assessment of Nick necessarily assumes that he recognizes and prioritizes so-called Western values, which, to my mind, the novel does not support. Nick romanticizes and disparages both Eastern and Midwestern America. His conflicted regionalism is explicitly articulated in the contradictions that define his experiences in the East and Midwest, and it is implicitly articulated in his narrative style.

Nick simultaneously resents and longs for the social order of his Midwestern upbringing. He associates a particular intrusiveness with the apparently close-knit communities of the Midwest, as symbolized by the "bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio with their interminable inquisitions" (179). In fact, gossip about his love life motivates his move East to a certain degree (20-21). Upon arriving in New York, however, Nick opts to live in a place reminiscent of home. Despite it being more practical to find a room in the city, he chooses West Egg because he "had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees" (3). Seemingly, he has

difficulty reconciling his valuation of privacy with his desired sense of belonging. Put

differently, tensions between individual and communal identity are central to Nick's nostalgia

and his experience of place.

Such tensions inform his paradoxical characterization of the East in terms of casualness

and excitement, superiority and distortion. During his first dinner with the Buchanans, Nick

considers the evening's being "casually put away" as "sharply different from the West, where an

evening was hurried from phase to phase toward its close, in a continually disappointed

anticipation or else in sheer nervous dread of the moment itself" (13). Here, he suggests the

contemporary atmosphere of the East is preferable to the monotonous rituals of social custom

that prevail in the West. Regardless of this ostensible preference, Nick claims that even when

most excited by the East, when "most keenly aware of its superiority" to the Midwest, "it had

always for [him] a quality of distortion" (179). In Nick's "more fantastic dreams," West Egg

figures

> as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque,
>
> crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon. In the foreground four
>
> solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher on which lies a
>
> drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles
>
> cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at a house — the wrong house. But no one
>
> knows the woman's name, and no one cares. (179)

As his dream suggests, Nick is disconcerted by a perceived sense of impersonality and

anonymity that qualifies the East's distortion for him. Additionally, his description of the houses

"at once conventional and grotesque" presents one instance among countless examples of Nick's

use of oxymoron throughout *The Great Gatsby*. Torn between a desire for community and his

individualistic aspirations, between tradition and progress, Nick has repeatedly travelled east and returned home.[87] Figuratively, his restlessness—like that of the Buchanans and Gatsby— embodies the two myths of American history Berman identifies (i.e., the golden past and the golden future). The degree to which characters are invested in either or both of these mythologies accords with their sense of not feeling at home in the present, so to speak.

The concept of home (and all of its rich, metaphorical nuances) has garnered increasing critical attention in recent years.[88] "To feel at home," in Boym's analysis, "is to know that things are in their places and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on actual location. The object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia" (251). In this view, feeling at home is akin to a sense of belonging, of being accepted and connected within one's community. Marked by estrangement, Fitzgerald's characters do not partake in the sort of intimacy with the world of which Boym speaks. Although feeling at home may not depend on actual location, it nonetheless requires the sort of familiarity that geographic dislocation makes impossible. Geographic dislocation symbolizes a temporal dislocation of sorts in *The Great Gatsby* whereby characters' dissatisfaction with the present gives rise to their pervasive restlessness. As such, the motif of restlessness is fundamental to various expressions of nostalgia in the novel.

As neither inherently good nor bad, the quality of restlessness is open to a variety of interpretations that suggest both positive and negative connotations. Although restlessness is not synonymous with movement, mobility—literal or figurative—remains central to its experience.

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[87] Prior to his summer in West Egg, Nick attended boarding school and college in the East.
[88] Jan Willem Duyvendak offers a useful, introductory list of some contemporary works "on 'home', 'feeling at home', and 'belonging'" in his chapter on "Why Feeling at Home Matters" (26).

By extension, so too does change. That is, restlessness may be understood as a desire for or an anxiety about change. In the first instance, mobility indicates freedom and energy; in the later, it signifies uprootedness and instability. In *The Great Gatsby*, the motif of restlessness shares a complex relationship with the novel's dialectic between the past and the future by symbolizing both dislocation and hope. Further, it illuminates various paradoxes central to characters' experiences of nostalgia.

A collective of restless travelers, *The Great Gatsby*'s major figures all undertake literal migratory journeys consonant with their figurative displacement. Motivated by a sense of lack and/or disconnection, Gatsby, the Buchanans, and Nick each symbolically move eastward: toward the rising sun and metaphorical renewal. For W.J. Harvey, the restlessness motif derives from the "rootlessness" of Fitzgerald's characters, who are "strangers not only to their own country but also to their past" (38). Conversely, in Jeffrey Steinbrink's view, characters' "geographic dislocation" suggests a "hope that it is possible to […] undo the calamities of the past or to relive its quintessential moments" (159). Although Harvey and Steinbrink both identify the past as important to restlessness in *The Great Gatsby*, neither further interrogates its significance. The past's relationship to restlessness in the novel derives from the American past of the frontier, which plays a crucial role in Fitzgerald's symbolic geography.

"In America," writes Raymond M. Vince, "the West was always a moving frontier" (93). Because it was unfixed and ever-evolving, the frontier became associated with restlessness, which itself came to be understood as an essentially American trait. As many scholars have suggested, the notion of American restlessness extends back to historian Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" (1893), which connects American vitality to relentless movement.[89]

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[89] E.g., Duyvendak 18.

In Turner's view, it is "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with an acuteness and inquisitiveness […], that *restless, nervous energy* […] — these are traits of the frontier. […] Movement has been [the] dominant fact" of American life (26, emphasis added). In his rendering of Gatsby, Fitzgerald draws on Turner's rhetoric to establish a paradox of desire that situates future-oriented aims in relation to the past.

When Gatsby arrives uninvited at Nick's one morning to extend an invitation to lunch, Nick observes the manner in which he (Gatsby) "was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American" (64). "This quality," Nick surmises, "was continually breaking through [Gatsby's] punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand" (64). The restless resourcefulness that Nick ascribes to Gatsby corresponds to the unrelenting movement that Turner associates with American vigor, and it suggests forward momentum. For Reed, this image depicts Gatsby as "ready to drive off into the future" (167). Significantly, however, Gatsby is perched on the dashboard of his car, not its hood. Given the design of cars in Gatsby's day, he cannot be facing forward (see fig. 1 and fig. 2).[90] Rather, he is facing backward, looking symbolically to the past. In this way, Gatsby's restlessness aligns with his experience of nostalgia, in which the seemingly future-oriented aims of his continual self-reinvention depend on a longing to repeat the past.

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[90] At the opening of chapter three, Nick tells us that Gatsby owns both a Rolls-Royce and a station wagon (39). Assuming that Gatsby owns the latest models in the summer of 1922, I reviewed online images of Rolls-Royce Silver Ghosts and Ford Model T Station Wagons of the period. Sitting on the dashboard of either of these vehicles would only be possible if facing backward.

Fig. 1. 1922 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, www.conceptcarz.com.

Fig. 2. 1922 Ford Model T Station Wagon, www.streetsideclassics.com.

Rather than borrowing from Turner in his depiction of Tom and Daisy, Fitzgerald presents the Buchanans as *aimlessly* restless. The sort of purposeless drifting in which the Buchanans engage anticipates philosopher John Dewey's 1930 diagnosis of American unrest as evidence of "an acute maladjustment between individuals and the social conditions under which they live" (qtd. in Berman, "America" 48). Whereas movement and the birth of American democracy go hand in hand for Turner,[91] by the end of the Jazz Age restlessness signalled

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[91] "American democracy," writes Turner, "was born of no theorist's dream; it was not carried in the *Susan Constant* to Virginia, nor in the *Mayflower* to Plymouth. It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier. Not the constitution, but free land and an abundance of natural

"nervous discontentment" in Dewey's assessment (qtd. in Berman, "America" 48). Instead of the resourcefulness of Gatsby's movement, the Buchanans are incongruously associated with impermanence *and* stagnation.

The Buchanans' restlessness resembles the paradox of Tom's restorative nostalgia for an aristocratic society whose values he persistently violates even as he trumpets their superiority. Following their honeymoon, Tom and Daisy "spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully" before moving to Long Island, "that slender riotous island" (6, 5). Although Tom maintains that their move to the East is permanent, his "hovering restlessly about" gives Nick the impression that he (Tom) "would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" (11, 6). The word *drift*, Harvey suggests, is important to implicating that the Buchanans are rootless (38). The irony unexplored by Harvey of such rootlessness concerns the Buchanans' reliance on family status as a measure of identity. In effect, the Buchanans prioritize roots while not maintaining their own. Fitzgerald further elaborates on this contradiction between the stability of lineage and the Buchanans' aimlessly drifting in his use of imagery (which I analyzed in section one) that establishes a paradox of stasis in movement. Actual and symbolic images of the Buchanans' inertia assign greater significance to the incongruity between lineage and drifting by implicating that the social order Tom and Daisy symbolize is stagnant.

Consistent with his status as an intermediary figure, Nick describes his own restlessness in contradictory terms. Initially, he envisions the East as the solution to his sense of restlessness in the Midwest. By novel's end, however, the restlessness of New York sends him back home. In the opening pages of the novel, Nick claims to have "enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly"

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resources open to a fit people, made the democratic type of society in America for three centuries while it occupied its empire" (293).

that he returns from war "restless" (3). Presumably finding the Midwest dull after his

experiences in battle, he is enticed by New York for what he imagines big city life will entail.

Nick reveals a Turneresque belief that movement and vitality are connected when he

characterizes himself, upon moving to the East, as "a guide, a pathfinder, [and] an original

settler" with the "familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer" (4).

He intimates that by living elsewhere, he may alleviate his restless boredom and renew his lost

sense of wonder.[92]

Yet Nick alludes to feeling restless in New York as well when he admits to enjoying the

"adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women

and machines gives to the restless eye" (57). On the surface, such restlessness appears desirable;

however, it is immediately succeeded by Nick's admission that he feels "a haunting loneliness

sometimes, and felt it in others […] wasting the most poignant moments of night and life" (58).

This juxtaposition of life's adventuresome nights and poignant waste elicits nostalgia and

accounts for Nick's decision to forego any further "riotous excursions with privileged glimpses

into the human heart" and return to the Midwest (2). He re-evaluates his position regarding the

West based, in part, on his sense of isolation in the East. Nick's restlessness may be accurately

summarized by his famous declaration that he is "within and without, simultaneously enchanted

and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (36). The conflicted motivations of his unrest

correspond to the dual nature of his nostalgia, which is both individually and nationally oriented.

The "intimate excitement" from which Nick feels excluded in New York exists, he

thinks, in the West of his youth (58). As Dan Seiters suggests, when Nick leaves the East "he

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[92] The issue of lost wonder is made explicit when Nick aligns his nostalgia for his youthful Midwest with a nostalgia for the mythic national past and the sense of wonderment he assumes Dutch settlers must have experienced upon first landing on the Eastern seaboard.

seeks his Christmas-vacation idealization of the West" (89). The "Middle West" that Nick

declares his is "not [that of] the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling

returning trains of [his] youth," which offered him a fleeting sense of camaraderie (178). Nick

recollects "a sharp wild brace" in the air of those trains that he and his schoolmates "drew in

deep breaths," which left them "unutterably aware of [their] identity *with* this country for one

strange hour, before [they] melted indistinguishably into it again" (178, emphasis added). For a

single hour, Nick is neither within nor without as he moves across America. In other words, his

sense of identity as an American depends on movement (i.e., progress). Yet, while Nick's

identity with America resists becoming rooted in one place, it also depends on a sense of

regional belonging (i.e., tradition).

Nick's contradictory nostalgic impulses are coloured by imagining escape and longing

for return. "I am part of that," writes Nick, "a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a

little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still

called through decades by a family's name" (178). In this passage, the novel's various treatments

of American identity briefly coalesce as Nick implicitly allies himself with Gatsby and the

Buchanans. While Nick's unutterable awareness recalls Gatsby's "unutterable visions" (112), his

complacency resembles the Buchanans' reliance on a decades-old family name — all of which

are markers of identity that depend on nostalgic longing. Nick identifies the way his past has

shaped him as he longs for that past.

Not only does he does set up a nostalgic image of his Midwestern youth, but Nick also

aligns that image with a mythic vision of the national past. On his last night in West Egg, Nick

visits Gatsby's now empty mansion one last time. He then wanders down to the beach and

sprawls out on the sand, where he becomes gradually

aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes — a fresh, green

breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's

house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a

transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this

continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired,

face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for

wonder. (183)

The language used to describe this awe-inspiring vision of an unadulterated continent invokes

that of Nick's nostalgia for the thrilling sensation of returning home from prep school. On both

personal and national levels, he mourns a lost sense of wonderment — an impalpable idealism

born, so he suggests, of the American land itself. As he broods "on the old, unknown world,"

Nick contemplates "Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of

Daisy's dock" (183). As many scholars have observed, the image of the green light resonates

with that of the fresh green breast of the new world. Whereas the Dutch sailors as Nick imagines

them encountered the unrealized materiality of the American continent, Gatsby pursues

ephemeral potentiality.

As with so many other images in the novel, the green light is a mercurial symbol that

signifies both the future and the past, as does the green breast. Gatsby "had come a long way to

this blue lawn," Nick muses, "and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail

to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast

obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night" (183).

Nick admires Gatsby's belief in "the orgastic future" as he acknowledges that that future lies in

the energy of a mythic national past (183). Nick, too, is nostalgic for a now-closed frontier.

His is not the Western frontier, however, but that of the first American frontier: the Eastern seaboard. "At first," Turner writes, "the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. […] Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influences of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines" (8). In this way we can understand the fresh green breast as signifying an American future and a European past. Nick's nostalgia for an Atlantic frontier is not a yearning for a European past but for the sort of realizable potential encountered by the Dutch.[93] Although Nick shares Gatsby's nostalgia for potential, he is acutely aware that "[y]ou can't repeat the past" (111). Consequently, Nick may be understood as offering a coherent sense of American identity that recognizes its own paradoxes. He embodies the simultaneous appeal of tradition and progress and recognizes that the future is unavoidably tied to the past, but he does not attempt to restore the past or structure his future upon its reinstatement.

The spaciotemporal binaries of *The Great Gatsby* animate a symbolic relationship between personal and national identity in which seemingly future-oriented goals compete with desires that are oriented toward the past. Characters' conflicting desires correspond to their varied embodiments of restlessness and expressions of nostalgia, their dreams of the past and future. These dreams situate characters along a nostalgic continuum that runs from backward- to forward-looking. At one end of this continuum are the Buchanans, who are focused solely on maintaining the past; at the other end is Gatsby, who is focused on re-establishing the past in the future. Nick lies between these two poles, thus offering a more nuanced vision of the interplay between past and future, tradition and progress. With the Buchanans, Fitzgerald suggests that

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[93] Of course, Nick (and presumably Fitzgerald) does not recognize this "potential" as exploitative.

dogmatic adherence to past conventions limits future potential; with Gatsby, he reveals the impossible fantasy of imagining a future that entails recovering the past. In the character of Nick, Fitzgerald acknowledges that the past cannot be repeated and yet should not be forgotten.

Concluding Remarks

The Great Gatsby, as Robert Beuka observes, "has proven particularly malleable, providing a kind of moral, political, or philosophical mirror for readers and critics to hold up to their own visions of America" (*American Icon* 76). Discussions of the nostalgic nature of that mirror, however, remain conspicuously absent from the critical literature. A curious omission, given the way that, as Michael Roth notes, a heightened attention to memory may reflect a culture's "anxieties about repetition, change, representation, authenticity, and identity" (qtd. in Ritivoi 20). In my review of *The Great Gatsby*, I have sought to address this oversight by demonstrating how the novel offers a catalogue of different modes of nostalgia as they motivate the national project of self-invention and disclose various anxieties of 1920s American culture.

Some ten years following *The Great Gatsby*'s publication Fitzgerald wrote that "[t]he test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function" (*Crack-Up* 69). *The Great Gatsby* is comprised of a series of oppositional ideas and ideals, which are held in tension by the thematic and aesthetic work of nostalgia. In Steinbrink's view, Fitzgerald's oeuvre persuasively conveys "a sense of the fundamental paradox which gave the Age its poignancy," which is a feeling of being "drawn almost simultaneously in two directions: toward the naive hope that the best of life is yet to come, and toward the realization that such circumstances as give life meaning lie buried in an irrecoverable past" (157). That *The Great Gatsby*, criticized in 1925 "for being too tied to its

own historical moment to have any real shot at lasting appeal" (Beuka, *American Icon* ix),

remains culturally relevant today is a testament to the fact that its paradoxes illuminate a

poignancy not specific to the Jazz Age but central to the American experience. The competing

past- and future-oriented desires that pervade *The Great Gatsby* remain central to Elliott

Nugent's 1949 adaptation of Fitzgerald's novel; however, Nugent does not attend to shifting

class dynamics, the paradox of self-making, or relations between restlessness and national

identity. Instead, he concerns himself with how to redress the past, re-establish moral order in the

present, and ensure a stable future. The next chapter considers how Nugent's film employs

nostalgia to imagine the past as it should have been in its efforts to assuage post-WWII tensions

between individualistic and collective identification.

The Green Light in Black & White:

Nostalgia for What Should Have Been in Elliott Nugent's *The Great Gatsby*

The Jazz Age had a wild youth and a heady middle age. […]
But moralizing is easy now and it was pleasant to be in one's twenties
in such a certain and unworried time.
—F. Scott Fitzgerald (1931)

I'm an optimist, especially about American youth. I think most of our young people
will whip any problem they face, and that an essential cleanness and decency and
loyalty will prove the young American—boy and girl—of this war to be
the finest in history.
—Alan Ladd (1943)

Testifying to the enduring relevance of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*—and contributing to Gatsby's iconic status within cultural memory—Fitzgerald's novel has been adapted to film six times since 1926.[94] Of the novel's surviving theatrical film adaptations, Elliott Nugent's 1949 version is uniquely invested in inventing a past for which to be nostalgic. Its nostalgic construction of the past does not, however, merely idealize a previous era; instead, it suggests how the past *should* have been to offer a corrective of sorts to the postwar present. In doing so, *The Great Gatsby* (1949)[95] intriguingly appears to position itself as out-of-time: rather than acknowledging the difficulty of returning home after WWII and celebrating consumer individualism, as other late 1940s American cultural artifacts did, Nugent's *Gatsby* endeavours to retain the values of WWII by retrofitting them to a WWI and a 1920s that should have been but never were. The film prioritizes collectivism over individualism, transforming Fitzgerald's

[94] Movie adaptations of Fitzgerald's novel include *The Great Gatsby* (1926), directed by Herbert Brenon; *The Great Gatsby* (1949), directed by Elliott Nugent; *The Great Gatsby* (1974), directed by Jack Clayton; *The Great Gatsby* (2002), a made-for-TV movie directed Robert Markowitz (2000); *G* (2002), directed by Christopher Scott Cherot; and *The Great Gatsby* (2013), directed by Baz Luhrmann.
[95] Henceforth, for the sake of clarity and concision, I will refer to Fitzgerald's novel as *The Great Gatsby* and Nugent's adaptation as *Gatsby* throughout this chapter.

account of the Buchanans' brutality and indifference and Gatsby's quixotic dream of self-made success into a conservative story about restoring the patriarchal family structure.

Despite engaging with such complex cultural work, Nugent's adaptation (comparative to other adaptations of Fitzgerald's novel) has, perhaps, received the least amount of critical attention.[96] This chapter seeks, in part, to address this scholarly gap by exploring how Nugent's film responds to the cultural ambivalence of its postwar era. Historically situating *Gatsby*, I offer a close reading of the film's formal, generic, and thematic treatments of nostalgia that suggests how its various expressions of nostalgia resonate with those concerns that dominated the American imagination at this time.

Nineteen forty-nine was a particularly fitting historical moment to adapt *The Great Gatsby* from novel to film. Following World War II, Fitzgerald's novel was recognized not only as a record of the Jazz Age but also as a vehicle for interrogating American society and the national experience.[97] In chapter one, I identified the ways in which Fitzgerald employs nostalgia to engage with the various social concerns and competing impulses toward tradition and progress characteristic of postwar 1920s America. The novel's tensions cohere in some sense with Americans' feelings of uncertainty during the immediate postwar years of the 1940s. The nation at this time, as Bob Batchelor describes it, was "casting about for ways to reinterpret and reimagine itself"; thus, he argues, the novel's ambiguity "seemed right for the times" because it enabled "readers to either see themselves and their country reflected in its pages, or experience it as a way of questioning the new era" (54). Nugent's adaptation offers postwar viewers similar

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[96] The absence of scholarship on the 1926 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* is attributable to its being a lost film.
[97] See Batchelor, esp. 53-55.

experiences by suspending time,[98] conflating past and present in a way that both invokes and

denies nostalgia to elicit audiences' critical reflection on the present.

The years between *Gatsby*'s inception and its release are significant for their resonance

with those years in which the novel's story takes place. Although Paramount approved producer

Richard Maibaum's proposal to bring *The Great Gatsby* to screen in 1946, difficulties with script

approval, disagreements over casting, and a change in directors delayed the film's premiere until

1949.[99] During the intervening years, America witnessed immense social, economic, political,

and technological changes akin to those of the postwar twenties.[100] As many commentators—

including Fitzgerald—have observed, the attitude of optimistic frenzy during the early years of

the 1920s gave way to ubiquitous disquiet as the decade progressed and eventually collapsed

with the stock market in 1929.[101] It is, perhaps, to concerns about such a trajectory that Maibaum

alludes in claiming that he "saw a similarity between what was happening in 1946 to what had

happened to the country in 1920" (39). While the twenties generally began in a postwar

atmosphere of optimism and ended in economic crisis, the latter half of the forties experienced a

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[98] I will more thoroughly address what I intend by "suspending time" and analyze how *Gatsby* suspends time in section one of this chapter.

[99] Joseph Breen, then head of the Production Code Administration (PCA), rejected numerous treatments of the script on the grounds of "low moral tone" (Talbot 65). "Specifically," Maibaum explains, the script "violated the code then in effect because it dealt with adultery, unpunished manslaughter, glamorized a gangster, depicted excessive use of liquor, undermined the institutions of marriage and the home, lowered moral standards, presented impure love as attractive and beautiful, etc., etc" (39). The screenplay—written by Maibaum and Cyril Hume—was eventually altered to the approval of the PCA, and Nugent was assigned to direct the film.

[100] While all decades may be considered transformational in some sense, the 1920s and 1940s were uniquely affected by the First and Second World War, respectively. "The two eras," Batchelor explains, "shared a fear of the massive upheaval that occurs during periods rife with excessive wealth and the sociocultural transformations that concurrently take place" (157).

[101] For Fitzgerald, the Jazz Age was an age of miracles, art, excess, and satire; an age in which "something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the [First World] War" (13-14). "By 1927," he writes, "a wide-spread neurosis began to be evident" (19).

similar postwar boom tempered by fears concerning communism, nuclear annihilation, and another economic recession.[102]

Although half-decades are not historically precise categories, dividing the forties into an early culture of war and a later culture of peace enables, as William Graebner suggests, a consideration of the very real "transition from the public, institutional climate of a nation at war to the private tone of a people living in peace" (1). The notion of living in peace, however, should not be mistaken for living peacefully. Dubbing the decade "The Age of Doubt," Graebner contests typical assumptions about the era regarding its alleged optimism, confidence, and security (xi). Nineteen-forties Americans, he asserts, "wondered aloud about their innocence, jettisoned revered notions of progress for an increasingly pragmatic and even dystopian perspective on the future, and took flight from a past that had long ceased to offer comfort and security" (41). Drawing on Graebner's work, Nicholas Spencer observes that during the 1940s "irony, historical contingency, a feeling of historical exhaustion and cultural fragmentation, and an attraction to existentialism borne of a sense of meaninglessness were evident in many areas of culture" (119). Yet, Spencer acknowledges, 1940s American culture was also paradoxically "characterized by nostalgia, sentimentalism, [and] a belief in scientific progress (118-19). Thus, in a manner strikingly similar to the tensions of the 1920s, the 1940s evidenced two general trends: it was a period of existential doubt characterized by nostalgia and anxious cynicism, *and* it was a future-oriented era characterized by a belief in progress.

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[102] In his summary of "the events that held Americans in a decade-long state of anxiety," Graebner includes the "trauma of war and cold war, the shattering revelation of the murder of millions of European Jews, the discovery of nuclear fission and the use of an atomic bomb on civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, [and] the Great Depression that threatened to return any day" (xi).

These oppositional impulses are often evident in 1940s Hollywood productions.
Tellingly, American film noir,[103] which began to flourish in the early 1940s, was immensely
popular by the end of the decade and throughout the 1950s.[104] The postwar rise of noir was
fueled, in part, by a cultural disappointment of sorts, which Robert Sickels identifies as
"dissatisfaction with what some saw as the failed promise of an American dream" (201). Noir
may thus be partially understood as a response to a lost sense of potential, a response driven by
nostalgia, frustration, and apprehension. While loss and nostalgia frequently underwrite film
noir, so, too, do anxieties about the future and its uncertain social, economic, and moral order.[105]
In Tony Williams's analysis, Hollywood films of the late 1940s "exhibit conflicting tendencies
toward tentative optimism and bleak pessimism, reflecting the lack of alternative clear-cut social
directions in the immediate postwar era" (199).[106] *Gatsby* engages many of these thematic
concerns and may be regarded as utilizing various noir elements. It also, however, evinces the
thematic concerns and features of melodrama. This chapter considers how the film's generic
elements—specifically, the conventions of noir and melodrama—give expression to various
cultural anxieties of the 1940s, and how the film offers nostalgic responses to such anxieties. In
order to trace the ways in which genre responds to the sociohistorical realities of *Gatsby*'s
production, it is first necessary to briefly address the usefulness and limitations of generic

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[103] As applied to early 1940s American crime dramas of a particular style and mood, the term *noir* is commonly
believed to have been introduced by French film critic Nino Frank in 1946. It has since been retrospectively
constructed as critical category.

[104] "Noir coalesced roughly in 1940," writes Drew Casper, "and continued, as a pronounced strain, until about 1960,
as far as its initial embodiment went. Though heating up in 1940-5, its epicenter was the next 15 years" (353).

[105] On the one hand, "loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, and insecurity" underwrite film noir (Schrader 11); on
the other, it functions as "a conspicuous vehicle for the dissemination of the idea of contingency in both its basic
forms: contingency experienced as chance event, and contingency experienced as a chaos that denied moral
absolutes" (Graebner 25).

[106] Joanna Rapf specifies that the ambivalence of such films concerned "an exuberant enthusiasm for America, its
heritage, and its future [as well as] a tremendous fear and anxiety about deracination and a loss of security, control,
and spiritual 'treasure'" (220).

taxonomies toward clarifying my own methodological approach to genre in my analysis of *Gatsby*.

Numerous critics have questioned and reworked the status of film noir and melodrama as cinematic genres. Arguably, noir and melodrama stand as the most contested film categories for interestingly analogous reasons. Whereas noir is a *post factum* category, melodrama possesses a rich literary history;[107] just as noir's retroactive status complicates clear understandings of the term,[108] melodrama's rich history poses definitional problems. Despite the problems of consensus over how noir and melodrama should be defined, approaching each as a generic category remains a useful analytical tool because, as scholars generally agree, generic analysis facilitates situating cultural productions within their social contexts to clarify the relationship between works and their sociohistorical milieu.[109] Rather than making categorical claims about either noir or melodrama, my analysis of Nugent's film concentrates on the implications of specific generic elements as a function of sociohistorical context.

I employ *genre* as a term that denotes flexibility, working under the assumption that precise film categories do not exist as such because most films demonstrate elements of more than one genre. Labelling *Gatsby* a film noir with melodramatic elements or a melodrama with noir elements is, to my mind, an irrelevant distinction. Instead of arguing for a specific classification, I consider how generic conventions offer a context for reading *Gatsby*. In

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[107] As David Rodowick explains, melodrama is a "historically complex phenomenon" whose problem of definition is "complicated by the apparent ease with which it is possible to point out melodramatic situations and conventions in a wide variety of dramatic and literary media of different historical and cultural situations" (268).

[108] Because noir was not a generic label acknowledged by the film industry or audiences of the 1940s, little agreement exists across critical and historical accounts as to what characterizes film noir, and thus "what films actually constitute the corpus" (Krutnik 17). For an overview of critical attempts to conceptualize film noir as a genre, a style, a mood or a period (and the problems inherent to such attempts), see Krutnik 17-23.

[109] See, for example, Jacobs 110 and Chandler 10.

particular, I interrogate how features of noir and melodrama work to invoke nostalgia and a fictional world that speaks to postwar issues.

Melodrama, like noir, tends to exhibit nostalgic impulses. As noted above, nostalgia and apprehension about what lies ahead commonly underwrite film noir. Noir heroes may be characterized as nostalgic in that, as Paul Schrader explains, they dread looking ahead and thus try to survive day by day; failing at that, they nostalgically retreat to the past (11). Whereas film noir often presents an anxious view of the future tempered by an escapist desire to return to a past perceived as less threatening, melodrama is frequently nostalgic in its impossible effort to reinstate that which has been lost. In fact, Tania Modleski identifies the experience of loss as constituting the "heart of melodrama" (335-36), and Thomas Elsaesser identifies "desire focusing on the unobtainable object" as a recurrent feature of melodrama (455).

Although theorists agree that melodrama is nostalgic in its looking back to the past, they offer slightly different explanations as to the sources of such nostalgia. For some, melodrama's nostalgia manifests in the traditional sense of being motivated by dissatisfaction with the present; for others, melodrama's nostalgic impulses are driven by a desire to *change* the past. Of scholars that adhere to the former view, Linda Williams claims that "melodrama is structured upon the 'dual recognition' of how things are and how they should be" (48).[110] Paraphrasing the work of David Grimstead and Martha Vicinus, Christine Gledhill notes that the challenge of melodrama does not lie in confronting things as they are but in in "asserting how they ought to be" ("Melodramatic Field" 21). Gledhill, however, tweaks this argument that assumes dissatisfaction with the present by altering "ought to" to "should have been" ("Melodramatic Field" 21), thereby intimating that a desire to change the past is central to melodrama's nostalgic inclinations.

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[110] In Linda Williams's analysis, "there is a moral, wish-fulfilling impulse towards the achievement of justice […] as the powerless yet virtuous seek to return to the 'innocence' of their origins" (48).

Nugent's film operates on both levels of melodramatic nostalgia by suggesting how things ought

to be in 1940s America and how they should have been in 1920s America.

Although (or perhaps because) Nugent's *Gatsby* defies simple generic categorization, it is

squarely situated within the atmosphere of ambivalence that permeates Hollywood films of its

time and, more generally, U.S. life during the 1940s. As I will demonstrate, Nugent addresses

contemporary anxieties concerning social and moral ambiguity by projecting them onto his

1920s characters, who then resolve such ambivalence by repenting for past indiscretions and

transgressions. In particular, the film characterizes its fictional events during World War I and

the postwar 1920s by allying them with the experience of World War II and its immediate

aftermath. Further, it resituates the concerns of class and meritocratic possibility that assume a

mythical dimension in Fitzgerald's novel into the realms of domesticity. Fitzgerald's tangential

treatment of war assumes a more central position in Nugent's adaptation, which considers the

status of democratic values in America during the immediate postwar years as it questions how

to atone for the past and live ethically in an age of uncertainty.[111]

While nostalgia works both with and against various national mythologies in Fitzgerald's

novel, in Nugent's film it sheds light on the general atmosphere of ambivalence in America at

the dawn of the Cold War era by assuming both sentimental and cautionary functions. Engaging

with the concerns of his day, Fitzgerald weighs the Buchanans' longing for the social structures

of a previous era against Gatsby's desire to relive a past belief in potential. Like Fitzgerald,

Nugent both idealizes and selectively exorcises the past. However, rather than offering up the

novel's anti-nostalgic portrait of class structure or its nostalgic glimpses toward a national past

that extends back to the Dutch explorers, Nugent's film expresses a nostalgic longing to reinstate

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[111] "Americans of the forties," Graebner observes, "lived their lives in a present that was every bit as uncertain as the depression-ridden past they were fleeing and the atomic-age future they feared" (18).

the ostensible moral order of an earlier era, aligning the 1920s and the 1940s to suggest the past

ought to be purged so as not to repeat its mistakes. In fact, the film's critical consciousness

springs from its engagement with nostalgia that relies on cinematically constructed temporal

ambiguity that works to figuratively suspend time in order to induce a historical perspective on

the present day.[112]

To clarify how *Gatsby* suspends time—and what I intend by this phrase—I first offer a

brief discussion of how the film's narrative and formal strategies both elicit and deny nostalgia.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I then address how *Gatsby* nostalgically responds to the

transformative influences of World War II by considering the film's generic elements in light of

Nugent's efforts to endorse collectivism in his thematic treatment of war, morality, gender, and

the traditional values of family and home. Throughout this chapter, I argue that, rather than

expressing nostalgia for the Roaring Twenties, Nugent's film puts nostalgia to use in a national

allegory that warns of repeating past mistakes, wherein personal failure followed by repentance

stands in for national failure and the possibility of a stable future.

Shoulder Pads and Rainbows: Screening the Past & Suspending Time

At the time of its release, Nugent's *Gatsby* was met with a curious mix of reviews that

either praised the director's invocation of the "whole atmosphere of the 1920s" (Graham) or

derided the film for its failure to adequately reflect "the flavor of the Prohibition era"

(Crowther).[113] The source of such disagreement likely resides in Nugent's anachronistic

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[112] I draw from Barbara S. Lawrence to clarify what I intend by *historical perspective*. "Historical perspective," Lawrence writes, "differs from history in that the object of historical perspective is to sharpen one's vision of the present, not the past" (307).

[113] Many contemporaneous reviews reflected disagreement over the film's depiction of the twenties. Among reviewers who sided with Virginia Graham, Thomas R. Dash wrote that the film "catches with fidelity the mood of the rabid twenties," and Mae Tinee wrote that the film "captures the generally frantic air of the days of paper profits, bootlegger, and jazz mad flappers." John Riley also felt that *Gatsby* "offers a credible approximation of the period,"

representation of 1920s America, wherein the film's sets, costumes, and music often recall the 1920s even as they appear rather indistinguishable from what would have been contemporary to 1949 audiences. In this way, the film subtly establishes nostalgia as central to its meaning. As Pam Cook observes, "nostalgic fictions depend upon a slippage between current styles and period fashion in order to draw audiences in to [*sic*] the experience" (11). Formally and narratively vacillating between the 1920s and 1940s, *Gatsby* both engenders and denies nostalgic investment among postwar viewers; in doing so, I will argue, it works to elicit a contemplative view of the present.

The various anachronisms of *Gatsby*'s mise-en-scène and soundtrack establish an affinity between the story's temporal setting and the time of the film's production. This association contributes to the film's evocation of what Cook calls *suspended time*: a convergence of past, present, and/or future that "expresses a desire to question linear progression, and the way we think of social progress and history" (16). Suspending time in this way, *Gatsby* evokes and inflects concerns contemporary to postwar audiences through a treatment of 1920s America and underscores the significance of historical perspective. The film offers a warning to the present by insinuating that history may repeat itself. That is, *Gatsby* suggests, mid-century, postwar America may be on the precipice of a similar decade-long trajectory from optimism to collapse that characterized the 1920s. Its interrogation of linear progress thus expresses anxieties about the similarities between post-WWI and post-WWII America. In other words, the film's confluence of past and present, which is formally and narratively sustained throughout,

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though he maintained the film failed to reflect the novel's nuanced values. Siding with Bosley Crowther and also negatively reviewing the film, Edwin Schallert did not find the twenties accurately represented; nor did a reviewer for *Variety*, who maintained that "Elliott Nugent's direction skips along the surface of the era depicted."

challenges notions of social progress by promoting restorative nostalgia — a restoration,

paradoxically, of a past that never was but which should have been.

Although props are an important component of surface realism in Nugent's film, its set

design and costumes do not convincingly establish the historical authenticity of the late 1920s.

Nugent's use of two 1928 Duesenbergs and a vintage speedboat generate a vision of the

opulence Jay Gatsby (Alan Ladd) wishes to project, while contributing to the 1920s look of the

film. Such visual periodization, however, remains relatively isolated to the film's vehicular

props. Sporting forties hairstyles and clothing that synthesizes 1920s and 1940s designs—low

waists and shoulder pads, free-flowing fabric and structured gowns—characters appear to

ambiguously straddle both decades. *Boston Globe* reporter Christopher Muther notes that famed

Oscar-winning costumer Edith Head "delicately balances the 1920s with the 1940s in her

costumes [for *Gatsby*], but eventually seems to shrug her shoulders and go with the 1940s."

While Muther's observation is on point, I very much doubt that Head simply shrugged her

shoulders. Indeed, her anachronistic creations are essential to the film's suspension of time.

Understanding the film according to its interplay between suspended time and nostalgia allows

us to see its cultural work: *Gatsby* expresses and endeavours to shape its social context by

highlighting historical similarities between the 1920s and 1940s and encouraging audiences to

consider the connections between the two postwar eras.

Further enhancing this overlay of decades, Nugent slightly alters the novel's temporal

setting. Whereas Fitzgerald's novel spans approximately two years, Nugent's film spans two

decades to uniquely engage audiences. The novel opens in the narrative present of 1924, and

Fitzgerald's narrator recounts the summer of 1922; Nugent's film opens in 1948 before

proceeding—by way of flashback—to the events of 1928, not 1922. The film thus yokes

characters' past to the historical reality of viewers' immediate past (1948). Furthermore, it draws

attention to the pending Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s by

shifting the action from 1922 to 1928. Manipulating the timeline like this, Nugent offers insight

into the American present of the late forties by alluding to a past that had not yet been

experienced by Fitzgerald when writing *The Great Gatsby*.

Music, too, plays a subtle role in advancing an association between historical perspective

and the film's suspension of time. For example, when Nick Carraway (Macdonald Carey) first

arrives at Gatsby's, it is to a woman crooning "There's a Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder" amidst

the chaos of partygoers: "There's a rainbow 'round my shoulder, and it fits me like a glove. Let it

blow and storm; I'll be warm 'cause I'm in love. Hallelujah, how the folks'll stare, when they see

the diamond solitaire that this pretty baby…" Suggestive of the rationale behind Gatsby's

parties—his feelings toward Daisy Buchanan (Betty Field)—and alluding to his ostensible desire

to impress her with his wealth, the song seems a lyrically fitting choice in this scene. The

thematic relevance of the song's lyrics is echoed by its historical associations. In 1928, Al Jolson

co-wrote and performed the song as the lead in Warner Brother's *The Singing Fool*: a musical

drama about a man's rise from obscurity to stardom, his subsequent decline after being

abandoned by his wife, and his determined comeback. Loosely, *The Singing Fool* speaks to

Gatsby's character arc, which, at this point in Nugent's film, has yet to be fully determined.

In addition to being a hit in 1928, "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder" was rerecorded in

1949 by Donald Peers. Consequently, the recital of this particular song works to address not only

the story's thematic concerns and Gatsby's guests but Nugent's audience as well. Here, the film

deftly overlays the present of viewers in the late forties onto the past of characters in the late

twenties. In this instance, the amalgam of decades is twofold: it reinforces a linkage between the

American experience in the late 1920s and the late 1940s, and it inspires nostalgia in those viewers who might be familiar with Jolson's production twenty years earlier.

Sound possesses a widely recognized power to elicit nostalgic responses in audiences. In fact, its capacity to do so was a common topic of film reviews as early as the 1930s (Sprengler 24). Christine Sprengler's work reveals that countless film reviews of the era celebrated sentiment rather than deriding it in their emphasis on visual and aural elements "(over and above narrative strategies) as triggers for longing for the past" (24). Hence, music in this scene may be understood as deliberately employed to evoke a sentimental (reflective) nostalgia that is not condemned. This nostalgic element, though, is in marked contrast to the regretful and cautionary depictions of the 1920s elsewhere in the film that ultimately work to advance a restorative nostalgia for a past that never existed.

Gatsby's varied nostalgic impulses are clearly established at the film's outset. Nugent's adaptation opens with a universal nostalgic trope in drawing attention to the passage of time itself. With Jordan Baker (Ruth Hussey) by his side at Gatsby's grave, Nick delivers the film's first line indicating that Gatsby has been dead for twenty years. For Jordan, Gatsby seems like someone they knew "in another life, another time, another world: jazz, Prohibition, flaming youth." Her wistful delivery of these lines induces reflective nostalgia for the Roaring Twenties. When the camera pans to a close-up of the tombstone, it gradually zooms in to reveal the dates etched beneath Gatsby's name before coming to rest squarely on the year of his death: 1928. Far from arbitrary, this death date alludes to a symbolic connection between the stock market crash of 1929 and the excesses Gatsby embodies (which the film will shortly depict).[114] Accompanied by Nick's voice-over, the image of 1928 on Gatsby's headstone dissolves into a ballroom of

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[114] I will address this connection in the next section of this chapter.

couples dancing. "Remember the Lindy Hop?" Nick asks, again occasioning reflective nostalgia for youthful exuberance. He proceeds to list popular dances of the twenties in reverse chronological order; with each symbolic step backward in time, the screen swipes right to reveal a different series of dancers reveling in an older fad.

The combined use of costumes and music from earlier decades has the potential to elicit audience nostalgia in a manner that clichéd fluttering calendar pages does not. Any nostalgic identification with the Jazz-Mad Twenties is, however, quickly denied. As the soundtrack's jazz tempo increases so, too, does Nick's fevered tone — matched only by a montage sequence depicting excessive amounts of money, "Go" signs, cars packed with drinking youths, speakeasy revelry, barrels of Prohibition alcohol, and a whole series of criminal activity associated with bootlegging and gang wars. In effect, the opening sequence offers an iconic vision of 1920s American culture that makes clear what sort of nostalgia is *not* on offer. It suggests that, for all their superficial glamour, the twenties were a dark time characterized by greed and corruption — a social milieu to which America can resist returning, the film ultimately suggests, if its citizens are morally diligent. Although audiences are invited to remember the Jazz Age via Nick's voice-over, the attending images enforce a particular understanding of the era that undermines nostalgic remembrance by cataloguing all that was wrong with the decade and lambasting affection for a past seen as undesirable.

Though a flashback sequence accompanied by voice-over narration often presents a spatiotemporal split between the character audiences see and the character they hear, under Nugent's direction such a pairing is more appropriately conceived of as a conjoining of spatiotemporal realities. Once again, *Gatsby* subtly suspends time by presenting an interplay between visual excess and violence and Nick's voice-over that constructs the 1920s as a chaotic

and immoral decade that remains, in some sense, connected to the late-1940s present. This opening montage concludes with a trench-coat-clad Gatsby stepping out of his car following a shootout, walking toward the camera, and looking directly into its lens. As he does so, Nick announces that Gatsby emerged "out of the twenties and all they were," that he "built a dark empire for himself because he carried a dream in his heart." Effectively, Gatsby steps out of the past to draw audiences into it.

To observe, as Candace Grissom does, that this opening sequence functions to establish the primacy of Gatsby as a felon seems to go without saying (20). As well as enacting lawlessness, the scene offers rich cultural associations that extend beyond his criminal status. Gatsby is characterized as both a product of the times and an active agent in his own downfall, hence serving as a cautionary example to postwar audiences. Understanding Gatsby as such reveals how Nugent's evocations of nostalgia and his efforts to suspend time serve a critical function: *Gatsby* didactically endeavours to change the present by condemning specific elements of the past even as it promotes a nostalgic investment in the past to engage audiences. These seemingly contradictory efforts may best be characterized as restorative nostalgia for social and moral order presumably belonging to a past that valued the group over the individual and that was grounded in the ideology of domesticity, as the remaining sections of this chapter will demonstrate.

Looking for a Boy in Uniform: Recasting WWI & Reaffirming Collective Ideals

Strange as it may seem, the Second World War increased the likelihood that audiences of Nugent's adaptation would have been familiar with Fitzgerald's novel.[115] One unanticipated

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[115] Yoni Appelbaum reports that "*Gatsby* sold just 120 copies [in 1944], and another 33 in 1945 before going out of print. The 155,000 copies of *The Great Gatsby* that [the Council on Books in Wartime] shipped out to the troops

result of World War II was the advent of the paperback novel in response to wartime rationing.

Due to their low cost and relative ease of distribution, paperbacks became a popular form of

entertainment for soldiers with long hours to fill in their barracks. Early in 1943, as Yoni

Appelbaum reports, the Council on Books in Wartime proposed selling paperback editions to the

United States army at the unprecedented low cost of six cents each.[116] Between 1943 and 1945

publishers shipped nearly one-hundred and twenty-three *million* books to the U.S. military for

distribution (Appelbaum). Of these books, *The Great Gatsby* comprised an estimated 155,000 to

200,000.[117]

The tens of thousands of copies of *The Great Gatsby* in circulation among military

personnel during World War II meant that at least as many veterans—if not more—were

potentially familiar with Fitzgerald's novel at the time of Nugent's adaptation. For some such

men, Gatsby's experience of returning from war to discover that his love interest had not waited

for him was liable to strike a chord.[118] Likewise, many women may have identified with Daisy's

predicament of having come to terms with past loss only to have that sense of resolution

disrupted by a returning ex-lover.[119] Thus, although 1940s audiences were not encouraged to

view the 1920s with nostalgia, they could likely relate to the nostalgia of characters affected by

WWI, having just lived through WWII themselves. While not explicitly a war film, Nugent's

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dwarfed all its previous print runs combined. Buoyed by that exposure, it would go on to become one of the great publishing successes of the 20th century."

[116] The volumes were provided to soldiers at no cost.

[117] Appelbaum cites 155,000, while Batchelor places the number of copies at 200,000.

[118] "According to the standard postwar mythology," as outlined by Graebner, "weary GIs trudged home to the accepting arms of wives and girlfriends, went to college on the GI Bill and took out a VA home mortgage, moved the new baby-boom family to the suburbs, and, of course, lived happily ever after" (13). Closer, perhaps, to the actual experience of Americans following WWII a number of "Hollywood's postwar films about returning veterans depict the moment of homecoming—that is, the founding moment of postwar domesticity—as awkward, traumatic, or disappointing" (Graebner 14).

[119] I acknowledge that these claims are heteronormative. I have deliberately framed them so with the ideological climate of postwar audiences in mind.

adaptation nostalgically responds to the transformative influences of World War II in its somewhat melodramatic approach to the narrative events concerning World War I as presented in the novel.

Gatsby may be considered melodramatic in its nostalgic emphasis on virtue as belonging to the past. The melodramatic quest, according to Linda Williams, is one for lost innocence. In her view, melodrama begins and desires to end in a *space of innocence*: a place of stability and harmony frequently belonging to the past (65). Because the restoration of the family assumes thematic priority in a large number of melodramas, the space of innocence is often symbolically figured as the home. Although the home is not the space of innocence in *Gatsby*, the film offers a unique space of innocence that functions to reaffirm communal values. Furthering its suspension of time, *Gatsby* recasts World War I as fought in the name democracy and censures individualistic greed. In doing so, it offers an anti-nostalgic cautionary tale that questions historical progress even as it expresses nostalgia for the past as it should have been.

As a novel published in 1925 and a film released in 1949, *The Great Gatsby* offers differing conceptions of war that correspond to the prevailing sociopolitical atmosphere of their respective historical moments. Throughout the 1920s (and 1930s), indictments of WWI dominated cultural productions. Although some novels and films during this time esteemed the war's idealism and sacrifice, most emphasized human carnage, meaninglessness, loss, and cynicism as central to the experience of WWI, thereby "setting a paradigm for understanding the war" (Keene 452). Nineteen-forties Americans conversely understood World War II as "a crusade to defeat the 'brutality, cruelty, treachery and cynicism' of the enemy" (May 142).[120]

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[120] Sickels similarly observes that "many Americans believed that World War II was more than just a conflict over politics; it was thought of as a moral war, one in which Americans had a chance to help make the world a better place, more free and more universally democratic" (xvi).

Accordingly, war in the novel is a source of disillusionment and restlessness, while in the film it is a necessary means in the fight for democracy. Although Nugent does not altogether elide connections between war and loss,[121] his adaptation participates in a *wartime* Hollywood trend of recasting the Great War in a more favourable light than it had been previously.[122] This early-1940s shift was prompted by the Office of War Information (OWI), which advised Hollywood filmmakers interested in promoting the war effort to portray the current war differently from earlier depictions of World War I — that is, as a so-called good war rather than one of meaningless despair.[123]

Consonant with Hollywood films of the early 1940s that depicted war as a moral endeavour, Nugent's film recasts World War I as an effort to preserve American values, an effort made explicit during the scene in which Jordan recounts Daisy and Gatsby's courtship. According to Jordan, in wartime (i.e., WWI) Louisville, "all the mad young things used to give teas and dances for the ninety-day wonders at Camp Taylor who were going overseas to make the world safe for democracy." At this declaration, the scene dissolves into a dimly lit veranda of men and women dancing and a doorframe left of center that reveals a well-lit room decorated with patriotic bunting. The camera slowly pans right to reveal a large American flag, and then

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[121] War is, after all, the intervening force in Daisy and Gatsby's romance in *Gatsby*. Although WWI intervenes in the novel as well, the film more explicitly suggests that Daisy and Gatsby would have been married were it not for his going away to war.

[122] "The creation of a new mythos for the Second World War," Thomas Doherty argues, "began with the de-mythologizing of the First World War. Hollywood had to recast the Great War as a reasonable national enterprise, not as the crazy slaughterhouse depicted in literature and film for the previous twenty years. Despair, meaninglessness, pacifism—the dominant legacy of the suicide of Europe—had to be erased, rejected, or revamped" (qtd. in Kozloff 64-5).

[123] President Roosevelt established the OWI in June of 1942 to consolidate the various propaganda agencies in operation before the war (Weinberg 73). Within weeks the Bureau of Motion Pictures, a division within the OWI, released its *Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, which outlined—among other things—the reasons behind U.S. involvement in the war and what to expect following victory; the power of motion pictures to enlighten the public "as to the nature and purpose of the enemy"; and what must be sacrificed on the home front in order to win the war (United States, Office of War Information). The OWI advised Hollywood filmmakers to benevolently portray WWII as a good war.

begins tracking a uniformed Gatsby intimately dancing with Daisy. Looking the part of a prim

Southern belle, Daisy wears her long hair tied back with a ribbon, and a gown that would have

been dated even in 1917. The effect here is to establish a somewhat propagandistic vision of

American involvement in the war that romanticizes the war effort at home and the sending of

troops off to battle — for a "good" cause.

Retreating to a secluded corner, Gatsby and Daisy discuss their love affair and their plans

following his return from war. Whereas in Fitzgerald's novel Gatsby courts Daisy under false

pretenses by allowing her to believe that he and she are of the same socioeconomic strata, in

Nugent's film Gatsby declares his love and confesses to having nothing other than a small,

contested inheritance. Regardless, he knows he "can make good," which she does not doubt.

Despite Daisy's insistent pleas to be married before Gatsby goes to war, he refuses on the

presumably noble grounds of wanting to wait until he can financially provide for her, until he

can "do it right" and make her family proud. Omitting the novel's focus on class conflict in this

way and connecting Gatsby's desires to be financially successful to familial duty, the film

prioritizes unity over individualism, an emphasis fundamental to how *Gatsby* reinflects the 1920s

according to late-1940s concerns as it expresses nostalgia for wartime values.

During WWII, class antagonism was subverted to the demands of patriotism and the need

for unity (May 151). As Lary May observes, major films produced during the war reflect a "need

to shed oppositional values in favor of commitment to hierarchical institutions dedicated to

saving the world" (151). By the latter half of the 1940s, however, the wartime necessity of

sublimating individual desires to collective interests was superseded by the prioritization of

individualism.[124] Yet, *Gatsby* maintains the wartime avoidance of class or cultural conflict:

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[124] As Graebner observes, an "emphasis on democratic systems" during WWII demonstrated "the absolute necessity of sublimating the self to the larger whole, of melding the individual into the life of the group"; following the war,

Daisy expressly asks Gatsby not to think of her as any different from other people; Tom

Buchanan (Barry Sullivan) is more unsettled by Gatsby's criminality than by his social status;

and Meyer Wolfshiem is renamed "Myron Lupus," thus eliminating any ethnic associations with

his name. Moreover, *Gatsby* subtly critiques the postwar shift to prioritizing individualism by

slightly modifying Nick's character arc from novel to film. Significantly, Nick is not a returning

war veteran in Nugent's film. By stripping Nick of military experience, the film denies his

identification with Gatsby. Although the novel's Gatsby has someone with whom he can

empathetically share his war stories, the film's Gatsby essentially faces his trials alone.[125] Thus,

Nick's status as a civilian works to insinuate the alienating consequences of a culture that ranks

the individual above the group because it forecloses the possibility of Gatsby and Nick

establishing a friendship based on shared experience.

In part, Nick's decision to return to the Midwest with Jordan after Gatsby's death at

film's end symbolically fulfills the nostalgic fantasy of returning to wartime values of group

identification. This fantasy is not merely a sentimental yearning for community but one that

expresses restorative nostalgia for a past that never existed — a characteristically melodramatic

nostalgia to change the past, which in turn suggests how to proceed in the present. By

reimagining 1928 as the year Nick and Jordan come to appreciate collective values, *Gatsby*

alludes to the possibility that the Crash may have been avoided had 1920s Americans been less

individualistic, less concerned with amassing individual wealth and more concerned with

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"emphases on the group and democracy" were overshadowed by "an emphasis on the individual and freedom" (3, 9).

[125] Although true that Gatsby and Klipspringer are war buddies in the film, the fact remains that Klipspringer is involved in Gatsby's criminal affairs. Perhaps more to the point, Gatsby cannot make any *new* connections (that are not criminal in nature) in a postwar world from which he is estranged.

collective wellbeing and the health of the nation. This desire to change the past also characterizes Daisy's nostalgia.

Gatsby's army uniform reveals a great deal about the symbolic significance of Daisy's nostalgia. In 1928, she desires the Gatsby who was a young army officer. When the two are reunited over tea at Nick's, she stares at him awestruck and wistfully declares that she's "looking for someone — a boy in a uniform." Gatsby's uniform is again evoked during the film's rendition of the novel's famous shirt scene, which emphasizes Daisy's longing for her soldier. Like countless other scholars, Sam Girgus interprets Gatsby's shirts (in the novel) as indices of "wealth and success [meant] to impress Daisy" (125). In Nugent's film, rather than embodying "ostentatious consumption" as diagnosed by Girgus (125), the shirts remind Daisy of a Gatsby eleven years earlier. She does not cry, as in the novel, when she holds one of his shirts to her chest; instead, she smiles brightly and declares that they "make [her] think of how nice he used to look in [his] lieutenant's uniform." Daisy's nostalgia, then, is for her past with Gatsby in a wartime world paradoxically characterized by innocence and moral order — that is, the past as it should have been rather than the past that characters (and audiences, by extension) actually experienced.

Gatsby embodies both the nostalgic past that should have been and the actual past as a warning to 1940s audiences. That the film censures individualistic greed, not consumption per se, is most clearly expressed in Gatsby's transition from pre- to postwar. As I have established, before being deployed overseas Gatsby is portrayed as an honest idealist who believes himself capable of making Daisy's family proud. Following his experience in war, however, Gatsby is a somewhat jaded crime boss who believes that "every man has his price." His response to the Dr. T.J. Eckleburg billboard and his overt brutality mark his shift from optimism to cynicism, a shift

that symbolically corresponds to the nation's shift during the 1920s and serves to caution against a similar postwar-1940s trajectory.

Gatsby's first appearance in the film following the opening montage[126] occurs at the garage owned by George Wilson (Howard Da Silva), where one of Gatsby's henchmen comments on the eerie quality of the billboard whose eyes seem to be those of God watching over everything. "They follow ya," he says. "It's painted that way; it's what they call an optical illusion," Gatsby gruffly interjects. For Gatsby, morality itself may as well be an illusion. Dismissing Eckleburg's religious connotations, Gatsby reveals himself as more interested in the secular world of observable and explainable phenomena. Underscoring this fact, *Gatsby* overturns the novel's speculative quality: rather than exiling Gatsby's ruthlessness to rumour, the film makes it plainly evident when Gatsby knocks an unwelcome and intrusive mobster unconscious at one of his parties. These glimpses into Gatsby's character are especially significant when considered alongside the flashback scenes depicting a hopeful and assured Gatsby of a decade earlier.

Nugent devotes a ten-minute flashback sequence to establishing Gatsby's backstory, which differs only slightly from that of the novel and firmly establishes Gatsby's initial optimism as principled. While there is no mention of Gatsby's having grown up on a farm, the film details his three years spent sailing the world with Dan and Ella Cody (Henry Hull and Carole Matthews, respectively). The backstory is set up with Gatsby's admission to Nick that he is a self-made man who, as a "dumb kid," struggled to make a living working the docks of Lake Superior. Gatsby proceeds in voice-over as the film displays his younger self rowing out to Dan Cody's yacht to warn Cody of the vessel's precarious position over a reef. Upon being invited

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[126] Nick's opening montage with Gatsby figuratively stepping out the past concludes with a dissolve to black and a fade-in to Gatsby in the diegetic present of the flashback at Wilson's Garage.

aboard, a wide-eyed Gatsby surveys the yacht, inciting Cody to ask Gatsby what his "big dream" is. The youth responds, "something like this" before launching into a diatribe on the necessity of persevering, working hard, and controlling his instincts in order to be successful. This scene nods to Gatsby's Franklinesque schedule in the novel and moralizes his initial project of self-making.

The Mephistophelian Cody—complete with hyperbolically arched eyebrows, goatee, and maniacal laugh—interjects to offer Gatsby his first lesson in calculated greed: nothing is a privilege earned because with money "smart people" can *take* anything they want. Enter Ella, who assumes a far more significant role in the film than in the novel. While Ella receives only passing mention in the novel, in Nugent's film she is Cody's prop for schooling Gatsby on all that wealth makes possible — namely, self-indulgence and the manipulation of desire. As Cody spies Gatsby ogling his wife, he laughingly condones Gatsby's behaviour on the grounds that Gatsby poses no threat without the bankroll. Agreeing to sail with the Codys, Gatsby grows increasingly attracted to Ella, who spurns his advances while her husband watches on with smug amusement. The flashback ends with Cody's death and Gatsby's rejection of Ella's advances, upon which she angrily tells Gatsby that she will ensure he never sees a penny of the $25,000 Cody has left him.

Despite his experience with Ella, Gatsby does not internalize Cody's lessons about money until he returns from war to learn of Daisy's marriage to Tom. Before leaving for war Gatsby insists that he will start a business once he returns with whatever money he may receive from Cody's estate; he is interested in building a future and believes himself capable of anything with Daisy by his side. The film's final nested flashback, however, reveals a postwar Gatsby determined to use his inheritance to build a criminal empire. In this scene, narrated by Gatsby's fellow veteran and gangster Klipspringer (Elisha Cook Jr.), we learn that Gatsby no longer views

himself as good enough for Daisy. Having seen a newspaper announcement of her marriage to Tom, Gatsby proclaims that "the old devil [Cody] was right: you can't win without money. You lose every time." He does not blame Daisy for marrying Tom because he views himself as "just a dumb nobody who hasn't got enough money to get out of his uniform." While the uniform will later signify Daisy's nostalgia for the past, here it signifies Gatsby's inability to establish the future he envisioned for himself and Daisy. In this instance, Gatsby's uniform is an emblem of postwar disappointment. Wallowing in self-pity, Gatsby discovers that he has inherited $5000 from Cody. Determined to make his money grow, he rushes off to a speakeasy with Klipspringer in tow — a decision that again establishes the interpenetration of past and present in Nugent's film by symbolizing how Gatsby substitutes the democratic ideals for which he fought with Cody's individualistic philosophy.

Gatsby's postwar transition to a life of crime in the film has often been inadequately interrogated. For some contemporary viewers, Nugent's depiction of Gatsby as a criminal emphasizes the gangster plot over other elements of Fitzgerald's story.[127] In Batchelor's assessment, for example, the car chase scene (in the opening montage) depicting a gun-wielding Gatsby is an "egregious [addition] for an audience that might actually desire an adaptation more attuned to the novel" (60). Although Nugent's Gatsby is more explicitly sinister than Fitzgerald's, the fact remains that Gatsby *is* a criminal in the novel as well. Fidelity-based critiques of Gatsby's cinematic criminality commonly neglect to acknowledge his remorse or to explore the motives behind such remorse. Whereas the ends justify the means for Fitzgerald's Gatsby, Nugent's Gatsby repents for his past crimes moments before being shot by Wilson in the film's penultimate scene. Rather than dismiss such an alteration in character as merely the dictate

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[127] See Asher; Batchelor; F.; and King.

of censorship codes,[128] I propose that the film's expressions of remorse are consonant with the emerging political mood in America at the close of the decade and the dawn of the Cold War.

Fears of communism, nuclear power, the threat of a third world war, and the possibility of returning to an economic recession of Depression-era proportions fuelled anxiety about the future of American society in the late 1940s.[129] Compounding such anxieties was the sense that moral certitude ended with the war. "In postwar eras," as Graebner puts it, "survivors inevitably rethink the past conflict, find the carnage less justified and less defensible than it had seemed at the time, and often become estranged from the moral certainties of wartime" (27). Responding to the cultural ambivalence of his era, Nugent offers accountability as a corrective to past wrongdoings and a vitalizing force for the future. Rather than supporting the don't-look-back mentality made popular in the anxious postwar climate that was predicated on changing with the times, the film gestures toward changing the times themselves. That is, it explicitly condemns characters' immorality via their own expressions of regret and remorse, thereby symbolically rewriting the past in order to right the present.

Central to this effort is the melodramatic space of innocence presented in *Gatsby*. While typically figured as the home in melodrama, the space of innocence in Gatsby is the cemetery. Symbolically home to the dead, the cemetery is, by extension, also home to the past. Although a cemetery may not typically conjure images of innocence, in Nugent's film it represents social and moral equilibrium because it stands in contrast to the immoral chaos of an era embodied by and laid to rest with Gatsby. As established earlier, Nick's cemetery flashback renders the 1920s as a confused and corrupt era. Just prior to being shot, Gatsby ameliorates Nick's unflattering view of how things were by addressing how they should have been. In the film's penultimate

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[128] The Hays Code dictated that studios were not to glorify criminals or criminal activity.
[129] For a discussion of postwar fears and economic anxieties, see Sickels, esp. 3-13.

scene, Gatsby transforms the past condemned by Nick in the film's opening scene into a past full

of nostalgic potential that may be put to use in the postwar present.

The morning following the death of Myrtle Wilson (Shelly Winters), Nick finds a

contemplative Gatsby laying poolside. For the purposes of highlighting its didactic tone, the

entirety of Gatsby's exchange with Nick is transcribed below:

> GATSBY. Nick, I made a mistake somewhere. I thought I was right. I thought old Dan
>
> Cody was right, but look at what I've done to myself and everybody else to get
>
> where I am. And for what? To be like the Buchanans?[130] Nick, old Dan said a
>
> man was a sucker if he didn't move in to take what he wanted. Well, I was a
>
> sucker for believing him.
>
> NICK. You're getting your eyes opened, Jay.
>
> GATSBY. I'm seeing it clear from here on. I'm gonna pay up, Nick. Square myself. I
>
> beat a lot of raps in my time, but I'll take this one. I'll wait right here until the
>
> cops find that car, and, if they don't find it, I'll call 'em. I owe that to a kid named
>
> Jimmy Gatz. Me, Nick. Me. What's gonna happen to kids like Jimmy Gatz if guys
>
> like me don't tell 'em we're wrong? Maybe after I do my time and start over—

At this, Gatsby is cut off mid-sentence as the first bullet from Wilson's gun strikes him in the

chest and exits his back.

Whereas Fitzgerald's Gatsby remains more or less captive to his idealized past, Nugent's

Gatsby acknowledges having lived under an illusion and is explicitly penitent. He promotes a

moral order based on how things should have been had he stuck to his principles of hard work,

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[130] At this question, the film cuts briefly to Tom on the phone with an operator declaring an emergency and trying to
get police to Gatsby's house; meanwhile, Daisy sits weeping with her head on his desk. This shot underscores the
Buchanans' transformation from careless rich to ethically responsible and morally repentant.

perseverance, and impulse control. His regret for past deeds and renunciation of his criminal life resonates in a nation recovering from war and threatened by the possibility of another. Significantly, he orients his declaration of remorse toward both the past and the future. On the one hand, Gatsby feels that he owes something to his younger self, suggesting that by repenting he can somehow make whole a past version of himself; on the other, he is anxious about the future of American youth.

By proxy, Gatsby's regret for the past and his concern for the next generation (i.e., the film's audience) are that of and for the nation. His monologue alludes to national history and the necessity of acknowledging the postwar excesses of the 1920s and the successive economic collapse of the 1930s. More significantly, perhaps, Gatsby's closing monologue also offers a corrective to cultural anxieties about the future that are in many ways rooted in the possibility of repeating past mistakes.[131] Gatsby's caution against obsessing about the acquisition of wealth and material goods is tempered by a glimpse of old-fashioned family values. As recompense for the crimes he has committed in the past, Gatsby determines to take the fall for Daisy and assume responsibility for Myrtle's death. With Gatsby's willingness to sacrifice individual freedom to the wellbeing of others, the film consolidates the institution of marriage and implicitly reaffirms collective democratic values.

The pathos of the film's penultimate scene resides in the too-late of melodrama: Gatsby realizes too late that, following Cody's example, he distorted his "big dream" so that it was no

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[131] Sickels also observes Americans' concerns over repeating past mistakes, noting that, with "millions of veterans returning home and needing work and housing, people were genuinely afraid America was going to reenter a depression"; curiously, however, he asserts that "people's fears were allayed by 1948" (24), an assertion unsupported by contemporaneous publications. A 1948 editorial in *Collier's Weekly*, for example, expresses anxiety about another war (W.L.C.), while another expresses frustration over Americans' failure to recognize that the indirect effects of WWII were "devastating" to the American economy by contributing to national debt and ever-worsening inflation; the author of this second editorial argues that pretending "otherwise would be to kid ourselves in a highly dangerous manner" ("War").

longer informed by democratic promise.[132] Although *Gatsby* does not explicitly address

consumer democracy, the film implicitly supports its cultural function. Following WWII, mass

consumption in America offered a means of reconciling capitalist growth with democratic

commitments (Cohen 16).[133] Postwar Americans were encouraged to spend their money and to

understand consumerism as a means of integrating in "a classless and family-centered way of

life" (Graebner 11). Though Nugent's film harkens back to the collectivism of WWII, it

nonetheless works to reconcile this collective responsibility with consumer freedom. The nuclear

family provides the symbolic space in which this resolution may be depicted because the family

home was widely understood as the site of democracy, domesticity, and the new consumer

dream.[134] Collective values are further supported in the cemetery by Nick and Jordan, who

suggest that true wealth is to be found in the family unit.

Given that Nick and Jordan arrive together at Gatsby's gravesite twenty years after his

burial, it is safe to assume that they are married. Such an assumption is supported by Jordan's

desire, expressed in the cemetery at film's end, to return to the Midwest with Nick. Presumably,

the two have not merely reunited to visit Gatsby's grave but have been together for twenty years.

Their leaving the cemetery together at film's end indicates how things ought to be. Although the

film is bookended by cemetery scenes, the cemetery is not a framing sequence: the film does not

begin and end in 1948; rather, it begins in the cemetery of the present (1948) and ends in the

cemetery of the past (1928). In this way, Nugent leaves the future left to be written, while also

indicating *how* it should be written (i.e., with the heteronormative marital union of Nick and

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[132] "Melodrama," Williams observes, "involves a dialectic of pathos and action — a give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time'" (69).

[133] The so-called democratizing effects of consumerism were an assumed function of Americans' equal access to commodities once deemed luxury items available only to society's most affluent (e.g., cars, appliances, etc.).

[134] For a discussion of the family home as the site of democracy, domesticity, and the new consumer dream, see May 164.

Jordan). The cemetery serves as a spatio-symbolic locale where the undesirable past is laid to rest and the desirable past of traditional values becomes the future.

Complementing its formal strategies, *Gatsby*'s thematic suspension of time encourages audiences to consider the present and past in tandem toward recognizing an analogous relationship between how things are and how they should *not* have been in the past. Gatsby's express remorse symbolically rewrites the past and presents a moral alternative to the present. The justice for Gatsby that readers desire in the novel, which would entail the Buchanans paying for their carelessness and/or Gatsby "winning" Daisy back, is transformed in the film into the justice Gatsby offers viewers by condemning himself. Again, Nugent's *Gatsby* does not offer nostalgia *for* the 1920s, but rather it presents a melodramatic nostalgia for how things *should have been*. By remedying the ills of the past at film's end, Nugent presents audiences with a means of righting the ills of the present. His vision of how things *ought to be*, as the next section demonstrates, depends largely on reinstating traditional gender structures.

A Bootlegger and a Beautiful Little Fool: Repressing Trauma & Punishing Female Agency

Typical of many films, issues of gendered social norms are intricately bound to issues of genre in Nugent's adaptation.[135] Paramount promoted *Gatsby* according to two main generic identifications: the film was advertised as a crime drama (i.e., a noir to twenty-first century viewers), presumably to attract male audiences; and it was advertised as a sentimental romance, presumably to attract female audiences.[136] As I established in the introduction to this chapter,

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[135] Conventional gender roles correspond to gender-specific assumptions about desire: men are drawn to soft women and tough entertainments because they are meant to be domineering and strong, and women are drawn to strapping men and romance because they require protection and the fulfillment of family — so the story goes.
[136] Maria LaPlace explains that Hollywood "studios conducted gender-differentiated surveys" to identify what audiences (purportedly) desired to see; gendered criteria for attracting viewers were then developed based on the survey results (138-39).

films noir and melodramas of the early postwar period often express nostalgia for either a

supposedly less threatening past or an idealized past as it should have been. Both genres also

share a number of formal and thematic characteristics that support gender norms despite

exhibiting countervailing impulses in their treatment of family. Paramount's two-pronged

marketing of *Gatsby* was thus important because it established the parameters of audience

expectations in gendered terms. Before even seating themselves in darkened theaters, men and

women were differently conditioned to garner distinct messages from the film.

  Gatsby's original theatrical poster offers a constellation of gangster iconography:

beautiful women surround a fedora-topped Ladd, who brandishes a scarcely concealed gun (fig.

3). Such images encourage an association between the tough-guy persona Ladd cultivated in a

series of successful, retroactively labeled noir films[137] and his portrayal of Jay Gatsby. While

Paramount's decision to endorse such an association may be understood as financially motivated

(i.e., as an effort to bank on Ladd's star persona), it nevertheless provided audiences with

particular generic associations that are now broadly conceived of as belonging to the category of

film noir. Of elements common to noir, *Gatsby* offers a male antihero; femmes fatale; a non-

linear treatment of time; and a thematic interest in issues of national identity, the family, and

masculinity.[138] Notably, the aforementioned poster frames Ladd's name—in capital letters—

above the phrase "Man of Violence and Mystery ...vs. Women of Wealth and Beauty!" Much

less noticeable, the smaller and unhighlighted font opposite Ladd's image reads: "A love story to

match the tension of the times." While this theatrical poster combines violence and mystery with

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[137] E.g., *This Gun for Hire* (1942); *The Glass Key* (1942); *The Blue Dahlia* (1946); *Calcutta* (1947); and *Chicago Deadline* (1949). Although *Chicago Deadline* was released in October of 1949, it was promoted at the time of *Gatsby*'s summer release, with trade journals reviews appearing as early as August.
[138] I have adopted this list of themes common to noir from Mike Chopra-Gant (11). For more on noir elements, see Schrader 11.

a love story, it does so in such a way so as to emphasize the former — ostensibly to appeal to male audiences.

Fig. 3. *The Great Gatsby* (1949), film poster.

Targeting female viewers by similarly relying on gender-based assumptions, Paramount created a series of posters and advertisements featuring a shirtless Ladd that prioritized the love story and/or presented Ladd as an object of heterosexual female desire. The caption of one such advertisement reads: "Ladd as a man of violence in a love drama as tense as the times" (fig. 4). Here, we do not just have a love *story*; we have a love *drama* — a melodrama. Of the conventions common to melodrama, *Gatsby* offers the pathos of irredeemable loss and the

excesses of music, mise-en-scène, and emotion; moreover, it is imbued with the symbolic potency of home and family.[139]
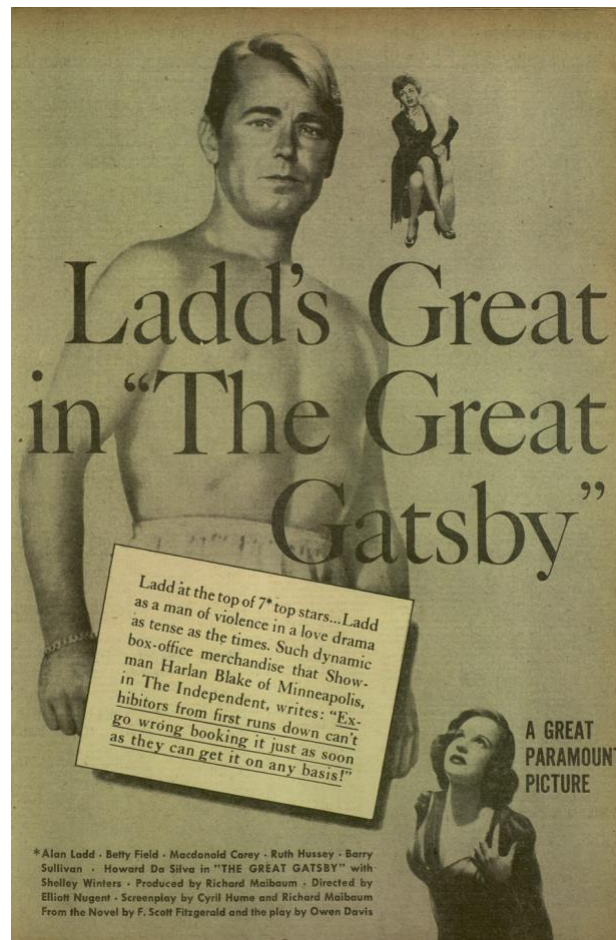
Fig. 4. "A Great Paramount Picture," advertisement for *The Great Gatsby*, 1949.

Given that the film was not marketed as a period piece, its promotional taglines subtly suspend time in their temporal ambiguity ("the times"), thus suggesting that *Gatsby* promises audiences a dramatic crime-romance relevant to the anxious cultural environment of 1949. In a postwar climate of returning veterans, Nugent's *Gatsby* struggles with the incompatibility of two ethical imperatives that require trauma and desire to be sublimated, which is expressed in the film through the excesses of mise-en-scène, visual metaphors, and emotional spectacle. On the

[139] This list of conventions common to melodrama was drawn from Singer 38, 57; and Gledhill, "Melodramatic Field" 21.

one hand, the film represses wartime suffering as it works to reaffirm the moral status of World

War II by reuniting lost loves separated by service. On the other hand, it represses sexual desire

and female autonomy in its aim to preserve the family unit and elevate the institution of

marriage. While Nugent's film does not offer an overtly nostalgic representation of family and

home, it is nostalgic in its drive to mend the fractured family by repressing sources of fissure and

idealizing a past stable domesticity that never was.[140]

Melodrama and noir, of course, are both inclined toward repression. While a film may

repress ideological, moral or spiritual values, its excesses offer a clue as to what does not—or

cannot—assume full expression.[141] In other words, that which cannot be fully articulated

dialogically or narratively finds expression in excess.[142] Melodramatic excess is commonly

comprised of exaggerated displays of emotion; however, social commentary and/or cultural

anxieties may also be sublimated to the excesses of mise-en-scène, music, histrionic acting, and

spectators' visceral responses (Singer 39). Similarly, a disavowed anxiety over "masculinity and

normality" characterizes noir and, Richard Dyer argues, constitutes the genre's "problematic":

"that set of issues and problems that [films noir] seek to come to terms with *without ever*

articulating" (qtd. in Krutnik 85, emphasis added). In what follows, I demonstrate how *Gatsby*

dramatizes such anxiety in repressing the trauma of war and punishing female characters who

violate traditional institutions by way of their financial and sexual agency.

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[140] Gledhill explains how melodrama offers nostalgic representations of family and home that serve as "'moral touchstones' against [social] instabilities" ("Melodramatic Field" 21). Her discussion is situated in the context of nineteenth-century social change, but her observations are applicable to any age of rapid social change. Responding to its postwar moment, Nugent's *Gatsby* nostalgically reinforces the moral authority of family and home.

[141] "Melodrama forments [*sic*] psychic energies and emotions which the narrative 'represses'," according to Ben Singer (39).

[142] As Singer notes, "[t]he essential element perhaps most often associated with melodrama is a certain 'overwrought' or 'exaggerated' quality summed up by the term excess" (38-9).

Gatsby cannot articulate the trauma of war because doing so would undermine the film's efforts to recast WWI. Foregoing Gatsby's sad return to Louisville after the war (as presented in the novel), Nugent's film stands in contradistinction to other postwar Hollywood films by minimalizing the difficulty of the veteran's homecoming.[143] Rather than emphasizing Gatsby's homecoming as disappointing and painful, the film relegates negative associations of war to the melodramatic excesses of pathetic fallacy, music, and mise-en-scène.[144] The reunion scene between Gatsby and Daisy at Nick's cottage presents a consummate example of how the film's excesses work in repressing the trauma of war by refusing to fully articulate the suffering of wartime separation.

Although Gatsby and Daisy have not seen each other for eleven years, when they are reunited at Nick's neither expresses how difficult being separated by war has been. Instead, their suffering is sublimated into the rainstorm that delays Daisy's arrival and the melodramatic score that commences as she and Gatsby first make eye contact. Nervous about seeing Daisy, Gatsby slips out the back door as Nick greets her in the drive. As the two enter his living room, Daisy's gushing praise of Nick's "darling" cottage stands in for the flood of emotions we expect when she comes face to face with Gatsby. Audience gratification of an emotional reunion is, however, delayed, as Gatsby quietly re-enters through the front door while Daisy, with her back to the door, rambles on about an aunt whom she used to see only on rainy days as a child. Mid-

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[143] A number of "Hollywood postwar films about returning veterans depict the moment of homecoming—that is, the founding moment of postwar domesticity—as awkward, traumatic, or disappointing" (Graebner 14). Garnered from a search of the American Film Institute (AFI) catalogue, the following is a non-comprehensive list of such films: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *The Searching Wind* (1946), *Swamp Fire* (1946), *Nobody Lives Forever* (1946), *Crime Doctor's Man Hunt* (1946), *Johnny Comes Flying Home* (1946), *From This Day Forward* (1946), *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), *Till the End of Time* (1946), *Gas House Kids* (1946), *The Burning Cross* (1947), *Perilous Waters* (1948), *Key Largo* (1948), *Act of Violence* (1949), *The Men* (1950), *Dark City* (1950), and *Teresa* (1951).
[144] The film does not entirely dismiss the novel's pathos of postwar return. It devotes one *very* short scene to depicting Gatsby's disappointing homecoming in which Gatsby reads of Daisy's marriage to Tom, and it then effaces the difficulty of the veteran's homecoming (e.g., by eliding Gatsby's sad return to Louisville).

sentence, Daisy turns to see Gatsby standing before her. Cue melodramatic score. To a symphony of strings, Daisy finishes her sentence about rainy days in a soft, trailing manner rather than bursting into tears. Her unshed tears find expression in the downpour outside. Within the shelter of the domestic space, her eyes remain dry because tears of joy and relief would betray the pain of absence. The film's refusal to acknowledge such pain begins to make sense when considered within its postwar cultural climate, which sought to justify the horrors of World War II by reframing American involvement in the war as a moral imperative in the good fight for democracy.

The repressed suffering of Gatsby and Daisy's wartime separation is also sublimated into the bourgeois décor of Nick's bachelor cottage and the affected displays of Gatsby's material success. Every surface in Nick's home is occupied by some trinket, or figurine, or model ship, or vase of flowers; his walls are cluttered with clocks, and paintings, and mirrors; his rooms are over-adorned with furniture and accessories: sofas, chairs, tables, end tables, a curio cabinet, a sideboard, a coat rack, and an umbrella stand. In its claustrophobic excess, Nick's cottage is a definitively melodramatic domestic space. As Elsaesser observes, "the setting of the family melodrama is almost by definition the middle-class home, filled with objects" (454). In his analysis, "the function of the décor and the symbolization of objects" correspond to "the characteristic attempt of the bourgeois household to make time stand still, immobilize life, and fix forever domestic property relations as the model of social life and a bulwark against the more disturbing sides in human nature" (454). Understood in this way, the excesses of mise-en-scène that characterize Nick's abode symbolically transform the bachelor cottage into a home in which Gatsby and Daisy can—but momentarily—negate the passage of time and the consequences of war.

Restlessly, Gatsby fondles objects around Nick's home as if to assert his presence in an unreal space. In some sense, this space is unreal for Gatsby and Daisy because it is figuratively suspended between the mansion she shares with Tom and the mansion Gatsby has filled in her absence, thus making it the nearest facsimile of a home that the two of them will ever share, a nostalgic fantasy of what should have been. As a bachelor's abode, Nick's cottage appropriately serves to stage a reunion that can only superficially play out as such. In a house cluttered with the markings of empty domesticity—of things, not family—Gatsby and Daisy can only awkwardly play house.

When Gatsby takes Daisy to his own house, she declares that "it's wonderful to see [him] like this, all successful and everything." On the surface the film seems to offer a critical view of Daisy as more interested in Gatsby's success than the fact of his return; however, her delivery of the line, in conjunction with her histrionic gasps of delight over the various items Gatsby displays for her, intimates that his success is an afterthought. The *this* she refers to is the fact of her joy over their surprise reunion, which is concealed by the excesses of her apparent pleasure in his material success. Such a reading is reinforced by Daisy's recollection of Gatsby in his officer's uniform at the sight of his shirts. As I argued earlier, the shirts are not indices of material wealth but nostalgic indices of longing for her "boy in uniform."

Although audiences may want to see these two lovers reunited permanently, the film's nostalgic adherence to a wartime shift in notions of American identity that emphasized group identification rather than individualism makes such permanence impossible. Simply put, marital relations and the family unit are more important than the individualistic desires of either Daisy or Gatsby. In fact, Daisy's and Gatsby's desires do not simply take a back seat to valorizing family

and marriage, they are symbolically perceived as threatening. Specifically, Daisy's sexual desire evokes postwar masculine anxieties about female power.

Confused ideological expectations following World War II contributed to male anxieties surrounding female agency. Elaine Tyler May, like many historians, suggests that, in response to women's wartime expansion of economic and sexual independence, many returning veterans wishing to reclaim their jobs and resume their prewar relationships were threatened by sexually assertive women and financial insecurity (87). Such anxieties are commonly implicated in a so-called crisis in masculinity during this period. Although issues concerning masculine identity generated persistent concerns long before the postwar period, assumptions of dissatisfaction and "identity loss among middle-class white men" frequently characterize "mid-century discussions of American males" (Cuordileone 14).[145] Arguing that debates over masculinity were complicated by a number of significant postwar social changes, James Gilbert observes that renewing "traditional masculine vigor and individualism" was often presented as a corrective to the ostensibly feminizing and debasing consequences of "conformity, suburban life, and mass culture" (4).[146] *Gatsby* tempers this corrective with its cautionary depiction of self-interest, yet its yearning to re-establish collective over individualistic ideals nonetheless affirms traditional gender roles (and the family unit).

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[145] "Concerns about a 'crisis' in masculinity," K.A. Cuordileone notes, "were a recurrent feature of modernity and already had a long history by the mid-twentieth century" (9). James Gilbert also notes that historians have found evidence of a purported "'male panic'—intense uncertainties about masculine identity—in almost every era of American history"; like Cuordileone, he perceives the mid twentieth century as a particularly salient moment with regard to such uncertainties, arguing that "the 1950s appear to hold a special place in this ongoing ['male panic'] discussion largely because sociologists and historians began at that moment to define the basic notions of social character and to isolate masculinity as a subject for contemporary study within this new category" (2-3).

[146] In fact, the perceived threat of feminization was so pervasive that policy makers were concerned that a crisis in masculinity precipitated by returning veterans' inability to resume their roles as family men might "lead to crime, 'perversion', and homosexuality" (Tyler May 86).

Because conventional frameworks of gender identity are authorized and regulated through marital and familial relations, threats to such relations risk unbalancing traditional gender structures. As such, "a large number of the postwar noir thrillers are concerned to some degree with the problems represented by women who seek satisfaction and self-definition outside the traditional contexts of marriage and family" (Krutnik 61). Often, female sexual desire registers subversive independence as it is disassociated from the patriarchal, procreative aims of sanctioned marital intimacy. Historically, many Hollywood films have thus worked to confirm patriarchal authority by policing female sexuality and moralizing women's sexual behaviour.

This tendency is evident in *Gatsby*, which deals in moral legibility (typical of melodrama) *and* moral ambiguity (typical of noir).[147] In the form of Cody and Ella, the film presents unequivocally bad characters whose selfish greed is pitted against an older ethic that associates hard work with success. All other central characters, however, appear morally ambiguous until film's end when the choice of family and integrity supersedes individual desire for monetary or romantic fulfillment. The film implicitly suggests that the future health of America depends on the nostalgic reinstatement of traditional gender structures. Combining elements of melodrama and film noir, *Gatsby* offers both a crime drama and a love drama that speaks to conflicted understandings of domesticity in 1940s America.

While there is little doubt over the profound influence of domesticity on the culture of the late 1940s, differing views exist about the meaning of domesticity during this time. The "culture of domesticity," according to Graebner, was "a contentious one whose ability to absorb postwar

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[147] Whereas moral legibility and melodrama presumably go hand in hand, film noir is more interested in moral ambiguity. Borrowing from Peter Brooks, Gledhill suggests that the conflicts of melodrama turn "less on the triumph of virtue than on making the world morally legible" ("Melodramatic Field" 32-33). In his discussion of late-1940s America, Graebner maintains that film noir "captured the moral ambiguity of the age" in that its "nonheroic hero has nothing to offer save an essential vulnerability and a basic decency that is often irredeemably compromised" (26).

social tensions and fissures was something less than complete" (17). Highly disruptive to family

life, the exigencies of wartime living effected lasting changes to social structures and institutions,

which generated a wide range of cultural anxieties rooted in disruptions to conventional gender

roles (Chopra-Gant 93).[148] The employment of women was but one of many sources of anxiety

that prompted a resurgence of domestic ideology in postwar America.[149] This renewed interest in

domesticity, however, "coexisted uneasily with other trends," which, according to K.A.

Cuordileone, suggests that "domesticity was less than pervasive in postwar American culture,

either as an ideology or reality" (139). Drawing on the research of Joanne Meyerowitz,

Cuordileone notes that during the late 1940s, there was much more variation, ambiguity, and

complexity expressed in popular magazines, which did not consistently endorse female

subordination, sexual passivity, and male domination [...] but frequently acknowledged, and even

celebrated, female ambition and achievement (139). Given the ideological instability of

domesticity during the postwar years, Nugent's directorial choices appear to express a pointed

nostalgia for the moral certainty of wartime and women's assumed proper place as paradoxically

asexual wives and mothers.

Rich with visual metaphors and melodramatic excess, *Gatsby*'s reunion scene and its

scene immediately preceding the hotel showdown collectively offer a portrait of female sexuality

and domestic harmony as antithetical. In the reunion scene, Daisy accepts Gatsby's offer of a

cigarette and shares her theory as to why people smoke. Daisy reminisces that she used to smoke

often, "when it was daring." She speculates that people smoke because they are frustrated, and

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[148] Sanctifying the home and family, insisting on precise gender roles, and encouraging women to dedicate themselves to homemaking and motherhood are among the hallmarks of domestic ideology (Cuordileone 139). Moral crusaders saw this ideology threatened during the war years, blaming women's increased presence in the workforce for juvenile delinquency rising divorce rates, which doubled from 1940 to 1946 (Sickels 22).

[149] Drawing on the research of Elaine Tyler May, Cuordileone notes that, in addition to the increased wartime presence of women in the workforce, "anxieties about gender and (female) sexuality, and the rise of the cold war" prompted the "revival of domestic ideology" (139).

that they are frustrated because they are bored. Unhappily married to an inattentive adulterer, Daisy's frustration and boredom are triggered in Gatsby's presence. Presumably, he stirs her unspent erotic energy, which can only find vicarious fulfillment via smoking. As a commonly used visual metaphor of sexual desire and/or fulfillment, Daisy's smoking is a conduit of her illicit sexual desire for Gatsby.

That she fulfills this desire is evident in a later scene wherein emotional excess signifies the consummation of Daisy and Gatsby's affair. In the presence of Jordan and Nick, Daisy unabashedly throws her arms around Gatsby's neck and kisses him as he enters her sitting room. Manically bounding from the sofa to the mantelpiece, Daisy euphorically declares how happy she is: "It's too hot to be happy, but I am. . . *very* happy," she beams as she twirls her skirts. It is at this moment that Gatsby asks where Tom is because he does not want to keep his and Daisy's affair a secret any longer. His intentions are interrupted by the arrival of Daisy's daughter, Penny, who asks for her "daddy." Tom follows closely behind carrying a tray of drinks. He chastises the nanny for allowing Penny to be present when they are serving alcohol (because he is such a "good" Prohibition-era father). Daisy wishes to preserve her sense of elation as tensions mount, so she suggests that the quintet go to the city for the afternoon. For her, alleviating tension means escaping the Buchanan home, which has become crowded with too many competing desires: she cannot simultaneously be a wife, a lover, and a mother.

Both Daisy and Jordan are initially figured as transgressive; however, they do not pose the same sort of threat to masculine security as Ella and Myrtle, the film's ostensible femmes fatale. Widely recognized as "a male fantasy figure," the *femme fatale* in 1940s noir is generally understood to have "existed solely to exorcise the fears of men returning home in postwar America" (Cook 24). Cook asserts that the "fate of these strong, transgressive heroines, who

were desired, feared, and punished in the course of the narrative, seemed to reflect the position of women in postwar American society, as they were divested of their economic and sexual independence and returned to a domestic role within the family" (24). The films of the mid and late 1940s commonly restored traditional family values via the death, conversion, or cure of vampish heroines (May 221). *Gatsby* adheres to this trend by punishing irredeemable women like Ella and Myrtle and morally converting redeemable women like Daisy and Jordan, thus revealing the stakes of its restorative nostalgia. Unsurprisingly, the diagnosis of *irredeemable* versus *redeemable* depends on the women's relationship to (i.e., dependence on) male figures.

This economy of gender roles is delineated early in the film with Ella's relationship to Cody, which is depicted as one she maintains for her financial benefit. Following Cody's death, Ella imagines herself free to pursue Gatsby, only to discover that he is no longer romantically interested in her. Spurned by Gatsby's rejection, Ella vows revenge. She enacts her revenge by interfering with Gatsby's inheritance. In essence, she wields economic power that she, as a woman, is not supposed to have. As a figure oppositional to patriarchal dominance, Ella's potentially destabilizing power is short-lived because she drinks herself to death. Ella's death by alcohol is moralistically intended as a fitting end for a greedy and licentious woman. That said, women in 1940s noirs are frequently condemned to a *violent* death.[150] Myrtle's death warrants special consideration for its especially graphic rendering, its symbolic confirmation of female imprisonment, and its juxtaposition with Daisy's conversion that re-establishes the primacy of marriage and family.

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[150] Forties femmes fatale typically meet violent ends, dying by strangulation (e.g., *Detour* [1945]); stabbing (e.g., *Scarlet Street* [1945]); gunshot (e.g., *Double Indemnity* [1944], *Murder, My Sweet* [1944], *The Blue Dahlia* [1946], *Decoy* [1946], *Born to Kill* [1947], *Lady in the Lake* [1947], *Out of the Past* [1947], *The Lady from Shanghai* [1948], *Criss Cross* [1949]); or vehicular accident (e.g., *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [1946], *Dead Reckoning* [1947]).

Like Ella, Myrtle is a woman who can only be contained in death. Audiences are first introduced to Myrtle when she descends the rickety wooden stairs of Wilson's Garage in heels and evening wear, a fur stole draped over her shoulders. "You're all dressed up again," Wilson notes. "I need a couple of dollars," Myrtle replies as she takes money from the till. Suspicious about the frequency of Myrtle's visits to her sister, Wilson asks his wife when she plans on returning. "I don't know, I might stay over," she coolly responds as she pats her hair and saunters toward the exit. In this manner, Nugent somewhat heavy-handedly presents Myrtle as a materialistic adulteress. Incongruous to her drab surroundings and indifferent to her husband's concerns, Myrtle embodies male fears of economic insecurity and emasculation. Outside, she finds Gatsby and his henchmen waiting for change after having purchased gas from Wilson. Addressing Gatsby with a spirited "hey, Mister," Myrtle asks for a ride as far as the railway station. While such a request may seem innocent enough to twenty-first century audiences, Myrtle's asking a car full of strange men for a ride marks her brazen sexuality. Presumably she is a woman accustomed to men's affections, as she appears more insulted than disappointed by Gatsby's curt "sorry" as he drives off without her. Shortly thereafter, Myrtle is shown walking along a darkened road as two headlights approach her from behind. Her cavalier attitude toward walking alone at night again alludes to her supposedly dangerous sexuality. The headlights belong to Tom's car. "You're late," she sulks as he pulls up beside her. Significantly, it is on this very road that Myrtle will later be symbolically punished for her transgressions when she is struck and killed by Daisy.

In punishing Myrtle, the film's excesses introduce a sense of domestic entrapment that she unsuccessfully manages and that Daisy must learn to mediate. On the afternoon of her death, Myrtle finds herself locked in the small apartment above the garage. In the lot below, Wilson

asks Tom if he can borrow money, first claiming that he and his wife "want to go out West" and then asserting that Myrtle will "go whether she wants to or not." The camera cuts to Myrtle, again dressed in her finest and attempting to leave her room. Frustrated by finding the door locked, she walks to the window where she sees Jordan, whose face is concealed in shadow as she waits in the car. Leaning out of the upper-story window, Myrtle watches as Tom drives off; she casts a furious look at Wilson and then slams the window shut. After once more unsuccessfully attempting to leave the apartment, Myrtle tears off her necklace and flings herself face-down upon the bed where she begins sobbing.

Nugent then crosscuts to the Waldorf where Daisy stands in front of a window, complaining that "it's stifling" and asking to "open another window." This shot suggests a thematic resonance between the experiences of Myrtle and Daisy: both women feel stifled and confined by marriage. Whereas Myrtle rejects Wilson by shutting him out as he has shut her in, Daisy's desire to open as many windows as possible corresponds to her longing for freedom and her decision to leave Tom. When Daisy finally makes her intentions clear, and she and Gatsby leave the hotel together, Tom is underwhelmed: he softly closes the hotel room door and offers Nick and Jordan a drink as he pours himself one. "I know Daisy. She isn't going to do a thing. Not a thing," he declares as he downs his liquor. Nugent again crosscuts to Myrtle, who is now banging on the locked door with an iron, hysterically screaming: "Let me outta here! Let me outta here!" Thus, Daisy's declaration that she is leaving and Tom's confidence that she will fail to act is followed by an explicit image of domestic entrapment. The fact of Myrtle's using an iron—a tool of female domesticity—to try to break free of the home her husband has locked her in lends visual poignancy to the source of her frustration.

As stated earlier, however, Myrtle is a woman who can only be contained in death. As Wilson walks up the stairs toward his wife's prison, the door flies open. Myrtle, wielding her iron, begins charging toward him: "I broke out, see?! Get outta my way! Where do you come off locking me up?!" Tossing the iron aside, she venomously declares that she is through with Wilson and his "garbage dump" of a home. Spotting the yellow car she earlier saw Tom driving, she then runs past the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg and into the street. The next twenty seconds of film offer nine cuts in depicting Myrtle's death.[151] The frenzied action of jump cuts works in conjunction with the excess of melodrama and the violence of noir to present Myrtle's death as a spectacle. While Ella's death scarcely warrants passing mention because she does not pose a tangible threat to the family, Myrtle's sensationalized death is meant to serve as a lesson to Daisy.

Domesticity is no less a prison for Daisy than Myrtle, a fact that finds covert expression in Daisy's hysterical reaction to Myrtle's accident. Myrtle's death does not intrinsically provoke Daisy's post-accident emotional meltdown; rather, Daisy is panic-stricken by the prospect of going to prison. "I'd *die*! I'd *die*!" she sobs histrionically. At one point Gatsby even slaps her across the face in an effort to jolt her into a rational state. Personal freedom—not manslaughter—is at stake in this scene. For Daisy, Gatsby represents choice, autonomy, and independence from Tom. By killing Myrtle, she sentences herself to continued confinement in a desperately unsatisfying marriage. With Gatsby willing to assume responsibility for Myrtle's

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[151] The nine cuts that comprise Myrtle's death sequence: an interior shot of the car as Gatsby warns Daisy of Myrtle's presence; Daisy's point of view just before striking Myrtle, which reveals an oncoming truck to the left and a frantically waving Myrtle to the right; a close-up of Myrtle's terror-stricken face, followed by a shot of her body being hurled through the air as the offending car speeds by in the foreground; Wilson's reaction shot; another interior shot of the car with Daisy screaming behind the wheel and Gatsby glancing backward; the image of Myrtle's contorted body lying on the shoulder of the road as Gatsby's car speeds off in the distance; a third interior shot in which Daisy actually takes her hands off the wheel, turns away from Jay, and begins sobbing with her head against the car door; and a close-up of the crumpled right fender.

death, Daisy recognizes that she cannot leave Tom. Myrtle's death, as Tom later puts it, teaches her "not to play around." Daisy's lesson concerns prioritizing family and her supposed proper place within society. The film aligns strength with female self-sacrifice and teaches Daisy to forfeit her needs to those of her husband and family. Her conversion from a threatening to a "socially appropriate" woman occurs when she reaffirms her commitment to her role as wife and mother. Daisy is not one of the women punished by the film because she appeals to Tom to help her "be decent and loyal, to do the right thing." That is, whereas childless, strong women like Ella and Myrtle are hopeless, Daisy is "salvageable" with the help of her husband.

Like Daisy, Jordan is converted with the help of a man. Before the accident, Jordan is a liar and a cheater who manipulatively bribes Gatsby into buying her an expensive car in exchange for her arranging the reunion tea with Daisy at Nick's. While Nick is offended by Gatsby's wanting him to arrange an assignation with Daisy, Jordan admonishes his smugness and asserts that neither she nor Nick have any right in judging whether Gatsby and Daisy should be together. She dismisses Nick's argument regarding Daisy's status as a married woman by affirming that Daisy is unhappily married because Tom has affairs. At one of Gatsby's parties Jordan admits to feeling lost; she views herself as a "pretty sad lot" no different than the world she lives in, which is "all out of joint." For Jordan, "there's nothing to live for or believe in except yourself." The film's subtle jab at excessive individualism here stands in sharp relief against Jordan's change of heart following Myrtle's death, which leads her to subordinate her desires to those of Nick. That is, Jordan abandons her own athletic pursuits to ensure Nick's fulfillment as a writer when she offers to assist him in actualizing his goals and asks to return to the Midwest with him. Her choice to stand by her man undoubtedly saves her from a fate as

bleak as that of Ella or Myrtle. By stressing the importance of the couple and marital relations, Nugent's film safeguards the family, the supposed foundation of social and personal security.

Although the nostalgic fantasy of reunion, of reliving the past as it should have been would likely have appealed to both postwar men and women, *Gatsby*'s generic elements—as endorsed by Paramount's bilateral marketing strategy—promoted gendered identification with the film's protagonists toward suggesting how the present ought to be. As a gangster and a repentant war veteran, Gatsby is both an emblem of nonconformity and heroism. His typically noir, antihero status, Tom's position as adulterer-turned-family man, and Nick's marriage to Jordan offered 1940s male audiences competing sources of identification: the vicarious fulfillment of masculine vigor and individualism, and the assertion of male authority and domestic responsibility.[152] Whether male audiences identified with Gatsby, Tom or Nick, they were taught to see things straight, to check their greed, and prioritize family. Female audiences were offered the same lesson by being encouraged to identify with Daisy, a victim of circumstance torn between her lost love and duty to her husband. As many scholars have observed, the power of melodramatic pathos lies in identifying with victimhood. Though female audiences may have identified with Daisy's dilemma, they were taught their place as wives and mothers via the film's punishment of unconventional women. For both male and female viewers, *Gatsby* thus reaffirms the domestic ideology as central to American life and national wellbeing.

Concluding Remarks

The tensions between nostalgia for the past and yearning for future progress that Fitzgerald struggled with correspond to the postwar tensions of individualistic and collective

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[152] Tom's attempt to warn Gatsby of Wilson's intentions exemplifies the film's displacement of the novel's class-based nativism with the demands of restoring the family.

identification that Nugent's *Gatsby* seeks to allay. Inviting viewers to contemplate their own

cultural moment, Nugent suspends time in the service of a revisionist history that serves as a

corrective to the present. The film offers a version of rewriting the past as it narrates the rise and

fall of Gatsby, who acts as a cautionary example of myopic desire and the corruptive power of

greed. In this narrative, contrition alone is insufficient to atone for past sins — unless, however,

one is part of a domestic unit. To the U.S. postwar sense of having been "set adrift from its

ethical moorings," to borrow from Graebner (20), *Gatsby* responds with nostalgia for the

supposed moral anchorage of gendered norms that assume the subordination of women to men

and a correlation between morality and heterosexual marriage.

Because the nuclear family "articulates patriarchal relations" it often stands in as a model

for the political in melodramas (Sprengler 73). *Gatsby*'s family restoration plotline is an analog

for postwar social restoration that relies on restorative nostalgia. Recall that restorative nostalgia

is frequently experienced as a nationalistic longing for an idealized past that depends on

conceiving *home* as under threat by external forces. The Second World War shifted attention

from adversarial relations inside the nation to the hazards of an outside enemy. In postwar films,

external threats to the harmony of the family unit frequently embody political metaphors. The

figure of the outsider is a particularly compelling icon capable of realigning or unsettling the

family.

Paradigmatic of melodrama's postwar outsider,[153] Gatsby threatens the security of the

Buchanan home and acts as a catalyst for reorganizing domestic relations and (re)instigating

moral and patriarchal stability. In having Gatsby facilitate the restoration of the Buchanan

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[153] Nugent's Jay Gatsby epitomizes the outsider as described by Casper: "A metaphor for the era's xenophobia and the surface-substance dialectic, the outsider [...] may be the former lover of a family member who reappears [and] exposes some festering secret that has kept the family members locked in ignorance, fear, hatred, and misery" (214, 220).

family, Nugent's film gestures toward re-establishing order in postwar America by way of a classless, consumer democracy grounded in the institution of the family. The film reaffirms the primacy of traditional values and the ideology of domesticity in the postwar American context as a way of dissolving the ethical and moral contingency incited by the war itself.

    Gatsby's filmic suspension of time nostalgically confronts ethical contingency in a postwar world by grounding the present in a reinvented past that replaces a linear historical narrative with the non-linear possibility of how things should (have) be(en).[154] Published only a few years after Nugent's film, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) also confronts postwar ethics. Rather than suggesting how things should have been, however, Nabokov's novel engages nostalgia as a means by which to challenge readers as moral subjects. The next chapter explores the aesthetic and ethic dimensions of this challenge as a function of nostalgia in *Lolita*.

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[154] This formulation draws from Graebner's observation that contingency in postwar America was dealt with by establishing "some basis on which distinctions and judgments of all kinds might be made. One approach popular with 'traditionalists' both in and out of academe, was to ground the present not in a linear, historical narrative but in certain intellectual and cultural moments of the past, moments that seemed to offer a body of established truths about human nature, ethics, and values" (33).

Predatory Desire & Vulnerable Innocence:

Nostalgia, Parody, and the Limits of Freedom in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

> *Beauty plus pity* — that is the closest we can get
> to a definition of art.
> > —Vladimir Nabokov
>
> About suffering they were never wrong,
> The Old Masters: how well they understood
> Its human position; how it takes place
> While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
> > walking dully along;
> > > —W.H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts"

Despite being neither a Renaissance figure nor a painter, Vladimir Nabokov belongs among W.H. Auden's "Old Masters." In his ekphrastic "Musée des Beaux Arts," Auden describes indifference to suffering as represented by Renaissance artists. Like the paintings of such masters, Nabokov's oeuvre explores human apathy and anguish. In particular, the thematic concerns of his novels reflect his interest in how we more fully reveal ourselves in suffering.[155] With *Lolita* (1955), Nabokov offers both a portrait of suffering and a condemnation of indifference. He did not, however, offer a concrete image of suffering when describing how he envisioned the cover of *Lolita*'s 1958 American publication; instead, he suggested that it might depict a "nostalgic highway" (qtd. in Connolly, *Reader's Guide* 7). Recognized as one of *Lolita*'s "master themes" (Moynahan 29), nostalgia is central to the novel's meaning but not—as this chapter will elucidate—in the manner commonly conceived by scholars.

Oscillating between self-accusation and self-justification, Humbert Humbert's memoir relies on a multitude of rhetorical strategies that work toward vindicating Humbert of abusing

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[155] When asked in a 1932 interview why he has a "predilection for characters who have gone astray," Nabokov responded: "It would appear that in man's suffering there is more that is significant and interesting than in calm life. Human nature reveals itself more fully. I think that this is what it is. There is something attractive in suffering (qtd. in Dawson 116).

and repeatedly raping twelve-year-old Delores Haze — "Lolita," as he calls her when she is in his arms (9). His defences have been recognized as grammatical, artistic, sociological, physiological, moral, and psychological (Connolly, *Reader's Guide* 32-3).[156] Most significantly, he psychologically seduces readers by rationalizing his treatment of Lolita in carefully constructed nostalgic terms, a fact that has gone unobserved by scholars. The absence of scholarship questioning Humbert's description of his childhood "princedom by the sea" (9) is surprising given his notorious unreliability. Declaring that "Lolita began with Annabel" in a "magic and fateful way," Humbert claims to have broken Annabel's spell "by incarnating her in another" (14, 15). Eliciting childhood nostalgia in this manner is Humbert's most cunning and symbolically meaningful defence strategy; it is the means by which Nabokov reveals his own nostalgic esteem of childhood innocence and curiosity, critiques the forces that corrupt these qualities, and condemns complacency. Hence, recognizing Humbert's nostalgic rhetoric as an act of misdirection, this chapter argues, discloses *Lolita*'s critical, aesthetic, and ethical agenda.

Discussions of *Lolita* typically forego reconciling Humbert's nostalgic rhetoric with his well-established unreliability. Standard readings of the novel's nostalgia align with Ole Nyegaard's suggestion that *Lolita* may be read "as a man's quest for 'lost time'" ("Uncle Gustave's Present" 144). When considering Humbert as a nostalgic, scholars generally view him as a romantic who longs for his childhood love. He has been variously characterized as being on a Romantic quest for "an impossible vision of imperishable bliss"; for the "pastoral"; for "Arcadia, for the past, for the unattainable itself"; and for "an ideal image wedded to an

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[156] Characterized by qualifiers, equivocation, apostrophe and parenthetical remarks, Humbert's narrative consistently contradicts earlier assertions. He relies on false analogy when attempting to situate himself within a poetic tradition of men who express their alternatively pure and/or obsessive love for young girls and suggests that erotic encounters with children are morally relative given that sanctions against such relations are historically and culturally dependent (19, 107, 124). Defending the supposed naturalness of his desire for Lolita, Humbert peddles an ironically moral view of himself while alleging Lolita's immorality (221, 150, 183).

impossible dream."[157] Such assessments, however, overlook a crucial detail in Humbert's efforts
to manipulate readers. Although Thomas R. Frosch, for instance, acknowledges the problem of
Humbert's reliability and thus questions how seriously readers are "meant to take Humbert and
his quest" (40), he nonetheless characterizes Humbert as a man "out of time, since he is still
pursuing the ghost of that long-lost summer with Annabel Leigh" (46). Frosch is not alone in his
failure to interrogate the veracity of Humbert's account of Annabel. In fact, Humbert's supposed
love for Annabel has never, to my knowledge, been critically questioned.

In lieu of rigorous analysis, numerous critics maintain that Annabel is the proper object
of Humbert's nostalgia. Such critics suggest that Humbert is "haunted by" and "fixated on" his
lost childhood love, whom he "continually remembers"; that he "desire[s] to recapture his past
romance," "re-experience [an authentic spiritual affinity known] through Annabel," and return to
and recover the "never-to-be-repeated rapture of first love."[158] Maintaining that the pain of losing
Annabel "never abates" for Humbert, James D. Hardy Jr. and Ann Martin assert that he "refuses
to forget" (8). Conversely, I maintain that he refuses to offer an honest account of his Riviera
lust. Recognizing that Humbert's unreliability extends to his account of Annabel—that is,
recognizing that his nostalgia for Annabel is fraudulent—is essential to understanding his
nostalgic obsession with Lolita as sadistic.

Although scholars recognize that nostalgia is relevant to Humbert's precursor defence,
they fail to interrogate the authenticity of such nostalgia or the implications of its falsehood. In a

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[157] Humbert's supposed Romantic quest has been imagined as being for "an impossible vision of imperishable bliss"
(Haegert 121), for the "pastoral" (Jonnes 116), for "Arcadia, for the past, for the unattainable itself" (Frosch 40), and
for "an ideal image wedded to an impossible dream" (Pifer, "Art" 84).

[158] Among those who maintain that Annabel is the proper object of Humbert's nostalgia, Susan Mizruchi and Julian
Moynahan respectively suggest that Humbert is "haunted by" (631) and "fixated on" his lost childhood love (31),
whom, Faye Hammill notes, he "continually remembers" (167). Marie Bouchet argues that Humbert "desire[s] to
recapture his past romance" (110), while Vladimir E. Alexandrov asserts he endeavours to "re-experience [an
authentic spiritual affinity known] through Annabel" (182), thus returning to and recovering the "never-to-be-
repeated rapture of first love" (Jonnes 115).

narrative saturated with unspoken and/or disguised forms of sexual violence, Humbert's

nostalgic rhetoric evokes "a realm where sexuality is void of violence, and thus any element of

domination or coercion" (Jonnes 116).[159] Sexuality in *Lolita*, however, is preeminently violent.

Humbert is a sexual predator who physically and psychologically overpowers and manipulates

young girls and women. Closely considering his nostalgia is therefore fundamental to fully

apprehending the ethical significance of his unreliability. Beginning with a discussion of

Humbert's supposed nostalgia for Annabel in light of his well-established unreliability, this

chapter examines Humbert's expressions of nostalgia as vehicles of Nabokovian parody by

situating *Lolita* within its historical and cultural moment.

Fully appreciating *Lolita* necessitates an understanding of postwar America because

familiarity with the narrative's cultural backdrop reveals how nostalgia both underwrites *Lolita*'s

aesthetics and informs the novel's ethical concerns. My analysis demonstrates a relationship

between Nabokov's treatment of nostalgia in *Lolita*, his concept of aesthetic bliss (as outlined in

the novel's afterword), and his condemnation of cruelty (frequently noted in his nonfiction and

interviews). Appreciating the nuances of Nabokov's purported injunctions against historicist

readings of literature,[160] I rely on a combination of close reading and historical contextualization

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[159] Dennis Jonnes implicitly acknowledges the role of nostalgia in divorcing sexuality from violence, writing that "Humbert underscores the aspects of romance, fairy tale and Arcadian pastoral which inform the 'magical' world in which he would prefer to dwell. Images of nubile young maidens and the rhetoric of innocent sensual pleasure which characterize pastoral evoke a realm where sexuality is void of violence, and thus any element of domination or coercion" (116). Jonnes, however, does not apprehend the novel's nostalgia as an ironic and critical device; instead, he argues that Humbert's pursuit of Lolita "might be read as the Ur-American dream of perennial youth" (116).

[160] While Nabokov's opposition to historicist approaches to literature has been well-documented, scholars tend to oversimplify his position regarding the relationship between literature and sociohistorical context. Time and again, critics assume that, in disparaging studies of "the sociological or political impact of literature" (*Lectures on Literature* 64), Nabokov denies that literary texts are sociohistorical artifacts and rejects the influence of history on literature (e.g., Hardy & Martin 179; White, "Nabokov" 299; Norman 144). In his university lectures, Nabokov asserts that neither so-called historical novels nor masterpieces can teach us about the past (*Lectures on Literature* 1); however, to argue that a work of literature cannot teach us about the past is not to say that an awareness of past times and places cannot enhance our understanding of literature. In fact, Nabokov includes historical details in his own lectures to augment students' understanding of specific textual elements. For instance, when explaining why, in

to illuminate how Nabokov employs nostalgia as a trope in *Lolita* to admonish complicity. I do not argue that he warns against nostalgia itself or critiques a particular nostalgic mode. Instead, I maintain that he provides readers with an opportunity to perceive the inseparable relation of aesthetics and ethics—to experience what he calls "aesthetic bliss" (*Lolita* 315)—by using nostalgia as a device to specifically rebuke the exploitation of children.

Nostalgia for childhood pervades Nabokov's works and reflects, in part, a longing for innocence, not youth itself.[161] As Susan Stewart argues, "[t]he nostalgic's utopia is prelapsarian," an ideal "moment before knowledge and self-consciousness" (23). For adults, this moment typically resides in the inevitably lost past of childhood and its presumed state of innocence.[162] The theme of childhood innocence, in Nabokov's view, should not be denounced as sentimental. He maintains that those guilty of such a denunciation are ignorant of what constitutes sentiment: appealing to higher emotion (*Lectures on Literature* 86).[163] To some degree, higher emotions depend on self-awareness and include, among others, experiences of guilt, love, empathy, and nostalgia.[164] *Lolita* appeals to readers' genuine nostalgia for childhood even as Humbert's

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Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, the Samsas hire another servant after dismissing one they cannot afford, Nabokov advises his students to "remember that in Prague, 1912, it was much more difficult to clean and cook than in Ithaca, 1954" (*Lectures on Literature* 275). Moreover, when discussing Leopold Bloom's status as a Jew and the shadow of anti-Semitism that hangs over him, Nabokov offers demographic statistics contemporaneous to *Ulysses*'s temporal setting to facilitate an understanding of Bloom's sense of being an outsider (*Lectures on Literature* 316). Given Nabokov's tendency to contextualize literature in this manner, it appears that he takes issue with the direction of inference regarding historical analysis. That is, instead of approaching a text from the outside-in (i.e., prioritizing its moment of production and reading for what it may teach us of history), Nabokov believes that readers should approach a text from the inside-out (i.e., prioritize its style and then consider what that style means).

[161] Others have also noted the centrality of childhood nostalgia in Nabokov's fiction (e.g., Borden 105; and Pifer, "Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 88).

[162] In her study of visual representations of children and the ideal of childhood innocence, historian Anne Higonnet offers a similar observation. "The modern child," Higonnet writes, "is always the sign of a bygone era, of a past which is necessarily the past of adults, yet which, being so distinct, so sheltered, so innocent, is also inevitably a lost past, and therefore understood through the kind of memory we call nostalgia" (27).

[163] *Lectures on Literature* will henceforth be abbreviated as *LL*.

[164] To the question of whether nostalgia is debilitating or enriching, Nabokov asserts that it is neither but instead "one of a thousand tender emotions" (*Strong Opinions* 149).

nostalgic rhetoric works to deceive readers. The novel's theme of childhood innocence is not mawkish indulgence but central to Nabokov's critical agenda.

In addition to valuing children's innocence, Nabokov esteems their curiosity, which he considers an exalted form of consciousness:

> In a sense, we all are crashing to our death from the top story of our birth to the flat stones of the churchyard and wondering with an immortal Alice in Wonderland at the patterns of the passing wall. The capacity to wonder at trifles—no matter the imminent peril—these asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness, and it is in this childishly speculative state of mind, so different from common sense and its logic, that we know the world to be good. (*LL* 373-374)

Collectively, for Nabokov, "the child's wonder, innocence, and spontaneity constitute the image and embodiment of human freedom" (Pifer, "Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 103), which he views as tantamount to artistic creation and critical thinking.[165] Accordingly, in Nabokov's fiction, genuine expressions of nostalgia for childhood may reflect characters' regard for the ideals of free thought and free speech. Disingenuous expressions of such nostalgia, however, may serve to indict the limits or loss of freedom — as is the case in *Lolita*.

To establish this indictment as central to the novel, I attend to how Humbert employs nostalgia in his self-proclaimed confession as a rhetorical appeal to pathos that baits inattentive readers into believing that he loves Lolita. Further, I illuminate how Humbert's nostalgia is ironic by exploring his attraction to vulnerability. Nabokov's use of ironic nostalgia facilitates his parody of what Anne Higonnet calls "the Romantic child" (i.e., the ideal of "the naturally

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[165] "Next to the right to create," Nabokov writes, "the right to criticize is the richest gift that liberty of thought and speech can offer" (*Lectures on Russian Literature* ii).

innocent child") (15). This parody of the romantic child, in turn, reveals how innocence makes children vulnerable.[166] Following my discussion of rhetorical nostalgia and parody, I establish a connection between Humbert's nostalgic modes and the discourses of consumer society by demonstrating how his rhetorical appeals are akin to advertisements. The affinities that I outline, I maintain, underscore Nabokov's concern with the exploitation of children. My discussion of nostalgia as an analogue of advertising bridges a consideration of the novel's engagement with the commodification of childhood, which demonstrates how nostalgic and consumer ideals may work to subjugate children. Toward this end, I analyze Lolita's relationship to consumer culture and mass media, as well as the paradox of seductive innocence promoted by the culture industry. Finally, I conclude by considering the intersections between Humbert's supposed nostalgia, homogenization, and the repudiation of autonomy. Here, I address *Lolita*'s slave motif and the correspondences between Humbert's treatment of Lolita and Rita to establish: first, that he longs not for an autonomous Lolita but for *his* Lolita, his solipsized creation; and second, that he attempts to relive with Rita the sadistic pleasure he derived from subjugating Lolita. I ultimately argue that nostalgia and parody in *Lolita* work in tandem to denounce restrictions to individual freedom made possible by cruelty and indifference.

The Glitter of That Remote Summer: Rhetorical Nostalgia & an Anesthetized Little Nude

Nabokov's nostalgia for childhood is sincere; Humbert's is not. In many ways, Humbert's narrative seems to detail his longing for childhood and his obsessive attempts to recapture the past, namely his boyhood romance with Annabel. However, as this section demonstrates, numerous symbolic and linguistic associations between Humbert's summer with

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[166] I refer to "the romantic child" with a lower-case *r* so as not to confuse a childhood ideal with the Romantic literary period.

Annabel and his violent treatment of Lolita establish Humbert's nostalgia for childhood as suspect. I argue that Humbert employs nostalgia as a rhetorical appeal to pathos in an effort to excuse his cruelty. The incongruence between Humbert's expressions of nostalgia and his actions validate a reading of his nostalgia as an ironic expression of his attraction to vulnerability, not childhood innocence. Humbert's ironic nostalgia, in turn, advances Nabokov's parody of the romantic child, which signals a gap between a romantic view of childhood and postwar American culture.

Humbert constructs an image of a happy, healthy childhood "in a bright world of illustrated books, clean sand, orange trees, friendly dogs, sea vistas, and smiling faces" (10). Seemingly, his picture-perfect childhood is marred by Annabel's death. He evokes readers' sympathy by imbuing his recollections of Annabel and "the glitter of that remote summer" with a nostalgic tone (13). Further, he uses his ostensible nostalgia for Annabel to explain his attraction to prepubescent girls—nymphets, as he calls them—and to justify his treatment of Lolita. Humbert's pursuit of nymphets, according to Vladimir E. Alexandrov, represents a futile "attempt to re-experience what he knew through Annabel, which appears to have been an authentic spiritual affinity for a specific girl, marked by a plane of being transcending the earthly" (182). As I shall confirm, Alexandrov is not alone in characterizing Humbert's relationship with Annabel as authentic and figuring Lolita as a substitute for an idealized childhood love.

Readers often erroneously accept Humbert's love for Annabel to be pure as a consequence of his nostalgic prose that engenders sympathy. In the opening pages of *Lolita*, Humbert declares, "in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel" (14). He tells readers that his "discovery of [Lolita] was a fateful consequence of that 'princedom by the sea'

in [his] tortured past," vowing that everything between his time with Annabel and his meeting

Lolita "was but a series of gropings and blunders, and false rudiments of joy" (40). Humbert

appeals to pathos by asserting that he led a miserable life void of genuine happiness following

Annabel's death, a life that Lolita has supposedly reanimated. Claiming to have broken the spell

of his first love "by incarnating her in another" (15), Humbert suggests that his nostalgia for

Annabel vindicates him of abusing Lolita. In Faye Hammill's analysis, "nostalgia for the lost

innocence of a past which is located before the start of the story" finds expression in Humbert's

continually remembering "his lost childhood sweetheart [and] comparing his pure and equal

erotic relation to [Annabel] with his corrupt, coercive, relation to her substitute, Lolita" (167).

Like Hammill, Ellen Pifer believes that "Humbert's love for Annabel is mutual and trusting —

innocent not of sexuality but of tyranny, rancor, and deceit. She is Humbert's willing and equal

partner, not the solipsized object of his self-serving fantasy" ("Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 95).

While I believe Hammill and Pifer have been duped by Humbert's nostalgic tone, their analyses

demonstrate how nostalgia works to convince readers of Humbert's love for Annabel. Given that

Humbert's narrative is a memoir written by a wildly unreliable narrator, Annabel cannot be

anything but a solipsized object of Humbert's self-serving fantasy.

In fact, Humbert's Annabel is as much his imaginative construction as Lolita. By naming

Lolita's predecessor "Annabel," Julian W. Connolly argues, "Humbert indicates that his very

creation of 'Lolita' is to a certain degree a literary or verbal creation, a product of the creative

imagination" (*Reader's Guide* 25). This reading of Annabel is, however, somewhat uninspired,

given that Humbert explicitly acknowledges Lolita to be his "own creation" (*Lolita* 62). Rather

than establishing Lolita as his invention, Humbert's allusion to Edgar Allan Poe[167] gestures

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[167] That Nabokov's Annabel Leigh as an intertextual allusion to Poe's 1849 poem "Annabel Lee" is a critical commonplace.

toward Annabel's status as one of Humbert's "safely solipsized" girls (60). She exists as an ideal in his mind, which he presents to readers as an object of nostalgia. "*When* I was a child and she was a child," Humbert writes, "my little Annabel was no nymphet to me" (17, emphasis added). In his emulation of Poe, Humbert intimates that his narrating self views Annabel as a nymphet. Substantiating this suggestion, Humbert juxtaposes his allusion to Poe—ripe in its evocation of childhood innocence—with his present perception of Annabel as "the initial fateful elf in [his] life" (18). Such a juxtaposition imbues readers' uncritical apprehension of Annabel with an aura of nostalgia. Underscoring the "twenty-nine years [that] have elapsed" since his summer with Annabel and portraying her as a fairytale character of sorts, Humbert diverts attention from his characterization of the nymphets for whom he lusted during his twenties and thirties as Annabel's "sisters [...] handmaids and girl-pages" (18). More significantly, painting a nostalgic portrait of Annabel discourages readers from attending to the affinities between her and Lolita that have nothing to do with love and everything to do with abuse and exploitation.

While Humbert would have readers believe that he and Annabel "were madly, clumsily, shamelessly, agonizingly in love with each other" (12), the terms in which he conveys his Riviera summer indicate anything but. He first describes the second time that he and Annabel tried to consummate their passion on the beach before being interrupted by two bathers, and he concludes his account of Annabel by detailing their first encounter in the mimosa grove. "The disrupted order of the passage, and the striking tonal differences between the two descriptions," Lucy B. Maddox proposes, "indicate that the first episode (the second one described) is the one Humbert most wants to remember and write about" (80). I, however, maintain that Humbert concludes with the first episode because it is the one he wants *readers* to most remember. The especially nostalgic and romantic tone of the mimosa grove episode detracts from Annabel's

implied discomfort and the potential that what Humbert describes is not the mutual passion of first love but his *modus operandi*.

Humbert's encounter with Annabel in the mimosa grove symbolically corresponds to his first sexual assault of Lolita on the davenport in Ramsdale. In the mimosa grove, Annabel uses her "bare knees" to catch and compress Humbert's wrist (14), while on the davenport Lolita's "bare knees" rub and knock against each other moments before Humbert grabs her by "her thin and knobby wrist" (58). While the repetition of knees and wrists alone might not convincingly establish a correspondence between Humbert's treatment of Annabel and Lolita, Nabokov builds a nuanced constellation of images that implies both Annabel and Lolita attempt to deflect Humbert's advances. Both Annabel and Lolita turn away from Humbert as he attempts to gratify himself (15, 58). Although Humbert vows that Lolita "was all over [him]" on the Ramsdale sofa, he also notes how she "recoiled," "wiggled and squirmed" as he proceeds to masturbate against her body (58, 61). It would appear that she even tries to kick herself free of Humbert. Lolita's "legs twitched a little," Humbert admits, "as they lay across [his] live lap" (59). Here, twelve-year-old Lolita is not trembling with erotic delight but trying to escape the "life" of thirty-seven-year-old Humbert's erect penis. Carefully concealed by Humbert's narrative point of view, Lolita's subtle protest lends new meaning to Annabel's "lovely live legs" (14), which, too, may have been kicking in resistance.

The possibility that Annabel is struggling with Humbert in the mimosa grove is further supported by Humbert's use of qualification. In describing Annabel's "solitary ecstasy" Humbert indicates that "her head would bend with a sleepy, soft, drooping movement that was *almost* woeful" (14, emphasis added) just as he claims that Lolita jumps from her seat immediately after he ejaculates "*as if* [they] had been struggling and now [his] grip had eased" (61, emphasis

added). The "honey dew" of the mimosa grove that supposedly haunts Humbert for years

resonates with the "honey of a spasm" he claims to have "stolen" from Lolita "without impairing

the morals of a minor" (15, 62). Here, as with the mimosa grove episode, Humbert subtly hints at

the nonconsensual nature of his sexual advances. In both the mimosa grove and davenport

episodes, he diverts attention from nonconsensual behaviour via his nostalgic prose.

The affinities between Annabel and Lolita grow even more disturbing when considering

how the mimosa grove tryst resonates with Humbert's rape of Lolita at The Enchanted Hunters.

Humbert's mention of the "haze of stars" that hung over the mimosa grove (15) works on a

series of interconnected levels: it sets a romantically nostalgic scene of childhood love; it

insinuates Lolita's importance to the episode by alluding to her surname; and it conjoins false

nostalgia with false love in alluding to the pills Humbert drugs Lolita with, which are full of

"live stardust" (109). Humbert's pills are his "magic ammunition" (109); the "magic potion" he

uses to rape Lolita (122) recalls the "mysterious potion" that distorts Annabel's mouth in the

mimosa grove (14). Rather than recognizing that Annabel's mouth is distorted in displeasure,

Humbert chooses to avert readers' apprehension of her antipathy by leading them to believe that

her "sibilant intake of breath" (14) is carnal. Similarly, he endeavours to establish the moment of

Lolita's rape as *her* "first unforgettable confession — her trick of sighing 'oh dear!' in humorous

wistful submission to fate, or emitting a long 'no-o' in a deep almost growling undertone when

the blow of fate had actually fallen" (187-88). Lolita's exclamations, of course, are no trick; she

does not submit to fate but is brutally dominated by Humbert. Likewise, Annabel's gasp may be

one of pain or shock rather than pleasure.

Succumbing to Humbert's childhood-nostalgia appeal to pathos leads to misapprehending

his obsession. Hardy and Martin, for instance, maintain that Humbert values childhood

innocence and destroys the thing he most values (178).[168] However, Humbert's nostalgia for

childhood and all it implies is ironic. While the "standard semantic notion of irony [is one of]

direct inversion," Linda Hutcheon posits that irony may be understood in terms of semantic

incongruity rather than mere inversion (61). Thus, expressions of nostalgia that are incongruent

with behavioral expectations may be considered ironic. We would expect that a man as

ostensibly nostalgic for childhood as Humbert would not harm children but would, rather, desire

to protect them. Considering the overwhelming abuse that Lolita suffers at Humbert's hands, his

expressions of nostalgia are incongruent with his actions and, consequently, ironic. While

understanding ironic nostalgia according to standard semantic notions of irony would suggest

that the nostalgic rejects that which they purport to long for (e.g., ironic nostalgia for childhood

signals a dislike of children), approaching ironic nostalgia from the vantage point of incongruity

rather than semantic inversion reveals that such nostalgia need not be interpreted as rejecting the

object of longing; instead, it may indicate that the object of desire is not what it seems to be. In

Humbert's case, as the following discussion makes clear, ironic nostalgia does not signal a

rejection of "innocent childhood" but an obsessive desire for the vulnerability of children.[169]

　　　　Nabokov combines a multitude of formal devices to signal Humbert's ironic nostalgia.

For instance, writing of himself in the third person, Humbert claims that he "tried hard to be

good. Really and truly, he did. He had the utmost respect for ordinary children, with their purity

and vulnerability, and under no circumstances would he have interfered with the innocence of a

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[168] Jonnes also reads Humbert as committed to an idealized vision of childhood that embodies "innocence and freedom" external of or "prior to an inevitably corrupt adult world" (114).

[169] The novel offers ample evidence of Humbert's sadism and attraction to vulnerability, such as: his disaster fantasies, which either position him alone with a vulnerable child or as Lolita's supposed protector and guardian (20, 53); his finding orphans' and Lolita's matted eyelashes (i.e., those wet with tears) "morbidly alluring" (16, 64); and his enjoyment in taunting Lolita with promises broken and pleasures denied. For example, Humbert finds it "sweet" to bring Lolita her morning coffee "and then deny it until she had done her morning duty" (i.e., sexually pleasure him) (164-65).

child if there was the least risk of a row. But how his heart beat when, among the innocent throng, he espied a demon child" (19-20). Ironically distancing Humbert from his own confession, Nabokov has Humbert write from the perspective of an observer to establish an air of objectivity that lends credence to his claim of goodness. This claim, however, is undercut by the inclusion of "tried," Humbert's reiteration of his efforts, and the repetition of his supposed sincerity ("really and truly"). By juxtaposing *purity* and *vulnerability*, Nabokov alludes to a connection between innocence and susceptibility to harm, a point to which I will return momentarily. The subjunctive *would* is qualified by the *if* of Humbert's own security: so long as Humbert is in no danger of being caught, he takes no issue with jeopardizing children's well-being. In fact, the use of present perfect ("have interfered") most subtly reveals that Humbert *has* interfered with the innocence of a child. Finally, by characterizing children as either "ordinary" or "demon," Humbert places the responsibility of victimization on inherently evil children — an irony he later recalls by referring to himself as "Jean-Jacques Humbert" (124). Humbert facetiously references Rousseau when recounting the first night he and Lolita spent at The Enchanted Hunters, during which he was "still firmly resolved to pursue [his] policy of sparing her purity by operating only in the stealth of night, only upon a completely anesthetized little nude" (124).[170]

Humbert's ironic nostalgia for childhood innocence also finds expression in *Lolita*'s ostensibly opposed motifs of prostitution and romance. Watching children at play, Humbert wishes to be left "alone in [his] pubescent park, in [his] mossy garden. Let them play around me

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[170] The "purity" to which Humbert refers, which he specifies has been "thoroughly debunked by modern science" (124), is Lolita's hymen. He claims to have "taken for granted […] that she was as unravished as the stereotypical notion of 'normal child' had been since the lamented end of the Ancient World B.C. and its fascinating practices" (124). In effect, Humbert's resolution is to sodomize his unconscious, twelve-year-old step daughter. If this is not an ironic expression of valuing childhood innocence, I do not know what is.

forever. Never grow up," he writes (21). Immediately following this appeal to pathos that

seemingly laments the loss of childhood, Humbert recounts how he "accosted" Monique, a

young prostitute (21). Enticed by the "nymphic echo" of Monique's "curiously immature body,"

Humbert draws attention to her "grubby fingernails," which he declares "did not matter, did not

matter at all" (21-22). Once again, his emphatic tenor signals irony. Reiterating the apparently

inconsequential fact of Monique's dirty fingernails suggests their significance: they indicate that

Monique's life is not one of ease. This subtle hint at Monique's difficult existence is coupled

with repeated mention of her childish features and small stature,[171] thus suggesting that she is

psychologically and physically easy for Humbert to control.

Consonant with his successful manipulation of over eighty prostitutes (22), Humbert

further exploits Lolita by paying her "three pennies—or three nickels—per day" for sexually

pleasuring him (183). He admits to regularly burglarizing her room, afraid "not that she might

ruin [him], but that she might accumulate sufficient cash to run away" (183), which is precisely

what she is attempting to do, with good reason. Regardless, Humbert describes his paying Lolita

for sex as "a definite drop in [*her*] morals" (183). In addition to taking the spotlight off his guilt,

Humbert's efforts to portray Lolita as culpable reflect an attraction to vulnerability motivated by

exploitative—not nostalgic—desires.

Also indicative of Humbert's predilection for vulnerability are his infantilizing and

romantic descriptions of the pain he inflicts on Lolita and her suffering. According to Humbert,

> [n]othing could have been more childish than [Lolita's] snubbed nose, freckled
>
> face or the purplish spot on her naked neck where a fairytale vampire had feasted,

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[171] Monique, Humbert tells readers, scarcely reaches his chest and takes "infantile pleasure" in listening to a street musician; she has a "round little face," "long lashes," "young body," "round forehead," "small hands," "naïve frown," and "hips no bigger than a squatting lad" (21-22).

or the unconscious movement of her tongue exploring a touch of rosy rash around

her swollen lips; nothing could be more harmless than to read about Jill, an

energetic starlet who made her own clothes and was a student of serious literature;

nothing could be more innocent than the part in that glossy brown hair with that

silky sheen on the temple; nothing could be more naïve. (139)

In his description of the bruise he has left on Lolita's neck and her chapped and swollen lips,

Humbert characterizes the physical evidence of his abuse as childish and naïve. Moments such as

this, which are frequent throughout the text, invalidate Humbert's supposed commitment to

innocence and illuminate his predatory exploitation of vulnerability.[172] That such exploitation is

likened to the actions of a fairytale-vampire figure gestures toward Nabokov's romantic

burlesque.

Building on previous work concerning Nabokov's parody of romanticism in *Lolita*, I

suggest that the novel specifically parodies the romantic child: a particular view of childhood

innocence vulnerable to corruption by experience. Numerous scholars have attended to the ways

in which *Lolita* parodies various narrative clichés and motifs belonging to the genre of

romance.[173] Drawing on Nabokov's definition of *romantic* as that which is "characterized by a

dreamy, imaginative habit of mind tending to dwell on picturesque possibilities derived mainly

from literature" (*LL* 132), Alexander Dolinin argues that *Lolita*'s main object of parody is

romanticism "as a general cultural phenomenon" rather than "in the sense of the specific literary

school of the early nineteenth century" (21). While Nabokov undoubtedly imitates elements of

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[172] Humbert's vampiric exploitation of Lolita's vulnerability is also echoed in his account of Annabel, whom he claims "would try to relieve the pain of love by first roughly rubbing her dry lips against [his]," drawing "away with a nervous toss of her hair," and then coming "darkly near" to "let" him "feed on her open mouth" (15).

[173] For discussions regarding the novel's parody of narrative clichés and motifs belonging to the romance genre, see Appel; Pifer, "Nabokov's Novel Offspring," esp. 85-87, 101-102; Nyegaard, "Leitmotif Racket" 4; and Meyer, esp. 16-17, 22-26, 34.

Romanticism as a literary movement, Dolinin's astute evocation of Nabokov's understanding of the term *romantic* underscores the centrality of childhood to the author's definition of *romantic*: the child's capacity to wonder at trifles corresponds to the romantic's imaginative habit of mind.

Perceiving this association between the romantic and the child, Pifer maintains that *Lolita* renders "the image of childhood with fresh resonance and complexity" by reinvigorating the romantic myth of the child ("Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 88). "The Romantic child," Higonnet suggests, "is desirable precisely to the extent that it does not understand desire" (28). That is, the romantic child is sexually and materialistically innocent. In Pifer's analysis, the novel's poignancy "largely derives from its vision of the child's sacred innocence" ("Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 89). Rather than renewing the romantic myth of the child, *Lolita*, I argue, parodies this myth in a multitude of ways, including presenting Lolita as Humbert's "sophisticated young mistress" and his "aging mistress" (187, 190); characterizing abusive middle-aged men as "huge helpless children" and Lolita as "hopelessly worn at seventeen" (299, 277); and depicting Humbert's perception of and obsession with a conflation of "dreamy childishness" and "eerie vulgarity" in nymphets (44). Nabokov's parody of the romantic child—embedded in Humbert's ironic nostalgia—surpasses mere mockery to critically signal a disparity between a romantic view of childhood and the lived experience of children in postwar America and its attendant consumerist boom. If, as Higgonet suggests, "[t]he image of the Romantic child replaces what we have lost, or what we fear to lose" (28), parodying this image serves to critique the agents, institutions, and/or conditions that facilitate the loss of childhood wonder and curiosity.

Crushed Kid for Crushed Kids:

Longing as a Permanent Mode & the Commodification of Childhood

While scholars frequently attend to American consumerism and mass culture in *Lolita*, the relationship between nostalgia and consumption in the novel has yet to be critically examined. Materialist critiques of the novel typically discern a condemnation or parody of American mass and consumer culture (e.g., Belletto; Moynahan; Roy and Whalen-Bridge), with Lolita positioned as both consumer and consumed (e.g., Kauffman). For some, Lolita's consumptive habits signal her response to loss (e.g., Mizruchi); for others, they signal her growing independence (e.g., Hardy and Martin). To this scholarly conversation, I contribute an analysis of the relationship between the novel's expressions of nostalgia and its dramatization of consumerism's constraints upon individual freedom and its effect on the child. *Lolita* does not condemn consumerism per se but turns a critical eye toward what Daniel Thomas Cook calls "the commodification of childhood" by establishing an affinity between Humbert's rhetorical nostalgia and marketing strategies that both target and commodify children.

In what follows, I establish a correspondence between Humbert's nostalgic modes and consumerism to reveal how child desire may be manipulated for adult gain. Considering Humbert's rhetorical nostalgia as metaphorical advertisements and explicating how nostalgia and consumerism in the novel rely on manipulation and longing, I argue that nostalgia is a particularly apt trope through which the novel critiques the consumer exploitation of children. As I will demonstrate, *Lolita* engages with contemporaneous concerns regarding the effect of consumer culture and mass media on children by revealing how nostalgic and marketing ideals may subjugate children. Specifically, the novel targets the sexualization of young girls by consumer culture and mass media, condemning the paradox of seductive innocence that

emblematizes Humbert's fetishization of nymphets, the exploitation of children, and the repudiation of others' agency.

Just as reading may be understood as an act of consumption, Humbert's expressions of nostalgia may be understood as metaphorical advertisements directed at readers. Acknowledging Lolita as both consumed (by Humbert) and consumer (of mass culture), Rachel Bowlby observes that "consumer culture and violent seduction are seen to be discursively interchangeable" in *Lolita* ("*Lolita*" 161; *Shopping* 38). While I agree with Bowlby's discernment of a relationship between consumerism and seduction, her oxymoron of violent seduction is a bit off the mark. Although seduction is characterized by artifice and manipulation, it relies on *persuasion* rather than violence (Seltzer). While Lolita is persuasively seduced by mass culture, readers are nostalgically seduced by Humbert's narrative. That is, since nostalgia is central to Humbert's exculpatory efforts, the novel obliquely aligns nostalgic seduction with discourses of consumer culture. As I have argued, Humbert employs nostalgia to sway and deceive readers — goals not uncommon to advertisers. Of course, the compelling and deceptive nature of advertisements alone does not establish Humbert's rhetorical nostalgia as an analogue of advertising. This correspondence is supported by recalling that Humbert is an adman and by noting his hypocritical and conflicted relationship to commodity consumption.

Humbert's status as an adman who ostensibly disdains popular culture is paramount among the numerous ways Nabokov suggests a resemblance between Humbert's self-promoting nostalgia and advertising. Humbert does not begrudge working in advertising; instead, he eagerly accepts "the soft job" of "thinking up and editing perfume ads," which takes little of his time or effort (32). Unsurprisingly, writing advertisements comes easily to Humbert. According to Nabokov, "the best advertisements are composed by sly people who know how to touch off the

rockets of individual imaginations" (*LL* 375). Humbert is indisputably manipulative and calculating; the rockets he ignites educe past rather than future potential. In other words, he elicits readers' nostalgia rather than consumerist expectations. His ability to appeal to pathos depends on knowing his audience in much the same way that sly advertisers must possess some awareness of their target consumers. That is, because Nabokov can safely assume his readers are adults, he has Humbert play on readers' collective loss of childhood to convince them he is a man deserving of sympathy.

Nabokov draws attention to Humbert's role as a conniving adman by way of irony. Like his evocations of childhood nostalgia, Humbert's disparagement of popular, consumer culture is ironic. Contradicting his admonishment of Lolita's reading habits, Humbert's narrative evinces his own engagement with magazine culture. For example, the novel reveals that Humbert reads advertisements in "lewd" magazines, seeking prostitutes (23), and that it is via an "advertisement in one of Lo's magazines" that he finds the private detective he hires following Lolita's disappearance (253). Although Humbert takes Lolita to task for her consumerist impulses, he is as much a consumer as she. Immensely concerned with money and appearances, Humbert undertakes the task of finding a wife with equanimity because he believes his inheritance and "good looks" will make doing so easy (24). He regularly draws attention to his supposed good looks and manliness (24, 25, 39, 49, 56, 72, 104, 132, 188), going so far as to liken himself to Hollywood hunks (39). In doing so, he intimates that his persona is informed by popular culture. Not only does Humbert heavily rely on consumer commodities to project his identity, but he also ensures that readers know his wardrobe is costly by noting the "new expensive bag" he carries

upon arriving in Ramsdale and asserting that Lolita mutely admires his "expensive, always

tailor-fresh clothes" (35, 76).[174]

Humbert's supposed distaste for mass culture appears particularly conflicted given that

advertisements partially inform his attraction to nymphets. For Humbert, the mixture of

childishness and vulgarity that he finds so appealing stems "from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads

and magazine pictures, from the blurry pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country

[…] and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels" (44). The

juxtaposition of nostalgic- and corrupted-childhood images (Old-Country youth versus child

prostitutes) in this passage recalls my earlier discussion of Humbert's ironic nostalgia for

childhood innocence and how the motifs of prostitution and romance signal both his attraction to

vulnerability and his exploitative desires. The addition of advertisements to this interplay

between childhood nostalgia and prostitution indicates a relationship between commodification,

children, and exploitation in *Lolita*. This association has been implicitly noted by other scholars.

Arguing that Humbert's "recreation of lost childhood more closely resembles Nabokov's

definition of 'poshlost' than of paradise," Richard C. Borden observes that the motif of foliage

dapples symbolizing "the paradisal archetypes from [Humbert's] Riviera childhood memories"

becomes attached to consumer commodities (132). Also considering the novel's engagement

with consumer culture, Susan Mizruchi remarks on an association between culpability and

consumptive acts in *Lolita* (632). Taken together, these associations between Humbert's

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[174] Humbert's efforts to ensure that readers are aware of his expensive tastes are not limited to describing his own clothing and accessories. He indicates that the sanitarium he stayed at was "very expensive" (34); the key to the table in which he keeps his diary is hidden beneath an "expensive" razor (93); the vest he buys Lolita is "quite expensive" (120); the tennis lessons he has Lolita take are "very expensive" (162); and Beardsley School for girls, which he insists Lolita attend, is "an expensive day school" (176).

supposed nostalgia, commodities, guilt, and acts of consumption reinforce the necessity of explicating a link between nostalgia and consumerism.

Nostalgia and consumerism are conceptually similar in their reliance on desire and their potential to subjugate individuals. Stewart's discussion of nostalgia echoes Colin Campbell's discussion of modern consumerism in that both perceive the centrality of longing to their respective topics of inquiry. For Stewart, nostalgia is maintained by a difference between desire and reality (lived experience) (23); for Campbell, "the spirit of modern consumerism" is characterized by a tension between illusion and reality that "creates longing as a permanent mode" (144-145). In effect, both nostalgia and consumerism are sustained by longing as a permanent mode. Incessant longing, in turn, is fueled by idealization. Whereas the nostalgic longs for an idealized past, the consumer longs for an idealized future that the acquisition of material goods will supposedly bring to fruition. Just as the past cannot be returned to, the perfect future promised by commodity culture can never exist because material acquisition breeds a need for more. Moreover, nostalgic and consumer ideals may work to repress personal freedom, as evident in the imbrication of nostalgia and consumerism in *Lolita*.

Nostalgic and consumer idealization often elide individuality and thus restrict autonomy. Although much of Humbert's nostalgia is suspect, he does construct a nostalgic ideal to which he holds Lolita up against. As John Haegert correctly observes, idealizing and subjugating Lolita are "the same impulse; they both imply the repudiation of Lolita as an autonomous being" (130). Similarly, consumer ideals may disavow self-determination by fostering artificial needs and promoting the illusion of choice, an illusion I will address in the last section of this chapter. In its reliance on nostalgia and attention to Lolita's consumptive habits, Humbert's narrative plays on both the sentimental and exchange value of children.

A tension between children's sentimental and exchange value informs *Lolita*'s

engagement with the exploitation of children and the commodification of childhood. As Cook

puts it, "the commodification of childhood refers to the ways in which this phase or stage of the

life cycle has taken on economic exchange values. The term focuses attention on how the

imputed 'nature', boundaries, and exigencies of childhood have become market segments in and

of children's culture" (6). On the one hand, as Cook suggests, there exists "the kind of value

embodied in the singular, sentimental 'nature' of children and, on the other, that which is

enforced by the equalizing, rational aspects of market calculations (8). According to Cook, these

two modes of viewing children have merged over time, thus engendering "a moral tension in the

social valuation of children" (8). Nabokov symbolically represents this moral tension in his

treatment of Lolita, who is all at once an innocent orphan, a sexualized victim, and—according

to Humbert—a prepubescent seductress.

Lolita's sentimental value exists by virtue of her being a child, while her market value

resides in Humbert's *ir*rational market calculations, so to speak. In Marxist terms, the multitude

of "gifts" (clothing, candy, magazines) that Humbert purchases for Lolita and the sexual acts he

engages her in define her exchange value. This dynamic is one of thinly veiled prostitution that

corresponds to Humbert's actual prostitution of Lolita when, as I noted earlier, he begins paying

her to perform sexual acts. In doing so, he sexually exploits and commodifies her: she is both a

product and service he consumes for personal pleasure. Because Humbert's pleasure is made

possible by Lolita's suffering, his commodifying impulses must be recognized as repugnant.

Humbert's exploitation of Lolita and the consumer exploitation of children share a

common facilitator: children's vulnerability as a consequence of their innocence. "The innocent

child suggests violation," C. Wendela de Raat proposes, because understanding childhood as a

blank slate means that adults may "freely project their own fantasies onto children, whatever those might be" (7). Consequently, Lolita, like all children, is especially susceptible to adult manipulation. The age difference between Humbert and Lolita is significant to both Humbert's ability to control Lolita and the strategies he uses to do so, which amount to the exploitation of her vulnerability.[175] Prior to implementing his "system of monetary bribes," Humbert keeps his "pubescent concubine in submission" by socially isolating her and threatening her with moving to an old, dilapidated farmhouse to live with him in exile (148-149). "A simple child [i.e., naïve], Lo would scream no!" to this threat (149). Humbert further manipulates Lolita in attempting to persuade her that their relationship is normal and that he desires to "protect" her "from all the horrors that happen to little girls in coal sheds and alley ways" (149). Finally, he intimidates Lolita with threats of institutionalization, intimating that, if she were to report his rape and abuse of her and he were to go to prison, she would end up in a correctional school, reformatory, or juvenile detention home (150-151). "By rubbing all this in," Humbert tells readers, he "succeeded in terrorizing Lo, who despite a certain alertness of manner and spurts of wit was not as intelligent a child as her I.Q. might suggest" (151). Certainly, the issue here is not Lolita's intelligence but her status as a child.

Lolita is susceptible to Humbert's manipulations because she initially trusts him. Just as she believes Humbert, Lolita "believed, with a kind of celestial trust, any advertisement or advice that appeared in *Movie Love* or *Screen Land*" (148). This trust indicates the extent to which mass media shapes Lolita's notions of so-called adult reality. Accordingly, the naïveté that makes Lolita prey to Humbert machinations also, as Pifer puts it, "makes her prey to the media's

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[175] Connolly makes a similar point in asserting "the age disparity affords the older man an opportunity for abuse and manipulation of his victim"; however, he refers to Lolita as a young woman, which—as a twelve-year-old girl—she is not ("Nabokov's Dialogue" 22). In fact, Nabokov insisted that "Humbert was fond of 'little girls' — not simply 'young girls'. [...] Lolita was twelve, not eighteen, when Humbert met her" (*Strong Opinions* 93).

versions of romance" ("Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 94). Lolita's idealized understanding of romance, which I will address in more detail shortly, and her objectional commodification by Humbert speak to contemporaneous concerns regarding the effect of consumer culture and mass media on children.

Although childhood naïveté is inevitably sacrificed to cultural initiation,[176] the rise of consumer culture and mass media may be seen as accelerating this process by eliding distinctions between children and adults, thus metaphorically robbing children of their childhoods. Although contemporary scholars increasingly figure children as "active and anticipating actors" who "create their own meanings from the stories and symbols of consumer culture" (Seiter 10, qtd. in Vanobbergen 164), there are those who assume a structural approach in viewing adult institutions as "'invading' childhood, essentially exploiting children through promotions, advertising, and media" (Cook 5). Earlier critics often ascribe to this second position, translating children's agency in terms of docility; that is, supposing children as passive recipients, powerless against advertisements and mass media. In the late 1920s, for instance, popular discourses about childhood began to focus on children's susceptibility "to an emerging mass culture" (Sammond 34). In fact, scientific research concerning the possible effect of movies on children was conducted during Hollywood's nascence.[177]

Hollywood films, radio, and advertisements were thought to possess a corruptive potential by exposing children to supposedly age-inappropriate concepts and images. These concerns were both persistent and influential. In the years immediately following the Great

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[176] That is, children are indoctrinated into adulthood via social institutions (e.g., education) that teach them social mores and cultural values, the acquisition of which is meant to signal an individual's passage from supposedly ignorant childhood to supposedly knowing adulthood.

[177] The "highly controversial" Payne Fund studies, for example, consisted of "twelve studies conducted from 1928 to 1933 to determine scientifically the effect of movies on children" (Sammond 43). According to Nicholas Sammond, the studies, although inconclusive, "produced a great deal of heat and light, and added to a growing range of discourses that imagined a normal child in a life of standardized practices" (43).

Depression, according to Nicholas Sammond, arguments about the role of popular entertainment in influencing children's development significantly influenced "both the production of movies and the meaning of childhood" (29). In *Lolita*, such arguments are couched in Nabokov's attention to the effects of consumer culture and mass media on Lolita. In what follows, I more closely consider Lolita's relationship to consumer culture and briefly trace the role of nostalgia in the historical development of the child consumer to explicate how marketing and mass media ideals may subjugate children.

Those who accept Humbert's account of Lolita as a licentious young girl tend to do so based on reading her as a consumer while overlooking the novel's complex treatment of nostalgic and consumer idealization in the subjugation of children. Hammill, for instance, suggests that Lolita's "amorous precocity is constructed as an effect of American consumerism and the sexualized imagery of advertising" (182). Lolita, in fact, is not amorously mature; she is, however, firmly situated in a cultural history of child exploitation that relies, in part, on an interplay between nostalgic sentimentality and the commodification of childhood.

Historically, the child market was, in some sense, made possible by nostalgia. "Innocence and nostalgia," Bruno Vanobbergen notes, "are central concepts in sentimentalizing childhood" (162), a sociocultural impulse that coincided with efforts to abolish child labour in America during the first decades of the twentieth century *and* posited a sacred view of childhood (Sammond 38). This understanding of childhood, Sammond observes, "set the preconditions for a children's market by imagining a child with psychic and material needs different from those of adults" (Sammond 38). With the emergence of a children's market came the "historical reality of the 'mother as consumer'" (Cook 41). While women were recognized as purchasing agents for their families due to their socially prescribed domestic roles, mothers, it was understood,

purchased for their children according to "instinctive love" rather than "the requirements of duty" (Cook 53). Responding to mothers' consumptive habits, retailers began organizing children's wear according to age categories (Cook 66). Organizing children's merchandise in this way coincided with an increasing recognition of children *as* consumers (Cook 66-67).

Arising in and extending from the 1930s, the child consumer, Cook argues, denotes a critical juncture in the history of childhood because, possibly for the first time, the child's perspective "becomes incorporated into market institutions and thereby becomes institutionalized" (67). Significantly, he observes, this perspective was "mainly a girl's perspective" (97). With the institutionalization of the (girl) child's perspective came advertisements not only *about* children but *for* children. Humbert testifies to this fact when he declares that advertisements were "dedicated" to Lolita: "the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster" (148). Advertisements, as Pifer eloquently puts it, "pander to human longing for the sake of profit" ("Art" 85). That longing, in turn, is a financially motivated social construction: advertisers make money by creating ideals that consumers desire to fulfill. That Lolita acts in accordance with the dictates of consumer capitalism does not confirm Humbert's accusations of vulgarity; rather, her behaviour reveals how child desire may be manipulated for adult gain and thus embodies Nabokov's own nostalgically motivated concern with childhood innocence and vulnerability.

As both subject and object, Lolita exemplifies a specific, historical connection between commerce and childhood that took shape during the late 1940s and early 1950s (i.e., the time during which Nabokov wrote *Lolita*). At this time, the teen-girl persona "offered by buyers and merchants was that of someone who is fashion-conscious, knows what she wants, and isn't shy about expressing her opinion" (Cook 131). Although only twelve, Lolita epitomizes this teen-girl

persona: she is a fashionista (64, 65, 120) who knows what she wants by virtue of what

advertisements tell her she wants (116, 148), and she readily speaks her mind in the fleeting

moments Humbert allows readers to perceive as much (65, 115).

The exploitative nature of Lolita's positioning as a child consumer is subtly suggested in

Nabokov's allusion to mid-century marketing trends that commercialized life-course distinctions.

During the 1950s, the use of *teen* to designate age-size went out of fashion in favour of

increasingly distinct categories like *misses* and *juniors* (Cook 127). Meanwhile, *preteen* as a

subdivision in girls' fashion arose, namely as a marketing strategy (Cook 127).[178] By appealing

to young girls' admiration for and desire to emulate their older counterparts, advertisers

developed "the child as consumer […] through age emulation and a longing to be older" (Cook

118), which, again, indicates how child desire may be manipulated for adult gain. These trends

are referenced during an episode when Humbert, shopping for Lolita, impresses a saleswoman

with his "knowledge of junior fashions" (108). "Having […] studied a midsummer sale book,"

Humbert shops "with a very knowing air [examining] various pretty articles, sport shoes,

sneakers, [and] pumps of crushed kid for crushed kids" (108). His pun conjoining high-heeled

shoes and damaged children is more than playful, dark humour. On one hand, it deftly alludes to

his ironic nostalgia (i.e., his desire for vulnerability); on the other, it subtly observes the

sexualization of young girls in the production of child commodities. Thus, what Humbert colours

as Lolita's seductiveness actually represents her conditioned response to retail campaigns.

While consumer culture manufactures Lolita's desires, Hollywood informs her

understanding of the adult world. Specifically, cinematic romance operates as a mechanism of

cultural initiation in the novel by teaching Lolita what romance is and how she should act in

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[178] "The new size ranges and forms of retailing," Cook observes, "represent, in material form, the interlacing of life course distinctions with merchandising strategy" (97).

romantic situations. As Humbert confesses, he knew Lolita would allow him to "kiss her throat" and that she would "even close her eyes as Hollywood teaches" (48). That Lolita is instructed by the illusions of Hollywood romance appears to have escaped critics who are arguably conned by Humbert's nostalgic rhetoric and thus believe his assertion that "it was she who seduced [him]" (132). In Hammill's analysis, for example, Lolita is "sexually knowing [and] deliberately provocative" (181). She argues that the Enchanted Hunters scene exemplifies Lolita's adult savvy and childish ignorance because in this episode Lolita both initiates sexual relations with Humbert, confessing that he is not her first lover, and believes his claim that adults do not have sex (181). Mistaking Lolita as sexually knowing, Hammill fails to discern that Lolita's very idea of romance differs markedly from the reality of intercourse. Attending movies during the late 1940s, Lolita would have been exposed to the most whitewashed versions of romantic love. Given the influence of the Production Code, which prohibited "excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures" (Hayes), she would not have been likely to encounter explicit (or even overtly suggestive) representations of sex on screen. In fact, twelve-year-old Lolita would probably not even have seen an open-mouthed kiss in the movies.

　　Lolita's exposure to Hollywood romance encourages a naïve misunderstanding of love and sex that becomes dangerous, not only during her stay with Humbert at The Enchanted Hunters but also while away at camp. Though Lolita reportedly initiates the game she played at camp, Humbert conveniently offers no explicit details of what this game entailed; he does, however, implicitly suggest that she may have been coerced into performing sexual acts while at camp. According to Humbert, Lolita tells him of "the way she had been debauched" at camp while the two "ate flavorless mealy bananas, bruised peaches and very palatable potato chips"; "*die Kleine*," he continues, "told me everything. Her voluble but disjointed account was

accompanied by many a droll *moue*" (135). Prefacing Lolita's account with the unappealing food

consumed, Humbert hints at the unpleasantness of what she shares. Talking incessantly and

incoherently, little ("*die Kleine*") Lolita exhibits discomfort in discussing camp events; her

frequent grimaces ("many a droll *moue*") indicate that she is sharing a bad experience.

Humbert, however, finds her scowls amusing — yet another indication of his sadistic

nature. Omitting Lolita's first-hand account, Humbert quaintly summarizes her time at camp:

"every morning […] the three children would take a short cut through the beautiful innocent

forest brimming with all the emblems of youth, dew, [and] birdsongs" (137). His fairytale-like

version evokes nostalgia for childhood and—to a careful reader—reveals his narcissistic lack of

empathy, which will be explored in the final section of this chapter. This passage and the one in

which Humbert describes how his "life […] was handled by little Lo in an energetic, matter-of-

fact manner as if it were an insensate gadget unconnected with [him]" (133-134) intimate that

Lolita was seemingly pressured into a non-penetrative sexual experience with Charlie, the

summer-camp director's son. In any event, she is unprepared for the difference between a *child's*

life (penis) and an *adult's* life (penis) (134).[179]

Her familiarity with cinematic romance explains what Humbert dubs Lolita's "curious"

manner of considering "all caresses except kisses on the mouth or the stark act of love either

'romantic slosh' or 'abnormal'" (133). Here, *romantic slosh* is a double entendre: it figuratively

references sappy behaviour, and it alludes to Humbert's sexual abuse of Lolita.[180] Thus, Lolita

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[179] In recounting the morning he rapes Lolita at The Enchanted Hunters, Humbert determines not to "bore" his "learned readers with a detailed account of Lolita's presumption" (133). Instead, he tells us Lolita "saw the stark act as merely a part of a youngster's furtive world unknown to adults. What adults did for purposes of procreation was no business of hers" (133). "My life," Humbert claims, "was handled by little Lo in an energetic, matter-of-fact manner as if it were an insensate gadget unconnected with me. While eager to impress [Humbert] with the world of tough kids, she was not quite prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid's life and [Humbert's]" (133-134).
[180] The phrase *romantic slosh* figuratively connotes sappy behaviour when the word *slosh* is understood as "[w]eak and trifling work or writing" ("Slosh," *n.*, def. 2b), and the phrase alludes to Humbert's sexual abuse of Lolita when

views Hollywood kisses (i.e., lips merely pressed together) as normal because she has seen them on screen, and she views Humbert's rough, sexual groping ("caresses") and intercourse ("the stark act of love") as abnormal romantic slosh because she has no cinematic point of reference for such actions. Problematically, she mistakes Hollywood depictions of romance for reality. I say *problematically* because Lolita's idealized understanding of romance leaves her even more vulnerable to Humbert. "A modern child," he writes, "an avid reader of movie magazines, an expert in dream-slow close-ups, might not think it too strange, I guessed, if a handsome, intensely virile grown-up friend—" (49). Interrupted by the return of Charlotte, Humbert does not complete his journal entry; however, attentive readers know full well what he, as Lolita's "grown-up friend," wishes to do to her (and eventually does).

Recognizing that mass media has made Lolita an easy victim, Humbert exploits her while striving to convince readers that he is the one victimized by a prepubescent seductress.[181] Any image of a child seductress inevitably embodies a nostalgic tension: a contradictory desire for childhood innocence and adult (sexual) knowledge. While this tension is still perceptible in contemporary media, it was especially central to mass media representations of children during the early half of the twentieth century and thus significant to considering Nabokov's use of nostalgia in *Lolita*.

Perhaps no aspect of the commodification of children is as visible and disturbing as the eroticization of young girls, a practice salient to the phenomenon of the child star since Hollywood's inception. While young actors were immensely popular with audiences during the opening decades of the twentieth century, many scholars have observed that America's

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the word *slosh* is understood as "[a] blow, an act of striking" ("Slosh," *n.*, def. 4), as the ways he crushes and defeats her ("Slosh," *v.1*, def. 5).

[181] In attempting to play the victim and deflect apprehension of his rape of Lolita, Humbert claims that *she* "seduced" *him* (132).

fascination with child stars was especially pronounced during the Great Depression, presumably because viewers found respite from hardship in the aura of innocence projected by children on screen. Seemingly motivated by hopes to pre-emptively quash accusations of children's financial exploitation by adults, fan magazines articulated an important paradox in their coverage of child stardom (Addison 1258). This paradox, Heather Addison observes, entailed representing child stars as "worthy of public attention" due to their distinctiveness and cleverness while simultaneously presenting them as "insulated from the adult world — unsophisticated and virtuous" (1258). The paradox Addison identifies parallels the aforementioned nostalgic tension between innocence and knowledge, a tension that is acutely perceptible in the commercial sexual exploitation of girl stars.[182]

In Addison's analysis, the so-called "childish charm" embodied by Hollywood child stars "was a complex phenomenon that co-existed with a tendency to sexualize young stars, especially girls" (1258). The girl star's complex persona, Addison writes, "incorporated elements of adulthood longing with reassurances that the young actresses were still naïve and innocent" (1259). For Elizabeth Power, Shirley Temple—who embodied "the cuteness and sexually unfettered love of daddy into the 1940s"—epitomizes the extremely young, openly seductive, and erotically unaware "Doll-Baby" version of the child star (107). It is, perhaps, no coincidence that "Dolly" is one of Lolita's nicknames. Also observing Temple's paradoxical persona, Bret Wood maintains that Temple "was coerced into adopting a precocious masquerade of adulthood, including adult sexual appeal" when as young as three years old (34). Like Temple and other child stars, Lolita finds herself in an absurd and dangerous situation as a consequence of her seductive innocence, a paradoxically nostalgic persona projected onto her by advertisers and

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[182] I do not intend to suggest that young boys cannot be sexually exploited; however, girl stars were particularly eroticized in media images in a way that boys were not.

popular culture as much as by Humbert. The paradox of seductive innocence—evident in advertisements that presented young girls as much older than their age and so prevalent in Hollywood movies of Lolita's era—relies on a conflicted nostalgic impulse and emblematizes Nabokov's concern with the exploitation of children.

The paradox of the child star's sensually precocious and childishly naïve persona finds expression in Humbert's definition of nymphets' "twofold nature": a mixture of "tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity" (44). Tellingly, he offers contradictory accounts of his being affected by this twofold nature. On the one hand, Humbert claims to be aroused by a combination of childishness and vulgarity in young girls (44); on the other, he accuses Lolita of being, "*when she chose*, a most exasperating brat" because she embodies a "combination of naïveté and deception, of charm and vulgarity, of blue sulks and rosy mirth" (148, emphasis added). Nabokov again signals the ironic quality of Humbert's nostalgia by having Humbert variably fetishize and denounce the confluence of innocence and vulgarity, thus revealing that while he (Humbert) finds the fantasy of the child-star persona appealing he is repelled by expressions of agency. Questions of autonomy are central to *Lolita* and, as the next section demonstrates, constitute the core of the novel's ethical concerns.

The Very Limit of Injustice and Frustration: Nostalgia, Autonomy, & Aesthetic Bliss

Cruelty is the antithesis of freedom in Nabokov's worldview. Asserting that acting unkind, being dishonest, and inflicting suffering are among the worst people can do, he self-identifies as an "old-fashioned liberal" (*Strong Opinions* 152, 96).[183] In doing so, Nabokov defines his "political creed" as "classical to the point of triteness. Freedom of speech, freedom of

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[183] "To stink, to cheat, [and] to torture," according to Nabokov, is the worst people can do (*Strong Opinions* 152). *Strong Opinions* will henceforth be abbreviated as *SO*.

thought, [and] freedom of art," he implies, constitute a life of integrity and joy (*SO* 34-35).

Conversely, in *Lolita*, restrictions to autonomy constitute "the very limit of injustice and

frustration" (283), a fact that corresponds to Nabokov's refusal to include "freedom of action"

among his principled list of civil liberties. This omission reveals that his liberalism does not

allow for violating others' autonomy. The extent to which Humbert refuses Lolita's agency and

preys on her helplessness, as established in my discussion of his manipulation strategies, defines

him as "a vain and cruel wretch who," Nabokov asserts, "manages to appear 'touching'" (*SO*

94). As I argued in section one, Humbert's ability to *appear* pitiful depends on his use of

nostalgia as a rhetorical appeal to pathos. In this section, I consider how Humbert's nostalgic

expressions reflect his repudiation of Lolita's autonomy and establish him as a sadistic narcissist.

     Nabokov's treatment of autonomy (and the limits of freedom) in *Lolita* reveals how

deeply entrenched the novel is in its cultural moment. Many postwar intellectuals, according to

William Graebner, were concerned by bureaucratic growth, cultural homogenization, and the

perceived dangers of a flourishing mass culture; thus, they "were much more interested in

challenges to individual autonomy than in making critiques, as they had in the 1930s, of the

unequal distribution of wealth and the condition of the working class under capitalism" (9). The

issue of autonomy in *Lolita* has been addressed by a number of critics. For some, mass culture is

to blame for Lolita's lack of autonomy (e.g., Dragunoiu). For others, Humbert effaces Lolita's

identity by ignoring her autonomous personality (e.g., Connolly, "Nabokov's Dialogue";

Alexandrov); stealing her childhood and, by extension, her identity (e.g., Collins); and

disallowing her agency in order to preserve his solipsized creation (e.g., Morlan; Haegert). These

readings of Lolita's autonomy intersect when we consider the relationship between nostalgia,

homogenization, and aesthetic bliss. Although, as I will establish, Humbert is incapable of

aesthetic bliss, readers are capable of experiencing aesthetic bliss by critically questioning the functions of nostalgia in *Lolita*. This experience, I argue, conjoins *Lolita*'s aesthetics and ethics, which collectively situate indifference and complicity in opposition to good readers as moral subjects.

John Ray Jr.'s suggestion in the foreword to *Lolita* that the novel is "a tragic tale tending unswervingly to nothing less than a moral apotheosis" (5) has generated some critical disagreement. Those who accept the fictional Ray's suggestion view Humbert as morally transformed over the course of his narrative; they assume that Humbert recognizes Lolita as an autonomous being and genuinely loves her by novel's end.[184] Far fewer scholars, however, maintain that Humbert does not change throughout *Lolita*.[185] Resolutely situated among this latter collection of thinkers, I maintain that determining the insincerity of Humbert's final declaration of love is important to assessing his nostalgia for Lolita.

Evidence offered to support Humbert's love is often weak and may be interpreted to refute his supposed recognition of Lolita's autonomy. Brian Boyd, for example, surprisingly concludes that "Humbert at last loves Lolita" despite observing Humbert's desire for revenge (78-79). For three years following the purported moral apotheosis of the scene above Elphinstone, Boyd notes, Humbert harbors a desire to take revenge on Lolita's abductor (78); thus, apotheosis and revenge are conjoined. Given this association, the possibility of a genuine transformation is nullified — an assertion supported by Humbert's weeping "the hottest tears [he] has ever shed" when he leaves Lolita before killing Clare Quilty (279). Hardy and Martin

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[184] For analyses that accept Humbert's moral transformation, recognition of Lolita's autonomy, and declaration of love for her at novel's end as genuine, see Donlinin; Voronina 157-158; Connolly, *Reader's Guide* 42-44, 137; Hardy and Martin; Moynahan 30; Twitchell 39; Bullock 92, 98; McNeely 145; Tamir-Ghez 35; Boyd 79; Pifer, "Art" 86 and "Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 104; and Hammill 185.

[185] For discussions that reject Humbert's purported transformation, see Ferger 148, 192-193; Herbold 80, 136; White 61-622, "Pregnant Parenthesis"; Norman 109; and Bloom, Introduction 2.

maintain, "Humbert's tears were primarily nostalgic and elegiac, in the full means of aching pain

of the lost past" (93). However, idiomatically, "hot tears" are those shed in frustration. Humbert

is therefore not expressing nostalgic sorrow in this moment but frustrated defeat — recall that

Lolita has just refused to run away with him. Like Boyd, Connolly observes Humbert's

hypocrisy while still maintaining that Humbert's love for Lolita is genuine (*Reader's Guide* 45,

42).[186] Connolly reads Humbert's hope that Lolita will give birth to a boy as a "crucial

disclosure" because it potentially signals Humbert's effort "to overcome his wretched

predilections" (*Reader's Guide* 136). I do not read a promise of redemption here; instead,

Humbert's disclosure indicates that he has not changed in the slightest. Just as Humbert married

Valeria "for [his] own safety" in an attempt not to purge but to control his "dangerous desires"

(24), Lolita having a boy would similarly serve Humbert's safety by controlling his desires (i.e.,

he would not have to endure being tempted by another so-called demon child). There is no

suggestion that his desires would change with the birth of a boy child. Echoing Connolly's belief

that Humbert comes to accept Lolita as an individual, Pifer posits that Humbert experiences a

"moral awakening" ("Art" 86). She takes Humbert's instruction that his memoir only be

published following Lolita's death as "one manifestation of his belated recognition of [Lolita's]

autonomous being" (Pifer, "Nabokov's Novel Offspring" 104). Rather than reading Humbert's

publication stipulation as evidence of a burgeoning conscience or respect for autonomy, I suggest

that it ensures there will be no witnesses to refute his account — no Lolita to correct his lies, just

as Annabel and Valeria cannot contradict his version of events because they are dead.

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[186] On the one hand, Connolly admits that "the notion of a repentant Humbert does not entirely square with his behaviour before and after the reunion with Dolly"; on the other, he argues that Humbert's declaration of love at novel's end "is meant to convey an acceptance of who [Lolita] is, who she has become, and not who he wishes she might be" (*Reader's Guide* 45, 42).

Humbert's lack of moral transformation discloses that for which he is actually nostalgic: subjugating Lolita, not Lolita as an autonomous little girl. This nostalgia finds expression in his attempts to relive his past with Lolita via his relationship with Rita. As Bowlby observes, Humbert's time with Lolita is repeated almost stage for stage with the homophonic but otherwise completely unresembling Rita" ("*Lolita*" 171). In my analysis, Lolita and Rita share more than a homophonic resemblance. Both characters are physically and mentally susceptible to Humbert's cruelty, their mothers are foils,[187] they fear abandonment, and they each embody Humbert's attraction to vulnerability. Like his relationship with Lolita, Humbert's relationship with Rita is characterized by manipulation, domination, and abuse. In effect, Rita represents Humbert's attempt to relive his exploitation of Lolita. While his nostalgia for Annabel is an exculpatory strategy, his nostalgia for Lolita is genuine insofar as he desires to recapture the sadistic fantasy he lived out with *his* Lolita.

Just as Humbert offers glimpses of Lolita's plight by way of omission,[188] he presents Rita mostly by equivocation. He offers very little information regarding his time with Rita, compressing the two years they spend together into ten paragraphs. In the first three of these paragraphs, readers learn that Humbert meets thirty-year-old Rita in a bar; she is thrice-divorced, petite and an emotionally unbalanced, morose alcoholic (258-259). As he did with Lolita, Humbert spends two years travelling with Rita, during which time she becomes "entangled with a pretty awful crook"; retrieving her from this crook with some difficulty, Humbert finds her

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[187] In part, Humbert's disdainful characterization of Rita's mother and Charlotte Haze establish the two women as foils. He describes Rita's mother as "crazy" and "little" (265) and Charlotte as "stupid" and "big" (95). Whereas Rita's mother thinks Rita and Humbert are well matched and hopes they marry, Charlotte is contemptuous of Lolita's attention to Humbert and marries him herself.

[188] In some sense, omission is the essence of truth in *Lolita*. As Will Norman observes, the most revelatory details of Nabokov's fiction are those we are often invited to pass over (108). Frequently embedded in richly ironic passages, Humbert's descriptions of Lolita reveal as much (if not more) about him than her by way of omission (e.g., Humbert's lack of empathy is revealed in what he omits from Lolita's experience at camp).

"used and bruised but still cocky" (259) — a fitting description of Lolita during her travels with Humbert. Humbert twice visits Briceland with Rita, purporting that a "curious urge to relive [his] stay there with Lolita had got hold of [him]" (261). Declaring that he has "given up all hope" of finding Lolita or her ostensible kidnapper, Humbert claims that he attempts "to fall back on old settings in order to save what still could be saved in the way of *souvenir*" (261). However, the memory he aims to preserve is one of violent domination.

Humbert's sadism informs his nostalgia for (his) Lolita. Presumably longing to reexperience his night at The Enchanted Hunters with Lolita, Humbert attempts to make reservations at the same hotel for himself and Rita. When he receives a no-vacancy reply via postcard, Humbert asserts that "a much better possibility of retrievable time [exists] elsewhere" (261). "Elsewhere" being the town library, where he searches the *Briceland Gazette* archives for a photo, taken during his stay with Lolita, in which he accidently stepped into the photographer's frame (262). "Passionately" hoping "to find preserved the portrait of the artist as a younger brute," Humbert assumes the photo that caught him on his "dark way to Lolita's bed" will serve well as a "magnet for Mnemosyne" (262). Despite suggesting that the picture will trigger memories of his first rape of Lolita, Humbert asserts that he "cannot well explain the true nature of [his] urge" (262). Of course, Humbert can—and does—explain the nature of his urge: he likens it to the morbid curiosity of those who examine execution photographs (262). Metaphorically, he killed the child Dolores Haze (Lolita) that first night at The Enchanted Hunters, a fact he attests to the morning of their departure when he feels "as if [he] were sitting with the small ghost of somebody [he] had just killed" (140). In wanting to recall that night as fully as possible, Humbert effectively desires to relive an experience that was horrific for Lolita but pleasurable to him, thus revealing his nostalgia to be sadistic.

Humbert does not acknowledge his sadism because he does not view Lolita as an autonomous person but as his solipsized creation: a nymphet he can abuse without calling it such because she is not a real person. Recall that, following his assault of Lolita on the Ramsdale davenport, Humbert argues that "what" he "had madly possessed was not she [Lolita] but [his] own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between [him] and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own" (62). To preserve his creation he physically, intellectually, and emotionally subjugates Lolita. While I examine his subjugation more thoroughly later, my point here concerns Humbert's conjoining his abuse of Lolita with his efforts to deny her autonomy. This confluence suggests his endeavours to relive their Enchanted Hunters night do not represent his nostalgia for the girl-child Dolores Haze but for *his* Lolita.

Humbert also expresses nostalgia for his solipsized creation by rehearsing his abuse of Lolita with Rita. Upon meeting an "amiably drunk" Rita for the first time, Humbert "decide[s] to give her a try" only after she places "her trembling little hand on [his] ape paw" (258). Like Lolita, Rita's slight physique makes her easy for Humbert to dominate.[189] Dulling her mental faculties, Rita's alcoholism makes her intellectually and emotionally vulnerable to Humbert in much the same way as Lolita's childish naïveté. Humbert exploits Lolita's and Rita's vulnerability by preying on their mutual fear of abandonment. Neither Lolita nor Rita have any family to speak of. Both Lolita's parents and her brother are dead; in addition to being divorced three times, Rita has been abandoned by many lovers and ostracized by her brother (258). Lolita's and Rita's tendency to seek comfort and companionship in men who mistreat them is driven by a fear of being alone. Indirectly voicing this fear, Lolita admits to her friend Eva that

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[189] Rita weighs 105 pounds (258).

dying is dreadful because in death "you are completely on your own" (284). Like Lolita, Rita "would have given herself to any pathetic creature or fallacy" rather than be alone (258). Acutely aware of Rita's weaknesses, Humbert preys on her vulnerability just as he did with Lolita.

Lolita and Rita also embody Humbert's attraction to vulnerability, as symbolized by the dwellings they share and his ironic expressions of affection. The "little flat" offering "a view of gleaming children taking shower baths far below in a fountainous arbor of Central Park" that Humbert and Rita briefly inhabit recalls the Thayer St. house he and Lolita share in Beardsley (260). This house, in part, accounts for his choice to teach at Beardsley because it affords him a "magic vista" of the school playground, a view Humbert intends to set his binoculars to so that he may take pleasure in distinguishing nymphets from "other girl-children playing around Dolly during recess" (178-179). Humbert's delight in the views of each abode speaks to his being entranced, as I established earlier, by vulnerability rather than innocence.

This predilection is reiterated in his utter disregard for Rita's wellbeing, despite his proclamations of affection. Humbert characterizes Rita as kind, dear, sweet, gentle, friendly, empathetic, soothing, understanding, and compassionate (258-260); however, when he is called from New York to Cantrip College, he leaves Rita in a motel, visiting her twice a week, because he is embarrassed by her (261). She vanishes from the motel "more humanly than her predecessor had done," and Humbert finds her a month later "in the local jail" (261). This episode explicitly establishes Lolita as Rita's predecessor, and it reveals how little Humbert cares for Rita.

Humbert's indifference to Rita stems from his refusal to consider her has an individual. Given that she has been in the local jail for an entire month, he obviously does not exert himself in searching for her after she vanishes. Sometime during the month of her supposed vanishing

act, Rita undergoes an appendectomy. Although she has been ill and incarcerated, Humbert

claims to find her "*très digne*" (261). His assertion indicates that his affection for Rita is as ironic

as his affection for Lolita. Humbert's utter lack of concern for Rita is also made clear in how he

abandons her: after reading Lolita's letter,[190] Humbert kisses a sleeping Rita "on her moist brow"

and leaves her "forever," "with a note of tender adieu […] taped to her navel" (267). His

disregard for Rita's feelings (how awful would it be to wake up and find a *Dear John* letter taped

to your abdomen!) belie his chivalrous tone, thus revealing his affection as contrived.[191] His

insincerity is of no consequence to Humbert because he does not recognize Rita's personhood

but sees her as an instrument of his own wellbeing. Echoing his rationale for marrying Valeria,

Humbert discloses that Rita "enters the picture" to satiate his lust and prevent him from sexually

assaulting schoolgirls (257-258). While Humbert's so-called safety does not rely on *actively*

repudiating Rita's autonomy, he must limit Lolita's freedom to safeguard against anyone

learning of his abuse. Earlier, I established some of the mechanisms Humbert employs to

manipulate Lolita. In what follows, I offer a more comprehensive discussion of how Humbert

limits Lolita's freedom by preserving her apathy and homogenizing her.

Although Lolita's autonomy is threatened more by Humbert than by mass culture, the

dominating power of each is related. Humbert ensures Lolita's subjugation and silence by plying

her with material purchases that preserve her apathy. Mizruchi posits that the variety of items

Humbert purchases for Lolita are "an attempt to compensate Lolita's doubled state of mourning

for herself (the lost innocent) and for her mother" (632). Instead of reading Humbert's supposed

gifts as compensatory, I argue that they distract Lolita—at least for a time—from critically

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[190] After spending three years unaware of Lolita's location, Humbert receives a letter from Lolita in which she explains that she is married, pregnant, and in need of money.

[191] That Humbert abandons Rita as soon as he receives word from Lolita most obviously marks his insincere affection for Rita.

engaging with her plight. It is no coincidence that Humbert prepares for his Enchanted Hunters night with Lolita by buying her a plethora of new garments (107-108) or that he inundates her with commodities following their departure the next morning (i.e., after he rapes her and reveals that her mother has been killed) (141-142). In effect, he strives to control her by manipulating her emotional responses with material goods. While some read Lolita as "transfixed by 'adman visions'" (Pifer, "Art" 85) and thus captivated by materialist desire, her materialism is cultivated by Humbert, who encourages her consumptive habits. The comic books, "hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals, [and] movie magazines" that interest Lolita mitigate and sustain Humbert's abuse, thus ensuring her silence (148).

While Lolita's silence is crucial to Humbert, he also needs to preserve her apathy to insure against her developing the self-awareness necessary to escape. Humbert's inhibition of Lolita's freedom is reflected in the novel's slave motif. During his davenport assault of Lolita, Humbert likens himself to "a radiant and robust Turk, deliberately, in the full consciousness of *his* freedom, postponing the moment of actually enjoying the youngest and frailest of his slaves" (60, emphasis added). Moreover, he imagines redecorating the dining room of The Enchanted Hunters with murals depicting "a sultan, his face expressing great agony (belied, as it were, by his molding caress), helping a callypygean [*sic*] slave child to climb a column of onyx" (134). As these examples illustrate, *Lolita*'s slave motif figures children as sexual slaves exploited by adults.[192] Humbert views Lolita as his "pubescent concubine" and "spoiled slave-child" (148, 188). Prefacing his admission of Lolita's bondage with "spoiled," he alludes to perpetuating her

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[192] Humbert also bemoans contemporary "customs and laws" that prohibit sexual relations between children and adults, lamenting that "[w]e are not surrounded in our enlightened era by little slave flowers that can be casually plucked between business and bath as they used to be in the days of the Romans; and we do not, as dignified Orientals did in still more luxurious times, use tiny entertainers fore and aft between the mutton and the rose sherbet (124).

servitude with consumer goods and money. This strategy sustains Lolita's compliance until she begins developing self-awareness. "Lolita," in Mizruchi's analysis, "is far more mindful of her plight than Humbert and some of the novel's critics are prepared to recognize" (636). While I agree that Lolita becomes increasingly aware of her plight, I maintain that Humbert recognizes her awareness. As noted in section one of this chapter, Lolita begins saving the money Humbert pays her for sexual acts, which signals her growing self-awareness; however, Humbert steals her savings because he knows that she desires to escape.

Even if Humbert were not to steal Lolita's meagre savings, her developing self-awareness is not sufficient to guarantee her freedom because her options are limited. Lolita may choose to remain with Humbert, be placed in a juvenile home, run away on her own, or run away with Quilty. Lolita's "choices" correspond to the false needs promoted by consumer culture because they represent a deceptive liberty. To borrow from Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Lolita is afforded the freedom to choose what is always the same (136).[193] Initially remaining with Humbert because "she had absolutely nowhere else to go" (142), Lolita eventually opts to escape with Quilty because he is preferable to both Humbert's abuse and attempting to navigate the world alone as a fourteen-year-old girl. However, since Lolita's options are all equally as poor, her freedom of choice is a false freedom.

Lolita's freedom is also limited by Humbert's homogenizing tendencies, which correspond to those of mass culture as understood by mid-century intellectuals. Lamenting the "sameness" that infects all aspects of culture in industrial-capitalist societies, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that standardized forms are not a consequence of consumer needs but of "a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need" legitimized by the culture industry (94, 95). In coining the

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[193] The "freedom," Horkheimer and Adorno write, "to choose an ideology, which always reflects economic coercion, everywhere proves to be freedom to be the same" (135-136).

term *culture industry*, Horkheimer and Adorno refer to a homogenous system of popular entertainment (film, radio, magazines) that perpetuates a culture in which "the false identity of universal and particular" flourishes (94-95). They maintain that such standardization— subordinating details to generalities—promotes the replacement of individual categories with stereotypes (166). Like Horkheimer and Adorno, Nabokov extols the "supremacy of the detail over the general" (*LL* 373). Mirroring the potential of mass culture to negate autonomy, Humbert prefers the general over the specific; his nostalgically tinted obsession is for homogeneity, for a vulnerable "type" rather than individuals.

   Lolita dramatizes the ramifications of subordinating details to generic categories in Humbert's penchant for general types and his inability (or unwillingness) to recognize (or acknowledge) the minutiae of places and people. In his travels across the United States with Lolita, Humbert often fails to distinguish one town from the next. Hyperbolically, he writes of the "[h]undreds of scenic drives" shared with Lolita on which they witnessed "thousands of Bear Creeks, Soda Springs, [and] Painted Canyons," passing their "twentieth Hell's Canyon" or "fiftieth Gateway to something or other *fide*" (157).[194] Humbert reduces the entire state of Texas to "a drought-struck plain" and dubs Arizona "[o]bvious" with its "pueblo dwellings, aboriginal pictographs, [and] a dinosaur track in a desert canyon" (157).[195] By imposing his own preconceptions onto the American landscape, Humbert fails to appreciate its native beauty or the individuality of specific places.[196] This failure extends to human beings and results in far more

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[194] Humbert's mention of "something or other *fide*" offers yet another clue to his deceptive nature and signals his refusal to acknowledge difference if we recognize that the qualifier he presumably cannot remember is "bad"; i.e., *mala fide* (bad faith).

[195] Humbert even ironizes his own nostalgia in this moment, observing that the dinosaur track was "printed there thirty million years ago, when [he] was a child" (157), thus intimating the bogus nature of his childhood nostalgia.

[196] Haegert offers a similar argument in asserting that Humbert imposes his own "outworn *idealizations*" onto the American locales, thus robbing "them of their native beauty and individual identity" (129, emphasis added); however, Humbert does not idealize the landscape but perceives the United States according to his preconceived (i.e., stereotypical) notions of America.

serious consequences. According to Humbert, the places he and Lolita travel through are consistently populated by "the same three old men, in hats and suspenders, idling away the summer afternoon under the trees near the public fountain" (157). Nabokov's facetious use of cliché underwrites Humbert's reliance on cataloguing people as supposedly recognizable types.

Humbert simultaneously attempts to naturalize and romanticize his taxonomic view of the world by insidiously using detail and inscribing his definition of nymphets with childhood nostalgia. When describing nymphets' bodies, Humbert offers mathematical measurements and uses anatomical vocabulary; his use of scientific detail "strengthens the illusion of 'reality'" (Bouchet 108) rather than signaling an appreciation of individuality. In other words, Humbert uses detail in the service of maintaining stereotypes, not recognizing difference. His emphasis on the "magic part" time plays, however, invites inattentive readers to overlook Humbert's homogenizing proclivities (17). Alluding to J.M. Barrie's Neverland, Humbert declares that nymphets inhabit an "enchanted […] intangible island of entranced time" (17). Evoking Peter Pan and his desire to eternally remain a child serves to imply Humbert's concept of nymphets expresses his nostalgia for childhood. This misdirection diverts attention from the perversity of a grown man's sexualized definition of children. In sum, nymphets are not individuals for Humbert but idealized types. By reducing Lolita to statistical, literary, and mythic types—that is, viewing her as a homogeneous nymphet rather than an individual little girl—Humbert repudiates her autonomy. The manner in which he details this repudiation (i.e., his eloquent, nostalgically inflected prose) seems to divorce aesthetic concerns from ethical ones. As I shall illustrate, however, the limits to Lolita's freedom constitute the novel's ethical centre, which is inseparable from its aesthetics.

Aesthetics and ethics are intimately bound for Nabokov, who rejects didactic literature.[197] Although he does not believe it the task of the writer to "improve the morals of his country and point out lofty ideas from the tremendous height of a soapbox," Nabokov does assert that writers may improve the world by making inequity absurd (*LL* 376). While condemning inequity may not be "the author's direct purpose or duty," it does, Nabokov notes, generally benefit the community (*LL* 376). In suggesting as much, he implicitly acknowledges the sociopolitical functions of humour and parody. Further, he distinguishes between so-called real and fake artists. When ridiculing injustice, according to Nabokov, the "authentic writer" is more interested in punishing cruelty by turning "the villain into a buffoon" than helping the community by stressing the farcical nature of crime (*LL* 376). *Lolita* makes inequity absurd and punishes cruelty by presenting Humbert as a seemingly nostalgic buffoon. This aesthetic maneuver informs the novel's ethical concerns.

In *Lolita*, seemingly trivial details and outrageous exaggerations reveal Humbert to be an utter boor. Not only does he laugh at his own jokes (45), but he makes inappropriate jokes regarding sexual crimes against children (165). Humbert's social faux pas regarding humour speak to his general social ineptitude informed by narcissism. This narcissism, which will be detailed further below, finds subtle expression in Humbert's dismissive attitude regarding world events.[198] His absurd character is further revealed by symbolically analogous physical traits. Contrary to his claims of attractiveness, Humbert is a hairy (44), over-weight (44, 140, 165),[199] foul-smelling (140), ape-like (39, 48, 104, 258, 298), middle-aged man with a nervous facial tick

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[197] In his afterword to *Lolita*, Nabokov confirms that he is "neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction" (314).
[198] For instance, he flippantly discusses whether he should grow a "delightful little toothbrush mustache" (48). Engaging in a casual conversation (with a twelve-year-old child, no less) regarding whether he should groom himself to resemble Adolf Hitler underscores Humbert's insensitivity.
[199] I interpret Humbert as overweight despite his claim of being "lanky" (44) because he variously describes his body as "big-boned" (44), "heavy-limbed" (140), and "massive" (165).

(161) and rotting teeth (44, 284, 291) who struggles with bouts of impotence (74) and heartburn (130);[200] he is a clumsy, burping drunk (73) — if not an alcoholic, given how often he alludes to consuming alcohol or admits to being drunk (72, 99, 103, 198, 216, 238, 240, 246, 249, 253, 293, 299, 301). Humbert is also a pretentious, pseudo intellectual who engages in the sort of literary criticism that Nabokov disdains.[201] In using obscure vocabulary to perform sophistication (and conceal the truth), Humbert regularly contradicts himself or makes illogical claims.[202] His exaggerated intellectual efforts are as laughable as his exaggerated desire is grotesque.[203] Equally ridiculous is Humbert's purported "photographic memory" that enables him to recount, verbatim, his diary from five years previous (40).[204] Although ostensibly superfluous, these details and exaggerations are not irrelevant; they are the means by which Nabokov makes inequity absurd. By presenting Humbert as buffoon, Nabokov characterizes his crime—the repudiation of Lolita's autonomy—as outrageous. Thus, failing to apprehend Humbert as the fool he is (e.g., reading him as a sensitive and suffering lover nostalgic for childhood) amounts to misapprehending—if

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[200] Humbert's impotence would not establish him as an oaf if he did not regularly emphasize his virility and manliness, while his heartburn might be irrelevant if it were not juxtaposed with his sexual desire for a child (i.e., "burning with desire and dyspepsia") (130).

[201] Humbert's pretentious, pseudo intellectualism is signalled, for example, by the factious title of one of his papers: "The Proustian theme in a letter from Keats to Benjamin Bailey" (16).

[202] For example, he writes that Ramsdale is under a heat wave while nevertheless characterizing the week as favonian (i.e., favourably mild) (42). He also claims the "corpuscles of Krause were entering the phase of frenzy" when detailing his increasing erotic arousal in the davenport scene (60). Since the corpuscles of Krause are mechanoreceptors that respond to cold, they would likely not be stimulated by sexual arousal — certainly not in the scene Humbert describes.

[203] Consider Humbert's claim that he worked "seldom less than fifteen hours" a day for "a couple of years" composing volume one of his comparative history of French literature (32) and his hyperbolic wish to turn Lolita "inside out" so that, with his "voracious lips," he may kiss her heart, liver, and kidneys (165).

[204] Despite his supposed photographic memory, Humbert claims not to recall numerous written details: the specifics of Charlotte's letter (68); the lyrical poem about Lolita he composed and later "tore up" (44); or the license plate number of the car trialing him and Lolita on their second journey across America, which Humbert wrote down but declares himself an "ass" for not memorizing (226). He purports to vividly remember the locales of his arguments with Lolita (158) but not the specific route of their first trip across America—because he "did not keep any notes (154)—or the route he takes when leaving Coalmont (281). In fact, he later claims to possess "a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory" (217).

not entirely overlooking—the novel's ethical concerns, which are encapsulated by Nabokov's concept of aesthetic bliss presented in *Lolita*'s afterword.

Although often mistaken to reflect an amoral aestheticism,[205] Nabokov's concept of aesthetic bliss conjoins ethics and aesthetics. He characterizes aesthetic bliss as providing a sense of connection with "other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (*Lolita* 315). Most significant to this concept is Nabokov's definition of *art*,[206] which he calls attention to when responding to art-for-art's-sake accusations that he writes of humans without questioning society or environment.[207] "Art for art's sake," for Nabokov, is meaningless "unless the term 'art' be defined" (*Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 214). If, as he suggests, art is about curiosity, tenderness, kindness, and ecstasy (i.e., happiness), then producing *art for art's sake* is an ethical endeavour very much engaged in sociopolitical concerns. This engagement especially relies on curiosity because incuriosity—an affront to genuine art—breeds complacency via indifference and a failure to empathize. Thus, the *real* artist recognizes that aesthetics and ethics are two sides of the same coin.

Like children, *real* artists are capable of aesthetic bliss, whereas *fake* artists are not. The primary role of curiosity to aesthetic bliss returns us to my earlier mention of Nabokov's assertion that curiosity—the capacity to wonder at trifles—is the highest form of consciousness.

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[205] Mizruchi, for example, claims that the "Nabokovian voice" of *Lolita*'s afterword suggests aesthetic bliss "is its own value, immune to moral and political considerations" (631).

[206] I fully agree with David Andrews's allegation that references to aesthetic bliss that neglect "Nabokov's ethical definition of 'art' [are] misleading" (5). Like myself, Andrews contests misunderstandings of aesthetic bliss in which "the phrase is taken as emblematic of an ideology that separates aesthetics from ethics" (5).

[207] To suggest that art, by definition, concerns ethical faculties differs from maintaining that art serves social and political functions by offering explicit didacticisms. Nabokov suggests this distinction in his comments on *Lolita*: in the novel's afterword he asserts that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow" (315), while in a letter to Edmund Wilson he identifies the novel as "a highly moral affair" (*Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 298). Also attentive to the difference between ethics and didacticism, Andrews posits that "Nabokov rejects 'moral' applied as a noun but not as an adjective. The difference," Andrews argues, "is significant. When 'moral' is descriptive, it implies that the ethical quality is immanent, not separate" (5).

He extolls the virtues of a childishly speculative state of mind and, as Borden succinctly puts it, "traces the origins of aesthetic sensibility, of unique artistic genius, to the primary sensual and cognitive experiences of childhood" (107). This affinity between children and authentic writers reveals Nabokov's sincere nostalgia for childhood as fundamental to his concept of genuine artistic production. Nabokov's understanding of *true* art and *real* artists is important to *Lolita* because it further illuminates Humbert's disingenuous nostalgia. Although he strives to position himself as an artist, Humbert possesses none of the capacities that define art and make aesthetic bliss possible.[208] His cruelty, narcissism, and incuriosity define him as both an artistic fraud and poor reader incapable of experiencing aesthetic bliss.

Like myself, Richard Rorty views cruelty to be Nabokov's "central topic" (146). While I agree with Rorty's analysis regarding the centrality of cruelty—of its misapprehension—in *Lolita*, I disagree with his assertion that Nabokov's novel helps readers discern how "the private pursuit of aesthetic bliss produces cruelty" (146). Although Rorty correctly observes that "no bliss is possible" where curiosity and tenderness are absent and concludes "there is, after all, no distinction between the aesthetic and the moral," he problematically asserts that Humbert is capable of cruelty *and* aesthetic bliss (157-159). He seemingly attempts to resolve this contradiction by arguing that "Nabokov would like the four characteristics which make up art to be inseparable, but he has to face up to the unpleasant fact that writers can obtain and produce ecstasy while failing to notice suffering, while being incurious about the people whose lives provide their material" (159). This suggestion, however, constitutes a misreading of aesthetic bliss as Nabokov intends it.[209] Producing ecstasy alone while failing to notice suffering does not

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[208] Lolita's childhood wonderment, on the other hand, aligns her with true art — with empathy. See 195n212 of this dissertation.

[209] Nabokov considers writers that fail to notice suffering fakes. Take, for instance, his views on Ezra Pound. For Nabokov, Pound's work is "pretentious nonsense" and the man a "total fake" ("Interview" 203). Arguably, Pound is

amount to aesthetic bliss. Moreover, any effort to pursue aesthetic bliss—privately or otherwise—is fraudulent if that effort is motivated by and/or produces cruelty. Put simply, Humbert is incapable of experiencing aesthetic bliss because he is cruel. His narrative is inspired by an effort to disguise his cruelty. That he attempts to do so by imbuing his memoir with a nostalgic aura to persuade readers of *his* torment only serves to underscore that his narrative is not a product of his private pursuit of aesthetic bliss.

Humbert's fraudulent artistic intentions both expose and inform his status as a poor reader. *Lolita* abounds with examples of Humbert's failure to apprehend the obvious,[210] as noted by many critics. David Andrews, for instance, suggests that Humbert sometimes appears "unintentionally careless as a perceiver, overlooking details by dint of his hedonistic self-absorption" (72). While I adhere to the view that Humbert's narcissism is central to defining him as a poor reader, I remain unconvinced by Andrews's suggestion that Humbert's supposedly careless perception allows him to "neglect the very details that might defuse his sexual desire through pity" (72). Although Humbert is doubtless a poor reader, he is consummately aware of the pain he inflicts on Lolita. In fact, as I argued earlier, he takes pleasure in it. Thus, I maintain that Humbert, as far as his abuse of Lolita is concerned, is sadistically rather than carelessly narcissistic. Humbert admits as much when he affirms that "it was always [his] habit and method

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a fake because his fascism does not allow for the curiosity, tenderness, kindness, and ecstasy (i.e., joy, happiness) essential to art and necessary to achieving aesthetic bliss.

[210] Humbert, for instance, fails to grasp the significance of *The Enchanted Hunters* as the title of the school play in which Lolita performs, despite having been told that Quilty is a playwright (63); in fact, he claims not to have given the matter of the "coincidence of the title" much thought (200). He also fails to deduce Quilty's identity or his relationship with Lolita. This failure, as many critics have noted, is especially significant given the numerous references to Quilty and clues that he is the one following Humbert and Lolita on their second journey across America: Quilty's picture is affixed above Lolita's bed (69); Lolita points Quilty out in The Enchanted Hunters' dining room, but Humbert assumes she means the dentist — she corrects him and explicitly connects Quilty to the picture in her room ("I mean the writer fellow in the Dromes ad"), but Humbert remains clueless (121); Humbert observes Lolita and Quilty talking at a gas station, knows that he is the man that has been following them, but still does not put two and two together (217); Humbert attends a play with Lolita *knowing* Clare Quilty and Vivian Darkbloom are the authors (221); and he runs into Quilty on the Beardsley College campus and believes him to be a "total stranger" despite Quilty's insistence that they have met at a Beardsley School lawn party (253).

to ignore Lolita's states of mind while comforting [his] own base self" (287). *Ignore* is the operative word here because one cannot ignore something unobserved, but one may ignore that of which they are aware. Humbert's tendency to "view the world as a reflection of his own desires, fears, and fantasies," as observed by Connolly, and his manner of evaluating "others primarily in terms of how well they meet his own preconceptions and desires" (*Reader's Guide* 70, 72) supports reading him as a narcissist who, by definition, is entirely incurious about others.

Humbert's lack of curiosity is manifest in his failure to empathize. Although incuriosity and indifference are not synonymous, curiosity, empathy, and imagination are closely related. We must first be curious about others in order to empathize, and empathy turns on our capacity to imaginatively place ourselves in another's position. That Humbert is incapable of doing so is revealed by his treatment of others and his failure to respond to their suffering. Consider, for instance, the images of pain and entrapment in the episode following Charlotte's discovery of Humbert's diary. Rather than attempting to empathize with Charlotte—who is entirely and understandably crushed by reading Humbert's cruel descriptions of her and his perverse desire for her daughter—Humbert questions why "faucets sometimes whine so horribly" and focuses on the fridge that "viciously" "roars" and the ice that emits "tortured sounds" as they are loosened from "their cells" (96-97). In projecting Charlotte's complaints onto inanimate objects, Humbert displays his refusal or incapacity to imagine himself in her position.

Humbert's lack of curiosity may also be detected in his resistance to change, which has often been implicitly mistaken for his nostalgia. For example, Dolinin maintains that "Humbert remains deaf and blind to new impressions; his imagination keeps recycling the previously known and experienced, be it in the emotional sphere or in the sphere of culture" (23-24). Harriet Hustis similarly characterizes Humbert's conception of time as "possessively iterative" (105).

While Humbert does often fail to apprehend the obvious, this failure does not necessarily suggest his being "deaf and blind to new impressions" but to empathizing with others because he takes pleasure in their suffering. Rather than iterative, Humbert's (idealized) conception of time may be characterized as static.

Humbert's desire to "fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (134) amounts to a static fantasy of time that negates any possibility of change. His obsession with fixing time is perhaps his most explicit expression of disingenuous nostalgia that is most often (mis)read as an index of childhood nostalgia. While Humbert wishes to reexperience his abuse of Lolita, he does not long to return to his past but to disavow it; he refuses to honestly recount his past to characters (79, 95) and, as I have argued throughout this chapter, readers. Unlike the nostalgic's desire to relive time, Humbert apparently wishes to stop time altogether. In desiring to fix the perilous magic of nymphets, he longs to ensure his boundless gratification: if girls remain young and vulnerable, he can endlessly manipulate them. He arguably rejects change because it suggests the possibility of his victims developing self-awareness and independence.

The fact of Humbert being a bad artist and poor reader is ethically significant because both labels point to a fundamental failure to care for others. This failure constitutes the core of Nabokov's moral aesthetic. Lecturing on Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Nabokov told his students that he was "trying to show [them] that in so-called real life we sometimes find a great resemblance to the situation in Kafka's fantastic story. Mark the curious mentality of the morons in Kafka who enjoy their evening paper despite the fantastic horror in the middle of their apartment" (*LL* 267). Like the Samsas going about their days in typical fashion with no regard for Gregor's suffering, Humbert exists with no regard for anyone's suffering but his own.

Likewise, readers who are seduced by Humbert's nostalgia fail to apprehend the extent of suffering Humbert has inflicted on countless victims. Truly, the Old Masters were right.

Concluding Remarks

If it can be said that *Lolita* is "about" anything, it is about failing to recognize others' suffering. As I have argued throughout this chapter, Humbert employs nostalgia as a rhetorical device that leads readers astray, seducing them into sympathizing with his supposed romantic anguish. In part, this seduction is made possible by readers' identification with Humbert's ostensible past — with an idealized, inevitably lost, and irretrievable childhood. Failing to apprehend Humbert's nostalgic distortions deceives readers into complicity by promoting indifference to Lolita's plight. The issue of complicity in *Lolita* has often been noted (e.g., Andrews; Norman; Mizruchi; Bontila; Rorty). For Mizruchi, "Humbert insists on complicity" by providing the so-called evidence with which readers coproduce his story (643). If the narrative is understood as a collaborative effort between readers and Humbert (wherein his nostalgia for Annabel and Lolita is presumed genuine), they remain complicit with his crimes; however, if that collaboration occurs between readers and Nabokov (wherein the ruse of Humbert's nostalgia is perceived), the novel's ethical aesthetics are revealed. Humbert insists on exculpation; Nabokov insists on resisting complicity. As Ruxanda Bontila argues, *Lolita* compels readers to recognize their position in its "staged warfare (between conscience and pleasure, the law and non-conformism, masculine and feminine) and to recognize" that they are implicated in and complicit with "the text's internal struggle" (283). Such recognition counters indifference, which corrupts compassion. [211]

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[211] Here, I modify Andrews's suggestion that "[p]assion corrupts compassion" (73).

Nabokov's genuine childhood nostalgia directs careful readers toward redeeming compassion and experiencing aesthetic bliss. That is, by recognizing Lolita as a little girl—and all that her status as a child entails—we may consider her benevolently and appreciate the lengths Humbert goes to in attempting to deceive us. Lolita is not as a "vile-tempered" child but a curious and compassionate little girl, as evidenced, for example, by her observation of and sympathetic concern for something as seemingly trivial as roadkill (141).[212] Readers, too, may be capable of compassion by approaching Nabokov's novel with curiosity.[213] Just as curiosity is essential to Nabokov's definition of art, it is implicit to his concept of good readers. Good readers, in Nabokov's view, possess imagination, memory, a dictionary, and some artistic sense (*LL* 3). That is, being a good reader entails imaginative effort: scrupulously attending to textual details and perceiving patterns among such details.

This chapter has demonstrated Humbert's nostalgia as one of *Lolita*'s key details, attention to which enables us to see through his façade of self-pity and observe his repudiation of Lolita's autonomy. In doing so, we are *not* denied "the satisfaction of condemning [Humbert]" as Mizruchi suggests;[214] rather, we prudently observe the novel's ethical distinctions between details that lie and those that reveal the world to be good. This distinction is not a theoretical abstraction but one that informs (good) readers as moral subjects.[215] By discerning Humbert's nostalgic justifications of rape, abuse and murder, readers succeed in recognizing suffering. The

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[212] When Humbert nearly runs "over some little animal or other that was crossing the road with tail erect," he fails to recognize why Lolita, his supposedly "vile-tempered companion" calls him "an ugly name" (141). I concur with Andrews's assessment that this incident confirms Humbert's narcissism by demonstrating his inability to identify the animal that Lolita "explicitly named and pitied" moments before (74). It also gives us insight into Lolita, not as a vile-tempered child, but as a compassionate, observant little girl.

[213] As Andrews puts it, "only curiosity makes possible understanding and pity, i.e., 'tenderness'" (95).

[214] For Mizruchi, "*Lolita* soils its readers while convincing us of its own beauty. It drowns us in the sadness of its perpetrator, while denying us the satisfaction of condemning him" (651).

[215] Good readers, Nabokov argues, make "fierce efforts when wrestling with a difficult author" (*SO* 183). In asserting as much, Andrews astutely observes, Nabokov suggests that the relative ferocity of the interpretive struggle is one index of the reader's goodness, that is, moral fibre" (8).

critical capacities that engender this recognition are not limited to literary analysis but extend to an empathetic engagement with the world that rejects complicit indifference to cruelty and violations to autonomy.

In a 1971 interview, Nabokov claimed to "believe that one day a reappraiser will come and declare that, far from having been a frivolous firebird, [he] was a rigid moralist kicking sin, cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel — and assigning sovereign power to tenderness, talent, and pride" (*SO* 193). He may have been a mindful firebird but not a frivolous one.[216] That *Lolita* kicks sin (understood in the secular sense as inequity), cuffs stupidity, and ridicules the vulgar and cruel is evident to attentive readers, especially those who consider the novel's expressions of nostalgia. Just as Nabokov's novel demands careful readers, Stanley Kubrick's 1962 adaptation of *Lolita* demands careful viewers. While Kubrick does not mobilize nostalgia in the same way or toward precisely the same ends as Nabokov, his film, as the next chapter demonstrates, engages nostalgia to offer a critique of postwar suburban America and the injustice of misrecognition.

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[216] Russian composer Igor Stravinsky's ballet, *The Firebird*, "is based on the Russian legend of the Firebird, a powerful good spirit whose feathers supposedly convey beauty and protection upon the earth" (Schwarm).

Unreliable Memories & Uncanny Homes:

Subverting and Perverting Nostalgia in Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*

> I think we tend to be a bit hypocritical about ourselves.
> We find it very easy not to see our own faults,
> and I don't just mean minor faults. […]
> We are capable of the greatest good and the greatest evil,
> and the problem is that we often can't distinguish between them when it suits our purpose.
> —Stanley Kubrick

Stanley Kubrick's films are widely recognized to reveal the director's fascination with a tension between appearance and reality.[217] They often present a seemingly rational world that conceals one of disorder lurking beneath the surface. Regardless of whether such disorder is institutional or individual, things in Kubrick's films are frequently not what they outwardly appear. The mid-century suburban world Kubrick depicts in *Lolita* (1962), for instance, is characterized by various ironic contradictions, including a seemingly wholesome high school dance chaperoned by swingers and a middle-aged Humbert Humbert (James Mason) secretly tormented by his desire for fourteen-year-old Lolita Haze (Sue Lyon). In Kubrick's *Lolita*, Humbert's suffering is most often rendered comically. It is not a disingenuous ploy facilitated by supposed childhood nostalgia to garner sympathy and conceal his abuse of Lolita, as it is in Vladimir Nabokov's novel; rather, it is meant to appear farcical. The absurdity of Humbert's distress derives from an incongruity between events as they occurred and events as Humbert recalls them. That is, lovelorn Humbert is made to look ridiculous via Kubrick's treatment of nostalgia in *Lolita*, which—to my knowledge—has never been critically addressed.

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[217] Kubrick's work, as Mario Falsetto contends, is primary interested in narrative, stylistic, and thematic dualities of meaning (i.e., "subjective/objective, classical/modernist, rational/irrational, empathy/distance, clarity/ambiguity, order/chaos, symmetry/asymmetry, conventional/subversive, surface/depth, what we know and what remains hidden") (xxii).

Kubrick's omission of Humbert's backstory may partially account for an absence of critical discussions concerning the film's engagement with nostalgia. Humbert's ostensibly nostalgic account of Annabel and his obsession with "fixing" time in the novel are not included in Kubrick's film. Accordingly, rather than considering how Kubrick adapts the novel's *presumed* childhood nostalgia, scholars typically attend to how the lack of Humbert's history affects viewers' perception of him. Greg Jenkins, for example, argues that it produces a "more palatable Humbert," who is both "more mysterious for his unstated history" and "more socially, morally, and psychologically conventional" (39). Jenkins believes this more palatable Humbert solicits audience sympathy, whereas others maintain Annabel's absence diminishes sympathy for Humbert and thereby enhances viewers' skepticism (e.g., Bell-Meterau). Closely related to this question of sympathy is that of Humbert's interest in Lolita. Critics generally assume that omitting Humbert's account of Annabel underscores either his obsession with Lolita (e.g., Pezzotta; Miles Watts) or his love for her (e.g., Mazierska). In any event, because his desire for Lolita, as Elisa Pezzotta puts it, "is not fused with his first love Annabel" (10), Humbert is most often viewed as a man interested in *one* under-aged girl (Lolita) rather than as a maniacal pedophile. Such assessments rightly imply that childhood nostalgia does not figure in Kubrick's *Lolita*; however, they neglect the issue of how the film expresses Humbert's nostalgia for Lolita.

Just as inattentive readers of Nabokov's *Lolita* may be seduced by Humbert's nostalgic rhetoric, inattentive viewers of Kubrick's *Lolita* may fail to apprehend the relationship between narrative perspective and nostalgia in the film. As this chapter will demonstrate, Kubrick shifts between subjective and objective narrative perspective throughout *Lolita* to present both Humbert's nostalgic recollections of Lolita and the reality of their time together. In doing so, he undermines the boundaries between the unreal and the real (i.e., Humbert's nostalgic fantasies

and actual experiences), thus upending the very principle upon which nostalgia relies. This strategy of destabilizing nostalgia by exposing the gap between the imagined and actual past I refer to as *subverting nostalgia*. In its critical sense, *subvert* refers to challenging or undermining that which is conventional (e.g., ideas or genres) by employing it "in a new or unorthodox way" ("Subvert," def. 6). In *Lolita*, I will argue, Kubrick's subversion of nostalgia largely serves to parody Hollywood melodrama.

Although, as noted in chapter two, critical attempts to define *melodrama* have generated a great deal of debate, the term (as applied to Hollywood productions) is generally accepted to denote an exaggerated quality intended to elicit an emotional reaction from audiences. In addition to excess and pathos, other elements common to melodrama include chance, nostalgia, victimhood, and moral legibility.[218] "Melodrama," Kubrick disparagingly suggests, "uses all the problems of the world, and the difficulties and disasters which befall the characters, to demonstrate that the world is, after all, a benevolent and just place" (qtd. in Ciment 174). Although this position is somewhat reductive, it reveals his antagonism toward the moral legibility numerous scholars have identified as a central feature of melodrama — a legibility that relies upon socially constructed notions of normalcy. By subtly foregrounding the distinction between diegetic illusion and reality in *Lolita*, Kubrick disrupts the moral order characteristic of melodrama. This disruption is not accomplished merely for comedic effect but is central to the way Kubrick critically mobilizes nostalgia to satirize notions of suburban normalcy grounded in an idealized conception of home.

In addition to subverting nostalgia, Kubrick's *Lolita* perverts nostalgia. If nostalgia is understood to signal longing for an idealized home, *perverting nostalgia*—a phrase I adopt from

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[218] For a discussion of elements common to melodrama, see Singer, esp. 13, 39-45, 136; Gledhill, esp. 21, 30-33; and Elsaesser, esp. 457.

Isabella van Elferen—entails rendering home uncanny by distorting its idealized attributes (7, 5).

In her editorial introductory chapter to an essay collection entitled *Nostalgia and Perversion in Gothic Rewriting*, van Elferen identifies nostalgia and perversion as "essential to the Gothic rendering of the past" (4). In her analysis, "[the Gothic] underlines the transgressive force of nostalgia [i.e., its distortion of the past] by *deliberately* perverting the orderly texture of the yearned-for past" (5, emphasis added). For her, "Gothic nostalgia is decisively active, as it transforms the past, turning it upside down, foregrounding its background, corrupting its order" (5). In this way, she explains, the Gothic renders the nostalgically idealized "homeland uncanny by perverting its idyllic quality" (5).[219] Although my analysis does not concern the Gothic, nor Gothic allusions in *Lolita*, I find van Elferen's terminology useful to explicating *Lolita*'s thematic concerns and Kubrick's satire of suburban normalcy. In *Lolita*, Kubrick ironically undermines the boundaries between assumptions regarding normalcy and deviation, thus making home uncanny by distorting its idyllic qualities. As I will demonstrate, his perversion of nostalgia advances his critique of postwar suburban America and its underlying hypocrisy.

The analytical distinction I draw between *subverting* and *perverting* nostalgia is important, as it allows for a more in-depth analysis of Kubrick's treatment of nostalgia and the complexities therein. Whereas attending to subversion illuminates associations between *Lolita*'s thematic and formal concerns, attending to perversion opens analytical doors that enhance our understanding of Kubrick's social criticism.

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[219] To illustrate, van Elferen offers David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks* as an example of the Gothic's "double performativity" (i.e., nostalgia and perversion): "The story is nostalgically set in an American small-town"; "however, the dreamy countryside atmosphere is shot through with ambiguity and uncanniness. The nostalgic 'home' is by no means idyllic, but reveals itself as a borderland where the real and the imaginary, and good and evil, dwell side by side" (5).

To elucidate Kubrick's approach to subverting nostalgia, I first offer a discussion of voice-over and dramatic irony in *Lolita*, suggesting that Humbert's unreliability is symptomatic of his nostalgia. I then consider how the film subverts nostalgia in its presentation of subjective and objective narrative perspectives, which are often only subtly distinguished. I conclude my analyses of three paired scenes that I consider exemplary of Kubrick's nuanced manipulation of perspective by addressing how *Lolita* parodies melodrama before turning to the ways the film perverts nostalgia. My discussion of perverting nostalgia in *Lolita* centers around the notion of *home* as an idealized symbolic space embodied by suburban places. I address nostalgia in the context of suburban history and the significance of 1950s suburbia within the cultural imagination to argue that, by perverting nostalgia for home, Kubrick satirizes cultural visions of suburban normalcy and anxieties about subversives to denounce hypocritical and discriminatory practices that attempt to rationalize misrecognition.

Cherry Pies and Teenaged Crushes: Subverting Nostalgia & Parodying Melodrama

Lolita's narrative structure underscores the importance of how events unfold in the film. As critics often note, the film is structurally circular: it begins and ends with Humbert's murder of Clare Quilty (Peter Sellers). In Kubrick's structural choice, a number of scholars observe an affinity between the novel and film, pointing out that the novel begins and ends with Lolita, while the film begins and ends with Quilty.[220] For some, bookending *Lolita* with Quilty's murder downplays the issue of sexuality in favour of emphasizing murder and revenge, transforming *Lolita* into a bizarre thriller or mystery rather than presenting an "erotic confession" or doomed

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[220] For discussions of the structural similarities between Kubrick's film and Nabokov's novel, see Delage-Toriel, esp. 2; Jenkins, esp. 67; Księżopolska; and Nelson, esp. 69.

romance.[221] Others focus on how this opening murder either sets "the requisite tone of black humour" (Ciment 92) or "lends an atmosphere of impending menace to the lightly satiric quality of the early scenes" (Nelson 66). Most commonly, the film's *in ultima res* opening is viewed as a means of establishing narrative tension in which the central question becomes that of *why* rather than *who*.[222]

In fact, in an interview with Joseph Gelmis, Kubrick revealed that he chose to open *Lolita* with Quilty's murder to sustain narrative interest. However, for Kubrick, sustaining narrative interest seems to be more a matter of engaging audiences in *how* rather than *why*, as evidenced by an interview with Michel Ciment. Speaking on his 1975 adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick asserts that "*Barry Lyndon* is a story which does not depend on surprise. What is important is not what is going to happen next, but how it will happen" (qtd. in Ciment 170). The same may be said of *Lolita*, given the reputation of its source material and the likelihood that many viewers would have been familiar with the novel— even if only by word of mouth—and thus aware of why Humbert kills Quilty. Like *Barry Lyndon*, *Lolita* is a story that does not depend on surprise; what is going to happen in the film is less important than how it will happen.

Lolita relies on flashback to highlight the issue of *how*. The film is comprised almost entirely of a single flashback and only returns to the narrative present in its last few minutes.[223]

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[221] Jenkins suggests that bookending *Lolita* with Quilty's murder downplays the issue of sexuality in favour of emphasizing murder and revenge (67); this structural choice, Alfred Appel maintains, transforms *Lolita* into a bizarre thriller (229). Robert Stam similarly reads the film's structure as transforming *Lolita* from an "erotic confession" into a mystery ("Film" 114), while Sarah Miles Watts reads it as transforming *Lolita* from a doomed romance into a mystery (301).

[222] For discussions of *Lolita*'s *in ultima res* opening as a means of establishing narrative tension, see Appel 230; Delage-Toriel; Pezzotta 16; and Stam, "Film" 114.

[223] Arguably, *Lolita* never returns to the narrative present since the film's final scene depicts Humbert entering Quilty's home prior to the murder (and does not include Quilty's shooting). This final scene, however, opens with the same POV shot, from Humbert's perspective, of the road approaching Quilty's residence (Pavor Manor) with which the film began. Thus, the film's structure is undoubtedly circular.

Alfred Appel argues that *Lolita*'s structure denies "the film any sense of fated action" regarding

Humbert's death (229), while Pezzotta maintains that beginning and ending with Quilty's murder

emphasizes "Humbert's predestination" (15). I am inclined to agree with Pezzotta because,

although Humbert's demise is not revealed until the film's epilogue, *Lolita* entirely depends on

fated action: viewers know from the beginning that Humbert will become a murderer. This

knowledge situates audiences in an epistemologically privileged position that facilitates dramatic

irony and ensures that they are aware of the film's distinct narrative and story times, a distinction

that is central to apprehending Humbert's nostalgia. Put differently, *Lolita*'s narrative structure is

central to establishing Lolita as the object of Humbert's nostalgia.

In addition to structure, genre—particularly comedy—bears upon how Kubrick signals

Humbert's nostalgia. Acknowledging the difficulties of adapting a source with an unreliable

narrator to screen, Kubrick has suggested that doing so may be accomplished if the resulting film

is "done as a comedy" via juxtaposing an unreliable narrator's "version of the truth with the

reality on the screen" (qtd. in Ciment 170). Although unreliable narration had been employed in

a range of non-comedic films prior to *Lolita*,[224] Kubrick's association of comedy with

cinematically depicting conflicting versions of the truth may partially explain his choice to

foreground the darkly comedic tone that runs throughout the novel. Kubrick's *Lolita* is a

brilliantly funny dark comedy that adapts Nabokov's unreliable narrator to screen by juxtaposing

Humbert's version of the truth with the reality on screen. This juxtaposition subverts nostalgia by

marking the gap between Humbert's desired version of the past and the actuality of that past.

In *Lolita*, Kubrick establishes Humbert's narrative unreliability by subverting nostalgia in

his complex treatment of narrative perspective, which is facilitated by voice-over, dramatic

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[224] E.g., *Citizen Kane*, 1941; *Laura*, 1944; *Detour*, 1945; *Possessed*, 1947.

irony, characterization, and music. Although some maintain that Kubrick failed to offer a

cinematic equivalent for the novel's narrative unreliability (e.g., Stam, "Lolita"; French), debates

regarding narrative perspective in *Lolita* suggest just the opposite. Critics disagree regarding

whether Humbert tells his story (e.g., Ciment) and audiences perceive diegetic reality as he does

(e.g., Baqué) or, as Mario Falsetto puts it, "another narrating consciousness […] organizes and

controls [the film's] presentation" (90). This disagreement, I suggest, is partially fueled by

Humbert's unreliability because it turns on narrative ambiguity in a film with a first-person

narrator. Whereas Nabokov uses language to convey Humbert's insincerity, ironically pitting

nostalgic imagery against revelations of Lolita's abuse, Kubrick relies on sound and image to

convey ironic contradictions. The inconsistencies that are conveyed by subverting nostalgia, in

turn, underwrite Kubrick's parody of Hollywood melodrama, a parody that disavows moral

legibility in the service of social satire.

 Unlike Nabokov's Humbert, Kubrick's Humbert is unreliable not because he endeavours

to deceptively employ nostalgia but *because* he is nostalgic. The term *nostalgia* is conspicuously

absent from discussions of Kubrick's *Lolita*, yet scholars nonetheless seem to recognize Humbert

as nostalgic. Thomas Allen Nelson, for instance, observes that Humbert is attached to and

"lovingly" embraces "the illusory" (71, 68-69). Norman Kagan also considers Humbert's

predilection for fantasy, observing that "Humbert wants a dream world which he can never have,

in which he and Lolita will live and love" (108). Viewing Humbert's journeys with Lolita as

"flights toward some impossible blissful life," Kagan argues that Humbert travels toward Lolita

at film's end because he hopes "to reclaim his old bliss" (108). This "old bliss" is fundamentally

nostalgic; it constitutes Humbert's version of the truth and defines his (unreliable) memories of

Lolita.

The ambiguities in Nabokov's novel find partial expression in Kubrick's use of voice-over, which establishes nostalgia as central to Humbert's unreliability. Curiously, Robert Stam argues that Humbert's voice-over narration offers "an anchor of truth, unlike the novel, where narration forms a shifting, unanchored space of mendacity and ambiguity" ("Film" 116). I say "curiously" because Humbert's voice-overs are anything but an anchor of truth. Instead, they shift in tense, tone, and perspective. The disorienting effect of such shifts corresponds to Humbert's confused recollections to signal a disparity between his perception and that of viewers. Kubrick has explicitly acknowledged that voice-over may function "as an ironic counterpoint to what you see portrayed by the actors on screen" (qtd. in Ciment 170), and he uses it as such in *Lolita*. The tone of Humbert's voice-overs often contrasts with that of preceding scenes. By and large, critics interpret the mood of Humbert's voice-overs as somewhat indifferent, suggesting that this indifference indicates Humbert's obliviousness regarding narrative events that have just been presented on screen (e.g., Jenkins; Sperb; Falsetto). [225] However, I argue that Humbert's tone denotes nostalgic self-delusion rather than outright ignorance.

Humbert's first and fourth voice-overs respectively follow the murder of Quilty and the death of Charlotte Haze (Shelly Winters), intimating Humbert's nostalgia by way of his discordant inflection. In his first voice-over, Humbert speaks in the first person and uses present perfect tense, happily explaining what brought him to Ramsdale. This direct address to viewers is preceded by a title card reading "4 Years Earlier" (i.e., four years before Humbert shoots Quilty), and it is accompanied by a travel montage that concludes with a sun-dappled taxi ride to the

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[225] For example, Jenkins considers the tone of Humbert's voice-overs to be "subdued, terse, and measured" (38). Similarly, Jason Sperb considers Humbert's first voice-over "emotionally indifferent" (55), while Falsetto characterizes it as "relatively informal," noting that it lacks "intimacy" and offers "only expository information meant exclusively for the viewer" (87).

Haze home, which appears cozily bordered by a white picket fence. Humbert's sunny tone presents a jarring mismatch between the emotional tenor of this voice-over and the preceding scene that ended with a hail of bullets. This mismatch cues viewers to the fact that they are witnessing Humbert's fantasy: his unproblematic journey from Europe to America that concludes with his arrival at Charlotte's bungalow and eventual introduction to Lolita. An accord between Humbert's voice-over and the visual presentation signals Humbert's unreliability, his nostalgically deluded perspective. Humbert's use of the present perfect indicates that he is relating his Ramsdale arrival from the film's narrative present (i.e., post-murder); having already enacted his revenge, he cheerfully recounts what brought him to the U.S. and Lolita while ignoring the fact of his having just killed a man.

A similar mismatch between narrative events and the tone of Humbert's voice-over occurs following Charlotte's accidental death. In the film's fourth voice-over, Humbert offers an expositional and interestingly instructional voice-over in a pleasant tone that belies acknowledging past trauma:

> You must now forget Ramsdale and poor Charlotte and poor Lolita and poor Humbert and accompany us to Beardsley College where my lectureship in French poetry is in its second semester. Six months have passed, and Lolita is attending an excellent school where it is my hope that she will be persuaded to read other things than comic books and movie romances.

Not only does Humbert refuse to acknowledge Charlotte's death and how Lolita has coped for six months, but he also instructs viewers to forget this unpleasant past as well. Like the first voice-over, this one is accompanied by a travel montage that underscores Humbert's nostalgia by

presenting quaint images of tree-lined streets, serene neighbourhoods, and a sprawling spring-time college campus.

      Humbert's second and third voice-overs enhance viewers' awareness of his unreliability by allowing access to his thoughts in the diegetic present of the flashback *and* the narrative present of the film. The second voice-over (in first person, present tense), provides the content of Humbert's diary entry. This voice-over is accompanied by a shot of Humbert writing at his desk in Charlotte's house to signify that it represents his thoughts as he writes them in the diegetic present of the flashback. Significantly, audiences are provided with a clue that Humbert's obsession extends beyond Lolita when he reveals that "the two-fold nature of *every* nymphet drives [him] insane" (emphasis added). This revelation again hints at Humbert's unreliability because nearly every other scene in the film suggests that Lolita remains his sole obsession. Kubrick's use of voice-over is quite sophisticated here. Rather than providing viewers with an accurate sense of Humbert's feelings for Lolita, access to Humbert's interior thoughts heightens ambiguity regarding whether he is erotically obsessed with Lolita because she represents a type or whether he genuinely cares for her as an individual.

      His third voice-over also offers access to his interior monologue. In this instance, however, Humbert's voice-over is narrated in multiple tenses and shifts between first, second, and third person. This voice-over accompanies the scene in which Humbert contemplates killing Charlotte upon realizing that her gun is loaded. It concludes with Humbert directly addressing viewers to explain that he could not bring himself to commit murder: "All the logic of passion screamed in my ear: *now is the time*. But, what d'you know folks? I just couldn't make myself do it." [226] This explanation rings a bit hollow as a consequence of Humbert's flippant tone and

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[226] Narrating in a mix of first and third person, Humbert uses present and past perfect tense when he realizes Charlotte's gun is loaded: "No man can bring about the perfect murder. Chance, however, can do it. Just minutes

because viewers know that the Humbert addressing them has already committed murder. Regardless, unlike Nabokov's Humbert, Kubrick's unreliable Humbert does not elicit nostalgia as an exculpatory strategy; instead, as I have suggested, he is unreliable because he is nostalgic. Humbert's nostalgically motivated unreliability is made all the more apparent by the film's subversion of nostalgia in its handling of narrative perspective.

Lolita subverts nostalgia in its nuanced presentation of objective and subjective narrative perspectives. Whereas an objective perspective in film may either present the action from the standpoint of an ideal observer (third-person limited) or without attaching it to a specific character (omniscient), a subjective perspective establishes an identification with a particular character. That is, the former conveys information independent of characters' point of view (POV), and the latter conveys information from the mental or affective outlook of specific characters. *Lolita* oscillates between objective and subjective perspectives, sometimes frequently in a single scene, thereby complicating the veracity of Humbert's narration. This oscillation marks his nostalgic gap because, as Barbara Schapiro observes, a "dialectical tension between subjectivity and objectivity" amounts to a tension "between idealized fantasy and recognition of reality" (18). Thus, the unbiased view of Humbert provided by the film's moments of objectivity highlight the nostalgic distortions of his subjective perspective. Such distortions primarily center around Humbert's interpretation of people and events versus what the film presents to viewers and—most importantly—his image of Lolita versus the film's characterization of Lolita.

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ago, she had said it wasn't loaded. What if I had playfully pulled the trigger then?" He then employs a combination of past, past continuous, and past perfect tense while imagining how he would explain her death as an accident to authorities: "She said it wasn't loaded. It belonged to the late Mr. Haze. She was having her morning tub. We had just finished talking about our plans for the future. I decided to play a practical joke and pretend I was a burglar. We were newlyweds and still did things like that to each other. As soon as it happened I called an ambulance, but it was too late." Finally, he shifts to second and first person when directly addressing viewers to explain that he could not bring himself to commit murder: But, what d'you know, folks, I just couldn't make myself do it. The scream grew more and more remote, and I realized the melancholy fact that neither tomorrow nor Friday nor any other day or night could I make myself put her to death."

For Falsetto, much of *Lolita*'s resonance and pleasure are a product of the "ironic distance between Humbert's view of the world and the presentation of narrative information" (86). This ironic distance is, in part, made possible by way of characterization. Richard Corliss suggests that the Charlotte ("the perfectly coarse fraufrump") and the Lolita ("the girlteen as teen, her figure filled out by a voyeur's roguish appreciation") audiences witness "might be those characters as seen in the distorting eye of Humbert, the casting director of his own fantasy" (*Lolita* 43). That Humbert is, indeed, directing his own nostalgic fantasy is evident in the scene he is (and viewers are) first introduced to Lolita, which subtly reveals his desire to recover an idealized past.

Having just provided Humbert with a tour of her home upon his arrival in Ramsdale, Charlotte insists that he view her garden before leaving. As the two make their way outside, music wafts in from the patio and the camera cuts to the backyard, revealing Humbert's vision. Seated on a blanket and surrounded by schoolbooks, bikini-clad Lolita assumes the serpentine pose of a sunbathing pin-up model (jutted hip, crossed ankles, and perched upon a slender arm). She is awash in sunlight, the lines of her body seemingly aglow. Her ephemeral luminosity is emphasized by her oversized and feather-trimmed straw hat, a sunlit halo framing Humbert's imaginary angel (see fig. 5). Imaginary because this nostalgically imbued imagery belongs to the narrative past; it constitutes Humbert's earliest memory of Lolita, his romanticized garden nymphet. "Voilà!" exclaims Charlotte, as Humbert steps from the porch shadows looking dumbfounded. Charlotte, seemingly prouder of her yellow roses than her daughter, dismissively acknowledges Lolita's presence while the camera remains on Humbert in medium close-up to emphasize his agape expression as he very slightly nods his head in the affirmative.

Fig. 5. Humbert's nostalgically idealized vision of Lolita.

The camera cuts again to offer a POV shot from Humbert's perspective: Lolita staring back through her dark sunglass, turning down her radio at her mother's request, and then lowering her sunglasses to look directly at Humbert. This last gesture appears quite suggestive by way of Lolita's languid movements and its congruity with Charlotte's declaration that she can offer Humbert her "cherry pies" if he becomes her lodger. Although Humbert clearly has euphemistic cherries on his mind, Lolita's thoughts are ostensibly more complex. As she watches her mother and Humbert finalize lodger arrangements, her expression reveals an interesting mixture of curiosity and skepticism rather than the seductiveness that characterized Humbert's POV shot (see fig. 6). Her shrewd glance arguably conveys an assessment of whom she likely considers her mother's potential suitor. The scene is ripe with dramatic irony that is both humorous and illuminating: it cues audiences to the nostalgic lens through which they are viewing this moment by offering an Edenic view of how Humbert wishes to remember Lolita while simultaneously suggesting that the way he remembers her and the way she was are not one and the same. Recall that nostalgia is sustained by a necessary gap between illusion and reality.

The garden scene highlights this gap by privileging Humbert's romantic perspective *and* revealing Lolita's discerning (rather than seductive) glance, of which he is oblivious. This strategy of revealing rather than concealing discrepancies between the imagined and actual past thus subverts nostalgia by undermining the very principles upon which nostalgia relies.

Fig. 6. Humbert's POV of Lolita as seductive (left) versus Lolita as curious and skeptical (centre and right).

Kubrick's subversion of nostalgia is even more striking when we consider Humbert's preoccupation with Lolita throughout the film. Like Falsetto, I take the difference between Humbert's perception of Lolita and her presentation to viewers as "another example of the way Humbert's view of the world is at odds with the [sometimes] omniscient perspective of the film" (12).[227] As Nelson observes, "Lolita never embodies" the "romantic substance" of Humbert's dream of her (78). Viewers most typically perceive Lolita as a superficial, manipulative and spoiled teenager (e.g., Howard; Bell-Meterau; Falsetto). "Lolita," Falsetto writes, "is nothing like what Humbert imagines her to be" and thus "does not seem to merit anywhere near the passion and attention Humbert lavishes on her" (11). This unworthiness raises the question of what motivates Humbert's obsession. Presuming his fixation is inspired solely by erotic attraction provides an insufficient answer because, as Ciment notes, the film's sexuality is "marked by deviance, non-reciprocity, aggression, [and] an absence of feeling and physical rapport" (259). A

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[227] I have qualified Falsetto's claim because I do not read the film as offering a wholly omniscient perspective. As I argue throughout this section, *Lolita* shifts between subjective and objective narrative perspectives, at times conveying Humbert's subjective version of events and at others assuming an omniscient POV.

more productive response to understanding Humbert's obsession resides in considering

Kubrick's Lolita as "safely solipsized" as Nabokov's Lolita (i.e., as an ideal who exists only in

Humbert's mind).[228] Like his novelistic counterpart, Kubrick's Humbert is obsessed with an

idea, not a person; unlike his novelistic counterpart, this Humbert's overwhelming desire for

Lolita is not motivated by an attraction to vulnerability but by nostalgia. Distinguishing

Humbert's nostalgically rendered dream Lolita from the film's real Lolita is possible by

attending to Kubrick's skillful use of subjective and objective narrative perspectives in his

presentation of paired scenes, which I now consider.

Comparing the opening credits pedicure to the Beardsley pedicure reveals a tension

between fantasy and reality. *Lolita*'s opening credits, accompanied by a lush, romantic score, are

superimposed over a shallow focus shot depicting a grown man painting a young girl's toes.

Assuming the hand and foot belong to Humbert and Lolita, many argue that this opening

sequence conveys an asymmetric power dynamic between the two in which Humbert is

metaphorically enslaved by Lolita, who controls their interactions (e.g., Kagan 82; Jenkins 35).

Others go further to suggest that this sequence, in conjunction with the later pedicure scene,

reinforces Humbert's subjugation by way of allusion to Chris's painting of Kitty's toes in Fritz

Lang's *Scarlet Street* (1945), a film that dramatizes the exploitative and humiliating

consequences of Chris's adoration of Kitty (e.g., Appel; Cocks). Rather than reading the opening

pedicure as indicative of Lolita's supposed power and Humbert's debasement, I argue that this

sequence depicts Humbert's nostalgic perspective.

The sentimental score and delicacy with which Humbert paints Lolita's toenails—

complete with his careful insertion of cotton tufts between her toes—imbue the opening credits

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[228] Nabokov, *Lolita* 60.

with a sense of idealization rather than subjugation. Philip Kuberski also perceives a sense of idolization in this pedicure sequence. As in the garden scene, Lolita, in Kuberski's analysis, seems to glow in the opening credit sequence: "the light seems to emerge from hand and foot, as if we [are witnessing] a true epiphany or showing forth of the sacred" (76). He argues that this use of light accomplishes "something like a photographic equivalent of sacred painting and witnessing — the pedophile's vision and recovery of the lost child of his youth is granted externalization and, in a sense, a kind of cinematic reality" (77). Since the film does not once mention Annabel, I maintain that, rather than externalizing Humbert's vision and recovery of "the lost child of his youth," the first pedicure externalizes his nostalgic recovery of Lolita. The credit sequence offers an idealistic vision of Humbert's relation to Lolita, suggesting that they are in a mutually satisfying relationship: he as the doting lover and she as a willing participant in their affair. However, when this vision is considered in relation to the film's second pedicure scene, which occurs after Humbert and Lolita have lived together in Beardsley for half a year, its illusory nature becomes glaringly apparent.

Whereas the subjective narrative perspective of the opening pedicure offers Humbert's nostalgic fantasy, the objective narrative perspective of the Beardsley pedicure demonstrates how this fantasy differs from reality. In contrast to the disembodied, incandescent hand and foot of the credits pedicure, the Beardsley pedicure scene presents Humbert and Lolita in high-contrast lighting as he kneels at her bedside fussily painting her toenails and she reclines with a bottle of Coca-Cola. Void of music, this scene emphasizes a growing friction between Lolita and Humbert. As Humbert jams cotton balls between her toes, he questions why she arrived home late from school. His suspicious and interrogative tone becomes increasing agitated and paternal as they bicker over Lolita spending time with boys and friends. When Lolita begins to complain

that Humbert allows her no fun, he counters that she "has all the fun in the world" before

itemizing the loads of fun he provides for her: buying her anything she wants when she wants;

taking her to concerts, museums, and movies; and doing all the housework and cooking. Now

sounding more insecure than agitated, Humbert offers: "You and I have lots of fun. Don't we,

Lolita?" Sensing his insecurity, Lolita smiles coyly, asks whether Humbert still loves her, and

seizes the opportunity to persuade him into giving her permission to participate in the school

play. By underscoring Humbert's status as a parental figure and intimating Lolita's desire for

Quilty (i.e., writer and director of said school play), Kubrick closes the gap between Humbert's

romantic fantasy and, to borrow from Irena Księżopolska, its "unglamorous realization," thus

revealing—and thereby subverting—the nostalgic idealization of the credit sequence.

Kubrick similarly subverts nostalgia in presenting two very different kisses between

Humbert and Lolita: one in the Haze home and one in a hospital shortly before Lolita eludes

Humbert. Whereas the pedicure pairing includes a shot that is not clearly located in the diegetic

timeline (credit sequence) and one that is (Beardsley scene), the paired kissing scenes occur at

two stages in the story. They nonetheless include non-diegetic elements and are worthy of

comparison, given that these scenes are the only moments in the film that Humbert and Lolita

exchange (or attempt to exchange) a kiss.

The first kiss occurs in an early scene that depicts Humbert and Charlotte playing chess

and in which Lolita enters to say goodnight. Grounded in Humbert's perspective, this scene

portrays Charlotte as an ignorant, unappealing, and ineffectual seductress. Rather than logically

sitting across from Humbert to play chess, Charlotte positions herself perpendicular to her

lodger, intimating her desire to be near him. Their full wine glasses go untouched as Charlotte

seemingly revels in Humbert's tutelage. Scowling in confusion, yet with an affected air, she

holds her knight between forefinger and thumb and gently dangles it as she asks whether "this is the one that goes back and forth." The wine, the cigarettes, Charlotte's exaggerated helplessness and performative grace collectively suggest that she hopes to seduce Humbert. He, however, appears utterly bored. "You're going to take my queen?" Charlotte asks, as Lolita enters the scene. Her entrance is accompanied by non-diegetic music, "Lolita Ya-Ya": Lolita's theme song, which is used throughout the film to signal an alignment with Humbert's perspective (and which was playing on the radio during the garden scene). In contrast to the bikini-clad Lolita of the garden scene, viewers are presented with a doll-like Lolita, dressed in a white cotton, ankle-length, high-collared nightgown. She props her elbow on the back of Humbert's chair as he responds to Charlotte with "That was my intention, certainly" while looking up at Lolita.

Whereas the garden scene juxtaposes Humbert's sexualized version of Lolita with her knowing glance, this scene juxtaposes a clichéd image of Lolita's innocence with her presumed attraction to and flirtation with Humbert, as signalled by the ostensibly suggestive smile she offers Humbert before kissing him goodnight. In contrast to the matter-of-fact tone Lolita uses when she offers her mother a good-night peck on the cheek, her voice deepens seductively when she leans in to wish Humbert goodnight. Concluding her statement with an upward inflection that stresses the word *night*, Lolita implicitly poses a question, almost as though she is inviting Humbert to spend the night with her. She smiles and sashays off to bed to the non-diegetic beat of her theme song. The cherries of the garden scene are here replaced by Charlotte's queen, which Humbert smugly and euphemistically "takes." Like the garden scene, dramatic irony in this goodnight scene is comical and revealing. It gestures toward a disparity between subjective and objective narrative perspectives, once again signalling the nostalgic lens through which audiences are viewing this moment.

Lolita's supposed desire for Humbert is undercut later in the film when they exchange a second onscreen kiss (or, more accurately, when he attempts to kiss her). Whereas the goodnight kiss Lolita offers during the chess scene seems to suggest her desire for Humbert, his attempted goodbye kiss during the hospital scene clearly indicates her repulsion. The earlier scene reveals Humbert's subjective perspective, as indicated by the unflattering characterization of Charlotte, the inclusion of Lolita's theme, and dramatic irony that resonates with the garden scene. The hospital scene, however, is presented from an objective perspective. It contains no music and presents Humbert as, to borrow from Lolita, "kind of slimy."

Having left an achy and feverish Lolita at the hospital overnight, Humbert arrives bearing flowers and books. Rather than positioning Humbert as a thoughtful lover, his gifts highlight his and Lolita's incompatibility. She considers his flowers "gruesome" and shows no interest in the reading material he has brought: *The Romantic Poets*, by Professor Bhaer (whom Humbert makes a point of noting is his "friend"); *The History of Dancing*; and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which Humbert's speculates she "might like." In an obvious sense, these books reflect Humbert's desire that Lolita read "serious" material rather than magazines and comic books. Less obviously, the allusion to Louisa May Alcott's Professor Bhaer illuminates how Humbert views himself in relation to Lolita. That is, as an academic, fatherly suitor/mentor marriage prospect. Lolita, however, neither notes the allusion nor demonstrates any interest in Humbert's offerings; instead, she glances down at the open magazine in her lap and clutches it tighter.

Their exchange is antagonistic throughout the scene, revealing different motivations for their irritation with each other. While Humbert is jealous and frustrated by Lolita's disinterest in him, she is frustrated by his very presence. He questions who has left a note and a pair of

sunglasses on Lolita's hospital tray, indicating that he is more concerned about her fidelity to him than her wellbeing. She asks why he must "antagonize everybody" and claims that both the note and glasses belong to Mary, her nurse. Suspicious and unconvinced, Humbert asks whether Mary and Lolita "have been exchanging the crummiest of confessions." This line of questioning further reveals that Humbert is less concerned with Lolita's wellbeing than he is with himself; that is, he is preoccupied by the possibility of getting arrested for his salacious affair with his stepdaughter (who is, let us not forget, a minor). His priorities are confirmed when Lolita claims that the doctor wants her to stay in hospital another forty-eight hours and he begins making plans for their departure, musing that they will make the Mexican border in three days.

When Humbert reluctantly leaves Lolita, he says "goodbye" with longing and leans down to kiss her. Turning her face away with a smile she declares, "might catch your cold." In fact, she turns so far from Humbert that he plants his kiss near her earlobe on her far-right cheek. Humbert confirms that he will not see Lolita until the following morning, which is significant for two reasons: first, because those familiar with Nabokov's novel know that she takes this opportunity to escape with Quilty; and second, because Lolita's response speaks volumes. Assuming that she will likely not see Humbert again, all she offers is "bye-bye" when he stands to leave. He lingers awkwardly at her bedside, and she lounges contentedly. Again, Kubrick subverts nostalgia by contrasting Humbert's subjective view of Lolita's desire with an objective view that presents him unfavourably and reveals her disinterest.

The final set of scenes I consider emblematic of Kubrick's nuanced manipulation of narrative perspective, the scene in which Lolita brings Humbert breakfast and the scene in which they say goodbye before she leaves for camp, respectively depict Lolita as a fickle teenager and a young woman in love. Although some critics find Lolita subjugating and provocative in the

breakfast scene (e.g., Kuberski; Kagan), the objective camera reveals her to be an average teenager seeking respite from her testy mother. Conversely, the subjective perspective of the goodbye scene offers Humbert's nostalgic remembrance of Lolita's departure for camp as infused with mutual romantic longing.

Careful attention to the nuances of Charlotte and Lolita's interaction before Lolita brings Humbert his breakfast reveals how ordinary a child she is. This scene opens with a close-up of Humbert writing in his diary accompanied by the film's second voice-over, which indicates that viewers are witnessing action from an objective perspective rather than Humbert's nostalgic perspective.[229] From Humbert, the camera cuts to a miserable looking Charlotte frying eggs and casting disgruntled glances at Lolita, who looks equally despondent as she pours milk over her cereal.[230] Charlotte proceeds to nag a sulking Lolita about mundane parental complaints and rattles off a standard list of chores Lolita must compete before she can leave the house to meet her friend Mona: do the dishes, make her bed, and clean her room. With her mother's back turned, Lolita viciously scrunches her face, mimicking Charlotte's ire. When the phone rings, Lolita rushes to answer it while contemplating aloud whether Kenny, her date at the dance the night before, is calling for her. Although her question takes only seconds of screen time it is important because it establishes her interest in a boy her age rather than Humbert. The call, however, is for Charlotte. Thus interrupted in delivering breakfast, Charlotte instructs Lolita to take the tray up to "Professor Humbert" and specifies that she is not to disturb him. As Lolita makes her way upstairs, she munches on Humbert's bacon and rolls her eyes at the fragments of

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[229] As I noted earlier, Humbert narrates the content of his diary entry as he composes it. This first-person present tense narration situates the scene in the diegetic *present* of the flashback, thus signalling an objective (rather than subjectively nostalgic) narrative perspective.

[230] For different reasons, mother and daughter appear to be brooding over the events of the previous evening. Hurt by Humbert's rejection of her attempts to seduce him, Charlotte blames Lolita for arriving home earlier than anticipated from Mona's, thus interrupting her time with Humbert and foiling her seduction plans. Lolita, conversely, is irritated by her mother having sent her off to bed early.

Charlotte's conversation she overhears. There is nothing "dreamy" about her childishness, nor eerie about her "vulgarity" (e.g., making faces at her mom). This scene depicts Lolita as a typical adolescent girl.

Lolita's interaction with Humbert similarly reveals her to be an ordinary girl rather than the provocative nymphet Humbert claims drives him insane. Wearing loose corduroys and an oversized sweater, Lolita sets down Humbert's breakfast tray and asks him not to "tell mom" that she ate all his bacon before snagging a piece of toast, which she nibbles on throughout their exchange. Gone is the throaty voice of the goodnight kiss scene; in its place is the frank voice of a young girl making casual conversation. Leaning over his desk, mouth full of bread, she asks Humbert what he was writing. There is nothing seductive about her posture or mannerisms here. She simply appears to be stalling to avoid her sour mother. After Humbert has read her excerpts of Edgar Allan Poe's "Ulalume," which Lolita admits to finding "a little corny," she seats herself on the window bench and props her feet on Humbert's desk. They briefly chat about Mona, but Lolita decides not to confide in Humbert for fear that he will "blab." When he promises to "never give away any of [her] secrets," she offers him a reward: one of his own fried eggs. Taking an egg from Humbert's plate, Lolita instructs him to put his head back as he only half-heartedly resists. Humbert obliges, and Lolita tells him he can have "one little bite" as she dangles an over-easy egg in front of his open mouth. He grabs her by the forearm and forces as much of the egg into his mouth as he can. The camera then cuts to Charlotte calling for Lolita at the foot of the stairs; Lolita mopes out of Humbert's room with a glum "what do you want," and the scene ends with her mocking yet another catalogue of her mother's demands.

The view of Lolita as an average girl in the breakfast scene differs markedly from Humbert's view of her before she departs for camp during a scene that is also especially notable

for its parody of melodrama. Like many others, Christine Gledhill observes that the central protagonists of Hollywood domestic melodrama often become objects of pathos "as victims of forces that lie beyond their control and understanding" (30). Closely related to the question of victimhood in melodrama is the issue of innocence. In her study of melodrama, Gledhill establishes how "innocence and villainy construct each other: while the villain is necessary to the production and revelation of innocence, innocence defines the boundaries of the forbidden" (21). In *Lolita*, the issue of innocence and guilt remains murky, to say the least. Rather than presenting a morally coherent world, the film offers a parody of innocence (e.g., Lolita's goodnight kiss getup) and villainy (e.g., Quilty disguised as Dr. Zempf). While some read Humbert as victimized by Lolita (e.g., Jenkins; Corliss), others view him as a victim of his own obsession (e.g., Falsetto). Conversely, Pauline Kael maintains that "Humbert is a worm" (207), which accords with Geoffrey Cocks's assertion that "the main subjects of Kubrick's films are perpetrators and not victims" (30). Instead of generating "a powerful feeling of pity," a common melodramatic element (Singer 44), Kubrick disavows any sense of pathos by subverting nostalgia to reveal Humbert as ridiculous.

From the vantage point of Humbert's bedroom window, the goodbye-before-camp scene opens with an aerial view of Lolita beside her mother's station wagon as Charlotte climbs into the driver's seat and Louise, her maid, loads Lolita's luggage into the car. Observing that many of Kubrick's shots "are pointedly *not* point-of-view shots," Stam argues that this shot, although "framed through Humbert's window, is subsequently revealed *not* to be from Humbert's point of view, since he is shown sleeping" ("Film" 121). Strictly speaking, Stam is correct: the shot is not a POV shot. However, Stam overlooks other cinematic techniques that establish the first half of the scene as viewed from Humbert's *perspective*, namely music and Lolita's portrayal.

From the aerial view of Lolita outside, the camera cuts to Humbert in bed, sheets drawn above his head. Awoken by the sound of the trunk slamming, Humbert makes his way to the window. As he does, the same saturated strings that accompanied the opening credits pedicure begin playing. Audiences are offered a rare POV shot as Humbert looks outside to see Lolita glancing up at his window. She first appears slightly left of frame so that Humbert (and viewers) perceive her through the gauze of the window curtains, an effect akin to her straw-hat halo in the garden scene. She steps to her left and appears centered in the small space between the curtains, offering Humbert a clear view of an oddly sophisticated-looking Lolita. Ironically, she is wearing heels and a dress à la Dior's New Look (cinched waist, full skirt) to make the two-hundred-mile car ride to summer camp. Telling her mother that she will "be right back," Lolita enters the house, runs up the stairs while the romantic score builds, and throws herself into Humbert's open arms as the non-diegetic piano reaches a crescendo. This *exceedingly* melodramatic moment is made all the more so by the stilted dialogue the two exchange, which parodically suggests the excesses of music and Lolita's urgency to see Humbert one last time stand in for all the two cannot say to each other:

LOLITA [*breathlessly*]. Well, I guess I won't be seeing you again, huh?

HUMBERT [*stoically*]. I shall be moving on. I must prepare for my work at Beardsley

College in the fall.

LOLITA. Then I guess this is goodbye.

[*Pause, followed by honking of car horn.*]

HUMBERT. Yes.

LOLITA [*with a slight wink*]. Don't forget me.

At which, she abruptly turns and runs back down the stairs. Humbert leans over the banister to watch her exit, turns and opts to enter her room rather than his own; he sits heavily on the edge of her bed and slowly places his face into her pillow, as if inhaling her scent. The camera then cuts briefly to Louise waving goodbye from the driveway as the station wagon pulls away and drives off down street before it (the camera) comes back to Humbert lying in Lolita's bed. This fleeting glimpse of the world outside Lolita's bedroom returns the film to objective narration and the truth of how ridiculous Humbert appears lying on Lolita's bed, mooning for a girl nearly four times younger than he is in a decidedly teenaged girl's bedroom, complete with stuffed animals and poster-adorned walls.[231]

The lush score does not abate throughout the entire episode and, though it softens a bit, continues to play even when Louise enters Lolita's room to give Humbert a letter from Charlotte. Since this score was attached to Humbert's perspective during the opening pedicure sequence and Lolita's breathless goodbye before camp, it may mistakenly be assumed to signal that the entire scene (from Humbert waking in his bed to reading Charlotte's letter in Lolita's bed) conveys Humbert's nostalgic perspective; however, I argue that the score functions parodically, as signalled by the dramatic irony with which this scene concludes. The melodrama of Lolita's goodbye is destabilized by Humbert's laughter as he reads Charlotte's "confession" of love on Lolita's bed.[232] That is, the scene opens by positioning Humbert as the "victim" of unfulfilled romantic longing and concludes by positioning him as a scheming "villain" who appears to take sadistic pleasure in Charlotte's declaration that she is "a passionate and lonely woman." He

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[231] Mason was fifty-one when production on *Lolita* began in January 1961; Lyon was fourteen.

[232] Marie Bouchet makes a similar point; however, her reading of why the "melodramatic element is […] undermined" differs greatly from mine. Noting that many "critics were puzzled by the music in the film, finding it at odds with the contents," Bouchet argues "this impression was created on purpose, so as to recreate the uneasiness one feels while reading the book, in a very subtle manner, since Kubrick could not show Humbert's scandalous pedophilia." Her analysis engages neither nostalgia nor Kubrick's parody of melodrama.

appears especially sinister when he reads that Charlotte will interpret the fact of his remaining

until her return as evidence that he reciprocates her love: he gleefully lies back on Lolita's bed,

laughing rather maniacally as the romantic music fades back in and the camera pans to a medium

close-up of a Drome Cigarettes ad featuring a photo of Quilty. Humbert's overwrought laughter

expresses his belief that Charlotte's letter has given him an excuse to remain in Ramsdale and

thus the ability to pursue Lolita. The Drome close-up, however, reveals that Lolita has her sights

set on Quilty.

Humbert's laughter and the music of the goodbye scene exemplify how, in his direction

of actors and use of music, Kubrick parodies melodramatic excess. Recall that such excess refers

to melodrama's exaggerated quality: its hyperbolic displays of emotion, and its use of music and

mise-en-scène as stand-ins for what cannot otherwise be expressed.[233] Of course, there is much

in *Lolita* that cannot be explicitly stated or depicted, namely Humbert's sexual desire for and

relationship with Lolita. Winters's histrionic acting in most scenes, Lyon's performance

following the school play, and Mason's portrayal of Humbert's reaction to Lolita's

disappearance from the hospital qualify as displays of emotional excess, whereas Kubrick's

ironic use of music burlesques the melodramatic impulse to sublimate repressed sentiments into

other filmic excesses. The romantic score and "Lolita Ya-Ya," which are both associated with

(but not definitive markers of) Humbert's subjective perspective, parodically stand in for

Humbert's emotion: the former mocks Humbert's nostalgic fantasy of love, while the playfully

upbeat jazz melody of the latter signals his lust for Lolita in the diegetic present.[234] Kubrick's use

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[233] "The essential element perhaps most often associated with melodrama," Ben Singer notes, "is a certain 'overwrought' or 'exaggerated' quality summed up by the term excess" (38-9).

[234] Humbert's humorously exaggerated toothaches also parody this mode of excess, given that they occur only when he "represses" (i.e., conceals from characters but not viewers) his disdain of Charlotte and desire for Lolita.

of "Lolita Ya-Ya" is especially effective during the bath scene following Charlotte's death in

which Kubrick parodies another central feature of melodrama: chance.

Often in melodrama it is by way of "chance," Ben Singer observes, that "bad things

happen to bad people, and good things happen to good people" (137). During the darkly funny

scene immediately after Charlotte's death, Jean and John Farlow (Diana Decker and Jerry

Stovin, respectively) are concerned for Humbert's emotional wellbeing and assume the gun on

the bathroom sink indicates that he is contemplating suicide; the Ya-Ya theme, however, tells

viewers that Humbert sees Charlotte's death as fortuitous because it provides him unfettered

access to Lolita. Kubrick convenes a motley crew in the Haze bathroom to discuss events while

Humbert bathes with a bobbing tumbler of whiskey![235] In a film lacking moral clarity, chance

becomes but a parody of moral retribution. Conventionally, according to Singer, "chance, rather

than causal action on the part of the protagonists […] brings about the villain's demise and saves

the day" (136). In *Lolita*, this structure is inverted: chance brings about Charlotte's demise,

ensuring Humbert's ability to pursue an affair with Lolita; and Humbert's actions, which save no

one, bring about Quilty's demise and guarantee his (Humbert's) own incarceration.

Just as chance serves a moralistic purpose in traditional melodrama, so too does

nostalgia. As I noted in chapter two, melodrama often offers nostalgic representations of family

and home that serve as, to borrow from Gledhill "'moral touchstones'" (21). Rather than concern

himself with moral standards, Kubrick traffics in Humbert's nostalgia for his affair with Lolita,

revealing its absurdity by subverting nostalgia. Like Gledhill, Steven Lipkin addresses the role of

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[235] Chance and pathos are further parodied in this scene when, in an effort to cheer Humbert, the Farlows minimize Charlotte's untimely death by noting that she had kidney disease and likely would have only lived another year, at most. Mr. Frederick Beale Sr., father of the driver that killed Charlotte, makes an appearance to cordially discuss the legalities of the accident. In an effort to avoid legal action against his son, Mr. Beale offers to pay for Charlotte's funeral — an offer clearly intended as a symbolic gesture that Humbert immediately accepts.

domestic institutions in melodrama, claiming that "[m]arriage and family provide primary reference points against which central characters (and we) measure feelings, desires, and the appropriateness of behavior" (291). Kubrick rejects such institutionalized meaning making and instead satirizes notions of suburban normalcy via his parody of melodrama and his perversion of nostalgia.

Rather than suggesting how things ought to or should have been, as typical of melodrama, Kubrick's parody (as facilitated by subverting Humbert's nostalgia) reveals both how things were and how Humbert misremembers the past. This misremembrance, Humbert's distorted view of Lolita, is significant for the way it is tied to larger misrecognitions that underwrite the myth of the suburban ideal, an ideal that Kubrick satirizes by perverting nostalgia for home in *Lolita*. His parody of melodrama is but one element of his larger effort to satirize—and thus deconstruct—ingrained assumptions regarding normalcy, assumptions that both reinforce cultural norms of family and home and underwrite postwar anxieties about so-called subversives. Specifically, Kubrick's satire questions hegemonic presumptions regarding suburban normalcy that promote xenophobia and discrimination.

Broad-Minded Suburbanites and Two Normal Guys:
Perverting Nostalgia & Satirizing Normalcy

Observing the "massive wave of postwar suburbanization in the 1950s," Robert Beuka considers how the America suburb during this time became endowed with extraordinarily "durable symbolic meanings" that have perhaps accounted for the persistent "cultural impression of suburbia" (228, 234): nuclear families, manicured lawns, cookie-cutter homes, and white picket fences. Although *suburbia* and *the fifties*, Beuka notes, occupy a "shared space in the

cultural imagination" (4), American suburban places have existed since the mid nineteenth century. In fact, Robert Lang et al. define six periods of American suburban development, suggesting that proto suburbs existed in the U.S. prior to 1850 and that the first suburbs proper appeared between 1850–1890 (66-67).[236] These "town and country suburbs" were followed by "street car suburbs" (1890–1930) and then "mid-century suburbs" (1930–1970) (Lang et al. 66-69). Suburban history is generally and, according to Lang et al., rather crudely divided into pre- and post-WWII periods; this dichotomy, they suggest, "is a caricature of suburban history" (65). I call attention to the nuances of suburban history and the significance of 1950s suburbia within the cultural imagination because—from their initial appearance in the nineteenth century and later increasing ubiquity—suburban places have been understood *as* nostalgic spaces even as critiques of suburbia have been underwritten *by* nostalgia.

From the outset, the suburbs were intended to offer a nostalgic sense of community within serene surroundings, qualities that were (and continue to be) identified with rural living in contrast to the alienating pace of urban life. At its core, as Beuka suggests, "the traditional vision of suburban living" rests upon a "bifurcated sense of urban/rural place identification" (162). The earliest suburban landscapes were viewed as providing "a pastoral retreat from the rush of urban culture," while the onset of mass suburbanization in the late 1940s was partially fuelled by "the *rebirth of the pastoral imagery*" (Beuka 24, 151 emphasis added). Hence, suburban places throughout the first half of the twentieth century "valorized familial domesticity in an environment positioned as the anecdote to the evils of city life," promoting a "nostalgic sense of community" (Beuka 24, 48-49).

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[236] Beuka also alludes to this fact in suggesting that the "American suburban impulse […] was evident" in the early nineteenth century (23).

Contrasting this nostalgic view of suburban place, Beuka identifies an "uneasiness over the evolution" of the American landscape during the early twentieth century as a particular "brand of nostalgia" that "anticipates prevailing concerns in the suburban age" (63).[237] In its scathing satire of suburbia, Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1922) offers an early example of critics' concerns with social conformity, anticipating mid-century discussions of suburban homogeneity.[238] By 1951, condemning suburbia was recognized as a literary cliché.[239] Meanwhile, real-estate developers were being accused of despoiling the countryside, and by the end of the decade detractors complained of suburbanite incursion upon a "once-pristine rural landscape" (Beuka 73). Beuka offers the writings of sociologist William Dobriner as paradigmatic of the "haute-bourgeois reaction to 'invasion' by suburbanites," noting how Dobriner sharply differentiates "the vanishing pastoral paradise of once-rural villages—the disappearing 'farmlands', 'cove valleys', and 'woody ridges'—[from] the prefabricated suburban environment that had superseded it" (73).

Regardless of such reactions to suburban development, a "prevailing cultural vision of suburban family life as the epitome of stable, ordered, even mundane existence" has persisted (Beuka 163). Kubrick's representation of suburban life in *Lolita* contrasts with this prevailing cultural vision and participates in a decades-old critique of suburban place. Among the various "diametrically opposed visions of the suburb" Beuka identifies that have characterized the so-called suburban debate (among sociologists and in popular media), a vision of the American

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[237] In fact, Beuka observes that "a sense of yearning for lost connections to landscape recurs throughout the major works of suburban fiction and film" (63).

[238] As Beuka notes, although the postwar "cultural critique of suburbia was many faceted," it most predominantly engaged "concerns over the unchecked spread of [suburbia as a] new homogeneous environment" (68).

[239] For an example of suburban condemnation as cliché, see Beuka 173.

suburb as "both an inclusive model of old-fashioned 'community' and a paranoid, exclusionary space" (27) underwrites Kubrick's satire.

Kubrick does not attack nostalgia *for* 1950s suburbia (e.g., the sort of nostalgia that surfaced during the 1970s nostalgia wave); rather, he very uniquely mobilizes nostalgia in *Lolita* to present his distinctive social critique. That is, Kubrick's satire relies on perverting nostalgia not for the suburbs themselves but for the idyllic qualities associated with *home* (as a symbolic space) that the suburbs embody. In my analysis of *Lolita*, I distill home's idyllic qualities into three broad categories: wholesomeness, tradition, and stability. If the paradoxical truth of nostalgia is misrecognition (i.e., idealizing and thus distorting or misrecognizing the past), perverting nostalgia turns away from the nostalgic ideal toward a greater truth.[240] In *Lolita*, I argue, this greater truth concerns *misrecognition*, as defined by Nancy Fraser.

Fraser identifies misrecognition as a "species of injustice," arguing that misrecognition prevents people from equally participating in social life: when "institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value" deny individuals the necessary standing for their participation as peers in social life, such individuals "suffer from status inequality or misrecognition" (20).[241] While Humbert's nostalgic idealization of Lolita distorts the past and thus transgresses his personal history, Kubrick alludes to larger social transgressions—to unjust misrecognitions—by satirizing notions of suburban "normalcy" that endorse suburban discrimination. The target of his satire, unlike many earlier and contemporaneous critiques of suburbia, is not homogenization per se but the

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[240] As Carol Margaret Davidson observes, "*to pervert* is the opposite of *to convert* and literally means *to turn around/away from the truth*; *to corrupt or ruin*" (28). Thus, because nostalgia distorts the past by way of idealization, perverting nostalgia may serve to reveal the fallacy of the ideal.

[241] Fraser also acknowledges that "people can be impeded from full participation by economic structures that deny them the resources they need in order to interact with others as peers," which she identifies as "distributive injustice or maldistribution" (20).

hypocrisy, complicity, and—most significantly—injustice that are both embodied and engendered by U.S. suburban places.

Although Kubrick's satire was not immediately apparent to some upon *Lolita*'s release, it has often been noted by contemporary scholars. In 1962, *Variety* magazine (in perhaps one of the most deprecating reviews of Kubrick's adaptation) declared *Lolita* "an occasionally amusing but shapeless film […] like a bee from which the stinger has been removed. It still buzzes with a sort of promising irreverence, but it lacks the power to shock, and, eventually, makes very little point either as comedy or satire" (qtd. in Hughes 99). Later critics identify notions of "normal" as the central target of Kubrick's satire but often neglect to sufficiently interrogate its critical implications (e.g., Nelson, 62; French, 229). To facilitate an exploration of Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia, I am most intrigued by Kagan's assertion that the "hook" of opening with Quilty's murder is blunted because the shooting is not connected to the film's "first hour of suburban satire" (104). Kubrick's suburban satire, I argue, is not limited to the film's first hour but persists until *Lolita*'s closing scene. Moreover, Kubrick's satire is eminently connected to Quilty's murder because the opening scene establishes a chaotic image of home that is juxtaposed with a supposedly idyllic view of home.

By following Quilty's murder with Humbert's tour of the Haze home, Kubrick subtly links Pavor Manor (Quilty's residence) to Ramsdale. Although Pavor is opulent and contains many expensive cultural artifacts (e.g., paintings, sculptures, and musical instruments), it is in an extreme state of disarray. Empty liquor bottles, full ashtrays and haphazardly placed garments suggest surface debauchery, while unopened crates and sheet-draped furniture suggest the possibility of concealed depravity, a suggestion made explicit when Quilty emerges from beneath a sheet. In contrast, Ramsdale is, on the surface, a quaint "resort town," a suburban

dream, complete with white picket fences, station wagons, and school dances chaperoned by doting parents. Yet, like Pavor, Ramsdale is full of hidden vices. Beyond the fences, nagging mothers and insolent teenagers spar; station wagons are vehicles of manslaughter and abduction; and school dances are attended by ostensible sexual deviants (e.g., harmless swingers and predatory pedophiles). In his rendering of Ramsdale, Kubrick offers an ironic vision of family domesticity that perverts nostalgia by distorting the idyllic qualities of home, thus rendering home (and the suburban ideal) uncanny.

Although I do not offer a psychoanalytic reading of *Lolita*, a concise summary of the uncanny as conceived by Sigmund Freud and others is useful to understanding Kubrick's satire as a function of perverting nostalgia.[242] In his 1919 essay, "The 'Uncanny'" (*Das Unheimliche*), Freud builds on F.W.J. "Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light," and he connects the psychoanalytic concept of repression to the uncanny, arguing that the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old — established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (13). Thus, the uncanny both makes unfamiliar what was once familiar and exposes that which was previously concealed.

Far from being limited to the realm of psychoanalysis, the uncanny has aesthetic and social implications. Kubrick's understanding of the uncanny's cinematic potential is evident in his familiarity with Freud's work: "In his essay on the uncanny," Kubrick explains, "Freud said that the uncanny is the only feeling which is more powerfully experienced in art than in life" (qtd. in Ciment 192).[243] Nevertheless, "the uncanny," Nicholas Royle clarifies, "is not merely an

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[242] It is worth noting that Kubrick was very familiar with Freud's work. In fact, James B. Harris, *Lolita*'s producer, reveals that Kubrick "advised" him to "read Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*" (qtd. in Ciment 202).

[243] In his discussion of the uncanny as depicted in literature, Freud maintains that "[t]he distinction between what has been repressed and what has been surmounted cannot be transposed on to the uncanny in fiction without

'aesthetic' or 'psychological' matter"; rather, "its critical elaboration is necessarily bound up with analysing, questioning and even transforming what is called 'everyday life' […] in relation to issues of sexuality, class, race, age, imperialism and colonialism" (23).[244] In *Lolita*, the experience of the uncanny corresponds to Royle's view that "it can (and indeed perhaps must) […] be what questions, unsettles and defamiliarizes any 'ordinary' sense or understanding of the 'historical', the 'cultural' and the 'phenomenon'" (161). As I will illustrate, Kubrick unsettles cultural assumptions regarding normalcy generally promoted by mainstream Hollywood films and specifically endorsed in 1950s and early-1960s sitcoms. *Lolita* perverts nostalgia to present an uncanny view of the suburban ideal, an image of home that satirically assaults standard notions of the normal American family as embodying wholesomeness, tradition, and stability.

Gerald Larson compares the notion of home to that of Augustine's comments on the notion of time,[245] suggesting that "[e]veryone assumes that the notion is perfectly obvious, but when one begins to think about it, the notion becomes elusive and nearly impossible to pin down" (336). Although Larson rightly observes that home is a somewhat abstract concept, and individual ideas regarding what constitutes home may vary, I have drawn from a variety of historical[246] and contemporary sources to identify qualities associated with the concept of home.

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profound modification; for the realm of phantasy depends for its very existence on the fact that its content is not submitted to the reality-testing faculty. The somewhat paradoxical result is that in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life" (18).

[244] Royle also suggests that the uncanny is critically relevant to interrogating "notions of automation, technology, and programming" (23), though these issues are not relevant to *Lolita*.

[245] In Book XI of *The Confessions*, Augustine writes: "For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this? Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it? But what in discourse do we mention more familiarly and knowingly, than time? And, we understand, when we speak of it; we understand also, when we hear it spoken of by another. What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not."

[246] I have deliberately chosen to consider mid-century studies of suburbia for what they reveal of American attitudes toward *home* at the time of *Lolita*'s release.

Because "the residential suburb is organized around the family" (Dobriner 24), I sometimes

employ *family* as a metonym of *home*.

Despite his 1960 assessment of suburbanites as "pushy, progressive, and plastic" (qtd. in

Beuka 73), Dobriner found, in his 1963 study (*Class in Suburbia*), that suburbanites "are

oriented to home ownership and the values of respectability" (48). This concern with

respectability—frequently synonymous with wholesome family values—was reflected in mid-

century television, film, and literature. "By the mid-fifties," David Halberstam writes, "television

portrayed a wonderfully antiseptic world of idealized homes in an idealized, unflawed America"

(508). Television programs during the 1950s and 1960s "were intended as weekly moral lessons

for parents and their children" (Kemper 257). The morally didactic quality of mid-century

popular entertainment contributed to a whitewashed view of suburban normalcy and stability.

Kubrick's satire of the presumably normal American family engages popular

entertainment trends of the 1950s, which saw a decline in box-office sales, the popularization of

drive-ins, and the ascendancy of television as the country's most popular entertainment medium

(Young and Young 181-3). *Lolita* evinces an awareness of such trends in a variety of ways (e.g.,

by having Lolita and Humbert discuss their movie-going preferences; including a drive-in scene;

specifying that Quilty is a "television writer"; and ensuring that domestic spaces and motels have

televisions). Given that approximately 86% of American households owned a television by 1959

(Young and Young 181), it is reasonable to assume that a vast majority of the population were

familiar with images of what American life was *supposed* to be, as depicted in sitcoms such as

Father Knows Best (1954–1963), *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952–1966), and *Leave

It to Beaver* (1957–1963). In their portrayal of American values, William Young and Nancy

Young observe, 1950s and 1960s sitcoms provided a "sanitized view of family life" that

emphasized familial bonds, good parenting, perfect homes, and happy (heterosexual) marriages (221-23). These sitcoms' wholesome, idyllic families uncannily resonate in *Lolita* by way of Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia that relies on the film's motif of sexual perversion.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Kubrick perverts nostalgia for 1950s and 1960s televisual culture (which would amount to perverting nostalgia for the present) but that he perverts nostalgia for the idyllic qualities of home that, while writ large in the sitcoms of the era, have nostalgically underwritten suburban places since their inception. With this understanding, I argue that Kubrick perverts nostalgia for home by perverting the orderly nature of cinematic and televised narratives that perpetuate idealized versions of home and family, thus presenting notions of normalcy and the mid-century American suburban ideal as uncanny.

Inseparable from Kubrick's satire of normalcy is the motif of sexual perversion in *Lolita*. Sexual innuendo is central to Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia because it humorously reveals common suburbanites' sexual kinks, which establish home as uncanny by undermining notions of wholesomeness. Although many scholars observe Kubrick's employment of sexual innuendo throughout *Lolita*, most attribute such intimations, as opposed to overt sexual references, to censorship issues. David Hughes, for example, concludes that Kubrick avoided "incurring the wrath and censure of the [Motion Picture Association of America] MPAA or the Legion of Decency" by using sexual insinuation to "add a sexual theme to his adaptation" (95).[247] Although fair to assume that implicit sexual references operate, in part, to appease censors, this assessment does not critically consider what motivates the ubiquity of sexual allusions in the film and thus overlooks Kubrick's satiric treatment of wholesomeness and sexual perversion. Sexual

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[247] For a list of sexually suggestive phraseology in Kubrick's *Lolita*, see Hughes 95-96.

perversion marks a socially constructed division between the normal and abnormal.[248] In *Lolita*,

this distinction is effectively obliterated. The nostalgic home that Ramsdale symbolizes is

revealed as an uncanny borderland where normal and abnormal not only dwell side by side but

are indistinct, as best demonstrated by considering the school dance scene.

The Ramsdale High School dance scene undermines conceptions of normalcy by

satirizing idyllic sitcom families that perpetuate the long-standing myth of suburban utopia. This

scene opens with an establishing shot of the school gymnasium, full of formally dressed

teenaged couples slow dancing, before panning in on Lolita and her date, Kenny. "Oh! There's

Mom. Let's go say hi," Lolita remarks pleasantly, in an octave or two higher than she typically

speaks. In fact, everyone but Humbert, it seems, speaks in a strained tone of exuberance

reminiscent of the Cleavers or Nelsons.[249] This hyperbolic congeniality reaches even greater

heights when the Farlows join Charlotte and Humbert at a refreshment table. Draping his arm

over Humbert's shoulder and straightening his bowtie, John apologizes for being late and prattles

on about his obligations as a defence lawyer. Like a dutifully concerned but good-natured wife,

Jean asks him in mock exasperation whether he can "stop being a lawyer for just one night in the

week." In this brief exchange, the Farlows epitomize what Young and Young identify as "the

goals to be attained in 1950s America": a "successful job, a secure place in the system, [and] an

understanding wife" (190). The Farlows' status as an ideal American couple is further

emphasized when John, while dancing with Charlotte, is met on the dancefloor with a chirpy

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[248] According to Julie Peakman, the latter half of the nineteenth century saw "the making of modern sexual perversity" by sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Sigmund Freud, who "realigned the division between the normal and the abnormal" (8).

[249] The Cleavers and Nelsons may be viewed as the televised descendants of their literary counterparts: The Babbitts, the suburban family of Lewis's *Babbitt*. Consider, for instance, the way young Ted Babbitt responds to his sister, Verona ("Rone"), when attempting to convince his father to allow him to use the family car: "Gee, honest, Rone, I don't want to take the old boat, but I promised a couple o' girls in my class I'd drive 'em down to the rehearsal of the school chorus, and, gee, I don't want to, but a gentleman's got to keep his social engagements" (Lewis 18).

"Hi, Dad!" from his daughter, Mona, whom he then kisses on the forehead. Kubrick satirizes this saccharine fantasy of family perfection by juxtaposing the events just described with Jean's revelation that she and John are "*extremely* broad-minded" (i.e., swingers), which is shortly followed by Charlotte's whispered exchange with Quilty that divulges a history of casual sex. Extramarital sex (let alone sexual fetishes), so it was presumed, has no place in the ideal suburban family. By saturating familiar images of wholesome family leisure with sexual innuendo and suggestions of unconventional sexual behaviour, this scene perverts nostalgia; it renders home uncanny by incorporating what ought to be absent.[250]

The dance scene also undermines conceptions of normalcy by ironically normalizing Humbert's obsession with Lolita. Viewing the dance scene as "instrumental" to the film, Jenkins notes that it underscores the "ongoing theme of naughty and pervasive sexuality"; set against Charlotte's aggressive sexuality and the swinging Farlows, "Humbert *ironically* (but deliberately) seems a paragon of dignity and restraint" (42, emphasis added). Ironically, of course, because Humbert—instead of chaperoning minors—voyeuristically devours Lolita throughout this scene, even going so far as to move a flower arrangement aside that obstructs his view. Rather than treating sex as dangerous, Kubrick presents characters' fetishes as humorous, establishing a comedic tone that facilitates his satire. As Kael puts it, "in *Lolita* our horror is split by laughter: Humbert has it coming — *not* because he's having 'relations' with a minor, but because, in order to conceal his sexual predilections, he has put on the most obsequious and mealy-minded of masks" (206). Humbert, however, is not the only one wearing a mask. His superficial demeanor that conceals criminal sexuality corresponds to that of highly sexed suburbanites who burlesque propriety. In effect, Kubrick's satire condemns *socially constructed*

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[250] Whereas "[t]he absence of what ought to be present is eerie," Gordon Bearn explains, "the *presence of what ought to be absent* is uncanny" (qtd, in Royle 88).

notions of "normal" that can only ever be superficially performed. *Lolita* does not condemn the institutions of family and marriage per se but the hypocrisy upon which these institutions rely to project the American mid-century suburban ideal.

Kubrick's critique of hypocrisy underwrites *Lolit*a's uncanny representation of tradition. Understood as beliefs and customs generationally transmitted, tradition is ideally figured to enhance familial bonds and foster collectivity. In Kubrick's treatment, however, traditions—specifically religious tradition and those embodied by social groups—are shallow, pretentious, and divisive. In responding to ontological questions, religions provide individuals with insight into the nature of reality. Since "the uncanny undoes any certainty about what is real and what is not" (Royle 134), perverting religious tradition highlights tensions between appearance and reality in *Lolita*, thus satirizing cultural pretense. As often noted, the cultural pretenses exhibited by Charlotte are a central target of Kubrick's satire (e.g., Kagan; Nelson). However, few commentators critically analyze this satire and instead limit its value to mere humorous effect. Moreover, to my knowledge, no one has considered the relevance of Charlotte's hypocritical religious devotion to Kubrick's satire. By attending to Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia and its ironic depiction of Charlotte's religious beliefs, I demonstrate how his satire of cultural pretense functions to censure discriminatory beliefs, practices, and behaviours.

The scene immediately preceding Charlotte's death satirizes her shallow religious attitudes, which are analogous to her cultural pretense. With Lolita away at camp and Charlotte and Humbert newly married, an emotionally needy Charlotte harasses Humbert for attention. At one point she declares their love "sacred" and that of his previous lovers "profane." Shortly thereafter, she asks Humbert apropos of nothing whether he believes in God. "The question is," Humbert responds with a chuckle, "does he believe in me?" Shushing him, Charlotte springs

from their bed to the shrine she has erected in honour of Harold, her deceased first husband. Gazing at a portrait of Harold and caressing his urn, she tells Humbert that she "wouldn't care if [his] maternal grandfather turned out to be a Turk" and thus reveals her suspicion that Humbert may be Jewish.[251] Her apparent "tolerance" of religious difference, however, is undercut by her ironic view of suicide.

Still contemplating the shrine, Charlotte removes a small gun from the bureau, turns to look at Humbert, and continues: "But if I ever found out that you didn't believe in God, I think I would commit suicide." Given the Christian (presumably Catholic) iconography surrounding Harold's shrine, Charlotte's suicide comment reveals her superficial engagement with religion and amounts to a confession of hypocrisy since suicide is antithetical to Christian beliefs (in fact, it is a mortal sin according to Catholic dogma). By having Charlotte prioritize Humbert's *belief* in God over her own salvation and eternal life, Kubrick once again alludes to a problematic emphasis on façade over fact whereby Humbert's membership within a socially sanctioned tradition is more important than upholding the tenets of that tradition. That is, *Lolita* censures the ideal suburbanite as defined not by who they are but how they seem. The sort of suburban pretense that promotes group membership on such terms, Kubrick's film subtly but repeatedly implies, potentially fuels ethnic and racial discrimination.

Kubrick uses humour as a diversionary tactic to demonstrate a relationship between suburban posturing and discrimination. He deliberately depicts Charlotte's pretensions as

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[251] Jewishness is matrilineal, which explains why Charlotte refers to Humbert's maternal grandfather. Turkey is pivotal in the history of the world's three major Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Semites (i.e., Semitic-speaking peoples) originated in the ancient near East (e.g., in Anatolia, present-day Turkey). Charlotte's suspicion that Humbert is Jewish is arguably corroborated later in the same scene when Charlotte reads his diary, in which he refers to her as a "brainless baba" (*baba* is Hebrew for *baby*). Humbert assigns this designation to his first wife in Nabokov's novel. Kubrick's choice to maintain the insult contributes to a pattern of allusions throughout *Lolita* to Jewishness, Nazism, and the Holocaust that signal the very real and dangerous consequences of the sort of hypocrisy he satirizes.

comedic.[252] By satirizing Charlotte's pomposity, Kubrick signals the seriousness of her cultural

elitism, an elitism characteristic of a suburban ideal based on assumptions of ethnic and racial

superiority. *Lolita*'s satirical view of suburban traditions intended to promote a sense of

community indicts both the exclusionary nature of social clubs and, more importantly, the social

forces that effect misrecognition: government-sanctioned programs that promoted suburban

segregation and informal discriminatory policies that restricted suburban homeownership to

whites. Such restrictions constitute the injustice of misrecognition because they impede non-

whites' participatory parity.

If, as David Thorns suggests, "the suburb engenders community-based activities which

provide the source of friendships" (122), it typically does so within the confines of promoting

white, middle-class solidarity. *Lolita* contains various subtle (and some not-so-subtle) nods to a

"whites only" world in its repeated emphasis on group membership that establishes an

exclusionary dyad (*us* versus *them*): Charlotte belongs to a country club; she refers to "our

group" before clarifying that she is referring to her book club; she implicitly distinguishes West

from East Ramsdale; she qualifies Ramsdale's "fortunate" residents as Anglo-Dutch and Anglo-

Scotch; she alludes to the possibility of Humbert being Jewish; and she employs a Black woman,

Louise, whom she refers to as "the coloured girl." The film's numerous references to

communities formulated via exclusion are not incidental but work to suggest a connection

between hypocrisy and misrecognition. This connection is signalled early in the film when,

moments after referring to Louise as "the coloured girl," Charlotte gives Humbert her phone

number: "one, seven, seven, six." "Seventeen seventy-six," Humbert murmurs as he records it in

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[252] Among his instructive annotations on the Dialogue Continuity script, Kubrick included the following "[n]ote to translators and dubbing directors: Charlotte Haze's choice of words in English are pretentious and awkwardly pseudo-intellectual. Try to retain that feeling because it is the basis of much of the comedy" (qtd. in Abrams 10).

his notebook, "The Declaration of Independence." Laughing—as though she has only just realized the significance of her phone number—Charlotte responds: "Hm. Yes. So easy to remember!"

In addition to emphasizing the hypocrisy and exclusivity of Charlotte's suburban world, *Lolita* contains allusions to Nazism and the Holocaust: Lolita responds to her mother's demands by offering Charlotte a "sieg heil," with her arm extended in a Nazi victory hail salute;[253] Humbert alludes to WWII refugees when recounting his emigration to "America, where so many Europeans had found a haven before"; and Quilty disguises himself as Dr. Zempf (a German-accented school psychiatrist), whom Kubrick claims was a parody of "movie clichés about Nazis" (qtd. in Ciment 156).[254] Both the humour and significance of Quilty's Dr. Zempf impersonation reside in its subtle indictment of American hypocrisy when Quilty, in his affected German accent, declares that "we Americans, we are progressively modern," a declaration that echoes an earlier statement made by Charlotte regarding her "progressive" community. The force of this subtle yet persistent political subtext becomes clear by compiling all of these seemingly random textual details and reading them against the historical backdrop of early- to mid-twentieth-century America.

Consider, for instance, Charlotte's country-club membership. While 1950s public opinion polls suggested a "growing public acceptance of Jews," Françoise Ouzan illustrates that Jews were nonetheless excluded from "social clubs or 'country clubs'" and prejudice was typically

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[253] From Lolita's salute, Kubrick cuts to a medium close-up of Charlotte ringing a servant's bell for Louise to deliver coffee, thus symbolically connecting the Holocaust to blindly hypocritical racism in the U.S.

[254] Although infrequently observed, *Lolita*'s Holocaust subtext has garnered the attention of a few scholars. Nathan Abrams, for example, observes that "through its close juxtaposition with [Lolita's] direct invocation of Hitler" in the previous scene, the scene in which Charlotte informs Humbert that Lolita is being sent to "camp" for "isolation" (Charlotte's phrasing) "uncannily echoes the Nazis' euphemistic language" (11). For discussions of *Lolita*'s Holocaust subtext, see Abrams; and Cocks, esp. 103-104. For general discussions of Kubrick's interest in fascism, see Kolker 138; and in "Jewish themes," see Hunter 279.

concealed "behind refined conformity and gentility, conduct often found among the elite" (62).

The very fact of Charlotte belonging to a country club signals her concern with social status[255]

and unconcernedness with discrimination — discrimination that extended well beyond social

clubs to define suburban demographics. As Samuel Heilman asserts, "for all the spirit of

reconstruction after the war and the apparent inclusiveness of 1950s America, in practice

Gentiles still did not want Jews in their neighborhoods" (21).[256] Although Charlotte does not

make explicit anti-Semitic comments, her complacency arguably amounts to complicit anti-

Semitism.[257] Of course, Jews were not alone in being victim to suburban discriminatory

practices.

Although democracy was the presumed postwar ideal, in actuality the melting pot only

offered "a chance to be white, Protestant-like, and middle class" (Heilman 15). Ethnoracial

segregation and discrimination in suburban places were not unique to the postwar period but

were implicit in the earliest suburban developments. Drawing on the work of historian Samuel

Kaplan, Beuka notes that "racial homogeneity was, from the outset [i.e., during the nineteenth

century], a crucial component of the 'dream vision' of suburbia sold to white Americans" (190).

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[255] Roger Simon observes that country clubs were "founded by upper-class elites" at the end of the nineteenth century, from which time "membership has been restricted by selective admissions procedures, large initiation fees, and high dues; thus country clubs served as important markers of status for the upper and uppermiddle [*sic*] class" (193).

[256] Nathan Abrams, too, addresses how "covenanted neighbourhoods prevented Jews from buying or renting property" during this time (9).

[257] Kubrick's satire of such complicity may be further supported by considering his choice to cast Winters as Charlotte. Only three years before *Lolita*, Winters (herself a Jewish woman) won an Oscar for her performance in *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959). Like Abrams, I find it very likely that Winters's performance in *Diary* "was a consideration in her casting" (6). Abrams concedes that, since "Kubrick's archives contain no explicit reference to his reasons for casting [Winters], or to her ethnicity, we cannot know with certainty what Kubrick valued of Winters's presence" (8). Though true that such certainty is not possible, *Lolita* contains other extratextual references (e.g., Quilty refers to himself as Spartacus, an allusion to *Spartacus* [1960], the last film Kubrick directed before *Lolita*). Moreover, in her memoir, Winters claims to have received a letter from Kubrick explaining that he was preparing a script from Nabokov's *Lolita* and asking that she read the book because he (Kubrick) wanted her to "meet Mr. Nabokov in New York to discuss the role of Charlotte" (383). That is, Winters did not secure her part as Charlotte via an agent; Kubrick specifically sought her out. For more on the relevance of Winters's Jewish identity to her casting as Charlotte, see Abrams 6-8.

Discrimination was not an ideological abstraction; rather, structural mechanisms for segregating neighbourhoods were common throughout the first half of the twentieth century. During the 1930s, for example, government programs intended to "facilitate the mass movement to suburbia were complicit in fostering the homogeneous racial makeup of the new suburban landscape" (Beuka 188). Beuka suggests that real-estate developers may have taken a cue "from such government sanctioned environmental racism" in "restrict[ing] sales of suburban homes to white, middle-class families," and inserting racial covenants into property deeds (i.e., clauses within the deeds that established "legal agreements between buyer and seller that no person of African descent could ever be allowed to live on the property") (188-189). Despite being outlawed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948, racial covenants "were common practice in the postwar suburban housing market" (Beuka 189).[258] Because "white middle-class" defined the "normal" American family, Blacks were typically excluded from pursuing the suburban American dream.

Indicative of systemic racism, Levittown—widely recognized as the first modern, American suburb—did not welcome racial difference. "Blacks could not buy in — a Levitt policy," Halberstam explains, "that lasted for two decades, long after the nation began legally trying to rid itself of lawful segregation" (141). In a sadly ironic, early-1950s statement, William Levitt of Levitt and Sons (the real-estate development company that built Levittown), himself a Jewish man, declared:

> The Negros in America are trying to do in four hundred years what the Jews in the world have not wholly accomplished in six thousand. As a Jew, I have no room in my mind or heart for racial prejudice. But, by various means, I have come to know that if we sell one

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[258] For more on racial covenants, as well as the discriminatory lending practices of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the ways the FHA enshrined racial and economic segregation into public policy, see Beuka 188-190.

house to a Negro family, then ninety to ninety-five per cent [*sic*] of our white customers

will not buy into the community. That is their attitude, not ours. We did not create it, and

cannot cure it. As a company, our position is simply this: we can solve a housing

problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two. (qtd. in

Thompson 72)

Levitt's comments reveal how the tension between appearance and reality expressed throughout

Kubrick's *Lolita* engages contemporaneous sociopolitical concerns.

The narrowly defined all-American family of mid-century suburbia is reflected in

Charlotte's declaration that "West Ramsdale" residents are "very fortunate" by virtue of being an

intellectually "progressive" and culturally "advanced group, with lots of good Anglo-Dutch and

Anglo-Scotch stock." Here, Charlotte subtly reveals—and Kubrick satirizes—her own bigotry

and alludes to the fact of Ramsdale being segregated.[259] Presumably, East Ramsdale is populated

by non-whites who, so Charlotte implies, are less intelligent and cultured than their West

Ramsdale counterparts. When Charlotte expresses her hope that Humbert "will want to address

our club" (emphasis added), viewers may assume that, as "Chairman of the Great Books

Committee," she is referring to her book club; however, her hope is noteworthy because she has

not yet specified to what club she is referring and thereby underscores her earlier use of

"advanced group" to define the exclusionary suburban community to which she belongs.

Charlotte's "progressive" community is, in fact, pejoratively traditional. I employ

tradition here in the sense of long-established ways of thinking; by *pejoratively traditional* I

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[259] Zachary Baqué also observes that Charlotte's notion of being "culturally advanced" involves "ancient prejudice and manners," and Abrams reads Charlotte's emphasis on Ramsdale's "fortunate" Anglo residents as expressing "an implicit postwar racism [...] in which covenanted neighbourhoods prevented Jews from buying or renting property" (9).

intend long-established bigoted ways of thinking.[260] Although Charlotte intends to suggest that

she is culturally sophisticated, she contradicts herself by claiming to be progressive in one breath

and bragging about her Anglo stock in the next, thus ironically admitting her own prejudice. The

suburban hypocrisy and discriminatory practices Kubrick satirizes by perverting nostalgia (e.g.,

by presenting distorted views of tradition) are symptomatic of larger, national anxieties of

subversion that promote prejudice and xenophobia. Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia engages

such anxieties by perverting notions of stability to further satirize the idyllic nuclear family

toward censuring racial prejudice and xenophobia.

     A critical commonplace holds that 1950s popular culture frequently equated the

traditional nuclear family with stability. Kubrick perverts nostalgia by satirizing this notion of

stability via his portrayal of the Schillers during *Lolita*'s penultimate scene (i.e., Humbert and

Lolita's final goodbye), which offers an uncanny portrait of the too-perfect sitcom families

discussed earlier. After spending three years without any word from Lolita following her escape

from the hospital, Humbert receives a "Dear Dad" letter in which Lolita tells him she is married,

pregnant, and in need of money. He drives to meet Lolita—Mrs. Richard T. Schiller—intending

to murder her "abductor" and resume their affair. As he approaches the front door of her home,

viewers are offered an external shot of the Schiller house. With its gable roof, double-hung

windows and picket fence, it looks like an uncanny replica of the Haze house; whereas the

bright, freshly painted Haze house is surrounded by foliage and a white picket fence, the drab,

run-down Schiller house is surrounded by an equally dingy fence (see fig. 7). Humbert knocks

on the door and frowns when he is greeted by an uncanny version of Lolita: a very pregnant

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[260] Identifying tradition as "[a]n essential feature of society," Jared Lobdell defines it as "the handing on of formed ways of acting — tradition being immemorial, prescriptive, and presumptive" (188). Thus, in Charlotte's racially and ethnically homogeneous community tradition regulates (i.e., denies) diversity by presuming the superiority of white, middle-class homeowners and the inferiority of those who are not a part of this demographic.

young woman wearing her hair pulled back, thick-framed eyeglasses, and a smock. Emphasizing how she has changed, Lolita asks that Humbert "excuse" her appearance because he has "caught her on ironing day." "But do come in," she insists, offering to take his coat and telling him that he is "looking marvellous!" Lolita's tone is reminiscent of the inflated congeniality used by many during the school dance scene and typical of 1950s and 1960s sitcoms. Although only three years have elapsed, her demeanor is no longer that of a sullen teenager but of an amiable, TV housewife.

Fig. 7. Humbert arriving at the Haze house (left) and at the Schiller house (right).

Throughout their short visit, Humbert learns the truth of Quilty and Lolita's relationship. Lolita admits to having had a crush on Quilty "ever since the times he used to come and visit Mother," ironically asserting that, unlike her or Humbert, Quilty "wasn't a normal person." Although Lolita believes Quilty to be a "genius," she complains of his "weird friends," whom she characterizes as "painters, nudists, writers [and] weightlifters." Here, Kubrick humorously positions artists as oppositional to suburban normalcy. Although Quilty told Lolita he was Hollywood-bound "to write one of those spectaculars" and promised to secure her "a studio contract," he actually wanted Lolita to cooperate with his "weird friends" in making an "art movie." Kubrick's ironic association of art and homemade pornographic films playfully alludes to misconceptions about artists as unwholesome, liberal subversives.

Lolita offers an ironic portrait of family stability in its depiction of the Schillers. They reside in a small and somewhat dilapidated house;[261] sleep on the living room sofa rather than in the upstairs bedroom because Lolita "likes to watch TV"; and are living in debt because they "overextended themselves." Struggling financially, the Schillers plan on moving to Alaska where Lolita's husband, Dick, hopes to "get in on the ground floor" of some unspecified "marvellous opportunity." Dick launches into a rambling discourse on what a "swell kid" Lolita is and what a "swell mother" she will make (presumably because she is "just nuts about dogs and kids"), as well as what a "great place [Alaska is] for kids" because it has "lots of room for them to run around." While in many ways Lolita and Dick appear to fulfill the nuclear family ideal, Kubrick's ironic humour throughout this scene undermines their ideal status. In his satirical depiction of the Schillers, he perverts nostalgia by challenging the myth of idyllic domestic stability.

Because the family home is frequently conceived as a microcosm of the nation, and the nation itself is figured as home, undermining domestic stability also implicates national stability. In other words, anything perceived to upset the stability of the nuclear family was (and often still is) also imagined as upsetting the stability of the nation as a whole — and vice versa. Prevalent, postwar anxieties regarding subversive threats to stability, to the so-called American way of life (i.e., democracy and family values), fuelled xenophobia and justified misrecognition. *Lolita* satirically targets the hypocrisy of cultural norms that promote exclusion in the name of democracy. That is, in addition to satirizing the ideal nuclear family, Kubrick's perversion of nostalgia also works to satirize anxieties about subversives common to postwar American culture.

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[261] Although the Schiller house appears large in shots of its exterior, shots of its interior reveal a cramped living space.

Literal and figurative associations between the political and domestic spheres meant that communism, in mid-century America, was often viewed as threatening to the American way of life. "Like other anti-Communists," according to K.A. Cuordileone, "J. Edgar Hoover spoke of Communism as an ideology and a lifestyle that spread like a disease and would subvert moral life and the American family" (72). Paradoxically, while communism was seen as threatening to family stability, the suburban family ideal was positioned as an answer to that threat (Coontz 28). In fact, Stephanie Coontz notes, "in 1959, Richard Nixon asserted that the superiority of capitalism over communism was embodied not in ideology or military might but in the comforts of the suburban home, 'designed to make things easier for our women'" (28). In this context, Coontz observes, a "'normal' family […] became the 'front line' of defense against treason" (33). As I have demonstrated, Kubrick perverts nostalgia for home to satirize the suburban family ideal and domestic stability, thus ironizing presumptions regarding the family as a bastion of American normalcy and morality.

This satire is both complimented by and inseparable from *Lolita*'s satire of anxieties about subversives. Kubrick advances his satire of subversive anxieties via his allusions to liberalism and moral degeneracy, which both Humbert and Quilty embody. It is through this satirical element of his film that Kubrick's darkly comedic genius shines: *Lolita* satirizes anxieties about subversives by ironically juxtaposing avatars of these anxieties with so-called normals to reveal that everyone is "perverse," thus censuring the hypocrisy that underwrites both the American ideal central to the utopian myth of suburban community and the injustice of misrecognition committed in the name of U.S. freedom and democracy.

Politicized anxieties about subversives in postwar America were rooted in assumptions regarding normalcy that positioned white, capitalist, heterosexual males as exemplars of a

national ideal. Cuordileone observes that the "masculine bravado," "scorn for feminine

attributes," and "language of sexual deviance and perversion" typical of "conservative anti-

Communism speaks […] to the convergence of anxieties about Communism, liberalism, and

sexuality" (39). The so-called "eastern establishment liberal of the kind the ultra-right loved to

hate" was purportedly comprised of intellectuals, who were scorned for their "self-indulgent

intellectuality, a lack of familiarity with the 'hard' facts of life, and a fetish for rhetoric"

(Cuordileone 41, 90). In addition to being characterized as self-indulgently intellectual,

Cuordileone explains, "the liberal was—in much 1950s right-wing rhetoric—feminine in

principle, effeminate in embodiment, and emasculating in effect" (49). In appearance and

mannerisms, subversive (according to the ultra-right) liberals were also imagined to be "well-

coiffed" and "super-refined"; their "urbane manner" was a source of anxiety because it was the

presumed "obscure mark of a gay man in the suspicious culture of the time" (Cuordileone 43).

Lolita satirizes this amalgam of perceived threats.

As seemingly intellectual, feminized, and urbane sexual deviants, Humbert and Quilty

epitomize the subversive "type" constructed and feared by conservative anti-communists. Both

Humbert and Quilty are parodies of supposedly decadent erudition: the former as a European

émigré, translator of French poetry, and literary professor who reads Poe to the disinterested

fourteen-year-old object of his obsession; and the latter as a playwright who works in television

and is a local celebrity of sorts whom Charlotte considers "a very erudite gentleman" and Lolita

believes to be a "genius." Humbert and Quilty also parodically embody the subversive-as-

feminizing stereotype. Whereas Humbert is rendered effeminate in his role as "housewife" to

Lolita following Charlotte's death, Quilty is feminized by way of the masochistic pleasure he

derives when dominated by his nameless judo lover.[262] Conservative rhetoric regarding

emasculation was underwritten by fears of sexual (and, by extension, political) conversion.

While Humbert and Quilty are both very well groomed and project cultured and stylish

personae, neither is gay; however, they are both associated with homosexuality because they are

feminized,[263] and they are respectively associated with explicit and symbolic homoerotic desire:

Quilty in his homoerotic banter with Mr. Swine, manager of The Enchanted Hunters; and

Humbert by virtue of playing double to Quilty, who ironically and repeatedly emphasizes their

shared normalcy while at The Enchanted Hunters. This association with homosexuality

underscores their presumed status as sexual "deviants,"[264] whom conservative anti-communists

viewed as threatening subversives.

"The idea that Communists in the United States were psychologically maladjusted or

emotionally unstable people gained wide currency in the fifties," Cuordileone explains, "and

provided the 'rationale' for the notion that they were therefore prone to be sexual misfits" (76).

At this time, homosexuality was considered a perversion by medical professionals, and it

continued to be perceived as such until it was removed from the American Psychiatric

Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973 (Peakman 106).[265]

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[262] Quilty's sultry companion, played by Marianne Stone, is listed on *IMDb* as "Vivian Darkbloom"; however, she is not named in the film, nor do the film credits identify her as Darkbloom.
[263] Within the popular homophobic imagination, feminization is often closely connected to anxieties about supposedly transgressive homosexuality.
[264] In no way do I endorse a view of homosexuality as sexually "deviant."
[265] Like the term *communism*, *homosexuality* was very broadly defined; "the term 'homosexual' (or, perhaps, 'repressed homosexual')," Barbara Epstein explains, included "those who maintained same-sex relationships" *and* "anyone who had ever had a homosexual experience, had thought about having a homosexual experience, or displayed qualities thought to be characteristic of those attracted to members of their own sex" (41).

Which is to say that at the time of *Lolita*'s production homosexuals were considered sexual

deviants and consequently presumed to threaten stability.

Like communists, homosexuals were imagined to be threatening because, despite their

supposed "abnormality" they were understood as being indistinguishable from allegedly

"normal" citizens. (A rather ironic anxiety in light of the fact that gay men were presumably

marked by their refined sensibility and urbane manners.) In postwar scandal magazines, Barbara

Epstein discerns "two seemingly contradictory attitudes toward [sexual] 'perverts'": "[o]n the

one hand," she claims, perverts "were regarded as abnormal, almost inhuman, on the other hand

they were described as looking and acting like everyone else, hard to distinguish from the

crowd" (38). Fears of being unable to discern "abnormals" from "normals" align with those of

identifying communists and the possibility of "enemy" infiltration. It is precisely in response to

such fears of recognition—prompted (and problematically justified) as they are by misguided

notions of protecting democracy and freedom—that the injustices of misrecognition are

committed. Kubrick satirizes such anxieties with the numerous disguises Quilty adopts

throughout *Lolita* and,[266] perhaps most explicitly, by way of key exchanges between stereotypes

of subversive figures during The Enchanted Hunters scenes.

As previously mentioned, Quilty engages in homoerotic banter with the manager of The

Enchanted Hunters. Their entire exchange offers a caricature of perverse subversives. On either

side of the front desk, Quilty and Mr. Swine lean conspiratorially toward each other. With their

faces in close proximity, they exchange sly and flirtatious smiles throughout their conversation,

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[266] In addition to Spartacus, Dr. Zempf and a police officer, Quilty variously impersonates and/or disguises himself as an old-timey prospector, a western hero, a boxing champion, an agent of some unidentified investigative department who phones Humbert in the middle of the night asking for a "report on [his] current sex life," and Lolita's uncle. While Quilty's mercurial identity facilitates *Lolita*'s dark comedy, it serves as more than a source of humour. As Ciment suggests, throughout "*Lolita*'s satirical travelogue of America, Quilty is a lurking threat, a pursuing shadow, the spy of a society that hunts witches" (92). Raymond Durgnat also suggests that "the chameleonic Quilty […] incarnates the conformising [*sic*] forces of America" (35).

which begins when Quilty asks Swine what "a guy like [him] is doing in a job like this." The question is loaded: Quilty intimates that Swine is the "type" of guy unsuited for a "normal" occupation such as hotel manager. Quilty's suggestion is made explicit when Swine asks for clarification and Quilty explains that he (Swine) does not "seem the type." When Swine responds that he "was an actor," Quilty claims to have known the first time he saw Swine that he must be an actor because "there was something about [him], some sort of aura that all actors and actresses have." Quilty's ability to discern Swine's supposedly authentic self (an authenticity ironically defined by his status as an actor) based on appearance alone derides anxieties regarding covert subversives.

The scene with Quilty and Humbert on The Enchanted Hunters veranda also satirizes subversive anxieties surrounding normalcy and suggests an association between such fears and surveillance. In their four-minute exchange, Quilty uses the word *normal* to describe himself and Humbert twelve times, though his rambling discourse and halting manner of speech gives the impression that he is anything but normal. For instance, Quilty claims: "It's great to see a normal face because I'm a normal guy. It'd be great for two normal guys like us to get together and talk about world events, you know, in a normal sorta way." His repeated emphasis on normalcy is, of course, ironic.

Having overheard Humbert's conversation with Swine when checking in, Quilty capitalizes on Humbert's knowledge that The Enchanted Hunters is hosting attendees of the State Police Convention and poses as policeman. His choice of disguise is relevant to institutionalized surveillance practices of the era. "The FBI and other government agencies," Coontz reports, "instituted unprecedented state intrusion into private life under the guise of investigating subversives. Gay baiting was almost as widespread and every bit as vicious as red baiting" (33).

Assuming the guise of a law enforcement agent, Quilty lampoons such surveillance practices by asking about Humbert's suspicions and noting that, although he (Quilty) does not have a suspicious mind, others find him suspicious — especially when he stands on street corners. In sum, The Enchanted Hunters episode satirizes, to borrow from Cuordileone, "the twin threat of sexual and political subversion" expressed in anti-communist rhetoric, which "relied on (and mobilized) real anxieties about both Communism and sexual disorder in American life" (29, 39).

Throughout *Lolita* Kubrick perverts the nostalgic ideals of wholesomeness, tradition, and stability that are associated with home. His perversion of nostalgia works to satirize suburban conventions. While the sexual habits of Ramsdale's residents offer an uncanny portrait of wholesome suburbia, Humbert and Quilty contribute to establishing an uncanny view of suburban stability. As parodic renderings of the implicitly queer intellectual outsider that haunted the mid-century anti-communist imagination, Humbert and Quilty—as "perverts" among many rather than invaders of suburban innocence—ironize the stability presumably threatened by subversives of their ilk. That outwardly "normal" Ramsdale suburbanites would, according to culturally defined stereotypes of abnormality, consider Humbert and Quilty dangerously subversive is supremely ironic and demonstrative of the link between hypocrisy and misrecognition that Kubrick satirically targets.

Concluding Remarks

Kubrick's treatment of nostalgia is central to *Lolita*'s complex interplay of irony, ridicule and humour. In subverting and perverting nostalgia, *Lolita* offers audiences a black comedy that mocks social taboos and disparages assumptions about normalcy. Kubrick's approach to black comedy is well explained by his own comments on his masterful satire targeting Cold War fears

of nuclear conflict, *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*:

"The only way to tell the story was as a black comedy, or, better, a nightmare comedy where the

things you laugh at most are really the heart of the paradoxical postures that make nuclear war

possible" (qtd. in Leitch 243). With *Lolita*, Kubrick invites audiences to laugh at the paradoxical

postures of suburban America, at the ignorance and complacency that makes dehumanization

possible.

Of his viewers, Kubrick demands as much as Nabokov does of his readers. While careful

attention and critical engagement with the products of both artists is crucial to grasping the

nuances of their work, Kubrick arguably takes Nabokov's notion of a good reader[267] a step

further in intimating that a good viewer must not only be engaged to appreciate a work of art but

must actually work to *create meaning* when watching a film. Just as Nabokov refused to

"explain" his novels, Kubrick refused to provide interpretations of his films, believing it

"misleading to try to sum up the meaning of a film verbally" (qtd. in Kuberski 4). My discussion

of *Lolita* does not "sum up" the film's "meaning" but illuminates one aspect of Kubrick's agenda

by providing a reading of the ways nostalgia works to offer a social satire that castigates

hypocrisy and misrecognition.

In the afterword to his novel, Nabokov asserts that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow" (315),

while in a letter to Edmund Wilson he identifies *Lolita* as "a highly moral affair" (*Nabokov-*

Wilson Letters 298).[268] In many ways, the same may be said of Kubrick's *Lolita*: the film is not

didactically moralizing, yet it possesses—to use Kubrick's phrase—"a moral theme" (qtd. in

Howard 77). This moral theme, Kubrick explains, resides in his supposition that *Lolita* "would

make people think" and deter them from passing "immediate moral judgements" (qtd. in Howard

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[267] For a discussion of what constitutes a good reader according to Nabokov, see 195 of this dissertation.
[268] Also see 189n207 of this dissertation.

77). Thus, the ethical quality of Kubrick's film, in typical Kubrickian fashion, is ironic: *Lolita*'s "moral theme" reveals the illusion of moral legibility based on cultural norms of family and home that, in turn, rationalize discrimination.

That Kubrick, in subverting nostalgia, often only subtly distinguishes discrepancies between diegetic illusion and reality in *Lolita* speaks to his desire to make people think. As does the fact that in perverting nostalgia *Lolita* couples the perversity of subversive stereotypes with the perversity of outwardly "normal" suburbanites to reveal the latter's hypocrisy. Social pretense is also identified as troubling in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*. However, whereas Kubrick employs nostalgia to lampoon social pretenses that underwrite injustice, Chandler relies on his own nostalgia to offer a very different sort of social critique. *The Long Goodbye*, as the next chapter illustrates, presents a discordant view of nostalgia that condemns middlebrow culture and reveals Chandler's prejudices.

Anglophilia & Anxieties of Inauthenticity:

Reflective and Restorative Nostalgia in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*

> I do not write for money or for prestige, but for love,
> the strange lingering love of a world wherein men may think
> in cool subtleties and talk in the language of almost forgotten cultures.
> I like that world and I would on occasion sacrifice my sleep
> and my rest and quite a bit of money to enter it gracefully.
> —Raymond Chandler

In an ironic twist, the canonization of Raymond Chandler—one of America's most influential hard-boiled detective fiction writers—began with critics exempting him from the detective genre in the mid 1940s and throughout the 1950s (Rhodes 80). They did so with complimentary intentions, seeking to distinguish Chandler as a literary stylist rather than an author of presumably lowbrow detective fiction. While mid-century critics most often praised Chandler's style, later critics have increasingly observed thematic similarities between Chandler's work and that of literary modernists. Central among the thematic concerns shared by Chandler and his modernist contemporaries are alienation, moral incoherence, and social transformation.[269]

Chandler's novels—all featuring his most famous creation, detective Philip Marlowe—are preoccupied with social transition understood as loss. His Los Angeles offers a reproachful vison of the modern metropolis that embodies the struggles of navigating a world in transition and offers a portrait of social disintegration, a portrait of, as Peter Messent puts it, "an entire society going down the drain" (145).[270] In fact, Chandler himself asserted that his fiction depicts "a world gone wrong" (qtd. in Raskin 90). Such a depiction presumes the existence of a once-

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[269] See Moss 70-71 for a brief discussion of thematic concerns shared by Chandler and his modernist contemporaries.

[270] See Mihaies 48, 153; Moss 91; Cooper 136; MacGowan 68; and Beekman 95 for discussions regarding Chandler's fiction as exemplifying social transition and/or disintegration.

better world, thus suggesting that Chandler's debased L.A. is underwritten by nostalgia for a lost

ideal. Although some critics have alluded to the sociological dimensions of loss expressed in

Chandler's work,[271] few have explicitly explored the dynamics of nostalgia central to loss in

Chandler's fiction. Will Norman and Benoît Tadié offer notable exceptions to this critical

oversight. While Norman argues that Chandler looked to England, "in search of a cultural

tradition and an imaginary alternative to his dystopian vision of Los Angeles" ("Big Empty" 93),

Tadié suggests that L.A. itself was an object of nostalgia for Chandler. Building on the work of

Norman and Tadié, this chapter considers Chandler's idealistic vision of nineteenth-century

England as well as the conditions of mid-century America in its exploration of nostalgia in

Chandler's penultimate novel, *The Long Goodbye* (1953).

    The Long Goodbye articulates a conflicted portrait of nostalgia that is inextricable from

Chandler's transatlantic upbringing. Born in Chicago in 1888, Chandler moved to Europe with

his mother, who was of Irish descent, after his parents divorced when he was a boy. The two first

lived briefly in Ireland before moving to London, where they resided with his maternal

grandparents and he received an English public-school education at Dulwich College. Tom

Williams notes that Chandler was proud of his Irish heritage, adored London, and was regularly

reminded that he was also American; this jumble of nationalities prompted young Chandler to

question whether he was Irish, English, or American, a question Williams suggests Chandler

resolved "by wholly embracing Britishness" (20-23). Although Chandler returned permanently

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[271] Fredric Jameson, for example, implies that Chandler's fiction mourns a lost sense of community understood as necessary to collective identity. In Jameson's view, Chandler's episodic narratives correspond to "the fragmentary, atomistic nature of the society [Marlowe] moves through" and thus formally reflect "an initial American separation of people from each other, their need to be linked by some external force (in this case the detective) if they are ever to be fitted together as parts of the same picture puzzle" (72-3). E.M. Beekman also perceives a lament for lost community in Chandler's writing. They speculate that Marlowe grieves the "loss, perhaps [of] a primeval Eden, perhaps [of] a community of decent men. Not a grief, however, simply for a loss of innocence, but a bitter frustration about the fact that things are as they are though they shouldn't be that way" (97).

to the United States in 1912, he continued to identify with British culture throughout his life. In fact, his letters reveal that he often chose to present himself as an English exile.[272] Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that Chandler preferred to identify with England because he viewed it as culturally superior to America.[273]

Chandler's Anglophilia accords with his romantic sensibility and was arguably fueled by nostalgia for the Victorian era. While in London as a young man, Chandler wrote and published romantic poetry (Lott 556; Cooper 120). When he began writing for pulp magazines in the early 1930s, he wrote to a friend whom he speculated would find it laughable that he, "with [his] romantic and poetical instincts," was "writing sensational detective fiction" (qtd. in Williams 110). Like his self-proclaimed romantic instincts, Chandler's Victorian-era nostalgia is suggested by the author's own declaration that he was "born half a century too late" (qtd. in Norman, "Big Empty" 96). Illuminating his Victorian predilections, Chandler writes: "I like a conservative atmosphere, a sense of the past. I like everything that Americans of past generations used to go and look for in Europe" (qtd. in Cassuto, "Raymond Chandler"). In Europe, nineteenth-century American travellers sought the elements of an allegedly cultured way of life understood as

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[272] For example, in a 1945 letter to Hamish Hamilton, his British publisher, Chandler admitted to still regarding himself "as an exile" and expressed his desire to return to England (qtd. in Norman, "Chandler's Hardboiled England"). That he felt little American affiliation is supported by a 1949 letter to James Sandoe, in which Chandler wrote: "I've lived half my life in California and made what use of it I could, but I could leave it forever without a pang" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 85). This implicit disavowal of American identity is made explicit in other letters to Hamilton. In 1950, Chandler wrote that he "had no feeling of identity with the United States" as a young man; shortly before his sixty-sixth birthday, he again wrote of his youth, claiming: "During my time in Paris I had run across a good many Americans [...]. But I wasn't one of them. I didn't even speak their language. I was, in effect, a man without a country" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 24-5). Written only a few years before Chandler's death, this last letter reveals Chandler's lifelong preoccupation with national identity and the extent to which he viewed himself a cultural outsider.

[273] I drew from various sources to compose this brief biography of Chandler, including Beekman 154; Cooper 119; Hiney 1-12; Lott 556; MacShane 3-7; Raskin 87; and Williams 1-27. Some discrepancy exists regarding precisely when Chandler and his mother moved to London. While most scholars maintain that they did so when he was seven (i.e., in 1895), Williams marks 1895 as the year Chandler's parent's separated and claims that Chandler was twelve before he and his mother settled in London (14, 17). Regardless, all biographers agree that Chandler began his studies at Dulwich in 1900.

traditional, glamorous, refined, and sophisticated (Stowe 5), a way of life associated with privilege that values high culture and social distinction. Thus, we may infer that by "everything" Chandler intends distinguished society marked by advantage, education, and urbane social mores.

The sense of the past Chandler appreciates is that of an "age of taste" to which, he laments, he "once belonged" (qtd. in Norman, "Big Empty" 96). Chandler's nostalgia for an age of taste amounts to his longing for some idealized time when people possessed and were capable of discerning moral, intellectual, and artistic quality.[274] Norman finds Chandler's yearning for nineteenth-century taste untimely for the way it evokes "precisely the Victorianism popularly understood to have been disavowed by Pound, Eliot, and Joyce" ("Big Empty" 123). While Chandler's longing for an age of taste understood in the context of high modernism may seem misplaced, it corresponds to modernists' esteem of high culture because it evinces his nostalgia for such culture.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Chandler desires to be recognized as a high modernist but that he is nostalgic for a view of culture shared by such modernists, especially as espoused by T.S. Eliot. Although, Eugene Lunn maintains, mid-century American discourse on the state of culture did not typically include "the kind of reactionary defense of social and cultural hierarchy" that Eliot advocated, in England such social criticism "carried a great deal of weight into the 1950s" (64). That it did so may partially account for Chandler's preoccupation with Eliot. Numerous scholars have considered Chandler's engagement with Eliot and the poet's

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[274] In eighteenth-century Britain, the word *taste* became prominent in both philosophical and popular discourse, connoting a rather kaleidoscopic index of artistic, moral, and intellectual judgements. Clarifying how the term was used, James Noggle usefully defines *taste* as an intellectual aptitude to discern "subtle qualities of practically anything" and a principle governing behavioural practices (2). This understanding of taste persisted in the nineteenth century as Victorian cultural critics continued to connect taste with ethics and regard it as "a category of aesthetic reception" (Bninski 22, 29). Although Noggle rightly insists that the terms *taste* and *aesthetics* should not be conflated, the age of taste for which Chandler is nostalgic appears to be that of nineteenth-century aestheticism.

particular relevance to *The Long Goodbye*.[275] Like Jonathan Eburne, I believe that, as an astute reader of Eliot, Chandler develops "through him a nuanced strategy for thinking about literature and social reality, about civilization and culture" (379). While Eburne rightly notes that claiming that Chandler wrote *The Long Goodbye* about Eliot would be inaccurate, he nevertheless maintains that "the numerous references to Eliot and his poetry in the novel, and in the letters Chandler wrote as he was composing it, suggest that Chandler was, at least, glancing over his shoulder at Eliot" (378). I will thus periodically borrow from Eliot's treatises throughout this chapter to explicate Chandler's views (which often accord with and slightly modify those of Eliot). I turn first to Eliot's views on culture to facilitate an understanding of Chandler's conflation of taste and culture.

In *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1949), Eliot expresses his "growing anxiety" about the increasing misuse of the word *culture* and sets out to "help define" the term (11). He first establishes "what the anthropologists mean [by *culture*]: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs, in their religion" (*Notes* 124). In addition to this anthropological sense, Eliot defines high culture, without calling it such, when he addresses the ways in which culture refers to possessing refined manners, social class, historical awareness, intellectual prowess, and artistic sensibility and/or ability (*Notes* 21). This understanding of high culture is particularly relevant to *The Long Goodbye*, in which Chandler's characters are

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[275] Many scholars have compared Chandler's urban environment to that of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) for the way it portrays modern alienation and spiritual decay. For such comparisons, see Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* 70; Trott 85; and Mihaies 47. Also see Norman, "Big Empty" 107, who observes some similarity between Chandler's and Eliot's ideas of style; and Eburne, who addresses Chandler's allusions to Eliot in *The Long Goodbye* and offers a thorough discussion of Chandler's preoccupation with the poet.

superficially cultured: they perform, without genuinely embodying, the cultural attributes outlined by Eliot. These performances hinge on nostalgia and inform the novel's critical stance.

The Long Goodbye mobilizes nostalgia to indict mid-century L.A. as morally, aesthetically, and intellectually vulgar (i.e., tasteless). It does so, in part, by evoking and then denying nostalgic fantasies of social order, romance, and friendship. The novel's repudiation of these fantasies participates in mid-century debates concerning mass culture and middlebrow culture by working to censure inauthentic performances of culture and taste as Chandler understands them. Nonetheless, the centrality of nostalgia to such performances, I argue, reveals Chandler's own reflective nostalgia for objects similar to those his characters long for. That is, Chandler often uses his characters as mouthpieces to express his own nostalgia for a bygone era supposedly characterized by taste, decorum, and comradery. This reflective nostalgia is complicated in *The Long Goodbye* by Chandler's restorative nostalgia, which is signalled by the novel's misogyny and racism and may be understood as a response to postwar gender dynamics and increasing ethnoracial diversity. In effect, Chandler's own problematic nostalgia motivates a social critique that is enacted via the motif of nostalgia in *The Long Goodbye*.

All Victorian Dignity on the Outside: Longing for an Age of Taste in the Coca-Cola Age

Chandler's nostalgic fantasy of Victorian English culture contrasts sharply with the reality of mid-century American mass culture. For Chandler, the former is characterized by taste and proper values, while the latter is broadly characterized by waste and vulgarity. He is, however, not entirely dismissive of mass culture. Considering his nonfiction alongside *The Long Goodbye* reveals that Chandler both believed mass entertainment to be a valid means of artistic expression and was troubled by its status in a commercial age. Throughout the novel, Chandler

expresses concerns regarding the deleterious effects of advertising and television lacking in aesthetic taste and intellectual value; his criticisms of mass culture are most expressly conveyed by newspaper mogul Harlan Potter. In many ways, however, Potter embodies what Chandler despises about the pretensions to taste that purportedly mark much middlebrow culture, a culture he—like many of his contemporaries—sees as fundamentally inauthentic. Potter therefore serves a dual purpose in the novel that corresponds to Chandler's mixed feelings: he articulates Chandler's critique of mass culture even as he participates in middlebrow efforts to inauthentically imitate the culture of taste for which Chandler nostalgically longs.

Potter seems to express Chandler's cultural nostalgia for a so-called age of taste characterized by gentility and moral refinement.[276] Claiming to be "a family man in an age when it means almost nothing," Potter complains to Marlowe of the "shocking decline in both public and private morals," which he attributes to mass production and "artificial obsolescence" (232, 234). Potter's diatribe against mass production and its attendant negative effects on quality (material and moral) echoes mid-century polemics against planned obsolescence[277] and aligns with Chandler's own views, as articulated in his nonfiction. Critical of America's "talent for manufacture," Chandler observed that by the early 1950s the country had "worked itself into an economy of overproduction" that could persist only with "an enormous artificial wastage of manufactured products" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 171). By having Potter, who may be characterized as a villain, ventriloquize his concerns, Chandler ostensibly tempers *The Long*

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[276] Norman offers a similar observation, claiming that "Potter emerges as a desperately belated figure nostalgic for the same fin-de-siècle moment with which Chandler identified himself" ("Chandler's Hardboiled England"), but he does not acknowledge Potter's hypocrisy nor the relevance of Potter's presumed nostalgia to Chandler's critique of middlebrow culture.

[277] Although, Stephen D. Rosenberg observes, the term *planned obsolescence* did not gain significant currency until the 1960 publication of Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers*, concerns with planned obsolescence were nonetheless articulated in both popular and academic literature throughout the 1940s and 1950s (218-231). See Rosenberg for a historical account of debates concerning planned obsolescence.

Goodbye's social criticism and thus adheres to his aesthetic principles regarding the impossibility of a "good proletarian novel" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 215) and the "pretentiousness" of writing about "social significance twaddle" (qtd. in Williams 24). More significantly, he establishes Potter as a middlebrow poseur. I will return to Chandler's critique of middlebrow culture as well as his aesthetics and the issue of pretention later in this section, after first establishing the hypocrisy of Potter's position, the relevance of this hypocrisy to commercialized mass culture, and Chandler's own seemingly incongruous views on mass culture.

Potter's condemnation of mass culture is hypocritical because he nostalgically disparages the very means of his immense fortune: newspapers and advertising. Although he owns multiple newspapers, Potter admits to disliking them:

> I own newspapers, but I don't like them. I regard them as a constant menace to whatever privacy we have left. Their constant yelping about a free press means, with a few honorable exceptions, freedom to peddle scandal, crime, sex, sensationalism, hate, innuendo, and the political and financial uses of propaganda. A newspaper is a business out to make money through advertising revenue. That is predicated on its circulation and you know what the circulation depends on. (234)

This passage reveals that although Potter is concerned with potential threats to his social advantage (i.e., via the invasion of his privacy), he remains unconcerned with the ethical contradiction underlying his acquisition of such advantage. By implying that advertising revenue depends on public interest in debased stories of scandal, crime and sex, Potter demonstrates his indifference to the moral condition of American culture insofar as he profits from moral degeneration, a hypocritical indifference contrary to his nostalgically inflected censure of declining morality.

While Chandler is not indifferent to the condition of American culture, he does appear conflicted with regard to mass culture. Toward clarifying his position and establishing how he employs nostalgia in *The Long Goodbye* to express outwardly antithetical views, I often draw from Chandler's correspondence and essays, which reveal the ways in which his views both resemble and differ from other mid-century critics of mass culture. Recognizing such similarities and differences promotes a greater understanding of Chandler's cultural nostalgia and the fact that he neither fully dismisses nor fully embraces mass culture. As I will demonstrate, he is most concerned about cultural decline as a consequence of an absence of taste, an inability to discern style that he attributes to the fact that Americans "lack the educational and historical background to know what style is" (*Raymond Chandler Papers* 72). That is, Chandler bemoans the fact that—unlike British citizens (whom he nostalgically venerates)—Americans are not educated in the classics and do not possess a historical sense.

Chandler's letters and nonfiction disclose a speculative appreciation of mass entertainment while also affirming specific antipathies toward mass media. Writing for *Atlantic Monthly* in the late 1940s, Chandler attributed the fact that "most motion pictures are bad" to poor source material, ninety per cent of which he felt was "tripe" (*Raymond Chandler Papers* 70). However, unlike most cultural critics of the time, he defended the medium of film as an art and criticized what he viewed as empty complaints against mass entertainment. "Not only is the motion picture an art," Chandler writes, "it is the only entirely new art that has been evolved on this planet for hundreds of years" (*Raymond Chandler Papers* 72). "Those who deride the motion picture," he observes, "usually are satisfied that they have thrown the book at it by declaring it to be a form of mass entertainment. As if that meant anything" (*Raymond Chandler Papers* 71). Whereas those like Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald pitted so-called

genuine culture against popular, commercial art,[278] Chandler identifies Greek and Elizabethan

drama to be forms of mass entertainment and finds it reasonable to suggest that "all art at some

time and in some manner becomes mass entertainment, and that if it does not it dies and becomes

forgotten" (*Raymond Chandler Papers* 71). Considering such claims, Norman suggests how

Chandler's views differ from those of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer: "Whereas

Adorno and Horkheimer located mass culture as a response to late capitalism, Chandler […]

preferred to understand it as an ideal principle last realized in Renaissance England" ("Big

Empty" 99). While Chandler may be correct in suggesting that all art eventually becomes mass

entertainment, I would not go so far as to suggest that his observation amounts to viewing mass

culture as an ideal principle last realized in Renaissance England. Regardless, Norman's analysis

usefully signals Chandler's relative disinterest in mass culture as a response to late capitalism in

comparison to his interest in the relationship between mass entertainment and art.

While Chandler was seemingly more interested in questions of aesthetics than politics,

his views nonetheless intersect with those who offered socioeconomic critiques of the culture

industry. Similar to other postwar appraisals of mass media that focused on the alleged

manipulation of presumably passive consumers,[279] Chandler appears especially concerned with

the intellectual passivity of television viewers and the detrimental influence of advertising upon

intelligence. For Chandler, "the debasement of the human mind caused by a constant flow of

fraudulent advertising is no trivial thing" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 139). In fact, he views

advertising's intellectually degrading effects on civilization as so consequential that he equates

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[278] Greenberg criticizes kitsch, "popular, commercial art and literature," as "ersatz culture" marketed to those "insensible to the values of genuine culture" (39-40). Macdonald also differentiates "good art" from mass culture "kitsch" and similarly argues that it is "not an art form but a manufactured commodity" (4, 17).

[279] E.g., Horkheimer and Adorno's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"; and Macdonald's "A Theory of Mass Culture."

the recognition of such effects with "worrying about what is going to happen to our civilization if everybody starts dropping atom bombs" and suggests that people "might start worrying about something they could really help if they tried" were they to conscientiously look at and listen to television (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 138-39).

Chandler's grievances with television and advertising are frequently implied in *The Long Goodbye*. For example, when Marlowe spends an evening watching television, he complains about lousy boxing matches with unskilled fighters, a trite and poorly produced crime show, and "commercials [that] would have sickened a goat raised on barbed wire and broken beer bottles" (99).[280] Thus, while Potter's allusion to the morally corruptive force of mass media may be taken as an unironic articulation of Chandler's position, Potter's attention to advertising revenue more significantly (and more subtly) signals one of Chandler's central objections to mass media: his belief that it detrimentally influences intelligence.

Chandler underscores this objection in *The Long Goodbye* by again using Potter as his mouthpiece. Echoing Chandler's condemnation of advertising for deliberately creating an immense waste of manufactured products (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 171), Potter recognizes this "commercial swindle" as requisite to mass production and complains to Marlowe that America "make[s] the finest packages in the world. The stuff inside is mostly junk" (235). Potter's remarks ironically serve to establish him as a finely packaged gentleman who is mostly junk on the inside, a metaphor that signals Chandler's critique of middlebrow culture, which I will address shortly. Like Potter, Marlowe is critical of fraudulent advertising and overpriced commercial "junk"; however, he understands that advertising agencies are an "elaborate a waste

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[280] Chandler's views regarding television also find expression in Dr. Verringer's claim that he "sold out" in choosing to sell his ranch to suburban developers: "'This peaceful little valley will become a real estate development. There will be sidewalks and lampposts and children with scooters and blasting radios. There will even'—he heaved a forlorn sigh—'be Television'" (*The Long Goodbye* 125).

of human intelligence" (9, 187).[281] The inverse relationship between intelligence and mass culture suggested in *The Long Goodbye* reflects Chandler's position that mid-century America is culturally inferior to his nostalgically idealized England because it lacks public taste and a historical sense, both of which Chandler believes necessary to aesthetic achievement.

Although mass entertainment and art are not diametrically opposed for Chandler, he appears to concur with other proponents of high culture who believe mass culture makes art virtually impossible. Whereas those such as Eliot, Greenberg, and Macdonald insist on a positive correlation between art and difficulty,[282] Chandler does not envision art as necessarily difficult. Rather, in his view, art cannot exist "without a public taste," which, in turn, depends on "a sense of style and quality throughout the whole structure" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 58). Although this sense of style "can exist in a savage and dirty age," he argues, "it cannot exist in the Coca-Cola age… the age of the Book-of-the-Month and the Hearst Press" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 58). That is, style cannot exist in an age lacking taste because quality cannot be discerned where it has not been fostered.

Educated in the Classics as a young man at Dulwich College in London, Chandler values a classical education for seemingly antithetical reasons. On the one hand, he maintains that a classical education provides a good foundation for writing in "a hard-boiled vernacular" because it "saves you from being fooled by pretentiousness" (qtd. in Eburne 374). On the other hand, he feels a classical education is essential to mannered and controlled linguistic expression

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[281] Marlowe's critical views are made clear when, the week following Thanksgiving, he observes that "[t]he stores along Hollywood Boulevard were already beginning to fill up with overpriced Christmas junk, and the daily papers were beginning to scream about how terrible it would be if you didn't get your Christmas shopping done early. It would be terrible anyway; it always is" (9).

[282] In his 1921 essay, "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot famously declares that poetry "must be *difficult*" (289). Following Eliot, Greenberg argues that "genuine art" is "necessarily difficult," whereas kitsch spares spectators and readers intellectual effort required of "serious" art by offering predigested ideas (44). Macdonald similarly assigns "serious ideas" to true art and faults kitsch for its "facility of access," which he argues "prevents it from achieving quality" (4).

(*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 81). "American is an ill-at-ease language, without manner or self-control," Chandler argues, because it "has no awareness of the continuing stream of culture"; he associates this "lack of the historical sense" with "shoddy education" and suggests it may be due to "the collapse of classical education" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 81). Chandler's valuation of a classical education as simultaneously important to revealing pretense *and* facilitating manner and control may be reconciled by considering how Matthew Arnold identifies culture with developing a historical sense.

While I have periodically addressed the ways in which Chandler's views accord with other mid-century social critics and indicated the relevance of Eliot to Chandler's thinking, considering Arnold's work is as equally useful to understanding Chandler's sense of culture — especially given Chandler's nostalgic Anglophilia and self-proclaimed status as a cultural exile. Lunn maintains that "because discussions of 'mass culture' debates have been contained by national boundaries, it has not been noticed that the British ones took a different turn from their American counterparts" (64). "Given the continued power of a cultural elite of 'intellectual aristocrats' in British life," Lunn continues, "the hoary Arnoldian mold of cultural criticism continued with renewed energy after the war, spurred on by resistance to the kind of egalitarian educational reforms carried out by the Labor party in the 1940s" (64). That Chandler was concerned with such reforms is suggested by his frequent praise of a classical education, praise that certainly engages Arnoldian ideals.[283]

Arnold writes that culture entails pursuing "our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock

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[283] For a sustained discussion of Chandler's engagement with Arnoldian ideals, see Norman, "Big Empty," esp. 100-102.

notions and habits" (6). Chandler appears to reprise Arnold's position in his 1938 essay, "In Defense of the Classics" when he asserts that an argument exists

> for the retention of the classics as compulsory subjects of education which cannot be ignored. It is the argument that the classics have now been taught so long that they cannot be dropped. It does not rest upon the respective glories and grandeurs of Athens and Rome. It rests merely upon the fact that Greek and Roman thinking is the core of our culture; that without the literatures of these two tongues we are without an understanding of our traditions; that cut off from our traditions, we are novices where we should be adepts. (*Notebooks* 19)[284]

Thus, a classical education as Chandler understands it encourages the development of aesthetic taste because understanding our traditions—familiarity with the best of what has been thought and said—enables one to distinguish style from empty pretence (e.g., writing that aims to express from writing that aims to impress). Moreover, this familiarity promotes the sort of intellectual growth essential to artistic innovation, to employing American language with style as opposed to mechanical, self-conscious expression.

Despite his pointed critiques of particular elements of mass culture, Chandler nevertheless believes that great writing is possible in America; however, he attributes this possibility to European taste: "all the best American writing has been done by men who are, or at some time were, cosmopolitans. They found here a certain freedom of expression, a certain richness of vocabulary, a certain wideness of interest. But they had to have European taste to use

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[284] Eliot, of course, offers a similar argument in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" when he asserts that a historical sense is indispensable to writing poetry (14). For him, "the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order ("Tradition" 14); thus, it is no wonder that he, too, views possessing a historical awareness, "a close acquaintance with the accumulated wisdom of the past," as significant to being cultured (*Notes* 21).

the material" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 81). Chandler arguably includes himself among this

cosmopolitan collective of talented American writers. In fact, he claims to be "a bit of an

anomaly [as a mystery writer], since most mystery writers of the American school are only semi-

literate; and I am," Chandler writes, "not only literate but intellectual, much as I dislike the term"

(qtd. in Eburne 374). Here, Chandler seeks to establish himself as a serious writer of popular

literature while simultaneously attempting to distance himself from the pretentious claims of

high art (as signalled by his purported unease with the term *intellectual*). Though, as some have

suggested, Chandler may consequently be understood as a *nobrow* artist,[285] he is nevertheless an

intellectual snob. This snobbery extends to Chandler's view of Americans in general and informs

his artistic project:

> It is no easy trick to keep your characters and your story operating on a level which is
>
> understandable to the semi-literate public and at the same time give them some
>
> intellectual and artistic overtones which that public does not seek or demand or, in in [*sic*]
>
> effect, recognize, but which somehow subconsciously it accepts and likes. My theory has
>
> always been that the public will accept style, provided you do not call it style either in
>
> words or by, as it were, standing off and admiring it. (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 61)

Chandler's distinctive style is widely understood to have developed out of his combination of the

classical education he received in England with American vernacular.[286] In this way, Chandler

employs his European taste to, as he puts it, "use" American material to create popular *art*.

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[285] Numerous scholars have addressed the ways Chandler sought to write detective fiction in a way that would unite highbrow and lowbrow, to produce quality mass entertainment with literary style. See Black 77; Gutkin 83-85; Mihaies 67; Norman, "Big Empty" 91-119; Raskin 88; and Swirski, *Lowbrow* 11, 121-147.

[286] For discussions of how Chandler merged American vernacular and English sophistication, see, for instance, Moss 74; and Norman, "Big Empty" 91-92, 96.

Despite such efforts, Chandler complained that the American public's "fundamental intellectual ignorance is too great. If it isn't a small best-seller or a book club selection, the hell with it" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 62). Presumably, while a cosmopolitan sensibility is essential to good American writers for Chandler, readers, by extension, must have European taste to appreciate great writing. That "semi-literate" Book-of-the-Month Club (BOTM) subscribers lack such taste seems a given for Chandler. As I will demonstrate, *The Long Goodbye* suggests that perhaps even more problematic than a lack of taste are attempts to imitate taste. His not-so-subtle jab at the Hearst Press and BOTM noted above is perceptible in *The Long Goodbye*. While Potter's business practices suggest the sensationalist, yellow journalism tactics commonly associated with nineteenth-century newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, *The Long Goodbye*'s Roger Wade and his publisher, Herbert Spencer, illustrate Chandler's problem with BOTM as the epitome of middlebrow culture.

Established in 1926, the Book-of-the-Month Club was founded by advertising copywriter Harry Scherman. To successfully market books about diverse topics to a wide audience, Scherman promoted both newness and cultural value as commodities by promising his subscribers a monthly selection of the "best new books" as chosen by a selection committee of "eminent experts" (Radway 165-171). By "regularly acquiring this objectification of the new," Janice Radway explains, BOTM subscribers were able to demonstrate to others their ability to "stay up to date, to be modern" (172). The BOTM further authorized subscribers' ability to remain *au courant* (a phrase employed in BOTM promotion) by evoking Arnold's famous dictum regarding cultural value and thereby assuring customers that, as "the best," the books they would receive were "legitimate embodiments of culture" (Radway 172). BOTM critics like Chandler objected to the commodification of *culture*, not the selling of books themselves. That

is, they saw the BOTM as treating culture as a liquid currency, as promoting the notion that

cultural capital can be purchased rather than acquired with time and intellectual effort. In doing

so, detractors maintained, the BOTM promoted books as mere objects of utilitarian value rather

than vessels of art or knowledge; it extolled the merits of owning new books, not their literary

quality.

Spencer echoes this disregard for quality when he tells Marlowe that Roger is "at the

moment […] an automatic best seller" (92). His mention of currency implicitly suggests that

Roger's popularly as a writer is simply a fad, a matter of public opinion rather than artistic skill.

As Caitlin L. Gannon observes, the direct mail model of the BOTM exposed the "market forces

that drive the publishing world" and threatened the notion that "that literature should be

published because it is good, not because it appeals to the tastes of the 'general public'."

Understood in this light, Roger is one of Spencer's "most important authors" because his books

sell, not because he is an especially talented writer (91). Spencer's distress over Roger's inability

to complete his latest novel is not motivated by concern for the author's wellbeing but by

concern for job security. As he tells Marlowe, "[w]e have to have that book finished. We need it

badly. To a certain extent my job depends on it" (93). Again, Spencer is not concerned with the

quality of Roger's work but with its exchange value.

While Spencer is "in bad trouble over Roger Wade" (93), Roger knows that he is sham

artist:

> You're looking right at a small time operator in a small time business, Marlowe. All
>
> writers are punks and I am one of the punkest. I've written twelve best sellers, and if I
>
> ever finish that stack of magoozlum on the desk there I may possibly have written
>
> thirteen. And not a damn one of them worth the powder to blow it to hell. I have a lovely

home in a highly restricted residential neighborhood that belongs to a highly restricted

multimillionaire. I have a lovely wife who loves me and a lovely publisher who loves me

and I love me the best of all. I'm an egotistical son of a bitch, a literary prostitute or

pimp—choose your own word—and an all-round heel. (174)

Roger's sense of worthlessness as a writer is likely a consequence of the fact that he writes

"historical romances" (92), "fat sex-and-swordplay historical novels" (105). Umberto Eco

compares how the past is deployed in historical and adventure fiction. He writes that "in

historical novels fictional characters help one to understand the past […], while in cloak-and-

dagger novels the past […] helps one enjoy the fictional characters" (69). While Chandler did not

take issue with reading for pleasure,[287] he appears to take issue with works that attempt to pass as

historical novels. In "Casual Notes on the Mystery Novel" (1949), Chandler disparages "the

current fat slab of goosed history masquerading as an historical novel" (*Raymond Chandler*

Speaking 65). His object of contempt is not the historical novel as a genre but *goosed history*;

that is, to borrow from Eco, novels in which "the past [is] taken as a pretext" (69) and that are

therefore, in Chandler's estimation, inauthentic cultural artifacts appreciated by middlebrow

readers who lack the necessary taste and historical sense to recognize the difference between a

historical novel and the imitation of one. Roger echoes this contempt and indicates how the issue

of inauthenticity extends to a writer's motivation:

I'm a liar. My heroes are eight feet tall and my heroines have callouses on their bottoms

from lying in bed with their knees up. Lace and ruffles, swords and coaches, elegance and

leisure, duels and gallant death. All lies. They used perfume instead of soap, their teeth

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[287] In "The Simple Art of Murder," Chandler writes: "I hold no particular brief for the detective story as the ideal escape. I merely say that *all* reading for pleasure is escape […]. To say otherwise is to be an intellectual snob, and a juvenile at the art of living" (987).

rotted because they never cleaned them, their fingernails smelled of stale gravy. The

nobility of France urinated against the walls in the marble corridors of Versailles, and

when you finally got several sets of underclothes off the lovely marquise the first thing

you noticed was that she needed a bath. I ought to write it that way. (250-51).

Roger, however, does not "write it that way" because doing so would mean living "in a five-

room house in Compton — if [he were] that lucky" (251). Thus, in the character of Roger,

Chandler establishes a connection between inauthenticity and the commodification of culture

that represents his larger problem with middlebrow culture as counterfeit.

This concern with being authentically cultured was expressed by BOTM critics who,

Radway notes, assumed the club "inspired consumers to purchase the mere signs of taste," "a

specious imitation of true culture" (11). Such assumptions were common among mid-century

detractors of middlebrow culture. Macdonald, for instance, attributed the emergence of a "tepid,

flaccid Middlebrow Culture that threatens to engulf everything in its spreading ooze" to the

gradual merger of mass culture and high culture, believing there to be "nothing more vulgar than

sophisticated *kitsch*" (7). Greenberg offers a similar, albeit implicit, critique of the middlebrow

by complaining that "high-class kitsch" dilutes "avant-garde material for its own uses" (41).

While Chandler arguably endeavoured to unite high and mass culture and does not appear

especially concerned with the "watering down of the avant-garde," Macdonald's contempt of

sophisticated kitsch and Greenberg's analogous disdain of high-class kitsch correspond to

Chandler's views in disparaging imitations of culture. Chandler perceived an essential difference

between *possessing* taste and *affecting* taste, a difference that is central to his critique of the

middlebrow, informs his disdain of the wealthy, and underwrites evocations of Victorian culture

in *The Long Goodbye* that reject semblances of Englishness even as they signal nostalgia for
nineteenth-century England.

Toward condemning middlebrow culture, *The Long Goodbye* satirizes those who do not
possess, to use Pierre Bourdieu's taxonomy, embodied cultural capital but nonetheless attempt to
wield objectified cultural capital in the service of *appearing* cultured.[288] At a party hosted by the
Wades, for instance, Marlowe meets a "[a] small girl with mud-colored hair and a band around
her forehead" who quotes from Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* after asking Marlowe
how he spells his surname. Rather than a marker of cultured intellect, her familiarity with
Faustus sardonically comments on what taste looks like among the rich and phony: mindless
posturing. That she is not an independent thinker is suggested by her bleating (like a symbolic
sheep) when she sets her glass down on the bar and then asking Marlowe whether he is
"interested in Communism" before declaring that she thinks "everyone ought to be" (179).[289]
Wearing a 1920s-sytle headband, the woman appears as one of Fitzgerald's flappers at a
distinctly Gatsbyesque party.[290] Her drunkenness, flirtatiousness, and emotionally overwrought
interaction with her husband (who must convince her that he is, indeed, her spouse) further align
her with Gatsby's party guests and establish her as yet another indistinguishable type lacking

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[288] Bourdieu distinguishes three forms in which cultural capital exists: "in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state [e.g., educational qualifications], a form of objectification which must be set apart because […] it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (17).

[289] In Chandler's view, communism diminishes individuality. In a letter to Charles W. Morton, he asserts "that the basic philosophy underlying big business and that underlying the Communist state [are] almost exactly the same" because, in both instances, people exist in the service of a system and "simply don't count" as individuals (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 141).

[290] Just as Gatsby's guests "conducted themselves according to the rules of behaviour associated with an amusement park" (Fitzgerald 41), the Wades' guests conduct themselves as though "[l]ife was just one great big vaudeville show" (177). Women at both Gatsby's and the Wades' parties argue with men who claim to be their husbands. Following such an argument in *The Long Goodbye*, Chandler self-reflexively acknowledges his allusions to *Gatsby* by having Marlowe ponder that "[e]very cocktail party is the same, even the dialogue" (180).

taste. The fact that she attempts to display her superficial cultural awareness while hobnobbing with the rich furthers Chandler's middlebrow critique, which is perhaps most scathingly expressed in the figure of Potter.

Potter embodies all Chandler disparages about the wealthy. Rather than a kindly old man wistfully nostalgic for a bygone era, Potter is "terrifying" (226). He is a physically imposing, psychologically intimidating, ruthless millionaire with an exaggerated desire for personal privacy that his daughter, Linda Loring, qualifies as "very old-fashioned" (229-237, 165). Explaining his attitude regarding privacy to Marlowe, Potter maintains that he and people of his "kind" expect to live in "decent privacy" (234). By associating decency with the privacy of the wealthy, Potter conflates economic class and civilized society — a correspondence Chandler decidedly rejects. He once wrote that both he and Marlowe "do not despise the upper classes because they take baths and have money; we despise them because they are phoney" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 215). Thus, author and character alike do not take issue with money per se but with the superficiality it engenders.[291] This association between inauthenticity and wealth is made clear within the first few paragraphs of *The Long Goodbye* when Marlowe observes a patron arriving at The Dancers club:

> At The Dancers they get the sort of people that disillusion you about what a lot of golfing money can do for the personality. A low-swung foreign speedster with no top drifted into the parking lot and a man got out of it and used the dash lighter on a long cigarette. He was wearing a pullover check shirt, yellow slacks, and riding boots. He strolled off trailing clouds of incense, not even bothering to look towards the Rolls-Royce. He

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[291] In *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe is bothered by others' phoniness regardless of their socioeconomic status because, he complains, "[w]here you find one thing phony you're apt to expect others" (124).

probably thought it was corny. At the foot of the steps up to the terrace he paused to stick

a monocle in his eye. (4)

Although Potter's pretense is not as garish as that of the monocle-wearing speedster driver, he

nonetheless belongs to the same club reporter Lonnie Morgan claims all rich men belong to: that

of the economically and politically powerful who will go to any lengths to ensure their prestige,

privilege, and position remain intact (68).[292] Such efforts, *The Long Goodbye* suggests, may

include everything from manipulating the law to impersonating taste.

As phonies, the wealthy, in Chandler's estimation, do not possess taste; they do not stand

as models of cultured sophistication because they value having over becoming in the Arnoldian

sense.[293] Although Potter judges Marlowe to be "a pretty honest sort of fellow," he tells him not

to be a hero because "[t]here's no percentage in it" (236). Prioritizing money over honesty,

Potter honours what Arnold considers a "false ideal" (178). Arnold is critical of those who

honour false ideals, such as "wealth and station, pleasure and ease," rather than the authentic

ideals of "intelligence and strenuous virtue" (178). That Potter embodies this distinction between

false and genuine ideals is perhaps most clearly evident when he tells Marlowe that "[t]he

average man […] can't afford ideals" because "[h]e has to buy food for his family" (234). By

noting the "average" preoccupation with meeting basic needs from the spacious luxury of his

own surroundings, Potter distinguishes himself as among those who can presumably afford

ideals; however, his ideals do not include those Arnold, Chandler, or Marlowe would consider

authentic. In fact, as Marlowe suspects and Potter later admits, Potter used "all [his] influence" to

quash the investigation of Sylvia Lennox's murder because he did not want a public scandal

(233). That he is more concerned with his image than with bringing his daughter's murderer to

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[292] Lonnie Morgan is a newspaper reporter whom Marlowe trusts in *The Long Goodbye*.
[293] For Arnold, culture entails becoming rather than having (48).

justice exposes his utter disregard for honesty and the depths of his callousness. As his son-in-law, Terry Lennox, puts it, Potter is "[a]ll Victorian dignity on the outside. Inside he's as ruthless as a Gestapo thug" (24). That is, although Potter is unscrupulous, he *projects* Victorian dignity in the same way middlebrow Americans, Chandler assumes, project a veneer of culture.

Potter's Victorian persona aligns him with middlebrow culture (as Chandler sees it) because it signals his failed efforts to purchase cultural capital. I characterize Potter's efforts as failed because the cultural capital he seeks (i.e., *embodied* cultural capital) cannot be purchased but only acquired with time and effort. Nonetheless, Potter is able to purchase cultural objects (i.e., cultural capital in its *objectified* state). The ways in which this false cultural capital confers him with additional social status and power underwrites Chandler's critique of middlebrow culture, his censure of the phony rich who believe they can "buy" cultural capital but who are, in fact, uncultured.

Potter actively attempts to associate himself with Victorian culture because he assumes such an association will reinforce his membership in an elite upper class. In the style of an aristocratic English gentleman, Potter does little for himself. He employs a chauffeur, has a "very snooty" butler, and orders Linda to "[r]ing for tea" (229). "Two cups," he imperatively demands before telling Linda that she "can have [her] tea in another room," effectively assuming the persona of a stereotypically cold, authoritarian Victorian father (229).[294] While Potter's affinities to Victorian stereotypes and England are frequently evoked, they are revealed as insubstantial. Victorian prudishness, for example, is subtly hinted at in Potter's assessment of Roger's "rather prurient books," which he, Potter, "should not be interested to read" (230). Although he would

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[294] Whether Victorian fathers were indeed unfeeling and authoritarian toward their children is debateable; nonetheless, the myth persists. See McKnight, esp. 2-8, for a discussion of the authoritarian Victorian father stereotype.

never read Roger's salacious novels, Potter, as I illustrated earlier, nonetheless conducts his

business according to a sex-sells maxim. When Potter makes a point of ensuring that Marlowe

knows he finds L.A. "a little too warm" because he is "used to a cooler climate," he implies that

he is more suitable to England (235).[295] His suitability is, however, seriously undermined by

Marlowe's observation that Potter "drank his tea as if he hated it" (230). That is, Potter's English

affectations are empty gestures solely for the benefit of others.[296] The critical dimension of such

posturing becomes clear when we consider how Potter's architectural preferences identify him

with nineteenth-century Europe while simultaneously suggesting the inauthenticity of such

identification.

For Linda's wedding, Potter gifted her and Dr. Loring a replica of a medieval French

château. His imitative Victorian medievalism exemplifies restorative nostalgia. In her study of

the ways American medievalism was influenced by and transformed its English counterpart,

Susan Aronstein distinguishes between chivalric (Romantic) and feudal (reactionary)

medievalism. The latter, she asserts, understands the Middle Ages "as a political ideal" that

corresponds to a "conservative politics of nostalgia aimed at preserving the rights and privileges

of the dominant class" (15). Such a "reactionary Middle Ages," Aronstein observes, longed for a

"return to feudal social practices [and] remained at the forefront of English medievalism in the

early part of the nineteenth century" (15). At this time, medievalism made its way to America

where, Aronstein claims, "it landed in the South [and] was used, much as the English aristocracy

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[295] As a middle-latitude country, England has a temperate climate and thus does not experience the same dry, extreme heat as California.

[296] This point is subtly reenforced by the fact of Marlowe's noting Potter's distaste for tea immediately after speculating that Potter hides his baldness with a combover. Marlowe's "hunch [that] there was nothing under" Potter's "MacArthur sweep […] but bare skull" draws readers' attention to Potter's concern with how others perceive him (230).

had employed it, to shore up privilege and justify a hierarchical social structure" (19).[297]

Understood in this context, the Loring château symbolizes the ideal political and social order

Potter longs for and attempts to emulate. The superficiality of Potter's association with all the

château's architectural style intimates is signalled first by Marlowe's wry assessment of the

château and later by Marlowe's cynical assessment of Potter's nostalgia.

Potter's efforts to associate himself with Victorian culture ultimately divulge his

simultaneously legitimate and disingenuous nostalgia. While Potter idealizes a past social order

characterized by hierarchical class divisions and upper-class privilege, he does not genuinely

long for a past moral order; rather, he desires to be recognized as a so-called American aristocrat.

Understood symbolically, this desire articulates Chandler's critique of middlebrow culture.

Marlowe seems to perceive Potter's spurious aspirations when he mockingly responds to Potter's

moralizing tirade against mass production: "You don't like the way the world is going so you use

what power you have to close off a private corner to live in as near as possible to the way you

remember people lived fifty years ago before the age of mass production. You've got a hundred

million dollars and all it has bought you is a pain in the neck" (235). Although Marlowe is not

deceived by Potter's fraudulent nostalgia for Victorian morality, he is, as the next section

demonstrates, initially deceived by other characters' performances of decorum and civility as a

consequence of his own nostalgic longings.

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[297] Chandler appears to parody Antebellum medievalism in the figure of Sewell Endicott, Potter's lawyer, who is a Virginian; when Marlowe meets Endicott, he tells him that Americans "have a sort of historical fixation about Virginians. We think of them as the flower of southern chivalry and honor" (56). Given that Chandler held lawyers in about as much esteem as he did the rich, it is reasonable to assume that Marlowe is ironically commenting on Endicott's "chivalry and honor." While Chandler does not establish a symbolic association between Old South slaveowners and Potter, *The Long Goodbye* does betray Chandler's racist, class-based prejudices (which will be addressed in the final section of this chapter).

Getting Lost in a Dream: Romance & the Tragedy of Time

Chandler holds a nostalgic view of England as a nation of tasteful, decorous individuals. He believes that English people possess "a fundamental decency […] and a sort of effortless sense of good manners," both of which he claims to "find very attractive" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 31).[298] Williams deems this view "romantic," arguing that by adhering to the stereotype of English people as emotionally restrained Chandler reveals his unfamiliarity "with modern Britain — how perfect he still hoped it would be" (160). Norman also alludes to Chandler's nostalgia, suggesting that "Chandler's notions of Englishness" primarily bespeak a culture unaffected by modernity, "a timeless pastoral" ("Big Empty" 112). In the last section, I addressed how Chandler's idealized England contrasts sharply with his view of mid-century American middlebrow culture and its presumed inauthenticity. This section further explores the issue of inauthenticity in *The Long Goodbye* to elucidate the gender dynamics of Chandler's timeless pastoral and the ways in which the novel's expressions of reflective nostalgia signal Chandler's own restorative nostalgia.

Over the course of the novel, Eileen Wade and Terry are exposed as frauds who each idealize the past and yearn for a time of uncorrupted youth: she longs for a past romance and he for a past version of himself. Explaining her feelings for Roger to Marlowe, Eileen expresses her profound nostalgia[299] for a lost love:

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[298] Chandler shared this view with his old form-master at Dulwich College, H.F. Hose, in a 1953 letter, in which he goes on to assert that "English people themselves seem to think that their manners have deteriorated, but they are still far better than they are anywhere else in the world. I am speaking of averages, of course. Americans can be very polite too, but you do not in casual contact, and especially in big cities, find that effortless courtesy which seems to be normal behaviour in England" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 31).

[299] Although Eileen's nostalgia is central to the mystery of *The Long Goodbye*, it has nonetheless been virtually neglected in critical discussions of the novel. My extensive literature review of Chandler scholarship and *The Long Goodbye* revealed no sustained analysis of Eileen's nostalgia and only a few passing references to her "idealized […] wartime love with Terry" (Cooper 134) and the fact that Terry and "the obsession of an impossible love" haunt Eileen (Mihaies 168). Tadié, perhaps, most carefully considers the significance of Eileen's nostalgic recollections of her lost wartime love in suggesting that they signify Chandler's self-reflexive rejection of his earlier poetic

I love my husband [...]. Not as a young girl loves, perhaps. But I love him. A woman is only a young girl once. The man I loved then is dead. He died in the war. His name, strangely enough, had the same initials as yours. It doesn't matter now — except that sometimes I can't quite believe that he is dead. His body was never found. But that happened to many men. […] Sometimes—not often, of course—when I go into a quiet cocktail lounge or the lobby of a good hotel at a dead hour, or along the deck of a liner early in the morning or very late at night, I think I may see him waiting for me in some shadowy corner. […] It's very silly. I'm ashamed of it. We were very much in love — the wild, mysterious, improbable kind of love that never comes but once. (183)

By novel's end readers learn that the man Eileen loved in Britain during World War Two—her first husband, Paul Marston—is none other than Terry Lennox. Although Terry is not dead, Eileen's Paul no longer exists because, as she complains, "[t]ime makes everything mean and shabby and wrinkled. The tragedy of life […] is not that the beautiful things die young, but that they grow old and mean" (329). Eileen's lament regarding the destructive forces of time resembles Terry's nostalgic self-conception in that he believes he was once an honourable man and is now an unmotivated coward who lacks integrity (13, 24). He is a lonely, alcoholic outsider nostalgic for "a time when [he] wasn't a no-good waster" (18).[300]

Marlowe is motivated by nostalgic fantasies that align with those of Eileen and Terry. Eileen's nostalgia for Paul and idealized love corresponds to Marlowe's romanticization of Eileen, just as Terry's nostalgia for his ideal self corresponds to Marlowe's image of an ideal

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aspirations: "[Eileen's] romantic language retrospectively appears [...] as unsatisfactory as, to the mature Chandler, his own early poems must have sounded."

[300] Echoing Tom Buchanan's account of his football glory days, Terry tells Marlowe that "I caught the brass ring and it shocked me to find out it wasn't gold. A guy like me has one big moment in his life, one perfect swing on the high trapeze. Then he spends the rest of his time trying not to fall off the sidewalk into the gutter" (24).

man. In part, Marlowe is compelled to help Eileen because she approximates a nostalgic image of ideal Victorian womanhood that Chandler imagines impossible in contemporary America. Likewise, Marlowe is driven to help Terry because he presumes Terry possesses civility that others lack, an implicitly male civility explicitly figured as English that is ultimately shown to be hollow. Terry's empty civility parallels Eileen's performance of demure femininity. In his portrayal of each, Chandler furthers his social criticism by establishing a symbolic association between nostalgia and inauthenticity that suggests contemporary American culture is morally inferior to *his* England (i.e., England as he nostalgically imagines it).

The moment immediately preceding Eileen's first introduction to readers establishes decorous behaviour as central to Chandler's understanding of taste and culture. Chapter thirteen opens with Marlowe waiting in the poolside-adjacent bar of the Ritz-Beverly hotel for his first meeting with Spencer. As he does so, he ogles a female bather:

> A girl in a white sharkskin suit and a luscious figure was climbing the ladder to the high board. I watched the band of white that showed between the tan of her thighs and the suit. I watched it carnally. Then she was out of sight, cut off by the deep overhang of the roof. A moment later I saw her flash down in a one and a half. Spray came high enough to catch the sun and make rainbows that were almost as pretty as the girl. Then she came up the ladder and unstrapped her white helmet and shook her bleach job loose. She wobbled her bottom over to a small white table and sat down beside a lumberjack in white drill pants and dark glasses and a tan so evenly dark that he couldn't have been anything but the hired man around the pool. He reached over and patted her thigh. She opened a mouth like a firebucket and laughed. That terminated my interest in her. I couldn't hear the laugh but the hole in her face when she unzipped her teeth was all I needed. (87)

I have quoted this passage in its entirety to draw attention to the ways in which it yokes

Marlowe's lust, aesthetic sensibility, and repulsion of vulgarity. Peter L. Cooper argues that

Marlowe, while "carnally" watching the young woman, is "actually drawn in by the ethereal

elements of the scene and repulsed by the carnal" (133).[301] Marlowe's appreciation of the

rainbows is notable for the way in which it subtly suggests that he is a man of taste, a man who

discerns and appreciates beauty; however, Marlowe does not appear to be repulsed by sensuality

but by the woman's coarse laugh. Her fire-bucket mouth prefigures that of the aforementioned

flapper at the Wades' cocktail party who "showed [Marlowe] her molars while she inhaled half

of [her drink]" (179). This symbolic association between the swimmer and flapper underscores

Marlowe's disdain of uncouth behaviour, an especially pronounced disdain when such behaviour

is demonstrated by women.

   While Marlowe continues to wait for Spencer, he scans the nearly empty bar and

observes people best described as inauthentic.[302] The pervasive inauthenticity and vulgarity (as

signalled by the aforementioned bather) surrounding Marlowe as Eileen enters the bar highlight

her presumed purity and grace as counterpoints. Though he does not yet know who she is,

Marlowe's world stands still when he first sees Eileen, a woman he thrice describes as a "dream"

and twice as "the golden girl" in the Ritz-Beverly episode (89-96). This first-impression episode

is also worth quoting at length for its richly symbolic language:

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[301] To be fair, Cooper later comments on "Marlowe's squeamish recoil from vulgarity" (133); however, he does not observe that Marlowe is disgusted by the woman's perceived lack of social etiquette rather than by her carnality.
[302] Marlowe sees "a couple of sharpies […] selling each other pieces of Twentieth Century-Fox, using double-arm gestures instead of money. They had a telephone on the table between them and every two or three minutes they would play the match game to see who called Zanuck with a hot idea" (88). He also notices "a sad fellow over on a bar stool talking to the bartender, who was polishing a glass and listening with that plastic smile people wear when they are trying not to scream" (88). Sensing that the sad fellow is an alcoholic, Marlowe muses: "You would never know how he got that way because even if he told you it would not be the truth. At the very best a distorted memory of the truth as he knew it" (88). The Hollywood hustlers, the barman's feigned kindness, and the alcoholic's unreliability embody inauthenticity.

right then a dream walked in. It seemed to me for an instant that there was no sound in

the bar, that the sharpies stopped sharping and the drunk on the stool stopped burbling

away, and it was like just after the conductor taps on his music stand and raises his arms

and holds them poised.

She was slim and quite tall in a white linen tailormade with a black and white

polka-dotted scarf around her throat. Her hair was the pale gold of a fairy princess. There

was a small hat on it into which the pale gold hair nestled like a bird in its nest. Her eyes

were cornflower blue, a rare color, and the lashes were long and almost too pale. She

reached the table across the way and was pulling off a white gauntleted glove and the old

waiter had the table pulled out in a way no waiter ever will pull a table out for me. She

sat down and slipped the gloves under the strap of her bag and thanked him with a smile

so gentle, so exquisitely pure, that he was damn near paralyzed by it. […]

I stared. She caught me staring. She lifted her glance half an inch and I wasn't

there any more. But wherever I was I was holding my breath.

[…]

The dream across the way […] was unclassifiable, as remote and clear as

mountain water, as elusive as its color. (89-90)

Eileen's white clothes, her pale gold hair, her likeness to a fairy princess, and her gauntleted

gloves evoke Romantic medievalism, thus encouraging an understanding of Eileen as the

famously chivalric detective's ideal woman.

Marlowe's symbolic association with chivalry and the figure of the medieval knight has

been addressed by countless scholars and generated some debate regarding the significance of

this association. While some support a straightforward reading of Marlowe as a knight-errant of

sorts, others complicate such straightforward readings by addressing Marlowe's vague moral code, calling for a reappraisal of his knight-status, or acknowledging the problems of trying to transplant a bygone moral order in mid-century L.A. to suggest how Chandler revises this figure.[303] Beyond this debate, though, a consensus exists regarding Chandler's engagement with a chivalric past and Marlowe's romantic sensibility, which is generally understood as informed by medieval literature. However, as Eco suggests, because the Middle Ages have always been differently appropriated "to meet the vital requirements of different periods," "every time one speaks of a dream of the Middle Ages, one should first ask which Middle Ages one is dreaming of" (68). Critical discussions of Marlowe's chivalric qualities typically forego this important question. That is, whether critics accept Marlowe as a knight figure at face value or complicate his association with the Middle Ages, they typically do not question to what Middle Ages he belongs. Drawing on the work of Aronstein, I suggest that Marlowe belongs to a nineteenth-century Romantic Middle Ages.[304]

Aronstein clarifies how, given the Enlightenment emphasis on reason, the Middle Ages during the eighteenth century were characterized "as childish and ignorant at best and primitive and barbaric at worst" (14). This characterization, she observes, allowed the Romantics "to equate the medieval and the natural in a critique of modern industrial society; the Middle Ages, they argued, offered a world of intensity, community, and feeling as an alternative to a barren, disconnected, and apathetic present" (14). Likewise, Chandler equates this Romantic notion of

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[303] For straightforward readings of Marlowe as a knight-errant of sorts, see Abbott 48; Cooper 126; Horsley 82; Moser 157; Scaggs, "Romance Narratives" 170; and Swirski, *American Crime Fiction* 96 and *Lowbrow* 142. For discussions that complicate such straightforward readings, see Cawelti 177; Hadley 59; Mihaies 32; Raskin 88; and Trott 72.

[304] To my knowledge, Norman is the only scholar to also recognize the importance of the nineteenth-century medieval revival—rather than a vaguely historic chivalric code—as central to Marlowe's characterization. He rightly asserts that "the chivalric conduct of the conquering hero which derives not so much from Mallory as from the British nineteenth-century medieval revival, and the latent sentimentalism, which, as Chandler himself acknowledged, emerged unrepressed in *The Long Good-bye* [*sic*]" ("Big Empty" 112).

the Middle Ages to gendered ideals in his critique of mid-century American society. While the Middle Ages provided the Romantics with "a nostalgic past that offered […] an alternative to barren scientific rationality" (Aronstein 15), the nineteenth-century Romantic Middle Ages provides Chandler with a nostalgic past that offers an alternative to moral corruption. Understanding Chandler's nostalgia for nineteenth-century medievalism—for a Romantic Middle Ages—is significant because it reveals how Marlowe's "chivalry" is both misogynistic and inseparable from Victorian ideology. His romantic idolization of Eileen is informed by a chivalric code that ironically serves to subjugate her: it reaffirms male power by encouraging a dehumanizing view of women as objects to be admired and protected, thus denying (and potentially signalling a fear of) women's agency.

Marlowe's romanticization of "the golden girl" Eileen is not limited to the first time he sees her nor to her physical beauty but persists for much of the novel. As in the Ritz-Beverly episode, Marlowe's appreciation of Eileen's physical beauty throughout *The Long Goodbye* is balanced by markers of her demure mannerisms, gentle disposition, femininity, and understated elegance. For instance, Marlowe describes Eileen's hands as "lovely, like the rest of her," noting that her "nails were beautifully shaped and polished and only very slightly tinted" (103). Her tastefully modest nail polish differentiates Eileen from the multitude of crass women Marlowe encounters, as does her wearing only a hint of perfume rather than applying it "with a spray gun" (108). In fact, her scent is so delicate that Marlowe contemplates whether it is Eileen's perfume or "just the summer day" that he smells as she stands close to him (108). In addition to being decorous, Eileen is initially depicted as a caring, dutiful wife (103-108). Further, she presents herself as virtuous and loyal, praising Marlowe as one who would rather go to jail than betray a friend (108).

The qualities Marlowe most admires about Eileen align her with the so-called Victorian

angel in the house. Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854-56) epitomized Victorian

standards of womanhood and the ideology of separate spheres, which presumed men and women

as unequal based on biological sex. Although the phrase *angel in the house* has become a

shorthand reference to oppressive Victorian gender divisions, during the Victorian era it was

commonly understood to indicate "the ideal to which every woman should aspire" (Black et al.

610-611). Patmore's poem promoted an image of the ideal woman as submissive and devoted to

her husband.[305] The angel in the house was self-sacrificing, gentle, compassionate, charming,

and dutiful (Patmore, lines 1-24).[306] Eileen's assumed submissive devotion to Roger and her

sexual purity are symbolized in the rumours of his domestic abuse that she downplays (105) and

her association with white throughout the novel (nearly every time Marlowe sees her she is

dressed in white). Perhaps most significantly, Eileen herself encourages her association with the

angel-in-the-house ideal. When Marlowe fulfills his contract with Eileen by locating Roger and

returning him home, he takes a kiss from her as payment that she does not reciprocate. Instead,

she pulls "away quietly" from Marlowe and tells him that he should not have done what he did

because it "was wrong" and he is "too nice a person" (151). Later excusing her reaction, she tells

Marlowe that she "must have looked very silly acting Victorian about [the kiss] [...]. A kiss

doesn't seem to mean much nowadays" (159). In addition to establishing Eileen as an ideal

woman (i.e., one who quietly defers to men, appropriately restrains herself, and is morally

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[305] In fact, during the nineteenth century, the notion that women should subordinate themselves to their husbands "was not only a matter of social expectation" but "also incorporated into English law" (Black et al. 611).
[306] In nineteenth-century America, ideal womanhood was similarly defined by rules of behaviour that dictated female subservience and chastity. However, my discussion focuses specifically on Victorian notions of ideal womanhood because, as my analysis demonstrates, the Victorian era is deliberately evoked throughout *The Long Goodbye*.

upright), this allusion to Victorian mores and the comment regarding the alleged modern-day

degradation of romance partly inform Chandler's Romantic, albeit restorative, nostalgia.

Eileen's assertion that romance appears meaningless in contemporary society

corresponds to Chandler's belief that he lives in an age that devalues romance. An admitted

romantic cynic,[307] Chandler maintains that "[t]he love story and the detective story cannot exist,

not only in the same book — one might also say the same culture. Modern outspokenness has

utterly destroyed the romantic dream on which love feeds" (qtd. in Plain 56). This is an

interesting complaint for the way in which it pits two types of mystery against each other.

Chandler implies that the mysteries of detective fiction, fuelled as they are by corruption and

violence, are incompatible with the mysteries of love, which are nourished by idealization and

chivalrousness. In blaming modern outspokenness for destroying the romantic dream, Chandler

implicitly indicts an absence of reserve—a lack of decorum associated with cultural

refinement—as degrading the so-called romantic dream and gestures toward his nostalgia for an

era of "infinite romance"[308] in which social conduct was "governed by strict rules, formal

manners, and rigidly defined gender roles" (Damrosch et al. 1101).

Chandler's nostalgia for Victorian mores accords with a collective nostalgia for similar

standards of behaviour manifest in postwar American gender dynamics. As I established in

chapter two, notions of domesticity were ideologically unstable during the postwar years.[309]

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[307] In a 1950 letter to his U.K. publisher and close friend, Hamish Hamilton, Chandler writes, "I am supposed to be a hardboiled writer, but that means nothing. It is merely a method of projection. Personally I am sensitive and even diffident. At times I am extremely caustic and pugnacious; at other times very sentimental" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 27).

[308] In 1862, U.K. prime minister Benjamin Disraeli characterized his age as "one of infinite romance" (qtd. in Damrosch et al. 1104).

[309] As I noted in chapter two, the exigencies of WWII disrupted traditional gender roles, disruptions that in turn incited various cultural anxieties surrounding notions of masculinity and femininity. Such anxieties encouraged the resurgence of a nineteenth-century ideology of domesticity that promoted the sanctity of home and family, narrowly defined gender roles, and the devotion of women to marriage and motherhood. Despite this resurgence, notions of domesticity were ideologically unstable during the postwar years.

While some Americans embraced social norms that advocated female subordination and male domination by identifying women's primary role as wives and mothers, others recognized and celebrated female ambition and achievement. Significantly, the Victorian cult of domesticity may be understood as equally unstable, given that the period was characterized by widespread debates concerning women's political, educational, and economic rights (Black et al. 611).[310] Hence, as Leonard Cassuto suggests, Americans' post-World War II "collective nostalgia for separate spheres […] sought to re-create an idealized form of social organization that had never truly existed in the first place" (*Hard-Boiled Sentimentality* 104). Intriguingly, this collective nostalgia was partially motivated by anxieties mid-century Americans (perhaps unknowingly) shared with Victorians: anxieties regarding masculine women.

Victorians who espoused the role of women according to a traditional wifehood-motherhood paradigm pejoratively masculinized women who rejected this paradigm. That is, they characterized women who failed to fulfill "their natural destinies as wives and mothers" as *unfeminine* (Black, et at., 611). Likewise, the purported naturalness of certain behaviours for American women was disputed during WWII, which required women's civilian and military participation. Encouraged to contribute to the war effort, many women assumed the industrial jobs vacated by servicemen, while others enlisted. Although temporarily empowered within the workforce, women were nonetheless expected to maintain their femininity while working in factories. A wartime Tangee Lipsticks advertisement, for instance, encouraged female workers to wear makeup by equating the use of cosmetics to femininity and democracy (Knaff 48-49).[311]

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[310] Such debates, collectively referred to as "the women question," addressed the role of women in society: while traditionalists who saw unmarried women as "odd" adhered to strict and disempowering gender divisions that subjugated women, proponents of women's rights embraced "the new woman" and advocated for suffrage as well as women's educational and economic equality with men (Black et al. 611-12).

[311] The Tangee Lipsticks advertisement in question opens by praising women for patriotically "doing double duty" (i.e., working in factories and as homemakers), and it concludes by claiming that "[lipstick] symbolizes one of the

The war effort also provoked discussions regarding the unnaturalness of service*women*. Donna Knaff explains how women who enlisted in (the formerly all-male) military were viewed as assuming a masculine identity and how "this 'deviant' female masculinity" was connected to lesbianism, which was seen as "abnormal"; thus, "mannish," unfeminine women were assumed to be somehow abnormal (59). These concerns with masculine women are evident in *The Long Goodbye*.

Chandler alludes to the issue of supposedly deviant, and thus threatening, masculine women by subtly juxtaposing symbolically gendered images of Eileen. During his first visit to the Wade home, Marlowe lights a cigarette while speaking to Eileen outside. She asks whether she may "have just one puff" (150), presumably "just one" because she earlier told Marlowe that she does not smoke (102). When he hands her his cigarette, Eileen draws on it, coughs, and hands it back laughing: "Strictly amateur, you see" (151). As they talk Marlowe is preoccupied with how close she is standing next to him, "slim and tall in a white dress of some sort," and he notices how "[t]he light from the open door touched the fringe of her hair and made it glow softly" (151). This imagery reinforces Eileen's amateur-smoker status, which she shrewdly asserts to project wholesomeness, performing a sort of idealized feminine purity. This performance is revealed as such the night Marlowe is summoned to the Wades' by Roger who claims to be "in bad shape" (189). Upon his arrival, Marlowe sees Eileen "standing in the open doorway with a cigarette in her mouth," wearing "slacks […] and a shirt with an open collar" (189). She calmly greets Marlowe and extinguishes her cigarette when he immediately comments on the fact that he thought she did not smoke (189). The cigarette and Eileen's

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reasons why we are fighting… the precious right of women to be feminine and lovely — under any circumstances" (qtd. in Knaff 49).

ostensibly masculine attire (i.e., comparative to the white dress she earlier wears) symbolize the disparity between the idealized image of femininity she projects and the woman she truly is.

Marlowe's burgeoning perception of this disparity is marked in terms that further support reading Eileen as performing rather than embodying ideal Victorian womanhood. Shortly after being questioned on smoking, Eileen expresses her exasperation with Roger and then faints as she enters the house. Marlowe begins to feel Eileen's behaviour "didn't quite add up" when he contemplates the events of the evening thus far, which include a besotted Roger first falling from his chair and then being carried upstairs by Marlowe and the Wades' domestic worker, Candy (201). The detective is disconcerted by the fact that Eileen did not look for Roger or ensure that he had not injured himself after she heard him fall, and by the fact that she retired to her bedroom while he (Marlowe) and Candy helped Roger to bed. Eileen's actions, which Marlowe finds immensely bothersome, seem to indicate she is not a loving, devoted wife. Marlowe thinks about the fact that Eileen "said she loved the guy. He was her husband, they had been married for five years, he was a very nice guy indeed when sober — those were her own words" (201). He then considers that "[i]f she was really scared, she wouldn't have been standing there in the open door smoking a cigarette. If she was just bitter and withdrawn and disgusted, she wouldn't have fainted" (202). Essentially, Marlowe questions Eileen's love for and devotion to Roger, as well as the veracity of her stereotypically feminine faint. In sum, he has begun to suspect whether she is an impostor.

Marlowe's suspicions parallel Chandler's antipathy toward what he perceives as spurious domesticity. In a letter to his friend James Sandoe, Chandler wrote: "I find it impossible to respect a woman who lives with a man. She can sleep with him all she pleases and with whomever she pleases and in whatever place she pleases, but the tawdry imitation of domesticity

gets me down" (qtd. in Williams 136). This hostility toward imitative domesticity (which

Chandler significantly qualifies as tasteless) accords with mid-century anxieties regarding the

sanctity of the home as a site of moral stability. As Cassuto suggests, "separate-spheres thinking"

gives rise to "assumptions inherent in this domestic ideal," threats to which he identifies as "the

most important fear expressed by the fifties femme fatale" (*Hard-Boiled Sentimentality* 118).

This fear is virtually inseparable from the supposed dangers of uninhibited female sexuality that

is also communicated by the femme fatale figure.

 As a femme fatale, Eileen attempts to deflect attention from her first failed bid to murder

Roger by seducing Marlowe. The seduction scene is especially significant for the way in which

Eileen appears to appropriate nostalgia. Following Roger's supposed suicide attempt, which

readers later learn Eileen has staged, Marlowe notes her "focused and clear eyes" (209) and

sends Eileen to her room while he tends to Roger. He waits until the distraught man falls asleep

before leaving him and observes Eileen's open door as he exits Roger's bedroom. When he hears

her call "out something like a name" that he knows is not his, Marlowe steps closer and asks

Eileen to keep her voice down because Roger has gone back to sleep (212). Rather than

acknowledge Marlowe's request, Eileen sexually propositions him, all the while behaving as

though Marlowe is her lost love returned: "'I always knew you would come back', she said

softly. 'Even after ten years'. […] 'Shut the door', she said in the same caressing voice. 'All

these years I have kept myself for you'" (213). By earlier drawing attention to Eileen's lucidity

(i.e., her focused and clear eyes), Chandler implies she is not under the influence of anything

when she now behaves as though in a trance.

 Eileen's appeal to nostalgia presents two equally plausible interpretive possibilities that

are not mutually exclusive. Eileen likely feigns confusing Marlowe for Paul/Terry because she

believes Marlowe will succumb to her wiles if romantically framed and/or because doing so grants her the protection of claiming ignorance if later confronted about her behaviour. In either event, she seeks to manipulate Marlowe with sex—and is nearly successful—because she senses his growing suspicion of her. Although Marlowe finds Eileen's behaviour "goofy," he enters her room (213). She first kisses him and then disrobes before asking that he put her on the bed, which he does; as Eileen thrashes and moans on the bed, Marlowe admits to feeling as though he is "losing control" (213). Interrupted by Candy's attempt to enter the room, Marlowe jumps for the door and surveys the hallway, believing that "Candy saved [him]" (213). He then shuts Eileen's door from the outside and listens to the "weird noises […] coming from the woman on the bed," explicitly noting that "that's all they were now. Weird noises. The spell was broken" (213).[312] Marlowe's willingness to help Eileen up to this point has been motivated by his romantic fantasies that rely, as I have demonstrated, on a nostalgic image of ideal womanhood, according to which Eileen is perceived as devoted and virtuous. The qualities that align her with the Victorian angel in the house, which Marlowe had begun to apprehend as suspiciously inauthentic, are confirmed to be performative in the seduction scene. With Eileen's spell broken and his romantic dream abolished, Marlowe is no longer vaguely suspicious but openly critical of Eileen, eventually exposing her as a liar and murderer.

During Marlowe's last meeting with Eileen, Chandler again couples nostalgia and an inauthentic Englishness. Upon arriving at Eileen's with Spencer, Marlowe notes that she is wearing a pendant that she first wore the morning after she attempted to seduce him and which, she then intimated, was given to her by her dead lover. In this final-encounter scene, she explains

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[312] Symbolizing Eileen's broken spell over Marlowe, he ceases to describe her as a dream. During their final encounter, he notes that "[s]he looked like a million" (297), thus replacing the romantic-dream metaphor with a simile that likens beauty to wealth — an association that signals inauthenticity for Chandler, given his views of the wealthy.

that she often wears the pendant because "a very dear friend" gave it to her "a long time ago"

(298). Dismissing Eileen's sentimentality with, "[y]eah. You told me," Marlowe suggests that

the pendant is "a British military badge of some sort" (298) before proceeding to discredit

Eileen's story that it was given to her by a lover lost to war in 1940. Although Eileen did not lie

about having loved and married a man named Paul Marston, she admits to having purchased the

pendant—a "jeweler's reproduction" of a regimental badge—in a New York shop that

specializes "in imported British luxuries," and she curiously lies about the date when and

location from which Paul went missing in action (298-300). When questioned about why she

lied, Eileen "softly" suggests that she was, perhaps, "lost in a dream […]. Or a nightmare, more

accurately. A lot of my friends were killed in the bombing. When you said goodnight in those

days you tried not to make it sound like goodbye. But that's what it often was. And when you

said goodbye to a soldier — it was worse. It's always the kind and gentle ones that get killed"

(302). Unswayed by Eileen's nostalgic evocation, Marlowe continues his informal interrogation

and asks whether she ever saw Paul Marston again, speculating that Paul could have been taken

prisoner rather than killed in action (302). Indignant, Eileen implies that she relied on nostalgia

to endure the pain of loss: "You're a horrible man. You want me to live that over again, to

punish me for a trivial lie. Suppose someone you loved had been caught by those people and you

knew what had happened, what must have happened to him or her? Is it so strange that I tried to

build another kind of memory — even a false one?" (302). Here, again, she resorts to justifying

her actions by evoking nostalgia, a nostalgia that became impossible to sustain once Eileen

discovered that Paul was living as Terry, an "empty shell of the man [she] loved and married"

(328-29). While nostalgia may mitigate loss, *The Long Goodbye* suggests that the disillusion of a

nostalgic fantasy may be as (if not more) painful as the initial loss itself. After all, being

confronted with the unreality of her nostalgic memories ultimately leads Eileen to commit murder.

Contrary to suggestions by some critics that Eileen is jealously driven to commit murder by a desire for revenge, I argue that she appears motivated by the foreclosure of her nostalgic fantasies. She tells Marlowe that she used to pretend that she would find Paul again "as he had been, eager and young and unspoiled"; instead, "[h]e came back a friend of gamblers, the husband of a rich whore, […] and probably some kind of crook in his past life" (329). Eileen is therefore driven to murder more by finding her lost love had become "a spoiled and ruined man" than by Sylvia's affair with Roger (329). Eileen was aware that Sylvia and Roger were having an affair before she saw Paul/Terry with Sylvia at the Lorings'. Although she could forgive Roger because "[h]e was just a husband," she could not forgive Paul because he "was either much more or he was nothing. In the end he was nothing" because, by virtue of Terry's corruption, what they "had was lost" and "could never be recovered" (305-06). When she did not know whether Paul survived the war, Eileen was able to maintain an idealized image of their past together. Confronted by the reality of the man he has become, she commits murder. That is, when she finds Paul living an inane existence as Terry Lennox, Eileen is unable to reconcile her nostalgic longing for the past with her disillusionment in the present and therefore kills the woman who signifies Paul's debasement. Although Marlowe does not murder Eileen, he is similarly disillusioned by learning that his idealized golden girl is not who she appeared to be and thus has no qualms about exposing her crimes and does nothing to prevent her suicide.[313] The tension

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[313] During Marlowe's informal interrogation, Spencer realizes that Eileen is guilty. Sensing as much, Eileen angrily ends the conversation and retires to her room. Chapter forty-three then opens with numerous allusions to Marlowe's belief that Eileen will commit suicide. While Candy questions what should be done next about Eileen and Spencer wants to notify the police, Marlowe insists that nothing be done until tomorrow. He first explains that Eileen "is very tired," "has been living under a great strain," and "doesn't want to be disturbed"; he then assures Spencer that "justice" will be served tomorrow (315). Marlowe knows that Eileen has a bottle of Demerol, and his repeated assertions to leave Eileen until the following day suggest that the justice he envisions amounts to Eileen taking her

between longing and disillusionment that Chandler establishes in Eileen and Marlowe is also clearly evident in his characterization of Terry.

Although Terry is disappointed by the disparity between who he once was and now is, he appears to embody the "effortless courtesy" Chandler perceives as "normal behaviour in England" and lacking in "casual [American] contact" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 31). In the opening pages of the novel, Marlowe details his first encounter with a very drunk Terry, who is repeatedly described as polite and whose mannerisms are characterized as English: his politeness is explicitly figured as an English trait when his wife, Sylvia, complains that Terry "gets so goddam English when he's loaded" (5), and Marlowe later observes that "although [Terry] wasn't English he had some of the mannerisms" (18). Marlowe seems to misread Terry's civility as accurately reflecting his character (i.e., as a marker of Terry's integrity) and thus immediately befriends him. However, he is not drawn to Terry simply because the latter possesses manners but because he desires to establish a homosocial bond with a man whom he believes shares his personal code, which prioritizes loyalty above all else.

Marlowe's homosocial relations are frequently read in the context of his supposedly chivalric code; that is, as an index of the detective's desire to protect the vulnerable. That the vulnerable Marlowe encounters are most often figured as male signals anxieties about masculinity and male intimacy.[314] Assumptions regarding the undesirable feminizing influence

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own life because he believes the police "won't even try" to convict her — a fact he asserts she "doesn't know" (316).

[314] Anxieties among Victorian and mid-century American men were often motivated by fears of feminization and homosexuality. Victorian gender divisions, Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis assert, "promoted the censuring of male intimacy, particularly homosocial intimacy, regarded by Victorian culture as harmful to the self, potentially feminizing, and tainted with sexual transgression" (11). Sexual and gender conformity were espoused in postwar America based on similar anxieties about presumably effeminate homosexuals, anxieties that were interrelated to fears about Communism and national security (Cuordileone xx). For discussions of the interrelationship between anxieties about effeminacy, homosexuality and Communism in postwar America, see Cuordileone, esp. chapter two; and Epstein.

of homosocial intimacy are reflected in the opening scene of *The Long Goodbye* when Marlowe

picks up a "vulnerable Lennox from the gutter of his drunken excess," a scene Gill Plain

describes as offering "a prime opportunity for romantic masculine self-definition through the

benevolent protection of a weaker, feminized other" (80). Fears of feminization are often closely

connected to anxieties about supposedly transgressive homosexuality. While Terry is not

identified as homosexual, his effeminacy is contemptuously suggested when Marlowe notes that

Terry "smelled of perfume as he went by. His eyebrows were awfully damned dainty too"

(370).[315] These remarks are tellingly made at novel's end, after Marlowe has learned of Terry's

betrayal and no longer sees Terry as a man in need of assistance but as an effeminate and

racialized other.[316]

The vulnerability of Chandler's male characters also exposes his preoccupation with war.

Sarah Trott uniquely suggests that "Marlowe's affinity for specific men resonates from military

experience and symbolizes the understanding that occurs between soldiers during times of

combat, a bonding of men upon whose actions your very life might depend" (97). In *The Long*

Goodbye, the men Marlowe cares for—Terry and Roger—are both veterans. Although Marlowe

is never identified as a veteran, Chandler served during WWI. According to some accounts, he

was the sole survivor of a platoon he led into battle.[317] Through the character of Marlowe,

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[315] Cooper observes that homosexuals in Chandler's fiction often "appear as stereotypes whom Marlowe generally disdains" (127). In *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe's homophobic condescension is most often directed at Earl, who is presented as mentally unstable and a homosexual stereotype: he has "delicate" features, "likes to dress himself up," manicures his nails, repeatedly calls Marlowe "sweetie," and is in the care of psychiatrist Dr. Verringer (119-123).
[316] I will address Terry's othering in the final section of this chapter.
[317] In his 1976 biography of Chandler, Frank MacShane writes that "Chandler's service in France ended abruptly when an artillery barrage of eleven-inch German shells blew everyone up in his outfit, leaving him the sole survivor" (29). Biographer Tom Hiney also claims that Chandler's military service ended as a consequence of this episode, during which Chandler was "knocked unconscious," "concussed," and then "taken behind lines" (43). According to Hiney, Chandler's severely depleted his outfit "was disbanded and survivors, including Chandler, were transferred back to England" (43). Williams considers such biographical accounts emblematic of a "typical [Chandler] story, one that casts him as a hero against all odds," and attributes their improbability to the fact that Chandler would have been "well behind the front" at the time of the alleged tragedy, as well as the fact that "his

Chandler may arguably have channeled his own nostalgia for wartime camaraderie (and,

potentially, survivor's guilt), which would explain Marlowe's persistent desire to protect

vulnerable men and his desire for homosocial bonds.[318]

Marlowe's yearning to establish and his failure to sustain male bonds in an allegedly

corrupt world has been explored by numerous scholars. Sean McCann, for instance, observes that

"Chandler returned time and again to a vision of male fellowship and showed the way it was

undermined by the various evils of the modern world" (140-41). McCann goes on to explain that

Chandler's most memorable novels (among which he includes *The Long Goodbye*) depict "the

deep feeling between Phillip Marlowe and some idealized brother figure; and each shows that

brotherhood falling prey to corruption and exploitation" (141). Like McCann, Williams

perceives Marlowe's persistent longing for "a real connection with another man" and suggests

that the detective "regrets that such a thing seems impossible to achieve" (80). This regret

amounts to nostalgia for a lost ideal man.

Marlowe's unwavering loyalty to Terry—a man he scarcely knows but considers a

friend—is tantamount to nostalgic idealization. When, at 5:00 a.m. and gun in hand, Terry shows

up at Marlowe's claiming to be in "a great deal of trouble," Marlowe readily agrees to help his

friend so long as Terry does not explain his trouble (27). Marlowe does not want to know if

Terry has committed a crime or has knowledge of a crime having been committed because he

"has a living earn, a license to protect" (29). Ignoring his intuition as a detective, Marlowe drives

Terry to Tijuana in an act of personal loyalty. After learning that Sylvia has been killed, Marlowe

refuses to believe Terry capable of her violent murder and remains unconvinced of Terry's guilt

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casualty form, the document that tracked his assignments, promotions, and injuries, makes no mention whatsoever of his being blown up and concussed" (66).

[318] For more on the relationship of Chandler's military service to his fiction, see Trott. Also see Trott for a compelling reading of Marlowe as a veteran, esp. chapter four.

even after reading his friend's confession letter (83-85) following Terry's alleged suicide in Mexico. Marlowe continues to investigate both Sylvia's and Terry's deaths despite Potter's threats to have his detective's license revoked if he continues to pursue his investigation (236). Marlowe's investigative work throughout *The Long Goodbye*, as Robert F. Moss correctly observes, "is undertaken out loyalty to his lost friend" (87), a loyalty grounded in nostalgia that idealizes Terry. In seeking to "restore Terry's reputation," Plain suggests, "Marlowe replaces the reality of the man he knew with [a romantic] ideal" (80). Mircea Mihaies considers Terry one of Chandler's "most fascinating characters" and suggests that in Terry Marlowe finds "an idealized image of himself" (169). Rather than being the "one good man" of hard-boiled fiction, Marlowe, Plain argues, is searching for such a man who represents "an ideal to set in the balance against the void of corruption and despair" and a person "with whom he might form an idealised homosocial union" (65). With Terry's reappearance at novel's end as Cisco Maioranos, Marlowe is confronted with the illusion of his nostalgic ideals. Just as Paul Marston's return as Terry Lennox forecloses Eileen's nostalgic fantasies, so too does Terry Lennox's return as Cisco Maioranos foreclose Marlowe's nostalgic idealization — the ethnoracial significance of which I will address in the final section of this chapter.

The final two chapters of *The Long Goodbye* depict the disillusionment of Marlowe's ideal-man nostalgia. Nearly unrecognizable after plastic surgery, Terry visits Marlowe one last time to explain how he faked his death. He realizes that he "came back too late" when Marlowe refuses to forgive his betrayal (i.e., Terry's complicity in covering up Sylvia's murder and his own staged suicide). Feeling manipulated and used by Terry, Marlowe arguably declines to resume their friendship because Terry, like Eileen and Potter, is an imposture. "You've got nice clothes and perfume," he tells Terry, "and you're as elegant as a fifty-dollar whore" (378).

Whereas Marlowe admired Terry's manners earlier in the novel, he now finds Terry's elegance annoying, in part, because Terry lacks integrity (371). Thus, Terry is no longer a nostalgic emblem of English civility but another embodiment of inauthenticity. In Norman's analysis, Terry's disloyalty to Marlowe reveals "the Victorian morality to which both Marlowe and, implicitly, the novel itself have appealed […] to be an empty and arbitrary fabrication, constructed purely of English manners" ("Chandler's Hardboiled England"). While I believe that Norman astutely identifies Terry's betrayal, Victorian morality and English manners as significantly connected, I do not believe the novel suggests Victorian morality itself is a fabrication. Instead, *The Long Goodbye* seems to suggest that imitations of such morality are problematic for Chandler, that—as evidenced by his characterization of Eileen and Terry— manners without substance are meaningless.[319]

The ways in which *The Long Goodbye* signals this lack of substance, however, expose Chandler's restorative nostalgia as misogynistic and racist. While Eileen is revealed as a femme fatale by being disassociated with an ideal womanhood that rests on deference to men, Terry is revealed as unworthy of Marlowe's friendship or forgiveness via the symbolic loss of his whiteness. Thus, while Eileen and Terry do not genuinely embody the manners of authentic culture (as Chandler defines it), they signify deeply problematic features of Chandler's nostalgia for an age of taste. In using the motif of nostalgia to censure mid-century American culture as morally bankrupt and lacking in taste, Chandler inadvertently divulges that much of his own nostalgia is reprehensibly tasteless.

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[319] As Eliot puts it, "good manners, without education, intellect or sensibility to the arts, tends towards mere automatism" (*Notes* 21).

Get Out of My Way, Peasant: Cultural Levelling & White Male Nostalgia

Chandler's work accords with Eliot's attitudes toward cultural levelling. Eliot disparages his postwar historical moment as "an age of cultural levelling" in which "it has become a point of politeness to dissimulate social distinctions, and to pretend that the highest degree of 'culture' ought to be made accessible to everybody" (*Notes* 81). In his view, "the ideal of a uniform system such that no one capable of receiving higher education could fail to get it, leads imperceptibly to the education of too many people, and consequently to the lowering of standards to whatever this swollen number of candidates is able to reach" (*Notes* 104). In rejecting the "dogma of equal opportunity," and believing it "for the best that the great majority of human beings should go on living in the place in which they were born," Eliot implicitly justifies xenophobia under the guise of promoting cultural continuity (*Notes* 106, 51).

Given that Eliot became a naturalized British citizen, renounced his American citizenship, and believed that "culture and equalitarianism […] conflict" (*Notes* 14), I find it reasonable to assume that the "great majority" of people he believes "should go on living in the place in which they were born" are non-white and that those to whom he believes high culture ought to be accessible are, at the very least, white. Chandler's tacit agreement with such views is signalled in *The Long Goodbye*, which reveals that the ideal man for whom Chandler is nostalgic is categorically white. In what follows, I consider the issue of cultural levelling and the racist dimensions of Chandler's nostalgia, particularly as expressed in *The Long Goodbye*. Like Eliot, Chandler appears concerned with cultural levelling — as distinct from middlebrow culture.

The first section of this chapter established how *The Long Goodbye*'s satirical portrait of middlebrow culture denies assumptions that cultural refinement and financial capital are positively correlated. The novel further challenges such assumptions by imbuing Marlowe with

immense cultural capital *and* regularly noting his tight financial circumstances. While some suggest that this disparity between Marlowe's financial and cultural capital registers the detective as a classless or working-class hero (e.g., Hilgart 378), I find it more significant for the way it suggests Chandler endeavours to disassociate economic wealth from notions of what constitutes *culture* or *being cultured*. While Chandler's disassociation of wealth from cultural refinement is fairly innocuous, his racist treatment of cultural levelling in *The Long Goodbye* is not.

Chandler's portrait of cultural levelling in *The Long Goodbye* resonates with mid-century discussions of American males that presume a crisis in masculinity.[320] The novel suggests that Chandler also sees cultural levelling as threatening to white male authority in a manner that echoes the concerns of a supposedly besieged masculine brotherhood. As McCann argues, the novel evokes "a nostalgic image of a fraternally unified culture" and portrays "that brotherhood as falling victim to a society robbed of its cultural integrity and falsely joined by the market, mass media, and bureaucratic government" (193). More specifically, I argue that *The Long Goodbye* frequently depicts racial and ethnic otherness in ways that substantiate reading Chandler's work as exemplifying a mode of white male nostalgia shared by his contemporaries.

In his study of twentieth-century North American literary fiction, Tim Engles illuminates "the forms of nostalgia often provoked in white American men by those who resist their dominance" (2). Although such resistance during the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement was, at times, literal, it was more often figurative; that is, egalitarian calls from women and ethnoracial minorities were viewed as challenging (and thus resisting) while male authority. Engles notes the frequency with which white male protagonists respond to "egalitarian calls from the subordinated" with anger, frustration, and bouts of restorative nostalgia; "these particularly

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[320] I addressed the postwar crisis in masculinity in chapter two. See 130, 130n145, and 130n146 of this dissertation.

socially inculcated moments of white male emotion," he argues, "are necessarily nostalgic, a deeply psychic homesickness for a nationally situated structure of uncontested, self-assured, and unchallenged eminence that never really existed" (12). Informed by Engles's enlightening study, my analysis addresses how racist depictions of cultural levelling in *The Long Goodbye* signal Chandler's own restorative white male nostalgia, which complicates his other forms of reflective nostalgia.

Chandler's racialized cultural levelling is expressed most vividly in an exchange between Marlowe and Potter's "middle-aged colored chauffeur," Amos (227). When Marlowe leaves the Lorings' after meeting with Potter, Amos drives him back to Hollywood. In exchange, Marlowe "offered him a buck but he wouldn't take it. [Marlowe] offered to buy him the poems of T. S. Eliot. He said he already had them" (237). The two men briefly meet again when Amos drops Linda off at Marlowe's. Although Chandler earlier established that Amos is Black, he makes a point of reiterating that, upon arriving at Marlowe's, "the middle-aged colored driver" held Linda's car door open for her (356). That Amos is repeatedly marked as Black serves to underscore Marlowe as unmarked by virtue of his whiteness.[321] Once Linda exits the car, Amos politely inquires whether he may "ask Mr. Marlowe a question" (356). Quoting from Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Amos asks Marlowe what the lines "I grow old … I grow old … I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled" mean (356). In doing so, according to Eburne's excellent analysis, Amos effectively calls Marlowe out on his sense of intellectual superiority:

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[321] "As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed," George Lipsitz points out, "whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (1). As a middle-class, heterosexual white man, Marlowe is *unmarked* as the norm within America's mid-century hierarchical social order.

Amos does not ask Marlowe to explicate a difficult passage, of course, but is rather interrogating his ability to "do" anything with Eliot's poetry other than wield the name as a form of belittlement. That is, by asking Marlowe to articulate what the lines "suggest" to him, Amos demands that Marlowe account for his earlier offer to "give him the poems of T. S. Eliot," implying, it seems, that Marlowe's privileged ownership of Eliot does not extend beyond name-recognition. (371)

Marlowe, however, refuses to intellectually engage with Amos, instead claiming that the poetic excerpt "just sounds good" but is meaningless (356). When Amos persists by asking Marlowe whether the lines "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michael Angelo" suggest anything to Marlowe, the latter responds with dismissive sarcasm: "Yeah — it suggests to me that the guy didn't know very much about women" (356). "My sentiments exactly, sir. Nonetheless I admire T. S. Eliot very much," Amos replies (356). Were the exchange to end here, Marlowe's dismissive treatment of Amos might offer only cursory evidence of the detective's bigotry. However, as this episode continues it pointedly racializes language to align whiteness with culture and showcases Marlowe's class-conscious racism.

Surprized by the fact that Amos is articulate, Marlowe seemingly chastises him for affecting a persona above his station — a station presumably defined by race and, as I will soon illustrate, ethnicity *rather than economic class*. He cautions Amos not to use the word *nonetheless* "in front of a millionaire. He might think you were giving him the hotfoot" (i.e., playing a practical joke) (357). Given Potter's earlier warning that Marlowe be careful when speaking to him because he does not like irony (233), Marlowe's warning to Amos suggests that, in using the adverb, Amos is attempting to be ironically funny. This suggestion is underwritten by racist assumptions regarding Black dialect and racist stereotypes of Black people as illiterate.

That is, to borrow from Engles, Marlowe evokes pejorative "connotations of blackness that reside in the collective white imagination" (38).[322] Amos "sadly" acknowledges Marlowe's implication and confirms that he "shouldn't dream of it" (i.e., he shouldn't dream of articulately expressing himself in Potter's presence) (357).

Quickly changing the subject, Amos asks whether Marlowe has had an accident — a question prompted by Marlowe's bruised face, the result of an altercation with mobster Mendy Menendez. Disregarding Amos's consideration, Marlowe again responds sarcastically, telling Amos: "It was planned that way. Goodnight Amos" (357). Marlowe's abrupt end to their conversation may arguably be prompted by his desire to spend time with Linda, who is waiting. Just as plausible, however, is the possibility that Marlowe does not wish to pursue a conversation about poetry and language with Amos because Marlowe assumes "true culture" to be inaccessible to a Black man — even one who seems to demonstrate a fluency in it. Put differently, Marlowe views Amos as embodying inauthentic culture by virtue of his race. That is, because Amos is Black he can, Marlowe assumes, only imitate so-called true (and implicitly white) culture.

Marlowe's racist inclinations are even more discernable when his behaviour is considered in the broader context of Chandler's epistolary correspondence. Chandler's letters reveal a wide range of prejudices, encompassing class, race, religion, gender, sexuality, and intellect. Reductive in his views of people, Chandler often categorizes individuals according presumed national "types."[323] For Chandler, the world is populated by stereotypes, a fact that he does not

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[322] I have adopted Engles's wording, not his claim. The phrase I quote is drawn from Engles's discussion of Black and ethnic characters in Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*.

[323] For example, Chandler characterizes Americans—"of all people"—as "the quickest to reverse their moods"; he also asserts his dislike of the French, claims to very much like Germans (specifically "South Germans"), and declares the "Anglo-Irish" (i.e., Protestant) to be "amazing people" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 53, 24-5, 20).

perceive as troublesome. On the contrary, he pompously defends his tendency to stereotype.[324]

This tendency is especially evident in his derogatory comments about domestic workers. For

instance, in a 1945 letter to Charles W. Morton Chandler explained that his "uncle's snob

housekeeper wouldn't have a Catholic servant in the house, although they were probably much

better than the trash she did have" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 20-21). Chandler did not view

the housekeeper as a snob because of her prejudice against Catholics, which he too possessed (he

admitted to still having "trouble with" the "terrible contempt for Catholics" with which he grew

up) but for her disparaging view of his uncle's profession (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 21).[325]

Although Chandler is critical of the housekeeper's bias, he is as class-consciously biased in his

reference to domestic workers as "trash." That he and his wife treated their own such workers

poorly is likely given the high turnover of domestic workers in his employ.[326] That he and his

wife were racist is even more likely given his assertion, in a 1949 letter to Carl Brandt, that

"[e]veryone has colored people and they are no damn good to us. My wife simply will not put up

with their dirt" (qtd. in Williams 156). The Chandlers' refusal to "put up with" Black people's

"dirt" is both racist and analogous to Marlowe's attitudes toward and treatment of Candy, which

I will soon explore. Chandler's letters thus justify reading his concern with cultural levelling as

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[324] Responding to criticism regarding his use of the word *Jew* in *The High Window*, for instance, Chandler wrote: "I call a character a Jew for purely intellectual reasons occasionally, since there is, except on the most exalted levels of personality, a Jewish way of thought too. The Jew is a type and I like types, that being so far as I have gone. He is of course many types, some recognizable a block away, some only on more intimate study, some hardly at all. I know there are Jewish people whom even Jews cannot pick out. I have had two secretaries who told me that, being both Jewish girls. There is a tone of voice, there is a certain eye, there is a colouring. It is not […] a matter of noses" (qtd. in Mihaies 123).
[325] According to Chandler, the housekeeper "did not regard [his] uncle as quite a gentleman because he was a solicitor. She used to say: There are only four careers for a gentleman, the Army, the Navy, the Church and the Bar. A barrister was a gentleman but not a solicitor" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 21).
[326] In a 1949 letter to Alex Barris, Chandler wrote that he and his wife were "[a]bout half to two-thirds of the time […] between cooks"; in a 1951 letter to Hamilton, he wrote of the difficulty of maintaining "a big house," complaining that "the help situation is damn near hopeless" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 29).

racially and ethnically informed, contrary to the opinion of some who believe Chandler's fiction

critiques racial and class inequality.

Peter Chomko's work exemplifies the sort of claims advanced by those who defend

Chandler against charges of bigotry. "Chandler's work, like that of most hard-boiled detective

writers," Chomko acknowledges, "has been challenged as sexist, racist, and otherwise

reactionary"; however, he maintains that reading "Chandler as a reactionary is [...] to misread the

vital and animating core of his work" because the Marlowe novels foreground "socioeconomic

inequities that were coalescing even as America settled into an era of post-New Deal prosperity"

(56). In my view, recognizing Marlowe's (and Chandler's) racism does not constitute a

misreading. While I agree with Chomko on the issue of Chandler's condemnation of a social

"system in which law, order, and even life can be bought and sold" (57), I maintain that Chandler

selectively condemns such a system because he is concerned with cultural decline insofar as the

term *culture* signals whiteness. That is, Chandler does not, as Chomko suggests, offer a "critique

of the racial and class inequalities at play in 1930s–1950s American society" (63); rather, he

seems very much concerned with the intersections of race and class and what shifting

demographics may mean to the state of culture as he understands it.

Contrary to those like Chomko who perceive a critique of racial and class inequalities in

Chandler's work, the majority of scholars now recognize Chandler's fiction as problematic for its

ethnic stereotyping and racism.[327] Megan Abbott, for example, observes that racial and ethnic

minorities in Chandler's work are often intended as barometers of urban decline (106). She

contextualizes Chandler's symbolic use of minorities by noting that his work responds to

contemporaneous tensions regarding rising ethnic diversity in 1930s and 1940s Southern

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[327] E.g., Orr; Raskin; Shoop; Williams; and Abbott.

California that coexisted with stringent segregationist policies designed to "keep non-white groups enclaved from white Californians" (94-95). "Chandler's texts," Abbott argues, "reflect white anxiety over the growth of these enclaves" by demonstrating how "white America racializes all those of non-white ethnic backgrounds," thus transmuting ethnic diversity into "a *racial* binary of white and Other, white and black, white and Mexican" (95). This racial binary, as my Marlowe-Amos analysis indicates, clearly exists in *The Long Goodbye*.

In addition to the racist assumptions regarding intellect evident in the Marlowe-Amos exchange, the novel also expresses racist concerns with white safety. For example, as Marlowe rushes to the Wade home after receiving a worrisome call from Roger, he envisions "what might be happening in the Wade residence"; his visions include Eileen "running down a moonlit road barefoot and [being chased by] a big Negro with a meat cleaver" (189). Because Eileen is home with her drunk and allegedly abusive husband, this metaphor is intended to illustrate Marlowe's immense concern for her safety. However, Marlowe's imagining Eileen threatened by a Black man echoes racist conceptions of Black men as sexually potent, unrestrained, "savages." This stereotype, Engles writes, embodies "the lethal propensities that were actually central to settler colonialism [and] was a foundational mode of collective projection that bolstered the victor's claims to moral justification and superiority" (76). Thus, to use Engles's phrasing, Marlowe's imaginings signify his nostalgia for a "stable white male identity" that resides in "a nationally grounded network of meaning and rules that tells him how the world should work, who he is as a morally superior being within it, and thus how he should regard and treat others" (76).[328] Understood in this light, Marlowe's often antagonistic encounters with overtly ethnoracial others

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[328] Here, I borrow from Engles's analysis of Richard Wright's *Savage Holiday*, not a discussion of Chandler, to succinctly articulate Marlowe's racist nostalgia.

evinces a restorative nostalgia for whiteness that is imagined to be under siege by increasing

ethnoracial difference in mid-century L.A.

Such threats to white safety are signalled in a conversation between Linda and Marlowe

following the Marlowe-Amos exchange. Linda apparently perceives Marlowe's discomfort with

Amos and explains that "Amos is a graduate of Howard University" (357). Although Chandler's

allusion to Howard is not incidental,[329] Linda's mention of Amos's alma mater goes unobserved

by Marlowe and is immediately followed by her commenting on the fact that Marlowe does not

"live in a very safe place" (357). To which he replies, "[t]here aren't any safe places" (357). In

this short exchange, Chandler establishes a symbolic association between an educated Black man

and white safety that enables reading Marlowe's reply as figuratively reflecting his anxious

racism. That is, he implies that no place is safe from racial (and ethnic) desegregation.

The Long Goodbye most significantly signals desegregation as symptomatic of cultural

levelling (and thus an index of cultural decline) during the final exchange between Marlowe and

Terry. I earlier noted that Terry resurfaces at novel's end, nearly unrecognizable after plastic

surgery, in the guise of Cisco Maioranos. I suggested that, when Marlowe learns of Terry's

betrayal and staged death, Terry is revealed as another embodiment of inauthenticity. While the

moral dimensions of Terry's phoniness have often been noted, the racist implications of Terry's

final transformation have gone virtually unacknowledged.

Readers are introduced to Terry's final incarnation when Marlowe declares that, about a

month after the police concluded their investigation, he "found a stranger waiting" in his office

(370). His description of this supposedly unfamiliar "well-dressed Mexican or Suramericano of

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[329] Located in Washington, D.C., Howard University is a historically Black university, though it accepts students of all races and has done so since being founded in 1867 ("Howard University"). At the time of Chandler's writing *The Long Goodbye*, Howard was presided by Dr. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, Sr., the university's first Black president — a position he held from 1926 to 1960.

some sort" is significant for the ways it signals Terry's symbolic loss of whiteness: "He sat by the open window smoking a *brown* cigarette that smelled strong. He was tall and very slender, and very elegant, with a neat *dark* mustache and *dark* hair, rather longer than we wear it, and a *fawn*-colored suit of some loosely woven material. (370, emphasis added). This emphasis on dark hues counters the ways in which Terry's whiteness is firmly established earlier in the novel by repeated mention of his white skin (5, 9, 25, 26, 29), his white hair (3, 4, 8, 18, 22, 72, 77, 239), and his white clothing and accessories (14, 18, 33-35). Commenting on the passage quoted above, Abbott astutely suggests that, in his choice of pronoun ("the longer *we* wear it"), Chandler "reveals the extent to which the reader is proscribed as white and is yoked with Marlowe in opposition to this man" (119). Despite Chandler's fairly obvious symbolic use of colour to establish the returned and disloyal Terry as an ethnoracial Other, Abbott is, to my knowledge, the only scholar that addresses Terry's ethnoracial transformation at novel's end, arguing that his "racial crossover from white to Mexican" is symbolically significant to "his crossover from hero to villain" (118).[330] I entirely agree with Abbott's assessment and would add that Terry's racialized transformation largely accounts for Marlowe's refusal to forgive his friend.

Many critics read Marlowe's rejection of Terry as motivated by the fact that, as Gene D. Phillips puts it, Terry no longer meets "Marlowe's moral standards of honest and decent behavior" (143). While Peter Swirski maintains this failure is the result of Terry's associations with the mob (*American Crime Fiction* 110), most scholars assume Marlowe views Terry as morally tarnished because Marlowe feels manipulated by his friend (e.g., Trott; Phillips; Cooper)

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[330] Although Terry's transformation at novel's end has often been commented upon, its ethnoracial dimensions have gone ignored. Some scholars read Terry's transformation as signalling the loss or absence of personal identity (e.g., Orr 77; Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* 65-66), while Norman suggests that it signals the way performed identity is underwritten by an ethical void ("Chandler's Hardboiled England"). Although Gene D. Phillips uniquely suggests that Terry's final Spanish pseudonym is symbolic because it translates to "better years" (143), he does not explore the racioethnic implications of the character's transformation into a Latin American.

and realizes that he shares nothing in common with Terry (Mihaies 180), whom he presumed to be a man of integrity. Stanley Orr goes even further to suggest that Terry is a symbol of cultural decay because "he is drunk (connoting moral and rational compromise) and broke (forced to sell his roadster for 'eating money')" (77). While Marlowe may be disappointed by Terry's association with the mob, this association is arguably not what most bothers Marlowe; rather, the detective appears to be most offended by Terry's racialized transformation, which is symbolically connected to his status as an illegal immigrant. When Marlowe asks Terry/Cisco whether he is now "permanently in Mexico," Terry responds: "Oh yes. I'm not here legally even. I never was. I told you I was born in Salt Lake City. I was born in Montreal" (377).

I maintain that Terry's inauthentic civility—his *performance of culture as a symbolically brown illegal immigrant*—is, for Chandler, a marker of cultural decline. Terry's civility was appealing to Marlowe when the former was marked as white. Although Terry remains very polite and elegant in the novel's final episode, he annoys Marlowe. I earlier suggested that Marlowe finds Terry's elegance annoying at novel's end, in part, because Terry lacks integrity. Having now established the ethnoracial connotations of Terry's transformation, I would like to build on my earlier suggestion by proposing that Terry's lack of integrity is, itself, racistly symbolic. That Terry's exposure as a fraud depends on the symbolic loss of his whiteness figuratively distinguishes white civilized society from non-white uncivilized society. This differentiation echoes Eliot's hostility toward cultural levelling and toward the belief that the highest degree of culture ought to be made accessible to everyone.

The Long Goodbye suggests that Chandler attributes cultural levelling, at least partially, to desegregation. This assumption is signalled when Marlowe asks Terry/Cisco to speak to him in English rather than Spanish and Terry responds: "English then [...]. It is all the same to me"

(370). That it is not all the same to Marlowe (or Chandler) is evident by Marlowe's reaction to Terry/Cisco. After telling Marlowe that he will soon be a Mexican national and that he has always liked Mexico, Terry suggests that they go to Victor's bar for a drink as they used to, but Marlowe declines (377). "Pick up your money, Señor Maioranos. It has too much blood on it," he replies (377). His use of a Spanish title and Terry's new surname connect his disdain of Terry's moral corruption to Terry's ethnoracial transformation, as does the fact that Marlowe draws attention to Terry's skin colour in the same passage: "He bit his lip with the very white teeth you can have when you have a brown skin" (377). For Marlowe, Terry's brown skin overshadows their previous bond, thus signaling his anxious racism.

Abbott, too, observes Marlowe's anxious racism but maintains that it frequently cedes to "a class camaraderie forged with those of other ethnicities, or symbols thereof" (107); however, little evidence exists to support this claim. In *The Long Goodbye* Marlowe's racism does not give way to class camaraderie but is foregrounded in his exchanges with the Wades' Chilean "houseboy," Candy (137). "If," David Gonsalves argues, "whiteness is threatened by race mobility, fifties-era America also insists on imagining a space free from race anxiety […] where the other can be safely contained as a service person" (17). *The Long Goodbye* registers this sort of containment via Marlowe's responses to Amos and Candy, which are informed by racist views regarding the proper relation of a white male to racial and ethnic others.

Candy's first mention in the novel is tainted by Marlowe's racism. When he calls the Wade home and Candy picks up, Marlowe explains that "[a] Mexican sort of accent answered" (137). Not only does he stereotype Candy's accent, but Marlowe also dehumanizes Candy by reducing him to an accent rather than referring to him as a man. He again betrays his racial stereotyping tendencies upon first meeting Candy in person: "A Mexican butler in a white coat

opened the door for me. He was a slender neat good-looking Mexican and his coat fitted him elegantly and he looked like a Mexican who was getting fifty a week and not killing himself with hard work" (171). Marlowe's unfounded emphasis on Candy being Mexican, which he is not, and his implication that Candy is lazy aligns with the racialized stereotype of the "lazy greaser," which was reflected in and perpetuated by Hollywood cinema throughout the twentieth century.[331] This stereotype seems to be enough for Marlowe to confess that he "didn't think [he] was going to like Candy," although the latter has neither done nor said anything to support Marlowe's negative assessment other than speak to him in Spanish and, perhaps, not defer to Marlowe to the degree Marlowe thinks appropriate for a non-white house servant (172).

Social class and ethnoracial identity are conjoined in *The Long Goodbye*. Marlowe repeatedly refers to Candy as "The Mex" (137, 171, 194) and does not even ask him his name until novel's end. When he does, he does so very disrespectfully: "'What's your name, cholo?' 'Take your hand off me […] And don't call me a cholo. I'm no wetback. My name is Juan Garcia de Soto yo Soto-mayor. I am Chileno'. 'Okay, Don Juan. Just don't get out of line around here. Keep your nose and mouth clean when you talk about the people you work for'" (195).[332] Following Marlowe's ethnic slur and derogatory allusion to Don Juan, the detective's last comments establish Marlowe's racism as class-conscious. That is, Marlowe's understanding of

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[331] "One of the earliest and most common stereotypes of representing Latinos in US cinema," according to Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, "was the so-called greaser." The greaser, Benshoff and Griffin write, was depicted as "an oily, dark-skinned and mustachioed bandit (frequently hailing from Mexico) who could be found causing mayhem in early silent cinema"; "this villainous thief was violent, cruel, and hot-tempered. A slightly milder version of this stereotype figured the greaser as shiftless and lazy […] In either case—volent or lazy—the Hollywood greaser was usually given his due by a stalwart white cowboy hero, implicitly if not explicitly a man of Northern European descent and US citizenship."

[332] While Candy criticizes Marlowe for his racism by refusing to accept the detective's slurs, such criticism does not lead Marlowe to correct or revise his bigotry (Abbott 107). Orr, too, notes that "Candy refuses Marlowe's 'lazy Mexican' stereotype to assume an even more aggressive, subversive role"; nonetheless, "Marlowe continually reminds the houseboy of 'his place'" (83). Arguably, the worse Marlowe treats Candy, the more his treatment is intended to be understood as justified by Candy's increasing aggressiveness toward him. Yet, Candy's aggressiveness is a response to being treated poorly, not a cause of Marlowe's behaviour.

social class appears inextricable from a racist view of all non-white people as automatically of a lower class than their white counterparts. Marlowe considers himself to be of a higher social class than Candy and Amos because they are, respectively, Chilean and Black — not because of their occupations.

That race and class are inseparable for Marlowe is reconfirmed when, after Candy tells Marlowe not to "come round [the Wades'] anymore" Marlowe slaps him across the face and retorts "I don't get called a son of a whore by the help greaseball. I've got business here and I come around whenever I feel like it. Watch your lip from now on. You might get pistol-whipped" (217). The implication of whipping the Wades' servant for speaking out of turn is profound. Marlowe again alludes to slavery when he later returns to the Wade home and speaks to Candy as though the Chilean is subhuman: "Out of my way, peasant. I got business here" (297).[333] In this way, Marlowe distinguishes his social position from that of Candy's based on ethnicity. Although both Candy and Marlowe are employed by the Wades, Marlowe characterizes Candy's work as lower-class servitude and his own as middle-class "business."

In the introduction to this section, I alluded to scholarship that advances a view of Marlowe as a classless or working-class hero. I would like to conclude this section by returning to assessments of Marlowe's class status to identify a scholarly tendency that replicates problematic assumptions of unmarked whiteness. Akin to John Hilgart's identification of Marlowe as a "class anomaly" (378), Abbott views Marlowe as classless. She writes, "Marlowe's efforts to distinguish himself morally from upper-class greed, middle-class

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[333] Marlowe's choice of *peasant* may be read in two ways: as an ethic stereotype of a Mexican farmer, or as an allusion to feudalism (i.e., *peasant* as a synonym for *serf*). In either event, Marlowe's class-conscious prejudice is echoed by other characters in *The Long Goodbye*. Roger, for instance, complains about contemporary attitudes toward the working-class: "We used to call them servants. Now we call them domestic help. I wonder how long it will be before we have to give them breakfast in bed" (245). Similarly, Marlowe's racist views regarding ethnic minorities are expressed by a cab driver. When the driver mentions "Frisco," Marlowe "mechanically" corrects him with "San Francisco" (11). "I call it Frisco," the cabbie retorts; "The hell with them minority groups" (11).

hypocrisy, and lower-class depravity can be read as attempts to mark him as classless" (107).[334]

Rather than reading Marlowe as classless, others suggest that he is a working-class hero. Rick

Lott, for example, claims that "Chandler saw his hero as a crusading but rather cynical working-

class knight who struggles against overwhelming odds to help the powerless and downtrodden"

(557), an intriguingly narrow-sighted claim given that Marlowe is most often hired by wealthy

families. Paul Skenazy, too, identifies a working-class element in Chandler's writing, which he

implicitly associates with democratic sentiments: "even as Chandler proclaimed himself an

aesthetic snob, he helped to create a genre grounded in working-class longing and despair, and a

hero—Philip Marlowe—with fiercely democratic sympathies" (1). Contrary to Skenazy's

position regarding working-class longing, I have argued throughout this chapter that *The Long

Goodbye* reflects Chandler's longing for taste and authenticity that he associates with a bygone,

more cultured era. I do not see Marlowe, who is clearly racist, as embodying "fiercely

democratic sympathies" because assuming that he does presupposes understanding democracy as

synonymous with white male hegemony. I find such arguments troubling because they implicitly

assume a white readership, not only of Chandler's work but of Chandler scholarship as well.

Concluding Remarks

I opened this chapter by suggesting that *The Long Goodbye* articulates a conflicted portrait

of Chandler's nostalgia. By considering varied expressions of nostalgia in *The Long Goodbye*, I

have identified the novel's tensions between reflective and restorative nostalgia — tensions that

are deeply personal for Chandler. My discussions of Potter's longing for an age before mass

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[334] I find Abbott's argument that Marlowe is marked as classless by his efforts to morally distinguish himself "from upper-class greed, middle-class hypocrisy, and lower-class depravity" both surprising, given her superb analysis of Terry's "racial crossover" (107, 118), and problematic for the way in which it socially stratifies immorality. In Chandler's work, the rich are as hypocritical and depraved as anyone else, if not more so.

production, Eileen's longing for her lost love, and Terry's longing for his ideal self have established Chandler's views regarding his sociohistorical moment as nostalgic. Chandler, too, laments some forces of mass production and longs for nineteenth-century aestheticism, for an age of taste. He does not mourn a lost love but romance itself, corrupted as it is (in his view) by vulgarity and inauthenticity. While Chandler's nostalgia for England appears reflective in that it lingers "in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym 41), *The Long Goodbye* also evinces Chandler's white male nostalgia in its treatment of gender and ethnoracial characters. Thus, Chandler's nostalgia for nineteenth-century England is both reflective and restorative: it is motivated by his longing for an idealized place and time belonging to his youth, and it is an anxious response to the conditions of postwar America.

According to Svetlana Boym, restorative nostalgia is not driven by "the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition" (45). This chapter has established that Chandler's bleak view of twentieth-century American culture is informed by such anxieties. Intriguingly, critical oversights regarding unmarked whiteness (i.e., by those who fail to apprehend Chandler's white male nostalgia and thus either argue that his work critiques social and/or racial inequality or that Marlowe is a working-class, democratic hero) may signal a scholarly nostalgia for the romance of Chandler himself as one of the preeminent American masters of hard-boiled fiction, a possibility that the next chapter briefly considers in addressing the reception history of Robert Altman's adaptation of Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*.

Tough Guys & Losers:

Nostalgia and the Soft-Boiled Antihero in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*

> [L]osing is an identity; […] you can be a good loser and a bad winner.
> —Robert Altman

Three years after releasing his critically and commercially successful *M*A*S*H* (1970), Robert Altman directed *The Long Goodbye* (1973), which was produced and distributed by United Artists (UA). Upon its release, the film was positively received by only a few critics who appreciated its performances, cinematography, humour, and social commentary.[335] On the whole, however, *The Long Goodbye* performed poorly at the box office and was predominantly met with unfavourable reviews — some of them bordering on vitriolic. Most of the critical rancor directed at Altman's film concerned his approach to the hard-boiled genre and his subversive take on private eye Philip Marlowe (Elliott Gould).[336] That the issue of fidelity to Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* seems to have driven most initial negative reviews of Altman's adaptation suggests a nostalgia for the film's source material, whereas frequent comparisons between Altman's Marlowe and previous filmic iterations of Chandler's character suggest nostalgia for the Marlowes of Old Hollywood. The role of nostalgia in *The Long Goodbye*'s reception history is interesting given both the so-called nostalgia wave of the 1970s and the centrality of (anti)nostalgia to the film itself. One of the tensions this chapter works through is the ways in which Altman's film paradoxically appears to be both nostalgic and anti-nostalgic.

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[335] For initial positive reviews, see Dawson; Howard; and Siskel.

[336] Critics also "complained of inconsistencies, loose ends, the film's violence, its tone of parody, and the choice of color film," as Kate McQuiston notes, (134); however, such complaints were typically made by reviewers who prioritized the issue of fidelity.

Detractors of Altman's film at the time of its release often exalted Chandler's work, which they perceived as somehow disrespected by Altman. Jay Cocks, for example, was especially caustic in claiming it "a curious spectacle to see Altman mocking a level of achievement to which, at his best, he could only aspire."[337] Writing for *The New York Times* in 1973, Julian Symons likewise accused Altman of impertinently handling Chandler's novel. He found it "unforgivable" that Altman so "flippantly" treated "something conceived with seriousness" (13), an odd charge given Chandler's self-acknowledged use of parody.[338] With this charge, Symons, a self-proclaimed "Chandlerian," betrayed his own nostalgia for Chandler as an "introverted romantic" whose work should not be tampered with for fear that it be denigrated in some way (22).[339] Symons's critique best exemplifies the nostalgia that underwrites others' fidelity-centric criticisms of Altman's film.[340] Ironically, such criticisms notably overlook the ways in which Altman reproduces key features of Chandler's Marlowe, such as the detective's

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[337] The level of achievement Cocks intended was Chandler's, as he made clear when he declared the film a "travesty of a superb novel" and suggested that "[a]ny resemblance between Chandler's book and [Altman's] movie is not only coincidental but probably libelous." Other complaints regarding a presumed dissimilarity between Chandler's novel and Altman's film often concerned the latter's depiction of Marlowe. Charles Gregory, for example, asserted that Altman's Marlowe is not Chandler's Marlowe (47), as did Charles Champlin (A20).

[338] In a 1949 letter to his New York literary agent, Bernice Baumgarten, Chandler complained: "Why is it that Americans […] do not see the strong element of burlesque in my kind of writing... The mystery writer's material is melodrama, which is an exaggeration of violence and fear beyond what one normally experiences in life" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 53-4). That Symons was unaware of Chandler's views seems unlikely given that he knew Chandler personally (13, 22); notes Chandler's "blackish humor" (25); and was familiar with Chandler's non-fiction, as indicated by his note on sources in his article: "I am quoting from a collection of [Chandler's] letters and articles edited by Dorothy Gardiner and Katherine Sorley Walker" (13). Symons's bias is also revealed by his disparaging Altman's flippancy yet acknowledging Marlowe's irreverence: "Marlowe, like his creator, was, beneath the surface flippancy and nose-thumbing, a virtuous and even sentimental man" (25).

[339] Commenting on how Altman's adaptation was received upon its first release, script writer Leigh Brackett asserts "the film was greeted, by some critics, with the tone of outrage generally reserved for those who tamper with the Bible" (28). As Miranda B. Hickman rightly suggests, Brackett's comments reveal "the sacredness of Chandler's memory to many" (287). For a discussion of the nostalgic appeal of Chandler's books, see Fredric Jameson, *Raymond Chandler* 15.

[340] The possibly of reviewers' nostalgia for Chandler and his works is also supported by renewed interest in the author during the mid 1960s and early 1970s. During this time, "Ballantine reissued three collections of Chandler's short stories: *Killer in the Rain* (1964), *Trouble Is My Business* (1972), and *Pickup on Noon Street* (1972)" (Panek 414). Observing that Chandler's work found "a new readership in the post-Viet Nam era," Woody Haut attributes this renewed interest to how "Chandler's writing plays on one's sense of nostalgia," arguing that it is apropos to "eras whose secrets demand investigation. This was true in the 1970s with the decoding of cultural narratives surrounding events such as Watergate and the trauma of war" (81).

personal moral code. In maintaining Marlowe's code, Altman seems to endorse nostalgia for an antiheroic vision of masculinity characterized by honour, loyalty, and social marginality as a marker of personal freedom. This romanticized view of the ideal man as antihero in *The Long Goodbye*, however, contrasts sharply with Altman's rejection of the antihero-as-tough-guy image common to both Old Hollywood and New Hollywood.

Altman's treatment of masculinity may partially account for negative assessments of the film that were grounded in nostalgia for the Marlowes of Old Hollywood, especially Marlowe as portrayed by Humphrey Bogart in Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946). Altman himself speculated that those "who were disappointed with *The Long Goodbye* were disappointed, not with [his] handling of Raymond Chandler, but because Humphrey Bogart wasn't in it" (qtd. in Phillips 161).[341] More specifically, he accused detractors of confusing Chandler's Marlowe with Hollywood's, noting that "[w]hen most people say 'That's not Philip Marlowe', what they really mean is 'that's not Humphrey Bogart'. They're not talking about Chandler, they're talking about Howard Hawks. Or about Robert Montgomery, Dick Powell, all those various interpretations of it" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41). That audiences expected a Bogartesque, classic Hollywood Marlowe in Altman's film is supported by numerous reviews as well as viewers' negative reaction to Gould's Marlowe at a pre-release screening of *The Long Goodbye*.[342] The issue of audience expectations for a presumably "tougher" Marlowe is noteworthy, given that *The Long Goodbye* evinces an anti-nostalgia for the hypermasculinity characteristic of many Bogart films

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[341] Altman's conjecture has merit in light of critical comments like those of Gregory, who asserted that "Altman's Marlowe is plainly foolish and foolishly dangerous, but he is not Hollywood's Marlowe" (47), and Symons, who complained that "Gould played [Marlowe] limp as flannel where Bogart's Marlowe was crisp as a biscuit" (13).

[342] The pre-release screening was hosted at a weekend film conference attended by film professionals and critics; attendees fundamentally objected to Gould's performance as Marlowe, which they viewed as "no match for the likes of Bogart and Powell" (Phillips 157-58).

and Old Hollywood genres as well as, and perhaps even more significantly, mid-century adaptations of Mickey Spillane novels featuring detective Mike Hammer.

In its competing nostalgic and anti-nostalgic impulses, *The Long Goodbye* appears to simultaneously participate in and resist the 1970s nostalgia wave. In doing so, it prompts viewers to question what they are nostalgic for and the implications of their objects of nostalgia. Ultimately, I argue that while *The Long Goodbye* parodies hypermasculinity, it suggests nostalgia for the figure of the antihero. As they were during the postwar 1920s and postwar 1940s, questions of male authority were especially pertinent in 1970s America. Such questions were largely prompted by the civil rights movement, second-wave feminism, and conflicting images of heroism and masculinity that dominated media coverage of the Vietnam War and antiwar protests. Thus, like the other works considered in this dissertation, Altman's *The Long Goodbye* critically engages nostalgia to comment on its sociocultural present.

Before considering the film itself, I present a brief overview of the 1970s nostalgia wave and significant trends within Hollywood filmmaking during this time to contextualize my ensuing discussion of Altman's revisionist approach to *The Long Goodbye*. I then consider how Altman establishes a nostalgic/anti-nostalgic tension in his film and the relevance of reflexive Hollywood allusions to this tension, which I postulate gestures toward Altman's revisionist aims and calls into question whether *The Long Goodbye* celebrates or censures Old Hollywood. Sections three and four of this chapter then explore the ways in which Altman both undermines and reaffirms generic myths via his treatment of the tough-guy protagonist of 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s Hollywood films and his rejection of romantic closure. Reading Altman's film alongside its allusions to '30s gangsters, '40s Marlowes and '50s Hammers, I demonstrate how *The Long*

Goodbye rejects the machismo of both the classic gangster and hard-boiled noir genres, while also affirming the appeal of the antihero figure embodied by the virtuous private eye.

(De)Riding the Wave: The Seventies Nostalgia Wave & New Hollywood Revisionism

Americans during the 1970s were seemingly nostalgic for the era immediately preceding their own, spanning approximately from the early 1930s to the early 1950s, a phenomenon scholars have commented on as early as 1970.[343] Commonly referred to as the *seventies nostalgia wave*, this phenomenon has been attributed to the combined influence of various sociopolitical realities, including—but not limited to—the Vietnam War, the counterculture movement, and the era's crisis of authority (i.e., the perceived waning legitimacy of governing institutions).[344] Hollywood, as many have observed, fed off of and energized this 1970s nostalgia wave.

In fact, film critic Richard T. Jameson complained in 1974 that "[s]uper-commercialized nostalgia trips of every description inundate theatre screens" (30). Multiple films produced during the decade have since been dubbed *nostalgia films* because they arouse nostalgia, either as period pieces that evoke nostalgia for a bygone era or as genre films that evoke nostalgia for Old Hollywood.[345] Drew Casper writes that "for films that rode the nostalgic wave and were

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[343] Writing in 1970, Fredric Jameson observed that "the nostalgia which gave birth to pop art fastens for its object on the period immediately preceding our own, one apparently from a larger historical perspective not very different from it: its object all come from a span of years too often referred to simply as the thirties and which in reality extends from the New Deal well across the parenthesis of the Second World War, and up to the beginning of the Cold War" ("On Raymond Chandler" 76).

[344] For more on the 1970s nostalgia wave and sociohistorical context, see Casper, esp. 1-2, 27.

[345] Drew Casper identifies six ways nostalgia was mobilized in 1970s films: 1) it was used in films about Hollywood to explicitly signal nostalgia for Hollywood's past; 2) it operated in period films that evoked nostalgia for an earlier era, which sometimes implicated topical concerns or ironized historical settings; 3) it was used to self-reflexively update or parody classical genres; 4) it was employed as a marketing strategy when films featured old stars in supporting or cameo roles; 5) it was elicited by intertextual references in films that paid homage to earlier films; and 6) it was conjured by dialogue, images, and music descriptive of the past in films that explored the function of nostalgia in characters' lives (49-50).

deliberate throwbacks to bygone forms, genre was a selling point" (131). Altering and subverting

traditional genres and themes was a dominant practice during the so-called Hollywood

Renaissance of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a transitional period in America's film industry

commonly referred to as either The American New Wave or New Hollywood.[346]

  The New Hollywood movement has been attributed to the interplay of institutional and

social factors: the dissolution of the studio system; the end of the Hays Code and implementation

of a new rating system; the counterculture movement; the growth of both a youth market and a

cinematically sophisticated audience; technological developments; and the rise of film studies as

an academic discipline.[347] Combined with the financial failure of a series of big-budget films

made in the mid to late 1960s and the gradual abandonment of the studio system, assembly line

mode of film production, studios began backing independent producers who were steadily

increasing in number.[348] Thomas Schatz explains that "the industry saw a period of widespread

and unprecedented innovation" thanks to those who were making "films that had as much in

common with the European art cinema as with classical Hollywood" ("New Hollywood" 291).

Among others, this new generation of Hollywood filmmakers included Altman, Stanley Kubrick,

and the "movie brats" (e.g., Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and Steven Spielberg).[349]

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[346] I acknowledge that, in its broadest sense, the term *New Hollywood* denotes post-World War II American cinema (i.e., films that began being made following the collapse of the Hollywood studio system and the introduction of commercial television) and may, as such, be considered to have begun in the late 1940s; however, like many scholars, I employ the term to denote a brief period during the late 1960s and early 1970s that witnessed significant stylistic and generic innovation among a subset of American filmmakers and the emergence of a purported director's cinema. For more on the difficulty of defining the term, see Schatz, "New Hollywood" 285.

[347] For more on the changes postclassical Hollywood underwent and factors contributing to the rise of New Hollywood, see Schatz, "New Hollywood," esp. 285-291 and "Hollywood as 'Critical Concept'," esp. 7-8; Casper 29; Pezzotta 154-156; and Watkins 185-186.

[348] See Altman and Vallan 20; Nystrom 24; and Schatz, "Hollywood as 'Critical Concept'" 7.

[349] In their seminal 1979 study, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took Over Hollywood*, Michael Pye and Linda Myles address the development of a cine-literate generation of directors who "know the past of cinema like scholars" (7). Pye and Myles coined the term *movie brats* to describe the six men they view as paramount to this new generation of filmmakers: Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Brian DePalma, John Milius, Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg (7-12). In addition to the examples I have offered, many other directors have been identified

The movie brats—the first generation of film school graduates—were influenced by European "director-driven 'art cinema'"; their "auteurist convictions," Schatz writes, "were nurtured in academia and practised in earnest" ("Hollywood as 'Critical Concept'" 7-8). Although Altman did not go to film school and was slightly older than his New Hollywood contemporaries, he was also significantly influenced by European cinema, especially that of the French New Wave.[350]

Modifying genres—which Noël Carroll terms *reworking* past genres—was a common New Wave practice adopted by most New Hollywood directors. Such directors typically afford audiences with new ways to perceive traditional generic forms and images by setting "the elements of a conventional popular genre in an altered context" (Cawelti 201). Like those of other New Hollywood directors, Altman's films may best be characterized as revisionist; that is, as films that transform (or rework) traditional genres in some way. Jonathan Kirshner argues that, in the seventies, film "genres that invoked a shared understanding of conventions and expectations, and tended to embellish kernels of truth with Hollywood myths, proved fertile ground for revisionists" (110).[351]

John Cawelti also addresses the significance of myth to revisionism, usefully classifying generic transformation into four key modes: 1) burlesque proper, which parodies an older form in the name of humour; 2) the nostalgic mode, which deploys traditional generic features to recreate an atmospheric impression (i.e., an "aura") of the past; 3) demythologization, which seeks to undermine the myths associated with a particular genre; and 4) the re-affirmative mode, which first subverts and then reaffirms myth for its own sake (201-206). Offering Altman as an

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with the New Hollywood movement, notably Hal Ashby, Peter Bogndanovich, William Friedkin, Sidney Lumet, Sam Peckinpah, Arthur Penn, and Bob Rafelson.

[350] For a discussion of French New Wave influences upon New Hollywood directors generally and Altman specifically, see Davis 101-103.

[351] For more on the appeal of generic revisionism to New Hollywood filmmakers, see Carroll, esp. 72-73.

example of a director who establishes a "rich and fascinating dialectic among different modes of generic transformation," Cawelti asserts that in films such as *The Long Goodbye* determining "whether Altman is attacking or reaffirming the genre" upon which the film is based remains difficult (208). I will return to this question much later in this chapter after first addressing Altman's engagement with all four modes of generic transformation identified by Cawelti. At present, I wish to consider how New Hollywood genre films were and continue to be understood as nostalgia films — for better or worse.

New Hollywood genre films are often referred to as *nostalgia films* and generally now understood to be of the 1970s present even though they recall the past,[352] yet assessments nonetheless vary regarding why the past is evoked in such films. While some scholars argue that genre films uncritically evoke the past for its own sake, others are attentive to the critical potential of genre films that elicit nostalgia. Although Fredric Jameson does not address the issue of genre, he famously disparages nostalgia films as ahistorical, arguing that, in attempting "to appropriate a missing past," they evade the present and displace historicity with aesthetic style (*Postmodernism* 19, 296, 20). His definition of *historicity* as distinct from *historicist* is crucial to understanding his objection to the "historicist deficiency" of "the classical nostalgia film" (*Postmodernism* 296).

For Fredric Jameson, *historicity* entails perceiving the "present *as* history"; it amounts to a "historical perspective" of the present and thus constitutes a genuine relationship to the present (*Postmodernism* 284, emphasis added). Conversely, he employs *historicist* to signal a superficial engagement with both the present and past that amounts to nothing more than an "indiscriminate appetite for dead styles and fashions" (*Postmodernism* 286). This appetite, Fredric Jameson

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[352] For more on how nostalgia films are of both the present and the past, see Palmer 213.

maintains, is evident in the proliferation of a "new aesthetic discourse" inaugurated by George

Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), a film that he believes "set out to recapture […] the henceforth

mesmerizing lost reality of the Eisenhower era" (*Postmodernism* 19). Nostalgia films in his

analysis are incompatible with "genuine historicity"; they are "historicist films" that merely offer

"the past as fashion plate and glossy image" (*Postmodernism* 19, 118). That is, such films rely on

simulacra of the past.

By mixing such (counterfeit) signifiers of the past with signifiers of the present,

according to Fredric Jameson, nostalgia films evacuate any ability to historicize the present by

relating it to a coherent and genuine past. He distinctly condemns nostalgia films for their

"approach to the present […] by way of pastiche of the stereotypical past," for mimicking the

past without a critical agenda (*Postmodernism* 21).[353] As this chapter will demonstrate, Altman's

The Long Goodbye does not merely mix signifiers of the past and present to invoke the past *as*

style; rather, it effectively relies on the strategies Fredric Jameson criticizes to elicit viewers'

critical engagement, prompting them to contemplate their nostalgic desires.

Richard T. Jameson also faults nostalgia films, though he does not concern himself with

the question of historical representation; instead, he finds "nostalgia tripping, recreating the

artifacts of the past for the sake of doing so," a worthless endeavour that reveals nothing beyond

the financial self-interest of those in the film industry (31).[354] He tempers this criticism by

acknowledging the virtues of generic self-consciousness, concluding that "*film noir* is still

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[353] In fact, Fredric Jameson claims that "[n]ostaliga films restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level" (*Postmodernism* 19). That he views pastiche as "blank parody" confirms his sense that nostalgia films uncritically engage the past (*Postmodernism* 17). "Pastiche," he writes, is "like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic [or generic] mask […]. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (*Postmodernism* 17).

[354] Richard T. Jameson's criticism of nostalgia films as financially motivated is not entirely unfounded since, according to Casper, film executives hoped that nostalgia would appeal to the middle-aged and elderly, demographic segments the industry was concerned it was losing (51).

possible [in 1974], and has no apologies to make to anybody" (33). Cawelti also assumes a balanced position, maintaining that "a contemporary nostalgia film cannot simply duplicate the past experience, but must make us aware in some fashion of the relationship between past and present" (203). In his view, nostalgia films succeed when they set a "highly traditional generic content in a slightly different context," thereby simultaneously providing "a sense of contemporaneity and of pastness" (203). In doing so, Cawelti suggests, films like *Chinatown* (1974) and *The Long Goodbye* achieve their "complex ironies" (203). While he views nostalgia as the end result of *Chinatown*, he asserts that *The Long Goodbye* often powerfully evokes nostalgia to undercut or ironically comment "upon the generic experience itself" (204). That is, it uses traditional generic structures to demythologize, to reveal a genre as embodying, in Cawelti's parlance, an "inadequate and destructive myth" (204) — a strategy I will explore in section three.

That numerous discussions concerning New Hollywood revisionist genre films address directors' treatment of film noir is notable. Many have commented on New Hollywood filmmakers' attraction to noir and its draw for audiences. Perhaps the earliest of such commentators was Paul Schrader, who, in his seminal 1972 essay, "Notes on Noir," observed that "Hollywood's *film noir* has recently become the subject of renewed interest among moviegoers and critics" (8). Noting that that "American movies are again taking a look at the underside of the American character," Schrader maintained that this then-recent trend in American film testifies to the "fascination *film noir* holds for today's young filmgoers and film students" (8). He attributed this fascination to the political climate of his age and suggested that "[a]s the current political mood hardens, filmgoers and filmmakers will find the *film noir* of the late Forties increasingly attractive" (8).[355]

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[355] For more on the popularity of noir during the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Richard T. Jameson, esp. 30-33.

Since Schrader, others have also attributed the 1970s film noir cycle to the era's

sociopolitical context, suggesting that revisionist noirs engage cultural myths or are thematically

underwritten in some way by politically motivated aims.[356] David Thomson, for instance, implies

that New Hollywood's interest in noir may be understood as a reaction of a disillusioned

generation responding to the illusions of Hollywood. Many New Hollywood directors, he writes,

"had come of age in the era of Kennedy and Nixon, civil rights, Vietnam, campus riots and drug

experimentation. They witnessed an America with more self-inflcted wounds than Hollywood

had ever cared to admit. They proposed tough new material — it was a new age of *film noir*,

albeit in colour" (65). With *The Long Goodbye*, as many have observed, Altman contributes to

this new age of noir.

Understanding *The Long Goodbye*'s place within this new age of film noir raises

semantic questions. Whereas Robert Kolker suggests that "*The Long Goodbye* may be the first

noir in colour" (*Cinema* 390),[357] some have explicitly labelled the film a neo-noir and revisionist

detective film.[358] Many others have suggested these designations by claiming Altman's film to

be a "radically new exploration of noir sensibilities," a "violent noir deconstruction," a "self-

conscious reexamination of original noir forms" that amounts to a "rigorous parody of the noir

detective film," an "idiosyncratic variation on the detective genre," and a "a radical

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[356] For a discussion of how revisionist noirs engage cultural myths, see Cawelti 209; and Kirshner 111. For a discussion of how such films are thematically underwritten by politically motivated aims, see Horwath 9-10; and Thomson 61-65.

[357] Although "first noir in colour" is an appealing turn of phrase, Kolker's suggestion is somewhat misleading because noirs filmed in colour were made as early as 1947 (e.g., *Desert Fury* [1947], *Black Widow* [1954], and *House of Bamboo* [1955]). Even if we assume Kolker intends *neo*-noir (i.e., postclassical films noir), his proposition is invalid because colour neo-noirs were made before Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (e.g., *The Chase* [1966]; *Marlowe* [1969]; *Darker Than Amber* [1970]; *Klute* [1971]; and *Shaft* [1971]).

[358] E.g., David Sterritt refers to *The Long Goodbye* as a neo-noir ("Breaking" 253); Len Gutkin labels it a revisionist noir (87); and Rick Armstrong considers it a revisionist detective film (624).

transformation of the detective genre."[359] While I do not disagree with any of these assessments, they are significant for the way they gesture toward *noir* as an unstable category.

That *noir* is a retrospectively constructed critical category that poses significant definitional problems is well rehearsed by scholars. I suggest that this difficulty may be partly attributed to the exceedingly complicated relationship that exists between hard-boiled fiction and film noir. While most agree that hard-boiled fiction gave rise to what is commonly understood as noir,[360] the archetypal hard-boiled hero—the private eye—is an uncommon noir protagonist.[361] Dan Hodges posits that the critical construction of noir during the 1970s engendered the private eye's iconic status; however, I propose that the inverse is true. That is, 1970s neo-noir films—in regularly featuring detective protagonists—cemented the PI's iconic status as a noir figure.[362] Critics, responding to the films being made and released, subsequently yoked noir and the hard-boiled paradigm.

Altman himself implies that his film revises the hard-boiled genre: "So I think Marlowe's dead. I think *that* was 'the long goodbye'. I think it's a goodbye to a genre" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41). Although Altman's assertion that Marlowe is dead gestures toward the hard-boiled tradition, the genre to which his film bids farewell is fuzzy because Altman engages with

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[359] Tom Dorey considers the film a "radically new exploration of noir sensibilities" (890); Gayle Magee calls it a "violent noir deconstruction" (481); Kolker argues that Altman's *The Long Goodbye* is a "self-conscious reexamination of original noir forms" that amounts to a "rigorous parody of the noir detective film" (*Cinema* 390, 398); Stephen Teo feels it is an "idiosyncratic variation on the detective genre" (581-582); and Adrian Danks deems it a "radical transformation of the detective genre" ("Man" 729).

[360] Like many others, Hickman observes that hard-boiled detective fiction "spawned the idiom of fiction and film we now think of as 'noir'" (288). Frank Krutnik, however, suggests that the influence of the hard-boiled tradition on noir "should not […] be conceived solely in terms of what the films drew from the books" because "hard-boiled fiction was in itself a particular response to the influence of the cinema as the most innovative mode of storytelling in the modern age" (41). Although exploring this potentially reciprocal relationship is beyond the scope of this chapter, Krutnik's suggestion is noteworthy because it further indicates the complexities inherent to untangling the category of *noir*. For more on hard-boiled fiction and noir, see Neale, esp. 155-157.

[361] Of the "hundreds of films" that comprise the "classic noir cannon," Bran Nicol observes, "only a handful" feature private eye protagonists (33).

[362] A search of the *American Film Institute* database indicates that 118 films featuring private detectives and/or investigators were made between 1969–1980.

multiple *sub*generic conventions. In the broadest sense, *The Long Goodbye* revises the classic crime drama genre in its treatment of the gangster, detective, and noir subgenres. I will address Altman's handling of these subgenres in sections three and four, focusing primarily on how he both upholds *and* undermines noir conventions. Here, I wish to return to Altman's assertion regarding his film's generic valediction, which he concludes with: "a genre that I don't think is going to be acceptable any more [*sic*]" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41). While this claim appears anti-nostalgic in its implied rejection of Hollywood's past, Altman's *The Long Goodbye* deliberately aims to induce a nostalgic response in viewers. This seeming contradiction is actually central to the film itself, a point that I now explore by considering how the film's formal and narrative strategies (namely characterization) are crucial to establishing a nostalgic tension in *The Long Goodbye* that muddies the nature of Altman's valediction.

Pastels are for Memory: Inducing & Negating Nostalgia

Although scholarly consensus dictates that *The Long Goodbye* serves as a valediction to the hard-boiled noir genre,[363] whether Altman regretfully views the impending demise of hard-boiled noir (and other subgenres of classic crime drama) or satirically condemns Old Hollywood is debatable.[364] Central to this debate, as I will demonstrate, are the ways Altman's film paradoxically induces and denies nostalgia for Old Hollywood. Interrogating this nostalgic tension, this section considers: 1) how *The Long Goodbye*'s formal elements signal nostalgic modes of viewing that encourage reading the film as an homage to Old Hollywood; and 2) how the film complicates viewers' experiences of nostalgia in its curious portrayal of Gould's

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[363] E.g., Luhr 170; Kael 133; Hillier and Phillips 166; Ferncase 89; and Stewart 31.
[364] Some imply that the film's hard-boiled noir valediction is a nostalgic homage to Hollywood (e.g., Howard; and Hale); others imply that it is anti-nostalgic in its objects of satire (e.g., Phillips 160; Abbott, "Nothing" 316; and Luhr 170); and others suggest a middle-ground position (e.g., Hamid; and Kael 133).

Marlowe as both a relic and modern man. By depicting Marlowe as both a man *out of time* and a

man *of his time*, I argue, Altman invites a consideration of the film's Hollywood allusions and its

complex interrogation of genre.

    The Long Goodbye often sounds and looks like longing. It opens to the jazz trumpets of

Johnny Mercer's "Hooray for Hollywood" as the UA logo appears and dissolves on screen

before the camera pans across what appears to be a framed intaglio of Hollywood, thus

immediately conjuring Hollywood's Golden Age and subtly alluding to *Murder, My Sweet*

(1944).[365] As "Hooray" fades out, the camera reveals a suited Marlowe sleeping atop his

crumpled sheets while a mellow piano begins to play "The Long Goodbye," penned by Mercer

and John Williams. Marked by yearning and regret, the film's titular theme song is essential to

reinforcing the nostalgic mood established via various elements of mise-en-scène. Its lyrics

concern missed connections between potential romantic partners and lament what could have

been.[366] Iterations of the title track recur diegetically and non-diegetically throughout the film; in

addition to serving as the melody of Roger (Sterling Hayden) and Eileen (Nina van Pallandt)

Wades' doorbell, its varied performances include the mariachi rhythms of a funeral procession in

Mexico and the jazz stylings of Jack Sheldon. Kate McQuiston cleverly suggests that Altman's

choice of Sheldon contributes to the "soundtrack's nostalgic mode" because the singer's

distinctive voice "sounds of the past, as it would have in 1973" (144).[367] Although the lyrics do

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[365] Famed lyricist, songwriter and singer, Mercer began writing music for films in 1935 and was variously employed by numerous studios, including the "big five" (i.e., Warner Brothers, MGM, Paramount, RKO, and Twentieth Century Fox); nineteen-time Academy Award nominee, he co-founded Capital Records in Hollywood in 1942 (Eskew). "Hooray for Hollywood" was first featured in *Hollywood Hotel* (1937), which starred Dick Powell — who later played Marlowe in *Murder, My Sweet* (1944).

[366] Consider the song's third and final verse for instance: "As in a dream / Running for a plane / Through the rain / If the heart is quicker than the eye / They could be lovers / Until they die / It's too late to try / When a missed hello / Becomes the long goodbye" (Williams).

[367] Legendary trumpeter and singer, Sheldon was a popular figure in the West Coast jazz movement of the 1950s; he performed the Grammy- and Academy Award-winning "The Shadow of Your Smile" in *The Sandpiper* (1965), was Merv Griffin's sidekick on *The Merv Griffin Show*, and voiced characters on *Schoolhouse Rock!* (Barnes).

not accompany every version of the song scattered throughout the film, the phrase *the long goodbye* nevertheless melodically "hangs in the air," to borrow from Thomson (59).

In Thomson's analysis, the phrase lingers "like haze or the trade of lies in L.A. — it's the sound of a game, and the click of fate closing. It tells you that so much in L.A. is set up, scripted, produced. There's so little 'there' left — just lines, shots and locations" (59). Alan R. Howard echoes Thomson's implicitly nostalgic reading of Hollywood's lost substance, maintaining that the title song is "wonderfully Forties in feeling […]. It's a leitmotif reminder that *The Long Goodbye* is a gloriously inspired tribute to Hollywood that never loses sight of what Los Angeles has become." Taken together, McQuiston's, Thomson's, and Howard's suggestions clarify how the film's theme song evokes nostalgia for an idyllic L.A. and Old Hollywood, a nostalgia conjured in the film's aforementioned opening sequence (see fig. 8).

Fig. 8. *The Long Goodbye*'s opening sequence.

That Altman desired to imbue *The Long Goodbye* with a nostalgic aura is supported by his assertion that he "wanted to give [his film] a look that you see on old postcards" ("Rip Van Marlowe"). To achieve this look, cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond relied on post-flashing, a technique that entails exposing film to varying degrees of light after shooting and before processing, which Altman claims "gave us the aura we wanted" ("Rip Van Marlowe"). Altman's choice of *aura* to describe his desired effect signals an important relationship between the film's appearance and emotional atmosphere. As Zsigmond explains, flashing was essential to creating a retrospective mood:

Towers 331

> For this picture we had a difficult job. We were making a today picture, but we wanted the look of twenty years ago. It is very difficult to talk about in words, but we did not want to re-create the Fifties, but to remember them. So what we decided to do was to put the picture into pastels, with a shading toward the blue side. Pastels are for memory. (qtd. in Lipnick)

Pastels are presumably for memory because, like memories, they are faded. Hence, in aligning pastels and memory, Zsigmond implicitly suggests that his aim was, in part, to make the film *look* nostalgic — nostalgia, after all, relies on unreliable (faded) memories.

Of course, memories alone are not necessarily nostalgic unless they are accompanied by or prompt longing. The memories most frequently conjured among viewers by the desaturated appearance of Altman's film align with those evoked by the soundtrack: an earlier-era Los Angeles in general and Old Hollywood in particular. For some, post-flashing reinforces the notion of 1970s L.A. as polluted and inhospitable.[368] Such assessments arguably rely on a nostalgic view of 1940s and 1950s Los Angeles best exemplified by Edward Lipnick's comments regarding how post-flashing contributes to establishing setting—time and place—as a character in *The Long Goodbye*:

> when Raymond Chandler created Philip Marlowe, he invented more than just another fictional detective. He set him into a time and place uniquely his own: Los Angeles in the late 1940s and early '50s. Those of us who lived in "L.A." then remember that it was a very different place from what it is now. We lived on the "coast," in stucco bungalows surrounded by palm trees, orange groves, and mountains, not tract houses and smog. We met our arriving visitors at Union Station, not LAX, and took them to Grauman's Chinese

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[368] E.g., Stewart 26; Ferncase 88; and Phillips 157.

to see the stars place their footprints in concrete, not to Disneyland to see an animatronic

President Lincoln recite the Gettysburg Address.

Lipnick's inclusion of Grauman's Chinese Theatre in his description of a bygone L.A. suggests

nostalgia for Old Hollywood, a nostalgia others also allude to in their discussions of the effects

of post-flashing. Rahul Hamid, for instance, asserts that the washed-out and underexposed look

of *The Long Goodbye* reinforces an impression of the cinematic past as fading away. Conversely,

Pauline Kael maintains that the film's "soft, mellow color" contributes to its "reverie on the lies

of old movies" (133).[369] In other words, while Hamid responds nostalgically to the film's

aesthetic, Kael reads it as implying an anti-nostalgic view of Hollywood's past (or at least

Hollywood's past productions). Their divergent interpretations emblematize a central debate in

discussions of *The Long Goodbye* concerning the nature of the film's "goodbye," a debate, as I

suggested earlier, that has been fueled by the nostalgic/anti-nostalgic tension that runs

throughout the film.

Altman's rendering of Marlowe as belonging to both the past *and* the present most

explicitly installs the nostalgic tension that underwrites *The Long Goodbye*. Complimenting the

previously discussed strategies that elicit nostalgia (e.g., music and post-flashing), mise-en-scène

functions to establish Gould's Marlowe as an anachronism. Many critics identify him as out of

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[369] Although Kael does not elaborate on what "lies" she intends, "the lies of old movies" likely refers to the studio system, its production process, and the resulting formal and ideological conventions of Old Hollywood. As numerous film scholars have noted, the visual-narrative style of classical Hollywood films broadly prioritizes continuity, linear time, narrative logic, characters' psychological motivations, and well-defined resolutions — strategies that New Hollywood directors often manipulated or disregarded. This style and its uniform reproduction in classic era films has earned Hollywood the sobriquet of *the dream factory*, a phrase coined by anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker in her groundbreaking 1950 study of Hollywood. In Powdermaker's view, Hollywood engages in mass producing "prefabricated daydreams. It tries to adapt the American dream, that all men are created equal, to the view that all men's dreams should be made equal" (39). Central to these mass-produced daydreams is the "*appearance* of virtue" maintained by the Motion Picture Association of America (Powdermaker 59, emphasis added). "Truthfulness," Powdermaker writes, "is usually considered an essential part of morality, but honesty is completely missing from most movies," which present characters "as passive robots moved about by the exigencies of plot" rather than "human beings of dignity" (58).

time because he wears a suit and tie, chain smokes, and drives a 1948 Lincoln Continental.[370]

Marlowe's residence is an equally important but, to my knowledge, entirely overlooked element

of mise-en-scène that situates him in Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles and Old Hollywood.

Marlowe lives in High Tower Court, a historical residential complex that underscores the

detective's temporal dislocation.

Both the interior and exterior architectural aesthetic of Marlowe's apartment symbolically

mark him as aligned with the past. The iconic, 100-foot-tall tower at the centre of High Tower

Court was built, circa 1920s, in the style of an Italian campanile and houses an elevator

(McLaughlin and Taylor) — "a private elevator for a private eye," one gangster quips in

Altman's film. Nestled in the heart of Hollywood Hills, the four Streamline Moderne style

buildings surrounding the tower were designed and built between 1935 and 1956 by architect

Carl Kay (McLaughlin and Taylor).[371] Inaccessible by car, the secluded complex is characteristic

of silent-era stars' proclivity for building their homes tucked into the hills of Hollywood Heights

to achieve privacy ("About Hollywood Heights"). Its seclusion symbolically corresponds to

Marlowe's sense of feeling displaced in 1970s Los Angeles (see fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Marlowe's secluded, Streamline Moderne residence.

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[370] E.g., Luhr 165; Minett 247; and Hillier and Phillips 166-167.

[371] Streamline Moderne emerged in the 1930s and remained very popular throughout the 1940s and 1950s. This architectural style notably characterizes the Malloch Building, which served as the apartment of Irene (Lauren Bacall) in *Dark Passage* (1947), staring Humphrey Bogart.

In in addition to mise-en-scène, Marlowe's moral code evokes nostalgia. As often noted, Altman envisioned his detective as temporally displaced:

> We called him "Rip Van Marlowe," and we took the position that he'd been asleep for twenty years, woke up and Elliott [Gould] just wandered through that film, and that was our idea, that he was wandering through this landscape and this film — trying to invoke the morals of a previous time into this early seventies. ("Rip Van Marlowe")

The morals Altman intends are specified by the film's screenwriter, Leigh Brackett, who asserts that "Gould's Marlowe is a man of simple faith, honesty, trust, and complete integrity" (28). When addressing Gould's Marlowe as an anachronism, commentators generally characterize him as an impractical idealist who is out-of-time by virtue of his allegedly outdated values.[372] That numerous critics and scholars read Rip Van Marlowe's moral code as anachronistic testifies to a profound nostalgia among both film crew and viewers for an allegedly principled age belonging to the past — a nostalgia Chandler shared, given that his Marlowe was always an anachronism (a point to which I will return momentarily).[373]

In addition to the myriad of ways Altman suggests that Marlowe is an anachronism, he paradoxically presents Marlowe as very much a man of the early 1970s. In doing so, he provides the previously mentioned simultaneous sense of contemporaneity and of pastness that Cawelti attributes to successful nostalgia films. Marlowe's demeanor throughout *The Long Goodbye* and the casting of Gould both work to complicate the view of Marlowe as outdated and underscore the film's nostalgic tension. Although "out of step," Mike Hale maintains, Gould's Marlowe is "also thoroughly up-to-date," capable of rolling with "whatever the city and times throw at him"

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[372] E.g., Mikulec; Ebert; Hamid; Gregory 47; Kirshner 174; Luhr 155, 165; Canby 6; Kael 133; Kolker, *Cinema* 372, 390; Lipnick; Altman and Vallan 22; and Pendo 162.

[373] Beginning with Marlowe's first appearance in *The Big Sleep* (1946), the detective's integrity was presented as outdated in all Chandler's novels, especially *The Long Goodbye* (1953).

by "shrugging and repeating the mantra: 'It's O.K. with me'." Jim Hillier and Alastair Phillips

also read this catchphrase as aligning Marlowe with his contemporaries, suggesting that the

refrain signals his passive acceptance of the "morally lax society" to which he belongs (167).

Others notably read this catchphrase as distinguishing the detective from his contemporaries'

passive indifference and conduct,[374] thus highlighting the ways Gould's Marlowe simultaneously

belongs to the past and present.

Like his catchphrase, Marlowe's attitude toward law enforcement and institutional

impositions on personal liberty situate him as a man of his times. For instance, while

incarcerated as a suspected accessory-after-the fact to the crime committed by Terry Lennox

(Jim Bouton), Marlowe shares a cell with a man who waxes philosophical about the prison

system, complaining that "they don't have burglars and thieves in here anymore" but "people

who smoke marijuana. Possession. Possession is what you get in here for. Possession of noses,

possession of gonads, possession of life. It's a weird world. But listen, someday, someday all the

pigs are gonna be in here and all the people are gonna be out there." To which Marlowe replies,

as he is being led away from his cell upon his release: "You can bet on that. Listen, Dave,

remember that you're not in here, it's just your body. See you when you get out." Marlowe's

empathic they-can-possess-your-body-but-not-your-soul response seems entirely uncharacteristic

of a 1940s or 1950s hard-boiled PI; however, it accords with the ethics of anti-

establishmentarianism and freedom that characterized the counterculture movement of the 1960s

and 1970s.

That Altman deliberately locates Marlowe in the past and in the present appears to escape

most critics. Mark Minett, for instance, acknowledges that Altman retained Marlowe's core

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[374] E.g., Luhr 164; and Minett 247.

values yet nonetheless feels that the distance between Marlowe and his times in Altman's film is undercut by Gould's casting. He argues that unlike a "classical-era Hollywood star like Robert Mitchum, who portrayed Marlowe in the 1978 adaptation of *The Big Sleep*, Gould seemed to epitomize the early 1970s" (245).[375] Kael, however, offers an entirely different assessment of Gould. Writing in 1973, she asserted that Gould, due to his overexposure at that point in his career, "is already an anachronism," a fact she believes "adds poignancy to the film" (133).[376] Minett's and Kael's opposing positions do not simply represent subjective appraisals of Gould as an actor; rather, they call attention to the fact that Gould's Marlowe paradoxically encourages *and* discourages nostalgia. This conflicting impulse is especially significant for the ways it engages the two sources of Altman's adaptation: Chandler's novel and hard-boiled noirs of the 1940s and 1950s.

Significant to Altman's engagement with Chandler is the question of whether the director fully understood that Marlowe's code was already presumed outdated when Chandler created his character. Altman's familiarity with Chandler's non-fiction suggests that the director was aware that Chandler intended Marlowe as a moral relic, a romantic idealist. Altman read *Raymond Chandler Speaking* and claims to have taken "rather careful note of what [Chandler] said about Philip Marlowe, that Marlowe was a character who could not possibly exist" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 40), namely because his moral code and profession would be at odds in the real world.[377] Altman's acquaintance with Chandler's letters suggests his awareness of Marlowe's

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[375] Vincent Canby likewise identifies Gould's Marlowe as a contemporary figure, dubbing him "a child of the sixties and seventies" (1). Also see Canby 6.

[376] Kael supports this assertion by explaining that Gould's box office value was speedily exploited following his success in *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (1969), noting that he appeared in seven films between 1969 and 1971 (133).

[377] Altman is likely referring to a 1951 letter Chandler wrote to a reader in which the author asserts that Marlowe is "in revolt against a corrupt society" and a financial failure because his "particular talents [are unsuited to] their time and place"; he then reminds his reader that "Marlowe is not a real person. He is a creature of fantasy. [...] In real life

anachronistic status; however, the director admitted that he did not read *The Long Goodbye* in its entirety ("Robert Altman and *The Long Goodbye*" 135),[378] a fact that calls the depth of his understanding into question. That is, Altman's understanding of Chandler's detective appears to have been derived, in part, from the author's writings *about* Marlowe rather than his fictional representations *of* Marlowe.

Although Altman believes his Marlowe to be "closer to Chandler's character than any of the other renditions" (qtd. in Thompson 81), he does not cite a shared anachronistic moral code among his Marlowe and Chandler's as evidence for this comparison. Instead, Altman feels his Marlowe to be closer to Chandler's because other adaptations presented Marlowe as "a kind of movie superhero" (qtd. in Thompson 81). This assertion—in conjunction with Altman's claim that his film offered a "reinvention of Philip Marlowe" ("Rip Van Marlowe") and Chandler's declaration that Marlowe has always been a "sentimentalist" whose "toughness has always been more or less a surface bluff" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 234)—supports my contention that Altman did not reinvent Chandler's Marlowe but Old Hollywood's Marlowes.

Altman's reinvention, as many have noted, parodies the hard-boiled noir genre. It also, however, parodies the male protagonists of other classic Hollywood genres. Central to this parody are his countless allusions to Hollywood, which both signal the film's reflexivity and clarify the director's revisionist aims. Minett offers a perceptive summary of Hollywood allusions in *The Long Goodbye*;[379] however, he argues that the film's "reflexive references to

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a man of his type would no more be a private detective than he would be a university don" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 232).

[378] In fact, Altman claims he told his crew not to "worry about reading *The Long Goodbye*" and to instead read *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, a book he "gave […] to everybody who worked on the film" ("Robert Altman and *The Long Goodbye*" 135).

[379] Noting that *The Long Goodbye* is bracketed by "Hooray for Hollywood," Mark Minett finds the song's function "fairly obscure," as well as the function of "the references to Al Jolson in blackface, the ineffective Malibu Colony guard's preoccupation with impressions of classic Hollywood stars, the borrowing of the suicide attempt and use of reflection shots from *A Star Is Born*, a hoodlum's reluctance to take off his clothes because George Raft never had

Hollywood are more provocative than coherent" (249). On the contrary, I find Altman's

Hollywood allusions coherent in their references to classic cinematic genres, including westerns,

gangster films, hard-boiled detective films, and films noir. In addition to its generic allusions,

The Long Goodbye reflexively alludes to numerous stars and films of Hollywood's Golden Age,

thus specifying the cinematic past to which Altman's film responds. That Altman "wanted all

that Hollywood stuff" ("Rip Van Marlowe") indicates the allusions are meant to serve a purpose.

In his discussion of generic revisionism, Carroll addresses how seventies filmmakers

used allusions to film history as an expressive device, a means to comment on the "themes and

emotive and aesthetic qualities" of their films' fictional worlds (52-53). By evoking old films, he

maintains, a new film "refers not only to its own fictional world but also to a web of interrelated

ideas previously introduced by film criticism and then recycled as reflections or commentaries

on the fictional world of the new film" (55). That is, cinematic allusions may exceed homage and

serve a critical function. For a genre reworking to operate critically, however, it must do more

than merely allude to previous work. As Carroll points out, "merely 'mentioning' great themes

about which great artists have expended great energies" is insufficient for an "allusionistic genre

film" to say "anything substantive of its own" (74). Mediated via allusion, Altman's *The Long*

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to, the 'invisible man' whose face is wrapped in bandages and shares Marlowe's hospital room, and the restaging (and reversal) of the ending of *The Third Man* as Eileen Wade drives past Marlowe in a jeep while he ignores her" (249-50). The Malibu Colony guard's impressions include Jimmy Stewart; Barbara Stanwick as Phyllis Dietrichson in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), the screenplay to which Chandler co-wrote with Wilder; and Walter Brennan, known for his supporting roles in classical westerns as well as *To Have and Have Not* (1944), directed by Hawks and staring Bogart and Bacall. To Minett's list of Hollywood allusions in *The Long Goodbye*, I would add *The Thin Man* film series (Marlowe calls a stray dog Asta, a reference to Nick and Nora Charles's Schnauzer in Dashiell Hammett's novel, which was adapted in a series of films made between 1934 and 1947); *Dark Passage* (1947) (while, like Minnett, most assume the bandaged hospital patient alludes to *The Invisible Man* films of the 1930s and 1940s, I find it more probable that the bandaged patient alludes to *Dark Passage*'s Vincent Parry, played by Bogart); *Once Upon a Time In the West* (1968) (although a discussion of Altman's western allusions is beyond the scope of this chapter, Altman's "Hooray" leitmotif and the harmonica Marlowe takes from his hospital roommate arguably both allude to Sergio Leone's film); *I, the Jury* (1953) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) (I will discuss allusions to Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer when I address Altman's tough-guy parody in section three of this chapter).

Goodbye works by iconic—and ironic—reference, thereby establishing a nostalgic tension that communicates a relationship between past and present. Understanding this relationship requires that we grasp the film's Hollywood allusions, its references to classical genres and their associated myths. As the next section demonstrates, Altman's parody of generic conventions exceeds burlesque to satirize generic myths.[380]

A Bunch of Thumbnail Essays: Parodying Machismo & Demythologizing Genres

The generic allusions in Altman's *The Long Goodbye* all share one figure in common: the tough-guy hero. In gangster films of the 1930s and 1940s, criminals who seek to rise up the ranks exemplify the tough-guy protagonist (or antagonist); this figure is also represented by rugged, stoic cowboys in classical westerns and the private eye in hard-boiled films. While the PI might also embody the noir tough-guy, the tough-guy hero of noir is most often an ordinary man entangled in nefarious circumstances beyond his control, either through no fault of his own or because of his own poor choices. Altman parodies each of these tough-guys in *The Long Goodbye* to articulate various social criticisms concerning notions of masculinity and heroism.

In fact, Altman described *The Long Goodbye*'s narrative as "merely a clothesline on which to hang a bunch of thumbnail essays, little commentaries" ("Altman" 199). In this context, his parodic and reflexive allusions serve a far more critical function than simply signaling, as Altman has vaguely suggested, that *The Long Goodbye* is "just a movie" (qtd. in Minett 68). They prompt viewers to consider their own nostalgic investment in Old Hollywood films and the tough guys of classic genres. This section considers how *The Long Goodbye* elicits such reflection by demythologizing generic myths. Specifically, I address the film's parody of

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[380] Altman himself identified *The Long Goodbye* as satire, clarifying that the "satire in the film is pointed more at films than it is at Chandler ("Robert Altman Speaking" 40).

hypermasculinity, which is accomplished via Altman's depiction of gangsters, his engagement

with noir conventions, and—most significantly—his allusions to Spillane's Mike Hammer. I

demonstrate that Altman demythologizes the underlying myth of classic gangster films and

selectively demythologizes the hard-boiled noir myth.

Zsigmond revealingly explains that, in their use of post-flashing, he and Altman did not

want to imitate the photographic style of old films, "except for a few scenes with the gangsters

where there is a satiric and ironic quality, a put-on. We used higher contrast with people moving

in and out of shafts of light, the way you would remember a Fifties gangster" (qtd. in Lipnick).

Although Zsigmond specifically references 1950s gangsters, the gangster genre to which Altman

alludes characterizes the iconic gangster films of the 1930s and 1940s.[381] Thirties gangster films

typically feature protagonists who are either immigrants or first-generation Americans and

document their rise as petty criminals from lower-class origins to powerful crime bosses. Cold,

ruthless and violent, these cinematic gangsters were especially appealing to audiences during the

early 1930s, a time when real-life gangsters became national celebrities as frequent subjects of

headline news ("Gangsters").[382] Profiting off the public's fascination with gangsters, studios

nonetheless attempted to avoid controversy and censorship by explicitly denouncing criminal

activity and emphasizing the gangster's inevitable downfall. That is, many gangster films of the

1930s endeavour to indict organized crime, typically concluding on a crime-doesn't-pay note

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[381] E.g., *Little Caesar* (1930), *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Scarface* (1932), *Lady Killer* (1933), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), *"G" Men* (1935, 1949), and *T-Men* (1947).

[382] In addition to the public's fascination with headline gangsters, the genre's popularity has been attributed to the fact that 1930s gangster films symbolized "the decay of American society," "the fear that traditional values would not survive the economic crisis" of the Great Depression, and "the deterioration of law enforcement and the government" ("Era").

with the death of the criminal protagonist. Forties gangster films offer the same didacticisms but typically feature law enforcement (rather than criminal) protagonists.[383]

Though *The Long Goodbye* parodies the protagonists of 1940s gangster films by presenting figures of law enforcement as ineffectual, I am most interested in how Altman demythologises the classic gangster film by satirizing the violent masculinity its protagonists embody in his representation of gangster Marty Augustine (Mark Rydell) and his cronies. This satire rests upon making the traditionally violent gangster figure appear ridiculous. Altman does so, in part, by spoofing the ethnic gangster cliché and presenting Augustine's gang as ethnically diverse. Drawing viewers' attention to this parody, Marlowe wryly comments on Augustine's crew as they usher him into his apartment: "I see you got a Mexican, and you've got an Irish guy, you got a Jewish fellow, and an Italian." Instead of acknowledging Marlowe, Augustine laughingly mocks the detective's living conditions and then itemizes markers of his own financial success. He also tells Marlowe that Terry committed a "minor crime" by killing Sylvia and a "major crime" by stealing his (Augustine's) money. Augustine's materialism and posturing corresponds to his crew's concern with appearances, which is facetiously depicted on multiple occasions.[384] Altman's parodic representation of gangsters undermines the aggression central to classic gangster films and demythologizes such films' affirmation of safety.

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[383] *The Public Enemy* (1931) notably opens with a disclaimer specifying that the film aims "to honestly depict an environment that exists today in a certain strata of American life, rather than glorify the hoodlum or the criminal," and it includes a closing intertitle that moralizes gangster Tom Powers's (James Cagney) fate: "The end of Tom Powers is the end of every hoodlum. The Public Enemy is not a man, it is not a character, it is a problem we must all face." *"G" Men* (1935) likewise attempts to counter the glorification of criminals by supplanting the criminal protagonist with the heroic federal bureau of investigation (FBI) agent. When the film was reissued in 1949, Warner Brothers added a pre-credits scene that highlights the "truth, drive, and vitality" of FBI agents in contrast to "the man who wants to get more out of life than he puts into it: the hoodlum." Like *"G" Men*'s re-release, *T-Men* (1947) lauds the efforts of law enforcement, opening with a statement read by Elmer Lincoln Irey, "the former chief coordinator of the law enforcement agencies of the [U.S.] Treasury Department," who is pleased to inform viewers "about the work of the law enforcement agents of the Treasury Department"; he then details the "six fingers of the Treasury Department fist," which he asserts "hits fair but hard."

[384] The morning after Augustine and his crew pay Marlowe a threatening visit, Harry (David Arkin), the gangster tasked with surveilling Marlowe's place overnight, is seen shaving in the front seat of his car. When Marlowe exits

In his discussion of the underlying myth of gangster films, Cawelti maintains that such films affirm the "limits of individual aggression in a society that tolerates and even encourages a high degree of personal enterprise and violence. The gangster becomes a tragic figure not because he is inherently evil, but because he fails to recognize these limits. The myth assures us that society is not repressive or violent; instead, it shows how criminal violence evokes its own inevitable doom" (205). In *The Long Goodbye*, however, no such limits are placed on the sadistic Augustine who successfully retrieves his money at no personal cost. His excessive violence is epitomized in the often-analyzed bottle scene, in which Augustine wilfully disfigures his mistress by smashing a Coke bottle in her face. Asked about this scene, Altman intriguingly did not acknowledge its resonance with a scene in *The Public Enemy* (1931) in which Tom Powers (James Cagney) smashes a grapefruit into his girlfriend's face. Instead, Altman responded that "the Coke bottle sequence" "was a calculated device; [it] brought violence into the film" to remind viewers that "in spite of Marlowe, there is a real world out there; and it is a violent world" (qtd. in Phillips 154). Whereas classic gangster films indicate that crime does not pay— and that gangsters' violence is successfully contained by law enforcement—Altman offers viewers a brutal scene of unmotivated violence, and then lets its perpetrator succeed in his criminal scheme. Altman's parody of gangsters therefore serves a satirical function, as does his parody of the hard-boiled private eye as a tough-guy icon.

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his building, he wishes Harry a good morning and the two briefly converse about Marlowe's neighbours. Harry asks what they "do for a living" and—shocked to hear they dip and sell candles—declares to "remember when people just had jobs." Marlowe gives him the address of where he is heading so that Harry has an easier time trailing him; he tells Harry he "look[s] great" but suggests that Harry straighten his tie a bit, and drives off. Harry straightens his tie and then takes the time to clear his car dashboard of garbage before pursuing Marlowe. The entire episode parodies the self-made gangster narrative by humourously drawing attention to Harry's concern with his appearance and juxtaposing this concern with Harry's ironic remembrance of a time "when people just had jobs." A later scene similarly parodies gangsters' concern with appearances when Augustine demands his gang strip naked to prove that they have nothing to hide and Pepe (Pepe Callahan) protests, explaining that he does not want to take his clothes off because he has "too many scars." Without hesitation, Augustine—a man who earlier smashes his lover in the face with a glass bottle—responds: "I understand, Pepe. I understand" and sends him out of the room.

Altman's parody of the hard-boiled detective hero is less clear cut than his parody of

gangsters because it overlaps with questions regarding how to define noir and because he

simultaneously demythologizes and reaffirms the hard-boiled myth. Frank Krutnik's work on

representations of masculinity in 1940s noir is useful to identifying the subgeneric targets of

Altman's parody. Examining the diversity of "the *noir* 'tough' thriller," Krutnik considers how

1940s noir heroes are "positioned in relation to the enigma (the disruption which mobilizes the

narrative process)" and identifies three primary subgeneric modes:

> (i) *the investigative thriller*, where the hero, often a professional detective, seeks to
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> restore order—and to validate his own identity—by exposing and countermanding a
>
> criminal conspiracy
>
> (ii) *the male suspense thriller*, which is the inverse of the above, in that the hero is in a
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> position of marred inferiority, in regard both to the criminal conspirators and to the
>
> police, and seeks to restore himself to a position of security by eradicating the enigma
>
> (iii) *the criminal adventure thriller*, where the hero, usually with the aid of a woman,
>
> becomes engaged in either a wilful or an accidental transgression of the law, and has
>
> to face the consequences of stepping out of line. (86)

Applying this taxonomy to Altman's film reveals *The Long Goodbye* as a parodic revision of the

noir investigative thriller that actually replicates many features of the noir male suspense thriller.

That is, Altman parodies the tough-guy PI of investigative noir (i.e., the hard-boiled detective)

but not noir generally. As I will demonstrate, Altman's rejection of some classic noir

conventions and maintenance of others supports the nostalgic tension that runs throughout his

film and registers *The Long Goodbye* as paradoxically anti-nostalgic and nostalgic. (For the sake

of clarity, I use the term *hard-boiled noir* to designate Altman's revisionist take on both the investigative thriller and male suspense thriller subgenres of noir Krutnik identifies.)

Although Altman revises a cinematic rather than literary genre, the hard-boiled narrative formula established by authors such as Dashiell Hammett and Chandler merits consideration because, as I noted earlier, film noir developed out of the literary hard-boiled tradition. This formula includes a marginal private eye protagonist who is typically both a man of integrity and a failure.[385] This paradoxical hero operates outside institutionalized law enforcement, though he is not himself a criminal. According to Cawelti, the hard-boiled hero's "position on the edge of the law is very important, because one of the central themes of the hard-boiled myth is the ambiguity between institutional law enforcement and true justice. Only the individual of integrity who exists on the margins of society can solve the crime and bring about true justice" (195). In sum, the hard-boiled tough-guy is an antihero.

Equally as important as the detective antihero to the hard-boiled myth is setting. Although hard-boiled novels and films may be set in different times and places, the hard-boiled myth is nonetheless deeply informed by Hammett's and Chandler's California. To again borrow from Cawelti's very useful analysis, "the California city setting of Hammett and Chandler and the approximate time of their stories, memorialized in the period furnishings, visual icons, and style of the great hard-boiled films of the 1940s, have become for us the look and the temporal-spatial aura of the hard-boiled myth" (194). My earlier discussion of the nostalgic/anti-nostalgic tension in *The Long Goodbye* is relevant here because the ways in which Altman both evokes and denies nostalgia work to disrupt this temporal-spatial aura — and thus the hard-boiled myth

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[385] "The private eye," Cawelti observes, "is a relatively poor man," "the most marginal sort of lower middle-class quasi-professional. Yet unlike the usual stereotype of this social class, he is a man of honor and integrity who cannot be made to give up his quest for true justice. He is a compelling American hero type" (195).

of the quixotic detective in a corrupt world capable of effecting justice. In disrupting this myth,

Altman specifically targets the hypermasculinity of hard-boiled noir films.

Humphrey Bogart is widely acknowledged as emblematic of the cinematic hard-boiled

noir tough-guy. He is, as Megan E. Abbott puts it, "*the* hard-boiled hero," the iconic embodiment

of hard-boiled masculinity through which we view the noir tough-guy protagonist ("Nothing"

305; *Street* 191). She rightly suggests that Bogart's iconographic status emerges from a melding

of various characters he has portrayed, thus making it "difficult to distill the cultural memory of

Marlowe from that of Bogart and his gallery of characters" ("Nothing" 306). Bogart began his

Hollywood career in supporting roles, playing gangsters and criminals (e.g., *Angles with Dirty*

Faces [1938]). Nineteen forty-one marked a turning point in his career with his leading

performances as morally conscious, paroled convict Roy "Mad Dog" Earle in *High Sierra* (1941)

and cynical, hard-boiled detective Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). The following year,

he portrayed cabaret owner Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* (1942), a role that epitomizes Bogart's

persona as a witty, laconic, composed, tough, and heterosexually attractive sentimental cynic.

That most of these traits characterize Chandler's Marlowe may explain why, for many, Marlowe

is Bogart.[386]

While correspondences between Bogart's Marlowe and Gould's Marlowe have been

observed, most argue that the latter lacks the former's assertiveness. Those who note that

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[386] Pico Iyer goes so far as to suggest that Marlowe, "Chandler's most immortal creation," was "co-produced by Humphrey Bogart" (98). That is, Bogart's portrayal of Marlowe in Hawks's *The Big Sleep* fixed Marlowe's image within the cultural imagination. By the time of Altman's film, Kael notes, Marlowe had already become Bogart, and you could see him in it when you read the book. You weren't likely to have kept the other Marlowes of the forties (Dick Powell, Robert Montgomery, George Montgomery) in your mind, and you had to see somebody in it" (134-35). Like Kael, most agree that Bogart's Marlowe is Hollywood's most memorable Marlowe, a fact that arguably has as much to do with Bogart's persona as with his performance. Interestingly, despite the similarities between Bogart's persona and the defining traits of Chandler's Marlowe, some argue that Bogart's Marlowe bears little resemblance to the character created by Chandler. For such discussions, see Abbott, *Street* 144 and "Nothing" 306; and Moser 159.

Gould's Marlowe shares central characteristics with Bogart's typically do so to suggest that such similarities contribute to the sense that Gould's Marlowe is a throwback from another era.[387] Hamid, for instance, maintains that in Altman's film, Marlowe's "one-liners and detached, knowing attitude, so charming in Bogart, make him appear completely out of touch in his unfashionable suit and old car." Kolker also addresses the issue of wit in Altman's film; however, he does so to suggest that its absence contributes to Marlowe's diffidence. In his view, Altman stripped away "the security of the Bogart persona, his wit and his ability to stand back from a given situation in a posture of self-preservation" (*Cinema* 390); thus, the "self-defensive Marlowe wit" wielded by Bogart becomes discursive incomprehension and passivity in Altman's film (391). As a "mumbling bumbler," Kolker writes, Gould's Marlowe is not the "tough and persistent detective portrayed by Humphrey Bogart" ("Long Reach" 1029). Kael likewise suggests that "Gould doesn't propel the action as Bogart did" (134). Gould's inaction contra Bogart's vitality is central to Altman's parody. As Wes D. Gerhring observes, "Bogart is such a film noir factor" that parodying noir may be accomplished by either imitating his persona or "*doing just the opposite*" (152, emphasis added).[388] Altman, of course, does the latter. In presenting a soft-boiled Marlowe, Altman parodies the hard-boiled noir tough-guy Bogart's persona connotes.

As Abbott suggests, Bogart's portrayals of Marlowe and Spade have "mingled with other, still-tauter models of hard-boiled masculinity to spawn a hyper-tough guy icon bearing minimal relation to any individual film and even less so to the source novels" ("Nothing" 306). Exposing the complexity of intertextual and intermedial relations at play in the construction of cultural

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[387] E.g., Ferncase 88; Mikulec; and Hamid.

[388] Gerhring offers "Robert Altman's spoofing adaptation" as an example of a parody accomplished by rejecting Bogart's personae, asserting that Gould's "delightfully laid-back" Marlowe often has viewers "laughingly thinking about how different Bogart's Marlowe was in *The Big Sleep* (1946)" (152).

memory, this icon persists and overshadows the fact that noir protagonists are often figures of

unstable masculinity. Among others, Krutnik argues that 1940s noirs "tend to be obsessed with

lapses from, and failures to achieve, […] a position of unified and potent masculinity" (93).

However, he continues, "*The Maltese Falcon* is explicitly concerned with the idealization of

Spade as an embodiment of self-sufficient phallic potency" (95).[389] That this type of

"invulnerable, self-assured hero" is uncommon in most 1940s noirs (Krutnik 99) is significant to

Altman's depiction of Marlowe. In presenting Gould's Marlowe as vulnerable, Altman

duplicates the noir trope of unstable masculinity, a fact that is often overlooked because

comparisons of Bogart's Marlowe to Gould's dominate discussions of Altman's *The Long

Goodbye*.

Masculine vulnerability as embodied by Gould's Marlowe amounts to trusting, agreeable

nonchalance. Altman immediately establishes as much during the often-discussed opening

sequence of *The Long Goodbye*, in which Marlowe is awoken in the middle of the night by his

hungry and very finicky cat. The film crosscuts between Marlowe's elaborate efforts to appease

his cat and Terry navigating his convertible through the streets of Los Angeles. Different

versions of "The Long Goodbye" play softly throughout the opening sequence, setting an

ironically affable tone. According to Altman, the film's opening "tells audiences that this isn't

going to be Humphrey Bogart, it isn't going to be broads and fights. It's almost obligatory in this

sort of film to open up with some very heavy action; we did just the opposite" ("Robert Altman

Speaking" 41). In his reference to Bogart, Altman presumably has the actor's rendition of

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[389] Bogart's Spade, Krutnik explains, is "confronted with a parade of characters who seek to deceive and threaten him, but he persistently triumphs over them" (93); his mastery is "explicitly linked with the triumph of 'tough' masculinity over a deviant/effeminate adversary" (i.e., Cairo, played by Peter Lorre) (95).

Marlowe in mind. However, Hawks's *The Big Sleep* does not open forcefully, nor do any of the

1940s Marlowe films. Thus, noir in general may be the "sort" of film Altman intends.

Although classic noirs do not necessarily open with "very heavy action," they typically

open with atmospheric tension conveyed via suspenseful music and a sense of foreboding or

chaos instilled, for example, by men lurking in shadows, women running from danger, cars

speeding perilously, sirens wailing, and murder being announced rather than depicted.[390]

Altman's opening, too, suggests tension in its depiction of Terry; however, this tension is

undercut by his ironic juxtaposition of Terry's actions with Gould's lackadaisical Marlowe.[391]

Thus, Altman appears to differentiate his film from action-oriented, "broads and fights" films.

He does so most explicitly by parodying the hard-boiled noir tough-guy. Though, as noted

earlier, this figure is not typically characterized as an invulnerable and self-assured hero in 1940s

noirs, he often assumes such qualities in the hard-boiled crime dramas of the 1950s. In fact,

machismo defines the most popular hard-boiled noir figure of the decade: Mike Hammer.

The possibility of Hammer's significance to Altman's generic revision is subtly

suggested by the director's frequent conflation of the 1940s and 1950s when discussing his Rip

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[390] Consider, for example, the opening sequences of renowned noirs such as *The Killers* (1946), *The Big Combo* (1955), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), and *Laura* (1944). *The Killers* begins with suspenseful music, an empty road lit only by a pair of headlights, and a brief back shot of two silhouetted men driving before the credits role; its first scene opens with the same two men in silhouette scoping a diner. *The Big Combo* offers establishing shots of New York city at night while the credits roll to an upbeat jazz score and then begins with a brief shot of a boxing match, followed by a woman fleeing two men in pursuit. The title sequence of *Double Indemnity* is accompanied by suspenseful music and the silhouette of a man on crutches approaching the camera; the film then offers an opening shot of a speeding car that barrels through a *stop* sign. *Sunset Boulevard* opens with the sound of sirens in the distance and a shot of an empty road soon to be overtaken by motorcycles and police cars, as Joe Gillis (William Holden) offers a voice-over monologue identifying the vehicles as belonging to the homicide squad and declaring that a murder has occurred. Likewise, the first line of *Laura* (1944) announces the titular character's death in voice-over. Again, while each of these opening sequences conveys atmospheric tension, I would not characterize them as depicting "very heavy action."

[391] The atmospheric tension in *The Long Goodbye*'s opening sequence is established by Terry regularly revving his engine, the bloody scratches down the right side of his face that he inspects in his rearview mirror, and the fact that he dons a pair of driving gloves to cover the bruised and bloodied knuckles of his right hand.

Van Marlowe[392] and explicitly supported by *The Long Goodbye*'s allusions to *Kiss Me Deadly*

(1955) and *I, the Jury* (1953). Whereas Marlowe dominated 1940s screens, Hammer was the

1950s tough-guy PI par excellence. The decade saw four Hollywood adaptations and one

television version of Spillane's work, while Chandler's work was not once adapted during the

1950s. As Abbott notes, Marlowe's character leaves film during the 1950s and is displaced by "a

very different model," that of "Mickey Spillane's sociopathic detective Mike Hammer [who]

becomes the era's most widely consumed representation of the tough private eye ("Nothing"

314). That Altman has both 1940s Marlowes and 1950s Hammers in mind when claiming to

have reinvented Philip Marlowe may explain why he inconsistently refers to Marlowe as a forties

and fifties man. Hence, rather than thinking of Gould's Marlowe as specifically antithetical to

Bogart's, I propose that it is just as useful to consider him in relation to 1950s hard-boiled noirs

featuring Hammer. In fact, *The Long Goodbye* contains significant allusions to adaptations of

Spillane that, to my knowledge, remain unacknowledged in the extensive body of work

addressing Hollywood allusions in Altman's film.

Altman's use of cars in *The Long Goodbye* perhaps represents his most subtle allusion to

Hammer. In the opening sequence of *Kiss Me Deadly*, Hammer (Ralph Meeker) is forced to stop

his white, 1951 Jaguar XK120 roadster in the middle of an empty, late-night highway by

Christina (Cloris Leachman), a barefoot young woman who flags him down desperate for help.

As Hammer drives, Christina pontificates about "how much you can tell about a person from

such simple things, your car for instance." When Hammer asks "what kind of a message" his car

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[392] In interviews, Altman inconsistently describes Gould's Marlowe as belonging to either the 1940s or 1950s. For example, on the one hand, he claims to have said: "'Let's take this guy out of the forties because there's no such thing as these private eyes. They don't exist as such.' And we put him in 1973. We called him Rip Van Marlowe. He was still in the forties, but suddenly he was in this period. And we made that the main kind of texture we were trying to deal with" (Altman, qtd. in Minett 245); on the other hand, Altman asserts that "Marlowe is a Fifties character who has survived unchanged into the Seventies. He's a man out of time, and out of place. [...] For him, the last fifteen or twenty years never happened" (qtd. in Lipnick).

sends her, she effectively calls him out as a narcissist: "You have only one real lasting love. […] You. You're one of those self-indulgent males who thinks about nothing but his clothes, his car, himself […]. You're the kind of a person who never gives in a relationship, who only takes." Altman's narcissists also drive light-coloured, luxury sport-car convertibles: Terry, a pale yellow, 1971 Ferrari 365 GTS/4 Daytona Spyder; and Eileen, a white/cream 1970 or 1971 Mercedes-Benz 280SL. Conversely, self-effacing Marlowe, as noted earlier, drives a 1948 Lincoln (see fig. 10).

Fig. 10. Terry leaving Malibu Colony (upper left), Eileen leaving Augustine's (lower left), and Marlowe obstructing traffic so that he does not hit a dog.

Cars in *The Long Goodbye* are not incidental but part of the film's symbolic language. As Thomas Elsaesser pointed out in 1975, "Altman is one of the few modern directors who still occasionally employ a symbolic language that clearly belongs to the epoch of the classical mise-en-scène: the symbolisation of objects through thematic use in the narrative" ("Pathos" 232). That Altman differed from his New Hollywood contemporaries in this regard is supported by Richard T. Jameson's 1974 complaint that contemporary revisionist noirs debase "standard noir icons" such as the car, which "has virtually lost its capacity to convey nuances of character and event" (32). This charge is entirely inapplicable to Altman's film, in which cars are thematically symbolic: they comment on past and present values by signifying the honorable Marlowe as an anachronism (via his 1948 Lincoln) and the narcissistic Terry and Eileen as contemporaries (via their luxury sport convertibles). That Altman establishes this symbolic language by alluding to

Kiss Me Deadly furthers his tough-guy parody: the generosity of his Marlowe mocks Hammer's narcissist machismo.

The Long Goodbye most explicitly alludes to Hammer during a scene in which Eileen and Marlowe share a meal she has prepared that parodies a dinner scene in *I, the Jury*. The latter scene features Dr. Charlotte Manning (Peggie Castle)—Hammer's love interest and the film's femme fatale—and Hammer (Biff Elliot) in her apartment during their first meeting in which she coyly attempts to psychoanalyze Hammer and assess what sort of threat he may present. The food and drink Charlotte offers Hammer signify his particular brand of masculinity: a simple fried chicken dinner and bottled beer indicate that he is a man's man. This association is reinforced by the fact that Hammer initially declines a drink because he assumes Charlotte is offering him champagne; however, when she reveals that the champagne bucket contains a towel-wrapped bottle of beer, Hammer happily accepts and pours them each a drink into the stemmed glasses Charlotte has set out. This scene further defines Hammer's masculinity when he tells Charlotte: "I like to stick my neck out, makes me think I'm tough." To which she replies: "You are tough, Mike, not a bad fault in a man." This emphasis on toughness accords with what K.A. Cuordileone terms a postwar "cult of toughness" (204),[393] which Altman appears to reject via parody.

In the Eileen-Marlowe dinner scene, Eileen prepares chicken Kiev for Marlowe. He claims that it is "the fanciest meal [he has] ever had," ironically parodying Hammer's stereotypically hypermasculine disdain of elegance. This parody also extends to Hammer's

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[393] The Second World War, Cuordileone explains, nourished a "preoccupation with masculine regeneration and toughness" that culminated with a "fixation on masculine virility, courage, will, and individuality" during the 1950s (238); in turn, "the relationship between courage and character formation, individuality and will—the courage to be—were recurrent themes in so much of the historiography, social criticism, and psychological discourse of the 1950s" that they gave rise to a "cult of toughness" (204). Spillane's Hammer excessively emblematizes this cultural preoccupation.

preference for beer. When Eileen offers Marlowe an aperitif ("Cognac, Grand Marnier, a liqueur of some sort"), he responds: "I'll just have my beer out of your wineglass, if you don't mind." Both dinner scenes thus imbue food and alcoholic preferences with symbolic significance. While *I, the Jury* unironically suggests Hammer's preferences mark him as a hard-boiled tough-guy, *The Long Goodbye* parodically suggests Marlowe's preferences signify his unmanly naïveté (he drinks beer from a wine glass and is awed by how Eileen got the butter to stay in his chicken).

Moreover, while Manning and Hammer exchange sexual banter and her seduction is successful, Marlowe and Eileen talk business; any hint of sexual tension between them is demolished in an earlier scene when Marlowe admits to Eileen that an apricot she gave him induced diarrhea. The issue of Marlowe's supposed disinterest in sex, which is emphasized throughout the film (most notably in his indifference to his neighbours' nudity), parodies the hard-boiled-tough-guy-as-womanizer trope common to both 1950s Hammer films and 1940s Marlowe films. While Marlowe's disinterest in sex directly corresponds to the chivalric code of Chandler's detective, in the context of Altman's allusions to Hammer it parodically comments on the two detectives' differing personal codes.[394]

The final scene of *The Long Goodbye* also resonates with that of *I, the Jury* in that Marlowe appears to adopt Hammer's code of vigilante justice. Both *I, the Jury* and *The Long Goodbye* conclude with the murder of a betrayer at the hands of the films' respective detectives.

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[394] Whereas Marlowe is widely regarded as a man of integrity, Hammer's moral lines are more ambiguously drawn. That Hammer and Marlowe are motivated by different aims is most clearly signalled in their positions regarding divorce cases: Hammer specializes in penny-ante divorce cases and Marlowe refuses to take them. Thus, Hammer is driven by financial compensation and Marlowe by something more abstract (i.e., an idealized, albeit personal, sense of justice). Altman's film makes this last point explicit in Marlowe's first phone conversation with Eileen in which the detective tells her his ability to take her case depends on its nature because he does not "do any divorce work." Noting that divorce business is a primary function of private detectives, Cawelti identifies a refusal to do divorce business as among the "most deeply symbolic clichés of the traditional hard-boiled formula," which typically functions to establish the PI's "personal sense of honor and his transcendent vocation" (197). Though Altman reproduces this cliché, he complicates Marlowe's code of honor at film's end by seemingly aligning it with Hammer's code.

Upon learning that Charlotte is responsible for the crimes he has been investigating, Hammer

shoots her in the abdomen while embracing her. He neither hesitates nor expresses remorse but

instead declares that killing her was "easy." Likewise, after learning that Terry is a disloyal

murderer, Marlowe shoots him point-blank. He does so immediately following his cynical

declaration that "nobody cares but me," thereby juxtaposing his supposedly anachronistic moral

code with the vigilante justice he enacts.

I will deal with the issue of moral ambiguity momentarily; here, I want to emphasize how

Gould's Marlowe dispenses the sort of hypermasculine vigilante justice associated with Hammer

rather than adhering to the restorer-of-order mode associated with Chandler to parody the hard-

boiled tough-guy's machismo. Addressing the issue of justice, Cawelti notes the existence of two

distinct strains of the hard-boiled myth: one emphasizes the hero's role as detective, judge, and

executioner (e.g., Spillane), while the other develops the hero's "relationship to the mythical role

of lawman-outside the law" in which the criminal self-destructs, is exposed, and/or confesses

(e.g., Hammett, Chandler) (196). Whether the detective actually kills miscreants or indirectly

causes their demise, Cawelti asserts, the hard-boiled myth is primarily concerned with

establishing the detective antihero as a figure of moral authority (196-197).

This myth is often implicit in much of the literature concerning Marlowe's murder of

Terry in Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, a sequence that has generated much debate since the

film's release. Although Abbott rejects any association between the murder and the hard-boiled

myth,[395] most critical discussions either implicitly or explicitly address the question of morality

(as it pertains to justice) in the film's final sequence. Such discussions may be broadly

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[395] In Abbott's view, the murder "serves as a more astute critique of contemporary Dirty Harry vendetta impulses than anything relating to the hardboiled mythology" (*Street* 194). While I endorse reading the murder as a critique of contemporary vendetta impulses (and will address this issue in the final section of this chapter), I nevertheless maintain that *The Long Goodbye*'s concluding murder is deeply implicated in the hard-boiled noir myth.

distinguished according to those that assume the film offers a morally coherent ending and those that characterize the closing sequence as morally ambiguous. Among commentators who adhere to the former view, Brackett felt having Gould's honourable Marlowe[396] ignore Terry's betrayal would not amount to a "moral ending" (qtd. in Tuska 387), whereas, she asserts, having Marlowe kill Terry "seemed right, and honest" (28).[397] Others also read Terry's betrayal as morally justifying Marlowe's actions.[398] In doing so, they seem to suggest that Altman supports the traditional hard-boiled myth of the marginal hero as righteous judge and executioner, as do those who argue that, by shooting Terry, Marlowe is transformed from passive to active and thus established as a moral authority and liberated from detached complacency.[399]

All readings that presume moral clarity are significant in that they overlook the manner in which moral clarity amounts to moral hypocrisy in Altman's *The Long Goodbye* — a notable oversight given that Altman himself speculated that the film's end disturbed viewers because it made them confront "their own moral hypocrisy" (qtd. in Gardner). Marlowe's hypocrisy resides in the fact that his dedication to integrity ironically prompts him to commit murder, to violate his ethical code of honour that prioritizes male bonds. Implicitly acknowledging Marlowe's hypocrisy, many critics have read the film's conclusion as morally ambiguous. Kolker, for instance, perceptively questions whether a viewer who applauds Marlowe's vigilante justice need

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[396] Recall that Brackett asserts, "Gould's Marlowe is a man of simple faith, honesty, trust, and integrity" (28).

[397] Phillips asserts that "Altman emphasized repeatedly in interviews that Marlowe's slaying of Terry was morally justified, and so he shows Marlowe behaving cheerfully at the final fadeout, thereby implying that Marlowe does not regret what he has done" (152). However, I have not found a single interview to support this claim. I suspect that Phillips either mistook Brackett's comments regarding the morality of the closing sequence as Altman's or assumed that Altman shared Brackett's sentiments. That Altman "liked the idea of Marlowe killing his best friend" (qtd. in Phillips 154) does not suggest that he views Marlowe's murder of Terry as morally justified.

[398] E.g., Phillips 152; and Kirshner 174.

[399] E.g., Hillier and Phillips 167; and Stewart 30.

answer for its implications (*Cinema* 397).[400] He also observes Marlowe's transition from

passivity, regarding the detective's murder of Terry as "an action of a sleepwalker momentarily

awake"; however, he does not read the murder as a means of establishing Marlowe's moral

authority but rather as signalling Altman's denunciation of the "passive acceptance of abuse

under the guise of loyalty" (demonstrated by Chandler's Marlowe at novel's end) and the

director's rejection of the "morally justified" murders in Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (*Cinema* 396).

Hamid offers a more general assessment of Terry's killing, suggesting that Altman turns

"the morality of film noir" on its head by mocking "the detective as the bringer of order and

justice" trope. Vincent Canby similarly notes Altman's departure from "conventional private eye

movies," arguing that rather than "setting everything straight" in the closing sequence, Altman's

film "erupts with violence and ends in a mood of moral confusion" that leads viewers to question

why Marlowe killed Terry. I find Hamid's and Canby's readings particularly interesting for the

ways they reproduce the myth itself: while true that the virtuous detective of *the hard-boiled*

myth brings justice, violent revenge and moral ambiguity are noir conventions — conventions

writ large in *I, the Jury* and *Kiss Me Deadly*.[401]

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[400] Specifically, Kolker asks: "Is a person who has been played for a fool only able to rectify his or her passivity by murder? If, on the other hand, the act is appalling, then why are we not appalled by other acts just like it in our cinema?" (*Cinema* 397).

[401] In his analysis of the closing sequence, Hamid offers a paradigmatic example of how critics reproduce the hard-boiled myth. He identifies Marlowe's resolute devotion to Terry and belief in the latter's innocence as both the novel's and film's "emotional core." Comparing Chandler's novel to Altman's film, Hamid argues that "Marlowe's superior morality is able to vanquish the fallen and corrupt noir world" in the novel, whereas "Altman recasts Marlowe's loyalty as irrelevant and naive in the modern world and changes the ending of the film to reflect this: Marlowe's reassuring values, like the glamour of classic Hollywood, are revealed to be illusory and out of date." I will address the presumed irrelevance of Marlowe's code shortly but included this summary of Hamid here to emphasize the difference between his reading of Chandler and events as they are depicted in Chandler's novel. As in all of Chandler's novels, Marlowe of *The Long Goodbye* is unable to "vanquish the fallen and corrupt noir world"; he is only capable of adhering to his code and affecting a negligible difference with regard to individual corruption, not social corruption at large (e.g., Eileen commits suicide but Harlan Potter and his kind go unpunished for their, arguably, greater crimes). Like Hamid's reading of Altman's film, Cawelti's analysis of *Chinatown* reproduces the hard-boiled myth. Cawelti suggests that Roman Polanski's film concludes contrary to the myth: "Instead of bringing justice to a corrupt society, the detective's actions leave the basic source of corruption untouched" (197), an observation, as I have just suggested, that is applicable to all hard-boiled stories. The hard-boiled detective is a lone crusader of sorts who cannot possibly resolve social corruption. "Instead of surmounting the web of conspiracy with

While Altman's allusions to Spillane adaptations work toward demythologizing the hard-boiled tough-guy via parody, the issue of moral ambiguity is also underscored via his equally important allusion to Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) in the concluding sequence of *The Long Goodbye*. Altman himself acknowledged that his closing sequence resembles that of *The Third Man*,[402] as have many critics. Most critics simply observe the correspondence between the films' concluding scenes as another of Altman's Hollywood allusions,[403] or they connect it to the use of "Hooray" in the final shot to suggest that Altman offers "a comic tribute to the Hollywood movie" (Stewart 30) and reiterates his generic nonconformity (McQuiston 145). Few, however, sufficiently consider the significance of the thematic resonance between the protagonists of each film. Just as Marlowe remains blindly loyal to Terry until the final sequence, *The Third Man*'s Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) remains resolutely devoted to his friend, Harry Lime (Orson Welles), until he is confronted with Lime's crimes. Both protagonists arguably take justice into their own hands: Marlowe by killing Terry, and Martins by first betraying his friend to police and then killing him.

How we read such killings depends on how we understand each character's motivation. Consider Martins's actions, for instance. Martins agrees to assist the police in capturing Lime after he witnesses the suffering Lime's crimes have caused children. His betrayal may either be read as a morally conscious act prompted by a desire to prevent further suffering, or it may be read as driven by guilt, a self-centered attempt to quell his own sense of culpability in others'

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honor and integrity intact," Cawelti continues, Polanski's "detective is overwhelmed by what has happened to him" (197). The same may be said of Chandler's Marlowe, who is jaded in *The Big Sleep* and increasingly so throughout the novels in which he is featured. By *The Long Goodbye*, as many critics have noted, Marlowe has nearly succumbed to his existential crisis (i.e., his sense of futility and inability to affect significant change in a corrupt world). Again, Marlowe is only ever capable of affecting individual justice, not social justice (i.e., the larger forces of corruption, as embodied by Potter, remain unaffected by his actions, whereas individual criminals and femmes fatale are punished — often by their own hands).

[402] See Minett 69.

[403] E.g., Kirshner 173; Kael 173; Minett 249-250.

pain. His motivation for murdering Lime is similarly ambiguous. Whether Martins shoots Lime

in an act of conformity or solidarity is debatable: given that Martins can hear Major Calloway

(Trevor Howard) shouting to shoot Lime on sight, his choice to shoot his friend may either be

read as an act of obeyance (he does as Calloway, the figure of moral authority, instructs) or as

mercy (because Lime's death is not guaranteed by Calloway's orders, Lime may be shot and then

incarcerated, a fate Martins "saves" him from). Likewise, are we to read Marlowe's killing of

Terry as an act of revenge, an act of justice, or the cynical violation of the detective's code? Is

revenge justice? Such morally ambiguous questions accord with noir conventions and thus—in

conjunction with the ways Altman's tough-guy parody violates such conventions—point to

nostalgic tensions in Altman's revisionist adaptation.

The question of whether Altman nostalgically or anti-nostalgically bids farewell to hard-

boiled noir may be productively addressed by considering how he both maintains and violates

hard-boiled noir conventions. On the one hand, as I have established, Altman parodies the

machismo of the hard-boiled noir tough-guy; on the other, he maintains the noir convention of

moral ambiguity by having the honourable and loyal Marlowe enact violent revenge upon his

friend. Recall, however, that Altman believes the "real world […] is a violent world" (qtd. in

Phillips 154). According to Kolker, "Altman is one of the few American filmmakers who

examines the results of the violent act, which more often than not only reaffirms the state that

existed previous to it" (*Cinema* 397). That is, Kolker writes, Altman views violence as

gratuitous, an "inevitable as well as erratic and unpredictable" act that "alters nothing" (*Cinema*

397)[404] — a fitting description of Marlowe's killing of Terry. The lighthearted tone with which

The Long Goodbye concludes (immediately following Terry's murder) signals Marlowe's act of

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[404] In a 1975 interview, Altman himself declared that he believes "most killing is senseless" ("*Nashville*" 32).

violence as parody in the service of satire. The film's ending may therefore be understood as an act of genre deconstruction. In parodying the PI tough-guy, Altman demythologizes hard-boiled noir; his film reveals the myth of hypermasculine violence that underwrites the genre as inadequate and destructive. In this sense, his goodbye to noir may be understood as anti-nostalgic. This good-riddance, however, does not entirely encompass Altman's position. In his treatment of moral ambiguity, the director nostalgically affirms the noir antihero figure.

In his work on 1940s American culture, William Graebner asserts that the "moral ambiguity of the age" was captured by film noir, whose "nonheroic hero has nothing to offer save an essential vulnerability and a basic decency that is *often irredeemably compromised*" (26, emphasis added). This description of the noir antihero (the "nonheroic hero") accurately applies to Gould's Marlowe, a vulnerable man of integrity. The noir detective's vulnerability and basic decency, as I noted earlier, are central to the hard-boiled antihero myth. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin elaborate on the role of the detective (anti)hero, writing that this figure "wanders through a narrative maze that may or may not completely resolve itself. […] The plots of film noir thrillers also often include multiple double-crosses, in which characters switch sides as various aspects of the mystery are revealed. Good and evil are thus blurred together, and even the hero's morality frequently comes under question." Although Benshoff and Griffin employ the term *hero*, they describe the noir PI as an antihero. While this figure is common to both 1940s noir and 1970s neo-noir,[405] it is particularly embodied by Gould's Marlowe. In Altman's film, Marlowe's integrity not only establishes him as an anachronism but also works toward aligning

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[405] Graebner observes that "the popularity of traditional movie heroes […] had begun to give way by the end of the forties to a preference for tortured, suffering, and unpretentious antiheroes who made no claim to a universal code" (27). Similarly, Kolker notes that the films of New Hollywood directors "speak to a continual impotence in the world, an inability to change and to create change. When they do depict action, it is invariably performed by lone heroes in an enormously destructive and antisocial manner" (*Cinema* 10). For a sustained discussion of the similarities between 1940s and 1970s noir, see Kirshner, esp. 170-177.

him with the noir antihero, an association Altman solidifies by insisting that his Marlowe is a genuine loser.[406] In so doing, Altman evidences nostalgia for the antihero and reaffirms a key element of the hard-boiled antihero myth — issues that I now explore in the final section of this chapter.

A Loser All the Way: Denying Romantic Closure & Affirming Antiheroic Integrity

According to Brackett, Altman claimed to "see Marlowe the way Chandler saw him, [as] a loser. But a *real* loser, not the fake winner that Chandler made out of him. A loser all the way" (28).[407] Consequently, she continues, Altman stripped Marlowe of his "fake hero attributes" (28). Elaborating on these presumed attributes, Brackett asserts that "Chandler's Marlowe always knew more than the cops. He could be beaten to a pulp, but he always came out on top one way or another. By sheer force of personality, professional expertise, and gall, he always had an edge" (28). While this may be true of Hollywood's Marlowes, Chandler's Marlowe, as Abbott rightly observes, "suffers constant defeat, retreating, time and again, to his own isolation" (*Street* 194). Thus, Hollywood, not Chandler, made a "fake winner" out of Marlowe.

That this fact eludes Brackett (and Altman presumably) speaks to the sustained power of the hard-boiled noir myth projected in classic-era films. Reading Marlowe as a loser comparative to the Hollywood Marlowes of the 1940s further illuminates Altman's tough-guy parody as social satire. In addition to converting Marlowe from a "tough-guy" to a "patsy" (Brackett 28), Altman desexualizes Marlowe and denies him the romantic closure typical of his 1940s

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[406] Recall that the hard-boiled narrative formula includes a marginal private eye protagonist who is typically both a man of integrity and a failure.

[407] This assertion is significant because, as Abbott astutely observes, it suggests Marlowe "exists independent of Chandler's rendering, such that Chandler can 'make him out' to be something he is not. It suggests that Chandler, like Bogart and Altman himself, is merely an interpreter of Marlowe" ("Nothing" 323). In reifying Marlowe, Altman unwittingly alludes to the enduring appeal of the hard-boiled myth.

counterparts. This section demonstrates how Altman's disavowal of romantic closure responds to the ideological conservativism of classic hard-boiled noir and reinforces Marlowe's position as an alienated antihero, thereby offering a vision of masculinity that differs from that of forties noirs as well as many seventies neo-noirs.

The detectives of classic hard-boiled noir are typically portrayed as exceedingly attractive to most of the women whom they encounter. These men are often philanderers who view women as objects of personal pleasure or obstacles to success. Their potent heterosexual appeal is an index of their virile masculinity. All of Old Hollywood's Mike Hammers and Philip Marlowes embody such virility. In the Spillane adaptations of the 1950s, Hammer kisses multiple women though he has—save Charlotte in *I, the Jury*—no genuine love interest. He carries on an affair with his secretary, Velda, but is often cruel and dismissive despite her devotion and concern for his well-being. Hammer is romantically pursued by women, but he does not purse them. In fact, he often resists women's attempts to seduce him, projecting a detached egotism that serves as yet another marker of his machismo.

The detectives in all the Chandler adaptations of the 1940s, including those that do not feature Marlowe, are similarly appealing to women.[408] That The Falcon (George Sanders) is a ladies' man is repeatedly emphasized throughout *The Falcon Takes Over* (1942); Michael Shanye (Lloyd Nolan) is known as a "wolf with the ladies" in *Time to Kill* (1942); Dick Powell's Marlowe is flirtatious and kissed by two different women in *Murder, My Sweet* (1944); Humphrey Bogart's Marlowe regularly trades sexually charged banter with nearly every female character, has (offscreen) sex with a beautiful clerk, and woos Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall)

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[408] *The Falcon Takes Over* (1942) was based on Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940); it replaces Marlowe with Michael Arlen's gentleman detective Gay "The Falcon" Lawrence. *Time to Kill* (1942) was based on Chandler's *The High Window* (1942); it replaces Marlowe with Brett Halliday's hard-boiled detective Michael Shayne.

in *The Big Sleep*; Robert Montgomery's Marlowe provokes seductive glances from multiple

women though he pursues only Adrienne Fromsett (Audrey Trotter) in *Lady in the Lake* (1947);

and George Montgomery's Marlowe is confidently flirtatious, immediately stimulating and

sustaining the romantic interest of Merle Davis (Nancy Guild) in *The Brasher Doubloon* (1947).

Altman parodies the ways in which these films present masculinity and heterosexual appeal as

inextricable by presenting Marlowe as entirely disinterested in sex.

Unlike the sexually appealing tough-guy of classic hard-boiled noir, the Marlowe of

Altman's film does not attempt to traffic in any sexual appeal; he neither flirts with women nor

elicits flirtatious reactions from female characters as his predecessors did. The asexuality and

symbolic impotence of Gould's Marlowe have been observed by many critics. Whereas Kim

Newman claims that Gould's Marlowe is "treated as asexual" by his often-half-nude female

neighbours (34), William Luhr suggests that "Altman's Marlowe is, as far as we can see,

asexual" (166). Minett appears to side with Luhr, finding it "almost inconceivable that Marlowe

would sexually pursue any woman" in Altman's film (244). Whether Marlowe is *treated as* or *is*,

in fact, asexual, his presumed asexuality accords with other (problematic) signifiers of his

emasculated status that parody the hard-boiled noir tough-guy (i.e., he is called a "fag" during a

police interrogation and threatened with castration by Augustine). Observing "Gould's lack of

drive and machismo," Garrett Stewart acknowledges that Altman revises Hollywood's private

eye stereotype (27). While the question of sex appeal is central to Altman's revision, I find it less

significant as a marker of emasculation and more significantly relevant to the issue of romantic

closure. That is, though Altman's film may be understood as a response to 1950s adaptations of

Spillane novels, it also revises the narrative closure of 1940s adaptations of Chandler novels.[409]

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[409] For the sake of brevity, my ensuing discussion addresses only adaptations of Chandler's work during the 1940s
that feature Marlowe.

The four films made during the 1940s that feature Marlowe all develop a central (and presumably successful) romance for Marlowe.[410] In fact, the theme of romantic love, Krutnik notes, "recurs throughout the *noir* 'tough' thrillers" of the 1940s (85). This fact likely accounts for Richard T. Jameson's assertion that he "concur[s] with Altman: *film noir* is terrifically romantic" (31). The romantic subplots of hard-boiled noir do not merely entertain viewers with innuendo and sexual tension between characters; they reinforce heteronormativity and the social institution of marriage. In this way, despite its other modes of subversiveness, the genre is fundamentally conservative.

In her discussion of noir adaptations, Abbott observes that family romances are added to the source text narratives of James M. Cain and Chandler and suggests that such romances "reinstall the loner hero into patriarchal structures that allot him a firm position free of transgressive contagion" (*Street* 134). Thus, she continues, "[t]he family structure that is critiqued in the novels becomes a means of normalizing the male protagonist in the films" (*Street* 145). Although Marlowe has no family of his own in the 1940s films, these adaptations suggest marital inevitability and thus induct him into acceptable social institutions.[411] Altman rejects the moralizing, ideological aims of romantic closure by refusing Marlowe a love interest and offering an *ironically happy* ending. That is, while the 1940s hard-boiled noirs normalize

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[410] The final scenes of all Marlowe films made during the 1940s provide romantic resolution. *Murder, My Sweet* concludes with a romantic score as Marlowe and Anne embrace and kiss in the back of a cab after leaving the police station. In the final scene of *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe summarizes how everyone should be dealt with now that he has solved the central mystery. When Vivian tells him that he has "forgotten one thing: me," he takes her by the upper arm, pulls her in close and asks, "What's wrong with you?" With a slight smile, Vivian suggestively replies, "Nothing you can't fix"; Marlowe flashes a knowing grin, romantic strings overtake the soundtrack, and the screen fades to black while the two look into each other's eyes. *Lady in the Lake* offers an epilogue in which Marlowe and Adrienne decide to leave L.A. for New York City to start a new life together. Finally, *The Brasher Doubloon* closes with a shot of Marlowe at his desk and Merle sitting on his lap as he pulls her in for a kiss, telling her that he has "a feeling that [she] is going to graduate with honours" — a euphemism for intercourse developed via the film's earlier reference to Marlowe giving Merle "lessons" on how to get over her phobia of being touched by men.

[411] While this claim is my own, I have built on Abbott's excellent observation that forties film adaptations of hard-boiled novels typically "seek to install [their male, detective protagonists] more firmly in family romances and marital inevitabilities" (*Street* 146).

Marlowe (and thus undercut his antihero status) by concluding with actual or suggested romantic

fulfillment, Altman negates the romantic pairing of Marlowe suggested in such films and

repudiates happy (moralized) endings. He consequently ratifies Marlowe's loner, antihero

status.[412]

In Altman's view, "happy endings are absolutely ludicrous […] bullshit" ("Movie" 166).

His position concerning happy endings installs his concluding allusion to *The Third Man* with

another level of meaning. Contrary to the wishes of Graham Greene (who wrote the film's

original treatment) and producer David O. Selznick, Reed famously refused to conclude his film

with a boy-gets-girl happy ending (Raskin). Rob White suggests that the film's justice lies in its

forlorn ending, which depicts Lime's love interest, Anna (Alida Valli), walking past Martins

without comment: by ignoring Martins, Anna punishes him for betraying Lime. Altman inverts

this association by having Marlowe ignore Eileen as she drives by in her jeep and replacing the

forlorn tone of *The Third Man* with jubilation as Marlowe walks jauntily down a tree-lined lane,

pausing to dance with a passerby while "Hooray" begins to play.

Altman's choice to parody the happy Hollywood ending by alluding to a film that itself

defies the happy-ending cliché ironically points to moralizing as his primary complaint with the

happy ending. While Eileen appears confused to see Marlowe, she is certainly not disappointed

to be ignored by him as Martins is to be ignored by Anna. That there is no suggestion of

punishment here supports reading Marlowe's shooting of Terry as a parody of nonsensical

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[412] Worth noting is that Altman's refusal to offer romantic closure accords with Chandler's Marlowe as a bachelor and loner. Chandler also felt that Hollywood detective films were compromised by including a love story. In his view, "the really good mystery picture has not been made… The reason is that the detective always has to fall for some girl, whereas the real distinction of the detective's personality is that, as a detective, he falls for nobody. He is the avenging justice, the bringer of order out of chaos, and to make his doing this part of some trite boy-meets-girl story is to make it silly. But in Hollywood you cannot make a picture which is not essentially a love story, that is to say, a story in which sex is paramount" (Chandler, qtd. in Krutnik 97). Although Altman rejects romanticizing the detective story for different reasons and is unconcerned with the representation of sexuality on film, he seems to share Chandler's view that including a love story in a detective film diminishes the antihero in some way.

violence rather than as marking Marlowe's descent into the corruption that surrounds him. In fact, Altman admits to considering Marlowe "admirable"; intriguingly, he states as much when discussing Marlowe's knowledge and acceptance of being unable to expect love ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41). On the one hand, this inability may signal Marlowe's understanding of his social milieu;[413] on the other hand, it reaffirms his outsider stance as an antihero: Marlowe's presumed resignation to a cynical view of love is part and parcel of his alienated-loner persona.[414] In the absence of a happy ending, Marlowe remains an antihero. That he does so signals both Altman's generic revision of romantic resolution in 1940s hard-boiled noirs and Altman's own nostalgia for the "loser" antihero.

Also relevant to his implicit nostalgia for the loser antihero is Altman's decision to have Roger Wade commit suicide rather than be murdered by Eileen (as in the novel). Likening Wade to Ernest Hemingway, Altman described Wade as embodying "the heavy drinking, the very masculine attitude that there's really no place for anymore" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41). Significantly, he does not condemn this outdated attitude but instead seems to romanticize Wade, considering him "a sort of hero who gave up the struggle" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 40). Because Wade "was in a world that no longer accommodated him," Altman explains, "suicide fitted that character very well" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 40). Kolker considers how Altman renders Wade as "the burned-out alcoholic writer who has been part of romantic mythology since the nineteenth century," as a "romantic boisterous loser" in contrast to the "recessive, passive

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[413] That is, Marlowe does not expect love because he knows that few people are trustworthy and thus love is rare.

[414] Marlowe's alienated-loner persona is symbolically underscored by the film's dog motif. Altman asserts that his "Marlow had no affinity with dogs. He was a cat man. I think," Altman continues, "you have to be one or the other" ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41). Thus, the ubiquity of dogs in the film may be but one way to signal how out-of-place Marlowe is. Moreover, whereas cats are presumably independent, dogs are idiomatically man's best friend. Marlowe is not meant to have friends; he is a solitary figure — an antihero.

loser" Marlowe embodies (*Cinema* 392). He does not, however, address the fact that Altman

does not view the designation *loser* pejoratively.

While numerous critics have commented on Marlowe's status as a loser,[415] no one, to my

knowledge, has considered how Altman's parody functions as satire to suggest the possibility of

true heroics; that is, of *anti*heroics. Altman's regard for outsiders cannot be overstated.[416]

Acknowledging that his Marlowe possesses none of the earlier Marlowes' heroics, Altman

reveals that he neither trusts nor distrusts heroics; rather, he is "just trying to play devil's

advocate when so many people paint so many pictures of heroes" ("Robert Altman Speaking"

41). Altman goes on to explain his belief that the

> anti-hero […] may in fact be the hero. Most people who are considered heroes are always
>
> found to be messing about in someone else's affairs, and I don't think that's very heroic. I
>
> guess I have a great deal of affection for fools. I consider myself one. The only people
>
> you can have affection for are fools. It's a matter of trust: if you don't trust, then affection
>
> is not possible. I think being a fool is the only way to be. I don't think Nixon is a fool.
>
> ("Robert Altman Speaking" 41)

Altman's implicit critique of American politics—his coded reference to Watergate in his

condemnation of surveillance and censure of President Richard Nixon as untrustworthy—in the

context of discussing the antihero illuminates the social satire that underwrites *The Long*

Goodbye. That is, Altman's Marlowe may be understood as an ironic counterpoint to the political

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[415] E.g., Kael 133; Canby 6; and Ferncase 88.

[416] Minett is one of few critics to also acknowledge Altman's affection for fools as significant to Marlowe, though he does so to make a point different from my own. He argues that Altman's "systematic use of ironizing juxtaposition [in the opening sequence of *The Long Goodbye*] primes the audience to view Marlowe as a comparative loser in the Hollywood milieu" and suggests that some "critics miss the sympathy that Altman seems to have for losers" (69-70). In Minett's view, "the juxtaposition of a wife-beater with a man who goes to a late-night grocery store to satisfy his cat hardly seems consistent with a project bent on the malicious humiliation of Marlowe. Instead, the sequence presents the moral universe and the narrative trajectory of *The Long Goodbye* in microcosm" (70).

corruption that characterized much of American public life in the 1970s, a point underscored by the newspaper headlines that he ignores upon his release from jail while trying to determine what happened to Terry and which collectively paint a very grim picture of seventies Los Angeles (see fig. 11). Among countless stories of administrative, government, and political dealings, "Private Investigator Refuses to Talk" distinguishes Marlowe from the world of ineffectual bureaucracy by which he is surrounded.

Fig. 11. Newspaper headlines distinguish Marlowe's antiheroic silence from bureaucratic nonsense.

Stephen Pendo argues that by the late 1960s the corruption Chandler's Marlowe fought seemed, in the view of many Americans, to have engulfed society; this sense, he posits, manifested in film in the "anti-hero, a character who looked out only for himself and held in contempt all the traditional heroic values" (128). While Pendo correctly observes a rise in antihero protagonists during the New Hollywood era, he offers a somewhat misleading definition of *antihero*. Although true that an antihero does not exhibit the qualities of a traditional hero, this fact does not automatically define him as self-centered.[417] Gould's Marlowe is anything but

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[417] Rather than inherently self-centered, the antihero figure is traditionally understood as noble. The antihero's nobility, Rosette C. Lamont explains, resides in his "endurance, resignation, [and] patient waiting"; his "ability to

selfish. Indeed, his code of honour is central to his antihero status. Many have suggested that

Marlowe is irrelevant in 1970s America because the code he represents is no longer valid.[418]

Such suggestions are deeply nostalgic because they presume integrity was once ubiquitous and

now obsolete. That Altman presents Marlowe as an anachronism does not signify that his code

should no longer be valid but seems to nostalgically regret its presumed irrelevance.

Altman's nostalgic regret is expressed in his partial reaffirmation of the hard-boiled noir

myth. As Cawelti argues, films that reaffirm a myth for its own sake probe a traditional genre

and its myth, expose the fantasy of the myth, and then affirm (at least partially) the myth "as a

reflection of authentic human aspirations and needs" (207). By remaining true to the hard-boiled

virtues of honour and loyalty, Gould's Marlowe does not suggest that these virtues are absurd. In

fact, he suggests just the opposite. Unlike Gregory, I do not believe that Altman, "in his anxiety

to express his own disillusionment with a mistrustful decade lacking in ideals and heroes, [...]

relentlessly attacks before he has shown what he wants to attack" (48).[419] On the contrary,

Hollywood had already provided Altman with the models he wanted to undermine — and the

elements of character he wanted to reveal as admirable. As Roger Ebert suggests, "[m]ost of

[*The Long Goodbye*'s] effect comes from the way it pushes against the genre, and the way

Altman undermines the premise of all private eye movies, which is that the hero can walk down

mean streets, see clearly, and tell right from wrong. The man of honor from 1953 is lost in the

hazy narcissism of 1973, and *it's not all right with him*" (emphasis added). In the end, *The Long*

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sustain hope"; "his strength from tenderness for man's vulnerability, and a respect for human life. If he appears at times ridiculous to others, and often to himself, it is because of the abyss which separates his efforts to retain a modest humanity from the bestiality of his surroundings, of his society" (21-22).

[418] E.g., Ferncase 88; Gutkin 87; Luhr 176; and Pendo 161.

[419] Gregory perceptively offers that Chandler did not claim "any man who tried to be honest" *is* sentimental or foolish but rather that such a man "*looks* in the end either sentimental or plain foolish" (48, emphasis added). "Only the corrupt eyes of an amoral world," he continues, "would see Marlowe as sentimental and foolish. To feel sentiment and to be honest, to have honor are clearly worthy ideals" (48).

Goodbye reaffirms integrity as an authentic human need, and nostalgically romanticizes such integrity as possible only among nonconventional heroes in 1970s American society.

During the seventies, this romanticization of nonconventional heroics in a presumably corrupt present (i.e., antihero nostalgia) was far from specific to *The Long Goodbye* but was, in fact, central to many revisionist films of the decade. The ubiquity of the antihero during the New Hollywood period corresponds to similar trends during the thirties and forties, thus suggesting the importance of sociohistorical context to cinematic representations of heroism.[420] In fact, Robert Hensley-King's research clearly demonstrates that sharp increases in Hollywood antiheroes' popularity "reflect periods of political and social flux" (6). Protagonists in both Old Hollywood and New Hollywood films are rendered "alienated from the rest of society" (Hensley-King 18): the antihero dominated 1930s gangster films and 1940s crime dramas, especially classic noirs such as *Detour* (1945) and *Double Indemnity* (1944). The difference between pre-code, postwar, and New Hollywood antiheroes lies not in their cinematic presence but in their representation.

Elsaesser offers perhaps the most renowned discussion of New Hollywood antiheroes, whom he dubs *unmotivated heroes*. Considering a selection of films made during the early 1970s that he maintains are all characterized by a "liberal outlook" and which all feature "the journey" motif, Elsaesser asserts two central and interrelated claims: 1) unmotivated heroes (i.e., protagonists who lack motives) are a significant feature of New Hollywood films; and 2) a tension exists between the externally imposed motive of the journey and the internally absent motive of the hero (280). While applicable to the selection of films Elsaesser considers—and

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[420] Just as the Vietnam War influenced people's views of heroes, so, too, did WWII: "Whereas some people during the war years were clamoring for heroes," Richard Huston explains, "others after the end of the war had come to consider the idea of the hero itself as dangerous, as belonging to the ideologies of the countries the allies had just defeated in World War II" (qtd. in Teo 590).

despite his explicit suggestion that Altman is "dismissive" of Marlowe's motives in *The Long Goodbye* (285)—Elsaesser's claims do not apply to Altman's film.[421] Although the journey is not a central motif in *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe twice travels to Mexico in search of Terry. Neither journey is externally motivated (e.g., he is not being paid to investigate Terry's death). Instead, Marlowe is *personally motivated* to visit Mexico: first, in an effort to clear his friend's name; and second, to enact justice. Hence, although Altman's Marlowe does not propel the film's action, he is not an unmotivated hero.

Marlowe's status as a motivated antihero is further confirmed by considering Elsaesser's assertion that "the sweet poignancy of defeat" imbues many New Hollywood films (286). Rather than concluding with what Elsaesser terms the "pathos of failure" (287, 290, 292), *The Long Goodbye* concludes with ironic jubilance: Marlowe has not been defeated but has solved the case.[422] The film's celebratory conclusion is ironic, as I noted earlier, because Marlowe's success entails killing his friend. This irony is relevant to Stephen Farber's identification of violent heroes in American films as belonging to one of two essential types: "those who perform the violence sanctioned by their society (soldiers, Western sheriffs, police detectives, business tycoons) and those who direct their violence *against* society (criminals, delinquents, rebels, and outsiders)" (45). Consistent with the hard-boiled noir myth, Marlowe is a liminal character; he exists as an intermediary figure between socially sanctioned law and criminal activity. In

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[421] Elsaesser's analysis of the unmotivated hero in seventies films is, in fact, quite specific to the slim selection of films he considers. As Hensley-King contends, "there is so much more to New Hollywood antiheroes than alienated characters who appear to lack motivation" (5). His macro study examines the evolution of antiheroes in New Hollywood cinema by analyzing 220 films made between 1965 and 1975, and it reveals "a variety of different antiheroes trying to make sense of themselves in relation to the world in which they find themselves" (26).

[422] My reading differs from that of Kolker, who appears to echo Elsaesser's belief that the pathos of failure characterizes seventies films when he asserts that "Altman takes the inevitability of failure as a fact and starts from there. He sees the film noir detective as a patsy and chooses not to have him struggle manfully to prove otherwise" (*Cinema* 392). Altman's rejection of hypermasculinity does not suggest that his Marlowe is a failure; as a loser antihero, Marlowe succeeds where traditional heroes fail: he remains free to live according to his code rather than conform to ideological (or generic) expectations.

Altman's film, the violence he enacts is neither socially sanctioned nor directed against society. Diegetically, Marlowe's single moment of violence is quite personal; beyond the diegesis, it deconstructs the myth of hard-boiled masculinity.

The Long Goodbye's concluding parody of vigilante justice rejects hard-boiled machismo and, arguably, mocks contemporary versions of vigilante antiheroes who glamourize violence. Elsaesser himself acknowledges the existence of such New Hollywood antiheroes, distinguishing the "liberal films" that are the focus of his analysis from the "conservative 'Republican' films of the 1970s — the cop-thriller or vigilante film" (282-283).[423] Whether generalized as *liberal* or *conservative*, New Hollywood antiheroes are overwhelmingly male and typically express concerns with notions of masculinity and masculine codes of behaviour.[424]

Many films of the period have "a strong nostalgic quality, invoking the male ethos and patriarchal order of a bygone era" (Schatz "New Hollywood" 293),[425] while others challenge and revise "ideas concerning masculinities and hegemony of uncomplicated male heroes" (Hensley-King 24). In either event, concerns with masculine identity may account for the popularity of revisionist noirs during the seventies because (as noted earlier) noir protagonists are often figures of unstable masculinity. In this sense, Altman's *The Long Goodbye* is typical of New Hollywood productions, as it challenges what it means to be a (male) hero; it differs from many films of the

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[423] Observing the purposive determination of conservative antiheroes, Elsaesser suggests that such "coldly determined heroes featured in excessive, violent plots are the reverse side of the unmotivated heroes in the liberal films" and that both (the conservative and liberal antihero) typify the difficulty of dramatizing "contradictions in American society" in mainstream cinema that has "as its language only the behaviourist code of direct action and raw emotion, devised for an altogether different philosophy of life or masculine ideal" (283). Though Elsaesser fairly suggests that the narratives of classical Hollywood films express attitudes and ideals that differ from those of New Hollywood films, I take issue with his reductive (and arguably sexist) assumption that direct action and raw emotion constitute the *only* cinematic language available to mainstream cinema to articulate social contradictions.

[424] According to Hensley-King's findings, ninety per cent of New Hollywood antiheroes are male (24).

[425] Benshoff and Griffin support this observation in their discussion of "male-male buddy films," which were extremely popular during the late 1960s and early 1970s. These film differed from "the buddy films of the World War II era," they write, in that "[t]hey often wistfully recreated earlier eras where 'men were real men' and/or pessimistically suggested that American culture was coming undone because American masculinity itself was in decline."

era in its complicated treatment of nostalgia that simultaneously rejects one vision of the male

antihero while affirming another.

Whether private eyes, vigilante cops or disillusioned civilians, 1970s antiheroes

frequently replicate classic era codes of behaviour, reaffirming the values of hypermasculinity

via their treatments of violence and confirming the ideologically conservative functions of their

predecessors. Altman refuses both the violence and moralizing common to Old Hollywood and

common among some of his contemporaries, while extolling the antihero's personal code and

loner status. Thus, with his real loser Marlowe, Altman offers an image of the antihero that

diverges not only from 1940s hard-boiled noir antiheroes but also many 1970s neo-noir

antiheroes.

His antiheroic Marlowe does not (unironically) embrace the vendetta-driven violence

characteristic of *Hickey and Boggs* (1972); he does not embody the phallic potency characteristic

of *Shaft* (1971, 1972, 1973);[426] and he does not involve himself in the romantic entanglements

characteristic of *Klute* (1971). Whether violent enactors of personal justice or taciturn men of

integrity who are intimately involved, seventies PIs are often, Newman observes "trapped by

their circles of friends, enemies, clients and family members" (36). Though New Hollywood

neo-noirs regularly feature vigilante civilians and renegade police detectives, Newman's point

remains valid in that, like *Chinatown* and *Night Moves* (1975) (the films Newman offers to

illustrate her point), films such as *Dirty Harry* (1971), *Death Wish* (1974), and *Hustle* (1975)

also "trap" their protagonists in a sense of interpersonal obligations.[427] Altman's Marlowe is not

trapped precisely because he is a loser all the way.

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[426] I.e., *Shaft* (1971), *Shaft's Big Score!* (1972), and *Shaft in Africa* (1973).
[427] *Dirty Harry*'s detective "Dirty" Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) loses his wife to a drunk driver, which may account for his myopic drive to rid his city of crime; *Death Wish*'s Paul Kersey (Charles Bronson) begins his vigilante murder spree after home intruders murder his wife and rape his daughter; and *Hustle*'s Lieutenant Phil

Concluding Remarks

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, Altman's film straddles two functions of genre revision as identified by Cawelti: it demythologizes the hard-boiled noir tough-guy myth to reveal the myth's inadequacy, and it reconfirms the antihero myth central to the figure of the hard-boiled private eye as an incorruptible loner. Understanding *The Long Goodbye* as both a demythologization and reaffirmation of myth helps clarify what others have perceived as Altman's ambiguous aims in revising the hard-boiled noir genre and ambiguous engagement with the 1970s nostalgia wave. That is, Altman's *The Long Goodbye* both spoofs and embraces noir; it is anti-nostalgic in its revisionist suggestion that the tough-guy myth is no longer tenable and nostalgic in its homage to the detective antihero.

When asked whether his films debunk classic genres, Altman replied that his "intention is just to take a more honest look—satirical or not—at some of our myths, to see what they are" ("Robert Altman" 39). With *The Long Goodbye*, this honest look exposes different elements of the hard-boiled noir myth that Altman alternately critiques and reaffirms. On the one hand, his soft-boiled Marlowe works to condemn the macho, heteronormative, misogynist hero who actually does come out a winner by virtue of his excessive violence and reinstalment into patriarchal structures; on the other, his detective also works to celebrate the antihero-as-loser who maintains his honour and principles precisely in his refusal to "win" by society's rules. In both demythologizing and reaffirming hard-boiled noir in this way, Altman comments on seventies American society and culture (particularly film culture). Liberating Marlowe from the constraints of generic convention, Altman offers a morally ambiguous antihero—a trustworthy

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Gaines (Bert Reynolds) struggles with his ex-wife's infidelity and pressure to marry his prostitute girlfriend while attempting to solve the murder of a teenaged stripper and prostitute.

outsider who dances contentedly after committing murder—who reveals the limitations of hard-boiled masculinity, the complexities of ethical choice, and the value of integrity.

Afterword

Many years ago, I was told to "turn off the radio" when doing my homework. I ignored this well-intentioned advice, however, because I have always preferred listening to music while working. Each period of my academic career thus has its own soundtrack, with specific songs that evoke nostalgia for who and where I was as an undergraduate student, as a master's student, and as a new Montrealer embarking upon a doctoral degree. While drafting each chapter of this dissertation, I listened to music contemporary to each text I was writing on. For me, chapters one and two will always sound like jazz. I listened to the likes of Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, Sidney Bechet, and Louis Armstrong as I worked through the relation of nostalgia to F. Scott Fitzgerald's treatment of class and self-making, and of the intersections between individual, regional, and national identity. Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald sung me through the generic and gendered webs of Elliott Nugent's nostalgia for the past as it should have been and desire for the present as it ought to be. Nineteen-fifties crooners like Frank Sinatra, Benny Goodman, and Nat King Cole provided the atmosphere to my ruminations on how Vladimir Nabokov and Raymond Chandler engage nostalgia to condemn very different elements of mid-century consumer culture, with the former offering a deceptively seductive but ultimately ironic portrait of childhood nostalgia and the latter exposing his own discriminatory, restorative nostalgia for nineteenth-century English culture. From The Chantels to The Rolling Stones, I embraced the entire decade of the sixties while working through the formal complexities of Stanley Kubrick's subversion and perversion of nostalgia for understandings of home that hypocritically presume a sense of normalcy grounded in the misrecognition of others. As I organized my arguments regarding Robert Altman's anti-nostalgic parody of hypermasculinity and his nostalgic homage

to the detective antihero, I typed in time to Fleetwood Mac and—perhaps most fittingly—

listened to a whole lot of David Bowie, my most favourite androgynous antihero.

As I sit here contemplating how to conclude *Visions of the Present*, The Verve's Richard

Ashcroft has just melodically declared: "All this talk of getting old / It's getting me down, my

love." I did not consciously choose to incite nostalgia for my own youth and late-1990s Britpop

while working on my conclusion, but I may have unconsciously done so to facilitate my

reflection on the processes and products of this dissertation, which has been almost a decade in

the making. Since I began this project, my then-teenaged daughter has entered adulthood and

will soon bid farewell to her twenties as the phenomenal woman I always knew she would

become; my once nine-month-old dog recently celebrated her tenth birthday and is often

recognized as a "senior" because of her grey eyebrows; I, too, have grown many grey hairs,

which are a source of marvel in reminding me of my mortality. To borrow from the celebrated

final lines of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, we really do "beat on" even as we are "borne back

ceaselessly into the past" (184). Everyone experiences nostalgia. They experience it at various

times in life, in response to different life conditions, and as a reaction to similar triggers. *Visions

of the Present* has worked to demonstrate how diverse objects of nostalgia in selected twentieth-

century American novels and films both replicate and resist particular sociohistorical realities,

how authors and directors critically employ nostalgia to offer nuanced commentary regarding

American society and culture, and how simultaneous evocations and denials of nostalgia work to

engage readers and viewers in their own present.

In identifying a range of nostalgic sources in the novels and films included in this study, I

have demonstrated how authors and filmmakers express both contempt and genuine longing for

different objects of nostalgia as diverse as class dynamics, the implied potential of youth, a sense

of national identity presumed to reside in the past, moral order founded on stable domesticity, childhood innocence, romantic ideals, home, culture, gender and racial divisions, and the cinematic past. By ascertaining how objects of nostalgia in adaptations differ from those in source texts I have underscored how expressions of nostalgia are inextricably linked to texts' moments of production, intersecting with debates regarding civilization, mass/middlebrow culture, suburban places, and notions of masculinity and heroism. Delineating the various uses of nostalgia importantly highlights how texts do not simply mirror contemporary debates but complicate them. My attention to how artists employ nostalgia has also elucidated the role of nostalgia in offering social commentary. That is, I have revealed that as important as specific objects of longing are to a text's moment of production are the ways in which nostalgia is mobilized to comment on the present. Fitzgerald, Nugent, Nabokov, Kubrick, Chandler, and Altman all variously employ nostalgia as a critical device to facilitate their unique social critiques. They each elicit and deny different forms of nostalgia to intellectually engage their readers and viewers, guiding audiences to understand their own pasts, presents, and futures in varying ways.

My chapters reveal that although the objects of nostalgia in source texts and their adaptations differ, common threads are discernable throughout the novels and films I analyze. In both Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, nostalgia underwrites a critical view of upper-class elites, albeit toward different ends. While Fitzgerald's novel satirizes those of inherited wealth for their insincerity and resistance to progress, Chandler's novel derides the inauthenticity of the wealthy toward condemning middlebrow culture. In his *Lolita*, Kubrick also offers a disparaging view of middlebrow posturing but for reasons antithetical to Chandler's. Somewhat reminiscent of Tom Buchanan's nostalgia for a so-called American aristocracy,

Kubrick's Charlotte Haze equates Anglo-European ancestry with culture. Whereas Kubrick's satire of Charlotte as a middlebrow poseur censures hypocrisy, Chandler's anxieties about inauthenticity are based on misogynistic and racist restorative nostalgia. Like Chandler's novel, Nugent's film expresses nostalgia for an earlier social order and traditional gender roles. Both thus replicate the terms of a postwar crisis in masculinity that itself may be understood as nostalgically motivated. Diverging from this pattern, Altman's use of nostalgia questions how cinematic representations of masculinity affect notions of heroism. Nostalgically prioritizing communal identification over individual heroics, Nugent's *The Great Gatsby* works to implicitly support democratic consumerism. Conversely, nostalgia operates to deride consumer culture in Chandler's novel and Nabokov's *Lolita*. Even though Chandler and Nabokov each use nostalgia to disparage the same mid-century social phenomenon, they once again do so toward different ends: Chandler, to express his concern with intellectual decline as a consequence (in part) of television and advertisements; Nabokov, to articulate disquiet about the exploitation of children.

What do a Minnesotan farm boy, an orphaned twelve-year-old girl, and a middle-aged private eye have in common? Gatsby, Lolita, and Marlowe have all captured the cultural imagination for decades. I venture that whether one has read Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, or Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, they are likely familiar with the figures of Gatsby, Lolita, and Marlowe. That each of these characters exists in the cultural imagination independent of their literary origins may be partially attributed to their numerous incarnations in multiple cinematic adaptations because, as Astrid Erll puts it, "cultural memory is based on communication through media" (389). *The Great Gatsby* has been adapted six times and *Lolita* twice. While *The Long Goodbye* has only been adapted once, Marlowe has appeared onscreen in eleven adaptations of Chandler's novels and, most recently, as the titular protagonist of Neil

Jordan's *Marlowe* (2022). That Gatsby, Lolita, and Marlowe are important figures within cultural memory is therefore unsurprising given the associations between media and cultural memory.

As figures of cultural memory, Gatsby, Lolita, and Marlowe may be regarded as cultural icons. Cultural icons are widely understood to serve important functions and to change with time. Central to cultural identity and memory, cultural icons "invite identification, empathy, desire, fear, or hatred" (Rieser 5). Using the term "figures of memory," Dragoş Manea considers how such figures "are constantly reshaped, repurposed and repackaged to meet the ideological needs of contemporary communities" (362). He argues that, among other figures of memory (e.g., historical figures), "massively popular fictional characters […] play a crucial role in shaping individual and collective identity"; however, their ability to do so depends on "their perceived relevance and familiarity: they are always renegotiated and resold" (362). Klaus Rieser likewise argues that American "icons must be constantly readjusted if they are to continue to capture the public imagination and shape public memory" because "many American cultural narratives conceptualize the country as engaged in a process of continual realization" (5).[428]

Intriguingly, while scholarly assessments of Gatsby, Lolita, and Marlowe have changed over time, as cultural icons these characters do not appear to have been "constantly readjusted."[429] Instead, though they exist in cultural memory as distinct from their initial literary representations, their names connote persistent meanings: "Gatsby" signals excess, failed ambition, and an inability to reclaim lost love; "Lolita" refers to a precociously seductive girl;

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[428] The "cultural narratives" to which Rieser refers include the "Frontier Myth, Manifest Destiny, [and the] American Dream" (5).
[429] Altman's *Marlowe*, of course, offers an exception to this observation.

and "Marlowe" is synonymous with "tough guy."[430] Early literary criticism arguably engendered these understandings of Fitzgerald's, Nabokov's and Chandler's characters, but popular media has crystalized their images. While completing this dissertation, I have often wondered what it is about these characters that has made them so appealing to filmmakers. What qualities of their source novels prompt Gatsby's, Lolita's, and Marlowe's frequent reincarnations in film? While there are many possible answers to this question, I nevertheless speculate that nostalgia may prove to be key. That is, Gatsby, Lolita, and Marlowe conceivably occupy a central place within cultural memory because their narratives all fundamentally depend on expressions of nostalgia.

To appreciate how cultural memory is mediated and the importance of nostalgia in the negotiation of cultural memory, one has only to consider what associations heart-shaped sunglasses evoke. Building on Umberto Eco's notion of *cult film*, Ewa Mazierska suggests that Kubrick's *Lolita* is often remembered as a collection of fragments rather than as a coherent whole, thus encouraging "nostalgic detachment" (35)[431] and, I would add, contributing to Lolita's lascivious persona within popular culture.[432] Mazierska posits that nostalgia for Kubrick's *Lolita* may be partially attributed to "the fact that the film became immortalized in a small number of carefully chosen and endlessly repeated stills" (35).[433] Perhaps the most famous of such stills is that of Lolita peering over the rim of heart-shaped sunglasses and seductively

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[430] As I have argued, Gatsby does not most desire to reclaim Daisy's love; Lolita is not a sex-kitten but an abused child; and Marlowe is less a tough guy than a sentimental cynic.

[431] "The way of remembering Kubrick's *Lolita* as a handful of images," Mazierska explains, "brings to mind Umberto Eco's definition of a 'cult film' as a film that tends to be remembered as a collection of fragments, not as an organic whole" (35).

[432] Although some complain that Nabokov's Lolita has been transformed from an abused child to an immoral seductress by mass culture (e.g., Marks), others acknowledge the pivotal role Kubrick's adaptation has played in influencing and sustaining Lolita's continued fame, regardless of her resemblance to Nabokov's character (e.g., Bell-Meterau). Sue Lyon's portrayal of Lolita is recognized as having created "a distinctive female icon for generations of film and nymphet aficionados" (Bell-Meterau 213), testifying to the indelible imprint of Kubrick's film "on the pop cultural unconscious" (Abrams 1).

[433] Mazierska also attributes a shift in critical assessments of Kubrick's film to nostalgia: "Kubrick's *Lolita* quickly became an object of nostalgia, as testified by the warmer tone of reviews and critical studies of it by those closer to the present day" (35).

sucking a lollipop as she looks directly into the camera. This image appears on the film poster;

however, it appears *nowhere* in the film. Those who (mis)remember Lolita as wearing such

glasses in the film—or, having never viewed the film, assume that she wears such glasses—

exhibit a particular nostalgia that reconstructs the film's narrative according to the intertextual

dynamics of cultural memory. Richard Corliss, for instance, asserts that when Humbert first sees

Lolita in the Haze garden, she is wearing "the eyewear that came to be known as 'Lolita

sunglasses'" (73). Although Lolita does wear sunglasses in this scene, they are not heart-shaped

(see fig. 5). By substituting the image of the poster for the fact of what is presented on screen,

Corliss (like many others) participates in a mode of nostalgic reconstruction. Significantly, just

as this reconstruction somewhat depends on inattention, so too—as I argued in chapter four—

does neglecting the role of nostalgia in Kubrick's film.

In scrutinizing the role of nostalgia, my chapters frequently highlight and address

significant critical oversights in discussions of Fitzgerald's and Nugent's *The Great Gatsby*,

Nabokov's and Kubrick's *Lolita*, and Chandler's and Altman's *The Long Goodbye*.

Scholarly discussions of all these texts lack sustained, critical analyses of the functions and

dynamics of nostalgia. By attending to this oversight, this dissertation contributes not only to our

understanding of the texts themselves but also to twentieth-century American culture. Of the

novels and films I consider, Fitzgerald's and Nabokov's novels have perhaps generated the most

scholarly interest. *Visions of the Present* synthesizes decades of scholarship by considering the

complex work of nostalgia in both novels.

To the sizeable body of scholarship on the American dream in Fitzgerald's novel, chapter

one contributes an analysis of the nostalgic dimensions of the American project of self-making.

This chapter also provides a more nuanced understanding of Fitzgerald's stance on consumer

culture. While standard readings of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) assume that it lambasts consumer culture and overlook Fitzgerald's dual concern with the past and the future, my analysis suggests that the novel does not offer a straightforward critique of consumer culture. Rather, it satirizes elitist stagnancy and acknowledges the complex interplay of the past and the future in our experience of the present. My attention to nostalgia thus reveals that, rather than wholly condemning material pursuits and imagining 1920s American culture as corrupt, Fitzgerald is more selective (and conflicted) in his targets of censure. That is, he rejects *a* past (i.e., one that refuses progress) but not *the* past because he recognizes the past and future are intimately bound. By examining diverse expressions of nostalgia and how they are relevant to Fitzgerald's sociohistorical moment, chapter one establishes that *The Great Gatsby* does not suggest the passing of the American dream, as scholars have often assumed, but how nostalgia and efforts toward self-reinvention share an ahistorical tendency.

Chapters two and three remedy significant scholarly gaps. Offering the first, sustained formal analysis of Nugent's *The Great Gatsby*, chapter two furthers our apprehension of the cinematic possibilities of nostalgia as a thematic, aesthetic, and critical device. In analyzing Humbert's account of Annabel, chapter three presents the first discussion sceptical of Humbert's love for her and alert to Humbert's nostalgia for childhood as fraudulent. This contribution to Nabokov scholarship illuminates the centrality of nostalgic rhetoric to Humbert's unreliability, which in turn discloses *Lolita*'s critical, aesthetic, and ethical agenda. Chapter three also offers a unique analysis of Nabokov's parody of the romantic child to render a sharper appreciation of Nabokov's position toward consumer culture: I expose how *Lolita* condemns the commodification of childhood rather than consumerism per se by closely inspecting Nabokov's skillful manipulation of nostalgia.

Considering the functions of nostalgia also reveals the ethical and political subtexts of Kubrick's *Lolita*. To Kubrick scholarship, chapter four contributes the first exploration of nostalgia in *Lolita* (1962). By probing the functions of nostalgia in the film, I clarify previously unobserved connections between *Lolita*'s thematic and formal concerns that enrich our comprehension of Kubrick's social criticism. Whereas Kubrick's satires of normalcy and cultural pretense are typically discussed in terms of comedic effect, studying the role of nostalgia reveals that the film's satirical elements function to censure discriminatory beliefs, practices, and behaviours.

Chapter five enhances our understanding of the femme fatale figure in postwar America. While commonplace to interpret this figure as a symptom of postwar patriarchal anxiety over the newfound freedoms and autonomy that women experienced during the war, chapter five clarifies how, in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, this anxiety is articulated through a structure of nostalgia. Chapter five also clarifies the unfortunately chauvinistic dimensions of the novel's and Chandler's nostalgia. To discussions of Marlowe as a knight figure, I contribute an awareness of Marlowe's code as misogynistic by considering Chandler's nostalgia for nineteenth-century England and situating Marlowe as belonging to the Romantic Middle Ages. I further contribute to Chandler scholarship by analyzing Terry Lennox's virtually unacknowledged ethnoracial transformation at novel's end to reveal how white male nostalgia is relevant to Chandler's anxious view of postwar America. I also observe critical oversights regarding unmarked whiteness in the novel and the possibility that such oversights may signal a scholarly nostalgia for the romance of Chandler himself as one of the preeminent American masters of hard-boiled fiction.

Offering substantial contributions to Altman scholarship, chapter six explicates a satire of hypermasculinity that has been all but neglected in discussions of Altman's *The Long Goodbye*. Further, it attends to the film's previously ignored antihero nostalgia and offers readings of heretofore overlooked elements of mise-en-scène and generic and film allusions. Noting previously undiscussed allusions to 1950s adaptations of Mickey Spillane novels, I identify the tough-guy figure as central to Altman's film. Extending the scholarly discussion beyond Altman's parody of noir, chapter six analyzes the role of nostalgia in the film to clarify that Altman parodies the tough-guy figure common to multiple crime subgenres and, in doing so, critically comments on notions of masculinity and heroism. Identifying how Altman's parody functions as satire to promote antiheroics, chapter six enhances our understanding of Altman's film and his presentation of Marlowe as an ironic counterpoint to political corruption and bureaucratic inefficacy. Against a dominant critical tendency to read Altman's Marlowe as irrelevant because his code is outdated, I demonstrate how Altman endorses and nostalgically romanticizes the detective's integrity. Through close analysis of the film's nostalgic aesthetics, chapter six establishes how Altman encourages and discourages nostalgia. It consequently elucidates what others have perceived as the director's ambiguous aims and contributes to Altman scholarship by revealing how *The Long Goodbye* (1973) both reaffirms and demythologizes generic myths.

As this review of my scholarly contributions has hopefully shown, nostalgia is an extremely valuable topic of study for what its analysis may reveal of cultural products, the past, and the present. Like Niklas Salmose and Eric Sandberg, I maintain that ignoring the aesthetic possibilities and expressions of nostalgia or condemning nostalgia "as politically naïve and intellectually regressive, would be to miss, and thus mis-read, substantial portions of

contemporary culture" (8). *Visions of the Present* addresses a recurrent inattention to the critical

functions of nostalgia in selected novels and films that has led to missing and misreading

significant elements of twentieth-century American cultural artifacts. By offering rigorous

analyses of the aesthetic, individual, and collective workings of nostalgia at play in texts central

to American cultural memory, this dissertation illuminates artists' visions of the present and

gestures toward a clearer vision of our own present by promoting more conscientious reflection

on the sources and objects of our own nostalgia.

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