Furthermore, like the educational series *The Story of Movies*,[3] which Scorsese's Film Foundation uses as an education tool to introduce students to classic cinema and the cultural, historical and artistic significance of film, Hugo is a good primer on film history, with its focus on one of cinema's early silent masters. Using ample historically accurate information, it provides some insight into early cinema's practitioners, like Méliès, for those unfamiliar with the European roots of America's favorite contemporary form of entertainment.

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Midnight in Paris. Dir. Woody Allen. Perf. Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams, Kathy Bates. Gravier Productions / MediaPro, 2011. Film.

"Gertrude Stein said it was a good picture hut not a great one. I said it could he a fine picture. We laughed over it. Hemingway punched me in the mouth (".Recorded Live")

In the mid-1960s, an American stand-up comedian portrayed himself as being among the Lost Generation expat writers living in Paris during the 1920s. In his account, Paris was a timeless City of Light, haunted by Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Stein, with never-ending balls and arty exchanges. The fact that comedian Woody Allen had never lived during that period probably added extra luster to his perception of Paris. Such a portrayal is nonetheless an atavistic romance: when falling in love with the past, one happily ignores the lapse of time and lets fantasy overtake reality.

Allen's fascination persists. A short routine from his stand-up years has evolved into a feature film, *Midnight in Paris* (2011). The filmmaker's craze for the city is evident in the four-minute-long opening sequence which lavishly showcases major landmarks of Paris: the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the banks of the Seine, to name but a few. These gorgeous images are woven together by jazz music from the 1950s, the

3 Scorsese's film *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies* (1995) is part of this series and explores the history and themes of American cinema from the beginning of cinema, including the work of D.W.Griffith, to 1969, the year Scorsese himself began his career as a director and thus he chose not to comment on himself nor his contemporaries.

result being an audiovisual feast. Here, we are invited to find a parallel to the monumental opening of *Manhattan* (1979) with its black-and-white shots of New York City accompanied by George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." In both films, highly romanticized views of the cities compensate the protagonists for their current dissatisfactions with life.

Nevertheless, there are distinct differences between these opening sequences. The representation of Paris in *Midnight in Paris* is restricted to postcard images of well-known tourist attractions and fashionable quarters. We see neither street hawkers pestering sightseers nor demonstrators marching through the streets. This selectivity remains consistent throughout the film: we see the well-appointed hotel suite rather than cramped apartment rooms, and gaze upon Versailles and Claude Monet's garden in Givemy rather than witness racial violence in the suburbs. By contrast, the opening of *Manhattan* forefronts the everyday life of New Yorkers: no world-famous tourist icons such as the Statue of Liberty and Times Square, but instead roadmen at work, garbage piled up on the street, and other not-so-glamorous views of the city. This difference suggests that the love for Paris felt by Gil (Owen Wilson), the protagonist of *Midnight in Paris*, is not rooted in any lived experience, but rather is steeped in a commercialized, tourist fantasy. Gil does not belong to Paris; he idolizes the city precisely because he is alien to it.

Similarly, the Paris of the 1920s, into which Gil slips for an unexplained reason, is depicted as an enchanting yet extremely cliché-ridden city. The writers and artists whom Gil meets during his time-travel remain one-dimensional: with the exception of the fictional heroine Adriana (Marion Cotillard), they behave and speak as if they had been cut out from *A Moveable Feast* by Hemingway or from any other memoir about 1920s Paris. The most notable example is the quirky impersonation of Salvador Dali by Adrien Brody, whose exaggerated Spanish accent, gesticulations, and oversized ego conform to the well-known, eccentric public personality of Dali. Adorned with the caricatures of literary and artistic celebrities, the period of the 1920s is not meant to be a realistic time, but rather a fictionalized space of nostalgia where the worn-out American yuppie from 2010 can find refuge.

However, the film exposes that such a romance with the past is nothing but an illusion. At a dance party thrown by Fitzgerald, Adriana takes Gil to a merry-go-round and passionately tells him of her love for the

Belle Époque of the 1890s. There is an endlessly recessive quality to their atavistic romance, as if Gil and Adriana were on a merry-go-round, forever pursuing what is out of reach, convinced that the old days must have been better than the times they live in. So, when they travel from the 1920s to the 1890s, they artists as Paul Gauguin (Olivier Rabourdin) and Edgar Degas (François Rostain) complaining about their time and yearning for the time of the Renaissance. Gil arrives at an insight: "If you stay here though, and this becomes your present, then pretty soon you'll start imagining another time was really [...] the golden time. Yeah, that's what the present is. It's a little unsatisfying because life's a little unsatisfying."

Since the glossy past depicted in the film is illusory, one might be tempted to interpret Gil's time travel as a hallucination, but that is not possible. Would-be psychoanalysts are confounded by the scene where, having returned to 2010, Gil finds an old copy of Adriana's memoir at a riverside bookstall. With the help of a museum guide (Carla Bruni) who translates for him, Gil discovers a passage about himself. It is evident that the past has been changed by Gil's time travel, and in return the past invades the present to change Gil's actions. The crossovers between the real and fictional worlds — or in the case of this film, between the present and the illusory past — are a theme that Allen had explored not only in such films as *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) but also in his O. Henry Award winning short story "The Kugelmass Episode" (1977). Whether it is Gil in *Midnight in Paris* or Madame Bovary in "The Kugelmass Episode," Allen's characters hop across different worlds with little difficulty and bring to both worlds changes that result in comic disorder.

By having the main characters jump back and forth between multiple time periods, Midnight in Paris throws the audience onto a merry-go-round of chaos, enticing the viewer into falling in love with an idealized past and ending up being lost among the Lost Generation. It's a love story, sort of.

Works Cited

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