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The Fallacy of Cultural Authenticity:
The Simulacra and Cultural Appropriation in the Free Market through the Lens of
Literature

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Introduction:

David Lodge writes in *Paradise News* that, “It’s is no coincidence that tourism arose just as religion went into decline. It’s the new opium of the people, and must be exposed as such” (64). This assertion (although admittedly hyperbolic) illustrates the ever-increasing need that people have to connect with culture. Many inherently believe that an authentic connection to culture (both their own and others’) will ‘make whole’ their fragmented, postmodern identity; a cultural connection will provide a spiritual transcendence and obliterate the existential void, finally making them a fully self-actualized individuals. However, as Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard assert, culture and art are inevitably corrupted by the free market rather than propagated by it; in accordance with ‘the profit motive’, the free market proliferates increasingly diluted variations (i.e. simulacra) of culture/art in which any genuine form of it is made irretrievable. As Jameson argues, the image of the commodity, such as its brand name or logo, becomes the commodity itself. The free market encourages this because it is easier to market the signifiers (i.e. the brand name, icon, etc.) rather than the signified; therefore, the image eventually eclipses the signified. Therefore, an individual seeking cultural authenticity often experiences a further fragmentation of the self.

This work is composed of three sections and advances this argument, applying this theoretical framework to four prominent modern and postmodern novels. (While the influence of late capitalism is a ubiquitous subject in postmodern literary criticism, I believe the genesis of many of these concepts and phenomena typically associated with postmodernism can be seen in modernist works.) The first section, “The Individual’s Pursuit of Cultural Authenticity Music and Materialism in E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* and

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*," analyzes the psychological upon individuals attempting to (re)connect to their own culture(s). The second section, "Buying' Into Culture; The Effect of Commoditization on The Cultural Artifact in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*," discusses the effects on a person seeking a true cultural experience which is not their own and examines how cultural artifacts become decontextualized due to the free market's influence. The third and final section, "Selling Experience: The Fallacy of Memory & the Influence of Late Capitalism on the Cultural Experience in Julian Barnes' *England, England*," examines capitalism's effect on cultural experience when culture becomes commoditized and subjected to the profit motive.

Section I will begin by juxtaposing the protagonists in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*. Although these works are representative of different periods of literature – the latter being postmodern, and the former belonging to the modernist era – they both concern the pursuit of cultural authenticity and explore the evolution of the musical genres of jazz and ragtime (a precursor of jazz). Historically, and within each novel, these musical genres traditionally associated with black culture are effectively hijacked by white culture. Authentic black culture being imitated by white society carries adverse sociological consequences; these harmful effects can be seen in the actions and psyches of the black protagonists from both of these novels as they descend into a kind of madness. In accordance with modernism's anxiety about increasing uncertainty in the world, Helga struggles to preserve the purity of her culture in an increasingly subjective modern world, whereas Doctorow's tragic hero, Coalhouse, discards ragtime as a vestige of black authenticity and instead places his faith in the Ford Model-T – a car which became a national symbol once virtually interchangeable with the American Dream. However, in line

with postmodernist sensibilities, Coalhouse places an absurd amount of faith in this national symbol; he believes this will enable him to achieve personal autonomy and unify his black identity, but it eventually devolves into a tragically arbitrary object and loses all cultural significance.

After analyzing how the protagonists in *Ragtime* and *Quicksand* fail to adapt to their multicultural identities and become alienated from society, I will explore the effects, on both the individual and societal levels, when a person tries to conjoin with a culture that is not his own. In Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* Tom Outland, a Caucasian, finds spiritual enlightenment through Native American culture when he discovers a Mesa full of cultural artifacts of a long forgotten tribe. When he finally convinces those around him of the Mesa's value, it is sold off piecemeal. The culture is commoditized under white society. Tom Outland objects to how the various cultural artifacts are 'refined' and further distanced from their original/authentic state. I will analyze the phenomenon of cultural artifacts being altered into whatever state the free market demands rather than them being preserved within their original cultural context. Furthermore, this commodification of Indian culture has a profoundly devastating effect on Tom Outland because he makes the mistake of misidentifying Indian culture for his own; therefore, he is unable to recover when he sees it sold off piecemeal. In parallel with the culture of the mesa becoming fragmented, so is his identity.

Additionally, *The Professor's House's* title character, Godfrey St. Peter, dedicates his life to a culture that is not his own; the professor achieves academic fame through the publication of various prolix volumes concerning Spanish history. Like the majority of the characters being studied in this work, St. Peter has an existential crisis when he realizes

that his quest to find the truth behind a culture has obscured his individual identity. I will apply Jean-Paul Sartre's assertions from *Being & Nothingness* about how an individual's identity can become institutionalized, and completely eclipsed by his chosen career. This is especially true of St. Peter, as whenever he is not forced to discuss or write about Spanish history, he reflects on what appears to be his most sacred memory of a lake house from his childhood. This is not surprising when one thinks about how he has made a living by synthesizing cultural experiences – none of which he experienced first-hand. Therefore, what remains the most authentic moment of his life – the lake house – lays behind the boundaries of adulthood before he identified himself as a Historian, an arbiter of cultural knowledge and of events he has never directly experienced.

My final section focuses on Julian Barnes' *England, England*. Rather than exploring the psychological effect on the individual who attempts to achieve cultural authenticity, this text offers a macroeconomic lens and looks at what effect this perpetual recreation of original cultural artifacts has on society as a whole. In this novel an entrepreneur decides that tourists would like to see all of the major attractions of England in one day and in one place, rather than having to travel to various destination in the country. Therefore, he recreates replicas of all of the major historical landmarks, producing the illusion of cultural authenticity. This text is an ideal proving ground for Fredric Jameson's theories: the novel highlights the desire the free market has for accessing culture in the most instantaneous way; many would rather see replicas of major historical landmarks, musical productions, cultural art, and artifacts in a few hours rather than having to invest several weeks to see the original products. Many people attempt to

become 'citizens of the world' by connecting to the multitude of cultures in the most instantaneous and superficial way possible.

My argument's final conclusion is that this cultural 'hijacking', incentivized by the capitalist model, creates the impossibility of reconnecting with genuine culture. This need to instantaneously access culture, as these texts show, results in the proliferation of simulacra. We are distanced from culture with every new model, simulation and artifact produced until the culture itself becomes obscured by models of the very artifacts that were meant to preserve it.

I. The Individual's Pursuit of Cultural Authenticity: Music and Materialism in E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, although belonging to, and emblematic of, different literary periods, are both concerned with Black American protagonists who attempt to unify their multicultural fragmented identities by exploring the musical genres of jazz and ragtime respectively. Additionally, in order to meet the more pragmatic needs of social autonomy within racist societies, they both court materialism and falsely believe material wealth to be interchangeable with social mobility.

Historically, and within each novel, these musical genres traditionally associated with black culture are effectively hijacked by white culture mainly because of economic incentives to do so. Because the musicality of the jazz movement is removed from its original cultural context, the novels' protagonists fail to connect to anything organic – only synthetic reproductions – which causes them severe psychological distress. Demonstrating a slow descent into uncertainty about grand narratives of (i.e. culture, religion, gender, etc.), an uncertainty that is archetypal of the Modernist movement, *Quicksand's* protagonist, Helga, attempts to find one foundational aspect of her culture on which she will base her identity. However, she fails because cultural experiences are not static and are even put in a more volatile state due to an influx of black culture pantomimed experiences in the marketplace.

Contrastingly, Doctorow's tragic hero, Coalhouse Walker Jr., discards ragtime as a vestige of black authenticity before the novel begins, realizing that it has been corrupted by the influx of the vaudevillian versions of ragtime, and he instead places his faith in the Ford

Model-T. He believes he will achieve self-actualization and success through embracing this national symbol that is often tethered to the American Dream. The car is even accompanied by the song “Wheels of Success” throughout the musical adaptation of *Ragtime*; in both the novel and musical, it is a blatant symbol for success and the American Dream. He believes that the Model-T will allot him the social mobility necessary to overcome racism that governs part of his existence.

However, Coalhouse’s reverence for the Ford Model-T is his undoing; he worships a car that achieves mass success because of the interchangeability of its parts (leading to easier manufacturing and repair). He fails to recognize that the sacredness and material value of an object is usually based on how few productions of any given product there are. When he fails to recognize the car as simply a *symbol* for the American Dream and believes the car to be what Kant would call the ‘Ding an sich’ (the-thing-in-itself), he cannot fully recover his sanity when the car is vandalized.

This is a problem shared in 20th century life and among many of the characters investigated in this work: often when a cultural ‘artifact’ is symbolic of a larger cultural truth, the cultural truth eventually *becomes* the artifact. As Baudrillard would have it, the replica supersedes the real, and when this artifact is broken or changed, so is the cultural truth. This becomes even more apparent when in each of these works the protagonists turn to materialism as a replacement for cultural authenticity, or misrecognize it as such. It is this cultural ‘hijacking’, and the impossibility of reconnecting with genuine black culture, that finally propels each character into his/her final self-destructive act.

Music Framing Narrative

As a necessary preface to this argument, it is important to first discuss how central the subject of music is to each novel; critics argue that music is so prevalent in each work that music is ultimately what structures the novels themselves. E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* is a reimagining of the 1920's. As many critics observe, the musical genre of ragtime acts as the novel's central metaphor. A widely accepted interpretation of this metaphor is aptly paraphrased in Busby's essay, "E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* and the Dialectics of Change"; he writes, "Doctorow uses ragtime music as a metaphor for the struggle between stability and change. The basis for ragtime music is the tension between the restrained, ordered rhythm played by the left hand and the free flowing syncopation by the right" (177). The novel is written in this same mode; Doctorow entangles well-known historical events (the left-hand) with thematic improvisations and speculations on the time period (the right-hand). A comic example of this improvised historical truth is when Freud and Jung take a ride in the Tunnel of Love together (38). Although this interpretation of the novel's central metaphor is valid, I will also explore how Jean Baudrillard's philosophical positions allow for a reinterpretation of *Ragtime's* narrative frame and of the novel's central metaphor.

Similarly, in her work, "Structure Would *Equal* Meaning": Blues and Jazz Aesthetics in the Fiction of Nella Larsen", Lori Harrison-Kahan argues that *Quicksand* thematically adheres to the structure of blues and jazz; she writes, "Set in the South, the opening of *Quicksand* uses the motifs of rural blues to configure Helga's plight. As Helga migrates North first to Chicago and then to Harlem, the pace of the text shifts from the

slower, lowdown sound of the blues to the fast-paced, up-tempo of jazz” (281). As indicated, in the beginning of the novel Helga lists many grievances of her life and teaching career at Naxos, similar to a blues song. I argue that the music she is exposed to in Chicago and Harlem not only reflects the tempo of her life and therefore the text, as Harrison-Kahan asserts, but that Helga’s movements in the novel are most often in direct response to the music that surrounds her; music is the motivating force behind this novel’s plot.

The Pursuit of Cultural Authenticity & “A Right to Sing The Blues”

Coalhouse Walker Jr. from Doctorow’s *Ragtime* and Helga from Larsen’s *Quicksand* attempt to utilize music as a way to satisfy their aspiration of obtaining a meaningful, successful life while maintaining cultural authenticity. However, this investment in music ultimately fails them and contributes to each of their respective psychological breaks. Why music fails them as a means to this ideal life can be most aptly understood through Jean Baudrillard’s philosophical positions on the evolution of art and music, and Jeffery Melnick’s book concerning society’s adoption of blues, jazz, and ragtime entitled, *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews and American Popular Song*.

As previously stated, the musical genre of ragtime acts as *Ragtime*’s central metaphor and is the structuring force behind this work. However, Brian Roberts, in his piece, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jewish Identity: Fleshing out Ragtime as the Central Metaphor in E. L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime*”, observe that there are two versions of the musical genre ragtime. The original genre emerged as a precursor to Jazz and was mainly developed and pioneered by the black community, and the more recent version is a

caricature exemplified in vaudevillian movies (Roberts 248-50). The novel notes, through the conversation between Father and the African-American musician, Coalhouse Walker Jr., that the latter version of the genre is now exclusively played by whites. Doctorow writes:

Father was not knowledgeable in music. His taste ran to Carrie Jacobs Bond. He thought Negro music had to have smiling and cakewalking. Do you know of any coon songs? he said. He did not intend to be rude – coon songs was what they were called. But the pianist responded with a tense shake of the head. Coon songs are made for minstrel shows, he said. White men sing them in blackface. (160)

Coalhouse does play two of Scott Joplin's ragtime pieces preceding this passage, but refuses to play the faster-paced, melodic version of the genre. Many scholars examine these two variations of the genre to illustrate the racial relations depicted in the novel, as well as in the 1920's as a whole. Roberts paraphrases Melnick's argument that the white community's need to "act black", as seen with the evolution of ragtime, is based on a need for them to distance themselves from the black community; in demonstrating their *need* to utilize blackface in performance art, it illuminates their inherent whiteness and 'racial health' (Roberts 248).

Melnick further explores the effect of this need to 'act black' and discusses how Jewish culture musically emulated and infringed upon black culture:

The subtle performance of Jewishness along with (and/or within) Blackness comes clear in a comment Fanny Brice made in the 1930's about the ragtime and "coon" songs she had specialized in earlier in her career. According to Brice, even as she sang these "Black" songs in the appropriate dialect, she embroidered

the vocal exhibition with “grotesque Yiddish steps”.[...] With this single presentation, then, Brice was able to suggest an important shift which had taken place in vaudeville, whereby comic Jews had come to displace the ubiquitous “coon.” (109)

This passage from Melnick shows why Coalhouse was so quick to dismiss Father’s request to play mainstream ragtime; it has been taken from the black community and mutilated beyond recognition. It is no longer a vestige for his cultural authenticity, but its continued existence and success is a constant reminder of what was taken from him. This is why he must find validation through other means.

As explained, many critics assert that the musical genre of ragtime clearly illustrates how Doctorow challenges, and even at times ‘thumbs his nose’ at, the concept of historical objectivity (the assertion that we can arrive at an absolute truth of a given historical period by continually revisiting and revising its historical narrative) by playfully interweaving ‘accepted’ histories with potential/improvised ones. By showing how the genre is utilized by the Jewish and black communities, the novel also comments on the racial tensions of the time. While these interpretations of the novel’s central metaphor are valid, they are an oversimplification (and have been explored *ad nauseum*). I argue that Doctorow provides us a new philosophical lens, most closely associated with Jean Baudrillard’s theories, through which we can interpret the novel as well as reality as a whole. How ragtime is employed in the novel shows us that history is imperfectly cyclical; past models and formulations inevitably comprise the present, but the past is something the present can never objectively understand or authentically emulate – thus interfering with our ability to experience culture organically. Therefore, the present lacks

authenticity; it is a superficial imitator of the past. Similarly, culture is always evolving similar to history, and it is therefore elusive; Coalhouse and Helga can never access it in its organic form because they are surrounded by imitations. This illusory fate of authentic culture is clearly demonstrated in the growth of ragtime and the symbolic significance of Coalhouse's Ford Model-T.

Relevant to ragtime's evolution as a genre, Jean Baudrillard asserts in his work, *Simulacra & Simulation*, that:

People have the desire to take everything, to pillage everything, to swallow everything, to manipulate everything. Seeing, deciphering, learning does not touch them. The only massive effect is that of manipulation. The organizers (and the artists and intellectuals) are frightened by this uncontrollable watchfulness, because they never count on anything but the apprenticeship of the masses to the *spectacle* of culture. They never count on this active, destructive fascination, a brutal and original response to the gift of an incomprehensible culture, an attraction that has all the characteristics of breaking and entering and of the violation of a sanctuary. (69-70)

Here Baudrillard asserts that humanity is not content simply observing culture or its respective artifacts; we need to make our mark on it and exercise our influence over it. This is in effect what happens with ragtime; people need to continually re-represent it until it is removed from its original effects and becomes a hyperbolic, fetishized version of its former self – the sanctuary is desecrated. This is why Coalhouse is unable to fulfill Father's request to play ragtime; the genre of ragtime has been manipulated through re-representations and has become violated and unrecognizable.

In his essay, “The Musical World of Doctorow’s *Ragtime*,” Brendt Ostendorf further reflects on how the genre continually distances itself from its original conception; he writes, “The success of the musical score of the film *The Sting* restored ragtime to the popular market and expanded its contemporary audience considerably. However, it also helped increase the distance from historical ragtime and to obscure further the role of its creators” (78). Coalhouse becomes alienated from this genre because it has been saturated with imitations; these imitations have absorbed the original version. Through the novel’s title, Doctorow demonstrates the impossibility of objective historical knowledge. Even this one signifier, ragtime, carries with it a multitude of signifieds; in referring to both the musical genre, as well as the time period, it paradoxically becomes all things to all people. When reading the nostalgia-evoking title, many people conjure the original movement, while others recall the vaudevillian version. With this one word, Doctorow confronts us with our own bias and subjective experiences; and perhaps it is this subjectivity that partly prevents Helga Crane and Coalhouse Walker Jr. from being self-actualized individuals. If culture cannot be agreed upon by those to whom it would seem to belong to, how can its categorical existence be achieved?

Accepting Materialism & “The Wheels of Success”

Christopher Morris, in his piece “Illusions of Demystification in *Ragtime*”, notes that Coalhouse is the only character that achieves a true demystification. Morris argues that the characters’ learning in *Ragtime* is illusory; when most characters ‘learn’ they only replace their previous delusions with further delusions. Their naiveté is never transcended, only

transferred to another idea/theory (67-9). Morris recalls how Houdini attempts to transcend death by escaping the most confining, overpowering situations (i.e. prison, a coffin, etc.). However, when he discards the idea that this will somehow make him immune to death, he attempts to discover someone who can communicate to the dead – thus replacing one delusion with another (70-1). This cultural ‘trading’ is what Coalhouse and Helga carry out within their respective narratives and what many others continue to perpetuate in society as a whole.

In contrast to Helga, Coalhouse abandons his attachments to ragtime before the novel begins, and attempts to achieve authenticity by reestablishing his relationship with his estranged girlfriend, Sarah; she is also the mother of his son. His car, a Ford Model-T, grants him the necessary means to continue his career as a musician and visit Sarah and his son in New Rochelle, and in this way, it is indicative of the social mobility allotted to him. His ‘black’ music does not seem to validate his life, but is rather a means to this authentic life. Although ragtime has been taken from him, he attempts to gain cultural authenticity through pursuing the (white) American Dream of financial success and a unified family. He accepts materialism, seen through his relationship with his Model-T, as a means to transcend the racist attitudes he is subjected to.

However, one day Coalhouse is told by a few volunteer firemen that he must pay ‘a toll’ before he can continue his commute to New York City. Coalhouse attempts to circumvent this unauthorized, improvised barrier, but fails. He enlists the help of two young, black gentlemen to watch his car so that he may inform the proper authorities about this fictitious toll that is being enforced by the volunteer firemen. When his complaint remains unrecognized by a nearby policeman, he returns to his car, only to find it

desecrated. It has been taken off-road, mangled and mutilated; inside the car Coalhouse discovers an amassment of human excrement (174-80).

As stated, The Ford Model-T is widely known to be an important national symbol for the American Dream. Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* adeptly summarizes part of the significance that this automobile carries in America's history; Steinbeck writes:

Someone should write an erudite essay on the moral, physical, and esthetic effect of the Model T Ford on the American Nation. Two generations of Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris, about the planetary system of gears than the solar system of stars. With the Model T, part of the concept of private property disappeared. Pliers ceased to be privately owned and a tire pump belonged to the last man that had picked it up. Most of the babies of the period were conceived in a Model T Fords and not a few were born in them. The theory of Anglo Saxon home became so warped it never quite recovered. (61)

The car is the vehicle required for him to reconstitute his relationship with his girlfriend, Sarah, and son and to attain a secure place in the predominantly Anglo Saxon society of this era. The quasi-racist Anglo Saxon family that his girlfriend is currently living with is less apprehensive to invite him for tea when they see the resilient shine of the car (155-6). The Model-T also enables him to travel to his gigs. Family and financial success are the two main components of the American Dream, and the car allows him to pursue both of these elements. In pillaging the car, the firemen also deny Coalhouse a reasonable chance to attain the American Dream. Even *Cannery Row's* somewhat lewd assertion that it has replaced love (in having a Ford coil supersede a clitoris) rings true: Sarah says she will be

with him if he drops his pursuit of having the car restored, but Coalhouse cannot relinquish his quest for its replacement. It was meant to be a means to reignite his relationship and unify his family and it has done so; however, ironically Coalhouse's insistence upon its significance in having it repaired will actually lead to the erasure of his success and reconstituted family unit.

As Morris notes in his essay "Illusions of Demystification in *Ragtime*", when most of the novel's other characters are confronted with adversity, they subscribe to an abstract theory. Later, they find the theory ineffective and/or flawed, and replace it with an equally abstract theory. Coalhouse goes against this 'trading' and achieves the only concrete demystification in the novel. Morris writes:

Walker's belated courtship of Sarah seems a direct expression of human dignity. His revolt against racial humiliation appears designed to demystify, to expose contradictions in the heart of the political and economic systems. His insistence on the particular – his car and Willie Conklin [the fire chief] – seems to give the lie to other characters' absorption in theory and fantasy. (69)

Essentially, Walker realizes that racism is alive and well when his car is desecrated, and he insists on its repair. Morris acknowledges that he is intelligently concerned with the particular of his car, rather than placing his faith in a metaphysical theory like most of the characters (i.e. Houdini) (68-72). However, Morris needs to more clearly acknowledge that this car represents all the abstractness within the American Dream for Coalhouse. Coalhouse is essentially in a war spurred by racism and is insisting that his country's flag (the symbol) be repaired, rather than his actual country (the real).

The volunteer firemen disfiguring the car shows that racism completely saturated this time period and even these people who risk their lives without monetary compensation are vehemently racist, and the repairing of the car, symbolic or not, would not change this fact. Doctorow destroys our nostalgia for the time period precisely when Coalhouse's car is lacerated. In an interview, Doctorow confirms that the novel dismisses nostalgia as a valuable emotion; Doctorow states, "I would agree that nostalgia is an inadequate self-deluding emotion. Usually you feel nostalgic for what you never experience or for what you have the illusion of having experienced. It is the disposition for nostalgia that *Ragtime* mocks" (36). Coalhouse's refusal to play 'popular' ragtime and the incident with the Model-T are vehicles through which the novel expresses its admonishment of nostalgia for both this time period and all others. Nostalgia, like attempting to preserve cultural vestiges, is in fact another form of mystification; it is a yearning for, and absurdly pursuing, a past that never existed.

The Evolution of The Model-T Into a Simulacrum

The evolution of the Model-T illustrates Baudrillard's conviction that all signifiers and representations inevitably become irrelevant and eventually die. Baudrillard writes:

Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum.

Such would be the successive phases of the image:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the absence of a profound reality

it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (6)

The Model-T (like many other cultural artifacts) goes through each of these phases.

Initially, the car is indicative of a profound reality, where racial equality has been achieved.

Coalhouse is comfortable pursuing the American Dream (i.e. financial wealth & family) and

is supported by those around him. As stated, his car enables him to work towards both of

these objectives simultaneously and is symbolic of this. The boy notes how pristine the

new Model-T is, and this is the environment that envelops Coalhouse when we are first

introduced to him (Doctorow 155). Racial equality seems to be evident when Coalhouse, in

the interest of courting Sarah, visits Father and Mother; Doctorow writes, “And so it

happened on the next Sunday that the Negro took tea. Father noted that he suffered no

embarrassment by being in the parlor with a cup and saucer in his hand. On the contrary,

he acted as if it was the most natural thing in the world. The surroundings did not awe him

nor was his manner deferential” (158). Father, up until it is vandalized, frequently

expresses how impressed he is with Coalhouse’s car. The fact that Father exhibits an

emotion close to jealousy for Coalhouse’s car is significant in that it potentially alludes to

racial equality – as a white man is envious of an African-American’s financial success.

However, the novel’s subtext foreshadows that racial equality/tolerance is an

illusion, and that the car’s significance will be undermined. This is evident in the first

chapter of the novel; the narrator observes, “There seemed to be no entertainment that did

not involve great swarms of people. Trains and steamers and trolleys moved them from

one place to another... Everyone wore white in summer. Tennis racquets were hefty and

the racquet faces elliptical. There was a lot of sexual fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants” (3-4). Once again Doctorow is mocking the typical nostalgia for the time period, and later the detached narrator interjects, in a non sequitur that, “Apparently there *were* Negroes. There *were* immigrants” (5). The fact that these two contradictory quotes exist alongside one another foreshadows the incipient conflict.

When Coalhouse finds his car vandalized, it belongs to the second ‘phase of the image’ – as Baudrillard writes, “In the first case, the image is a good appearance – representation is of the sacramental order. In the second, it is an evil appearance – it is of the order of maleficence” (6). The car is initially somewhat of a holy object, because it allots Coalhouse social mobility. However, the instant it is vandalized, its symbolic value becomes inverted; the Model-T now represents the lack of social power Coalhouse faces. As concurrent with the second phase, it ‘masks and denatures a profound reality’. And like the genre of ragtime, Coalhouse’s vehicle has become a perversion of its former self. As stated, the car enabled Coalhouse to juggle his duties as a breadwinner and an emotionally available spouse. After this incident occurs, Coalhouse is now faced with the obvious difficulty of commuting between his work and house duties. However, the car has the opposite of its original effect; it now actually prevents the evolution of his romantic relationship with Sarah; Coalhouse utilizes money that he was saving for the explicit purpose of their wedding to hire a lawyer to fight for the repair of the Model-T (179).

Additionally, this desecration continues to ‘mask and denature a profound reality’; as Coalhouse takes the actions of these racist, insensitive volunteer firemen to be indicative of society as a whole. The symbol is removed from a profound reality because it now only reflects the actions of a few individuals. Because of this injustice, Coalhouse gains followers

who wish to see this act of racism rectified. However, he is myopic and only obsesses about his car being repaired; he does not perceive gaining the support of many people as a step towards rectifying this racial injustice. Tragically and ironically, Coalhouse develops his own prejudice because of this incident and declares that all volunteer firemen will not be safe until his care is restored. This is evident in Coalhouse's second letter of demands; the narrator recalls, "This is what it said: One, that the white excrescence known as Willie Conklin be turned over to my justice. Two, that the Model T Ford with its custom pantasote top be returned in its original condition. Until these demands are satisfied, let the rules of war prevail" (222).

Here it is important to acknowledge the implications of Coalhouse Walker Jr.'s name. Many critics have recognized that it is in reference to Kleist's character, Michal Kohlhaas. In *Michal Kohlhaas*, the protagonist is also stopped and told to pay a toll. Kohlhaas leaves two horses to go to town and acquire money for the toll. He finds out the toll was illegal; he was duped and his horses are taken. Kohlhaas later finds his horses on the brink of death, because they were put to work in the fields. *Ragtime's* Coalhouse plot is a modernization of these events; Coalhouse's car is held hostage by the volunteer firemen and is likewise desecrated. Both characters become tragic heroes and die because of their adamancy to repair their respective vehicles. (Additionally, this plot in *Ragtime* is also a sort of simulacrum – being a reimagining of Kleist's work without the original historical context.)

Relevant to the second order of a representational image (i.e. 'it masks and denatures a profound reality'), Coalhouse's name has another implication in addition to it being a literary allusion. Coal is simply compressed, multilayered organic matter. Coal,

while being a natural mineral, is known for its combustion properties, when put in the context of capitalism. This is also true of Coalhouse's character. It is when the car, a product of industrial capitalism, reaches the second order of the image, that Coalhouse becomes increasingly self-destructive. At the end of this plot, Coalhouse confines himself in J.P. Morgan's museum and outfits the museum with explosives. As his name foreshadows, Coalhouse creates his own combustible house, and his name alludes to this end. He is ready to eviscerate the lavish, historical heirlooms afforded to Morgan under the capitalist model. The Model-T which was once the means of his success now becomes the vehicle that propels him to his destruction; it is finally unveiled to be a false idol and truly belongs to the second order of images.

Baudrillard states that in the third order of images "masks the absence of a profound reality". Coalhouse believes that repairing his car is synonymous with reinstating his and other African-Americans' rights as citizens. In Coalhouse's and his followers' minds, the Model-T advocates racial equality. However, as demonstrated by the events of the text, the car only promotes the illusion that equality has been established. The idea that the car will eventually be repaired, and that this action is indicative of correcting the racism Coalhouse encountered, is absurd; the Model-T successfully 'masks the absence' of a fair and tolerant society. And Coalhouse states, he is unwilling to marry until it is repaired. In accordance with the third order of an image, the car is exposed as the epitome of tokenism – the Model-T is meant to express equality, but it is ultimately a superficial gesture made by society. It does not signify any substantial rights.

This is further evidenced in Father's reaction to the incident. Father is initially impressed with Coalhouse's car and is surprised, but pleased that he lives in a country

where Coalhouse, a young African American, finds himself comfortable in a commodious house, taking tea with Caucasian Americans. However, when Coalhouse demands the car to be repaired, Father distances himself from him. Father accepts the superficial signifier of a humanitarian America, the Ford Model-T, but nothing more. This is demonstrated shortly later when Father aligns himself with the police's pursuit of Coalhouse; Doctorow writes, "It was clear the crisis was driving the spirit from their lives. Father has always felt secretly that as a family they were touched by an extra light. He felt it going now. He felt stupid and plodding, available simply to have done what circumstances would do. Coalhouse ruled" (225). Father becomes insecure with his own social position when Coalhouse attempts to combat racism and further the rights of African Americans; Father is concerned that the media's focus on Coalhouse's protest will overshadow *his* plight and pursuit of the American Dream.

Similarly, Douglas Fowler argues that the novel is about the dissolution of the pompous, secure WASP family – exemplified in the unnamed family in *Ragtime*; Douglas explains, "Doctorow's central intention seems to be to depict the invasion, from below and within and without, of a smug and secure American WASP family, circa 1908-1915, a family which is a microcosm of American self-conception at about the turn of the century" (109). As Fowler explains, patriotism, for Father, is simply being content and optimistic about his economic position. Hence, he exhibits patriotism when he creates munitions for the war in the factory, but becomes wary when Coalhouse demands equal rights. Fowler believes Father is worried that if America fully recognizes blacks and immigrants, his place in society will be under attack. Fowler believes the ironic narration is apt for recognizing this racist and exclusionary sense of patriotism and nationalism of the time period (110-3).

Father's descent into racism is again exhibited when he attends a Giants' baseball game. First, he notices the list of culturally diverse players and comes to the conclusion that professional baseball is now mainly played by immigrants (229-30). Father has a surprising rumination in response to this, which illuminates his physiological disintegration; he recalls baseball at Harvard twenty years ago, when all of its players were white. Although Father comes from a racist standpoint, he is disconcerted in seeing that American Baseball (his cultural vestige) is also in a constant state of change. Doctorow writes:

He was disturbed by his nostalgia. He'd always thought of himself as progressive. He believed in the perfectibility of the republic. He thought, for instance, there was no reason the Negro could not with proper guidance carry every burden of human achievement. He did not believe in aristocracy except of the individual effort and vision. He felt his father's loss of fortune had the advantage of saving him from the uncritical adoption of the prejudices of his class. But the air in this ballpark open under the sky smelled like the back room of a saloon. Cigar smoke filled the stadium and, lit by the oblique rays of the afternoon sun, indicated the voluminous cavern of air in which he sat pressed upon as if by a foul universe, with the breathless wind of a ten-thousand-throated chorus in his ears shouting its praise and abuse. (231)

Father, in seeing the list of culturally diverse baseball players, becomes disconcerted due to his belief that his social prowess is slipping away. Father wishes to be culturally empathetic to the point where his conscience is appeased, but where he still remains the unquestioned patriarch. It is significant that it is the baseball game where he has this self-

realization. The ten thousand voices emerging from this foul universe serve as a reminder that his legacy will be absorbed into anonymity. His search for financial stability is clearly less significant compared to Coalhouse's fight against inequality and he is resentful of this. The Model-T – the symbol that masks his and society's prejudice – serves Father as much as it serves Coalhouse; the car, as Baudrillard would have it, "masks the absence of a profound reality," one where true equality exists. The Model-T, the symbol of success, essentially all Father, and surrounding white society, is willing to allot to Coalhouse in order to appease their own white guilt while still maintaining their superiority.

The Ford Model-T moves into the fourth and final order of the image in the climax of the story. To reiterate, the fourth order commands that the symbol has, "no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 6). The line that denotes the Model-T's evolution into the fourth order of symbols is when J.P. Morgan tells the police to, "Give him [Coalhouse] his car and hang him" (286). As is emblematic of simulacra, the car has become so far removed from reality that its original meaning is completely lost. It no longer carries correlation to Coalhouse and other African American's rights as citizens if the car can be repaired, and Coalhouse can be simultaneously lynched.

When Coalhouse violently lashes out, insisting chaos will ensue until the car is repaired, Booker T. Washington attempts to convey to Coalhouse the absurd value he attaches to the car; it is a dead symbol completely removed from reality. He exclaims, "Monstrous Man! Had you been ignorant of the tragic struggle of our people, I could have pitied you on this adventure. But you are a musician! I look about me and smell the sweat of rage, the impecunious rebellion of wild unthinking youth. What have you taught them!" (281-2). For Coalhouse, ragtime has become simulacra; it has been copied in so many

various forms that its original meaning has been lost and it only references itself. In response to this, Coalhouse takes refuge in the solace of the car. As Morris acknowledges, in insisting on a particular, he supposedly overcomes the subjectivity and abstractness of theories. However, like most abstract theories, the Model-T's significance becomes equally elusive and is ultimately lost. It becomes commoditized and superficial like ragtime and many other previously sacred and theological beliefs.

The car's meaning dissolves even further when the fire chief, Willie Conklin, finally repairs it. Conklin, instead of fixing its damaged parts, simply exchanges its original components for identical ones created on the assembly line; the car paradoxically is and is not itself. This is the Theseus paradox; Plutarch famously asks how a ship, if repaired by replacing all of its parts, could remain the same ship (10-2). Baudrillard comments on this process of the replication of the real:

The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. (2)

As Baudrillard indicates, a thing's significance is destroyed within the process of its endless replication. Its replication becomes its own justification; it ceases to be compared to anything outside of its other replications. Conklin does not have any training in automotive mechanics and is still able to fix the car. Similarly, Melnick notes that many white

performers of jazz and ragtime had the most elementary understanding of music and blackface concerts were just a means to make a quick dollar (113-5). This illustrates Baudrillard's assertion that the imaginative intellect required to create ragtime music or the car is no longer necessary, and therefore their meaning is lost. We can restore the visible order of the car, and emulate the syncopation of ragtime, but not their significance. Ragtime, like Coalhouse's Model-T, has become an uninspired simulacrum.

Even more startling still is the assertion that I believe Doctorow is making here in this narrative: our identities, like the Ford Model-T, are interchangeable. The novel implies this in analyzing Henry Ford's business model; Doctorow writes, "Ford established the final proposition of the theory of industrial manufacture – not only that the parts of the finished products be interchangeable but that the men who build the products be themselves interchangeable" (136). This capitalist model provides compensation for a person's ability to duplicate another's actions on an assembly line. The worker only demonstrates simulated knowledge of creating a car; they are not required to have any real working knowledge of automotive mechanics. They simply replicate another person's actions without the need for understanding their significance. As Baudrillard would agree, they are indeed living within a hyperreality.

Barbara Estrin, in her work "Recomposing Time: *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ragtime*", expresses a similar idea; she states, "*Ragtime* examines the philosophy of interchangeable parts and an economic and psychological construct. The book's central thesis turns human beings into cogs on the wheel of time. Henry Ford's theory allows for metaphor: music is a flower; a flower is like music. At its worst, it admits that we are all expendable" (8). If music and a flower are interchangeable, we can certainly see the death of the signifier.

Once a signifier can be exchanged for another, the signified becomes increasingly distant until it fades away. The purpose of metaphor is to link together two worlds, but what actually happens is one world eventually consumes the other; the signified irrevocably fades out of memory. This is clearly what happens with ragtime and the Ford Model-T. Similarly, the little boy in the novel, when peering into the mirror, perceives a doubleness within himself; he sees his present self and himself as a man. Doctorow writes:

And then he took to studying himself in the mirror, perhaps expecting some change to take place before his eyes. [...] In fact he continued the practice not from vanity but because he discovered the mirror as a means of self-duplication. He would gaze at himself until there were two selves facing one another, neither of which could claim to be the real world. The sensation was of being disembodied. He was no longer anything exact as a person. He had the dizzying feeling of separating from himself endlessly. (117)

For him, this creates a paradox: How can his singular identity signify two different likenesses? (This is similar to how Coalhouse and Helga try, but ultimately fail, to live authentic to their bicultural identities.) The boy, in witnessing the potential capriciousness and fluidity of his identity, now believes himself to be expendable. This is evident when he becomes disillusioned with the baseball game; he realizes the Giants (like Ford's assembly line) are composed of interchangeable people.

Finally, like the Ford Model-T, ragtime, and the Giant's baseball game, reality has become so reliant on the replication of previous models that history will remain cyclical. Wars will only be reenactments of previous wars; parades inevitably will become shadowed remembrances of one's past; literature will only contain allusions to other works

- all of whose meaning becomes increasingly distant and apocryphal. However, it is after all the villains of the story, Henry Ford and J.P. Morgan, who are comforted by the thought of endless repetition and reincarnation – a Nietzschean eternal return. The way to overcome this endlessly repetitive, nihilistic view of reality is to be especially conscious of the slight variations and idiosyncrasies encompassed in the present day and within our own individualities. Perhaps this is why Doctorow, in encouraging us to be introspective, opens his novel with Joplin's conviction to, "... not play this piece fast / It is never right to play Ragtime fast..." (1). Life, like ragtime, should be valued for its unique, candid improvisations, not its adherence to form. For Coalhouse, both the cultural vestiges of the Ford Model-T and ragtime, in which he has placed his faith, have become simulacra and thus have thwarted his attempt to attain an authentic life. In fully identifying with these now corrupted symbols, he is barred from achieving self-actualization.

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*: Open to a Hermetically Sealed Culture

Just as Coalhouse swears off ragtime, the once center of his financial wealth, *Quicksand* begins with Helga Crane expressing a similar conviction against the all Negro school, Naxos, at which she teaches Larsen writes, "The great community, she [Helga] thought, was no longer a school and had grown into a machine. It was now a show place in the black belt, exemplification of the white man's magnanimity, refutation of the black man's inefficiency" (4). Like the genre of ragtime, this school was originally founded by black individuals, but it now can only be seen within the context of a white society; it advocates the containment of black individuals, rather than their participation in society as

a whole. In response to this, Helga decides to actively pursue racial authenticity (her black heritage) outside of this institution and looks to both music and consumerism to achieve this.

In Walter Michaels' work, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, he examines this sudden need Helga has for authenticity; he writes, "[...] the object of attachment is not merely the particular race to which its heroine, Helga, belongs but the fact of race itself where the desire produced is not just to be "with" Negroes but to *be* Negro" (115). It is this need to "be Negro" that propels this text into a kind of modern epic.

Cultural Diffusion

Many critics debate whether Helga is a master of her own destiny and some conclude that, after her falling out at Naxos, she travels the path of least resistance. In her piece, "Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*: Untangling the Webs of Exoticism," Debra Silverman addresses this common misconception that Helga is weak and indecisive throughout the novel; she states, "frequently other characters in the narrative position Helga by "creating" her as they see her; however Helga's own actions and moving are self-motivated, not literally created by the other characters in the text" (5). Admittedly, there are moments in the text where she stereotypically conforms to the people and the ideology that surrounds her, acting as a kind of cultural chameleon, but she often rebels against this conformity by invoking her right to migrate somewhere else; for a black woman of this time period to continually reject various comfortable careers and living arrangements, in the pursuit of cultural authenticity, is actually quite unusual and is heroic in its own right.

Although Helga attempts to achieve cultural authenticity, she immediately excommunicates any facet of her culture that is sexualized, because she inherently believes that it is only confirming white society's perception of blacks to be uncivilized, as evidenced through their overtly sexual behavior, especially in dance. This is another instance of how the 'white gaze' controls what black culture becomes. This is clearly evidenced when Helga visits a Harlem dance club; Larsen writes,

They danced, ambling lazily to a crooning melody, or violently twisting their bodies, like whirling leaves, to a sudden streaming rhythm, or shaking themselves ecstatically to a thumping of unseen tomtoms. [...] She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. The essence of life seemed bodily motion. And when suddenly the music died, she dragged herself back to the present with a conscious effort; and a shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she had enjoyed it, began to taunt her. She hardened her determination to get away. She wasn't, she told herself, a jungle creature. (54)

Here, Helga achieves unbridled happiness and the world simply begins to make sense for her; in syncopating the rhythms around with her bodily motion, she has a brief cathartic experience. However, as this passage demonstrates, this temporary solace is overcome by guilt; Helga is unable to overcome the idea that whenever she expresses and/or indulges herself sexually, she is fulfilling white society's expectations. This scene exemplifies how throughout the novel Helga is subjected to a dual consciousness: she paradoxically wishes to live life in line with black cultural values, but a life that also does not conform to white

society's perception of black culture. An effect of this unwillingness to conform to white society's expectations is seen when Helga abandons her evolving romantic relationship with James Vayle because of her fear of conforming to white society's expectations; she becomes disgusted by her own sexual impulses. Later on, she only follows her sexual impulses within the acceptable context of being married to a Reverend, as evident through the abundant amount of babies they have.

Instead of pursuing a romantic relationship with James Vayle or continuing her professorship at Naxos, like Coalhouse she begins to subscribe to materialism to attain autonomy and cultural authenticity. This is first witnessed when leaving Naxos; she exclaims, "*They* can't stop me. Trains leave here for civilization every day. All that's needed is money" (14). Like Coalhouse, Helga now believes that money affords her the social mobility needed to attain an autonomous life, and Helga realizes that it is a necessity to help her establish herself. Larsen writes, "She hated to admit that money was the most serious difficulty. Knowing full well that it was important, she nevertheless rebelled at the unalterable truth that it could influence her actions, block her desires" (6). This passage truly foreshadows how money/materialism will govern Helga's existence, rather than granting her autonomy. An example is seen when Helga is forced to take a job as a speech coordinator because of her financial circumstances. Miss Ross makes Helga aware of this job opportunity with a charitable and condescending tone. However, considering Helga's previous work experience as an educator at an elite school, this job offer is truly demoralizing to Helga; Larsen writes, "The presumptuousness of their certainty that she would snatch at the opportunity galled Helga. She became aware of the desire to be disagreeable. The inclination to fling the address of the lecturing female in their face

stirred her, but she remembered the lone five-dollar bill in the rare old tapestry purse swinging from her arm. She couldn't afford anger" (32). Here the narrator asserts that Helga cannot afford to be herself and must remain complacent. This illustrates to the reader, that although our protagonist continues to think money and materialism will be the means to her liberation, they will actually be responsible for her inhibition. This confinement is demonstrated later when Helga is at first perturbed at the notion of being a subject in Olsen's artwork, but later acquiesces when Aunt Katrina and Olsen buy her ornate clothing; Larsen writes, "Helga's perturbation subsided in the unusual pleasure of having so many new clothes at one time. She began to feel a little excited, incited" (68). Throughout the novel Helga believes that a necessary step towards autonomy and cultural authenticity is the ability to express herself through dress, but as this scene demonstrates, it is once again this lust for materialism which limits her potential.

Furthermore, Kimberly Monda in her work, "Self-delusion and Self-sacrifice in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*", asserts that Helga's adoption of materialism is a way to deny her sexuality; she writes:

Helga attempts to escape the intertwined social and psychological pressures that cause her to repress her sexuality by rechanneling her desire into what appears to be a safer outlet – and elegant consumerism. Her pursuit of beautiful things and her pleasure in self-display temporarily free her from the self-sacrifice of repression caused by racist constructions of black peoples' "primitive" nature... (9)

As Monda asserts, Helga is cursed with a dual consciousness (white and black) and in adherence to Freudian ideology, feels that she is unable to act upon her sexual desires

because they fulfill a cultural stereotype. Therefore, she must sublimate her energy, and in this case she replaces sex with consumerism. In her desire for cultural authenticity, she rejects any feelings reminiscent of this stereotype, and ironically replaces it with something even more superficial and inauthentic – materialism.

Helga believes that if she has many of the objects associated with success, she will have achieved it. However, she soon realizes that she is not buying her way into success and self-definition. When Helga's belief in materialism begins to recede, she enmeshes herself within the Harlem jazz culture; Larsen writes:

Clanging trolley bells, quarrelling cats, cackling phonographs, raucous laughter, complaining motorhorns, low singing, mingled in the familiar medley that is Harlem. Black figures, white figures, little forms, big forms, small groups, large groups, sauntered or hurried by. It was gay, grotesque, and a little weird. Helga Crane felt singularly apart from it. (53)

This passage is located immediately before Helga enters the Harlem jazz club. Harrison-Kahan specifically addresses this section of the text, and poignantly observes that this described cityscape is “as if the text were already describing the dance floor of a jazz club” (282). The musical formulations of jazz enforce themselves upon the surrounding environment. However Helga, as the passage denotes, still finds herself as an outsider. Many criticize jazz for utilizing too many instruments at one time without adhering to a specific melody. Likewise, Helga is not able to uncover the melody of Harlem as a whole and is depicted as lost within its streets and within the jazz club she visits.

Relevant to this characterization, Baudrillard in his work *The Conspiracy of Art*, expostulates on an idea that can be used to explain the reasons for Helga's detachment

from Harlem's jazz culture; he writes, "[...] the viewer most of the time, does not understand anything, and consumes his or her own culture twice removed. The viewer [of a work of art] literally consumes the fact that he or she does not understand it and that it has no necessity to it other than the cultural imperative of belonging to the integrated circuit of culture" (91). When first descending down into the jazz club, Helga smiles, believing this to be, "one of those places characterized by the righteous as hell" (53). The promise of unbridled cultural authenticity apart from mainstream/white society excites her. However, as Baudrillard asserts, she cannot absorb the totality of this atmosphere without feeling immediately detached; she is paralyzed by it, as Larsen describes Helga "circling aimlessly" throughout the club (53-4). What was once a means of celebrating her black heritage now becomes a point of confusion; she is unable to reconcile her idealizations of black culture with the reality of Harlem.

After this experience, Helga flees Harlem after seeing her cultural heritage exploited in the music industry and proceeds to Copenhagen where her heritage will be exploited in the art world. Here, she is coerced by those around her to have a relationship with the painter, Herr Axel Olsen. She quickly becomes his muse due to her perceived 'exotic blackness'. Silverman draws on James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* and discusses the power dynamic between subject and artist; she writes, "In Clifford's formulation, body=art= refiguring relations of power. As the body becomes an exotic curiosity, a literal performance of the exotic, the power relationship between the performer and the viewer is politicized" (2). Helga seems to believe that by being the subject of a painting, she asserts her 'blackness' and lives within cultural truth. However, in allowing herself to be painted by Olsen, she is once again a black individual that is allowing herself to be contextualized

under white society's framework. Larsen writes, "'Oh,' said Helga again. Then at last she laughed. It was too funny. The great man [Olsen] hadn't addressed a word to her. Here she was a curiosity, a stunt, at which people came and gazed" (66). Helga becomes an artistic curiosity, rather than an actualized individual. In refusing to actually converse with his potential subject, Olsen is willfully simultaneously objectifying and intensifying her racial otherness because she does not have the opportunity to directly relate and converse with Olsen or the audience of this artistic medium.

Melnick discusses this phenomenon of white commoditization of black subjects further through his commentary on a scene from the play *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*; Melnick writes, "Jack, as Gus, takes center stage and is asked where he has been. He responds: 'I've been down to my father's farm where we have a black hen that lays a white egg'" (107). Melnick recalls this play to reflect how white art is often made out of black materials; white society can process black culture and bring it to the mainstream. This is seen with Coalhouse and the evolution of ragtime, the production of minstrel shows, and now with Helga; she is the black hen that yields a figurative white egg – that is to say, the portrait.

Helga's commoditization becomes especially evident when Olsen proposes to Helga, addressing her portrait rather than Helga herself (78). This is in line with Baudrillard's postulations on simulacra, which assert that eventually, within all art, the representation inevitably presides over the original (*Simulacra* 2-3). Helga rejects this relationship and simultaneously renounces the work of simulacrum in her continuous search for 'the real'. Perhaps in response to this failed relationship, she abruptly marries a reverend. In the

resolution of the novel, she is unfulfilled and depressed, unable to acquire the autonomous, culturally authentic life that she had pursued so resiliently.

Walter Benn Michaels explains why racial authenticity is an impossibility; he states:

So the problem is, on the one hand, if there is to be a Negro there needs to be identifiably Negro “ways,” and, on the other hand, if there is to be a Negro there needs to be more than one class of Negroes. And this is a problem because if there’s more than one class, but there’s only one set of ways, it’s difficult to see how the difference in class can be kept from becoming a difference in racial authenticity... (89)

Helga attempts to embody the totality of a pluralistic culture, and this is what leads her to a psychological disintegration. Similarly, Coalhouse becomes absurdly myopic, after having the musical genre of ragtime stolen from him, when he now believes his Model-T to be a relevant symbol to black civil rights as a whole. He exchanges the totality of culture for a specific, whereas contrastingly, Helga seeks it out in its most abstract, unarticulated form. This longing for the abstraction of cultural authenticity is seen when Helga becomes disenchanted by Harlem where moments before she found, “a sense of freedom from a release from the feeling of smallness which had hedged her in, first during her sorry, unchildlike childhood among hostile white folk in Chicago, and later during her uncomfortable sojourn among snobbish black folk in Naxos” (43). After this brief respite, Helga yearns for another facet of her culture and being which Harlem fails to meet; Larsen writes, “Little by little the signs of spring appeared, but strangely the enchantment of the season, so enthusiastically, so lavishly greeted by gay dwellers of Harlem, filled her only with restlessness. [...] As the days multiplied, her need of something, something vaguely

familiar, but which she could not put a name to and hold for definite examination, became almost intolerable” (43). Helga yearns for any facet of her culture which she is not currently experiencing and for abstractions that she is unable to define because they do not exist.

Apropos to Helga’s methodology of wishing to experience the entirety of her culture and being in a singular moment, Carl Jung in his work, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, proclaims that, “We know a man can never be everything at once, never complete; he always develops certain qualities at the expense of others, and wholeness is never attained” (92). Similarly, Helga is never able to simultaneously embody all of the facets of black culture. Because she is unable to reconcile this failure, she finds herself the vehicle of perpetuation through childbirth, rather than representative of racial authenticity, and is confined to the realm of domesticity rather than achieving autonomy.

Although each novel is representative of different time periods, they both admonish white society’s commoditization of black music and art and conclude that acquiring cultural authenticity is an impossibility, because culture is an ever-changing, evolving concept and/or is a superficial, caricaturized imitation of the past. Culture has become similar to Theseus’ ship; it continues to be repaired, utilized, augmented, and rearranged so frequently that it has become unrecognizable – and therefore, unattainable.

II. 'Buying' Into Culture: The Effect of Commoditization on the Cultural Artifact in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*

"But what are we then if we have the constant obligation to make ourselves
what we are, if our mode of being is having the obligation to be what we are?"

-Jean-Paul Sartre (*Being & Nothingness*)

Introduction

In *Ragtime* and *Quicksand*, we witnessed two protagonists who lost themselves in attempting to unearth and/or preserve their cultures. Willa Cather's novel, *The Professor's House*, adeptly models similar societal and self-alienating psychological effects on its two main characters, St. Peter and Tom Outland, who instead dedicate their life to a culture that is not their own. As will be shown, they try to connect with cultural artifacts and experiences that exist solely outside of their original context. Because the cultures cannot be experienced under authentic circumstances, this pursuit of culture only causes Outland and St. Peter to become alienated from themselves as well as society as a whole.

Additionally, *The Professor's House* is concerned with how to maintain one's individuality while simultaneously negotiating the materialistic and socially demanding culture that, for many, encapsulates the American Dream. The novel's protagonist, Professor Godfrey St. Peter, is quite successful in attaining financial security and maintains healthy (although somewhat detached) relationships with his family. The central conflict of the novel is ultimately an internal one: St. Peter believes that somehow while achieving

material wealth, gaining academic acclaim, and cultivating a family, he has somewhere lost his essential self. Sartre's positions in *Being & Nothingness* will be used to shed light onto this internal conflict St. Peter goes through; Sartre acknowledges that people can be institutionalized by their careers, even if they are chosen by the individual, because an occupation's demands can create an unnatural mode of existence where people complete tasks for the greater good of fulfilling their job rather than being faithful to themselves. As St. Peter reflects upon his career, he can't help but feel uprooted from his original environment (his childhood lake house) and commoditized by society, like much of the art and artifacts in the novel. Witnessed especially through Tom Outland, his former student, who quests to preserve Indian culture, the close examination of the treatment of the art and artifacts in the novel reveals a poignant social commentary on how the capitalist model - mass-producing goods for purely financial gain - infringes upon our personal freedoms and cultural authenticity. Additionally, Haruki Murakami's short story "Barn Burning" further demonstrates the psychological effects, evidenced in *The Professor's House*, of being subjected to a postmodern era in which only simulacra have survived; "Barn Burning" arguably takes *The Professor's House* to its logical conclusion where original experiences and authentic art and artifacts are no longer attainable.

"The Trap of Worldly Success":

The Commoditization of the Individual & The Cultural Artifact

Sartre has frequently proclaimed that, "We are condemned to freedom" (634). This has become a well-known aphorism that is central to existentialist philosophy. It is meant

to produce the effect of having one evaluate and take charge of his/her own life, rather than appealing to a higher power for things to turn out well. However, St. Peter has the inverse of this problem: Fate has treated him well, but he believes that he has become enslaved to circumstance and feels suffocated by trying to fulfill the necessary obligations tied to his professional and familial roles. Although he did pursue these titles in good faith, he perceives his personal authenticity as eluding him when called upon to satisfy the majority of his domestic and professional responsibilities. We see this concern manifest itself in his anxiety when traveling with his family and in his ever-increasing reclusiveness exhibited by the amount of time and passion he invests in his attic.

However, Sartre in his work, *Being and Nothingness*, does acknowledge that we are enslaved to what is expected of us by our professions – even if it is one we elect to do. He uses the example of an imagined café waiter to illustrate this point:

Let us consider this waiter in the café'. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. [...] He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at *being* a waiter in a café. [...] The child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it; the waiter in the café plays with his condition to *realize* it. (101-2)

Similar to the way that a waiter 'plays' at being a waiter, people 'play' when they wish to experience a culture; in acting out any cultural tradition for the first time, such as when Helga goes to a Harlem Jazz Club, achieving authenticity is impossible because all a person

is doing is modeling the behaviors set before them. Sartre's exploration of the waiter alludes to the paradox which is central to St. Peter's existential crisis: Is a person authentic if in order to become successful at a specific role (i.e. waiter, father, Indian artifact curator, ragtime musician, etc.) they conform to what is expected of them?

For St. Peter, this question is answered with a resounding 'no.' This is evidenced by the one consoling fact about his favorite student's (Tom Outland) premature passing: that, in death, he evaded 'the trap of world success' (236). St. Peter hypothesizes:

What change would have come in his [Tom's] blue eye, in his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas? A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. His fellow scientists, his wife, the town and State, would have required many duties of it. It would have had to write thousands of useless letters, frame thousands of false excuses. It would have had to 'manage' a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that. He had something new in the world – and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others. (236-7)

This passage reveals astounding insights into St. Peter's crisis; when St. Peter notes that Tom worked exclusively with things that were symbolic of ideas, St. Peter draws a parallel between their two lives – as St. Peter occupies himself with continuously working on the retelling of history that he has not directly experienced. They both inhabit the realm of ideas and attain financial success (Tom posthumously) through their respective pursuits. However, Tom dies in poverty; it is not until a few years after his death that Tom's patent of

a vacuum engine, only after being manipulated and transformed by his colleague, yields a large fortune. It is seemingly absurd and even perhaps cruel that St. Peter finds solace in the fact that his closest friend departed this world before he could see or utilize the abundant material wealth his research has produced. However, St. Peter carries the belief that in tandem with this material wealth and ascendancy to success, society has a barrage of dehumanizing expectations, dehumanizing in the sense that the majority of these expectations are primarily a series of ‘meaningless conventional gestures.’ St. Peter eventually arrives at the conviction that success, even if it is a purely intellectual achievement, will inevitably become commoditized – and so will the individual. St. Peter is known for being one of the top historians for Spanish history and is defined by many only in that context. He becomes self-alienated in being defined in terms of a cultural history (again, a culture and time he has never experienced). Tom has escaped this commoditization through death; within this passage the Professor realizes it and, as will be explored later, he begins to contemplate the idea of his own death – perhaps to further validate Tom’s escape.

St. Peter draws another parallel between him and Tom in discussing the hypothetical letters Tom would have to write after achieving ‘success’. Earlier in the novel St. Peter discusses how each of the two of his desks are utilized. We are initially introduced to the desk in his attic being his sanctuary where he completes his work, and later we are told about the more lavish desk that resides in his study. Cather writes, “Downstairs, off the back parlor, he had a show study, with roomy shelves where his library was housed and a proper desk at which he wrote letters. But it was a sham” (8). This comparison of the desks reveals a dichotomy between the interior and the exterior of one’s person. The fact

that the desk is a 'sham' logically suggests that the letters St. Peter writes, and the relationships these letters are intended to maintain, are likewise only for 'show'. St. Peter plays the part of being a Baron of Spanish history in his professional letter writing and loses part of himself in the process. St. Peter rejoices in the fact that Tom will never have to write any of these superficial letters; he arguably even becomes slightly envious that Tom no longer has to fulfill these professional and personal obligations and begins to see death as a means to freedom.

Interestingly, within St. Peter's reflection about Tom's passing is veiled resentment for his family: St. Peter declares that, in death, Tom evades an evermore 'exacting' wife, alluding to Rosamond, St. Peter's demanding daughter who was formerly engaged to Tom. St. Peter clearly loves his daughters and wife; however, he is paralyzed with the growing amount of demands thrust upon him, coincidentally due to Tom Outland's wildly profitable patent. The paralyzing effect of 'worldly success' and material wealth for St. Peter is apparent in his social anxiety when faced with the premise of traveling with his family to Paris and meeting other scholars within his academic field. Susan Rosowski, in her work *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism*, concurs with the inhibiting effect these personal relationships have for St. Peter described above; she writes:

The idea of public selves runs through this section, which consists of encounters that remind St. Peter of outward responsibilities. [...] Each encounter presents to St. Peter a symbolic mirror of others' expectations; together their reflections multiply. Kathleen, for example, reminds her father of Rosamond's treatment of the Cranes, who believe themselves entitled to money from Outland's invention. It is as if St. Peter is caught in a maze of

mirrors from which there seems no escape, each mirror demanding that he assume a pose – of concerned father, of sympathetic host, of brilliant scholar, of devoted husband. (132)

As Rosowski's argument implies, St. Peter's family and friends create a new species of existential gaze. The traditional 'gaze' (often referred to in psychology as 'the Look') is that of a phenomenological 'other.' It is the idea that our actions are always being watched by an undefined, specter-like other, and for many this produces a hyperconsciousness in the self; this often causes a great deal of angst and anxiety because people cannot justify their actions to this 'other' who can really be defined as an objective self. With St. Peter however, as Rosowski acknowledges, the source of his angst and anxiety stems not from not this phenomenological 'other', but from very specific people in his life. Each of these people expects to see a certain version of St. Peter reflected back at them (i.e. husband, father, Spanish history aficionado, etc.). St. Peter is asked far more questions about Spanish history than his own person; he has achieved success because he is a conduit to a culture that is not his own and his person is consequently bypassed. The internal crisis of St. Peter is ultimately that the original 'unmodified' St. Peter is still retrievable. The question is, has St. Peter been replaced with a collection of socially accepted dilutions and deviations of his authentic self, necessitated by his familial and professional roles and by achieving the American Dream in this capitalist system?

It should be noted that St. Peter pursued and cultivated these personal relationships in good faith and these relationships comprise much of his success. However, as will be illuminated through Sartre, achieving success can take away personal freedom rather than grant it. We are once again brought back to the café waiter; Sartre writes:

...the waiter in the café can not be immediately a café waiter in the sense that his inkwell is an inkwell, or this glass is a glass. It is by no means that he can not form reflective judgments or concepts concerning his condition. He knows well what it “means”: the obligation of getting up at five o’clock, of sweeping the floor of the shop before the restaurant opens, of starting the coffee pot going, etc. [...] And it is precisely this person *who I have to be* (if I am the waiter in question) and who I am not. It is not that I do not wish to be this person or that I want this person to be different. But rather there is no common measure between his being and mine. It is a “representation” for others and for myself, which means that I can be he only in *representation*. But if I represent myself as him, I am not he; I am separated from him as the object from the subject... (102-3)

Here, Sartre astutely outlines the universal paradox of how we can aspire to become something new (in this case, a café waiter) while maintaining our authenticity. If we are in fact in ‘a constant state of becoming’ and work toward this becoming, in approaching something that is not representative of our present self, we cannot live in ‘good faith’ without self-alienation. St. Peter’s pursuit of preserving Spanish culture through his scholarly work, and Tom’s at preservation of Indian artifacts through the creation of a museum, demands that they lose some of themselves within their aspirations.

In his work, “A Cave of One’s Own”, Leon Edel agrees that St. Peter willfully detaches himself from his worldly duties. Edel writes, “The professor lives for us as a man who has given up his good fight and takes the world as preparation for the grave. Suddenly we recall his name: Professor St. Peter. He has retreated into a vale of misanthropy and despair”

(215). It is strikingly unusual for someone to, as Edel articulates it, retreat into “misanthropy and despair”; however, St. Peter’s problem is an uncommon one: he is too successful in being the academic authority of Spanish culture and his success begins to supersede his identity. Because of this he engages in a traditional ritual of one who is contemplating suicide: discarding everything that one used to hold dear. Cather writes: “He [St. Peter] did not leave his study. He sat at his desk with bent head, reviewing his life, trying to see where he had made his mistake, to account for the fact that he now wanted to run away from everything he had intensely cared for” (251). This willful self-exile is to escape what the novel succinctly refers to as the ‘trap of worldly success’ (236). It is to appease his internal self, which wishes to escape the signifier of Spanish historian, that St. Peter becomes a recluse. Tom Outland similarly withdraws into the abandoned Mesa where he achieves “happiness unalloyed” (227). Clearly this deliberate alienation of the self, at least temporarily, promises salvation for both of these characters.

Re(de)fining The Cultural Artifact

Furthermore, in examining the treatment of art and artifacts in the novel, we can better understand the ethos of St. Peter’s and Tom’s withdrawal from society. The epigraph of *The Professor’s House* is excerpted from the novel itself and refers to a bracelet worn by Rosamond on her wedding night; the epigraph reads, “A turquoise set in silver wasn’t it?... / Yes, a turquoise set in dull silver” (i). Louis, Rosamond’s husband, is the one speaking here and he recalls his affinity for it when Rosamond’s new emerald necklace becomes the subject of discussion. The juxtaposition between the modest silver bracelet

and the more lavish emerald necklace comments on the central issue of authenticity in the novel. Diane Prenatt in “Art and the Commercial Object as Ekphrastic Subjects in *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor’s House*”, examines the function of material goods in modern society; she writes:

The objects in *The Professor’s House* are primarily purchased rather than crafted. They are made, of course, but the act of their making is not central to their value. Their most important relation is to the purchaser, not the maker, and the circumstances of their acquisition and the degree to which they aggrandize the owner bespeak their value. (220)

The assertion that items are valued purely for how much they elevate their possessor’s social importance, as Prenatt argues, is truly disconcerting. Additionally, the fact that objects are processed to achieve an optimum economic worth distorts their origin.

Prenatt’s observation is seen with Tom’s turquoise gemstones one of which is set in Rosamond’s dull silver bracelet. During Tom’s first encounter with the St. Peter’s family, he gives the Professor’s daughters unprocessed turquoise gemstones. When Lillian refuses these stones on the basis that they are too expensive, Tom protests that they do not have monetary value, because they have not been processed and polished by jewelers. As Tom states, “Turquoises, just the way they come out of the mine, before the jewelers have tampered with them and made them look green. The Indians like them this way” (102). Unlike the free market and most members of society, Tom does value the origin and the authentic form of an item over its potential monetary value. Similarly, Louis values the bracelet referred to in the epigraph, because it is modest and ‘dull.’ There is truth in its dullness, as Louis appreciates the item because, as he states, it holds ‘intrinsic value’ (90).

Ironically, the original context of the artifact is lost especially to Louis, as it was a gift from his wife's previous fiancé and although she still possesses the artifact, she will not possess the experience of being his love again. Like the overwhelming majority of cultural artifacts, the original context becomes obscured with time.

A connection can be made between St. Peter and these turquoise gemstones. It is unfortunate that the turquoises need to be refined by jewelers to be greener before they are economically valuable. In order for the gemstones to become desirable, they need to become hyperbolic versions of themselves (by being stunningly green). This is quite reminiscent of Sartre's depiction of the café waiter who 'plays' at being a café waiter and walks and speaks a little too eagerly; essentially the waiter comes across as a vaudeville act to the customers.

Similarly, as many critics have also observed, St. Peter is no longer happy to be defined through his academic work. Kurt Vonnegut in the introduction to his novel, *Mother Night*, warns us that, "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (vi). This is precisely what happens with St. Peter and Sartre's waiter; their pursued careers have superimposed themselves over their lives. After all, even in the title of the novel St. Peter is signified by the epithet denoted by his profession, rather than his actual name. His eight-volume series on Spanish history acts as a metonym for his self; it has superseded his actual person. In refusing to act as a liaison for Louis among various European academic circles, St. Peter has taken his first step to stopping his work from defining him. Concerning an object or a person, if a primary attribute is emphasized (i.e. the green in a turquoise stone), clearly it is at cost to his/its other characteristics. As Sartre states, "But if I am one [a café waiter], this cannot be in the mode of being in-itself. I am a

waiter in the mode of *being what I am not*" (103). The bracelet, referenced in the epigraph, is admired because it's silver, something that is known primarily for being bright and lustrous, but it is actually dull. Because of the fact that what it is known for is not overemphasized, it is more authentic. (However, the bracelet's emotionally charged narrative symbolic of Tom's courtship of Rosamond is still irretrievable, because the bracelet has become decontextualized.) It can be said that St. Peter likewise attempts to once again *become* unpolished or unmodified by shunning many attachments and success in his modern life.

Additionally, the other item Tom gives to the St. Peters while he is dining with them is a Pueblo Indian clay pot that he has retrieved from the mesa. When showing the jar, Tom interestingly comments on its blackened underside; he states, "That's not from firing. See, I can scratch it off. It's from soot, from when it was on the cook-fire last – and that was before Columbus landed, I guess. Nothing makes those people seem so real to me as their old pots, with the fire-black on them" (101). It is fascinating that the fire-blackened underside of the jar, what most appraisers of artifacts would consider a significant imperfection of the item, is what Tom values most. For Tom, the soot is evidence that it was used for its original purpose and it should be valued because it is in this way faithful to its origin – it has acted in accordance with its 'intrinsic value'.

Guy Reynolds' *Willa Cather in Context* analyzes the significance of this clay pot by recalling a time when Tom was on the mesa and oddly describes himself as having "happiness unalloyed" and "being full to the brim" (Cather 227). Reynolds writes:

Civilization's excrescences are stripped away. Outland is then 'full to the brim'. The phrase is an odd one, unidiomatic, uncharacteristically obtrusive

in Outland's well caught American English. [...] Outland, in fact, here imagines himself as if he were one of the water-carrying Pueblo vases which are strewn around the mesa. When Outland arrived at the Professor's house he carried an Indian vase. [...] To imagine himself 'full to the brim' is thus to continue an association that has recurred throughout the novel, a coupling of Outland and the humble artefacts of Pueblo culture. (131-2)

As Reynolds proposes, the Pueblo jars enable Tom to reconnect with a bygone era – one that is free from modern infrastructure, or as Reynolds aptly puts it, 'civilization's excrescences'. The idea that Tom achieves 'happiness unalloyed' indicates that his contentedness no longer depends on a specific agency or the fulfillment of miscellaneous socioeconomic conditions. He is 'full to the brim' like the vase, in fulfilling his most basic, intrinsic functions by simply laying down on the mesa.

However, Tom's variety of blissful happiness on the mesa, as is often the case, is aided by willful ignorance. Charles Mann, in his prolific work, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, implicitly addresses the flawed logic behind Tom's happiness. Mann writes:

For almost five centuries, Holmberg's Mistake – the supposition that Native Americans lived in an eternal unhistoried state – held sway in scholarly work, and from there fanned out to high school textbooks, Hollywood movies, newspaper articles, environmental campaigns, romantic adventure books, and silk-screened T-shirts. It existed in many forms and was embraced both by those who hated Indians and those who admired them. Holmberg's mistake explained the colonists' view of most Indians as

incurably vicious barbarians; its mirror image was the dreamy stereotype of the Indian as a Noble Savage. Positive or negative, in both images Indians lacked what social scientists call agency – they were not actors in their own right, but passive recipients of whatever windfalls or disasters happenstance put in their way. (15)

Tom is making Holmberg's mistake in believing that Indian culture is ahistorical and has not been tampered with. In fact Indian culture is still subject to Walter Benn Michaels' assertion discussed earlier; cultural authenticity is impossible to fully attain because culture is in a constant state of becoming – it is a perpetually moving target, one which a person cannot ever hit, like water slipping through the cusp of one's hands. Indian culture is also subject to the entropic forces that make the pursuit of cultural authenticity problematic and/or impossible.

However, Tom believes he can simultaneously preserve and access Indian culture through the exploration of the signifiers of Native American culture – the artifacts. Although artifacts do carry an almost religious significance in the novel, the free market most often corrupts their meaning. An apt example is the complete liquidation of the mesa when Tom, in hoping to convey to Washington bureaucrats the historical significance of the mesa, showcases one of the pueblo clay bowls. One of the members of the Indian Commission wishes to purchase it, so that he may use it as an ashtray in his office. This is a clear denaturing of the bowl; this application of it has no regard for its origin and intended use. This denaturing although oftentimes unintentional inevitably occurs simultaneously when the artifact is repurposed (for performance art, for a museum exhibit, etc.).

Rosowski corroborates this point about the inevitable corruption and latter transmutation of art and artifacts in the novel into simulacra; she writes:

In *The Professor's House* Cather asked what remains when aesthetics can no longer provide that order. Science has disproved religion, and rampant materialism has undermined art. As a result, outward connections 'had become insupportable' (156), and St. Peter can save himself only by cutting loose from them. In doing so he confronts questions about the self basic to modern literature... (136)

Rosowski's conviction reigns true: St. Peter's eight-volume series has become monetized; the artifacts at the mesa have become uprooted from their original context, diluting and desecrating their significance, and will probably become ashtrays in executive offices; even a person's memory, like Tom Outland's, can be commoditized, as seen through the creation of 'Outland'.

In her essay, "On the Art of Fiction, even Cather argues, "The thing worthwhile is always unplanned. Any art that is a result of preconcerted plans is a dead baby" (26). 'Outland' is a perfect example of this hypothetical dead baby. 'Outland' is the creation of Louis and Rosamond to supposedly honor Tom's memory. They purchase a Norwegian house and fill it with a variety of antique furniture, and in the attic they plan to create a museum to commemorate Tom's life with the few remaining artifacts from the mesa, accompanied by his lab equipment downstairs. In uprooting everything from its original context – the lab from the university, the artifacts from the mesa, and the various types of antique furniture from their respective time and space – Louie and Rosamond have created

a simulacrum; they have combined three types of replicas whose meanings do not build upon one another; instead they bleed into each other until they are completely dissolved.

The wish to create new spaces to house these important artifacts truly shows that have become decontextualized. There is no context other than an artificial one (i.e. 'Outland' or a museum) for these artifacts to exist in. This museumification of artifacts only marks the fact that these items, these signifiers, denote that the culture, the signified, no longer exists in any real, organic context.

“Peeling” an Orange: Pantomiming Authenticity

The line between what is organic and real and what is synthesized by capitalism becomes further blurred with time. And once again what is a serious concern of Modernism (see *The Professor's House*) becomes the 'plaything' of Postmodernism; Modernism's serious pursuit of authenticity is now reduced to satire. Haruki Murakami's postmodern short story, "Barn Burning", takes up the issues of authenticity raised in *The Professor's House* to their logical conclusion; as previously discussed, St. Peter is concerned that he is playing the part of an academic scholar and patriarch, that he loses his identity within his daily responsibilities. "Barn Burning" asserts that our occupations consume us by having the protagonist's mistress dedicate herself to becoming a professional of *pantomime*. Murakami tells of the mistress practicing her future profession; he writes:

The she "peeled a mandarin orange." Literally, that's what she did: She had a glass bowl of oranges to her left and another bowl for the peels to her right - so went the setup - in fact, there was nothing there. She proceeded to pick up

one imaginary orange, then slowly peel it, pop pieces into her mouth, and spit out the pulp one section at a time, finally disposing of the skin-wrapped residue into the right-hand bowl when she'd eaten the entire fruit. She repeated the maneuver again and again. In so many words, it doesn't sound like much, but I swear, just watching her do this for ten or twenty minutes - she and I kept up a running conversation at the counter of this bar, her "peeling mandarin oranges" the whole while, almost without a second thought - I felt the unreality of everything around me being siphoned away. Unnerving to say the least. (133-4)

This unnerves the protagonist precisely because his mistress is able to 'perform' her economically incentivized craft, while simultaneously having a normal conversation with him. She is living within two worlds; she is modeling the universal primitive action of eating a piece of fruit, while simultaneously existing authentically (i.e. discussing various matters with our protagonist). However, our protagonist has acute anxiety because these two existences are converging into a singular moment at the bar. St. Peter likewise has extreme difficulty in not being able to have a real conversation with those that surround him without being asked about Spanish history, and Coalhouse cannot have tea with an Anglo Saxon family without being immediately asked to play 'coon' songs. These characters, like so many others, are commoditized by the cultural significance they carry.

Murakami's "Barn Burning", in being modeled after William Faulkner's short story of the same title, is therefore a simulacrum in itself. And relevant to the short story's original title, the protagonist's inability to distinguish between what is real and what is performed in witnessing his love interest 'peeling an orange', which propels him into a

desire to set barns (symbols of essential nourishment) afire. Qun Wang convincingly argues that this simultaneity of identities is the genesis for the destructive desire to burn barns; he writes, 'Failing to grasp the significance of the person's talk about the possibility of simultaneity - being able to be at two places at the same time - the narrator became very excited about barn burning' (2).

This destructive impulse to which Wang alludes is in response to our protagonist witnessing a hyper-reality at the bar; the real and the imaginary are no longer distinguishable. In *Simulacra & Simulation*, Baudrillard further comments on this; he writes, "In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (2). The capitalistic model is primarily responsible for creating this hyper-reality; his mistress is monetarily incentivized to reenact the primitive action of eating a piece of fruit. The mistress is not gaining any nourishment which is the authentic effect of eating an orange, and therefore, this action has been utterly de-contextualized. As in *The Professor's House*, the significance of the creation of 'Outland' and St. Peter's continued writing of his multivolume Spanish history work, are wholly equivalent to that of "eating an orange" in "Barn Burning"; they are all done purely for material gain and lack any true connection and respect for the originals on which these models are based. The main difference is that in modernist texts this loss is tragic and often detrimental to characters' psyches, while in postmodern texts characters believe the assertion that they inhabit a hyper-reality to be a *fait accompli* and are more attuned to accept, and may even celebrate, this loss of 'the real'.

The Problem with Reproductions: Breaking the Cycle

In her work, *Dwelling in the Text*, Marilyn Chandler further reflects on the dilution of meaning that takes place in *The Professor's House*. She states:

In Cather's metaphysics originating energy always loses something in the process of articulation, as heat is lost in physical transformations. So the transformation of St. Peter's ardor, vision, and creative energy into books, then into money, then into a building (and later the money from Tom's discoveries is transformed in the same way), represents a tragic debasement of the original impulse. The "word made flesh" – or the idea made product – is a decent from the spiritual into the material realm that results in disillusionment and loss. (191-2)

The intended meaning of 'Outland', as Chandler would have it, is completely lost in translation: 'Outland' does not function as a memorial, but as a distortion of Tom's memory. It is an incredible debasement of his life; his life is now being used as a justification for rampant materialism. When St. Peter describes Rosamond purchasing the antique furniture for 'Outland', he tells his wife, "It turned out to be an orgy of acquisition. [...] She was like Napoleon looting the Italian palaces" (135). The utilization of the Professor's birth name, "Napoleon", implies that he is also not immune to this imperialistic materialism. It is not a coincidence that St. Peter, like his birth namesake, uses Spanish culture for his own financial success (lest we forget the temporary existence of Napoleonic Spain). Relevantly, Prenatt comments that "... *The Professor's House* reflects a similar belief that no object, however beautiful, can be considered art when it is disconnected from its ceremonial

origins, as the 'standardized' object almost necessarily is" (221). This expeditious 'looting' of various antique furniture pieces is clearly at cost to each of their respective origins and personal histories. The history of Tom Outland's memory bleeds into materialism until they can no longer be separated. The creation of 'Outland' creates a clear equivocation with these rooms filled with European antique furniture. Outland now ironically obscures Tom's life and as Chandler would argue, this is truly Cather's metaphysics at work: the product 'Outland' has been created out of Tom's life and through this transition from the spiritual to material realm, the deeper significance of Tom's life is lost in this transition. This inevitable decay of meaning when a new symbol or idea is communicated in a new medium is precisely why apathy can be an effective means to authenticity; if art and artifacts adhere to their original medium and context then we can slow the entropic forces that inevitably decontextualize its significance.

Furthermore, Fredric Jameson in *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, comments on how the free market inevitably dilutes culture. Jameson writes:

In the gradual disappearance of the physical marketplace, of course, and the tendential identification of the commodity with its image (or brand name or logo), another, more intimate, symbiosis between the market and the media is effectuated, in which boundaries are washed over (in ways profoundly characteristic of the postmodern) and an indifferentiation of levels gradually takes the place of an older separation between thing and concept (or indeed, economics and culture, base and superstructure). For one thing, the products sold on the market become the very content of the media image, so that, as it were, the same referent seems to maintain in both domains. (273)

Cultural artifacts are meant to *represent* a culture. But for Outland, he makes the mistake of seeing them as the culture. He believes that in saving the artifacts, he will save the culture itself. However, he is only saving the referent (the 'logo') of culture; as in many postmodernist absurdist narratives, Outland is invested in saving a signifier while the signified is tragically irretrievable, in part due to the free market's emphasis on reproduction of products without context.

Even posthumously the degradation of the signified in favor of the strengthening of the signified is still evident: Tom Outland's memory has been equated to a palace of completely asynchronous, decontextualized artifacts. It is seeing how Tom Outland's memory has been subjected to Jameson's aforementioned observation and to what Chandler calls Cather's metaphysics, that offers St. Peter escape from this dilution of self and meaning. After telling the story of the creation of 'Outland' (Rosamond's 'orgy of acquisition' in Europe), St. Peter, perhaps passive-aggressively, states to his wife, "I was thinking [...] about Euripides; how, when he was an old man, he went and lived in a cave by the sea, and it was thought queer at the time. It seems that houses had become insupportable to him. I wonder whether it was because he had observed women so closely all his life" (136). Although this sentiment may serve as a passive aggressive insult, it also foreshadows the Professor's reclusive behavior in Book III. It is common knowledge that Euripides wrote his later tragedies isolated in a cave which he turned into a library. These tragedies were the ones that received the most acclaim and it says something profound that it is the writing he conceived in isolation which is the most true to life. This is also certainly true for Tom's Diary, which he wrote in the tallest building in Cliff City. Sartre's café waiter is deprived of an environment that encourages reflection and this is

unfortunate because, as Euripides and Tom show us, and St. Peter believes, with isolation comes objectivity and understanding – of both the self and of the world.

Jung is frequently cited in psychoanalytic theory as saying, “Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will control your life”. Edel is one of the critics who argues that St. Peter develops and maintains a Freudian death wish throughout the novel, but he concedes that Tom does find hope in seclusion; he writes, “And his retreat into his past, his reliving the experience high in the mountains where he had found his treasure- and a cave of one’s own – becomes an act of catharsis” (216). As explored, there are a multitude of parallels between Tom and St. Peter – drawn by both Cather and her critics. St. Peter’s cave is clearly his attic and he even makes a comparison between himself and Euripides.

The Hope for Authenticity

The therapeutic catharsis – a reconciling of the human psyche – can be achieved through apathy and removing oneself from culture and materialism. This explains St. Peter’s contentedness at the closing of the novel; Cather writes,

He (St. Peter) doubted whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to; they would be too happily preoccupied with their own affairs. If his apathy hurt them, they could not possibly be so much hurt as he had been already. At least, he felt the ground under his feet. He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future. (258)

St. Peter begins to achieve authenticity only after withdrawing from capitalistic society in refusing attempts to go to Europe and commoditize his ideas, and by extension, his person.

The denouement of *The Professor's House*, unlike *Ragtime* and *Quicksand*, implies a possible salvation for our protagonist through his retreat from culture and materialism into his self. St. Peter believes he is able to bring the subconscious (his most internal self) to the surface and is, therefore, able to reconnect with the idealism of his youth. He will now work on publishing Tom Outland's diary – which is a *personal* (rather than academic) history that is a tale of idealism and subsequent withdrawal from society. While the diary it is not immune to Cather's metaphysics – the gradual dissolution of meaning with every translation – because it will be somewhat commoditized via the publishing channels, it is art because it was not planned to be art; it will be an infinitely more worthwhile and accurate representation of Tom Outland than 'Outland'. St. Peter is no longer acting at becoming. St. Peter becomes a paragon for pursuing personal authenticity within a modern or postmodern, capitalistic era: In refusing to 'eat an orange' (i.e. go through the meaningless conventional gestures apropos to his profession), St. Peter may now become the 'unmodified', authentic turquoise via an internal journey, prompted by Tom Outland's diary and memory.

III. Selling Experience: The Fallacy of Memory & Influence of Late Capitalism on the Cultural Experience in Julian Barnes' *England, England*

Introduction

The texts explored above all have protagonists who try to have an authentic cultural experience, but ultimately fail at this endeavor. This concluding section will address the larger macro-socioeconomic reasoning why connecting to a culture in a meaningful way is so problematic, particularly under postindustrial western capitalism.

Many critics agree that the largest obstacle when attempting to pursue, and later achieve, cultural authenticity is the fact that many cultures have been repressed by the economic superpowers' emphasis on capitalism and consumerism. Therefore, many literary critics and cultural theorists have observed how late capitalism takes full advantage of any repressed cultures whose cultural traditions create an artifact/product, and due to adherence to the 'profit motive' the cultural artifact will be reproduced and sold as quickly and inexpensively as possible in order to maximize earning potential. Therefore, with this business model, the artifact will inexorably become isolated from any authentic cultural significance and context it once had. As Walter Benjamin states, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence" (220). In addition to the inevitably lost connections an object has to time and space, an object's meaning is even further dissolved by its incorporation into late

capitalism; the object is fully absorbed into the impersonal, fully mechanized capitalist manufacturing process until this once sacred cultural artifact is now fully traceable and labeled with a barcode and SKU number; therefore it loses any potential transcendent properties because the object's meaning is completely immersed in capitalism.

The Fallacy of Memory

While this capitalist model does have the effect of often dissolving a product's cultural significance by integrating the object into a modern mechanized manufacturing process, alienating the artifact from the very culture whence it came, this is only part of the reason why cultural authenticity is becoming less of a possibility for most individuals to achieve as the postindustrial world progresses. The other part of the equation, which explains why achieving cultural authenticity has become nothing short of a dream, is the fallacy of memory, and the nonexistence of any shared, absolute national cultural consciousness. Julian Barnes' novel, *England, England*, demonstrates this. The characters of *England, England* do not concern themselves with utilizing any cultural traditions or artifacts from traditionally repressed cultures/nations for economic gain, but rather one of the novel's central characters, Sir Jack Pitman, has England turn its culturally exploitive, capitalistic eye in on itself; he decides to create a theme park where all of the classic icons and architectural marvels of England will be recreated within the confines of one Disneyworld-esque theme park.

England, England demonstrates the mourning of English Imperialism; it is a sardonic masterpiece which proves that capitalism eventually commodifies all cultures, not

just those which have been subordinate to the 'dominant culture'. As this novel demonstrates, once a group of people become nostalgic for any culture - their own or otherwise - it creates a desire in the free market economy. This sociological desire will inevitably be filled with the promise of reconnecting people to this dissipating culture, a promise fulfilled by a ticketed 'museum' of recovered cultural relics, removed from any native context, and/or cultural artifacts assembled by the latest technological manufacturing processes available for purchase.

These aforementioned relics and artifacts only function as signifiers for what we have lost. The creation of these replicas actually has the opposite of their desired effect: instead of functioning as mementos of the authentic cultural experience we remember having, they instead fog and inevitably replace the authentic cultural experience we were trying to recreate when we first purchased these items and ticketed experiences. As Baudrillard posits in his work *The System of Objects*, "Like the dream, advertising defines and redirects an imaginary potentiality" (188). We prefer the replica to the original because we can possess it; advertising equates whatever 'imagined' value we have for the real and redirects this desire to the advertised object/experience. This is what England, England does - it redirects nostalgia for Englishness to a theme park.

Again, we prefer the replica because we can *have* it; many of us use abbreviations and acronyms, but do not have any idea of what the acronym or abbreviation was originally used to represent. It is now irretrievable whether the domain '.com' originally stood for company or commercial, and most people fail to realize that the farewell remark goodbye was originally a common abbreviation for the expression 'God be with ye'. Likewise, the

object or 'museum' visit superimposes itself over, and thus eventually completely obscures, any other authentic cultural memory we may have had.

A few examples in the current free market prove that it is obscenely profitable to convince the populace that they can purchase a commodity which will, in turn, reconnect them to their cultural origins (their 'roots') or offer connections to a new culture. This is evidenced with the success of genealogy sites like ancestry.com, recent trends in tattoo artistry (i.e. Tibetan Script, Chinese characters, etc.), and the proliferation of Native American art (e.g. totem poles that can be contracted for hundreds of thousands of dollars). These ventures are successful because they have the promise of connecting us to a *truer* version of ourselves and of humanity. The services which claim that they can connect us to who we truly are, offer us a way to return to our supposedly blissful, primordial selves, similar to how atavism is praised in Victorian literature. These services promise to stave off the sensory saturation and subsequent identity fragmentation we are faced with in postmodern society, allowing us to instead focus on our cultural essences. However, as *England, England* demonstrates, due to the impersonal mass production process and the inevitable degradation and fallacy of memory, these services, much like the theme park itself, are doomed to fail.

As previously stated, many literary critics and sociologists concern themselves with cultural appropriation and construct litigious arguments as to how, through legal recourse, a culture can reassert itself and reclaim its cultural artifacts which have been lost to capitalism. However, even if the law were concerned with these matters, memory, in being subjected to replicas and sensory saturation as part of the postmodern experience, has eroded many of these cultural recollections beyond recognition, making the process of

retrieval more difficult. Therefore, it is appropriate that the novel *England, England* begins with its protagonist, Martha Cochrane, recalling her earliest memory of her childhood; she would often complete a counties of England jigsaw puzzle, but there was almost always one piece missing, "...whereupon a sense of desolation, failure, and disappointment at the imperfection of the world would come upon her, until Daddy, who always seemed to be hanging around at this moment, would find the missing piece in the unlikeliest place" (3-6). This memory is sacred to her because it is a metaphorical moment where the world (represented in the jigsaw puzzle) finally comes together with the aid of her father.

Literary critic, Elena Semino further comments on the significance of this scene:

The novel sets up a potential parallel between Martha's partly conscious reconstruction of her own personal history and the reconstruction of national history in the "England, England" theme park. Similarly, Martha's focus on her "counties of England" jigsaw puzzle anticipates her involvement with a miniature, fake England as Jack Pitman's employee. But, even on first reading, the first part of the novel worked...as a powerful evocation of an individual's memories, memories that are no less compelling for being potentially only partly 'true'. (430)

Semino aptly conveys the parallel that exists between Martha wishing to experience her earliest blissful memory as a child and that of one wishing to recapture one's feeling of cultural heritage and sense of nationalism of a bygone era, the impetus behind Sir Jack's *England, England*.

Similarly, Martha's father, after he abandons her and her mother, attempts to once again be a presence in her life during her adult years. However, Martha immediately

refuses his proposal when he cannot recall this memory of her and this jigsaw puzzle;

Barnes writes:

"He shook his head. 'You did jigsaws? I suppose all kids love them. Richard did. For a while, anyway. He had an incredibly complicated one, I remember, all the clouds or something - you never knew which way up it was until you were half finished...'

'You don't remember?'

He looked at her.

'You really, really don't?'

She would always blame him for that. (26)

This exchange of dialogue between Martha and her father conveys the tragedy of memory. Because Martha's father is unable to recall Martha's earliest memory, it has lost its validity, and she, like the jigsaw puzzle her father coincidentally remembers her brother completing, is unable to determine which way up is. In being her earliest memory, this has been the point of origin where she has defined herself. After all, what difference is there between something only you remember and a dream? And as Semino comments, because her father is unable to affirm this memory, Martha inevitably begins to question it. This scene illustrates that if we cannot even be certain of the validity of our personal memory - as Martha begins to question the validity of one she held most sacred - then there isn't much hope for us to preserve or retrieve any semblance of a cultural memory.

As this dialogue between Martha and her father shows, memory needs consensus in order to survive. However, true consensus is an impossibility - especially when it comes to something as sensitive and polarizing as culture. Defining or agreeing upon shared traits of

any culture is incredibly difficult, and any definition will immediately cause controversy and alienate members of the culture who do not adhere to the definition.

The 'Disneyfication' of Cultural Experience

Walter Benn Michaels, in his book *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, expresses a similar idea about the central problem of cultural definition and authenticity; he writes:

'We have a great desire,' Calvin Coolidge remarked, 'to be supremely American,' which is to say that, in nativist modernism, identity becomes an ambition as well as a description. Indeed, it is only this transformation of identity into the object of desire as well as its source that will make the dramas of nativism - the defense of identity, its loss, its repudiation, its rediscovery - possible. What we want, in other words, may be a function of what we are, but in order for us to want it, we cannot simply be it. (3)

Here Michaels focuses on a kind of Lacanian argument around Coolidge's statement. As Lacan theorizes, we first utter a signifier for an object/concept when it is absent from our lives; therefore, we are incentivized more to speak 'ma' or 'da-da' when they aren't present. Mary Klages paraphrases in her work *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, "Lacan says that language is always about loss or absence: you only need words when the object you want isn't present. If your world was all fullness, with no absence or emptiness, then you wouldn't need language" (78). Clearly Michaels is doing a similar reading of Coolidge's statement by saying that we as Americans wish to be 'supremely American' - implying that

we have yet to achieve being something we are already labeled as being. Therefore, as Lacan would argue, and Michaels does, Coolidge's statement more accurately reveals a void present in what it means to be 'American', rather than an aspiration towards an already existing American-ness.

Sherry Turkle, in *Alone Together*, discusses a real world instance at Disneyworld of people preferring the replica, as Baudrillard and Pitman would have it, over the original when given the option. She writes:

When Animal Kingdom opened in Orlando, populated by “real” – that is, biological – animals, its first visitors complained that they were not as “realistic” as the animatronic creatures in other parts of Disneyworld. The robotic crocodiles slapped their tails and rolled their eyes – in sum, they displayed the archetypal “crocodile” behavior. The biological crocodiles [...] pretty much kept to themselves. (4)

As evidenced in this anecdote, people prefer the hyperbolic versions of things because that is how they are remembered. We want an alligator to perform all of the things it is known for simultaneously. This need for having a compressed experienced unfortunately creates a false narrative (for alligators as well as cultures) to which the public demands people, destinations, and performances adhere. This is why the vaudevillian version of ragtime was destined to supersede its original and more complex variety.

In line with desiring animatronic alligators over original ones, Sir Jack Pitman in Barnes' novel has realized that people wish to experience all a particular culture has to offer simultaneously, and England, England is created to fulfill this market desire. The patrons of England, England are able to experience all of England almost simultaneously; it

can be absorbed within a few hours whereas experiencing all of the real sites first-hand would take weeks of worth of travel time to explore; therefore people begin to prefer the replica because of its accessibility. Even a helicopter ride that ironically gives a tour of the tourist attraction of England, *England* is done in a tongue-in-cheek manner, but then it becomes wildly successful. Barnes writes, "The helicopter tour of the Island - well, that at least had been rather a lark. A sort of fast-forward version of England: one minute it was Big Ben, the next Anne Hathaway's cottage, then the White Cliffs of Dover, Wembley Stadium, Stonehenge, one's own Palace, and Sherwood Forest" (168). This exemplifies how postmodernism and late capitalism contribute to cultural exploration; they offer a simultaneity of ideas and nostalgia facilitated by technology. The anonymous French intellectual, in *England, England* seems to echo Benjamin's "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by stating, "We prefer the reproduction of the work of art to the work of art itself, the perfect sound and solitude of the compact disc to the symphony concert in the company of a thousand victims of throat complaints, the book on tape, to the book on the lap" (55). We prefer the experience we can most readily possess. As this passage implies, we falsely recognize accessibility as authenticity. The CD supersedes the actual concert because it is more accessible; it is the lowest common denominator of experience and therefore becomes the most culturally relevant because of its availability, not its validity; this is one negative effect of the democratization of art that many celebratory critics like Benjamin have not taken into account.

The Temporality of Cultural Experience

Barnes' novel shares a perspective with Fredric Jameson who notes, in his work *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, that, "We have often been told, however, that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (16). As Jameson posits, culture has transitioned from being diachronic -happening over time - to synchronic - happening all at once. The transition from the diachronic to the synchronic has occurred because of our insatiable nature for authentic experience. We desire immediate satisfaction and cultural authenticity because the market has proclaimed we can have it - for a price. We believe we can absorb all of these cultural elements observed simultaneously, preferring a compilation CD of the most important artists rather than going to see one in particular; we prefer England, England, a theme park which can be explored in a few short hours, rather than the *real* England which takes several days to traverse. This is what Coolidge's statement would have us yearn for: an America existing in a synchronic space, rather than a diachronic one - so that he can have the illusion of finally possessing the totality of America.

However is it truly possibly to summarize a culture or movement in the form of bullet points like a compilation CD may do or as England, England does in only replicating some of England? I believe there is a second reading to Coolidge's ambition of being 'supremely American' which helps us answer this question: Coolidge's proclamation reveals how any particular culture cannot be defined in terms of anything except other

linguistic variations of itself (i.e. 'American', 'the New World', 'the United States', U.S.A.). Alternately, we are able to create binaries (i.e. First World/ Third World, America/un-American, New World/Old World', etc.) and define what a culture is, by reference to what it is not. However, this is as far as our mass consensus goes. When Americans wish to become even more American, or any individual for that matter becomes imbued with a sense of nationalism, the activities often include flag waving and fireworks, and an amassment and later consumption of various libations. These actions in and of themselves celebrate what we are unable to define; we are celebrating a community which really only exists and comes together when we are ironically celebrating it.

Contrastingly to people who have an ambiguous sense of nationalism, those who dedicate themselves to defining culture or reflecting upon the significance of culturally historic moments incite controversy. For example, if you were to define being American in terms of 'the American Dream' of owning a house in the suburbs with a white-picket fence, and being married with 2.3 children, you would instantly alienate and ostracize a large number of the population - like farmers who, for many, are exemplars of what it means to be American and who have been the focus of much art and literature. As Jung states in his work, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, "We know a man can never be everything at once, never complete; he always develops certain qualities at the expense of others, and wholeness is never attained" (92). Jung's idea that wholeness can never be achieved by an individual can be applied to a culture as well. The second we define a culture in any way, a number of its members who do not adhere to the definition become alienated by the definition, and by extension, the very culture itself. Therefore, a mass culture cannot be defined by anything other than a repetition of its name without inciting controversy.

Hence, when it is debated what this theme park shall be called, they agree upon 'England, England'; the repetition of its name validates its significance in the citizens' minds.

Therefore, *England, England* is all about creating a mass amount of replicas and intentionally lacks any definition. When Sir Jack is running through the list of desired attractions (ranging from Big Ben to a visage of a Robin covered in snow - an image of Englishness which the characters believe to have been attained from not England itself, but Christmas cards) he thinks, "Most people remembered history in the same conceited yet evanescent fashion as they recalled their own childhood. It seemed to Dr. Max positively unpatriotic to know so little about the origins and forging of your nation. And yet, therein lay the immediate paradox: that patriotism's most eager bedfellow was ignorance, not knowledge" (85-6). As can be applied from Jung's position about the individual achieving 'wholeness', cultural wholeness can never be achieved because for every assertion or trait it has, the opposite attribute is absent. Therefore, Barnes argues that ignorance is patriotism's "most eager bedfellow" because a culture or nation's history, if brought into light, will alienate those who disagree with its specificity. Therefore, culture exists almost uncontestedly in a beautifully undefined time and space. After all, what is more beautiful than something that can be all things to all people?

Because of this fact, sightseeing has become a postmodern religion. The transformation of travel into becoming a religious experience is aptly summarized in David Lodge's novel, *Paradise News*; he writes, "'I'm interested in religion myself, obliquely,' said he [Sheldrake, an author]. 'The thesis of my book is that sightseeing is substitute for religious ritual. The sightseeing tour as secular pilgrimage. Accumulation of grace by visiting the shrines of high culture. Souvenirs as relics. Guidebooks as devotional aids. You

get the picture' (Lodge 61). Culture is such a frustratingly abstract concept for many who wish to seek it; therefore we religiously follow guidebooks which tell us what are the archetypal experiences that we must see. Then we purchase various souvenirs of the experience. Our participation in this tourism process demonstrates the appeal-to-tradition fallacy: the fact that they these sites have been visited so many times seemingly validates their cultural importance.

The idea that a specific destination carries profound cultural significance creates within us a need to visit it as well. As Lodge writes, "'I'm [Sheldrake, an author] doing to tourism what Marx did to capitalism, what Freud did to family life. Deconstructing it. You see, I don't think people really want to go on holiday, any more than they really want to go to church. They've been brainwashed into thinking it will do them good, or make them happy. In fact surveys show that holidays cause incredibly amounts of stress'" (62). Again, these tourist attractions, like England, England, are selling the imagined value one has for any particular culture in the form of photographs, key chains, postcards, and T-shirts. This is indicative of the vastly profitable process of translating an intangible concept (i.e. culture) into a tangible and marketable commodity.

Reification: The Path to Profit

The aforementioned commoditization process is what Marx refers to as reification. Terry Eagleton in his work, simply entitled *Marx*, aptly paraphrases and quotes Marx's conception of reification:

This process of reification, in which animate and inanimate are inverted and the dead tyrannize over the living, is particularly evident in the 'universal commodity', money:

The stronger the power of my money, the stronger am I. The properties of money are my, the possessor's, properties and essential powers. Therefore what I am and what I *can do* is by no means determined by my individuality. I *am ugly*, but I can buy the *most beautiful* women. Which means to say that I am not *ugly*, for the effect of *ugliness*, its repelling power, is destroyed by money. As an individual, I am *lame*, but money procures me twenty-four legs. Consequently, I am not lame. I am a wicked, dishonest, unscrupulous and stupid individual, but money is respected, and so also is its owner. Money is the highest good, and consequently its owner is also *good*. (EW 377)

Money, Marx comments, is 'the universal whore, the universal pimp of men and peoples', a kind of garbled language in which all human and natural qualities are scrambled and inverted and anything can be magically transformed into anything else. (32-33)

This phenomenon of reification can be aptly seen in *England, England* and throughout the world. Simply put, people enjoy spending money. Much like the Lacanian theory that language is created because of a lack of something, the same can be said for money. People enjoy enacting their ability to spend because they feel like they are filling a void. For many, productivity is synonymous with spending money; in *England, England* Barnes writes, "As Ms. Cochrane points out, Pitman House could easily have eliminated any awareness of

financial disbursement, by either all-inclusive packages or the instant crediting of a final account. But research indicated that the majority of vacationers enjoy the act of spending, and, just as important, that of being seen to spend" (186). This is further evidence for Marx's conviction that we have become empowered and in awe of our own spending; it validates our selves.

Similarly, it has been recently become common knowledge that when the U.S. government subsidizes condoms, in countries such as Africa, STD proliferation becomes less of a problem than when they are made free. An article entitled, "Zambia: The Economics of Sex Work" from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, speaks to this point:

Free condoms are distributed at health clinics, guest houses and bars, but the subsidized condoms in attractive packaging, against the bland presentation of free condoms, are much more popular, even though they cost about 500 kwacha (\$0.10) each.

Kaluba [a resident of Zambia] said the socially marketed condoms were preferred, as "sex is prestigious," and the packaging and presentation added to the currency of such condoms. (1)

The fact that the same condom is more valuable in being contained within different packaging speaks to how we grant a specific landsite cultural importance. We believe money is progress and are less receptive to cultural things which can be attained for free. With sex it is more empowering for a person to buy their sexual freedom (via condoms), as with tourism a person feels better in buying back their culture or into a new one. A free

experience feels less productive; after all, if something costs money it becomes validated by the market, and as Marx would posit, within our consciousness.

The free-market's use of reification has additional effects on art, culture, and other forms of aesthetic production. Jameson writes:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the varied kinds of institutional support available for the newer art, from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage. (4 -5)

The phenomenon which Jameson describes above can be witnessed in *England, England*. In the novel, when the characters are discussing their individual conceptions of 'Englishness', one character speaks to the fact that they believe the exclamation 'Heavens to Betsy!' to be an English expression. But instead of spending a single moment to look into the origin of the expression and conducting any research about who this 'Betsy' may be, those commissioned to run England, England take the path of least resistance which leads to a marketable product. They have no regard for the expression's original meaning or origin; Barnes writes:

Marketing provided the clinching refinement: the Heavens-to-Betsy Bunjee Experience would become the Island Breakfast Experience. At the top of the cliff would be a free-range hen facility aswagger with plumed and coiffed

birds; fresh eggs would be flown in daily; and the Visitor would descend to the beach with a clip-on Betsy Basket. Then he or she would be led by a mob-capped waitress to Betsy's All-Day Breakfast Bar, where the eggs would be taken from the Basket and fried, boiled scrambled, or poached, according to choice, before the jumper's very eyes. With the bill would come an engraved certificate of Descent stamped with Sir Jack's signature and date. (126)

As evidenced in this passage, capitalism manipulates this English phrase to produce the highest profit margin. It is also significant that a souvenir certificate is issued with the bill after the experience. It is reaffirming proof that your money has bought an authentic cultural experience.

Word etymologist Charles Funk has researched the significance of this supposedly English phrase; he writes:

Well, though I don't doubt that "Heavens to Betsy!" is a hundreds years old - it would almost have to be to have become so wide-spread before the days of rapid dissemination by radio, movies, or newspaper [...] Possibly the phrase was known in Revolutionary War days, but I doubt it. Nor do I think, as some friends have suggested, that it pertained in any way to the maker of the first American flag, Betsy Ross. It is much more likely to have been derived in some way from the frontiersman's rifle or gun, which for unknown reason, he always fondly called Betsy. However, despite exhaustive search, I am reluctantly forced to resort to the familiar lexicographical locution, "Source unknown. (x-xi)

As evidenced in this passage, the original meaning of the expression 'Heavens to Betsy!', like so many expressions and acronyms is irretrievable. The best estimation we can make is that the expression is ironically an American not a British expression - this is the classic example of a culture misrecognizing itself. The capitalistic employment of this phrase, and its unknown source, suggests the impotence of pursuing legal action against those who utilize various cultural elements purely for economic gain. The irretrievableness of this expression, and many other artifacts and traditions, invalidates many of legalese arguments about defending against cultural appropriation. Even if the law did suddenly impose cultural patent laws, they would not work, because as so often is the case, the origins of cultural artifacts and expressions are often irretrievable.

In *England, England*, it becomes a tumultuous time for the protagonist, Martha, when she discovers that she is unable to verify her earliest childhood memory. Barnes implies that the fallacy of memory is as strong a barrier as capitalism to accessing both our personal and cultural histories. Barnes writes, "And there was another reason for mistrust. If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between" (6). This same barrier of memory prevents us from remembering who we truly are, and knowing that culture and the individual do not exist outside of time and space. Culture and personal identity become a moving target because they are inevitably changed with new experiences and the passing of time; these identities are frustratingly liquid. Bob Dylan concisely expresses the existential idea that, "We have never arrived. We are in a constant state of becoming". This existential assertion also applies to culture in addition to the individual. Each new cultural memory changes the

culture as a whole; similar to how we are a collection of experiences, so is culture. This is another obstacle that prevents a culture from being fully actualized.

Nick Bentley, in his work "Re-writing Englishness: Imagining the nation in Julian Barnes's *England, England* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*", realizes the novel's investment in the fallacy of memory; he writes, "If our pasts are a series of memories of constructed images, then recovering those reconstructed images operates as a kind of recovery of what passes for the authentic. The novel, therefore, is a lament, not for lost Englishness, but for the fact that we can never recoup the past, or, that if we do, it is always a false, artificial past that we recover" (494). Bentley addresses the crux of the problem with cultural authenticity. Cultural authenticity cannot exist in capitalistic societies in part because of the fallacy of memory. *The pearl* that is cultural authenticity cannot be recovered through legal recourse or individual investigation; authenticity is never attained because of the subjectivity of human experience. The exploitative nature of capitalism will have us perpetually shopping in various nostalgia shops and disingenuously traveling to tourist trap destinations which tout to connect us to triumphs of the human spirit and creativity, but we will perpetually exit through the gift shop and purchase some curio to remember our pilgrimage to this sacred site. However, this memento, like cultural memories, will be thrown into a confined space until one day it is unearthed and we will have the unpleasant experience of thinking about its origins and significance to our lives, only to discard it or sell it to anyone finding themselves desiring of this enigmatic artifact ripped from its original time and space.

Conclusion:

Evidenced in the study of these modernist and postmodernist texts, the ability to access cultural authenticity is nearly impossible within a postindustrial, capitalist context. This has led many to vilify late capitalism's and western imperialism's influence on the erosion of cultural authenticity. While this criticism is often well-founded, these barriers brought on by economic incentives which prevent the individual from connecting to a culture have been in place for significantly longer than most people realize. A perfect example is explored in Charles Mann's *1491: New Revelations of The Americas Before Columbus*:

Meanwhile, other projects of the city [Tiwanaku] were constantly enveloped in construction projects, which testified to the continued wealth and vitality of the state. Sometimes these projects acquired construction materials by cannibalizing old monuments, thereby hastening the process of creating ruins [...] "They build their monuments as if their intent was never to finish them," the Spanish academic Polo de Ondegardo marveled in 1571. Exactly right Isbell and Vranich said. Completion was not the object. The goal was a constant buzz of purposeful activity. (264)

As this passage demonstrates, communities predating late capitalism and imperialism are often willing to cannibalize their own culture and its respective artifacts for economic incentives and to have it appear that the culture is vital and vibrant as opposed to being stagnant. As previously expostulated, many people find American Indian culture appealing, because it is often misconceived to be ahistorical.

Static truths and cultures are often appealing, but they rarely, if ever, exist. We need to overcome this misconception that cultures are unchanging, immutable truths and look within ourselves and in our immediate communities rather than shopping for cultural truth.

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