“More Than Just Another Dumb Blonde Joke”: Humor and Gender in Anita Loos’s Novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Howard Hawks’s Film Adaptation

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Abstract:
Humor is a central element, if not the cornerstone, of both Anita Loos' highly humorous, satirical novel *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* and Howard Hawkes' 1953 film adaptation of the same name which stars Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. Yet Loos' novel and the film use very different forms and registers of humor in order to achieve very different aims. The 1925 novel reads like a guidebook to the liberated and emancipated lifestyle of the 1920s flapper and provides the reader with an unadorned, strongly satirical view of Western culture. The humor of the film adaptation is of a more situational kind and relies heavily on slapstick. This essay aims to compare and contrast the kinds of humor employed by both novel and film version with a special focus on the relationship of the two main characters, Lorelei and Dorothy. It examines the way in which male and female characters are portrayed in general and investigates how humor and satire is used in order to challenge the firm order of class and society. It is the aim of this essay to draw a clear, differentiated image of these two very distinct works. Furthermore, this analysis tries to find possible reasons for the loss in translation from book to film as well as to find examples where critical themes and satire can still be found but in another form.

1 Humor is a central element, if not the cornerstone, of both Anita Loos' highly humorous, satirical novel *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* and Howard Hawkes' 1953 film adaptation of the same name which stars Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. In the introduction to her book on women's humor and American culture Nancy A. Walker summarizes the role of the humorist as one who is at "odds with the publicly espoused values of the culture, overturning its sacred cows" (9) and addresses the even more difficult situation for women humorists who have to "break out of the passive, subordinate position." (Walker: 9) Walker sees the role of the female humorist as one who has to "confront and subvert the very power that keeps women powerless, and at the same time to risk alienating those upon whom women are dependent for economic survival. The delicate balance between power and powerlessness informs the themes and forms of women's humorous writing." (Walker: 9) A theme that also very much applies to the poor, uneducated, lower class heroines of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.* Despite their background, Lorelei and Dorothy enter into the spheres of upper class American and European society and threaten the established order and stability of class and society. This constant is the only common ground in terms of humor between Anita Loos's novel and the 1953 film adaptation as both works use very different forms and

registers of humor in order to achieve very different aims. The 1925 novel reads like a guidebook to the liberated and emancipated lifestyle of the 1920s flapper and provides the reader with an unadorned, strongly satirical view of Western culture through the eyes of the seemingly naive protagonist and narrator Lorelei Lee. In contrast, the humor of the film adaptation is of a more situational and slapstick kind and the movie "fits into the clearly defined and theorized category of the Hollywood musical." (Hegeman: 526) This essay aims to compare and contrast the kinds of humor employed in both versions with a special focus on the relationship of the two main characters, Lorelei and Dorothy. It examines the ways in which male and female characters are portrayed in general and investigates how humor and satire is used in order to challenge the firm order of class and society. It is the aim of this essay to draw a clear, differentiated image of these two very distinct works. This seems to be a worthwhile effort, especially since there is according to Susan Hegeman "almost no recent criticism about the book on which the film was based," (Hegeman: 526) the essay by Hegeman being one of the few exceptions to this case. A comparative and contrasting approach of both the book and the film seems particularly interesting as there has been very little research in this direction and also Hegeman's essay deals only partly with this topic. Furthermore, this analysis tries to find possible reasons for this loss in translation as well as to find examples where critical themes and satire can still be found but in another form, due to the "transcription" from the medium book to the medium film. A distinct point of interest in this will be the 1949 musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* from which the film draws many elements as well as its major songs and the genre of Musical Comedy itself.

2 In the November of 1925 Anita Loos's novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, previously serialized in the *Bazaar* magazine, was published in a small edition and was sold out overnight. Three more printings were released before the end of the year, which also sold out. (Carey: 95) "Blondes didn't need critical praise to become the surprise best-seller of 1925," Gary Carey states in his definitive biography of Anita Loos: "It was one of those books that sold itself through word of mouth, and the word was good along every avenue of American life. Lorelei's diary made a hit with those who read nothing but light fiction as well as with James Joyce, whose failing eyesight made him highly selective about what he read. Anita was told that her book was one of the few he chose from the list of current fiction. *Blondes* was enthusiastically endorsed by the literati. Anita received notes of appreciation from William Faulkner and Aldous Huxley. Novelist, photographer; and music critic Carl Van Vechten proclaimed the book 'a work of art'. And George Santayana […] praised *Blondes* only half-jestingly as 'a great work of philosophy". (Carey: 98) T.E. Blom, an important scholar on the

novel “sees Lorelei as an amalgam of characters from Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Henry James, and describes *Blondes* as a picaresque, as a Bildungsroman, and finally ‘a classic American satire’.” (qdt. in Hegeman: 526)

3 What made the novel so unusual and outstanding that it received this much praise and fame? Why is it that nowadays the title is irrevocably linked to the 1953 film version with Marilyn Monroe? Is it, as Susan Hegeman states, that “*Blondes*’s critical reputation as a literary work may be marred for some by its fame as the basis of the popular stage musical starring Carol Channing and the 1953 Howard Hawks musical film starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell”? (Hegeman: 525)

4 Anita Loos's novel follows the story of the naive and, in the widest sense, uneducated Lorelei Lee who tells of her life as a "professional lady", the book's subtitle, through the ingenious literary device of diary-form entries. Through this diary the reader is offered a very satirical and often critical view of the 1920s – either through Lorelei's naive impressions and observations or through more ironical comments by Dorothy. Very few of these elements of parody remain in the 1953 film adaptation by Howard Hawks and as already stated – the genre changed from satire to musical comedy. The era of the film seems unspecified and greater emphasis has been laid on the relationship between Lorelei and Dorothy. The film takes further liberties from the source material – a prime example would be the trip through Europe that includes stops in London, Paris, Munich and Vienna in the book and is reduced to a cruise across the Atlantic and a visit to Paris in the movie.

Humor

5 Although both the novel and the film adaptation make use of humor as it is a central element, they make use of very different registers and styles of humor. Hegeman describes "Loos's comical use of illiteracies (misspellings, bad grammar misusages) [...] akin to [Gertrude] Stein's stylistic experiments" (Hegeman: 527) and David Tracy sees these factors as a form of vernacular humor: "A key aspect of this humor [being] the *appeal* of the personas even as they reveal themselves to be uneducated, or at least unlettered, in comparison to the reader – and indeed their ability to stand in for the reader by representing a universalized foolishness and vanity." (Tracy: 126) Tracy finds connections to "a group [...] referred to as the 'literary humorists' or the 'misspellers' [who] publish[ed] from the 1860s to the 1880s. These writers [...] wrote mock essays, letters and dramatic monologues in a style replete with phonetic, and usually dialect-associated, misspellings, misquotations and malapropisms emphasizing the persona's lack of education and understanding." (124) On the other hand he

also argues that the "vernacular humor in Loos's writing of Lorelei Lee transforms under the pressure of increasing focus in U.S. mass culture on the question of becoming cultured." (Tracy, 127) *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* itself made fun of this urge to become cultivated and the fear of "cultural degeneration but also seemed to fuel it: Loos' novel became a bestseller, […], while other […] experimental and serious works struggled to gain a readership." (Currell: 69) While this essay does not necessarily attribute higher cultural value to serious and "high brow" literature it is certainly true that the serialization of Loos's novel in the esteemed *Bazaar* magazine led to a debate on its literary and humorous value. Laurie J.C. Cella also examined the humor in Lorelei's grammatical mistakes and the novel's satire, yet she interprets them in a radically different way to Tracy. For Cella Lorelei's "grammatical error[s] [are] a purposeful misnomer that elicits more than just another dumb blonde joke." (48) Furthermore, she sees more than just "unintentional comedy" (Cella: 48). For her, Loos uses this particular style in order "to put her readers in a position of false superiority comparable to Lorelei's hapless suitors." (Cella: 48) This strengthens the theory that Lorelei is actually subverting established patriarchal systems. This argument is also discussed by Nancy A. Walker who seems certain of Lorelei's hidden intellect as she characterizes her as a "dumb blonde [...] who is not so dumb after all, but uses the assets she has to turn matters to her own advantage, all the while laughing at the men who perceive her as stupid." (11 - 12) *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* did not establish the "dumb blonde" stereotype (Walker: 92) as an end in itself. Rather Lorelei's naive comments are used as a "vehicle for [...] Loos's social satire." (Walker: 93) Lorelei and Dorothy face both socioeconomic as well as cultural injustice because of their gender – they are exploited and marginalized by the patriarchal power around them. (Fraser: 16). Yet Lorelei is able to escape this exploitation by putting emphasis on the constructed, marginalized image of the "dumb blonde". Thereby she is able to turn the tables and exploit men such as Gus Eisman or Henry Spoffard. Although this can also be observed in the film, this subversion of patriarchal society and the subsequent redistribution of economical goods come to a halt when the film's Lorelei decides to marry Gus Esmond in order to enable a Hollywood happy ending.

6 There is also a great variation in the critical potential of the forms of humor employed by novel and film. The often biting social and cultural satire chosen by Loos in order to criticize Western culture cannot be matched in its critical potential by the slapstick episodes in the film adaptation. This is not too say that slapstick in general cannot be socially critical – Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* is the best example that it can indeed – yet the only deeper underlying theme in the film is the unity of Lorelei and Dorothy and their rejection of

patriarchal structures. This theme is ultimately undermined by the very conventional Hollywood ending which reinforces these patriarchal patterns once again. Lorelei's subversion of the male dominated culture is short-lived in the film.

7 Aim and target of humor also differ greatly between the novel and the film adaptation. The novel version seems much more in favor of equality as Europeans of both genders are the target of Lorelei's and Dorothy's pranks and jokes. The film adaptation offers a much stronger gender contrast insofar as the two female main characters are more strongly united in order to defy masculine patriarchy with their ridicule. Lorelei and Dorothy are not part of the high and wealthy society they consort with and they do not care about this fact, they "create a carnival wherever they go. They create havoc; they produce a whirlwind of intense experience which leaves the lives of others deeply changed eves as their own lives remain untouched. (Barreca: xv) Lorelei and Dorothy often converse with European aristocrats or the wealthy business tycoons as if they were equals and often they create scenes in which they outsmart them or they upset the whole order of society: "Dorothy said by the time the party got into swing, anyone would have to be a genius if he could tell whether he belonged to the Racquet Club, the Silver Spray Social Club, or the Knights of Pythias" (Loos: 104-5). The humor of this passage underscores rather than undermines the socially disruptive nature of Loos's characters. “You can't tell the men apart; they themselves cannot distinguish one another by rank, ethnicity, or social standing." (Barreca: xiv)

8 Lorelei's and Dorothy's relationship with the circles and societies they enter into is disruptive, as they are difficult to define in terms of social class. They "are unassimilable and yet, paradoxically, they spend Loos's two novels joyfully and wholly infiltrating the homes of the ruling class. They embrace, and thereby parody and undermine, the rituals of the powerful." (Barreca: xiii) Although this aspect is clearly emphasized in the novel and is still a topic in the movie, the difference of social rank seems to be more downplayed and is more a question whether a person is wealthy or not. It is also notable that in the film, Lorelei and Dorothy are considerate of their name and reputation, and the private detective Ernie Malone is seen as a threat who might unearth Lorelei's infidelity. In the book, on the other hand, Dorothy remarks to Lady Beekman: "'Lady you could no more ruin my girl friends reputation than you could sink the Jewish fleet,'" (Loos: 58) thereby stating a general non-interest in their reputations.

9 Yet while the two impoverished Arkansas (show-)girls defy the authority of both European aristocracy and American business tycoon's in the film adaptation as well as in the novel, ultimately the message of the 1925 novel proves to be more radical and modern in

comparison to the more conventional Hollywood ending of Howard Hawks's movie. In the novel Lorelei decides to marry the devout Christian Henry Spoffard, who is sure to guarantee her personal freedom through his prosperity. By continuing to perform the stereotype of the "dumb blonde" Lorelei is able to ensure the continuous redistribution of economic wealth. This paradoxically assures her a freedom that is virtually on the same level as before her wedding, as Spoffard is deceived by Lorelei. It thus ends on a much more subversive note than the film in which Lorelei decides to marry Gus Esmond out of love and therefore abdicates from her liberated, male-defying lifestyle and chooses to adhere to the established moral values of the male dominated 1950s, which confirms both the established norms of the Hollywood happy ending and the Hollywood musical.

Comparing novel and film - a tale of two Loreleis

10 It is safe to assume that the title *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is nowadays more strongly connected with the film adaptation and Marilyn Monroe than with the Roaring Twenties and the novel. "Anita Loos's [...] novel [...] has been all but eclipsed by the voluptuous shadow of Marilyn Monroe." (Frost: 291) This statement may be true and any given text would have problems in competing with the iconic Hollywood sex bomb that is Marilyn Monroe, yet at the same time "few popular novels generated as much attention" (Frost: 291) as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. The novel "was adapted to nearly every medium imaginable – magazine, stage play, silent film, musical, sound film, comic strip, dress fabric, and wallpaper" (Frost: 291) and still it is the 1953 movie that remains in the conscience of the general public. That there could not be a more direct translation from novel to film is highly puzzling considering that Loos was a screenwriter herself and that her novel "is fashioned from a convergence of literature and film." (Frost: 291) Yet, the failure of direct translation is probably the fate of most adaptations, especially of source texts that deal with a surplus of character thought and a strong narrative voice as is the case with Loos's novel. Linda Hutcheon points this out in her *Theory of Adaptation:* "Movies are good at action; they're not good at reflective thought or conceptual thinking" (57) and also harkens back to Bertold Brecht who claimed "that the film demands external action and not introspective psychology." (Hutcheon: 57) The idea of a direct translation from novel to film in itself is problematic as well since "every reading of a literary text is a highly individual act of cognition and interpretation." (McFarlane: 15)

11 Still, the loss of Lorelei's narrative voice is mourned by critic Laura Frost who points out that most of the "novel's superficial signifiers (champagne, diamonds, and dancing vamps)

could be captured on film [...], its most important characteristic, its voice, was paradoxically silenced with the coming of the sound film." (Frost: 291)

12 In terms of setting and locations Anita Loos's book could almost be considered as a sort of travel guide since a large portion of it features a journey from New York to Europe, with stops in London, Paris, Munich and Vienna. Always included in this narration are insightful comments on the land and its people, always from Lorelei's very unique perspective, which sheds a satirical light on the Europe of the 1920s. These accounts have been reduced to a great amount in the 1949 musical and consequently in the movie version as well. The reason for this may have partly been that a time-dependent medium such as the musical also required a reduced number of different locations and places in order to be better approachable by the viewers and to offer a better pacing. Especially in consideration to the fact that the original musical version received unfavorable reviews: "Channing [as Lorelei] was a sensation, and there was praise and applause for score, sets, costumes, and direction. Only the book was found wanting. The chief problem was the end of the first act, so wordy it slowed down the momentum until the second act was too far under way." (Carey: 229)

13 This leaves the question why of all the locations in the novel Paris was chosen to remain in the adaptation. A feasible explanation can be found in post World War II politics and culture. Munich and Vienna had certainly lost some of their touristic values and cultural connotations. Vienna served as a better setting for dark and somber espionage thrillers like Graham Greene's *The Third Man* (1949) than for lighthearted comedies. Although these connotations did not apply to London, its prestige and rank as a city of world-rank did certainly suffer after the end of the war. Unaffected by all of this was Paris, still considered the city of love, arts and culture – a plethora of connotations that are applied to this city to this very day.

14 The novel's setting can distinctively be identified as the era of the 1920s. The reader can deduce this even though Loos does not provide a specific year. The period can be identified through the dropping of names from that period – for instance Charlie Chaplin, H.L. Mencken (a personal friend of Anita Loos) or Sigmund Freud – or by allusion to topics of the era such as in the reference to the "bolshevicks". (Loos: 8) These factors do not occur in the movie adaptation and there may be a number of reasons for this decision. It is very possible that the movie did not want to address problems like communism, due to the Cold War and the Red Scare in the 1950s. Another viable explanation might be that it did not want to relate to specific topics and the style of the 1920s in order to give the viewers something they could better relate to than having it set thirty years ago. The motives behind an update

are quite obvious though as "the 'movement of proximation' bring[s] it closer to the audience's frame of reference in temporal, geographic, [and] social terms." (Sanders: 21)

Fig. 1.

15 When we want to compare Lorelei Lee from the book with the one from the movie version in terms of appearance we have to do this with the help of the illustrations from the *Bazaar* edition- since her looks, besides that she is a blonde, are never directly stated. This is quite a sharp contrast to the obvious attractiveness of Marilyn Monroe in the 1953 movie version. The looks of the two Loreleis are not the only contrast we find if we compare the book's slender, big eyed, short haired flapper version to the " buxom, glittery" (Hegeman: 547) Hollywood sex bomb variety of the movie. "In the illustrations for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Ralph Barton, Lorelei and Dorothy wear the fashionable tight cloche hats and short skirts that complement their willowy figures, big eyes, "bee-stung" lips, and coltish legs. Scandalously baring the knees, the style otherwise deliberately de-emphasized the traditional marker of feminine beauty, including long hair, the high forehead, and the curves of the mature female body." (Hegeman: 536)

16 Hegeman's quote and the illustration describe the typical attire and looks of the liberated 1920s flapper. As daring and chic this haute couture must have been in the 1920s it still stands in contrast to the more revealing, flashy and feminine dresses of the movie version, especially their blazing costumes "covered with spangles, topped with feathers" (Rosenbaum: 94) Lorelei and Dorothy wear in the opening number "We're just Two Little Girls from Little Rock." The musical version falls right in between novel and film adaptation,

as it was released in 1949, well after the novel but still a few years before the movie. From a look at Carol Channing's portrayal and style we can discern that it sways more to the flapper version than to the Hollywood sex bomb. This tells us that the re-invention of Lorelei was conceived in the movie version and alterations in form and place can be attributed to the change from diary narrative to that of the musical. This denotes a paradigm shift of the way women are perceived in movies – from the "new woman", the independent but 'simple' flapper of the post World War I era to the less "‘dangerous' and ultimately more 'tame' post World War II sex bomb.

17 Although both Lorelei's share common characteristics, they are very different when it comes to details. The novel's Lorelei has to take strong measures and force in order to liberate herself from the rule of her father – she shoots her boss Mr. Jennings in Little Rock to set off the events that eventually make her a "professional lady" in New York. While the movie's Lorelei does not suffer from these restraints, she is ultimately presented as a more obedient and weaker character. She lets moralistic values be imposed upon herself as she marries Gus Esmond out of a sense of love and attachment even though there is no real implication of a romance between the two and it is not clear if Gus marries her because of her dumb blonde image or out of love. Her counterpart from the novel stays pragmatic to the very end by marrying Henry Spoffard to further her standard of living and her prestige, so she ultimately is able to continue her way of life.

18 While we know the thoughts and ideas, but not the looks of the novel's Lorelei this phenomenon is directly reversed with the movie's Lorelei where the viewer knows her appearance but only gets short glimpses of her thoughts through visual hints, as in the scene on the ocean liner where Lorelei sees Piggy's head as a diamond. It might be true that for characters in musicals their "unverbalized subconscious can be likened to their music" (Hutcheon: 60) but in this regard songs such as "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" and "When Love Goes Wrong" do not offer too much input in regards to characterization. So in terms of history and psychology the Lorelei of the movie is a blank page to the reader and she can only be characterized in terms of her actions, often sly and calculated – very similar to Lorelei in the novel. The other important component is her portrayal by Marilyn Monroe, whose star personality itself rouses connotations of the "dumb blonde per excellence" for which Monroe was often typecast and through which she became a world famous actor. This dualism of simplicity and calculation is a clearly paradoxical phenomenon that has been perceived by critics like Richard Dyer in *Stars* as "incoherence at the very heart of the film, in the figure of Lorelei as played by Monroe: 'a quite massive disjunction' between the

innocence of Monroe's image and the calculation of Lorelei's character: 'This is not a question of Lorelei/Monroe being one thing one moment and another the next, but of her being simultaneously polar opposites.'" (qtd. in Rosenbaum: 96)

19 A calculating, scheming personality can very well be attributed to the novel's Lorelei as the following episode shows: "[…]a gentlemen who has a friendly interest in educating a girl like Gus Eisman would want her to have the biggest square cut diamond in New York. I mean I must say I was quite disappointed when he came to the apartment with a little thing you could hardly see. So I told him I thought it was quite cute, but I had quite a headache and I had better stay in a dark room all day and I told him I would see him the next day, perhaps." (Loos: 7) Her defining qualities seem to be her simple-mindedness, expressed through her "comical use of illiteracies (misspellings, bad grammar, misusages), her repetition of words, her simple diction," (Hegeman: 527) and her very predetermined, simple view of the world: "But the only Greek I know is a Greek gentlemen by the name of Mr. Georgopolis, […] [who] is also quite cultured, as I know quite a few gentlemen who can speak to a waiter in French but Mr. Georgopolis can also speak to a waiter in Greek which very few gentlemen seem to be able to do." (Loos: 12)

20 What is generally seen as the most defining motif in the character of Lorelei and which is featured strongly in both the novel and the film adaptation is the critique of the excess of capitalism and consumerism: "The men who perpetually orbit around Lorelei and Dorothy have two major problems: They have too much money in their bank accounts and too much time on their hands. Lorelei and Dorothy are able to solve both their problems at once. The two women soak up excess time and money by being excessive themselves – by embodying excess." (Barreca: xii) As well as criticism on capitalism through the means of "economic fetish objects." (Hegeman: 548) This criticism on capitalism led to an academic comparison of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* with *The Great Gatsby*, which was published in the same year.

21 "The movie versions of Lorelei and Dorothy are like those of the book in that they actually possess the very thing they desire, […] symbolized by the tiara. However, instead of presenting this situation as a moment of potential freedom, the movie uses it to punish the women for their aggressiveness and to reassert their proper place in the sexual order: the tiara must be taken out of their control. Thus, Piggie steals back the tiara he gave to Lorelei and is only discovered by the detective Malone, who rights everything in time for the two couples to join: Lorelei with Gus, Dorothy with Malone." (Hegeman: 548) In this regard, the movie can be considered more restrictive and in order with society and moral standards than the novel.

Dorothy as Lorelei's dark double

22 The character of Dorothy has already been discussed in some detail in this essay but since "a picture is worth a thousand words" this still frame from the movie's opening number "Little Rock" should be considered for the analysis of the two main characters:

Fig. 2.

23 In this picture the two women can be seen wearing the same, flashy red dresses and they inhabit the same place on the screen – no one is emphasized in the foreground or marginalized in the background. The only way we can discern them is by their faces. This "clear camaraderie between the two woman stars, [...] serv[ing] visually and narratively as each other's double and opposite. They also affirm their allegiance to one another over and above the interests of their male love objects, displaying a kind of partnership that some critics have described as romantic and erotic." (Hegeman: 547) This relationship has indeed been a topic of contemporary feminist scholarship, most prominently featured perhaps in

Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca's *Pre-Text and Text in 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'* who state that "[o]ne of the most extraordinary and positive aspects of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' depiction of the friendship between [Lorelei and Dorothy] is the absence of competitiveness, envy, and pettiness." (Arbuthnot: 121) This camaraderie is definitely a positive aspect that has to be stressed – still, the heroines of the movie are strongly sexualized and serve in the "traditional exhibitionist role [to be] looked at and displayed, […] their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact." (Mulvey: 837)

24 Although this friendship is also featured in the novel, where even after her marriage Lorelei "retains complete autonomy over her actions and continues her strong and central relationship with Dorothy, whose importance clearly eclipses devotion offered by any man," (Barreca: xvii) this essay wants to draw a clear distinction insofar as the book's Dorothy cannot be considered as Lorelei's "dark double" and her equal. This question of equality is brought up early on as Lorelei writes in her diary: "Dorothy never has any fate in her life and she does nothing but waste her time and I really wonder if I did right to bring her with me and not Lulu." (Loos: 22) She muses if she shouldn't have brought her black maid with her instead of Dorothy, expressing control over the situation and also a friend.

25 Yet what seems of greater importance is the very different function Dorothy has in the novel "as the force of tough-cookie righteousness in Loos's work (and, one imagines, more often than not the mouthpiece for Loos's own wisecracks)." (Barreca: xiv) Dorothy can even be considered as a self-insertion of the author: "so Loos's own position would be that of Lorelei's flapper sidekick, Dorothy Shaw. This sidekick is not only darker but smarter than the narrating Lorelei." (Hegeman: 529)

Conclusion

26 All the topics discussed in this essay and their varying possible interpretations help to illustrate the sheer depth of meaning Loos's novel and her characters offer and how much room for debate there still is. While one group of critics argued that "Lorelei's humorous exploitation of men shows Loos endorsing the system of conspicuous consumption that produces the gold digger, as well as the gender dynamics inherent in that system – not critiquing them" (Tracy: 136), others argue that Lorelei's appeal lies in "her ability to manipulate her own image and effectively become mistress of her own grand confidence game. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Lorelei is aware of herself as an image, and she constantly adjusts this image to best 'take advantage' of the situation around her." (Cella: 47) This ambiguity the novel leaves is what allows for interpretation and this is also where humor

and satire enter the novel. In adapting the text for the stage and later the cinema much of this ambiguity had to be reduced. This is connected to the medium as "director and performers make choices that inevitable reduce the 'interpretive richness' of the written text [...]; in a movie or television adaptation, those choices are final, recorded forever." (Hutcheon: 70)

27 Besides this loss of interpretive richness the changes and dissimilarities between novel and book can be grouped into two broad, main categories – either the changes were motivated by an alteration in the form and genre, as in the reduction of destinations on Lorelei's and Dorothy's journey which stems from the musical version and was adopted by the film version or the very format of the five sing and dance numbers with story segments in between. The other large category would be changes traced back to social, political and psychological factors. This would encompass the move from the 1920s backdrop of the novel to the era-unspecified film or most of the changes and different interpretations in the characters, most prominently in the two main characters.

28 In between are a few aspects that can be explained with either of the two categories or which cannot be closer specified or reduced to one category. In this field we have the transformation of Dorothy from a mouthpiece of the author Anita Loos to the dark double of Lorelei in the film version which either can be attributed to psychological factors or the fact that Anita Loos was not involved in the film's production and there would not have been an association with her by the audience, due to both her waning prominence and of course the strong visuality of the medium.

29 Concluding it can be said that it is not the understanding of this essay that "*Blondes*'s critical reputation as a literary work may be marred for some by its fame as the basis of the popular stage musical starring Carol Channing and the 1953 Howard Hawks musical film starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell," (Hegeman: 525) as the three works in question vary considerably from each other and cannot be compared on terms of equality as an adaptation is always a interpretation of the original. Comparing and contrasting can be a worthwhile and interesting endeavor – especially in terms of detecting social, cultural change and political change – as this essay's findings have shown and there is still much room for further research on this particular topic.

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