

Whatever Happened to Nelson Algren ?: Otto Preminger's Adaptation Of *The Man with the Golden Arm*

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Abstract

This article takes issue with the predominant construction of Otto Preminger as an auteur dealing with problematic subjects and with the excessive emphasis that critics have placed upon the iconoclastic aspects of Preminger's adaptation of Nelson Algren's novel *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949). These critical views owe much to the type of Preminger studies carried out in the 50s and 60s by the reviewers of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Because such criticism focused primarily on the cinematic specificity of film, it refused to adopt a comparative approach that would include in their assessment of Preminger the literary texts on which he based the majority of his works. In the case of *The Man with the Golden Arm* this neglect has been paralleled by the literary critics' lack of attention to the novel. This study recovers the missing comparative dimension and shows how the crucial changes made by Preminger for the screen adaptation reveal the conformist and conservative ideology informing the movie.

Key words: American Literature, American Cinema, Otto Preminger, Nelson Algren, Auteur-theory.

Talking about his 1955 adaptation for the screen of Nelson Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949) in 1970, Otto Preminger describes the movie as iconoclastic and as an adequate means to help those who, like him, challenge «ridiculous and old-fashioned» rules: «Today, people everywhere ask me to lend them *The Man with the Golden Arm*, because they want to discuss drugs, they want to see it dramatised in public. This is the story of everything. If you don't challenge these rules, then the world does not move forward» (Pratley, 1971: 103). Much of the criticism of Preminger's movie has emphasised its iconoclastic aspects. Writing for *Movie*, V. F. Perkins (1962: 20) claimed that *The Man with the Golden Arm*, though «inferior to the rest of Preminger's work... could serve as a model of the well-made film on a forbidden subject». The emphasis has proved influential: when *The Man with the Golden Arm* was recently released on video (1992), a critic still described it as exploring «a convincing and startlingly unromantic American underworld of jazz clubs, poker dives and heroin addiction» (*Sight and Sound* 1992: 60). My discussion of the movie will challenge these critical views.

Through a comparison between Algren's novel and Preminger's adaptation, I will show how the movie subdues the more radical aspects of the book and how, regarding matters of class and gender, it conforms to that very conservative ideology that the book was trying to undermine.

As in the case of many other Hollywood directors, Preminger was held in great esteem by the critics of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, who, during the 50s and 60s, set the tune for his critical assessment.¹ In a review of *The Man with the Golden Arm* written for *Cahiers*, Charles Bitsch points out that since *The Moon is Blue* (1953) Preminger has become his own producer and, enjoying that total freedom that big studios deny to directors, he has been able to tackle themes that are still considered taboo by censors (Bitsch, 1956: 41-42). Preminger was intelligent enough to capitalise on his reputation as a director confronting topical and risqué subjects. He repeatedly declared that he remembered very little about his 20th Century Fox *noirs* and melodramas. In an interview with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Eric Rohmer published in *Cahiers*, he stated it was in his nature to confront problematic issues: «Cela tient au fait que je vis au XX siècle et que je m'interesse à mon temps. Je m'interesse à Israël, à la politique américaine, aux questions de race. («This is because I live in the 20th century and I am interested in my times. I am interested in Israel, in American politics, and in race-relations», my translation) (Doniol-Valcroze and Rohmer, 1961: 7). The achievement of *The Man with the Golden Arm*, Bitsch argues, calls for a promotion of Preminger from simple «technicien» to «auteur» (Bitsch 1956: 41). Bitsch celebrates the cinematic virtuosity of the movie and is surprised that one cannot hear the technicians' swearing against «ce sacré Otto» who has always opted for the most daring and difficult formal solutions (Bitsch: 42). The critic's

1. Otto Preminger was born in Austria in 1906 and started his artistic career as a theatre actor and director in Vienna where he also directed his first movie *Die Grosse Liebe* (*The Great Love*) in 1931. In 1936 he sailed for New York and started his American career with a contract at 20th Century Fox, where he had several clashes with the producer Darryl F. Zanuck. His best movies of this first period are the so-called «Fox Quintet»: *Laura* (1944), *Fallen Angel* (1945), *Daisy Kenyon* (1947), *Whirlpool* (1949) and *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950), five movies which exploit conventions and situations of both *film noir* and melodrama. Preminger started his career as an independent producer with *The Moon is Blue* (1953), a comedy of misunderstandings that caused Preminger his first problems with censorship for its sexual innuendo. With his newly-gained independence from big studios, Preminger started a successful series of grand-scale movies on (at least superficially) scandalous topics such as drug-addiction (*The Man with the Golden Arm*, 1955), rape (*Anatomy of a Murder*, 1959), Communism and homosexuality (*Advise and Consent*, 1962) and on institutions like the US army (*The Court Martial of Billy Mitchell*, 1955 and *In Harm's Way*, 1965), the US government (*Advise and Consent*, 1962), the state of Israel (*Exodus*, 1960), the Catholic Church (*The Cardinal*, 1963). Preminger's last phase, which includes movies continuing his analysis of contemporary society (race-relations in the US South in *Hurry Sundown*, 1967, Palestinian terrorism in *Rosebud*, 1975) and others striving for new directions (the slapstick farce *Skidoo*, 1968) was marked by critical and commercial disappointments. Preminger died in 1986.

enthusiasm for the movie goes as far as to argue that even some technical imperfections such as the shadows of the camera and of microphones are actually qualities since «nous ne sommes plus spectateurs, mais nous participons au travail : nous sommes sur le plateau aux coté du metteur en scène» («we are not simply spectators any longer, but we take part in the job : we are on the set near the director», my translation) (Bitsch: 42).

Bitsch's article should be read in the context of the *politique des auteurs* championed by *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s, which can only be briefly summarised in this context. In reaction to what they perceived was the dominant and sterile tradition of French film-making, literary and script-dominated, the reviewers of *Cahiers* «claimed that the film director or *auteur* was equivalent to any artist as the primary force behind aesthetic creation» (Klinger 1994: 3). Preminger's independence from the big studios as well as his protest against restrictive production codes endeared him to the *Cahiers* critics. In Preminger they found an iconoclastic *auteur* who indeed liked to describe himself as the primary force behind aesthetic creation:

I say what I like because it is completely my picture, an independent picture. I am the producer, the director, the casting director, it's all my decision. As a matter of fact, even the publicity and the advertisements are determined by me, which makes it great fun to do a picture, because I used to work in major studios, where many of these things were taken out of your hands. I don't think it's a good system (Pratley, 1971: 114).

The *politique des auteurs* was directly taking issue with the practice of making film adaptations of literary texts and judging them according to their faithfulness to the texts, a practice that the *Cahiers* critics considered as a claim that «film lacked artistic sophistication or cultural prestige in itself» (Stoddart, 1995: 39). What these French critics argued for was instead a new focus on «the cinematographic specificity of film, most particularly its use of *mise-en-scène*» (Stoddart, 1995: 39). In the interview with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Eric Rohmer mentioned earlier on, Preminger, whose preference for literary adaptations is well documented by his filmography², astutely explained that when adapting a literary subject for the screen he would modify it to such an extent that the movie would seem to be based on an original screenplay (Doniol-Valcroze and Rohmer, 1961: 6). A novel or a play, Preminger goes on to explain, should only serve as a starting point for the director who simply finds in it the general ideas for his movie. Ideally, once the movie is completed, its resemblance to the literary text will be tenuous. The example Preminger gives is his planned (and never realised) adaptation of Christian Megret's novel *Carrefour des Solitudes*. Though the original novel is about an African-American soldier in France after the war,

2. Of Preminger's thirty-seven movies, only four were based on an original story.

Preminger feels no qualms in changing the protagonist into an American «tout court», a definition that says a lot about his views on race (Doniol-Valcroze and Rohmer, 1961: 8). Responding to Leon Uris, who complained that *Exodus* (1960) was not a faithful adaptation of his novel, Preminger peremptorily dismissed the matter of adapting faithfully: «once an author sells... the film rights, he gives up any claim to have somebody to do it faithfully» (Pratley, 1971: 135).

Given these premises it is not surprising that the criticism of Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm* has completely neglected the novel by Nelson Algren on which the movie is based. This neglect has been favoured by the scant attention paid by literary scholars old and new, progressive and conservative, to Nelson Algren's novels.³ Algren, who defined Preminger's movie as «a cheap biography of Frank Sinatra» (Algren 1987: 94), has often been dismissed as «the bard of the stumblebum» who, in his books, employs «sentimentality pretending to be politics» (Leslie Fiedler, quoted in Cappetti 1993: 149). Algren is one of the many twentieth-century naturalist writers from Chicago who are currently neglected by literary critics. Just like James T. Farrell and Willard Motley, Algren has been described rather unappealingly with cliché labels such as «social determinist», «failed sociologist», «a sentimentalist writing against the evils of the big city». Drawing on Kurt Vonnegut's description of Algren as yet again another modern writer exiled from his Chicago homeland, Carla Cappetti has insightfully concluded her polemical review of Algren's criticism by defining him as «an exile of American literature as well» (Cappetti: 155). Robert C. Rosen's comparison between Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* and its film adaptation by Preminger, while containing interesting remarks about the movie,

3. Nelson Algren was born in Detroit in 1909. In 1912 he moved to Chicago with his family. He graduated from the University of Illinois with a Bachelor of Science in journalism in 1928 and, after holding very diverse jobs throughout the US, he published his first novel *Somebody in Boots* in 1935. From 1936 to 1940 he worked as editor for the Works Progress Administration Illinois Writers' Project. *Never Come Morning* (1942), a novel about first and second generation Polish immigrants, gave him the title of «poet of the Chicago slums» and therefore put Algren in the tradition of Chicago urban writers like Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Willard Motley, James T. Farrell, Richard Wright. The novel was felt to be immoral by the Polish Roman Catholic Union who succeeded in banning it from the Chicago Public Library. In 1950 Algren received the first National Book Award for his third novel *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949), which gave him success and recognition. From 1947 to 1950 he had a love affair with the French writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, whose love letters to Algren have recently been published. His prose-poem *Chicago - City on the Make* (1951) had very unfavourable reviews in Chicago (the *Daily News* described it as a «case for ra(n)t control») but was translated into French (by Jean-Paul Sartre) and Italian. After his fourth novel *A Walk on the Wild Side* (1954), Algren published two collections of short-stories, *Nelson Algren's Own Book of Lonesome Monsters* (1965) and *The Last Carousel* (1973), and a book of travel writings, *Who Lost an American* (1963). Algren died in 1981 and until recently most of his books were out of print.

resorts to the usual critical stereotypes when analysing the novel. Rosen claims that Algren «has lived... self-consciously in the 'worst' neighbourhoods, often in a room», that his excessive identification with his characters «creates some of the problems in Algren's work» (Rosen, 1978: 190-91). Much of the symbolism of *The Man with the Golden Arm*, Rosen goes on, is «naturalistic and bleak», the novel never really addresses «where skid row comes from or who benefits from its existence», Algren's narration «awkwardly» asks us to identify with the characters, who are romanticised together with their defeat (Rosen: 191-92). What Rosen and other critics have failed to understand is, in Carla Cappetti's words, «what the slum and its inhabitants stand for and... what place these occupy within the fictional and social order» (Cappetti: 154). What Cappetti has shown for Algren's second novel *Never Come Morning* (1942) can be applied to *The Man with the Golden Arm* as well: the slum and its inhabitants stand both at the margin and the centre of Algren's Chicago. Algren is always very careful not to show the slum and its inhabitants in isolation: the slum is closely tied to the city as a whole. The slum is, in fact, truly representative of the city. In *The Man with the Golden Arm* when the protagonist Frankie Machine kills the local pusher Fomorowski and breaks the code of the slum, it turns out that he has broken the code of the law and of the city as a whole too, two systems which we take to be antithetical. The murder of Fomorowski becomes an important political and electoral issue and this is why the police are so interested in catching the murderer.

The present study tries to recover a comparative dimension in its analysis of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and its screen adaptation, and argues for a reassessment of the ideology behind Preminger's movie. While the practice of holding a literary text as the original model to which a cinematic adaptation must be faithful is dubious at best, in the case of *The Man with the Golden Arm* the changes introduced by Preminger are highly significant of the conformist ideology conveyed by the movie and of its attempt to erase the slum from American society through a final vision of upward mobility.

Nelson Algren's man with the golden arm is Frankie Majcinek, a card dealer who, when dealing, attains (or at least wants the others to believe he attains) a state of mechanical perfection, hence the nickname «Machine». Frankie returns to his Chicago Polish-American slum neighbourhood from an army evacuation hospital with a shrapnel in his liver and picks up again his occupation as card dealer. To kill the pain of the wound, Frankie becomes more and more dependent on morphine; his addiction is described as «a monkey on his back» (Algren, 1990: 25, hereafter *Arm*). Though married to Zosh, Frankie is in love with the young Molly Novotny. During an argument about the price of a fix, Frankie kills the local pusher Fomorowski. Molly hides him but when the case becomes an important electoral issue, the police finally find him. He manages to escape, but, chased by the police and desperate for a fix, he commits suicide. Molly becomes a prostitute and Zosh's already failing health worsens.

Apart from the physical one, Frankie has another painful wound: Zosh, his wife who deceived him into marrying her ten years earlier by means of a false pregnancy, is in a wheelchair because of a psychosomatic illness developed as a result of a car crash caused by Frankie's drunkenness. Because of Frankie's sense of guilt, which she does everything to enhance, Zosh keeps him hostage:

She had got exactly what she had wanted more than anything else in the world. Frankie Majcinek. Had him forever and for keeps and all for her very own. For there was no other place in the world for him, since the accident, save this one small furnished room. So now it was time to feel her victory in her heart, sweeter than all the dances she had missed through that perverted victory (*Arm*: 122).

Guilt, entrapment and urban space are closely linked in the novel, and their pervasive power affects all characters from the very first page. Even Captain Bednar, head of the local police, has been filled by «the city... with the guilt of others; he was numbed by his charge sheet's accusations... the finger of guilt, pointing so sternly for so long across the query-room blotter, had grown bored with it all at last and turned, capriciously, to touch the fibres of the dark gray muscle behind the captain's light gray eyes» (*Arm*: 3).

Guilt is the only thing that remains to the people in the neighbourhood along West Division Street, «the great, secret and special American guilt of owning nothing... in the one land where ownership and virtue are one» (*Arm*: 17). The «disinherited» expiate their guilt in the city, which «seemed some sort of open-roofed jail with walls for all men and laughter for very few» (*Arm*: 17). While she looks at the city at night from her window, Zosh, herself trapped in a wheelchair, does not see stars; moonlight shows her «how the city was bound... steel upon steel: how all its rails held the city too tightly to the thousands-girded El», Chicago's elevated subway (*Arm*: 96). In the case of Frankie, the guilt of owning nothing is paralleled by the guilt of having caused Zosh's illness. The marriage between the two of them is not based on love, what strengthens it is precisely guilt: «For where... the Church's ritual had failed to bind, guilt had now drawn the irrevocable knot so fiercely that she [Zosh] felt he [Frankie] could never be free of her again» (*Arm*: 86).

Significantly, when Zosh hears the mousetrap in the closet click, she feels it «close as if it had shut within herself, hard and fast forever. Heard the tiny caught thing struggling, slowly tiring, and at last become still» (*Arm*: 99). Frankie confides to his friend Sparrow that his entire life is now «soiled by a slow and cancerous guilt: the image of her [Zosh] waiting, night after night, who had so loved to dance and be with dancing people» (*Arm*: 87). Frankie finds a partial substitute for drugs and escape from Zosh in Molly Novotny, «a girl scarcely out of her teens... with a heart-shaped face » (*Arm*: 27) who hustles drinks at the Safari club to support herself: «He had found that, with Molly Novotny's arms around him, he could resist the sickness and the loneli-

ness that drove him to the room above the Safari... He had fought off the sickness four nights running and on the fifth it was no worse than being hungry all night. «I got one of that monkey's paws off my back,» he bragged to Molly». (*Arm*: 113). Yet, the guilt he feels for his role in Zosh's illness is even stronger than his dependence on drugs: the image of Zosh in a wheelchair is constantly on his mind and it becomes «the monkey's other paw» (*Arm*: 114). During the course of the novel Frankie will be soiled by yet another guilt: the murder of the local fixer Louie, which will lead Frankie to his death.

Preminger's adaptation for the screen downplays the pervasive sense of guilt present in the novel. In the movie, Frankie (Frank Sinatra) comes back to Chicago from prison where he has been cured of his drug-addiction and where he has learnt to play the drums. His wife Zosh (Eleanor Parker) pretends to be crippled to keep Frankie for herself. She urges Frankie to pick up his old job as card dealer and she opposes his willingness to become a musician. On the contrary, Molly Novotny (Kim Novak) lets him practice in her flat and, as the movie goes on, it is clear that Frankie and Molly are in love with each other. The pressure Frankie has to undergo while he deals makes him take up drugs again which he gets from the local pusher Fomorowski. After a violent argument about the price of a fix during which Frankie beats Fomorowski unconscious, the pusher goes looking for him. He enters Frankie's room and he catches Zosh standing by the window. When he threatens to reveal her faked illness, she springs at him and pushes him down the stairs. Frankie is of course the prime suspect for the murder and has to hide with Molly. With her help he goes «cold turkey» and, cured of his dependence from drugs, he goes to tell Zosh that he is leaving her for Molly. He has been followed by the police, alerted by Molly's jealous boyfriend Johnny, and just when Zosh jumps up from her wheelchair to stop him leaving, Captain Bednar with other policemen enters the apartment. As soon as she sees the policemen she attempts to escape, but she falls from the third floor onto the street. While the ambulance carries Zosh's corpse away, Molly and Frankie walk away from the slum.

Zosh's faked illness is very clear to the audience from the very first scenes. This important change shifts completely the burden of guilt from Frankie to Zosh: he is not guilty of having caused her illness, while she is guilty of lying to him. In tune with this shift, in the movie, it is Zosh, not Frankie, who kills the pusher Louie. Freed from the burden of guilt, at the end of the movie Frankie is freed from the burden of his slum life. The fact that Frankie and Molly sever all the links with the slum is symbolised by their leaving Sparrow, Frankie's loyal friend, behind: he is part of the defeated whole out of which only Frankie and Molly can emerge and he has therefore no place in their new lives.

A novel about «the guilt of owning nothing... guilt that lay crouched behind every billboard which gave each man his commandments» (*Arm*: 17) has been turned into a movie about upward mobility and personal success. The movie does not take into account the entrapment to which the novel's

characters are subjected. While in the novel Frankie is a former soldier who starts taking drugs because of his war wound, in the movie he starts «for kicks», just to try it. In the novel Zosh is trapped in a wheelchair by her illness; in the movie she decides to stay in the wheelchair to keep Frankie tied to her. This complete neglect of the realm of necessity in which the novel's characters live has important consequences when one turns to the identity of the main character. In the novel Frankie briefly considers assuming a new identity and becoming a famous and successful drummer. At the New Year's Eve party, he takes over the drums from the drunken drummer and when Cousin Kvorka approaches him by calling him «Dealer», Frankie answers him: «Don't call me "Dealer", call me "Drummer"»:

For half an hour, while everyone was helping to bring the drummer around, the dealer was a man in a dream: he was Dave Tough, he was Krupa, then he was Dave Tough again without missing a beat. «The kid can do it when he feels like it», somebody said, and everyone shook his hand to tell him he was as much in the slot with the traps as he was with a deck (*Arm*: 161).

The paragraph is bitterly ironic. Frankie's new identity only lasts for half an hour, as part of a dream, and he does not seem to have much attention from the audience since everyone is busy bringing the real drummer around. Moreover Frankie's ability as a drummer is appreciated in terms of his ability as a dealer: no matter how much Frankie tries to be a drummer he will always be remembered as a dealer. And yet even his ability and his reputation as a dealer start to be shaky. Sparrow is «the only hustler on Division Street who still believed there was anything tough about Frankie Machine» (*Arm*: 10-11). Frankie may well deal cards, but other people «deal» him. Significantly we are told that «the dealer didn't want to go home» since Zosh «did all the dealing there» (*Arm*: 26). In an early scene in the novel with strong homoerotic overtones, Frankie goes to Louie for a fix to ease the pain of the wound: «This was Nifty Louie's Hour. The time when he did the dealing and the dealer had to take what Louie chose to toss him in Louie's own good time». (*Arm*: 57).

When, the pain killed and his confidence restored by the fix, Frankie gets ready to go to work and boasts his ability as a dealer saying that «the sheep'r gonna get a fast shearin' tonight», Louie thinks that Frankie looks like one of the weaker sheep himself (*Arm*: 61). The epitaph at the end of the novel makes clear that the Polish-American neighbourhood remembers Frankie as «the dealer»:

It's all in the wrist, with a deck or a cue,
And Frankie Machine had the touch.
He had the touch, and a golden arm... (*Arm*: 343).

And yet the epitaph closes on a note of failure : «the arm that held up has failed at last» (*Arm*: 343).

The movie strongly emphasises Frankie's ambition of assuming a new identity, renaming himself Jack Duval and becoming a successful drummer. While Zosh strongly opposes Frankie's ambition, Molly encourages him. The end of the movie makes Frankie the ultimate self-made man and, because of her loyalty to him, Molly will be rewarded too. They reciprocally redeem themselves of their wrong sentimental choices: Frankie leaves the bad and neurotic Zosh to be with the good Molly, Molly leaves Drunky Johnny for the cured Frankie. In this respect *The Man with the Golden Arm* exploits the same formula of many successful films of the 1950s such as *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1953), *The Country Girl* (1955), *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *Rebel without a Cause* (1956). Jackie Byars has grouped these films together, pointing out how the various social problems which they present are «basically family problems, and they can be solved only by a return to traditional family values and structure» (Byars, 1991: 114). All these movies have a deviant male character as protagonist and all of them end with his reintegration into the domestic and communal order: «in depicting deviance... these films forcefully portray the range of the permissible, the norm, the ideal» (Byars: 116).

While Algren views Frankie and Molly as clearly being part of the defeated whole living in the slum, Preminger's adaptation emphasises their difference. In an early scene, the camera shows us in the foreground Sparrow and Vi at the counter of Antek's bar, while Molly is sitting at a table in the background. Sparrow's and Vi's trivial conversation is contrasted with Molly's dignified pensive posture. Vi talks about her husband and how boring life is with him. Sparrow tells her that he knows what Vi needs to improve her life. Vi glances at him intimately and asks provocatively: «Do you?». She is very disappointed indeed when Sparrow tells her that she needs a dog and tries to sell her one. The fact that in the movie Vi is considerably older than Sparrow and that he has a boyish sexually harmless look about him increases the grotesque dimension of the scene. The spectator is clearly to feel distanced from Vi and Sparrow: they are people to be laughed at. Nelson Algren once complained to Simone De Beauvoir that Americans do not like extremes such as ugliness and beauty, the grotesque and the tragic, good and evil to mingle (Algren, 1996: 53). The movie keeps these extremes well separated. The novel tells quite a different story: Vi is young and sensuous but married to the old Stash Koskoska. While her husband is at work, she lets Sparrow eat sausages and make love to her. During the love-making a sausage string hanging from his mouth tickles her and when she protests about it, «Sparrow generously switched the string to the other corner». Vi is satisfied since Sparrow making love to her with a sausage in his mouth is «better than no love at all» (*Arm*: 140). As James Giles has pointed out, Algren makes it quite clear in this scene that «Violet and Sparrow are simply seeking love wherever and however they can find it... With one short sentence, Algren affirms the humanness of his two otherwise absurd characters and challenges the reader to acknowledge a momentary identification with them». (Giles, 1990: xiii).

It is this «momentary identification» that is absent from the movie and one that Preminger was not the least interested in creating. If we are to believe Algren's words, one of the first questions that Preminger asked him was: «How come you know such terrible people you write about?» (Donohue 1964: 119). While Algren tried in his novel to give visibility to the Chicago slum, Preminger denied such visibility, reconstructing in studio a theatrical neighbourhood which is a caricature in itself. His reason for not shooting on location - if we are again to believe Algren's words - is one that goes hand in hand with the philosophy of upward mobility espoused by the movie: «Oh, that neighbourhood's all built up now; there are no slums left» (Donohue: 124). The slum is finally erased from the American city, it no longer exists. Paradoxically, the «unreality» and «invisibility» of the slum go against what Carla Cappetti has defined as «Algren's life-long commitment to challenging the perceptions of "reality" and "unreality" of middle-class America» (Cappetti: 159). As Algren puts it

There is no way of convincing or even making the slightest impression on the American middle class that there are people who have no alternative... The world of the drug-addict doesn't exist... The world of the criminal does not exist... [They] said, «It doesn't exist, they aren't there, we know that they aren't there, and if they are there, it doesn't matter, because we're here and we don't live in that sort of world» (Algren quoted in Cappetti: 159).

Significantly, one of the few shots taken «on location» in Chicago shows the audience not the slum neighbourhood where Frankie lives but the huge skyscraper where he goes to meet a businessman who promises to get him an audition as a drummer in a band. American big business is therefore seen not as exploiting the inhabitants of the slum, but as helping them out - at least help out those, who, like Frankie, want to be helped out.

John Hess has argued that the films favoured by *Cahiers du Cinéma* were those that «expressed a certain world view»: «an auteur was a film director who expressed an optimistic image of human potentialities within an utterly corrupt society. By reaching out emotionally and spiritually to other human beings and/or God, one could transcend the isolation imposed on one by a corrupt world» (Hess quoted in Hillier, 1985: 6). As we have seen, Preminger's *The Man With the Golden Arm* certainly fits perfectly this description ignoring as it does the social and political concerns of Nelson Algren's novel in the name of a paradigm of redemption from the corruption of the slum through the chance of upward mobility offered by big business. In a scene towards the end of the novel Molly has become a stripper and the narrator describes her entrance onto the stage with the chorus:

A brown and a white chorus came out one by one, seemingly too indifferent toward each other to come out together, till there were five. Though each wore only slippers and a G string, all seemed overdressed, so studiously had their nakedness been donned. Each were powdered, each taut pink nipple

tinted with fingernail polish and dusted with some mauve talc, the armpits shaven and deodorised, each navel dusted and the hair swept back behind each small catlike ear (*Arm*: 307).

In James Giles's words, the girls' «disguised, deodorised nakedness is a metaphor for respectable society's preferred view of the urban lumpenproletariat» (Giles, 1990: viii). The members of the «respectable society», just like Preminger's audience in the 50s, want to be titillated by «sanitised glimpses of the urban ghetto», but refuse to see «its naked reality because in so doing they would be forced to recognise its humanity» (Giles: viii). It is precisely these sanitised glimpses that Otto Preminger's adaptation of Nelson Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* offers to its audience, transforming Frankie Machine from a victim of the larger capitalist American society into a successful drummer who moves away from the slum into that capitalist society and who, one day, who knows, might even own his own band.

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