Chapter 4

GHOSTING HOLLYWOOD: *SUNSET BOULEVARD* (1950) AND *FEDORA* (1978)

"[A] ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back."
—Jacques Derrida[1]

"The ghost of *Sunset Boulevard* was hanging over the production of *Fedora* … and that I think was good."
—Billy Wilder[2]

Enter the Ghosts

Early into the 1940 musical comedy, *Rhythm on the River,* Oliver Courtney, a famous singer-composer suffering from writer's block, tries to persuade young writer Cherry Lane to write songs for him without receiving actual credit. Perplexed by his offer she expresses her fear that this would be a "misrepresentation," but Courtney puts her mind at ease when he explains this to be a common practice: "It's called ghost-writing. It's a very profitable profession." "For the ghost?" she wonders, only to be corrected by him: "For the writer."

Even though *Rhythm on the River* (originally called *Ghost Music*) contains some clearly Wilderesque dialogue, Wilder would only earn story credit on the film. Like Cherry Lane, he was familiar with the experience of being a ghost and hence at the short end of the rather lucrative stick of having a career in entertainment, an experience which extends back to his early days in Berlin where he claims to have written literally hundreds of uncredited stories and exposés for silent films. The term for such writers in the industry at the time was "Neger" (negro), and meant to convey both the invisibility of their labor and the slave-like conditions under which they produced their work. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the two films in which Wilder would turn the spotlight directly on the film industry, what came into view would be specifically the industry's strategies of making labor—and exploitation—invisible. Wilder's goal therefore was to illuminate the

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human cost incurred in the making of films and the creation of stardom, and the notion of the ghost would become the central organizing metaphor.

The 1950 masterpiece *Sunset Boulevard* and the seldom-seen *Fedora* (1978) are companion pieces that forcefully foreground what haunts Hollywood filmmaking at distinct historical junctures of the studio era, exploring questions of visibility and invisibility; the changing roles of actor, writer, and producer; the transitory experience of fame and stardom; and the merciless process of aging. Both films skillfully depict the old and the new regime of filmmaking as parallel universes that enter a collision course at moments of crisis, their parallelism enhanced by the fact that the second film not only revisits the terrain of the first but takes it to a new extreme. Made almost thirty years apart, they are also elaborate reflections on what Wilder perceived to be his own respective position within that industry at key moments of his career, providing the most personal account of his ambivalent status as outsider and insider and the concomitant exilic perspective of his filmmaking.

Saturated with dense intertextuality, both films revolve around the logic of what in contemporary digital culture is referred to as ghosting—the copying and layering of images (by manipulating images in Photoshop, for example) or the lingering of a shadow that appears after an image has been moved on a computer screen. Taken together, they are a palimpsest of over sixty years of filmmaking history as well as an interrogation of the mechanisms that govern the writing of that history. The metaphor of the ghost here extends beyond its thematic use in the film. It follows Jacques Derrida's argument that the logic of ghosting goes beyond the realm of the visual, for it encompasses the key metaphysical categories through which we comprehend our lives. Ghosts, he contends, violate the binary category of alive and dead, body and spirit, present and absent. The presence of the specter casts into doubt the "border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality."[3] *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* can be seen to probe similar oppositions, providing a hauntology of Hollywood that makes them the most somber and uncanny films of Wilder's career.

From the outset, *Sunset Boulevard* establishes itself as a story of death. Involving an old-time movie star in a murder case, it connects the sudden demise of a young man with the more gradual disappearance from view of a Hollywood actress. Opening with a famous shot of the murder victim floating in a pool as seen from below, we come to realize that we will be offered an unorthodox angle on what is to unfold. A voiceover promises to reveal to us "the facts, the whole truth" of the crime, but when a flashback begins and the corpse (clearly recognizable as the actor William Holden) is now seen sitting at a typewriter, we realize that the story is in fact told by a dead man, giving his "presence" in the film an eerie and ghostly quality. When we follow Joe Gillis on the screen, we are aware that we are in fact

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witnessing a walking corpse, making his encounter with the undead figure of a film star, a person believed to have passed away a long time ago, doubly ironic.

Similarly haunted, *Fedora* opens with the mysterious suicide of a woman (Marthe Keller) who throws herself in front of a train. The terror-stricken look of the hooded woman just before she jumps evokes Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream," one of the most famous artistic representations of anguish and horror.[4] As a newscaster informs us, the dead woman is the famous actress Fedora (halfway through the film we will learn that it was actually her daughter Antonia), known for her performances in *Madame Bovary, Joan of Arc,* and *Lola Montez*. At her subsequent lying-in-state in her palatial Paris residence, mourners gather to pay their last respects. As with Gillis' death, here too the cameras of the press are present to report to the news-hungry, establishing a tension between petty sensationalism, public melodrama, and private emotion that also structures *Sunset Boulevard.* Both films are told as flashback voice-over narratives—incidentally by the same voice, that of William Holden, who plays both Gillis and producer Barry Detweiler in *Fedora*—and follow a circular structure that lets each film end at the scene of death at which it opened. Both Fedora (Hildegard Knef) and Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) are former stars responsible for the deaths we witness at the outset of each film—Desmond becomes a murderess when her kept lover rebuffs her and walks out on her, while

Figure 4.1. "Mort" signals Fedora's imminent suicide

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Fedora's desire to prolong her fame by making her daughter her stand-in drives the daughter to drug addiction and suicide. Both are ghosts of their respective former selves; a refusal to come to terms with the natural process of aging has ultimately led them to live in complete social, geographical, and psychological isolation.

Norma Desmond is one of the living dead, embalmed in her own illusions (the dozens of photographs that clutter her house; the films of herself which her butler screens for her at night; the fake fan letters he writes to her); she is less a femme fatale than a vampire who sustains her fantasy by draining the lives of those who surround her.[5] When Gillis stumbles into her home, she is in the midst of burying her pet chimpanzee and mistakes him for the undertaker; in an ironic reversal of roles, he will leave her house as a corpse six months later. The dilapidated mansion with heavy drawn curtains, the wind sighing through the pipe organ, and rats scurrying across the bottom of an empty swimming pool mark it as a gothic place that radiates pastness and decay. Even though the story begins at sunrise, Sunset Boulevard denotes a road that literally leads to death.

Fedora, too, features seemingly undead characters who command others so that they can live their imaginary lives. Fedora's ambition makes her a witness to her own death, as her daughter is mourned by hundreds, while her mother, Fedora under the assumed name Countess Sobryanski, orchestrates the memorial service. The need to have her daughter become her stand-in arose when cosmetic treatment meant to preserve her youthful looks went awfully wrong and permanently disfigured her. A ghoulish figure, the wheelchair-bound Fedora spends her days surrounded by electric heaters and hiding the mutilated half of her face behind a dark veil. Concerned about appearances until the very end, the Countess commands her dead daughter's make-up to be retouched and her white gloves exchanged while the lying-in-state ceremony is interrupted for lunch—a very literal enactment of what in Austria is called displaying "a schene Leich'," (a beautiful corpse), a spectacle the young Wilder first experienced at age seven when the Emperor Franz Joseph was buried with royal pomp in Vienna.[6]

If *Sunset Boulevard* is the camped-up version of the haunted screen of Weimar that is both nostalgic and sarcastic in its look at the classic studio era, *Fedora,* too, is a swan song that wavers between somberness and romance—an elegy to classic studio filmmaking it is also a defiant response to the coming of the New Hollywood cinema. While the former film ironically inaugurated Wilder's most prolific decade in the studio system, the latter provides us with a last celebration of Wilder as author and anti-*auteur.*

When the Pictures Became Small

In both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* the enormous distance between the present and the past is highlighted in a recognition scene between the Holden

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character and the aging star. In *Sunset Boulevard,* it takes Joe Gillis some time to figure out into whose house he has unwittingly stumbled when fleeing from pursuers wanting to repossess his car. When he finally recognizes who his host is, he exclaims: "I know your face. You're Norma Desmond. You used to be in pictures. You used to be big." To which Desmond replies with one of the film's most memorable lines, "I *am* big. It's the pictures that got small." Desmond is of course referring to the demise of the silent age—which ended her career and that of many others—when the introduction of sound led to a complete restructuring of the industry that had no more use for her. What came after that is according to Desmond hardly worth considering. Detweiler's much delayed recognition of Fedora, which does not occur until halfway through the film, is an even more dramatic scene as it highlights the abyss that separates the beautiful star with whom he had spent a memorable night on the beach from her present morbid state. When Barry Detweiler finally understands who he has in front of him and says, "*You* are Fedora," the star responds by saying, "I *was* Fedora." She is alluding to the fact that for the public her daughter has unknowingly assumed the star identity of the mother. With the death of the daughter, the mother's identity as star has in fact died a second time, and this time without any hope for another "second chance" (Fedora's term for "comeback," a word which she, like Desmond, shuns). As we learn at the end of the film, Fedora dies only six weeks after her daughter, further underscoring how mother and daughter had indeed become one.

Both films ultimately indict the measures the respective film stars take to cope with their failing careers, but not without a certain sympathy for them. In some ways, Norma is quite right about pictures getting smaller. The two pivotal changes in the film industry which provide the backdrop both for *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* can indeed be understood as a dramatic change in the size of the picture, that is, the actual size of the image of the screen, the overall dimensions of film production and distribution, and the significance of the star. While Norma Desmond may be wrong in believing that she is still "big," her lament that with the transition to sound films became inferior is not incorrect. Artistically, the coming of sound *at first* did not mean progress but regression. A novelty killed a highly perfected art, as early sound film had severe mechanical limitations. Because the camera had to be encased to prevent its whirring mechanism from interfering with the microphones that recorded the voices of the actors, it became immobile and stationary. The movement of the actors, too, became more limited as they had to stay close to the microphone, often hidden in a stage prop or outside the frame. If before the visual style had told a story, now dialogue simply supplanted camerawork. The length of individual scenes became determined by dialogue and tended to last longer, with fewer cuts. During a transition period, the art of telling stories visually was disregarded, and it would take some time until sound film could match the artistic achievements of the late silent era.

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At first sight, Fedora's disappearance from the screen—unlike Norma's—is not attributed to major changes in the industry but to the disfiguration she suffers at the hands of Dr. Vando, prompted as much by the industry's ruthless demand for youth as well as Fedora's zeal not only to halt the aging process but reverse it. When the Academy of Motion Pictures bestows on Antonia/Fedora an Oscar for life-time achievement, and subsequently a chance to renew her career arises, we realize, however, that changes in the industry have affected her career (and will continue to do so). Her "second chance," made possible by the wide media attention following the Oscar, will present itself under very different terms than during her rise to fame. As Fedora herself realizes, Hollywood filmmaking has changed, which is why she responds to Academy President Henry Fonda's encouragement to return to Hollywood by saying "they don't make women pictures anymore." Her lament, just as Norma Desmond's, points to a major transition in studio filmmaking, namely the demise in the 1950s of genres (such as the melodrama), which afforded actresses key roles. When Antonia/Fedora subsequently makes her "come-back" in the 1960s it is notably in smaller European productions that cash in on the established aura and mystique of the reclusive star. These second-tier productions are profoundly nostalgic films that satisfy a demand for "glamour," as Fedora calls it, no longer supplied by Hollywood; they are also completely at odds with current European art cinema of the time—the very cinema that Fedora dismisses as "what passes for entertainment today—cinema verité, the naked truth, the uglier the better."

Thus both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* explicitly refer to dramatic transitions within the studio system to explain the psychological make up of its respective female star, thereby rendering their personal tragedies not only as the result of hubris, vanity, or delusion but concrete historical circumstances. What is more, both films were made at moments when further changes would radically challenge the ways in which films were written, produced, distributed, and seen by the audience.

Fedora is set in 1977, with an extensive flashback structure that covers moments in the late 1940s (when Detweiler first meets Fedora), the 1950s (when Antonia is a young girl and Fedora at the height of her fame), the 1960s (when Fedora's face is disfigured and Antonia begins her career as Fedora), and the 1970s (when Antonia/Fedora meets Michael York and is subsequently treated for depression). By the time Antonia commits suicide, American filmmaking was undergoing yet another radical transition, with two very different forms of movies gaining dominance. On the one hand, there was the success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) that surprised everyone, including the relatively unknown filmmakers, and led to the calculated pursuit of the blockbuster film, a development which still dominates today's computer-generated mega-budget films which threaten the extinction of flesh-and-blood actors. On the other hand, there was the rise of an alternative aesthetic—the

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auteurism of Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, who in response to European influences such as the *Nouvelle vague* and Italian Neo-Realism created a grittier and more somber view of American society. In both instances, power shifted from studio bosses to individual filmmakers while production and distribution became more segmented. "The kids with beards," as Detweiler refers to them, "have taken over." They are symptomatic of "a whole different business" that has no place for people like him. "They don't need a script—just give 'em a hand-held camera with a zoom lens." Detweiler's efforts to coax Fedora back into the limelight for a second time (*his* only shot at a second chance) thus look pathetically anachronistic. As he learns the truth about her tragic story, he realizes that life has more moving stories to tell than his contrived script. But the story of Fedora will never be told, not only because the star asks Detweiler to keep "all this to yourself—for old time's sake," but also because, as the frail star astutely observes, with "Fedora" gone the last Hollywood star who could possibly have played the role has disappeared.

The reasons that caused figures like Fedora to disappear can be traced back to the late 1940s. By the mid-1940s it still seemed unimaginable that stars like her would ever go out of style. The old studio system appeared invulnerable, and any thought of it toppling preposterous. But by the end of the decade the boom of the war years and the immediate postwar years was over. For the first time in ten years, ticket sales were declining. The industry was also plagued by labor struggles, heightened production costs, and the onset of anti-Communist hysteria inaugurated by the HUAC hearings. And the production companies were literally becoming smaller. In the so-called Paramount decision, the Federal Court ruled the dismantling of the corporate structure of the studio and its movie theaters. The year 1950 became one of heavy losses for Paramount and the other major studios as they began to divest their affiliated theaters. Divestment de facto initiated the end of the classic studio era. At the same time the industry tried to move away from the star system that was perceived as too expensive with individual stars commanding too much power. Finally, the advent of television heralded the coming of a medium in which pictures would be even smaller than Norma Desmond could have ever imagined. (Ironically, Gloria Swanson did have a career in television, not least because of her very successful comeback through *Sunset Boulevard,* and it was on television that a truncated version of *Queen Kelly*—the silent film Desmond screens for Gillis—was first shown to a larger American public.) While a television announcer informs us about the passing of Fedora, and television cameras are ubiquitous at the lying-in-state, television is conspicuously absent in *Sunset Boulevard.* The cameras photographing the floating Gillis are from the print media, and even though the voiceover makes brief mention that the murder will be covered by television, the word is never again used in the film. Needless to say, there is no television set in Norma's mansion (nor a radio for that matter); instead a huge painting hides a screen for her

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private film projections. Yet elsewhere in Los Angeles, television was very much on people's mind. Paramount's own station KTLA was a leader in the young industry that ultimately contributed its share to the demise of the studio system. Television *is* an issue in another famous film from that year (one often compared to *Sunset Boulevard*)—Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve,* which also revolves around an aging actress, this time a Broadway star, played by Bette Davis. A young Marilyn Monroe stars as an ingénue hoping for a career in television at the precise historic moment when both Hollywood and Broadway are losing their shared monopoly over the American entertainment industry. (It is fitting that Monroe would be the star to inaugurate the last phase of the classic studio system, notably twice under Wilder's direction, and that her tragic, premature death is considered by Fedora the "correct" form of exit).

In this context, Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah,* produced at Paramount at the same time as *Sunset Boulevard* and an integral part of its plot, takes on its real significance. Norma seeks out DeMille (playing himself) at the studio because she mistakenly believes the veteran filmmaker, who was instrumental in establishing Norma's (and Gloria Swanson's) early stardom, is interested in directing her script, "Salomé." The fact that at age seventy his career is still going strong is indicative, of course, of the gender inequality within the studio system.[7] But it is also an example of a

Figure 4.2. Norma Desmond and Cecil B. DeMille, two veterans of the film industry

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film professional with the very ability for reinvention that Norma lacks. At first sight, *Samson and Delilah* looks like a throwback to DeMille's biblical extravaganzas of the silent period, but ironically the monumental technicolor production points toward the future. Totally at odds with dominant genres, stylistic trends, and market strategies of the period, it topped the box office in 1950 and became the biggest hit of the decade, inspiring a wave of imitators, including *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953, the film to introduce CinemaScope), DeMille's remake of his own *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Ben Hur* (1959). With its scale of production—brilliant colors, monumental dimensions, and lavish sets designed by the same Hans Dreier who was also art director on *Sunset Boulevard*—it would offer viewers a spectacle television would not be able to compete with for a long time. But perhaps Norma Desmond was not out of touch with the times at all. Her "Salomé" script, had it been made, would most likely not have been that different from DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* extravaganza. Indeed, a version of the film was made in 1953, directed by William Dieterle and starring Rita Hayworth as Salomé. A central character of that film was actress Judith Anderson as Herod's wife, Salomé's stepmother. A middle-aged woman of beauty and evil sexuality, her characterization of the role exudes a melodramatic intensity that one could have also expected from Norma Desmond.[8]

"A Little Plot of My Own"

The previous section has outlined the broader historical changes in the studio system that provide both backdrop and plot elements for *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora.* It is now time to take a closer look at how these respective changes impact the role of the writer and the star as well as the relationship between them. In both films, that relationship is one of competition and rivalry, but also mutual dependency. Both films furthermore concur in depicting that rivalry as a struggle over controlling the narrative of the film(s) the writer and the star are involved in making, as well as the narratives of their own lives. In order to establish that control the Holden character in both films uses dialogue and plot(ing) while both Norma and Fedora rely on the attributes of the film star, primarily the face. Let us first turn to the figure of the writer.

The fact that both films are told as flashbacks with voice-over by the Holden character suggest that Gillis and Detweiler are in control of their respective narratives. At the outset of *Sunset Boulevard,* Gillis assures the viewers that they "have come to the right party" if they want to hear "the facts, the whole truth" before it is "all distorted and blown out of proportion" by "those Hollywood columnists," thus promising to cut through illusion and deception in a narrative that will offer little else but that. As the story unfolds we learn that Gillis actually has trouble exercising control

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over his stories—a professional writer, he has not only not sold a script for several months, but will also end up as invisible editor on Norma's Salomé material, and even invites aspiring young colleague Betty Schaefer (Nancy Olson) to use whatever she can from his writings without himself demanding credit. There is thus considerable irony in the fact that only as a corpse does he finally get to tell his story, a ghostwriter in a much more radical sense than he had anticipated.

Detweiler, too, appears to possess authorial control over the narrative, until he—and the viewer—learns halfway through the film that he has been thoroughly duped by Fedora. The second part of the film is comprised of the flashback narrations of the true Fedora, Dr. Vando, Miss Balfour, and Count Sobryanski which offer a startling contrast to Detweiler's, revealing that he had never mastered his material in the first place. His lack of power to probe beyond the surface is captured in the shot when the hotel manager shows him the headline of a newspaper reporting the death of Fedora—it is literally all Greek to him, and the real Fedora is correct in telling him that he is "both blind and stupid!"

Thus, both Detweiler and Gillis find themselves in the position of being deceived deceivers. Detweiler's initial ruse was to make Fedora believe that his big-budget film would ensure her triumphant comeback when in

Figure 4.3. Gillis editing Desmond: A ghostwriter in more ways than planned

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truth the shaky finances of that production depended entirely on Fedora's willingness to appear in front of the camera again. Gillis, who likewise sees in Norma Desmond an opportunity to regain his financial independence, concocts "a little plot of my own"—he plans to charge a hefty sum for a "patch-up job" on her script—which quickly backfires. Satisfied with himself for "the way I handled the situation—I dropped the hook and she snapped at it," he soon learns that she is one step ahead of him in a game that will eventually turn him into her gigolo. (Gillis and Detweiler belong indeed to a long list of Wilder's male protagonists whose powers of detection and scrutiny fail them at critical moments, and which include claims investigator Barton Keyes, private detective Sherlock Holmes, and defense attorney Sir Wilfried Robarts in *Witness for the Prosecution.*)

The fact that Detweiler and Gillis are unsuccessful in claiming control over their lives is related in both films to the very problem of claiming authorship within the film industry. In other words, the failure of both Detweiler and Gillis is presented as the logical consequence of the conditions according to which film scripts are conceived, written, and produced. Notions such as originality, autonomy, creativity, and inspiration, which have been central since Romanticism invented the modern author, are radically redefined within the confines of the culture industry. The key image for the problematic position of the writer in that industry is the swimming pool, the symbol of success for Gillis and his Paramount peers (at Artie's New Year's Eve party they sing "Hollywood for us ain't been so good/got no swimming pool" while Gillis makes his entrance) but also of his failure. Floating head down in the brightly illuminated pool at the end of the film, Gillis comments wryly on his one moment in the limelight, "Well, in the end he got himself a pool—only the price turned out a little high." In his poetry cycle "Hollywood Elegies," the exiled German poet Bertolt Brecht, struggling to find employment in the film industry in the early 1940s, described the city as a place where "musicians play the whore," and where moneyed moguls "with blue rings round their eyes/Feed the writers in their swimming pools every/morning."[9] Brecht's vision of screenwriters being kept like gold fish resonates with Gillis' predicament of being a kept man at Norma's house, ultimately contained in the pool, and implicitly compared to two different animals. In his first night at the house he sees rats scurrying at the bottom of the empty pool, whose place he will soon take (emphasizing later that he is "no Valentino," the star who regularly swam there), and he subsequently has "a mixed-up dream" of a "chimp . . . dancing for pennies," the very pet whose role of keeping Norma company he just assumed.[10]

The pool is also of some importance to the plot of *Fedora.* It is while she is floating naked in a pool on a film set that young Dutch Detweiler first notices, or rather fails to notice Fedora, thereby irking the offended star into spending a night with him. In his capacity as assistant director, it is Dutch's job to cover her breasts with water lilies to avoid problems with

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the censors, thereby facilitating the circulation of the star image. This misrecognition is repeated at the lying-in-state when Detweiler yet again fails to comprehend the identity of the horizontal woman surrounded by flowers in front of him: the real Fedora's powers of creating illusions clearly top those of a veteran producer, indicating his professional inferiority very much like the pool scenes in *Sunset Boulevard* symbolize that of Gillis.

But why is it that the writer, or the writer-producer, should be in such an inferior position? In what predicament do these professionals find themselves during the late 1940s and the 1970s, respectively? In the first shot of Gillis's flashback we see him sitting at his typewriter, the tool that anchors his professional identity and that will also be with him at the moment of his death. In voice-over, he explains that things have not been going well for him: "I hadn't worked in a studio for a long time. So I sat there grinding out original stories, two a week. Only I seemed to have lost my touch. Maybe they weren't original enough. Maybe they were too original. All I know is they didn't sell." Clearly, the terms of Gillis' employment are circumscribed by the demands of an industry which turns creative work into "grinding out," and which, to a radical degree, renders relative the meaning of originality—if the work is too derivative, it will be discarded for lack of innovation, but if it is too daring and new, it will likewise be ill-suited. Under these conditions, originality becomes redefined as the kind of material that studio executives consider appropriate to meet the changing tastes of the viewing public. But more than taste and fashion determine the viability of a script. As becomes evident when Gillis pitches his idea to the producer Sheldrake, stories are evaluated according to whether or not they will be suitable for certain actors who are contractually bound to individual studios. Thus Gillis' "original story" of "Bases Loaded," a drama about a poor athlete mixed up with professional gamblers, is meant for Paramount star Alan Ladd, but producer Sheldrake, who is "always looking for a Betty Hutton," suggests to "put in a few numbers" and turn it into a musical entitled, "It Happened in the Bull Pen." Apart from keeping the star employed (and on the mind of the public), other production costs are also an important factor. When unexpected rain falls in Arizona, rather than halt production the film on which Artie works as assistant director has to be rewritten to accommodate the weather. As a selling point of his script, Gillis emphasizes that making it would be rather inexpensive, because "it's pretty simple to shoot, lots of outdoor stuff," as opposed to elaborate setups in the studio.

Creating and evaluating scripts for industrial production involves a series of professionals within a highly segmented system. This is a part of the studio system that has grown significantly since the advent of sound, as the many offices that were formerly occupied by Norma Desmond—pointed out to Gillis by Max—now form the Writers' Annex. Betty Schaefer of the Readers' Department is housed here, and her assignment is to cover story outlines with a short synopsis that recommends whether they war-

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rant further development. Then there are writers in charge of writing "additional dialogue," an assignment Gillis pleads to take on when all other options fail. The process from initial story to screenplay to actual film in fact involves so many revisions that the final product can become virtually unrecognizable. As Gillis explains to Norma, "The last picture I wrote was about Oakies in the dust bowl. When it reached the screen, it played on a torpedo boat."

By the late 1970s, the status of the writer had changed significantly again, as the new directors, as Detweiler remarks, can do entirely without screenplays. The decline in the significance of the film script can be seen in the trajectory from carefully guarded treasure—Norma will not allow her Salomé script to leave the house—to photocopied tome which Detweiler sends to multiple addresses and subsequently unsuccessfully "forgets" at the Villa Calypso and the hotel bar, as if to dissociate himself from it.

Given the industrial nature of studio production, the use of certain generic formulas, as well as the remake, are of central importance for scriptwriting. As Gillis implies in his statement about being too original or not original enough, the key to success is to manipulate what has proven itself just enough to create novelty and stretch its longevity (even if he seems no longer in possession of that key). For this approach he is reprimanded by Betty, who accuses him of taking "plot 27-A, [to] make it glossy, make it slick." A counterpart to Gillis' cynicism and disillusionment, the idealistic Betty supports a realism that is based on authentic experiences (of which she finds traces in Gillis' story "Dark Window") and advocates films "that say a little something." The screenplay she will work on with Gillis follows that sense of realism, abandoning Gillis' original "psychological stuff—exploring a killer's sick mind," a trademark of *noir* narratives that had dominated the 1940s and had now run its cycle. Yet ironically their script about two people who share the same bed but do not even know each other because one works during the day and the other at night had in fact been told before—in Ludwig Berger's *Ich bei Tag und du bei Nacht* (1932). (Its insertion here has to be seen as an in-joke by Wilder who was in all likelihood the only one on the set familiar with this film.)

The remake is also the narrative convention that dominates *Fedora*. Not only has the film itself been seen as a remake of *Sunset Boulevard* (and would become the basis for Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss* [1982]), but Wilder quipped that he should have called it *Fedora II*, to cash in on the fad for remakes at the time.[11] Detweiler's script intended to facilitate Fedora's *third* comeback–-ironically entitled, "The Snows of Yesteryear"—-is based on Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, one of the most often adapted novels in film history. As Fedora observes, the great Greta Garbo (a recluse very much like herself) had already starred in two versions (1927 and 1935), thus making the material, which Fedora calls "a Russian soap opera," doubly unsuited for her. Yet the fact that Antonia takes her own life in the same way as Tolstoi's famous heroine

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did—a carefully planned act of retribution against her mother—suggests that certain plots retain their currency, no matter how often they have been used before, and that Tolstoi's work continues to hold power over its readers. In an ironic twist, through Antonia's suicide "The Snows of Yesteryear" becomes a reality, just as "Salomé" is enacted by the delusional Norma Desmond descending the staircase, under the "direction" of Max von Mayerling. Thus, the notion of the remake as such is not condemned by either of Wilder's films but presented as a highly ambivalent form of storytelling contingent upon multiple factors. As noted above, DeMille is able to prolong his career precisely because of his mastery of remakes, just as the "Salomé" material not only proved to be less anachronistic than was presented in *Sunset Boulevard* but could itself look back upon a long screen tradition, including most famously a 1923 version starring the legendary Russian silent star Alla Nazimova in a scandalous performance that may well have inspired Norma Desmond in the first place.

Face Value

If the position of the writer is determined by the demands and constraints of the film industry and subject to encompassing historical change both within the era of the classic studio filmmaking and its aftermath, the changes that affect the construction and function of the film star have to be seen as even more radical. While Detweiler and Gillis are represented as down-on-their-luck writers exploited by a culture industry that has little use for them, the stars they encounter are even more abject, both by virtue of the fact that they are female and that the star is the most visible and volatile component of that industry.

As noted above, the relationship between star and writer in both *Fedora* and *Sunset Boulevard* is presented as a mixture of rivalry and mutual dependency in controlling the narrative of one's life and films, an unusual scenario as the studio system traditionally assigned each very specific roles that prevented them from entering into direct contact. In both films, the tension between the two serves to highlight the predicament with which each has to struggle. If plotting and plot are the domains of the writer, the face becomes the primary tool of the star to anchor her power and to exert control over her career and life.

Norma Desmond's use of the face is her central weapon in the confrontation with narrative and dialogue as embodied by Joe Gillis, as well as in her attempt to orchestrate her "return."[12] Gloria Swanson's acting style with its self-absorbed posturing deliberately invokes that of the silent era, providing a sharp contrast to Holden's modern style, which is detached, cool, and laid back, but ultimately also corrupt. Desmond is a silent movie queen clothed in furs and silks, made up like a siren, and drawing in the viewer with her eyes. Such externalization was of course the tool of the

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silent actress, where the lack of dialogue was compensated for by exaggerated body language and facial expressions. As Norma puts it, "We didn't need dialogue. We had faces!" She views her power as relying on the visual, not the aural, as indicated by her blunt rejection of Gillis' suggestion that her screenplay needs more dialogue—"What for? I can say anything I want with my eyes." The power of her gaze is furthermore underscored by the fact that she sees and commands him—"You there! Why are you so late?"—before he can make her out behind the blinds of her villa. Throughout the film, "those dark glasses" will observe every move of his.

Norma Desmond is the prime example of the film star invented by the silent era as a bankable commodity guaranteed to draw an audience. During its heyday, the studios paid their stars astronomical salaries, and their much-publicized life styles served as a fantasy life that could be sold to the people. With the introduction of sound, films lost for a while their international appeal and market, terminating the careers of many a great star, including Norma Desmond. However, for others the ascendance of sound did *not* pose an insurmountable challenge; Fedora and the two famous stars on which her figure is based, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, all mastered that transition, as did Gloria Swanson who had one of her biggest successes in the early sound feature *The Trespasser* (1929). Clearly then, the real challenge to Norma and Fedora's career is age; the exorbitant demands show business makes on the youthful looks of feminine stars determine the longevity of their respective careers. While *Sunset Boulevard* presents its heroine as a grotesque but ultimately human figure victimized by the hypocrisy of a system that creates stars only to discard them when the public's taste alters, Fedora is a self-empowered woman apparently beating the dream factory at its own game, but ultimately suffering a cruel defeat twice.

It is the tragedy of Norma that her image, the source of her power while a star of the silent era, becomes the source of her madness. Throughout *Sunset Boulevard,* Norma is shown looking into mirrors, or watching her celluloid self on the screen. It is as though her isolation from the film industry has split her personality in two, and she is seeking a way to reassimilate herself with the star image. Her failure to distinguish between herself and the image on the screen, between reality and the myths Hollywood created for her, only to snatch them away when it no longer needed her, are at the heart of her insanity. They are also the fantasies that fuel the star system, which relies on merging the image of the actress with the parts she plays in order to sell films. It is thus fitting that the end of the film unites the two spheres by having Norma become delusional, thereby abandoning the borders that separate the real from the imagined. As Gillis, who has just been shot by her, comments with true sympathy: "The dream she had clung to so desperately had enfolded her."

Even though *Sunset Boulevard* presents Norma as a delusional film star of a former era unable to cope with the present, the film is careful to couch

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her psychological predicament within the wider mechanisms that govern the creation of stardom. Thus Betty Schafer's confession to Gillis that as aspiring actress she had her nose "fixed"—an act far more drastic than anything Desmond ever did—attests to the "culturally shared willingness to endure almost anything in order to be chosen for cinematic exploitation" and recasts Desmond's antics as behavior determined by the industry.[13]

Similarly, director Cecil B. DeMille renders what appears to be the psychological deformation of a single individual in terms that blame the industry at large: "You didn't know her when she was a lovely little girl of seventeen with more courage and wit and heart than ever came together in a youngster . . . A dozen press agents working overtime can do terrible things to the human spirit." An ambivalent figure, DeMille offers sympathy and understanding, but is also complicit in keeping Desmond's illusions alive. When he commands gaffer Hog-Eye to "turn that light back where it belongs, " we know that Desmond will disappear into obscurity forever. Indeed, the real star getting ready for DeMille's close-up was significantly younger than Norma Desmond—thirty-six-year old Hedy Lamarr, an Austrian expatriate like Wilder, and considered by Louis B. Mayer "the most beautiful girl in the world." Confined in *Samson and Delilah* as in many films to portraying her beauty rather than allowing her to demonstrate her acting skills, her static, statuary roles are reminiscent of a model and could not be further away from the grandiose gestures of Norma Desmond.[14]

Figure 4.4. Another victim of the film industry: Betty Schaefer's confession about her nose job

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If Barry Detweiler can be seen as a reincarnation of the wise cracking, cynical Joe Gillis, Fedora is a reborn Norma intent on not getting caught up in illusions ever again. A producer as much as a product of Hollywood's star system, she is a calculating mastermind that sets out to beat Hollywood at its own game, only to face similarly tragic consequences. Like Norma, Fedora realizes that the central attribute of the star is her face, and her eagerness to preserve her youthful looks will force Dr. Vando into the experimental treatment that ends in catastrophe. With her face destroyed, she actually ceased to be "Fedora," as she explains to Detweiler. Whereas Norma is surrounded by an excess of Desmonds, Fedora will ban all mirrors in her home and everything else that ties her to her past. Yet when her daughter becomes "my mirror" and Fedora notices a startling resemblance, she will be prompted to revive a face she believed to be lost. The efforts for restoring that face (and the fame connected with it) are outlined in a number of scenes that directly reference *Sunset Boulevard.* While a short montage shows how Norma undergoes "a merciless series of treatments" to prepare her for her return to the screen, a similar sequence illustrates how Antonia is artificially aged thirty years to resemble the timeless beauty of an "ageless" star. When Antonia receives coaching on how to act as Fedora by watching privately screened films of her mother, the mother explains that the secret of her success did not lie in her skill as an actress: "Acting, that's Old Vic. But ever so often a face comes along the camera falls in love with"—a clear echo of Desmond's comment during the screening of *Queen Kelly*: "We had faces!"

The scene that inaugurates the relationship between the old and the new Fedora and that maps the future course described above is the bestowing of the Academy Award by Henry Fonda, the president of the Academy of Motion Pictures, who visits the star on her Greek island. At first reluctant to accept the award, the true Fedora suddenly changes her mind when she hatches the plan of using Antonia as a double, a form of ghosting that goes far beyond what Gillis had in mind. The scene is charged with the metaphors of ghosting and doubling that structure both *Fedora* and *Sunset Boulevard.* At dusk, "when the light fades," Antonia (as Fedora) accepts the award from Fonda (as himself) while the true Fedora observes hidden from view, with Dr. Vando behind her, an appropriate position for the man who is behind so much of what (mis)shaped her. In one of the few scenes in which cinematographer Gerry Fisher allows the beauty of the Greek islands to shine through, Antonia/Fedora is (re)born as star, literally illuminating her surroundings in her all-white suite, with Garboesque dark glasses and wide-brimmed hat hiding much of her face. With its soft-focus, golden-hour picture perfectness the scene deliberately imitates Hollywood's style for rendering happy endings, thereby demonstrating that Fedora's powers for creating illusions match those of the film industry and are surely worthy of an Oscar. Elated as much about her success at impersonating her mother as about the recognition her mother has received,

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Figure 4.5. An Oscar-worthy performance by Antonia as Fedora

Antonia will soon realize that for the legend to continue the role playing may never stop. Fedora here literally becomes a witness to her rebirth, just as Antonia's suicide will make her a witness to her own death. The second mutilation of her face—so complete that a team of surgeons has to work overtime to prepare the corpse for the lying-in-state—is the final destruction of Fedora. All that remains to be done is to orchestrate the last exit, because "that's what people remember."

Both films highlight that the construction of the star is not only due to the efforts of an industry but also relies to a considerable extent on personal discipline and willpower. What is needed is "sugar and spice, and underneath that stainless steel and cement," as Detweiler observes.[15] One of Hollywood's stars most closely fitting that description, and someone considered in full control of her public persona, is Marlene Dietrich, whose condolence letter Fedora comments on by saying, "a true fighter." The same could be said about Hildegard Knef herself, the actress playing the old Fedora, not only because of her close ties to Dietrich but also because German audiences knew her as a woman who would not give up, having recovered from a serious bout with cancer and persevered in a career with steep ups and downs. Indeed, the permanence of the comeback is one of Knef's main attributes as star, lending her representation of Fedora as rich a subtext as Gloria Swanson's of Norma Desmond.[16]

It must be added that no matter how great the personal effort may be, neither Fedora nor Norma can sustain the act of saving face alone. Max

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Figure 4.6. Von Stroheim as his master's gatekeeper and servant

von Mayerling doubles as servant and guardian and is instrumental in maintaining Norma's illusion that "Madame is the greatest star of them all" by keeping the outside at bay and the fan letters coming. Her erstwhile director and former husband, Max is also a has-been whose career—like that of Erich von Stroheim, who directed Gloria Swanson[17]—ended with silent film; when at the end he "directs" her "descending the staircase of the Palace," he proves for the last time how his fate is tied to hers. Her exit into the waiting police cars will also bring to an end his life time project. The same can be said of the people surrounding Fedora, for Dr. Vando and Miss Balfour are inseparably bound to the star—the Doctor ostensibly atoning for past mishaps, and Miss Balfour as the faithful assistant in charge of numerous responsibilities that include carefully upholding the star's public persona, barring access to intruders, and keeping Antonia's performance as Fedora under surveillance (as well as phone and liquor under lock and key). Parallel scenes of Max and Dr. Vando reminding the Holden character to "wipe your feet" before entering the house, or of Max and Miss Balfour running old films of the star underline the symmetry in the two stars' support system. Vando and Balfour are Fedora's waxworks, companions who shared her biggest successes and failures, and who pro-

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vide the only possible camaraderie to a relic, just as Buster Keaton, Anna Q. Nilsson, and H.B.Warner do for Norma Desmond.

The Outsider as Insider

Of the many incidents Billy Wilder was fond of recalling for the benefit of his biographers and interview partners, there may have been none he relished retelling more than the one about using the f-word to insult studio boss Louis B. Mayer after the very first Hollywood screening of *Sunset Boulevard*. Mayer had been incensed not only about the film's attack on the industry but particularly by the fact that it was written and directed by someone whom that very industry had made rich and famous; for having bitten the hand that fed him, Mayer shouted, Wilder "should be tarred and feathered and run out of town."[18] The fact that Mayer addressed his scorn only toward Wilder and not toward coauthor and producer Charles Brackett suggests that it was largely fueled by the fact that a foreigner had dared to shine an unflattering light at "Hollywood from the inside" (as the movie poster caption had it), and at least one critic claims that Mayer explicitly called Wilder a "goddam foreigner son of a bitch."[19]

Obviously, Mayer attacked Wilder for what he perceived as a lack of gratitude to his host country and a sign of halfhearted assimilation, a stance to which he himself provided the perfect counterexample. The son of Russian-Jewish émigrés, Mayer had come to this country at age three, and throughout his life displayed an overzealousness for assimilation and patriotism typical of first-generation immigrants—most ostensibly by making the fourth of July his birthday, thereby conflating a celebration of himself and of his adopted home country's independence. By singling out Wilder as responsible for the glaring attack on Hollywood, Mayer also (unwittingly) confirms what is the basic premise of this study—that it was precisely Wilder's status as exile and outsider that provided him with a perspective from which to articulate such a critique in the first place.[20]

His status as insider/outsider provides, of course, some striking similarities to both Joe Gillis and Barry Detweiler and lends the two films' reflections on the film industry a rich biographical subtext. Gillis is the only non-Angelino in *Sunset Boulevard* and began his career as a journalist before arriving in Hollywood in 1945 (as we learn from the prologue not included in the final film). He reads *The Young Lions* and *The Naked and the Dead,* clearly seeing himself in the tradition of Hemingway who was also a reporter first and wrote fiction with a voice of authenticity and realism. Gillis's struggles thus resemble Wilder's tough beginnings as a writer hawking scripts that lasted from 1934 until he was paired with Brackett. Yet whereas Gillis laments that he seems to have lost his touch, Wilder's career took off with Brackett, and by the time he directed *Sunset Boulevard,* "BrackettandWilder", as they were called, had become the most

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sought-after writers in Hollywood, while Wilder as director had a series of commercially and critically acclaimed films under his belt, including two Academy Awards for *The Lost Weekend* (1945). The very fact that Wilder could depict Paramount Studios, his own employer, in the film and not just use a fictitious name, shows the enormous status Wilder commanded in the industry.

This important fact is of course also part of the film's sense of realism that includes using real locations (Schwab's, the Alto Nido apartments, the Bel Air golf course) as well as the names of numerous film professionals. John F. Seitz's cinematography deliberately inserts the film both in the tradition of the Weimar street film as well as Hollywood's silent era's star vehicles—a task for which Seitz had all the credentials, since his career had begun in 1916 and included filming Valentino. *Sunset Boulevard* contains some of the most stunning cinematography in Wilder's oeuvre, breaking with his credo that images should not draw attention to themselves. From the pool shot using mirrors to the wide-angle shots with extreme depth-of–field—-for example in the scenes when Max' white-gloved hands dominate the foreground when he plays the organ, or when the bandaged wrists of Desmond after her suicide attempt are featured big in the foreground while her soon-to-be-lover is kept in sharp focus in the background—-the film presents a daring cinematography which even includes several of the very zoom-shots ridiculed by Detweiler (for example when Gillis recognizes the repo-men in his rearview mirror, or when he first discovers Norma Desmond standing behind the blinds of her mansion).[21] It thereby matches visually its outspoken social criticism and satire, and firmly situates Wilder in a von Stroheim tradition of realism. One could even see *Sunset Boulevard* as Wilder's successful attempt to wed von Stroheim's intelligence with DeMille's power—after all, it is *not* a baseball picture that ends up as a musical but a forceful critique of Hollywood articulated by a writer-director whose works would eventually rank with the most canonical of 1940s and 1950s American cinema.

If *Sunset Boulevard* is the work of an accomplished insider taking an outsider's hard look at the industry that made him, the situation is reversed in *Fedora,* where a director pushed to the outside by very same forces as his protagonists contemplates his career. The situation of Barry Detweiler at the time was thus much closer to Wilder's own than Gillis's ever was. *Fedora* was commissioned by Universal, after they bought Tom Tryon's collection of short novels, *Crowned Heads.* But the studio ultimately rejected Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond's screenplay, forcing the director to peddle his wares as he had had to do in the 30s. Wilder indeed had sunk low in the Hollywood hierarchy. With the help of Paul Kohner, Wilder secured some German tax shelter money, just like Detweiler, in order to get the film made.[22] The film was clearly written with a certain star in mind—Wilder and Diamond had thought of Marlene Dietrich or Faye Dunaway—but both declined, and Wilder had to resort to two actresses playing the part,

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which he blames for the film's lack of success in the United States (it hardly seems to matter to him that the film did very well in France).

The two films' very different emotional register is best expressed in their respective use of the voice-over narration. Gillis's tale is detached, ironic, and seemingly at ease with the peace he has found in death (he is notably much kinder to Norma in his commentary than when talking to her); he (now) stands above the story. Detweiler's commentary, in contrast, is nostalgic and elegiac. Surveying not just the events of the last six months but those of a lifetime, he is a witness to the passing of time and to the impossibility of stopping it. Time told coincides with the time it takes to tell the story—the approximately two hours he spends at the open coffin of Antonia/Fedora—and it is only for these hours that time will seemingly pause. The flashback is indeed the mode of narration that promises, even if for a moment, to arrest time, an attempt that finds its visual expression in the freezeframe of Antonia's suicide that opens the film[23]—the entire film can be seen as an effort to comment on and comprehend this split second. *Sunset Boulevard,* by contrast, culminates in the shot of Norma Desmond approaching "DeMille's" camera, ready for her closeup but ironically never getting it as she slips out of focus and out of film history. The scene provides a sense of closure denied to Detweiler who will survive all surrounding him; he will be condemned to move on, without making his film, and without being able to share the incredible story he has just heard.

Whereas one of the structuring tensions of *Sunset Boulevard* is the Old versus the New Hollywood, everybody in *Fedora* is part of the former New Hollywood that has now grown old; the only young person in the film, Antonia, is forced to artificially age. The film's sense of datedness and even anachronism is further enhanced by Miklós Rózsa's vintage 40s score as well as the voice-over flashback narration itself: while pathbreaking in *Double Indemnity* and still highly effective in *Sunset Boulevard,* the technique was basically unheard of by the late 70s. *Fedora* is indeed a swan song both of, and about, Wilder's career as writer and director. It would be followed by only one more film three years later, the eminently forgettable *Buddy Buddy.*

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 99
2. Cameron Crowe, *Conversations with Wilder* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 105.
3. Derrida, 39.
4. The comparison with Munch's painting was first made by Neil Sinyard and Adrian Turner, *Billy Wilders Filme* (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1980), 353.
5. For an elaboration of the vampirism in the film see Lucy Fischer, "*Sunset Boulevard:* Fading Stars," in *Women and Film,* ed. Janet Todd (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 97–113, especially 103f.

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6. According to Wilder's biographer Charlotte Chandler, the scene of Michael York placing a rose on the dead Antonia/Fedora was inspired by Wilder's memory of the actress Katharina Schratt, Franz Josesph's mistress, leaving flowers on the chest of the emperor at his funeral (*Nobody's Perfect,* 293). *Sunset Boulevard* was originally meant to open with a scene at the morgue where dead people have a conversation about what got them there, but the scene was dropped when preview audiences expressed dislike.
7. See Lucy Fischer, "*Sunset Boulevard*: Fading Stars"; Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Mollie Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).
8. The significance of Wilde's "Salomé" for *Sunset Boulevard* has been explored in Daniel Brown, "Wilde and Wilder" *PMLA* 119.5 (2004): 1216–1230. Some of my observations on the writer are based on Brown's very perceptive analysis. However, he fails to consider Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* a central text regarding the fear of aging that underlies both *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora,* a connection which Wilder himself acknowledged: "[Fedora] was sort of like *Dorian Gray,* except it was herself she kept in the closet instead of the portrait. Maybe we should have called our film *The Picture of Fedora Gray,* by Oscar Wilder." Charlotte Chandler, *Nobody's Perfect: Billy Wlder, A Personal Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 289.
9. Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956,* ed. John Willett and Ralph Mannheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 380–381.
10. Wilder is fond of telling the anecdote of how he explained the significance of burying the monkey to Swanson by saying, "There goes your last lover." (See Crowe, 318.)
11. Wilder quoted in Adrian Turner and Neil Sinyard, "Billy Wilder's *Fedora,*" *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1977): 160–165; here 160.
12. The following remarks are indebted to Lawrence's insightful analysis of the use of sound and visuals in *Sunset Boulevard.*
13. Lawrence, 158.
14. Wilder had planned to highlight the displacement of the older star by the young beauty by having DeMille ask Lamarr to let Norma use her chair when she visits the studio. "[Lamarr] said she would do it—for twenty-five thousand dollars. I said it would be enough for Norma to sit in a chair with Hedy Lamarr's name on it. That was ten thousand dollars. So I put her in DeMille's chair." Quoted in: David Freeman, "*Sunset Boulevard* Revisited," *The New Yorker* 21 June 1993, 72–79; here 77.
15. Wilder apparently recognized some of these attributes in Holden, too, whom he considered perfect for the part precisely because the underneath coincides with that which is visible: "Holden is probably the only actor of his age in Hollywood who hasn't had a facelift. This is truly remarkable in a town that has enough pieces of skin lying around taken from one star's face to refashion five or six stars." (From the *Fedora* press kit.)
16. On Knef's penchant for the comeback see Johannes von Moltke and Hans-J. Wulff, "Trümmer-Diva: Hildegard Knef," *Idole des deutschen Films,* ed. Thomas Koebner (Munich: Text+Kritik, 1997), 304–316.
17. Billy Wilder mentioned "die Swanson" as far back as 1929, in a feature on Erich von Stroheim's career published in *Der Querschnitt,* in which he also writes that *Queen Kelly* "is allegedly a great film." The review is reprinted in Billy Wilder, *Der Prinz von Wales geht auf Urlaub: Berliner Reportagen, Feuilletons und Kritiken der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1996), 108–112.
18. The episode is recounted with little variations in the biographies by Zolotow, Lally, Karasek, and Sikov, as well as in Crowe's long interview.
19. Sam Staggs, *Close-Up on Sunset Boulevard: Billy Wilder, Norma Desmond and the Dark Hollywood Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), 164. Ironically, it was Mayer, not Wilder, who was ousted only a year later, because his management style and leadership qualities seemed out of touch with the demands of running the very studio he had founded.

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20. The hostile comments of the MGM studio head illustrate not only the widespread taboo to challenge an industry that had provided wealth and comfort for so many who had come here from near and far. It also speaks to the Hollywood moguls' volatile sense of belonging, which was premised on clear-cut distinctions between "us" and "them." For Mayer and many other moguls who, like Wilder, were first- and second-generation Central European Jewish immigrants, it was important to assimilate without criticism to the United States since it had allowed them the creation of their own empire—the film industry—something that had proven difficult in the Midwest and on the East Coast. Thus even though *Sunset Boulevard* does not revolve around questions of Jewish identity, it presents an attack on Hollywood that has its origin in Wilder's sense of Jewish identity—nonassimilated, critical, and outspoken—that was very different from the camouflaging of ethnic origins of many industry professionals.
21. The depth-of-field photography is discussed in Herb Lichtman, "Old Master, New Tricks: A Combination that Spelled Success for Photography in *Sunset Boulevard*," *American Cinematographer* (September 1950): 309; 318–320.
22. In an interview, Wilder tried to give the fact that he had to rely on tax shelter funding a typical positive spin: "I can't lose, because if this picture is a big hit, it's my revenge on Hollywood. If it is a total financial disaster, it's my revenge for Auschwitz." In Robert Horton, ed., *Billy Wilder Interviews,* 144–45.
23. See Sinyard and Turner, 354.

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