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The Rebirth of the Postmodern Flâneur: Notes on the Postmodern Landscape of Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat*

You can't explain Hollywood. There isn't any such place.
It's just the dream suburb of Los Angeles.
—Rachel Field, *To See Ourselves*
(qtd. in McWilliams 330)

Francesca Lia Block deftly weaves descriptions of real and imaginary places in her contemporary literary fairy tales set in a dreamy, mythical Los Angeles. Grounded in an urban landscape fueled by the entertainment industry, Block's stories celebrate the fantasy of Hollywood, while simultaneously examining the details of contemporary Los Angeles. Her first novel *Weetzie Bat,* published in 1989, is a slender postmodern fairy tale intended for adolescent readers. In subsequent novels, Block has revisited the same group of characters and locations to produce the five-volume collection *Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books* (1998) which consists of *Weetzie Bat* and its three sequels *Witch Baby* (1991), *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys* (1992), *Missing Angel Juan* (1993); and the one prequel, *Baby-Bop* (1995). In the addition to her *Dangerous Angels* series, Block has explored a similar combination of fairy tales and contemporary adolescent culture in novels such as *I Was a Teenage Fairy* (1998), and the short-story collection *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold* (2000). While Block is justly celebrated as one of the most innovative and challenging writers of contemporary adolescent novels, the *Dangerous Angels* series and, *Weetzie Bat* in particular, remain her most powerfully written literary fairy tales.

Whether *Weetzie Bat* is an accurate representation of the author's hometown or a dreamy fantasy has been debated since the book's publication.

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Horn Book printed an exchange between Patrick Jones and Patricia J. Campbell concerning the genre of the book. Jones situated the text in the tradition of young-adult texts, such as S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), which deal with controversial topics; he found *Weetzie Bat* more focused on alternative lifestyles rather than the frequently censored issues of sex, violence, or language. Jones praised the language of Block's novel calling it a "pop-culture-driven, fable-laden, sentimental-tone prose poetry," and essentially read it as a fantasy, calling it both "strange" and "dream-like" (700). Block has acknowledged the strong influence of magic realism on her writing, and has mentioned Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970) and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1985) as influential texts ("Genie Story" 27). Campbell took exception to Jones's description of Block's novel as fantasy while acknowledging that there are "magical elements" in the book and that the tone is "pure fairy-tale" (57). But as a former Los Angeleno, Campbell insists no other writer has "written so accurately about the reality of life in Los Angeles" (57). She argues far from being a fantasy, *Weetzie Bat* is "documenting a very particular time and place" and that the author has "got it exactly right" (60).

A year after Block published *Weetzie Bat,* Mike Davis published *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990), his idiosyncratic and highly-politicized interpretation of the cultural geography of Los Angeles. Block and David seem to be discussing two different cities: Block presents a magical Los Angeles framed as a fairy-tale Hollywood, while Davis's sociological study of the urban landscape, which he describes as "Fortress L.A.," verges more on the nightmare and apocalyptic than the fairy tale. But the unattributed epigraph that Davis uses to introduce *City of Quartz* is useful for understanding both Block's metaphorical and Davis's literal rendering of Los Angeles. Davis extracts the second and third sentence from Walter Benjamin's "The Return of the Flâneur": "The superficial inducement, the exotic, the picturesque has an effect only on the foreigner. To portray a city, a native must have other, deeper motives—motives of one who travels into the past instead of into the distance. A native's book about his city will always be related to memories; the writer has not spent his childhood there in vain" (qtd. in Davis 1). Benjamin's "The Return of the Flâneur" is a review of Franz Hessel's *Spaziern in Berlin (On Foot in Berlin),* published in 1929. The same passage from "The Return of the Flâneur" appears in the second volume of Walter Benjamin's *Selected Writings,* in a slightly different translation by Rodney Livingston: "The superficial pretext—the exotic and the picturesque—appeals only to the outsider. To depict a city as a native would calls for other, deeper motives—the motives of the person who journeys into the past, rather than to foreign parts. The account of a city given

by a native will always have something in common with memories; it is no accident that the writer has spent his childhood there" (Benjamin 262).

Benjamin's observation is helpful in explaining how Jones's and Campell's responses to *Weetzie Bat* can be contradictory and accurate. Indeed, Block is exactly that sort of native writer whose novel journeys into the Los Angeles past as well as into her own childhood, so that the text functions both as memoir and as travelogue. As Benjamin suggests elsewhere in "The Return of the Flâneur," the city is "a mnemonic for the lonely walker: it conjures up more than his childhood and youth, more than its own history" (262). Growing up in Los Angeles, Block left the city to attend the University of California-Berkeley where, as an English major, she was introduced to magic realism by writers such as Marquez and Allende. During her senior year at Berkeley, Block began writing *Weetzie Bat,* recalling that the novel had been written during "a very lonely time as a way to comfort myself with nostalgic memories of Los Angeles. I thought up most of the plot on my long walk home from school through the blossoming Berkeley hills" ("Genie Story" 28). Block's protagonist Weetzie, who navigates the streets and freeways of Los Angeles in her best friend Dirk's red 1955 Pontiac, is a postmodern version of Benjamin's flâneur. Just as Benjamin was surprised to discover in reading Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* that the rebirth of the flâneur "in Berlin, of all places, where it never really flourished" (263) noting that such an observer ought to be a creature of the strollable streets of Paris, it may come as a shock to discover the postmodern flâneur cruising the streets of Los Angeles rather than wandering the streets of New York City, but so it is. Block's description of *Weetzie Bat* as "my love letter to the Angeles I missed, the lullaby that consoled me" ("Genie Story"28) evokes the same attitude that Benjamin praised in Hessel's descriptions of Berlin.

Block has noted that since many of her books are set in Los Angeles, "I suppose I've become known for my descriptions of that city" ("Genie Story" 32). With *Weetzie Bat,* Block has seemingly contributed a contemporary addition to Lois Lenski's well-known series of regional novels. Lenski explained in her Newbery acceptance speech for *Strawberry Girl* (1945) that one of her primary goals of that series was to suggest the ways in which "a certain environment makes people live as they do" (283). Lenski felt that once the reader understood a character's environment and how her life had been conditioned by it, the reader would be capable of understanding that behavior. While Lenski intended to show young readers from other parts of the country how Birdie Boyer's character was shaped by the environment of Lakeland, Florida, it is Block's intention that one must comprehend contemporary Los Angeles to understand the characters of *Weetzie Bat*.

The application of Lenski's 1940s dictum to Block's very 1990s novel is surprisingly easy in that, as Bruce Ronda, has noted, "Much of American children's literature celebrates place" (37). *Weetzie Bat* conveys vivid descriptions of a sense of place which often makes it read more like a travelogue of Los Angeles than a novel. The protagonist's alienation in high school is the result of her peers' inability to appreciate their local sense of place, or as Weetzie says, "they didn't realize where they were living" (Block, *Bat* 3). In the novel's opening paragraph, Block recounts that for Weetzie, Los Angeles means Marilyn Monroe's handprints outside of Graumann's Theater, the canyon where Jim Morrison and Houdini lived, the roller-skating waitresses at the Jetson-style Tiny Naylor, and the plastic palm tree wallets for sale at Farmer's Market (*Bat* 3).

Sense of self and sense of place are intimately connected in *Weetzie Bat*. To make sense of her characters, the reader needs to accept Block's postmodern version of Los Angeles as a paradoxical literary landscape that embraces both Jones's reading of the text as a fantasy and Campbell's acceptance of it as accurate reproduction of reality. As Linda Hutcheon has suggested, the defining characteristic of postmodernism is that it is "fundamentally contradictory" (4). Weetzie's Los Angeles, which is known alternatively as "Shangri-L.A." or "Hell-A," is a landscape of multiple contradictions: "where it was hot and cool, glam and slam, rich and trashy, devils and angels, Los Angeles" (Block, *Bat* 19).

Although alienated from most of her adolescent peers, Weetzie's friendship with Dirk is based on their mutual appreciation and acceptance of this postmodern landscape. They compulsively cruise the freeways in Jerry, Dirk's red 1955 Pontiac, named after Jerry Lewis. Like younger versions of Maria Wyeth, the actress-heroine of Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays* (1970), who found meaning in the navigation of the vast L.A. freeways, Weetzie and Dirk attempt to find meaning in their hunt for "the Ducks of their respective dreams" (*Bat* 11). Driving in L.A. becomes both a literal and metaphorical introduction to the geography. It is the very process of driving the freeways which is the defining motivation for these characters. Their constant driving reveals the essential placelessness that defines this sense of place. The architectural critic Reyner Banham has argued that the freeway is one of the distinctive ecologies of Los Angeles; he writes that he was forced to learn to drive "to read Los Angeles in the original" (23). Block simply updates Benjamin's flâneur into the seat of a 1955 Pontiac. So it is fitting that Block explained that it was while driving through Laurel Canyon that she passed a "punk princess with spiky bleached hair, a very pink '50s prom dress, and cowboy boots" that became, for her, the embodiment of the spirit of Los Angeles. When Block spotted another girl wearing pink glasses in

a pink Pinto with the license plate "Weetzie," she had a name for her character ("Punk Pixies" 1, 11). In a knowing postmodern move, Block transforms a vanity license plate into character: You are what you drive.

In their subsequent quests to locate the duck/man of their dreams in the clubs and video arcades throughout the City of Angels, Weetzie and Dirk discover "[l]ove is a dangerous angel" (*Bat* 14), a phrase that subsequently became the collective title for the *Weetzie Bat* series. Dirk's grandmother, Fifi, who functions as the novel's fairy godmother, gives Weetzie a magic lamp, whose genie grants her three wishes: a Duck for Dirk, My Secret Agent Lover Man for herself, and a beautiful little house to live in "happily ever after" (*Bat* 24). With the sudden death of Grandma Fifi, each of the wishes literally comes true. Dirk finds Duck, the blonde surfer of his dreams. Weetzie meets My Secret Agent Lover Man, a filmmaker and the man of her dreams, who makes Weetzie a star in his film. In her will, Fifi leaves her Hollywood cottage, with its "fairy-tale roof" that looked "like someone has spilled silly sand" (*Bat* 26) on it, to Dirk and Weetzie.

One might suspect that Fifi's cottage was inspired by the Irvin Willat Studio Headquarters which was designed by Willat's art director, Harry Oliver, in 1923 to resemble a replica of Hansel and Gretel's cottage. The house was moved in 1931 from Culver City to Beverly Hills where the private residence is known to locals as "the witches's house" (Lockwood 162), an appropriate home for Weetzie and Max's second child, Witch Baby. Fifi's cottage blends in perfectly with those "Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages" (61) that line the canyons of Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1933). West's novel savagely exposes the artificiality and corruption of Hollywood and its inhabitants who are unable to separate the worlds of life and film.

While Block owes a debt to West's novel, the difference in style of the two writers distinguishes *Weetzie Bat* as a postmodern text. Fredric Jameson has suggested one of the prominent features of postmodernism is the use of pastiche. Both parody and pastiche imitate and mimic other styles, with postmodernism quoting heavily from popular and mass culture as well as high culture. While the impulse to satirize or ridicule the original is found in parody, pastiche lacks parody's ulterior motive. Pastiche, as practiced by Block, is, as Jameson suggests, "blank parody" (114). Where West mocks the sheer superficiality of the Hollywood houses that are more film backdrops than residences and suggests that the houses mirror their inhabitant's shallowness, Block simply reports on Hollywood's eccentric structures without laughter, but with genuine affection for them and their inhabitants.

Dirk and Weetzie's Hollywood cottage becomes a home for their

extended family; it is the one place in this postmodern landscape where both characters feel "very safe and close" (Block, *Bat* 7). Since Edward Relph has argued that "quaintness" is the overriding characteristic of the postmodern townscape, it is a fitting home. Creating their own sense of place and community, Weetzie and friends work against the prevailing atmosphere of placelessness which John Findlay and other urban planners have suggested is exemplified by the disordered and fragmentary structure of Los Angeles that discourages "a sense of community" (Findlay 48). Plucked out of a fairy tale, or a movie lot, or both, Fifi's cottage becomes, as Gaston Bachelard has suggested in *The Poetics of Space,* the place that "shelters daydreaming" in that "the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6).

While Block's novel is set in contemporary Los Angeles, it is more narrowly situated in Hollywood; films quickly become one of the central metaphors of the novel. As David Fine has observed, "Landscape in the Los Angeles novel is always weighted with symbolic meaning" (10), and *Weetzie Bat* is no exception with Block's Los Angeles becoming Hollywood, where life and film are synonymous. Block's text mirrors Jean Baudrillard's observation that the American city seems to have stepped out of movies. Baudrillard's concept that "you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards to the screen; you should begin with the screen and move inwards to the city" (56) seems particularly apt here.

Even Block's writing style is cinematic. Glenna Sloan has noted that her images and events are recorded with a "camera's objectivity and presented without evaluative comment" (3). Block's strength as a writer is in her selective use of detail to reveal the interior lives of her characters. Yet, despite its multicultural atmosphere, *Weetzie Bat* is highly selective in its use of geography. With Los Angeles reduced primarily to Hollywood, major sections of the urban landscape disappear: Santa Monica, Watts, and Malibu. The working class and poorer neighborhoods and downtown, which feature so prominently in Davis's *City of Quartz,* are almost completely absent in Block's novel. Surprisingly, the only Black character Weetzie meets is Jah-Love Valentine, a sculptor from Jamaica.

Weetzie Bat is literally a child of the movies. Her father, Charlie Bat, came to Hollywood from New York City in the 1950s to make his fortune in the movies. Brandy-Lynn, Weetzie's mother, grew up in Hollywood, lived in the Garden of Allah, collected film stars' autographs as a child, lunched at Schwab's drugstore, and dreamed of the time when she would become a star. Charlie, a special-effects man turned screenwriter, met Brandy-Lynn as a young starlet on the set of *Planet of the Mummy Men.* Their whirlwind romance is told in the language of a grade-B movie. Divorced, Charlie has

abandoned what he considers the cultural wasteland of Los Angeles to write plays in New York City. In his most bitter diatribe against Los Angeles, Charlie tries to explain to his daughter why he can never live in L.A.: "Everything's an illusion: that's the whole thing about it—illusion, imitation, a mirage. Pagodas and palaces and skies, blondes, and stars. It makes me too sad. It's like having a good dream. You know you are going to wake up" (Block, *Bat* 73). With the appearance of My Secret Agent Lover Man, who also goes by the less exotic name of Max, much of the activity of Weetzie's extended family involves the making of Max's autobiographical films which blur the distinctions between actors' lives on film and off-camera. At one point, declaring his love for Weetzie, Max exclaims: "You are my Marilyn. You are my lake full of fishes. You are my sky set, my 'Hollywood in Miniature,' my pink Cadillac, my highway, my martini, the stage for my heart to rock and roll on, the screen where my movies light up" (*Bat* 75).

Life is Film. L.A. is Hollywood. Stock movie clichés become heart-felt declarations of love. Block's novel supports Neal Gabler's observation that with the power of performance, "life has become art, so that the two are now indistinguishable from each other" (4). Inspired by Weetzie's observation, "We live in Shangri-la, [. . .] Shangri Los Angeles. It's always Christmas" (Block, *Bat* 67), Max produces *Shangri-L.A.,* a remake of Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937). Block's text confirms Baudrillard's observation: "In America cinema is true because it is the whole of space, the whole way of life that is cinematic. The break between the two, the abstraction which we deplore, does not exist: life is cinema" (Baudrillard 101). Block's regionalism is not so much about a geographic sense of space, but a metaphorical sense of space: the silver screen. She shows how her Hollywood characters are unable to distinguish life from film.

Charlie Bat's rejection of the blurring of these two landscapes echoes that of Tod Hackett, the young painter-turned-set-designer, who bides his time in Hollywood drawing *The Burning of Los Angeles* in West's *The Day of the Locust.* The equally bitter Brandy-Lynn tans in a chaise lounge next to the pool, drinking and brooding over her lost opportunity to become a film star. Both parents are part of what J. U. Peters has called the "anti-myth" of Los Angeles, which appears in many novels set in Los Angeles from the 1930s on, when the dream of success is replaced with disillusionment and the fresh start in California comes to a disastrous conclusion (21). The myth and antimyth of Hollywood collide when Charlie Bat acts out his suggestion for the conclusion of Max's *Shangri-L.A.* of having the protagonist get back at her family by taking drugs and dying (*Bat* 72).

In coining the phrase "Shangri-L.A." as a nickname for L.A., Block simultaneously combines the reality of L.A. with the fantasy of Shangri-La,

the Tibetan utopia made a household word by James Hilton's popular novel *Lost Horizon* that was made into a film by Frank Capra four years later. Capra recalls in his memoir, *The Name Above the Title,* that when his film adaptation of *Lost Horizon* was released in 1937 it was referred to by film reviewers as a "Capra fairy tale" (203). Shangri-La is a utopian community hidden in the Valley of the Blue Moon in the Himalayan Mountains. It is an idealized world where the inhabitants never age and where the prevalent belief is moderation in all things. Regulated by the High Lama, who is later revealed to be a Belgian priest named Perrault—note the fairy-tale connection—the inhabitants of Shangri-La feel that "the exhaustion of the passions is the beginning of wisdom" (213).

In Max's remake of *Lost Horizon,* the ideal community of *Shangri-L.A.* is "a magical Hollywood where everyone looked like Marilyn, Elvis, James Dean, Charlie Chaplin, Harpo, Bogart, or Garbo, everything was magic castles and star-paved streets and Christmas lights, and no one grew old" (Block, *Bat* 67). Weetzie plays the role of a girl on her way to Hollywood to become a star, but her bus crashes and the passengers are magically transported to Shangri-L.A. A similar plane crash enables Conway, a minor British consul, to enter Shangri-La in *Lost Horizon.* Once in Shangri-L.A., Weetzie's character falls in love with Charlie Chaplin who explains to her she can stay there forever and never grow old. They attempt to leave Shangri-L.A., but Chaplin ages and dies once he leaves the confines of Shangri-L.A., leaving Weetzie in Hollywood. Conway attempts to escape Shangri-La with one of the seemingly young inhabitants, Lo-Tsen, who immediate ages and dies once outside of her utopia. Charlie Bat's death once he leaves Shangri-L.A. for New York City simply repeats the plot. Charlie's suggestion for the film's conclusion and his suicide unite life and film.

Block's frequent borrowing, reworking, and allusions to previous texts—ranging from the fairy tales "Cinderella" and "Aladdin and His Lamp," to the films *Lost Horizon* and *The Girl Can't Help It*—are symptomatic of postmodern literature. As Todd Gitlin observed, the postmodern sensibility is a constant cultivation of surfaces that mirror and recombine with an apparent disregard for unity or closure (106). The endless miles of L.A. freeways is simply a literal example of the play of surfaces which Daniel Boorstin has argued have contributed to making Los Angles "one of the least legible of the great settlements of the world" (qtd. in Findlay 30). *Weetzie Bat* concludes with, "I don't know about happily ever after . . . but I know about happily" (88). It is a text that is the constant repetition of surfaces appropriated from popular culture.

Like Hilton's Shangri-La, Block's Shangri-L.A. is moderate in all things, including its depiction of adolescent sexuality. The relaxed morality of

Shangri-La causes concerns for some of the visitors. In Hilton's *Lost Horizon,* one shocked outsider to this utopia comments, "the morals of this place are quite hideous—we might have expected that" (196). The same is true of Shangri-L.A., with Weetzie's accepting attitude toward Dirk and Duck's homosexuality, her three-way conception of her daughter Cherokee Bat, and her willingness to accept Witch Baby, the child of Max's affair with Vixanne Wigg. These attitudes and actions suggest toleration mirroring the morals Shangri-La.

Block has acknowledged her long-time fascination with fairies. She writes: "I have always been obsessed with fairies, not as they are seen in Disney cartoons and some children's books, but the true, darker fairies, the sometimes terrifying beings who are expressions of nature, the ones Shakespeare writes of so vividly" ("Genie Story" 27). The recent paperback editions of *Weetzie Bat* are illustrated by moody colored photographs by Suza Scalora who specializes in dramatic images of young girls costumed as fairies. Scalora's cover art for Block's novels has resulted in the publication of two books of her photographs, *The Fairies* and *The Witches and Wizards of Oberin,* which includes many of the images that were first featured on Block's novels. While some of Scalora's photographs of contemporary fairies capture the sensual tone of Block's prose, most of the images are too elaborate, staged, and overburdened by special effects to capture the postmodern aura Block achieves. While Scalora's fairies are certainly not Disney fairies, they remain film fairies. Rather than Scalora's photographs, the images that seem most in keeping with Block's prose are the brilliant and disturbing photographs in Lauren Greenfield's *Fast Forward: Growing Up in the Shadow of Hollywood.* Like Block, Greenfield grew up and left Los Angeles for college, but returned as photographer. Like Block's *Weetzie Bat,* Greenfield's *Fast Forward* was her "journey into the world of L.A. youth" (5). The composition of *Fast Forward* is remarkably similar to that of Block's writing of *Weetzie Bat* in that once Greenfield left Los Angeles for college, her "most vivid memories of the city revolved around high school" (5). The postmodern flâneur returns, this time with a camera. Like Block's novels, Greenfield's photographs explore, as she explains, "The relationship between Hollywood and the teens growing up in its shadow [that] epitomizes the modern dialectic between kids and media, reality and fantasy" (5). In particular, the photograph "Lauren, 12, wears wings to Crossroads School, Santa Monica" (42), which features a beautiful young girl dressed in a bright red kimono jacket and a thin pair of white wings sitting calmly on the hood of a BMW as she waits to be driven to school, embodies the fusion of fairy-tale and contemporary Los Angeles that is at the heart of *Weetzie Bat.* Greenfield notes that a common theme of many of her pho-

tographs is "the sense of early loss of innocence" (5). Greenfield quotes one teenager: "You grow up really fast when you grow up in L.A. It seems like everyone is in a rush to be an adult. It's not cool to be a kid" (5).

Thomas More coined the term "utopia" from the Greek words meaning "no place" for the setting of his *Utopia,* where an imaginary island served as his version of the perfect society. In creating Shangri-L.A., Block reaffirms that Hollywood exists primarily as a state of mind. Living in Shangri-L.A. is like living on a movie set or in a fairy tale, and at one point Weetzie announces: "I feel like Cinderella" (*Bat* 42).

Perhaps the most recognized embodiment of this movie version of Hollywood is the famous HOLLYWOOD sign on the slope of Mount Lee, which has become the emblem of a seemingly utopian version of Hollywood. Early in their relationship, Weetzie and Max hike to the HOLLYWOOD sign and spraypaint their initials on the back of the letter "D" to celebrate their love. The famous landmark was erected in 1923 by Mack Sennett, noted silent film director, whose Keystone Studios once included Charlie Chaplin, W. C. Fields, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. The twenty-thousand-dollar sign originally spelled "HOLLYWOODLAND" and was constructed to advertise the five-hundred-acre real estate venture that Sennett and Harry Chandler, the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times,* planned to develop on the slope below. Sennett had planned to build his own mansion on the top of Mount Lee, just above the sign. According to Charles Lockwood, by the time the architect John de Larro had completed the plans for the structure, it resembled more "the Dalai Lama's winter palace at Lhasa" (79) than the home of film director. But the construction of the elaborate masonry embankment with fountains, water falls, and a hanging garden was never begun since Sennett lost his stars to talking films and later lost millions in the stock market crash of 1929. By 1933, Sennett's corporation declared bankruptcy and his dream palace and Hollywoodland were never actualized.

Kenneth Anger reports that in 1932 a trend was begun when Peg Entwistle, a minor actress, climbed the top of the thirteenth letter, the final "D," and dove to her death. Other actresses followed her lead and according to Anger, the sign "became a notorious signing-off place" (168). When the sign was restored in 1949 by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce only the first nine letters—"HOLLYWOOD"—were replaced, but "LAND" was discretely removed. While the Chamber of Commerce may have just intended to erase from public memory the embarrassment of Sennett's failed land deal or a location which had become synonymous with suicides, it also symbolically separated Hollywood's connection to the land, reinforcing the concept that Hollywood is more a state of mind than a sense of place. Hollywood, like

Shangri-La, is not a sort of place that is marked on any map. Norman M. Klein argues that "Los Angeles remains the most photographed and least remembered city in the world, and will most likely stay that way" (250). But as Benjamin suggests, for a native of Los Angeles such as Block, the need to depict the city derives from "deeper motive—the motives of the person who journeys into the past, rather than to foreign parts" (262). *Weetzie Bat* is both a highly autobiographical memoir and a deeply metaphorical description of the city. In contemplating the meaning of the phrase "happily ever after," Weetzie laments the loss of the Los Angeles of her own past. Block writes that "the really old places" are being torn down. The Kiddie Land amusement park has been replaced by the Beverly Center. The abandoned Tiki restaurant in the valley and the Jetson-style Tiny Naylor's with the roller-skating waitresses have been removed for the construction of a video store and a yogurt shop (*Bat* 39–40). *Weetzie Bat* is the sort of book in which, as Benjamin argues, "memory has acted not as the source but as the Muse" (262).

Weetzie's Shangri-L.A. is essentially a postmodern world which, as Jameson has suggested, is the consequence of the development of a new type of social life and economic order that has emerged in late, multinational consumer capitalism (125). It is telling that few of the characters in *Weetzie Bat* work other than to act in Max's experimental films. Weetzie's brief stint as a waitress in Duke's functions more as a way to meet, Hollywood-style, Max, the man of her dreams, rather than as a way to generate needed income. With Grandma Fifi's inheritance (real estate) and the income generated from Max's films (entertainment industry), the characters have plenty of time and money for expensive and beautiful things: an unlimited supply of sushi, a mint 1965 T-bird, or Weetzie's jacket made out of gold silk antique kimonos. Jack Zipes warns in "The Contemporary American Fairy Tale" that this overtly consumeristic aspect has become an integral part of the modern American fairy tale. Zipes cites Friedmar Apel, who maintains "that it is impossible in the twentieth century for it [the fairy tale in either its oral or literary form] to be anything more than *divertissement,* escape literature, a cultural commodity that is part of the entertainment business" ("Contemporary" 140–41). For Weetzie and her companions, the world of the contemporary fairy tale is a consumeristic paradise and they rarely look beyond the confines of their own richly-appointed magic kingdom of wealthy white upper-class privilege. Furthmore, Zipes argues in "Do You Know What We Are Doing to Your Books?" that although Block is one of "the gifted and concerned writers" of contemporary adolescent literature, her novels, like those of many other contemporary adolescent writers, are limited to those readers who are primarily "white, middle class children, their parents, teachers, university students, and professionals in the field." (35).

After living in Shangri-La, Hugh Conway in Hilton's *Lost Horizon,* realizes that "the strangeness of everything made it increasingly difficult to realize the strangeness of anything" (197). The urban geographer, Edward W. Soja, notes that Los Angeles has come "to resemble more than ever before a gigantic agglomeration of theme parks, a lifespace comprised of Disneyworlds" (246). But as John M. Findlay argues, even this artificial theme park is the product of a specific time and place in that "[a]bove all else, Disneyland was a product of southern California's motion picture industry" (54). Zipes has consistently shown that fairy tales have never been "ageless, universal and beautiful in and of themselves" but have always revealed "historical prescriptions" (*Fairy Tales* 11) with imbedded ideological assumptions of a historical time and place; Block's *Weetzie Bat* is no exception. While *Weetzie Bat* features a magical Shangri-L.A., Block's vision of Los Angeles is an eclectic, fragmentary, and contradictory postmodern landscape that is simultaneously fantastic and realistic.

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