

**HOLLYWOOD DREAMING:
SATIRES OF HOLLYWOOD 1930-2003**

Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines film and literary satires of Hollywood 1930 – 2003 and asserts that such satires are attacks on the Hollywood Dream. The study reveals that these satires focus on two common themes: the artificiality of Hollywood, and the amoral and corruptive nature of Hollywood.

The study examines the depiction of the Hollywood Dream within satires of the industry and demonstrates its increasing importance in American culture. The similarity of themes in film and literary satires highlights an interesting dialogue between the two modes which has not been thoroughly investigated. Although satirists' approaches towards the artificiality of Hollywood vary greatly, the most significant treatment of the theme in both literary and film satires is one which gains much understanding through use of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation.

My examination also investigates the tendency of characters within satires of Hollywood to discard previous identities and create in their place a Hollywood identity. Such an identity is linked to the artificiality of Hollywood and is displayed by satirists as a prerequisite for one wishing to achieve the Hollywood Dream.

While there have been numerous studies on novels on the Hollywood industry and its films, this study is unique in examining both literary and film satires of Hollywood together, and covering such an extended period of time. It hopes to show that satires of Hollywood have reached a critical juncture. The satire of many recent works has become moribund due to the public's awareness of and apathetic attitude towards the amorality and hypocrisy of Hollywood, and because these satires fail to acknowledge the intrinsic artificiality of Hollywood.

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Date

Introduction

In 1925, screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz sent his friend Ben Hecht a telegram from Hollywood: “Millions are to be made out here, your only competition is idiots. Don’t let this get around” (qtd in Hecht 466). Hecht might have kept the news to himself, however he was but one of many writers who went to Hollywood. Mankiewicz’s advice underscores the reason artists and others came (and still come) to Hollywood – the prospect of easy money. As Hecht was to write in his memoirs, his scripts for movies brought him “huge sums of money for work that required no more effort than a game of pinochle”(467). Despite this, his memories of his time in Hollywood are bitter, and he states that there has only been “one basic plot” in any Hollywood film, “the triumph of virtue and the overthrow of wickedness”(468). Hecht’s opinion is similar to that of many artists who went to Hollywood. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Nathanael West, William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, Raymond Chandler and others came to Hollywood for the easy money, but found the experience to be hollow. These early satirists of Hollywood saw no art in movies, and no virtue in the moviemaking industry. As Chandler commented: “If you go to Hollywood just to make money, you have to be pretty cynical about it. And if you really believe in the art of the film, it’s a long term job and you ought to forget all about any other kind of writing” (*Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* 298).

Regardless of how successful their time in Hollywood was, many of these writers did record their experiences in the American Babylon, in memoirs such as Hecht’s, or in satirical novels as did West, Fitzgerald and Chandler. It is a pattern which has repeated itself for seventy years. The greatest change over that time has been that those who now satirise Hollywood believe film is an artistic medium; many such as David Lynch, David Mamet and Robert Altman in fact are primarily

filmmakers. Despite the change in outlook, the satires of Hollywood from 1930 to 2003 reveal a number of similar themes. First among these is the artificiality of Hollywood, and second its hypocrisy. Its artificiality stems from the fact that since its beginnings, Hollywood has been a place where ‘image is everything’, and satirists detail the extent to which the artificiality of Hollywood infects the psyche of those within the industry, and those who would be a part of it. This artificiality does not suggest that Hollywood is an imaginary place, but rather because artifice is central to the filmmaking industry, Hollywood is viewed as a place where the artificial is superior to the real. Thus satires of Hollywood focus on how the artifice of film bleeds into the lives of those within, and on the fringes of, the industry. To this end, satirists, for example, not only depict filmsets but also the houses in Hollywood as artificial – fake Tudor style cottages, or faux Japanese temples. Similarly, not only do satirists portray the emotions and words of actors on screen as artificial, but they also depict the words, emotions and even appearances of people as mere examples of artifice. The hypocrisy arises from Hecht’s view of the industry’s product: Hollywood films often exalt the supremacy of virtue, yet, in the view of satirists, the industry itself is mired in amorality and corruption.

Underlying both these themes is the very issue which brought the artists of the 1930s to Hollywood: the pursuit of the Hollywood Dream of easy money and fame recurs throughout all satires of Hollywood. This pursuit is linked to Hollywood’s artificiality and hypocrisy, and its presence in these works over the past seventy years highlights the Hollywood Dream’s increasing importance within American culture, and to this end, my study will examine how the Hollywood Dream has subverted the traditional American Dream.

The theme of the American Dream in Hollywood has been examined before. Carolyn See analysed it in her unpublished thesis, “The Hollywood Novel: An Historical and Critical Study” (1963), and her article “The Hollywood Novel: The American Dream Cheat” (1968) asserts that “*artificiality* is perhaps the most pervasive device [in Hollywood novels], and points to a dominant theme: that the whole American world is a cheat, that there is something wrong with the dream”(201). Walter Wells’ study of Hollywood fiction of the 1930s, *Tycoons and Locusts* (1973) also draws upon the theme of the American Dream set within the context of Hollywood (or more specifically Californian) novels, as does the more recent study by Bruce Chipman (1999). Even on a less encyclopaedic level, the relationship between the American Dream and Hollywood has been investigated, most recently in K. Edington’s short article: “The Hollywood Novel: American Dream, Apocalyptic Vision”(1995). Yet these studies all focus solely on novels of Hollywood, and thus neglect the extensive number of film satires of the industry, the cross-media influences of many recent textual and film satires, and the plethora of film parodies that have been released in the last twenty years. The absence of analysis of film satires in major studies on Hollywood is most baffling given that film is the purpose of Hollywood. Similarly, major studies of films on Hollywood such as Christopher Ames’ *Movies About Movies: Hollywood Reflected* (1997) do not compare the films with the novels. Given the links between the two media this anomaly needs to be rectified. These previous studies also examined the satires as examples of Hollywood’s corrupting influence on the American Dream, whereas I assert the satires of Hollywood do not so much depict the American Dream crumbling, as show its infiltration and displacement by the Hollywood Dream.

The American Dream is a rather slippery phrase that over the past seventy years has become ubiquitous. It is espoused so regularly in television advertisements and by politicians on both sides that it has come to represent all things to all people. Yet the Dream does have a core foundation. In Jim Cullen's recent history *The American Dream* (2003) he establishes that the central notions of the Dream lie in the American Declaration of Independence. Crucially, the essence of the Dream is encapsulated in the lines: "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness". Yet even here there is evidence of the Dream's ambiguity. Leaving aside the issue of only men being created equal, such equality as Jefferson espouses is of a very limited scope. Michael Walzer's work on the differences between simple and complex equality in *Spheres of Justice* (1983), for example, shows that as George Orwell puts it, some are more equal than others.

Just what life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness entails is also complex. Jefferson's lines (as Cullen and others have noted) are obviously inspired by Locke's second treatise on government: "... that all being equal and independent, no one ought to harm another his life, health, liberty or possessions..."(Locke 119). Yet these beliefs were expressed even earlier in American writing by the Puritan writers of the seventeenth-century. The Dream had its first stirrings in the ideals espoused by men such as the founder of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, who in the 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity" asserts: "no man is made more honorable than another, or more wealthy, etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himself, but for the glory of his creator and the common good of the creature, man"(31). Winthrop also famously called for the colony of New England to "be as a city on a hill"(41), a

phrase which as Cullen notes has been used by American politicians as a source of inspiration (though often out of context, given that Winthrop wanted the colony to be a city on the hill “so that if we deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word throughout the world”(41))¹. Yet such utopianism as Winthrop espoused was even by the time of Jefferson shifting inexorably towards a more material rendering of the Dream.

George Mason’s Virginian Declaration of Rights which was written earlier in 1776, presages Jefferson’s declaration but with an added clause to American Dream trinity of life, liberty and happiness:

That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, *with the means of acquiring and possessing property*, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. [my italics](“Virginia Declaration of Rights” 2004)

The inference of the “pursuit of happiness” also entailing the pursuit of property or possessions is a major alteration to Winthrop’s ideals. Such an inference has become central to modern notions of the dream, and has led to the common and most “widely realized American Dream: home ownership”(Cullen 9).

Yet despite the influence of Winthrop, and the inestimable importance of the Declaration of Independence to the concept of the Dream, the actual term “American Dream” was first used only in 1931 in James Truslow Adams’ *The Epic of America*

¹ The “city on the hill” ideal is not merely confined to American culture. Australian Prime Minister Ben Chifley famously called for the Australian Labor Party to make its “great objective – the light on the hill”(Chifley 1949).

(1931)². Adams work does much to build on the foundations of the declaration and he defines the Dream as: "... a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position"(374). Thus in effect any American child can grow up to be president. Carolyn See, in her study on the position of the American Dream in Hollywood novels, reinforces this aspect: "In the beginning, the American Dream promised that by working hard everyone could be somebody" ("The Hollywood Novel: The American Dream Cheat" 200). Yet Adams is not a dewy-eyed idealist, and he realises (as does See) that the American Dream required hard work: "If we are to make the dream come true we must all work together, no longer to build bigger, but to build better"(381). Or as John F. Kennedy would put it: "...ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country"(301).

As befitting a central idea of American culture, the American Dream is a central theme of a great many works of American literature. The desire for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness has permeated through the works of, among many others, Whitman, Twain and Fitzgerald. The spirit of the Dream is throughout Whitman's poetry, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) concerns Huck's and Jim's desires for life and liberty, and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is the tale of a man who has achieved the Dream yet found it to be an illusion. Kathryn Hume has noted in *American Dream, American Nightmare: American Fiction Since 1960* (2000) the focus of the American Dream for many authors in the latter half of the twentieth century has drawn on Fitzgerald's theme of the illusory nature of the Dream. As

² Cullen notes that Adams had wanted to title his work "The American Dream", but was dissuaded by his publisher, which suggests that at the very least the term was not widely used (Cullen 3-5). However Kathryn Hume notes that while Adams is "credited with popularising" the term, "the idea was present long before"(293)

Hume writes, “novelists... frequently respond with anger or disillusion to the gap between the America they experience or see and the ideal America enshrined in founding documents and the American Dream” (266). John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run* (1961), for example, details the hollowness of achieving the perceived ends of the dream of marriage, a job and a house – for him “the American Dream does not work” (Hume 114). By 1965, Norman Mailer in *An American Dream* (1965) would use the term in a savagely ironic sense as the title of a novel about a successful man who murders his wife and is able to justify his actions. As Elizabeth Long noted, in the post World War II period the Dream “seemed closest to fulfilment [but] was paradoxically the first time when the limits and contradictions of that dream became widely apparent”(1)

Clearly the first tenants of the American Dream have led to the Dream becoming an illusion for many. Aspects such as owning a house and gaining financial security are visible and seem attainable, yet the fact is that for many, attaining them does not attain happiness. Thus the myth of the Dream is due to ‘life’ and ‘liberty’ not ensuring ‘happiness’. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that the American Dream should be illusory when one considers that the Dream in effect attempts to make concrete the abstract notion of happiness. Even the first elucidation of the Dream by John Winthrop was guilty on this score, with his biographer, Cotton Mather, acknowledging that Winthrop’s “ideal... was impossible to realise in fact”(Baym 31). This illusory nature continues to fascinate authors, who often write of characters, such as Rabbit Angstrom, coming to terms with the myth.

The American Dream’s place in American culture leads directly to the great perpetuator of myths and the Dionysus of American culture – Hollywood. Cullen remarks that in Hollywood a new version of the American Dream occurs (that is one

that does not merely encapsulate the desire for home ownership, and the life and liberty which it accompanies). He states that this version of the Dream is “the dream of the Coast”(161). It is connected to dreams of Americans to “go west and grow with the land”, and Cullen asserts that this new kind of dream is a dream of “something for nothing”(161), which (for him) is personified by Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. Georges-Claude Gilbert similarly splits the American Dream into two; the first is the traditional “happy middle-class family: two cars, two children, a dog, a house in a ‘clean’ suburb...”, the second is “access to stardom” (149). Jeffrey Richards notes the populist framework of the American Dream (though he does not use the term itself) and asserts that its beginnings were essentially agrarian but by the end of the nineteenth century it had become more “small town” (231) – that is it idealised the values of ‘small-town America’. He also observes that by the 1940s, with the growth in popularity of Hollywood, the “mythology” of the dream changed from “Small Town to Tinseltown”(232). Yet such is the difference between the traditional Dream and this “shimmering new” version (Cullen 161), that they can hardly be contained under the same banner. A new term is required to denote this ‘new’ dream. Moreover, given its emphasis on stardom and the west Coast of America, and given as well that this dream is not particularly new, I propose to use an old term, the Hollywood Dream.

Satires of Hollywood reveal the extent to which the Hollywood Dream has subverted and ultimately replaced the position of the American Dream in American culture. Hollywood represents the place where financial security and liberty are only indirect results of people’s desire to obtain their “fullest stature” – namely fame. Hollywood is a symbol unlike any other. No other nation – apart from India and its ubiquitous (and derivative) Bollywood – has a symbol which denotes the place where

films are made and dreams (and often in satires, nightmares) can occur. The primary concern of the Hollywood Dream, unlike the American Dream, is 'ends not means'. Implicit in the traditional version is the need to earn the Dream. For example, with respect to home ownership the implication of the American Dream is that one will work towards the goal of being able to afford a house. The Hollywood Dream, however, is not concerned with work. In this respect, the Hollywood Dream is not actually limited to Hollywood. In the case of home ownership, the Hollywood Dream is not to gain employment and earn a credit rating which allows one to secure a mortgage, but rather is to enter a contest which will win one a house – and a more recent twist on the Hollywood Dream, is that the contest will be televised and will also result in fame for the victors.

The Hollywood Dream is thus actually more a fantasy than the traditional version, for a dream by its very nature is something imaginative. Embedded within the American Dream is the belief that it is possible for anyone to achieve its ends – in whichever form they take – without the need for luck. The Hollywood Dream however requires luck – it is about being in the right place at the right time – and given its lack of emphasis on effort, is wholly unrealistic. The difference between the American and the Hollywood Dream is in essence the difference between wishing to be an actor and wishing to be a star. The former realises the difficulties of such a profession, and those who chase that dream are prepared to work for little money and less recognition on the stage or in small parts in small movies, in the hope that one day their talent will be recognised. Those who desire to be a star have no connection to the craft of acting; their desire is purely for fame and wealth. It is the dream of someone who wishes to be plucked from obscurity into the leading role of a major Hollywood film, rather like someone who wishes to be a professional athlete but who

does not desire to practise or train to become one. In Hollywood this new Dream is not limited to actors: others in the moviemaking industry chase the Dream. In the case of producers or studio executives, the end is power rather than fame, but again it is achieved without reference to effort. As Chili Palmer in Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty* (1991) explains to a friend: "I don't think the producer has to do much"(127). Success comes from knowing the right people, and being seen at the right places.

The Hollywood Dream is thus a simulacrum of the American Dream, it simulates the American Dream but it is unconnected with everyday life. It is the dream of the publicity agent and fan magazine. It is the dream that, as Richards writes, "Movie stardom [is] within the grasp of all" (232). On the surface, the ends of both dreams appear the same and correspond with America as a 'land of opportunity'. Yet as a simulacrum, the Hollywood Dream only simulates the ends of the American Dream, and collapses when placed alongside reality. An example of the Hollywood Dream's incompatibility with reality is revealed in the documentary *Hoop Dreams* (1994) in which two young African-American boys from Chicago dream of playing basketball in the NBA like their hero Isiah Thomas. Their Hollywood Dream of fame and fortune as professional basketball players is shattered when it encounters the reality of their lives and the extreme amount of work and discipline required to reach that goal. The Hollywood Dream is thus a false creation, and even those who do become stars in Hollywood do not become so solely because of luck. One need only examine the credits of the biggest stars in the history of Hollywood to see the small roles they performed in small films before finally hitting it big. The Hollywood Dream ignores these small roles, it is concerned with the end result of Academy Awards and lavish mansions. As such it is integral to all satires of Hollywood, for it is the product of Hollywood's artificiality and hypocrisy.

These two elements make Hollywood a ripe subject for the satirist's pen. Indeed Hollywood is so well suited for satire that almost all novels and films on the subject contain satirical elements one could state for authors writing of Hollywood as Juvenal did when he observed Rome: "It is difficult not to be writing satire" (77). Even non-fictional accounts betray this position, as can be seen by a review of some of their titles: *You'll Never Eat Lunch in this Town Again* (1991), *Which Lie Did I Tell?* (2000), and *Hello He Lied: And Other Truths from the Hollywood Trenches* (1997). Thus a review of the films and novels on Hollywood, by the very nature of their subject, requires an examination of them as satire. Comparing film with novels also allows an examination of the different modes of satire in both media.

Satire has been a much-examined mode of literature. Formalist theory divided satire into three categories: Horatian, Juvenalian and Mennipean. Yet these terms are antiquated within the context of contemporary critical theory. While it may be possible to pigeonhole some of the works examined here into these categories, for the most part the satires of Hollywood resist such compartmentalising. West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939) for example exposes human folly as would an Horatian satire, yet it is also indignant as would befit a work of Juvenalian satire. Recent critical studies of satire have also resisted the use of such categories. Stephen Weisenburger in *Fables of Subversion* (1995) replaces them with two new categories: generative and degenerative satires. He asserts that degenerative satire (essentially a post-modern phenomenon) "is delegitimizing" and seeks to "subvert hierarchies of value"(3), whereas generative satire "does not participate in the oppositional, subversive work of much twentieth-century art"(2). This essentially reinforces Leonard Feinberg's assertion that "satire does not always teach a moral lesson or offer a desirable alternative to the condition it criticises"(3).

Though it may not offer a desirable alternative, satire must criticise. In the satires reviewed in this thesis, the targets of this criticism are the producers, actors and directors within the Hollywood system; the films produced by the Hollywood studios; and the influence of Hollywood on American culture, as expressed through the Hollywood Dream. The satires of Hollywood do not approach these targets from the same viewpoint. Some like Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941) take an ethical standpoint, others, such as Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), offer little ethical perspective, rather they delight in the artificiality and deception of Hollywood. In this instance, Vidal criticises Hollywood because he believes it worthy of criticism, not because he is appalled by the goings on in Hollywood. Those works which have no ethical standpoint, but which seek only to amuse are shown to be examples of parody rather than satire. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four, parody does not criticise its target and thus lacks the satirical impulse evident in even those works of satire which are less ethically motivated than others.

The modes used by satirists to attack their targets are commonly exaggeration, parody and pastiche. An analysis of film compared to literature satires reveals that film satirists of Hollywood have more tools available to them, especially with regard to intertextual modes of satire such as parody and meta-fictional references. Film satirists of Hollywood however also must be more wary of claims of hypocrisy given that they are using film to satirise the film industry; some films, it will be shown, have not successfully avoided this paradox.

The time-span of novels and films about Hollywood also allows for an investigation of the influences of postmodernism on satire. Those satires which approach Hollywood from a postmodern outlook are shown to be more focused on the artificiality of Hollywood, and use common postmodern narrative structures such as

circular plots, randomness and discontinuity. These satires – such as Vidal’s novels and David Lynch’s film *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) – also merge fantasy and reality and seek to subvert notions of truth and falsity.

Each of the following chapters addresses how satirical representations of Hollywood have changed since 1930, how satirists have examined the artificiality of Hollywood, and how they have represented the Hollywood Dream. The chapters follow an approximate chronological order, however it is at times a sequence based more on the thematic modes of the works rather than time. Taken together, the works present the development of satire on Hollywood and the Hollywood Dream in film and literature since 1930.

The first chapter takes issue with the view of the 1930s and 1940s as the “Golden Years of Hollywood”. While nostalgia towards the period is due to a highly selective view of the industry’s output during that time – *Gone With the Wind* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942), *Citizen Kane* (1941) and others – a review of satires written at the time reveals the period was hardly one worthy of nostalgia. Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust* is positioned as the centre of the satirical canon of Hollywood, and its themes and characters recur throughout satires of the industry over the next seventy years. It is compared with Ethan and Joel Coen’s *Barton Fink* (1991), which satirises the golden years, and owes much to West’s novel. Other works of the time, such as Fitzgerald’s *The Last Tycoon* (1941) and Budd Schulberg’s *What Makes Sammy Run?* also attack the Hollywood Dream, and its negative influence on artists. The chapter also serves as an example of satirists who, by and large, regarded film with distaste.

The second chapter begins with an author who worked in Hollywood at the tail end of the Golden Years, Raymond Chandler. His novel *The Little Sister* (1949) and the two other novels examined in the chapter, Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty* (1991) and Michael Tolkin's *The Player* (1989), approach Hollywood from a different perspective than the works of the first chapter. Here the genre of crime novels is placed within the context of Hollywood and reveals that the common mode of created identities prevalent in crime fiction, when transplanted to characters in Hollywood, has a satirical function. The artificiality of Hollywood is revealed through these characters' created identities, which also allows the authors to satirise the insularity and amorality of Hollywood.

The third chapter focuses on the representation of Hollywood as a simulacrum. It uses Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation to analyse Gore Vidal's novels, *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* (1974), Billy Wilder's *Sunset Blvd* (1950) and two recent and influential films, *The Truman Show* (1998) and *Mulholland Dr.*. This approach reveals that Hollywood is inherently hypocritical but more importantly, inherently artificial. The satires construct simulacra that reveal (and in the case of Vidal's works, revel in) the artificiality of Hollywood. *Sunset Blvd* is also shown to be the centre of the film satires of the Hollywood canon. Both *The Truman Show* and *Mulholland Dr.* examine the hyperreal nature of Hollywood, which continues to mythologise the past – specifically the 1950s. The films also highlight the difficulties inherent with satire in a postmodern world, where as Baudrillard writes, “a kind of non-intentional parody hovers over everything...” (“The Orders of Simulacra” 150). This is most evident with *The Truman Show*, whose concept has been copied by numerous television programmes since its release. *Mulholland Dr.* is also revealed to be a postmodern retelling of *Sunset Blvd*, where the distinction between reality and

delusion is blurred. Its approach places it as the work most likely to influence satires of Hollywood in the future.

Chapter Four examines works which extensively use intertextual references to further their satire and parody of Hollywood. The chapter examines the difference between those films which parody and those which satirise Hollywood. The genre of spoof films uses intertextuality to parody both Hollywood films and the representation of the Hollywood Dream in those films. Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) is markedly different from Tolkin's novel (examined in Chapter Two) due mainly to the overwhelming uses of intertextual references throughout the film. In this instance the purpose of these references is to both parody and satirise the Hollywood filmmaking industry. Finally, the television programme, *The Simpsons* (1989 -) is examined as an example of both the hold of Hollywood over American culture, and as further evidence of the subversion of the American Dream by the Hollywood Dream. The programme is a veritable intertextual smorgasbord, yet here the references are used to satirise American culture rather than Hollywood itself.

The final chapter examines film and literature satires of the past fifteen years. These works, unlike *The Truman Show* and *Mulholland Dr.* are not postmodern, but rather are more in spirit with the satires of the Golden Years. One of the most recent film satires of Hollywood, Andrew Niccol's *S1m0ne* (2002) is revealed as an updated version of one of the earliest textual satires, Liam O'Flaherty's *Hollywood Cemetery* (1935). These generative satires also highlight that recent satire of Hollywood which aims to shock readers or viewers through criticism of characters' ethical malfeasance invariably fails due to the awareness and apathy of contemporary society to the ethical crimes of Hollywood insiders. Such has been the number of satires on the industry, coupled with "tell-all" memoirs, airport novels and tabloid press stories, that the satire

of works which merely aim to depict Hollywood as corrupt and do not acknowledge the inherent artificiality of Hollywood as do Vidal and Lynch lack relevance. While these satires do attack artists more than did satirists in the past, the satire is revealed to actually reinforce rather than subvert the hierarchies of Hollywood.

Satires of Hollywood over the past seventy years have used two main approaches towards the industry. The first primarily attacks the corrupt nature of Hollywood; the second attacks the artificiality of Hollywood. Both approaches of course overlap (*The Day of the Locust* for example attacks the artificiality of Hollywood with great venom, as well as exposing the corrupting nature of the industry) however it is those satires which focus their satire on the artificiality of Hollywood that are likely to retain relevance as the years pass. Gilbert Highett notes in *The Anatomy of Satire* that by compelling readers “to look at a sight they had missed or shunned, [the satirist] first makes them realize the truth, and then moves them to feelings of protest” (20). Yet the corruption and amorality of Hollywood is so well known that satirists can no longer score points by alerting readers to such moral crimes. The artificial aspect of Hollywood however, remains a ripe subject for the satirist’s pen or camera. The satires of Billy Wilder, Gore Vidal and David Lynch unmask the façade of Hollywood and discover it merely covers another façade. Hollywood is an artificial place filled with people with artificial identities selling an artificial dream. It has been so successful in selling that dream that it has replaced the American Dream in American culture, and is the purest example of the simulation becoming more real than the real.

1.0 All that Glisters is not Gold:

Satires of the Golden Years of Hollywood

“Now he’s out in Hollywood... being a prostitute” (Salinger 6).

The 1930s and 1940s in Hollywood have become universally known as the Golden Years. For example, in Thomas Schatz’s history of Hollywood, *The Genius of the System* (1988), his section on the 1930s is subtitled: “The Golden Age”; Jeffrey Richards notes that the period “was truly the movies’ Golden Age” (231), and for many years on Australian television, film-buff Bill Collins has presented films from this era in a programme titled, “The Golden Years of Hollywood”. Just what years this period encompasses is somewhat undefined. As a general guide, one can state that it began with the advent of sound and ended with the decline of the studio system in the 1950s. Yet even such a broad time frame is open to debate, and whether a film is or is not from the Golden Years is essentially unimportant. What is crucial are the implications of the term.

When critics or film lovers use it, they imply that films made during this era were of a high quality (and by further implication, of higher quality than contemporary films). When analysts of the film industry, such as Thomas Schatz, use the term, it indicates that the period was financially successful for the studios: indeed for the studios, the Golden Years is a literal term, describing a time before their vertically integrated oligopolies were broken up, and before the advent of television. In either case, the term is overtly nostalgic and is often accompanied with reference to films released during the period – as when William Goldman compares contemporary films with those released in 1939 (*Adventures in the Screen Trade* 155). And indeed when one examines the films nominated for best picture that year (*Dark Victory*,

Gone with the Wind (the winner), *Goodbye Mr Chips*, *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, *Ninotchka*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Wuthering Heights*)³, the number which have continued to be revered is impressive.

Yet such a view also betrays a belief that the industry was better then than now – as though the contemporary industry alone is at fault for the large numbers of sequels released each year or for films such as *Gigli* (2003)⁴. Such thinking however ignores that poor films and sequels are not a recent addition to Hollywood. For all the wonderful films released in 1939, there are many more which are now forgotten. It is unlikely that anyone will soon be clamouring for *Charlie McCarthy, Detective* (1939) to be released on DVD; and the release of three Charlie Chan films in 1939 alone⁵, displays that Hollywood studios – even in the Golden Years – were as interested in profit as are current studios. ‘The Golden Years’ also relates to the stars of Hollywood of that era; it implies they were of a better class – more starlike than the scandal-ridden and flash-in-the-pan stars of today. However, anyone who believes the stars of that era were more dignified is obviously unaware of Errol Flynn’s exploits, the hostility between sisters Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine, or many other scandals of that time.

Pointedly, the satires written during the 1930s and 1940s reveal that nostalgia for the period is misguided, as the crimes with which contemporary satirists charge modern Hollywood were also made against the Hollywood of the earlier era. The Hollywood that Nathanael West depicts in *The Day of the Locust* is hardly a joyous place. Other works, such as Kaufman and Hart’s play *Once in a Lifetime* (1930), F

³ It was not until 1944 that the academy limited the numbers of nominees to five.

⁴ *Gigli* ‘won’ six Razzie Awards (including Worst Picture) – the annual awards given by the Golden Raspberry Award Foundation to “dishonor Hollywood’s worst”(Razzies.Com 2004).

⁵ The three are: *Charlie Chan in Reno*, *Charlie Chan at Treasure Island*, *Charlie Chan in City in Darkness*. There would be three more Charlie Chan films released in 1940, yet the most productive year was 1944 in which there was five films of the series released – all with Sidney Toler as Chan (“*Sidney Toler*” 2004).

Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*⁶, and Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* portray studio executives as money-hungry and as lacking in artistic qualities as their current-day counterparts are believed to be. When one reads these works – as well as personal memoirs, such as those of Ben Hecht – the impression is that great films were made in spite of, not because of, the studio system⁷.

The literary satires of this period effectively set the template for future satires of the industry. They attacked what they perceived as the preference for profit over art, the soulless nature of the business, the insincerity of the executives, and – crucially – the impact of Hollywood on the American Dream. They detail the elusive nature of the Dream for those who ventured to Hollywood in search of fame, and its illusory nature for those who supposedly attain the Dream (such as Monroe Stahr in *The Last Tycoon*), and they display the first changes of the traditional American Dream into its 21st century replacement: the Hollywood Dream. They also demonstrate the influence of Hollywood on people's psyche, wherein people act not only in front of a camera but also in every part of their lives.

One contemporary film satirises the Hollywood of the 1930s and 1940s. The Coen Brother's film *Barton Fink* is set during the Golden Years (specifically 1941)

⁶ While I cite from Matthew Bruccoli's edition of the work, which he titles *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, throughout my thesis I shall refer to the novel by its more common title of *The Last Tycoon*. While, as Bruccoli notes in his introduction, there may be little evidence that Fitzgerald was to use this title, there is, I believe, little evidence that Bruccoli's favoured title is the one Fitzgerald would have, in the end, settled on. Bruccoli himself notes that the choice is between "Stahr: A Romance" and "The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western", and he chooses the latter because "it is close to the title by which the novel has been known..."(xvii). As such, I feel little need to change the title, which has, due perhaps to the film version produced in 1976, become as well known as any other Fitzgerald titles. Moreover, Bruccoli's title, though proposed in 1993, has gained little currency. K. Eddington uses Bruccoli's title in her article "The Hollywood novel: American dream apocalyptic novel", whereas Chip Rhodes uses the more common title in his article "Ambivalence on the left: Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?*" (2002). Indeed even a cursory comparison of the two titles on the Modern Literature Association database shows *The Last Tycoon* remains the most preferred.

⁷ Hecht recounts how he, with David O. Selznick and Victor Fleming, doctored the script for *Gone with the Wind*, in seven days despite not having read Mitchell's novel. They worked from a "treatment" by Sidney Holland, who had since died. Howard was subsequently awarded the Academy Award for screenplay, and Hecht was not credited – but was paid "fifteen thousand dollars for the week's work" (488-89). The film, of course, also had three directors.

and has much in common thematically with the earlier satires; specifically *The Day of the Locust*. The two works examine the perceived dichotomy between art and money, the theme of the artificiality of the moviemaking business, the metaphor of Hollywood as hell, and the impact the industry has on the American Dream. A comparison of the two also highlights how little has changed over the past sixty years (a point which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 6).

The Last Tycoon; Fitzgerald's series of short stories, *The Pat Hobby Stories* (1962); Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?*; *The Disenchanted* (1951); and other satires of the period are also examined to highlight the representation of Hollywood as the symbol of the crumbling American Dream and its displacement by the Hollywood Dream.

1.1 Hollywood as Hell: *The Day of the Locust* and *Barton Fink*

Since the 1950s, *The Day of the Locust* has been the most critically praised satire of Hollywood. Initially the work was dismissed by critics, and Budd Schulberg relates how he and other writers in Hollywood at the end of the 1930s mourned "the failure of West's unappreciated Locusts" ("Afterword to *Queer People*" 279). By 1973 however, Walter Wells, in his seminal work on the Hollywood novel, could write that *The Day of the Locust* was "unquestionably, the most successful Hollywood novel of the 1930s" (49). While it was not the first satire of Hollywood, its position as the most influential, ensures that with respect to Hollywood novels, it is the centre of the canon. The narrative's themes (primarily the artificiality of Hollywood) and

characters have become stock trade for any satire on the industry, and the work has become synonymous with satire of Hollywood⁸.

The artificiality of Hollywood is presented immediately. The narrative begins with the protagonist, Tod Hackett sitting in his office and hearing the sound of “an army of cavalry and foot...passing” (259). Only when “a little fat man” screams through a megaphone ordering the troops to move to “Stage Nine” (260), does the reader understand that Tod works in a movie studio. The artifice of filmsets is a common motif in Hollywood satires. In the first satire of Hollywood⁹, Henry Leon Wilson’s *Merton of the Movies* (1922), the protagonist Merton discovers to his dismay that the sets “were to real houses what a dicky is to a sincere, genuine shirt” (61). When Tod later walks through the streets of Los Angeles back to his hotel, he views a similar façade among the people he sees on the street:

A great many of the people wore sports clothes which were not really sports clothes... The fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping not boating; the man in the Norfolk jacket and Tyrolean hat was returning, not from a mountain but an insurance office; and the girl in slacks and sneaks with a bandana around her head had just left the switchboard, not a tennis court. (261)

The buildings he passes while walking around Hollywood are likewise fakes:

“Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages...” (262). Among this saturation of sham, Tod notices other people: the homeless and the working class, whom he believes “had

⁸ I will in the course of this thesis use Hollywood and industry somewhat interchangeably, for, while the geographical position of Hollywood in California and on the west coast of America is important – and has been highlighted in a number of studies, including Wells’ *Tycoons and Locusts* – when I write of “Hollywood” I am more concerned with the industry than a geographical location.

⁹ Although Chip Rhodes (2002) and Bruce Chipman refer to it as the first satire, in reality it is, to use Budd Schulberg’s description, a “tongue-in-cheek” (“Afterword to *Queer People*” 279). The narrative is less satire than an amusing fish out of water tale.

come to California to die” (261). Tod works for the studio as a set and costume designer, but is actually a graduate of the Yale School of Fine Arts, and he hopes one day to paint these lifeless souls he sees walking the streets in his painting *The Burning of Los Angeles* (260-1).

The opening of *Barton Fink* also details artificialities. The film opens backstage of a Broadway theatre on the opening night of Barton Fink’s play *Bare Ruined Choirs*. It is a play about “fishmongers” who supposedly represent the “common man”, however the common men working backstage seem utterly uninterested in the play. The dialogue, which parodies the style of Clifford Odets, is overwrought and hardly the language spoken by the real life figures the play attempts to portray: “I’m awake now, awake for the first time in years... daylight is a dream if you live with your eyes closed. Well my eyes are open now!”. And the near final line: “We’ll hear from that kid. And I don’t mean a postcard.” Immediately after the triumphant reception of the play, its wealthy producer entertains Barton at a swank restaurant. Despite Barton’s overexcited protestations that he “can’t start listening to the critics” and that he must continue to write plays for the common man, there seems little evidence of his connection to the ‘common man’ whom he so desires to reach. There is also great irony in his arguing, while dressed in a tuxedo and drinking champagne, that he cannot take up the contract offered to him by Capitol Studios in Hollywood, because he will “lose touch with the common man.”

When Barton does arrive in Hollywood, he stays at the seedy Hotel Earle. It is here in his cramped room that he meets his neighbour Charlie Meadows. Charlie is the archetypal “working stiff”, the very common man whom Barton believes he writes about and writes for. The Coens reinforce Barton’s detachment with the common man by having Charlie repeatedly state that he “could tell you some stories”, only to have

Barton either ignore him, or condescendingly dismiss him as when he cuts him off, saying: “and that is the whole point”. Barton thus misses the point – as he is made crucially aware in the climax – he professes a love for the common man, yet has no time to listen to him. Indeed, when Barton is contracted to write the screenplay for a “Wallace Beery wrestling picture” he is struck with writer’s block¹⁰. Thus, while using overblown language and writing about those whom he believes are the common men of society he is fine, yet when given the task of writing a story for these common men, he is rendered mute.

The satire of *Barton Fink* is as much directed at Barton as it is at the Hollywood producers. The Coens, like many satirists before them, do not allow their protagonist freedom from attack, and Barton, like everyone else in the movie, seems without talent. The most obvious satirical target in the film, however, is the Hollywood system. And as with all satires of the Hollywood system, unsurprisingly, it is written by a writer¹¹. The point is crucial, as satirists (whether in films or novels) often focus their attack on Hollywood producers’ lack of creativity and the plight of the ‘poor artist’ in Hollywood. In *The Last Tycoon* Fitzgerald encapsulates the problems writers encountered in Hollywood with his description of a producer who explains how he had “watched [the studio writers at work] for ten minutes and there were two of them that didn’t write a line”(120)¹².

¹⁰ Barton’s predicament, as has been noted by Michael Dunne, appears to be based on fact (306). Ian Hamilton in his work, *Writers in Hollywood 1915-1951* (1990), notes that William Faulkner was employed to write a wrestling picture starring Wallace Beery, and like Barton, Faulkner watched a screening of a similar picture to gain ideas. Faulkner, unlike Barton, walked out of the screening and “out of the studio’s main gate”. He did return for a week, whereupon he announced he had been “wandering around Death Valley”(195)

¹¹ Or in the case of the Coens, writers. Both Ethan and Joel share the writing credit for *Barton Fink*, as they do for all of their films.

¹² This story also appears to have its basis in fact. Hamilton writes of Harry Cohn, “the greatly dreaded boss of Columbia Pictures” approaching the writers’ building. When he found it silent, he shouted: “ ‘You people in there are supposed to be working’ . All at once the typewriters within began to clatter. Cohn, enraged by this disobedience yelled: ‘Liars!’ ”(53).

The Coen brothers continue this tradition, displaying the shallowness of Hollywood producers, and highlighting what satirists of Hollywood often consider the over-riding fault of the film industry: the link between art and money. This link is wonderfully presented through the character of studio head, Jack Liptnik, a stereotype of such golden-age movie moguls as Harry Cohn and Jack Warner. His belief in the connection of art with money is reflected in his first meeting with Barton, in which he states: “the writer is king here at Capital Pictures. You don’t believe me, take a look at your pay check at the end of every week – that’s what we think of the writer”. However, the Coens do not only satirise the studio executives and producers; the writers themselves are objects of attack, and shown to be either drunken charlatans or, like Barton Fink himself, a pretentious artist who cannot write.

Such an attack is, ironically, a common feature of satires of the Golden Years. While many satires do expose the difficulties for writers in Hollywood, rarely are these writers portrayed as blameless for their predicament¹³. Fitzgerald, Schulberg, and West all include screenwriters in their novels who are either frauds or drunks. In *Barton Fink*, the Coens continue this theme by satirising Barton’s inability to write his screenplay. They repeatedly cut from Barton in front of his typewriter in the Hotel Earle to a close-up of typewriter keys crashing onto paper, only to reveal that the typing is actually being done by the secretary at Capital Pictures. The one writer Barton turns to in desperation during his attack of writer’s block, the supposedly talented Bill Mayhew, is a drunk, abusive fraud. Bill (who, given his attire, alcoholism and southern accent, appears to be modelled on William Faulkner) does not write his own screenplays or even most of his novels; his secretary, Audrey, in

¹³ Ben Hecht’s view of screenwriters betrays this same sentiment. He writes: I should make it clear that the movie writers ‘ruined’ by the movies are for the most part a run of greedy hacks and incompetent thickheads. Out of the thousand writers huffing and puffing through movieland there are scarcely fifty men and women of wit or talent’(474).

fact writes them. Her advice to Barton on how to write a screenplay is: “Look it’s really just a formula. You don’t have to type your soul into it...”.

The line also draws on the Coens’ other attack of the soullessness of Hollywood, which is in effect, Hell for an artist. At the end of their first meeting, Liptnik pointedly thanks Barton “for his heart”, thus positioning Liptnik and the Hollywood system as a drainer of the hearts and souls of artists. Many critics and reviewers (such as Michael Dunne (2000) and Michael Wood (1996)) have noticed as well, the connection between Hell and aspects of *Barton Fink*, most notably the Hotel Earle, with its motto of “For a day or for a lifetime”. The link is further enforced with a number of Biblical references throughout the film: most notably, to Nebuchadnezzar and the book of Daniel. When on a picnic with Mayhew and Audrey, Mayhew gives Barton a signed copy of his latest novel, *Nebuchadnezzar*. Later Barton, in the midst of his writer’s block, randomly opens the Bible in his hotel room, to the book of Daniel. There he reads how Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, takes Daniel as prisoner from Israel to Babylon and trains him to become part of the court. Nebuchadnezzar then comes to value Daniel for his ability to interpret dreams. The passage that Barton focuses on is 2:30:

And the king Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to the Chaldeans, I recall not my dream; if ye will not make known unto me my dream and its interpretation, ye shall be cut in pieces and your tents shall be made a dunghill.

Somewhat oddly however, this is not Dan. 2:30, the verse Barton reads is actually Dan. 2:5. The correct verse 30 reads of Daniel telling King Nebuchadnezzar:

this mystery [of your dream] was revealed to me, not because I am wiser than anyone else, but so that Your Majesty may learn the

meaning of your dream and understand the thoughts that have come to you. (*Good News Bible: Today's English Version*)

Thus, the Coens have replaced a verse that posits the writer as an interpreter of dreams with power given by God, with one that reveals the punishment for failure of interpretation¹⁴. The link with Barton's position is clear: Barton has been taken from the holy land for playwrights of Broadway to the Babylon of Hollywood, where the king Jack Liptnik urges him to be part of the system and interpret his dream of a "Wallace Beery wrestling picture" by giving it "that Barton Fink feeling". Whereas Daniel does have the ability to interpret dreams and is rewarded with a high position, Barton's inability to write the screenplay causes Liptnik to discard him. Liptnik scorns Barton's work and rejects his talent; this is the artistic equivalent of being cut to pieces and having his tent turned into a dunghill. Yet, there is greater punishment for Barton; while under contract with Capital Pictures, Barton cannot write for anyone else, yet Liptnik refuses to film anything Barton will write. He is told to stay in town but out of sight. He is thus in purgatory.

Another link between Hollywood and Hell, deals more specifically with Barton's lack of talent and pretentiousness. His neighbour Charlie is actually 'Madman Mundt' a serial killer – thus a man who really could "tell you some stories". However, Charlie's place in the film is problematical. If Hollywood, and specifically the Hotel Earle, represents Hell, then Charlie is a resident of that Hell, and more specifically a devil. Yet, after two anti-Semitic detectives tell him the truth about Charlie, Barton takes Charlie's advice and uses him as the model for the wrestler in his screenplay, and is now able to write. What is more, he is, according to his own opinion, able to write "something beautiful". Thus Charlie, devil or not, has at least

¹⁴ The oddity of this replacement is further revealed by the lack of its mention in the published screenplay of the film. In the screenplay the scene is presented: "5. And the king, Nebuchadnezzar, answered and said..." (100). In the film however the passage begins with the number "30".

helped Barton. Yet, when we view sections of Barton's screenplay, the most obvious aspect is its similarity with his play, *Bare Ruined Choirs*. They are both set in lower New York City, concern fishmongers, and his screenplay ends with a similar line to that of the play: "We'll be hearing from that crazy wrestler and I don't mean a postcard". That the screenplay is so similar causes the viewer to wonder whether there is actually any real difference between the two. Perhaps, as Barton himself at one point worries, "he only has one story in [him]". If this is actually the case then the only writers seen in the film are frauds. Mayhew does not write his own work, and Barton has only one work to write.

The satire of the film is sharply directed at writers from other media, specifically novelists and playwrights, who come to Hollywood and believe it worthy of scorn. If they believe Hollywood is merely "the great salt lick" (as Mayhew calls it) then, the Coens assert, the writers deserve all they get. The crucial difference between this satire and other Hollywood satires of the Golden Years is that the Coens are not playwrights or novelists¹⁵ – they are filmmakers. Their attack on those who would seek to belittle the occupation of moviemaker is rather similar to that depicted in Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*. At one point in that narrative, studio head Monroe Stahr talks with the upper-class author Boxley¹⁶, who has written a scene where two men duel and one of them falls down a well. Stahr asks him:

'Would you write that in a book of your own Mr Boxley?'

'What? Naturally not.'

'You'd consider it too cheap.'

'Movie Standards are different', said Boxley hedging.

¹⁵ While it is true Ethan Coen has written a book of short stories, *Gates of Eden* and a books of poems, *The Drunken Driver Has the Right of Way*, both of these works were written well after the establishment of his career as a film-maker with his brother Joel.

¹⁶ Boxley, according to Bruccoli, was based on Aldous Huxley (xxvii)

‘Do you ever go to them?’

‘No – almost never.’

‘Isn’t it because people are always duelling and falling down wells?’

(31)

In *Barton Fink* it is true that Jack Liptnik is without taste, and does not even read the scripts, but he respects movies: “We do not make B pictures here at Capital. Let’s put a stop to that rumour right now”. Liptnik is so respectful that he sees no absurdity in his wearing an Army Colonel’s uniform as soon as he is commissioned, even though the uniform is actually made by the studio’s wardrobe department. For him it is real. Barton, on the other hand, does not respect film, and his fate is thus deserved. He did not view the task of writing a screenplay worthy of his talent, and thus he is denied the rewards that the modern Daniel reaps: Barton, artist or not, did take the money; that he was a bad whore, does not take away the fact that he whored.

This point of view reflects the message of Preston Sturges’ *Sullivan’s Travels* (1941). In that film, successful Hollywood director, John L. Sullivan is determined to stop making the lightweight comedies he has in the past, such as “Ants in Your Pant 1939”, and instead direct a serious drama called “Oh Brother Where Art Thou?”. Sullivan tells a studio executive he wants the “picture to be a document. I want to hold a mirror up to life. I want this to be a picture of dignity, a true canvas of the suffering of humanity”. To which the executive responds: “But with a little sex in it”. To achieve his aim Sullivan resolves to dress as a homeless man and go “looking for trouble”, in the belief that he will then understand the poor and be able to direct the picture with the proper sensitivity.

After a number of false starts, due to the studio’s insistence that he be followed on his odyssey among the poor, he is able to briefly experience life as a

homeless man. He returns to his Hollywood mansion and announces he is ready to begin filming. Before doing so, he returns to the dead-end streets to hand out money to the homeless, at which time he is mugged and thrown into a boxcar travelling south. His attacker is then run over by a train, and because he had stolen Sullivan's shoes is believed to be Sullivan. Sullivan wakes in a rail yard, and, while dizzy and suffering amnesia from the blow to his head, strikes a railroad guard. He is sentenced to six years on a prison farm. During his time on the farm he is beaten and abused. His only joy comes when he and the other prisoners watch a Mickey Mouse cartoon at a nearby church. Sullivan then remembers who he is and to gain attention claims to be Sullivan's murderer. Once his identity is established he returns to Hollywood and announces he no longer wants to make "Oh Brother Where Art Thou?" but rather wants to make a comedy, because, as he states, "there's a lot to be said for making people laugh. Did you know that that's all some people have?"

The message of *Sullivan's Travels* is thus complex. As Maltby notes: "It satirizes Hollywood and the studio system, but endorses its capacity to bring pleasure to even the most oppressed" (*Hollywood Cinema* 51). In this regard, Sturges is unique among satirists of Hollywood during the Golden Years who rarely viewed any positives to work in Hollywood. *Sullivan's Travels* is a prime example of the "commercial aesthetic" of Hollywood film – it contains numerous attacks on Hollywood film, but is itself a refutation of criticism of the unartistic qualities of Hollywood film. Because of this, its satire is not as persuasive as that in *Barton Fink*. It does contain moments of satire, but it is more an argument towards both film producers and critics (such as the satirists of the period) that film can be artistic despite (and perhaps because of) the financial aspects of Hollywood. While Sturges

notes the dichotomy of art and money, he is more optimistic than other satirists of the period that the two can be reconciled.

The link between art and money is less evident in *The Day of the Locust*. The narrative focuses on Tod Hackett, a graduate of the Yale Fine Arts School. Like Barton (and the author of the work, Nathanael West), Tod goes for the money and becomes the painting equivalent of a Hollywood hack – set and costume designer. Tod’s friends at Yale believe he has sold out (262), yet as with many artists who came to Hollywood he believes the money he earns will enable him to pursue his art. While in Los Angeles he befriends his neighbours, Harry and Faye Greener. Harry is an old ex-vaudeville actor who now works as a door-to-door salesman, and Faye is his daughter. The other main character in the narrative is Homer Simpson, a 40-year-old bookkeeper from Iowa. Like all the men in the narrative, he falls in love with Faye, and (as is the case for the other men) the association ends badly.

The Day of the Locust however, unlike *Barton Fink*, *The Last Tycoon* or most other satires of Hollywood, only indirectly concerns the moviemaking industry. What West attacks is more the effect the industry has on the people of Los Angeles, and by extension the rest of America; an effect, West suggests, that is wholly contrary to that which exists in so-called Hollywood happy endings. One critic, Richard Simon (1993), has also detailed the parody in *The Day of the Locust* of Frank Capra’s film, *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) – a film which like most Capra movies ends happily and reinforces good homespun American values. *The Day of the Locust*, with descriptions of cock fighting, brothels, characters thinking of rape and ending with a violent mob riot, is the literary antithesis of a Capra film¹⁷. And, as Simon also

¹⁷ Capra of course wrote few of his own screenplays, and thus I am using “Capra film” in the purest auteur sense. His most common collaborator, and the screenwriter of *Meet John Doe* (1941), was Robert Riskin. While Riskin would no doubt have chafed at the term Capra-corn and Capraesque, I am using them purely as a means of short hand, and not to give Capra authorship.

explains, any narrative that has characters who are movie industry insiders venturing to a whorehouse to watch a movie, (which occurs early in the narrative) is suggesting that “movie houses are whore houses”(513). Moreover, if this analogy is taken further, then those involved in the movie business are the pimps and whores.

This aspect is made abundantly clear with the character of Faye Greener. The seventeen-year-old Faye is desired by both Tod and Homer, as well as most of the other males in the narrative. Aside from her cowboy-acting boyfriend, she is also the only one of the main characters who hopes to succeed in show business. However, she is merely a bit actress with no talent. Her only role in a movie was as an extra in a “two reel farce”(270) in which, the reader is told, “she had only one line to speak, ‘Oh, Mr Smith!’ and spoke it badly”(270). Lack of talent notwithstanding, Faye acts continuously throughout the narrative, whether playing the starlet, loving daughter, or whore. Tod at one stage remarks to himself:

... being with her was like being backstage during an amateurish, ridiculous play. From in front, the stupid lines and grotesque situations would have made him squirm with annoyance, but because he saw the perspiring stagehands and the wires... he accepted everything and was anxious for it to succeed. (316)

Tod’s relationship with Faye is based purely on sexual desire. Crucially he feels no love for her, and neither do any of the other males in the novel aside from Homer Simpson, whose feelings position him as the outsider. Tod’s lack of love for Faye is revealed early in the narrative when he asks the madam of a brothel if Faye works for her. When he discovers that she does not, he is not “really disappointed. He didn’t want Faye that way, not at least while he still had a chance some other way”(281). Later when Harry dies, Faye does start working as a prostitute, and

quickly turns from acting the role of grief-stricken daughter, to that of worldly woman who is not concerned she will lose her virginity while working as a prostitute.

Yet Faye, the struggling actress with few prospects and less talent, embodies more than merely Tod's sexual desire in the narrative; she represents Hollywood. She has no talent, boundless optimism, and will become a whore if need be. She can act sexually, yet in reality is untouchable, she gives people the feeling of importance, yet gives away none of her own feelings to others. This aspect is highlighted by her actions towards the men in the narrative. She repays any compliments by

... smiling in a peculiar, secret sort of way and running her tongue over her lips. It was one of her most characteristic gestures and very effective. It seemed to promise all sorts of undefined intimacies, yet it was really as simple and automatic as the word thanks. She used it to reward anyone for anything, no matter how unimportant. (385)

With his use of Faye, West also debunks the myth of the hard woman, so often depicted in film, who just needs the right man to set her straight. She is no whore with a heart of gold. The men in the narrative may all treat her as an object of desire, yet she has no shame either in using their feelings for her own purposes. At no stage does West ever suggest there is a niceness to this woman that is often found in similar 'hard-boiled' female characters in Frank Capra films such as *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) whose Violet Brick would have become a salacious woman jailed for immoral conduct, were it not for the friendship of George Bailey; or *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* in which Louise 'Babe' Bennett, a hard nosed newspaper reporter, initially uses Deeds for her own ends, only to fall in love with him and realise the evil of her ways; or *Mr Smith Goes Washington* (1939), whose Clarissa Saunders is the definitive hard-boiled working woman: she gets drunk, and is at home in the world of journalism and

crooked politics, but she also falls in love with one of the most innocent men in movie history in Mr Smith. In *The Day of the Locust*, one of the most innocent men in literature, Homer Simpson, falls in love with Faye Greener, who then teases him, uses him, and finally leaves him.

Just as Faye changes her identity with regards to her needs, the two professional actors in the narrative, Harry Greener and the young Adore Loomis, also create multiple identities. While Faye may act continuously, she does it consciously, Harry, on the other hand completely loses himself in the role of playing himself. He is an ex-vaudeville clown whose career high-point was a favourable review in *The Sunday Times*: “ ‘My first thought was that some producer should put Mr Greener into a big revue... But my second was that this would be a big mistake’ ”(284). Harry then tried to “get a job by inserting a small advertisement in *Variety* (‘some producer should put Mr Greener into a big revue...’ *The Times*”)”(284). Yet though he gained no success in films he continues to act while selling silver polish as a door-to-door salesman. He uses his acting skills not only to sell the polish, but also as a defence: “most people he had discovered, won’t go out of their way to punish a clown”(282). At one point, he attempts to sell some metal polish to Homer Simpson. During his sales pitch he acts sick in attempt to gain Homer’s sympathy, but when Harry actually collapses:

... he was even more surprised than Homer. He had put on this performance four or five times already that day and nothing like this had happened. He really was sick (301).

His act has so overtaken his own identity that he “wonder[s] whether he was acting or [actually] sick”(299). Harry, the old vaudeville performer, however, quickly jumps “to his feet and [begins] doing Harry Greener, poor Harry, honest Harry, well-

meaning, humble, deserving, a good husband, a model father, a faithful Christian, a loyal friend”(300), after which he again collapses, and this time he is unable to recover.

Harry dies soon after this last performance, and the child actor, Adore, replaces his role as the professional actor in the narrative. The young Adore is pushed into show business by his over-bearing mother, Maybelle Loomis, who forces him to dress as an adult, and perform songs with suggestive lyrics. Mrs Loomis, who professes to be a “raw-foodist”(361) is also a satire of the Californian guru junkie, which along with West’s depictions of people wearing sports clothes for purposes other than sport, makes this novel a rather prescient narrative. The Loomises are Homer’s neighbours, and just as Harry, the first actor of the narrative, brought Faye into Homer’s life, and thus set him on a downward spiral, Adore likewise has a sharp impact on Homer’s life.

Harry and Adore exemplify the two divergent points of an acting career, yet both attack the false identities created in Hollywood. Adore, while indeed possessing some degree of talent, seems destined to miss out on roles due to “favoritism”(361). The constant praise and exhortation of his mother suggests that even if his career were to reach some measure of success it would be at the cost of his childhood. Mrs Loomis forces him to dress and act as a gentleman; he bows when he greets Tod and Homer, and she does not admonish him for making faces at the men, but merely apologises by saying: “He thinks he’s the Frankenstein monster”(363). And indeed he is. Despite being presented as a sweet child, he is revealed at the end of the narrative as cruel. This occurs, in part, because his mother spoils him, but more so because he has no real identity. He is never the sweet little boy, unless that is the role his mother wishes him to play. His various performances therefore have no grounding. Just as

Harry does not realise if he is acting or not, Adore knows nothing other than acting. He is likely to remain undiscovered and be one of the innumerable child actors in Hollywood, who if they do gain some measure of success quickly become has-beens: over the hill at the age of eighteen. Harry's is the life which awaits Adore, one which has been spent acting for little money, but nonetheless acting. A life which has been led acting for so long that now he is unable to know the difference between artifice and truth, and, as will be shown, is a trait which affects many characters in Hollywood satires.

Of all the characters in the narrative, Homer is the least "Hollywood", and he represents the traditional American Dream of honest work bringing rewards. Unlike Tod he does not work for the studios, and unlike Harry or Faye he has no background in acting nor does he desire any involvement in the film industry. Apart from Harry, he is also the oldest character, yet he is the most naïve. After Harry's death he takes Faye in, not as his lover, but as his business partner. He "agree[s] to board and dress her until she [becomes] a star"(357). Homer's real motivation is his love for Faye and he hopes that their arrangement will one day end in their marriage. She, of course, never has any such intention, and soon invites her boyfriend, as well as his cock-fighting buddy to stay, and Homer begins his descent to madness. Faye as the representation of the Hollywood Dream thus destroys the American Dream as represented in Homer, and signals the beginnings of the former's supremacy in American culture.

As Richard Simon has noted, both Tod and Homer represent different aspects of the average American, and more specifically the two sides of Mr Deeds in *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*. They arrive in Los Angeles from, in Tod's case, the east coast, and in Homer's, Iowa, part of the heartland of America. Tod, at least, has some street

knowledge, and with his insider's view of the Hollywood industry, he is aware of the artificiality that surrounds him. Homer on the other hand is one of the most gullible characters in American literature. He is completely taken in by Faye, and his pale, weak appearance is contrasted with the masculinity of Faye's boyfriend Earle Shoop, Miguel, the Mexican cock-fighter and Abe Kusich. That he is the only male character in the novel not in attendance at the cockfight, highlights his lack of masculinity. He arrives only after the fight has long finished and gives "a little start" when he sees the "dead chicken sprawled on the carpet"(383). He has been so thoroughly emasculated by Faye that he leaves during the sexual dance Faye performs for the men after the fight. Similarly, he does not get angry when he discovers Faye in bed with Miguel, but even takes her side and tries to hide the act from Earle. Yet Homer will become violent, and it is his use of force that triggers the climax of the novel. Thus like the failure of Faye to 'go straight' after finding the arms of a good man, so too does Homer fail to triumph in the manner of similar characters in Hollywood films. He is not the poor yokel who succeeds despite (or in most cases because of) his naivety, rather he is pushed into madness by his inability to grasp the cruelty of the people he meets in Los Angeles.

One explicit similarity between *Barton Fink* and *The Day of the Locust* is the symbolism of fire in their endings. The fire of *Barton Fink* occurs in the Hotel Earle and as nothing actually seems to burn and no one appears to notice the flames, it symbolises that it is only Hell for Barton. The fire occurs with Charlie's return – now in full Madman Mundt mode – and suggests once again the link between Charlie and Hell. Yet if Charlie is a devil, he is a very curious one. He kills the anti-Semitic detectives, and rescues Barton with an act of inhuman strength. He is in effect more an angel than devil, as he gives Barton the inspiration to write, rescues him, and even

wrestles with him as did the angel with Jacob in Genesis. He appears the embodiment of the devil as fallen angel. Perhaps, as Michael Dunne suggests, it really does not matter what Charlie represents, what is important is that despite experiencing the inferno in the hotel and then being sentenced to the purgatory of being able to write but not being read, Barton walks along and sits on the Californian paradise of the beach and looks happily out to sea. Thus Barton in the end endures his ride through hell, and achieves a sense of peace.

Barton Fink has an aspect which is lacking in *The Day of the Locust* and other satires of the period: it is a film, not a novel or play. As a film, the satire of Hollywood is by necessity different to that of a novel or play. Plays and novels can view film as a low-brow or soulless medium, yet such a tack cannot be followed by a filmic satire without opening itself up to charges of hypocrisy. The Coens value film because it is their artistic medium of choice. As such, *Barton Fink* does not merely satirise the quaint longing for the Golden Days, but also those who, like Barton and Bill Mayhew, do not respect film as art. The Coens imply that working in Hollywood means selling your soul to the devil only if you believe, as do Barton, Bill Mayhew, and Tod Hackett, that you are selling your soul. And if that is the case, then you deserve all you get.

The climax of *The Day of the Locust* is not as optimistic as that of *Barton Fink*, and displays West's greater bitterness towards Hollywood. The narrative ends with Tod Hackett caught in a riot of people at a film premiere. West describes the emotion of the large crowd:

There was a continuous roar of catcalls, laughter and yells, pierced occasionally by a scream... At the sight of their heroes and heroines, the crowd would turn demoniac. Some little gesture, either too pleasing

or too offensive, would start it moving and then nothing but machine guns would stop it. Individually the purpose of its members might simply be to get a souvenir, but collectively it would be grab and rend. (409)

West wonderfully exploits this sinister nature of the crowd. A young man acting as the emcee for the premiere, announces over a microphone:

‘What a crowd, folks! What a crowd! There must be ten thousand excited, screaming fans outside Kahn’s Persian tonight. The police can’t hold them. Here listen to the roar’... ‘It’s a bedlam folks. A veritable bedlam! What excitement!’(410)

Thus the tension in the crowd is channelled by the emcee to ensure the people will react with unrestrained excitement on the stars’ arrival. The emcee’s performance suggests he does not care that the crowd’s size and demeanour could lead to violence. He merely wishes to excite the crowd into a state of unreleased tension; a tension that he hopes will be released into ecstasy when the stars arrive.

The tension is released when, in a park near the theatre, Adore Loomis teases Homer Simpson. Homer, in an almost comatose state due to his treatment by Faye, ignores the boy until Adore hits him with a rock, whereupon Homer chases after and kicks him repeatedly. Here West displays the ability of the mob to “grab and rend”. Having witnessed Homer attack Adore, people in the crowd charge towards the pair to help Adore, only to trample on another boy in the process. As others in the crowd mistakenly think the stars have arrived the situation quickly turns into a riot. People surge in various directions; those in the middle of the crowd are crushed, while others are indiscriminately attacked. Tod, who is caught up in the crowd, sees a young girl whose dress is torn being molested by an old man (417).

However, people in the riot appear to enjoy the experience. One woman jokes about the men who are groping her, saying: “this is a regular free-for-all”(418). Others laugh when someone recounts the story of a man in St Louis who “ripped up a girl with scissors” and they laugh even harder when a man announces, “that’s the wrong tool [to use]”(418). In a narrative which contains detailed depictions of cock-fighting and drunken fights, and in which one of the most sympathetic characters is a foul-mouthed, money-swindling dwarf, this final scene remains startling for its savagery. What makes the power of the scene even greater is the awareness that these acts are perpetrated by a group merely waiting to see film stars.

During the riot Tod, whose ribs are cracked and leg badly stomped on, thinks of his unfinished masterpiece *The Burning of Los Angeles*. Once free of the mob, he looks over the scene and can see “all the rough charcoal strokes with which he had blocked it out on the big canvas”(419). The flames Tod sees are a psychotic vision, and at one point he even stands “on a chair and worked at the flames in an upper corner of the canvas...”(420) as though he was actually painting the picture. Soon after, he is taken by police to hospital. As he sits in the back of the police car, he laughs maniacally and “imitate[s] the [police] siren as loud as he could”(421).

Thus, a group waiting to see movie stars turns into a savage riot. Faye Greener, the girl who wishes to be a star, ends up in bed as a whore and later with a sleazy Mexican cock-fighter; Tod, who dreams of painting a masterpiece, goes mad; and Homer, the middle-aged, mild-mannered man from middle-class America, ends up mercilessly beating a child. The effect of Hollywood, West suggests, is thus vastly contrary to the stereotypical Hollywood happy ending. It is a savage and violent ending that suggests a hidden darkness behind the glamour and light of Hollywood.

The connection with Hollywood has no positive impact for any of the characters, and the climax is a damning indictment of Hollywood's impact on society.

Barton Fink and *The Day of the Locust* take aim at the target of Hollywood in different manners yet with similar objectives. Both suggest a sinister undertone to the Hollywood dream factory: West, through the implicit connection between Hollywood and prostitution, and the final savage riot; the Coens with the sinister Hotel Earle, and the analogy of Barton's journey in Hollywood with a trip through hell. Though West was of course not looking back, but making a statement about Hollywood and the America of his day, both *The Day of the Locust* and *Barton Fink* depict a Hollywood that is very similar to that which is attacked by contemporary satirists. West exposed the sham of Hollywood: how those within the Hollywood system and their influence are so diametrically opposite to the values depicted in the classic Hollywood films.

Barton Fink, on the other hand, uses stereotypes to satirise the Golden Years of Hollywood and to reveal them as artistically barren as contemporary Hollywood, and thus ill deserving of praise or favourable comparison. It was a time when a producer could tell Barton "writers come and go, [but] we always need Indians". While those years may have also been the era of films of the order of *Casablanca*, *Citizen Kane* and *Gone With the Wind*, the aura that the Golden Years of Hollywood holds, is for West and the Coens, to use Barton's words, "as phoney as a three dollar bill".

1.2 F. Scott Fitzgerald and Budd Schulberg

Although unfinished, Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* remains, along with *The Day of the Locust*, the most widely known of the Hollywood novels of the 1930s. Critics' opinions on the work remain largely disparate; some like Kingsley Widner refer to it as Fitzgerald's "not very good romantic-realistic Hollywood novel"(1999), while

others reflect John Dos Passos's view that the work represents "the beginnings of a great novel"(qtd. in Bruccoli lxxvii). Regardless of critical reception (for any critical judgement on an unfinished work must by its very nature be part guesswork), the novel stands as one of the best narratives of Hollywood's Golden Years written by a novelist working as a screenwriter during that period. While writing the work, Fitzgerald read some of the drafts of *The Day of the Locust* (Maurer 139), however, unlike West, Fitzgerald focuses solely on the Hollywood industry and those within the system. Not for him is the story about those who have "come to Hollywood to die", but rather that Hollywood itself is dying. Within this premise, Fitzgerald uses the same satiric themes as West and the Coens: the soullessness of Hollywood, the reduction of art to part of a production process, and the decline of the American Dream and the rise of its Hollywood counterpart.

The Last Tycoon, unlike *The Day of the Locust*, has only one main character. Monroe Stahr is the novel¹⁸; all other characters are represented by their relation to Stahr, and although Stahr is a producer, he is more creative and artistically driven than either the writers or the actors. Indeed the writers in this tale are depicted as largely childlike and dependent on the paternal figure of Stahr. Yet while Fitzgerald's representation of Stahr is hardly a cutting satire of Hollywood executives, he does represent Stahr as (largely) insular and uncaring of the world outside of Hollywood. During negotiations with the newly established Writers Guild, Stahr asks the narrator of the novel, Celia, to arrange a meeting with him and "a Communist Party member" and asks her to "tell him to bring one of his books along"(118). He then prepares for the meeting by "running off the Russian Revolutionary films that he had in his film library... and... he had the script department get him up a two-page 'treatment' of the

¹⁸ Indeed so central is Stahr to the narrative that one of Fitzgerald's working titles for the novel was *Stahr: A Romance* (Bruccoli xiv-xv).

Communist Manifesto”(119). After such ‘exhaustive’ research it is little wonder the meeting ends badly. Yet the incident is one of a number that highlight the detachment of those who work in Hollywood from the rest of America and the world.

The novel begins with a plane trip from the east coast of America that pointedly disassociates those on the plane from the rest of America. Fitzgerald uses these characters to satirise the insular nature of Hollywood. The narrator, Celia (who is the daughter of Stahr’s partner, Pat Brady) notes: “We don’t go for strangers in Hollywood unless they wear a sign saying that their axe has been thoroughly ground elsewhere, and in that case it’s not going to fall on our necks – in other words, unless they’re a celebrity” (11). Those on board the plane (including Stahr) are all industry insiders and the descent of their plane into Los Angeles sets the mood for the rest of the narrative: “coming down into the Glendale airport, into the warm darkness”(21). The rest of the narrative takes place within this “warm darkness”, yet it is a time of change, and Fitzgerald uses the decline in power of Stahr as a metaphor for the decline of the Hollywood system; a decline that occurs more than anything due to the encroachment of the outside world into Hollywood through the guise of the Writers Guild.

Soon after their return, Los Angeles suffers an earthquake which symbolises the beginning of the end for Stahr (and a ‘shake-up’ of the Hollywood system). Immediately after the quake he sees Kathleen Moore, a woman with whom he will have an affair. Later in a meeting with the heads of the studio and its financiers, he announces: “It’s time we made a picture that’ll lose some money. Write it off as good will”(48). Coupled with an earlier meeting with two writers where Stahr commands them to re-write a film to make the heroine implausibly perfect – virginal, yet sexual – Fitzgerald presents Stahr as the perfect studio boss, at once both artistically driven,

yet also knowledgeable of the realities of the business of moviemaking. As the narrative continues these abilities falter, evidenced by his drunken fight with the union organiser, Brimmer, that ends the manuscript, which in turn, Fitzgerald's notes tell us, leads to Stahr losing control over the running of the studio and his eventual death (Brucoli lx).

In many respects, *The Last Tycoon* is the first of the novels and films to romanticise the Golden Years of the 1930s and 1940s. Although Fitzgerald's story eulogises the studio system and the age of the producer kings such as Irving Thalberg, (on whom Stahr is obviously based¹⁹), and David O Selznick, this eulogy is satirical in nature. Stahr's brilliance is exaggerated to absurd lengths, in one scene, he views the rushes of the day's shooting and gives his comments and commands; and they are unquestioned:

The oracle had spoken. There was nothing to question or argue. Stahr must be right always, not most of the time, but always – or the structure would melt down like gradual butter. (56)

But despite Stahr's position as all-knowing, Fitzgerald's notes make it clear, that Stahr's word would no longer have the weight it once did, and nor would he have the power over production. Thus the Hollywood industry is so corrupt that even a 'perfect' studio executive will fail. As Fitzgerald writes in his outline for the novel, Stahr's death in a plane crash would symbolise the end of the era of production kings:

I have set it safely in a period of five years ago to obtain detachment, but now that Europe is tumbling about our ears this also seems to be

¹⁹ It is however not merely a fictionalised version of Thalberg. As Brucoli notes: "Stahr is not a direct portrait of Thalberg; the events in the novel do not duplicate his life"(xxv). Thalberg, however, undeniably inspired the character of Stahr. In a synopsis sent to Kenneth Littauer, the editor of *Colliers*, Fitzgerald wrote: "... - Milton Stahr (who is Irving Thalberg – and *this is my great secret*)"(qtd. in Brucoli xxxi). Yet given the difference between Stahr and Thalberg – such as Stahr being single and Thalberg married – there is little to be gained from reading the novel as a roman à clef.

for the best. It is an escape into a lavish, romantic past that perhaps will not come again into our time. (qtd. in Brucoli xxxiv)

The above quotation appears to show that Fitzgerald believed the period he depicts as worthy of nostalgia, yet, as Walter Wells notes, a close examination of the narrative reveals a portrayal of Hollywood which is “brutally negative”(119), and it is on this score that Fitzgerald’s satire is most apparent. This is especially so of his portrayal of writers in Hollywood, whom Fitzgerald depicts as altogether unworthy of respect. The main writer in the narrative, Wylie White is an alcoholic who fawns over Stahr at the beginning of the novel, and who despite earning a salary of \$1500 a week, writes nothing that is viewed favourably by Stahr. After watching the rushes of a film written by White, Stahr asks: “Is he sober?”(55). On discovering that he is, Stahr employs four more writers on the scene, thus bringing to fruition the earlier prediction of White when he tells Cecilia: “He [Stahl] may have ten writers working ahead of me or behind me, a system which he so thoroughly invented”(19). In fact, Stahr’s use of the writers as a production line encapsulates his regard for them. As he says to White: “[it’s] a question of merchandise... I’m a merchant. I want to buy what’s in your mind” (17). And then just to make sure White does not view this as praise, Stahr informs him that

you writers and artists poop out and get all mixed up, and somebody has to come in and straighten you out... You seem to take things so personally... always thinking people are important – especially yourselves. You just ask to be kicked around. (17)

Throughout the novel, writers are viewed condescendingly, which satirically exposes the industry’s regard for writers, and the incompetence of many writers within the industry. Whether it be the English writer Boxley’s inability to write a

scene, or the false indignation of writers such as the Marquands, the husband and wife team whom Stahr takes off a movie because they are outraged to discover they were not the only ones working on the script, Fitzgerald depicts the writer with contempt. Indeed, once Stahr tells the Marquands they will be put to work on another picture, they beg to be allowed to stay on the initial picture as they see “a quicker credit, even though it was shared”(58). The other characters in the narrative also look down on the writers, indeed the first mention of writers is a negative comment by a washed up studio executive: “There’s a writer for you...knows everything and at the same time he knows nothing”(12). Cecilia’s reaction on discovering that Wylie White is a writer also highlights the regard of the writer in Hollywood:

I like writers – because if you ask a writer anything, you usually get an answer – still it belittled him in my eyes. Writers aren’t people exactly. Or if they’re any good, they’re trying a whole *lot* of people trying so hard to be one person. (12)²⁰

Later she notes that she

grew up thinking that writer and secretary were the same, except that a writer usually smelled of cocktails and came more often at meals. They were spoken of the same way when they were not around – except for a species called playwrights, who came from the East. These were treated with respect if they did not stay long – if they did, they sunk with the other into the white collar class. (100)

Yet the writers, despite these ‘brutally negative’ views of them, are crucial to the narrative. Indeed, aside from Stahr’s romance with Kathleen Moore, the

²⁰ This last comment is actually Fitzgerald’s own view of writers, as he once commented: “there was never a good biography of a good novelist. He’s too many people if he’s any good” (qtd. in Callahan 376).

unionising of the writers is the main narrative thread. The creation of the Writers Guild leads to Stahr meeting and fighting Brimmer, which in turn leads to the short lived affair between Stahr and Celia, and Stahr's ultimate ruin. Thus while Stahr's decline at the studio is masterminded by his partner, Billy Brady (a characterisation of Louis B Mayer), his ultimate fall comes from his inability to control the writers. With this result, Fitzgerald gives the writers in Hollywood ultimate power and enacts a wish-fulfilment on his part. Fitzgerald's time in Hollywood was one of emasculation as a writer²¹, and the narrative line of the Writers Guild providing the catalyst for Stahr's end (and by implication the Hollywood studio system's) reads as a final act of revenge by an author disgusted with himself for having taken the money (and had he not died most certainly would have continued to do so).

Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* also has the creation of the Writers Guild at the heart of its narrative²². In Schulberg's novel however, the enterprising and ethically-bereft protagonist, Sammy Glick uses the guild for his own purposes. In Schulberg's narrative, Sammy's ability to exploit the guild ends with him assuming a position similar to that held by Stahr, whereas in Fitzgerald's tale it is Stahr's inability to adjust to the growing power of the writers which leads to his demise. That the two novels should have the creation of the guild as central to their themes is unsurprising given that Fitzgerald had read and praised Schulberg's novel, and both authors were working in Hollywood during the time the Writers Guild was formed. It was a significant moment in the history of filmmaking in Hollywood, one

²¹ Despite living in California for the last four years of his life, Fitzgerald received only one screenwriting credit: *Three Comrades* (1938).

²² Chip Rhode's article, "Ambivalence on the Left: Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?*" offers an excellent history of the formation of the Writers Guild, as well as placing the events of the novel within the historical context.

that would have repercussions for the next two decades²³. Throughout the 1930s, many aspects of the filmmaking process, from writers to actors and directors, became unionised. This, together with the Superior Court of California ruling in 1944 that studios could no longer suspend actors for refusal to take on certain roles (Schatz 318), signalled the end of the studio system and the shift in power from producers to directors and actors. No longer would the producer, as was Stahr, be a virtual puppeteer. Directors such as Hitchcock would begin to demand and receive say over the final cut, and actors began to be paid percentage of the film's gross (Schatz 396)²⁴. While it is folly to suggest the power of the producer was at an end, no longer would they rule like Tsars.

Fitzgerald's and Schulberg's use of the effects of the Writers Guild for different purposes highlights the difference in their aims: Fitzgerald to show the end of an era, Schulberg to show the beginning. *What Makes Sammy Run?* while ostensibly a satire of the Hollywood that Schulberg had known since his childhood²⁵, is also prescient for detailing the change in the hierarchy of the Hollywood studio. Sammy is not a financial expert, nor does he have a great knowledge of art and film. Schulberg set a clear target for his satire, and there is no sense of his holding a grudging respect for Sammy or his type. Unlike Fitzgerald's portrayal of Stahr, Sammy Glick at no point struggles in vain against the world outside Hollywood. Sammy is completely without principles, a true pragmatist who can become "spokesman for the [Writers] Guild elite without ... ever having written a line" (*What*

²³ Indeed, the three founding members of the Screen Writers Guild: John Lawson, Lester Cole and Samuel Ornitz, were all part of the 'Hollywood 10' and were jailed and blacklisted for refusing to answer questions before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1947 (Hamilton 103, 292).

²⁴ Actors would only begin to receive a percentage of the profits in the 1950s. James Stewart was the first actor to have this arrangement for his role in the film *Bend of the River* (1952) (Schatz 469-71).

²⁵ His father, B.P. Schulberg, was the managing director of production at Paramount Studios in the 1920s and 1930s.

Makes Sammy Run? 148). The portrayal of Sammy is an amalgam of those Schulberg had met while growing up, and later, while working, in Hollywood.

While Sammy's character is unchanging, rarely does Schulberg's portrayal of Sammy appear exaggerated. Indeed, Schulberg's ability to capture the mannerisms and thought processes of the corporate-ladder climbing Hollywood mover and shaker has led in recent years to the novel being read minus the satirical implications.

Schulberg in his afterword in the 1978 edition of the novel notes that readers

... come up to shake my hand because 'I learned so much from your book; it helped me get ahead – the more I read the more I wanted to be Sammy'... being called a Sammy is no longer an insult. ("Afterword to the Penguin Edition" 251)

The reason for such a reaction is that despite the ever-moralising presence of the narrator, Al Manheim, Sammy succeeds. The only comeuppance he receives is at the climax when he discovers that his wife has cuckolded him. Nevertheless, career-wise, Sammy thrives. Even when there appear times when he might falter, such as during the Guild negotiations, or when it becomes obvious that he has not written any of the screenplays for which he has taken credit, Sammy always comes out on top. At no point does Schulberg suggest that such actions will ultimately end in failure, ruin or eternal damnation. For all his actual lack of writing ability, Sammy is not, as is the case with the character of George Lewis in Kaufmann and Hart's play, *Once in a Lifetime*, a bumbling fool who succeeds despite (and perhaps because of) his own stupidity. Sammy is the smartest guy on the block; always a step ahead, yet he is so utterly concerned with the ends rather than the means, that he at one stage is flattered by a comparison with Hitler and Mussolini (71).

Schulberg's exposition of the workings of Hollywood has less in common with *The Last Tycoon* than with *The Pat Hobby Stories*, a series of short stories written by Fitzgerald in the 1930s. Pat Hobby, like Sammy Glick, is another in the line of fictional protagonists of Hollywood types who do not conform to the idealised vision of Hollywood glamour. Hobby is a hack writer in every sense of the phrase, his few attributes are his ability to get on the studio lot, his lack of scruples with regard to stealing other writers' ideas, and an uncanny resemblance to Orson Welles. He has worked in the industry "fifteen years on and off - chiefly off during the last five"(36), and once earned \$2000 a week, but now is lucky to make \$250 (73). He is in effect Sammy Glick without luck and undaunted ambition. Whereas Sammy Glick at times seems intent on total domination of Hollywood, all Hobby desires is the ability to earn money without requiring anything approaching effort. Yet despite the absence of any real satire of the industry *The Pat Hobby Stories* display, as do *The Last Tycoon* and *Barton Fink*, the insularity of Hollywood. This is reflected in Hobby's belief that "Orson Welles belonged with the rest of the snobs back in New York"(65) as well as Hobby's assertion that "they [the producers] don't want authors. They want writers – like me"(159).

The common satirical theme of Hollywood as a place and business devoid of art is reversed with Pat Hobby. Fitzgerald, whose own experience of Hollywood was bitter, uses a protagonist who delights in not being artistic. Pointedly, Fitzgerald ensures that almost all references to writing for the movies are accompanied by the amount of money the screenwriter earns per week; thus positing writing in Hollywood as a per-hour type of employment rather than an artistic process. For Hobby "what people you sat with at lunch was more important in getting along than what you dictated in your office. This was no art, as he often said – this was an industry"(43).

Thus while Fitzgerald's protagonist here is a true Hollywood insider rather than an outsider like Sammy Glick, they both display the shallow and venal nature of Hollywood.

Schulberg's *The Disenchanted* further displays this aspect of Hollywood, with its semi-autobiographical narrative of a young screenwriter and a fading novelist working together on the screenplay of a lightweight Hollywood film in the 1930s. Schulberg had actually worked with Fitzgerald on the screenplay of *Winter Carnival* during which time Fitzgerald was fired for a drunken display while scouting location at Dartmouth College (Murray 195). *The Disenchanted* is an obvious fictionalised account of this experience, with Shep Stearns and Manley Halliday representing respectively, Schulberg and Fitzgerald. Less a satire than a tragi-comedy, *The Disenchanted* is none-the-less another portrayal of Hollywood as the destroyer of artists, and the purveyor of lies. As with *What Makes Sammy Run?* Schulberg draws on his experience of growing up in Hollywood, and satirises the superficiality of the industry. At one point the young novice screenwriter, Shep, realises that he now replies to a woman: " 'I love you' ... automatically as six months ago he would have said 'Thanks'"(14).

The hyperbolic praise and lack of emotional depth is a constant: people are addressed as 'sweetheart', films are referred to as 'terrific' (Halliday's agent tells him his script "has to be *only* terrific"[my italics](72)), and with this superficiality is a distinct lack of creativity among the filmmakers. Shep and Halliday, due greatly it must be noted to the pair's constant drinking, are unable to come up with any sort of storyline apart from ones rehashed from previous films. Their producer, Victor Milgrim, also lacks any creative spark; his zeal is moneymaking and personal aggrandising. While on the train from New York City to Webster College, Milgrim

notices young women and attempts to induce a number of them to go to Hollywood. He calls it his “search for freshness”(211) yet, as Shep notes, he does not view the girls as new, but as new copies of established stars. The entire trip to Webster College as well, though notionally done for the purposes of scouting locations for the film and for Shep and Halliday to soak in the atmosphere, is, in fact, little more than an attempt by Milgrim to obtain an honorary doctorate.

The narrative thus has two objectives: to detail the decline and fall of Manley Halliday, and to highlight the hypocrisy involved in the Hollywood industry. The first of these is the more successful, as Schulberg’s condemnation of Hollywood is lessened through the obvious link between Halliday’s decline and his alcoholism. Indeed well over half the narrative contains Halliday vacillating between a drunken stupor and a sober torpor. The negative effect of Hollywood on Halliday is however, immediately apparent. The greatest novelist of the 1920s is forced to collaborate with an inexperienced writer just out of college, and the forced trip to Webster College is not one that Halliday is fit to undertake and leads directly to his falling off the wagon. The screenplay he and Shep are hired to write degrades the great skill of Halliday, whose position is further degraded when they discover neither he nor Shep have a room booked at Webster²⁶.

Schulberg, however, is not so blind as to ignore the failings of his protagonists. The only reason Shep and Halliday are in Hollywood is money. Shep views his original screenplay without any pride, merely as a “means to an end” that will ensure he can marry his girlfriend and not have to work for his future father-in-law (10). Similarly, Halliday is working on the script purely to alleviate his \$20,000

²⁶ After the actual trip undertaken by Schulberg and Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald wrote to Schulberg sending his best wishes and apology: “I won’t forget the real pleasure of knowing you, and your patience as I got more and more out of hand under the strain. In retrospect, going East under those circumstances seems one of the silliest mistakes I ever made” (*Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald* 579).

debt. As with Barton Fink, neither Shep nor Halliday can get too high on the horse of the sanctity of authors. Indeed Halliday at one point blames Hollywood for the decline of a 1920s playwright, yet then admits that the real reason the playwright (and other similar writers) failed is the inability to resist the temptation of the Hollywood money (186).

Writing of the authors in Hollywood during this period, Ben Hecht noted that many struggled because of the interference of studio executives, and that most were prepared to accept changes to their scripts by a raise in salary. Hecht states that “half of all the movie writers argue [with the studio executives]. The other half writhe in silence, and the psychoanalyst’s couch or the liquor bottle claim them both”(473). His reminiscences of Hollywood depict the importance, and corrupting influence, of money on their art. He was enticed to Hollywood by a telegram from his friend Herman Mankiewicz stating: “Millions are to be grabbed out here and your only competition is idiots”(qtd. in Hecht 466). Yet, Hecht soon realised that in studio executives’ minds “art was a synonym for bankruptcy”(471). His memoirs reveal a man who views his time in Hollywood with disgust. Like Halliday, Fitzgerald and even West, he knows that he prostituted himself:

While walking its familiar streets for what seemed to me a last time, a mild hallucination came to me. I stood in a mouldy, once gaudy saloon.... Music started up, and a siren came in through the swinging doors and stood ogling me. I knew her name – Madame Hollywood. I rose and said good-by to this strumpet in her bespangled red gown; good-by to her lavender-painted cheeks... A wench with flaccid tits and a sandpaper skin under her silks; shined up and whistling like a

whore in a park; covered with stink like a railroad station pissery and swinging a dead ass in the moonlight. (514)

The Disenchanted continues the view of Hollywood as the scourge of the American Dream: a place where the Dream reconstitutes itself as a struggle for wealth and fame with no respect for ethics or effort – the Hollywood Dream. One dramatic satire, *Once in a Lifetime*, again regards Hollywood as artistic hell, the place where the Dream is corrupted. While George Kaufman and Moss Hart, two staunchly Broadway partisan playwrights, take much glee portraying Hollywood as a place where intelligence is, if anything, a liability²⁷, they do not so much attack the Hollywood system, as the medium of film itself.

The narrative involves a trio of “bum actors” from New York moving to Hollywood immediately after the release of the first talkie, *The Jazz Singer* (1927). They pass themselves off as elocution experts, with the most naïve of the three, George, presented to Hollywood executives as Dr. George Lewis. Through a series of misunderstandings, George becomes the producer of a film. Kaufmann and Hart’s disdain for the industry is made clear as George’s film succeeds critically and commercially despite (and because) George has used the wrong script, and because he has absolutely no idea how to make a film.

The two playwrights make no secret of their belief in the inferiority of film over plays, and their belief that this would be displayed by the introduction of talkies. As the studio head Gogauer at one point notes:

Why did they have to go and make pictures talk for? Things were going along fine. You couldn’t stop making money – even if you turned out a *good* picture you made money. (43)

²⁷ Both Kaufmann and Hart largely resisted the lure of Hollywood in the 1930s, although a number of their plays (and those written by Kaufmann alone) were adapted for the screen. Most notable is the winner of the 1938 Academy Award for best picture, *You Can’t Take it with You* (1938).

Their disdain for the craft of Hollywood screenwriting is reflected in the fact that the script George uses to make his film is one he pulled out of a waste paper bin.

Kaufman and Hart also detail the lack of any substance behind Hollywood films of the time through the conversation involving a coat check girl and a cigarette girl at a Hollywood restaurant:

COAT CHECK GIRL. Say, I got a tip for you Kate.

CIGARETTE GIRL. Yah?

COAT CHECK GIRL. I was out to Universal today – I heard they was going to do a shipwreck picture.

CIGARETTE GIRL. Not enough sound. They're making it a college picture now – glee clubs.

COAT CHECK GIRL. That was this morning. It's French Revolution now.

CIGARETTE GIRL. Yah? There ought to be something in that for me.

COAT CHECK GIRL. Sure! There's a call out for prostitutes for Wednesday.

CIGARETTE GIRL. Say, I'm going out there! Remember that prostitute I did for Paramount.

COAT CHECK GIRL. Yah, but that was silent. This is for talking prostitutes. (31)

The fact that George Lewis succeeds in the Hollywood system despite a complete lack of intelligence or even a vague idea of how films are produced, reveals that Kaufman and Hart would view the term 'Golden Years of Hollywood' with much irony. In fact George's initial success in Hollywood occurs mostly because he tells an executive: "This darling industry of yours is the most God-awful thing I've ever run

into”(75) – a sentiment with which Fitzgerald, West and Schulberg would have much sympathy.

* * *

The satirists of the Golden years of Hollywood primarily attack the hypocrisy of Hollywood, yet beneath this lies a satire of the American Dream and of its transformation into the Hollywood Dream. All the satirists discussed in this chapter show the Dream as either elusive, or an illusion. When the characters pursue life, liberty and happiness in Hollywood they invariably come to grief. Barton Fink seeks money in Hollywood and becomes trapped in Hell with Madman Mundt. Homer Simpson seeks happiness in Los Angeles, and is driven insane by the constant teasing of Faye Greener. Tod Hackett seeks fortune and fame in Hollywood, but sees his dreams of painting a masterpiece vanish in the metaphorical flames his mind imagines after the riot. Monroe Stahr is successful, apparently the epitome of the American Dream fulfilled, yet he too seeks happiness, this time of the non-financial variety. His attempts to pursue Kathleen Moore, and in turn a contentment in his life ends (according to Fitzgerald’s notes) with his loss of occupation and life. Sammy Glick, though he attains what he supposes is his dream life in Hollywood ends with his wife openly having an affair, and his fear over the rise of other younger men in the studio, who “would spring up to harass him, to threaten him and finally to overtake him”(246).

Happiness (both materially and psychologically), which is the crucial aspect of the American Dream, is thus constantly denied the protagonists in satires of the Golden Years of Hollywood, and the impact of The Great Depression is of significant importance. The depression is most obviously present in *The Day of the Locust*. As he walks around the streets of Los Angeles, Tod Hackett views the people who “have

come to California to die” (261). While similar to the Oklahoma farmers in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), who also in effect come to California to die, the people Tod views are obviously urbanites rather than the rural Joads and their kin. They are cast-offs from the middle-class, and West describes them as

people of a different type [than those obviously working]. Their clothing was sombre and badly cut, bought from mail-order houses. While the others moved rapidly, darting in stores and cocktail bars, they loitered on the corners or stood with their backs to the shop windows and stared at everyone who passed. When their stare was returned, their eyes were filled with hatred. (261)

Despite his friends’ belief that he has “sold out” (262) Tod still hopes to paint these people. Now that he lives in Los Angeles he views them as the real people, and he desires to never paint a “fat red barn, old stone wall or sturdy Nantucket fisherman...” (261).

Tod’s attitude, in this respect, is vastly different to that of the Hollywood studios. The studios, by and large, ignored the depression as a context for their movies. If the Depression was used, it was used merely as a backdrop for a romantic comedy such as *It Happened One Night* (1934). Hollywood’s lack of focus on the decade-long recession is highlighted by the winners of Best Picture in the annual Academy Awards. Of the ten there were four historical dramas; one western (*Cimarron*); one musical (*The Great Ziegfeld*); two Frank Capra comedies; one Noel Coward adaptation; and *Grand Hotel*, which was set in “Berlin’s plushiest, most expensive hotel” (“*Grand Hotel*” 2004)²⁸. Similarly the ten biggest box-office earning

²⁸ The 1930s was by no means an atypical decade as far as content of the Best Picture winner is concerned. Of the ten “Best Picture” winners in the 1990s only two (*The Silence of the Lambs* and *American Beauty*) were of contemporary settings. All the other winners are set in a period ranging from 13th century Scotland in *Braveheart* to the cold war period of *Forrest Gump*. The greatest change in

films of the decade included the hugely successful historical romance, *Gone With the Wind*; *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*; three musicals; *Frankenstein*; an adventure yarn set in the Congo (*Ingagi*); an adaptation of *Tom Sawyer*; Frank Capra's *You Can't take it with You*; and the historical drama, *San Francisco* (*Box Office Data for 1930s*). Thus Hollywood films of the era largely ignored contemporary issues.

The argument of the studios was, as it has always been when attacked by critics over the content of Hollywood films, that they merely produce what the public desires to see, as Richard Maltby notes: "Hollywood has constantly asserted that the movies belong to their public rather than their producers" (*Hollywood Cinema* 61). That is, filmmaking is business not art, and if realistic, dramatic, contemporary films are what the public desires to see – and more importantly pay to see – then that is what they will produce. David Bordwell (1985) argues that Hollywood films contain a commercial aesthetic in which the financial needs of studios and the artistic desires of filmmakers "work together to create a distinct film style"(11). Richard Maltby continues Bordwell's analysis and states: "taking Hollywood seriously involves acknowledging the cultural importance of the entertainment industry and examining its products for what they are, rather than evaluating them according to criteria borrowed from other critical traditions" (*Hollywood Cinema* 8). Bordwell also notes the difference between so called 'art film' and Hollywood film by writing: "characters in Hollywood film have clear-cut traits and objectives [whereas] the characters of the art cinema lack precise desires and goals" (373). The argument that "the symbiotic relationship between 'art' and 'business' in Hollywood is central to understanding its

content is thus more to do with genre than setting: in the 1930s four of the films are comedy/ musical, in the 1990s only *Shakespeare in Love* and *Forrest Gump* can be classed as comedic.

The top ten grossing film in North America over the past decade also betray a similarity to those of the 1930s: two animated films, one historical romance, six fantasy/sci fi adventures, and *The Passion of the Christ* (*Box Office Mojo* 2004). Admittedly, perhaps the greatest film depiction of the Great Depression – John Ford's adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* – did appear in 1940, and was nominated for seven Academy Awards.

commercial aesthetic”(Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* 30) is helpful for critics to analyse Hollywood film, yet there is little evidence that satirists of Hollywood in the Golden Years considered Hollywood films from such a point of view. When Hecht writes “art was a synonym for bankruptcy” (471) he is viewing art – as did most satirists of Hollywood, studio executives – from a more traditional perspective than do Bordwell or Maltby.

The studios’ argument that they merely present that which the public desires, and are thus passive agents, ignores the fact that the studios’ productions create a self-perpetuating cycle, whereby the studios produce films only in genres which have been profitable, thus insuring against risk taking. Fitzgerald understood this fact when he wrote in *The Last Tycoon*, of the executives’ shock towards Stahr when he announces that he will produce “a quality picture” that will make a quarter of a million dollar loss. What appears like a demonstration of Stahr’s force of will and power is ultimately the beginning of his end as head of production.

In *The Last Tycoon*, it is not the pursuit of fiscal happiness that brings about the undoing of Stahr, but his pursuit of an artistic dream. Throughout the narrative Fitzgerald portrays Stahr as an exemplar of the Hollywood system: equal part artist and businessman. For Stahr to maintain, and indeed pursue, happiness he requires this balance, as well as the reconnection with his dead wife, through the guise of Kathleen. Yet as the narrative of *The Last Tycoon* develops, the elusiveness of his happiness manifests itself until the climax of Stahr’s death (unwritten but envisioned by Fitzgerald). The narrative makes little reference to the time preceding the events within the narrative, and thus we have little knowledge of whether Stahr was happy at one time. We can postulate that until the death of his wife he was in a state of near perfection in the eyes of most: happily married, professionally successful, engaged in

an industry known for glamour and excitement, and above all respected and powerful. By the end he would be without a mistress or wife and professionally finished; the glamour and excitement symbolised as a sham with Johnny Swanson (a washed up cowboy-actor) mistakenly asked to be one of Stahr's pallbearers. Stahr may have once attained the Dream, yet Fitzgerald asserts it is not sustainable.

Fitzgerald suggests that the American Dream, though elusive, does exist. This however is at variance with the view of Nathanael West. For him, the dreams of those in *The Day of the Locust* will never be attained, and to illustrate his point West uses films as the catalyst for these failed dreams. Faye Greener's dreams only concern those within the Hollywood framework. Her desire for success is actually a desire for the success that exists only in Hollywood films. She announces to Tod Hackett that she has an idea to earn money: "... I've got some swell ideas for pictures. All you got to do is write them up and then we'll sell them to studios" (318). Tod notices that the actual plan is "very vague" (318), and that Faye is more concerned with the results of the plan than the actual work involved with obtaining the results:

He realized as she went on that she was manufacturing another dream to add to her already very thick pack. When she finally got through spending the money, he asked her to tell him the idea he was to 'write up,' keeping all trace of irony out of his voice. (318)

Tod discovers that Faye's ideas for film stories are largely derivative of stock B-Grade pictures: a south sea tale, a backstage story – "they're making a lot of them this year"(320). As with her overall plan, she is more interested in the beginnings of the stories than the conclusions. Yet Faye survives, not because she attains her dream, nor because she does not believe in the dream, but because her role within the narrative is symbolic of Hollywood and the Hollywood Dream. Just as her shallowness and

elusiveness represents Hollywood, her fraudulent and ill thought-out dreams are illusions, just as is the Hollywood Dream. Her “films” will never be made, yet this does not concern Faye, it is enough for her to have the ideas; reality would only destroy the illusion that she has enough talent to be a success.

This encapsulates the Hollywood Dream. It is a dream based on an illusion – the simulation of a dream. It contains the hope in which one will achieve all aspects of the traditional American Dream, as well as fame. But crucially it will require no effort. Star-struck wannabe-actors are not the only ones who follow this dream. Many writers have believed in it. When returning to Hollywood in 1937, Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter about his first attempt at success as a screenwriter: “I honestly believed that with *no effort on my part* I was a sort of magician with words – an odd delusion on my part when I had worked so hard to develop a hard, colourful prose style”(16). Thus when pursuing his American Dream of becoming a great novelist he realised the requirement of hard work, yet when transplanted to Hollywood, he took this to be unnecessary. And, of course, he discovered he was misguided.

James Truslow Adams in *Epic of America* refers to the Dream as:

... not [only] a dream of motor cars and high wages but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to obtain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (374)

Adams wrote this in 1931 at a time when the nation was beginning to feel the full effects of the Great Depression. West’s novel, written eight years later, however scorns this desire of a social order where in effect any child could grow up to be President or, in Hollywood, that anyone could become a star. West focuses on those

who were not stars, and who would never be. His narrative reflects the economic reality of the depression, and the continuity of Hollywood in perpetrating the myth of the American Dream.

In his essay “Inside the Whale”, George Orwell wrote:

[o]f course a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a footler or a plain idiot. (10)

West obviously agreed with such a statement and believed the studios were footlers, and most likely idiots. However, others at the time took an opposing view. Preston Sturges’ comedy, *Sullivan’s Travels* addresses this issue pointedly, and reaches a contrary conclusion. In that film, director John Sullivan comes to believe that it is Hollywood’s duty to divert the public from everyday life. His opinion that “there’s a lot to be said for making people laugh... that’s all some people have” was revisited in *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952) with the famous musical number, “Make ’em Laugh”. Yet both those films, despite mild instances of satire – such as studio executive, Lebrand’s repeated insistence that Sullivan’s picture “have a little sex in it” – are celebrations of Hollywood. As a filmmaker, Sturges (like the Coens) is an advocate of the artistic merit of film. He is also more pragmatic towards filmmaking processes of Hollywood than the satirists of Hollywood. Unlike West, Kauffmann, Hart and Schulberg, Sturges shows in *Sullivan’s Travels* that although Hollywood was infused with individuals concerned only with profit, it was an industry which could produce films of artistic merit, including those films which entertained. Indeed given the era continues to be called the Golden Years of Hollywood, it would be hard to disagree with such an opinion. However, while for Sturges, Hollywood was a dream factory –

and the dream was worth attaining – for West, Fitzgerald and Schulberg, the Hollywood Dream was false; and the impetus behind it, hypocritical. They believed it would require them to sacrifice their art for money, and become part of a production process. It was a world where they felt they needed to abide by hypocritical standards, and where falseness reigned supreme. As we shall see in the next chapter, this falsehood and hypocrisy has made Hollywood, and those who work in the industry, perfect for crime narratives, where the Dream truly becomes a nightmare.

2.0 The Stuff Dreams are Made of:

The Hollywood Identity and Crime fiction in Hollywood

“The movies are one of the bad habits that corrupted our century” (Hecht 468).

In detective and crime fiction, characters commonly construct false identities to avoid capture or (if the character is a detective) to solve the crime. However, when these fictions are set in and around Hollywood, the authors use this construction of identities to satirise Hollywood’s impact on American society. The characters in this setting adopt these identities not to avoid or help detection, but to achieve the Hollywood Dream, and to this end the identity they create is a uniquely Hollywood construction. This identity is seen to be an almost unconscious attempt to fit the mould of a successful Hollywood player – whether artist, producer or star.

Nathanael West and the authors discussed in the previous chapter noted this construction of a Hollywood identity. In *The Day of the Locust*, for example, West notes “a great many of the people wore sports clothes which were not really sport clothes” (261) and he describes a successful screenwriter “who lived in a big house that was an exact reproduction of the old Drupy mansion near Biloxi, Mississippi” (271). West’s, Fitzgerald’s and Schulberg’s focus was the corrupting influence of Hollywood on those who move within or near its sphere, whereas the authors in this chapter show that the primary cause of characters’ corruption is the construction of a Hollywood identity.

The Hollywood identity occurs in three stages, each of which is revealed in the three novels discussed in this chapter. In the first stage, the construction of the identity is a conscious act, and is characterised by characters speaking as though they are in a movie. This stage is highlighted in Raymond Chandler’s *The Little Sister*. The second

stage has the Hollywood identity infiltrating characters' thoughts. In this stage, which occurs in Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty*, characters think about people and events around them from a Hollywood context – that is they either view a scene as though it were a film, or consider people from the point of view of a casting agent. In the final stage, which occurs to Griffin Mill in Michael Tolkin's *The Player*, the identity completely overtakes any previous identity. At this point characters are unable to view anything in their lives outside a Hollywood context. Thus, not only do they view others through a Hollywood lens, they also regard their own life from the point of view of a film.

Raymond Chandler was the first major crime writer to highlight the phenomenon of the Hollywood identity²⁹. *The Little Sister* continues the theme of the corrupting nature of Hollywood evidenced in *The Day of the Locust*. Yet while earlier satires of Hollywood showed the industry as morally bankrupt, in *The Little Sister*, Chandler explicitly links the industry with crime by having studio executives, agents and actors all involved with murders and blackmail – and crucially, they appear comfortable in such dealing. Yet, Chandler's primary focus is not the moviemaking industry, but rather the illusion of the Hollywood Dream and the identities that those within and around the fringes of the industry create in a vain attempt to achieve the Dream.

While other crime writers since Chandler – most notably James Ellroy – have set their narratives in and around Hollywood, Elmore Leonard's *Get Shorty* best continues the examination of the Hollywood identity. Whereas Chandler – due to Marlowe's first person narration – only depicts characters' identities through speech and actions, Leonard presents the Hollywood identity pervading as well the thoughts

²⁹ Other crime novels had been set in and around Hollywood before *The Little Sister*. Carolyn See (1968) gives an excellent review of the 'hard-boiled' novels set in Hollywood. However, *The Little Sister* is the first that notes the construction of the Hollywood identity.

of characters. He depicts characters' inherent need to create a Hollywood identity when chasing their dream, and once they have attained success, how this new identity replaces any previous personality. His use of the protagonist Chili Palmer also reinforces the premise that Hollywood is comfortable with crime and criminals are comfortable in Hollywood.

Michael Tolkin's *The Player* is ostensibly a crime novel featuring a murder and blackmail, but it is much more satirical than Chandler's or Leonard's works. The novel focuses on a character (Griffin Mill) who appears to have achieved the Hollywood Dream. But whereas Chandler suggests the Hollywood identity is a conscious creation, and Leonard implies that it is subconscious, Tolkin depicts both. Griffin consciously re-creates his identity (and observes others do the same) but also depicts the impact Hollywood has on his subconscious thoughts.

In *The Little Sister*, characters create a Hollywood identity to displace the non-Hollywood aspect of their personalities, whereas those in *Get Shorty* create new identities because they are necessary to achieve their Hollywood Dream. In *The Player*, the two aspects are combined: Griffin and others create the Hollywood identity to discard their previous selves, but also to achieve their dreams. Of the three, Tolkin's also comes closest to depicting Hollywood as a simulacrum, wherein the artificial becomes real. A concept which will be investigated in future chapters.

2.1 The Conscious Identity: *The Little Sister*

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, with the work of (among others) Dashiell Hammett, crime fiction moved from the 'classical' detective story genre of Edgar Allan Poe and

Arthur Conan Doyle to a more ‘hard-boiled’ genre³⁰. Given this new genre’s penchant for masculine detectives who talked the language of the streets and who dealt with nefarious underworld crooks and seductive molls, it is little surprise that Hollywood quickly took notice. What differentiated the new genre from the classical detective stories were not merely the structures of the narratives and the morality of the detectives, but also the location of the narratives. Where the classical genre was almost entirely European, the hard-boiled detectives worked primarily in America, and specifically in California. While Hammett’s main setting for his novels, such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), was San Francisco. Authors who followed Hammett would often use Los Angeles and Hollywood itself as the locale for the action. This setting allowed the authors and (later) filmmakers to reveal the underbelly of the filmmaking capital, to satirise Hollywood as a dream factory, to highlight the hypocrisy of an industry founded on immorality, and examine the false identities of those caught in the web of Hollywood life.

From the beginning of the film industry, detective/crime stories were popular. In 1900, for example, a thirty-second film titled *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* was produced³¹. In 1905, another film featuring Sherlock Holmes, *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, was made and was soon followed in 1908 by *Sherlock Holmes in the Great Murder Mystery*; a film which actually uses Conan Doyle’s character within the Edgar Allen Poe story, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841). Thereafter until the 1930s, there were dozens of productions in a number of countries that used Conan Doyle’s most

³⁰ I am using here the terminology of John G. Cawelti, in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (1976), although the terms had been in use before his work. For example, David Madden (1968) in his introduction to the collection of essays, *Tough Guy Writers of the 1930s* frequently uses the term ‘hard-boiled’.

³¹ One can only assume he was not baffled for long!

famous character as the protagonist³². Similarly, Poe's stories were often used as the basis of a film's narrative. *The Pit and the Pendulum* for example, was first produced in 1913 as a silent film, and in 1914, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* was produced. However, these films are highly differentiated from the detective and crime films that would become a staple of Hollywood in the 1930s to 1950s.

The points of differentiation are exactly what led the hard-boiled genre to be so adaptable and successful when transferred from the page to the screen. The "classic" detective story involves a generally unemotional (but at the very least objective) detective, who sees evidence that other characters do not – because he (especially with respect to Sherlock Holmes) is "a man of transcendent intelligence or intuition"(Cawelti 83). Thus the crime is solved through the genius of sleuthing rather than by slowly understanding the significance of a multitude of fragmented clues, and definitely not through playing tough with suspects. The "hard-boiled" detective however is placed at almost the opposite end of the spectrum. He³³ is emotional, and the solution of the crime often involves his personal involvement with suspects. Moreover, unlike the classical detective novel, most of these hard-boiled narratives were written from the detective's point of view. This narrative technique is the greatest factor determining the genre's adaptability to the screen. No longer does the reader hear only a second person account of a detective. As Cawelti points out with relation to the classic genre:

³² For example, Ellie Norwood played Sherlock Holmes in 47 films between 1920 and 1923 ("Ellie Norwood" 2002).

³³ Until the 1970s with P D James' female detective Cordelia James in his *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972) the hard-boiled detective was male. In the past 25 years however, a number of fictional female detectives have been created, from Patricia Cornwell's Dr. Kay Scarpetta (1990 –) to Sara Paretsky's decidedly hard-boiled V.I. Warshawski (1982 -). As however, the general thrust of my analysis in this chapter concerns the detectives set in the 1940s and '50s I shall use the masculine pronoun when referring to the detectives.

The narrator is often a Watson-figure or a character involved in the story who has an excuse for being close to the detective but cannot follow or understand his line of investigation. (83)

With the advent of Hammett's "Continental Op" and Sam Spade, such a narrator was no longer required. The hard-boiled narrator may have as little sense of where the investigation is heading as does the narrator in the classical genre, but not because he is unable to keep up with the much superior "Holmes" type.

Such a narration also allows the author greater opportunity for placing emphasis on the characterisation of the detective, rather than on the intricacies of the plot. Not that plot was ignored, for indeed the twists associated with this genre of writing would reach such Byzantine lengths, that Raymond Chandler was infamously unable to explain who committed one of the murders in his novel *The Big Sleep* (1939) (*The Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* 155-6). And, as Cawelti points out, both Hammett and those authors who would follow him, such as Chandler and Cain, were hardly writing novels steeped in realism (163-64). For example, *The Maltese Falcon's* plot, involving a jewelled statuette from the Crusades and nefarious characters who travel the globe searching for it, is hardly realistic.

When readers and critics alike think of the hard-boiled genre as more realistic compared to the classical genre, they are undoubtedly thinking of the characterisation of the detectives and the settings, rather than the plots. Hammett's most famous detective Sam Spade³⁴, for example, has an affair with his partner's wife, is regarded by the police force and the District Attorney's office with suspicion, and, conversely, is so well regarded by the group of those chasing the falcon that they ask him to join

³⁴ This point is due more to the success of John Huston's film version of the novel, with Humphrey Bogart's seminal performance as Spade, for indeed the previews of film *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) referred to it as "from the creator of *The Thin Man*".

them. Thus he is hardly the fine upstanding member of society such as Hercule Poirot or the amateur sleuth of the Sherlock Holmes type³⁵.

The amateur aspect of the “classical” detective is the most important distinction between the two types: what the hard-boiled detectives do, they do for money. The motivation of these detectives is thus more mercenary than the classic type. In *The Maltese Falcon* for example, the matter of Brigid O’Shaughnessy’s fee is of prime importance to Spade and his partner Archer. The two detectives check the two one-hundred dollar notes she gives them, and Miles Archer notes: “They’re right enough... and they had brothers in her bag”(300). Later when Spade confronts Brigid after Archer’s death he tells her they had not believed her story: “We believed your two hundred dollars”(315). He then instructs her to hock her jewellery to pay for the rest of his fee.

Thus while detectives of the classical type (for example Christie’s Poirot), may have been employed as detectives, never is there the sense that the case is important because there is a need to pay the rent. Poirot, for example, often solves the case while on holiday, as is the case in *Death on the Nile* (1937), while in *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*, Poe deals with Dupin’s monetary situation quickly:

By courtesy of his creditors there still remained in his possession a small amount of his patrimony; and upon the income arising from this, he managed, by means of a rigorous economy, to procure the necessities of life, without troubling himself about its superfluities.

(143)

By comparison Spade and Marlowe, and other hard-boiled detectives, are men who might be on the side of right and justice, and will occasionally work for little or no

³⁵ Holmes, of course, was not as upstanding a citizen as one may believe, in *The Sign of Four* (1890) for example, he is observed using cocaine.

pay, but such occurrences are the exception³⁶. The emphasis placed on Spade's and, in particular, Marlowe's monetary situation not only sets them apart from the classical detectives, but also makes them uniquely American³⁷.

This is perhaps the most obvious, yet important, distinction between the classical and the hard-boiled genre. Holmes, Dupin, Poirot and Miss Marple are all Europeans, whereas the hard-boiled detectives of the 1930s and 1940s are an exclusively American club. This is not only reflected in the locales of the mysteries that each detective attempts to solve, but in the attitudes of the detectives themselves. In place of the eccentric genius of Dupin or Holmes, the gentlemanly Poirot, or the matronly Miss Marple, are men who earn a living, and men who have an implicit relationship with the American Dream. However, because of what they have seen, they do not believe in it. As David Madden notes, the hard-boiled detective's "life of action is the nightmare version of the American Dream"(xxvi). Although they 'pursue property', there is no sense that the reason they are detectives is to become wealthy. Similarly, while they own their own businesses, there is no sense that they have achieved an aim in life and are content. And although they solve crimes and help strangers, there is little sense of a pursuit of happiness in their own lives. Yet despite this, their connection with the Dream is implicit, for their occupation often involves them with those who are searching for the Dream.

The hard-boiled detective's lack of faith in the American Dream is highlighted at the end of *The Maltese Falcon*. Spade rejects his own happiness and turns Brigid O'Shaughnessy over to the police for murdering his partner, despite the fact that

³⁶ Thus while Marlowe does forego his fee in *The Little Sister*, his fee is always made known. We know that in *The Big Sleep* he charges \$25 a day plus expenses, but by the time of *The Little Sister* is charging \$40 a day plus expenses.

³⁷ However, the genre was quickly imitated by authors in other countries. In Australia this was done most famously by Alan Yates, who, under a variety of pseudonyms – the most well known of which was 'Carter Brown' – wrote around 150 'pulp novels'. His detectives, such as Al Wheeler and Danny Boyd, although Australian, owe more to Spade and Marlowe, than to Holmes and Poirot (Wilde 124).

“maybe he loves her and maybe she loves him”(438). His final speech to her is a virtual litany of lost happiness, and just as he “won’t play the sap” (438) he also will not allow himself a chance to attain happiness. With Sam Spade, Hammett created the template for all hard-boiled detectives who would follow: quick-witted, charming to women, intelligent, professional, and rarely finding happiness. It would be a template that authors after Hammett would follow closely.

Raymond Chandler acknowledged his legacy: “Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse” (qtd. in Cawelti 163). Chandler also disliked the “classical” detective story. After reading Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None* he wrote to fellow writer George Coxe:

The fundamental conception of the book in particular annoyed me...
But I’m very glad I read the book because it finally and for all time settled a question in my mind that had at least some lingering doubt attached to it. Whether it is possible to write a strictly honest mystery of the classic type. It isn’t. (*Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* 16-17)

Yet Chandler did not merely produce a carbon copy of Sam Spade. Chandler’s great detective creation, Phillip Marlowe, is different in many respects, not the least of which is the location of the narratives. Marlowe, from his first appearance in *The Big Sleep* in 1939 through to the last Marlowe novel, *The Long Goodbye* (1953), is situated in Los Angeles.

That Hammett and Chandler use California as their settings is symbolic of the West Coast’s position as both the frontier of America and the land of dreams. As Liahna Babener notes, “California has served the popular imagination as the ultimate symbol of the American Dream” (77). Often California also represents the illusory

nature of the dream; for example in *The Grapes of Wrath* or *On The Road* (1957). Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses Don't They* (1935) takes this symbolism to the ultimate degree by placing the dance hall on a pier; thus the characters have gone beyond the coast and, in effect, past the point of their dreams; there is nowhere left for them to go except the marathon dance contest which does not realise their dreams but exploits them.

In most of the Marlowe novels, Chandler does not refer to Hollywood, in *The Little Sister* however, it is featured prominently. Chandler uses the characters associated with Hollywood in the narrative to satirise the Hollywood Dream. Importantly he also shows that immersion in the world of Hollywood leads to characters creating false identities.

The Little Sister is the penultimate Marlowe story³⁸ and the only one of Chandler's works which could be called a "Hollywood novel" (Rhodes "Raymond Chandler and the Art of the Hollywood Novel" 95). It begins with Marlowe sitting in his office introducing himself to the reader: "Come on in – there's nobody here but me and a big bluebottle fly"(387). The first impression the reader has of Marlowe and his surroundings reinforces his image as tough, working-class and unpretentious. The door of his office, for example, "is lettered in flaked back paint" and is described by Marlowe himself as "a reasonably shabby door at the end of a reasonably shabby corridor..." (387). Thus Marlowe, as the narrator, is at pains to show the reader that he is a regular 'working stiff'.

This aspect is reinforced by the manner of his speech: colloquial and abrupt. His first conversation with the eponymous little sister of the title, Orfamay Quest, includes Marlowe telling her his fee is "Forty bucks a day..." (388) and ends with

³⁸ Not counting the posthumously published *Poodle Springs*, written in part by Robert Parker.

him dismissing the young girl from Manhattan, Kansas by telling her if she wants a gentleman to “try the University Club... I heard they still had a couple left over there...” (389). Thus Marlowe’s act of playing the straight, tough-guy applies to his clients as well as to the reader. As he tells Orfamay:

If you hire me... I’m the guy you hire. Me. Just as I am. If you think you are going to find any lay readers in this business, you’re crazy.

(390)

The case is rather less elaborate than, for example, *The Big Sleep*, and involves Marlowe moving within Hollywood as well as his usual haunts in Bay City. It concerns Orfamay Quest’s search for her older brother, Orrin. Orfamay describes Orrin to Marlowe as “not the type to do [drugs, crime or women]”(396), but who is actually involved in an attempt to blackmail their older sister and her lover, an ex-gangster named Steelgrave. The sister whom Orrin blackmails is a rising actress, thus requiring Marlowe to match wits with Hollywood producers and agents as well as his usual sparring partners of crooks and police detectives. Yet Marlowe is not out of place in Hollywood, indeed his office is located in the Cahuenga Building on Hollywood Boulevard³⁹, however it is at the eastern end of the boulevard, thus physically and symbolically far from the glamour and movie world of Beverly Hills. And the narrative is steeped with references to films and Hollywood; most of them are bitter.

Why Chandler should have such a negative view of Hollywood is somewhat unclear. As Al Clark points out, Chandler was well paid as a screenwriter, and was even treated fairly by the first producer he worked with, Joseph Siström, who paid Chandler \$600 more a week than he actually demanded (29). Unlike F. Scott

³⁹ There is not, nor ever was, an actual Cahuenga Building, though it is thought to be based on a bank which was located on the Boulevard (*Raymond Chandler Square* 2002).

Fitzgerald, he received numerous screen credits and was twice nominated for an Academy Award for screenwriting (*Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Blue Dahlia* (1946)). He was also involved with the classic Hitchcock film *Strangers on a Train* (1951) and his Marlowe novel, *Farewell My Lovely* (1940), was made into the critically successful film, *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). The film version of *The Big Sleep* (1946) starring Humphrey Bogart, is considered by critics and the public alike as one of the finest examples of film-noir in the twentieth century⁴⁰.

Chandler's own opinion on Hollywood is one subject to great change. In a letter to his English publisher, Hamish Hamilton in 1945 he wrote:

I love advice, and if I very seldom take it, on the subject of writing, that is because I have received practically none except from my agent... I much prefer Hollywood, with all its disadvantages [to writing for "big shiny paper national weeklies](45).

Similarly, a year later, to his American publisher Alfred Knopf, he wrote: "No doubt I have learned a lot from Hollywood. Please do not think I despise it, because I don't"(64). Although he qualifies this opinion by noting: "the overall picture [of Hollywood]... is of a degraded community whose idealism even is largely fake"(64). He also notes, somewhat presciently, that "It is a great subject for a novel – probably the greatest still untouched" (65).

However, three years later his position on Hollywood had soured. In describing the morality of Philip Marlowe to film producer John Houseman, Chandler wrote: "He [Marlowe] can be poor and bitter and take it out in wisecracks and casual amours, or he can be corrupt and amiable and rude like a Hollywood producer"(197).

⁴⁰ In 1997, *The Big Sleep* was listed in the National Film Registry as a film that is considered "culturally, historically or aesthetically important" (*National Film Preservation Board* 2004). (*Double Indemnity* was registered in 1992.) Roger Ebert, reviewing the film due to its release on DVD, stated that it is "one of the great film noirs" (2000).

In 1950, in another letter to Hamilton, his position towards Hollywood is discussed at length, and displays that Chandler's feelings on the artistic process of filmmaking had changed along with his opinion of Hollywood:

Like every writer, or almost every writer, who goes to Hollywood, I was convinced in the beginning that there must be some discoverable method of working in pictures which would not be completely stultifying to whatever creative talent one might happen to possess. But like others before me I discovered that this was a dream. It's nobody's fault; it's part of the structure of the industry. Too many people have too much to say about a writer's work. It ceases to be his own... By the end of 1946 I had had enough. (237)

Thus, Chandler's resentment of Hollywood, which manifests itself in *The Little Sister*, is not because of neglect (as was the case with Fitzgerald) but because of his resentment towards those with whom he worked and their working styles. Clark notes, for example, that Chandler was often annoyed by Billy Wilder's mannerisms whilst working together on the screenplay of *Double Indemnity* (29). Later Chandler was unhappy with the studio's treatment of his screenplay for *The Blue Dahlia*, which altered the ending to the extent that Chandler thought it "a routine thriller" instead of a "fairly original idea" (Clark 62). Chandler also suffered bouts of alcoholism during the writing of *The Blue Dahlia*, brought on by strict deadlines and self-doubt. His screenplay for *Strangers on a Train* (1951) was largely re-written, and he was greatly aggrieved by the final script, terming it "a flabby mass of clichés, a group of faceless characters, and the kind of dialogue every screen writer is taught not to write" (*Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* 243). Thus his time during Hollywood was not one of great happiness. He did earn a substantial income writing for films,

and his profile – and that of his novels – was greatly enhanced, yet his attitudes to collaboration and the censoring process of Hollywood left him disillusioned.

With this knowledge, the path taken by Marlowe in *The Little Sister*, and Marlowe's own contempt for Hollywood, becomes clear. As Chandler himself noted about *The Little Sister*: "it was written in a bad mood and I think that comes through" (qtd. in Marling 131). Indeed the narrative contains a greater indictment of Hollywood and the Hollywood Dream, than any of his previous works.

The narrative concerns three members of one family who have all come west in search of a dream. The little sister, Orfamay Quest is the last of the three to arrive and her dream involves a return to happiness and normality in her and her family's life; a normality which was upset when her older sister, Leila, moved to Hollywood, followed soon after by her brother Orrin. Leila is on the way to achieving the Hollywood Dream: she is a rising movie star under the name Mavis Weld. Orrin's dream on the other hand has turned sour; he has lost his job working for a chemical company, and has spent time living in rough hotels and cheap apartments. He has also become involved in a scheme to blackmail Leila. Whatever his dream was, by the time Marlowe hears of him, it is long dead.

William Marling has noted that the very name Quest has significant overtones of the search for the American dream (128), but Marling suggests that Chandler blames Los Angeles' decay on 'outsiders' from the east, or in the Quests' case, Kansas. Aside from the illogical nature of blaming the decay of a city founded on people emigrating from the east on those same people, Marling ignores the fact that decay in Chandler's Los Angeles existed long before Marlowe took on Orfamay Quest as a client. For example, the Sternwoods in *The Big Sleep* are hardly model citizens despite being Los Angeles residents. Marlowe as well does not so much

blame the decay of Los Angeles on the Quests and their ilk, but rather blames the dream that would lead their type to move to Los Angeles in the first instance.

Chandler's resentment towards this dream and Hollywood are evident in perhaps the most quoted section of the novel. Sitting in his office, Marlowe ponders the case he has been inadvertently drawn into, and notes:

Wonderful what Hollywood will do to a nobody. It will make a radiant glamour queen out of some little wench who ought to be ironing a truck driver's shirts, a he-man hero with shining eyes and brilliant smile reeking a sexual charm out of some overgrown kid who was meant to go to work with a lunch box. Out of a Texas car hop with the literacy of a character in a comic strip it will make an international courtesan, married six times to six millionaires and so blasé and decadent at the end of it that her idea of a thrill is to seduce a furniture mover in a sweaty undershirt. (516)

Thus his anger is not directed at the people who come following their dream. Indeed, it seems that he views their coming as almost beyond their power. The heavy irony used to detail Hollywood dreams coming to fruition – the glamour queen, the he-man, the international courtesan – displays a bitterness that is enhanced with his following view of the darker side of the Hollywood dream:

... by remote control it might take even a small town prig like Orrin Quest and make an ice-pick murderer out of him in a matter of months, elevating his simple meanness into the classic sadism of the multiple killer. (516)

Thus the glamour of Hollywood is used ironically to describe what actually lies behind the make-up and costumes of the stars, while using another stereotype of

Hollywood film – this time a multiple killer – to display the negative aspect of the Hollywood dream.

Of course this does not suggest that behind every failed writer and actor lurks a multiple homicide, for in this instance Marlowe is concerned specifically with Orrin and his situation. But the brutality of Marlowe's connection between Hollywood and the crimes of Orrin suggests a bitterness equal to – if not greater – than that displayed by Nathanael West with Homer Simpson's beating of Adore at the end of *The Day of the Locust*. Soon after, when Marlowe talks to bit-part actress Dolores Gonzales, this negative influence of Hollywood is also touched upon, as is the effect of the Hollywood Dream on Los Angeles:

I used to like this town... a long time ago. There were trees along Wilshire Boulevard. Beverly Hills was a country town... Hollywood was a just a bunch of frame houses on the inter-urban line. Los Angeles was just a big dry sunny place with ugly homes and no style, but good hearted and peaceful. (537)

He then explains to Dolores what he believes is the problem:

Now we get characters like this Steelgrave owning restaurants... We've got the fast dollar boys, the hoodlums out of New York and Chicago and Detroit – and Cleveland. (537)

In Marlowe's opinion, what makes Los Angeles different from other cities with problems of urbanisation and seedy characters is Hollywood: "Real cities have something else, some individual bony structure under the muck. Los Angeles has Hollywood – and hates it" (538).

However, Marlowe is not completely disparaging towards the industry. Sardonicly, he tells Dolores that far from hating Hollywood, Los Angeles "ought to

consider itself damn lucky. Without Hollywood it would be a mail order city”(538). For Marlowe (and for Chandler) herein lies the difficulty: Hollywood encourages people to come to Los Angeles in search of their dream, yet such dreams invariably fail, and even if they do succeed, the people are soulless and contemptible, however, without Hollywood, Los Angeles would be indistinguishable from numerous other cities. *The Little Sister* reflects Chandler’s own divergent views on Hollywood. The differing morality of his characters associated with Hollywood, from Dolores who blackmails her friend Leila, to Leila herself, who offers to sacrifice herself for her sister Orfamay, displays Chandler’s own ambiguous attitude to Hollywood. Such ambiguity is surprising given Chandler’s comments about writing it while in a bad mood, and reflects that Chandler in spite of his disgust with the Hollywood system could not bring himself to condemn everything and everyone it touches.

The narrative of *The Little Sister* is also frequently spiced with references to Hollywood and films – most often in a negative sense. At one point Marlowe taunts Leila by remarking: “I’m beginning to think you write your own dialogue... I’ve been wondering just what was the matter with it” (477). Soon after, he drives around Los Angeles and notes: “Behind Encino an occasional light winked from the hills through thick trees. The homes of screen stars. Screen stars, phooey. The veterans of a thousand beds” (450). Hollywood is also referenced for sardonic purposes, such as when Marlowe tells Orfamay that “they don’t have gangsters in Bay City. They’re all working in pictures” (497), or when Marlowe expresses a resignation that Hollywood has taken over Los Angeles, and we hear the bitterness when he remarks: “I stepped out into the night air that nobody had yet found out how to option. But a lot of people were trying. They’d get around to it” (451).

Marlowe is not the only character who spices his/her speech with cinematic allusions. Leila tells Marlowe near the conclusion that she cannot shoot him because: “I guess I don’t like the script... I don’t like the lines. It just isn’t me, if you know what I mean” (554). Earlier she describes the denouement to Marlowe as “the picture to end all pictures – for me” (546), and she asks Marlowe if he is going to wrap up the gun she gave him “in a handkerchief, the way they do in the movies” (550). Likewise when Marlowe is interrogated by the police, there is an obvious reference to detective movies and *The Maltese Falcon* in particular, when one of the detectives instructs Marlowe: “Just don’t try to steal the picture with that nineteen-thirty dialogue” (526).

The numerous references to Hollywood and metaphors of films in general are a marked development from the earlier Marlowe novels, most noticeably *The Big Sleep*. In that, the first Marlowe novel, Mrs Regan makes reference to Marcel Proust (40) and tells Marlowe she “didn’t know they [private detectives] really existed, except in books” (13). In the ten years between *The Big Sleep* and *The Little Sister*, films versions of *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep* (and others) would ensure that no one would think private detectives existed only in books. Yet the difference between the two novels also highlights Chandler’s change of tack. *The Big Sleep* details the immorality of the elite Sternwoods who, it would seem, much prefer mention of French avant-garde than common film, yet who in fact possess all the “usual depravities” (10). Those whom Marlowe encounters in *The Little Sister* however have not even a pretension of being artistic or cultured. The actresses he meets would have been as unlikely to have read Proust as Marlowe was in *The Big Sleep*. Yet significantly, the characters within the narrative who most obviously lack artistic knowledge or desire are the studio mogul, Jules Oppenheimer and the agent, Sherry Ballou.

In 1957, eight years after writing *The Little Sister*, Chandler wrote (in a letter) that he “found it quite wonderful to deal with the Moguls. They seemed so ruthless, they conceded nothing” (423). Perhaps Chandler was now in a mood to be gracious for he also wrote in the same letter: “some of them were very clever people” (423), and he wistfully mentions that he could “write the Hollywood novel that has never been written” (423). Clearly, Chandler felt that *The Little Sister* was not that Hollywood novel. Yet his attitude here is at variance with the views he conveyed in a letter to Hamilton on 6 January, 1946:

It is possible to make good pictures – within limits – but to do it you have to work with good people. They exist in Hollywood, but they are scattered and at the moment none of them is available to me at Paramount. The studio is now under the control of a man whose attitude to picture-making is that if you own 1600 theatres, all you have to do is grind out the product as quickly and economically as possible. I cannot do anything in that atmosphere except spend time and collect a salary. (61)

He would recall this observation while writing *The Little Sister*.

When Marlowe goes to Leila’s film studio, he meets the financial executive, Jules Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer is an absurd character who lets his three dogs urinate against his desk. Upon viewing the sight Marlowe with wonderful understatement observes: “I figured it was just Hollywood” (486). Oppenheimer then tells Marlowe the key to success in the film industry:

Fifteen hundred theatres is all you need... The motion picture business is the only business in the world in which you can make all the mistakes there are and still make money... Give them [the stars]

anything they like, all the money they want. Why? No reason at all.
Just habit. Doesn't matter a damn what they do or how they do it. Just
give me fifteen hundred theatres. (487)

Ironically, because in 1948 the Justice Department had filed anti-trust suits against the major Hollywood studios, by the time *The Little Sister* was published, the number of theatres was no guarantee for success. Among the many ramifications of the antitrust suits was the breaking up of the studios' "privileged arrangements" with theatres, and studios were "ordered to divest themselves of their theatre holdings" (Schatz 435).

Chandler's portrayal of Oppenheimer is a singular example of introducing satire into his narrative. Oppenheimer adds little to the plot: he is not involved in the crime, and he is only incidentally involved in the cover-up for Leila. Yet he represents Chandler writing "in a bad mood". Disgusted by the market-driven nature of the studio – a stance which Schatz notes Paramount had taken since its earliest years (72) – Chandler uses the studio head's words against him. And for the only time in the narrative, he presents a satirical caricature rather than character. It is true that other characters in the novel, notably Flack, the hotel housekeeper, and the detectives, are types rather than fully dimensional characters. But what is different between their portrayal and Oppenheimer's is Chandler's intention.

Flack and the detectives are shallow characters lacking psychological depth. The primary concern in *The Little Sister*, as with all the Marlowe novels, is how Marlowe reacts to others in the narrative. However, this novel differs from other Marlowe stories because of Chandler's treatment of Oppenheimer and Ballou. While *The Little Sister* is not a satire, the characterisation of Oppenheimer, Ballou, and aspects of Leila displays Chandler using satirical methods. Thus within this seemingly

standard hard-boiled detective story Chandler has created characters with which to satirise Hollywood and its Dream.

Chandler uses Oppenheimer purely to attack the parsimonious nature of the studio heads. With his eccentricities and cold financial observations on the film industry, Oppenheimer is not presented as the archetypal studio executive, but more an accountant with little care for the industry's output. At one point Oppenheimer throws an unlit cigar into a swimming pool and notes: "Memory's going... wasted fifty cents. Oughtn't do that"(486). He then tells Marlowe that if you save fifty cents in the movie business you have "five dollars worth of book-keeping" (487). Oppenheimer then makes Chandler's view of film studios perfectly clear by referring to the studio as "the brothel" (487).

Sherry Ballou is Leila's agent, and he is more in keeping with the traditional characterisation of men in such positions: tough, eccentric and used to getting their way. When, for example, Marlowe sees Ballou walk around his office swinging a cane, Marlowe states: "it could only happen in Hollywood"(480). While not a purely satirical device like Oppenheimer, Chandler depicts Ballou (in a manner that others such as James Ellroy and Elmore Leonard would follow) as a man not indisposed to dealing in criminal activities. Ballou admits to Marlowe that he was the one who sent two men to Marlowe's office to threaten him. He is also impressed that the two thugs did not scare Marlowe. When Marlowe mentions that Leila should not be seeing the ex-gangster Steelgrave, Ballou qualifies:

But show business has always been like that – any kind of show business. If these people didn't lead intense and rather disordered lives, if their emotions didn't hit them too hard – well, they wouldn't be able

to catch those emotions in flight and imprint them on a few feet of celluloid. (482)

He then pays Marlowe to investigate the blackmail case. Ballou is at ease dealing with Marlowe and is well able to be a basis for Chandler's metaphor of Marlowe being "as corrupt and amiable and rude as a Hollywood producer".

Both Ballou and Oppenheimer believe (as does Marlowe) that the Hollywood Dream is a myth. While none of the three have come to Hollywood or Los Angeles in search of their dream (at least not within the confines of this narrative) the Quests on the other hand most definitely have. Leila is the starkest example, and importantly she has had to assume a new identity to chase it. Now known by her screen name, Mavis Weld, her dream appears to be approaching fulfilment, and yet throughout the narrative, Marlowe realises Leila is acting the role of 'Mavis Weld'. When he first views her she is in a disguise (albeit a rather amateurish one) of dark glasses and with a towel in front of the lower part of her face (424). Later, when Marlowe visits her home she plays the role of Hollywood starlet, complete with over the top lines: "Open the door honey. This is the day we put the garbage out"(445); and gestures such as throwing a glass at Marlowe after he says her "dialogue" is bad (447). Only at the end of the novel does she become conscious of the fact of her acting when, stripped of her pretension, she acknowledges to Marlowe that she is playing a role and that she does not "like the script"(554).

Leila is not the only character to assume an artificial identity. Chip Rhodes (2001) has noted that even the minor character of the funeral director whom Marlowe sees when he visits Dr. Lagardie, displays a note of hypocrisy. Marlowe views the director break into "a beaming smile"(499) after the coffin has been taken away. Rhodes observes that this small section highlights Marlowe's ability as a detective

with an eye for minute detail, but also stresses the “novel’s ethical perspective”(101). In addition, Chandler’s disgust for false identities is conveyed through the lack of acting done by Marlowe. The only time Marlowe acts is over the phone when he pretends to be another character in order to chase a lead, otherwise he is straight. This is inconsistent with the rest of the characters and because they are inured to Hollywood ways, they often cannot believe he is being true.

In the Los Angeles Chandler depicts, the acting is performed not only by those in front of cameras. Rarely do the characters present themselves as they really are. George Hicks pretends to be Dr. G.W. Hambleton and pays for the deception with his life. The Bay City detective, Maglashan, lies about finding an ice-pick at the scene of a murder but then threatens Marlowe to tell the truth because “somebody’s a goddam liar and it ain’t me” (529). Dolores Gonzales on the other hand does not merely act in one scene, but throughout the narrative. At the end Marlowe comments: “The only thing Mexican about you is a few words and a careful way of talking that’s supposed to give the impression of a person speaking a language they had to learn”(588). She pretends to be attracted to Marlowe, but she kills the man she does actually love (Steelgrave) and is then murdered by her ex-husband Dr. Lagardie.

The one character however, who acts more than all the others, is Orfamay Quest. She presents herself to Marlowe as an innocent, who is concerned only for the welfare of her brother Orrin. In fact, her only concern is that Orrin give her and their mother a share of the blackmail money. Thus her Hollywood Dream is to gain profit from the blackmail of her sister, and she is prepared to sell out her brother to achieve it. By the time she leaves Los Angeles, she has realised her dream, and therefore has foregone the need for acting. When she returns home however, the implication is that

her act will begin again. After his last meeting with Orfamay, Marlowe makes an observation similar to that of Tod Hackett's regarding the acting of Faye Greener:

The play was over. I am sitting in the empty theatre. The curtain was down and projected on it dimly I could see the action. But already some of the actors were getting vague and unreal. The little sister above all. In a couple of days I would forget what she looked like. Because in a way she *was* so unreal. (583)

The importance of false identities within the narrative is highlighted with Orrin Quest. The entire narrative hinges on him – it is his photograph of Leila and Steelgrave together that is the subject of the blackmail attempt. Ironically, however, Orrin is never viewed by the reader except for one scene in which he is mortally wounded. Yet Orrin's role is crucial to the illusion of the Hollywood Dream, and the perception that one needs to adopt a false identity to achieve that dream. In her first meeting with Marlowe, Orfamay explains to Marlowe that Orrin liked to take photos of people when they were unawares, because he believed "people ought to see themselves as they really are" (396). Marlowe presciently notes: "Let's hope it never happens to him"(396). This is the foundation for the entire narrative, throughout which Chandler scorns those who pretend to be that which they are not, instead of, as Rhodes notes, their "real identity" (103).

All of Chandler's narratives contain characters involved in subterfuge, whether for purposes of solving a crime, such as Marlowe impersonating a rare book collector in *The Big Sleep*, or for means of avoiding responsibility such as Dolores Gonzales pretending to be Mexican. What marks *The Little Sister* from the other tales is the connection of this subterfuge with Hollywood. Here the acting is done by characters not merely for reasons of criminal intent, but as a method of achieving their

dream. Leila has reinvented herself as Mavis Weld, the gangster Weepy Moyer reinvents himself as Steelgrave. Even Moyer's reinvention is not done for criminal purposes, for the police are fully aware of who he is, but it is done more because he is "a gentleman now" (433). Whereas in Chandler's other novels the subterfuge is of malevolent intent, here it reflects a deeper aspect; that of reinvention as a consequence of following the Hollywood Dream. Here the characters do not attempt to merely confuse or temporarily fool others, but rather they hope to permanently discard previous personalities. That Leila's and Moyer's old identities are revealed and that their ends are, especially in the case of Moyer, dismal, highlights Chandler's distaste for the pretence that lies under the Hollywood system.

As Rhodes observes, *The Little Sister* cannot be viewed as a wholly negative description of Hollywood. Despite their traits, Ballou and Oppenheimer, for example, are not presented as overtly malfeasant. Indeed their lack of pretence makes them admirable – if, in the case of Oppenheimer, eccentric – in the eyes of Marlowe. Leila is also viewed sympathetically, however this aspect is due to her dropping the act of bitch-movie star, and playing her true role of older sister. Thus, those characters who stay true to their original identity achieve success at least in gaining the sympathy of the reader, if not success in any traditional sense. The implication is of course, that Hollywood, the purveyor of imitation, corrupts the true nature of people, and forces them to adopt false identities not only in the discharge of their occupation, but also in their life. Chandler's bitterness towards the film industry at the time of his writing *The Little Sister* is reflected throughout the narrative, giving the reader an opportunity to view the hard-boiled genre used against the industry which helped it flourish. Chandler achieved success in Hollywood, but not edification. *The Little Sister* is his attempt to condemn the industry that had embraced the hard-boiled genre since its

beginnings. Chandler may have lightly bit the hand that fed him, but in doing so, he condemned the dream that Hollywood creates rather than the industry itself.

2.2 The Subconscious Identity: *Get Shorty*

Elmore Leonard's first dealings with Hollywood were in 1957 when two of his stories (*The Tall T* and *3:10 to Yuma*) were adapted into movies. However, Leonard's main association with films occurred when he stopped writing westerns and started writing crime fiction. Despite his novels and characters being of a decidedly hard-boiled variety, Leonard himself claims no heritage to the pioneers of the genre, and states he "wasn't influenced by them [Chandler, Hammett and others] at all" (Shah 37). Indeed his novels have no recurring main character like a Marlowe or Sam Spade, and often no detective at all. His style is notably different; for example, it contains few of the metaphors that are pervasive in Chandler's writing. Leonard himself makes a point of this: "I can't write metaphors... Any time I see an adjective or adverb I cross it out" (Shah 35). Another difference between Leonard and the originators of the hard-boiled genre are the locations of his narratives. While Chandler and Hammett placed their fictions in California, Leonard for the most part sets the action of his novels in Florida or Detroit⁴¹. Yet two of his novels, *Get Shorty* (1991) and *Be Cool* (1999) are set in Los Angeles. In the first of those works, Leonard, like those authors who came before him, uses the location to examine the film industry. Despite his differences to Chandler, *Get Shorty*, like *The Little Sister* explores the fallacy of the Hollywood Dream and satirises Hollywood as a corrupt industry in which people alter their identities. Crucially, these identities are pure filmic constructions.

⁴¹ The reasoning for these settings is uninspiring: he lives in Detroit and his mother lives in Miami, and on visiting her he found Miami to be a "great locale" for his novels (Shah 39).

The narrative opens in Florida, where the protagonist, Chili Palmer, works as a shylock for a local mafia boss. Due to a complicated turn of events, he follows a client to Las Vegas and in turn to Los Angeles. While in Los Angeles, as a favour for a Las Vegas casino, Chili locates Harry Zimm, a producer of Z-grade films. From this set-up, Leonard is able to connect Chili with Hollywood. There he encounters a number of characters pursuing the Hollywood Dream, and Leonard uses intertextual references to both enhance the connection of the film industry with the narrative, and to satirise the characters and the industry.

This use of intertextuality is highlighted in the first description of Chili. His hair is combed “straight back, no part, like Michael Douglas in *Wall Street*” (10). With minimal description, Leonard conveys both the physical image of Chili as well as his impression on other characters. The link between Chili and Gordon Gekko, (the character played by Michael Douglas in *Wall Street* (1987)) gives the reader a precise indication of Chili’s character. Gekko and Chili are powerful figures who intimidate others but do not use violence. While they are both crooks, they are also charismatic. Had Leonard described Chili’s hair as being combed straight back like Charlie Sheen in *Wall Street*, the effect would have been markedly different. For, despite being effectively the hero of *Wall Street*, Sheen’s character Bud Fox, is the junior partner whenever dealing with Gekko, and is not in the least threatening. Similarly, when Chili first meets Harry Zimm, Zimm’s first impression is defined in filmic terms:

The guy, Chili, kept staring, not saying anything now. Typecast, he was a first or second lead bad guy, depending on the budget. Hispanic or Italian. Not a maniac bad guy, a cool bad guy with some kind of hustle going. But casual, black poplin jacket zipped up. (25)

Within Harry's description of Chili are subtle attacks on Hollywood. The sardonic comment that he could play either "Hispanic or Italian" alludes to the common occurrence of Hispanic and Latin actors playing characters of either nationality⁴². Harry's observations of Chili also frame Harry's own identity, and highlight him as a producer who views everything within a Hollywood context. Despite being confronted with a menacing stranger asking him about a \$200,000 debt, Harry's immediate reaction is to cast him for a movie.

Harry and Chili are two of many characters in search of the Hollywood Dream. Chili immediately pitches a movie idea to Harry, and dreams of leaving the loan-sharking business and becoming a movie producer. As Chili remarks to friend from Miami, that he has little knowledge of filmmaking is irrelevant: "I don't think the producer has to do much" (127). Harry similarly dreams of being a producer, although the producer of big-budget features rather than Z-grade horror-movies he has thus far produced. Harry's ex-girlfriend, Karen Flores, also has a dream: to move from working as an actor in front of the camera to that of producer/executive behind. Thus the three main characters all desire to be producers. Lest the reader be under an impression that Leonard views producers as an honourable occupation, Chili also meets Bo Catlett, a drug-dealing, limousine-service operating crook who finances Harry's movies. Ostensibly done as a means to launder money gained through drug dealing, Catlett has other reasons for his investment in Harry's films: he too wishes to be the producer of a major motion picture. With such an assortment of characters hoping to make it in Hollywood it is little wonder that Harry is able to respond to Karen's assertion that Chili is "a crook" with: "So? This town he should fit right in"

⁴²One example of this is Italian-American Al Pacino playing the role of a Cuban in *Scarface* (1983). This is not merely limited to Hispanics and Italians; generally, European is regarded as a single race. This also applies to the sets of movies. For example, at Universal Studios there exists a "European backlot", to be used to represent any town in any part of Europe.

(76). Given a narrative containing a drug dealer, a loan shark and a producer of schlock films, the lack of a major scam seems surprising. While Catlett does attempt to set up Chili, and Catlett is in the end killed, the scam in *Get Shorty*, unlike other Leonard narratives, is not the main narrative point.

The main focus is Chili's and Harry's attempts to get "shorty" – the diminutive actor Martin Weir – to act in their movie. Weir has achieved his dream of becoming a major Hollywood star, and like the characters in *The Little Sister*, he has created a Hollywood identity: that of Martin Weir, movie star. Weir is first seen at a nightclub, and Chili notes that he tried to act like a normal guy but he "was too used to being who he was to pull it off" (172). While talking to some people, Martin impersonates Michael Jackson, and when Chili pitches his story to Martin, Martin acts as Shakespeare's Shylock rather than as a shylock. Later, Karen asks Chili if Martin did any impersonations and she comments that "he used to do Howard Cosell constantly... it isn't easy being Michael Weir" (214). Martin, acting as 'Martin Weir the movie star', attempts to impress Chili with a long-winded explanation of acting that highlights his insecurity with his profession: "Once I have the authentic sounds of speech, the rhythms, man, the patois, I can actually begin to think the way those guys do, get inside their heads" (175). Yet Chili quickly shows that this boast is false. Leonard pointedly highlights Weir's false identity by having Chili read a film magazine with Weir's photo on the front cover and the caption "Martin Weir: Will the real one please stand up?"(113).

Throughout the narrative many of the incidental characters also engage in acting in their day-to-day lives, which reflects their desire to be viewed as successful. Harry, for example, explains to Chili that no stars actually ate at the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel as it was full of tourists looking for stars, and executives who

had their secretaries page them so that they would appear important to the tourists. This reflects the major reason the characters change their identity: ego. The desire to be successful, or at least be viewed as successful, infiltrates the psyche of the characters and forces them to alter themselves. Just as Leila in *The Little Sister* took on the identity of Mavis Weld in an attempt to separate herself from her past and appear to all as a Hollywood star, throughout *Get Shorty* the desire for status affects the characters.

Leo Devoe, for example, obtains insurance money under false pretences, flees his creditors in Miami and goes to Las Vegas, where he assumes the identity of Leo Paris and plays the role of high-roller. He is so absorbed in his new identity that he momentarily brushes off Chili when they meet in Las Vegas. Chili later notes: “this dry cleaner, been on the hook to us for years, talking to me like that. I couldn’t believe it” (60). Harry Zimm compares this attitude of Leo with that of movie actors who have suddenly become successful:

That kind of attitude is called delusions of grandeur... he’s the same schmuck who made it on his tight pants and capped teeth, but now all of a sudden he knows everything there is about making pictures. (60-61)

Bo Catlett also notes this desire to feign success when he meets the Colombian drug runner Yayo. Catlett, who himself changed his identity, and his name, when he discovered one of his ancestors was black, notes how Yayo was of a type: “a mean little Colombian” who had seen “that movie Scarface and turned into... Al Pacino doing Tony Montana. Only [he] didn’t know how” (104). Thus Yayo is the case of a character attempting to take on the identity of a movie character. Once again Leonard’s use of intertextuality gives the satire a deeper edge. Yayo is a Columbian

attempting to play a Cuban character portrayed by an Italian-American actor. Whereas Yayo fails, Chili succeeds because Chili is not acting, but because that is his true identity. In fact, he and Karen are the only major characters who do not (for the most part) create a false identity. Chili, because he finds it unnecessary, and Karen because she has given up playing the role of B-movie actress; with her desire to quit acting professionally comes the desire to quit all aspects of acting in her life.

Karen's dropping of her false identity results in her being offered a job as a production executive after she, Harry and Chili pitch their movie idea. Interestingly this meeting is the only moment where Chili adopts a different identity. He too is caught in the desire to fulfil his Hollywood Dream of being a movie producer, and like the other characters, adopts what he believes will be an identity to achieve the dream. Highlighting that all involved are acting, the dialogue of the characters is presented as in a play. Crucially, Leonard reinforces the outsider aspect of Chili's character by writing his speech and thoughts during the meeting in prose form, thus implying he is the only one who is not acting:

Elaine: "Mr Palmer, what do you think of Michael Weir?"

"I think he's a great actor," Chili said...(199)

However, in keeping with the Hollywoodese that the other three characters speak, Chili repeats lines previously used by Martin Weir, and refers to the "visual fabric of the movie"(199). However this is the closest Chili comes to adopting the Hollywood identity. At the end of the novel in the final meeting with Weir, Chili breaks from the traditional Hollywood schmooze, and the falseness inherent with such talk and tells Weir that he does not see him as being able to play the shylock because he is "too short" (291).

Karen, on the other hand, does change her identity after the job offer. Despite intending to play it straight, she now becomes the archetypal Hollywood executive who sees things only from a film perspective. As with Harry's first viewing Chili in terms of casting, Karen observes Chili throwing Bo Catlett's offside down a staircase from the point of view of a producer:

There was a scene like it in an Eastwood picture only Clint grabs the guy a little higher... As a film sequence it would work from her point of view if she represented a third party at the scene. Then another setup to get the effect of it on her face. But there would have to be close shots too of what was going on... A tight close-up reaction shot of the guys face. Reverse to see him go down the stairs. (217)

Thus, the pull of Hollywood to take over the thinking of everyone is almost irresistible. Although Karen has given up her previous Hollywood identity of B-Movie star, she subconsciously creates a new identity in its place, this time that of a Hollywood producer.

Leonard's narrative, although consistent with the rest of his oeuvre in involving underworld figures and likeable crooks, is at its heart a satire. To this end, the Hollywood types, Zimm and Weir, are stereotypes. Weir, like many Hollywood stars, is short. As Karen points out to Chili at the end of the narrative: "They all are [short]... you shoot up" (292). Thus she highlights that the actors' height (and their insecurity) is disguised by the camera. Leonard wonderfully illuminates this insecurity by not only the character of Martin Weir, but also the title of the novel. "Get Shorty" ensures no amount of shooting up by the camera is going to hide the fact of Weir's lack of height. Leonard also uses Weir to satirise the traits of the Hollywood star. As mentioned earlier he launches into a pseudo-scientific explanation of the

acting process, reflecting a desire not to be belittled for being someone who merely dresses up and pretends to be other people for a living. William Goldman makes the point that in public Hollywood stars for the most part do “what they do best: acting” (*Adventures in the Screentrade* 9).

The most pointed satire of movie stars is Weir’s actions at lunch. He arrives wearing an old, worn-out, brown leather jacket and, reflecting what Leonard describes as “the unwritten rule in Hollywood” (260) does not order from the menu:

The seven-million dollar actor in the jacket a bum wouldn’t wear told the headwaiter he felt like an omelette, hesitant about it, almost apologetic. Could he have a cheese omelette with shallots, but with the shallots only slightly browned?... Then could he have some kind of light tomato sauce over it with just a hint of garlic but, please no oregano?... And fresh peas in the tomato sauce? Harry wanted to tell him, Michael, you can have any fucking thing you want. You want boiled goat? They’ll send out for it if they don’t have one. (260)

This scene reflects Goldman’s belief that stars act in such a manner “because they can” (25). And with respect to the creation of a Hollywood identity, because it is expected of them. Peter Travers has suggested that Leonard’s portrayal of Weir grew out of an encounter with Dustin Hoffmann during the proposed adaptation of Leonard’s 1983 novel *LaBrava* (74). If that is the case then Weir is certainly a pointed caricature of Hoffman; Elaine during her first meeting with Chili, Harry and Karen even remarks that Weir is “worse than Hoffmann and Redford put together...” (198).

Harry Zimm is, as much as Weir, completely absorbed in Hollywood. He sees himself as the most important part of the filmmaking process and cannot view anything outside of the frame of Hollywood. It is indicative of Zimm’s delusions of

grandeur that although his most successful films are *Grotesque* and *Slime Creatures* he pointedly tells Chili he produces “feature motion pictures, no TV” (31). Unlike Leonard’s depiction of Weir, there is no malice in the characterisation of Zimm. Harry is merely one of a type of whom Leonard believes all producers are; Harry is just a bit less lucky than some, and luckier than others. Harry can recognise the verbal diarrhoea of Weir for what it is (as is the case when Weir orders the omelette), yet in the next instance can act vitally interested in Weir’s conversation. Thus Harry is the perfect Hollywood producer, unable to think outside movie terms, ignorant of events outside of Hollywood (for example he does not recognize that Chili’s story about Leo is true, whereas Karen does immediately), and perfectly adept at doublethink when dealing with Hollywood stars.

Unlike the other two novels in this chapter, Leonard does not aim any real invective at Hollywood studio executives. The only executive in the novel, Elaine, is portrayed as intelligent and artistically driven. Indeed so positively portrayed is she, that in the sequel, *Be Cool*, she and Chili become romantically involved. The only satirical reference to studio executives is that Elaine’s previous occupation was marketing cosmetics – and the suggestion that this is a rather apt background for someone in her current position. Similarly, agents are only dealt with peripherally. Weir’s agent discusses the optioning of a novel for film development. The agent is completely without artistic sympathies, and says dismissively of the author: “Well what the fuck is the guy writing for, he doesn’t want to sell his work?”(254). When asked why he thinks the author wrote the novel, the agent responds: “Money. The idea of hitting it big... Selling one to Martin Weir. What else?” (254).

Get Shorty is not a satire full of invective and bile. Leonard shows movie stars to be shallow and self-centred, and producers to be sleazy, yet Harry Zimm for all his

ethical malfeasance does aim to make a great film, though his motives are somewhat skewed towards monetary incentives rather than artistic ideals. Within this narrative, Leonard's satire is directed primarily at the tendency of those within Hollywood to create false identities. Despite being positioned outside of Hollywood, even Chili, at times, cannot stop from playing the role of Hollywood wannabe.

The exposition of Hollywood as a facile place filled with facile people is not new, and Leonard's linking of Hollywood so directly to crime, and most decidedly the implication that a person involved in crime would be a perfect fit for Hollywood, continues the link first made by Chandler. Both he and Chandler however presented those in Hollywood as merely linked to crime, Michael Tolkin in *The Player* takes the next step and has them committing the crime.

2.3 The Complete Identity: *The Player*

Unlike *The Little Sister* or *Get Shorty*, *The Player*⁴³ is not focussed on underworld figures and criminals. A murder does occur and detectives are involved, however the main thrust of the narrative is the condemnation of Hollywood studios and the executives who run them. Executives, such as Griffin Mill, are the focus of this narrative, and there is little mention of actors, except as names thrown around by those executives. Like the 'masters of the universe' in Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) the executives are isolated from those whom their decisions affect. Also in common with Wolfe's novel, a murder is committed when two people from those opposing groups meet.

Griffin is an executive at an unnamed Hollywood studio, who, for all his cynicism and cold-heartedness, loves the studio because it is one of the few that

⁴³ In this chapter I will examine only Tolkin's novel, in Chapter Five I will analyse his screenplay and the film adaptation directed by Robert Altman.

remain “with property, with soundstages and back lots, where you could point to a building and say, ‘That was Alan Ladd’s dressing room’ or ‘Over there we made *Bringing Up Baby*’”(4). While Griffin’s main attention is on studio politics and whether he is ‘in or out’, he is also increasingly troubled by a series of anonymous, threatening postcards which have been sent to him by a disgruntled screenwriter.

The executives are for the most part people who have sold their artistic soul but who are at pains to defend their position. Griffin for example, is defensive when people discover he majored in Art at college, as he finds it “an easy thing to pick on”, especially by those “who pick on Hollywood for being artless. The people who still believe in capital-A art” (133). The executives are also jaded by the process of filmmaking. Tolkin depicts them as primarily concerned about their position in the studio and film industry; an actual film is only a means to consolidating their position. The executives in the narrative represent what William Goldman writes is the definition of such people: “intelligent, brutally overworked men and women... who wake up every morning of the world with the knowledge that sooner or later they’re going to get fired”(39).

Despite their ability to convince themselves that they are merely making movies the public wishes to see, they know there is little quality involved. This is revealed when Griffin talks to Levison, the head of the studio, over breakfast:

‘Read any good scripts lately?’ asked Levison.

‘*Chinatown*.’

‘They already made that one.’

‘I read it last week.’

‘You know they’d never make it now. They wouldn’t even make *Saturday Night Fever* now.’

Griffin smiled. ‘Excuse me, but you and I are ‘they.’ ’ (10)

Yet for all his good intentions and artistic background, Griffin is unable to recognise the artistic merits of a classic film such as *The Bicycle Thief* (1948). He sees the film when he goes to a theatre in the hope of also meeting screenwriter David Kahane.

While watching, Griffin gives the film the Hollywood producer treatment:

Griffin was shocked when THE END flashed on the screen. They didn’t get the bike. They would never get the bike. The ending was sad. It was so unnecessarily sad, too, because the father had suffered enough; having seen the bicycle thief’s apartment, he had reached the point where he could forgive, and instead, he was being forgiven. The father was the Bicycle Thief. Was there a sequel? (28)

Griffin, who is employed to decide which scripts the studio should make into films, is thus nonplussed by a film many critics consider to be among the finest films of the twentieth century⁴⁴. Indeed its status is such that Tolkin has used it here for the obvious purpose of highlighting Griffin’s absence of an artistic sensibility. Yet *The Bicycle Thief* has added meaning, for Tolkin could have had Griffin watch *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), or even *Citizen Kane*. De Sica’s film however is also one of the finest examples of neo-realism. This aspect is most jarring to Griffin; he exists in a world diametrically opposed to realism. In Griffin’s social/business circle, even the act of paying to watch a film in a theatre is considered unusual. So rare is the case for the studio executives to see a film in public that Levison has to order them to “go to a movie theatre and pay to see a movie... at least once a month” (38). Thus Griffin is in the act of doing something unnatural for him –

⁴⁴ In the first *Sight & Sound* poll in 1952 it was named the greatest film of all time, though it has since dropped out of the top ten of the magazine’s subsequent polls (“The Ten Best Movies of All Time” 27). On the influential web site, Internet Movie Data Base, it is rated the ninth best film of the 1940s by its subscribers, and 106th best film of all time (“Best/Worst 1940s Titles” 2004).

that is, something real – and also he is exposed to a film diametrically opposite to a Hollywood film given that De Sica employed non-actors ("Trivia for *The Bicycle Thief*").

After watching the film, Griffin's ordered view of the world is further disrupted when he meets Kahane. Griffin attempts to appease the writer of the threatening postcards by helping one random writer (Kahane). But when Kahane rejects Griffin's offer, Griffin turns from saviour of writers to their attacker. Kahane's rejection is in effect a rejection of entry into the dream world, and dispels Griffin's ability to make such dreams come true. Kahane is blithely critical of Griffin's offer to write a remake of *The Bicycle Thief*: "You'd give it a happy ending"⁴⁵, and when Griffin follows him to the parking lot Kahane tells him: "I didn't come here tonight to make you happy"(33). Griffin at this point convinces himself that Kahane is the anonymous postcard writer and he murders him:

Griffin pushed Kahane down from his unsteady balance in the balls of his feet... With his arms out, he fell over, and Griffin stood up and then dropped on his knees to Kahane's chest, like a TV wrestler... Griffin felt the strength of that legendary mother who pulled the car off her child, the power of the universe was in his hands. He sat on Kahane's chest and held his throat in those hands, and he saw what it was to choke a man to death. (35)

Although the attack is completely unprovoked, Griffin has a paranoid delusion that Kahane will tell others of his actions with regards to their meeting. However, during the murder, Griffin's motive changes from an attempt to silence Kahane to one of almost sexual fulfilment. He achieves a state of ecstasy as he feels himself become a

⁴⁵ This of course is an accurate criticism. The next day when Griffin tells Levison he saw *The Bicycle Thief*, he explains that if they were to remake it, "We'd have to give it a happy ending"(38).

murderer. The sense of powerlessness he feels because of the studio politics and the threatening postcards is replaced by the “power of the universe”.

Unlike many of the characters in *The Little Sister* or *Get Shorty*, Griffin does not change his identity. Tolkin shows that Griffin, the studio executive, is perfectly suited for the role of murderer. During and after the act, Griffin does not undergo any change of character, nor does he attempt to speak differently. The murder is, if anything, committed calmly, and afterward Griffin feels “detached”, but secure in the knowledge “that it was not impossible to kill”(35). Griffin is however, “shocked by how little guilt he felt”(45), and ponders if his lack of guilt is why he is not married. Thus for Griffin the problem lies not in his having committed a murder but that he does not feel the requisite amount of guilt. Griffin’s ability to associate his lack of guilt with his inability to marry, also reveals the utter soullessness and egocentric nature of his character.

Tolkin’s portrayal of Griffin uses the traditional satirical tactic of exaggerating the targets’ failings (Feinberg 14), to attack their position. Griffin’s effortless jump from murdering a screenwriter’s career to murdering the screenwriter reflects executives’ contempt for writers and artists, as well as their own moral failings. In Griffin’s case, his artistic soullessness is reflected by a lack of humanity. It also highlights Griffin’s inability to exist outside of the dream world of Hollywood. Confronted with a film beyond his comprehension and the fact that he cannot control the actions of the postcard writer nor make David Kahane’s dreams come true, he responds with an attack that allows himself to reassert his position as purveyor of dreams and one who is outside (and above) those unconnected with the dream world of Hollywood.

Pointedly the lack of change in Griffin's identity is what separates Griffin from those in *The Little Sister* or *Get Shorty* who chase their Hollywood Dreams. Griffin is the complete realisation of a character whose identity has changed to achieve the dream. He is unable to view anything outside filmic terms. Whereas in *Get Shorty*, once Karen Flores gained a position as a studio executive, she occasionally notices the filmic qualities of happenings in her life, Griffin continuously thinks and acts from a filmic perspective. When he initially decides to take action against the anonymous postcard writer, he seeks advice from a friend, but sets his question in terms of asking advice about a film script. Later, when he is worried about the legalities of certain issues – such as his requiring a lawyer at a police station – he once again asks advice as though seeking counsel on a film script.

Other characters exhibit the change in identity so characteristic throughout Hollywood satires. Griffin notes that young executives attempt to mimic the style of Levison and other more flamboyant senior studio heads. He believed this “looked obvious”(99) and thus was determined not to do it. For example, he refuses to grow a beard because although

... some very rich men in Hollywood were bearded... most of the assistants and vice-presidents who wanted to look like rich producers with beards only looked like those assholes with license plates frames that say MILLIONARE IN TRAINING.(99)

Griffin of course has changed. Once an Art student at college, now he states the only reason he achieved any success in art was because “it was sort of like cooking; I knew the recipe. I knew how to get the faculty to give me prizes”(132). His identity is such that he cannot admit to an artistic side, and any evidence of such a sensibility is given a businesslike explanation. Griffin's desire not to imitate others

does not reflect a lack of a created identity but merely a belief that his current identity is the correct one for achieving success. He hopes that “people [make] fun of his own manner, but... knew they probably didn’t”(100). His decision not to wear a beard is thus not out of any belief that he is above such antics, but because “he knew it was too late to develop a trait for the sake of attention and power”(100). Such thoughts imply he has already constructed a Hollywood identity but one without such traits.

Griffin is thus fully aware of the falsity surrounding him, but he is unable to see, or acknowledge, that he is in anyway false in manner or character. He notes for example, that even the rich men with beards were only copying bearded directors (a profession considered artistic) and that these bearded directors were actually “copying Francis Ford Coppola. And Coppola, Griffin told himself, only had a beard because he was too busy to shave, or didn’t like the shape of his chin”(99). Tolkin depicts Hollywood as a place where everyone attempts to be someone else, and that even those people they are attempting to replicate have themselves based their identity on someone else. This is the sense of simulation that Gore Vidal reveals to a greater extent in *Myra Breckinridge* (as will be discussed in the next chapter) and is also reflected in the ability of filmic sensibility to infiltrate the character’s (namely Griffin’s) thoughts and actions.

This infiltration is evident throughout the narrative. When Griffin meets a screenwriter at a restaurant, he notices the dining room was set up to replicate old Hollywood. Rather than be cynical about the “Disneylandization of America”(93), or the fact that “the movies [were] turning America in to a movie”(93), Griffin likes the fake touches. Similarly, when he and June Mercator (the girlfriend of Kahane) travel to Mexico for a weekend, Griffin notes that:

There were droves of college kids everywhere, most of them drunk, sitting at tables in bars that were made to look like Mexican cantinas. Fake Mexico in Mexico, because the owner was a fan of *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. Everything was a stage set now. (171)

The entire narrative is set within Hollywood. Unlike *The Little Sister*, where only Hollywood appears directly with Marlowe's meetings with Oppenheimer and Ballou, and indirectly in the dreams of Leila, or *Get Shorty* where Chili's background in Miami remains a major focus of the narrative, here nothing exists outside Hollywood except through a Hollywood perspective. A trip to New York is undertaken by a minor character purely to obtain the adoption rights for a novel; Griffin and June's trip to Mexico has Griffin viewing Hollywood induced counterfeit, and sees him imagining himself in a thriller where he is tailed by police. Cultural theorists Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that "real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies"(126), and Griffin is a character whose life has reached such a point. He even begins to view his situation as though it is a film and mentally produces the movie, making changes in the script as he does:

It wouldn't be a movie, it was sort of morality play that television liked to put on, they'd spread it over two nights, they'd make a big meal of the trial... What would they start with? Griffin would begin the show with Kahane's pitch... He'd have to sleep with June before the murder too... And who would play Griffin? Michael Douglas? Val Kilmer would be terrific, thought Griffin, he could play the office politician, the smarm, the manipulator. Or John Malkovich? He could play paranoid. (166-7)

So immersed is Griffin in the culture of Hollywood that he is unable to examine his conscience without viewing it in the third person and as though it is a script.

Interestingly at this point Griffin does not attempt to give himself a 'Hollywood happy ending'. He thinks that he will go to jail and that the happy ending will apply to the police, or perhaps the postcard writer. He notes his own actions as being pathetic, and once again transfers them into filmic terms:

He picked up his towel, his sandals, his magazines. In a comedy these details could make the audience laugh, or at least set the character as a fussy, someone the audience had no need to take seriously. (168)

While Griffin might believe himself a paranoiac, smarmy manipulator (which of course he is), he does not change his identity. He continues to be 'the player'. Those who wish to attain his status continue to imitate and alter themselves, whether through speech or appearance, Griffin however remains unaltered. His (relative) guilt about the murder passes – he marries June – and he takes over the head of production for a minor film company. The postcard writer contacts him and apologises for his actions – indicative that Griffin has achieved his ultimate happy ending. The man acting on behalf of all the writers whom Griffin had treated with disdain and contempt actually apologises for behaving to Griffin in a like manner. Tolkin's satire in this instance targets Griffin, and the ability of his type to gain the ending they desire. Richard Sugg (1994) has pointed out that one difference between the novel and the later film adaptation is the lack of the writers' culpability in the Hollywood system. This point will be developed in Chapter Five, however of interest here is that Griffin has in the end attained his position as 'master of the universe', while the writer has succumbed to the pressure of Hollywood and quit screenwriting. The final line, which informs the reader that he has married June, reinforces Griffin's triumph.

The Player is the most satirical of the three narratives examined in this chapter. Tolkin's portrayal of Griffin as a film executive who is so cold hearted and soulless that he is able to murder without guilt does not however, imply that Hollywood executives are inherently evil. Indeed Griffin's character is at times presented sympathetically, or at the very least no more unsympathetically than the other executives such as Levison or Larry Levy. That Griffin feels no guilt after his murder of David Kahane reflects not evil but complete immersion in the Hollywood world. "Everything is business"(186) he tells the police detective Susan Avery – in his case, movie business. He can only examine his conscience within the frame of a film script, and, despite Griffin's fear that his script might end in a decidedly un-Hollywood, gloomy manner, Tolkin ensures that the satire keeps a sharp edge. For Griffin learns no lessons from his experience other than that he wants to run a smaller film company rather than a large studio. A just ending would have seen Griffin's crime revealed and his being jailed, but it would have been fatal to the satire. Griffin does not exist outside the Hollywood Dream. He has reached the point where he can make dreams come true through his deciding to produce a film, and where he himself lives the dream. That his dream-life seems soulless and based on falsity is Tolkin's point. In *Get Shorty*, Harry, Karen and even Bo, at least wanted to make movies, Griffin is only concerned with movies because of the power they give him. The movies he is most concerned with are the ones he creates in his head.

* * *

The movie industry is the most prominent example of business influencing the artistic process. Publishing is of course a major industry, yet the business itself is less visible than film – there is never going to be a theme park built around a publishing house as there is with Universal Studios – and nor is there an abundance of media attention on

the costs of publishing a novel in the sense that there are with the cost of producing a film, where scenes can be cut purely for financial reasons. The popular music industry with its emphasis on charts and hits has a comparable accent on the monetary aspects of the industry⁴⁶, yet the movie industry is structured to the point that the daily grosses of films are known and are news in themselves. For example, with the release of *Spider-Man 2* (2004), most media attention was focussed not on whether the film was artistically sophisticated in any way but whether it would break the record for the highest grossing *opening weekend* in North America⁴⁷.

Thus even the once examined total gross figure has been replaced by a short term figure; one that reflects more the ability of the studio's marketing department than the film's artistic quality, or popularity⁴⁸. Such emphasis on the monetary aspects of the industry leads quite naturally to Hollywood's link with crime. Within the three narratives examined here, there is no sense of criminals being out of place dealing with those within the Hollywood scene, or vice versa. From *The Little Sister*, written in 1946, with executives who do not hesitate to hush-up a murder or hire armed thugs, to Griffin Mill in the early 1990s, who can murder and get away with it, the depiction of Hollywood as an ethical free-zone has continued apace. Yet the novelists examined here do not merely comment on those who run the studios, but also those on the fringes of the industry.

These people, who are minor stars and producers, are generally shown to have retained the ethics which those in power have lost. Their characters however, are not

⁴⁶ It is perhaps then no coincidence that in Leonard's sequel to *Get Shorty*, *Be Cool*, Chili Palmer becomes involved in the music industry.

⁴⁷ It did not, the record is held by *Spider-Man* (2002) ("U.S. Opening Weekends" 2004).

⁴⁸ The growth in importance of the opening weekend figures can be seen by the fact that in 1989 the top 50 box office earners in the United States opened, on average, in 1408 theatres, and the opening weekend accounted for, on average, 17.51% of the total gross. By 2003, the average number of theatres the top 50 earning films opened in was 2956 (and increase of 110%) and this opening weekend accounted for an average of 27.4% (an increase of 54%) of the total gross (*Box Office Mojo* 2004; *Box Office Prophets* 2004).

solid; almost universally they are shown to have discarded, or attempted to discard, the previous 'non-Hollywood' part of their selves. Whether through a change of name such as Leila to Mavis, or Antonio to Bo, or through the adoption of different speech or behaviour which gives (or at least attempts to give) a more successful impression to others, the characters on the fringes are shown to have constructed a Hollywood identity. The desire for success, and the pursuit of their dreams appears inherently to require them to do this.

The pastiche of the crime fiction and Hollywood satire throws this adoption of identities into stark relief. Within crime fiction, characters are required to create identities for nefarious purposes; thus we see characters, such as Marlowe and Chili Palmer, who are used to dealing with underworld characters, being at ease in Hollywood. Similarly, and more pointedly for the satirist, is that those within the Hollywood industry are also at ease with those in the underworld. Such a rapport between what should be opposing groups reflects the deeper distaste that satirists have for Hollywood: not so much that they are criminal, but that the industry is based on deception. The adoption of new identities also reflects the insularity of Hollywood. That those who arrive from outside Hollywood feel the need to adopt a new self indicates not just of the desire for success, but also the implication that their old self was not strong, nor glamorous enough. *The Little Sister*, *Get Shorty* and *The Player* all involve characters in various stages of adoption of new identities who also feel the effects of that adoption. In *The Little Sister*, Leila finds she is unable to escape her past. In *Get Shorty*, Chili walks the line between adoption of a new identity and staying true to his non-Hollywood self. *The Player* however, shows Griffin Mill as the end product of someone who has totally discarded his or her previous identity, and as a result is amoral and completely self-centred.

The cynical attitude of these authors towards those who change identities is reflected in the common occurrence of characters being unable to think outside of Hollywood. This psychic infiltration of Hollywood affects every facet of the subjects' lives, and is one which is taken to a greater extent in satires, such as Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*. In the crime fictions examined, the line between the Hollywood dream world and reality is blurred. In Vidal's satires – and the others to be discussed in the following chapter – the lines all but disappear and the reality of Hollywood and its illusions collapse into one simulacrum.

3.0 Hollywood Simulacra

“Where is Cinema? It is all around you...” (Baudrillard *America* 56).

At the end of John Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) a reporter discovers that Senator Ransom Stoddard did not in fact shoot the infamous bandit Liberty Valance as was popularly believed. Rather than report the truth, the reporter promptly tears up his notes and tells the senator: “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend”. As Ted Sennett has pointed out, this statement could almost stand as the motto for virtually the entire Western genre (77). Yet it is also the maxim for the business of Hollywood itself. Indeed so conscientiously have Hollywood films, and those who write on Hollywood, “printed the legend” that a point has been reached where the legend is accepted as fact despite little or no historical authenticity.

As seen in the previous chapters, in satires of Hollywood the supremacy of the legend is often revealed through characters assuming identities in order to blend in with those around them, to pursue the Hollywood Dream, or to remain in power (that is to continue possessing the Hollywood Dream). Yet the artificiality of Hollywood is not limited to the people. The place and industry itself has a mythical existence with little basis in fact. The myth of Hollywood as the place where dreams come true is now so complete that it has become – to use Jean Baudrillard’s term – a simulacrum.

Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra and simulation, which he developed in a series of works in the 1980s, is particularly useful for analysing satires of Hollywood since the 1960s. While works before this time (such as those mentioned in Chapters One and Two) highlight the artificiality associated with Hollywood, they do not suggest, aside from occasional moments, that Hollywood is artificial in itself. In *The Day of the Locust*, West notes the houses reproduced to look like chateaux and

southern American mansions, and Raymond Chandler similarly notes that those who arrive in Hollywood begin acting as soon as they get off the bus; however, both suggest that there is always a truth behind this simulation. Baudrillard's notion of the image however refutes any notion that an underlying truth exists.

He outlines the four stages of the image:

- it is the reflection of a basic reality
- it masks and perverts a basic reality [first order of simulation]
- it masks the *absence* of a basic reality [second order of simulation]
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum [third order of simulation] ("The Precession of Simulacra" 11)

Baudrillard initially was concerned with the precession of simulacra throughout capitalist society since the Renaissance. Thus he argues the first order occurred from the Renaissance through to the Industrial Revolution, during which time, for example, fashion allowed people to signify themselves as belonging to a different class; the second order occurred during and after the Industrial Revolution where mass production and consumption meant that images were no longer perverting a reality – that is the intention was not to fake an original – but rather the image had little relation to an original, its importance lay in its part in the process of mass production. The final order, Baudrillard asserts, is that which currently exists, and will continue in the future through technological advances such as cloning. The simulation now has no connection with an original, indeed, it is a simulation of a simulation, and thus there is no sense of truth and falsity, an original or a copy.

Baudrillard relates this final stage to Disneyland. He argues: “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe the rest is real. Whereas all of Los

Angeles and the America that surround it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation” (“The Precession of Simulacra” 12). Baudrillard’s association of simulacra with Disneyland affords a distinct link between his theory and analysis of Hollywood fiction. Disneyland exists only because Hollywood does. While it has become a theme park largely separate from the films produced by Disney Corporation and its subsidiaries, its myth as “the happiest place on earth” is founded in movies. Baudrillard does mention other theme parks situated in Los Angeles – such as Magic Mountain and Marine World – which suggests that he does not view Disneyland’s connection with Hollywood to be acute, yet it is this connection which most illuminates his theory.

One theme park that Baudrillard does not mention, yet which is better suited to his analysis than that of Disneyland, is Universal Studios. Now situated in its own suburb (Universal City) and surrounded by a shopping district featuring movie theatres and shops oriented purely towards tourist consumers, the park features movie-themed rides and performances (such as the *Waterworld* spectacular) as well as the added – and unique – attraction of a tour of the Universal Studio’s sound stages and sets. One can ride on the studio tour and view the bungalows/offices of known directors and producers – and their car spaces – and also view the sets used for various films produced by Universal Pictures. This tour is the perfect representation of the order of simulacra. In buses spaced at specific times apart, patrons can see the submarine model used in the film *U-571* (2000), or “Bruce”, the model shark from *Jaws* (1975) swimming next to the bus, as well as the sets used for television programmes and films. Thus, one can see the Bates Motel from *Psycho* (1960) next to the set used for *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* (2000), both situated behind a street which has the Cleavers’ house from *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) opposite the

fraternity house used in *Animal House* (1978). On the tour, tourists happily take photographs of houses that are mere frontages, and the discard sets of old films and television programmes.

In essence the studio tour highlights the artificiality of Hollywood films – it cheerfully displays how the illusion of rain is created, reveals that buildings used in films are merely frontages, and discloses that houses situated in the distance are often built two-thirds size to simulate perspective. Such insights do not destroy the verisimilitude of the films; they enhance the illusion. Paradoxically, when driving past the sets, one is struck by how ‘real’ they look, and indeed were this not the case the simulacra would be destroyed.

It is the ability to appear real which drives the simulation, but it is the lack of connection with reality that creates the simulacra. Most of the tourists who frequent the park would have little idea what a typical 1950s American street looked like, yet upon viewing the site used for such scenes in films the tourist accepts that it is the perfect representation of such a street. It looks like a 1950s street even to those who were not born at the time, or who never lived in “small town” America. In fact even those who may have lived in such circumstances would not be dismayed, because the sets simulate the streets featured in television programmes and films of the 1950s which even at the time had no basis in reality, but were formed more by the Motion Picture Production Code⁴⁹. They depicted a world where husbands and wives slept in

⁴⁹ Indeed even the influence of the production code is one based in myth – or at least exaggeration. For example, Richard Maltby asserts the common trait of married couples sleeping in separate beds is not due to a requirement in the production code (Maltby "More Sinned Against than Sinning" 2003). Maltby also notes in *Hollywood Cinema* that the production code was in many ways welcomed by the studios as a method of guaranteeing to the public that they would be viewing “amusement that was not ‘harmful’”(61). In this sense the code was helpful for commercial reasons for the studios. In this vein what also must be considered – especially with respect to television programmes – is the influence of advertising. The conservative nature of advertisers is one that persists to this day. After the recent “wardrobe malfunction” by Janet Jackson during the 2004 Super Bowl, NBC, the network which screens the popular programme *E.R.*, removed footage of an elderly patient’s breast from an episode of the medical drama because “... the atmosphere created by this week’s events [the Super Bowl] has

separate beds, no one used profane language, women did not get pregnant, (rather, they were “expecting”⁵⁰) and – as in the case of *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968) – a world where even in the southern states of the United States no African Americans lived. The street on the tour is therefore unconnected with reality, yet appears real – in fact more real than an actual photograph of an actual street from the 1950s would look – because the houses on the Universal Studio tour have a sense of familiarity created by the films and television programmes.

Yet the tour is little more than a simulation of tours that occur throughout Los Angeles. People can go on bus tours of famous stars’ houses, places of infamous renown, or of the “Grave Line Tours” which feature the sites of celebrities’ deaths. On Hollywood Boulevard, at Mann’s Chinese Theatre, tourists flock to place their feet in the footprints of stars, or to take a photo of a favourite actor’s star on the boulevard. Thus, the Universal Studio tour is a perfect simulacrum, which, like Disneyland, hides the fact that much of Los Angeles is itself a theme park. Indeed Hollywood Boulevard itself has become a simulacrum, for in recent years the city council has redeveloped the street to hide the fact that for many years it was a district where prostitutes were a more common sight than movie stars (Frank Rose 48).

However, this sense of simulacra is not limited to Los Angeles and the specific areas of Beverly Hills and Hollywood. It has infiltrated the films the industry produces. Like Disneyland, many films produced by Hollywood are pure simulacra.

made it too difficult for our affiliates to air this shot” (*Post-Janet: E.R. Breast Shot Cut*). Implicit in such a statement is not that the shot would contravene any regulations, but that NBC’s affiliates would have difficulty in persuading advertisers to be associated with the programme. Given that in 2004 such a furore can exist, it is logical to conclude that the influence of advertisers in the 1950s would have been of similar impact.

⁵⁰ The most infamous example of this was on *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957), and is again a case of the network censoring itself rather than a specific directive from the code. With respect to pregnancy, the code only states: “Scenes of actual birth, in fact or silhouette, are never to be presented”. With respect to the word pregnancy, the only clause which may be relevant in the code is “Clause III”: “The treatment of low, disgusting, unpleasant, though not necessarily evil subjects should always be subject to the dictates of good taste and regard for the sensibilities of the audience” (“The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (Hays Code)” 2000).

This does not merely apply to the now stereotyped vision of “middle America”: the towns featured in Andy Hardy films or television programmes of the 1950s – for such scenes are now usually represented ironically such as in *Pleasantville* (1998) – those movies which attempt realism are also simulacra. They simulate a reality that does not exist, but which the audience believes does. Indeed the ‘realism’ has become a marketing tool for producers of the films. Stephen Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) was marketed heavily for its ability to portray the Normandy landings in the most realistic manner ever seen on film. Yet in fact, the film was shot slightly overdeveloped to simulate Robert Capa’s photos of the landings, which were overdeveloped by mistake (Nathan 114). Thus the film was actually an attempt to simulate a look that occurred only after the event in the photographer’s laboratory – in effect a simulation of the look of films and photos of the act, rather than the act itself. Similarly, *Schindler’s List* (1993) was shot in black-and-white to give the effect of a documentary, and a 1940s film. The film, promoted as a realistic portrayal of the Holocaust, was in fact a simulation of both documentaries and films of the period, yet was successful because viewers believed the black-and-white made the film more real – as though because films and documentaries of the time were shot in black and white, the most accurate manner to depict events happening during that time is not to depict the events as people saw them (that is in colour) but how people saw them in films at that time.

Such a simulacrum of reality is common among critically successful films. While it may seem plausible to suspend disbelief in such ‘low-brow’ action films as *Con Air* (1997) and allow a character who is a psychopathic serial-killer to be presented as humorous and at times caring – he is nice to a young girl he meets, and even admits to her that he “is sick” – such a representation is only slightly less

realistic than that of the serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). In that film Hannibal Lector is a psychopathic serial killer who is however at all times presented as rational and often witty. He eventually wins over the audience due to his disdain for the arrogant psychiatrist, Dr. Chilton, and his final line which suggests he is intending to murder Chilton is presented as a witty double entendre: “I’m planning on having an old friend for dinner”. Thus the film depicts a psychopath as one whose crimes are the mere incidental traits of someone who is otherwise charming (and indeed in *Hannibal* (2001) he is almost a comic figure). Despite such implausibilities, critics and viewers treated the film as realistic, Peter Travers, for example, described the film as “mercilessly scary and mercifully humane at the same time” (“*The Silence of the Lambs*” 1991).

Similarly, the 2001 winner of the Academy Award for best picture, *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), presents a schizophrenic sufferer who uses his rational intellect to cure himself – despite the reality of John Nash’s illness and recovery being quite different. Because of the popularity of the film, his illness and cure becomes reality, whereas the biography on which the film was based is reduced to a footnote. Such instances are not mere examples of a Hollywood treatment⁵¹, or attempts by studios to give narratives ‘happy endings’. Rather, they are examples of simulacra: though they portray a reality which does not exist, they are deemed to be of sufficient verisimilitude to win critical acclaim – in fact their reality is so authoritative that revelations that Nash’s illness and recovery were not accurately depicted in *A Beautiful Mind* were little impediment to it being honoured as Best Picture.

Paradoxically, many believed the actions in real life involving Russell Crowe (who

⁵¹ Nor are they exceptional. Consider the critically acclaimed *The Godfather* (1972) in which the mafia is presented as a family business that metes out punishment to those who “get mixed up in the rackets”, or *Goodfellas* (1990) in which the narrator states that the mafia is merely “protection for the kind of guys who can’t go to the cops”, which implies it is a passive organisation absolved of guilt because it is merely providing a service and not actively seeking to commit crimes.

played the role of John Nash) did affect his chances of winning Best Actor (Corliss “Inside the Oscar Wars” 60-1).

Such a position should not surprise, as the Academy Awards themselves are a simulacrum. Notionally the ceremony is designed to honour the best achievements in film in that year, yet in fact it is a simulation of an award ceremony. Such is the importance of the awards that studios actively market their films for nomination. The release dates and subsequent publicity campaigns are orchestrated with the Academy Awards in mind. As Damien Bona points out, such a situation has existed for over fifty years (92). Thus, the awards to a great extent do not honour those films that are ‘best’ but those films that are marketed best. To win, a film need not be the best artistically, but it must have achieved some measure of box office success. *Gandhi* (1982) was the last film to win Best Picture, which, at the time of nominations, was the least successful box office earner in the United States of the five nominated films⁵². Since then, seventeen of the films that have won Best Picture were either the first or second highest box office earners of the five nominated films at the time of nomination. Two of the three that were not (*Chicago* (2001) and *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)) were in the top two by the time of the awards. Only the 1987 winner, *The Last Emperor* remained in the bottom two (“Academy Awards Box Office” 2004).

Despite this and other facts, such as the bias against non-English films⁵³, the awards are depicted as the pinnacle achievement in film. In fact, their real purpose (and that of other awards ceremonies which occur around the same time of the year) is to disguise the reality that a vast majority of films made by the Hollywood industry are purely market-driven entities as likely to be based on computer games or theme

⁵² After its nomination and subsequent victory, *Gandhi* did go on to gross more than one of the other nominated films, *Missing*, yet at the time of the nominations it had grossed nearly \$3 million less than any of the other four nominated films (*E.T.*, *Tootsie*, *The Verdict* and *Missing*)(“Academy Awards Box Office: 1982” 2004).

⁵³ For example, only seven foreign language films have been nominated for Best Picture.

park rides (for example, *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003)) as on a novel or true story. As William Goldman writes, “studio executives spend fifty-one weeks a year making lowest common denominator flicks. The fifty-second they all take baths and try to smell nice. Welcome to the Oscars”(*The Big Picture* 245).

For satirists of Hollywood, the implications of Hollywood as a simulacrum are crucial – as indeed the theory of simulacra is for all satirists. Satirists’ power lies in their ability to evoke in their readers a blend of amusement and contempt towards their subjects (Hight 21). Yet, as Baudrillard points out, in the postmodern world, “a kind of non-intentional parody hovers over everything...” (“The Orders of Simulacra” 150). One cannot satirise a simulacrum for being a false or hypocritical image, because there is no real image with which to compare it. Coupled with this dilemma is the lack of contemporary concern at being satirised. Thus no longer can the satirist alone claim the ability to see the faults of the world: not only does the world already see the faults, the perpetrators are aware of them, and to a great extent revel in them. With respect to Hollywood satires, this requires the satirist to make the leap from attacking those who create artificial identities to realising that all identities are in a sense artificial. Such an approach is one taken by the three works examined in this chapter.

Both of Gore Vidal’s Hollywood satires: *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* treat Hollywood as a simulacrum: the first through the construction of an academy which simulates Hollywood, and through the constructed identity of the character, Myra; the second through the merging of fact and fiction to the point where art does not merely imitate life, but becomes life. These two novels will be compared with Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Blvd*, in which screen legend Norma Desmond lives the maxim of “legend become fact” to the fullest extreme. These three works are pivotal examples of satire

of Hollywood that does not primarily attack the corrupt values the industry holds, or the corrupting influence it has on those who come to Los Angeles chasing their dreams, but rather the artificiality of Hollywood itself, the artificiality of those within the industry, and the aura of the film industry. It is an attack which satirists have continued until the present day; highlighted by two films produced around the turn of the twenty-first century: *The Truman Show* and *Mulholland Dr.*.

The Truman Show and *Mulholland Dr.* are in many respects the cinematic equivalents of *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*. *The Truman Show*, with its creation of Seahaven as a simulacrum of small town America, is comparable with the Buck Loner Academy of Acting and Modelling in *Myra Breckinridge*. Whereas in Vidal's work the students and teachers allow themselves to treat the academy as though it were a real end and believe that the fame they achieve in the academy is comparable with fame outside its walls, in *The Truman Show* the actors who populate Seahaven know it is not real, yet act as though it is. Only Truman Burbank is unaware, and thus his position is akin to a student at the Buck Loner academy who does not realise the academy is a simulacrum. In *Mulholland Dr.*, fiction and reality merge in a situation similar to *Myron*, wherein characters live in a world bounded by the fiction of *Sirens of Babylon*. Just as events in the fictional world in *Myron* have an impact in the real world, so too do incidents in the dream world of *Mulholland Dr.* influence the real.

The two films are thus divergent examples of the treatment of Hollywood as a simulacrum; each has its own approach. *The Truman Show* is a normative satire, which aims to attack and correct. Seahaven is a simulacrum, but at no time is it suggested that it is more real than the world. Screenwriter Andrew Niccol and director Peter Weir argue that Truman's situation is morally unjustifiable and they attack the entertainment industry's treatment of people as units of production. Inherent in the

satire is the sense that that which is created in film – or television – is artificial, and it is thus a distorted representation of the real world. The film also attacks those who view such ‘reality’ programmes.

Mulholland Dr., while similarly highlighting the artificiality of film, treats fiction and reality as one, and does not attempt to convey that one is less artificial than the other. Lynch’s satire is thus more postmodern in conception than *The Truman Show*. Lynch’s film uses common postmodern techniques (Goring 270) such as permutation, discontinuity, randomness and excess. Whereas Niccol and Weir use a false world to highlight the amorality of Hollywood, Lynch depicts how real the false can seem to highlight the inherent link between artificiality and Hollywood: the connection is so extreme that it is not limited to that which is filmed; it permeates throughout all things and people associated with Hollywood.

The two films also contain links to films which came before them. *The Truman Show*, and the character of Truman Burbank in particular, are linked explicitly with Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* and its protagonist, George Bailey. *Mulholland Dr.* is linked with Wilder’s *Sunset Blvd.* The two films are thus postmodern re-workings of two pivotal films of the earlier twentieth century. *It’s a Wonderful Life* glorified the American Dream, and *Sunset Blvd* is the most influential filmic satire of Hollywood and the Hollywood Dream. *The Truman Show* reveals that Hollywood has created a conception of the traditional American Dream which is a pure simulacrum: it never did exist except in television programmes and movies, and Truman’s escape from Seahaven is an escape from a belief in this simulacra. In *Mulholland Dr.*, the delusions Norma Desmond creates in *Sunset Blvd* are taken to the full extreme, and given a postmodern twist. Whereas the viewer of Wilder’s film always knows that Norma is deluded, in *Mulholland Dr.* we see delusion presented as

fact. Together, *Mulholland Dr.* and *The Truman Show* illustrate Hollywood's influence on American culture and attack the artificiality inherent in such an influence.

3.1 *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*

The subject of the first two of Gore Vidal's five major satires⁵⁴, *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*, is Hollywood. It is an industry he would return to later with his novel *Hollywood* (1990). In the introduction to his series of historical novels, "Narratives of the Golden Age", of which *Hollywood* is the penultimate work, Vidal writes: "In *Hollywood* both Hearst and Caroline [William Randolph Hearst and Caroline Sanford, the protagonist of the novel] decide that the movies will be the next big thing, the source of dreams for the world" (ix). This aspect of Hollywood as the source of dreams is one he examines in both *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*. In all Vidal's satires, the world is often an absurd place where human cruelty thrives. However, in *Myra Breckinridge* and its sequel, *Myron*, he focuses less on the hypocrisies and cruelty in the world, and more on the artificiality of the world – specifically, Hollywood.

The symbol of Hollywood as a "dream factory" of course is hardly a new concept, however Vidal's representation of Hollywood is decidedly postmodern, and bears much similarity to Baudrillard's analysis of Disneyland. In both novels, Vidal does not seek to attack those in the industry, or even those wishing to enter it, rather his focus is the image of Hollywood and its influence on American culture.

Throughout *Myra Breckinridge*, Vidal attacks the nature of Hollywood as a simulacrum: a world enclosed in myth and artificiality. He does this in two ways:

⁵⁴ The others include: *Kalki* (1978), *Duluth* (1983) and *Live from Golgotha* (1992).

through the characterisation of Myra Breckinridge, and through the motif of the Buck Loner Academy of Acting and Modelling.

With her confused gender, Myra is herself a simulation. At the beginning of the novel, Myra, the narrator, gives the reader no indication that she is a transsexual. Yet despite this, she is the simulation of a powerful woman. At this point the issue of her gender is irrelevant for it is only on further reading that the reader discovers Myra is in fact a construction: the feminine alter ego of Myron Breckinridge. So completely does Myra dominate her own narrative, however, that it may be more accurate to describe Myron as the masculine alter ego of Myra. Yet her position as a construction of Hollywood is evident from the first page. She describes herself for the reader as

... Myra Breckinridge whom no man will ever possess... I held off the entire elite of the Trobriand Islanders...Wielding a stone axe, I broke the arms, the limbs, the balls of their finest warriors, my beauty blinding them... unmanning them in the way that King Kong was reduced to a mere simian whimper by beauteous Fay Wray whom I resemble left three-quarter pose if the key light is no more than five feet high during the close shot. (3)

Her description has little connection with the real world; the hyperbolic images and metaphors she uses are those of Hollywood films, which suggests she is a creation of Hollywood film, rather than merely the feminine side of Myron Breckinridge. Even her alleged similarity to Fay Wray exists only in the context of a movie shot – it requires lighting and a specific camera angle. This blur of reality and fantasy is reinforced soon after when she writes:

I am not the same Myra Breckinridge who was the scourge of the Trobriand Islanders. She is a creature of fantasy, a daydream... I live

no longer in the usual world. I have forsaken the familiar. And soon by an extreme gesture, I shall cease altogether to be human and become legend like Jesus, Buddha, Cybele. (6-7)

In acknowledging the fantasy of her description, Myra counters with another fantasy.

The use of Myra as the simulation of the perfect woman is coupled with the other simulation within the narrative: Buck Loner's Academy of Acting and Modelling. Whereas Myra simulates a modern woman, the academy simulates the Hollywood system; it is thus a simulation of a simulacrum. The academy, run by Buck Loner, is presented as a means for those wishing to gain a toehold in the Hollywood system, yet the academy only simulates the system, and is an end in itself. All those within the academy are affected by its nature as a simulacrum and are themselves simulacra. All the students, for example, present themselves as actors. Myra notes disappointedly that

... only one has sought to model himself on a Forties star: the sickest of the Easterners is currently playing Humphrey Bogart, and he is hopeless in the part. The rest are entirely contemporary, pretending to be folk singers, cowboys and English movie actors. Needless to say, all attempts at imitating Cockney or Liverpudlian accents fail. (35)

Myra does not criticise the students for their act, but for their ability. She comments: "the students are not entirely typical of the nation. They are somewhat stupider than the average, while simultaneously rather more imaginative and prone to daydreaming"(36). That Myra would belittle the students for their ability, and not their acting, is unsurprising given Myra's continual play-makings. What differentiates Myra from the others within the academy is her acknowledgment that she is acting. Throughout the narrative she draws attention to this: "I realized too late that I was

playing Gail Patrick...”(39); “I addressed him warmly, a husky Jean Arthur note to my voice...”(43); “I was stern but pleasant like Eve Arden...”(59). Myra is not only a simulation of the powerful woman; she is also the representation of Vidal’s view of the specious nature of the Hollywood system. The transition he has made from the traditional mode of satire to a more postmodern genre is this introspection of Myra’s. A traditional satirist would have scorned the students’ attempt to create identities based on movie actors; Vidal, through Myra, mocks not their actions, but their feeble ability. Vidal realises the crucial element of the simulacra: not that it is false, but that it exists. Were he to attack the students’ constructed identities he would be suggesting that there is a true identity which they are hiding; he does not. He sees the creation of the Hollywood identity as merely a specific type of creation, and indeed given the nature of Hollywood as simulacra, such identities are to be expected.

More traditionally, Vidal mocks Buck’s righteousness. Unlike Myra, Buck believes (or attempts to believe) that his academy helps the students to be part of the Hollywood system:

Those boys and girls are a cross-section of the youth of this country, no better, no worse. What they have got that is unusual... is the overwhelming desire to be in show business, to have their names and faces known to the world, to see themselves beloved by strangers, and that believe me, is the only truly gratifying life any human can have...
(43)

Thus Buck feeds their shallow desire, because as a former movie star cowboy he is like them. His words anticipate the line of Suzanne Stone in the film *To Die For* (1995): “You aren’t really anybody in America if you’re not on T.V.” Such a line also encapsulates the difference between the American and the Hollywood Dream. The

Hollywood Dream may result in a similar end to the traditional American Dream – that of financial security – however, what is crucial is that the person also achieves fame. The Hollywood Dream requires fame, for it is the ultimate end of the dream. Power and fortune may accompany it, but fame is the defining difference between it and the more traditional American Dream.

The academy, however, is not a stepping-stone to Hollywood, but an end in itself. Its name is a play on the “Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences”, it performs the “Buck Loner July Spectacular”, and hands out a series of awards: “the Bucks”. Buck himself admits finally that his academy is not concerned with its students moving into the Hollywood system. When Myra challenges him on the inability of graduates to make it in “the professional worlds” he responds:

... what matters is making people happy and while the kids are here they are happy. Now there is, I am willing to admit, a real let down come June when our kids realize that the outside world of show biz is a big cruel place with maybe no place for them...we all have to suffer through the June letdown which is immediately followed by the Buck Loner July Spectacular... (101)

Oddly, for someone so constructed as herself, Myra replies that “... sooner or later they will *have* to go out into the world...”. Buck responds:

Why?... As long as they scrounge up enough money to pay tuition they can stay here for life. Look at Irving Amadeus. He came here fourteen years ago as a student... he is still with us, on the staff now as an invaluable teacher with over *three hundred recordings* to his credit. If that isn't as good as being a real star I don't know what is! (101).

The academy is thus the perfect simulacrum. The students perform, feel the vicissitudes of professional life, agents meet them, they participate in stage extravaganzas, receive awards, and act continuously. All that is missing is the fame of strangers Buck spoke of early in the narrative, yet within this simulacrum the students, and teachers, achieve fame. Their exploits and performances are known and respected by others within the academy. Myra herself is famous among the academy. It is only when the outside world breaks into the simulacrum, through attempts by students to leave, that the simulacrum is revealed. Within the academy, it is easy to believe, as do the students and teachers, that it *is* the real world. Only Buck and Myra seem aware of the distinction; Buck, because he is exploiting the simulation experience for profit, Myra, because being a simulacrum herself she knows one when she sees one, as she tells talent agent Letitia Van Allen: “Talent is not what Uncle Buck and I deal in... We deal in *myths*”(105).

Vidal’s mockery of the simulacrum that is Hollywood with the construction of his own simulacra displays a new, perhaps postmodern, approach to satire. He displays the vapidness of Hollywood and, through Myra, the incongruity of sexual and gender stereotypes, but does not hope to cure these ills. Vidal may somewhat smugly laugh at those in Hollywood and people’s fascination with stars and movies, but rather than take the traditional satirical position of condemning that which he satirises, Vidal – especially with the character of Myra – celebrates the shallowness of Hollywood. Myra is a movie goddess. That she has not actually performed in any films is irrelevant, for she does not exist outside of the characters she creates in her head. She can only express her feelings or remark on her appearance through the use of movie images. The implicit satire of the narrative is Myra’s acknowledgment that

she does this. When, for example, another member of the Academy staff relates an episode from her past, Myra notes that it is actually a plot of a movie:

We all recognised the plot of *The Seventh Veil* and so were able to ask the right questions in order to help her complete the fantasy whose denouement was that, in spite of everything, she had come through, become an artist, after the obligatory nervous breakdown, et cetera, and she owed it all to her uncle who had been cruel but *cared*. (74)

Again, Myra does not mock the woman for using a fictional story as her own history, but the insipid plot of *The Seventh Veil*. The implication of the satire is that if you are going to fake sincerity at least choose a sincere movie to do so.

As Steven Weisenburger has suggested, satire in the postmodern era is not restricted to the corrective rule which the formalist critics associated with the genre⁵⁵. Vidal, in *Myra Breckinridge* (and *Myron*) is not overly concerned with changing the world for the better. Indeed, he mocks such theories repeatedly in his satires. In *Myra Breckinridge*, Myra's attempts to rid the world of the practice of circumcision and overpopulation are patently farcical. While, given Myron's own circumcision, a Freudian reading may aid understanding of Myra's hatred of the practice, Vidal is aware of such readings and plays the angle for all its worth. Indeed Myra herself is a parody of Freudian attempts to categorise human sexuality. Her belief that traditional values, as represented by male desire to have sex only with women, and female desire for children, was "proof that our society is now preparing to kill itself by exhausting the food supply and making nuclear war inevitable"(128), is so extreme as to render it absurd. These desires continue in *Myron* with greater success, due to the ability in that narrative of Myra to exist in a fantasy world. In his later satires, Vidal continues his

⁵⁵ For example M.H. Abrams *A Glossary of Literary Terms* states: "Satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly"(166).

attack of all encompassing theories and meta-narratives. In *Kalki* (1978) the apocalyptic prophecies of religious groups are mocked, and in *Live From Golgotha* (1992) he attacks perhaps the greatest meta-narrative – Christianity. In each case, he does not fall into the trap of offering his own vision, aside from a seeming preponderance to forward the cause of homosexuality/bisexuality.

This latter aspect is evident in *Myra Breckinridge*, with Myra's ambivalence towards communism as the antithesis of 'American traditional values'. She delights in shocking the students of the academy by sprouting communist points of view yet she is overtly apolitical. Her only mission in life, as she puts it, is "...the destruction of the last vestigial traces of traditional manhood in the race in order to realign the sexes, thus reducing population while increasing human happiness and preparing humanity for its next stage" (36). With Myra, Vidal mocks the traditional American Dream, but he replaces it with nothing, for he realises that the dream, as with the theoretical ends of Communism, are no more real than Myra's absurd desires for realignment of the sexes. The absence of a note of corrective desire on the part of the postmodern satirist does not however cause, as formalist thinking often presumes, the work to be no longer satire. As Weisenburger rightly points out satire is "a complex still-evolving mode"(29), and one of the primary evolutions of postmodern satire is its lack of the advocacy of corrective measures.

The sequel to *Myra Breckinridge*, *Myron*, sees Vidal take his satire of people in *Myra Breckinridge* living and viewing the world from the perspective of Hollywood film to its full extent. The narrative begins with Myron mysteriously transported through his television onto the set of the film *Siren of Babylon*, starring

Maria Montez, in 1948⁵⁶. Vidal does not greatly care how such a merging of fantasy and reality occurs, though we discover that Myra “*pushed* Myron into *Siren of Babylon*”(233). Similar to the implausibility of time travel he would detail in *Live from Golgotha*, Vidal is not concerned, as would be the science fiction author, with explaining how such a thing occurs, but merely the phenomenon.

It is not surprising that Myra quickly comes to dominate the psychosis of Myron, as living in fantasy – especially fantasy involving film – is Myra’s forte. The use of fantasy or imagined worlds for the purpose of satire is of course common. *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), *Brave New World* (1932), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and many others have satirised the real world by setting the narrative in future or unreal worlds. Vidal’s use of a 1948 film set to satirise censorship in America and ‘traditional family values’ is merely another example of this long line of satire. He takes the mode one step further, however, and echoing somewhat the stories of Borges (such as “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*”(1964)), he merges the two worlds, such that what occurs in fantasy changes what happens in the real world. No longer is the fantastic a reflection of the real world, it now becomes the real world. Myron reflects on the difference between these aspects when he muses:

Up to a point I can see how you might think yourself in a movie.
People wander around doing that all the time at Buck Loner’s
Academy of Drama and Modelling... but it is totally demoralizing to
find you have thought yourself or been thought by somebody else into
a place where there is a road which ends, just ends completely as far as
you and the other out-of-towners are concerned even though this very
same road keeps right on going for all the cars that whiz by... (250-1)

⁵⁶ The film is a creation of Vidal’s. Maria Montez did star in *Siren of Atlantis* (1949) and various films which *Siren of Babylon* resembles in spirit, such as *Arabian Nights* (1942) and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944).

Vidal's blurring of reality and fiction is not done to satirise Hollywood. His satire is more directed at the prevailing attitudes towards sex in American culture – and more directly the censorship laws. Susan Baker and Curtis Gibson point out that since its first edition *Myron* has been changed with regard to the naming of certain Supreme Court Justices in place of “words considered obscene”(155). Such a method is of only short-term impact and quickly becomes dated, thus necessitating the change. Indeed much of the satire towards censorship, and other authors in *Myron* is rather traditional and similarly dated. One of the problems involved for satirists mocking contemporary laws of decency is that those laws are in time invariably relaxed. While the satire could perhaps be said to have helped such a relaxation (and that *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* are now no longer thought obscene in any real sense, indicates clearly the change in society's view), the problem for the satirist is that satire often dates as the rules of censorship relax.

The only option left to the satirist in such a case, and one taken by Vidal in *Myron*, is to render the ‘obscenity’ so absurd that the reader can recognise the satire though their conception of the ‘obscene’ may have changed from what was common on publication. In *Myron*, Vidal has Myra wandering on to the set of *Siren of Babylon*, and shaving the pubic hair of a male extra, and then removing garments on the extras, leaving them semi-nude⁵⁷. Vidal has Myra perform these acts not for pure pleasure on her part but, in direct acknowledgment of the influence of art on society, to change the world: “Triumph! I have altered *Siren of Babylon* as well as world history by inserting near nudity of topless variety in a 1948 film... I have suggested male and female nudity but in a way that not even the keenest editor or the most devoted censor could object to” (380-1). Myra's action thus satirises censorship. The point of her action is

⁵⁷ She is able to do this because in the world of “Siren of Babylon” those involved with the film stop at various times to replicate the action of the film stopping during advertisement on television. During such times, Myra can walk around the set unobserved by any of the actors, who are at that point frozen.

not to insert nudity into film – a common enough occurrence in 1974 when the novel was published – but to insert nudity into a 1948 film. Vidal highlights the absurdity of regarding such minor touches – the revealing of male buttocks or female breasts – as obscene. That our society may look back with mirth at the conservative attitudes of past generations displays for Vidal how incongruous it is to base censorship laws on current values. Just as readers of 1974, and indeed current readers, smile at the coquettishness of 1948 society, Vidal suggests future generations will laugh at current views of obscenity. Vidal does not however seem to be suggesting a sexual free-for-all, though such a scenario does not appear to be something he would dislike, rather it is merely a desire for acknowledgement that what is obscene is dependent on context, a context that should not be decided by those in power. The actions of Myra on the set of *Siren of Babylon* do change the world, as when Myron returns to 1974 John F Kennedy is still alive, and Steve Dude, the extra whom Myra raped and dominated in 1948, is now Governor Stefanie Dude. Yet Myra's actions do not seem to have effected any significant changes – Nixon remains president. The last line of the novel, “!sevil aryM”(440) suggests that Myra still lurks in Myron's unconscious and will return to complete her unfinished business.

In *Myron*, Vidal does not attack the artificiality of Hollywood with the intensity that he does in *Myra Breckinridge*. Vidal is more interested in playing with fictional boundaries than attacking Hollywood per se as artificial. That, through the meddling of Myra on the set of *Siren of Babylon*, the course of American history is changed demonstrates in a small, yet significant manner, the impact Vidal argues movies have on American culture. Indeed, the reason each generation looks back with gentle humour at ‘controversial’ films of yesteryear is because those films did cause

controversy, and thus pushed the boundaries. Thus, that which occurs in a fictional world – on film and in literature – does affect the real world.

In *Myra Breckinridge*, however, Vidal is not concerned with such lofty ambitions as changing the world. In his first satire Vidal concentrated on the theme of artificiality. What is crucial is that his protagonist, a supremely artificial character, is at home – indeed, she thrives – in the world of Hollywood. Yet, there is a price to be paid for existing purely in a simulacrum. Throughout both narratives, Myra continually struggles with the masculine side of her gender, Myron. Myron attempts to destroy the simulacrum Myra inhabits. That Myra does survive in both narratives does not hide the difficulty of living within a simulacrum. Her struggles with Myron are metaphorical struggles to ignore the ‘real world’. In *Sunset Blvd* the protagonist, Norma Desmond discovers that living in a simulacrum is only sustainable if the outside world does not intrude, and unlike Myra, she truly discovers the high price one must pay to live in an artificial world.

3.2 *Sunset Blvd*

Sunset Blvd is indisputably the most influential film satire of Hollywood. This position is asserted in almost all critiques of the film – notably those written since its release in DVD format. Roger Ebert calls it “... the best drama ever made about the movies” (2003), and James Berardinelli similarly states: “What everyone can agree on... is that this is the greatest film about Hollywood ever put on celluloid by Hollywood”(2003). Such is its status that the cover of Christopher Ames’ work, *Movies About the Movies: Hollywood Reflected* is a reproduction of the famous final scene of the film featuring Norma Desmond performing her final close-up. Directed by Billy Wilder, and written by Wilder with Charles Brackett and D.M. Marshman Jr.,

the film notionally concerns the fortunes of down-on-his-luck screenwriter Joe Gillis, but it is the character of faded silent-screen star Norma Desmond which is the real centre of the film.

As Berardinelli points out, the film is considered by some as a drama, others as noir, and others as satire. But, while the film was originally viewed as a damning indictment of the Hollywood industry⁵⁸, the original target of the satire (Hollywood as a place that eats its own) is now quaint. While it might be disheartening that a former star, who according to Cecil B. DeMille had “more courage and wit and heart than ever came together in one youngster”, has now been forgotten by “30 million fans”, do we really need to feel disgust at Norma’s treatment? She remains wealthy, lives in a large mansion, and is still used to her every whim being answered. Do we really believe that Norma, and other film stars like her (and those that have come and gone since) should be treated with compassion purely because they are no longer in demand? While it may be deplored that many actresses once they reach middle age are no longer considered suitable for lead roles, it is hardly cause for anyone’s concern that an actress such as a Julia Roberts will, in ten years time, be thought unsuitable to play the lead in a romantic comedy. Thus while the original satire – and what is still considered by many critics as the message of the film – was directed at the soullessness of Hollywood, what resonates now is the satire of Norma Desmond herself. She may be in a pitiable position, but she is the perfect representation of one who has lived her life in a simulacrum. Wilder’s satire thus becomes two-fold, it is firstly an attack on Hollywood as a simulacrum: a place built on myths, and secondly an attack on those who remain within the bounds of the simulacrum. Norma is in

⁵⁸ At its premiere, Louis B Mayer reportedly blasted Wilder: “You Bastard! You have disgraced the industry that made and fed you.... You should be tarred and feathered and run out of Hollywood”, to which Wilder responded: “Fuck You” (Zolotow 168).

effect the equivalent of one who has stayed at the Buck Loner Academy for thirty years, and can no longer survive outside its limits.

When screenwriter Joe Gillis swerves into the driveway of 10028 Sunset Boulevard to avoid his creditors, what he discovers is not merely the home of a recluse, but the home of one who can no longer determine the difference between fact and fiction. Norma Desmond lives believing she remains a popular and much loved film star. Yet she is not merely suffering from delusion, for crucially her belief is driven through the actions of her ex-husband, now butler, Max von Mayerling. Max continues to send her fan mail, treats her with a deference that would be accorded one of the biggest stars in Hollywood, and hides her from intrusions by the outside world. Her house, though run-down outside, significantly remains lavish inside; thus, though those outside her world would believe – as Gillis does – that “the house was empty”, inside the illusion remains complete. Throughout every room are photos of Norma taken when she “was big”, and her bedroom is according to Gillis “the perfect setting for a silent movie queen”. Norma’s mansion is not just a sanctuary for someone hiding from the reality; it is a place where the reality does not exist.

Norma’s belief is thus driven through the simulacrum of her surroundings. Her house simulates the life she led in the 1920s when she was the biggest star of Paramount Studios. Yet even that existence, we are told, is one based on myth. When Norma visits the studio to meet with Cecil B. DeMille under the mistaken belief that he wishes to direct her in her “return” film, *Salome*, DeMille implies that her life while she was a star was one based on illusion. He tells one of his assistants: “a dozen press agents working overtime can do terrible things to the human spirit”. Thus, even at her peak Norma was living in a simulacrum. Such a situation is not surprising given the nature of the film industry then and now, where image is everything and

one's appearance, social life and even name are mere tools for publicity agents. That Norma would begin to believe her own publicity – and that it would in effect become her reality – is not unique. For example, in *Singin' in the Rain*, silent screen star Lina Lamont believes she and her co-star Don Lockwood are having an affair purely because she reads it in fan magazines. And similar to Norma's belief that she remains more important than others, Lina states: "People? I ain't 'people.' I am a – 'a shimmering, glowing star in the cinema firmament'." Yet whereas Lina is a comic device used to demonstrate that film actors need to be talented (a myth of its own perhaps), Norma is tragic because unlike Lina she is never presented as unintelligent, nor untalented – as she demonstrates when she performs a wonderful impersonation of Charlie Chaplin.

The tragedy of Norma is reinforced through her age. She is a woman of fifty, who according to Joe Gillis is trying to be twenty-five. Yet Gillis is wrong: she is not 'trying' to be twenty-five, she believes she is twenty-five. She writes a screenplay of *Salome* and sees nothing odd in the fact that she intends to play the part herself despite *Salome* being a role fit for a teenager⁵⁹. Her belief in the reality of her simulacrum is reflected when she yells at Joe Gillis for suggesting that a scene featuring her should be cut: "Cut away from me?... They want to see me!" Gillis, as narrator, responds he could not argue with her because "you don't yell at a sleepwalker...". Norma's situation is pitiful because she is, as Gillis notes, "still waving to a parade that had long since passed her by". She believes the only reason she no longer appears in films is "idiot producers", and yet she continues to live as though she is a film star. The only people she has contact with outside of Max and

⁵⁹ For example in the 1961 film *King of Kings*, the role of *Salome* was played by Brigid Bazlen, who was sixteen years old.

Gillis are her bridge playing partners – other famous silent-film stars – whom Gillis dubs “wax works”⁶⁰.

Crucially the simulacrum, which has been created by Max – and no doubt by Norma as well – is not of a young Norma, but a young movie star Norma. The photos that are littered throughout the mansion are not just of her when she was young, but are publicity shots taken of her as a movie star – thus they are themselves artificial images, created at the time to make her appear glamorous and star-like. Also crucial to the simulacrum is her frequent watching of old movies of herself – whereas with anyone else they would be old home-movies (that is recordings of one as a younger person) for Norma they are actual Hollywood movies. Thus, again she sees her past only in terms of what is represented through the Hollywood lens (both literally and figuratively). While she and Gillis watch one of her old silent films, the title card for one of the scenes reinforces the simulacrum aspect of her existence, and alludes to the difficulties inherent: “Cast out this wicked dream which has seized my heart...”.

One senses that Norma does know her situation is a simulacrum. She is loathe to venture outside her mansion, unless to play bridge, and demands Gillis stay, as though his leaving will place him figuratively outside her reality. When he first proposes to edit her screenplay she refuses to let him even take the script out of the house – “it’s too precious” – because once out of the house it will no longer be part of the simulacrum. Indeed this is the case. When Max takes the script to DeMille, the action leads to the destruction of her simulacrum, for when Max is at the studio a production designer notices Norma’s car. He then calls Norma asking to rent it for use

⁶⁰ The most famous of the three bridge players was Buster Keaton; the other two were Anna Q Nilsson and H.B Warner. While Keaton’s and Nilsson’s film careers had significantly diminished, Warner continued to appear in a number of high profile films throughout the 1930s and 1940s (many directed by Frank Capra). He was nominated for Best Supporting Actor in 1938 for his role in *Lost Horizon*. He is arguably now best known for his role as Mr Gower in Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946).

in a movie, which she misconstrues as requests from DeMille for a meeting. This chain of events leads to her complete mental disintegration.

The New Year's Eve party she holds for her and Gillis is a further indication of her desire to remain within the simulacrum. Although a string quartet has been hired to play music and a lavish buffet is set, she and Joe are the only ones in attendance. They dance on a floor which Norma tells Joe used to be wooden but she had tiled because "Valentino said there's nothing like tile for a tango". Gillis at this point reveals to Norma that he is not all she believes him to be. When she comments on his appearance in his tuxedo he replies that it is "all padding – don't let it fool you". He then leaves the house and goes to another party with people "his own age". Confronted with the break in the simulacrum Norma attempts to commit suicide because until that point she had been able to keep Gillis within the boundaries of her own reality. Thus, Norma does know she lives in a simulacrum, but is vainly attempting to forget the fact; that there is evidence she has attempted suicide in the past (none of the doors in the house have locks) highlights that she has not always been successful.

It is not only Norma who lives in a world of artificiality; Joe Gillis and Betty Schaefer also find themselves more comfortable in the dream world of film than reality. Betty, a script-reader at Paramount Studios who desires to be a screenwriter, meets Gillis at a New Year's Eve party hosted by his friend and her fiancé, assistant director Artie Green. The two discuss one of Gillis' scripts and then begin flirting. Mindful of her relationship with Artie they hide their feelings by speaking like characters in a B-grade movie:

GILLIS. Hungry? After twelve years in the Burmese jungle, I'm starving Lady Agatha, starving for a white shoulder, thirsting for the coolness of your lips.

BETTY. No, Phillip, no, we must be strong. You're still wearing the uniform of the Coldstream Guards.

Thus, it is only in speech like that from a film that they are able to communicate honestly. Later when they write a screenplay together, they wander the studio at night, walking through sound stages and past sets. They stop at the set of a New York street, where she reveals she "prefers this street to any other" as she grew up near the studio and used to sneak onto the studio lot as a child. She also reveals her parents hoped she would become an actress and thus she had plastic surgery to straighten her nose, demonstrating that she is aware and comfortable with the importance of illusion in Hollywood⁶¹.

Despite his initial cynicism, Joe comes to be comfortable with the illusion. Like Betty, he is aware that films are illusions. As Katelin Trowbridge (2002) has observed, his occupation as a screenwriter puts him at odds with his situation. Joe is aware of this and cynically states: "audiences don't know someone sits down and writes a picture, they think actors make it up as they go along". Yet, he returns to Norma and allows her to dominate him because he wishes to avoid the real world. Although he has had some of his screenplays turned into films, the changes made to them by the studios do not reflect his art: "The last one I wrote was about Okies in the dust bowl. You'd never know because, when it reached the screen, the whole thing played on a torpedo boat". His other screenplays are rejected because, he surmises,

⁶¹ In the musical version of the film, composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber, the implications of their setting are highlighted in the song "Too Much in Love to Care", in which Betty sings the lines: "I always loved illusion/ I thought make-believe/ Was truer than life/ But now it's all confusion/ Please can you tell me what's happening?/ I just don't know any more./ If this is real..." (Black 1994).

“they weren’t original enough, or maybe they were too original”. Thus, he comes to view his situation with Norma as a chance to escape his creditors and his probable return to Dayton, Ohio and his job there at the *Dayton Evening Post*, and the “smirking delight of the whole office”. Norma allows him to continue living the Hollywood Dream, which he was on the verge of admitting was over.

His love for Betty however draws him out of the simulacrum, because she still believes in the Hollywood Dream. She believes that “pictures should say something” and that they should be “true” and be “moving”. Joe sardonically asks her: “Who wants truth? Who wants moving?” Yet, her optimism and his growing attraction for her draws him away from Norma, and he begins to believe he can still be a screenwriter. Ironically what ultimately destroys his and Betty’s relationship is not that she is engaged (for she is willing to break it off) but that his interludes with her at night writing their screenplay – which is essentially a dream-like existence for him – reveals the truth of his situation with Norma. By believing again in the myth of Hollywood – that it is a place where dreams can come true – he is forced to realise that his situation with Norma (which he believed was artificial) is real, and he has to admit to himself that he has become part of Norma’s simulacrum – he plays the role of the younger lover. Acknowledging his situation he states: “She [Betty] was a fool not to sense that there was something phoney in my set-up”. He realises his artificial existence with Norma is a reality he cannot escape from, and when Norma anonymously rings Betty to tell her about their relationship he admits everything to Betty. Whereas Norma cannot cope with outside intrusions into her simulacrum, Joe cannot cope when his life with Norma intrudes on his outside existence.

The most striking example of the dangers of the real world interacting with the simulacrum is revealed in the final scene of the film. Having shot Joe while he

attempts to leave (and after he had revealed to her that DeMille is not interested in her screenplay and that Max is the one sending her fan mail), Norma retreats completely into her simulacrum. Norma sits in her bedroom doing her make-up and is unaware of the presence of the police despite being surrounded by them and celebrity columnist Hedda Hopper – who in a perceptive note on the power of mythmaking in Hollywood tells a policeman that her call to her editor is “more important” than his call to the coroner. Norma only responds to their voices when she hears that the cameras have arrived.

Norma’s final walk down her staircase towards the television cameras she believes are filming her acting in “Salome” is the extreme finale of one who has become immersed in the simulacrum of Hollywood. Max continues to construct the simulacrum as he instructs Norma as though he was DeMille – though as he was once a director whose career also failed, at this point he is also situating himself inside the simulacrum as much as creating it – and he yells out commands to the camera men: “Cameras! Action!”. Gillis’ final words as narrator reinforce Norma’s situation: “Even if she got away with it in court – crime of passion, temporary insanity – those headlines would kill her: ‘Forgotten Star a Slayer’, ‘Aging Actress’, ‘Yesterday’s Glamour Queen’.” Thus it is the media attention, not the more ‘real’ punishment of prison, that will most damage her.

As Norma descends the staircase, Gillis’ narration encapsulates Norma’s plight: “The dream she had clung to so desperately had enfolded her”. At this point she appears to the viewer at her most deluded. Yet this is only because she has continued to believe in her simulacrum despite the intrusion of reality into its boundaries, whereas in fact she has been deluded throughout the narrative. Her actions here are hardly less deluded than when she is at Paramount Studios and truly

believes DeMille wishes to make Salome. While at the studio an old lighting technician puts the spotlight on her and she is fawned over by extras on the set of DeMille's film, until DeMille returns and instructs the technician to "turn that light back where it belongs". Yet Norma does not grasp the reality of DeMille's words, for it is here on a film sound stage that she is most comfortable. As she says after descending the staircase in the final scene:

I just want to tell you all how happy I am to be back in the studio making a picture again! ... You see, this is my life. It always will be! There's nothing else – just us – and the cameras – and those wonderful people out there in the dark.

When there is nothing else other than that which appears on film, the simulacra of Hollywood is perfect. And it is fatal.

3.3 *The Truman Show*

The Truman Show is a film almost defeated by its own success. It grossed US\$125.6 million in the United States and US\$264.1 million worldwide, ("U.S. Box Office Earnings: *The Truman Show*") was the twelfth highest grossing film in the United States in 1998, and besides *Saving Private Ryan* (which was the highest box office earner) was the only movie in the top fifteen not of the action or comedy genre. Though *The Truman Show* is at times humorous and stars Jim Carrey, in no sense would it fit in the same category as *The Waterboy* or *There's Something about Mary*⁶². Rather, at the time of its release, it was viewed primarily as a satire against media intrusion into people's lives, and involved a situation that was seen as, at most, an extreme extension of the American MTV programme *The Real World* (1992-). Yet,

⁶² *There's Something about Mary* was the 3rd highest grossing movie of 1998 and *The Waterboy* was 5th ("U.S. Box Office Earnings: 1998" 2003).

within two years of its release, *The Truman Show* would no longer be a satire: it would be a prophecy.

The Truman Show is not merely a satire aimed at the ends to which the producers of television will go to achieve high ratings. The film also satirises the ideal world that Hollywood uses to create the illusion of happiness: a pastiche of small town America in the 1940s and 1950s. The film is, as well, a pointed renewal of the satire of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the film, the government's intrusion into people's lives in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is replaced by that of the media. This aspect, and the film's conclusion, displays the different attitudes towards such surveillance, and a greater sense of hope in the ability of the individual to triumph. Finally, and most crucially, *The Truman Show* attacks the consumers of such 'reality programmes', and it is this that ensures the message of the film remains potent.

No work of satire in the past generation has demonstrated more abundantly the difficulties of satire in the postmodern world. While *The Truman Show* was initially viewed as satire, its legacy and message, far from being viewed as a warning, has served as a template for television programmers around the world. By the end of 2000, reality programming had become the hottest programming genre on television. In the United States, the final episode of the programme *Survivor* (2000) was watched by 51.7 million viewers (Davis 38) and was soon followed by a raft of similar games/reality programmes worldwide: *Shipwrecked* (2000), which had a similar concept to *Survivor*; *Temptation Island* (2001), which involved couples being tempted by single members of the opposite sex at a tropical island resort; and most notably, *Big Brother*, a programme wherein members of the public are placed in a house under constant surveillance. All these programmes (and I could go on, for the list is long and continues to grow) have subverted the message of *The Truman Show* to the point

where it is now as difficult to view the film in its original context as it is to read Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in a world where communism is largely a spent force.

This subversion of *The Truman Show* is a prime example of the inherent difficulties of producing satire in a postmodern world. Each television programme that bases itself on a Truman Show type format indicates contemporary society's apathy towards the film's satire. That something is worthy of satire is no longer an unfortunate position. The programme, *Big Brother*⁶³ best demonstrates this apathy, as it has gone further than any of the other programmes to the point of not only attempting to replicate the constant surveillance that the character Truman Burbank submits to unwittingly, but also through its very name. Not only does the programme embrace the procedures condemned by *The Truman Show*, it pointedly aligns itself with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the line "Big Brother is watching you". Yet what was originally a warning of the power totalitarian dictatorships could have over the public, is now a term removed completely from its original connotation. 'Big Brother' is no longer a figure of terror: merely the figure of a television game-show host. He may lay down guidelines, but he is no more threatening or powerful than is a quiz show compere. What is most disconcerting with respect to the absence of satire present in these programmes is that these are not forced acts of surveillance: they involve members of the public who have volunteered to undergo the types of treatment which Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* so desperately tried to avoid, and which Truman Burbank in *The Truman Show* desired to escape. This desire to replicate an experience that was initially featured in a satirical context is a uniquely

⁶³ The first *Big Brother* series was in Holland in 1999. Since then there have been over sixty variations in different countries.

postmodern phenomenon, and would be akin to an eighteenth-century English political party calling itself The Lilliputian Party⁶⁴.

Despite this, the message of *The Truman Show* regarding the intrusive nature of the entertainment medium and its warnings remains relevant. People may volunteer to undergo surveillance, but there is no suggestion that members of the public wish to be under *covert* surveillance. The message of *The Truman Show*, and the (in some ways) similar film *Ed TV* (1999) (in which a character, Ed Pekurny, volunteers to be filmed by a cable television network 24 hours a day), however has somewhat skewed since its release. While the warnings of the intrusive lengths to which the media can go remain, what is more at issue – and pointedly given the popularity of the “reality” based programmes of recent years – is the attitude of the public.

Both *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV* focus on the viewing public, and this focus is of greatest significance for understanding their satire. The importance lies in the popularity of the television shows within *The Truman Show* and *Ed TV*. “The Truman Show” is posited as the most popular television show in the world, and “Ed TV” quickly becomes a hit for a struggling cable network. This importance is highlighted throughout both films as we see viewers reacting to Truman or Ed. *Ed TV* contains as well numerous actual television talk shows such as ‘The Tonight Show with Jay Leno’⁶⁵. Both films realise and predict that such “reality” based programming would be popular. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that television executives would try to replicate *The Truman Show* given that it is cited as the most popular in history. The films however, are not merely concerned with this aspect, but also with why the public would find them interesting.

⁶⁴ And to take the analogy further, given the popularity of “reality television”, the party would win a general election.

⁶⁵ Jay Leno has become a veritable regular in films. *Dave* (1993), *In & Out* (1997), *Mad City* (1997) and *Wag the Dog* (1997) are merely a few of the other times his programme has been used by filmmakers to create verisimilitude (“Jay Leno” 2003).

In both films, the viewers are shown as completely addicted to the programmes: unable to turn away from the screen, preferring it to conversation with their family, or using the programme as a security blanket – as the creator of “The Truman Show”, Christof notes: “people leave him on at night for comfort”. One viewer of “Ed TV” tells how he only goes to the bathroom when Ed does so as not to miss anything. Clearly both films condemn this position. The victims of such programming are thus not merely Truman and Ed, but the viewers who forgo their own lives to watch another’s. Paradoxically, in both films the viewers are happy when the protagonists escape from the confines of the show although this brings the end of their viewing experience as the programmes would no longer run⁶⁶.

The role of viewers in *The Truman Show* is heightened as well by the existence of a “vocal minority” who seek to have “The Truman Show” taken off the air because of the human rights implications. A number of critics have noted that this is one issue *The Truman Show* neglects to consider. Would, for example, a government allow such a fraud against a person to be perpetrated? Such criticism however is speculative and does not change the nature of the film. Other critics have noted that the presentation of “The Truman Show” as the most popular programme in history is not credible; if this were the case programmes such as *Big Brother* would run all day instead of an hour of edited highlights. Yet, such an attack again misses the point. The popularity of “The Truman Show” rests on Truman’s ignorance of his role, which is decidedly different from those competing in a reality-based game show. Mention is also made of a “greatest hits” tape, as well as numerous moments in the film where it is shown that the producers of “The Truman Show” make use of

⁶⁶ In the case of *The Truman Show*, this aspect has greater significance for the owners and workers of a Truman Show themed bar where the programme runs continuously on the television. The celebration of the viewers in the bar and the owners is somewhat odd and would be similar to the owners and frequenters of a sport themed bar celebrating a players strike.

flashbacks or other programmes – for example a talk-show about Truman – which leads to the conclusion that “The Truman Show” is more than a programme which merely follows Truman. In “reality” programmes, such as *Big Brother*, all members of the cast are amateurs working without a script, and thus there are lengthy periods of boredom that require the editing of a twenty-four hour period into a one hour highlights package. “The Truman Show” however, has professional actors, scriptwriters and backing music, all of which give the viewers the impression they are watching a typical television programme. Within this context, the thought that viewers might have the television on all day is no more unrealistic than people watching soap operas or infomercials during the afternoon.

The position of the audience in *The Truman Show* is made clear at the beginning of the film. The film begins *in media res* with an absence of a traditional film introduction. In its place is the credit sequence for the programme “The Truman Show”. The implication is that the viewer is not watching a film about “The Truman Show”, but is a viewer of the programme. The inference that we are watching the programme and not a movie is reinforced when, after a brief introduction by Christof, in which he asserts that the public has become tired of the “phoney emotions” of actors, the first sight of Truman is underscored with the credit “Truman Burbank as himself”, rather than with a reference to the actor Jim Carrey.

This first viewing of Truman is important for understanding the satire of the film. He looks directly at the audience, yet is actually looking at a mirror. The point of view of the audience is crucial throughout the film, as director Peter Weir attempts to replicate as closely as possible the look of “The Truman Show” with its more than “5000 cameras”. Thus, we immediately realise that we are watching Truman not from a normal camera perspective, but through a camera placed behind a two-way mirror.

At this point we see Truman, who is the sole non-paid actor of “The Truman Show”, alone. In other scenes he is guided by the actors around him (or as his best friend Marlon states: “controlled”), yet here we view Truman free of a public identity. As he is unaware that he is on camera, his actions betray his unconstructed self. He is like a person trapped in the ‘mirror stage’. As Lacan writes, this stage is “a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation”(1288). Truman’s life is still one of anticipation.

Significantly, both times we see Truman stand before the mirror, he projects himself into a fantasy where he is an adventurer. In the first, he pretends to be a mountain climber who is part of a team attempting to reach the summit, and in the second, he is an astronaut who has landed on planet “Trumania” in the “Burbank Galaxy”. Yet, while these two fantasies serve to highlight Truman’s desire for escape from his day-to-day life, the second mirror scene is not a mere repetition of the first. This second time he is pointedly acting. By that stage he is aware that someone or something is watching him, and that even his most private moments are part of an artificial world. He does his routine in front of the mirror merely to preserve the guise of normality. His repetition of the event however, instils a sense that this was an ongoing exercise of Truman’s; that every morning he stands before his bathroom mirror and dreams of another life.

The impact of the monotony of life upon Truman’s shoulders is further emphasised with the caption at the beginning of the film: “Day 10 909”. His actions upon leaving his house again highlight that everyday is the same. He greets his neighbours with his catch phrase: “... in case I don’t see you: good afternoon, good evening and good night”, and he is playfully attacked by his next-door neighbour’s dog, with reference to the fact that the dog does this every morning. In this context,

his pre-breakfast adventures in front of the mirror are an obvious outlet for his frustration, and he pointedly sighs when his wife calls out to him to get ready for work. It is not merely the sigh of a man who does not look forward to going to work, but one of a man who is happiest when his thoughts are on matters far removed from reality. For though the programme is set up as the ultimate ‘reality’ show, ironically, Truman wants nothing more than to discard the reality of his life.

We discover, through flashbacks, that this has long been Truman’s desire. For example, while in school he wishes to become “an explorer like the great Magellan”, whereupon he is quickly informed by his teacher that he is “too late, there’s nothing left to explore”. Even at a pre-school age, Truman enjoyed exploring, and we see in another flashback his attempt to climb over a wall of rocks at the beach, unaware that on the other side, construction of the set is in progress. Most crucial of all, for it allows Truman an actual goal, is his desire to go to Fiji, where he believes his lost love Sylvia now lives. But this desire is also the manifestation of a deeper desire to explore the world for its own sake, and to be alone and free; as he points out to Marlon: “There are still islands in Fiji where no human being has ever set foot”. This is further demonstrated in his view that with respect to his home town Seahaven and Fiji, “you can’t get any further away before you start coming back”.

Thus his desire to escape runs deep, yet for twenty-nine years he has remained in Seahaven. He is the postmodern equivalent of George Bailey from *It’s a Wonderful Life*. In the Capra film, George continually dreams of being an adventurer – he joins the National Geographic at an early age and describes himself as “an explorer”. Like Truman, he is constantly denied an opportunity to leave his hometown of Bedford Falls. Thus, it seems that George has never even ventured to another town, let alone the Alaska or the Amazon he so ardently desires, just as Truman has never left

Seahaven. For George “the three most exciting sounds in the world” are “anchor chains, plane motors and train whistles”, yet he is destined only to hear those sounds, never to be on board. In the end however, George comes to believe that this is not important, for he finds happiness in the arms of his family and his many friends, and asks that he be allowed to “live again” rather than for the world to exist without him. Truman however, does not want to take it all back, nor does he find happiness in his wife or family. His father returns from the dead (and is thus given a chance to live again – this time by Christof, not God⁶⁷), yet while this does bring temporary happiness, it does not dampen Truman’s desire to leave. At the end of *It’s a Wonderful Life*, we know that George will go back to the Bailey Building and Loan and eke out a living helping the people of Bedford Falls. Moreover, he will never leave. Truman, on the other hand, battles the impediments to his leaving, and triumphs in a manner that George Bailey does not. For whereas George wants to live, Truman, while attempting to escape, demonstrates he is prepared to die rather than remain when he shouts at the sky “You’re going to have to kill me!”.

Despite the different outcomes, the two films are explicitly linked: Truman’s hometown “Seahaven” has a similar pastoral name to “Bedford Falls”, and Truman’s dress sense is decidedly 1940s –50s: he wears argyle sweaters, a shirt and tie while at home, and his wife’s nurse uniform is the traditional white, starched uniform that has long been replaced in American hospitals. The two protagonist’s lives are also closely linked: George does not leave Bedford Falls because of his father’s death, his brother

⁶⁷ A number of critics, such as Richard Porton (1998), have noted the link between Christof and Christ. And Christof is most assuredly the god of Truman’s world. Yet, the name Christof is more sinister in speech than is ‘Christ’. The Eastern European harshness suggests a connection with Soviet KGB surveillance, rather than a benevolent saviour. Other names in the film also have double meaning. Most obvious is Truman who is the only “True Man” of the programme. His wife Meryl and best friend Marlon are also the same first names of two famous actors, Meryl Streep and Marlon Brando. The names of the streets of Seahaven also reflect the duplicity involved, as they are all named after famous actors, such as “Barrymore Road”.

Harry's marriage and job offer, and finally his own marriage. Similarly, Truman does not follow Sylvia to Fiji, because soon after her departure, his mother becomes ill and he begins a relationship with Meryl (which is contrived by Christof) that ends in their marriage. In *It's a Wonderful Life* during World War Two, George is classed 4F and thus cannot leave because of his health. The main reason Truman never leaves the island of Seahaven is that he is afraid of the water. Thus, like George Bailey, his health keeps him at home.

The link between Truman and George is further established with Truman's television viewing habits. His favourite programme, "Show Me the Way to Go Home", appears to be a veritable copy of *It's a Wonderful Life*, and every 1950s American family drama of the, *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966)⁶⁸ or *Leave it to Beaver* variety. The announcer of the programme states it is "a hymn of praise to small town life", in which "you learn that you don't have to leave home to discover what the world's about, and that no one is lonely who has friends". Thus, as with George Bailey, everything in Truman's life, from his viewing habits, to his wife and his friend (who informs him that he has travelled all over but never found a place as good as this) or the local newspaper, which announces on its front page that Seahaven is the greatest place to live in America, is set towards keeping him from leaving. Yet crucially, Truman overcomes these obstacles and breaks free (literally) of his hometown.

This inter-textual reference to *It's a Wonderful Life*, and Truman's inability to learn the lesson which George Bailey does, reflects a subtle satire of the Hollywood desire to idealise the past and characterise the contemporary world as one which is corrupt. Christof at one point voices this opinion when he states to the actress who

⁶⁸ Reed, of course, played George Bailey's wife in *It's a Wonderful Life*.

played the role of Sylvia: “The world you live in, is the sick place...”. Such a view is not merely fraudulent, but also forgetful. The belief that films such as *It’s a Wonderful Life* display that the world at that time was a kinder, less corrupt place ignores films released around the same time, such as *The Lost Weekend* (1945), which present a counter view. Truman’s escape from Seahaven into the “sick place” thus symbolises an attempt to destroy the myth of ‘the good old days’, and the sense that this was the period when the American Dream seemed closest to fulfilment (Long 1). Truman in the end discovers that Seahaven is fake, and his ripping through the outer wall of the dome displays that any depictions of the past as wholesome are mere illusions.

Truman’s break from the boundary of his world is also a reflection of his need to escape from his constant surveillance, and this aspect is reflected as well in the conclusion of *Ed TV*. In that film, Ed Pekurny threatens to reveal embarrassing sexual details about the president of the network that runs “Ed TV”. As with “The Truman Show”, Ed’s triumph occurs when the transmission is cut, and the programme is taken off the air. In both films, the conclusion of the ‘reality programme’ is a blank screen, which suggests that the man under the microscope can triumph over the “Big Brother” figures in his life. In this sense, the films are a great deal more optimistic than was George Orwell in the father of all such satires. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith succumbs to the torture of the party and submits to the existence it has decided for him. Truman does not succumb. When Truman is in his “place where there is no darkness” (that is, the edge of the dome that houses Seahaven, illuminated by a fake sun), and he talks with his authority figure, he is able to resist Christof’s pronouncements and threats in a manner which Winston Smith cannot when confronted by O’Brien in the Ministry of Love.

As with *It's a Wonderful Life*, there exists a similar link between *The Truman Show* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These links occur mostly with respect to Truman's relationship with Christof and Winston Smith's with O'Brien. As a member of the controlling inner party, O'Brien knows of Winston's every actions and while interrogating Winston in the Ministry of Love, O'Brien both tortures him and also acts as a paternal figure, "with the air of a doctor, a teacher, even a priest, anxious to explain and persuade rather than punish"(195). Christof similarly takes both roles. He can observe Truman's every action and tells Truman that he "has watched him since his first step. I know you better than you know yourself". Christof is also Truman's creator and controller, but primarily he feels the paternal implications. At one point he stands next to the huge television screen in the control room and, like a loving father, runs his hand along the figure of Truman sleeping. Christof also tortures Truman while Truman tries to escape by using "the weather programme" to create a violent storm centralised over Truman's boat. Yet despite these similarities, *The Truman Show*, unlike *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, ends optimistically.

The source of the differences in tone between these two satires is the attitude of each protagonist. Winston Smith is aware of his entrapment, and from the outset is pessimistic of his chances of success. In his second diary entry, he writes: "they'll shoot me i don't care they'll shoot me in the back of the neck..."(19). Thus Winston sees no possibility of escape, and during his torture he submits and reneges on his diary entry, for he does care about dying. Truman, on the other hand, does not comprehend his situation. He does not realise that his occupation as a life insurance salesman is as much about preserving the artificiality of his situation as is Winston's in the Ministry of Truth. As a seller of life insurance, he offers policies to people on the expectation that they might die prematurely, when in fact the only possibility of

their premature death is if they are written out of the show as his father was. Yet the role he plays reinforces in his mind and the viewers' – for it is imperative for the show's success that his life seem real – that his life is not controlled.

Winston however, cannot avoid knowing that his life is controlled. He can see the telescreens, and participates in the Two Minute of Hate and Hate Week, Truman however, cannot see the 5000 cameras and does not realise that he is a walking advertisement or that the producers plan even his wife's choice of food utensil. Thus Truman has no need to be pessimistic. He can be frustrated by what he correctly sees as attempts to keep him from leaving, but he does not understand the higher forces involved. Fortunately for Truman, the higher forces controlling his life are for the most part benign. Winston, regardless of his pessimism, is not able to escape because O'Brien, (acting on behalf of the party) will not allow this to occur. Christof cannot merely have Truman "vaporised" despite the fact that Truman's leaving will end the existence of the programme as surely as Oceania's existence would crumble if Winston Smith and other likeminded people were able to leave. Christof can try to kill Truman, but only by means that appear to the viewer as natural. Winston is part of a totalitarian dictatorship; Truman lives in a television programme. Christof has created a simulacrum and thus is bounded by its rules – everything, even his attempts to keep Truman in Seahaven, must appear 'real'. Indeed only at the end, with no other option, does Christof break the rules, and acknowledges the simulacrum's existence when he speaks to Truman through a speaker.

On this score, screenwriter Andrew Niccol and director Peter Weir hold back the venom of their satire. That Truman is the star of a television show however, does not preclude the possibility of the producers killing him. The most obvious example of this step is *Network* (1976) in which Howard Beal becomes "the first known

instance of a man who was killed because of lousy ratings”. The optimistic outcome of *The Truman Show* certainly reflects a seeming perspective of Niccol, whose earlier work, *Gattaca* (1997) is set in the future where one’s position in life is determined by one’s DNA. In this, again Orwellian situation, the protagonist triumphs over the controlling powers, and succeeds despite his ‘poor’ DNA. Niccol satirises society in *The Truman Show* and *Gattaca*, yet both times he remains optimistic about the ability of individuals to triumph. The reasons for such an outlook must surely be linked with the medium Niccol chooses. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, despite its phenomenal success as literature, has not been adapted to film with any comparable degree of popularity⁶⁹. Had Truman died at the end of *The Truman Show* it is rather plausible to believe that it would not have met with the same commercial success. While some do enjoy those films which lack closure, such films generally do not succeed financially compared to movies which attempt to reinforce, or provide a positive message⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ The most recent film version of the novel – released not uncoincidentally in 1984, grossed US\$8.4 million in the United States, and was only the 88th best performing film that year (“U.S. Box Office Earnings: 1984” 2004).

⁷⁰ A review of the top 200 grossing film worldwide, for example reveals that only a small number contain endings which seek to disturb the viewer: *American Beauty* (1999), *The Godfather* and possibly *Traffic* (2000) (“All Time Box Office: Worldwide”). This does not mean that only ‘happy’ films are commercially successful. *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial* (1982) is an obvious example of a film which has a ‘sad’ ending, yet despite this its ending is closed. The child Eliot makes a connection with an alien and he and his friends succeed in their attempt to help E.T. escape. That is, while it is sad that E.T. leaves it is still an ‘up’ ending. Had E.T. been caught and killed by authorities, the effect on the viewer – and the film’s commercial performance – would have been drastically altered. Other films that are commercially successful, such as Spielberg’s, *Saving Private Ryan*, do not contain ‘happy’ endings. Yet *Saving Private Ryan*, again despite ending with the protagonist’s death, does contain a reassuring message: Private Ryan was worth the sacrifice, and that greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for another. Thus the ending is closed and does not seek to disturb the status quo.

William Goldman (who rather wonderfully terms such endings, “Hollywood horseshit”) points out: “[a screenwriter] can tell sad human stories – but do not expect Mr. Time Warner to give you \$100 million to make your movie” (*Which Lie Did I Tell?* 275). Thus those movies which disturb can be critically praised, yet they will on average be made with a smaller budget, and earn less money than those which provide the positive ending.

This discrepancy between those movies which are successful and those which may be viewed with critical acclaim can even be related to the difference in genre of those films which are financially successful and those which are nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture. In the past 10 years of the 50 films nominated for best picture, only 3 were comedy and 1 each were fantasy and action; the rest could be loosely termed drama. Yet of the top 50 box office earners of all time in the United States, only 11 are dramas, and 15 are comedies, while action and fantasy account for 12 films in each category. And those 11 dramas all have closed endings.

The Truman Show is a satire of the media and entertainment industry, yet it is financed by that same industry. Paramount Pictures, the distributors of *The Truman Show* would have no problems producing a film which in effect satirises their own role in the entertainment industry, but not if it were to be a poor financial risk. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that Niccol was originally slated to direct the film, but when Jim Carrey agreed to the role of Truman, and the budget for the film rose to US\$60 million, the producers, reflecting their desire for profit, refused to gamble such a sum of money on a first-time director and instead enlisted a director with a solid track record in Peter Weir⁷¹ (Bart 74-79). These events ensured, to a great extent, that the film would have an ending which suggests closure.

Thus, *The Truman Show*, while a stinging rebuke of the Hollywood entertainment industry, offers little incentive for either the producers or consumers of such entertainment to change: the producers are shown a blueprint for success, while the consumers view a programme which is depicted as being the most popular programme in television history. Such popularity for a television programme in this instance does not even appear to be one where it is a guilty pleasure. There are scenes similar to rock concerts for the telecast of Truman's wedding, and there even exists a Truman Show Bar, which is filled with people who watch the programme while they are out socialising. Thus "The Truman Show" is not, as was once joked of *Baywatch*, a programme that became the most popular in the world despite no one admitting to watching it.

Here the satire of *The Truman Show* is most potent. There is the easy reprimand of television executives for making a child the unknowing and thus unwilling subject of complete surveillance, yet at no stage do the viewers in the film

⁷¹ Niccol was not surprised at the turn of events and his contract had "a \$200,000 penalty clause if [he] was not permitted to direct"(Bart 73). Weir was also Niccol's first choice to direct the film.

consider the ethical implication of their watching. In *Ed TV*, this position is addressed more pointedly, as we witness the initial stages of the “Ed TV” programme, and thus can witness the arguments between couples or friends over whether or not to watch the programme. “The Truman Show” is of course already the most successful show on earth, and thus we can assume such arguments have long been settled. Yet in both films, the writers take the position that as a rule the viewing public will not consider the ethics or morality involved in the programme, but – if anything – consider only if the programme is ‘interesting’ to view.

In *Ed TV*, such arguments over watching the programme are quickly won by those in favour of the programme, and those who initially resisted just as quickly become addicted watchers. Both films, as well, attempt to replicate the viewing experience by use of handheld cameras, or in the case of *The Truman Show*, small “hidden” cameras in Truman’s car radio or office pencil sharper. Moreover, these are the moments which carry the film, and which we as viewers of the film enjoy. If Truman’s antics were boring and lacking in absurd set-ups such as his imitations in front of the bathroom mirror, or if Ed Pekurny was not such a low-rent, white-trash male with a sleazy brother, there is little doubt that the film-going audience would have found little enjoyment in viewing either film⁷².

Yet for the viewers of these films there exists an added dimension: the struggle each protagonist undergoes. We have no vested interest in Truman Burbank, not having witnessed his birth, first kiss or marriage – except through quick flashback. Thus for the film viewer, the interest with Truman lies purely in his desire to escape his surroundings. That he succeeds and we rejoice (as do the viewers seen in the film)

⁷² As it is, *Ed TV* was an abysmal failure at the United States box office. It grossed a mere \$22.4 million dollars, despite a projected budget of \$80 million (“*U.S. Box Office Earnings: EdTV*” 2003). A major reason for its lack of success was in fact *The Truman Show*, which was only released some 9 months earlier (Corliss 219).

must lead to the question: in what are we rejoicing? As stated previously the joy of television viewers in seeing Truman escape is illogical and suggests that on some level they dislike watching the programme and wish to be free of the addiction they feel, or they believe Truman's situation is ill-fated. Their joy reflects that despite the popularity of the programme, the viewers realise that their covert viewing of Truman is unethical. Yet the joy suggests they place such ethical problems on the shoulders of the producers.

There is less joy in Ed Pekurny's triumph over the television network. The major failing of *Ed TV* is the lack of sympathy the viewer has for Ed's predicament, and lack of care for his desire to escape the intrusion of the media in his life. Unlike Truman, Ed volunteered for the programme, and if an adult male (one who works in a video rental store no less) is unaware of the intrusive nature of the media, then it is difficult for one to muster any sympathy for his plight – especially when he revels in his fame while it suits him. Thus, there appears a distinct lack of a moral in *Ed TV's* satire, other than not to invite the world's media into your front door.

The satire of *Ed TV*, therefore, fails to find a suitable target. Is it the media's intrusion in people's lives? Yet Ed asked for this intrusion. Is it a satire of those who use the media for their own purpose? If so, then the film's protagonist is also its point of rebuke. Is it those who would view the lives of others on television instead of concerning themselves with their own? Yet *Ed TV* shows people actively participating in the programme: polls decide whom Ed should date, if he should have sex, and when he does, crowds gather to cheer him on. This is a case of television viewing becoming an almost active pursuit, which at the very least promotes discussion amongst family. The viewers are not damned for their pursuit; in fact their enjoyment of the programme is used to highlight the programme's growing popularity. Thus on

all counts the satire fails due to a hesitancy of the four writers and director Ron Howard to take aim at a target and fire.

Conversely, *The Truman Show's* satire succeeds because, despite the plethora of imitations that have come to light in the years since its release, the satire is aimed ultimately, not at the producers of such shows, but the viewers. Truman Burbank is genuinely likeable, and it is understandable why such a large audience enjoys watching his life. Yet not once do we see them question the ethics of their habit. There does exist a minority of those who wish for the show's demise and argue for Truman's rights. The leader of the movement – an ex-cast member – is, however also shown watching the programme, and aside from a poster on her wall announcing a "Free Truman rally" there is minimal mention of this resistance movement. Within this paradigm is the position of the viewers of *The Truman Show*. Surely it is Niccol's intention for them to desire Truman's escape, and indeed the ending is euphoric. Although the use of hidden cameras and television programme like credits replicates to an extent the viewing experience of "The Truman Show", the film viewers are interested in only Truman's plight, not his life. Thus, the film viewers are able to delude themselves that they would rise above the mob and protest against the plight of Truman, rather than become addicts themselves.

While the proliferation of programmes has crippled *The Truman Show's* satire of television programmers, it has conversely sharpened the satire directed towards viewers. Although there is no longer a great sense of outrage in the thought that a television executive would seek to exploit a child, there still remains the belief that the public would not allow such abuses of human rights to occur, and that the majority would desire only Truman's escape from Seahaven. However, it is this aspect which reveals the accuracy of Niccol's and Weir's satire. The satire does not so much warn

of the need for regulation of the entertainment industry, but of the public's allowance for rights to be subjugated in the name of entertainment.

'Reality shows' under the guise of game shows remain popular, yet there still lingers some indignation when a programme becomes too "real" such as *The Bachelor* (2002) where a participant chooses a wife from 25 contestants, or *There's Something About Miriam* (2004)⁷³, where six men compete to win the affection of an attractive model, only to discover she is actually a male-to-female transsexual. In this instance, people's supposed emotions are used for entertainment, and the programmes are popular enough to ensure more will continue. Of course, like Ed Peckurny, the participants volunteer for such treatment, yet unlike "Ed TV", 'reality programmes' are heavily edited, and thus ensure the context of statements and actions can be lost in the interest of swaying public opinion. What Niccol and Weir realised is not just that these programmes will continue, but that people will not pause (or not pause for too long) to consider the ethical question of watching people's lives. People watched "The Truman Show" without concern, despite the intrusion into his daily life and the subjugation of his right to live a free existence, because he was safe and not (until the near end) subjected to harm. Similarly, because Ed Peckurny (and others like him in real life) volunteered to undergo the ordeal there is the sense that this absolves us of any moral issue. That the fans of "The Truman Show", and we the film viewers, cheer as Truman Burbank makes his last exit proves that the public views the television producers as the enemy. Yet in a world where the impact of satire is diminishing, and the mode is now used for profit, what should concern the viewers of "The Truman Show" is not whether they were cheering at his escape, and thus siding against the dark forces in the entertainment industry, but why they had allowed themselves to be

⁷³ In an article in *People* commenting on *There's Something About Miriam*, Greg Adkins describes such programmes as "humiliation TV" (24).

in a position to cheer at all. Truman Burbank was not confined in his world because producers allowed it, but because people continued to watch.

3.4 *Mulholland Dr.*

In *The Truman Show*, Andrew Niccol and Peter Weir created an artificial world which attempted to replicate the perfect town according to Hollywood. In doing so the film satirised both an industry which could intrude to such an extent in someone's life and, as well, an industry which could view, for the most part, life in small-town, 1950s America as perfection. In *Mulholland Dr.*, David Lynch similarly creates an artificial world. However, unlike *The Truman Show*, *Mulholland Dr.* is not a traditional satire of the entertainment industry, for Lynch does not merely attack the hypocrisy of an industry built on sex and violence, yet projected as glamorous; rather he satirises the inherent nature of the industry. He depicts Hollywood as sexual, violent *and* glamorous. Where Niccol and Weir took pains to alert us that the world they created is false, Lynch collapses the distinction between reality and fantasy.

Mulholland Dr. is a non-linear narrative filled with characters and images that at times seem to offer the viewer little insight into the plot. Lynch constantly challenges the viewers to discern whether the images they see are the product of a character's imagination, or are the "real" story. Yet the key to understanding *Mulholland Dr.* and the satire Lynch has employed is not dependent on finding clues as though it were a postmodern thriller, for there is no real twist ending such as in Cameron Crowe's *Vanilla Sky* (2001), or M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999)⁷⁴. Lynch is not concerned with the difference between dream/nightmare and

⁷⁴ While there is a twist, it does not occur at the end, and it is not followed by a recap of scenes (as occurs in *Vanilla Sky* and *The Sixth Sense*) to demonstrate its importance to understanding the narrative.

reality, and when analysing the film there is little to be gained from attempting to separate them. That one narrative may appear more real than another is largely irrelevant for they are both simulacra of Hollywood.

The film is ostensibly about love, betrayal and revenge, yet Lynch uses this plot to explore the psyche of Hollywood: how it is viewed by outsiders and what it does to those involved in the film industry. The love story involves two women, and it is the only relationship in the film involving any semblance of true love. Unfortunately for both women involved, the love is not equally shared.

Any discussion of the film is complicated purely because the two protagonists play dual roles⁷⁵. Betty, the innocent, wide-eyed girl from Canada is also Diane, bitter ex-lover of movie actress Camilla Rhodes. Camilla herself is also Rita, a woman who has miraculously escaped murder, yet suffers from amnesia before meeting and becoming Betty's lover. (Crucially, Rita takes her name from observing a poster for *Gilda* (1946) which starred Rita Hayworth.) The main narrative involves Betty and Rita attempting to discover Rita's true identity, Betty's attempt to become an actress, and the intervention by underworld figures to cast a certain Camilla Rhodes in director Adam Keshner's latest film. The twist occurs two thirds into the film, with the realisation that Betty is Diane, and that she has hired a hit-man to kill Rita (whom we discover is actually Camilla Rhodes) because Camilla has ended their affair and is engaged to Keshner. The first two thirds of the film are thus the deranged imaginings, or perhaps fantasies of Diane that occur prior to her committing suicide.

Such a straightforward reading of what is essentially a circular narrative however, belies the false images and clues Lynch disperses throughout. For though the film is mostly the imaginings of one character, Lynch plays with the myths of

⁷⁵ Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler present a typical reading of the plot in their article "The Slip Stream of Mixed Reality: Unstable Ontologies and Semiotic Markers in *The Thirteenth Floor*, *Dark City* and *Mulholland Dr.*" (2004).

Hollywood in both narratives and offers a simulacrum of Hollywood as both dream-factory and the new Babylon; pointedly, he does not assume that one is more real than the other.

As Niccol and Weir did in *The Truman Show*, Lynch creates a simulacrum of the 1950s to illustrate the fallacy of seeing that period as characterised by the good life and high ethics. This view of the period is one which Lynch attacks primarily because it is one perpetrated by Hollywood movies. Peter Biskind, in his work *Seeing is Believing* (1983) illustrates that movies and television shows such as *Grease* (1978), *Diner* (1982), *American Graffiti* and *Happy Days* (1974-1984)⁷⁶ have done much to create the illusion of the period as one of innocence. Such films are themselves simulacra: representatives of an era that never existed. Thus a 1950s styled restaurant will owe more to the production design of *Grease* (1978) and *American Graffiti* than the actual restaurants of the time. The socio-cultural impact of such simulacra is most potent in Australia, where there exists 1950s styled restaurant chains (such as “Johnny Rockets”) that are modelled on movies set in 1950s America rather than bearing any resemblance to restaurants that existed in Australia at that time.

Lynch has seized upon this false image of the period and uses it for satirical impact. The first view of Betty is her arrival at Los Angeles International Airport. We immediately discover the event which occasioned her travel to Los Angeles: her victory in a jitterbug dance contest. Images of this contest are the first image of the film, viewed in a hazy, dream-like sequence. Its function as a simulacrum of the

⁷⁶ Although *American Graffiti* is set in 1962, there is the notion that it is a period before the “sixties” began. That is, it is set before America’s involvement in the Vietnam War, before the assassination of John F Kennedy and before the arrival of The Beatles. As such, it is closer to popular perception of America in the 1950s, complete with “sock hops”, drag racing and drive-in diners. *Happy Days*, while not a “spin off” of *American Graffiti*, was certainly influenced by the movie (and the movie’s success), and was explicitly set the 1950s.

'innocent' 1950s is highlighted when the images of the dance contest are followed by a dark and mysterious drive along Mulholland Drive which is set in the present. Equally important is Betty herself, for she is not only the winner of a 1950s style contest, she is dressed and talks like an entrant in a Doris Day competition. She wears a pink sweater-set, is polite and wide-eyed. This pure attitude surrounds her as well. As she stands outside the airport, she talks to an elderly couple who were judges in the jitterbug contest, and have chaperoned her to Los Angeles. At this point she discovers her luggage is missing and momentarily fears it has been stolen, before seeing a taxi driver place them in his taxi. Added to the implausibility of this occurring in modern Los Angeles is the fact that the taxi is in mint condition.

Though this "dream place" (as Betty will later describe it) seems perfect, Lynch quickly shows that underneath the surface lurks a disturbing menace: the elderly couple are seen in the back of a limousine smiling, yet smiling like escapees from a lunatic asylum; while at a diner on Sunset Boulevard a man dies while confronting a vision from a nightmare. Rita, as well, has been involved in a murder attempt, and she meets Betty while suffering amnesia. In a sub-narrative, film director Kesher is threatened and victimized for not agreeing with the casting decisions of underworld financiers. This place is thus a dangerous one to be in, for it is not real: it is Hollywood.

The presence of Hollywood and the film industry is central to the narrative. Betty stays at her aunt's bungalow – which recalls the bungalows featured in West's *The Day of the Locust*. Her aunt is a famous movie actress who is away acting in a movie in Canada, and Betty herself has hopes of becoming a movie actress. The manager of the set of bungalows, 'Coco', is dressed as though she is auditioning for the role of Norma Desmond in *Sunset Blvd*, which can hardly be unintentional, for

Billy Wilder's satire of the film industry looms large over *Mulholland Dr.*. The connection is evident in the similarity of the titles, though Sunset Boulevard is ironically the setting for more of the action than the eponymous drive: Betty's bungalow is situated on the boulevard, as is also the Winkies diner at which Betty and Rita eat and where Diane arranges the murder of Camilla. The name Betty recalls the screenwriter whom Joe Gillis falls in love with and for whom he attempts to leave Norma. Most striking, is that like the narrative of *Sunset Blvd.*, the narrative of *Mulholland Dr.* appears to be told posthumously. In the Wilder film however, this is made obvious through the narration of Joe Gillis, whose voice-over continues even as he floats dead in Norma Desmond's swimming pool. The only hint Lynch provides is the shot just after the scenes of the jitterbug contest, which is done from the point of view of someone face down on a red pillow. The importance of the pillow is revealed at the end of the film when we see Diane facedown on such a pillow after committing suicide.

Thus in both films, contact with Hollywood ends in death. Whereas Wilder concentrates on the ageing star, Norma Desmond, and uses her mansion as a symbol for a decrepit industry, Lynch focuses on Hollywood's impact on a young actress, and in place of Norma's mansion, the symbol of Hollywood's destructive power is Betty/Diane herself. Diane's creation of Betty is a mental attempt to undo her murder of Camilla, and redress the failure of her career. Diane imagines a world wherein she is a Doris Day type, and this reflects, as in *The Truman Show*, a belief that this period (the 1950s) was one of innocence.

The films of the period may have been free of nudity and coarse language, thus giving the impression of innocence, yet as discussed in the previous chapter this was due to censorship restrictions of the time, not purer social mores. This inaccurate

view of the period is the source of Betty's inability to remain innocent. Not only is her attempt to undo her actions flawed, so is her choice of setting. Lynch thus sets up a perfect simulacrum of the fifties – it is a setting which never existed. No longer is it a representation; it replaces the real.

At this point, whether the narrative is real or dream becomes irrelevant. When we return to Diane's life, Lynch continues the process of simulacra building, this time of a glamorous Hollywood and a dangerous Los Angeles, where lavish parties are thrown, and a hit-man can be hired and met in a diner. Lynch throughout plays on the viewers' knowledge of film, and thus creates a position where there is no plausibility in the question of what is real or unreal. For example, at one point the hit-man (whom we later discover has been hired by Diane) attempts to take a black book with names from another man. While doing so, he inadvertently shoots a woman in the next room, whom he then kills; he also kills a cleaner who witnessed the second murder, and then shoots the cleaner's vacuum cleaner. All this is presented in a farcical manner – the woman next door is overweight and at first thinks she has merely been bitten, and the hit-man trips over the vacuum cleaner. It is also unclear if this scene is part of Diane's fantasy, for it is presented separately from the narrative of Betty and Rita or the problems encountered by Adam Kesher. Thus despite its existence outside the narrative it is no less a simulacrum than the other scenes. Here Lynch uses the viewers' knowledge of films such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which also presents an accidental shooting as a comic scene.

Mulholland Dr. is thus a simulacrum not only of Hollywood but also of Hollywood's self-representation in movies. This is highlighted when he moves from a shot of the famous "Hollywood" sign to a scene of Betty and Rita arguing, only to discover that they are merely rehearsing a scene for Betty's audition. Betty, the

squeaky clean girl from Canada, laughs at the lines she must speak, for they are sexual and violent, yet when she does the audition she drops the Doris Day image and performs with extreme sensuality.

This scene is an obvious creation of Diane's mind. In her fantasy, not only do she and Camilla remain lovers, but she is also a great actress, and not the bit player who gets roles purely through her contact with Camilla. This image of a Hollywood where dreams can come true is juxtaposed against the image of Hollywood as a place where nightmares exist⁷⁷. When we finally do view Diane, she is bitter and cynical. Her jealousy of Camilla and Kesher visibly boils to the surface, especially when she attends a party at the director's house where he and Camilla announce their engagement. Yet even this party is obviously an unreal event. Diane views the mysterious cowboy figure who earlier had threatened Kesher, while the party itself is too lavish an affair to be real. Kesher and Camilla's announcement is also presented in such a manner as to preclude conception of it as a real occurrence. They giggle like adolescents after the announcement and Camilla pointedly kisses the woman whom Diane had situated as Camilla Rhodes in her fantasy.

Lynch's portrayal of this party is thus as satirical as any of the party scenes in Robert Altman's *The Player*. Whereas in *The Player* the Hollywood parties are used to highlight the shallow nature of those in the industry (one character can state that a party was attended by "a hundred of my close personal friends"), Lynch uses the party to reinforce the industry's artificiality. The people at the party are vain and shallow, but more importantly the topics of conversation are facile. As many of those in attendance have appeared in Diane's fantasy, the effect on the viewer is that this scene

⁷⁷ Ironically for Naomi Watts, her portrayal of Diane/Betty was her big break in Hollywood. The role garnered her numerous awards and nominations, and has led to significant fame (for example she was featured on the cover of the July/August edition of *Premiere*). Her success highlights the complexity of the Hollywood Dream. Watts' dream of an over-night success appears to have been realised, yet in reality she had been working as an actor for over ten years before her break-through role.

is as unreal as those featuring Betty and Rita. Yet the artificiality is based on its hyperreality: it is more real than real. Lynch presents a scene which is familiar – that of a glamorous Hollywood party – yet everything is too perfect, too glamorous, too sexual, too shallow, and thus the viewer cannot accept the verisimilitude of the scene. In its place is a sense that we are witnessing the representation of something that does not exist, or that it only exists within the cinematic boundaries of movies.

The importance of this sense of hyperreality is made clear when Betty and Rita watch a performance at Club Silencio. At the club, the emcee announces that despite the presence of music, “There is no band. This is all a tape recording... It is an illusion”. The scene serves two purposes: firstly, it allows the viewer insight into the fact that Betty and Rita are merely figments of Diane’s imagination – for after the visit they disappear and Diane makes her first appearance – and secondly, it is the motif for the entire film. “It is an illusion” does not merely relate to Diane’s fantasy; Lynch has perceptively realised that to satirise the film industry on film, one must acknowledge that a film which satirises other films is no less of an illusion as those which it satirises.

In *Mulholland Dr.* everything is false. The sentiments expressed by those viewing Betty’s audition are false; they quickly change once the viewers leave the room. The supposed talent of Camilla Rhodes is false; she succeeds because she sleeps with Kesher. The love between Diane and Camilla is false; Camilla quickly moves onto Kesher, and even finds another female lover; and Diane arranges for Camilla’s murder, as much for jealousy over Camilla’s career as for Camilla’s relationship with Kesher. Pointedly when Diane arranges for the murder she shows the assassin a studio photograph of Camilla, thus suggesting she is attempting to murder the actress (the artificial identity) as much as the person. Thus throughout the

film there are no scenes which can be viewed as authentic representations. Even those scenes which appear to be outside of the narrative line of Betty and Rita, such as the two men discussing a nightmare, have an aura of unauthenticity.

Mulholland Dr. is thus an extrapolation of the final scenes of *Sunset Blvd.* In that film, Norma Desmond, who has murdered her lover, descends her staircase towards the waiting police and newsreel cameras, believing she is acting in a film, and gives the final line: “Mr DeMille, I’m ready for my close up.” In place of showing us the mental disintegration of Diane, Lynch allows us to view matters from her perspective. It is as though he has made a film in which DeMille actually is ready to give Norma Desmond her close up, her film version of *Salome* is made, and Joe Gillis is not murdered. Thus, just as Truman Burbank is the postmodern equivalent of George Bailey, Diane is the postmodern version of Norma Desmond. Where Wilder shows Norma’s visions as deranged fantasies, Lynch takes the view that Betty’s visions are no less unreal than that which surrounds her. Both films attack the sinister nature of Hollywood, but Wilder retains a sense that there is a positive aspect to the industry. As Danny Peary has noted, Wilder’s attack is aimed more at the industry’s tendency to “make junk” and forget the stars who made the industry what it is (104). (A surprising attitude given that co-screenwriter, Charles Brackett was at the time president of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences⁷⁸.)

Both films, as well, contain meta-cinematic motifs. In *Sunset Blvd.*, Norma Desmond is desperate to star in her film version of *Salome*. It does not come to fruition due to her murdering Joe, and because the script is poor. In *Mulholland Dr.*, Adam Kesher’s attempts to make “The Silvia North Story” are blocked by a wheelchair-bound dwarf and members of what seem to be an underworld

⁷⁸ David Lynch conversely was the president of the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, a decidedly anti-Hollywood establishment, highlighted by the fact that only one film, *Marty* in 1955, has won the Palm d’Or and the Academy Award for Best Picture.

organisation. The film, which appears to be set in the 1950s, is apparently a hot property, with a large number of actresses desiring the lead role. Kesher, despite his initial refusal, does finally agree to the casting of 'Camilla Rhodes', and thus is a director who compromises his vision. Ostensibly this is part of Diane's fantasy revenge against Kesher for both casting Camilla over her, and for then causing the end of her affair with Camilla, yet Lynch as a director of films is also commenting on the studio pressures on directors.

Mulholland Dr. was initially intended as a television series, and much of the film was to be the series pilot episode. Thus, ironically, the result is not Lynch's original vision, but one forced on him by outside – financial – interests. In the film, Kesher enacts every director's fantasy of standing up to those who would have control over his/her art. After the first meeting where he is instructed to hire "Camilla Rhodes" and is told abruptly that "it's no longer your film", he, in an act of defiance, damages the financiers' car with his golf club. When told that production of the film has stopped, he refuses to go to the studio, where he would have to make compromises. Yet for all his defiance, he is swayed when his bank records are deleted and it becomes apparent that those in control of the film's finance have control over his life as well.

Diane, who wishes to see her nemesis in love destroyed, and has paranoid fantasies that there is an ulterior reason why Camilla was cast instead of her, reflects Lynch's battle to have his own artistic vision realised. The history of Hollywood is littered with examples of directors being forced to change their films to suit studio pressure. Those who were unwilling to do so – most famously Orson Welles, whose *The Magnificent Ambersons* was recut by 50 minutes, and given a happy ending while Welles was out of the country – found that their careers suffered. Thus studios do

have control over directors' finances, unless like Lynch, directors are prepared to work for independent film companies, and with small budgets⁷⁹. That Kesher in the end fails to keep artistic control of his film, would suggest that Lynch is pessimistic with respect to a director's power. Yet in the Diane/Camilla narrative we discover that Kesher is not so much interested in his artistic vision as he is in using his position to make advances on Camilla, which suggests that Lynch is unconvinced that there is any artistic vision at all involved in Hollywood films.

Mulholland Dr. ends as only such an acerbic satire on Hollywood could – with death. Diane, unable to cope with the knowledge of her actions, and haunted by the memory of the elderly couple who judged the jitterbug contest, commits suicide. While Diane may never have been as innocent and hopeful as Betty, we know that she did come to Hollywood with dreams of making it big. Her fantasy of Betty is not only what she wished would have happened in retrospect, but is also the dream of Diane before she arrived. As Betty, she gains success and recognition as an actress, lives in an upmarket bungalow complex, and finds love with Rita. For Diane the opposite occurs: she finds no success as an actress, lives in a small downmarket bungalow, her love affair is shattered, and finally she commits suicide.

Diane and Betty are thus the opposite outcomes of the Hollywood Dream, yet Diane's failure is no less shocking to the audience than Betty's success. We know that many actresses go to Hollywood in search of fame, yet end up working in bit parts in bad movies, or as waitresses or worse. Lynch's decision to portray Betty's side of the coin first highlights a desire to focus on the falseness of the Hollywood Dream. It is

⁷⁹ *Mulholland Dr.* had a budget of US\$15 million. For the film, Lynch was nominated for Best Director for the 2002 Academy Awards. Of those who were also nominated, Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* had a budget of US\$95 million, Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Rings* was budgeted at US\$109 million, while the winner, Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind*, cost US\$60 million. The remaining nominee, Robert Altman, a director who like Lynch operates outside of the Hollywood studio system, was nominated for *Gosford Park*, a film which, coincidentally, had the same budget as *Mulholland Dr.* ("Academy Awards: 2002").

also worth noting that we only view it as a dream narrative because Lynch allows us to view it as such. Until we view Diane asleep in her bungalow, we only have a vague idea that something is amiss. We know that Betty is too good to be true, and that the actions of the underworld figures seem absurd, but we have no actual evidence to view the narrative as a dream. Lynch includes a number of situations within this narrative to counter any such view. Kesher's discovery of his wife's infidelity, the meeting of the two men in the diner (whose role in the film only appears to be incidental, for they are unconnected with any of the other characters), and the discussion between the hit-man and a prostitute are all presented straight, with no sense that they are the projections of someone's delusions.

The only indicator that all is not what it seems is our knowledge of film discourse. We know Betty cannot be real because she is too much like a Doris Day character. While such a figure in a 1950s' Doris Day film is allowable, when placed in the context of modern Los Angeles, the breaching of the genre boundaries causes her position in the film to become untenable. When the hit-man farcically shoots a number of people we know that this is absurd and signifies the many violent, yet "humorous" images of late 1990s, Tarantino style film. Placed outside of such a context it once again causes the viewer to question the verisimilitude. Also any knowledge of Lynch's own body of work causes the viewer to question the reality he presents. Two of Lynch's previous films *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992) involved similar fractures in reality, and thus in some respect *Mulholland Dr.* is a simulacrum of a David Lynch film. Such knowledge allows the viewer to anticipate to an extent that Betty and her associated narrative are illusory.

Yet Diane is just as illusory, for she is just as much a simulacrum of the failed actress as Betty is of the successful one. Thus, throughout the film, the audience's

sense of reality is undermined. Lynch has created a satire that uses the very medium he satirises. Rather than lay himself open to similar attacks of perpetuating a myth, he has created a narrative not grounded in any reality. It avoids the pitfalls of other satires of Hollywood, such as *The Truman Show*, for it does not seek to persuade the reader that anything in film is real. In this respect it is almost the perfect Hollywood satire; nothing is real, it is all an illusion.

* * *

Myra Breckinridge and Norma Desmond are both creatures of simulacra. They both battle to stay within their respective simulacra because it is there that they feel most comfortable. To this end, Myra has to fight to stop her male alter ego Myron from taking control of her body, and Norma must fight to stop the reality of her decline in fame from entering her existence. In both narratives, others help them. Myra is able to exist because the Buck Loner Academy is a perfect setting. It is itself the perfect simulacrum of Hollywood – success, fame, recognition and occasional failure are accorded all who enter its doors. All within it live disassociated from reality: they live as though they are film characters – their lives are those they have created from watching films. In *Myron*, Myra takes the next logical step and exists within (and around) a movie. Whereas in *Myra Breckinridge* she was part of a simulacrum, here the lines between fiction and reality become more blurred. In *Sunset Blvd*, Norma is assisted by Max, Joe and her “wax works” to help keep the real world from entering her mansion.

Norma Desmond is in some respects an aged Myra⁸⁰; she has lived too long in a simulacrum and thus is no longer able to distinguish the artificial from the real. She

⁸⁰ It is perhaps no surprise that the film, and especially the character of Norma, has become a drag queen stereotype. In the recent mini-series *Angels in America* (2003), a homosexual character, Prior Walter is dressed in a drug induced hallucination as Norma and utters the line: “I’m ready for my close up Mr De Mille”.

has remained within the boundaries of her artificial world for so long that at the end of the film, the reality of the outside world becomes one with the simulacrum created inside her mansion. At this point she is unable to cope either physically or mentally outside its boundaries. Yet at no stage does Wilder attempt to suggest that her reality is more real than that observed by Gillis. We always know Norma is deluded, just as we know the Buck Loner Academy and Myra's foray into the world of *Siren of Babylon* is a simulacrum and a fictional existence. However, these works do mark a turning point in the representation of Hollywood. The representation of the artificiality of Hollywood would no longer be limited to characters lying or deceiving – they would come to believe the lies and deceptions as truth. This representation of Hollywood as simulacra in *Sunset Blvd* and *Myra Breckinridge* leads directly to *The Truman Show* and *Mulholland Dr.* where the simulacra is extended and completed.

The Truman Show and *Mulholland Dr.* have left little room for filmic satires of Hollywood to explore. The first created an artificial world, while the second destabilised the boundaries of the real and the imagined. Both films have in the short time since their release become enormously influential. Since their respective releases, two films have followed in their path (and will be discussed in Chapter 6). Andrew Niccol's *S1m0ne* follows on from *The Truman Show* (not surprisingly given Niccol wrote both films) with the creation of an artificial person in place of the artificial location of Seahaven. *Adaptation* (2002) continues the theme of *Mulholland Dr.*, in which the real world, and the "movie world" intersect.

The Truman Show is also the reference point for all 'reality programmes', and given the lengths to which participants in such programmes are willing to go to deceive friends and family, one can only assume that financial concerns are the only aspect stopping a "Truman Show" style programme occurring. *Mulholland Dr.* on the other

hand has become the new centre of the canon of Hollywood satires. As *Sunset Blvd* dominated films on Hollywood throughout the last half of the twentieth century, so too does it seem *Mulholland Dr.* will influence those in the future. Indeed as will be shown in the following chapters, those films and novels which attempt to ignore the influence of *Mulholland Dr.* are decidedly anachronistic in their approach and either repeat the themes and narratives of the 1930s' satires, or retreat from a full satirical attack and instead only parody the industry and its influence.

4.0 Intertextual Hollywood: Parody, Pastiche and Satire

TED STRIKER. Surely you can't be serious (*Airplane!* 1980).

In this chapter, I examine works which focus on Hollywood films and Hollywood's effect on the rest of America. These works also make use of parody to an extent not evident in the novels and films already examined. This use of parody inevitably requires the films to be so laden with intertextual references that critics such as Frank Pilipp have referred to the films as examples of "creative incest" (55). This chapter will examine intertextuality used for parodical and satirical means in three contexts: spoof films, Robert Altman's *The Player*, and the television programme *The Simpsons*. All three comment on the role of Hollywood in the American Dream, and also demonstrate the extent to which the Hollywood Dream has subverted the American Dream.

The first aspect examined is the category of spoof films. "Spoof" is a common used term to describe those films which parody other films with a pastiche of similar characters and narratives. It is a term that generally denotes a certain "low-brow" comedy. These films highlight the differences between intertextuality which involves specific and that which involves general hypotexts. The terms 'hypotext' and 'hypertext' were originated by Gerard Genette, in his work *Palimpsestes* (1982). Hypotext relates to the text that is parodied (or used in an intertextual sense), while hypertext is the resultant parody. Thus, Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is the hypertext to the hypotext of Homer's *Odyssey*⁸¹. Those films that have specific hypotexts are

⁸¹ Simon Dentith writes that the terms are useful (13), yet with the increasing use of 'hypertext' to denote words used as links on the internet or world wide web, the use of the term in Genette's sense is now somewhat confusing, and may be in need of review. However, rather than replace the terms with a clumsy "initial-text" or "resultant-text", I will use Genette's terms, and will specify if I am using 'hypertext' in the, now, more common internet context.

presented as examples of pure parody, whereas those with a non-specific, or general, hypotext are revealed as examples of parody used for satirical purposes. These spoofs also parody the change of the American Dream into the Hollywood Dream.

Secondly, Robert Altman's adaptation of *The Player* is presented as an example of parody and pastiche used for satiric purposes, which also displays the inherent differences between literary and filmic use of intertextuality. In the film, both specific and general hypotexts (that is the hypotext are the stereotypes of a genre rather than specific films in the genre) are used for satirical purposes, yet whereas the parody in movie spoofs is directed at Hollywood films, here the target of the satire is the Hollywood industry.

Finally, *The Simpsons* is examined as a television series that makes extensive use of intertextual and interfilmic parodies to satirise American culture and the American Dream. Its focus is thus not so much Hollywood itself, but the influence Hollywood has on American culture.

Barton Fink, *The Truman Show*, *Mulholland Dr.*, *Sunset Blvd* and other films discussed previously all contain intertextual references that contribute to the complexity of meaning in the films. They incorporate scenes and characters from other films (whether the references are specific or general) such as Betty in *Mulholland Dr.*, who is portrayed as a Doris Day type in a contemporary world, which allows the filmmakers to enrich their works through subversion of these references – we do not expect to see Doris Day in modern Hollywood, and we certainly do not expect to see her engaging in sexual acts with another woman. The use of intertextuality in literary satires of Hollywood is also abundant. *The Day of the Locust* refers to a number of Frank Capra films, and Gore Vidal drew on numerous works, both textual and film, in his 'Myra' novels. The satirical target of the above

examples is not only the Hollywood industry, but also the American Dream, and Hollywood's representation of that dream. The manner in which these aspects are targeted cannot be simply described as playfully comic. West, Vidal, the Coens and others desire more than merely to make the audience or reader laugh – indeed in the case of *Mulholland Dr.*, humour is largely absent. It is this point that marks the crucial difference between parody and satire. In both forms, intertextuality is pervasive; indeed, it is impossible for a parody to exist without a specific or general hypotext. That is, a parody must contain voices from other texts or subjects, for without them there is no text or subject to be parodied. As Bakhtin writes: “Every type of parody... is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid”(*The Dialogic Imagination* 75). Yet in parody, unlike satire, the comic element is also essential.

The nature of parody has been the subject of debate for many postmodern critics. Margaret Rose, in *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern*, attempts to define parody and, importantly, to distinguish it from similar forms such as satire and pastiche. She laments the formalist critics' preference for intertextuality and their attempts to use parody only in a negative context. Fredric Jameson on the other hand, in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) declares parody to be virtually dead: “... it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place” (17). In Jameson's view, pastiche is a “blank parody, parody that has lost its humour” (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 114) which is characteristic of postmodern culture, whereas parody belongs to a time no longer relevant, as he believes there is no longer “a linguistic norm” (114). Linda Hutcheon agrees with Jameson that parody need not be humorous, but rather than declare it extinct, she acknowledges that “parody... is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders” (“The Politics of Postmodern

Parody" 225). More recently, Simon Dentith, in the succinctly titled, *Parody* (2000) pointed out the difficulties in defining the term: "... we must recognise that 'parody' now alludes to a spectrum of cultural practices and the specific ways in which individual parodies work will always require careful elucidation (18)".

Thus 'parody' occupies a central position in the polemics of postmodernist theory, although, it has also taken on an elusive meaning. Even in the confusion, two characteristics remain which distinguish parody from satire: the need for humour in parody, and the lack of any corrective impulse.

That even Jameson feels the need to define "parody without humour" as "pastiche", suggests that humour is integral to parody. What is often implied by pastiche is that it is superior to parody, or that it has replaced parody because it is more complex. Aside from the absurdity of ranking genres, such attempts serve to ensure the role of the discounted genre – in this case parody – is either ignored or undervalued, in much the same manner as films based on serious matters such as wars or the holocaust are viewed with greater reverence than comedies⁸². For Margaret Rose, humour is the crucial aspect in her definition of the term: "parody may be defined in general terms as *the comic refunctioning of performed linguistic or artistic material*" (52). That is to say, parody must attempt to amuse, satire need not.

The lack of a corrective impulse in parody is a direct result of its humorous element. When Joyce parodies Dickens in the 'Oxen of the Sun' chapter of *Ulysses*, it cannot be said that his motive is to improve Dickens, or even to highlight the faults or inadequacies of Dickens' writing. This lack of a corrective impulse does not make his writing any less rewarding or effective than if he had chosen to take a more satirical line, and neither should his parody be discounted merely because humour is used less

⁸² This bias is most obvious with respect to the nominations for "Best Picture" for the annual Academy Awards. Of the fifty films nominated for Best Picture between 1994-2003, 43 were dramas and only 3 were comedy. Of the other four, 2 were fantasy, and 1 each was of the musical and action genres.

as a means, than as an end in itself. It must also be noted that the corrective element in satire does not necessarily mean the satirist is proposing a solution. As Leonard Feinberg writes: "... satire does not always teach a moral lesson or offer a desirable alternative to the condition it criticises" (3). That satirists do not offer a solution to the ills they notice merely highlights that satirists are not philosophers. They are more interested in finding faults that need correcting than proposing corrections – though it must be said, many do.

The distinction between the two genres on the basis of the corrective intention can of course be problematical given the inherent difficulty (and some would argue, absurdity) of determining the intention of the author or filmmaker. That what amuses one, shocks another, seems to imply that what for one is parody, is for another satire. This however, need not be a difficulty, for such an argument implies that one must be able to denote in finite terms the category into which a work falls. Yet the flexibility of this definition actually allows readers (or viewers) to discern for themselves the impact they gain from the work. Thus it is possible that one critic will view a work as satire; another as parody. Yet to do so, the first must demonstrate that more is at issue than the desire for humour, while the latter must argue that there is not.

Such a test is not particularly new. Gilbert Highet, in *Anatomy of Satire* (1962) writes that "the final test for satire is the typical emotion which the author feels and wishes to evoke in his readers. It is a blend of amusement and contempt" (21). Thus my definition of parody does not, in effect, present any greater critical difficulties than determining whether one wishes to view, for example Shakespeare's *Richard III* as a tragedy or history. That a work can be viewed as representative of two genres is no cause for redefinition of the two genres. As with the case of *Richard III* two classifications can obviously overlap. The only difference with respect to satire and

parody is that satire will always take the dominant position in any work; for parody can be employed in a satire, but satire cannot be employed in a parody⁸³. The function of parody as either an end or a means also adds to the difficulty of definition. Many satires of Hollywood make use of parody, but they are not actually ‘parodies’. Satire, of course can as well be a means; T.S. Eliot, for example, writes that Ben Jonson’s use of satire “is merely the means which leads to aesthetic result” (158). That such satire might also (and if done well, should) result in art does not influence the definitions of satire and parody. A parody cannot use satire, for were it to do so the impetus would no longer be merely to provoke laughter, but also to improve, and thus the whole should be termed a satire, rather than parody.

We still need to consider how satire, which may use parody, is different from pure parody. In effect this requires us to differentiate the use of parody in a film such as *The Player* from that used in, for example, *Not Another Teen Movie* (2001). Both make use of intertextual and interfilmic⁸⁴ methods, attempt to amuse, and are, to differing extents, examples of meta-fiction. Indeed, the meta-fictional aspect of these films is a common trait of recent Hollywood parodies, yet of the two, only *The Player* has that essential desire of satire – wanting to correct the status quo. Robert Altman uses parody as a weapon to subvert the Hollywood system; the writers of *Not Another Teen Movie* use it for laughter and as a means to making a profitable film⁸⁵.

⁸³ However a work *can* contain both parody and satire – one chapter or character may be purely parodical and another satirical, but when the two modes are used together the satirical takes the dominant position.

⁸⁴ While in a sense interfilmic is a form of intertextuality I have decided to distinguish between the two; with intertextual relating to narrative and characters from film, and interfilmic relating to film specific aspects such as music/sound, cinematography and editing.

⁸⁵ The monetary motive of filmmaking is one that cannot be ignored, and is especially imperative with parody and satire. Satirical films on average do not perform as well as pure parodical films. And regardless of their performance (*The Truman Show* was a notable success), satires do not spawn sequels. Of the parodical movies, one need only think of the *Naked Gun* series, or the *Scary Movie* sequel to witness the profit motive of Hollywood parody. One would need to draw an extremely long bow to suggest that *Scary Movie 2* (2001) was made for motives other than profit. Indeed despite poor reviews for the first sequel *Scary Movie 3* (2003) was released and its initial financial success (it broke

Indeed *Not Another Teen Movie* is a prime example of the difficulties of definition. One reviewer described it as a “parody of teen comedies”, another termed it “a clever satire”, while yet another described it as “a pastiche of a pastiche” (“*Not Another Teen Movie*” 2003). One critic pointedly wrote: “no one would ever mistake ‘*Not Another Teen Movie*’ for sophisticated satire” (Lawson 2003). The adjectives, ‘sophisticated’ and ‘clever’ are ones that are rarely used to modify parody, and highlight a critical bias towards satire, equating it with highbrow, and parody as being a lower form. Yet parody’s position as ‘high’ or ‘lowbrow’ is greatly dependent on the hypotext, because the humour of parody is only accessible to those who know that text. For example, Joyce’s parody of the styles of literature in “Oxen of the Sun” could hardly be presented as ‘lowbrow’.

With respect to the differences between pastiche and parody, once again the impetus for humour separates the two, for, as with satire, pastiche does not require humour. And similar to the relationship between satire and parody, parody can use pastiche (as is the case in *Not Another Teen Movie*), but once pastiche is employed to produce a comic effect, the work becomes a parody. As Summer Stalter (2003) has noted, *Singin’ in the Rain* is a pastiche, as it incorporates numerous songs from previous films, and the function of songs (such as “Singin’ in the Rain” and “Broadway Melody”) from *The Broadway Melody* (1929) is not to parody the original film. While *Singin’ in the Rain* does contain parody of Hollywood, any humour in the film is not directed toward the films in which the songs were originally sung. As Jameson asserts:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a

the box-office record for an October opening weekend in the United States) has led to the production of *Scary Movie 4*.

neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive,
without the satirical impulse, without laughter.... (114)

Thus pastiche is not a synonym for parody, nor is it parody's successor.

The relationship of the hypertext to the hypotext is crucial in examining the two modes. Parody, as Genette points out, transforms the hypotext, whereas pastiche merely imitates it. In both cases the same hypotext may be repeated verbatim in the hypertext, yet with parody, the hypotext is transformed due to the context in which the repetition is used, or the juxtaposition (especially in film) of this repeated text with the scenes that precede and follow. This juxtaposition in parody necessarily ridicules the hypotext, and often subverts it; in pastiche, the juxtaposition infuses the meaning of the surrounding text. Thus to a point pastiche does transform the hypotext, this transformation is a secondary aspect, for its main impulse is to alter the hypertext. Pastiche also requires a specific hypotext (though more often numerous specific hypotexts). Parody, on the other hand, while often employing a specific hypotext as a form of mimesis, can also parody a general hypotext. As will be shown with the film *Blazing Saddles* (1974), parody can take as its hypotext a genre – in the case of *Blazing Saddles*, westerns. To this end, the parodies involved do not reference a specific film or character, but rather stereotypical narratives and characters.

The desire to subvert the cultural status quo (as evident in *The Player*) is however, not enough to explain the differences between satire and parody. The subversive aspect is present in all satire, yet it exists as well in parody. When teen sex comedies are parodied in *Not Another Teen Movie*, or horror movies are parodied in *Scary Movie* (2000) there is an implicit sense that the hypotexts deserve ridicule. Yet such is the nature of Hollywood parodies, that despite this desire to highlight the faults of the hypotexts, the filmmakers nevertheless have an innate pleasure in such

films. The lengths to which the writers and directors parody specific films and genres indicates that they must possess a delight in the hypotext, as indeed Jameson notes when he writes: “a good or great parodist has to have some secret sympathy for the original...” (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 113).

This leads to the overriding difference between Hollywood *parody* and Hollywood *satire*. The major point of departure between the two forms is that Hollywood parody exists only within the context of meta-fiction. Nothing which is outside the frame of film is of any relevance to Hollywood parodies. Thus Hollywood parody has little, if anything, directly to say about the real world. The films indirectly detail the stereotypes perpetuated by Hollywood films, though they are not satirical because there is a lack of corrective impulse. Indeed the parodist desires such stereotypes to persist, for not only do they take a somewhat smug delight in them, they wish for them to continue that they may continue to parody them. Such an attitude is similar to T.S Eliot’s reading of Ben Jonson, when he described him as the “type of personality [which] found relief in something falling under the category of burlesque or farce” (158). As we shall see this “relief” is also present in those works which I shall term satire, and indeed has been present in many of the works already examined in previous chapters – Gore Vidal pointedly delights in satirising his targets because he delights in their foibles – yet such delight is non-essential to satire, though always present in parody. The following table details the difference and overlaps of satire, parody and pastiche:

	<u>Hypotext</u>	<u>Humour</u>	<u>Corrective</u>	<u>Subversive</u>
<u>Satire</u>	specific/general	not necessary	necessary	often
<u>Parody</u>	specific/general	necessary	absent	often
<u>Pastiche</u>	specific	absent	absent	possible

These aspects will be further elaborated in the following discussion.

4.1 Intertextual Parody: Spoofs

Since the financial success of *Airplane!* (1980)⁸⁶, Hollywood studios have commonly released spoof films. Unlike the earlier films by director Mel Brooks, such as *Blazing Saddles*⁸⁷ and *Young Frankenstein* (1974), these spoofs do not attempt to parody film genres, rather they explicitly parody individual films (though a spoof may – and usually does – parody several individual films), at times using the same dialogue. Such is the extent of pastiche in these films that they could not exist without the hypotext films. Had those films which are parodied not been made, there would be no occasion for the parody⁸⁸. The rise of these spoof films has reached the point where sequels to the original spoof are made which parody the first film. In the case of *Scary Movie 2* (2001) the sequel of a film (*Scary Movie*) which spoofed, among others, *Scream* (1996), which was itself a pastiche of horror films, we have a film which parodies a spoof of a pastiche⁸⁹. These spoofs are pure Hollywood products, and that which they spoof are pure Hollywood products. More than any other novel or film examined in this thesis, they focus their attack on the end product of Hollywood.

The closed meta-fictional aspects of these Hollywood parodies is most evident in those films which parody stereotypical teen comedies, and the influx of intertextual

⁸⁶ It was the fourth highest grossing movie in the United States in 1980 ("U.S. Box Office Earnings: 1980" 2004).

⁸⁷ *Blazing Saddles* was also a financial success, grossing US\$119.5 million in 1974, making it the 44th highest grossing movie in the United States, when adjusted for inflation ("All Time Domestic Box Office: Adjusted for Ticket Price Inflation" 2004).

⁸⁸ The titles of these films also indicate the explicitly parodical nature: *Fatal Instinct* (1993), parodies *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992); *Scary Movie* was the working title of *Scream*; *Airplane!* parodies *Airport* (1970); and the to be released in 2004 film *My Big Fat Independent Movie* parodies *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002). Quite often, the posters of the spoofs parody the posters of the hypotext. Such use of title (and the posters as well) to designate the target of the film's parody is also often seen in the title of 'adult' films – though usually with a much more salacious meaning.

⁸⁹ And *Scary Movie* is a case of a film spoofing a film distributed by the same film company, Dimension Films, (a division of Miramax).

horror films that have been produced since *Scream* in 1996. The hypotexts, though often using generic narratives, commented on American society. The narrative pattern of a teenage girl from a working-class background, or who is fiercely independent, falling in love with a male from a higher socio-economic class is common in teen film comedies. For example, the 1980s' films, *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), and *Pretty in Pink* (1986) all featured actress Molly Ringwald in the role of the poor/ independent girl. In the past decade this narrative line has been repeated with slight variations in such films as *She's All That* (1999), *Can't Hardly Wait* (1998), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *Never Been Kissed* (1999). Such films may be repetitive to the point of plagiarism and they also have in common a seeming reinforcement of the American Dream, but in fact, the dream they portray is the Hollywood Dream.

In *Pretty in Pink*, the protagonist Andie Walsh is from such a poor background that she is reduced to making her own clothes and working part-time while attending high school. Despite the attentions of her friend Phil "Duckie" Dale (who is from a similar background), she falls in love with the austere named Blane McDonough, who drives a BMW. Yet crucially Andie is not actually poor. She drives her own car – though it is obviously second hand – and she lives with her divorced father in a house, rather than a small rented apartment. This distortion of the real economic circumstances is common in the American teen comedy. The eponymous character in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) complains earnestly that he is "born under a bad sign" because his parents gave him a computer, while his sister "got a car". Hardly a tragic predicament. Films such as *Pretty in Pink* and *She's All That* attempt to display an egalitarian desire in American culture: the rich boy will eventually fall in love with the poor girl, the poor girl will see that "rich people" are not all shallow and vain

(though most are, except the boy she loves), and the rich boy will discover that most of his rich friends are shallow and vain. However the narratives themselves refute such egalitarianism. The high schools are depicted as rigidly structured along class boundaries, where rich predominately equals cool. Similarly the most intelligent characters are poor, and it is often implied that the “rich kids” will be accepted into an Ivy League college irrespective of their grades. They may be smart, though this ability to attain good grades seems independent of any study. Should any characters be seen studying they are immediately positioned as poor or “nerds”.

Although – often after a climactic moment, such as a girl’s humiliation in front of the entire school at a party or the prom – these class barriers can be crossed. However, the result is so fanciful that the narratives actually reveal that such egalitarian ends are wholly unrealistic. They are little more than escapist fantasies which build on romances of Jane Austen, where again those who are “poor”, such as the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*, are still able to employ a servant and do little in terms of work beside the gathering of reeds and flowers. Given such a categorising of “the poor” it is not surprising that one teen comedy, *Clueless* (1995), is essentially an updating of Austen’s *Emma*.

Clueless, however, unlike the *Pretty in Pink* type of teen comedy, was at heart a satire of the American culture, and of the class differences evident in what is supposedly a classless society. Just as Austen’s novels themselves were social satires, the remake of *Emma* accomplishes much the same goals. On the other hand, *Pretty in Pink*, *The Breakfast Club* and others, merely attempt to display that underneath people’s social façade everyone is the same. This aspect is highlighted in *The Breakfast Club* when the rebellious girl is accepted by the popular boy only after her

heavy punk-style make-up is removed – revealing her ‘true self’, and a self which conforms to Hollywood stereotypes of a ‘nice girl’.

These teen comedies, as David Greven (2002) has argued, highlight changes in the sociology of American teenagers, but they also display the traditional American Dream coloured by the Hollywood Dream. The teen comedy genre focuses primarily on the pursuit of happiness. In it, the American Dream of obtaining “the fullest stature of which they [all men and women] are innately capable” (Adams 374) is transformed into the dream of obtaining this stature *through the smallest amount of effort*. To this end Ferris Bueller is a serial truant, yet there is no doubt he will graduate and attend college; Cher Horowitz in *Clueless* “renegotiates” her grades from a “C” to an “A”; and Joel Goodsen in *Risky Business* (1983) is accepted into Princeton because he successfully runs a brothel in his house while his parents are away.

Such examples highlight a common feature of American film and television. The top rating series *Friends* (1994-2004) for example, involved six people who, despite working full time, seemingly had abundant time to drink coffee in their favourite coffee shop. One of the characters, Monica Geller, is perhaps the only chef in history who never works nights or weekends. Thus the American Dream, when filtered through the lens of Hollywood, becomes wholly unrealistic, and becomes the Hollywood Dream. The ends of the American Dream are achieved, but there is no effort required. This fallacious aspect of the dream that is perpetrated through Hollywood comedies and television has the effect of making the American Dream impossible to achieve. Whereas people once believed the dream could be achieved through hard work because America was “the land of the free” where such hard work was rewarded, the dream is now presented as one that is only achievable in the

unrealistic world of film and television – which is of course correct, for this dream is actually the Hollywood Dream.

In the past, this was not the case. Teen romance/comedies of the 1940s and 1950s, such as the *Andy Hardy* and *Gidget* series, idealised the elements of American culture, had the underlying theme that effort is required to achieve the American Dream, and crucially that the dream was one worth attaining. For example, in *Gidget* (1959), the eponymous heroine realises that the life of a “beach bum” is not as idyllic as she initially believed. The film concludes with the leader of the surf gang, ‘the Big Kahuna’, returning to his job as an airline pilot, and with Gidget and her boyfriend, ‘Moondoggy’, going to college. Thus living from day to day with neither responsibility nor stability is revealed to be unfulfilling, and that the American Dream (which is fulfilling) of a house and stability requires work – whether it be study or a job.

By the end of the 1960s, however, this attitude had changed. Teenage dramas of the 1950s, such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Splendor in the Grass* (1961) and *West Side Story* (1961)⁹⁰, had highlighted the growing social distance between teenagers and their parents that had also been revealed in literature such as in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1957) and *On the Road* (1957). Yet until *The Graduate* (1967) this aspect was not crucial to the narrative of teen comedies. *The Graduate*, based on the novel by Charles Webb, while not technically a teen comedy (Benjamin Braddock turns 21 during the film), set the template for the genre: disaffected youth, sex (including snippets of nudity), and a soundtrack featuring popular music. While the films of the genre that appeared in the

⁹⁰ *West Side Story* does of course concern a number of issues, primarily the relationship between migrants and non-migrants in America, yet its position as a narrative of teenage rebellion is highlighted when, for example the character Action tells the elderly Doc: “When you was my age, when my brother was my age. You was never my age none of you...”

1980s and 1990s placed more emphasis on sex and nudity, the theme of youth's struggle (in a humorous manner) with developing sexual desires and their future careers remain crucial elements.

Central to *The Graduate*'s narrative is the lack of belief in the rewards of the American Dream. It is a theme that would permeate American teen comedies for the next thirty years. In *The Graduate*, Benjamin Braddock is the perfect child, and one who would fit nicely into any 1950s' teen comedy: intelligent, studious and from a wealthy family. The opening welcome-home party highlights these points, yet his parent's exaltations of his achievements ("Quiet everybody, I want to tell you some more things about Ben...") turns them into negatives. The American Dream, which seems ripe for Ben's taking does not fulfil him. This aspect of the dream is one that saturates post-1960 American film and literature on the subject. Kathryn Hume (2000) has noted that for the so-called Generation X, or the "blank generation" of the seventies, the dream is unfulfilling. The American Dream has thus become illusory, rather than elusive.

In the past, the dream was elusive for people such as the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, because it was economically implausible, or for African-Americans and Native Americans, because of social factors such as segregation. But for members of the current post-baby boomer generation the dream may be *less* elusive than ever before – the generation has suffered little economic hardship, and wars since the end of the Vietnam War, due to the lack of a draft, have had little social impact – yet the pursuit of the dream has become not worth the effort, because while it may result in security and financial liberty it does not result in happiness.

The most recent parody of these teen comedy/romance films is *Not Another Teen Movie*, which directly parodies virtually every film in this genre made since the

early 1980s. Unlike the works that it parodies, the film makes no comment on American society. It acknowledges the stereotypes that are promulgated by the teen comedy genre, but does not satirise American culture except to the extent that these stereotypes are the ones favoured by American (and in general, worldwide) audiences. Thus in *Not Another Teen Movie* the stereotypes that are exaggerated are not those of American culture, but American movies. While often these amount to the same thing, the intention of specific parodies, such as this one, is to create a film that has no reference outside the filmic context. The humour relies purely on the audiences' knowledge of the hypotexts.

The focus of these spoofs effectively results in films that are for the most part entirely lacking in narrative complexity. Although the portrayal of stereotypical characters and narratives in Hollywood films deserves parodical treatment, these spoofs are linked so closely with the targeted films that what results is less an attack of the films, but more a celebration of them. Just as the viewers need to have a wide knowledge of the hypotexts to fully appreciate the humour of the films, so too must the writers and directors of such spoofs – a knowledge that reveals a great affection for the hypotexts. So rarely do the films comment on non-filmic aspects, that such screenwriters as the Wayons brothers (who wrote the film spoof *Scary Movie*, and its sequel *Scary Movie 2*) must be grateful that Hollywood studios continue to produce such films that they can in turn parody. As a rule, the makers of these spoofs do not use the parody for any means other than laughter, and do not – despite the opportunity – satirise the films they parody.

When parody merely seeks to rephrase bad dialogue for amusement it suffers through lack of thematic significance. The makers of such Hollywood spoofs seem unsure of what/whom they are attacking, and given that the intended audience is the

same as those who watch the targeted films, they are careful not to attack the audience. Thus, what remains is a parody wholly lacking in malice or substance. Because they are so closely linked to the hypotexts the spoofs are essentially the same film only played ‘tongue in cheek’. The best filmic parodies however, are not such “empty films”.

Mel Brooks’ *Blazing Saddles*, and the Abrahams, Zucker and Zucker’s *Airplane!* are examples of film parodies that transcend the genres they target. While they do at times parody specific films – indeed *Airplane!* contains dialogue taken straight from *Zero Hour!* (1957) – the parody as a rule targets genres. In doing so the films use parody to attack aspects such as racism in American culture as well as in Hollywood films. *Blazing Saddles* for example subverts the western film genre through the character of an African-American sheriff. This not only parodies the lack of any African American characters in most western films, but also attacks racial-prejudice in American society. Throughout the film, Bart, the sheriff, is referred to as “nigger” by even the most stereotypically nice people, such as an elderly, prim woman. The elderly woman is a common character in westerns, and often represents the films’ moral centre. She is usually a widow with an independent spirit who refuses to be bound by social conventions. In *Blazing Saddles* this role is subverted:

BART. Mornin’, ma’am. And isn’t it a lovely morning?

ELDERLY WOMAN. Up yours nigger!

Similarly, *Blazing Saddles* subverts the representation of country folk as hard working farmers in such classics of the genre, as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) or *Shane* (1953). In the film, the country folk are inept, crooked and racist. Bart’s deputy, Jim (The Wacko Kid) explains to Bart why these people are so unwilling to accept an African-American sheriff: “You’ve got to remember that these are just simple

farmers. These are people of the land. The common clay of the new west. You know... morons.”

The difference in intention between the specific and general parody, can be seen through the representation of African-Americans in *Blazing Saddles* and *Not Another Teen Movie*. In *Blazing Saddles*, there is no direct reference to the lack of African-Americans in western films. The sheriff’s role in the film highlights this absence only indirectly, whereas in *Not Another Teen Movie* the African-American character, Malik, states his role in the film with his opening lines: “I am the token black guy. I’m just supposed to smile and stay out of the conversation and say things like: ‘Damn’, ‘Shit’, and ‘That is whack’”. His position as “the token black guy” does not therefore, directly reflect the lack of African-American representation in American society, but more their lack of representation in Hollywood teen comedies. Thus the general parody directly comments on American society; the specific comments on it indirectly. Yet so focussed are specific parodies on parodying films that any comment on American society is lost under the barrage of intertextual references.

Thus, *Not Another Teen Movie* directly parodies teen films rather than American society. To this end, it contains the stock characters observed in such films. Originally the characters were to be credited by their stereotype. Thus the girl from the poor background, who is initially positioned as weird and ugly, yet who falls in love with the most popular boy in school, was to be credited as, “the pretty-ugly girl”, referencing the fact that many “ugly” girls in such teen comedies need little other than to take off their glasses, or let their hair down to be transformed into the prettiest girl in the school. Other titles of characters, such as, “the popular jock”, “the obsessed best

friend”, “the dumb fat guy” and “the foreign exchange student” all refer to stock characters in teen films since the early 1980s.

The absence of direct comment on American society is also revealed through the many metafictional and intertextual references within the film. The “pretty-ugly girl” is Janey Briggs, which refers to the lead actor of *American Pie* (1999), Jason Biggs, and the lead female character in *She’s All That*, Laney Boggs. One of the “desperate virgins” is called “Ox”, which again refers to *American Pie* and the character “Oz”, who in that film is one of three teenage boys who make a pact to lose their virginity before graduating. In *Not Another Teen Movie*, this pact is also made by three boys, however in this case one of them does point out that there is no great rush as they are only freshmen. The actors themselves are used as metafictional jokes: actress Jamie Pressly’s character (“the bitchy cheerleader”) is named Priscilla in direct reference to the former wife of Elvis Presley. And actor, Ron Lester’s character, Reggie Ray (“the stupid fat guy”) actually parodies a character that Lester played in *Varsity Blues* (1999)⁹¹. Such references serve only to amuse those who watch such films, and reinforces the absence of commentary on aspects outside the frame of film.

The narrative of *Not Another Teen Movie* also highlights the extent of its dependence on hypotexts. It not only parodies *American Pie*, but also several other films: *She’s All That*, with the plot of a popular guy betting he can turn any girl into the prom queen; *Cruel Intentions* (1999), with the relationship between a brother and sister; *Never Been Kissed*, with a reporter going undercover at a high school; and *Pretty in Pink*, with the efforts Ricky Lipman (“the obsessed best friend”) to woo Janey. Together with the multitude of other intertextual references, the working title

⁹¹ Such metafictional references also occur in the *Scary Movie* franchise. Many of the characters of *Scary Movie* reference the actors of *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) such as Cindy Campbell, which refers to the character in *Scream* of Sidney Prescott played by actress Neve Campbell.

of “Ten Things I Hate About Clueless Road Trips When I Can’t Hardly Wait to be Kissed” details the intention of the writers. As enjoyable to the aficionados of teen comedies as these parodies are, they are in effect little more than filmed versions of the *Mad Magazine* movie parodies which have been a staple of that magazine since its inception.

This parody has also extended to the spoof films themselves. In *Shriek if You Know What I did Last Friday the 13th* (2000) (a spoof similar to *Scary Movie*, yet which was not released in theatres), a character parodies the advice on how to survive horror films espoused in *Scream*:

MARTINA. All right, listen. There are certain rules that you have to follow in a parody situation if you want to survive. Rule number one: exaggerate everything. Number 88: accept the ridiculous as logical. Sexual sight gags are always funny. And along with wacky sound effects, and unlimited absurdity. Remember, nothing is sacred.

DAWSON. You're forgetting, point out the obvious.

MARTINA. And finally, perpetually painful stereotypes.

BLACK GUY IN PIMP OUTFIT. Dat’s ridikkulous.

Thus film spoofs have become circular parodies – they parody films which are successful and then because spoof films also become popular they too are parodied.

The popularity of spoof films suggests that, like the *Mad Magazines* parodies, they are more celebrations of the hypotexts than attacks on them, and marks them as completely without satire. They parody the stereotypes perpetuated in teen comedies but to little end. They do not present such stereotypes as indicative of American culture nor to assert that such films perpetuate the stereotypes. To do so would require

attacking those who enjoy such generic teen comedies, because a satire of teen films would also question the audiences' enjoyment of such films. Spoof films however include the audience in the humour. The extensive number of hypotexts ensures the parody is only appreciated by those who are aware of the hypotexts, and the parody essentially becomes a roman á clef of film characters and narratives. The films will likely remain regular releases as *Scary Movie 3*, released in 2003, grossed US\$48 million in its opening weekend, and a fourth movie in the series is already in pre-production. Such a financial success will ensure that other studios will continue to produce similar spoofs. And the intertextual and parodical use will also continue to be lacking satirical purpose.

4.2 Intertextual Satire: Robert Altman's *The Player*

While *Blazing Saddles* did step outside the bounds of parody of film, it is an exception in the genre of film spoofs. Spoof films parody only other films and make little comment on American culture outside that which is presented in American films, or of the implications of the stereotypes perpetuated in such films. These films do not parody Hollywood, but only its product. However intertextual references – both specific and general – can be used to satirise, and more than just the hypotexts. Robert Altman's *The Player* uses intertextuality to parody not only generic Hollywood films, but also to satirise the industry which creates them.

The Player, which was adapted for the screen by Michael Tolkin from his own novel, differs significantly from the novel. First, instead of studio executive Griffin Mill leaving the studio and running a smaller independent film company, as he does in the novel, in the film he actually takes control of his studio. Second, as Richard Sugg (1994) has noted, the role of the writer in the film version is also significantly

changed. Finally and crucially, the film version uses intertextuality of a type not possible in the novel format. This is exhibited through the use of cameo appearances by actors and writers which destabilise the fictional boundaries, and also through the interfilmic methods used throughout.

The opening of the film immediately announces to the viewer that it will rely on intertextuality to sustain a good deal of its satire. This occurs with the view of a clapper and off-screen a voice announcing: “Quiet on the set! Scene one take ten. Marker!”. Significantly, this is the only point where it is implied that we are watching a film. Although references to other films occur throughout, only here at the start does it reveal itself as a film. The moment is quick and is often forgotten by critics who refer to the opening eight-minute tracking shot. Sugg is one critic who realised the importance of this moment and notes that it ensures the film will be viewed as “a self-reflexive creation [which] announces its intention to draw power from that stance”(11). Pointedly the clapper has a French title, “Le Jeux” that references Jean Renoir’s *La Regle du Jeu* (1939), a work which heavily influenced the post-war French and Italian neo-realists, including Vittorio De Sica, whose film, *The Bicycle Thief* (*Ladri di Biciclette*) assumes a pivotal role in *The Player* as it is the film Griffin watches when he meets screenwriter David Kahane.

After the clapper is taken away and the off-screen voice announces “action!”, the dialogue begins and with it the celebrated eight-minute tracking shot. With this shot, Altman immediately sets the film version apart from the original novel. The technique is purposefully both interfilmic, with the overt reference to Welles’s *Touch of Evil* (1958), and self-referential, as the viewer realises that the mention of *Touch of Evil* and complaints about the over-use of editing cuts in movies occurs during a long tracking shot:

WALTER. The pictures they make these days are all MTV. Cut, cut, cut. The opening shot of Welles's *Touch of Evil* was six and a half minutes long.

JIMMY. Six and half minutes, Walter?

WALTER. Three or four anyway. It set up the whole picture with that one tracking shot.

Such a scene is impossible to construct within a novel, and highlights the use of interfilmic techniques that are crucially different to intertextual ones. The closest writing can approach the interfilmic is when an author – often for purposes of parody – relates a narrative in the style of another author. What is consistent between the two forms is the need to highlight that one is imitating the style (or shot in interfilmic examples) for purposes of parody rather than homage. Failure to do so causes a confusion of method over intention. When used for parody, the intention is clear, due to the juxtaposition of form with the narrative: for example, G. K. Chesterton's parody of Walt Whitman parodies Whitman's style, but ensures the parody is clear through his use of the narrative of "Old King Cole":

Me clairvoyant,

Me conscious of you, old camarado,

Me needing no telescope, lorgnette, field-glass, opera-glass, myopic
pince-nez...(1-3)

Similarly interfilmic parodical use occurs when, for example, a shot, or music more commonly associated with a horror film is used while characters subvert the shot or music through humorous actions, as occurs throughout the *Scary Movie* films.

However the interfilmic use of the tracking shot in *The Player* is satirical. The shot, together with the reference to the "MTV" style of film becomes satiric, rather than

homage, as in this instance Altman uses parody of Welles's film to attack the absence of such filmmaking in contemporary Hollywood films⁹².

Another difference between the film and the novel is that the dialogue between Griffin and the writers with whom he holds meetings during the opening shot is absent in the novel. At no point in the novel does Griffin actually do his job, whereas the film highlights the seemingly never-ending meetings that he must endure. These meetings crucially involve real-life screenwriters, such as Buck Henry, and do not involve any scripted dialogue⁹³. Sugg has noted that the role of the writer is markedly different in the film compared to the novel. In the novel, writers are depicted as more passive and powerless and they believe in the artistic merit of film. In the novel Griffin also continually denies his artistic background, and the one pitch he does hear is a film that has little or no commercial possibilities. In the film, the writers are split into two camps: those outside (David Kahane and his writer-friend who eulogises him), and those inside the Hollywood system. The attitude of those outside the system is reflected, by Kahane's response (which was also in the novel) to Griffin's suggestion that they do a remake of *The Bicycle Thief*, that "you'd probably give it a

⁹² While it is possible to parody a literary style to satirise a third party, or topic, without the author's permission it is not legal. In 1997, in the matter of *Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P. v. Penguin Books USA, Inc.*, the court ruled that an author cannot parody the style of an author unless the target of the parody is the author or the style itself, and not (as did the work in the case) a third party unconnected with the original author. In this instance, the book "The Cat NOT in the Hat", by "Dr Juice" used the style of Dr. Seuss to satirise the O.J. Simpson murder trial. Thus were an author to wish to use such a form of textual parody to satirise a third party s/he would require permission from the original author (*Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P. V. Penguin Books USA, Inc 1997*). This legality is not required for film, as directors are unable to copyright a certain camera angle or shot.

⁹³ That this dialogue is unscripted has not, however, stopped Michael Tolkin from including it in his published version of the screenplay. He does this, as he writes in the introduction to the screenplay, because "refusing to publish a transcription of the movie because it doesn't live up to the screenplay is blaming the meat of reality for obscuring the ether of an idea..."(2). While such a position is debatable, what it does do is to question the authorship of the film version of *The Player*. The insistence of each of the actors in the film who play themselves on having no scripted dialogue was that of director Robert Altman. Thus in this instance we have a vision which would seem to agree with the "auteur" critics who would place the director as the creator (or at least author) of the film. This being the case, I shall refer to the film version as Robert Altman's work, while giving Michael Tolkin authorship of the novel. As Sugg has noted, the question of authorship of a film is a major theme in *The Player*, and thus it is only right that such questions should arise with respect to the film itself.

happy ending”. Similarly when eulogising Kahane, the writer ‘Phil’ comments: “... the next time we sell a script for a million dollars and the next time we nail some shit-bag producer to the wall we’ll say: ‘That’s another one for David Kahane’ ”.

Thus the film, like the novel, depicts the production process as one in which the writers have to fight the studio executives to ensure their art remains uncorrupted. However this view is only promulgated by those writers outside the system; those who, like Kahane and Phil, are unproduced. The writers within the system have no such concerns. The screenplays pitched by real-life writers to Griffin in the opening eight minutes are completely without artistic merit. Significantly, the writers are all too willing to accommodate Griffin’s ideas, whether they are for casting (“Bruce Willis... Julia Roberts...”), or for changes in the plot. In one meeting Griffin leads two writers to change their story from that of a television star who goes to Africa (“Goldie goes to Africa”) to the improbable mix of “It’s *Out of Africa* meets *Pretty Woman*”.

These meetings are clear examples of parody used for satirical means. Like the best parodies, the meetings are played straight, and were one not aware of the intertextual references there is the possibility that the humour of the situation could be missed. Yet it would be hard to miss the humour of a meeting in which a story is pitched as “a psychic political thriller comedy with a heart”. Similarly, it is not essential to know that Buck Henry co-wrote the screenplay of *The Graduate*, to understand the humour of his pitch for a sequel to the film in which he outlines Mrs Robinson has had a stroke, and that the movie will be “dark and weird and funny and with a stroke”. As the pitches are performed in a straight manner with real-life screenwriters however, it also reminds the viewer that though the situation may be humorous, it is only a slight exaggeration of reality – the implication is that this is not

far removed from the system in which writers must work, and highlights how uncondusive it is towards the production of films which are not fiscally motivated.

This system is the main target of Altman's satire, and within it few are free from attack. Neither the writers, directors nor producers are singled out: they are all guilty. This is most pointed with reference to the movie within the movie, 'Habeas Corpus'. In the novel, the film idea is pitched, but there are no further details. In the movie version, 'Habeas Corpus' becomes the symbol of all that Altman sees is wrong with Hollywood. It begins as an idea which director Tom Oakley pitches as: "No stars, no Schwarzeneggers, no pat Hollywood endings, no car chases. This is an American tragedy in which an innocent woman dies, because that happens. That's reality." Yet even from this beginning, the seeds of sell-out are sown by producer Andy Civella, who whispers to Griffin as Oakley mentions "no stars": "Bruce Willis... Julia Roberts".

The development from no pat-Hollywood ending to the opposite is gradual yet inevitable. Thus at the end of the film when we discover that 'Habeas Corpus' has indeed been changed, we are not surprised. The film, now starring Bruce Willis and Julia Roberts, is decidedly trite. Willis explains to Roberts that he was late in saving her from the gas-chamber because "traffic was a bitch", yet he does save her, and thus ensures the film has an "up" ending. Altman again shows that writers and directors are as susceptible to monetary desires as are studio executives. Tom Oakley, who earlier had pleaded for the film to be a tragedy because "that's reality", now responds to Bonnie Sherwood's statement that they sold out by stating: "What about the way the old ending tested in Canoga Park? Everybody hated it. We reshot it. Now everybody loves it. That's *reality*." Thus reality has now come to mean that which the public desires it to be. Thus a Hollywood film can be a realistic portrayal of life, but

only if it is a realism that is palatable to the public – in this instance (and Altman implies in all Hollywood films) a realism that involves a happy ending which reinforces the perception that truth and justice will prevail.

This about-face by the writer highlights the interesting position of all writers in the film. Throughout, Altman includes mention of the pointlessness of the writer; for example, studio executive, Larry Levy asks: “who wrote the ending to *Fatal Attraction*? The audience...”, and Levy also argues that writers are largely irrelevant and definitely not worth their large fees. Altman obviously disagrees with this position – reflected by Griffin’s sardonic comment: “... what an interesting concept it is to eliminate the writer from the artistic process. If we could just get rid of these actors and directors maybe we’ve got something here.” Griffin of course is no great friend of the writer, and his comment reflects as much the fact that he is the writer’s executive at the studio, and thus if there were no writers he would have no job. The matter of writers’ expensive fees, however, is dealt with in a manner that suggests Altman has some sympathy with Levy’s position. The studio makes the decision to bid one million dollars for the rights to Tom Wolfe’s latest novel. The choice of Wolfe is pointed, and it parodies the spectacular (and very public) failure of the film adaptation of Wolfe’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities*⁹⁴. While Altman has sympathy with writers, his position here suggests that the writers’ fees have little relationship to the quality or success of the film. Crucially as well, Wolfe’s large fee is purely for the rights to adaptation, not the actual script. Altman, a film man through and through, no doubt would have sympathies with screenwriters, but those such as Wolfe who never sully their hands in the world of film are rather less worthy of compassion.

⁹⁴ The difficulties during the production of the film were detailed by Julie Salamon in *The Devil’s Candy* (1991).

Interestingly, although Altman takes aim at the Hollywood system, he does not satirise the actors who star in those films. He does not refer to their high salaries, or known excesses. In fact, throughout the film, he makes use of their profile with the many cameo appearances (of which there are over sixty). Throughout, the actors are viewed as opponents of the studio executives – Burt Reynolds refers to Griffin as an “asshole”, and Malcolm McDowell angrily confronts Griffin for bad-mouthing him behind his back. And while writer-director Oakley and producer Civella are shown to have sold out with the new ending of ‘Habeas Corpus’, neither Bruce Willis nor Julia Roberts is attacked for his/her role in the film. Thus Altman suggests that actors are not culpable in the crimes of which the other creative groups in Hollywood are guilty.

Clearly this position is biased. Actors are no less guilty of altering scripts for their own ends as are studio executives. The studio executive does it for profit; the actor, for more camera time and a better image. Yet Altman is famously ‘an actor’s director’, whom stars will take large pay cuts to work with. It is obviously not in Altman’s interests to jeopardise such a position, but ultimately this compromises the satire of the film. To suggest that stars do not ‘sell out’ is to suggest that they have no power, and are at the mercy of the script: they merely perform the task asked of them. His attitude towards them and those of their profession in *The Player* displays a paternalistic position, and given his reputation as ‘an actor’s director’ it is also self-serving. Directors, writers and producers, Altman asserts, should know better than to make bland Hollywood films; actors, on the other hand, have no choice and thus are excluded from criticism – and presumably will continue to favour working with him.

However the use of these cameo appearances does improve on the satire of the novel. While a novel can refer to actual actors and screenwriters, the sight of these people on screen has greater potency than mention of them on paper. While a literary

satirist can use ‘real people’ as characters, the reception to such instances is that it is within the bounds of the fictional narrative, whereas the implication of cameo appearances on film by actors or famous figures “playing themselves” is that they are speaking non-fictional dialogue within a fictional film. That Altman instructed these actors to ad-lib is irrelevant. Had they been reciting scripted lines, the implication is the same; because the actor is not portraying a character, their words are received differently than the fictional characters with whom they interact.

Such implications also occur when actors in films reference their own work. For example, in the film adaptation of *Get Shorty* (1995) John Travolta plays the character of Chili Palmer who, when musing over whether he could be an actor, states: “I couldn’t see myself in ones, like the one where the three guys get stuck with the baby”. While the direct reference is to the film *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), the line has added meaning as Travolta appeared in *Look Who’s Talking* (1989) which involved babies; the satirical point is not merely that bad films are made, but that actors make bad choices.

The changed ending of *The Player* also intensifies the satire. In the novel, Griffin quits his position at the studio, and the postcard writer some time later sends him a letter apologising for his actions. Thus the ending is “up”. Griffin gets an ending that is too good to be true, and Tolkin does his utmost to almost make the reader feel sorry for Griffin’s treatment. In Altman’s version, Griffin still marries Kahane’s girlfriend, however rather than leave the studio, he usurps Levison and takes charge of it. Most importantly, in the film, the postcard writer does not apologise but blackmails Griffin. The writer has written a screenplay based on Griffin’s experience – essentially the script for *The Player* (which is the screenplay’s title), and in exchange for a movie deal, the writer guarantees Griffin a happy ending, which he

gets: Griffin arrives home, June is pregnant, and he repeats the last line of 'Habeas Corpus': "Traffic was a bitch". Whereas the novel's ending positions Griffin as a victim, in the film, his culpability (and his triumph over guilt) remains.

The ending suggests that Altman has not sold out: it is down, not up. Griffin gets away with murder, marries the murdered man's girlfriend, and Altman ensures the audience feels no sympathy for Griffin. The movement of the camera from Griffin and June to a palm tree that symbolises Hollywood while children's voices sing the teasing cry of "nah, na-nah, na-nah, nah" suggests Altman is laughing at the audience. Sugg points out that the use of the children's voices "undercut[s] the too-perfect film colour and content of Griffin's 'happy ending' "(14). While throughout the film, Altman has used a predominately blue tone, that suggests a coldness of feeling exhibited by those within the scene (especially in June Gudmundsdottir's art studio, the party Griffin attends, the scene of the initial pitch by Civella and Oakley, and numerous scenes within the offices of the studio), this final scene uses bright colours and bombastic music as a parody of the happy ending prevalent in Hollywood films. The teasing cry is aimed at the audience and mocks its desire for a happy ending. Altman has given the audience such an ending, yet it is happy only for Griffin, not the audience.

Altman's parodical use of intertextuality throughout the film furthers the satire. He uses parody to satirise the screenwriters and the desire of studios to make films with positive endings, big stars and little originality. The opening eight-minute tracking shot is only one example of Altman's use of intertextuality in the film. The continuing motif of old movie posters that signpost Griffin's plight – "They Made Me a Criminal", "Something is Waiting", "Murder in the Big House", "Highly Dangerous" – and the use of postcards featuring old Hollywood stars and scenes also

serves to highlight that Griffin's plight is bound within the realms of film. His attacker uses the old stars and postcards as a reference to the belief that Griffin, aside from treating screenwriters with contempt, is guilty of destroying the legacy of Hollywood. The legacy is highlighted with the gala event the studio holds to celebrate the donation of old film prints to the Los Angeles Country Museum, where Griffin announces hypocritically: "... we and the other major film studios, have a responsibility to the public, to maintain the ART of the motion pictures as our primary mandate." This legacy is, of course, itself a myth. Griffin's speech implies that studio executives of the past did place art as their primary mandate, which they did not. Again, Altman's satire is self-serving. By attacking contemporary film production, he mythologises films of the past and places his own work as an example of the right way.

Yet Altman's use of parody at times lacks the satirical impulse. When actors such as Bruce Willis and Julia Roberts parody their role in stereotypical Hollywood blockbusters the implication is that they are not the subject for scorn, but are merely laughing at themselves. Similarly, the screenwriters in the opening scene, by virtue of their appearance, are not subject to the ridicule that their performance provokes. Their appearance in the film thus places them apart from others who are being parodied. The absence of actual studio executives acting in the film implies that the writers and actors are comrades against the evils of the executives. Altman's use of parody thus is highly subjective: those who parody themselves are free from attack because their performance implies they know what they do is worthy of ridicule, conversely those subjects (such as studio executives) who are portrayed by actors are guilty because their faults are portrayed by others. On this score, even those writers who have yet to be produced are ridiculed: David Kahane is presented as "uniquely untalented", and

his friends at his funeral are parodies of struggling writers. That Kahane and his eulogist Phil wear the same clothes highlights that they are part of a group, a group that is ignored and in effect destroyed by the Hollywood system, yet Altman gives it no sympathy.

The Player highlights the difficulties in ascribing intertextuality a parodical or a satirical meaning. At times Altman uses it to further the narrative, to parody writers and actors, and, as well, to satirise studio executives. This multi-faceted use of intertextuality gives *The Player* an artistic depth absent in spoof films that use intertextuality purely for parodical means. Altman does not target all of Hollywood or all film. His use of real-life actors and writers gives his target focus, while ensuring those groups with whom he has sympathy remain free from attack. This preferential treatment also occurs in those films which directly parody other films. In the spoof genre, actors often take delight in parodying other actors, however there always exists the implication that it is the characters who are parodied, and not the actors themselves. Indeed, when actors are parodied, quite often they parody themselves. For example in *Hot Shots! Part Deux* (1993), Charlie Sheen parodies his role in *Platoon* (1986) and more recently Pamela Anderson and Jenny McCarthy parody their own public persona in *Scary Movie 3*. Thus, as in *The Player* the targets of attack are those who would make such formulaic films, not those who appear in them.

The Player, as with the movie spoofs, does not directly attack American culture; its satire is directed purely against Hollywood. The television programme *The Simpsons* however uses intertextual and interfilmic references not to satirise Hollywood but to demonstrate the enormous influence of the industry on American culture.

4.3 *The Simpsons*

Over the past decade, there has been no more successful satire on the American Dream than *The Simpsons*. It is also a prime example of the hold Hollywood has over American culture. *The Simpsons* makes extensive use of intertextual and interfilmic references to Hollywood films, not to satirise those films or the industry that creates them, but rather to satirise American culture. The popularity and the extent to which *The Simpsons* has assumed a place in the consciousness of American culture, and even non-Americans' perceptions of American culture, also highlights the destruction of reality in the post-modern world. *The Simpsons* and its setting of Springfield has, in many ways, replaced Disneyland as the real America: it has attained a hyperreal position in the American cultural landscape.

That a television programme, and a cartoon at that, should hold the position of most successful satire reflects not so much a dearth of talented satirists, but merely a reflection that satire, to be classed as successful, must have a message that is heard by the broader public. A satire that merely preaches to the converted is essentially pointless. On this score, *The Simpsons* reigns supreme over all other satires. It is the longest running animated programme on American television, and the second longest running (after *Saturday Night Live*) comedy programme. It is watched by literally 'all ages' in countries throughout the world. And lest its satire be purely directed at America, it has also targeted (with varying degrees of success) the cultures of Australia, Japan, France, Brazil and England.

Its position as the leading satire of American culture should not be overly surprising, when considered that arguably the major American political satirist of the past 30 years is Gary Trudeau, writer of the daily comic strip *Doonesbury* (1970 -). Whatever any other satirists might claim, no one apart from Trudeau can assert to

have provoked personal comments from the administrations of five presidents (and personal attacks from two first ladies), won a Pulitzer Prize, been placed on an enemies list by P.J O'Rourke (*Give War a Chance* 131), and have a daily readership of millions. Trudeau's comic strip has also ingrained itself into American culture to the extent that it has become synonymous with reading the newspaper, as perhaps only Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts* has before. For example, in the film *Patriot Games* (1992), the protagonist Jack Ryan is at one point warned against reading the newspapers for fear of prejudicing the evidence he is about to give in court. He responds sardonically: "Not even *Doonesbury*?"

Yet not even *Doonesbury* has influenced American culture (and the world's) to the extent of *The Simpsons*. When *The Simpsons* debuted on American television in 1989, the likelihood of it being listed some eleven years later by *Time* magazine as the "best TV show ever" (Poniewozik 73), and its character Bart Simpson being hailed as one of the twenty most influential entertainers of the twentieth century was remote. Indeed at the time of its initial run, one reviewer compared it with *Married... with Children* (1987-1997) and gave the programme a "B+" review grade (Hiltbrand 10). Since that time, not only has it been named "the best TV show ever", but rather than being compared to sit-coms such as *Married... with Children*, it is now mentioned in the same breath with Shakespeare, and compared favourably to winners of The Booker Prize (Walden 31). Whether one agrees with *Time* magazine's critic, James Poniewozik, there can be no denying that *The Simpsons* has influenced numerous other television programmes, and has had a major cultural impact on American life in the early twenty-first century.

Even on the linguistic level, the impact of *The Simpsons* is apparent. Homer Simpson's oft used catch-cry: "D'oh" is now listed in (among others) the *Oxford*

English Dictionary, while any number of lines from the programme have become so commonplace that they are recognised by those who rarely, if ever, watch the programme, such as Ned Flanders' "Okeleedokelee" or Bart's "Don't have a cow" and "Eat my shorts". Such occurrences, of course, are not exclusive to *The Simpsons*. Numerous television programmes, from *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) to *Seinfeld* (1990-1998) have bred catch phrases and quotations that have been used in everyday speech or by fans at dinner parties in place of relating humorous anecdotes of their own.

The Simpsons, however, differs from either of the above (or any other television programme) purely through its ability to invade the culture of its target audience on such a broad scale. *Monty Python* has never had more than a cult following, and *Seinfeld* (which coincidentally debuted in the same year as *The Simpsons*) never impacted on the scale of *The Simpsons*. Indeed as the time since *Seinfeld's* demise lengthens, the programme becomes more dated. When one now says the well-known *Seinfeld* catchphrase of "Yada, yada, yada", it betrays the speaker's age rather than the programme's impact on society. While this is due in part to *Seinfeld* no longer running on television (except in re-runs) the popularity of *The Simpsons*, and its ability to appeal to a broad spectrum of the population has ensured that its impact has surpassed other programmes, even those which may have achieved higher ratings⁹⁵.

This popularity is based largely on the ability of many people (regardless of nationality) to relate to the Simpson family and their habitat. The Simpson's home

⁹⁵ Indeed *The Simpsons* has been running for so long, that many of the original catch phrases associated with the programme have become dated. Phrases that featured prominently in the first season, such as "Don't have a cow", "Eat My Shorts", are no longer used. The programme references this fact. In the seventh season in the episode, "Summer of 4 Ft. 2", Lisa says, "Don't have a cow". When Bart complains that she is using his expression Marge responds: "Oh you haven't said that in four years. Let Lisa have it".

town of Springfield is a curious amalgam of every small town in American films: all the children go to the same school; there is only one church (and virtually all of the main characters attend); the chief of police knows everyone on a first name basis; and, apart from the semi-regular character of Snake, the town is essentially crime-free – rather like an animated version of Mayfield in *Leave it to Beaver*. The amalgam is enhanced by the absence of a reference to the state in which the town is situated⁹⁶. The programme is also set in a place where the real and fictional worlds exist together. There is frequent reference to the city, Capitol City (with the nickname of, “The Windy Apple”), yet the characters also visit Washington D.C. and New York. Similarly, there exists an Arnold Schwarzenegger type actor, Rainer Wolfcastle, yet there is also frequent mention and appearance of actual actors, such as Mel Gibson. The time period of the programme is also indeterminate, especially given that none of the characters age, despite having numerous birthdays. Thus Homer recalls that Bart was born in 1981, yet he is still only ten years old.

This peculiarity has allowed the programme to continue satirising aspects of American life, without the need for introducing new characters. For example, there is no need to introduce additional characters to parody the American schooling system, because Bart and Lisa remain in the 4th and 2nd grades respectively. Similarly Homer is no nearer retirement than he was when the programme began (nor any nearer to a promotion), and thus he can still be used to satirise the use of nuclear power, due to his position as safety supervisor at the Springfield nuclear power plant. Homer’s father Abe Simpson, despite having once “taken a shot at Teddy Roosevelt” (and thus meaning he was born well before 1919) is able to stay alive and dwelling at the Springfield Retirement Castle, and can be used to parody retired nit-pickers (he writes

⁹⁶ In episode BABF19 it is revealed that the Simpson’s are “a northern Kentucky family”, though given that Kentucky is a land-locked state and Springfield is on a coast, this revelation is obviously erroneous.

letters protesting the use of words such as “horny” and “family jewels” on television) and grandparents in general. Yet despite the unchanging nature of the Simpson family and a majority of the Springfield inhabitants, the world around them does change. When the programme began George Bush Sr. was president (and he was satirised) then when Bill Clinton was elected he too was satirised as is now George W Bush⁹⁷.

One of the main reasons for the programme’s impact and popularity for adults is its detailed use of intertextuality. The animation, for example, is not of a detail comparable with any of the traditionally animated Disney films, such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) or those which are computer animated, such as *Toy Story* (1995), and aside from occasional moments, there are no songs. Thus the programme’s popularity essentially rests with the humour of its script. From the earliest episodes there was a definite emphasis on the use of intertextuality that ensured its humour was more complex than that employed in the cartoon series *The Flintstones* (1960-1966), which until *The Simpsons* had been the most popular animated programme in American television. In that programme the humour essentially relied on replicating the television programme *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) in animated form, and the extent of its wordplay was the renaming of places such as Las Vegas to “Rock Vegas”.

As it is set in the present, *The Simpsons* is able to reference television, film and literature in a manner never attempted by *The Flintstones*. In its first episode, “Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire”, Bart Simpson tells his father Homer: “If TV has taught me anything, it’s that miracles always happen to poor kids at Christmas. It happened to Tiny Tim, it happened to Charlie Brown, it happened to the Smurfs, and it’s going to happen to me.” Thus in one short speech, the writers have referenced

⁹⁷ Humour directed at George W Bush however has been less pointed than that directed at his two predecessors. Most of the jokes have referenced the controversial result of the 2000 presidential election.

nineteenth-century literature, the most popular comic strip of all time (Peanuts), and a children's cartoon, while also containing the meta-fictional acknowledgment that *The Simpsons* is itself a product of television.

The intertextual nature of the humour was initially confined to occasional parodies of films. In its first season the programme parodied *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Patton* (1970), *The Godfather* (1972) and *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982). While these parodies were often little more than quick images, such as Bart waking up in bed with the head from Jebediah Springfield's statue in his bed, in a specific reference to the horse's-head scene from *The Godfather*, they indicated that the programme was intended for viewers significantly older than the traditional audience for cartoons. Significantly as well, for a programme that satirises the traditional American family pursuing one variant of the American Dream of owning a house and raising a family, it acknowledges the influence of Hollywood on American society.

This influence quickly developed from the occasional parody, to multiple references in the second season, where four films (*The Terminator* (1984), *Gone With the Wind*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939), and *Vertigo*(1958)) were parodied in the one episode. By the fifth season the intertextual use had become so prominent that in one short speech, Homer references four films:

Look Marge, you don't know what it's like – I'm the one out there everyday putting his ass on the line. And I'm not out of order! You're out of order! The whole freaking system is out of order! [... and *Justice for All* (1979)] You want the truth? You can't handle the truth! [*A Few Good Men* (1992)] 'Cause when you reach over and put your hand into a pile of goo that used to be your best friend's face, you'll

know what to do! [*Patton* (1970)] Forget it Marge, it's Chinatown.

[*Chinatown* (1974)]

Thus complete understanding of *The Simpsons* requires an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of contemporary film and culture. While this aspect makes it enjoyable for fans of the show, it satirises the influence of Hollywood on American culture. Homer takes lines from the films out of context, which results in a nonsensical statement that displays when he needs to make a point he draws on his memory of film, as one would also quote passages from the Bible, or literature. Thus the speech displays that film has surpassed traditional literature as the text of the common man, and through Homer's misuse of the lines, does so in a manner that amuses.

The continual use of intertextuality throughout a programme that satirises the American way of life displays the Baudrillardian connection of Hollywood and America. Frequently, when the main characters remember their past they recall television programmes or films. Homer for the most part is unable to discern the difference between his life and the films or programmes he has seen – as when he and Marge discuss their high school reunion:

HOMER. It'll be great to see the old gang again, Potsie, Ralph Malph,
the Fonz.

MARGE. That wasn't you, that was *Happy Days*!

HOMER. No, they weren't all happy days. Like the time Pinky
Tuscadero crashed her motorcycle, or the night I lost all my
money to those card sharks and my dad Tom Bosley had to get
it back.

Thus Homer's memories of film and television have become memories of his own life. Brian Ott argues that *The Simpsons* is an example of the difficulty of postmodern

identity. As Ott notes: “That Homer's past is often inconsistent with his present life is inconsequential, because it is simply a vehicle for a trip down media lane, not a psychological clue (i.e., structuring element) to who he is today”(66).

This use of intertextuality has allowed *The Simpsons* to satirise most facets of American culture while simultaneously avoiding alienating its audience. Such a position is unique for satire. Such is its role, satire tends to provoke criticism from its targets, and is appreciated only by those who feel outside of the group targeted. Often as well, given the very nature of satire, it is the establishment that reacts against the satire. *The Simpsons* satirises its own audience, yet continues to enjoy popularity, not because the satire of *The Simpsons* is anodyne, but rather because it is an example of Swift’s belief that “satire is like a glass wherein you see everyone’s features but your own”(373). The negative reaction normally associated with satire has only been brought to bear on *The Simpsons* when it has ventured outside America; the episode which featured the family in Australia drew criticism from Australia for portraying it as a backward nation that had only had electricity for thirty years, and where one can only order beer to drink. Similarly, its portrayal of the French as uncouth and arrogant was not appreciated in that country. Most recently an episode set in Brazil has drawn criticism from the Brazilian government and tourist board, which threatened to sue the Fox Network (Orecklin 84).

The surprising aspect of such criticism is that it ignores how the stereotypical portrayal of those nations is little different from the programme’s portrayal of America. While some may find it insulting to view their Prime Minister portrayed as a buffoon called “Andy” who spends time swimming naked in a pond (as was the case with the Australian Prime Minister), is this any worse than an episode which features Bill Clinton saying “I’m a pretty lousy president”? Indeed few of the images of non-

Americans are worse than the images of Americans. Homer Simpson is a drunk, dim-witted, incompetent, lazy man, known for his rank body odour. His friends are for the most part similar, except perhaps a little less incompetent and dim-witted. The mayor of the town, Joe 'Diamond' Quimby, is a philandering, corrupt Kennedy-wannabe; the police are cited as "lacklustre"; the local church minister bores the congregation and is married to a pious, yet gossiping wife; Seymour Skinner, the principal of Springfield Elementary School, is so humourless that the school superintendent asserts: "the rod up his butt must have another rod up its butt"; and Krusty the Clown, who is the town's most popular children's entertainer, gambles, smokes excessively and actually dislikes children. Indeed apart from Marge and Lisa, one has to search wide to find a character who has predominantly positive qualities.

A survey of the characters would suggest there is little of any worth in America. Yet despite this, Homer Simpson is revered as an ideal parent and role model. A poll of BBC2 viewers in Great Britain named Homer as the "greatest American of all time" ("Your Greatest American" 2003). He beat Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King Jr. The result however should be placed into context, given that actor Mr T also made the top ten it suggests that the vote reflects not so much who the British (and any non-Americans who voted in the on-line poll) believe is the greatest American, but rather a note of sarcasm. The sample of the voters is also somewhat suspect. Some forty thousand voters is hardly a large enough sample to satisfy the title of the accompanying television programme "What the World Thinks of America", nor would the sample be random. The results, far from representing the British view, merely reflect the opinions of those who visit the BBC2 web site; and thus would be expected to be predominantly male and under the age of 30. The suggestion that Homer is the greatest American of all-time, while

obviously reflecting his popularity perhaps more reflects the lack of respect the voters held for America.

However, the poll, despite the obvious flaws in the veracity of its result, displays that Baudrillard's view of America has come to fruition. Whether the people voted for Homer to praise or demean America, the fact they chose a cartoon character suggests Disneyland (or perhaps now, Springfield) has truly become the simulacrum of America. That Homer Simpson should win a poll of greatest Americans is no less logical than the Brazilian government protesting against the representation of its nation in an episode of *The Simpsons*, but similarly acknowledges the influence of the programme. No longer is there the view that because it is merely a cartoon, it is not real. Homer is compared with American presidents, and the representation of a nation in a cartoon is treated as though it were a gross distortion of fact.

Homer's victory in the poll implies that he, more than any other real or unreal figure, represents America. Yet Homer, as with all simulacra, is not a reproduction of any person, just as Springfield is not a reproduction of any place. Springfield conceals the fact that cities like Springfield no longer (if they ever did) exist. Americans, and others who watch the programme, see Springfield as the representation of the good in America, and Homer as all that is good in the "common, working-man", yet what the poll reveals is that this representation has become more real than the real America. Just as Disneyland once represented America in the minds of tourists, Springfield, while not physically real, is real in the minds of viewers. It would not be surprising for Springfield to receive votes if a similar poll was done to discover the greatest American city. Indeed the view of Springfield as ideal is reflected in the fact that in 1997 over 15 million people in America entered a contest to win a house modelled on the design of the Simpson's home. The house is situated in Springfield Community,

South Valley Ranch, Nevada: which was named after the city in the programme (Nadler 2004).

The blurring of fictional boundaries has been further emphasised through the many guest appearances by known actors (or at least their voices). The writers have used the actors – specifically their public identity and famous roles – to great parodical effect. Dustin Hoffmann, for example, (wonderfully credited as “Sam Etic”) provided the voice for Jewish substitute teacher, Mr Bergstrom, on whom Lisa develops a crush. Within the episode a scene references the seduction scene in *The Graduate*: Bart’s teacher Edna Krabappel sits on a desk and bends her knee with the ‘camera’ pointing under her raised legs at Bergstrom saying: “Mrs Krabappel you’re trying to seduce me”. Earlier in the episode, Bergstrom teaches the class in a similar manner to Hoffmann’s character Michael Dorsey teaching acting in *Tootsie* (1982).

Often the intertextuality is contained within the narrative. In one episode, Bart and his friends Milhouse and Martin buy a rare comic and their mistrust of each other references the mistrust of the gold prospectors in *Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948). Bart at one point tells the other two, “Nobody makes a sap out of Bartholomew J Simpson”, directly referencing Humphrey Bogart’s character Frank C Dobbs, who frequently refers to himself in the third person. The link to Bogart is reinforced when Martin says of the comic book: “This is the stuff dreams are made of”, directly quoting Bogart’s line as Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*. The original source of this line is Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, yet while this may have been obvious in 1941, such is the cultural impact of *The Maltese Falcon*, that the final line has come to be more popularly associated with the film than Shakespeare. In this episode of *The Simpsons*, it is the line from the film that is referenced, rather than the line from the play. In a wonderful example of simulacra, the copy has replaced the original.

This constant use of intertextuality as well as meta-fictional aspects has placed *The Simpsons* at the forefront of postmodern readings of American culture. There is a continuous movement of textual boundaries within the programme. At one moment the family can be watching television and hear President Bush state that he wishes America to “be a nation more like *The Waltons* than *The Simpsons*”, the next can have Bush moving in to the house across the street. In one scene, while the family is watching the Thanksgiving Day parade on television, Homer explains to Bart the significance of the balloons in the parade: “Son, this is a tradition. If they start building a balloon for every flash-in-the-pan cartoon character, you’ll turn the parade into a farce”. While he says this a ‘Bart balloon’ is shown in the parade on the television. The family is obviously fictional, yet is often treated as real. They have been interviewed in *Rolling Stone* magazine and by Oprah Winfrey. In a number of episodes, the programme is referred to as a television programme, to the point of showing its position on the Fox Network programme list. One episode, “Behind the Laughter” positions itself as a documentary on the Simpson family and the programme. It featured revelations that Lisa was given “anti-growth hormones”, that they avoided paying income tax, and that Homer thought about firing Marge.

Such blurring of the textual boundaries in television programmes is not unique to *The Simpsons*. In the sit-com *Just Shoot Me* (1997-2003), a similar behind-the-scenes episode was done for the character Nina Van Horne. Yet there was no reference to the fact that *Just Shoot Me* was actually a television programme. This aspect is one pioneered on television by *The Simpsons* (if not in literature). The interaction between real-life figures and fictional ones has also occurred before; specifically, Dan Quayle’s reference to the fictional character Murphy Brown raising a child without the father: Quayle’s quote, and Murphy’s response were included in

the programme. However as *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) concerned a current-events news programme, the fictional boundaries while crossed, were not dissolved, as at no point was the viewer led to believe *Murphy Brown* was actually fictional.

The Simpsons however, repeatedly destabilises the fictional boundaries. It has become an almost annual event to run a “clip show” which features outtakes from previous episodes, linked together by a slim narrative concerning memories of the characters. Such a device is common in American sit-coms, yet *The Simpsons* is alone in acknowledging that such episodes are little more than re-runs. The title of the first episode of this type in the fourth season, acknowledges this fact: “So It’s Come To This: A Simpson’s Clip Show”(episode 9F17). The next clip show in the sixth season continues the meta-fictional mode with the title: “Another Simpsons Clip Show”(episode 2F33). In both episodes, meta-fictional and intertextual references abound. In the first, Grandpa Simpson tells Bart that a coma is “like one of those TV shows where they show a bunch of clips from old episodes”. In the second, Bart and Lisa watch an episode of their favourite cartoon, “Itchy & Scratchy” during which Lisa explains that the episode is “not exactly [new]: they piece it together from old shows, but it seems new to the trusting eyes of impressionable youth”.

By the seventh season, not content with merely parodying clip shows, the programme also takes aim at programmes (usually variety shows) which celebrate their longevity in the episode “The Simpsons 138th Episode Spectacular” (episode 3F31). This episode contains the line in the opening credits: “Episode contains 23% new footage”, and has Bart writing on the blackboard for detention: “I will only do this once a year”. As well, the episode differs from the previous clip shows by not attempting to create a new episode around the clips, but rather positions the episode as a retrospective of the programme, hosted by B-grade actor (and semi-regular

character) Troy McClure. The episode features Troy answering letters from viewers concerning characters, and elements of the programme. Such an approach owes some debt to the similar “annual mail-bag” series of Doonesbury cartoons.

The use of intertextual references has also been replicated in animated television programmes that have been produced since *The Simpsons* began, most notably *South Park* (1997-). From its inception, *South Park* has used intertextuality to satirise American culture. The main difference in its use of intertextuality to *The Simpsons* is that the films *South Park* references are generally more recent. This indicates that the intended audience of *South Park* is younger than that of *The Simpsons* – and given the level of profanity in *South Park*, there is no sense of it attempting to appeal to all ages. Yet both programmes bear a number of similarities: the characters of *South Park* do not age, the school principal, teacher, police chief and mayor all have pivotal roles, and as with *The Simpsons* these authority figures are portrayed as poor role models. In keeping with *South Park*'s position as a subversive programme, however, these figures are a significantly poorer role models than those in *The Simpsons*⁹⁸. Moreover, unlike *The Simpsons*, the main characters of *South Park* are the children.

These children (Stan, Kyle, Cartman and Kenny) are also of lower social-economic status than those in *The Simpsons* – Cartman has a mother who is reputed to have posed for a pornographic magazine, and Kenny is frequently teased by Cartman due to his poverty. In *The Simpsons*, no one in Springfield is below middle-class. They may be “yellow trash” but even local bully Nelson Muntz while perhaps on the borderline of poor, is never seen to be wanting for any commodities because of this

⁹⁸ For example, while the teachers in *The Simpsons* smoke and drink and hold little hope for the futures of their students, Mr Garrison, the teacher in *South Park* has paedophilic tendencies, is suspected to have had sex with a pig, and wrote a Christmas song titled, “Merry Fucking Christmas”.

lack of wealth⁹⁹. The only character who would fall below the middle class line is “Cletus, the slack-jawed yokel”. However, he, his wife Brandine (who is also his sister) and their twenty-six children pointedly live outside Springfield. His role is purely comic, and the flatness of the character is referenced in “Team Homer” (episode 3F10), when he is seen bowling for a team named, “The Stereotypes” which also include Willie, the Scottish school groundskeeper; Captain McCallister, a “sea captain”, who rarely utters a line without an accompanying: “Aahrrr”; and Luigi, the local Italian restaurateur.

The main difference between *South Park* and *The Simpsons* is however, one of intention. *South Park* is an anarchic comedy that aims to subvert established norms of American culture and society. For example, it often displays the children learning lessons (a traditional sit-com device) but these lessons challenge rather than reinforce social norms:

STAN. Halloween isn't about costumes, or candy. It's about being good to one another, and giving and loving.

KYLE. No, dude. That's Christmas.

STAN. Oh. Then what's Halloween about?

KYLE. Costumes and candy.

STAN. Oh

The predominant impression left by the programme is however little more than that children use foul language and that flatulence remains humorous. While I would argue this does not detract from *South Park*'s cultural importance, as its motivation is to outrage so-called “middle America”, to remain culturally valid (and popular) it is required to continually ‘raise the bar’ in terms of outrageousness. Since its inception,

⁹⁹ Although as Nelson is a known shoplifter, this may be due to his stealing any commodities rather than them having been bought for, or by, him.

phrases from the programme have entered the lexicon. “Oh my God, They killed Kenny!” has been used on T-Shirts and bumper stickers, and many characters from the programme have been used in merchandising. Yet when a supposedly anarchic character such as Cartman can be worn on a shirt and his catch phrase of “Screw you guys, I’m going home” is generally recognised, then the programme’s effectiveness is much decreased, as it has in effect become part of the mainstream which it is attacking.

As *South Park*’s intended audience is “Generation X” its intertextual references are significantly different from those in *The Simpsons*. Whereas *The Simpsons* references films from the 1920s onwards, *South Park*, as a rule relies on those films or – more often – television programmes released post 1970. The references are also more direct than those used in *The Simpsons*. Whereas *The Simpsons* often relies on subtle references, whether in dialogue or narrative, *South Park* will often directly mention the film or television programme. The boys often are swept up by the latest cultural craze, and this usually involves a film, such as the *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings* series. These intertextual references in *The Simpsons* do not so much satirise Hollywood, but rather satirise the immense hold Hollywood has on American culture.

In *The Simpsons*, the uses of intertextuality to directly satirise Hollywood are as a rule limited to occasional swipes at Hollywood action films, through the use of the Rainer Wolfcastle character. Obviously modelled on Arnold Schwarzenegger, the patently Austrian actor is most frequently seen playing the action character “McBain”. Clips from these films are occasionally seen, and all parody the elements of standard Hollywood action films: the policeman who is shot just before retirement and the detective who does not obey orders. Only twice does Springfield encounter the

Hollywood world directly. In episode 2F17 (“Radioactive Man”) a film version of the comic strip “Radioactive Man” is set in Springfield, and in episode AABF23 (“Beyond Blunderdome”) the latest Mel Gibson film – a remake of *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* – is previewed in Springfield after which Mel invites Homer to help him rewrite the film in Hollywood.

In the “Radioactive Man” episode, the filmmakers are artists hoping purely to make a good film, and are exploited by the local businesses and government of Springfield who charge a “film tax” on most items. The film, “Radioactive Man” (itself, a pastiche of futuristic action films, such as *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981) and *Waterworld* (1995)) eventually closes production due to budget constraints (brought on by the town’s exorbitant taxes) and Milhouse’s refusal to play the character ‘Fallout Boy’. As the film crew leaves, Mickey Rooney, in a cameo, berates the citizens of Springfield:

Well I hope you’re all satisfied. You bankrupted a bunch of naïve movie folks – folks from Hollywood where values are different. They weren’t thinking about the money. They just wanted to tell a story, a story about a radioactive man, and you slick small-townners took ’em for all they were worth.

Upon returning to Hollywood, the film crew is greeted by a cheering crowd, one of whom tells the director: “We know you don’t have any more money left, but that doesn’t matter. Just take whatever you need from our boutiques until you get back on your feet.” The scene ends with the song “Lean on Me” played as the director responds: “Thank God we’re back in Hollywood where people treat each other right”.

While the episode satirises the fiduciary mindedness of Hollywood, the attack is genial. Similarly when Mel Gibson asks Homer to help rewrite his remake of *Mr*

Smith Goes to Washington the satire is light, and in terms of narrative it is only a slight variant on an earlier episode where Homer's long lost half brother asks him to help design a new car (episode 7F16 "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?"). In both cases Homer is perceived as representing the average American, yet his help ruins the product. The car he designs is obscenely ugly and costly, and similarly he ruins Gibson's remake of *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* by recommending that the climactic filibuster scene needs a shoot out.

Aside from the occasional jibes at Hollywood, such as a sign on the gates of the film studio: "Polystar Pictures: No Artistic Integrity Beyond This Point", there is little in the episode that could be termed subversive, indeed it focuses more on the influence Hollywood films have on Homer. They so control his life that he checks under his toilet to see if there is a bomb because he witnessed this occurrence in the film *Lethal Weapon 2*. The influence of movies on his life is revealed when he states that they are "the only escape from the drudgery of work and family". This is in effect the crux of *The Simpsons'* use of Hollywood intertextuality. Movies have taken such a hold on American culture that they have in many respects replaced work and family. For example, when left alone minding his children Homer quickly asks them: "What is the quickest, cheapest, easiest way to do something with you?" The answer of course is rent a video.

The success of *The Simpsons* highlights the influence of Hollywood on American society. It is inarguable that the programme would take a different form if it did not attempt a meta-fictional mode. Similarly, Springfield's position as a town in the United States is essential to the humour. Were the programme set in a location with no reference to the real world, or was set in the past, there is little doubt that its popularity would be diminished. Such is its impact that since its inception the vast

majority of animated films produced by Hollywood film companies such as Disney and Dreamworks are set in the contemporary world¹⁰⁰, yet before *The Simpsons* one would struggle to find an American animated film not set in the past, or based on a fairy tale.

The success of *The Simpsons* has thus changed the public's perception of animation, both on television and on film. Gone is the need for such films to be essentially animated musicals (although *The Lion King* (1994) and *Aladdin* (1992) both were, and were both extremely successful) or a need for the humour to be aimed purely at children. Indeed the *South Park* feature length film, *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999) in America was rated R for perverse vulgar language and crude sexual humour, and for some violent images. Hardly the stuff of traditional animation.

As Jonah Goldberg (2000) and others have pointed out, because it is animated *The Simpsons* is able to prick the American conscience in a manner that would never be acceptable for a typical "live action" sit-com or film. The reason for this is due to the traditional reception of animation/cartoons as innocuous. The programme itself often references this point. In one episode Homer responds to Marge's concerns about the influence of violent cartoons on children: "Oh Marge, cartoons don't have any deep meaning. They're just stupid drawings that give you a cheap laugh". This belief is not something from which only *The Simpsons* has benefited. It has long been the case that political cartoonists in newspapers and current affairs journals have been able to suggest or portray political figures in a manner which had it been suggested by columnists would likely result in libel suits. Rather than take legal action against such

¹⁰⁰ Although a number of these are also set in a somewhat fantastical world such as that of *Toy Story* (1995) or *Monsters Inc* (2001), the films have a contemporary setting despite the presence of talking toys, or monsters. And the two films based on fairy stories – *Shrek* (2001) and its sequel *Shrek 2* (2004) subvert the genre through the use of intertextual parody much indebted to the spirit of *The Simpsons*.

cartoonist, often is the case that the political figures lampooned in the cartoons request original copies of the cartoon to place on their office wall.

Paradoxically, when such figures do take offence at cartoons they are often affected by the traditional view of animation and cartoons as lightweight. When Dan Quayle attacked the *Doonesbury* cartoons that implied he had smoked marijuana, he was lambasted by stand up comedians. Johnny Carson, for example, remarked that “the way to get [Quayle’s] attention was mention him in the comic section, he’s sure to read it”. This implied that comics by virtue of their being drawn are in some manner childish and thus less deserving of critical praise or attack. *The Simpsons* has however shown that animation/ cartoons can be highly prescient and powerful.

The Simpsons’ position as satire of American culture is one that will be long remembered after its inevitable end. Its influence on other television programmes and films is such that it will remain in the American psyche for many years. What is most important is the implied acknowledgment that to satirise American culture, one must acknowledge the influence of Hollywood film on that culture. Throughout its run, *The Simpsons* has used parody, pastiche, and satire of Hollywood films to attack Hollywood’s hold on American culture. The success of the programme, and its impact on the culture and perceptions of the culture of America highlight the simulacra aspect of Hollywood. Homer Simpson is seen as the embodiment of the American Dream filtered through the gauze of Hollywood – wealthy enough to own a four bedroom house, two cars, become an astronaut, and win a Grammy Award, all without any major effort on his behalf.

* * *

The Player, *The Simpsons* and the spoofs of Hollywood films all depict the American Dream merging into the Hollywood Dream: the desire to achieve the fullest stature of

which one is innately capable of through the minimal amount of effort. In all three, the American Dream of working hard and using the freedom America allows to achieve a sense of financial independence through owning a house and having a secure occupation, is subverted. The movie spoofs highlight that the American Dream represented through Hollywood teen comedies is illusory; it is achievable only by the implausibly rich, and even then it requires little or no effort. In *The Player*, the American Dream is also subverted, as the only character to achieve the dream, Griffin Mill, does so through murder and corruption. In *The Simpsons*, Homer has also achieved the dream, but again it is through means not consistent with a hard working ethic. Indeed *The Simpsons* highlights more than any other film or television (or indeed literary work) the displacement of the American Dream. The ethic of hard work to achieve one's ends is gone:

BART. I'm through working. Working is for chumps.

HOMER. Son, I'm proud of you. I was twice your age before I figured that out.

What has replaced it is a dream that is both elusive and an illusion. Elusive, because like the position of characters in television sit-coms and teen comedy films it alludes to wealth gained through the means of good luck and unrealistic circumstances. Illusory because the ends are as unrealistic as the means. Not everyone can win a 'reality' television contest, become famous, or be a celebrity, for they are by their very notions exclusive positions held by a minority. The American Dream is open to all, the Hollywood Dream requires that only a few can attain it, for that is its worth – or as Gore Vidal asserts: “It is not enough to succeed. Others must fail” (“Gore Vidal Quotations” 2004).

Intertextuality resonates through all three examples, each used for differing means. In the movie spoofs, the intertextual references of teen comedies allows the filmmakers to parody those films, but with little reference to American culture. In *The Player*, Altman uses intertextual references of films such as *Touch of Evil* and *Fatal Attraction* to satirise the Hollywood industry and its output. In *The Simpsons* the two aspects are combined as the plethora of intertextual references parodies the hypotexts and satirise the impact of the Hollywood industry on American culture. The differing means however all display one end, which will be examined further in the following chapter dealing with the most recent satires of Hollywood, that the American Dream has been displaced by the Hollywood Dream. And satires of America culture and society in the present time involve satire not so much of the American Dream but the Hollywood Dream.

5.0 Everything Old is New Again: Recent satires of Hollywood

“It’s like dope this place” (O’Flaherty 64).

During the past fifteen years a large proportion of film and novelistic satires of Hollywood have ignored the more postmodern elements evident in *Mulholland Dr.* and *The Truman Show*, and instead have returned to the themes present in the earliest satires of Hollywood. Satires, such as Andrew Niccol’s *SlmOne* (2002), Christopher Guest’s *The Big Picture* (1989), David Mamet’s *State and Main* (2000), *Bowfinger* (1999) (written by actor Steve Martin) and the novels of Bruce Wagner satirise Hollywood in a manner in keeping with satirists of the golden years. They attack the corrupting and venial nature of the industry, rather than its artificiality. Similar to the fin de siecle literature at the end of the nineteenth century which signalled the declining phase of the literary period, these satires revisit the themes prevalent in satires of Hollywood throughout the twentieth century, yet the satire in the works often fails because, while they revisit the themes present in the canonical works of Hollywood satire, they lack the purpose and relevance of the earlier works.

Most crucially, the satire of these works fails because the authors desire to attack the artificiality of Hollywood on one hand, but also desire to display the supremacy of the American Dream on the other. The works have taken the role of the carnivals of ancient Rome and medieval Europe, wherein roles are subverted but which, in fact, function “as a licensed safety-valve which makes possible the perpetuation of authority” (Morris 22). Studios can produce and distribute such satires and artists can perform in them, and rather than be ostracised they are congratulated by the industry, which then continues to produce standard Hollywood fare. Such satire has become in effect part of the simulacrum of Hollywood. They often attack

Hollywood as an amoral industry, but one where morality and ethics can triumph. This contradiction results in satires which lack relevance compared to those satires, like Vidal's works and *Mulholland Dr.*, that acknowledge the futility of praising one dream over another in a place as concerned with artificiality as is Hollywood.

Similarly, because of the cumulative number of novels and films on the industry, plus the extensive and intrusive coverage of Hollywood in the media, these generative satires, such as Bruce Wagner's *I'm Losing You* (1997) and *Still Holding* (2003), lack the effectiveness of the 1930s and 1940s satires as they have lost the shock of the unknown. Hollywood has been so comprehensively documented in non-fiction and fiction that no reader is surprised to discover Hollywood as corrupt, and as such the attacks levelled at the insiders of Hollywood do not result in a sense of outrage – indeed the corrupt and amoral behaviour is now taken as a given.

Despite the relative failure of the satire in these contemporary works, they do exhibit one important difference from those satires of the 1930s and 1940s. Most of these recent satires focus their attacks on the directors and actors in Hollywood rather than the studio executive and producers. This displays the change in the power structures of Hollywood over the last seventy years, and also reveals the different approach towards Hollywood of the recent satirists. Unlike Nathanael West, Liam O'Flaherty, F. Scott Fitzgerald and others, recent satirists of Hollywood often worked in Hollywood – as either writers or journalists – before becoming novelists. Thus their attitude towards the industry is less malicious than their earlier counterparts; they view film as an artistic medium, and as a result, their satire is less vindictive.

A comparison between *SimOne* and *Hollywood Cemetery* reveals that the film is in essence a remediation of O'Flaherty's novel. Both satires attack the artificial

elements of Hollywood, yet somewhat surprisingly it is O'Flaherty's satire that is the most effective as it satirises the inherent artificiality of the industry.

Bowfinger, *The Big Picture* and Richard Rushfield's *On Spec: A Novel of Young Hollywood* (2000) are prime examples of contemporary satires which attack Hollywood as corrupt, and also focus on the artists in Hollywood. In these satires, directors and actors are shown to be all too willing to compromise their artistic integrity (if they have any) in order to gain a foothold in the filmmaking industry.

Bruce Wagner's *I'm Losing You* and *Still Holding* highlight the recurrence of themes of satires of the golden years. His works draw on previous satires such as *The Day of the Locust* and the influence of the Hollywood Dream on American culture. Yet the potency of his satire suffers from his desire to attack the artificiality and corruptive nature of Hollywood, yet also to depict Hollywood as a place where good can triumph. This aspect is also revealed in David Mamet's *State and Main*. The film is a unique example of satire of the mechanics of film production, yet it too seeks to attack the corrupting nature of Hollywood while betraying a sympathy for the targets of the satire.

5.1 *SlmOne* and *Hollywood Cemetery*

SlmOne, which was written and directed by Andrew Niccol (who also wrote the screenplay for *The Truman Show*), initially displays a different approach than satires of the golden era. The film opens with director Viktor Taransky being fired from his film due to "creative differences" with his lead actress – she is upset that hers is not the biggest trailer on the set. At this point he is cast off from the Hollywood industry and attacked by studio executives for being unaccommodating to the needs of movie stars. The problems he encounters detail a different Hollywood from that depicted in

the golden era. In that time, stars, while indeed famous, were little more than chattels of the major studios. Held firmly under contract, and required to act in roles the studio decided, any salary and perks they were afforded were essentially done purely to keep them content. Thus, *The Last Tycoon*, *The Day of the Locust* and other satires of the 1930s and 1940s do not concern themselves too greatly with actors and actresses, but with studio executives and writers.

This is not to say that stars at that time were not demanding, yet any demands were mere nuisances with respect to filmmaking. As the studios held the power, stars' demands could only go so far before they would be punished through suspension of their contract – that is, they could not work for the period while under suspension. Crucially, this period of suspension was also added to the length of their contract, and thus could lead to their contract being of significantly greater duration than agreed to. The contracts were of various duration, during which actors' fees were set, and they could only work for other studios if their contracting studio agreed to loan them out (at a fee which was paid to the studio – not the actor). This system ended to a large extent in 1944 with the Superior Court of California ruling that Olivia De Havilland (who had sued Warner Bros.) did not need to serve out any further time on her contract despite having been suspended by Warner Bros. for six months. The “De Havilland Law” meant that studios could only contract actors for a maximum of seven years, after which the actors were free to ply their trade elsewhere. This was, in Thomas Schatz's view, “a watershed event in Hollywood's history” (318). Actors and directors (who also commonly signed to similar contracts) were able to make greater demands, knowing that the studios' power to punish had been largely destroyed.

Since the demise of the studio system, actors have gained greater power to the point where it is now common for actors to produce films through their own

companies – such as Jodie Foster’s Egg Pictures, Tom Hanks’ Playtone or George Clooney’s Section Eight Ltd. With their power, stars have been able to demand higher fees, larger percentages of their films’ grosses and, notoriously, to make idiosyncratic requests¹⁰¹. *SI* begins with Taransky removing the cherry Mike and Ike’s (a type of candy) from the bowl of actress Nicola Anders. Among her other demands are: “... strict instructions that any room she walks into must have seven packs of cigarettes waiting for her, three of them open. That there be a personal jacuzzi within eighty paces of her dressing room, and that any time she travels, her nanny must fly with her, first class”. The last demand is all the more bizarre given that she does not have any children. After Taransky’s ex-wife, who is now a studio executive, fires him, Taransky refers to the days of the studio system: “We always had movie stars but they used to be our stars. We used to decide who would play what role. We told them what to wear, what to say, who to date. When they were under contract, we could change their names if we wanted to – more than once!”.

Thus Niccol believes the greatest danger to artistic filmmaking is that actors have too much power. To demonstrate their actual lack of importance to the creative process he has Taransky discover (through a contrived set-up) a computer programme that can simulate the human body perfectly – to the extent that a viewer would be

¹⁰¹ An indication of the difference in the power and remuneration of stars from the 1930s with the current generation can be seen in the earnings of stars. While inflation, of course, makes any monetary comparison meaningless, if the actors’ earnings as a percentage of the films’ budgets is considered a stark difference is apparent. In the 1930s and early 1940s, popular actors Mickey Rooney, Clark Gable, James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart received on average earnings that accounted for 4.3% of their films’ budgets. In 2003 the salary of the six top box office earners according to the annual Quigley poll (Jim Carrey, Nicole Kidman, Jack Nicholson, Tom Cruise, Julia Roberts and Russel Crowe) accounted for on average 22.7% of their films budgets. That is were Julia Roberts paid according to the 1930s scale she would have earned US\$2.8 million for her role in *Mona Lisa’s Smile*, rather than the reported US\$25 million (*The Internet Movie Database* 2004).

Even on a more individual level, the increase in the power of stars can be revealed. Humphrey Bogart in 1942 earned US\$36,600 for his role in *Casablanca*. At this point, while not the star he would be after the release of the film, he was certainly not unknown, having already starred in *High Sierra* and *The Maltese Falcon*. The fee accounted for a mere 3.9% of the film’s budget. Only 12 years later however, when he starred in *Sabrina* his fee was US\$300,000, or 15% of the film’s US\$2 million budget: a rise in pay of some 290% (“Biography for Humphrey Bogart” 2004).

unable to discern that the actor is in fact a simulation. Taransky uses this programme to finish the film from which he has been fired, and discovers to his shock that the fraud works. His creation “Simone” – so named because she is “Simulation One” – is lauded as “magnificent”... “absolutely unreal”... “a miracle” and “not of this earth”. Because Simone is a computer-generated image she cannot, of course, be seen in public – at the parties or film premieres that stars exploit to keep in the public eye. Her lack of appearances only serves to heighten the public’s desire to see her, and she quickly becomes the hottest actress in the world, purely because no one knows anything about her. This plot device and the film’s focus on the superiority of the artificial over the real is one that bears much similarity to Liam O’Flaherty’s 1935 novel *Hollywood Cemetery*.

In that work, Hollywood producer Jack Mortimer, while scouting locations in Ireland, spies a girl having sex in a park. Her performance during and after the act convinces him that she has “the elemental quality that goes to make a screen star” (11). He pays her aunt for the rights to her body and he changes her name from Bidy Murphy to Angela Devlin. He then decides: “... to revolutionise all previous methods of selling a new star. Instead of publicity I’m going to employ secrecy in order to excite the public appetite. I’ll have nobody see her, until they see her in all her glory on the screen” (100). Though the public appetite is excited, Mortimer soon realises that Bidy cannot act and that she also wishes to return to Ireland. He thus delays revealing her to the public, and is subsequently accused in the press of holding her against her will. His assistant, Larry Dafoe, solves the problem by hiring a shady European doctor to perform a sex-change operation on an effeminate actor, Jesse Starr, who bears a striking similarity to Bidy. When Jesse is presented to Mortimer’s associates as ‘Angela Devlin’ they eventually realise what has occurred; one of them

announces: “She’s fixed... that’s what he’s done. He’s fixed her” (280). At this point Mortimer counters:

She’s not fixed... but adapted for the screen... Adapted for the screen... with the closest possible regard for the original. All the salient features have been retained and something has been added which no screen star ever had before... Since the first day I came into this industry, I have dreamt of this moment, when I could salute on bended knee, with my lips, a star of stars that was entirely my own creation. (280)

Thus, Mortimer’s Angela is in essence the same as Taransky’s Simone, the simulacrum of the perfect star.

In *SimOne*, Taransky becomes envious of Simone’s success due to the public’s perception that it is she who has made him successful. He attempts to turn public opinion against her through the release of a fake pornographic film of Simone and by having her express outrageous statements in interviews, such as: “I think all elementary schools should have a firing range – so students could learn how to defend themselves”. Yet the public remains faithful to her, and in desperation he erases all records of her and dumps all the computer disks he used in the ocean, whereupon he announces that Simone has died, of “a rare disease on her goodwill tour of the third world.” However, when footage of him lugging the case filled with the computer disks onto his boat is discovered by the police, Taransky is arrested for her murder. Unlike Mortimer in *Hollywood Cemetery*, Taransky cannot pass off another person as Simone, yet he is freed when his ex-wife and daughter discover that Simone was in fact a computer creation. They resurrect her files and continue the fraud by later creating a baby which Taransky announces is his and Simone’s. Thus in both

narratives the artificial becomes accepted as the real, highlighting that the main change in Hollywood over eighty years has been technology.

O'Flaherty's notion of the supremacy of the artificial is strikingly consistent throughout satires of Hollywood, whether film or narrative, since his own. While in Ireland, Mortimer decries the idea of filming on location in an actual Irish village, with words that are the virtual imprimatur of satires on Hollywood:

If I want a primitive village as a background for my star, why, my scenery expert, Sam Goldberg, can rig one up in a couple of hours, far superior to the original, which was not built in the first place for the screen, but to accommodate the lousy inhabitants... All of [the villages] in this country are the bunk as screen material. They're too improbable. You couldn't get an American audience to believe that a primitive Irish village is like what it is. No, sir, they want the real thing and the real thing is the genuine Hollywood product. (32)

The artificial has become "real", indeed hyperreal because as with the definition of reality in *The Player*, what is real is what the public is willing to perceive as real, even if the artificial replacement has no connection to the original. O'Flaherty's observation here – some sixty-five years before Jean Baudrillard – highlights the inherent connection between Hollywood and notion of hyperreality and simulacra, but also posits the satire as a key text in the canon of Hollywood satires – a position that has been overwhelmingly ignored.

Hollywood Cemetery also contains other aspects common in most satires on Hollywood: the megalomaniac producer, the novelist who comes to Hollywood and is destroyed by the industry, and the metaphor of Hollywood as the place where dreams can equally come true as they can turn to nightmares. The description of Mortimer's

office, in which “every single article was what is known to the antique trade as ‘a museum piece’ ”(151), and his clothes: “he wore... a monocle, a massive tiepin in which there was a rare jewel, four exquisite rings and a wrist-watch strap composed of small diamonds set in platinum”(152), display a character who would be at home in contemporary Hollywood. Indeed the character is (with the monocle changed to dark glasses) similar to Dustin Hoffmann’s portrayal of Hollywood producer Stanley Motss in the 1997 film *Wag the Dog*¹⁰². The connection between the two characters is not only physical. In the film, Motss and a political operative create an artificial war to distract the attention of the press after the President of the United States was caught having sex with an underage girl. At one point they create a short film clip supposedly of an Albanian girl fleeing a war zone. Motss prefers to digitally insert a kitten into the actress’s arms rather than have her hold a real kitten because it gives them “a wider option of kittens”. He too asserts the artificial has thus attained supremacy over the real, not because it is cheaper, or simpler, but because it is better, and will actually appear more real.

Hollywood Cemetery also depicts Hollywood as the nadir for an artist. The prospect of prostituting oneself to the moneymaking industry of film is a common theme of satires of Hollywood, as is artists’ struggle with the conception of the superiority of the artificial. In *Hollywood Cemetery* the artist is represented by Irish author Brian Carey, who is “a big-shot intellectual”(9) brought to Hollywood to adapt his novel, *The Emigrant*. In the hands of Mortimer however, the novel’s plot is quickly and drastically altered. Carey is, as expected, shocked by the changes, but worse, upon arriving in Hollywood, he is told that *The Emigrant* adaptation is “on the shelf”, replaced by a film yet to be written, called *The Veiled Goddess*, and that his

¹⁰² Hoffman actually based his character on producer Robert Evans.

services are no longer required. Like many artists depicted in Hollywood satires, he is an alcoholic, and his dismissal leads quickly to a return to drunkenness.

Carey achieves salvation through rejecting Hollywood (as is often the case for artists in Hollywood satires). He explains to a journalist how Biddy was discovered and the amount of money Mortimer paid her aunt for “relinquishing her legal rights [to] ... Angela Devlin’s body”(29). The interview draws the attention of a nefarious group of crooks known as the “Irish-American Brotherhood” who kidnap him and Biddy so as to stop them both from “lowering the prestige of the Irish race”(223). The plane in which the kidnappers take them crashes in the Mexican wilderness, after which they are found by a group of Mexican horsemen. The pair marry and when discovered by a journalist they announce that they have rejected Hollywood and all “civilisation” (271). Carey who was forced by the Irish-American Brotherhood to wear a sack cloth and ashes to represent his shame at ruining the good name of Biddy Murphy, continues to wear the garment, stating: “I shall go on wearing sack-cloth and ashes until I have washed the stain of Hollywood off my soul”(271).

This stain is one which artists in Hollywood satires commonly feel. In Budd Schulberg’s *The Disenchanted* Manley Halliday’s alcoholism is fed by his disgust at working for Hollywood, and the English author, Boxley, in *The Last Tycoon* similarly turns to drink through his disgust at his occupation. The portrayal of artists (especially authors) in Hollywood as depressed alcoholics is so common that when producer Ben Geisler in *Barton Fink* remarks of author Bill Mayhew that he is “a souse” one feels he is speaking of all writers in Hollywood. The cause of the artists’ alcoholism is however, not merely the result of over-bearing studios, or the depression they feel through their lack of control over the final product. While the sense of Hollywood as the lowest point to which an artist can sink (due to the fallacy that artists who work

for money are selling their souls) is one which is perpetrated by many Hollywood satires, it is not as clear-cut as it would initially seem.

In *SimOne*, the narrative seems to point towards this formulaic end. Taransky despairs over his inability to create his vision, and his anger is directed at actors who are concerned only with the monetary rewards of films, and at the studio – personified by his ex-wife – which terminates his contract “because [his] last three pictures tanked” and because “no bankable star” will work with him. That the studio he works for is called “Amalgamated Studios” gives insight into the view Niccol and other satirists have of the Hollywood studios during the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. No longer is there a sense that megalomaniac movie moguls such as Louis B Meyer or Jack Warner control the show; the names of Hollywood studios such as MCA/Universal, Columbia TriStar, United International Pictures or Time/Warner reveals that the old studios have been merged, or taken over by companies whose main aim is not to make films¹⁰³. Yet the satire of *SimOne* is not directed only at the studios or vain actors, but the artists as well.

In attacking the over-inflated egos of stars in Hollywood, Niccol also suggests that any characterisation of artists slumming, or prostituting themselves is largely due to their own egos. Thus Taransky represents those artists who believe that their gifts are wasted because they are more creative than Hollywood requires. Niccol commented on this aspect in an interview:

¹⁰³ One indication of the change in the power structure of Hollywood is *Premiere's* Hollywood Power List for 2002. According to the magazine Robert Pittman and Richard Parsons, the dual chief executives of AOL Time Warner were the most powerful, followed by Sumner Redstone (chairman of Viacom) and Jean-Marie Messier (C.E.O. of Universal Pictures). All four run companies of which filmmaking is but one aspect of a multi-media conglomerate, and in Messier's case his company Vivendi, which merged with Universal, is a French water utility company. Messier was actually forced out of Vivendi-Universal in July 2002, and was arrested in June 2004 on charges of embezzlement and manipulation of share prices.

Well, I take a dig at pretentious directors – like me! [Laughs.] That’s why Taransky’s films are so bad. I mean, they’re terrible and nobody would make them without Simone. Then he’s so caught up in himself that he thinks he’s changing lives. ‘We’re speaking to the human condition,’ he says – to a digital actor! (Niccol 2003)

And truly, Taransky’s films are terrible. The titles alone are enough to inform the viewer of their pretentiousness: *Sunrise*, *Sunset*, and *Eternity Forever*. The footage that the viewer sees of both films reveals them to be overwrought, pompous art-house films. They appear to be feeble attempts to emulate the work of such European directors as Ingmar Bergman or Krzysztof Kieslowski.

This pretension is also displayed on the web site that was constructed to accompany the release of *Simone*. A link to a site titled, “The Real Simone” gives a summary of the films as though they are actual creations (the site also features a photo gallery of Simone featured on the covers of well known magazines)¹⁰⁴. *Eternity Forever* is detailed as:

[a] heartbreaking drama starring screen legend Simone. [It] is breaking box office records around the world. The world famous actress lights up the screen in this existential tale of betrayal and the triumph of the human spirit in this Victor Taransky opus. (*The Real Simone* 2003)

One quotation we hear from the film (and one which is mentioned on the film’s web site) highlights the implausibility of the film’s success: “Love is like a wildflower, but that flower only grows on the edge of a very high cliff (*Simone in Eternity Forever* 2003)”.

¹⁰⁴ The use of web sites to continue the suspension of disbelief is one that is now quite common for films. The web site for the film *Memento* (2000) contained a fake newspaper article which gave clues to unravel the narrative of the film (*Memento Official Web Site* 2000). Famously, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) had an accompanying web site which at no stage suggested the movie was anything other than a true story (*The Blair Witch Project Official Site* 1999).

The films *Sunrise, Sunset* and *Eternity Forever* are greeted with an acclaim of critical and popular magnitude the like of which has never been seen before in Hollywood – especially for a film that is an “existential tale” (*The Real Simone* 2003). The acclaim that greets the films is so over the top however that the satire is diminished due to its implausibility. It is all very well to suggest that the masses will be tricked into believing a computer-generated image is real, it is another to suggest a film which would barely register a blip on the box-office charts would ignite the attention of the world’s press. Proof of the implausibility of the satire is Niccol’s own attempts to do the same for *SImpOne*. Actress/model Rachel Roberts, who portrayed Simone, was unbilled in the credits, with the credit line “Simone as Simone” in its place. Her presence on the set during the making of the film was kept secret, and it was rumoured in the press that Niccol was actually using a completely computer generated actress. Yet despite the ruse and the accompanying web sites, few were fooled, and less cared – *SImpOne* grossed a mere US\$9.7 million, and was only the 148th highest grossing film of 2002 (“U.S. Box Office Earnings: 2002”).

While failure of popularity does not lessen the validity of a satire per se, its validity must be questioned when events which the satire predicts do not actually occur. *SImpOne*, like most satires, contains exaggeration, but its basic premise is faulty for Niccol does not depict the media’s and the public’s desire for Simone as an exaggeration, and he does not seem to attack the public (or indeed the press) for believing an artificial actress is a real person. Obviously the public can choose to suspend disbelief of artificial creations, were it not the case then most Hollywood films (such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Matrix* trilogies) would be abject failures at the box-office. It is of course true, and a worthy target of satire, that Hollywood stars’ projected and public identities are largely artificial – whether

through industrious press officers ensuring embarrassing personal details do not appear in the press, through digital effects enhancing certain physical aspects, or even through such basic techniques as make-up and lighting which highlight aspects of their appearance. Indeed, such techniques are crucial to creating stars' 'perfect appearances', and are why so many tabloid magazines run "stars without their make-up" articles. However, unlike the premise of his screenplay, *The Truman Show*, which has essentially been proven through the plethora of 'reality' based programmes that have appeared through the world, the premise of *Simone* has largely been disproved. In 1996, the Japanese company Hori Productions introduced the first "Idoru" (a computer generated pop-star, based on the title of the William Gibson novel), Kyoko Date. Yet despite an initial curiosity-driven popularity, "she" quickly faded from view, and was never popular outside Japan (Wolff 1997). Thus Niccol's exaggeration on this score undermines his satire rather than propels it.

These failings aside, Niccol's satire of artists in Hollywood remains potent. Taransky, for example, is so immersed in his own greatness that he becomes jealous of Simone's fame, and begins to plot her end when "she" fails to thank him in her speech for receiving the award for Best Actress at the Academy Awards. This depiction of artists' insecurities and their fragile egos is a common theme in Hollywood satires. In the past, actors would occasionally be ridiculed for their belief in their own abilities – such as the character Lina Lamont in *Singin' in the Rain*, who despite the need for her voice to be overdubbed, announces to a cinema audience: "If we bring a little joy into your humdrum lives, it makes us feel as if our hard work ain't been in vain for nothing". Yet *Simone* reflects a trait found in a number of recent films such as *Bowfinger*, *Hollywood Ending* (2002), *The Big Picture* and *State and Main* which depict directors as being as misguided about their abilities as any

actor. This does set it somewhat apart from the satires of the golden years, such as *Hollywood Cemetery*, which focus mainly on producers and studio executives.

Despite this, the recurrence in a film of themes first put forward some seventy years earlier highlights the lack of relevance in a satire which merely satirises artificial elements in Hollywood, but does not seek to satirise Hollywood as artificial.

5.2 Corrupt artists: *On Spec*, *Bowfinger*, *The Big Picture*

The trait of satirising artists in Hollywood is also seen in many recent literary satires. Whereas in the 1930s many of the writers of satires classed themselves as novelists first and screenwriters second, many of the contemporary satirists are primarily screenwriters or Hollywood journalists. Bruce Wagner and John Blumenthal, for example, wrote their first screenplays long before their first novels, Richard Rushfield and Martha Sherrill wrote on Hollywood for *Vanity Fair* magazine and *The Washington Post* respectively before writing novels on the industry, and Peter Lefcourt wrote his Hollywood novel *The Deal* (1991) only after working for many years as a writer on a multitude of television programmes. Thus, these authors have arrived at their satire of Hollywood from a different direction than their 1930s' counterparts. They believe in the artistic merit, and cultural importance of film, and whereas the earlier satires often featured a failed novelist, the new artist of the Hollywood satire is the failed screenwriter.

Rushfield's 2000 satire, *On Spec: A Novel of Young Hollywood*, is a prime example of this crucial difference. He not only satirises the actors, but also the artists, in the guise of young screenwriter Stu Bluminvitz. Stu believes himself to be a true artist in the mould of Charles Bukowski and Quentin Tarantino, yet the best script he can write is called *Kennel Break* and is described as, "Tarantino meets *Turner and*

Hooch” (1) and which he believes “underlines the absurdity of American culture and the small value it places on human life”(1).

The novel also features a wannabe-actress, a development girl (“D-Girl”) at Hotatsi Studios, a young producer, and an agent. All are Hollywood insiders, and reflecting the insularity of Hollywood, little is made of their history before they arrived. The actress, Chelsea Starlot arrived in Los Angeles on her eighteenth birthday from Indiana, and the D-girl, Deana grew up in Connecticut and describes her three oldest friends as “losers who stayed in the East working in businesses no one could care less about” (one is an editor for Simon & Schuster, another works for a bank and the third has a Ph.D. in Anthropology)(128). Thus implicit in their situations is that any success outside the bounds of Hollywood is worthless, and by implication the American Dream is futile, unless achieved within the frame of Hollywood – and indeed that the American Dream in this context is invalid, for these characters are not concerned with work but with making contacts, being seen in the right places and if necessary having sex to attain success – in short, they are chasing the Hollywood Dream.

Stu is the only character in the novel who is concerned with the artistic process. He is determined that his script will be made without him compromising his artistic integrity. Of course when his script is developed he quickly changes it to meet the desires of any who read it, although he continually rationalises: “This final draft is more of a *Waiting to Exhale* meets *Con Air* homage. But hey, look at what John Woo is able to do with the action genre and no one accuses him of selling out (72)”. For the other characters, the artistic process is something that either gets in the way of making a film, or is something to concern oneself with after success has been achieved. Thus when Chelsea, who is initially prepared to do anything to become successful –

including becoming a Scientologist – achieves stardom, she states that she aims to preserve “the artistic freedom”(183) of her days as a struggling actress. Chelsea also at this point in her career reinvents her past (similar to Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain*) from white-trash girl from Indiana to one who was “raised in the aristocratic enclave of Westport, Rhode Island and educated at the famed Swiss finishing school of La Roset”(182).

Hollywood has therefore become less a place where artistic souls die, as one where artists consider movies to be the pinnacle of artistic achievement. Thus Stu is a writer who has no desire to write a novel, and only wishes to write screenplays, and he is also a student of *Hollywood* film. He has no desire to write a screenplay in the mould of Jean Renoir, and in all likelihood has never seen a Fellini film. His artistic vein is focused purely on Hollywood films and trashy Korean kickboxing movies. His interests depict the shift in influences on Hollywood ‘artists’. He represents the second generation of film buffs who became filmmakers. In the 1970s, directors such as Peter Bogdanovich, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg were true film artists, who had no desire to work in other medium, such as theatre. Bogdanovich idolised Orson Welles and the French ‘New Wave’ directors, and Spielberg has stated that his influences are films by directors such as David Lean, Akira Kurosawa, Frank Capra and John Ford. The next generation of Hollywood directors led by Quentin Tarantino, however, while just as much students of film as their predecessors, are influenced more by less critically acclaimed directors¹⁰⁵. As Daniel Mendelsohn writes,

¹⁰⁵ Of course, not all current directors are followers of the “Tarantino school”, yet an example of the difference in influence between the two generations can be seen through their choices of best movies. In the 2002 *Sight & Sound* poll of the top ten movies of all time Tarantino listed: *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, *Rio Bravo*, *Taxi Driver*, *His Girl Friday*, *Rolling Thunder*, *They All Laughed*, *The Great Escape*, *Carrie*, *Coffy*, *Dazed and Confused*, *Five Fingers of Death*, and *Hi Diddle Diddle*. Compare this list with that of Paul Schrader (who wrote the screenplays for *Taxi Driver* and *Rolling Thunder*): *La Regle du jeu*, *Tokyo Story*, *Pickpocket*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Lady Eve*, *La Belle at la Bete*, *The Conformist*, *Vertigo*, *The Searchers*, and *The Wild Bunch* (“The Ten Best Movies of All Time” 49-50).

Tarantino is “of the first generation of directors to have been raised on cable television and video recording”(Mendelsohn 2003).

Thus contemporary Hollywood satires are less concerned with artists who are anti-Hollywood than satires of previous decades. Regardless of geographical background, the characters do not have an inbuilt prejudice against Hollywood, and there is no sense of them slumming in Hollywood – Hollywood is where they want to be. What does characterise these artists however, is their lack of talent. Stu Bluminvitz is unlikely ever to be successful, and his film *Kennel Break*, although extensively re-written into a film about a woman with a pet dinosaur, still believes it to be a “spoof of Hollywood filmmaking”(182). Even though he decries Hollywood, he does not do so in a manner such as Boxely in *The Last Tycoon*, or even Homer Simpson in *The Day of the Locust*. Stu’s complaint against Hollywood is that studio executives are ruining the possibility of making great movies, whereas Boxely would have thought a great movie an oxymoron, and Homer Simpson saw only a degeneration of morality. The artists in contemporary satires truthfully and fundamentally believe in film as an artistic medium.

What this artistic medium entails however, is open to debate. In Steve Martin’s *Bowfinger*, Bob Bowfinger hopes to be a director of blockbuster films. He has no desire to make films that may be acclaimed by critics or win prizes at film festivals. His desire to produce what he sees as art is linked exclusively to the Hollywood industry. As he tells the members of his group while observing a delivery truck passing by his house: “Everyday that FedEx truck comes through here delivering important things to important people. Someday it’s going to stop here, and when that day comes, then we – and by we, I mean me – will be important”. Thus Bowfinger does not desire to make movies for artistic reasons, but, as is crucial with

all dealings in Hollywood, for power. The film he surreptitiously contrives to make with Hollywood star Kit Ramsey is a prototype Hollywood blockbuster. Its plot is inane, the dialogue is witless, but even if he actually had a budget one wonders whether it would be different from the standard Hollywood action film. Indeed even when Kit discovers Bowfinger's plan – which has involved Bowfinger secretly filming actors speaking dialogue to Kit – Kit approves of the film because it gives him a good catchphrase.

Kit's sense of the artistic process is similar to Bowfinger's. He does not care for films as art, but purely because they give him power. He complains that white actors win all the awards, and get "all the best catchphrases", yet his complaint is not that he is denied an opportunity to star in critically acclaimed films, indeed he tellingly knows what he needs to do to win an Oscar:

White boys always get the Oscar. It's a known fact. Did I ever get a nomination? No! You know why? Cause I hadn't played any of them slave roles, and get my ass whipped. That's how you get the nomination. A black dude who plays a slave that gets his ass whipped gets the nomination, a white guy who plays an idiot gets the Oscar. That's what I need, I need to play a retarded slave, then I'll get the Oscar.

While Bowfinger and Kit are cynical of the Hollywood system, the protagonist of Christopher Guest's 1989 satire, *The Big Picture*, highlights that the young idealist remains a common figure in Hollywood satires. Unlike Bowfinger, director Nick Chapman does wish to make artistic films. He has recently arrived in Los Angeles from Illinois, and after winning a prize at a film school he is contracted to direct a film for a major studio. As with Stu Bluminvitz, his idea is quickly changed; thus his

story of a love triangle between two forty-year old men and a woman in a cabin in Vermont during a snow storm shot in black and white is changed to a teenage sexual romp featuring two women and a man in a beach house in California during summer, now shot in colour. Nick, as with most artists in contemporary Hollywood satires, rationalises the changes, and as a result is able to enjoy the success he gains despite his breaking up with his girlfriend and losing touch with his best friend. He only regains his sense of loyalty to his friends and his art when the deal falls through and he finds he is broke and forced to work as a courier.

The satire of *The Big Picture* is directed once again at the insiders of Hollywood. Although Nick does turn against his friends and allow success to go to his head, he redeems himself by not compromising his principles when he is given a second chance to direct a film: he shoots it in black and white, the plot reverts to his original theme, and he employs his best friend, Emmet as cinematographer. And this chance to succeed only comes through his rejecting the norm of pandering to the studios. He ignores calls from his agent and from studio executives, which they assume must be because he has been hired by someone else; thus the demand for his services increases.

The satire, however, is ineffective as the protagonist is allowed to realise the error of his ways and succeed because he keeps true to his ethics. Thus, Guest suggests Hollywood success does come to those who stay true to their friends and values. While Guest does attack Hollywood, he does so with little venom. Allen Habel, the studio executive he deals with is a stereotype, who is ignorant of things outside of Hollywood, (when he hears that Nick comes from Illinois he responds: “Oh, my first wife was from Idaho”) and believes sex (especially that involving two women) is something every film needs. Such portrayals of studio executives are

common, and are done more effectively in the 1994 film, *Swimming with Sharks*. In that film, studio executive, Buddy Ackerman is the ultimate example of the abusive, conniving, sexist studio executive. When he first meets his new assistant, the idealistic film school graduate Guy, Buddy tells him: “You are nothing! If you were in my toilet I wouldn’t bother flushing it! My bathmat means more to me than you!”. Buddy’s dehumanisation of Guy causes Guy to murder producer Dawn Lockard, which actually leads to his promotion. As such, the satire of *Swimming with Sharks* is more compelling. Writer-director George Huang views Hollywood and ethics as incompatible, and does not suggest as Guest does, that one good man can rise above the industry’s amorality. In Huang’s view Guy must murder Dawn because to swim with sharks you must become a shark, any other view is fanciful and a duplication of Hollywood-happy endings. Guest on the other hand sees the rewards of honesty and integrity in Hollywood. *Bowfinger* is also an example of a Hollywood satire that parodies the industry but also exalts it. Bowfinger’s Hollywood Dream does come true – his film with Kit gets released and though he goes on to make low budget karate films in Hong Kong he believes he has ‘made it’. For him perseverance has paid off, and he and his talentless band of players are rewarded. *The Big Picture* and *Bowfinger* are thus prime examples of the anodyne nature of contemporary Hollywood satire. They attack the industry without any venom, and without any new insight.

5.3 I’m Losing You and Still Holding

Two recent novels by Bruce Wagner, *I’m Losing You* and *Still Holding* also highlight that contemporary Hollywood satire continues to use similar themes to satires of the 1930s and 1940s, in part as homage, but more because little has changed in

Hollywood over the past seventy years – and because contemporary satirists are less vindictive towards the industry than West and O’Flaherty. His novels also detail the influence of the Hollywood Dream on American culture.

I’m Losing You tells, in a fragmented narrative, the story of numerous people in Hollywood circles. It reflects that, for what is supposedly an egalitarian society, the Hollywood Dream concerns a rise in caste. The Hollywood Wagner describes has a strict class structure, in which everyone is acutely aware of his/her position. The dermatologist Dr. Trott, for example, groups his clients in three categories: “... an underpowered, non-celebrity stranger ;... a powerful yet non-celebrity acquaintance [; and]... a Big Star”(6). Similarly, therapist Calliope Krohn-Markowitz has a clientele that is “almost strictly the scarily famous” (11), any who do not fall into such a category are recommended to another therapist, or if there is a possibility they may become famous, they attend sessions run by her husband Mitch. Even those whom Calliope consults with are segregated according to class: agent Donny Ribkin surmises that he never saw “Big Stars” in the waiting room when he attended sessions because “Thursday morning – his time – was probably C-list material...”(12). Producer Phylliss Wolfe, when concerned about the development of a number of her projects, and thus by implication her position in the power structure of Hollywood, admits in her journal that she “is afraid Calliope’s gonna dump [her] on the husband – Mitch’s psychiatric specialty being the ‘below the line’ personality” (65). The segregation of patients also extends to those with H.I.V.. Those people who are famous – or powerful – and have the virus are designated as “H.I.V.I.P.” (7). The existence of class barriers in Hollywood can thus be measured by any number of ways, but ultimately as Phyllis noted, it comes down to whether your name is above or below the title in film credits.

This narrative, and his later work *Still Holding*, also includes numerous references to previous Hollywood satires, most notably *The Day of the Locust*. One character writing a journal for her recently born blind son, states: “Time to enter our Day of the Locust phase, Burgess Meredith tromping wheezily through the hills, exotic drinks at the Garden of Allah and all that...” (110). Pointedly, she references John Schlessinger’s 1974 film adaptation, not the novel. Later a Hollywood magazine is referred to as “part *Day of the Locust*, part *That’s Entertainment!* [with] some *What Makes Sammy Run?* Pop psychologizing” (203). And an actor and his agent at one point are described as having “their *Get Shorty* ‘done-deal’ moment...” (27). Wagner describes a society that is aware of the satires of itself, yet the characters do not shy from the references. However, he does not actually satirise this aspect. He notes it but fails to satirise the characters for their self-satirising manners. Indeed the woman who referred to her “Day of the Locust phase” is presented as the most sympathetic character in the novel. But Wagner’s references to previous satires not only positions his work among the canon, but also highlights contemporary society’s apathy towards satire. As with the contestants on *Big Brother*, characters here refer to satirical works minus the satire.

In common with the satires Wagner references, many of his characters are on their way down and his theme is the amorality of Hollywood. Those at the top, such as actress (and definitive “big Star”) Oberon Mall have little conception of morality: Oberon sexually abuses a young girl and yet tells Calliope in a session that she did it because it was what the character she is to play in her next film would do. Calliope after pondering the ethical implications of Oberon’s confession decides to instruct her that what she described was actually a fantasy because if Calliope: “... acted according to law and contracted authorities, her assiduously cultivated practice might

easily topple; the legal nuances of confidentiality were not an issue her paranoid, illustrious clientele cared to grapple with (48)”. The amorality of Hollywood is thus not merely confined to those in the industry, but affects all who come into contact with it. Soon after, Oberon suffers a heart attack during a root canal operation and lapses into a coma, and the corrupting influence of Hollywood is displayed when soon after being admitted to hospital “two attendants were caught photographing her nude, their hands on her”(53).

For the remainder of the narrative, Oberon is progressively forgotten by her partner and others, with many considering the story of the root canal as cover for a drug overdose. For some time “visiting Oberon Mall had become anecdotally correct” (174), but her death provokes little attention. Indeed, despite the presence of H.I.V.I.P. patients, and innumerable numbers of stars attending therapy sessions, illness and death are things to be avoided in Hollywood. The exception is if one is old and famous enough to warrant comments in the media referring to the end of an era, or an extended viewing of one’s career in the obituary reel screened during the annual Oscar ceremony (and even then a hierarchy exists, with the biggest stars generating the most applause – and often left till the end of the reel), as was the case in the 2004 ceremony for Katharine Hepburn, Bob Hope and Gregory Peck. The other exception is if one is young and famous enough for the death to be marked as tragic – for example James Dean and River Phoenix. In all other cases, as the eponymous protagonist of John Blumenthal’s novel, *What’s Wrong with Dorfman* (2000) observes, “Death can be a real stigma in Hollywood”. Screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, in his memoirs on Hollywood, *Hollywood Animal* (2004) echoes this when he refers to his diagnosis of having lung cancer: “Hollywood was not a place where people wanted to work with a cancer victim” (Eszterhas 2004).

Apart from Oberon Mall, whose death and the lack of attention it receives marks the lowest one can fall, the other character who meets the lowest end in the narrative is, not uncoincidentally, the one who starts from the lowest position: wannabe actress, Kim Girard. She is a recent arrival in Hollywood from Vancouver, and like many struggling actors in Hollywood narratives, she works as a waitress, and also like many young hopefuls she is obsessed with the industry. She displays no real desire to act, but rather desires success for its own sake. Her diary contains numerous references to Hollywood stars, whom she lists in capitals, as though it is important they stand out on the page. Her story reflects the sentiment that she makes concerning another character: “Another Hollywood story, no doubt. What a melancholy, magical town this can be”(82).

Soon after arriving in Hollywood, Kim is fired from her job as a waitress and also has a short romance with agent Donny Ribkin. She then changes her name to Kiv Giroux and takes a job as a topless waitress at a gentleman’s club. She rationalises showing her breasts because

... all one has to do is flip through HARPER’S BAZAAR or VANITY FAIR ads, et alia, to see NADJA and AMBER and CLAUDIA and KATE doing just that. Women having been baring breasts since time immemorial; I’m certainly in good company. [DEMI RULZ!!!]”(113).

She does not however, inform her mother what she is doing because “NO WAY would she consider this merely a fuel stop on the road to the proverbial pot o’ gold”(120). Soon after beginning this work, she stars in some soft-core pornography films. Again she is able to rationalise her situation:

they... are NOT XXX, as private parts are NOT shown... Actresses have always worked beyond the pale; countless members of the

PANTHEON have bared breast and pubis. Altogether my new venue is not too far a cry or leap. In the meanwhile I'm getting FANTASTIC experience with set, crew and camera (124).

At this point her diary entries end, symbolising the end of any control she may have had over her life. The next mention of her is on the set of a hard-core pornography film, in which she continues to believe she can become a mainstream star, and states she would like to star in a series like *Friends*, and asserts that "I look at what I'm doing now as a preparation for film. It's a legitimate tool"(141).

Kim's spiral into the depths of Hollywood is of course, nothing new. The flip-side of the glamour has always existed, and it is staple fodder for authors. Kim's story is essentially the personification of *The Flying Burrito Bros'* song about Hollywood, "Sin City": "This old town is filled with sin/ It'll swallow you in"(Hillman 1969). She is the modern equivalent of Faye Greener. Where Faye in *The Day of the Locust* becomes a prostitute – and is able to act as though it is nothing out of the ordinary, so too Kim believes her porn career is little more than a side-step on the way to fame, and she actually enjoys the attention she has generated through her career as an adult actress: "I find myself somewhat in demand. That's a nice feeling in this town. I've also been told I'm a hot commodity" (124).

What has changed in the fifty years between *The Day of the Locust* and *I'm Losing You* is the difference in the attitude of the public towards the less glamorous side of Hollywood. Far from being an underground industry the American pornography industry is now, according to reports, worth "US\$2.6 to US\$3.9 billion" (Ackman 2001). While this still pales compared to the revenue generated by mainstream entertainment, it displays that the industry has a sizeable audience. Interest in the industry, and its role in the Hollywood story is highlighted by the

critical success of Paul Thoms Anderson's film *Boogie Nights* (1997)¹⁰⁶. And the lowering of stigma associated with the industry can be seen through the 'reality' programmes such as *Who Wants to be a Playboy Centrefold* (2002), and *Can YOU be a Porn Star?* (2004) in which women participate in a contest for the prize of \$100,000 and a contract with an adult movie studio¹⁰⁷. Kim's assertions of her artistic desires throughout her descent also reflect this change in attitude.

Yet underneath the surface, the reactions of both Faye and Kim reveal a similar attitude. Faye acts cool after deciding to work as a prostitute, partly as a defence mechanism, and partly the result of being a girl who has grown up believing herself to be a star no matter which role she is playing. While Kim does not begin to develop a façade of world weariness until her porn career is well developed, her belief in the artistic benefits of working as a waitress, a topless waitress, a soft-porn actress, and even as an actress doing hard-core pornography, displays not only the defence mechanism of a woman whose life is spiralling downwards, but as is the case with Faye, a woman who believes herself truly destined to be a star. Where Faye continually changes her act, from that of starlet, to loving daughter, to whore, Kim continually acts in one role – that of star-in-waiting. Her act is revealed not in her conversations with others but in the manner she writes her diary. Her writing of stars' names in capitals suggests their importance to her, and thus by implication make her more important for having seen them, met them or even merely thought about them in connection with her life. She makes comments on the careers of stars as though she is giving them advice: "I wanted to write about SANDRA BULLOCK but I think I may

¹⁰⁶ The film was nominated for three Academy Awards and was the 48th biggest grossing film worldwide in 1997 ("Worldwide Box Office Earnings: 1997" 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Ironically the contracts which exist in the adult film industry are similar to those employed by movie studios in the 1930s and 1940s. Numerous actresses sign exclusively with one studio – most prominent are the "Vivid Girls" who are contracted to Vivid Video ("Vivid Video Press Release" 2004).

be too tired... SANDRA is on a Cinderella trajectory and does not need my help”(93).

The diary reveals that regardless of her situation her self-belief is unchanged: she merely changes her role model from Sandra Bullock to Traci Lords.

Another young struggling actress features in Wagner’s latest novel *Still Holding*. Unlike Kim, Becca Mondrain is less interested in becoming a star, than becoming an actress. The difference is acute. Becca believes she will succeed because: “She would simply persevere, perseverance being the one quality all successful *actors* had in common [my italics]”(4). The difference between her desire to be an actor as opposed to a star can be seen in the definition William Goldman gives for a star:

To be a star, yes, you have to have talent, and my God do you ever have to be lucky, but riding alongside is this: desire. One so consuming you are willing to piss away everything else in life. Stars have no friends, they have business acquaintances and serfs. They can only fake love on screen.

But they get a good table at Spago. (*Which Lie Did I Tell?* 29)

Thus stardom is not about acting, it is about power and fame. With her delusions of grandeur, Kim decides to “forge a career in the vein of the following: MICHELLE PFEIFFER, UMA THURMAN, LAURA DERN, ANDIE MacDOWELL, SANDRA BULLOCK and LINDA FIORENTINO” (74), whereas Becca is more concerned with obtaining her S.A.G. (Screen Actors Guild) card, and auditioning for small roles, while also doing theatre work.

The difference between Kim and Becca is the difference between the American and the Hollywood Dreams. Kim desires success and fame without any real conception of the occupation. She hopes to be discovered like Lana Turner in

Schwab's Drugstore¹⁰⁸, whereas Becca realises that to succeed she must start from the bottom. Indeed her first role underlies her position on the ladder of success: the role of a corpse on the television show *Six Feet Under*. Before she even achieves this small amount of success, she first works for a theatrical company that specialises in actors who look like famous stars. She bears an uncanny resemblance to Drew Barrymore, and as a result gains employment at functions such as auto shows and – in a stark symbol of her position in Hollywood – at a birthday party for Drew Barrymore, during which one character refers to such look-alike actors as “bottom feeders”(61).

Yet Becca's lowest point comes when she takes up the position as personal assistant (or to use the more common, and more vulgar expression, “chore-whore”) for actress Viv Wembley. During her tenure in this position she is, among other things, forced to listen to Viv's instructions while Viv sits on the toilet and while Viv is having sex. Becca knows that her position is demeaning, but unlike Kim she does not attempt to rationalise it in her mind other than expressing a belief that meeting “people she was in awe of”(207) would help her relax when she needed to audition in front of those people. Indeed, when she is required to attend auditions, so unhelpful is her position towards her career that she lies to Viv and tells her she is visiting her sick mother.

While Wagner uses Viv to satirise Hollywood stars, as with many contemporary satires, it fails because what Wagner hopes will shock the reader, does little more than briefly amuse. It is hardly an earth-shattering revelation to discover that Hollywood actors are not as pure as their publicists would have the public believe. Indeed on this score Wagner verges into the territory of Jackie Collins's *Hollywood Wives* (1983) novels. It takes the form of a roman à clef where the

¹⁰⁸ This is of course one of the greatest Hollywood myths. Turner was in fact noticed at the Top Hat Malt shop opposite Hollywood High School.

interest is generated through attempting to guess who are the actors on which the characters are based. Yet, while the narrative is replete with actual stars such as Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore they, as one reviewer stated, “slide through as gods, untouchable” (Homand 2003). As a result any deplorable behaviour is committed by the fictional stars and therefore, such behaviour has little purpose other than forwarding Wagner’s theme that amoral Hollywood stars deserve bad ends, and the superiority of the American Dream over the Hollywood Dream . To this end, in *I’m Losing You*, Oberon Mall dies as the result of a botched dental procedure, Kim Girard, who desires success but appears bereft of a moral barometer, becomes a porn star. In *Still Holding*, Viv Wembley is dumped by her superstar fiancé for his high school sweetheart. Becca Mondrain however, succeeds because she keeps her morals and does not hope for fame purely for its own end. Similarly, the fiancé of Viv, actor Kit Lightfoot, is attacked by an autograph hunter but recovers and achieves even greater fame as an actor because he is seen to discard his Hollywood lifestyle.

The satire in Wagner’s works ultimately fails however not because his characters’ actions do not shock the reader, but because of this assertion of the superiority of the American Dream over the Hollywood version. The personal and career failure of the characters in his works who chase the Hollywood Dream because they chase that dream and not the American Dream displays a belief that the older dream is more worthy. Although Wagner’s work draws on West’s *The Day of the Locust*, unlike West, Wagner’s narratives glorify the American Dream. Yet such a position is absurd within the context of Hollywood. West acknowledged the futility of chasing the American Dream in Hollywood. Similarly, Fitzgerald showed that even those like Monroe Stahr who achieve success in Hollywood through hard work and enterprise will ultimately fail. The crime novels of Chandler and Leonard highlighted

the corrupting influence of Hollywood on those who initially come to Hollywood with high ideals – it subconsciously affects characters’ psyche, and a Hollywood identity takes hold. Vidal and Lynch on the other hand displayed the absurdity of the American Dream within Hollywood. In *Myra Breckinridge*, young actors come to Hollywood with earnest desires and find themselves lost in the simulacrum of Buck Loner’s Academy. In *Mulholland Dr.*, Diane also hopes to achieve success through hard work, but so inconsistent is the American Dream in Hollywood that her efforts lead to murder and suicide.

Wagner however, has Becca succeed because she keeps true to the American Dream. She is prepared to do small jobs, to work her way up. Kim is not prepared to do this and so her dream turns into a nightmare. Yet this position is untenable within a narrative which describes the making of a film about look-a-like actors that underscores Hollywood’s artificiality. Wagner wishes to acknowledge the artificiality on one hand, but deny it on the other. His desire for the American Dream to exist conflicts with his description of Hollywood society – a place where even diseases are given a social rank. He writes of the society in the hope that it will be viewed as amoral and worthy of contempt, yet he also positions it as one where people – so long as they remain true to themselves and do not follow the Hollywood Dream – can triumph. It is a position that may be tenable in humorous novels on Hollywood, or Jackie Collin’s type tales, but is flawed in satires on the industry. Wagner, like Martin with his screenplay of *Bowfinger* and Guest with *The Big Picture*, is a satirist with rose-coloured glasses.

5.4 Corrupt but nice: *State and Main*

Oddly, given the nature of the industry that they satirise, very few Hollywood satires actually deal with the mechanics of film production. *The Day of the Locust* involves characters on the periphery of the industry, *The Last Tycoon*, although set for the most part in a film studio, aside from a number of script conferences, leaves the actual production process untouched. Even recent satires such as *The Big Picture*, *Still Holding* and *The Player* stop at casting and initial script conferencing. David Mamet's *State and Main* however, displays that the act of production is just as fraught with hypocrisy as the rest of the industry. The film also examines the impact of Hollywood on outsiders, shows that the lure of the Hollywood Dream is one not confined to those who move to Los Angeles, but like *Still Holding* and *The Big Picture* the effectiveness of its satire fails because of a desire to show the industry as one where integrity can triumph alongside corruption.

The film concerns the production of a Hollywood film called *The Old Mill*. The film was to be made in a small town in Maine, however the production has had to move due to numerous reasons, not the least of which is lead actor Bob Barrenger's predilection for underage girls. While the new town they discover initially appears to be the perfect setting, problems arise when the crew discover the mill they were to use was in fact burnt down some years before. The film's focus however is not so much the difficulties of filmmaking, but on the interaction between the Hollywood folk and those of the small town, and on the impact Hollywood has on the small town.

The film crew is represented for the most part by director Walt Price, who betrays all the traits of the stereotypical Hollywood figure: he has a self-important ego: "This is what my people died for, the right to make a movie in this town"; he is autocratic: "Who designed these costumes? It's like Edith Head puked and that puke

designed these costumes”; he follows fads: “Oh, like I’m really going to eat carbohydrates”; and he has little regard for others, unless it is in his interest, often referring to the lead actress of the film as “the broad”. He also has a ‘succeed at any cost’ attitude towards the film, which is ably assisted by producer Marty Rossen who is often quick to threaten legal action and who knows that everyone has a price. And, reflecting the amorality of Hollywood, Rossen’s and Price’s only concern regarding Barrenger’s paedophilic desire is that it may delay production of the film, not that the act is unconscionable.

The film crew contains one outsider – the archetypal artist, playwright Joseph Turner White. Yet, unlike many of his predecessors in Hollywood satires, White is not anti-film, though he does find it bewildering. His position as outside Hollywood is reflected in his inability to write on anything except a manual typewriter, and in his ethical dilemmas, which seem of no concern to anyone else on the crew. In his first conversation with Price his position is shown when he catches Price in a lie, yet is unable to reply when Price states: “It’s not a lie, it’s a gift for fiction”.

Mamet is obviously sympathetic to White, and places the character apart from the rest of the film crew through not only his ethics but also his speech. Price, Rossen and Barrenger talk over the top of others; barely listening to the other person in the conversation, and able to change tack mid-sentence, as when Rossen talks to an agent on the phone: “You fuck with me and I’m going to tear out your heart and piss on your lungs through the hole in your chest. And the best to [your wife] Marion”. Their conversations also involve numerous incomplete sentences, as though they can only speak in titles, such as when Barrenger meets the lead actress Clair:

WALT. Claire, Bob Barr...

BOB. I just saw Desert Sun and I wanna tell you...

CLAIRE. No, I was, I was, I was just learning on, it's a...

BOB. How'd you like working with Richard Hill?

CLAIRE. I loved it he...

BOB. Isn't he?

When Claire later attacks Price for insisting she do the nude scene she states with what she believes is perfect clarity: "I'm gonna tell you something. And I think you know what I mean". For these characters, a conversation is only important for what they say, not what they hear, thus, when Price's assistant informs him that his wife is having a baby, Price answers: "Is that on the call sheet? Is that on the call sheet, or is that personal business?"

White, on the other hand, struggles to express himself. When he attempts to explain the meaning of his screenplay he stutters and searches for the words, highlighting that he is more comfortable with the written word, rather than the spoken world of Hollywood. The only time White speaks quickly is when he explains to Price and Rossen that he has re-written "the nude scene" so that Claire does not have to reveal her breasts. This action more than any other results in approval from the Hollywood types, not because they believe it helps the film artistically, but because it saves them \$800,000 Claire was demanding to be paid for showing her breasts on film.

The townsfolk are also set apart from the film crew. This is done again through the differences in speech: the locals are for the most part slow talkers. Their most important topic of conversation seems to involve a pothole in the main street. The mayor of the town is named George Bailey in an explicit link to the main character of Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, and the town of Waterford represents to the filmmakers the archetypal small town America, and as such the townsfolk would

appear to be living the American Dream. Yet the town is quickly disturbed by the arrival of the film crew, and reveals that the Hollywood Dream is paramount here as well.

Initially the filmmakers are welcomed with open arms by the majority of the town's folk. Lured by the possibility of rubbing shoulders with famous stars, the mayor quickly gives the company all the rights to filming in the town. The mayor also plans a large dinner for the director and the stars, which causes his wife to remodel their house for the occasion – the dream of fame by association like Kiv's in *I'm Losing You*. The local theatre company which was to produce an amateur play cancels production as the cast all become extras on the film – acting in theatre is for those chasing the American Dream, film, even as an extra, is for those pursuing the Hollywood Dream. But, the greatest indication of the influence of Hollywood on the town is when local politician, Doug Mackenzie, takes a bribe (the \$800,000 saved by White) in return for not pressing charges against Barrenger for statutory rape, which will allow him to finance his campaign for a seat in congress.

The satire of *State and Main* suffers as does *I'm Losing You* and *Still Watching* and other contemporary satires of Hollywood from the public's knowledge of the lives of Hollywood stars. The saturation of articles on the stars' lives is even reflected in the film. Two elderly men in a coffee shop discuss the gross earning of films, while the owner of the shop responds to a suggestion that communism is dead by stating "that's what they said about Warner Bros., 1985, but if you look at their price-per-share..". Moreover, Carla, the under-age girl who has a dalliance with Barrenger, discovers his sexual appetites by reading a magazine. Thus people in a town supposedly ignorant of Hollywood are as knowledgeable of the industry as the insiders.

Mamet's treatment of Barrenger's sexual crime exemplifies the failure of the film's satire. Carla, who is hardly the innocent country girl, is dazzled by the movie crew, and rather than be shocked or wary of Barrenger's desires, she approaches him and encourages them. Although Barrenger is positioned as lecherous and amoral – he frequently explains his behaviour by stating “everyone needs a hobby” – rather than have him prey on a 14 year old girl (which we are told earlier in the film is what he likes), Carla is played by actress Julia Styles, who was 19 years old at the time, and unlikely to be regarded by any viewer as innocent – or younger than her real age. While the public may not be surprised that a Hollywood star could desire under-age girls, Mamet flinches from unleashing an attack on the hypocrisy of Hollywood. Instead he depicts Barrenger as an almost passive agent in the relationship. The audience is able to tolerate his behaviour because we see no evidence of any real impropriety other than a man flirting with a younger woman – though not too young. Carla does not reveal her age, and Mamet does not show the two kissing, but only the suggestion of a kiss. Thus, as a result, Barrenger is shown to be merely sleazy, not criminal, and his sleaziness is tolerated (if discouraged) by the film crew.

This treatment of Barrenger's crimes highlights the problems with satires of Hollywood, and in turn the triumph of the Hollywood Dream. To shock the viewer – or reader, the author needs to present acts of such perversity that they would hardly qualify for viewing in a mainstream film, and if rendered on the page of a novel would become merely another example of Hollywood excess. The sexual activities of Hollywood types have gone hand in hand with Hollywood satires. In the 1930 novel *Queer People*, the protagonist, Whitey, works in a brothel that is frequented by many executives of Hollywood studios; in *Hollywood Cemetery*, Biddy is discovered having sex in a park; in *The Day of the Locust*, Faye Greener works as a prostitute; in Terry

Southern's novel *Blue Movie* (1973), famous actors are persuaded to act in a pornographic film – with a brother and sister performing a scene together; and in William Goldman's novel *Tinsel* (1979) a young studio executive takes after his father by using the casting couch – indeed having sex with women his father had once slept with.

The absence of shock and lack of a real corrective impulse in *State and Main* and Wagner's narratives reflects the change in American culture since the first satires of Hollywood in the 1930s. That society is not only not shocked, but now almost expects Hollywood stars to be embroiled in perverted activities, displays the triumph of the Hollywood Dream. When success is achieved purely for its own sake, then the need for traditional values such as a strong work ethic, or moral fibre are no longer required. Wagner's characters may be debauched, but their position relative to the actual film stars in the narrative shows a genial spirit towards the industry that is also betrayed in *State and Main*. In this sense, *State and Main* is less a satire of Hollywood than a satire of Hollywood's impact on American culture. As Boris Trbic writes, Mamet "criticizes the corrupt moviemaking industry, but also reveals the shallowness of the ostensible simplicity of rural America. The locals living on Main Street, USA are not much different from the Hollywood moguls" (2001).

Satires of Hollywood have become works that in general gently prod, yet have no danger of causing offence to anyone within the industry. With the studio system, and its secrecy-minded publicity department long gone, so is the veil of purity that Hollywood studios so longed to engender for their stars. Today, stars such as Angelina Jolie and Colin Farrell will talk openly about their sexuality. Moreover, many now survive scandals that in the past would have ruined their careers. As Donna Freydkin writes in *USA Today*, "the more gorgeous a star, the more blameless they

seem to people who are in awe of beauty they don't have themselves" (Freydkin 2003). One need only look at the ability of Hugh Grant to continue a successful career despite his indiscretion with a prostitute, or the lack of surprise at reports that Ben Affleck attended a strip club to see the death of ethical and moral prerequisites for Hollywood stars. In the past, these events would have needed to be 'hushed-up' by studio publicity departments, now they are openly acknowledged¹⁰⁹. The public's blasé attitude towards Hollywood stars' scandals is reflected in an article on the indiscretions of various actors in the Australian edition of *Empire* magazine. While listing the crimes of stars such as Winona Ryder, and Robert Downey Jr. they refer to actor Colin Farrell:

He may smoke, drink, swear like a trooper and have enough casual sex to give the Pope a heart attack, but Colin Farrell has never been arrested, never been to rehab (so far touch wood) and has never had a gun in anyone's face. Bad-boy? Pah, he's a Sunday driver. (Hewitt 71)

This complacency is coupled with a lack of actual criticism within many contemporary satires. It is difficult to determine just what Mamet, for example, intends the viewer to take from *State and Main*. He does not seem to hope Hollywood types will become less corrupt, for it is Price's and Messner's ability to corrupt Mackenzie that ensures the film is made, and Mamet would have us believe that the film is a worthy endeavour. Even White, although he wants to testify against Barrenger, does not complain when the charges are dropped – White still knows Barrenger is guilty, but this does not appear to disturb him. Thus all the viewer can take from Mamet's film is that Mamet is aware of the hypocrisies of Hollywood, and

¹⁰⁹ This is not to say that all stars' misdemeanours are revelled in. Infamously, in 1997 actor Eddie Murphy was caught by police with a transvestite prostitute in his car, which was explained to the press as a Good Samaritan act by Murphy. The head of 20th Century Fox studios at the time (who were producing Murphy's latest film *Dr. Doolittle*) alleged in the documentary *The Big Picture* (2002) that this explanation was the work of Murphy's publicists.

therefore he retains artistic and moral superiority, unlike the filmmakers in *State and Maine* who see no hypocrisy in their actions. But his culpability in making a film that lacks any bitterness towards its targets results in Mamet being in many aspects worse. He knows of the hypocrisy yet does nothing – the true satirist would not allow the audience to remain undisturbed by what they have seen.

* * *

Many contemporary Hollywood satires, like literature of the fin de siècle of the nineteenth century, revisit the themes of the past but fail to enlarge or invigorate them. Too many contemporary satirists are willing to give their characters happy endings that seek to support notions of goodness in Hollywood, and thus present it as an industry where the American Dream can come true. Other contemporary satires fail because they depict events which attempt to shock the reader, but which do not due to the numbers of satires, novels and tell-all memoirs written over the past seventy years. Since 1930, characters in Hollywood satires have gone from visiting brothels (*Queer People*), to watching pornographic films (*The Day of the Locust*), to participating in pornographic films (*Tinsel*), to covering up murders (*The Little Sister*), to committing murders (*The Player*, *Swimming with Sharks*). In both *Swimming with Sharks* and *The Player*, the murders committed by the protagonists lead to greater success at their studio. Having thus shown that the taking of a life is no impediment to success in Hollywood, any other crimes ignored or rewarded in satires are mere repetitions. The earliest satires of Hollywood desired to reveal the true nature of the industry; it was a nature the industry wished to be kept hidden. However so many satires and memoirs on the industry have since been written that the hidden nature is known by all.

Neither Mamet, Wagner nor any of the other contemporary satirists covered in this chapter seek to destabilise the industry. In Wagner's case, the evils of Hollywood

are accepted and used merely to show the impact on characters of chasing the Hollywood Dream. Like Mamet, he has no desire to subvert the industry, or even reform it. Rushfield at least does not depict Hollywood as a place where the American Dream triumphs – indeed, the one character in *On Spec* who is prepared to work to achieve his dream, screenwriter Stu Bluminvitz, is left floundering amidst the politics of the industry. However his satire, like Niccol's with *SI mOne*, lacks invective. The reader and viewer are not shocked by what Niccol or Rushfield tells us because it has been written and filmed before. The position of Hollywood as the Babylon of America is now taken as given. As a result, satires of the industry resemble morality plays. They have no wish to change the industry; they just wish to warn those who would become involved that they should not chase the Hollywood Dream. Indeed many contemporary satirists seem uncaring that the industry is based on artificiality and hypocrisy. In *State and Main*, despite the unethical behaviour exhibited by those involved in the production of *The Old Mill*, the film gets made. In many ways this is an allegory of Hollywood satires.

This leaves satire of the industry in a precarious position. Whereas many of the earliest satirists of Hollywood had no love for the industry, recent satirists are either filmmakers or screenwriters. As such their work attempts to combine an attack on what they perceive are the ills of the industry with a desire to highlight the ability for good to triumph. By trying to have it both ways, their satire fails to achieve any veracity. The repetition of themes and characters in satires over the last seventy years also highlights not only how little has changed in satire of the industry, but how little has changed in the industry itself. Which begs the question of how successful have been the satires of Hollywood. Satires since 1930 have attempted to reveal the hypocrisy of an industry which exudes glamour but which is unethical and at times

cruel. Yet the industry survives – indeed it flourishes. Satires of Hollywood also continue to flourish, as though they allow the industry to cleanse itself of any guilt. Similar to the “carnival” of Ancient Rome and medieval Europe where for a certain period of celebration the roles of servant and master were reversed, satires of Hollywood allow the artists to attack the executives. Crucially – especially in the case of film satires – the executives allow this and, if they foresee a profit from the endeavour, encourage it. Thus the satires actually reinforce the status quo rather than destabilise it¹¹⁰. In films such as *Bowfinger* and *State and Main*, filmmakers present the industry as amoral and artificial, and in doing so elevate themselves above such depths of behaviour. The satire is thus self-serving, and given the tendency for such filmmakers as Mamet and Martin to continue to direct or appear in standard Hollywood fare, it is an insincere exercise as well. Satire of Hollywood has become so ineffectual that one reviewer of *Still Holding* suggested “being mentioned in a new Bruce Wagner novel will become a Hollywood status symbol”(Homand 2003) – this is hardly indicative of a forceful attack on the industry.

The satire of *Mulholland Dr.* was successful because Lynch admits the industry and medium in which he works is false, and that attempting to find redeeming values in Hollywood is equally false. However, it is unlikely his work will change anyone’s view of Hollywood, just as *Sunset Blvd* has not stopped old stars being forgotten. But this is not because the satire is anodyne. Hollywood will not change, because, as Lynch believes, it is completely artificial. Stars will wish to be named in Wagner’s satires because Hollywood is immune to all satirical attacks. It is a fractured looking glass from which satire is refracted into a compliment. Stars might

¹¹⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and his World* (1965) refutes this argument of the carnival. He asserted the carnival was “a true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal”(10). My argument that the carnival is a “safety-valve” is that of the critics of Bakhtin’s thesis, such as Michael A. Bernstein, “When the Carnival Turns Bitter: Preliminary Reflection Upon the Abject Hero”(1986).

be named in a satire on the industry, but rather than be angered they are comforted that they are important enough to be named, even if it is to be ridiculed. As the industry's response to the satire of *The Truman Show* was to copy the formula and produce it for profit, so too have people in Hollywood embraced satires.

Satire has become in effect part of the simulacrum. It plays the role of critic, and allows the industry to appear imperfect, and thus plausible. No longer will the satirist need worry that he or she will 'never eat lunch in this town again', or be subjected to abuse as was Billy Wilder by Louis B Mayer. Satirists are welcomed and encouraged. Film companies have no qualms about producing films that parody or satirise other films they have produced; thus Miramax finances *Scary Movie* which parodies *Scream*, and Columbia Pictures finances *Not Another Teen Movie* which parodies *Can't Hardly Wait*.

Budd Schulberg wrote of *Queer People* that "when it was published in 1930 it was the sort of thing you would not dare bring into a motion picture studio unless you hid it in a brown wrapper and locked it in your middle desk drawer" ("Afterword to *Queer People*" 280). Now Bruce Wagner satirises the industry and insiders hope they are mentioned. This as much as anything displays the decline of the genre. Inside the simulacrum of Hollywood, all is embraced.

Conclusion

Woody Allen's 2002 film *Hollywood Ending* is in many respects an apt title for recent satires of Hollywood. The film includes many of the stereotypical characters of Hollywood satires – the financially driven studio executive, the artistic director who battles to have his art preserved, the seductive actress willing to do sexual favours to help her career. Allen's attack against Hollywood films and the industry which produces them is also typical of many previous Hollywood satires. The plot involves a once renowned film director, Val Waxman, who is given one last chance to resurrect his career. Waxman is against all that Hollywood stands for, but unfortunately on the day shooting is to begin he suffers a case of psychosomatic blindness which continues throughout the shooting. When production is completed, he regains his sight and discovers that the film is junk. Despite this, he triumphs over the Hollywood insiders (who have all been shown to be incompetent) by regaining the love of his ex-wife – now the fiancée of a Hollywood executive. *Hollywood Ending* however, is more a parody of Allen's supposed own position as Hollywood outsider, than a satire of Hollywood. It was a financial and critical failure that adds little to the canon of Hollywood satires.

Considering this film, it is tempting to finish a study of Hollywood satires by drawing a line and suggesting that an end has been reached in the genre. And when one examines the recent satires of Hollywood (such as *Hollywood Ending*), this does appear to be the case. Yet since the 1930s, Hollywood has delighted in making films about itself, and authors who have worked within or on the fringes of the industry have similarly enjoyed describing its workings. Given the nature of Hollywood as an industry in which the financial and artistic demands of filmmakers are often opposed,

it is inevitable that many of these works have been satirical. It would also be foolish to suggest that this will stop. Hollywood's position in America's (and the rest of the world's) culture ensures authors and filmmakers will continue to scrutinize its workings. The relevance of these future satires, however, remains in question.

Contemporary satirists of Hollywood, regardless of their medium, as a rule, do not despise the industry. Even Woody Allen, for so long held as a poster-boy of anti-Hollywood filmmaking, is as dependent upon the industry as is the ultimate Hollywood director Steven Spielberg. Indeed given that Allen currently is under contract with Spielberg's film company DreamWorks SKG, he is as 'inside' the industry as one could get. Similarly David Lynch may presciently depict the vicissitudes and falsity of life in Hollywood, however he remains willing to attend the great celebration of Hollywood – the annual Academy Awards – when he is nominated for Best Director. This is not to suggest a level of hypocrisy among such satirists, but to illustrate that satire of Hollywood is different from, for example, Orwell's satire of totalitarianism, or Swift's satire of the treatment of the Irish by their English 'protectors'. Even such satirists as Kaufmann and Hart, who firmly remained loyal to Broadway and the New York dramatic scene, received the benefits of their plays being adapted – often successfully – into film.

Satirists of Hollywood have always had a peculiar relationship with their subject. Those satirists of the Golden Years essentially satirised the industry as a defence of their working within it – the satires were a counter to the implication that they were whoring in a corrupt and amoral industry. Others since then have taken a less personal stance. Billy Wilder and Robert Altman, for example, attack aspects of the industry which they believe are detrimental to the art of film, but there is no sense that they believe working in film is a step down from novels or plays – it is their love

of film which drives their satires, and they desire to improve the industry rather than tear it down.

The persistent themes (though to varying degrees) in satires of Hollywood are, firstly, the corruption of those within the industry, secondly, the industry's desire for profit over art, and finally the belief that the industry is based on deception and artificiality. These have been so thoroughly pursued that it is also tempting to suggest that any future satires which focus on these aspects will lack relevance. To an extent, this is true. Yet just as contemporary politicians are not spared purely because politicians have been satirised for their greed and dishonesty since the time of Juvenal, so too is it to be expected that the 'crimes' of contemporary Hollywood insiders (whether studio executives, directors or actors) will attract satirical treatment. However, in order for the satire to remain pungent, the satirist must address more than just these 'crimes'. They need to examine (as have the satirists discussed in this thesis) the continuing impact of Hollywood on American culture and, in particular, the displacement of the American Dream by the Hollywood Dream.

This aspect has infused the significant works of satire in film and literature over the past seventy years. Whether to highlight the elusiveness of the American Dream, as do West, Fitzgerald and Chandler, or to display the illusion (and often sinister nature) of the Hollywood Dream – as do Vidal, Lynch and Altman, both dreams are central to satire of Hollywood. Similarly the parody of Hollywood films in spoofs and *The Simpsons* has depicted the portrayal of the American Dream in Hollywood films, and illustrated the gradual supplanting in American culture of the American Dream by the Hollywood Dream: that is, the change from a dream based on an ethic of hard work and entrepreneurial skill to one based on fame and success irrespective of effort. It is a change that has accompanied the shift in the industry's

attitude towards satires of itself. Once attacks on the industry would be dealt with by blackballing and career destruction, now they are welcomed – so long as they are profitable. Actors now flock to be involved in such productions, or desire to be mentioned in satirical novels of Hollywood, confident that such attacks will be viewed favourably by industry insiders and as examples of their integrity by viewers.

This study aimed to show that those satires which focussed on the artificiality of Hollywood have been the most effective in terms of examining the rise of the Hollywood Dream. Vidal, Wilder, Niccol and Lynch realised that as the Hollywood Dream is one without connection to the real world, any examination of the industry which perpetuates that dream must acknowledge this absence. Those recent satires which focus on the corruption of Hollywood, and present the Hollywood Dream as a corruption of the American Dream, fail not because such themes were articulated some seventy years earlier, but because they do not acknowledge the artificiality of the portrayal of the American Dream in Hollywood film and the artificiality of the Hollywood Dream itself. Such satires in effect cling to a belief that the American Dream continues to exist and that its ends are achievable for all.

In a world where television game shows are portrayed as “reality shows”, it is obvious that ‘reality’, when filtered through the Hollywood industry, has a very peculiar meaning. Those satires which recognise this are those which have remained – and will continue to remain – of interest. West’s observations of fake housing, and the delusions behind Faye Greener’s aspirations to become a star; Vidal’s depiction of people assuming the identities of film stars; Tolkin’s noting the need to change one’s identity to be successful in Hollywood; Lynch’s blending of dream and reality; and Wilder’s depiction of the dangers of living in an artificial world; these are the satires that continue to be important. They are important not only because of their portrayal

of Hollywood, but because they recognise that if Hollywood is corrupt, it is so because it is the nature of the industry. These satirists believe that when an industry is as concerned with deception and artificiality as is Hollywood, it is foolish to expect the morals and ethics displayed by those within the industry will be anything other than artificial depictions of what people expect. Indeed, to do so is to be blind to the nature of the industry.

The study of Hollywood satires is important because not only do such satires represent the work of some of the most significant filmmakers and authors of the last seventy years, but because to satirise Hollywood is to satirise American culture. Hollywood's influence on the American way of life is now all-encompassing. In *The Day of the Locust*, Homer Simpson was ignorant of the industry because he came from 'small-town America'; by contrast, in *State and Main*, the citizens of Waterford are as aware of the financial dealings of Hollywood as are the members of the film crew. In *The Simpsons*, so infused by Hollywood have many of the characters become, that memories of their own life are in fact memories of films. So long as Hollywood continues to influence American (and, of course, the world's) culture, satires on the industry will be written, and the study of such satires will continue to reveal the changing view authors and filmmakers have of not only the industry, but America itself.

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Airport. Screenplay by George Seaton. Dir. George Seaton. Universal Pictures, 1970.

Aladdin. Screenplay by Roger Allers, et al. Dir. Ron Clements, and John Musker. Buena Vista Pictures, 1992.

American Beauty. Screenplay by Alan Ball. Dir. Sam Mendes. DreamWorks, 1999.

American Graffiti. Screenplay by George Lucas, Gloria Katz, and Willard Huyck. Dir. George Lucas. MCA/Universal Pictures, 1973.

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Bazlen, Brigid, perf. *King of Kings*. Screenplay by Philip Yordan. Dir. Nicholas Ray. MGM, 1961.

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The Big Picture. Screenplay by Michael Varhol, Christopher Guest, and Michael McKean. Dir. Christopher Guest. Columbia Pictures, 1989.

The Big Picture. Dir. Peter Friedman. Strange Attractions, 2002.

The Big Sleep. Screenplay by William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett, and Jules Furthman. Dir. Howard Hawks. Warner Bros., 1946.

Blackboard Jungle. Screenplay by Richard Brooks. Dir. Richard Brooks. MGM, 1955.

Blazing Saddles. Screenplay by Andrew Bergman, et al. Dir. Mel Brooks. Warner Bros., 1974.

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Bowfinger. Screenplay by Steve Martin. Dir. Frank Oz. MCA/Universal Pictures, 1999.

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Chinatown. Screenplay by Robert Towne. Dir. Roman Polanski. Paramount Pictures, 1974.

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Con Air. Screenplay by Scott Rosenberg. Dir. Simon West. Buena Vista Pictures, 1997.

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The Day of the Locust. Screenplay by Waldo Salt. Dir. John Schlesinger. Paramount Pictures, 1974.

Diner. Screenplay by Barry Levinson. Dir. Barry Levinson. MGM, 1982.

The Donna Reed Show. Created by William Roberts. Perf. Donna Reed. American Broadcasting Company, 1958-1966.

Double Indemnity. Screenplay by Raymond Chandler, and Billy Wilder. Dir. Billy Wilder. Paramount Pictures, 1944.

Driving Miss Daisy. Screenplay by Alfred Uhry. Dir. Bruce Beresford. Warner Bros., 1989.

E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial. Screenplay by Melissa Mathison. Dir. Stephen Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1982.

Ed TV. Screenplay by Lowell Ganz, and Babaloo Mandel. Dir. Ron Howard. Universal Pictures, 1999.

Fatal Attraction. Screenplay by James Dearden, and Nicholas Meyer. Dir. Adrian Lyne. Paramount Pictures, 1987.

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The Flintstones. Created by Joseph Barbera, and William Hanna. Columbia Pictures Television, 1960-1966.

Friends. Created by David Crane, and Marta Kauffman. NBC, 1994-2004.

Gandhi. Screenplay by John Briley. Dir. Richard Attenborough. Columbia Pictures, 1982.

Gattaca. Screenplay by Andrew Niccol. Dir. Andrew Niccol. Columbia Pictures, 1997.

Get Shorty. Screenplay by Scott Frank. Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld. Perf. John Travolta, and Danny DeVito. MGM, 1995.

Gidget. Screenplay by Gabrielle Upton. Dir. Paul Wendkoss. Columbia Pictures, 1959.

Gigli. Screenplay by Martin Brest. Dir. Martin Brest. Columbia Pictures, 2003.

Gilda. Screenplay by Jo Eisinger. Dir. Charles Vidor. Perf. Rita Hayworth. Columbia Pictures, 1946.

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Happy Days. Created by Garry Marshall. American Broadcasting Corporation, 1974-1984.

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Hollywood Ending. Screenplay by Woody Allen. Dir. Woody Allen. DreamWorks, 2002.

The Honeymooners. Created by Herbert Finn, et al. Paramount Television, 1955-1956.

Hoop Dreams. Screenplay by Steve James, and Frederick Marx. Dir. Steve James. Fine Line Features, 1994.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas. Screenplay by Jeffrey Price. Dir. Ron Howard. MCA/Universal Pictures, 2000.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Screenplay by Bruno Frank, and Sonya Levien. Dir. William Dieterle. RKO Radio Pictures Inc., 1939.

I Know What You Did Last Summer. Screenplay by Kevin Williamson. Dir. Jim Gillespie. Columbia Pictures, 1997.

I Love Lucy. Created by Jess Oppenheimer. Perf. Lucille Ball. CBS Television, 1951-1957.

It Happened One Night. Screenplay by Robert Riskin. Dir. Frank Capra. Columbia Pictures, 1934.

It's a Wonderful Life. Screenplay by Francis Goodrich, Albert Hackett, and Frank Capra. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. Donna Reed, and H.B. Warner. RKO Radio Pictures Inc., 1946.

Jaws. Screenplay by Peter Benchley, and Carl Gottlieb. Dir. Stephen Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1975.

The Jazz Singer. Screenplay by Alfred A. Cohn, and Jack Jarmuth. Dir. Alan Crosland. Warner Bros., 1927.

Just Shoot Me. Created by Steven Levitan. NBC, 1997-2003.

La Regle Du Jeu (The Rules of the Game). Screenplay by Jean Renoir, and Carl Koch.

Dir. Jean Renoir. Cine Classics Inc., 1939.

Leave It to Beaver. Created by Bob Mosher. CBS (1957-1958), American

Broadcasting Corporation (1958-1963), 1957-1963.

Lester, Ron, perf. *Varsity Blues*. Screenplay by Peter W. Iliff. Dir. Brian Robbins.

Paramount Pictures, 1999.

The Lion King. Screenplay by Irene Mecchi, Jonathon Ronerts, and Linda

Woolverton. Dir. Roger Allers, and Rob Minkoff. Buena Vista Pictures, 1994.

The Lost Weekend. Screenplay by Charles Brackett, and Billy Wilder. Dir. Billy

Wilder. Paramount Pictures, 1945.

Lynch, David, dir. *Lost Highway*. Screenplay by David Lynch, and Barry Gifford.

October Films, 1997.

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New Line Cinema, 1992.

Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior. Screenplay by Terry Hayes, George Miller, and Brian

Hannant. Dir. George Miller. Perf. Mel Gibson. Warner Bros., 1981.

The Magnificent Ambersons. Screenplay by Orson Welles. Dir. Orson Welles. RKO

Radio Pictures Inc., 1942.

The Maltese Falcon. Screenplay by John Huston. Dir. John Huston. Perf. Humphrey

Bogart. Warner Bros., 1941.

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Goldbeck. Dir. John Ford. Paramount Pictures, 1962.

Married... With Children. Created by Ron Leavitt, and Michael G Moyer. Fox

Network, 1987-1997.

Meet John Doe. Screenplay by Robert Riskin. Dir. Frank Capra. Warner Bros., 1941.

Memento. Screenplay by Christopher Nolan. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Newmarket Film Group, 2000.

Monsters, Inc. Screenplay by Andrew Stanton, et al. Dir. Peter Doctor, David Silverman, and Lee Unkrich. Buena Vista Pictures, 2001.

Montez, Maria, perf. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Screenplay by Edmund L Hartmann. Dir. Arthur Lubin. Universal Pictures, 1944.

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---. *Siren of Atlantis*. Screenplay by Robert Lax, and Rowland Leigh. Dir. Gregg C. Tallas. United Artists, 1949.

Monty Python's Flying Circus. Created by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin. BBC, 1969-1974.

Mr Deeds Goes to Town. Screenplay by Robert Riskin. Dir. Frank Capra. Columbia Pictures, 1936.

Mr Smith Goes to Washington. Screenplay by Sidney Buchman. Dir. Frank Capra. Columbia Pictures, 1939.

Mulholland Dr. Screenplay by David Lynch. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Naomi Watts. Universal Pictures, 2001.

Murder, My Sweet. Screenplay by John Paxton. Dir. Edward Dmytryk. RKO Pictures Inc., 1944.

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Murphy Brown. Created by Diane English. CBS Television, 1988-1998.

My Darling Clementine. Screenplay by Samuel G. Engel, and Sam Hellman. Dir. John Ford. 20th Century Fox, 1946.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding. Screenplay by Nia Vardalos. Dir. Joel Zwick. IFC Films, 2002.

Network. Screenplay by Paddy Chayefsky. Dir. Sidney Lumet. MGM and United Artists, 1976.

Never Been Kissed. Screenplay by Abby Kohn, and Marc Silverstein. Dir. Raja Gosnell. 20th Century Fox, 1999.

Not Another Teen Movie. Screenplay by Michael G. Bender, et al. Dir. Joe Gallen. Perf. Ron Lester, and Jamie Pressly. Columbia Pictures, 2001.

An Officer and a Gentleman. Screenplay by Douglas Day Stewart. Dir. Taylor Hackford. Paramount Pictures, 1982.

Pacino, Al, perf. *Scarface*. Screenplay by Oliver Stone. Dir. Brian De Palmer. Universal Pictures, 1983.

Patriot Games. Screenplay by Peter W. Iliff, and Donald Stewart. Dir. Philip Noyce. Paramount Pictures, 1992.

Patton. Screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola, and Edmund H. North. Dir. Franklin J Schaffner. 20th Century Fox, 1970.

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl. Screenplay by Ted Elliot, and Terry Rossio. Dir. Gore Verbinski. Buena Vista Pictures, 2003.

The Pit and the Pendulum. Dir. Alice Guy. 1913.

The Player. Screenplay by Michael Tolkin. Dir. Robert Altman. Fine Line Features, 1992.

Pleasantville. Screenplay by Gary Ross. Dir. Gary Ross. New Line Cinema, 1998.

Pretty in Pink. Screenplay by John Hughes. Dir. Howard Deutch. Perf. Molly Ringwald. Paramount Pictures, 1986.

Psycho. Screenplay by Joseph Stefano. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1960.

Pulp Fiction. Screenplay by Quentin Tarantino, and Roger Avary. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Films, 1994.

The Real World. Created by Mary-Ellis Bunim, and Jonathon Murray. MTV, 1992-.

Rebel Without a Cause. Screenplay by Nicholas Ray, Irving Schulman, and Stewart Stern. Dir. Nicholas Ray. Warner Bros., 1955.

Risky Business. Screenplay by Paul Brickman. Dir. Paul Brickman. Warner Bros., 1983.

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Scary Movie 2. Screenplay by Shawn Wayans, et al. Dir. Keenen Ivory Wayans. Dimension Films, 2001.

Scary Movie 3. Screenplay by Craig Mazin, and Pat Proft. Dir. David Zucker. Perf. Pamela Anderson, and Jenny McCarthy. Dimension Films, 2003.

Scream. Screenplay by Kevin Williamson. Dir. Wes Craven. Dimension Films, 1996.

Seinfeld. Created by Larry David, and Jerry Seinfeld. Castle Rock Entertainment, 1990-1998.

Shane. Screenplay by Jack Shaefer, and A.B. Guthrie Jr. Dir. George Stevens. Paramount Pictures, 1953.

Sheen, Charlie, perf. *Hot Shots! Part Deux*. Screenplay by Jim Abrahams, and Pat Proft. Dir. Jim Abrahams. 20th Century Fox, 1993.

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Sherlock Holmes in the Great Murder Mystery. Crescent Film Manufacturing Co.,
1908.

She's All That. Screenplay by R. Lee Flemming. Dir. Robert Iscove. Miramax Films,
1999.

Shipwrecked. RDF Television, 2000.

Shrek. Screenplay by Ted Elliott, et al. Dir. Andrew Adamson, and Vicky Jenson.
DreamWorks, 2001.

Shrek 2. Screenplay by Andrew Adamson, et al. Dir. Andrew Adamson, Kelly
Asbury, and Conrad Vernon. DreamWorks, 2004.

Shriek If You Know What I Did Last Friday the 13th. Screenplay by Sue Bailey, and
Joe Nelms. Dir. John Blanchard. USA Network. Inc, 2000.

Silence of the Lambs. Screenplay by Ted Tally. Dir. Jonathon Demme. Orion Pictures
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The Simpsons. Created by Matt Groening. 20th Century Fox Television, 1989 -.

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2002.

Singin' in the Rain. Screenplay by Betty Comdem, and Adolph Green. Dir. Stanley
Donan, and Gene Kelly. MGM, 1952.

Sixteen Candles. Screenplay by John Hughes. Dir. John Hughes. Perf. Molly
Ringwald. MCA/Universal Pictures, 1984.

The Sixth Sense. Screenplay by M. Night Shyamalan. Dir. M. Night Shyamalan.
Buena Vista Pictures, 1999.

South Park. Created by Trey Parker, and Matt Stone. Comedy Central, 1997-.

South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut. Screenplay by Trey Parker, Matt Stone, and
Pam Brady. Dir. Trey Parker. Paramount Pictures, 1999.

Spider-Man. Screenplay by David Koepp. Dir. Sam Raimi. Columbia Pictures, 2002.

Spider-Man 2. Screenplay by Alvin Sargent. Dir. Sam Raimi. Columbia Pictures, 2004.

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Splendor in the Grass. Screenplay by William Inge. Dir. Elia Kazan. Warner Bros., 1961.

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Sullivan's Travels. Screenplay by Preston Sturges. Dir. Preston Sturges. Paramount Pictures, 1941.

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Survivor. Created by Charlie Parsons. CBS Television, 2000.

Swimming with Sharks. Screenplay by George Huang. Dir. George Huang. Tri Mark Pictures, 1994.

Temptation Island. 20th Century Fox Television, 2001.

10 Things I Hate About You. Screenplay by Karen McCullah Lutz, and Kirsten Smith. Dir. Gil Junger. Buena Vista Pictures, 1999.

The Terminator. Screenplay by James Cameron, and Gale Anne Hurd. Dir. James Cameron. Orion Pictures, 1984.

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There's Something About Miriam. British Sky Broadcasting, 2004.

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Perf. Dustin Hoffman. New Line Cinema, 1997.

Wall Street. Screenplay by Oliver Stone, and Stanley Weiser. Dir. Oliver Stone. Perf.
Michael Douglas, and Charlie Sheen. 20th Century Fox, 1987.

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Columbia Pictures, 1937.

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Buena Vista Pictures, 1998.

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Olivera. Fox Network, 2002.

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Columbia Pictures, 1938.

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20th Century Fox, 1974.

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