

“Almost a golden glow around it”:
The Filmic Nostalgia of Walt Disney’s *Pollyanna*

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The 1960 film adaptation of Eleanor H. Porter’s *Pollyanna* by Walt Disney Productions can be regarded as a work of recovery. The late 1950s was a period infused with nostalgia for turn-of-the-century American life and a desire to reconnect with a sense of innocent fun and community coherence in a period in which social, economic, and cultural shifts had created anxiety about families and the state of the nation itself. The film’s creators reveal their nostalgia through a focus on play in the film’s form and narrative, which, in conjunction with period details such as costumes and songs, creates a sunny, nostalgic picture of small-town American life in the early 1900s.

“*Pollyanna* has almost a golden glow around it when you look back and think of it as the adventures of children and the way they affect the adults they come in contact with,” notes film historian Stacia Martin in the feature “*Pollyanna: Making of a Masterpiece*” in the Vault Disney DVD Collection of the film (2002). Rather than focusing on twenty-first-century reactions to the film, this chapter analyzes *Pollyanna*’s 1959 production and 1960 release; however, I begin with Martin’s words because they capture not only the nostalgia for a past, seemingly more simple era in American life that pervades the Disney adaptation, but they also set up the figurative and literal glow, conveyed through form and narrative, that is one of its central features. A brief examination of the film sets up its similarities to, and differences from, Porter’s novel, as well as from an earlier film adaptation released in 1920. Historical background on the nation and the film industry, including Walt Disney Studios, in the 1950s is then provided for cultural and industrial context. Finally, a close reading of the aural, visual, and narrational emphasis on play within the film demonstrates how play is employed by the film’s creators to recover a

sense of a cohesive American identity while building a utopian vision of the nation's past.

While the film and Porter's novel differ in a number of ways, the novel's essence—the transformation of an early-century town by the 12-year-old orphan Pollyanna—remains the same. After traveling to her wealthy aunt's home in Harrington (the novel's Beldingsville, Vermont), Pollyanna uses her glad game to win over the household staff and the townspeople, including the grumpy, invalid Mrs. Snow and the town's fire-and-brimstone minister, Reverend Ford. Through her play with Jimmy Bean, a boy who lives in the town orphanage, Pollyanna also encounters the reclusive Mr. Pendergast (the novel's Mr. Pendleton), and Edmond Chilton, a doctor recently returned to town.

In a plotline that marks a significant departure from the novel's narrative, a fracture between the townspeople and Polly develops over what to do about the town orphanage, endowed by Polly's father. The mayor advocates a new building, while Polly supports repairs to the existing structure. While the townspeople are initially reluctant to defy the autocratic Polly, they plan a charity bazaar to raise funds for a new orphanage. Almost everyone in town takes part in the bazaar, with the notable exception of Polly. Pollyanna is forbidden to go, but she manages to escape her attic room and attend the celebration.

Pollyanna's evening ends in tragedy, however, when she is paralyzed after she falls from a tree while climbing back to her room. Aunt Polly reluctantly consults Dr. Chilton, who arranges for surgery in the city; however, he worries that Pollyanna seems to have lost hope because she no longer plays the glad game. Word of Pollyanna's injury reaches the townspeople, who flock *en masse* to Aunt Polly's house. Dr. Chilton carries Pollyanna downstairs to greet them, and their joyful thanks for everything she has done for them quickly restores her spirits. While Porter ends her novel with Pollyanna's first tentative steps and then details Pollyanna's full recovery in the sequel *Pollyanna Grows Up* (1915), the film ends with Pollyanna still impaired, although on her way to surgery and a hopeful outcome. The final shots of the film show Pollyanna and a reconciled Polly and Dr. Chilton off to the city by train, with the entire town on hand to bid them farewell. As the train leaves the station, an updated version of the town's name is shown on a sign—it reads "Harrington: The Glad Town." As this summary reveals, the 1960 film adaptation adheres relatively closely, on the whole, to the spirit of the novel despite its plot differences. At the same time, it also engages with elements of the 1920 film adaptation, which stars Mary Pickford.

On the surface, the two films appear very different on both the level of narrative and form; however, a closer examination reveals some interesting parallels. The 1920 film has a much shorter running time than the 1960 film—58 minutes in comparison to 134 minutes—thereby limiting its room for narrative and character development. Technical differences between film production in the eras in which the films were produced, such as the contrast of silence to sound and black and white to color, along with shifting audience expectations of the visual, aural, and narrational capacity of cinema, influence each film's final shape. At the same time, the films are linked on the level of content and form in a shared focus on play and, with that play, a sense of an emotional buoyancy conveyed via a light-filled *mise-en-scène*.

This focus on playfulness and luminosity in each film can be seen as a response to the demands of adapting *Pollyanna* for film. To communicate the novel's theme of "gladness" through the film medium, the cast and crew of each film version emphasize this theme visually through the appearance of the film's world and its characters. The creators of the 1960 film also add aural elements of dialogue, sound effects, and music to parallel and augment this visual cheerfulness.

To create the look and tone of the 1960 film, director and screenwriter David Swift and his crew provide an emotional sunniness through their use of formal details, especially *mise-en-scène* choices such as high-key lighting and colorful costumes, augmented by cheerful period and original music; together, these produce "a golden glow" that is both figurative and literal (Martin). A narrational highlight on play on the part of both children and adults further advances the novel's focus on gladness. At the same time as these components of form and narrative are used to recreate the novel's atmosphere and message of cheer, they also produce a sense of nostalgia for a seemingly more easygoing, sociable period in American history. This can be seen especially strongly in the focus on community coherence in the two sequences that bring the townspeople together before and after Pollyanna's accident: the charity bazaar and the gathering at Polly's house. Together, these aspects of Disney's *Pollyanna* create a film text that evokes a sense of nostalgia for a supposedly more innocent, hopeful time in viewers' lives—their childhood—while also engaging with the nation's past: a past set before World Wars I and II and the subsequent social, economic, and political changes wrought by wartime and war recovery. As this engagement with history is crucial to this argument, a brief sketch of the history of the period and the production is provided before a move to an exploration of the film and the aspects of form and narrative within *Pollyanna* that undergird the argument.

1950s America and Hollywood: Success and Struggle

Between the century's early years and the late 1950s, the United States went through rapid economic, sociopolitical, and technological changes that transformed the nation internally, while simultaneously resulting in increased global prominence. The post-World War II years of the 1950s saw many U.S. citizens enjoying unprecedented economic success, although the situation for the nation's film industry, particularly the major Hollywood studios, was much less settled. A combination of factors challenged the dominance of the film studios and altered the nature of film production, distribution, and exhibition. In *Movie-Made America: A History of American Movies*, film theorist Robert Sklar details these challenges, beginning with the ruling in *United States v. Paramount Pictures* in 1948 that led to the dismantling of vertical integration (272–73). Utilizing vertical integration—the ownership of not only film production, but also of distribution and exhibition branches—studios had been able to make films, distribute those films through their own distribution arms, and then exhibit the films in studio-owned theaters. As a result of the ruling, studios had to shed their distribution networks and sell their theatres, retaining only their production facilities, many of which were significantly scaled down during the period.

Added to these economic problems were the repercussions of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings from the late 40s and into the 50s. As Sklar notes, the hearings associated many Hollywood workers with the threat of Communism (249–68), and had a significant impact on cinema attendance and on perceptions of the movie industry as a whole.¹ Other developments that led to significant changes in American culture and society, including shifts in the film industry, were the growth of freeways and suburbs and the resulting decline of the inner cities; the mixture of attention to and anxiety over young people and youth culture; and the beginnings of the civil rights movement. Together, these changes created concern on the part of many Americans about the cohesion of the nation's families and worries about the nation's social fabric as a whole.

For the film industry, however, perhaps the most daunting challenge was the competition from the new medium of television, which threatened the industry's command of viewer dollars. To counter dwindling audience numbers, many film producers utilized contemporary technology and highlighted the unique visual and aural qualities of the film medium that set it apart from television. For example, some producers created epic spectacles in brilliant Technicolor that utilized widescreen

formats such as Cinemascope, including *The Robe* (Koster 1953) and *Ben-Hur* (Wyler 1959), while others turned to decidedly adult adaptations of contemporary plays, articles, and books, such as the sexually fraught *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Kazan 1951), the gritty *On the Waterfront* (Kazan 1954), and *Blackboard Jungle* (Brooks 1955).

Another tactic that studio heads used to draw in audiences was to focus on the genres that seemed to resonate mostly strongly with the public; of these, as Sklar notes, westerns, costume melodramas, and comedies proved particularly popular (283). The popularity of comedy could explain why Swift, like Frances Marion and Paul Powell (the screenwriter and director, respectively, of the 1920 film), emphasizes the comic aspects of Porter's story, drawing from the novel or, in some cases, creating new incidents.² Attention to contemporary audiences interests and sensibilities, and an understanding of their distance from early-century mores, was certainly important for Swift. On his commentary for the Vault Disney Collection DVD, Swift notes that he deliberately sought to leaven the book's more overt sentimentality with touches of humor in consideration of contemporary tastes, and he points to star Hayley Mills's facility with comedy as a central reason for the success of her performance and for the longevity of the 1960 adaptation.

The popularity of genres such as comedy and costumed spectacle may have kindled the interest of Walt Disney and his studio in adapting *Pollyanna*, a text whose period setting could create the opportunity for lavish scenes, while the innocent, family-friendly nature of the story aligned with Disney's own reputation as a producer of works, whether media texts or the newly-built Disneyland theme park, that could appeal to both adults and children. At the same time, the Disney studio was transforming in response to the socioeconomic demands of the period. As Neal Gabler notes in *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*: "If the studio and the staff were different from the ones over which Walt had presided before Disneyland, so now were the films they produced. For one thing, animation had practically disappeared; in the five years after *Sleeping Beauty* the studio produced only two animated features, *101 Dalmatians* and *The Sword in the Stone*. . . . The emphasis had shifted to live action films" (585).

Walt Disney's interest in engaging with bygone eras through these live-action films is revealed by an examination of their titles and their content for, like *Pollyanna*, a number were set in previous centuries, some specifically in the nation's past. For example, *Johnny Tremain* (Stevenson 1957) is located in Boston during the Revolutionary War, the popular *Davey*

Crockett television series (directed by Norman Foster and compiled as the 1955 movie *Davey Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*) is set in the early half of the nineteenth century in Tennessee and Texas, and *Old Yeller* (Stevenson 1957) takes place in nineteenth-century Texas. Preceding *Pollyanna* as a work of early-twentieth-century small-town nostalgia is *So Dear to My Heart* (Schuster 1948), set in 1903 in a fictional town in Indiana. This list argues for the studio's interest in wedding family-friendly stories with tales situated in the American past.

This background on 1950s America and the state of the Hollywood studios, including Disney, explains why both *Pollyanna's* audience and the film's creators might be interested in a work from earlier in the century—one that recreates an idyllic past, at least momentarily, via the film medium. A close reading of the film's formal and narrational aspects will detail how these work to produce for viewers a glowing, nostalgic glimpse into that past.

Formal Choices: Creating a "golden glow" through Sight and Sound

Formal choices, particularly in the selection of *mise-en-scène* elements such as lighting and costume, are essential in creating the sense of gladness and play delineated in the narrative. For example, the choice of the lighting of interior and exterior scenes, and of specific characters, is one of the primary ways in which Swift and his crew created a "golden glow" on both an emotional and perceptual level. Watching the film, one is struck by the brightness of the images, with all of the exterior location scenes apparently filmed in brilliant sunshine and the interior scenes brightly lit, even in the few sequences in which characters express emotional gloom.³ These lights illuminate exterior settings that display a pastoral abundance full of blooming flowers and green fields. There is, in fact, an interesting temporal aspect to both lighting and setting. Given the abundance of flora and the bright golden quality of the light, *Pollyanna* appears to arrive in the summer; however, although time passes as she transforms the townspeople's lives, neither the exteriors nor the interiors visibly shift to mark seasonal changes. The town of Harrington may, as the film opens, be a pleasant space, yet *Pollyanna* seems to bring with her something extra: an eternal summer whose visible glow augments the internal transformation that she creates in the townspeople's hearts and souls.

That the film literally glows is important in understanding the ways in which it conveys its blithe tone, maintains a focus on the transformation of the townspeople, and nods to the genres of comedy and musicals. For example, the brightness of the *mise-en-scène* creates a distinct emotional affect in viewers, insisting on a sense of lightheartedness even in more dramatic, even frightening, moments—such as *Pollyanna's* refusal to play the glad game following her accident. While *Pollyanna's* rejection of the glad game does create a momentary sense of emotional depression, especially given *Pollyanna's* predicament, the high-key lighting of the scene, reinforced by the light-colored costumes of the actors and the overall decor, assures the viewer that this gloom is temporary and fleeting.

If the film in general has a literally lighthearted look, this is particularly true of the appearance of *Pollyanna* herself. Film theorist Richard Dyer notes in his book *White* that *mise-en-scène* elements, particularly lighting, can not only be used to differentiate certain individuals from others on-screen—a necessary act in developing character and plot—but can also associate these individuals with a sense of spirituality, almost otherworldliness, and purity. As Dyer notes, there is a tendency on the part of many artists and thinkers to associate paleness with positive moral/spiritual values: "In Western tradition, white is beautiful because it is the colour of virtue. This remarkable equation relates to a particular definition of goodness. All lists of the moral connotations of white as symbol in Western culture are the same: purity, spirituality, transcendence, cleanliness, virtue, simplicity, chastity" (72). This association of whiteness or light with spirituality is, Dyer argues, particularly the case in regard to white women or girls and the ways in which they are lit and photographed: "Idealized white women are bathed in and permeated by light. It streams through them and falls on them from above. In short, they glow" (122). In Disney's *Pollyanna*, the lightness of Mills's blond hair, combined with the brightness of the sunshine (whether artificial or real) and the pale colors of many of her costumes, creates a sense that Mills as *Pollyanna* is literally, as well as figuratively, associated with light and with the emotional/spiritual implications of such light. In this particular use of lighting the film echoes the 1920 adaptation, in which bright lighting consistently picks up the pale face and blond ringlets of Pickford's *Pollyanna*, particularly in close-up shots, and makes her appear to glow.⁴

Pollyanna's is not the only palely glowing face in the 1960 adaptation, although she receives special attention; in fact, it is noteworthy that Harrington's population is entirely white. (In contrast, *Polly* [1989] and

its sequel *Polly: Comin' Home!* [1990], two later adaptations of *Pollyanna* produced by Walt Disney Television, feature a cast that is largely African American in productions set in a small Alabama town in the 1950s.) Given the film's production in the late 1950s, when issues of racial equality became a theme, overtly or covertly, of so many contemporary media texts, this is important, as it makes the film's nostalgic bent potentially problematic. The argument may be made that a viewer might not expect a small New England town in the early years of the century to have much racial or ethnic diversity, yet the uniformity of whiteness on-screen creates a sense of omission. This lack contrasts with the 1920 film, in which an African-American woman and child appear, albeit in a manner that is curious—the woman chides Pollyanna for chatting with the child as he washes himself in a water trough—and cursory, in that these characters are afforded only a few minutes of screen time and then disappear.

The result is that one might read the distinct whiteness of Disney's Harrington as a conservative move, a nostalgia on the part of its producers for a time before the sociopolitical turmoil of the civil rights movement, a yearning for a time when communities, whether towns or groups of people, may have seemed, at least on the surface, more cohesive. In the creation of this literally light community in the adaptation, brought together through the ministrations of the pale, blond Pollyanna, there is also an echo of Porter's novel, which largely eschews a discussion of racial or ethnic difference despite the period's waves of immigration and domestic migration, which were widely discussed in the contemporary popular press. One of the few exceptions to this in the novel is the character of Nancy, who is Irish. In the 1960 film adaptation, however, Nancy is no longer Irish, and she speaks with a distinctly American accent.

Just as lighting is essential to convey a sense of gladness on-screen, so too a gradual shift in costume styles and colors throughout the film helps the viewer appreciate the manner in which the characters are gradually transformed by Pollyanna and her game: moving from gloom and isolation to gladness and community involvement. For instance, Polly initially appears in dark colors and heavy fabrics, such as the deep blue dress accented with abundant jet beading she wears when Pollyanna first meets her. However, her costumes gradually lighten as she becomes closer to Pollyanna and more integrated into the community. As the film progresses, she begins to dress in costumes such as a light gray dress accented with white, a dress in light blue, and, in the film's finale, a pale pink and white dress that mirrors Pollyanna's own flowered pink and white dress with pink bows. Pollyanna's costumes are consistently light-colored, although

on the whole she too moves to brighter, lighter colors as the story progresses and the sense of gladness within Harrington grows.

The use of such a bright *mise-en-scène*, particularly the high-key lighting, generically ties the film to film genres such as the comedy and the musical, which normally feature this lighting style. In fact, with its brilliant lights, colorful turn-of-the-century costumes, and period songs, the film recalls a famous musical of Hollywood's Golden Age: *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), directed by Vincente Minnelli.⁵ Music is, in fact, a vital aspect of the film's playful, nostalgic mode, and while *Pollyanna* is not a musical per se, attention to its soundtrack reveals the manner in which specific aural choices amplify the visual choices I have discussed.

Notably, the film's aural elements support and emphasize the film's nostalgic mode and lighthearted touch. For example, the music in the title sequence, with its lush, lilting orchestration, quickly sets the aural tone and augments the pastoral, almost timeless appearance of the setting. At the same time, certain unusual musical punctuations highlight specific moments, reinforcing the sense of play that is so central to the film's narrative. For example, as a little boy swings into the water in the film's opening, the camera focuses on a large steam locomotive crossing over the stream, moving toward the viewer; at the same time, the soundtrack contains not simply the sound effects of the locomotive, but also the addition of a musical "choo-choo" from the orchestra. This addition both reinforces the presence of the train and playfully comments on it. So too, a little later in the title sequence a boy, later revealed to be Jimmy Bean, is seen running by a family sitting in a broken-down motorcar with the father underneath the car, attempting to fix it. As Jimmy runs by the motorcar in one direction, a horse-drawn cart moves by it in the opposite direction. The camera fixes on the departing cart, and the musicians draw the viewer's attention to the moment by playing the "clip clop" of the horses' hooves.

This deliberate use of sound, as Claudia Gorbman notes in "Classical Hollywood Practice" from *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, is known as "mickey-mousing" (181), and it aurally hints to the viewer that in beginning to watch *Pollyanna* he/she is entering a lighthearted, playful world.⁶ At the same time, this mickey-mousing of the train and the cart serves to comment on these particular aspects of early-twentieth-century life that would, by 1960, seem delightfully strange to young viewers and quaint relics of a bygone time to older viewers. In the instance of the contrast of the broken-down motorcar versus the jaunty movement of the horse cart, with the sound emphasis given to the latter, there is an additional element of meaning at work, for in the focus on the cart there seems to be

an argument for the pleasures of a simpler kind of technology and, with it, a slower pace of life. Together, these elements of the title sequence help to emphasize the playfulness and innocence, and the nostalgia for both, that will fill the rest of the film.

The film's aural elements also create a nostalgic hail to viewers in the use of era-appropriate music in concert with composer Paul J. Smith's original work. Period tunes such as "When You and I Were Young, Maggie" and "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen" help not only situate the film authentically in the early twentieth century, but also evoke the past for listeners who may have grown up hearing these songs. Music also provides a way to demonstrate the increasing playfulness and cohesion of Harrington's inhabitants thanks to Pollyanna. For example, when Pollyanna and Nancy, Polly's maid, have begun to bond, Pollyanna leads Nancy in an impromptu singing of the traditional round "Early One Morning": the twining of their voices together and the cheerfulness of the song emphasizing their new camaraderie and breaking down any sense of barriers—whether socio-economic or emotional—between them.

So, too, music plays an essential role in the bazaar scene, indicating how the fractured community has come together in joyful play. Medium shots and close-ups of the musicians playing for the dancers, such as an older lady beaming as she enthusiastically pounds away on some drums, stress the participatory nature of the music-making and the manner in which Pollyanna has united the townspeople despite their differences.

This association of music and community is emphasized toward the conclusion of the bazaar, when Pollyanna and some other little girls, dressed to create a living American flag, sing "America the Beautiful." The choice to have Pollyanna sing a solo highlights her central role in the narrative and in the town's transformation, while numerous close-ups of the townspeople responding to her song stress the emotional affect of the moment. That the choice of song references the history and beauty of the nation makes the moment nostalgic on both an individual and communal basis, and the decision to have Pollyanna deliver the song makes the character a conduit for this sense of shared history and patriotism.

The Power of Play

In addition to the formal choices—visual and aural—I have noted, the focus on play conveyed by the narrative's arc is an essential way in which the adaptation creates a sense of overt sunniness. Play as actual play and

as a goal, a way of life, is central in the film, with Pollyanna the chief proponent/instructor of this through her glad game. Images of children at play, individually and together, are central tropes of the film, as they are of the 1920 version, and set a tone of lighthearted fun and innocence within the pastoral, small-town setting.

The initial moments of the film's title sequence, for instance, quickly introduce this trope of play and its importance in the film. The screen goes from dark to pale to reveal the naked backside of a little boy who swings on a rope, jumps into a stream, and then joins his friends, who are already splashing in the water. The camera then follows another boy, Jimmy Bean, as he races with a giant toy hoop around town, finally approaching the train station where Pollyanna will shortly alight. Once there, he places a piece of chain on the tracks in order to see how the train will flatten it. While Jimmy's actions in the title sequence may seem mundane, even superfluous, to the main narrative action of Pollyanna's arrival in Harrington, they support the trope of play within the film. So does a later segment, added by Disney himself, which shows Jimmy, on a visit to the creek with Pollyanna, ducking his head underwater and blowing bubbles at a fish.⁷ Moments of this kind, woven throughout the film, let the viewer know that play is an essential, and desired, aspect of the world of *Pollyanna*.

After Jimmy and Pollyanna meet, the two are often shown at play: taking turns being leader and instructing each other in new ways to play. For instance, Jimmy encourages Pollyanna to climb trees and shows her how to leave her attic bedroom via the giant tree outside her window. Similarly, Pollyanna teaches Jimmy the potential for play even within the dark, gloomy space of Mr. Pendergast's home. As in the novel, she notices the beautiful rainbows that Mr. Pendergast's prisms, hanging from his lamps, cast on the walls, and in the film she soon gets both Jimmy and Mr. Pendergast interested in creating such "rainbow-makers." Here, a child's play spreads not only to other children, but also to adults. Mr. Pendergast's subsequent interest in such play and in the children themselves not only foreshadows his later adoption of Jimmy, it also indicates his re-entry into the Harrington community.

While one might expect to see Pollyanna and her fellow children at play, the film also demonstrates the manner in which Pollyanna's playfulness, particularly her glad game, spreads to encompass the adult townspeople, regardless of differences such as gender or class. The culmination of this community play is, as noted, the added plotline of the bazaar, a sequence that shows the entire town, with the exception of Polly, in celebration:

dancing, eating, and playing games under bright lights as upbeat music plays. One of the booths features a dunking tank, in which members of the town pay to attempt to hit a target and send a clown (a costumed townsman) into the water. The transformation of Reverend Ford from an isolated, oppressive preacher earlier in the film to a good-natured father to his flock is revealed in his interaction at this booth as, at the urging of some onlookers, he takes a turn. Patiently responding to the jeers of the clown when he misses his first few throws, he notes, lightheartedly, that he always wanted to see this particular townsman baptized. Then, to cheers from the onlookers, he succeeds in hitting the target and dunking the clown. The joyfulness of this extended sequence, in which Reverend Ford and the film's other characters come together for a good cause, is then counterbalanced by Pollyanna's accident and the contrast between play/no play when Pollyanna tries and fails to play the glad game.⁸

Pollyanna's dismay when she realizes the result of her accident and her angry statements—"It was a silly game, I hate it. I never want to play it again. Leave me alone"—demonstrate her separation from the game and from the sense of celebration she has helped to create. However, the appearance of the townspeople at Polly's house, carrying flowers, puppies, food, toys, and other delights, quickly counterbalances her gloom. As she is carried among the townspeople, Pollyanna's interaction with them emphasizes the importance of the girl—and her game—in their lives, and augments the sense of a town-wide celebration begun in the exuberant bazaar sequence. For example, Mr. Pendergast reveals that he has adopted Jimmy and that the two will continue to make rainbow-makers; as Mr. Pendergast says, they plan to spend their lives in an act of play—"just hanging prisms"—a work that not only can please the two of them, but that also has the potential to spread a sense of gladness to others.

Finally, the film's finale marks the culmination of the adaptation's focus on play, particularly the playing of the glad game. The entire town assembles to bid Pollyanna farewell and the camera lingers on the word "Harrington" on the town's sign, which is now nicknamed "The Glad Town." Not just a few individuals, but the entire town has been changed due to the power of Pollyanna and her play.

Myth-making

This focus on play works to create a land in a state of perpetual innocence and joy: a vision of an ideal, and idealized, America of pleasure

and equality. That *Pollyanna* takes place in a world before World War I, a war that heralded the horrors of modern warfare and touched the lives of millions of people around the globe, can explain why the pre-war setting of *Pollyanna* may have indeed seemed for viewers in 1960 and beyond a much more innocent and idyllic time. Certainly, contemporary reactions to the film focused on *Pollyanna* as a nostalgic project, in a manner that was both positive and negative. For instance, in his chapter on *Pollyanna* in *The Disney Films*, film critic Leonard Maltin reproduces a review from Arthur Knight, a writer for the *Saturday Review*, who views the film's wistfulness about the past and its subject matter in a very positive manner:

Pollyanna has the feeling for Americana, the nostalgic glow of a simpler, gentler way of life that has characterized most of the Disney live-action features. . . . There is warmth here. . . . More fundamental, there seems to be a genuine belief that the art of positive thinking, as practiced by Eleanor H. Porter's little heroine, is every bit as applicable today as when the "glad game" was first invented. (172)

Yet Maltin also includes a review from *Time* that, as he notes, contains very tempered praise, writing, "*Time* magazine, in a curiously backhanded yet favorable review, called the film 'the best live-actor movie Disney has ever made,' qualifying that remark by calling it a 'Niagara of drivel and a masterpiece of smarm'" (172). The *Time* review indicates the manner in which a mid- to late-century viewer might view *Pollyanna* and her early-century world, at least Disney's version of it, as flawed, even suspect, given, as I have noted, factors such as the simplistic nature of its vision of an America that elides differences such as class and race.

Perhaps for reasons of this kind, and despite Swift's efforts, as noted earlier, to adapt the film's tone for a contemporary audience, the film was not a box-office success. While acknowledging the appeal of the film's lavish look and experienced cast of veteran actors such as Jane Wyman and Adolphe Menjou, Maltin notes that "*Pollyanna's* gross of \$3,750,000 fell short of the \$6 million goal, and Walt Disney thought he knew why. 'I think the picture would have done better with a different title,' he explained. 'Girls and women went to it, but men tended to stay away because it sounded sweet and sticky'" (172).

The 1960 film production of *Pollyanna* was a work of recovery, an attempt to reconnect with a particular vision of American childhood and America, from a studio that specialized in such visions. Taken individually and together, the film's visual and aural elements and narrative arc contain

the potential not only to connect viewers with their own childhoods, but also to hail those viewers in a more general sense, replaying a vision of a perfect childhood and of an idyllic location for that childhood: small-town America. Of course, the film, like the book, is a fantasy, but, as Martin notes, there is no denying that it has “almost a golden glow” around it.

Notes

1. In a chapter titled “Adapting Children’s Literature” from *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, Deborah Cartmell discusses the increasing conservatism of Disney, as displayed in his sociopolitical actions and reflected in his films: “In addition to visual anchorage, was an ideological agenda that Disney brought to the stories, reflected in his founding role in the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals (the foundation of the Hollywood blacklist). It’s no accident that the rise of Disney coincided with debates about the morality of the cinema and American values, and a very conservative view of the family is common to all of these films” (170).

2. However, the nature of this comedy and how it is conveyed is an area of difference between the films. For example, the creators of the 1920 film focus on physical comedy, with a few ironic asides to viewers via the title cards, while much of the humor of the 1960 film is created via dialogue, coupled with reaction shots that emphasize character moments.

3. This use of brightly lit exteriors mirrors that of the 1920 film, in which many scenes take place outside in what appears to be bright sunshine. Both films appear to have been shot in California—with the exteriors of the 1920 production resembling locations in Southern California and the 1960 film shot in Northern California around Santa Rosa—which creates a visual link between the two.

4. At certain emotional junctures, Pickford’s character is shown with her eyes heavenward, as if communicating with the divine, which enhances the suggestion of her special, expressly spiritual nature.

5. The connections between the two films go beyond the early-century setting and a central use of music. Both films seem to construct their settings, the St. Louis of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and the Harrington of *Pollyanna*, as utopian spaces. In *Meet Me in St. Louis* the pleasant, pastoral environs of St. Louis are contrasted with the city to which the family may have to move: New York. In *Pollyanna* Harrington is imagined as a lovely place with unhappy people. The addition of the bazaar sequence, in which the town’s people display their transformation under Pollyanna’s influence as they celebrate together, is also similar to the fair that is so central to the plot and music of *Meet Me in St. Louis*. For example, in his 1994 essay “Meet Me in St. Louis: Smith, or The Ambiguities,” Andrew Britton notes:

If “St. Louis” suggests a myth of the organic community in a lost Golden Age, then the idea of “the fair” is the furthest reach of the myth—“It must look like a fairy land.” The last moments of the film—the camera tracking in to a huge close-up of Esther’s face on her rapt, repeated murmur of “Right here where we live”—convey an achieved

union of the “normal”/everyday and the miraculous. They put forward, implicitly, for the spectator’s consent, the proposition that “your home town too is miraculous if only you stop to look at it.” (164)

6. Gorbman notes that “Music making action on the screen explicit—‘imitating’ their direction or rhythm—is called mickey-mousing (after musical practices used in the early Disney sound cartoons)” (181). The use of such “mickey-mousing” in *Pollyanna* not only aligns the film with the Disney output as a whole, but particularly connects it to the overt playfulness and visual and aural experimentation of the early Disney films. For example, in Disney’s *Steamboat Willie* (1928), one of the first synchronized-sound cartoon films released in Hollywood, Mickey Mouse creatively manipulates the bodies of a variety of animals, from a duck to a cow, in order to produce a variety of sounds for his own enjoyment and to entertain Minnie Mouse.

7. In this sequence the children go down to a stream and Jimmy sticks his head underneath the water. The camera shares his point of view to reveal the magical nature of this underwater environment. As Jimmy looks around underwater, he/the viewer sees an effects-created fish, who also notices him. This leads to a switch in perspective as the fish/viewer views Jimmy imitating the open, bubbling mouth of the fish. Disney conceived of the moment and had it shot by a second unit without Swift’s knowledge; in fact, Swift relates that he did not learn of it until he saw the dailies.

8. Swift notes that Disney showed great interest in the project, investing in it not only creatively and financially, but also emotionally. As Swift and several other interviewees on the DVD extra note, Disney carefully watched the film’s dailies, which often brought him to tears. Disney also insisted that the lengthy bazaar scene, which Swift desired to trim, remain intact.

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