PRESCRIBING THE PRESENT OVER THE PAST: A STUDY OF PRESENTISM IN POSTMODERN VISUAL NARRATIVES

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Prescribing The Present Over The Past: A Study Of Presentism In Postmodern Visual Narratives** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Prescribing The Present Over The Past: A Study Of Presentism In Postmodern Visual Narratives

This thesis analyses two postmodern visual narratives - a 1998 film, *Pleasantville,* and a 2008 mini-series, *Lost in Austen*. The former is a depiction of High Modern American society while the latter is set in Regency England. The primary concern of my study is to identify and examine the 'presentist' elements in these visual narratives and how they overshadow the actual socio-cultural dilemmas of Regency England and High Modern America, as well as the tools and techniques used to achieve this. Jane Austen's Regency romance novel, *Pride and Prejudice,* is analyzed parallel to *Lost in Austen*, while Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is juxtaposed with *Pleasantville,* as cultural artifacts detailing the respective eras depicted in both visual narratives. This research also examines the influences of the postmodern era that have resulted in such presentist portrayals as represented in the selected film and mini-series. My research identifies how the actual events and occurrences of the postmodern age shaped the contexts of production of the film and mini-series, and are the purpose behind the presentist elements depicted in them. It concludes that owing to the filmmakers' presentist inclination; racial bias, gender discrimination and dubiety of new knowledge and advancements have trickled into more contemporaneous depictions of Regency and High Modern periods. It further reveals the actual socio-cultural dilemmas of people from both eras as represented in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Key Words

Presentism, Focalization, Ocularization, Gaze, Postmodernism, Visual narratives

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Parents

May Allah bless them infinitely in this world and the next

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of four literary and visual texts - a film, a mini-series, a novel, and a novella - that depict the life, culture, society, and problems of Regency England and High Modern America. The novel and the novella serve as artifacts detailing the actual cultural and social contexts of the eras depicted in the film and the mini-series which are the main focus of this study. The Regency Era, which is a part of the greater Georgian Era, refers to the period between 1811 and 1820 when King George III lost his sanity, and his son King George IV became Regent. It is marked by significant socio-cultural progress and thriving aristocracy in England. King George IV was a great patron of art, music, science, and literature, which contributed to prosperity and growth in these fields (The Regency period). The literary text selected for this study depicting this specific period is Jane Austen's classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice,* published in 1813. It is a Regency Romance that tells the story of its protagonist, a strong and independent-minded woman, Elizabeth Bennet. Her mother's only purpose in life is to find suitable matches for her five daughters. The eldest Bennet sister, Jane, catches the eye of Mr. Bingley, a wealthy young man who is convinced by his other wealthy friend Mr. Darcy to abandon her, but eventually, the two are united and get engaged. Darcy and Elizabeth also start off on the wrong foot but after a series of misunderstandings, confusions and revelations that span the length of the novel, Darcy confesses his feelings to Elizabeth who accepts his proposal. Darcy is also the interest of Bingley's sister, Caroline, however, her affection is not reciprocated. Elizabeth Bennet is also made an offer for marriage by her repulsive cousin, Mr. Collins, who after getting rejected marries her friend, Charlotte Lucas. The younger Bennet sister, Lydia, elopes with the villainous Mr. Wickham, who is on poor terms with Darcy for trying to corrupt his younger sister, Georgiana, for her wealth after squandering his own inheritance (Austen). The novel follows Elizabeth's growth and the stories of people around her as she discovers that first impressions can be deceiving and there is more to people than meets the eye. It also beautifully depicts the mannerisms, traditions and practices that prevailed in Regency England.

The second historical period studied in this research is that of High Modernism in America (hereafter referred to as the High Modern Age / High Modern Era). High Modernism dominated the 1950s and 1960s and is signified by the firm belief that scientific knowledge and technological advancements can reshape society and the world as we know it. It emphasized the potential of scientists, intellectuals, and experts to make progress through advanced city planning, restructuring, and creating order in public spaces (Taylor). The literary text depicting this period selected for the purpose of my research is Truman Capote's 1958 novella, *Breakfast at Tiffany's.* It is narrated by an unnamed, aspiring writer who rents an apartment in Manhattan and befriends his neighbor, Holly Golightly. She is the ultimate café society girl who associates with wealthy men and lives off the gifts they shower her with. She is attractive and always the center of attention in every room she enters. The narrator notices that her apartment has no real furniture. She is reluctant to settle down or talk about her past. She also visits a man, Sally Tomato, in prison thinking he only needs some company. The narrator warns her against it but she doesn't listen. He later discovers that as an orphan child, she had married an older man, Doc Golightly, but escaped him and changed her name to become an actress in New York. When her husband comes to take her back, she refuses him and continues to live her life of freedom in the city. She soon gets news of her brother Fred's death and breaks down. This tragedy changes her, and she decides to marry and settle down with a Brazilian politician. However, her wedding gets called off when she notoriously makes headlines for unknowingly helping Sally Tomato communicate with his drug mafia. Holly decides to leave America and find her dreams elsewhere. The only contact the narrator ever has with her after that is through a single postcard from her without any return address. The novella is a depiction of High Modern society in New York during the 1950s. As a corollary of the sudden rise in reliance on science, education and technological advancements as markers of progress during this era, upward social mobility and class consciousness became more pronounced. It represented a belief in progress in terms of rising up in society by climbing the social ladder. This is apparent in Capote's characterization of Holly who is actually an uneducated hillbilly but pretends to belong to the high class and lives her life as a social climber or 'society' girl.

The visual narrative depicting the Regency period is a 2008, four-part, mini-series called *Lost in Austen*. It is a postmodern re-adaptation of Jane Austen's classic, *Pride and Prejudice*. Postmodernity has been identified as the "cultural logic of late capitalism" in the period after High Modernism (Jameson 5). It saw an increased consumer culture, depthlessness, and questioning of grand narratives such as positivism, nationalism and religion. Although Frederic Jameson is not the primary theorist for this study, he has laid the grounds for postmodern critique of late capitalist America, globalized culture and Americanization. Film and television media are used as some of the tools to propagate this capitalist agenda to the world. The western media promotes its underlying motives by appropriating and skewing the lived realities of people from the past in favor of its own ideals. Since the effects of capitalism spread to the Global South as well, it is important for everyone to study literary and visual texts from the Global North as they propagate Western capitalist consumer culture internationally in the postmodern globalized culture.

The intellectual counterpart of postmodernity is postmodernism which is a condition that coerces one to question prevalent metanarratives. It denies stability or universality of meaning and challenges established structures and hierarchies. It coincides with Poststructuralism and deconstructs popular beliefs. It holds that reality is a mere construct and thus, plurality of meaning finds acceptance and justification. Jean-François Lyotard was the first theorist who spoke about the philosophy of postmodernism in 1979 (Postmodernism). The Postmodern era started in the 1970s, after the Modern era. As the mini-series, *Lost in Austen,* is also produced in this period, it is characteristically a postmodern cultural product and puts a twist on the original plot of the Regency novel, *Pride and Prejudice.* It introduces a 21st century girl, Amanda Price, who is a huge fan of Jane Austen, into the storyline as the protagonist. Amanda's adventure begins when one day Elizabeth Bennet suddenly appears in her house in 21st century Hammersmith through a secret passage in her bathroom. Somehow, the two end up swapping their places and Amanda finds herself in Longbourn, the house of the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice*, in Regency England. Once there, Amanda tries her best to keep the storyline on track but ends up causing utter chaos when Bingley falls for her instead of Jane. When she convinces him to pursue Jane, Jane ends up getting married to Collins instead. Charlotte Lucas, who was supposed to marry Collins decides to venture off to Africa alone. Wickham, who

was Jane Austen's villain, turns out to be a gentleman, deliberately allowing his own reputation to be ruined to save Georgiana's honor. Caroline Bingley who fancied Darcy reveals herself to be a lesbian. In all this chaos, Amanda starts falling for Elizabeth's Darcy but he breaks her heart when he finds out that she is not chaste and lived with her previous boyfriend. He also finds the book, *Pride and Prejudice*, that Amanda carried with her and asks her to leave. However, after an interesting series of events, Darcy and Amanda end up getting married while Elizabeth happily chooses to become a writer instead of marrying to settle down (Zeff). I contend that *Lost in Austen* is a presentist depiction of the Regency period. Therefore, it frequently depicts notions of feminism and LGBTQ which merit discussion in my study of the mini-series as a postmodern visual narrative. The original narrative is taken apart because Amanda's postmodern sensibilities and outlook do not blend in with Jane Austen's world and interfere with the plot, effectively overturning the Regency narrative.

The second visual narrative selected for this study is a postmodern film called *Pleasantville* which was produced in 1998. It is a postmodern representation of High Modern American society. The film's protagonists are two siblings, David and Jennifer, who live in the 1990s but are mysteriously teleported into a monochrome, 1950s sitcom. This sitcom is set in the apparently Utopian, High Modern American suburbs. The siblings initially try to stick to the plot of the show but eventually end up causing chaos and confusion in the fictional town because of their postmodern consciousness. David gets a job at a soda shop and both siblings go to school as they should, but their interventions start bringing color to the monochromatic town. Before their arrival, the town functions under precise rules and regulations, people have pre-defined roles and tasks, the mayor is all powerful, books are completely blank and nobody ever questions anything. However, David introduces Bob, who works at the soda shop, to novel ideas such as free thinking, creating art, and disrupting his routine. Jennifer also introduces her mother and schoolfellows to notions of sexuality and pleasure. They notice that words start appearing on pages of books as the siblings tell people what was supposed to be written in them. Suddenly people start appearing in color as they break free from the shackles of ignorance and become empowered. A particular group of orthodox townspeople, including the mayor, see these changes as a threat and start oppressing the people in color. At the end, David wins this battle, the entire town becomes colorful instead of monochrome, and the people are freed (Ross).

My study aims to demonstrate how postmodern devices like parody, metafiction, intertextuality, and techniques such as focalization and ocularization have helped filmmakers produce such visual narratives whose surface level humor masks presentist tendencies. These techniques and devices are elaborated in detail in chapter three but only to convey some idea here – 'parody' means to utilize, imitate, subvert, and ridicule historical texts (Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism); 'metafiction' is a kind of self-reflexive fictional writing that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction (Waugh); 'intertextuality' is the underlying relation and connection between different texts that endows them new depth and meaning (Werner); 'focalization' is in intricate mix of what viewers see and what the characters on screen see, know and experience (Jost); and 'ocularization' refers to the use of the camera to control what the viewers see on screen versus what the character sees or is shown (Jost). My primary theorist for this study is Mieke Bal whose methodology of 'traveling concepts' has been invoked to enable an interdisciplinary cultural analysis.

Interestingly, the social issues indicated in the film and mini-series, despite being important, are actually more relevant for people in the postmodern era. Their projection over Regency and High Modern eras overshadows and plays down the actual social dilemmas that confronted the people of those times. Such texts act as mediated narratives representative of the postmodern culture rather than the time periods that they are depicting. This study relies on the two literary texts, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's,* to identify the actual societal issues of the 1800s in Regency England and the mid-20th century in High Modern America. My study shows how such issues have been masked by projecting a postmodernist perspective on these narratives using media technologies such as cinema and television.

In the Postmodern era, when filmmakers create visual adaptations of literary texts depicting a certain time period, they may deliberately or unknowingly impose their own social paradigms onto it. The literary text may never have been written with such a futuristic, postmodern audience or sensibilities in mind. Thus, such a visual adaptation of it falls victim to the trap of 'presentism'. Presentism means to interpret the past under the influence of modern or postmodern consciousness and apply their respective attitudes, values and notions to these interpretations (Armitage). It causes people to look at the past from a postmodern lens, thereby, denying the past its own

objective representation and meaning. This can be seen in *Lost in Austen* where Amanda forces Jane to go to Netherfield Hall in the rain as Mrs. Bennet does in the original *Pride and Prejudice*, but once Jane falls ill Amanda treats her by giving her Paracetamol - a prescription drug that did not even exist in Regency England. Similarly, the film *Pleasantville* is not so much a representation of the 1950s High Modern suburban life as it is a satire on the romanticized and nostalgic notions of it. The trope of color is used in the film to parody and hold up a mirror to the society that was keen on racist segregation and female oppression.

There are different theorists who have penned down their conceptions of presentism like Thomas M. Crisp, Mark Hinchcliff and Ned Markosian. In defense of presentism, it is said that if the past can make any claim on us at all, it is only possible in the present (Armitage). Benedetto Croce points to a similar notion that no account of history is entirely objective and all history can only be read and understood with respect to present-day knowledge, needs and situations. Thus, the person writing history keeps in mind his contemporary audience and his own present-day context which influences his depiction and writing as well. The argument of another historian, Leopold von Ranke also supports the notion of the prescription of the present on the past when he says that the present puts a kind of pressure on the past so that one cannot comprehend it without the influence of the present (Armitage). With this view, 21st century television and film makers who put a postmodern twist on different adaptations of historical texts can find solid ground to steady their feet. However, this position can become problematic when viewers attempt to understand and unravel the Regency and High Modern periods through such postmodern visual narratives.

1.1 Thesis Statement

In the postmodern milieu, contemporaneous issues are projected onto the past in art and other media productions. Since my research is on visual narratives, I focus on a film and miniseries. While postmodern parody tends to use and abuse history to give critique on different matters, it is important to keep in mind if a certain postmodern visual narrative is merely a critique of history or prescribing attributes to it that do not belong there, under the influence of the context of production. Inaccuracy in such depictions occurs because the past is only understood in the present under the influence of postmodern context, experience, and sensibilities.

Hence, filmmakers may prescribe postmodern consciousness over depictions of the past which renders them inaccurate and overshadows the actual dilemmas, problems and socio-cultural issues faced by those people.

1.2 Delimitation

My research is delimited to two postmodern visual narratives, *Lost in Austen* and *Pleasantville,* that depict Regency England and High Modern America respectively. Furthermore, two textual artifacts contemporary to the time in which the visual narratives are set, have been selected to compare the social issues depicted in the film with the actual social issues of that time period. These texts are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* depicting the Regency period and Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* depicting the High Modern period.

1.3 Research Questions

Keeping in view the presentist elements in the film and mini-series, my research endeavors to answer three research questions.

1- What are the means through which the selected postmodern visual narratives assist in prescribing the present over the past?
2- How are the actual social issues and dilemmas of the past trivialized in *Lost in Austen* and *Pleasantville*?
3- Why is presentism responsible for stripping the past of its honest truth and representation?

1.4 Rationale and Significance

The visual narratives being produced in the 21st century on postmodern lines merit critical reception because this is not only the era that we live in but also one that has changed the way we look at bygone eras. 21st century television and film productions have given birth to mutated forms of portrayal which combine the past and the present in the most intriguing manner such as re-adaptations, spin-offs, and parodies, among others. This ability to combine the past and the present opens new horizons in the study of historical periods but also raises questions regarding the accuracy of these narrations, interpretations, and depictions. It is, therefore, vital to be fully aware of the factors that come into play whenever we are trying to make sense of

historical periods or depict them through written or visual texts. We live in a postmodern globalized culture where Americanization and Western capitalist consumer culture is steadily being promoted internationally using different tools such as film and television media. Often this is done by skewing and appropriating the portrayals of the past to serve Western motives. Capitalism and globalization impact everyone across the world despite originating from the Global North. Because of this widespread impact, it is important for people in the Global South to understand the agenda behind such media productions as well starting from their source in the Global North. Being critical of the influences of the present and our contemporary environment in our reading and portrayal of the past is essential to making sure that the past is depicted and understood as objectively, honestly and truthfully as possible. The influences of presentism in postmodern visual narratives set in the historical periods overshadow the true social dilemmas of those times by choosing to understand and portray them from a 21st century perspective. This is the main precipitating factor behind this research.

This study is of significance for researchers, students, and the public in general for myriad reasons. It has the potential to equip them with the ability to view postmodern visual narratives not only as an entertaining or apparently informative piece of fiction but one that must be critically analyzed to distinguish facts from fantasy. The objective of my study is not to align the selected film and mini-series with the selected novella and the novel respectively, but to align the time period depicted in the film and mini-series with the actual time periods in history. Since the novel, *Pride and Prejudice,* depicts the Regency period and is also the original text parodied in *Lost in Austen*, it has been selected for this study. For the High Modern period *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is a good example depicting a strong and independent woman. It is a good choice for my study because it aligns with the issues I identify and analyze in the portrayal of the High Modern period in *Pleasantville*. The film adaptation of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* tampers with Capote's original plot and doesn't portray the High Modern issues relevant to my study. Moreover, a postmodern film adaptation of this novella does not exist so I selected *Pleasantville* as a postmodern representation of the High Modern period depicting the issues that this study focuses on.

1.5 Research Plan

This thesis is composed of six thematically organized chapters. The first one comprises a scrupulous introduction of my research including the research questions, delimitation, thesis statement and the significance of my study. Chapter two is the literature review which helps locate my study in the plethora of existing literature and indicates the lacunae in existing knowledge. It also suggests how my research can contribute to filling them. Chapter three elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of this research and the methodology employed. It gives a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework founding this research and associated tools and techniques pertinent to my research used in the film and mini-series. It elucidates Armitage's notion of presentism, Hutcheon's intertextuality, Kristeva's parody, Waugh and Gass's metafiction, Jost's focalization and ocularization, Lacanian Gaze and Burgin and Bunyan's concept of camera's gaze. Moreover, it elaborates the formulation of my research methodology that combines different theoretical concepts using Mieke Bal's proposition of concepts traveling across disciplines. Chapters four and five comprise the cultural analysis of the four selected texts. Chapter four endeavors to answer the first research question by identifying the areas in which postmodern consciousness is prescribed over Regency and High Modern periods in the selected visual narratives. It also analyzes the tools used for this purpose. Chapter five addresses the second and third research questions collectively since the answers of both questions are interconnected and each supports and enriches the other. It covers the actual social issues of the Regency and high Modern eras as evidenced in the novel and novella and the postmodern influences that have resulted in the presentist prescription in the visual narratives. Chapter six is the conclusion of this research and pens down the findings of this study with respect to the research questions. It also elaborates how my research adds to current knowledge pool and is followed by recommendations for future researchers and a list of the works cited.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to warrant the present study by painting a background picture of the existing literature in which to situate it and indicate gaps that need to be filled. The literature in this chapter consists of works pertaining theory and methodology, works on the selected texts, and contextual references and literature. There has been extensive work done on presentism as an area of research as well as in terms of fiction that is produced under its influence. It has been pitched as the issue that the modern world should be most concerned about when John Brockman asked all the great minds of the world to find out what it is that people should be most worried about today (Arikha). Noga Arikha talks about how the collective amnesia of the modern world must be addressed because everything that is being taught to students focuses only on the present. She frowns upon the internet as the only source of information to students who are more interested in quick fixes, social media, generalized topics and interpretations rather than the actual history of things. However, it should be noted that when Arikha laments the loss of history, she also laments the loss of canonized historical works over accusations of the works promoting imperialist agendas. My primary concern with her view is that while presentism is certainly damaging for historiography, the imperialist canonized texts should not be returned to center-stage regardless of the position that presentism has in the modern academic domain. The most important of reason for this is how all those texts are eurocentric and paint the local in poor light. So even if such historical texts have to be studied academically, they must be studied with modern 21st century awareness of the imperialist prejudices and biases against the locals. We must be able to see through biased representations even in classical texts.

In a meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Alex Barker expressed that in today's age, we are incessantly obsessed with the present because our past haunts us. This fear makes us get narcissistically involved in the present (Barker). He elaborates that it is not because the past has passed but because we are subconsciously always aware that it is the past that has shaped and formed the present and that is what always has and will determine the course of time and history. This fear of the control and the grip that the past has on us makes us run from it in favor of

the present but just as we try to make the present dominate over the past, the past dominates over the present just the same. This is a point observed by David Armitage as well in his essay written in defense of presentism. While Barker states that our attempt at being presentist is paralleled by the attempt of the past to devour the present, Armitage claims that it is only in the present where we can make any sense of the past at all or where the past can have any right on us (Armitage). This puts a responsibility on us in the present towards the future as well. All these possibilities indicate the presence of other possible approaches towards time and history as well and, therefore, Armitage believes that presentism is a justifiable notion for understanding, interpreting and deciphering the past.

A research paper on family trinkets and heritage objects in the present era, tries to uncover why such traditions have seized to hold importance in the 21st century for different reasons (Legendre and Olivier). The primary factor responsible for it according to the authors is the reign of presentism which they claim rules not only over us but also over objects that surround us such as furniture, possessions and family heirlooms that once held value which used to increase over time but have now begun losing their worth and sentimental value. Postmodern consumerism has taken the place of legacy, heirlooms and tradition. What the authors have concluded in this paper can easily be extended over to television and print media as well where the postmodern creators and audience are both less interested in a past that is gone and more interested in the now or at least an amalgam of the past and present.

In addition to this, I have studied various analytic approaches and singled out the best one which is most suitable for my research, while formulating its methodology. While studying Susan E. Chase's view of narrative analysis, I discovered that her main focus is on the analysis of interviews in which she focused on methodological issues and presented some analytic lenses for narrative inquiry. She notes that narrative literacy is somewhat universal, and every individual is exposed to narratives in one form or another, thereby, enabling him/her to narrate a story of some sort if needed. One of her major areas of focus has also been feminists of the second wave who gave new meaning to the study of personal narratives by amplifying historically silenced voices (Chase).

I have also studied literature written on the four texts selected for this research. The mini-series, *Lost in Austen,* produced by Guy Andrews, received mixed reviews for the liberties it took with the original novel by Jane Austen. Many do not even consider it proper enough to be considered an adaptation owing to the introduction of new 21st century characters which renders the entire plot topsy-turvy. However, there are researchers like Sara Tamburini who seek to justify this adaptation. In her paper written for a seminar, *Literary Adaptation: Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Emma on Screen*, at the University of Osnabrück, Tamburini refers to different theories of adaptation and postmodernism to rationalize *Lost in Austen* as a postmodern adaptation and its effect on the audience (Tamburini). She uses Julie Sanders' theory of adaptation to justify it as an act of revision which implies the introduction of new and revised notions in the original. Furthermore, the adaptation qualifies as postmodern on account of elements like Jameson's pastiche, Baudrillard's hyperreality and postmodern intertextuality. She also presents postfeminist critique on the miniseries. It is interesting to note that while the researcher only points out the disparity in sexuality and gender roles in regency and 21st century England on account of the lack of progress in feminism in Jane Austen's time, it is actually an effect of presentism that the postmodern producer, Guy Andrews is able to prescribe these ideas onto a Regency setting.

In another conference paper, Zborowski considers Amanda Price of *Lost in Austen* a genius invention that comforts the annoyed Pride and Prejudice fans who find it improper for Elizabeth Bennet to have the narrative voice in film adaptations which gives her such knowledge and perspective of her position and historical context of which the character is originally unaware. Giving the same voice to Amanda is less discomforting and more sensible for postmodern viewers in such a parodic adaptation (Zborowski).

Since *Pride and Prejudice* has been made into films time and again, intertextual references to previous adaptations in the selected mini-series is an important point for consideration. The incident of Darcy getting soaked in a pond in the mini-series is one such scene. It is found to be an intertextual reference to one of the older film versions. Darcy in the 1995 rendition takes a dip in a pond at Pemberley (Langton). This scene is parodically recreated in the miniseries.

The second selected visual narrative is the 1998 film called *Pleasantville*. Researchers have often taken interest in the psyche of characters as depicted in the film. Dr. Eichel notes that while the film has numerous allegorical elements, it is the psychological aspect that can most interest experts. There is an uncertainty, confusion and dilemma throughout the film and in the struggle of the characters as they start appearing in color. It emphasizes the opposing aspects in individual's psyche and how they find color when they bring their shadow self to light, whatever it may be (Eichel). However, what he is short of pointing out is that the psychological implications extend beyond the fictional characters of the film. Just as the producers making the film have some interest in fighting the cultural war of the late 20th century through the film, the audience watching the film is equally influenced or even disillusioned.

Several research papers have been published taking this film as the primary object of study. Crippen through his study points out that the film is not as much a telling of the historical period as it is a depiction of the already circulating mainstream beliefs regarding that time. By focusing on mythic imagery and marketing mainstream ideas, the researcher is trying to emphasize that the film is only an affirmation of stereotypical western values which turn it into a cultural asset (Crippen).

The striking number of similarities between *Pleasantville* and *The Truman Show* call for a viewing of the latter as well. It is the story of a man who lives his life in a carefully curated simulation under strict watch of the show's maker believing it to be real life. It is reminiscent of government control dictating how citizens should live their lives (Weir). It helps to take a look at the similar effects that postmodern society and context have had on both films.

Since a major theme of the film is the dilemma of color and race, an article on photographic coverage of the struggles of African Americans during the civil rights movement reveals that their pictures are always shown in black-and-white (hereafter black-and-white is referred to as monochrome/monochromatic) not due to lack of colored photography technology but as a political move to minimize their visibility (Colorizing Historical Photos of the Civil Rights Movement).

Pleasantville intertextualizes a myriad of art works, novels and paintings. A painting depicting still life has been identified as Paul Cezanne's *Still Life with apples and*

Oranges that beautifully plays with dimensions, depth and contrasts (Still Life with Apples and Oranges, 1895 by Paul Cezanne). Another scandalous artwork in Pleasantville is a nude painting of Betty. It holds a stark resemblance to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Jewitt). The painting has been studied to understand the expression of female sexuality through art.

There are also many research publications that highlight the social issues of the 19th century. Many of these issues have also been discussed in various novels such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Such literature proves that the depictions of these issues in novels are as close to the truth as we can know today. Colin Carman studies the way that the traditionally patriarchal society of Regency England forces women to behave and carry themselves in a particular manner which is considered lady-like, proper and pristine. Any female deviating from this constructed notion of propriety would be considered wild and unsophisticated (Carman). It indicates the subtle oppression that women were subjected to on a daily basis. Such instances have also been parodied in *Lost in Austen.*

Hashemipour, in another paper, notes how social status in the Georgian era was a matter of grave concern as reflected by Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*. She notes that it is not only the class difference that hinders social intermingling but also the disparity in the social status of men and women, even within the same social class. Such issues, as depicted by Jane Austen were more dominant at that time so marriage for financial security and prospects was more important than love in general. This is exactly why Elizabeth Bennet has won the hearts of millions by defying the norm in an age when it was utterly unthinkable for most (Hashemipour).

Truman Capote's 1958 novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is studied by Dina Smith as a retelling of an old fairy tale with modern characters in a modern setting. She sees it as another Cinderella story of a poor girl trying to make it big in life. She notes how domestic servitude was a major problem for women in the mid-20th century. It is exactly this mundane life that Holly tries to escape (Smith)

Wübbelt notes disruption in gender roles, especially of wives who used to look after domestic affairs but had to step outside in the war years in search of employment. Furthermore, Capote's novel alludes on several occasions to the homosexuality of the

anonymous narrator which also signifies sexual orientation as a rising issue at the time of the novella's setting. Inversion of gender roles is another issue that Capote tackles as he ends the story with Holly's adventurous side taking her to Africa. The lust for adventure which is traditionally viewed as a masculine trait is subverted and allocated to a female character by Capote (Wübbelt).

In order to understand the author's point of view, particularly in developing the character of Holly, his interviews have also been studied in detail. Capote explains clearly that he intended for Holly to be a modern, progressive and a strong-willed woman trying to make her way in a world that wanted to keep her locked up in the age-old shackles of patriarchy (Inge).

The literature in this section helps readers become cognizant of the context that has resulted in the presentist tendency evident in the visual narratives which pronounces their subjectivity. Since presentism is the main theoretical underpinning of this research, the context of production of each film has been studied in detail. A lot of information has been gathered from newspaper articles and books published at that time for the purpose of this thesis. It has been discovered that in the late 20th century, popular opinion of political leaders and opposition to same-sex marriages resulted in the emergence of laws that prevented same-sex marriages. One such law is the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act that defined marriage to exclude same-sex couples (The 1990s, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and DOMA). A newspaper article recorded the strong political voice against homosexuality which was raised during that time as well by senators and leaders. They openly hurled insults at homosexuals and gained public support by doing so. (Franke-Ruta). Several books also explain the public stance towards homosexuality. In a book by John Gallagher and Chris Bull, it is stated how a Christian group emerged to stand against gay rights activism claiming that whatever work was done to support gay rights was a violation of the rights of those who wanted to teach their children Christian morality (Gallagher and Bull). It was also pertinent to locate the origin of acceptance of homosexuality in England for this research. For this purpose, Elizabeth Manwell's publication in a book was consulted. She identifies 1967 as the year when LGBTQ movements picked up pace in England after the decriminalization of homosexuality in the country (Manwell). Britanica identifies 3rd

wave feminism as one of the key factors that boosted female homosexuality in England (Valk).

In this discussion of defying heteronormativity, Judith Butler's contribution cannot be neglected. In her book *Gender Trouble,* she explains how gender is not innate but a performative act. As such, the societal dictates of stereotypical male and female characteristics cease to hold much weight (Butler). Another interesting concept is that of Men's Feminism as explained by Micheal Messner. One of its major claims is that men's struggles are often undermined by their stereotypical roles as the heads of households and breadwinners for their families (Messner).

While looking up information on the temporal and spatial setting of the films, a lot of relevant information came forward. It further came to my attention through a book by Chopra-Gant that post-war America faced a steep moral decline in the absence of father figures from family units. Most men went off to fight in the world war while their families, particularly the children, were left behind to fend for themselves. This resulted in more cases of delinquency among children (Chopra-Gant).

In terms of moral decline falling apart of family units, the *National Affairs* magazine records the evolution of the no-fault divorce law that resulted in higher divorce rates since either partner could file for divorce without proving any fault of the other. The high divorce rates were further fueled by increased female employment rates that enabled them to lead lives without depending on men for sustenance (Wilcox).

In the 1990s, American society did not make any further progress concerning gender equality and acceptance according to a paper published in *The Brookings Review* (Blendon). People became more concerned with declining morals in society. The so-called moral police had actively started patrolling every house and every street to keep women in their stereotyped lanes and prevent any freedom of expression and independence which women had thus far been fighting for. However, another article records that the positive side to this moral policing was fewer cases of crimes and delinquency in America in the last decades of the 20th century as compared to the 1950s (Weisberg).

Researching the stereotyping and objectification of women in the late 20th century, I discovered the term "Bitchification" in a book by Allison Yarrow. She writes that all the powerful women of the decade were labeled derogatorily and vilified to coerce them back into their domestic cocoons (Yarrow).

From the literature gathered and reviewed pertaining this study, its theoretical underpinnings, selected visual narratives and texts, the lacunae that persist have become evident as well as the areas that have already been addressed. While the existing literature is in abundance and studies many of the problems in society as depicted in the film and mini-series, it is often done unidimensionally, focusing only on the visual narrative at hand and not in relation to texts. *Lost in Austen*, although always juxtaposed with the original *Pride and Prejudice*, is studied by taking the latter only as a mere fictional work and the former as its parodic adaptation. It lacks reference to the Georgian society, which is reflected in the novel, as the main object of parody in *Lost in Austen*. This depth is lacking in most research works done in the mini-series since they analyse the relation between it and the novel without any reference to the cultural contexts and the actual societies of which both works are a product. Similarly, the research done on *Pleasantville* falls short of mentioning how the context of production plays an important role in calling out the suburban fantasy depicted in the film. While a myriad of aspects have been deliberated by researchers for both visual narratives, they apparently fail to acknowledge the reasons and influence behind their divergence from previously held conventions. The existing literature has only talked about some of the social issues addressed in both visual narratives but not about the accuracy of those issues with respect to the period or even the reason behind any disparity. Furthermore, the existing literature does not study the selected texts in light of the theoretical underpinnings I have chosen for my research such as presentism and the unique methodology devised using the paradigm of traveling concepts.

The present study is an attempt at bridging this knowledge gap by studying both visual narratives in relation to texts that have been produced in the time periods that are depicted in the film and mini-series. The novel and novella serve as artifacts for looking into the actual conditions of Regency and High Modern periods respectively. The present study analyzes the film and mini-series parallel to the

novella and novel rather than studying them independently. Secondly, it analyzes these visual narratives not only parallel to the novel and novella but also their contexts. Thirdly, my research also looks into the reasons for the divergence seen in the postmodern depictions of the past. Moreover, my research studies the actual contexts of production of the visual narratives as well as the ones depicted. This ensures that the issues raised are not only generally valid but also specifically with respect to the Regency and High Modern periods. Lastly, the exact methodology I have devised is unique to my research and has not been used before. Taking presentism as a major theoretical underpinning for this study, it exposes how the context of production has a massive influence on the product. It also investigates the theoretical advancements, laws, social and political movements, and other such factors that slowly add up and result in this influence. In doing so, this research has added another layer of meaning and depth to the selected film and mini-series.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates the theoretical concepts on which my research is founded and how I have used them to create the specific methodology that I used to find answers to my research questions.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The primary conceptual underpinning for this study is Presentism. It sees present day interests as the main driving force behind assigning meaning to literary texts (Ramirez). While presentism is more of a tool for literary study, it can be employed by postmodern authors when reiterating the past. According to Ewan Fernie, a presentist interpretation of literature is such that resonates most strikingly with the postmodern world (Fernie). Keeping in view this understanding of presentism, the authors, writers, and filmmakers who portray the past with a present-minded approach are also considered to be presentist. Presentism can be understood in multiple ways depending on the field of study. In terms of philosophy, it is the belief that only those objects exist which are in the present (Emery, Markosian and Sullivan). As such presentism is the opposite of eternalism which implies that all objects, whether in the past, present, or future, exist ontologically in their own times even if they are not existent in the present (Leininger). However, pertinent to this research is the literary definition of presentism which simply means to interpret the past with present-day sensibilities (Ramirez). It is to casually apply modern or postmodern values, attitudes, and notions to the interpretations of the past on the basis of staunch adherence to present consciousness. It implies the existence of a kind of pressure of the present on the understanding and the reconstruction of the past (Armitage). Theorists like Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes see presentism as essential to any reading of the past. While they agree that a modern critic is unable to withdraw from his present context while trying to study a text of the past, this inability does not necessarily contaminate or pollute his understanding. Rather, such a reading adds to the meaning of the texts and gives added perspectives (Grady and Hawkes). In support of presentist interpretations of any narrative, I also refer to Mieke Bal's claim that anachronism of

any interpretation is necessary. Bal substantiates her claim by stating that all interpretations are imposed on texts whose time and conditions of production are simply unknown to us and beyond our reach. She argues that sometimes certain questions arise when reading a text which are not innate to it. Rather they emerge from the cultural framework of the reader who feels that the text does not fully address the concerns of his context (Bal, *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past*).

Although Presentism is the principal conceptual foundation of this research, there are some tools and techniques such as focalization, ocularization, camera's gaze, framing, metafiction, intertextuality, and parody, that are used to manifest the presentist approach in the selected visual narratives. I have relied on Mieke Bal as the primary theorist for developing the methodology of this study since presentism is a more generic conceptual framework. In her book *Traveling Concepts in The Humanities,* Bal explains how concepts, ideas and notions can travel from one discipline to another and can be deployed as 'mini theories' in order to conduct analyses of cultural products or objects. For example, the concept of focalization started out as a visual concept that simply meant to look through a lens. This concept travelled to another field and was taken up in narratology to mean a kind of interpretation and understanding that directs people's perceptions of different narratives. In its third travel it entered the domain of visual analysis where it refers to the movement of the gaze. It is in this 3rd sense that I study the concept of focalization in my research. I have made a methodological and perspectival intervention by bringing together theoretical concepts and tailoring them to meet the requirements of my study based on a postmodern premise. In this manner I have employed Bal's paradigm of travelling concepts in my thesis to carry out an interdisciplinary cultural analysis.

Keeping in view Bal's proposition that it is possible, and even necessary, for concepts to travel from one field of study to another, I have selected 'focalization' as an important theoretical concept from the area of film theory which is employed by filmmakers for conveying and concealing information from the viewers. In the essay, *The Look: From Film to Novel - An Essay in Comparative Narratology,* Francois Jost describes focalization as a complex amalgam of what the viewer sees and what the

character is thought to be seeing, knowing, saying, or even doing (Jost). While the narrator is a character who tells the story, a focalizer is the character who actually sees it unfolding. Thus, focalization is the limiting of information presented to the viewers based on what the character/narrator knows or experiences. Focalization binds the object with the changing effects of time and culture that frame it. It also helps form a connection between the content and its communication. Thus, helping to account for the subject of the discourse as well. In this study, the viewers of the postmodern visual narratives are also the subjects in a way because they feel one with the subject-characters depicted in the film and mini-series that get transported back to the High Modern and Regency periods. The content is communicated to the viewers through the experiences of these subject-characters on screen. I have, therefore, invoked concepts from film theory to analyze and understand how different subjectivities can be prescribed through the power of the lens and the art of filmmaking.

In the latest sense of "visual analysis" which is pertinent to my research, focalization means that neither the subject nor the object of the gaze is significant. Instead, it is the "movement" of the look that is important which brings forward the limitations that are imposed by the gaze.

Gaze, as Lacan explains, initially started out as the sense of self developed by a child when he is 6 to 18 months old and sees himself in the mirror at the mirror-stage. Lacan then differentiates between merely looking and the Gaze by explaining that when a subject looks at an object, the object gazes back at him. He refers to a painting by Hans Holbein, known as *The Ambassadors*, to elaborate this distinction. Upon first looking at the painting the onlooker or the subject sees symbols of wealth and power. He feels like he has control over his look and its object. Upon closer inspection it becomes evident that what seemed to be a strange mark at the bottom of the painting is actually a skull which becomes obvious only when viewed from a specific angle. The skull Gazes back at the subject and shatters the illusion that the subject has power over the object. The painting's initial impression of worldly prosperity on the subject changes when the skull gazes back at him as a reminder of man's mortality. After this, Lacan refers to the Gaze in relation to objet petit a i.e the object of one's desire which can never truly be achieved. He states that it is the subject's Gaze that gives the object its desirability because through his Gaze, the

subject projects his unreal expectations onto the object. This concept of Gaze has travelled to the feminist domain as well where it is used as the male gaze through which men project their fantasies over women as the objects of their desire (Felluga). The male gaze objectifies women and views them as objects of their desire. It is an important aspect of the patriarchal politics of power that belittles, oppresses, stereotypes and restricts the freedom of women.

Having understood the concept of Gaze, I return to the notion of focalization where the Gaze limits the positions of the subject and the object. On one hand is the objectifying look, and on the other hand is the disempowered object of that look. Due to this tension between the focalizer's movement of the look and the limitations of the Gaze, the true object of analysis comes forth which is in itself meaningful, ever changing and culturally functional under the temporal changing effects of their cultural context (Bal).

The concept of the Gaze helps us understand the ideological weight that the subject-position carries. At times, it is not the subject's burden to carry an ideology but societal structures that form the setting in which the gaze is directed. Therefore, if it is the Lacanian Gaze that produces the frame which assigns meaning, then the subject or focalizer i.e. the one whom the camera's eye is aligned with, must negotiate his/her position within its boundaries. The subject thus exists in a dynamic situation where he is not completely subordinate to the gaze neither is he entirely free to create meaning. Mieke Bal in *Traveling Concepts* proposes that such ideas of visual analysis can travel from the reading of images to the analysis of movies as well. So when viewing a film, the focalizer or the subject is not entirely slave to the gaze nor is he free to produce meaning as he likes. Rather, the gaze just produces the frame in which the focalizer must negotiate his/her position to produce meaning (Bal).

Related to what is being shown on screen and how it affects meaning, another concept from film analysis comes up known as Ocularization. It refers to the relation between what the camera shows the viewers and what the character on screen is thought to be seeing (Jost). This term was coined by a film theorist, Francois Jost. Ocularization relies on different camera techniques to show different perspectives to the viewers such as internal, external and spectatorial ocularization. When the camera is utilized to recreate the visual perspective of the focalizer and show the viewers

exactly how and what the focalizer is seeing, it is called Internal Ocularization. Another camera technique is to show the focalizer from the outside perspective. This is called External Ocularization. The camera can also be used to show the viewers such a perspective that reveals knowledge to them which is unknown even to the focalizer on screen. This is called Spectatorial Ocularization. (Badman). Jost's ideas are significant in this study because in both the film and the mini-series, the context of production has influenced the content to deliberately muddle facts about the time periods being depicted. Jost believes that the subjectivity of the camera puts the objectivity and impartiality of the content at risk.

The subjectivity of the camera invokes the idea of Camera's Gaze. Gaze has a deeper implication than merely looking at something. It refers to a psychological relationship in which the gazer has power over the object of the gaze (Shroeder). The camera's gaze signifies an underlying psychological relation of control and power not only for looking at something through the camera but also for being looked at through its lens (Finch). The camera directs and orders how and what someone will look at (Burgin). The camera, therefore, is actively subjective in its portrayal of any image or scene and imparts its own version of reality (Bunyan). The gaze of the camera can be identified with the gaze of the filmmakers. This idea helps us understand the presentist depiction made by the makers of the selected visual narratives. They can show the past through a presentist lens because the camera gives them the ability to impart their subjectivity through it.

I have already explained how the gaze creates the frame in which meaning is produced. In general, framing of an image or a visual object refers to how it is presented in a particular frame or setting. It specifies the accompanying information that is supplied with or about an image or object. In this way, it also influences the viewers' interpretation and perception of the object and its meaning. Particularly in motion pictures and films, framing refers to how an object or person is situated within a video frame (Compesi). The term frame can be used to mean the overall content or image shown on the rectangular area of the screen (Konigsberg). Framing is manipulated by filmmakers to control what the viewers see as well as how they perceive it. The filmmakers decide what is to be included or excluded and what sequence should be followed (Elsaesser and Barker). Thus, framing influences the

viewers to assign certain interpretive meanings to the objects on the screen and molds their understanding as intended by the filmmakers. It guides the viewers' attention towards specific things and away from others (Pickett). Just as the context and framing of the images contribute to their understanding, interpretive framing adds further layers of meaning to it. The fact that two images are shown together may indicate overlapping meanings of the two. While the viewers' prior political and sociocultural knowledge and experiences do influence how they respond to different modes of interpretive framing, the actual decision of how a visual object is framed in order to have a certain effect is made by the filmmakers and not the viewers (Frame and Gaze).

Keeping such framing in mind, the concept of "visual syntax" becomes important (Bal, *Double Exposures: The Practice of Cultural Analysis*, 42). Bal contends that "the discourse of display is practically irresistible" (36). What she means is that the visual placement, location and presentation of any object or artifact are combined to produce a discourse which has an impact on the viewers. This combination dictates how the viewer will perceive that object. The positioning of all the elements within a frame determines the power it will hold over its onlooker. Bal refers to this placement technique as a "rhetoric of persuasion" because it convinces the viewer of the power structure surrounding an object and inferiority or superiority of the object in relation to its context (53).

It should be reiterated that focalization, ocularization, camera's gaze, framing and visual syntax are relevant conceptual tools for this analysis because the selected visual narratives are being examined for the prescriptions of the present over the past, rather than their objective and accurate representations.

Another conceptual tool relevant to my research is Metafiction. It can be understood as the kind of fictional writing that deliberately draws attention to itself as an artifact with the aim of questioning the relation between reality and fiction. It is fundamentally a self-reflexive fantasy (Waugh). The term first appeared in a 1970 essay by William Gass called *Philosophy and the Form of fiction*. He uses it to refer to such a form of fiction that acts as an object which allows other forms to be imposed on it (Gass). However, metafiction is not a recent form or invention even though it has been enjoying a center stage position in the postmodern era. There have been past

accounts of metafiction as far back as the 14th century in Geoffrey Chaucer's famous writing, *The Canterbury Tales*. Fiction of this sort deliberately and openly conveys its own consciousness of being a fictional piece. It views the conventions of traditional storytelling with a critical eye that it employs in its own telling as well, emphasizing the fictional and constructed nature of those conventions. In doing so, it exposes the fluidity of the various levels of our own identity and structures in society as well. This is to say that metafiction concurrently establishes and deconstructs the illusion of fiction and thus, puts the reader and the author side by side in their endeavor to find meaning. It helps writers and even filmmakers to play with meaning and representations of the past. The mark of identification of all metafiction writing is the blurring of its boundary of reality and fiction in different forms such as when the author also becomes the protagonist, the characters or narrator call out and declare the fiction of which they are a part or turn to the audience and address them directly as if in conversation with them. As a consequence, metafictional stories turn into proverbial playgrounds where authors and readers all gather to play around with different ideas and experiences to test and push the limits of fiction writing (Roberts). Metafictional literature, standing on the edge between fiction and criticism, takes this edge as its subject matter, converging the two. It is marked with a reflexive cognizance of the surrounding conditions in which meaning is produced (Curie). Linda Hutcheon believes that with the advent of postmodernism, history and literature have become a part of the public domain, but this sometimes creates problems because postmodern metafiction has declared both history and literature to be mere human constructs (Muneer). This ability to construct a picture of the past as one finds appropriate in the present using different tools, techniques, and forms such as metafiction also helps promote a presentist attitude. Hence metafiction is called upon by makers of postmodern visual narratives to impose the postmodern consciousness on depictions of previous eras.

A study on Nigerian film industries analyses their use of metafiction as a tool to enable the film makers to voice their personal concerns as well as those of the masses. It shows how film makers use different metafictional forms to convey their messages and play with the porous boundaries of fiction and reality to blur this divide (McCain). It shows how metafiction can be politicized to raise sensitive issues and criticize dominant power structures in society.

The next technique I have studied that is used by postmodern film makers is Intertextuality. The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva which she defined in her essay *Word, Dialogue, and Novel* as "a mosaic of quotations" (37). While Kristeva was the first to come up with a formal term for it, there are other theorists who expressed the idea before her as well. Roland Barthes claims texts to be a "tissue of quotations". (Barthes, The Death of the Author). It forms an interwoven network like a spider's web (Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*). The main concept behind it is that no text is ever truly independent. There are always underlying relations and connections to other texts, forming a sort of complex matrix. Texts may be linked through allusions, retelling, direct references, citations, or by their engagement in the existing literary and linguistic conventions. Thus, in one way or another, connections among texts are inevitable. Intertextuality allows an image to be interpreted considering, compared to or juxtaposed with another image or a surrounding set of images. This assigns new and differing meanings to images than what they would convey had they been seen and understood in isolation (Werner). In other words, whenever a text, visual or written, allows interpretation in light of another text to generate new and varied meanings, this phenomenon is known as intertextuality (Walker and Chaplin).

One of the most common tools of intertextuality is Parody. Linda Hutcheon states that parody is a form of imitation which is distinguished by ironically inverting that which it imitates (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*). Its distinctive quality is in its duplicity. On the one hand, parody depends on historical texts for its successful execution while at the same time there lies a rebellion underneath this dependence where it ironically abuses these classical texts and depictions. She labels intertextual parody as a way of appropriating and rewriting dominant discourses. Therefore, parody, according to Hutcheon presents a paradox because while it incorporates the object of its interest, it also subverts it (Hutcheon, *Theorizing the Postmodern: Toward a Poetics*). She believes that postmodern parody is not merely a depthless, surface level trope, as opposed to what Frederick Jameson and Terry Eagleton believed it to be. For Hutcheon parody juxtaposes change and cultural continuity by reiterating the past from a safe distance that allows the limelight to fall on the difference between the past and the present in the midst of its similarity (Hutcheon, *Modelling the Postmodern: Parody and Politics*). Thus, through its ironic

play on society's incongruity, parody forces people to question the numerous abiding suppositions around them.

3.2 Research Methodology

The theoretical foundation for this study is a deployment of concepts and ideas which I have taken from different but relevant fields, relying on Mieke Bals's paradigm of travelling concepts. My research is designed to expose how the prescription of the postmodern consciousness in the depictions of Regency and High Modern eras can overshadow the original dilemmas and sociocultural issues of those time periods. It also studies the tools and techniques used in postmodern visual narratives employed to eclipse the actual concerns of the Regency and High Modern eras in favor of being looked at through a postmodern lens. This thesis refers to the concept of presentism as defined by David Armitage, Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes, and supported through Bal's methodological arguments in favor of anachronic interpretations and culturally defined questions raised by viewers. Armitage claims that any reconstruction or interpretation of the past is done under the influence of the present. Grady and Hawkes posit that presentism allows us to read and understand texts more fully and appropriately. They believe that a text is not contaminated by a presentist reading and that the only way to understand a text is through making sense of it in the present (Grady and Hawkes).

I have analyzed four texts in this research. The first is a postmodern film, released in 1998, called *Pleasantville* which depicts the High Modernist American suburbs of the 1950s. The second is a mini-series called *Lost in Austen,* produced in 2008. It is a postmodern portrayal of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice.* Both these visual texts prescribe postmodern consciousness over the Regency and High Modern eras using various techniques. The third text is a Regency romance novel, *Pride and Prejudice,* written by Jane Austen in 1813. It is studied in juxtaposition with *Lost in Austen* to examine the disparities between the depictions of the Regency period in the two texts. *Pride and Prejudice* is taken as the more accurate portrayal of that era since its time and context of production coincide. Similarly, a High Modern novella called *Breakfast at* Tiffany's by Truman Capote, written in 1958, is juxtaposed with *Pleasantville*. The film and mini-series have been studied to examine how postmodern techniques have enabled the filmmakers to depict the High Modern age through a

postmodern lens which overshadows the actual issues of that time, prescribing presentist concerns over them instead.

The parodic portrayals of both time periods in the mini-series and the film are apparently subjective owing to the influences of their contexts of production. In order to understand the broader influences that have resulted in such subjective portrayals, the study of cultural, political, social, historical and spatial contexts of the film and mini-series is integral to this research. To meet this end, cultural analysis has been employed to study how the unfolding of various events and the choices made by the characters in the film and mini-series reflect the greater concerns of the time and context of their production (i.e the Postmodern era) rather than the period which they depict (i.e Regency and High Modern eras). The founding principle behind this approach is that the development and structure of human psyche is a consequence of engagement with one's surroundings and participation in historically evolving and culturally regulated activities (Cole). Therefore, such an approach demands that an individual's disposition be studied and understood within his/her historical and cultural context (Gutierrez and Rogoff).

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS
RACISM, GENDER, AND SKEPTICISM

This chapter analyzes how *Lost in Austen* and *Pleasantville* employ different tools to prescribe postmodern consciousness onto their depictions of Regency and High Modern periods. This chapter focuses on how they use parody and other postmodern techniques to criticize the racial and gender norms of these periods as well as their skeptical approach to knowledge. It also studies metafiction, intertextuality, focalization and ocularization as techniques used in these visual narratives to establish their presentist views.

4.1 Racism in High Modern American Society

Parody is one of the handiest tools for satire and is, therefore, among the favorites of many postmodernists. Frederic Jameson claims that the end goal of parody is to cast ridicule upon its object of interest. It functions through the deflation of a particular piece of art, literature, history or such, and the application of a satirical imitation of it to an inferior and ill-suited subject (Mambrol, *Postmodern Use of Parody and Pastiche*). Postmodern parody also uses and abuses history and historical texts to satirize and ridicule them to bring forward the issues of race, gender stereotypes, and a general fear of the unknown, which are some aspects of history that have not been openly discussed before.

While parody has most popularly been defined by Hutcheon, it is not entirely a postmodern tool. A study has revealed how parody existed and thrived in Indian literature long before the advent of postmodernist notions of it (Montaut). Apart from Indian literature, English and other literature is also replete with parodic works such as the Spanish novel, *Don Quixote,* by Miguel de Cervantes, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

Parody is commonly used by postmodern filmmakers to satirize the High Modern American take on power, gender roles, race and fear of the new and unknown. The American 1950s saw the rise of the Civil Rights Movement on one hand while on

the other, white supremacists made every attempt to obscure and erase such movements before they could be written down as part of history. Truman Capote's novella, *Breakfast at Tiffany's,* also provides sufficient evidence of this erasure as not even a single significant character is black while Holly stays in America. The novel only briefly and indirectly mentions her trips to other countries like Africa and Brazil, but the focus is on her experiences in America. While she is there, Mr. I. Y. Yunioshi and José Ybarra-Jaegar are the only two persons of color specifically mentioned, the former Japanese and the latter Brazilian, among the numerous white characters that become acquainted with Holly (Capote).

In addition to novels and written texts, monochrome photography and television productions also played a significant role in concealing the racial biases that prevailed during the High Modern era. The newly introduced color television and photographs, despite their varied hues, did not do justice to people of color. Interestingly, when a variety of shades of brown was finally introduced, it was only because of the pressure imposed by chocolate and furniture companies to do justice to their respective products in advertisements. Brown and black flesh remained as insignificant as they always had (Lewis). The film, *Pleasantville,* is replete with such examples to satirize this racial discrimination. It employs parody as a tool for criticism. The reason for this criticism is the context of the film's production that had already seen the success of the Civil Rights Movement and others to promote racial equality and resist discrimination. It is also interesting to note that even though the Civil Rights Movement started in the 1950s, most of its photographic coverage is monochromatic, and remains so today, despite the invention of color photography as early as mid-19th century, gaining mainstream popularity in the second half of the 20th century (1861: James Clerk Maxwell's Greatest Year). It is easy to understand that one contributing factor behind this absence of color is the deliberate desire to make these images of racial discrimination more abstract and distant in time from 21st century viewers (Coloring Historical Photos of the Civil Rights Movement).

Relating the notions of colored versus monochrome to the parodic elements in the film, *Pleasantville*, it is obvious that the film ridicules the attempts of white supremacists represented by the monochromatic characters, who try to obscure the racial discrimination to which people of color, represented by the people in color,

were subjected to in High Modern America. The filmmakers expose to the viewers, through David's experiences in the fictional town, that the perfect society that he looked up to conceals underlying discriminatory, oppressive, and prejudiced attitudes. The parodic elements allow postmodern viewers to see High Modern America in the light of new knowledge and sensibilities that people had previously been devoid of.

One of the antagonistic characters of the film is named Whitey to signify and satirize the racism lurking beneath the apparent picture-perfect American suburbs of the 1950s. Moreover, when David's intervention starts bringing color to the hitherto monochromatic town of Pleasantville, his friend Margaret also becomes pigmented, thus, becoming a metaphoric person of color. Whitey, the racist white American male archetype, harasses David and Margaret by calling her his "colored girlfriend" (Ross 1:25:08-1:25:11). Although he is referring to her as colored in the literal sense of the word, the underlying implication of this parody is to show how Black, Brown and other people of color were discriminated against without any fear of repercussion. Color here is an insidious reference to the racism that was rampant in High Modern America so it taps into actual American history. As the film progresses and more and more people start appearing in color, the bigoted monochromatic shop owners start displaying signs outside their shops stating "No Coloreds" allowed (Ross 1:26:55). Once again, the trope of people in color is used to parody how American shops, bars, clubs and even public parks prohibited people 'of color' from entering.

As the film goes on, the attacks against people of color become more severe and deadly. This can be seen when Whitey and his friends hound David's mother, Betty, chasing her to a dead-end street. They threaten to remove her blue colored dress when suddenly David comes to her rescue and fights the harassers away. This incident immediately flushes pigment into David and he also starts to appear in color like his mother (Ross). On the surface, the film shows that it is the strong emotions of love, anger and the desire to protect his mother that bring color to David. However, the parodic element reveals that a person who has the potential for goodness and the capacity to feel and connect with others on a human level is in color and not merely monochrome, thereby , substantiating the importance of people of color.

There is another instance in the film that parodies the persecution of Blacks and other people of color at the hands of White supremacists in high Modern America.

The townspeople become outraged when they see a colorful nude painting of Betty made by Bill on the window of his soda shop. They not only smash the glass window but also destroy the entire shop including all of Bill's colorful paintings inside to teach him a lesson (Ross). The mob becomes so wild that it would have also harmed Bill had they found him in the shop. Such scenes serve as a reminder for viewers that it is only after many decades that the movements for equality have started creating a global impact to some extent and the world has started acknowledging the sufferings of people of color, particularly Blacks in America.

Intertextuality has also been used as an important tool in the film to expose racism in High Modern America. When David brings the art book for Bill, the first painting he sees is *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* by Masaccio (Ross). It is a subtle yet important moment because Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden for disobedience and enjoying a forbidden pleasure. With this intertextual reference the filmmakers want to emphasize that while the people in monochrome do become racist, it is not just being different in color/race that makes them abuse and persecute others. It has a lot to do with the victims' willingness to disobey orders and defy rules in order to enjoy life's simple pleasures, explore their own uniqueness and demand to be treated equally regardless, which is a threat to the existing authorities and structure. It is only in recent years that acceptance for such individuals and communities has started gaining momentum and therefore, showing such a painting in the film makes viewers look at the High Modern era from a different perspective as well. Moreover, on the victim's end, just as Adam and Eve's visible suffering in the painting comes from their naked appearances and the shame rooting from it, the people in color in Pleasantville also have to hide their skin and colors as a mark of shame. This is also why Betty goes through the trouble of covering herself in makeup and pretending to be who she's not just to avoid being embarrassed of it.

Moreover, when David is asked by the people in the soda shop what lies outside of Pleasantville, he tells them that there are some places where roads have no end and rivers just keep going. One person, to David's surprise, names a very specific river, asking him "like the Mighty Mississippi?" (Ross 53:19-53:21). It is then revealed that in a library book the first chapter of Mark Twain's novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, has become filled with the author's words. Jennifer

tells David that she was the one to narrate the story of the first chapter to the others and consequently words and colored illustrations started appearing on the pages (Ross). This intertextual reference to Twain's novel is significant because it shows how David and Jennifer introduce people to modern notions such as freedom of thought, the ability to question prevailing structures and challenging norms. Just as Huck and the slave discover their freedom on the river, the book itself becomes a source and symbol of freedom for the people in color in Pleasantville. This forms yet another association between the emergence of color and the liberation of the masses.

4.2 Gender Binaries And Stereotypes In High Modern America And Regency England

This distinction of colored versus monochrome depicted in the film is not the only binary division that limits the roles of individuals in the town. In addition to race, gender is also parodied as a discriminatory factor in that patriarchal society. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* depicts Holly as an independent woman who knows how to make men dance in the palm of her hands (Capote). Hence, even though such independence may have been rare, it was not unheard of in High Modern America. However, in *Pleasantville's* patriarchal society, gender roles are so strictly enforced that nobody can question them. The female characters are all very shy and modest. Betty who represents traditional suburban housewives of that era, is always only at the listening end of her husband's desires and needs. She is scared out of her mind to face him when she starts appearing in color and resorts to hiding her new self under layers of makeup just so he would not disapprove of her (Ross). This fantasy of a submissive woman and a man in charge is subverted and parodied through the characters of Jennifer and Skip. Jennifer is bold and upfront about what she wants while Skip is shy and naive. When Jennifer goes on a date with him, she suggests that they go to Lover's Lane and get intimate while Skip, in his innocence, is taken completely by surprise. He is so baffled by the changes in his body and confused by the way he feels that he thinks he might be getting sick (Ross). Their relationship parodically shows complete role reversal of traditionally accepted male and female stereotypes.

In order to show the changing values in Pleasantville, an intertextual reference is made to Pablo Picasso's painting, *Woman Stretched Out with Arms Under Neck on*

a Red Bed. The painting depicts a woman who seems to be crying. Bill shows the painting to Betty who notices the tears first because she can also relate to the sorrows of another woman. The moment serves to uncover Betty's own unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the life she has always lived and she too begins to cry. When wiping her tears, Bill accidentally wipes off her makeup to reveal her skin in color underneath. He compliments her and tells her to own it. It is a moment of liberation for Betty. This liberation soon leads to Bill painting the nude portrait of Betty on his shop's window (Ross). The scandalous portrait of Betty is in the style of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Jewitt). It is one of the first loud and public expressions of female sexuality in the town. It is an act that infuriates the townspeople because in the High Modern era, a woman with a voice and the ability to think and express herself was looked down upon. However, the painting was a step vital to Betty's self discovery.

The intertextual reference to Picasso's painting also has a significant part to play in all this because it is the pain of the woman in the painting that makes Betty conscious of her own sadness. Moreover, it paves way for the expression of a woman's desires that find no other outlet in patriarchal High Modern American society. In a time and society where it is unacceptable for a woman to express her sexuality in any way, Betty's transformation signifies how the intrusion of postmodern characters, David and Jennifer, has influenced her into embracing and prioritizing herself. The nude painting is a symbol of her release from toxic socially constructed gender roles of the past that had suffocated her all her life, forcing her to live as a mere housewife whose only job was to cook dinner and look after her husband and children.

Furthering Betty's liberation, Jennifer deliberately encourages her to question the family structure she has been living in all her life and leave her husband (Ross). This encouragement comes very naturally from Jennifer because she is a metafictional character coming from the postmodern era. The fluidity that accompanies metafiction enables not only characters to be deconstructed but also structures in society. Jennifer has strong postmodern beliefs so her intrusion in the High Modern town of Pleasantville also helps viewers deconstruct the apparently idyllic family units depicted in the film. The family structures seem perfect only because the members are so rigidly confined in their roles that everything happens almost mechanically like

clockwork. The wives seem to be most oppressed as their identities and roles in their families are defined only by their cookery and efficiency in doing chores to please their husbands. This deconstruction is possible only after the disillusionment brought about by postmodern sensibilities.

In addition to High Modern society, gender stereotyping was also prevalent in Regency England. It has become one of the objects of criticism in the miniseries, *Lost in Austen*. While the socially acceptable behavior in the Regency period was for women to be romantically involved with only men, *Lost in Austen* challenges this notion by introducing the concept of homosexuality. It is a readaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* under the influence of postmodern inclinations towards sexual freedom and individuality. At first it is Amanda Price who lies to Charles Bingley about being a lesbian just so he would lose interest in her and start noticing Jane instead. However, when Bingley fails to keep her secret and tells it to Caroline, she too unwittingly exposes herself to Amanda by telling her that they are both the same in their sexual preferences. Amanda's desperate attempt to stop Bingley from pursuing her exposes the extreme lengths that a woman would have to go to in Regency England to do something that deviated from socially accepted norm. In this case the only socially acceptable action would have been to happily marry Bingley. This is because in that era it was not for a woman to reject a good marriage proposal without giving a strong reason for it which shows how caged women were by that society.

There are numerous other incidents in the mini-series that criticize the limitations put on women on the basis of gender. Elizabeth, despite knowing the original plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, chooses not to marry Darcy and sets out to become a writer (Zeff). It is quite a novel and unexpected path for a woman to walk on during the Regency period but the filmmakers choose it for Elizabeth in order to condemn the shackles that Georgian society had put women in. Elizabeth defies many other conventions of her gender as well. In the last episode, it is revealed that she has chopped her hair down to a short pixie cut, almost like a man's hair. The nonconformity becomes even more significant when juxtaposed with the scene where Kitty offers to curl Amanda's hair but she refuses saying that she can manage her hair by herself (Zeff). It first signifies the importance of hair for women and its

fashionable styling in Regency England and then parodies it by having two of the most important female characters of the plot refuse to wear their hair as per convention. This refusal has literally no effect on the plot or any of the other characters, thereby, showing how pointless it was to force women to appear a certain way at all times.

Regency England expected women to be smart, submissive, clever and dexterous but Amanda fails to check these boxes. When she is asked to play the piano and sing, she denies having the skill for the former and does such an abominable job at the latter that all are shocked (Zeff). In another instance of nonconformity to gender roles under the influence of the 21st century, Amanda is caught smoking a cigarette by Charles Bingley. The shock and disbelief on his face is hilarious but his willingness to pursue Amanda despite her habit of smoking and her lack of accomplishments is a way for the readaptation to criticize and parody Georgian era's demand for women to be pristine, sophisticated and multitalented in order to be liked and accepted.

There is another unexpected twist in the plot of *Lost in Austen* when Wickham turns out to be the good guy as opposed to Austen's villainous rendering of him. He takes the blame for Georgiana's advances to protect her honor and even helps Amanda when she is thrown out by Mrs. Bennet (Zeff). The criticism here is on the traditional belief that the male gender is always the one at fault in any feud between men and women, owing to the former's power and abuse of power in patriarchal societies. Through the metafictional character of Amanda, the filmmakers successfully deconstruct and pull apart Wickham's traditionally antagonistic character. Amanda's metafictionality enables her to easily cross the boundaries of her reality and Jane Austen's fiction, transporting elements of her postmodern frame of mind to Austen's fictional world of Regency England.

Amanda also often refers to Jane Austen and the original characters of *Pride and Prejudice* every time something horrendously deviates from the familiar plot to emphasize the metafictional nature of her character. When Caroline Bingley comes out to Amanda and tells her that she is secretly a lesbian, Amanda shivers and speaks directly of Jane Austin tumbling in her grave at such a revelation (Zeff). By doing so, Amanda is able to foreground how unreliable a singular narrative regarding the Regency era, or any period for that matter, can be because when seen through a

presentist lens, the same era begins to reveal aspects that had never been conceived before. She thus, questions gender norms that were prevalent in Georgian England and exposes new dimensions of gender identities.

The filmmakers also employ the camera's gaze to control the way the viewers look at the regency and high modern eras. The camera gives them the power to prescribe their own subjective presentist views over the texts such as the postmodern notions of feminism. This is interesting because the feminism in its postmodern sense was unheard of in Regency England and High Modern America. This is noticeable in the way Elizabeth chooses to become an author in *Lost in Austen* and the way Betty chooses to leave her husband to discover her own identity in *Pleasantville*. The camera's gaze combined with the gaze of the viewers, thus, introduces a whole new dimension to the scenes. The viewers' gaze also overlaps with the gaze of the protagonists of the film and the mini-series because both view the Regency and High Modern eras from a postmodern perspective. So, since *Pleasantville* is set in the 1950s, David and the postmodern viewers' gaze exposes the pretentious charade being carried out in the town. The same is true for *Lost in Austen* where the setting goes back centuries, but the gaze of Amanda and the postmodern audience reveals numerous possibilities that had not been commonly explored by people of that era.

An important aspect of feminist film theory is the idea of the male gaze as introduced by Laura Mulvey, a filmmaker and scholar, in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. The male gaze empowers men by objectifying women and suggesting a sexualized way of looking at the latter. It hints at the sexual politics of the gaze by visually positioning women as the object of male desire. Her own feelings and thoughts become insignificant when she is framed only by sexualized male desire. (Loreck). Bearing this in mind it can be understood why Betty's nude painting wreaks havoc in the town of Pleasantville. It is not Betty who is at fault for causing all the chaos but the male gaze which objectifies her.

4.3 Skepticism Of The Unknown At The Turn Of The 20Th Century

In the midst of binary societal constructs of right and wrong, monochrome and in color, male and female, etc, Jennifer and David question this rigid conformity by bringing new knowledge and introducing the town's people to avant-garde notions

such as independence, noncompliance and fulfillment of personal desires. They show people that they can reason and question the way they have always lived their lives. Through these two characters, the filmmakers expose how shallow and superficial such a world is where people live their lives wearing masks and acting out their parts without question as if in a grand Broadway play. Modern inventions have made knowledge accessible to all, equipping the masses with the ability to question and challenge preset norms and constructs. *Pleasantville* ridicules the idea that the world would crumble if norms are ever challenged or societal dictates questioned. When David tells Skip that it is not a very good time for him to go out with Mary Sue who only he knows is actually Jennifer, Skip says that he wouldn't know what to do if she refused to go out with him because that is just how he knows things to happen. As a result, for the first time in the history of Pleasantville, when Skip throws a basketball, it does not go through the hoop as it had always done (Ross). In this way the film parodies the blind societal conformity of the High Modern America to rules, roles and regulations which supposedly made the world go round. At the start of the film David gets late for his job at the soda shop so Bill just keeps wiping the counter until the countertop paint starts to fade because he does not know what else to do until David arrives. When David tells him that he can start making the fries even if he hasn't reached, Bill is astounded. Similarly, it is brand new information for Bill that he can make and assemble the burgers all on his own if David is not there (Ross). Parody brings the flaws of such a trifling world to light where people are restrained by the invisible shackles of their socially assigned roles. It divides the townspeople into two classes. There are those who choose to stick to their orthodox ways in the name of norm, order and structure and there are those who dare to explore the new and unknown at the risk of becoming outcasts seen in color. Bill becomes one of the latter and is overjoyed when he tells David that he closed the shop without his help and did things out of order (Ross).

Such conformity in Pleasantville is enforced through various means including language, discourse, and knowledge. Words, language, and discourse can determine a society's entire conception of the truth and even alter their reality. They carry authority when used properly and can lend immense power to the speaker (Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language). However, the language of the people of Pleasantville functions under the control of certain

institutions and a particular class of people who hold and maintain their power by manipulating language to spread only that knowledge which is beneficial for them. This is because for the townspeople language is nothing more than polite exchanges and pleasantries that serve no actual purpose. They are disillusioned only when Jennifer and David show them otherwise.

The film brilliantly parodies the control that government institutions have on the masses by using language through the control exercised by the Mayor of Pleasantville. At one point in the film when the basketball team faces its first ever defeat, some men sitting at the barber's shop find solace in the saying that they can't win them all. However, the mayor suddenly enters and reinforces the need for conformity. He rejects their reasoning by saying that the team does win them all because that is how it has always been, and they have never lost a match before so this is how it shall always be. His logic seems to be flawed but all the men nod approvingly just because the words are coming from their Mayor (Ross). In this way he uses language to silence the men who had unknowingly just made an attempt to justify and embrace change. His discourse is what controls the knowledge of the men and gives him authority and power over them.

Similarly, in Jennifer's Geography class, the limitations of language are reciprocated in the limitations of knowledge, and which leads to blind conformity. The teacher explains that the town of Pleasantville has no entrance or exit. Since knowledge is so controlled and limited, none of the students ever question what exists outside of Pleasantville. Jennifer is the first to ask these questions only to be met with incredulous laughter that successfully silences her (Ross). The physical boundaries of the town become metaphorical cognitive boundaries for the people beyond which they cannot deliberate. The students are simply incapable of thinking beyond what is taught to them. It is concerning for Jennifer and David because all the books in Pleasantville are blank so there really isn't much to teach or learn from. In this manner, the film parodies how the masses are controlled by different institutions and people by manipulating and monitoring their knowledge and discourse. Just like the Nazi book burnings during the holocaust, *Pleasantville* parodies this horrific incident through the outrage and absurdity of the monochromatic people who burn all such books from the library that have magically been filled with words on their once blank

pages. The film criticizes the absurdity of people and institutions that would go to any length to prevent the masses from gaining knowledge and learning the truth. In the postmodern era, while the risk of being deceived through false information persists, the easy access to information combined with the ability to think and process it neutralizes the risk to a significant degree. This is the notion that the filmmakers have tried to replicate through the characters of David and Jennifer who enable people to ponder and question the norms in an era when they would otherwise have believed whatever was fed to them.

Related to the ignorance of the people of Pleasantville, there is another aspect regarding which the people are shockingly naive. The film criticizes the so-called pure society of High Modern America through exaggerations such as holding hands being the height of an intimate relationship and a double bed being the most outrageous piece of furniture as it goes against puritanical modesty. Jennifer brings the notion of intimacy and sexuality to the town, things previously unheard of by the people. It is a new kind of knowledge and people do not know how to handle it. It results in bringing color to them as a sign of their ignorance being stripped away. However, they are persecuted for undergoing this change as it threatens the existing structure of the town. People used to go to Lover's Lane for dates and holding hands but as soon as they become acquainted with their inner desires and individuality it becomes the spot where couples go for getting physically intimate. People start morphing into free-thinking individuals who challenge the rigid orthodoxy that had always ruled over Pleasantville. The film criticizes how in puritanical societies, parents and grownups refuse to talk about relationships and sexuality with their children leaving them to either remain ignorant or risk exploring and learning such things on their own. However, this is not the case in the postmodern society where sexual health and education have become comparatively more openly discussed topics.

Pleasantville parodically reverses the roles of parents and children when Jennifer becomes the one to introduce her mother, Betty, to the concept of sexual pleasure, an idea entirely alien to her despite having two children of her own. This notion of free choice in relationships and sexuality begins to trickle down into other aspects of her lives as well. Soon enough Betty realizes how caged a life she has been living and decides to leave her husband to go to Bill. Bill, on the other hand is also

influenced by David. He is learning about freedom of choice from a kid and disrupting the pattern of running his soda shop because of him. Because of doing things that please him, he learns to defy conformity and becomes the first person in Pleasantville to start painting using colors. David also inspires him by bringing him a book of art from the library that exposes him to knowledge he had previously been unaware of. All this discourse of free choice, new-found knowledge and sexual freedom amalgamates in the form of Betty and Bill's relationship.

In a similar fashion, *Lost in Austen* ridicules and criticizes the rigidity of Regency England. It uses and abuses Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to take a look at Georgian society through a postmodern lens while adding humor to the plot. The mini-series does not conform to many of the Regency standards and regulations. Marriage is one of the most important parts of life for Austen's characters but *Lost in Austen* plays with this notion quite freely. First it ridicules Bingley and Jane's love by showing Bingley as a failure and marrying Jane off to Collins. Then it defies their laws of marriage when Lady Catherine annuls Jane's marriage to Collins simply because she can, and Jane becomes free to marry Bingley (Zeff). The reason for this twist is to show that the stringent and uncompromising laws and expectations of the Regency era had no sound foundations. They existed merely to control people but under the influence of the freedom allocated by postmodern consciousness, the readaptation ridicules such regulations and sets its characters free of them.

Moreover, the use of intertextuality as a postmodern device encourages viewers to look at the Regency period from a new vantage point. Although the mini-series itself is one of the many adaptations of Jane Austen's classic, owing to its postmodern parodic element, there are many intertextual references to its earlier sister adaptations. The 1995 adaptation starring Collin Firth is invoked when Amanda asks Darcy to get soaked in the pond at Pemberly. The character of Darcy played by Collin Firth also takes a dip in the pond at Pemberly in the 1995 version (Langton). In making Darcy get in the pond, it is implied that Amanda sees the fictional idea of Darcy in front of her and not an actual person. In this manner, Amanda's metafictionality also surfaces. It makes the viewers of the mini-series have the same postmodern epiphany that Amanda is having. She realizes that being from the 21st century, she has the power to use and abuse Jane Austin's original *Pride and*

Prejudice as she pleases now that she is a part of it. Her knowledge of the original plot and all its later adaptations has given her the freedom to change the narrative. The same Amanda who had wanted all the characters to stick to the plot now sees herself as the replacement for Elizabeth. If she can make Austin's Darcy act like Collin Firth's Darcy, why can't she herself take the place of Elizabeth too?

In a similarly interesting turn of events, Darcy ends up in the 21st century and meets Elizabeth Bennet for the first time. She shows him evidence of their marriage 200 years prior in the form of images and descriptions of the 1995 adaptation of Jane Austen's novel on her computer (Zeff). It is her superior knowledge that allows her to break free of the original plot and use her free will to choose not to marry Darcy. Despite having unorthodox ideals even in Regency England, now having spent time in the Postmodern era Elizabeth is even more inspired to break the orthodox norms of her time. The postmodern viewers also learn to see the Regency period with this view after witnessing the shocking character development and changes that Elizabeth undergoes.

The makers of *Pleasantville* also use postmodern tools to make characters as well as viewers question dominant discourses. One such tool is metafiction. Since metafiction draws attention to itself as a work of fiction, the characters of David and Amanda constantly remind viewers that what they are witnessing is not reality and therefore, has the potential to be questioned and challenged even if what it depicts is an apparent reflection of High Modern America. David, by ultimately refusing to listen to the TV repair man, begins to do what feels right to him (Ross). The way he looks out for Betty against patriarchal oppression and helps Bill find his artistic expression are the kinds of freedom and rights that people were devoid of in the High Modern town. David projects his postmodern consciousness onto the town and its people. Had he remained a mere fictional character like Bud, whose place he takes in the show, he would also have stuck to the script and carried on living in the oppressive structures that surround him. Instead, he is able to step outside of Bud's fictional role and notice the town's flaws for what they are only due to his metafictionality.

Another goal of metafictional literature is to criticize the flaws that are otherwise overlooked. This is evident in the way David exposes the hypocrisy of the

Mayor of Pleasantville during his trial at the end of the film. When the Mayor's duplicity is revealed, it is not just the person but the entire institution of government in Pleasantville that is criticized. The mayor coerces people to remain trapped in their assigned roles and persecute all those who dare to break free (Ross). It is David's knowledge and awareness brought back from the postmodern era that enable him to see the truth of the mayor and his government and ultimately expose him.

Pertinent to the revelation of information is the choice of focalizer in the film. Focalizer is the character who sees the story unfold and is used to conceal or reveal information to the viewers through his/her experiences and knowledge. This character behaves as the eyes and ears of the viewers. *Pleasantville* has been made mainly from the perspective of David, making him the focalizer for most of the film. However, to convey some important messages or to emphasize the presentist element of the film, on occasions other characters of the film are brought forward in his stead. Choosing David as the focalizer serves the very important purpose of disillusioning the modern viewers regarding the perfect facade of High Modern America through parody and to view it with a presentist lens through David's eyes. When Betty starts appearing in color, she is terrified of being exposed and fears her husband's disapproval merely based on the color of her skin. David is the one who comes to her rescue and helps her cover up using monochrome makeup to conceal her true identity until she is ready to come out with it herself (Ross). The filmmakers have purposefully made David the focalizer here to heighten the contrast between the High Modern era and the postmodern age by showing how the latter has a more accepting eye for difference. It is more tolerant as David is the one who attempts to normalize the changes and colors that start spreading throughout the town despite being the one who tried to stick to the status quo at the beginning.

However, just as the focalizer is disillusioned and gains new knowledge of the previously sugar-coated reality of Pleasantville, so are the viewers. Hence, when the monochrome people destroy Bill's paintings, David takes him along to make the largest colored graffiti on the wall of the Pleasantville police station that the town has ever seen. The modern knowledge of the focalizer is projected through the painting featuring all the topics that are considered taboo in Pleasantville. It shows books like *Moby Dick, Catcher in the Rye* and *Huckleberry Finn* being set on fire; men and

women kissing; young couples in cars out on Lover's Lane; another nude painting of a woman and the Town Hall - a symbol of decorum, order, and regulation - being destroyed in the midst of all this unrest. (Ross). The purpose behind the provocative painting that is so out of time and place is to start a debate among the residents with fresh ideas in their minds that trigger them to consider possibilities outside of their orthodox norms. It would not have been possible had David used any form of expression familiar and well within the comfort zone of the townspeople. Even when his father, George, asks David why things have suddenly started going so wrong in the town, it's through the focalizer's eyes that the viewers are able to understand that things are not going wrong, rather just changing. David tells him that people and things change and that is not something to resist or be troubled by.

'Focalization' is what relates the object of perception with the subject (Bal). It is a kind of communication that helps account for the subject of the discourse as well. The filmmakers make the viewers feel one with the postmodern subject-characters who have travelled to settings in the Regency and High Modern eras. In doing so, the content is communicated to the viewers in the form of the postmodern characters' experiences on screen. In *Lost in Austen,* Amanda starts to smoke when she is stressed which was uncommon in Regency England but a comparatively more frequent occurrence in the 21st century (Zeff). Her stress therefore becomes more real and relatable for the postmodern viewers. Amanda is the major focalizer in *Lost in Austen*. She, like most 21st century viewers, is well aware of how the story of *Pride and Prejudice* should unfold so the viewers see everything going wrong through her eyes. Since the viewers' vision overlaps with Amanda's, both initially see Wickham as the wicked, cunning villain of Jane Austen's story. However, the viewers also become disillusioned as Amanda realizes that he is not as horrible as she had believed him to be based on her knowledge of the novel. This disillusionment which is a characteristic of the postmodern era is translated into the disillusionment of Amanda and the viewers under the influence of presentism.

Utilizing another important tool from film theory i.e. 'ocularization', the filmmakers have tried to use the camera lens to control how certain scenes and events are conveyed to and approached by the viewers. In *Pleasantville,* when Jennifer is in her geography class, she asks what lies beyond the two streets of Pleasantville shown

on the map. The camera suddenly zooms out to show the incredulity and skeptical laughter of all her classmates as they look at her (Ross). In this moment, the perspective shifts from Jennifer to those around her through the camera, revealing how her classmates perceive her and her curiosity in an unpleasant manner. Seeing Jennifer from this point of view, which is shared with the townspeople, it is clear to the viewers how unwelcome any question about the existing beliefs of the town is. This is quite in contrast with David and Jennifer's postmodern approach towards things. Therefore, through the employment of ocularization in this scene, the filmmakers have purposefully conflated the view of the postmodern audience with that of the people in the High Modern era, who were intolerant and unaccepting, in order to bring the striking difference between the two mindsets to the forefront.

Furthermore, framing scenes in a particular way through the camera controls and directs the view of the postmodern audience to look at the Regency and High Modern periods under a postmodern lens. As such, the presentist depiction of the eras shown makes more sense to viewers and seems more relatable as well. Through Bal's notion of the rhetoric of persuasion, Betty's nude painting on the window of the soda shop gains a whole new dimension as a clandestine power structure is exposed. The painting is framed in the midst of monochromatic surroundings signifying the modern transformation budding within the narrow-minded, biased and orthodox context of the town. This very contrast is responsible for all the upheaval that is caused by the monochromatic people as a consequence of seeing the painting. In a similar manner, the framing of Darcy dressed up in his Georgian attire as walks the streets of 21st century England or Amanda dressed up in a pair of Jeans and a top in Regency England make them both glaringly stand out. In showing both characters as such, the filmmakers do not merely showcase the fashions of the two eras but use them to juxtapose two different time periods in order to symbolize their contrasting mentalities and world views.

Interpretive framing of scenes is also important where two scenes are put side by side. Although interpreting meaning is the viewers' burden, the task of putting the scenes together and depicting different elements in a purposefully specific manner is done through the camera to guide the audience about what and how to interpret through that visual syntax. However, the viewers will interpret any given scene in the

light of their own socio-political knowledge, background understanding and context. In this manner the impact of visual representations in the film and mini-series is stronger and more relatable for viewers as compared to written texts because of the powerful discourse of display. In Pleasantville, When Betty comes to the Soda Shop to meet Bill, he shows her Paul Cezanne's *Still Life With Apples and Oranges* in his art book. The painting appears even more striking as it is displayed in the midst of monochromatic surroundings being looked at by two apparently monochromatic people. Immediately after this, Betty's true identity in color is exposed in front of Bill who accepts her as she is and encourages her to embrace it as well (Ross). The painting itself is interesting as it has done away with traditional stabilizing constructions of paintings. The table on which the fruit is present is absent from view and the wall behind this setting is also not shown. To make up for these absences, the entire space is draped in fabric that is connecting and dissociating at once. It blurs the perception of depth as well as the margins of vertical and horizontal planes (Still Life with Apples and Oranges, 1895 by Paul Cezanne). While Betty and Bill have this exchange in this scene, David is shown sitting at Lover's Lane with Margaret who fetches him a fresh red apple, just as bright and colorful as the apples in Cezanne's painting, from a tree nearby (Ross). Watching the two scenes as they happen at the same time, showing vividly colored apples in monochromatic contexts, allows viewers to draw comparison. It makes viewers wonder about the overlapping meaning of the two scenes. Just like the painting's obscure representation of boundaries and perspective, the boundary of monochrome and colored also becomes vague as Betty's identity in color is revealed and the following morning Margaret and Bill also wake up in color. The entire town is torn between its habit of sticking to its old traditions and the wave of change that is engulfing each one of them one by one. Viewers are able to notice this based on their own postmodern understanding of blurred boundaries and decentralized meanings.

CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS

DISCREPANCY BETWEEN REALITY AND POSTMODERN DEPICTIONS

In this chapter I have analyzed how issues such as gender and sexuality have been addressed in the four selected texts in relation to their contexts. Some aspects of gender and racial discrimination represented in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, have been overlooked in the postmodern representations of the Regency and High Modern periods in the selected visual narratives. I have therefore, also examined events in the postmodern period which have contributed to the altered, presentist portrayals of Regency and High Modern periods.

5.1 Reality Versus The Postmodern Representation Of Gender And Sexuality in High Modern America

The interesting thing about both the film and mini-series under discussion is that their time of production and the eras they depict do not overlap. This is why the postmodern outlook continues to trickle into these productions. In some cases, the actual issues and dilemmas of Regency England and High Modern America get eclipsed when viewed under a lens that projects futuristic concerns on them, influenced by the context of production, rather than objectively focusing on the era depicted. Since both visual narratives have presentist undertones, I have invoked the theory of presentism to identify and analyze the factors responsible for the presentist elements in them.

In the film *Pleasantville,* gender and gender roles in the 1950s are viewed only in terms of the traditional binary of male and female where characters are involved only in heterosexual relationships. However, when paralleled with Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* it is indicated on multiple occasions that the narrator, called Fred by Holly, might be gay, hinting at the prevalence of homosexual relations as well. When he is invited to Holly's party, he feigns interest in books on baseball and horses stacked in

her bookshelf merely to appear occupied (Capote 36). Soon Holly approaches him and tells him that she determines a man to be gay if he is neither interested in baseball nor in horses, something Fred is also guilty of (38). The narrator later describes a visitor who comes to Holly's place to see Mag Wildwood but mistakenly knocks at his door instead. The time it takes the visitor to explain his error is enough for him to draw a highly flattering sketch of the stranger for the readers. He admires the "exactness" and the "perfection" of his gorgeous brown hair and chiseled figure, equating him with tempting fruits that "nature had made just right" (46). Such a manner of describing another man gives away his inclination towards men. In contrast to this, when Holly asks him to rub oil on her body, he mentions her breasts in an entirely unaffected manner as if he were speaking of a mere piece of furniture that had failed to catch his interest and deserved not more than a couple of words (60). Throughout the novella, there are mentions of lesbians as well in the most casual manner. Holly, when asking the narrator for a roommate, tells him about the lesbian roommate she had in Hollywood and how happy she would be with such an arrangement, as lesbians make the perfect homemakers (25). She even does not hesitate to lie to Mag Wildwood that she did not sleep with Jose by falsely claiming that she is secretly a lesbian (58).

While Capote openly makes all these references to homosexuality, *Pleasantville* turns a blind eye to this notion under the influence of its context of production. In the 1990s, homosexuality started getting unfavorable political attention in America. In 1996, The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) declared marriage to be the union of a man and a woman, thereby, stripping same-sex marriages of legitimacy and recognition as well as denying them federal marriage benefits (The 1990s, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and DOMA). Further on the political front, Senator Jesse Helms came into the limelight for his open opposition of homosexuality and referring to such individuals as degenerate and morally sick. Another senator, Trent Lott, referred to homosexuality as a pathological condition necessary to be treated in a manner similar to alcohol addiction or kleptomania. Another member of the senate further othered homosexual individuals by declaring that this condition prohibited them from functioning or doing their jobs properly (Franke-Ruta). In 1977, a political alliance was established under the name of Save Our Children, which started a bitter feud between fundamentalist Christians and gay activists. The former claimed that any

ordinance banning discrimination against homosexuals actually discriminated against Christians who wished to teach their children Biblical morality (Gallagher and Bull). Numerous such factors accumulated in the late 1990s and account for the presentist portrayal of sexuality by filmmakers. These events had such an effect on productions that many filmmakers refrained from speaking of the controversial subject of homosexuality, including *Pleasantville,* despite its prevalence in and since the 1950s.

Pleasantville's portrayal of the 1950s women makes them come off as highly dependent on men for love and a sense of purpose and wholeness. Betty's entire existence revolves around her husband and though she leaves him, she is still pulled towards another man, Bill, to feel free (Ross). However, when the same era is shown through *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, a completely different relationship dynamic is seen between men and women. Holly's relationship with one of her closest friends, the narrator, is completely platonic, firstly because he is hinted to be homosexual and secondly because Holly chooses to call him Fred after her beloved brother (Capote 22). Holly's relationship with many other male acquaintances is also quite similar. She stands for all the women in post-war America who do not need a lover to feel complete nor do they need male protection to avail their freedom. This liberty contrasts with the women depicted in *Pleasantville* whose purpose revolved around their husbands alone. Holly's relationship with the narrator is entirely platonic because she sees her brother's reflection in him. The narrator also describes the feelings of love he has for her are the same as what he felt for an elderly cook and a nice postman he knew during his childhood (71). Holly is free to choose the kind of relationships she has with different men. When Sid Arbuck brings her home from a party, he has hopes of spending the night with her, but she says goodnight and shuts the door on his face despite his protests. This shows that not all men she is acquainted with are her sexual partners. There are many men she is merely familiar with while there are others she sleeps with as she pleases. When she finds out that the narrator is a writer, she says she has never slept with a writer, thus, implying that she has slept with men from other professions (23). At one point she even discloses to the narrator that she has been with eleven men, not considering the ones she slept with when she was younger than thirteen (76). Her freedom to choose how she spends time with men is also made apparent when she enters the narrator's flat in nothing but a robe and exposes the bite marks on her shoulder left by the man downstairs, suggesting that she

had been intimate with him to some extent at least (21). When speaking of her feelings for Rusty Trawler, she tells the narrator that it is possible to make oneself love anyone at all (42). It shows how she is free of all the stereotypical notions of love and feelings which most women are labelled with. She doesn't hesitate and merely blushes when disclosing to the narrator that she had been intimate with Doc the night before (68). All these events show that Holly is very vocal about her actions and opinions regarding sexuality which is a characteristic unseen in the women shown in *Pleasantville*. Although it may appear so at first impression, Holly is not a prostitute for accompanying lonely rich men at parties. Capote himself once confirmed that Holly is just attractive and pleasant company for wealthy married men who come from out of town. She simply serves to boost their egos in exchange for gifts while the men merely enjoy her good company and the admiring looks they get for being accompanied by such a beautiful woman. Neither of them is emotionally involved and the decision to spend the night together depends entirely on Holly (Inge). Holly is, therefore, an obvious contrast to the *Pleasantville* women who face backlash for expressing the slightest sexual desires. The townspeople are appalled when they see a double bed in the window of a furniture shop and even more so when one man's wife demands to get one for her house. Similarly, as the film draws to a close, Jennifer becomes more and more studious and modest like the other girls in town, shunning her sexuality, as if her old promiscuous self was too flawed to be accepted (Ross). So, while Capote shows an independent woman as strong and bold, *Pleasantville's* ladies are either fully dependent on men like Betty or are implied to be of poor character otherwise and must choose modesty and decency to be classified as good women like Jennifer.

The reason for such a presentist portrayal of the High Modern era in *Pleasantville* is that the American society of the late 1990s was more orthodox in its understanding of the role that the government should play and considerably more concerned with the apparent moral decline in the country than they were 3 decades ago (Blendon). The social and moral state of affairs took a turn for the better in America as the 20th century drew to a close. Crimes, teen pregnancies, illegitimate births and divorce rates all dropped as compared to the mid-century statistics (Weisberg). All this was thus reflected in the television productions of the time as well, including the selected film as it was also produced in 1998.

Furthermore, the leading lady of Capote's novella is the prime example of a woman who takes charge of her own life. She flees from a marriage to an older man and runs away to New York where she forms a new identity and builds a new life to make her dreams come true. Her freedom means everything to her and it is emphasized each time she refers to herself as a wild thing. She speaks of herself as a "wild thing" when she advises Joe Bell to never love one as it would just take advantage of the love until it is strong enough to flee and be free again (Capote 69). This declaration is important because even as she speaks she is ready to flee the life she has built for herself in New York. She is not a stereotypical female who can spend her life trapped in the process of building a home with and for a man. She refuses to even name the cat she owns because she does not believe that they belong together by saying "he's an independent and so am I" (40). She doesn't even like to go to the zoo because she hates cages. They go against her wild spirit and yearning for freedom and independence. Her rebellious side is further brought forward when instead of being hurt or stalled for being considered brazen and unashamed by people, she sees it a perception that is handy for the image she has created of herself. She is not bound by the norms of traditional decency and social acceptance. She wishes to climb the social ladder but on her own terms, as opposed to the ladies in *Pleasantville* who had no mind of their own before David's intervention. Holly had prospects for becoming a very successful Hollywood actress but chose to run away to New York last minute because "you got to want it to be good" and she simply did not want it (34).

In another contrast with *Pleasantville* that shows women as the objects of male desire such as in Betty's paintings, in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* Holly is the one who gets to objectify men as she desires instead. She tells Mag that men like Jose are to be looked at when a woman likes them. For her a man's appearance is just as important as his heart or his personality, maybe even more. She even goes as far as being almost indecent and somewhat racist about her objectification of a guide she meets in Havana. She attributes her attraction towards him to his exotic biracial ethnicity, describing him as half Black and half Chinese. While neither race particularly appealed to her, "the combination was fairly riveting" and she could not resist flirting with him. (Capote 58). After all her adventures in New York, she finally heads out on her own to explore Brazil and Africa leaving behind her past affairs and the life she had built. Such an adventurous and freedom loving temperament is something alien to the

Pleasantville women. Even as the film ends Betty is seated on a bench between two men, her husband and the man she loves, showing that despite all her self discovery, her life and choices would still be framed by the men in her life. It depicts a view that women essentially rely on men for fulfillment as opposed to the actual post-war America. This subordination of women can be credited to the concept of "Bitchification" that became popular in the 90s. At the end of the 20th century the freedom that women had been fighting for faced resistance in the form of objectification of their newfound sexuality and independence. As women rose to claim public spaces, society pushed back to label and reduce them to sexual fantasies and stereotypes. The most powerful women of the decade were labeled as whores, prudes, emasculators, and trash in order to strip them of their influence. It was an attempt to push women back into their socially dictated roles and let the center of gravity be male in every manner (Yarrow). This notion seems to have influenced *Pleasantville's* production as well to subtly emphasize the need for a man in a woman's life. The impact of 90's bitchification is also noticeable in the choice of the film's protagonist as male. David is shown as a sensible and chivalrous young man who saves the town as opposed to his sister who is only interested in personal pleasure and enjoyment (Ross). On the other hand, the anonymity of Capote's narrator clearly emphasizes his insignificance, bringing the female protagonist to full attention of the reader. At Holly's party, every man is disappointed to see the others there. Each wants to be Holly's only special guest. Each wants her undivided attention, highlighting how significant her role is in the setting (Capote 36). However, the choice of a heroic male protagonist in the film seems to trivialize the actual issue of empowerment and emancipation of women as highlighted in the novella.

Furthermore, in the post-world war era, when *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was published, normative gender roles became highly disrupted as women were forced to take on men's jobs who got recruited in the army. Such an absence of father figures results in lowered moral standards and increased delinquent behavior among adolescents (Chopra-Gant). Holly is affected by the same tragedy. Once orphaned, she and her siblings are sent to foster families that are unkind. She runs away from them when she is fourteen and marries Doc who is much older than her. Later she runs away from him as well and settles in New York. She tells the narrator that "[she] had to [steal]. If [she] wanted anything" indicating how unpleasant her childhood had

been (Capote 53). She reveals more about her traumatic childhood when she mentions she had slept with men even before she turned thirteen (67). Regardless of her consent, such an act with an underage child qualified as molestation and child sexual abuse by American law even in the 1950s (Drobac). This abuse could possibly have added to her childhood trauma and the rebellious young adult she grew up to become. Rusty Trawler's childhood is also tumultuous. He is orphaned when his father is killed by an anarchist and his mother dies of shock. Despite being a famous child millionaire, he is abused. He becomes a victim of sodomy by his guardian and later stays in the headlines due to his many scandalous divorces and marriages (Capote 37). While tragedies such as Holly's and Trawler's often faced by children of post-world war America, nothing of this sort is mentioned in *Pleasantville*.

5.2 Discrepancy between the Reality and Postmodern Depiction of Gender and Sexuality in Regency England

Similarly, when Jane Austen wrote her classic *Pride and Prejudice*, marriages for financial security and dependence on the male members of families were issues central to the lives of women. The sole purpose of Mrs. Bennet's life is to have her daughters married and settled (Austen 3). She is so keen on it that even a proposal from the abominable Collins is received with considerable delight (100). He has no genuine attribute to pride himself on but just because he is a man and next in line to inherit the Longbourn estate he audaciously insults Elizabeth by saying that she will never get another proposal for lack of wealth despite her many qualities (105). When Charlotte agrees to marry him, it is merely to attain an acceptable social status. She is neither interested in men nor in marriage, but it is "the only honorable provision" for a woman in her position (Austen 120). Lydia and Kitty's irrational fondness for the officers even at such a young age is further proof of how deeply ingrained the necessity of marriage is in the minds of Regency women. After Lydia elopes with Wickham, Mrs. Bennet cares for nothing except her marriage to him. She is neither worried for her happiness nor ashamed of her wrongdoing. "To know that her daughter would be married was enough" (Austen 295).

While Austen criticized such notions of marriage, *Lost in Austen* took it a step further under presentist influence. In the visual narrative, Lady Catherine very easily annuls Jane's marriage to Collins. It is an incident that trivializes the actual plight of

married women of that era who did not have the luxury of leaving their husbands to marry whoever they liked. The producers apparently take inspiration from no-fault divorce laws that gained momentum in the 20th century and enabled unilateral divorces and separations without requiring one party to prove the fault or crime of the other as grounds for divorce. Such laws granted moral legitimacy to marriage dissolution which was furthered by higher rates of female employment, heightened feminist consciousness and the sexual revolution of the Swinging Seventies (Wilcox).

Another such presentist deviation from the actual lives of Regency women was Charlotte's decision to travel to Africa instead of marrying Collins after the humiliation Amanda puts her through. Elizabeth also departs from the reality of that era by choosing to become a writer instead of marrying Darcy (Zeff).

The world depicted in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* demands adherence to tradition, customs, and propriety. A woman had to marry a man and vice versa. It was considered the main object of life despite the irony implied by the author when she says that "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). Men had to marry to have an heir who could inherit their fortune while women sought social ranking and security. As such there was no room for deviance from traditional heterosexual matrimony. However, when the same matter is addressed in the postmodern period, people have a myriad of alternatives than to just marry the opposite sex. Such unconventional sexual orientation is shown in *Lost in Austen* as well. Caroline Bingley upon hearing of Amanda's secret from her brother, foolishly exposes herself to Amanda and comes out as a lesbian herself as well. She reveals that she intends to marry Darcy but that is only because it is expected and considered correct, otherwise she has no interest in men.

Including this plot twist serves to divert attention from financial insecurity of women who got no inheritance or employment. Rather they made it share its spotlight with homosexuality which distracts people from the issue of women's financial dependence as the major issue of that era for which they actually had to marry. There are, however, records of homosexuality predating the advent of Christianity in Britain since the Iron Age. In 1967, male homosexuality became decriminalized in Britain and the first LBGT rights came to prominence in the region (Manwell). 3rd wave

lesbian feminists also challenged the notion of heteronormativity and advocated for bodily and sexual autonomy (Valk). Since the 20th century was a time when such movements were quickly rising to prominence, it is easy to see why the producers of *Lost in Austen* included this dynamic in the plot as well.

In terms of gender conventions, Regency England was not accommodating or accepting of deviance from the norm. There were strict stereotypes that Austen criticized in her writing through her characters. Upon the mention of hosting a ball at Meryton, Darcy states, "It is a subject which always makes a lady energetic" (Austen 21). Speaking to Ms. Bingley soon after, he comments that it is typical of women to assume one is in love and willing to marry at the first hint of admiration (22). Such statements imply that all women must be the same. To further this mentality, roles of women were predefined in every setting. It is Elizabeth and Mary who play the piano at the ball, Miss Bingley later plays at Netherfield and even Mr. Bennet asks Mary to let other ladies display their talents at the piano, indicating how ladies had to show off their abilities (97). Men were just too sought after merely for being men so they had no need to exhibit their qualities in such manners. Through the character of Darcy, Austen criticizes how it is assumed that women must be seeking compliments and admiration for their appearance when he comments on Elizabeth and Miss Bingley's motive behind taking a stroll around the room. He assumes it is either because they have personal matters to discuss, or they think they appear attractive when moving about (52). Collins also expresses his belief that he likes making compliments to please Lady Catherine that are "always acceptable to ladies" (64). He is also quick to mistake Elizabeth's refusal to marry him as modesty which is a "usual practice of elegant females" (106). While postmodern notions of female individuality have evolved, Austen's Elizabeth asserts her independence and strength without compromising on her femininity. As opposed to this, the Elizabeth depicted in the TV series, *Lost in Austen,* manifests her progressive attitude through an obvious change in appearance. Upon her arrival in postmodern England, she is quick to chop off her hair and dress up in jeans and T-shirts, leaving behind her traditional curls and dresses. All her life she has seen men in charge of everything so she fully avails the chance to embrace that role herself and dresses according to the part. Even when she returns to her own time, she decides to become a writer instead of marrying Darcy and settling

down. This was a luxury afforded only to men of that era. She seems to be performing a role that Regency women were generally deprived of.

This postmodern twist is enabled by notions of performativity that became popular in the 20th century. In 1990, Judith Butler presented her theory of Gender Performativity which states that gender is a social construct which determines the roles that each gender can perform. It further holds that gender is not innate but is a performance done by people as dictated by society. It criticizes the notion of heteronormativity and allows people to express themselves outside of socially acceptable norms of gender (Butler). This idea has gained prominence because the fixed roles of women are often limiting while men enjoy unchecked freedom and power. Therefore, performativity as taken up by Elizabeth in *Lost in Austen*, by changing her appearance and course of life, is a privilege that women of the past could not commonly enjoy.

Furthermore, in the original *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham is a conniving villain who exploits Georgiana Darcy and then elopes with Lydia. He is exposed to Elizabeth in a letter by Darcy who tells her that Wickham had seduced his sister, Georgiana, and convinced her to elope with him for the sake of her fortune (Austen). It is a setting in which women are innocent and inexperienced while men are wise, knowledgeable, and clever. However, such stereotypes can be detrimental not only to women but also to men at times. This is the presentist aspect that has been considered in *Lost in Austen* when depicting Wickham as a hero in disguise. Amanda learns from Georgiana that she was the one who offered herself to Wickham and upon rejection, she maligned him by telling her brother that he had violated her. However, Wickham keeps the truth a secret to protect Georgiana's honor and quietly takes the blame upon himself. He even befriends Amanda and comes to her aid when Mr and Mrs. Bennet come to Hammersmith believing it to be her hometown. Later when she is kicked out by Mrs. Bennet, Wickham helps her get back into society. He buys her a dress, teaches her the mannerisms of a lady, and devises a plan for her to meet Lady Catherine (Zeff). However, in doing so the producers have diverted attention from the real evils of patriarchy at the hands of which women suffered for centuries. Instead, another possibility is emphasized that men who are thought to be wicked might just have been misunderstood.

Such a change of portrayal may be credited to the movement of Men's Feminism in the USA that gained momentum in postmodern times. The unifying principle behind Men's Rights Movement is the notion that men's suffering is often dismissed, the oppression they face is concealed and they are burdened by the financial responsibility of being the primary breadwinner (Messner). So, the producers' sympathetic stance towards Wickham may be due to such an influence.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

This chapter sums up my analysis and concludes how this study has answered its three research questions. It also encapsulates how my study has contributed to the existing knowledge and recommends possibilities for further work on this topic.

This study shows that modern theoretical advancements and socio-cultural progression have changed people's perception. They have enabled people to look at Regency and High Modern periods from a kaleidoscopic lens through which the postmodern age prescribes itself over these periods and gives them a whole new dimension.

My analysis was structured in a way so as to answer the three research questions I identified in the beginning of this study, so it is reasonable to draw the conclusion for this thesis in consistency with a similar structure. I have relied on a methodology[1] framed particularly for this research using Mieke Bal's proposition of traveling concepts, bringing concepts together from different areas including film theory and literature to conduct an interdisciplinary cultural analysis. Through my research, the actual circumstances of Regency England and High Modern America have been revealed by analyzing Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, and Truman Capote's novella, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. My analysis of the mini-series, *Lost in Austen*, and the film, *Pleasantville*, shows that the filmmakers were critical of these eras, and their reconstructions were 'presentist', coming under influences of the cultural and intellectual trends of the 21st century. In this thesis, the incidents and other factors that could have potentially contributed to the filmmakers' particular points of view have also been identified.

First of all, the analysis has revealed how the issues of race, gender and skepticism of the new and unknown have been raised in the film, *Pleasantville*, and the mini-series, *Lost in Austen*, owing to the presentist inclinations of the filmmakers. It has also been revealed that parody, intertextuality, metafiction and the camera's gaze have been deployed by the filmmakers as their tools and techniques of choice to

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[1] See Pg 26 for Research Methodology

critique the Regency and High Modern eras.[2] It is important to mention that feminism and theories of gender studies have not been a part of my research methodology. Rather, my study has revealed that these issues of gender inequality, race, homosexuality, female oppression in patriarchal societal structures and financial dependence of women on men, in the Regency and High Modern era as presented in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* respectively differ from the representations of these issues in *Lost in Austen* and *Pleasantville*. The reasons for this difference in representation and the means used by filmmakers to create such disparity have also been identified and analyzed in my study.

In the film, *Pleasantville*, the attempts of White supremacists in the High Modern age to silence efforts for racial equality, have been satirized. The analysis shows that in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, race or racial discrimination have not been brought up. This absence of representation is satirized in *Pleasantville*, which uses parody as one of the tools to criticize white supremacists by showing them as people in monochrome and representing people of color as the marginalized and ostracized people in color. Gender discrimination is also found to be a prevalent issue in Regency England and High Modern America. While *Breakfast at Tiffany's* shows that strong and independent women did exist, the role of stereotypical suburban housewives and modest young girls has been parodied and reversed in *Pleasantville*. Even in *Lost in Austen*, gender norms are subverted and parodied when characters reveal their homosexual tendencies, defy their traditionally assigned gender roles and challenge their normative gender stereotypes. My analysis further shows that through the prescription of postmodern consciousness, the structures that prevailed in Regency and High Modern periods are revealed to be baseless and exist only to control people. I have discovered that people in Regency and High Modern periods were suspicious of new knowledge and anything that deviated from their accepted norms and beliefs. The film, *Pleasantville*, parodies the idea of a world that would collapse with the slightest change in its structure. My analysis also reveals that the societal structures are often maintained by manipulating people through the power of discourse and knowledge - a notion elaborated by Michelle Foucault. To maintain existing structures, the school in Pleasantville does not teach anything about the world outside the town, the library books are all blank, and nobody ever questions the limited

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[2] See Pg 28-45 for Chapter 4: Analysis – Racism, Gender and Skepticism

knowledge of the adults. People's ignorance and hesitation towards sexuality and physical intimacy as a sign of purity and modesty is also parodied and challenged through the film. Similarly, *Lost in Austen* also ridicules blind societal conformity when it parodies rigid marriage customs.

Along with parody, my analysis reveals that intertextuality has also been employed repeatedly in both visual narratives to convey the underlying presentist messages. A painting of Adam and Eve is intertextualized in *Pleasantville* to show that just as Adam and Eve were punished for enjoying a forbidden pleasure, people in color are punished for breaking the dominant yet oppressive laws of the town. Similarly, words appearing in Mark Twain's novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, are symbolic of the people in color gaining the same freedom as Huck and the Black slave in the novel. Gender binaries are also challenged using intertextuality in the film by referencing Picasso's painting and Bill's artwork in the style of Titian, both symbolic of female sexuality and liberation. The analysis also brings forward metafiction as a tool used in the film to deconstruct the gender binaries of high Modern American society through fluid characters. Even in the mini-series, Amanda's being a metafictional character allows her to bring her own frame of mind to Regency England and discover that Wickham is actually a noble man and not the villain the world has always thought him to be.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown how the filmmakers utilized the camera's gaze to present a picture of Regency and High Modern periods through a postmodern feminist lens. The gaze of the viewers overlaps with the camera's gaze, allowing the prescription of postmodern consciousness onto these periods. My reading of all the selected visual narratives brings forward focalization as an important tool used by filmmakers to introduce and show the process of change as it unfolds in *Pleasantville* and *Lost in Austen*. The audience identifies with the postmodern subject-characters on screen who act as 'focalizers'. Viewers are disillusioned with the apparent perfection of High Modern American suburbs and the previously undisclosed possibilities in Regency England. The deployment of 'ocularization' is also identified as a means to control what the viewers see. Using the camera, filmmakers are able to show the postmodern audience the rigid points of view of people in Regency and High Modern eras. For instance, this can be observed when the camera zooms out to show how

Jennifer's classmates are shocked by her unconventional questions. Framing is also seen to be an important tool used in the film and mini-series to create varied settings and put together scenes that provoke viewers to think and perceive them in a specific manner. Bill's colorful paintings, in the midst of the monochromatic town, frame his unusual artwork for due attention. A similar effect is achieved by interpretive framing of scenes such as when Bill shows Betty a colorful painting of fruits at his shop while at the same time David and Margaret are shown enjoying a colorful red apple at Lover's Lane.

Answering the second research question, my analysis has shown that certain aspects of the High Modern and Regency eras that have been embodied in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Pride and Prejudice* respectively, have been overlooked in the representations of these eras in the postmodern visual narratives selected for this research. One important aspect is gender and sexuality[3]. While the High Modern era in America saw a rise in homosexuality, the representation of this era in *Pleasantville* is devoid of any such reference. Gender roles are another factor that is misrepresented in the film under presentist influences. While Capote depicts High Modern American women as independent and headstrong, *Pleasantville*'s depiction of women in that era is the exact opposite. The film portrays women as highly dependent on the men in their lives. It defines their roles only within their households as wives, mothers, and homemakers. It also implies that good girls are modest. Hence, a girl who explores her sexuality is improper and unworthy. Moreover, while the women in *Pleasantville* are objectified by the male gaze, Capote shows how his High Modern heroin casts an objectifying gaze over men instead. Even the choice of protagonists is meaningful since Capote's protagonist is a woman while *Pleasantville* shows a male hero. Another aspect of High Modern life that seems to be missing is the disruption in family units in post-war America. Father figures were often missing at home since men had gone to fight in the war and women had to step out to earn for their families.

In the Regency period, the primary goal of a woman's life was to get married and settle down. Although Jane Austin satirized this notion, *Lost in Austen* cast immense ridicule upon it by trivializing marriage in multiple ways, including an annulment simply because it was wanted, and without any serious deliberations so

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[3] See Pg 46-56 for Chapter 5: Analysis

characteristic of Austen. Moreover, gender roles that were fixed in Regency England are altered in the mini-series when female characters decide to find another purpose in life rather than getting married and raising a family. Deviant sexuality is another topic that was not openly discussed in Regency England but *Lost in Austen* declares important female characters to be homosexual. This is accompanied with the lack of attention to the financial plight of women in *Lost in Austen*, which in fact is a huge predicament for females in *Pride and Prejudice*. Financial insecurity is the reason Mrs. Bennet is willing to have her daughters married at any cost. It is also the reason why Charlotte Lucas agrees to marry Collins, despite his repulsiveness. The female characters' lives in the novel are defined by their attempts to gain financial security and attain a respectable position in society. The analysis also brings forward the problem of gender stereotyping that dominated the Regency period. However, when this period is depicted in *Lost in Austen*, gender stereotypes and gender roles are challenged because this subversion is a common practice in the postmodern era where women are becoming more empowered. Interestingly, this subversion in the mini-series is also extended to male stereotyping to show that there are multiple dimensions to the roles and personalities of men as well. However, this was an issue that was not discussed in Regency England as patriarchy was the ruling structure in society.

Finally, answering the third research question, my study identifies why presentist influences are responsible for the skewed representations of Regency and High Modern periods[4]. This is because the context of production of the film and mini-series is different from the eras that they depict. *Pleasantville* was made in the 1990s when American political and social atmosphere was quite hostile towards homosexuality and its advocacy. Moreover, it was a time when the American public became concerned with the moral decline of society. They tried to make efforts and even redefine the role of the Government in preventing further deterioration. Hence, the presentist influence of the context of the 1990s American society became apparent in the media and television productions of that time as well, including the 1998 film, Pleasantville. In addition to this, the concept of "bitchification" gained popularity that insulted and degraded any woman who rose to a position of power and influence. It was an attempt to push women back and limit them to their domestic spheres (Yarrow).

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[4] See Pg 46-56 for Chapter 5: Analysis

This research has also uncovered certain events that influenced the way the Regency period is represented in the mini-series. The No-fault divorce laws that came into force enabled people to get divorces without having to prove their partner's fault as justification for it. Ending a marriage this way without reason is seen in Lost in Austen even though divorces were not commonly practiced this way in Regency England. The 20th century was also a time when LGBTQ rights and feminist waves picked up momentum, so it was reflected in the selected film and mini-series as well. Related to feminism, Judith Butler's notion of Gender Performativity also became popular at the turn of the 20th century. She challenged heteronormative gender roles and constricting binaries that bound women into oppressive stereotypes. Another postmodern movement that influenced the mini-series and challenges stereotypes is Men's Rights Movement. It advocates men's right to equality, justice, and protection. Such events in the 20th century and the postmodern era specifically, had an overall influence in the television and media productions of this age as well. Hence, the presentist influences of these events are reflected in the visual narratives analyzed in this research.

My study significantly adds to the existing knowledge about postmodern visual narratives regarding how they depict different scenarios, the tools, and techniques they utilize, the reasons behind these choices and the impact they have on their viewers. It also helps inform readers how narratives can have underlying motives which need to be studied and understood in context to fully grasp their meanings. While existing literature has been concerned with each of my selected texts separately, I have analyzed them in relation to one another which has enriched the understanding of these texts in the postmodern context.

6.1 Recommendations

While my research analyses a film and mini-series to question the prescription of postmodern consciousness on Regency and High Modern eras, it opens this avenue for future researchers to analyze such prescription of and on different time periods. They can also investigate other techniques and tools used in media productions to convey clandestine messages to their viewers. Moreover, they can study different forms of literature and media such as comic books, memes, animations, etc.

Historicism can also be taken as an interesting dimension for future research pertaining the novel and novella analyzed in my study. Since historicism holds all that all ideas and notions are historically conditioned and capable of being altered, researchers can study *Pride and Prejudice* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* under this paradigm to identify and analyze the influences of historical contexts on both these texts. They may even take further steps and combine their research with film studies to see how the films made on both these novels have been historically influenced by their own contexts as well.

My research is likely to raise thought-provoking questions, and critical inquiry of the information that is transmitted to them through various means under the guise of facts to seek out the underlying influences that may be altering the true picture of the reality and the reason for this variation.

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