"HE’LL JUST BE PAUL NEWMAN ANYWAY": CINEMATIC CONTINUITY AND THE STAR IMAGE

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“HE’LL JUST BE PAUL NEWMAN ANYWAY”:
CINEMATIC CONTINUITY AND THE STAR IMAGE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of
Kentucky

By
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

“HE’LL JUST BE PAUL NEWMAN ANYWAY”:
CINEMATIC CONTINUITY AND THE STAR IMAGE

Since performers first became credited for their on-screen work in the early twentieth century, stardom has been understood as a primary factor distinguishing cinema as a unique, discrete art form. Much of the work done by canonical film scholars emphasizes film as a continuous medium defined by relation, as well as the irreducible value of human presence in creating meaning that transcends the boundaries of film. These are important cornerstones of star studies, a subfield within film studies that interrogates how film performers accrue and project meaning and value. They also isolate continuity as a singular tool for developing approaches to understanding cultural and ideological value of film stars – determining why certain stars are such powerful commodities and addressing the deceptively elusive question of what they actually mean.

Through careful inspection of the transactions between film production and culture, my dissertation – “He’ll Just Be Paul Newman Anyway: Film Continuity and the Star Image” – pursues two primary goals regarding the cultivation of stardom and our understanding of star persona. First, I reestablish the star image as a discrete force, informed by on-screen performances and off-screen biography but remaining distinct from both (following the framework of French film theorist Edgar Morin). I attempt to disentangle these figures, asserting star image – the intangible, ethereal collection of values, expectations, and investment constituted from both performer and character – as the central mechanism for interpreting human presence. Second, I explore the notion that narrow range of performance and on-screen consistency are more essential to developing stardom than the revelation of the performer’s actual self. This position applies both to the production of stars and to our critical understanding of them, creating compelling connections to central debates of film studies. In doing so, my goal is to reassert the star as the most valuable and definitive source of meaning in film.

The combination of Paul Newman’s on-screen continuity, enduring persona, and career trajectory (rising to stardom during the fall of the studio system) makes
him uniquely valuable for understanding the evolution of film stardom and encourages new perspective on the development and deployment of star image. Moreover, Newman is an ideal subject for investigating the star image as a discrete force and the function of range in its development. Through critical examination of his on-screen tendency to “go his own way,” I demonstrate the immense value stars can offer to our understanding of the moving image and surrounding culture(s). Moreover, in asserting star persona as a discrete force integral to interpreting the meaning of human presence in film, I also cultivate a contextual understanding of the rebel archetype in response to changing dominant cultural ideologies. In doing so, my work directly addresses valuable questions essential to and extending beyond film studies: why stardom is essential to defining film and understanding how it signifies, how star persona is accumulated and deployed in individual films and across a whole career, and what meanings are generated and revealed by the star as an projection of social values and ideals.

KEYWORDS: Film Studies, Star Studies, Celebrity, Masculinity, Cultural Studies
Multimedia Elements Used: JPEG (.jpg)

William Guy Spriggs

5 November 2018
Date
“HE’LL JUST BE PAUL NEWMAN ANYWAY”:
CINEMATIC CONTINUITY AND THE STAR IMAGE

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For Ashleigh and Ollie, my stars
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On October 26, 2017, the Rolex Daytona wristwatch – specifically a rarer model known as the “Paul Newman” Daytona – featured in lot eight of the auction hosted by Philips sold for a record-breaking (and mind-boggling) $17,752,500. “Paul Newman” Daytona models typically sell at auction for amounts topping out in the low six figures, but this item in particular was Paul Newman’s “Paul Newman” Daytona – or, as some outlets referred to it, the “Paul Newman” Daytona – given by the film star decades ago as a gift to a boyfriend of his daughter Nell (Clymer). Prior to this event, the most expensive “Paul Newman” Daytona ever publicly sold was a rare model known as “The Legend” auctioned in May 2017 for over 3.7 million dollars, nearly quadrupling the previous record set in 2013 (Touchot). While the value of “Paul Newman” Daytona models has been steadily increasing since the early 1990s, the rarity, aura, and provenance of the “Paul Newman” Daytona meant that only thirty-two enthusiastic and extremely wealthy bidders were eligible to participate in the record-breaking event (Barrett). Even then, as accounts of the auction indicate, the opening bid of one million dollars was immediately and unprecedentedly raised to ten million, eliminating participation from every bidder physically present at the auction (Barrett). When the bidding ended at just under $18,000,000, only one watch in history – the Henry Graves Jr Patek Phillipe Supercomplication pocketwatch – had ever sold for a higher amount. In the wake of the auction, experts and enthusiasts speculated that only one wristwatch could ever
sell for more than *the* “Paul Newman” Daytona: Buzz Aldrin’s Apollo 11 Omega Speedmaster, the first watch ever on the moon (Barrett).

Naturally, the simple and obvious question that followed the record-breaking sale of Newman’s watch was *why*. Why would the film star’s watch, which hadn’t even been in his possession for decades, share value with such ultra-rarified company? The Graves Supercomplication is considered a singular artistic and technical marvel, commissioned in 1925 and taking seven years to complete, still operating flawlessly despite not being serviced since 1969 (Clymer). Aldrin’s Speedmaster – also called the Moonwatch – not only carries obvious unmatched cosmic significance, but has been missing since the 1970s, lost or stolen in transit to joining a display at the Smithsonian (Cox). By comparison, the record-breaking Daytona was, more simply, a watch briefly worn by an actor. And importantly, as even the most inexperienced and amateur watch enthusiast might assume, the difference between a traditional Rolex Daytona and the “Paul Newman” Daytona series is incredibly slight; the “Paul Newman” models feature a different font and square caps in the lap dial, a second band surrounding the face, and red coloring on
the face border markers. And since the differences are so slight, fake “Paul Newman” dials outnumber authentic ones – there are more fake dials for “Paul Newman” Daytonas than for all other watches combined (Clymer). Nevertheless, experts and commentators readily admit they have no means to truly explain why “Paul Newman” Daytonas are considered so desirable or continue to increase in worth. The signs, quite simply, point to Paul Newman himself – for whatever reason (and by whatever method or process), he is the reason for the Daytona’s high value.

The anticipation, interest, and eventual investment in Newman’s wristwatch are obvious indicators of his continued significance as a cultural and economic commodity, over sixty years removed from his feature film debut and nearly a decade after his death. More critically, in this case the goals of asking why – of attempting to account for the astronomical value of the “Paul Newman” Daytona – reveal a need to better understand and measure Newman’s value as a transcendent cultural figure. The admitted difficulty of assessing this kind of aesthetic commodity value powerfully demonstrates the enduring utility of star studies as a method of cultural inquiry. More than that, it uncovers a deficiency in understanding any sense of process behind the cultivation and deployment of stardom or what forces facilitate a transcendent persona such as Newman’s. The “Paul Newman” Daytona’s rarified company makes it a compelling reflection of the mythical and even otherworldly value of film stars – again suggesting the necessity of reading stardom. As expected, articles written after the sale of Newman’s watch accordingly grasp at any concrete, observable motivation for its unbelievably high price. Some point to concerted efforts from Rolex to cultivate Newman’s watch-related celebrity after he
appeared on the cover of an Italian sporting magazine wearing the model that would later be referred to by his name. Others associate its value with Newman’s wife Joanne Woodward, who gave the watch to Newman as a gift with the somewhat cryptic inscription, “Drive carefully me.” Most compellingly, others still make perhaps unwitting connections to the very idea of stardom: the watch’s high value, they reason, could be owing to the aura surrounding the auctioneer (named Aurel Bacs) or Newman’s mythical, undocumentable fame in the timepiece community owing specifically to his 1969 racing film Winning. The only thing that’s clear—again, owing to critical conceptions of stardom and celebrity—is that something about Paul Newman suggests, imbues, or generates meaning and value.

Identifying, recognizing, and assessing this something is precisely the work of star studies—and exactly the avenue pursued by my project. But this gesturing toward the value of star studies without quite naming or recognizing it (as in the examples above) is commonplace, both in popular cultural criticism and film studies in general. I believe this necessitates first resituating and focusing the methodologies of star studies criticism, as well as uncovering and reasserting the longstanding centrality of stardom and celebrity within the larger field of film studies. The goal of star studies is to interrogate star persona or image—the intangible, ethereal collection of values, expectations, and investment constituted from both performer and character—and therefore understand the meaning of human presence in film. In simpler terms, star persona can be described as everything shaping our expectations of a star’s performance and character, constituted from other roles and our understanding (however mediated) of their
off-screen identity. Reading persona presupposes a performer is also a star, meaning they have enough transcendent qualities to generate and inform both our expectations and subsequent readings of contributions to their on-screen career. This critical approach has limitations in that it cannot be applied to all film performers and demands close reading of a star’s filmography, but it nevertheless offers a compelling lens for understanding how human presence functions as a part of film culturally and aesthetically. Importantly, and perhaps surprisingly, the history of film studies and cinematic criticism demonstrates significant investment in reading the transcendent factors of performance and character in film. In other words, star studies has been integral to film theory since its beginning, long before Richard Dyer, Edgar Morin, and other brilliant scholars focused specifically on celebrity. Therefore, my work has its genesis in the critical writings of earlier film theorists whose ideas set the stage for Dyer’s inescapable and brilliant description of the film star as “the reconciler of contradictions” (*Stars* 95), as well as his later explorations of the value of consistency in building the star and the star’s capacity for reinforcing social norms. My work centers on this idea of consistency, reframing persona in narrative terms and positioning on-screen continuity as the primary criteria for understanding how stardom is generated, developed, and deployed.

The invaluable distinction between performer and persona has been posited in different forms by canonical theorists in a variety of contexts, all of whom attempt to define film through combination or relation. Rudolf Arnheim’s *Film as Art* helpfully theorizes the film frame as a space where abstract concepts are made visible. But more importantly, Arnheim contends that human presence is integral to
reality in film, creating a continuum of meaning that allows audiences to associate with stories and characters while recognizing film material as essentially unreal. Gilles Deleuze’s theory of movement in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* suggests that we understand moving images because of the continuity they create through succession. Deleuze also argues the cinematic frame is never totally closed: the whole is defined by relations and constantly transformed by the unity of movement. These ideas are compellingly reflected in the critical work of formalist giant Sergei Eisenstein, whose extensive remarks on montage locate meaning in the combination of images *and* in the correspondence between concepts and the human face.

Eisenstein approaches film as an ideogram: an attempt to represent ideas through images. Though known primarily for his lengthy explorations of film technique, Eisenstein’s theories resonate within the domain of star studies through his identification of acting and human representation – *not* techniques of editing or sound – as the primary sources of a film’s significance.

Other scholars fruitfully combine these ideas, situating this medium-defining understanding of continuous relation specifically within the consistency of human presence in film. Béla Balázs, for instance, suggests that film has no meaning without the possibility of identification, which is made possible only by the representation of human personality (specifically the “hero”). Similarly, Andre Bazin associates the “aesthetic continuity which characterizes the cinema” (73) with the consistency of human presence through on-screen characterization. The work of these theorists emphasizes film as a continuous medium defined by relation, as well as the irreducible value of human presence in building the grounds for this continuity and
creating film meaning. This is integral to my approach, as my work examines cinema as a continuum of signification. But more than that, I contend these critical frameworks are equally essential to the work of star studies and film studies. What these theorists refer to as “human presence” is vital to understanding film as a continuum, since it both reinforces the star image – as produced through a narrow range of on-screen performance – and conceives of film as understandable as part of a larger whole.

Dyer’s assertion that stars are part of the way films signify helpfully compartmentalizes much broader discussions regarding how film’s meaning is facilitated by human presence on screen. He also associates the star’s ability to reconcile contradictions with charisma, a formulation that has particular relevance in my discussion of Newman (whose rebel is defined and made more identifiable by charm). My views on stardom are also shaped by Edgar Morin, who perhaps makes the greatest attempt to define the star image as a force separate from both actor and character. Simply put, this project would not exist without Morin’s original formulation that, “Once the film is over, the actor becomes an actor again, the character remains a character, but from their union is born a composite creature who participates in both, envelops them both: the star” (29, emphasis in original). Morin presents stardom as a symbiotic transfer: the actor incarnates himself in characters which become incarnate in him; the star “absorbs some of the heroic [...] substance of the hero” and “enriches this substance by his or her own contribution” (30). This transfer/exchange is essential to understanding the star, as it demands recognition of both how characters are informed by the star’s other roles outside that single film
and the extent to which our impression of the star’s off-screen, actual identity is defined by on-screen persona. Morin’s view of the star is at times more mythical than my own, such as when he claims the star is capable of transcending screen image. If anything, the record-breaking sale of the “Paul Newman” Daytona only reinforces the centrality of Newman’s on-screen persona in any understanding of his cultural relevance. As I explore throughout this project, the fact of Newman’s continued popularity/value and hyper-mediated access to his off-screen identity practically necessitate the predominance of star persona as lens for reading the meaning of celebrity. But the transcendence noted by Morin elucidates how the act of consuming film involves far more than mere spectatorship. Since stars are reflections of dominant cultural values and constructs, it is difficult to overstate their role in the construction of both our shared social ideals and individual identities. What must be consistently restated, however, is how this work is specifically routed through and compartmentalized within the phenomenon of star persona as explored here. In other words, the impact of Newman’s cinematic “doomed rebel” archetype on identity formation or on the value of the “Paul Newman” Daytona results from our mediated relationship with his star image, not with anything assumed or imagined from his “actual” life.

But Morin’s subsequent observation that the star “must nourish her own myth” (55) raises central and unavoidable questions about the role of agency in the cultivation and deployment of stardom. Newman’s star image is still defined by the essential elements of characters he portrayed more than five decades ago and may be more recognizable off-screen than on, further testament to the ways star persona
is unique to film and shaped by forces other than the star’s actual identity. But these insights don’t necessarily reveal what is actually “responsible” for or motivating such consistent, continuous on-screen image. Obviously preexisting elements of a star’s image can be and are taken into account during the production process, recognizing the star as a discrete (and ideally measurable) commodity whose presence has clear ramifications for the economic viability or cultural resonance of any given film. However, the production process is also shaped by unpredictability: innumerable failed experiments to create new stars make it clear the processes informing stardom are not totally structured or controlled (or controllable). The distinct non-clarity in figuring which roles will help create or reinforce transcendent star qualities similarly reflects the complexity in determining who and what makes stars happen. The biggest difficulty in critically reading stardom stems from its situation in consistent human presence and its seeming self-generation. In other words, stardom demands close reading of coherent characteristics and prioritization of the star’s presence because the star’s body is the focal point of the accumulation and deployment of the characteristics that constitute persona. This does not mean film performers themselves are the primary agents, selecting roles for their transcendent continuity and actively cultivating a clearly delineated cultural function or value. While certain qualities – namely consistency – can account for how a star’s image becomes ingrained in the cultural imagination or recognized as a bankable facet of production, stardom also arises from factors like luck, timing, and social context that are much, much harder to account for. As a result, reading stardom necessitates acknowledging the lack of clear, conscious,
human agency at every level. Paul Newman is not consistently cast in roles for what he deploys, nor does he necessarily choose to maximize or minimize specific characteristics to encourage coherence with elements of his persona. Rather, everything we understand about Newman's persona or expect from his characters is concentrated in and reflected by his physical presence. This forfeiture of agency or responsibility suggests a different magical quality to film stardom, whereby films and characters can be defined by an almost innumerable number of far-reaching factors. However, this focus on consistency and transcendent qualities reveals observable, structured patterns of star development and deployment that shed new light on stardom as a cinematic and cultural phenomenon.

As I explore throughout this work, Newman is an ideal subject for my investigations into the star image as a discrete force and the function of consistency in its development and deployment. My goal is to use Paul Newman's on-screen career as a case study for developing a more thorough understanding of how stardom is accrued and deployed as a unique cinematic cultural phenomenon. My research and analysis surveys Newman's films alongside reviews, essays, and promotional materials for threads of cultural and cinematic consistency that transcend individual artifacts and offer a means for reading his on-screen career as a narrative of stardom. I characterize my approach to film as an attempt to make connections and establish a type of continuum – to understand, paraphrasing Gilles Deleuze, how the whole is defined by its relations. In examining this peculiar brand of extradiegetic interconnectivity, my work demonstrates the immense value stars can offer to our understanding of the moving image and its exchange with ever-
shifting cultural values. Moreover, re-establishing the star image (or star persona) as a discrete force – informed by on-screen performance(s) and off-screen biography but remaining distinct from both – addresses a compulsion for biographical criticism that runs through star studies approaches to film and cultural criticism. Once granted access (however mediated) to the “real lives” of stars, individual films and entire on-screen careers are scrutinized for any reflection or revelation of who the star really is. The distinctions star studies posits between actor, character, and star persona in some ways require attention to the biographical, but these divisions are understandably slippery: when watching a film, how can we confidently distinguish between them? This line of inquiry parallels questions made by Edgar Morin in his interrogation of our investment in stars: “But where is the star? Where is the man? Where is the dream?” (149).

The impulse to read biographical details into on-screen characters is bolstered by critics and actors alike, who both suggest that the identity of the performer is there on the big screen, laid bare by the magic of cinema. This complexity potentially muddies using Newman as a case study, since he has been celebrated as a singularly authentic star: famed New York Times film critic Pauline Kael was attracted to Newman “because he seemed to offer up an intangible part of himself, something genuine and real, something we could take home” (quoted in Dargis). Moreover, Newman invited such notions by characterizing his own acting method in terms of self-exposure (Godfrey 119), which depends upon “absorbing other people’s personalities and adding some of your own experience” (quoted in Dherbier & Verlhac 50). It is unsurprising, then, that descriptions of Newman
conflate impressions gathered from on and off screen: he is simultaneously a private
man with little to hide (O'Brien xiii), “a rebel and a loner who called the shots as he
saw them” (Quick 23), and a serious, reserved man with a quirky sense of humor
(O'Brien xvii). These problematic formulations generate a composite image of
Newman’s career-defining roles that claim to uncover the actual man himself rather
than offer – as I do here – an interpretation and redefinition of the archetype
biographer Lionel Godfrey refers to as the “Great Loner” (119).

If we recognize the star as distinct from the actor – acknowledging Richard
Dyer’s view of the real person as the site of the star image (Heavenly Bodies 7) – then
Newman’s interpretation(s) of the doomed rebel can reveal far more about the
nature of stardom in American film than about what we might call his own identity.
Dyer in particular associates the star image with ideology rather than identity,
suggesting that the star has certain qualities – chief among them charisma –
distinguishing it from actor and character. In Edgar Morin’s medical metaphor, the
star is “infected” (27) by both character and actor, eventually accruing enough
signifying power to inform the meaning of a film and embody cultural ideals. The
star, then, is not only representative of ideology but distinct from the factors taking
part in its creation, recalling Morin’s formulation of the star as a discrete force
informed by actor and character but coming to envelop them both. Moreover, the
cultivation and management of the star image reveals audience investment and
interest in the star are not predicated on authenticity – they continue regardless of
how “real” the star image is or to what degree it is exposed as artificial. Stardom
obscures the reality that acting is also pretending, making it possible for (if not
encouraging) us to curiously overlook the star’s capacity to play roles with no
connection to his/her history or biography. As Dyer points out, the public is
manipulated by and sold on the star, but we nonetheless “make it work according to
how much it speaks to us in terms we can understand about things that are
important to us” (Heavenly Bodies 14). Simply put, in spite of our desire to possess
stars, we accept their artifice even if we don’t explicitly acknowledge it.

The unique trajectory of Newman’s career – rising to stardom at the end of
the studio era and maintaining star presence across six decades – illustrates the
benefits and complexities of an approach to stardom built on consistency and
narrative coherence. Newman’s embodiment of the archetypal doomed rebel
demonstrates how stardom can be cultivated not through self-exposure but through
a narrow range of performance. The similarity and self-reflexivity of Newman’s
roles creates a “narrative of unfolding personality” (xxii) film critic Ty Burr
associates with the construction of the powerful star image. Yet on the set of the
1966 film Torn Curtain, Peter Bogdanovich remarked to director Alfred Hitchcock
that concerns raised by Paul Newman about his role in the film were unimportant
because the character was “just going to be Paul Newman anyway” (quoted in
Borden 43). The phenomenon identified by Bogdanovich doesn’t really have
anything to do with the character being like Paul Newman the man: the “Paul
Newman” lead character in Torn Curtain would instead – to Bogdanovich’s seeming
dismay – mimic the star image created by Newman’s on-screen continuity. Film
theorist Richard Dyer has written broadly and extensively on this division, pointing
out that “we can never know [stars] directly as real people, only as they are to be
found in media texts” (Stars 2). Therefore, Bogdanovich’s remark reaffirms the predominance of the star image while emphasizing concerns central to star studies, namely the value of deploying certain talent in certain roles/films and the meaning engendered by the consistent on-screen presence of the star.

There are many books written about Paul Newman, and not surprisingly, all prioritize Newman’s biography. Yet, even the books seemingly informed by star studies (namely Paul Godfrey’s Paul Newman: Superstar) provide readings of Newman’s roles or film career with heavy reliance on details from Newman’s life. My project does not aim to retell Newman’s biography or posit Newman’s own life as the source for understanding his star image. These studies offer good background material and provide points of departure for accessing Newman’s archive, but they don’t pursue the same questions or use the same theoretical tools essential to my work. Newman’s image has persisted in the American public, both figuratively and literally, among the general population and within niche communities (such as ultra-wealthy watch collectors). I believe there is opportunity and need for a critical study of Newman’s stardom, especially one that operates from a more film-based approach to understanding his career, star persona, and lingering place in American culture. Moreover, I hope my framework and methodology for reading the star image will offer insights to the development of stardom that transcend an understanding of Newman’s career alone.

The best critical work on Newman’s career comes from Christine Becker’s chapter “Paul Newman: Superstardom and Anti-Stardom” in the collection New Constellations: Movie Stars of the 1960s. In similar fashion to the second chapter of
my project, Becker studies the presence of rebellion in Newman’s films, particularly *The Hustler, Hud,* and *Cool Hand Luke.* While Becker’s criticism does not cover the entirety of Newman’s career, she does admirable work in offering close formal readings of these films and examining audience reception to (and acceptance of) Newman’s stardom. She also makes very compelling claims about ways in which Newman the man was decidedly *not* a rebel, both because of his willing participation in the production system and the cultural incorporation of his on-screen rebellion. As Becker writes, Newman “embodied a mainstream version of 1960s nonconformity, one that echoed the ways in which the counterculture itself was gradually assimilated into dominant sensibilities across the decade” (15). This reading reflects an increasingly accepted view of Newman’s career – not as an industry rebel, but the “perfect post-factory movie star” (Burr 215). Nevertheless, Becker’s interpretations of Newman’s films still attempt to look through on-screen roles in an attempt to find the man himself. Becker points out ways in which he differed from his career-defining characters, but still associates Newman the man – rather than a distinct sense of his star persona – with the rebellion and dissatisfaction that shaped his recurring on-screen persona. Becker’s conflation of performer and star image suggests Newman’s stardom was achieved by revealing elements of his true nature. I contend that access to the film star through on-screen roles is mediated to the point of impossibility, necessitating the star image in the absence of the star him/herself, who we never *truly* see. I believe that all we find in media texts is the star image, and this belief is part of what distinguishes my work in
highlighting the easily overlooked distinctions between actor, character, and star persona at the center of reading stardom as a cinematic and cultural phenomenon.

In my first chapter, “He Could Develop a Classic Character: Reading On-screen Presence in the Absence of Star Persona,” I explore how Newman’s films during the 1950s reveal certain values and limitations in star making during the last years of the Hollywood studio system. Although later audiences would come to expect charm, rebellion, and restlessness from the casting of Paul Newman, in the 1950s Newman’s performances were read exclusively through the lens of talent. This is because Newman was simply not a star during the 1950s, inasmuch as his on-screen presence failed to represent and reflect a coherent ideology or consistently embody an image that generated investment and expectation for audiences. Moreover, his most prominent and memorable roles during this period (Ben Quick in *The Long, Hot Summer*, Billy the Kid in *The Left Handed Gun*, and Brick Pollitt in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) were either reprisals or adaptations of previous performances (Quirk 75, 87). This may have enabled Newman as a talent – Becker suggests Newman desired “to be appreciated as an actor rather than a star” (16) – but these roles inevitably did little to cultivate Newman as a cinematic or cultural figure. The gap in semiotic and cultural value that would be filled by persona was instead shaped by evaluation(s) of talent and definition on non-cinematic terms (such as good looks). In Newman’s case, the 1950s created the means for his association with rebellion by limiting his opportunities to build a distinct, coherent star image and escape the shadow of stars like James Dean and Marlon Brando. While Newman would later overcome these limitations and comparisons by
developing a new image of the rebel archetype himself, the restraints of the studio system meant Newman’s star image in the 1950s had no consistency and thus no real power or meaning.

My second chapter, “I Guess I Gotta Find My Own Way: Aesthetic and Ideological Continuity in Film Stardom,” examines Newman’s development of a lasting star image (the doomed rebel) in the years following his decision to buy out his Warner Brothers contract. Through his roles in the “H films” of the 1960s (The Hustler, Hud, Harper, Hombre, Cool Hand Luke), Newman managed to develop a persona distinct from James Dean and Marlon Brando, not by avoiding the doomed rebel archetype but by depicting it almost exclusively. Biographer Daniel O’Brien contends Newman’s stardom was the result of adventurous range as a performer, but Newman’s on-screen roles during the period that established him as a star do not seem to reflect this kind of fundamental difference. Newman said he seemed to repeat the same roles, explaining, “The more I do, the more I duplicate. I’m not inexhaustible, like an Olivier” (quoted in O’Brien 135). I contend that the ideological consistency visible in Newman’s roles throughout the 1960s illustrates the centrality of continuity in cultivating a consistent, marketable, culturally-relevant star image. This chapter centers around Cool Hand Luke, the film which both completes the narrative of the doomed rebel and allegorizes the inescapable demands of film stardom. Luke’s rebellious spirit draws the attention of those in charge of the jail, but it also makes him a celebrity among fellow inmates. Luke encourages this fandom, and eventually the inmates expect a very narrow range of behavior from Luke and begin placing demands on him. Luke cannot abide the
pressure of this arrangement, and the film dramatizes the impossibility of resisting the demands created by the star-making process. Newman’s films in the 1960s set the stage – through both production history and narrative – for his future escape attempts from the would-be prison of the rebel persona.

My third and final chapter, “I Always Thought I’d Grow Up to Be a Hero: Beyond the Maximized Star,” centers around curious gesturing toward the rebel archetype in Newman’s 70s roles, particularly *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Films in this third “phase” of Newman’s career – primarily buddy films, ensemble pieces, and sequels – dramatize Newman’s loner rebel in a wider and increasingly problematic variety of relationships and contexts. On the surface, Newman’s career in the 1970s may appear as a series of attempts to expand the acceptable context of the doomed rebel image. However, the shadow of *Cool Hand Luke* – the film which brought the archetypal rebel to its logical conclusion – colors this period as one in which Newman’s persona struggles to maintain coherence after reaching what Richard Dyer might call the “maximum stage” (*Stars* 112). Newman remained a highly sought-after star during the 1970s, topping the list of box office draws in ’70 and ’71 (Morrison 3). But his on-screen persona was not so coherent in narrative or ideological terms, offering incomplete, empty, and distilled versions of the restless, charming rebel embodied in Newman’s presence just a decade before. This period of Newman’s career reveals that what follows the maximum stage of stardom is a form of what media scholar Roberta Pearson refers to as additionality – works that offer something less than meaningful expansion. Films such as *Winning, The Sting, The Towering Inferno,* and *The Drowning Pool* are marked by excess, whimsy, and
gratuitousness, trading the complexity and narrative development of the rebel at its
peak for the hollow extravagance of simply seeing Paul Newman do things. This
expansion of Dyer’s framework further charts the structures guiding the
deployment and modification of star persona, shedding new light on the continued
development and self-reflexivity of the star.

The existence of the film star as a phenomenon is itself a result of luck, as
Edgar Morin reasons cinema didn’t need the star but it came to be nevertheless. For
Richard Dyer, stars are absolutely essential to the way films signify, and I contend
this power of signification supersedes economic, production-focused approaches to
stardom in cultivating enormous cultural capital. Again the star reconciles
contradictions: the existence of stardom is unnecessary but also fundamental and
irreplaceable as a lens for understanding the transcendent significance of film as a
cultural artifact. This study of the discrete phases of superstar Paul Newman’s
career uncovers the primary shaping forces along observable, repeatable patterns
leading to the realization of film stardom. The resulting conclusions do more than
point out the irreducible value of the star in shaping film meaning, they affirm the
necessity of reading stardom in understanding the ongoing exchange of projection
and identification at the very center of our understanding of how popular culture
constructs our individual and collective sense(s) of self.
Chapter One
He Could Develop a Classic Character: Reading On-Screen Presence in the Absence of Star Persona

Within the field of star studies, performers – specifically those lucky\(^1\) enough to be labeled “stars” – are theorized as figures with a dual function, simultaneously commercial (commodities within a closed economic power structure) and interpretive (embodying and projecting dominant cultural ideas). The second half of this function is often overlooked, devalued, or taken for granted\(^2\), enabling a critical approach to film wherein the significance of human presence is viewed as natural and accepted without interrogation. Developing a more nuanced approach to the cultural and ideological value of film stars is essential for understanding why certain stars are such powerful commodities and for addressing the deceptively elusive question of what they actually \textit{mean}. That stars are an integral feature of the Hollywood production system is a claim that scarcely needs to be made further\(^3\), but

\(^1\) The discourse of star studies consistently invokes chance as an essential component of the star across all eras of American film. Edgar Morin writes that “accession to stardom depends on luck; luck is a break, and a break is grace” (41). Similarly, Richard Dyer claims the “success myth tries to orchestrate several contradictory elements,” one of which is “that luck, ‘breaks,’ which may happen to anyone typify the career of the star” (\textit{Stars} 48). Screenwriter William Goldman says stars happen “Invariably by mistake,” offering Robert Redford as a star who is not a force of nature but simply a “California blond” that could be easily found in Malibu (13). In “Clark Gable: The King of Hollywood,” Christine Becker contends the star had such charisma “that all he needed was to be in the right place at the right time and success was inevitable” (259).

\(^2\) For instance, Dyer conceives of stars as part of the commodity of film and as commodities themselves – “they are both labour and the thing that labour produces” (\textit{Heavenly Bodies} 5). Generally speaking, film studies and star studies alike privilege this concept over understanding the star as a cultural phenomenon (\textit{Heavenly Bodies} 3) or as the site of “ideological contradiction” (\textit{Stars} 38). This is represented by Richard Maltby’s commonly-held claim that “Hollywood movies are determined, in the first instance, by their existence as consumable goods in a capitalist economy” (1).

\(^3\) While early formalist approaches to film insist upon the limited significance of acting – Paul McDonald suggests the Kuleshov Effect was used to demonstrate the importance of editing or montage over performance (24) – for decades the star has been increasingly conceived of as a phenomenon unique or specific to film. Morin famously observes that “nothing in the technical and aesthetic nature of the movies immediately required the star” (4), and Alexander Walker expands on
there is still a need to emphasize the human factor in cinema – not to stylistically or aesthetically evaluate performance itself, but to recognize and analyze it as an essential part of film meaning informed and potentially defined by the values that make up a star’s persona. Importantly, as this chapter demonstrates, this means understanding human presence on screen in the absence of these features as well. In other words, if we approach analyzing the cinematic and cultural significance of a film, performance, or on-screen career by devoting significant energy to exploring the deployment of stars – as I do – how do we read performance and find meaning in stars when there is no identifiable, tangible star persona to be found?

Paul Newman is, of course, no exception to the dual nature of stars: he is both one of the most thoroughly branded icons in film history and an embodiment of social ideals and audience expectations; an established box office draw and critically-lauded performer, as well as an icon of a specific type of American masculinity built on individualism and restlessness. In this way, Newman is not unusual or special⁴, as all star icons of the cinema can be described in terms similar to those used above. Stardom is not, after all, merely a measure of popularity or box office presence, but a phenomenon resulting from a performer simultaneously being recognizable and having accrued enough meaning to represent something that

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⁴ This is true in the sense that these conclusions are not limited to Newman’s stardom, but also reflects the paradox of film stars as simultaneously ordinary and untouchable, as well as Morin’s ruminations on the replaceability of the star as a factor in film (4). As John Ellis asserts, echoing Richard Dyer, “The star is at once ordinary and extraordinary” (302) – we identify with stars and accept them as mortals like us as we also recognize the impossibility of being stars ourselves.
transcends individual on-screen character(s). Newman is nonetheless an illuminating lens for comprehending stardom because of how his career (broadly) and performances (individually) reflect the very nature of film stardom and reveal the boundaries of the star as agent of meaning. Over the course of his fifty-year film career, Newman modeled two traits in particular—handsomeness and rebellion—and his connection with these characteristics transcends casual association. His rebelliousness, charm, and charisma are part of a matrix of representation and identification which lies at the core of the cultural function of film stars.

But Paul Newman was not a star during the 1950s. This is not a judgment of his films, roles, or performances—indeed, his turn as Brick Pollitt in 1958’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* earned him the first of his nine Academy Award nominations for acting—but a remark on the absence of a coherent, embodied ideology requisite for stardom. Newman’s on-screen presence in the waning years of the studio system lacked a clear, definable star persona, and he thus failed to project an image that stood for some ideal, reflected continuous meaning, or generated real investment for audiences. These conditions reveal significant gaps in the means of interpreting performance and on-screen presence. As we might expect, these gaps generate a variety of approaches—contemporaneous as well as reflective—for understanding what Newman’s image means. In exploring this first stage of Newman’s career, I engage with these competing forces in order to better recognize the methods used

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5 The process by which stars develop their personas—becoming more than just performers—is a primary focus of my second chapter.

6 Dyer utilizes a similar approach in interrogating John Wayne’s star image, offering the following preface to his analysis: “Let it be stressed that this has nothing to do with evaluation (I am not remotely interested in vindicating Wayne as a ‘good’ actor) nor with (Wayne’s) ‘authorship’. Performance is defined as what the performer does, and what s/he, the director or some other person is authorially responsible for this is a different question altogether” (*Stars* 165).
to read performance in the absence of recognizable star persona. Examining advertising materials, reviews, cinematic and cultural contexts, and Newman films themselves illustrates more than just the profound value and necessity of stardom in interrogating film performance in semiotic or cultural terms. Rather, these artifacts illuminate underexplored phenomena operating in the vacuum generated by Newman’s lacking star persona. For instance, commentary concurrent with Newman’s films struggles to offer any sense of transcendence or expectation – any approach for reading his on-screen presence beyond the appearance of talent or similarity to other established stars. By contrast, Newman’s eventual superstardom and repeated portrayals of the rebel loner archetype also shape our understanding of Newman’s early career in curious and tangible ways. His career is the subject of significant retroactive continuity, reconfiguring earlier roles to fit within the recognizable narrative constructed through his post-1950s career. These non-complementary tendencies enable novel critical insights into the unique mobility and transcendence of film stardom, as well as the patterns of narrative development shaping star persona.

To start, we can see these forces at work in materials used to promote Newman films. More specifically, the changes in these advertising materials reflect evident shifts in stardom resulting from the competing mechanisms for reading performance outlined here. Contemporary DVD covers for Newman’s most popular and memorable 1950s films – *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Left Handed Gun*, and *The Long, Hot Summer*, all of which premiered in 1958 – clearly place emphasis on his physical figure and presence. He is not merely the focus of each film’s story, value,
and meaning (at least as communicated by the poster), but curiously projects the charismatic rebelliousness his image later accrued in the 1960s. Newman’s appearance on these covers is consistent: appearing on the left side of the frame, never standing up fully upright or facing straight ahead completely, looking off to the right (even if only slightly, as in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), seeming to focus on something we can’t see with an expression both unsettled and resigned. In the cover for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Newman’s physical presence and stature are as obvious as his unflinching disinterest in Elizabeth Taylor’s seeming desperation. His figure dominates the frame (in profound contrast to the film’s original poster) and suggests a desire to escape, even if through the drink in his hands. Newman is not especially sexualized – despite appearing to have just emerged from the shower – but is instead brooding, his intensity made almost menacing by the shadows shaping his face, contrasted by Taylor’s seamless, well-lit form. The restlessness and

Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3. The DVD covers for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Left Handed Gun*, and *The Long Hot Summer* reveal an image of Newman that is not only consistent, but familiar. (Credit: Warner Home Video, Warner Home Video, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment)
dissatisfaction in Newman’s face unsettles any sense of calm or intimacy otherwise communicated by the film’s promotion. The cover for The Left Handed Gun is built around a similar Newman stare, perhaps implying the film’s vaunted psychological complexity but decidedly portraying a consistent physical presence. With his narrowed eyes, Newman’s image suggests a distant, singular focus more so than the need to escape: Newman’s Billy the Kid appears ready, centered, and curious, while his overall appearance projects a paradoxical clean ruggedness seen in other archetypal rebels of American film. Newman is also alone in the frame, with his name advertised in letters bigger than some parts of the title. As will be seen more dramatically in later examples, Newman is regularly the overwhelmingly central signifier offering meaning or expectation in a film’s promotion. His body is more sexualized in the cover for The Long, Hot Summer – perhaps unsurprising when “Steamy” is the only word emphasized in the advertising blurb below the title. As with the cover for The Left Handed Gun, Newman’s image is the only truly meaningful presence, only this time in a film co-starring titan Orson Welles (whose name is completely absent) and wife Joanne Woodward; as the cover’s background image suggests, the only road goes through Newman himself. His presence occupies the same space and reflects the same general mood as the other covers, but does so

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7 For instance, Dyer conceives of The Left Handed Gun in terms of its psychological “innovation” for the western genre – a result of the film’s concentration on character over the previous model of “subordinat[ing] character to the working out of a plot” (103).

8 In describing the seemingly overwhelming power of stars, Morin insightfully observes that “The names and faces of the stars devour all movie advertisements; the name of the film itself scarcely counts” (1). The decision to look at promotional materials is not a casual one: posters and covers are frequently the most widespread means of identifying a film’s qualities and building its expectations – Martin Shingler writes that stars can attain power more so through promotion than roles or on-screen presence (130). As Dyer writes, “Promotion is probably the most straightforward of all the texts which construct a star image, in that it is the most deliberate, direct, intentioned and self-conscious (which is not to say that it is by any means entirely any of those things)” (68).
with more irreverence – he is less methodical and driven, more amused and unaffected.

While these covers don’t reflect Newman in perfect continuity as a literal image, it’s clear his presence is made to mean something. His name and face are clear in each poster – even for The Long, Hot Summer, where he is otherwise dirty. Newman’s presence is made to fit into the continuum of his later-conceived doomed rebel persona; he is not only projected as a meaningful, valuable star but as an emblem of this specific, highly-contextual rebel loner. The most valuable takeaway here is that while these representations seem natural and acceptable enough – they certainly fit within contemporary expectations of Newman’s prominence and attitude on film – even a cursory examination of promotional material concurrent for his 1950s films reveals drastically different marketing approaches and patterns of signification altogether. Original posters for these same films advertise other stars, Newman’s character (that is, the subject matter of the film), and even the writer being adapted, but never build expectations or value around Newman’s image. In doing so, these posters reveal significant differences in how Newman’s persona was perceived and promoted for the very same films at different stages of his career – even, tellingly, in the absence of a clear persona. The conclusions enabled by this examination extend far beyond Newman: exploring this absence in his early career creates compelling perspective on how star images are built and deployed, as well as how performers operate or function in such a complex ideological, semiotic system without a discernable star persona.
The infamous original poster for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* trades on Elizabeth Taylor’s legendary sexuality, overtly suggesting the power of her own star persona as the primary (if not sole) means of advertising the film. Whereas Taylor’s image had the stature to reflect specific traits and generate audience expectations, the absence of Newman’s image altogether suggests the inability of his star – barely in its incipient stage in 1958 – to do the same. It is worth noting that this poster is unique for its implied subject position: while other posters (and DVD covers) appear as detached snapshots or collages of moments from the film, this one puts the viewer in the position of Newman’s character Brick, who consistently rejects Maggie’s attempts to rekindle their sexual intimacy. Again, however, this does more to indicate Newman’s absence and to reinforce the power of Taylor’s own allure and seductiveness – encouraging viewers to see the film because of her and advertising how she will be deployed – than to illuminate anything we might expect from
Newman’s presence in the film. Importantly, even though Taylor’s image here is not perfectly recreated photographically (a common theme among these posters) she is extremely recognizable and the design – built around her posture, expression, dress, and even her left hand extending beyond the frame’s boundaries – clearly communicates an intense, inviting sexuality even without her photographic image.

The poster for *The Left Handed Gun* does offer some depiction of Newman’s image, a shift that could be attributed in part to the film’s studio[^9]. However, unlike Taylor’s image in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the drawn portrait of Newman as Billy the Kid renders the film’s star unrecognizable, making his advertisement as the star of the movie function instead as a label or nametag for the otherwise unreadable image. Newman’s painted presence for *The Left Handed Gun* is also his most James Dean-like, with the poster’s main figure in a red jacket and blue jeans while the insert features a man in a clean white t-shirt – all definitive components of Dean’s iconic Jim Stark from *Rebel Without a Cause*. Here again the methods used to advertise the film do not reflect any expectations that might be found in Newman as a star or, as with Taylor previously, project any or unique meaning. We know he is the star of the film and nothing else: his unreadable image on the film’s poster doesn’t communicate any definable values on its own nor does it relate to other examples of his physical presence in a continuous way. The promotions for *The Left Handed Gun* prioritize character over image or persona, advertising the film simply as the story of Billy the Kid. As the tagline reads: “The screen’s first real story of the

[^9]: Newman was under contract to Warner Brothers – which produced *The Left Handed Gun* – for his 1950s career. He was loaned out to MGM for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Twentieth Century Fox for *The Long, Hot Summer*. 
strange teen-age desperado known as ‘Billy the Kid’...” This emphasis on character limits any influence of transcendent cinematic factors outside this discrete film in building viewers’ expectation. Nevertheless, there is some attempt at continuity, only regarding content instead of persona: the caption in the lower-left insert – “All of a sudden, just for ‘kicks’ Billy would slip down to Mexico” – suggests the possibility of sexual intrigue for a film almost completely devoid of romantic plot.

The same investments in romance and source material over performers and star power are unsurprisingly present in promotional materials for *The Long, Hot Summer*. It also shows an artistically-rendered (but more identifiable) Paul Newman as Ben Quick next to his romantic pursuit, played by Joanne Woodward in their first on-screen appearance together after getting married. Although the figures can likely be recognized as Newman and his co-stars, the poster’s tagline advertises not the film’s stars or story, but the author being adapted on screen: “The people of Faulkner...the language of Faulkner...the world of Faulkner!” The allure of *The Long, Hot Summer*, then, is not the burgeoning relationship between Newman and Woodward or even the presence of a huge star like Orson Welles (or his interactions with a new school of performers), but witnessing a faithful adaptation of the works of William Faulkner. The content of the poster vaguely suggests romance – although

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10 Curiously, this also calls attention to the casting of 33-year-old Newman as a “teen-age desperado” – undermining the film’s attempt to tell Billy the Kid’s story with an appearance of realism and further distancing Newman himself from attempts to bring in audiences. Simply put, it is very difficult to recognize Newman as a unique commodity here or to recognize how these films rely on his presence.

11 It is unlikely that the newlyweds were specifically presented together to draw attention (or comparisons) to their real life romance since (a) Newman was notoriously private, even in the 1950s, and (b) their relationship isn’t mentioned in advertisements for or reviews of the film. This suggests that Newman and Woodward’s marriage was either largely unknown to the public, unvalued by potential moviegoers, and/or empty in terms of its significance for the film or their characters in it.
the relationship between Jody (Anthony Franciosa) and Eula (Lee Remick) is never as romantic as depicted here – but again there are no definable values or expectations generated around Newman’s presence at all except for the basic fact of his appearance. Newman’s name is first in the list of performers at the bottom, but is not distinguished in any other way. In fact, the expectations manufactured by this poster are relatively minimal: its space is mostly empty or negative, creating space for Faulkner’s name and inserting an indiscernible drawing from the film in the upper left corner.

The elements within these contemporaneous promotional materials demonstrate little consistency in how Newman is portrayed – strictly speaking, he doesn’t actually appear in any of them – except for a lack of investment in him as a marketable or meaningful element of the films. It is worth pointing out that these are not rare, singular examples found in a dusty archive, but common, widespread advertisements, representative of the promotional strategies for these films and for Newman’s fledgling star persona. The contrast between release posters and later DVD covers of these films indicates the eventual presence of a star persona for Newman and our desire to see that persona as continuous for his entire career. More importantly, though, they also illustrate lacking interpretive or economic significance for Newman in the 1950s, raising the question of how performers are deployed as elements of cinematic meaning in the absence of established, valuable

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12 In *Stars*, Dyer writes that “Promotion can get things wrong. Early promotion may not push the aspects of the performer which were subsequently to make them a star” (68). He later suggests promotions nonetheless “can be taken as an indicator of the studio’s (or its promotion department’s), agent’s or star’s conception of a given star image” (68). In this case, not advertising any identifiable aspects of Newman as a performer is an indicator of an empty or absent star image.
persona. While these posters do depict and advertise Newman in some way, they clearly don’t project his star persona in the way his films would be promoted following his split from Warner Brothers in 1959 and star-making performance in 1961’s The Hustler. None of the release advertising materials for Newman’s 50s films depend on his presence: he is essentially interchangeable rather than unique and valuable.

The complicated deployment of stardom is compellingly illustrated by these contrasting approaches used to promote Newman films. Whereas the above advertisements for DVD releases suggest the eventual development of Newman’s persona and its projection back through time, later materials demonstrate the continuity, bankability, and expectations that constitute film stardom. Release posters following Newman’s career-defining role as “Fast” Eddie Felson demonstrate Newman’s growing, recognizable on-screen consistency during the 1960s, as well as his integral value as a deployment of film meaning. Unlike the above later-released DVD covers, which similarly trade on Newman’s physical presence but do so only in hindsight, these posters from the 1960s reveal his promotional value and ideological significance contemporaneous with the films’ releases, demonstrating the continuous narrative of persona actively used to generate expectation for the films. Films throughout the 1960s aren’t just about some character, they are about who Paul Newman is: he is Hud, he is Harper, he is Hombre, all named title characters and all direct associations that don’t prioritize limited aspects of individual films or source material. The posters for these films
suggest that what we can expect from these films is Paul Newman in a sense that surpasses earlier casual references to his name and unreadable reproductions of his appearance, simultaneously promoting his burgeoning star persona while encouraging identification with it.

In Hud (1963) Newman is “the man with the barbed wire soul!” (and in alternate posters, “Newman means action!”). His image is still drawn but now clearly recognizable, looming incredibly large with a casual, unbalanced posture – embodying a rebel paradox, simultaneously unconcerned and threatening. At Hud's feet are women and men alike: the former looking up at him, almost enraptured despite being overwhelmed and disheveled, the latter looking down, intimidated by his virility and coolness. Newman's figure is bigger than cars and the landscape itself, a testament to the power gathered in his star persona and the disregard associated with it. His stature is larger than life, but it is also threatening, implying
the dangerous potential of the rebel. Fittingly, his name is not only the same size as
the title (as it is for all three posters seen here), but also above it – he is both the
color and the film itself. There is also (as will prove important later) a claim
specifically directed at the talent of the performers, presumably focused on
Newman: \textit{Hud} will of course be a spectacle of rebellious manhood, but will also
prove itself to be a well-made, “superbly acted” picture. All of these are facilitated by
the promotion’s singular investment in Newman, in spite of him simultaneously
being advertised as a villainous heel.

The poster for \textit{Harper} (1967) is similarly built on seeing Newman embody
the central character, specifically the opportunity to watch him look for trouble,
shoot straight, have many fights, go for girls, and deal with tricky people. He is
surrounded by images from the film in the “collage” style mentioned earlier, but his
physical presence is above them all (along with his name) and is by far the largest
object in the poster. Moreover, every single constituent element, even if something
other than an image of Newman’s character, is nonetheless related directly back to
him – all of our expectations are stemming from and routed through Harper (and, of
course, Newman is Harper). Even the presence of other stars like Lauren Bacall and
Vivian Leigh means almost nothing: their images and names are small, nondescript,
and unremarkable, just as Newman’s had been in the posters for \textit{Cat on a Hot Tin
Roof} and \textit{The Long, Hot Summer}. The entire draw of the film is, simply, to see Paul

\footnote{Interestingly, Newman and director Martin Ritt failed to win Oscars for \textit{Hud} in 1964, but Newman
costars Patricia Neal and Melvyn Douglas earned statues for leading actress and supporting actor,
respectively. Neal also won the BAFTA for best foreign actress and the New York Film Critics Circle
Award for best actress, both awards whose counterparts Newman received nominations for but
failed to win that year.}
Newman *do things* as Lew Harper\(^\text{14}\) – and nothing else. There is clear repetition emphasizing his centrality and towering rebel persona, as well as visual continuity (appearing like a signature pose) between Hud’s stance and the silhouette of Harper above Newman’s name. This burgeoning image of casual coolness and irreverent charm results directly from Newman’s consistent deployment in films like *Harper*. Moreover, the investment and expectations generated by these images of Newman illustrate further the significant contrast from Newman’s comparative absence and unmarketability in the 1950s.

The ideology present in Newman’s persona transcends character and stands for something much larger in the poster for *Hombre* (1968), which follows the basic model of image repetition and collage from *Harper*. Here, instead of language connecting Newman’s character to every significant image (“See Harper,” etc), the central frame containing his face shades the surrounding moments from the film; everything else in *Hombre* is colored by and absorbed into his image, and is thus subordinated to Newman’s presence. The only exception to this web of star persona is the image beneath the orange frame containing Newman’s face – one that shows him standing tall and ready while other figures hide (a less dramatic or exaggerated version of the poster for *Hud*). Newman’s expression is also noticeably similar: he is again focused but seemingly unbothered, less amused than in the poster for *Harper* but nonetheless rugged and cool. As a sign of Newman’s developing stardom, the

\(^\text{14}\) In *The Stars*, Dyer closely examines the career and politics of Jane Fonda, concluding that "The significance of all of this – the events and the films – is always in terms of the fact that *it is Jane Fonda doing them*" (90, emphasis in original). Dyer continues more broadly, arguing for the necessity of recognizing stardom: "What the star does can only be posed in terms of *the star doing it*, the extraordinariness or difficulty of his/her doing it, rather than in terms of the ostensible political issues involved" (90, emphasis in original).
poster for *Hombre* shows his persona – the entire matrix of values and meanings projected by his presence – has expanded to embody the very idea of man: “Hombre means man...Paul Newman is Hombre!” This portrait of masculinity is not romantic but tough, active, and violent, rooted in the individualism and magnetism of a loner whose characteristics can’t be fully reproduced in or by someone else. In these promotional materials, Newman’s expression is the same (and distinct from both the 1950s posters and DVD covers), and he is deployed in ways that suggest him as the primary – if not only – source of each film’s marketing and meaning.

The specific image of masculinity and cinematic meaning engendered by Newman’s presence transcends genre and is sourced in his doomed rebel persona cultivated throughout the 1960s. Newman’s films during that period increasingly identify him as a “doomed” or “loner” rebel, a figure who wants to go his own way, whose charm belies a destructive resistance to any force – however benign – that would make demands on or seek to control him. But as these promotional materials demonstrate, this persona is retroactively deployed onto a period in Newman’s career when he had no discernable star image and was advertised in accordingly non-special, non-unique ways. More simply, elements of this persona can be seen in DVD covers for Newman’s 1950s films even though it is nowhere to be found in promotional materials, reviews, or any other materials coinciding with the release of those same films. If, as Edgar Morin contends, stardom occurs when “the interpreter takes precedence over the character [...] while profiting by that character’s qualities on a mythic level” (29), then the first period of Newman’s career is defined by the absence of stardom in any meaningful way. Nevertheless,
examining Newman’s 1950s career enables three significant lines of inquiry: the limited development for his on-screen presence and public image, the challenges of cultivating stardom through range rather than on-screen consistency and continuity, and the question posed at the start of this chapter interrogating the meaning of a performer’s presence in the absence of a clear persona.

Newman’s most critically-recognized and memorable roles during this period, including *Somebody Up There Likes Me* along with aforementioned films *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Left Handed Gun,* and *The Long, Hot Summer,* were either reprisals of previous theatrical performances or built on copying the real-life mannerisms of biographical subjects (Quirk 75, 87). This may have enabled Newman as a talent, as film scholar Christine Becker suggests Newman desired “to be appreciated as an actor rather than a star” (“Paul Newman: Superstardom and Anti-Stardom” 16). But these roles inevitably did little to cultivate Newman as either a valuable commodity or representative of cultural values. While the persona Newman developed in the 1960s loomed large over the rest of his career and life – even extending back to the years before its inception – understanding his relationship to this archetypal figure and the social constructions of stardom revealed in that relationship must begin with a more thorough investigation into the complexities of his 1950s career. Doing so reveals the tension between stardom and talent – both attempting to embody it or being understood as having it – while laying the groundwork for understanding meaningful star persona as the result of narrowness and consistency.
Biographer Lionel Godfrey suggests audiences began associating Newman with his archetypal “loner embattled against overwhelming odds or fighting a fierce struggle within himself” (118) as early as his first starring role as Rocky Graziano in the 1956 biopic *Somebody Up There Likes Me*. However, as demonstrated above, there is no evidence to suggest that studios projected Newman’s presence in this way or that audiences identified with him as a loner, rebel, or as any other type – he simply did not accrue such social, ideological, or “mythical” value so early in his career. Promotional materials for this *Somebody Up There Likes Me* instead take one of two approaches: casting the story as an inspiring romance (most posters utilize the tagline, “A Girl Can Lift A Fellow To The Skies!”) or, as seen in *The Left Handed Gun*, emphasizing it as the authentic, true story of a singularly fascinating figure (boxer Rocky Graziano). The film itself is built from the start around the idea of authenticity: before the story begins we are given a statement signed by Graziano himself that reads, “This is the way I remember it...definitely.” The story follows Rocky as he rises from being physically abused by his father in the very first scene and operating as a petty criminal to building a family with wife Norma (played by Pier Angeli) and becoming boxing’s middleweight world champion. Along the way, Rocky is sent to prison, drafted into and dishonorably discharged from the Army, extorted for his criminal past, and in the end, finds some comfort in conforming to the structures of family, mentorship, and the public.

*Somebody Up There Likes Me* seems to establish many valuable contexts for the development of Newman’s rebel persona: Rocky is subjected to orders made by figures who wish to break his spirit, he has little reservations about doing whatever
he wants, and even finds himself on a prison road crew (imagery repeated later in *Cool Hand Luke*). He finds romance distasteful – groaning at the “whole love business” and saying he “can’t stand hearing people say nice things to each other” – and seems singularly focused on boxing in spite of his growing romance (and family) with Norma. Rocky is repeatedly referred to as “not being fit to live with” and his boxing trainer/manager Irving (Everett Sloane) says he is capable of beating boxers with more style because he has hate. These characteristics could simply be ascribed to the film’s real-life subject, but the nature of Rocky’s pursuits and his inevitable reformation within the film minimize the continuity suggested by Godfrey between this role and Newman’s later persona-defining performances. Rocky is not singularly-focused or determined, but instead non-committal and oblivious; he rarely seems to fully grasp the reality around him, and the way he flees from scene to scene dramatizes his indecisiveness and lack of resolve. He bounces from crime to crime at the film’s outset – establishing little about the film or his character outside of his violent potential – and never stays in one place for very long afterwards: Rocky attacks guards while in prison, deserts his position in the Army, and wins his first boxing match in mere seconds because he wants to flee before police officers notice him. This resistance to rules and structure changes dramatically – the film is based on Graziano’s autobiography, after all – and by the end of the film he accepts that he has to make good on past bad deeds and gleefully accepts his positions as role model, son, husband, and father.

These healthy personal relationships are particularly important in examining Newman’s career and interrogating the development of his star persona. Even
before the 1960s – wherein his on-screen rebels were largely fatherless, sonless, and completely detached from familial bonds – films such as *The Long, Hot Summer* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* infamously placed Newman’s characters in broken, secretive, manipulative family units whose very nature lies at the center of the story. This is not especially unique, except for the striking contrast it creates with the dysfunction of and resistance toward family present in so many of Newman’s films.

As previously mentioned, *Somebody Up There Likes Me* opens with Rocky being punched by his father, but he nevertheless tries to reconcile their relationship and act as a proper son, worthy of his family’s pride. His father offers a sort of cautionary tale: a former boxer himself, he takes out his failings on his wife and son, and Rocky explicitly (and ironically) says his father should have been smart enough to give up boxing and be a better husband. In the film’s climactic title fight, though, Rocky seems to finally find the proper motivation when his father tells him to “be a champion.” Furthermore, Rocky’s mother and wife stay by his side and provide unflinching support – his mother even warns that Norma shouldn’t forget that boxing is Rocky’s whole life or interfere with that. By the end of the film, Rocky desperately wants to make up for the bad things he’s put his wife and mother through despite their resignation to not being his first priority. Again, these elements might reflect the reality of Graziano’s own biography. Regardless, the circumstances of *Somebody Up There Likes Me* create a strikingly different family context than any of Newman’s more career-defining films.

Newman’s performance as Rocky Graziano, then, does not coherently establish the elements of his doomed rebel persona or create noticeable continuity
with other roles in his early career. As suggested earlier, Newman’s films in the 1950s do not reveal consistent portrayals of loners or rebels; indeed, all movies examined in this chapter except The Left Handed Gun are to some degree built around traditional romance plots. As this chapter demonstrates, Somebody Up There Likes Me reflects the cultivation and projection of talent, not persona. Newman, as Graziano, embodies no quality or ideology that transcends the limits of the individual film and doesn’t accrue any significance that informs the meaning of later performances and presence. In this case, the significance of Newman’s performance is limited to his interpretation of the real-life Rocky Graziano’s life events and mannerisms. O’Brien makes a version of this argument in his 2005 biography of Newman, contending that Somebody Up There Likes Me offers minimal insight into the star’s development because of the script’s limited character study and the Newman’s overreliance on mimicking the physical behaviors of film subject Rocky Graziano (37). The review in Variety suggests much the same, calling the film a “frank and revealing probe” and Paul Newman’s talent “large and flexible, revealing an approach to the Graziano character that scores tremendously.” In other words, Newman’s presence is understood on two simple terms: what it reveals about the cinematic subject and, as I will focus on later, his perceived talent as a performer. Acknowledging the limited scope of these two elements is essential, as it illustrates a fundamental difference in interpreting performance through talent rather than through persona.

For Bosley Crowther, Newman simply disappears in Somebody Up There Likes Me – a damning prospect for the cultivation and deployment of stardom. In his
review, Crowther makes a similarly revealing claim about the film’s limited insight into Newman: he focuses on the presentation of Graziano as a hate-filled “overgrown boy,” only mentioning Newman for his simultaneous mimicking of Graziano and Brando\textsuperscript{15}. Newman, then, is absent as both a performer and a star: he dissolves into a real life figure through the style of another real life actor. Such assessments are not limited to \textit{Somebody Up There Likes Me}, as examinations of Newman’s 1950s career reveal the absence of persona-building continuity through the privileging of talent and pervasive, restricting associations to James Dean and Marlon Brando. Comparisons to Dean and Brando are important because they were primarily made on the grounds of Newman’s good looks and boxing roles (respectively), shaping how he was perceived in terms that transcend star persona and even talent. As such, this context for Newman’s incipient stardom complicates our understanding of his on-screen presence while exposing essential elements of star construction, maintenance, and value.

According to Godfrey, Newman “bore enduring scars from his early years when the press had insisted on comparing him with Brando, cynically reluctant to allow a rising star his own identity and uniqueness” (121). Part of this comparison undoubtedly stems from the two performers’ association with the Actor’s Studio and Method school\textsuperscript{16}, the acting workshop and style that also produced film “rebels”

\textsuperscript{15} Crowther writes in his review that Newman plays the role “well,” presenting Graziano as “funny, tough and pathetic in that slouching, rolling, smirking Brando style, but with a quite apparent simulation of the mannerisms of the former middleweight champ.”

\textsuperscript{16} Research on Method acting reveals a tendency (recognized by acting/performance theorists) to conflate the Method and the entire concept of acting in America film – it seems the title of the collection \textit{More Than a Method} is meant to combat this very idea. Nevertheless, because the Method is built on “transforming performance into ‘being’” and conceptualizing the performer’s actual personality as a “mine” of experiences for building on-screen character (Palmer 4), it is essential to
James Dean and Steve McQueen. In *Acting in the Cinema*, James Naremore posits Method acting as part of Brando’s legacy, writing that “a good many aspiring male actors approached the Studio” but often ended up simply imitating Brando, “who became godfather to several generations of players”¹⁷ (212). Newman is frequently lumped into this group: Alexander Walker, for instance, writes that Newman “certainly had Brando’s shambling, mutinous look of an athlete ordered to turn out for training on a frosty morning” (341). However, Walker also points out that the two were compared more so on the grounds of similar source material – which he calls a “coincidence” – than on stylistic or character similarities¹⁸ (341). It is unsurprising, then, that reviews of *Somebody Up There Likes Me* are quick to compare Newman to Marlon Brando¹⁹ (Quirk 46-47), who won the Academy Award for Best Actor as former prizefighting contender Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront* just two years prior.

The limitations generated by the weight of Brando’s star persona can be seen in cultural and cinematic terms, dramatizing both the shifts in acceptable representations of masculinity as well as the embodiment of reluctance and

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¹⁷ This is sort of acting “family tree” is interesting to consider in terms of Newman himself as a godfather, since *Somebody Up There Likes Me* features both Newman’s first standalone leading role and first non-extra role for Steve McQueen (as Rocky’s gang member Fidel).

¹⁸ Walker also notes that Newman was “far from annihilated by the comparison” (341). While this is true in hindsight, Newman’s ascension to stardom and uniqueness was never a foregone conclusion – in part due to the very comparison Walker discusses.

¹⁹ Interestingly, Alexander Walker writes that Brando, like Newman, studied Rocky Graziano’s mannerisms – not for *On the Waterfront* but for his career-defining role as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (341). Furthermore, although it falls outside the specific scope of this project, the conflation of Brando and Newman is reflected most tellingly by the Spanish poster for *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (titled *Marcado por el Odio* – “Marked by Hatred”), which features an illustration of the main character that bears little resemblance to Newman but appears instead to be modeled directly on Brando’s Terry Malloy from *On the Waterfront*. 
inescapability later foregrounded in Newman’s own career. Walker associates the comparison between Brando and Newman with substantive change in control exhibited by archetypal alienated heroes in American cinema and the subsequent shift in audience identification (341). Just as Naremore contextualizes Brando as a sort of response to “utterly straight” male stars such as John Wayne and Gregory Peck – a reaction that created “brooding, ostensibly inarticulate types” like Clift, Dean, Elvis, and Monroe20 (195) – Walker places Brando and Newman on a continuum of suffering and disaffection: the former out of control, the latter attempting to maintain control or cultivate some semblance of it. For Walker, Brando’s performances reflect of “the rising graph of violence in society”; he observes a deep ambivalence toward violence in Brando’s acting, as well as a “compulsion to play men who undergo a moral awakening, who start the film against the law and order or human decency and then end up fighting for these very values” (340). In light of the richness and complexity of Brando’s stardom, the labeling of Newman as a “second Brando” (Godfrey 44) restricted his ability to grow on his own terms: despite of lacking similarity in style or character – a claim Walker supports – Newman was nevertheless consistently read either as a character born out of this brooding violence or as a performer mimicking Brando’s technique. As a result, Newman was hesitant to play Graziano because, in his words, “they’ll say I’m just like Brando” (quoted in O’Brien 35). As examination of his 1950s films and promotional materials demonstrates, the inconsistent violence and rebelliousness

20 Naremore departs from Walker in attributing the source of this new type of stardom with “American entertainment’s drift toward adolescent audiences in the decades after the war” (195). However, this explanation – while resonant – does little to explain the cultural investment in decidedly adult rebels (like Newman) that followed.
associated with Newman's roles meant that – due in part to Brando’s ever-looming shadow – his image would embody or project acting talent, but little else.

If understanding of Newman’s early characters and performances is molded by Brando’s inescapable presence, it is equally influenced by James Dean’s absence. Comparisons between Newman and James Dean are more tenuous in terms of acting style, but Dean’s short career had far more practical and measurable impact on Newman’s, particularly in regard to his on-screen roles and connection to the rebel archetype. In particular, biographer Marian Borden suggests Newman was offered the lead in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* because of his role in “The Battler” – an adaptation of the Hemingway short story also centered around a boxer – for the television program *’56 Playwrights* (26). The common link between these two roles is that both were originally intended for Dean, whose death in 1955 led to the openings Newman would reluctantly fill (Borden 26). Moreover, Newman’s breakthrough in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* also saw Sal Mineo, Dean’s surrogate son in *Rebel Without a Cause* and costar in *Giant*, playing Romolo, Rocky’s closest friend. Daniel O’Brien points out that while Newman had no problem playing “second fiddle” to Dean on-screen – a peculiar assertion since the two stars never appeared together, even in their extensive work on television – he had to be persuaded to take over the roles for his deceased friend and had no interest in trying to embody or duplicate Dean’s star image (30). Nevertheless, Newman’s career was clearly molded by Dean: not only due to the practical reality of roles becoming available in the wake of Dean’s death but also due to their mutual association with the “doomed rebel” and the boundaries it created for Newman.
Dean is not only an enormous star and one of the archetypal rebels of American film, but persists today as the definitive model of the “live fast, die young” ethos of fame and celebrity. As a result, it can be difficult to properly situate his persona in context or understand it outside of its own historical and cultural significance. In writing about Heath Ledger, film scholar Claire Perkins echoes Edgar Morin’s reflections on James Dean’s short career. Perkins refers to stars who die in the height of their fame as “doubled” or “pure” stars, becoming overdetermined symbols that can’t be dissociated from their defining roles (148). Importantly, these roles (such as James Dean’s Jim Stark or Heath Ledger’s Joker) dominate understanding of the star while also remaining distinct and apart, limiting our ability to fully reconcile with the films that contain them. It is impossible for us, then, to see Dean’s characters in a purely cinematic context or isolate them within the boundaries of an individual film. The type of stardom identified by Perkins explains the challenge of separating Dean from his three feature roles, as well as persistent public and critical interest in Dean’s sexuality, performance style, fatalistic worldview, and transcendent rebelliousness (among many other possible areas of inquiry). As discussed in the context of Method acting, Dean’s doubled/pure-autonomous stardom renders the lines between his characters and actual identity particularly blurry. This muddiness means that even thoughtful analysis of Dean’s image also demonstrates an attempt to mine cinematic details for biographical insight into the actor’s life. In the context of this project – which is built on distinguishing persona from performer – the slipperiness of Dean’s stardom
makes it harder to clearly delimit the star images and rebel archetype shaping Newman’s growth into a film star.

The abrupt and tragic trajectory of Dean’s career enables not only this profound exchange between his on-screen career and off-screen identity, but also the social and semiotic over-determination of his cinematic characters. In other words, each of Dean’s on-screen roles is forced to autonomously embody and reflect the ideological weight of his enormous star persona. Alexander Walker, for instance, describes Dean as the “screen hero” of the beat generation, embodying youthful identity by “[giving] expression to the unformulated need of the young people who wanted to see their own growing pains reproduced in films” (338). But film scholar Murray Pomerance goes far further in his essay “James Stewart and James Dean: The Darkness Within,” characterizing each of Dean’s three film performances as different, singular archetypes. He writes that Jim Stark “galvanized the consciousness of teenagers around the world, and remains the icon of displaced, disaffected youth,” Jett Rink “seems a model of the helplessness of the poor in the face of enormous wealth and privilege,” and Cal Trask is “innocent and beautiful as no male had ever been on the screen before” (81, emphasis in original). As his title suggests, Pomerance posits Dean as a figure of masculinity contrasted by James

21 Dyer’s work in Stars is built in part on the assumption that “one can conceptualise a star’s total image as distinct from the particular character that he or she plays in a given film” (99). This holds true in virtually any case – including Newman, as I will show – but does not explain popular or critical readings of Dean’s persona. Morin suggests that stars’ private lives must be “movie” lives: since the star interprets herself with each characterization – echoing certain definitions of the Method approach – the star similarly “interprets the heroines of her films” by revealing anything of her actual character (45). The example of Dean pushes this framework to its most extreme limit.

22 Specifically, Pomerance describes Dean’s masculinity as “compact and muscular, not lanky and gangling; eager for physical contact, not reticent to engage; expressive, not repressed; outwardly torn, awkward, clumsy, even at times uncoordinated, and always sensitive, deeply pensive, almost
Stewart. Stewart is also particularly distinct from Dean because he is a thoroughly *cinematic* star: a figure known primarily for his on-screen presence, who received critical acclaim and was an established box office presence for greater than a decade before and after Dean’s on-screen career. This comparison highlights the non-cinematic factors shaping Dean’s star image; his persona loomed and looms so large – doing so specifically on-screen – as a result of the paradoxical autonomy and reflexivity generated by the nature of his death and perceived self-destructive tendencies. Specific elements of Dean’s persona inform a model of cinematic masculinity and rebellion that retains recognizable meaning and interest even in the wake of Newman’s passing. Dean’s sensitivity and inner torment emphasize a psychological dimension in male film performance that transcended even the larger-than-life rebel archetype.

These boundaries reveal the defining contexts surrounding Newman’s early career: the violence, sexuality, and talent of Brando, and the expressiveness, vulnerability, and recklessness of Dean – two models of rebel masculinity with little common ground. But Newman was simply not the things articulated by Brando and Dean as models of on-screen rebellion: his 1950s films redeem and even glorify the idea of family, are built on romance rather than suffering or sexuality, and follow wandering outsiders rather than tortured malcontents. Balázs writes that Newman’s on-screen presence is more complex than Dean’s and thus not as easy to categorize (107), and his roles throughout the 50s have no clear analogs in Brando’s oeuvre. Nevertheless, his performances and fledgling star image remain difficult to feminine by standards of the day in terms of the way he exhibited an effortless physical beauty in his expressions and poses and the way he responded passively to the aggressions of other men” (79).
understand apart from these two unmoving star personae. Film reviews from the 1950s, such as those of esteemed New York Times critic Bosley Crowther, never spend more than one line discussing Newman’s actual performance. As demonstrated in Crowther’s review of Somebody Up There Likes Me, Newman is characterized as talented but is also seen as a watered-down version of other stars – particularly Brando – or as minimized and overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of costars like Orson Welles. The shadows of Brando and Dean, however, stood in for the expectations and ideologies that had yet to be developed by Newman: he was understood in a limited capacity because of comparisons to other screen rebels, but also because he otherwise had no persona extending across his films to generate expectations and meaning. We can’t identify with Newman as the “loner embattled against overwhelming odds or fighting a fierce struggle within himself” described above by Lionel Godfrey because that figure simply doesn’t exist in a recognizable or continuous way.

This lack of coherent character holds across all of Newman’s roles during this period, whether forgotten and maligned or respected and acclaimed. My analysis thus far suggests that the gaps created by the lack of star persona are filled at least in part by comparisons to other established stars (on a variety of terms). Newman’s early career is a profound demonstration of the difficulty of building a unique star persona independent of established stars. But further examination of Newman’s films and roles – and responses to them – reveals a more far-reaching and valuable
concept: the predominance of talent\textsuperscript{23} as the primary measure for determining the value and meaning of film performance in the absence of a continuous star image. In this context, Newman’s would-be stardom was built around the idea of talent: his projection of it, the film or role’s deployment of it, and the viewer’s expectation of it. His cultivation of talent was the result of his specific roles and his background in theatre, the latter of which engendered a specific and observable approach to performance that limited his ascent to stardom\textsuperscript{24}. Therefore, I am not attempting to redefine or re-contextualize talent as a concept but instead exploring how the attempted development of talent by performers and the labeling or appreciation of it by viewers has underexplored ramifications for critically reading performance and articulating a star’s persona. Newman’s on-screen presence was defined by the subjective evaluation of his talent – a factor outside of the matrix of ideologies and cultural values associated with stardom. Talent does not stand in for stardom, but Newman’s 1950s films show that embodying acting talent or being understood as talented is inversely related to stardom: the absence of one enables the identification with the other, and a performer can rarely if ever be read as embodying both.

\textsuperscript{23} Dyer describes the notion of talent as “historically and culturally specific” but broadly associates it with skill “at being a certain sort of person or image” \textit{(Stars 18)}. More specifically, in \textit{Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation}, Andrew Klevan associates talent with “the performer’s capacities for revealing and withholding aspects of a character’s sensibility” (9, emphasis in original). He argues further that the viewer’s ability to appreciate talent is as important to engaging with the narrative and character as the act of identification itself. These frameworks suggest the connection between talent and character, as well as the value of talent as a cinematic concept.

\textsuperscript{24} In Vesvolod Pudovkin’s canonical essay “Film Acting,” he suggests a deep legacy of theatre acting in the cinema, particularly in the Stanislavski school: “From the culture of the stage actor is taken over into the cinema everything connected with the process of creating a united image, and its ‘absorption’ by the actor, everything that precedes the search for ‘stage’ and ‘theatricalised’ forms for the acting” (40).
Before resuming examination of Newman’s 1950s films and persona, it is worth briefly discussing Newman’s performance as Ad Francis in the aforementioned television broadcast of “The Battler.” Although it aired on the TV program ‘56 Playwrights rather than on the big screen – and after his film debut in 1954’s The Silver Chalice – Newman’s performance in “The Battler” serves as a revealing microcosm for his 1950s career. “The Battler” opens with Dewey Martin (who previously appeared in the 1950 boxing drama The Golden Gloves Story) as Nick Adams, a man running away from his family and hometown in hopes of something better. After being robbed and thrown off a moving train, he meets a belligerent and volatile character played by Newman who, along with his friend Bugs (played by Frederick O’Neal), offers Nick some food and a place to rest. Newman’s character is revealed to be Ad Francis, former boxing champion who says he built his career on a slow heartbeat and absorbing punishment. Ad describes himself as “not quite right,” and Bugs has to knock him out with a blackjack when he becomes too animated – an act which Bugs implies he has done plenty of times before. A flashback reveals that Ad considered retiring with a 63-0 record – and his health, looks, and brains in one piece, according to his wife/manager – but was pressured to continue by his entourage and eventually lost everything. Ad attributes his rise to allowing others to “bust their hands” on him, a reality that is undoubtedly

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25 In her book It’s the Pictures That Got Small: Hollywood Film Stars on 1950s Television, Christine Becker argues that television in played a major role in exposing “the very mechanisms behind the creation of star images across the 1950s” (8). Although she focuses on established film stars performing in television roles (not figures like Newman building an image on TV during this era) and analyzes stardom in terms of labor and capital more so than ideological or semiotic value, Becker is clear in asserting the industrial and cultural value enabled by appearances on television – particularly in “live anthology dramas” (198) such as ’56 Playwrights.
responsible for this fall – the depths of which Ad sadly fails to recognize. The story ends with Nick deciding to return home after hearing Ad’s story and realizing he shouldn’t try to follow him.

“The Battler” dramatizes the three major components of Newman’s on-screen presence in the 1950s: the absence of continuous stardom or the ideology associated with it, the looming shadows of Brando and Dean, and the prevalence of talent in attempts to both cultivate and interpret screen presence. The makeup creating Ad’s battered face renders Newman unrecognizable in “The Battler,” both as a performer and as a character. It is nearly impossible to distinguish any features of Newman’s own face, and Nick is similarly unable to identify Ad despite knowing exactly who he is – he even recoils when first given a clear glimpse of Ad’s face, swollen and grotesque from his years in the ring. Newman’s vocal performance similarly obscures his presence behind the role, mixing together the dry, tired voice of an old man with a variety of intonations and dropped syllables indicating no specific or consistent regional origin. Ad doesn’t appear to be from anywhere, and has no place within his own generation or those that follow. Only thirty years old
when “The Battler” aired, Newman is a difficult fit as a character who already appears broken down and directionless yet somehow simultaneously established and clinging to past glory, a poor version of the failed mentor he would portray in a later phase of his career. His masked physical presence suggests an absence similar to that noted in the posters for his films during this same period: since he can’t be really be distinguished, Newman does not figure as a principal element of expected or cultivated meaning in “The Battler.” His on-screen presence – not yet anything like a star image – engenders nothing in the character of Ad Francis and, just as importantly, takes nothing from the role.

At this formative stage in the development of his persona, Newman also finds himself (again) between the defining elements associated with Brando and Dean. As Ad Francis, Newman plays a washed up boxer (not unlike Brando’s Terry Malloy) adjacent to a tortured young rebel, portraying a character lacking and in opposition to youth, vitality, energy, or genuine internal complexity. In “The Battler,” it is Dewey Martin’s character that presents more cogent parallels to Dean’s archetype of rebellious youth: as Nick Adams, he is restless and inquisitive, unsatisfied and running from family troubles in a town where he “couldn’t be anything,” a victim of a manipulative and jaded older generation, his hair carefully styled and his jacket dark leather. Even in the flashback depicting his earlier life Ad projects none of the qualities associated with the rebel archetype; he is this way because he stayed inside the system for too long, not because he revolted against it. He is cogent and confident in his youth, but he only cares about boxing; indeed, he says it is all he ever cared about – a monomania at odds with the broader sense of unrest that
defines James Dean’s characters. Ad’s stubbornness and refusal to consider the future leave him in old age without the means to provide for himself (Bugs says his former wife and manager sends him money). He is unpredictably violent, saying he “busts” people without realizing it, and has to be knocked out by Bugs when he becomes nonsensical and agitated – a man without memory or the ability to save himself, a cautionary tale of lost youth and potential. Again, in spite of the complexities that can be read in Ad’s story, Newman’s presence doesn’t project any additional qualities in Ad Francis or retain any characteristics that transcend the story of “The Battler” (that is, help form a continuum with other on-screen roles). Indeed, Newman’s performance in “The Battler” rests decidedly within the boundaries of what the story and script suggest, existing outside the transcendence and continuum of the star.

Newman’s minimized presence, hidden away by makeup and accents, is an example of a performer “disappearing” into a role – an element of acting Richard Maltby argues as equally important to the performer’s autonomous stardom (382). Disappearing into a role necessarily emphasizes on-screen character, and in doing so minimizes the ideological or semiotic value viewers might associate with the physical presence of a star. Maltby associates this phenomenon with stars in particular, and while he doesn’t clearly distinguish between film stars and other actors or performers, Newman’s career suggests that the act of disappearing is more indicative of the absence of stardom. Therefore, the appearance of talent indicated by the ability to disappear creates something of a paradox in understanding what factors constitute components of star persona. Maltby’s observations make it
unclear if talent and stardom are opposing forces that can only exist in the absence of the other or if talent – even if generated by “disappearing” – can be recognized as a transcendent facet of stardom. Since vanishing behind a character is understood as an essential part of the actor’s work, the best actors would be those most willing or able to limit their own presence in order to fully inhabit a character. But the restraints placed on the continuity of physical presence and embodied ideology place pure talent at odds with stardom as a cultural, semiotic, and economic phenomenon. Audiences may place some investment in talent when building expectations about film. However, talent simply seems too specific to context and medium to operate as a transcendent value, operating within the exchange of projection and identification at film’s core as a cultural artifact.

Importantly, as Christine Becker points out, the pursuit and projection of talent were enabled specifically by the era of television that gave Newman his start. In other words, the predominance of talent in responding to performance in the absence of stardom is suggested by Newman’s inconsistent on-screen portrayals.

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26 My intention here is not to suggest talent is a uniform quantity or impossible for someone to aspire to. Just as the same behaviors and characteristics could generate varying identification responses across different historical and cultural contexts, so does the idea of talent change in these differing scenarios. While talent is necessary in communicating the ideals and values necessary for stardom, it is more of an enacted ability than part of an embodied system of characteristics that speaks to dominant cultural ideologies or transcends a specific medium or context.

27 Becker argues that the “unique artistry” of television programs such as Playhouse 90 (on which Newman appeared in January 1958) was built on “allowing actors to display their genuine acting skills” (It’s the Pictures That Got Small 213). According to Becker, such shows “stipulated that the true talents of the actors mattered more,” creating a distinct connection between television and talent by giving performers a showcase to “explore roles that revealed their genuine skills” (It’s the Pictures That Got Small 207).

28 Pudovkin suggests a sort of proto-star studies approach to understanding acting, saying the performer’s job – “the creation of a whole and lifelike image” – is achieved by relating to the character and “the nature of the actor’s self” (35). He argues in particular that the “relation between the proposed image and the actor as a live person is particularly strong at the beginning of his work” (35), which again suggests the importance of appearances like “The Battler” in establishing – or failing to establish – Newman’s star persona.
and by the historical context of his career’s trajectory. According to William Goldman, who wrote the script for the 1969 Newman film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, Newman wanted “the best possible script and character he can have” and desired “to be surrounded by the finest actors available,” believing he would necessarily benefit from appearing in a superior film (179). The emphasis on talent here is clear: the goal of an *actor* – not a *star* – is to be part of a good film and to offer a good performance. However, the emphasis on character is equally important; again, adherence to discrete characters inherently limits stardom by minimizing both the performer’s presence (as described in “The Battler”) and on-screen continuity. Continuity must transcend individual films and characters: it creates a narrative that connects the components of a star’s cinematic career and builds the characteristics that are the very material of star persona. The creation of a continuum of human presence – an essential element of stardom – is made all but impossible by the “disappearance” of a performer into a role and the predominance of a singular, enclosed performance.

Although many of Newman’s 1950s roles were reprisals of previous theatrical performances, his limited persona during this era suggests the transfer from stage to screen likely impinged upon his ability to cultivate star image. At the very least, Newman’s immersion on stage – a medium that inherently limits the continuity and transferability of stardom – seems to have made his disappearing act on film easier. The revelation here is not that talent equates to versatility, but rather that talent necessarily limits continuity regardless of range or typecasting. In *Star Studies: A Critical Guide*, Martin Shingler observes that versatility is a key element of
acting even though stars “are often considered to play themselves in each and every role, being associated with a particular type, a specific genre and a recognisable set of mannerisms” (89). Shingler also suggests that stars “may be distinguished by their remarkable acting talent and distinctive idiolect [things that recur from role to role]” (91), but stardom requires that such elements of persona can be recognized and invested in across the continuum of a star’s on-screen career. Examining Newman’s early career reveals that those factors in particular are not so easily reconciled. The consistency Morin identifies in stardom allows for development and change (110), but the cultivation of range and subordination to character limit the development of cultural ideology, as well as the mannerisms and idiolect suggested by Shingler. For continuity to engender stardom it must transcend individual character. This means the predominance of talent directly impedes any development of the expectations and values inherent in film stardom.

Few careers demonstrate this better than Newman’s, particularly in terms of the demonstrations of skill and lack of coherence from role to role in his early film appearances. Newman’s first Hollywood film was the 1956 Bible epic *The Silver Chalice*, a film panned by critics for its lacking performances and failing to live up to its epic scope and presentation. The film was also infamously panned by Newman himself, who took out an ad apologizing for his performance in *The Silver Chalice* when it was scheduled to be shown on television (Quirk 53). *The Silver Chalice* follows two plots surrounding the religious and political landscape in ancient Rome: the attempt to create a new holy grail to galvanize the Christian people, and a plot to destroy the grail and lead a rebellion against Christian preachers. Basil (played by
Newman) is adopted into a life of luxury, only to be sold into slavery and later recruited as the one talented enough to make a cup in the image of Christ. Opposing those efforts is Simon the Magician (played by Jack Palance), who wants to use his tricks to convince others he is a new messiah and turn them away from messages of love and peace. Simon uses his magic to accumulate power while Basil reluctantly agrees to create the grail, and the new relic is constructed just before Simon dies attempting to fly by “his own will” rather than through trickery.

The film’s disjointed story leans heavily on Basil’s unwillingness to choose, whether between romantic interests or between rejoining his adoptive family and creating a new Christian relic. Indeed, it is difficult to detect any rationale or motivation for Basil’s choices: his decision to finally sculpt the grail is not the result of acknowledging meaning in the Christian cause or attempting to realize his artistic potential, but follows his frustration over Deborra’s decision to put herself at risk by assisting Simon in his flying trick. As Basil, Newman barely stands out from the film’s painted backdrops: it is hard to describe anything the character values or holds dear – basic elements for the protagonist of any story – but it’s even harder to
identify what elements of his performance might redeem an otherwise forgettable role and film. Crowther’s review unsurprisingly notes the debuting star “bears a striking resemblance to Marlon Brando,” but he more directly characterizes Newman as “given mainly to thoughtful posing and automatic speech-making” and as “rarely better than wooden” in spite of being pursued by Helena (played by Virginia Mayo) and Deborra (played by Pier Angeli). Basil is referred to as having “magic in his hands,” and his adoptive father Ignatius (played by LG Marshall) wants to raise him because he is a dreamer, deserving of admirers. But Newman neither projects any charisma that might generate continuity nor seems to “absorb” Basil’s character and immerse himself through the projection of a talented performance.

The review for the video release of The Silver Chalice suggests that viewers “may want to study the 29-year-old Mr. Newman’s film debut for hints of his future greatness,” but concludes that any who do will be “disappointed at his wooden performance” (Collins). The reviewer also asks a relevant question: “surely it must be more than hindsight that detects an Oscar-winning sparkle in his blue-eyed gaze?” (Collins). The answer is that this film – like Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Left Handed Gun, and The Long, Hot Summer – can only be made to fit within the continuum of Newman’s persona through complete retroactive construction (as seen in the DVD covers at the start of this chapter). His stillness and lack of agency fail to establish continuity with either his aforementioned patterns of movement as Rocky Graziano or the smiling, determined, irreverent image at the core of his doomed rebel persona. Newman is physically recognizable in The Silver Chalice (unlike Somebody Up There Likes Me or “The Battler”), but he is not recognizable as a
star – or as anything other than another screen performer. Newman’s debut film does not particularly demonstrate the tension between talent and stardom, but it does clearly present the undeniable reality of his relative ordinariness, replaceability, and distinct lack of individual, transcendent stardom.

While Newman’s later 1950s films are more successful and celebrated, they reveal a less exaggerated form of the limited deployment seen in The Silver Chalice. The Left Handed Gun, for instance, seems to derive its psychological complexity (aforementioned by Dyer) from Newman’s intense looks and facial expressions. The film’s story is modeled after Gore Vidal’s teleplay “The Death of Billy the Kid” (“Review: The Left Handed Gun”), produced in 1955 as an episode of The Philco-Goodyear Television Playhouse that also starred Paul Newman. Again, this kind of repetition doesn’t constitute proper star-making continuity, instead prioritizing character while minimizing what elements a star might communicate from outside the role in question. The Left Handed Gun tells a simple story of revenge: Billy (or

\[\text{Footnote: The distinction between continuity and mere repetition – or between expansion and simple addition – is explored much further in my third chapter.}\]
William Bonney, played by Newman) seeks justice for the murder of Mr Tunstall (played by Colin Keith-Jackson), a cattle rancher who graciously gives Billy a job when he appears to have hit rock bottom. He hunts down each responsible party, killing them one by one and becoming an outlaw. Even though the government grants an amnesty – which would forgive him for his crimes – Billy continues his pursuit and incurs the wrath of friend-turned-sheriff Pat Garrett. Billy is captured but escapes from jail, and finally seems overwhelmed by the loss of his friends and is killed when he walks out unarmed to confront Garrett and his deputies.

As with Somebody Up There Likes Me (and seen in the above promotional documents), the film does more to offer insight into its subject than to establish or repeat essential or identifiable elements of Newman’s persona. Accordingly, the Variety review of The Left Handed Gun refers to it as “another look at Billy the Kid,” this time giving a glimpse into Billy as “the crazy, mixed-up Kid.” The film's opening image shows Billy walking slowly through a field by himself while the soundtrack encourages us to “tone the bell” for this singularly tragic figure – he is “death’s child” and “shadowed by lonesomeness.” The Left Handed Gun thus suggests its viewers should not to judge Billy too harshly: while he is “dangerous and devilish, gentle and wild,” we are encouraged to “look on him tenderly, speak of him gently.” Nevertheless, the film presents Billy as incredibly violent – not just guilty of harming people outside of the law but consistently willing to use violence as the first, best option to any confrontation. He dismisses the objections from those who rightly point out the flaws in his understanding of justice and refuses any compromise that might bring his journey to an end without his own self-destruction. Not only are
these characteristics directly related to the film’s dramatic perspective on Billy, they also limit the degree to which any performer can instill those values through persona rather than individual performance. In other words, star personae are unlikely to be built around consistent portrayals of murderous rage and genuinely threatening danger. While elements of this performance could inform Newman’s persona, Billy’s unflinching anger and seemingly-blank stares aren’t repeated in other performances and don’t clearly figure in his eventual image as a rebel.

Nevertheless, the film’s pervasive fatalism results directly from Newman’s aforementioned looks – whether enraged or potentially vacant. Billy doesn’t make any great statements or gestures explaining his motivations, attachment to Mr Tunstall, or willingness to die. In the absence of these elements of character and

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30 Billy’s desire for revenge seems familiar enough as a component of other star images, particularly those associated with the western. But his vigilantism and disregard for the law – even if pursuing those who deserve punishment – push his character past the limit of what is acceptable or “repeatable” as a reflection of dominant cultural ideals. He is completely, unnaturally consumed with revenge, and his desire to kill regardless of who opposes him or points out the destruction he’s responsible for defies the logic of justice so inherent in the western genre.

31 The reduction of star persona to a single idea – like a gesture – and the implications of such distillation are explored in chapter three. In this case, while Newman’s portrayal of Billy has repeated, idiosyncratic elements that may reveal character and ideology, they are also inextricable from this specific, individual character and compartmentalized to The Left Handed Gun.
performance, any complexity in Billy's state of mind is only suggested by his long, curious stares. Interestingly, another example of this phenomenon can be seen in Rally, Round the Flag Boys!, a lesser-known Newman (and Woodward) comedy also released in 1958. The film revolves around the conflict between Harry Bannerman (played by Newman) and wife Grace (played by Joanne Woodward) as their relationship is tested by plans for construction of a missile base in their hometown and the seductive efforts of Angela Hoffa (played by Joan Collins). Much of the film's comedy stems from its coincidence and circumstance: for instance, Harry is asked to champion plans for the base while Grace leads a grass roots organization against it, and it is revealed that the entire plan for the base involves sending a monkey into space. Nevertheless, as with The Left Handed Gun, Newman's primary contribution to the film's meaning is in just one specific element of his performance: his long, theatrical, Laurel and Hardy-esque glares of disbelief. These looks do draw incredible attention to Newman's trademark blue eyes (which the black-and-white cinematography of The Left Handed Gun couldn't do), but they also again reveal the lack of meaningful continuity in Newman's physical presence from film to film in

Figures 1.18 and 1.19. In Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!, Newman's stare isn't depth or rage, but complete, wide-eyed bewilderment – the entire source of the film's comedy. (Credit: Twentieth Century Fox)
this era. It’s telling that Newman wouldn’t star in another successful comedy until 1977’s *Slap Shot*, an unsurprising revelation given his pervasive connection to more earnest portrayals of dangerous yet charming rebels. Here, Newman’s still-unformed persona brings little to the role of Harry Bannerman outside of the opportunity to see a real life couple on screen. Therefore, the repetition of Newman’s stares indicates an attempt to bring some meaning to the film in the absence of any specific bankable or ideological value.

Newman’s two most celebrated films of the 1950s – *The Long, Hot Summer* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* – do not rely on simple mannerisms or behavior, but the similarity in their settings and narrative patterns again reveal the tension between consistency, embodied ideology, and stardom on one hand, and character, minimizing the performer, and talent on the other. Both films follow an outsider (one a shamed wanderer, the other a willingly estranged son) entering a manipulative, controlling environment overseen by a sick, rich, southern patriarch obsessing over his mortality and legacy. They also feature a loyal, spurned son who seeks retribution, a powerless matriarch, and a reluctant romance that ends in the promise of new children (thus absolving the patriarch’s concern over his legacy). As noted, these families differ from the one portrayed in *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, which has members providing support and attempting to reconcile their differences. Importantly, both films were also adaptations of works in which Newman had previously starred on stage, again suggesting critical differences between repetition and consistency.
These films feature more of an ensemble cast than *Somebody Up There Likes Me* or *The Left Handed Gun*, but there is nevertheless a strikingly minimal focus on Newman’s role or presence in them. It should be no surprise that reviews and commentary on these films speak of Newman only in terms of faithfulness to his roles: *Variety*, for instance, refers to his “cynical underacting” and “command of the articulate, sensitive sequences” in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In contrast, Elizabeth Taylor is praised not only “perceptive interpretation” but for her portrayal of “frustrations and desires, both as a person and a woman,” a result of characteristics associated with her presence from outside the film. Bosley Crowther spends a good portion of his review trying to understand the motivations of Brick (played by Newman), particularly why he fights with wife Maggie (played by Elizabeth Taylor) instead of making a family with her and why he resents his father Big Daddy (played by Burl Ives). Like the review from *Variety*, Crowther limits his comments on Newman’s performance to appropriateness: he is “dramatically restrained” and offers an “ingratiating picture of a tortured and tested young man.” Again, in this period Newman can only be read and understood in the context of an individual film; our understanding of each character stems from his immersion into it – or his “disappearing” behind it – rather than from the values that transcend specific films as a result of consistency and stardom.

But Crowther’s review of *The Long, Hot Summer* makes the most revealing, salient observation about the nature of Newman’s on-screen presence in the 1950s. First, his comment that Newman “is best as the roughneck who moves in with a thinly veiled sneer” suggests not only that he offered the best singular performance
in the film, but also can be read as an implication that Newman is best suited for this particular kind of role – an early indication of expectation, investment, continuity, and the beginning of star persona. Second, as if interpreting Ben Quick (played by Newman) as a proto-Hud Bannon (from 1963’s *Hud*), Crowther observes that Newman hides “deep and ugly deceptions” behind his “plowhand figure [and] hard blue eyes.” Again, the suggestion of depth resulting from more than an acting technique (such as the long stares of *The Left Handed Gun* or *Rally ‘Round the Flag, Boys!*) illustrates the possibility of real continuity beyond the physical. And this possibility is driven home in the last and most important takeaway from Crowther’s review. Before moving on to his discussion of the performances by Woodward and Welles, Crowther remarks that Newman “could, if the script would let him, develop a classic character.”

This development is precisely what we *don’t* see in Newman’s 1950s career, and in pointing out the relationship between that development and the script, Crowther also points out the boundaries of talent and character. Furthermore, he implies that it is from something beyond the script – something beyond character and individual story – that a star like Newman must draw on order to create something classic.
In Aljean Harmetz’s *New York Times* obituary for Paul Newman, the actor is remembered as, among other things, a car racing enthusiast, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and “one of the last of the great 20th-century movie stars.” Newman’s legacy is described in terms of his portrayals of the “defiant American male,” a figure defined by Marlon Brando and James Dean as “sullen” but transformed by Newman into “a likeable renegade, a strikingly handsome figure of animal high spirits and blue-eyed candor whose magnetism was almost impossible to resist” (Harmetz). Tellingly, in discussing his tendency to play “imperfect men,” film journalist Harmetz says it is “Mr Newman” – *not* Lucas Jackson – that is too rebellious in 1967’s *Cool Hand Luke*. The obituary implies that the features we identify in Paul Newman’s characters – the defining attributes of the fictional figures he portrays on-screen – are present in his actual identity. In other words, Paul Newman the man is *actually there* when we see “Fast” Eddie Felson in *The Hustler* or Hud Bannon in *Hud*, his actual off-screen self exposed by the magic of cinema. This element of Newman’s obituary is typical of a larger phenomenon: namely, the reluctance or inability to distinguish the film performer from his/her on-screen character(s).

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32 In order to avoid confusion when discussing slippery terms related to identity and personality, I will use the term “actual” exclusively in referring to Paul Newman the man (his off-screen self, his private life, and so on) in contrast to his star persona as a cultural artifact. This will be important in distinguishing Newman from both his on-screen characters and the ideologies that become constituent elements of his star image.
This common assumption is undoubtedly a manifestation of the audience’s desire for direct access to the star. But the seemingly innocent compulsion (by casual filmgoer and sophisticated critic alike) to refer to an on-screen character as the performer him/herself results from a lacking – but necessary – understanding of the constructed identities of film stars. Star studies seeks to address this gap, but even important works in the field conflate the star (or performer) with the star image (the ethereal collection of values embodied in the star, existing only in highly-mediated on-screen glimpses). This approach can reduce star studies to biographical criticism, suggesting cinema is an industry of self-exposure and seemingly ignoring the theoretical frameworks of major figures such as Richard Dyer and Edgar Morin. Insightful production-focused investigations into celebrity, such as Paul McDonald’s *Hollywood Stardom*, seem to limit an understanding of the star’s value to his/her economic power. These approaches emphasize the star as a product manufactured and sustained by Hollywood, deployed within a closed power structure in order to achieve specific economic ends. While stars undoubtedly perform this economic function, I contend that approaches which attempt to theorize and measure the star’s deployment in the film production system are remiss in ignoring the cultural and ideological value engendered by star persona. It is important to (re)assert that stars are more than commodities: as Dyer points out,

33 Richard Dyer in particular spends considerable time discussing the desire to see part of the star’s “person” (his term for a star’s real identity), suggesting in *Heavenly Bodies* that the constructed nature of stars encourages us to think in terms of who they “really are” (2).

34 Biographies of Paul Newman – namely those by Marian Borden and Daniel O’Brien – shape their portraits of the actor using on-screen roles, creating an understanding of Newman’s identity based almost entirely on his film characters. Borden in particular conceives of acting as dependent on “exposure” (18), building from Newman’s own contention that a performer must “show your ass” (24) on screen.
again affirming the star as “the reconciler of contradictions” (*Stars* 95), stars are both part of a labor system and an integral element of the way films signify. Even if stars are only measured projections of dominant ideals, recognizing star persona as distinct from character and performer is essential to articulating how stars are used – the cultural value they embody, the ideologies they project, the way they communicate meaning. With this in mind, there are two particular constructions that resonate throughout my attempt to refine critical approaches to star persona and demonstrate the immense value stars can offer to our understanding of the moving image. The first is André Bazin’s reflection on the power of the recorded image and object presence, namely that the “aesthetic continuity which characterizes the cinema” (73) results from the consistency of human presence and characterization on screen. The second is Edgar Morin’s assertion that the star can “transform” (1) the film scenario – referring to both the star’s impact during film production and his/her signifying power. These essential formulations demand a more complicated recognition of the star image and encourage reading stardom as narrative – a system of projection and identification developing over time.

The degree to which popular understanding of Paul Newman *the man* is informed by on-screen characters – evidenced by the above obituary – is a direct result of his 1960s career specifically. However, most film criticism on Newman’s career-defining roles interrogate them for what they reveal about his actual identity.

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35 This is an important part of the constellation of stardom, as it speaks to the dominance of traditional values in film production. Challenging the boundaries of these acceptable, dominant ideals engenders the sense of inescapability I engage with throughout these chapters.

36 As discussed in my introduction, many canonical approaches to film theory conceptualize cinema as a continuous medium defined by relation and understandable as part of the larger whole – due in large part to the irreducible value of human presence.
rather than how they construct a continuum of cinematic meaning and audience expectation. Such approaches misplace the valuable critical impulses that can uncover the star: even if it were possible to access the actual Paul Newman – which it isn’t, for both theoretical and practical reasons\(^3\) – searching out biographical connections misses a crucial aspect of cinema as an expressive storytelling and cultural medium. Rather, it is essential to recognize the star image as the product of the performer’s on-screen presence, and Paul Newman’s films in the 1960s – specifically the star vehicles in which he appeared from 1961 to 1967 – offer exceptional and underexplored examples of the cinematic and cultural value of the continuous star persona.

Free from his first contract with Warner Brothers in August 1959 and confessing boredom with acting by the late 60s (O’Brien 135), Newman developed in these intervening years a recognizable and measurable pattern of values and expectations, embodying the image of the doomed rebel that would define the rest of his career. The unique trajectory of Newman’s stardom illustrates the necessity of understanding on-screen presence alongside but separate from biographical context. Furthermore, examining Newman’s films from the 1960s reveals the value of consistency in the creation of the film star. The effect of star persona I trace in Newman’s career is not limited to his own films, but instead persists as a testament to the continuity of human presence as a defining element of cinema’s signifying

\(^3\) As Dyer crucially reminds us, “we can never know [stars] directly as real people, only as they are to be found in media texts” (Stars 2). Importantly, Dyer’s understanding what constitutes media texts is quite broad: he suggests that a star’s image is found in “pin-ups, public appearances, studio send-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star’s doings and ‘private’ life” (Heavenly Bodies 2).
power. My goal here is more than simply prioritizing star persona as a unique, irreplaceable, and unparalleled source of cinematic meaning. Newman’s career makes it clear that stardom, for all the difficulty in grasping its agency, is accrued most completely and deployed most meaningfully through specific terms – namely self-reflexivity and on-screen continuity.

In this chapter, I offer readings of Newman’s 1960s films – focusing on *The Hustler, Hud,* and *Cool Hand Luke* – to trace the growth and deployment of his star image. These readings will accomplish three increasingly complicated goals. First, I will describe the defining characteristics of Newman’s star persona during this period, establishing his stardom as both distinct from the first period of his career and representing an unsustainable model of rebellious masculinity. Second, I will show how Newman’s persona – a figure biographer Lionel Godfrey refers to as the “Great Loner” (119) – resulted from on-screen consistency rather than self-exposure or the cultivation of acting range. This consistency not only creates a “narrative of unfolding personality” (xxii) film critic Ty Burr uses to characterize powerful star image, but also reaffirms aforementioned film theorists’ assertions of continuity of human presence as essential to the reality and meaning in film. Third, I will argue that Newman’s burgeoning persona demands a more thorough and complicated understanding of star image as separate from both singular on-screen character and off-screen identity. Newman’s association with the doomed rebel archetype results from a narrative continuum reaching across his entire career, and the meaning that ensuing persona brings to bear on all of his films – even in its absence or less-than-thoughtful expansion – supersedes both his individual characters and any public
understanding of who Newman the man might actually be. The rebel image that echoed throughout Newman’s post-60s roles and shaped popular understanding of his off-screen life was the result of consistent and narrow characterization rather than a side effect of cinema’s mythologized capacity for revealing or reflecting the identities of those on screen.

Newman’s stardom and continuous portrayals of rebel loners each reached a climax with *Cool Hand Luke* in 1967, and this development was enabled by Newman’s decision to buy out his contract with Warner Brothers. After buying his freedom for half a million dollars – a rare act even near the end of the studio system – Newman later reflected, “I was free, at least, to make my own decisions [...] it was the best financial transaction I ever made” (quoted in Burr 214). Interestingly, Newman’s independence manifested itself in the form of a peculiar approach to image-building in the shadow of icons Marlon Brando and James Dean: in spite of constant comparisons to these “rebels,” Newman portrayed the loner figure almost exclusively throughout the 1960s, primarily in the so-called “H” movies – *The Hustler, Hud, Harper, Hombre,* and *Cool Hand Luke.* Biographer Daniel O’Brien suggests Newman attained stardom because of his immense talent and adventurous range as a performer (135), but Newman’s on-screen roles in this period do not reflect range or even the attempt to cultivate it. More astutely, Ty Burr describes the

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38 As is always the case in engaging with stardom, there is no way - and arguably no point in trying – to determine who or what is specifically responsible for the association of a star with a specific persona or type. In this period, Newman had greater freedom to pursue a wider variety of roles but seems to appear in similar situations or circumstances. At the same time, he carries something from role to role that defies individual character, generating meaning in a way that can’t be explained through character and story alone. What connects otherwise unrelated characters played by Newman is the simple fact of his occupying those roles. This is the mysticism and difficulty of reading stardom: like other stars, Newman draws characteristics from roles in subtle, difficult to measure ways while informing those roles through his mere presence.
star image Newman cultivated in the 1960s as “far more consistent and entertaining than Brando’s” (214), suggesting Newman’s marketability and star power were predicated precisely on his limited range of on-screen roles. Newman’s commentary on his own performances can be vague and even contradictory; he believed he seemed to repeat the same sort of performances and lacked the right kind of talent for playing fundamentally different characters: “It’s all getting pretty familiar. The more I do, the more I duplicate. I’m not inexhaustible, like an Olivier” (quoted in O’Brien 135). For Burr, it is Newman’s films from this period that establish the actor’s image in terms we easily recognize – “as a glamorous and very male rebel, with a crazy twinkle that added to his appeal” – giving birth to the sense of on-screen continuity which made Newman “the perfect post-factory move star”39 (215). Newman’s career raises essential questions of how his star image and how our broader understanding of the star image in film was (and still is) defined in relation to notions of range, originality and talent. The doomed rebel as played by Newman is defined by two primary qualities: intense charm (even in the absence of other desirable characteristics) and resistance to outside sources of control (which would prevent him from “going his own way”). These traits are at the forefront of a continuous, marketable, and pleasurably predictable star persona that transcends the limits of genre. Appropriately, it was during this period that Peter Bogdanovich remarked to Alfred Hitchcock that Newman’s concerns about his character in 1966’s Torn Curtain were unimportant because the role was “just going to be Paul Newman

39 Even with his acknowledgement of the predominance of Newman’s on-screen presence in the creation of his star image, Burr still suggests that buying out from his Warner Brothers contract created the impression that Newman was a rebel in real life as well (215).
anyway” (quoted in Borden 43). Newman was by then an established, known quantity, but not in the sense we might assume from Bogdanovich’s seeming dismissal: the “Paul Newman” we see in Michael Armstrong (Torn Curtain’s protagonist) is not a revelation of Newman’s actual self but another in a long series of projections of his star persona.

Newman’s first film after leaving his Warner Brothers contract was the modern-day epic Exodus (1960), an adaptation of Leon Uris’s 1958 novel dramatizing the creation of the Israeli state. In many ways, Newman’s appearance in Exodus is a continuation of his 1950s career: ads for the film make little reference to Newman
– in other words, they make no attempt to trade on his star value (or lack thereof) – and he finds himself part of an ensemble cast rather than a standalone star. Interestingly, the cast of Exodus is full of performers whose most celebrated roles at the time occurred alongside James Dean or Marlon Brando, giants whose legacies loomed large over Newman’s early career. Sal Mineo famously appeared alongside Dean in Rebel Without a Cause and Giant, earning an Academy Award nomination for his supporting role in Rebel (as he did for Exodus) but finding little success once he was too old to believably play the troubled teen. Similarly, while Eva Marie Saint and Lee Cobb were associated with memorable films such as North by Northwest and 12 Angry Men (respectively), their most critically-acclaimed roles came alongside Brando in 1954’s On the Waterfront. Writing in 2012 for the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, columnist Bradley Burston suggests Uris’s novel and its film

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40 This would change years later, as would the means of advertising almost all of Newman’s early films (as demonstrated in chapter one). While contemporaneous posters for Exodus advertise the story, DVD covers, poster reissues, and foreign advertisements of the film all place Newman, looking like a stolid war hero, at the center.
adaptation have had lasting significance due to their impact on shaping American understanding of Israeli and Jewish identity. However, Burston spends almost the entirety of his retrospective recalling and responding to contemporaneous reactions to the novel, only discussing the movie in one paragraph. This lack of engagement reinforces the notion that, despite its commercial success and star power, *Exodus* the film has almost no legacy: aside from a telling reference in a season one episode of the TV series *Mad Men*\textsuperscript{41}, *Exodus* appears to have little lasting resonance in American public or cinematic memory.

The presence of Dean and Brando’s looming star images are not made explicit by *Exodus*, but the absence of Newman’s rebel persona is: Ari Ben Canaan (played by Newman) demonstrates some of the superficial elements of the rebel – he is, after all, a revolutionary fighting for the Jewish state – but, as the *Variety* review points out, is simply too “conventional.” Newman’s fledgling star persona is not limited by the politics of *Exodus* as much as it is by the nature of the film’s story: Ari’s rebellion is not as personal or idiosyncratic as the unflinching resistance to authority enacted by Newman’s later on-screen appearances. Ari is a problematic but nonetheless heroic figure: he is a man of action, willing to ignore the law and sacrifice his life to secure safe passage for Jewish refugees. His motivations and goals have greater historical significance (and possibly even legitimacy) than those of Newman’s later rebel roles, but they take place in a larger cooperative movement that incorporates

\textsuperscript{41} In the episode “Babylon,” the Don Draper’s ad agency is tasked with promoting Israeli tourism. The client believes Americans will be interested in visiting Israel, in part because Paul Newman is starring in the adaptation of *Exodus*. This is asserted as seemingly objective proof that Americans have strong interest and investment in the Israeli state. As with the aforementioned posters, this is an example of retroactively constructing Newman’s career – implying a star persona and box office presence before either really existed.
him rather than distinguishing him as a singular figure. This lack of individual
cracter is reflected clearly in Bosley Crowther’s New York Times review: “Ari Ben Canaan […] is a mighty stout fellow to have around, quick and sure with the
command decisions, but it is hard to gather precisely where he stands or what
distinguishes him as an individual from any other fellow who would naturally be
attracted to Eva Marie Saint.” Crowther also says that Ari is played “too neatly” by
Newman, and the Variety review of Exodus suggests he gives a “sound
performance”42 but “fails to give the role warmth.” In Paul Newman: A Life43,
biographer Lawrence Quirk contends that Newman took the role in Exodus quickly
after leaving Warner Brothers, implying that his attempt to test his commodity
value in the open market was essentially a cash grab (102). The only mention of
anything like Newman’s persona in Exodus comes from Crowther, who refers to the
actor as “always well-shaved.” In other words, the only expectations surrounding
Newman are connected to his looks, and the only responses to his on-screen
presence are limited to his talent – both limitations and restrictions held over from
the 1950s. Newman, then, can only really be understood as a facet of the film’s story
instead of a project of any identifiable cultural ideals.

Newman’s career – and as it would later turn out, even his life – changed most
dramatically as a result of his performance as in 1961’s The Hustler. In the film,

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42 Similar language is used to characterize Lee Cobb’s performance as Barak Ben Canaan, the father of
Newman’s Ali Ben Canaan. Cobb is described as giving “his customary dependable, thoroughly
professional [sic] performance,” (“Review: Exodus”), language that very nearly copies that used to
describe Newman’s star image-less 1950s roles.
43 Paul Newman: A Life is Quirk’s third book on Newman’s life and by far the most problematic source
I encountered in researching this project. Most of Quirk’s claims about Newman’s professional
history coincide with details in other biographies, but his conclusions about Newman as a performer
and person are colored by his explicit goal of revealing Newman as an “ordinary” human being (2),
offering bizarrely critical asides and remarks on almost all aspects of the star’s life.
Newman plays “Fast” Eddie Felson, a pool hustler from Oakland who travels across the country for a big money game – and to prove he is the best – against reigning pool king Minnesota Fats (played by Jackie Gleason). What follows is a recognizable story of redemption: Eddie loses his bankroll in the first match with Fats, struggles to get back on track, returns to form, sacrifices his personal relationships (most tragically with girlfriend Sarah Packard, played by Piper Laurie), and bests the man who previously defeated him. But Newman’s presence brings out qualities that elevate “Fast” Eddie’s journey above simple a narrative of deliverance: Felson is singularly focused and resilient, demonstrating an unrelenting determination to be the best. Eddie doesn’t want to be Minnesota Fats – although he does demonstrate some reverence for him in their two meetings – he wants to beat him: to show how the game can be great, to (as he proclaims) “make shots no one has made before.”

The compelling complexity and expressive values generated from the combination of Newman and Felson creates the means for building and recognizing stardom in a way unmatched by previous on-screen appearances. Even though Newman had been nominated for an Academy Award in the 1950s (for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), Daniel O’Brien refers to *The Hustler* as “the film that brought [Newman] true stardom” (79). Roger Ebert’s 2002 revisitation of the film – part of his online “Great Movies” series – refers to Eddie Felson as one of the “handful of movie characters so real that the audience refers to them as touchstones.” Ebert’s claim is particularly

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44 The notion of Felson as a “touchstone” is also important in relation to the career of Steve McQueen. In this same retrospective, Ebert refers to McQueen’s 1965 film *The Cincinnati Kid* as a remake of *The Hustler* (which, strictly speaking, it is not). While the stories of the films follow similar patterns (building toward a showdown with “the best”) and involve similar subject matters (pool and card gambling), the similarities between these films actually reveal important differences in the star personae of lead actors Newman and McQueen – particularly in regard to consistency. McQueen’s
valuable because it communicates the vitality and identification enabled by stardom without suggesting its effects must leave the confines of the movie screen.

Additionally, while I can’t speak for Ebert, I contend that Eddie seems real because he establishes a new type and serves as the starting point for a narrative that transcends any of Newman’s individual films (in the 1960s and beyond)\(^45\). Our understanding of Felson as the genesis of Newman’s star persona isn’t limited to the narrative of *The Hustler*, but plays out on screen over decades.

Newman’s star persona is dramatically brought into being from the film’s opening scenes, realized through unique expression of character and cinematic technique. In two sequences – the initial hustle in the bar with partner Charlie (played by Myron McCormick) and the marathon match against Minnesota Fats – Eddie’s charm and smile are omnipresent even when the stakes are at their highest and he admits he is nervous. Charlie’s morose concern is contrasted by Eddie’s love of pool: the former treats the Ames pool hall (site of the big money game against Fats) as a morgue, the latter pets the pool table like a lover and says being at Ames feels “like church.” Throughout the film, Eddie demonstrates a desire for his superiority to be witnessed and recognized, but this desire isn’t realized at the film’s outset. Even though the film follows Eddie into the pool hall, establishing his story at the center of the narrative, once inside the camera follows Fats almost exclusively:

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\(^45\) This implies that stardom can perhaps only be recognized only through hindsight, once afforded the ability to look back over the entirety of a star’s career. My analysis obviously relies on this hindsight, recognizing the possibility of assessing patterns that develop once presented with all available information. However, contemporaneous commentary on Newman’s developing career reveals the prevalence of such observations about continuity of stardom and the unique value of stardom in reading and understanding these films.
Eddie and the audience are both captivated by the aura surrounding Minnesota Fats. Later in the film Eddie will seek out a rematch with Fats, agree to be managed by Bert Gordon (played by George C Scott), and play all night against Findley (played by Murray Hamilton) in Louisville precisely because those people have either beaten him or seen him beaten. When playing Findley, Eddie even demands to keep the game going despite early losses and insists he will win although he is competing in billiards, a game outside of his true expertise.

Even though Eddie loses to Minnesota at the beginning of the film – a loss Bert Gordon associates with lack of character as opposed to lack of talent – he is restless and unsatisfied when pursuing anything other than hustling immortality. The essential difference between character and talent shapes both Felson’s development as an on-screen type and our understanding of Newman’s burgeoning star persona. The opening match between Eddie and Fats reveals both to be almost superhuman – their battle on the felt lasts a staggering forty hours – but while Eddie may be the more skilled player, at this point he is not yet able to control himself and be the unmoving figure of poise we see in Minnesota Fats. Eddie is confident and charming (as mentioned before) but consistently unsettled: by drinking too much, by Bert calling him a loser, and by Charlie’s intervention in attempt to minimize their losses. The necessity for (or compulsion to) control – specifically related to identity and how one is understood – is at the forefront of The Hustler: as biographer Lionel Godfrey smartly observes, “Eddie is in the grip of a divine obsession, haunted by the idea of being the best, an original, a great artist who will surpass even himself” (91). Newman’s presence projects charm but foregrounds
Eddie’s need for independence and unrelenting determination to be the best, laying
the groundwork for Newman’s star image as one defined by an unyielding desire to
be in control. Eddie is also a craftsperson: gifted at one thing (and, by all
appearances, only one thing) and willing to do anything to perfect that craft. These
conflicting tendencies weigh on Eddie, but in the case of The Hustler, Newman’s
rebel is willing to use his current independence as down payment on future control,
power, and freedom. Therefore, Eddie accepts an uneasy management arrangement
with Bert Gordon not because it will make him money but because it will give him
the chance to play against the best. Eddie plays for status and prestige – what we
could call “glory” – rather than money: for him money is a tool, the means rather
than the end.

Eddie inevitably returns to Ames pool hall and challenges Fats to a game for
his entire $3,000 bankroll; at these stakes, Eddie must defeat Fats from the outset or
start (again) from nothing in his quest. He wins the rematch by realizing his
original goal of forcing Fats to quit the game – Eddie doesn’t want any doubt about
who is the best. Eddie’s relationship with Bert and the final showdown with
Minnesota Fats shows The Hustler isn’t just about what Eddie achieves but about
how he achieves it: he wants to do things his way, to win without following someone
else’s rules or instructions. This theme is visually foregrounded in Eddie’s game
against Findley in Louisville, as the scene’s framing consistently places Eddie
beneath the other characters, suggesting his lack of power, as a commodity and

46 This moment is later revisited by 1986 sequel The Color of Money: as Eddie prepares to play Vince
(Tom Cruise) at the film’s closing, he warns Vince that he won’t give up, saying, “Because if I don’t
whip you now, I’m gonna whip you next month in Dallas […] And if not then, then the month after
that, in New Orleans.”
plaything to Bert and as a mere diversion to Findley. By the scene’s end, Eddie wins not only by besting Findley on the table – at Findley’s chosen game, no less – but by overcoming Bert’s undermining criticisms and even risking his own money to demonstrate his superiority of character. Eddie’s renewed power and agency are reflected in a new framing scheme, placing him above the figures who are only interested in money. But his expression is just as important as his relative power within the frame: Eddie has won the match, yet shows no signs of contentment or accomplishment. He is immensely dissatisfied because his victory is on someone else’s terms: the film’s communication of his power may shift, but his emptiness is consistent, whether in the center of the frame or on its margins. Each step towards Eddie’s rematch with Fats in an exercise in building “character,” and throughout this

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47 The match with Findley is obviously not the only time Eddie plays for money, but this scenario is distinct from his games with Minnesota Fats in part because of the role money plays in each contest. Findley is fabulously wealthy and, while a skilled player, plays for money he can afford to lose many times over. For him, losing in a game on his own table hidden away in his own basement is essentially no loss at all – he feels no “sting” from being defeated in spite of Bert’s demands about paying off the gambling debt. But money is a scorekeeper and profound reward for elite players like Eddie and Fats, who use it as a means to determine who is the better man and to support their lifestyles. Eddie’s initial defeat against Fats is total: he loses his entire bankroll but he cares far more about the loss of glory and opportunity. In simpler terms, Eddie simply doesn’t conceive of or use money in the same way as Bert.
match he has been reminded of his personal weaknesses by seeing his own loss to Fats mirrored in Findley (a talented player who eventually loses control) and by Sarah’s failed attempt to convince Eddie to quit sacrificing his pride and agency in the pursuit of being the best.

Newman’s doomed rebel type is shaped and defined in large part through these personal weaknesses. In *The Hustler*, Eddie is a loner struggling with the demands of any interpersonal relationship: he rejects Bert’s control over him just as he rejects partnership with Charlie at the beginning of the film, and he constantly pushes against the boundaries of his romance with Sarah Packard. These relationships offer various forms of control to which Eddie inevitably refuses to subject himself. Furthermore, both Charlie and Bert are established as would-be father figures: Charlie says he thought of Eddie like a son, and Eddie responds to all of Bert’s chiding and demands by asking, “When did you adopt me?” Here again Newman’s rebel is informed by a complete resistance to authority and control. Eddie cannot really dedicate himself to Sarah Packard, and his commitment to redeeming himself on the pool table eventually leads to the demise of their relationship and the end of her life. When Sarah says she needs to hear him say he loves her and that she will never let him take the words back, it’s no surprise Eddie remains silent. For Eddie, committing to Sarah is submission – he asks, “What’s your idea of love, chains?” – and he cannot abide that level of relinquishing control. Eddie

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48 This is another integral moment that reveals the compulsion to force a biographical reading onto Newman’s films. O’Brien’s biography says Newman admitted he was “never close to his father” (3), which can encourage readings conflating managers like Charlie and Bert with Newman’s actual father. Such readings are trivial, however, and bring no genuine meaning or ideology to an understanding of Eddie Felson or Newman’s star persona.
joins up with Bert once he believes he has hit rock bottom, but begins his rematch with Fats by reestablishing his independence from Bert: “How should I play that one, Bert? Play it safe? That’s the way you always told me to play it: safe, play the percentage. Well, here we go: fast and loose. One ball, corner pocket. Yeah, the percentage players die broke too, don’t they Bert? How can I lose?” One of the central lessons of *The Hustler* is that character beats talent, and this is precisely why Eddie achieves some sense of triumph at the film’s end; he is not only talented, he has developed the essential elements that compose his individuality – and which define Newman’s persona as a doomed rebel.

As the film that establishes Newman’s star image, it’s also important to recognize *The Hustler* as a movie with little tolerance for acting. Eddie’s major downfalls stem directly from too much pretending on his part – he suffers throughout the film in scenarios when he pretends to be someone else or is otherwise untrue to himself. As he attempts to play his way into a rematch with Minnesota Fats, Eddie is willing to be taken advantage of but won’t be tricked or made into a fool49 – further complicating his relationship with authenticity. When another hustler (credited as “Young Hustler”) thinks he is genuinely getting the better of him at Arthur’s pool hall, Eddie loses his composure and wins straight out; he shows the other hustler he is the better man – that he “doesn’t rattle” – but in doing so loses out on the potential of a bigger payoff and exposes his identity as the true hustler. In the face of his opponent’s confidence and assumed (but false)

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49 In *The Hustler*, Eddie is devastated by losing to Minnesota Fats and tortured by his role in the death of Sarah. This is also recalled by *The Color of Money*, as Eddie reacts with similar – if not greater – frustration and anger after being hustled by Amos (played by Forest Whitaker).
superiority, Eddie is inevitably unwilling to continue playing the role of the loser in order to complete the hustle. The price for Eddie’s performance and exposure, however, is broken thumbs. He later says he had to show them how the game could be great, perhaps implying he could have kept up the illusion, but does so in an environment that punishes excellence – and hidden excellence in particular – rather than glorifying it. The men at Arthur’s seem gleeful to have recognized Eddie’s superlative abilities, and threaten him while praising his skill but stating they have “no use for pool sharks.” After insisting that Eddie take the money he won from the other hustler, the men drag him into the back to break his thumbs. The image of Eddie’s punishment is highly suggestive, more so of gang rape than broken thumbs. Eddie’s penalty for this pretending is his complete loss of freedom: he cannot play pool or work and must rely completely on Sarah for everything. But this moment is also a near-absolute weakening of his masculine and rebellious character. If *The Hustler* plays the formative role in Newman’s stardom Ebert and O’Brien suggest, its influence stems in large part from the film’s attitude toward pretending. Eddie and
Newman are both undoubtedly shaped from the according power that comes with finding and being one’s truest self without pretense.

Following this failure, it is little surprise that Eddie subsequently abandons his attempt to build a rematch with Minnesota Fats on his own and instead agrees to be managed by Bert. Additionally, at the start of the film, one of the primary distinctions between Eddie and Fats is that Fats doesn’t have to pretend: he is a known quantity, his skills and qualities already defined. Eddie, however, enters Ames pool hall as a relative unknown, playing the part of an anonymous pool player and saying he’s never heard of “Fast” Eddie. This performance is importantly contrasted by the end of the film, as Eddie is able to crush Fats when he returns to the hall and demands a game from the outset – no pretending. Similarly, Eddie is justifiably in awe of Minnesota Fats during their first match, but succumbs to imitation, trying to one-up the reigning king but nonetheless following his lead – mimicking his opponent’s gestures, ordering drinks when Fats does, and so on. But this changes once Eddie is himself a known quantity: he sets the terms of the rematch with Fats, never relinquishes control, and keeps all of the reward for himself. This contest over identification and authenticity gives added weight and meaning to Eddie’s resilience, particularly at the end of the film when he threatens Bert: “You tell your boys they better kill me, Bert. They better go all the way with me. Because if they just bust me up, I’ll put all those pieces back together again, and so help me, so help me God, Bert...I’m gonna come back here and I’m gonna kill you.” Eddie’s willingness to sacrifice himself here moves from the figurative to the literal; whereas before Eddie accepted Bert’s attempt to take advantage of him, now he will
submit himself to being broken because he knows only death will stop his pursuit and desire. The evolution of these conflicts shows *The Hustler's* investment in originality, as Eddie attempts to occupy a position held by someone else and only succeeds by doing things his own way. The gritty black-and-white underworld of the pool hall is the context in which Newman’s star persona is established. There is plenty of rule-breaking in *The Hustler*, and even the pool halls where the hustlers work have signs outlawing gambling. But no one else besides Eddie breaks *every* rule; the only room that outlaws the masse shot (a difficult shot requiring a lot of spin on the cue ball) is the room where he plays Minnesota Fats, and Eddie only uses the masse in the two games he plays there. In other words, Eddie doesn’t use the masse unless there is a sign telling him he can’t: he refuses to play by anyone else’s rules. *The Hustler* is a portrait of Eddie’s obsession with control, both as it relates to the outcome of a match and how his actions affect his identity.

The intersections between Eddie’s struggle in *The Hustler* and Newman’s career as a Hollywood performer are clear – as is often the case, descriptions of Newman’s characters (such as Godfrey’s above) are frequently applied to Newman the man. Understanding the narrative generated by Newman’s on-screen presence relies on recognizing the consistent elements of his persona and interrogating how they change or contribute to the “whole” of his image over time. In this case, Newman’s real-world pursuit of control over his labor seems to be allegorized in

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50 For example, Newman has been described as a private man with little to hide (O’Brien xiii), “a rebel and a loner who called the shots as he saw them” (Quick 23), and a serious, reserved man with a quirky sense of humor (O’Brien xvii). These descriptions are impossible to separate from on-screen star persona, and as a result it is similarly impossible to imagine them solely as commentary on the man himself (that is, distinct from his film archetype).
Eddie’s compulsion to win under his terms and the sense of authenticity running throughout *The Hustler*. But this specific overlap offers a rare and important illustration of the way the star can, to borrow Morin’s phrase, “nourish” the “myth” (55) of their star persona. Newman’s emergence as a free agent in Hollywood, if only by virtue of being one of the few things about Newman we can actually know, inserts itself into our understanding of *The Hustler* and the character of Eddie Felson. This understanding of star persona differs from the approach I refer to above as biographical criticism, which creates a circular pattern of interpretation that obliterates any sense of origin in persona and ideology. It bears repeating that his off-screen life offers limited insight into a reading of *The Hustler* or “Fast” Eddie Felson: for example, Eddie’s inability to sustain interpersonal relationships is contrasted by Newman’s fifty year marriage to Joanne Woodward and close bonds with their children. Asserting Newman himself as a rebel – as even insightful critics like Ty Burr demonstrate a willingness to do – completely removes cinema’s role in the construction of star persona: if Newman is actually a rebel, then we would gain remarkably little from interpreting film as an artistic medium or cultural artifact. Actual off-screen life can engender traits in the star persona (in specific, unique cases), but the echoes that follow from Newman’s performance as Eddie Felson are best understood in terms of their cinematic resonance: the way they inform on-screen meaning and create a continuum of character. Newman’s characters trying to escape the shadow of others, struggling for control, and attempting to assert independence become trademarks of the rebel loner – they are *not* revelations of Newman’s actual self. As Edgar Morin invaluabley reminds us, the star image is
“infected” (27) by character and actor, not the other way around. It is Paul Newman’s star persona we come to recognize in *The Hustler*, and the realism Roger Ebert sees in Eddie Felson grows out of the subsequent consistency of Newman’s star image. In the incipience of Newman's star persona, Eddie Felson emphasizes one ideal of the loner rebel above all else: the desire to be free of the limitations others would impose on him.

The division between Newman and his star image is more pronounced in 1963’s *Hud*, the film which advertised him as “the man with the barbed wire soul.” Promotional materials reveal the development of Newman’s persona in two short years: posters not only emphasize his figure but assert that he *is* Hud. But again, the figure being advertised “as Hud” is not Paul Newman the man, but the collection of traits and ideals that form his on-screen persona. Our anticipation is built on his stardom: the things we expect to see in *Hud* the film and embodied by Hud the character are the result of the image established in *The Hustler* (primarily), not the marketing value of Newman’s actual identity. *Hud* represents an important development of the rebel persona conceived through Eddie Felson – the traits that shaped and informed Eddie’s desire for greatness are defining and predominant in Hud Bannon. The film’s plot revolves around two main tensions, both amplified by the determination and rebelliousness of Newman’s on-screen persona: the reluctance of Homer Bannon (played by Melvyn Douglas) to leave the family farm to

51 As discussed in chapter one, this is a common theme for Newman’s 1960s films: *Harper* (1966) and *Hombre* (1967) both utilize the “Newman is...” tagline. These posters suggest Newman’s on-screen consistency, revealing his integral value as a deployment of film meaning. The movies themselves aren’t just about some character, they are about who Paul Newman is, promoting his growing star image and encouraging identification with it.
Hud (his son) after his passing and the threat posed to the farm by the possibility that their herd has contracted foot-and-mouth disease. Newman’s portrayal of Hud is often mentioned for the absence of energy and passion famed critic Bosley Crowther associates with hustler figures like Eddie Felson: Hud is cruel and unfeeling, “churned up inside with [...] meanness” (Crowther), a guy “who didn’t give a damn about anyone” (*Films of Paul Newman* 119). He encourages his father to sell their infected livestock to unwitting buyers instead of letting them be killed off by the government. Perhaps most tellingly, after suggesting Hud is just waiting for him to die, Homer remarks that his son “isn’t a patient man.” Hud appears to be a man with no code – a man who believes “the law was meant to be interpreted in a lenient manner” – and is thus read as “amoral” (Borden 41) and as “purely and simply a bastard” (*Films of Paul Newman* 120). *Hud* gives the audience a portrait of Newman’s rebel at its most base: a man without principle, obsessed with pursuing his own ends, whose rebellion isn’t as isolated or noble (even if inevitably destructive) as Eddie Felson’s.
In spite of these negative characterizations, Lionel Godfrey presents the transition from *The Hustler* to *Hud* as somewhat natural, writing: “Like *The Hustler*, *Hud* contains a compelling characterization of the loner who recurs in so many Newman pictures, and Paul’s acting, through immensely authoritative and encompassing a wide range, nevertheless projects the coldness, often overlooked, that lies somewhere near the heart of his best work” (107). Despite celebrating Newman for his range, Godfrey importantly touches on the continuity present in Hud Bannon: more than his other 60s films, *Hud* reveals what might be called the predominance of charm in Newman’s doomed rebel – a perceived charisma and allure belied by his direct association with the role (as in, “Paul Newman is Hud”). Hud demonstrates an utter contempt for others (except women he is pursuing), and he doesn’t do or say one genuinely kind thing in the entire film, but people are nonetheless drawn to him. Godfrey suggests charm was Newman’s “biggest handicap as a performer,” warning that “sometimes when you think you are not using it, it creeps out anyway” (65). Newman himself suggested *Hud* “backfired” because people admired his character (quoted in Borden 41), but the film shows charm operating on multiple levels: even Homer, who finds no redeeming qualities in his son, tells him, “You got all that charm and it makes the youngsters want to be like you.” The film’s engagement with charm as a theme is amplified by Newman’s presence, and the appeal of his star image is similarly complicated by Hud’s genuine

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52 Newman also ascribes a certain range to his performances – as a means of distancing them from himself. According to Daniel O’Brien, Newman “yearned for roles far removed from his own personality, enabling him to ‘crawl out of [his] skin’” (xiv). Similarly, Newman himself said: “The characters I have the least in common with are the ones I have the greatest successes with” (quoted in Dherbier & Verlhac 82). However, the similarity in Newman’s defining roles speaks for itself: he doesn’t play a fundamentally different character in any of the critically-acclaimed, memorable films in his whole career.
cruelty. We are drawn to Hud in spite of all his badness – the magnetism of Newman’s rebel authorizes audience fascination with a quintessentially unlikable character in spite of our recognition of the threat posed by his charm. Indeed, Newman’s established good looks and charisma obscure Hud’s unrelenting meanness and, at worst, can be said to excuse his attempted rape of Alma (played by Patricia Neal). The hard-to-watch scene of Hud’s assault on Alma visually reinforces the troubling dual nature of Hud’s charm. Before he is thankfully stopped by nephew Lon (played by Brandon De Wilde), Hud is simultaneously lit with almost overwhelming brightness and wrapped in concealing shadows, an unnatural (or impossible) lighting scheme further complicating the meaning of Hud’s charm.

This trait persists at the core of Newman’s rebel even when it isn’t a particularly natural or logical aspect of the character.

Figures 2.7 and 2.8. Hud’s problematic duality is seen in more than just character: here he is a man in white bathed in light, but somehow simultaneously entirely shrouded in darkness. (Credit: Paramount Pictures)

53 The effect of Newman’s star charm in minimizing Hud’s attempted rape is also reflected in the film’s script and dialogue. Before they part for the final time, Alma shockingly laughs off Hud’s prior assault and suggests they could have been intimate on less forceful grounds under the right circumstances. But Alma doesn’t insist on this reshaping of her near-rape: it is a believable or even acceptable moment for both Alma and Hud’s characters precisely because of Newman’s forceful, inescapable charm.
Newman’s charm has the practical function of bringing roundness to a character in Hud Bannon that might otherwise be a boring villain. In his review, Bosley Crowther suggests as much when he writes that something about that the “heel” figure in Hud seems different, “more than a stock Western brute, banging the bar for red-eye and sneaking out to steal cattle in the dark.” More importantly, it also creates a continuum with his other roles and maintains the likeability and marketability of Newman’s star persona. Despite the differences in their stories, Hud and Eddie Felson both embody the growing central qualities of the doomed rebel: charm, determination, and the desire for control. Hud bristles at the presence of government officials on his family’s farm because he doesn’t want to be interfered with or told what to do. Both characters have a defining sense of independence and desire to do things their own way, but Hud just wants what he feels he is owed and has no shame or regret about pursing his end(s). He mocks the supposed honor in being “poor but honest” and doesn’t understand why a person would do anything other than what they want all the time. Both of them want to feel like they matter: Eddie is consumed with being the best, and Hud’s greatest frustration comes from feeling like his perspective and desires are insignificant. As a result, Hud offers no apologies for the ruthless pursuit of his goals. Importantly, Hud’s self-first attitude has the capacity to transcend his singular identity: as his father’s concerns about charm imply, people want to be like Hud, and Homer clearly fears they might succeed in developing Hud’s meanness. Homer says Hud isn’t fit to live with because he doesn’t give a damn and only cares about himself, but more importantly, he warns Hud that the “country changes because of who we admire.” This not only an
indication of the threat posed by Hud’s character but also suggests the cultural irredeemability of the doomed rebel figure. This helps explain why Dyer pays particular attention to the rebel type in Stars, suggesting the rebel rejects dominant values and is recuperated – but never legitimized – by cultural narratives of stardom. Hud expands and intensifies any unsavory or unacceptable tendencies we might identify in Eddie Felson, pushing the rebel archetype’s rejection of prevailing ideologies and unsustainability to new limits.

The similarities between Hud and Eddie importantly reveal how the charm of Newman’s star persona can function differently relative to character and context. In The Hustler, Eddie’s charm covers or obscures his capacity for cruelty: he offers no real rebuttal to Sarah’s description of their relationship as a “contract of depravity.” Eddie’s abrasive and unfeeling nature can be excused because we accept his desire to be the best and even expect him to display some nastiness – which we may read as determination or tenacity – in order to get what he wants. This luxury is not afforded to Hud for two reasons. One, while it is possible to feel some sympathy for Hud, his environment is full of good-natured people and absent a villain with worse intentions than his own (like Bert Gordon in The Hustler). Hud degrades the decency around him by blaming it for his coldness: as he tells father Homer, “I had to go bad in the face of so much good.” Two, the nature of Hud’s rebellion is simultaneously less redemptive and more public or open than Eddie’s: his desires and questionable

54 Homer’s remarks on admiration and identity formation also offer clear metacinematic commentary on the processes of identification and projectopm inherent in stardom. In the world of Hud, Newman’s character is a threat precisely because of his profound appeal. Beyond this single film, however, the doomed rebel archetype and, by extension, Newman’s persona are comparatively harmless: while communicating the same charm and desirability, their capacity to influence is also shaped by the inescapability and punishment that accompany other iterations of the rebel and serve as would-be cultural warnings or limits.
methods for achieving them are established elements of his character. He is known and recognized in his environment, and importantly, the setting of his heelish behavior is far removed from the hidden, shadowy underground of *The Hustler's* pool halls. Again, the charm of Newman's star persona is a source of conflict: it stands in opposition to Hud's meanness, and in doing so emphasizes it rather than covering it up. This conflict can be read as a sort of defense of Hud's character: Lawrence Quirk writes that Newman's performance serves “first to cover, then to reveal, the shallow, egocentric, callous nature of Hud” (*Films of Paul Newman* 120). However, when Homer asks how a man like Hud came to be a son to him, the question doesn’t excuse anything but rather reveals an unwillingness to acknowledge the parts of himself that bear a resemblance to Hud. Hud exudes charm in spite of what Homer and the audience must recognize as the dark, undesirable parts of his (and their) identity. *Hud* confronts us with the most destructive elements of Newman’s doomed rebel type, but the film’s open acknowledgement of the potentially blinding power of charm speaks beyond the character of Hud to limitations in deploying Newman’s star persona.

Newman’s rebel reappears in other 1960s films such as the aforementioned *Harper* and *Hombre*, but 1967’s *Cool Hand Luke* represents the greatest refinement of Newman’s doomed rebel, the realization of a near-decade’s worth of experience and development. We only need to watch Luke being utterly pummeled by Dragline (played by George Kennedy) to know Newman has come a long way from his roles as boxers in *The Battler* and *Somebody Up There Likes Me*. In the film, Newman’s Lucas Jackson is sentenced to a road prison camp for cutting the heads off of parking
meters – a crime he claims he committed because he lived in a small town and just wanted something to do. Luke wants to go his own way, and finds himself in escalating confrontations with those in authority because of his resistance to rules. The rules that surround Luke are nonsensical: he is put in the box (the road prison’s version of solitary confinement) after learning of his mother’s death because the bosses fear he will try to escape, and his response is to break out the first night he is freed from the box – he only escapes after being told he shouldn’t. Even the otherwise powerless inmates have rules, and Dragline warns Luke that everyone has to learn the rules of the bosses and the rules of the prisoners. *Cool Hand Luke* attempts to redeem the rebel – Luke is told to “shape up” and “get his mind right” – but inevitably the film dramatizes the unsustainability of the rebel’s resistance to authority and accumulated fandom (recalling Homer’s warning about the ramifications of Hud’s “charm”).

The defining elements Newman’s rebel remain consistent: Luke is strong-willed and determined, critical of what he perceives as melodramatic seriousness, and uninterested in following anyone’s rules but his own. His characteristics are emphasized by his on-screen presence: the camera rarely strays from his figure and frames are consistently built around his central placement. Luke also expands and amplifies elements of this ideology through his general carelessness (engaging in activities because they “give him something to do”), resistance to “weight” (that is, the demands and expectations of others), and recognition that the forces he confronts cannot be overcome. Fittingly, Luke was a decorated war hero but never received a promotion, saying he was “just passing the time” in the war, doing what
he felt he was supposed to do and nothing more – echoing Hud, Luke wants only what he put in. Moreover, like Eddie Felson, Luke wants to do things that have never been done before: when Dragline doubts Luke can eat fifty eggs, Luke responds flatly, “Nobody ever ate fifty eggs.” Dragline also encourages Luke through the egg-eating trial by proclaiming how close he is to “everlasting glory,” never realizing how uninterested Luke truly is with such conceptions of fame. Luke’s exploits – challenging Dragline to a fight, running bluffs in a card game, talking back to the prison bosses, pressing the road crew to work faster – situate his rebellious nature in an unrelenting dismissal of any established order. There is visual and ideological continuity in the doomed loner Newman portrays in *Cool Hand Luke*, but the universal scope of Luke’s rebellion makes it hard to discern the ends of his restlessness (unlike Eddie and Hud, who both have relatively clear, stated goals).

*Cool Hand Luke* closes the narrative development of Newman in the 1960s, restoring some “decency” to his star persona and revealing his relationship to the rebel as both inescapable and unsustainable. Newman himself described Luke as “the ultimate non-conformist and rebel” (quoted in O’Brien 89), but as Ebert astutely
points out in his review of *Cool Hand Luke*, "Newman brings this character to the end of its logical development, playing a hero who becomes an anti-hero because he despises the slobs who worship him." The logical conclusion of Newman's rebel loner carries with it a sense of self-realization: he can continue to find his own way and resist control, but consistency means he will do so under the supervision of spectators and the weight of expectations. Luke has all of the will, determination, and independence of Eddie Felson and Hud Bannon, but he also has a following – a collective force making demands on him.

In the company of men who *do* submit to the rules of others, Luke’s rebellious spirit and carefree attitude – both hallmarks of the rebel – quickly earn him fanfare. Luke becomes the film’s prime mover to a comedic degree: when he is absent from the plot (while in solitary confinement or after having escaped from the road jail), the lives of the other characters slow to an absolute standstill. Conversely, scenes that would be short in actuality (such as Luke’s initial escape, when he only makes it 1.5 miles from the jail) seem stretched to the absolute limit of believability. It is also worth noting that it is Luke’s escape sequences that reflect him at his most
genuinely content: his smile is nearly ever-present, but never with the almost childlike glee we witness when he is on his own. Luke doesn't want to be a hero or part of a group, but his stature nevertheless grows, making it more difficult to escape the pressure of trying to live for other people – that which his previous rebels sought to resist above all else. Luke’s connection with the other inmates, then, is tenuous at best: he is the idol of the prisoners but nonetheless has contempt for them (Crowther), and he is alienated because “his relationship with the other inmates is more an accommodation than genuine feeling” (Godfrey 139). Moreover, when Luke’s mother Arletta (played by Jo Van Fleet) visits the prison, we realize the pressures of “stardom” exist for him outside of jail as well. Consider the following exchange between son and mother:

Arletta – No it ain’t, Luke. You ain’t alone. Everywhere you go I’m with you, and so is John.
Luke – You ever thought that’s a heavy load?
Arletta – We always thought you was strong enough to carry it. Was we wrong?

Luke may be capable of carrying the load, but in rebel loner fashion, he doesn’t want to: he wants to do things his own way, for himself, without being accountable to or even watched by outside forces. Giving in to the demands and expectations of others requires a sacrifice of the autonomy and independence at the heart of the rebel – a sacrifice he curiously makes and then obviously regrets. This sense of metacinematic commentary on stardom reaches its peak in Cool Hand Luke, and by this point it is just too much for the rebel: the Captain famously says Luke has things
“the way he wants it,” but it’s clear that having things the way he wants just isn’t possible. The “growing fatigue” and “spiritual weakening” Lionel Godfrey praises in Newman’s performance (140) carry a sense of realism – recalling Ebert’s characterization of Eddie Felson – precisely because of the doomed rebel narrative cultivated throughout the 1960s.

Dragline and the other inmates – Luke’s fans – fundamentally misunderstand who Luke is and how they relate to him. This is echoed near the end of the film when Dragline declares Luke is “an original,” but says so based on his assumption that Luke’s submission to the bosses was all an act. Moreover, the inmates also fail to recognize when Luke does engage in theatrical behavior: throughout the sequence when he eats fifty eggs, Luke performs for his fellow convicts, overtly feeding the fan relationship that will later become too much to bear55. Although the sequence ends

Figures 2.14 and 2.14. Luke does seem happy to have given the inmates something to hold on to, but the film foregrounds the level of sacrifice implied in submitting to the will(s) of others. (Credit: Warner Bros)

55 *Cool Hand Luke* is full of moments when Luke digs his own grave, a theme that is literalized when he is given the Sisyphean task of digging, filling, and re-digging the same patch of land because “his dirt” is in the boss’s ditch – a keynote example of the prison’s nonsensical rule structure. This moment in particular implies the paradoxical nature of the rebel, a figure that fundamentally resists dominant ideals (meeting Dyer’s criteria) while simultaneously sustaining his star image (as Morin suggests the star must) by offering up some part of himself to those who admire him.
with Luke apparently exhausted and laid out as if crucified – a sacrifice on the altar of his own stardom – there are indications that the result of this colossal eating challenge are never really out of hands. In other words, Luke appears to be in complete control: he engages in public preparation (acting aloof and nonchalant – or “cool” – about the whole affair), limps around the room as he eats (appearing to struggle with the task he’s set up for himself), and then completely changes gears once it is announced that every dollar in camp is riding on the outcome of the event (in other words, when there is nothing left for him to accumulate). Luke is, in this moment, the essence of a hustler – not just embodying and projecting the restlessness that characterizes the doomed rebel, but doing exactly what “Fast” Eddie Felson would do. But the inmates don’t recognize any of this: they accept Luke as an emblem of the kind of masculinity they wish they could embody but do not (or cannot) – the very definition of the star. But these behaviors enable the prisoners as fans, encouraging them to invest themselves further in Luke. When he screams “Where are you now?” to the inmates after sustaining the abuse of the bosses, the commentary on star worship is clear: the other prisoners essentially become a fan

Figures 2.15 and 2.16. Luke provides the ultimate spectacle for his fellow inmates, playing to his audience and pretending to be on the brink of failure for their sake. (Credit: Warner Bros)
club for Luke, but they abandon him when he doesn’t do exactly what they want and/or expect. He has already given them everything he can, but they still want more – and, importantly, only more of the same.

Like Eddie, Luke demonstrates the importance of being seen: he not only engages in behavior his peers (or fans) can witness, but facilitates their fandom through visual images, sending them a picture of himself (drinking and surrounded by women) he later reveals to be a fake. Therefore, Luke demonstrates some submission to the control of others, but when he returns and admits to the fakery – robbing his fans of the authenticity of their fantasy – the prisoners don’t believe him. Luke has given them a tangible part of himself: something his fans can possess and use as a representation of the values and ideals they have attached to him. As the image in the magazine suggests, the illusion can kill: the image Luke has developed has accumulated so much value, energy, and meaning that his fans cannot accept it as anything other than wholly real even when he tells them it was just pretend. The inmates have invested their own identities in Luke, and he resists their pressure and demands, saying “Listen. Open your eyes. Stop beating it. And stop feeding off me.”
But the cult of personality Luke has established with the other prisoners can’t be quieted so easily – he cannot take back the essence of rebellion and “world shaking” he has given to his fans. As Godfrey points out, “[Luke] is strong—sustained and nourished by his own spirit, though it is not inexhaustible, and he can become angry about others’ dependence on him, their habit of sensing his power and feeding on it” (139). The key phrase here is not inexhaustible: the exact same used by Newman in counterpoint to himself (“like Olivier”) when explaining his portrayal of similar on-screen characters. When Bert makes demands on Eddie at the end of The Hustler – screaming that he is owed money – Newman’s rebel still has enough vigor and nerve to resist. By Cool Hand Luke, however, the pressures of control and expectation for/on the rebel are simply too widespread to overcome. If Newman’s rebel loner cannot abide the power that would be shared with a father or a lover or even a manager, there is just no way he can give so much of himself to a group of inmates (that is, fans). Just as Newman’s characters are understood in relation to each other – creating the persona or image at the center of his stardom – so is his off-screen life affected by the demands of adoration. Another intersection with the performer’s actual life bears mentioning here – Newman, like his on-screen rebels, didn’t want the feeling of being in someone’s debt:

Sure, I owe [the fans] a lot. I owe them the best performance I can give; I owe them an appearance on my set exactly on time: I owe them trying to work for the best I can, not just for money. But if somebody says that what I owe him is to stand up against a wall and take off my dark glasses so he can take a picture of my baby blues, then I say, “No, I don’t owe you that” (quoted in Borden 45).

In spite of his view of acting as a process of revelation or exposure, Newman also felt he only owed fans what he wanted to give: professionalism and the products of
work necessary to shape and inform his star image, and nothing more. *Cool Hand Luke*, however, shows us that this type of managed, mediated relationship with fans is not so easily maintained. Newman’s on-screen rebels have diminishing space to go their own way, but his “doomed loner” persona persisted throughout the 1960s, embodying a coherent, consistency system of values as the conditions and expectations around the archetype changed.

In this way, *Cool Hand Luke* offers a critique of the demands of film stardom as impossible to sustain or fully realize. Luke resists rules and control from all sides (even when it might benefit him), and only finds peace at the end of the film when he is free from stardom and infamy – that is, when he is dead. But the ending of *Cool Hand Luke* suggests the sacrifice and lack of control that come with stardom cannot be escaped through death. The film does not end with Luke smiling after being shot – suggesting the satisfaction he feels at being released from the expectations of others – but closes with the prisoners talking about Luke’s smile. The final images of *Cool Hand Luke* are a montage of “that Luke smile,” including moments from the film the other prisoners did not witness\(^{56}\) and closing with the fake photograph Luke had made for the prisoners. The prisoners in *Cool Hand Luke* remember him how they want, suggesting that Luke’s legacy – like Newman’s – is not truly in his hands: in spite of the doomed rebel’s desire for going his own way, the conclusion of his story shows that control cannot be perpetuated. The characters in *Cool Hand Luke* remember Luke for his persona, for the ideals and attitudes he represented as a star rather than for his actual identity. Yet these questions of agency, power, and

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\(^{56}\) Of the thirteen images included in the “smile montage,” seven of them come from scenes where Luke is either alone or apart from the gaze of his inmate fan club.
responsibility – that is, who actually creates and maintains the star – are inevitably secondary to the contradictions inherent in Luke’s embodiment of this rebel archetype. As discussed, rebels like Luke, Hud, and Eddie Felson desire to go their own way and resist the burden of others’ expectations or rules. But Luke nevertheless knowingly and willingly undertakes efforts – or performances – to build and sustain his legend as a “star” within this context. He naturally gathers fans of his rebellious spirit given the restricted environment of Cool Hand Luke while simultaneously making it harder to go his own way by giving some part of himself to those around him. Furthermore, Luke refuses to give up even though it’s increasingly clear there are no avenues for escape. This naturally raises questions about what actually motivates his rebellion, as Luke pursues his ends knowing they can’t be realized while seeming willing to sacrifice some part of his desires for the sake of his fellow inmates. Like the turtle he retrieves when submitting (or pretending to submit) to the prison guards, Luke is “dead but won’t let go,” a dramatic metaphor for the unsustainability of the doomed/loner rebel. In spite of the questionable viability of this uniform star image, this complex – and like Figures 2.19 and 2.20. Early on, Luke knows he can’t beat Dragline boxing but says he’ll just have to kill him – like the turtle shot by the Man Without Eyes, who is “dead but won’t let go.” (Credit: Warner Bros)
stardom itself, necessarily contradictory – rebel persona looms large over Newman for the rest of his career and life. Again the reconciler of contradictions, the rebel star persona is simultaneously unsustainable and inescapable, a tenuous position that recurs even after the archetype has reached its narrative conclusion.

But it must be repeated that star image never give us access to the actual person behind it: this discussion of Newman’s stardom – even though it intersects occasionally with details from his off-screen life – never brings us any closer to observing or understanding the actual man. Most importantly, the conclusions I reach in my exploration of Newman’s star persona are not limited to an understanding of his career or life specifically. Rather, I contend that examining Newman’s films in the 1960s reveals the immense value in privileging star persona as the entry point to interrogating mediated identities of film stars and recognizing the meaning generated by the continuum of human presence on screen. Approaches to film studies engage with aesthetic continuity as an essential component of cinema, and in doing so prioritize the narrative structure and coherence of stardom in coordinating film meaning. In *Film and Fiction*, Keith Cohen identifies the presence and value of what he calls “interrelations”: configurations that transcend the boundaries of individual films (4). I believe this concept has a specific connection to narratology’s engagement with character, particularly as theorized by Thomas Leitch in *What Stories Are*: figures on display, designed to be apprehended, their identity a uniquely discursive function (158). These narrative formulations reinforce Deleuze’s invaluable paradigm of movement – the cinematic frame is never totally closed, the whole is defined by relations and consistently transformed.
by the unity of movement. In *Cool Hand Luke*, Newman’s presence actively refers back to several elements of his on-screen presence: charm and restlessness, yes, but also his past as a boxer, his criminality, his weariness at managing the expectations of others, and so on. It also reveals the complexity of his rebel star persona: once identified for the values his image has accrued over time, even the rebel becomes trapped in a matrix of control and expectation. These meanings are inextricably rooted in Newman’s star image: the figure of Lucas Jackson is far more than a war hero resisting the pressures of life inside prison, and this phenomenon is the direct result of interrelation between films and Newman’s consistent on-screen image. The film, then, reflects on Newman’s career as a star but also the narrative structure and limitations of the rebel loner persona. It is vital to recognize that the image of stardom and masculinity projected by Newman is neither himself nor is it a rigidly unchanging portrait of rugged American toughness. Instead, through consistent on-screen presence, Newman offers fluid but recognizable embodiments of impatience, charm, determination, and self-destructiveness. Newman was, then, a known quantity, but not strictly in the sense implied by Peter Bogdanovich at the start of this chapter: Newman will play himself on screen, but only inasmuch as his on-screen presence refers to other defining components of his continuous star image *rather* his actual identity. Instead, “just being Paul Newman” effectively underlines the effect of his star persona, which persists as a cultural, cinematic, and economic commodity throughout his films in this period and beyond.
Chapter Three
I Always Thought I Was Gonna Grow Up to Be a Hero: Beyond the Maximized Star

Newman’s sequence of roles in the 1960s offers singularly compelling insight into two underexplored elements of stardom: its foundation in consistency rather than range and the functional separation of persona from a star’s “actual” off-screen life. These factors suggest on-screen presence is best understood in narrative terms, examining how roles exist in a self-reflexive continuum of semiotic and cultural meaning(s) continuously drawing from and reshaping his star persona. At the same time, the narrative of Newman’s archetypal doomed rebel persona seems to reach a conclusion in 1967: the ending of Cool Hand Luke seems to offer clear closure to this second phase of Newman’s career and his association with the rebel loner. After nearly a decade of increasingly reluctant engagement with the demands of the outside world, it stands to reason that the two deaths of Newman’s Lucas Jackson – his figurative crucifixion after eating fifty eggs and his shooting by the Man With No Eyes – should bring the narrative of the rebel and his growing fandom to an end. Luke even smiles as he is driven away to certain death, glad to be free of the world’s rules and the demands of idolization.

As Newman’s films increasingly demonstrate across his career, even if the doomed rebel appears harmless, any real or perceived threat he poses can only be truly eliminated through his death. But the archetype doesn’t die, and the continuation of Newman’s film career after 1967 is complicated by this presumed resolution to the narrative arc of his star persona. In other words, Newman’s association with the doomed rebel continued in spite of the self-reflexivity and
meta-cinematic criticisms embedded in *Cool Hand Luke*. Importantly, as I illustrate in chapter two, the conclusion to *Cool Hand Luke* is as much about Luke's remaining fan base as it is about his doomed fate as a loner rebel. The end of the film dramatizes the limited acceptable range of stardom, as the remaining members of the chain gang refuse to allow Luke's memory to simply fade away. This general commemoration appears benign enough, but the men of the labor camp seem particularly fixated on the memories of Luke they can associate with his smile. In other words, Luke's biological death only took with it the more complex and complicated elements of his character: resistance to authority, restlessness, independence, and world weariness. He is remembered only for his smile and for making the other inmates smile, reducing him to little more than an entertaining (and empty) diversion. *Cool Hand Luke* minimizes any emancipation or freedom he might attain in existing outside the expectations of others and separating from one single image. In this way, Newman (as Luke) lingers on, this part of his story still somehow open and unfinished even though his narrative seems to have concluded in every way.

Newman himself addressed this phenomenon in the context of performance and typecasting, suggesting that American audiences are unwilling to accept actors in a variety of roles: “they get something they hook on to and they like, and that's what they want to see” (quoted in Goldman 27, emphasis in original). But Richard Dyer’s commentary on how star images pursue balance between consistency, roundness, and development reminds us that “Certainly there is no requirement that a star image should change” (*Stars* 110). The insistence on sameness
dramatized by *Cool Hand Luke*, then, is a result of both external pressures (the audience) and the very nature(s) of cinema, stardom, and persona. Regardless of Newman’s stated desire to demonstrate range and to be known for his talent as a screen performer, the potential for change in established star persona is not mandatory or in any way natural, and therefore cannot be assumed. Moreover, Dyer’s language suggests that when a star image does change it can only really do so gradually – it develops or expands, slowly building towards a more complete image but always maintaining some relation to its original defining components. Instead of variety there is a crucial emphasis on consistency: while a star’s image is often composed of contradictory elements, it can also become “novelistic” in nature, wherein “sameness becomes the over-riding feature” (*Stars* 110, emphasis in original). This repetition of features and characteristics in new cinematic contexts relies on the fluid boundaries of cinema as an art form and reinforces star persona as a transcendent phenomenon, carried from role to role.

Borrowing a concept from critic Lawrence Alloway, Dyer refers to stars demonstrating this lingering sameness as maximized or being at the “maximum stage,” referencing John Wayne in particular as capable of “[being] read as the Westerner par excellence, the man of the West taken to his logical conclusions” (*Stars* 112). Dyer fruitfully challenges the misconceived assumption that “‘great stars’ transcend the type to which they belong and become ‘utterly’ individual,” reminding us that achieving such status would render the act of identification impossible (*Stars* 111). The phenomenon he refers to as “pure individuality” would remove the possibility of recognizable semiotic value, rendering an “indecipherable”
image (*Stars 111*). Stars must maintain the capacity for identification\(^{57}\) regardless of their accrued cultural or signifying power. As a result, even the biggest stars can never be completely unique, whether in comparison to on-screen archetypes or in connecting with off-screen audiences. Importantly, Dyer also suggests the star persona is always understood in relation\(^{58}\): to other on-screen appearances, to the audience, and to the defining traits of the archetype itself. The star’s type – be it the man of the West or the doomed rebel – has a unique narrative trajectory which, like persona, transcends the boundaries of any individual film. Moreover, it further necessitates reading stardom and human presence as a continuum, suggesting narrative development and continuity for both the star and the archetype.

In the context of this chapter, recognizing Newman (or more specifically, Newman in the years after 1967) as a maximized star provides an invaluable context for understanding the continued existence of a star persona whose narrative arc seems completed. In spite of multifarious foreclosures on the doomed rebel, some version of this type continues to exist into the late 1960s and throughout the 70s, whether as a shadowy impression or as an integral but limited part of a specific Newman character. Importantly, extending the work of Dyer shows this persistence is not the result of audience control or reluctance to accept him any other way but a

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\(^{57}\) Both Edgar Morin and Béla Balázs insist on identification as an integral element of cinema itself. For Morin, all engagement with film relies on integrating ourselves with characters on-screen and integrating them into our own sense of self. Similarly, Balázs suggests we relate to cinematic material through identification, a psychological process that requires the “personality of the hero” (12) – again demonstrating the necessity and value of human presence on screen.

\(^{58}\) Dyer’s framework here recalls Gilles Deleuze, who not only argues for the openness of the cinematic frame but presents film as the model of continuous movement. For Deleuze, even the shot – the most basic unit of film production – is a movement-image, part of a system of continuity continuously creating and describing the new. Film itself is therefore best understood through the relations necessarily generated by movement and the locomotion of the camera, not as a succession of still images or separate elements.
ramification of the nature of stardom. The lingering presence of this rebel star image reveals the fate of the maximized film star – that is, what comes after his persona, like John Wayne’s, has reached its logical conclusion. Following this stage, Newman’s star image undergoes a process of distillation, reducing his persona to its most basic terms, narrowing and minimizing the complex presence of the star as well as our understanding of its cultural and semiotic value. This process can be understood as a manifestation or application of the forces of sameness and change which coexist in Dyer’s writings on the development of stardom. The tension between consistency, presence, and change here foregrounds the paradoxical nature of film stardom. The star’s ability to accrue semiotic meaning and ideological value is situated in their physical presence, meaning qualities are projected through the star rather than simply through individual characters or films – a phenomenon reflected in Newman’s problematic turn in Hud. In seeing Newman, we can just glimpse ethereal, fleeting reflections of Eddie Felson or Lucas Jackson, earlier defining incarnations shaping expectations for and understanding of Newman’s persona. But these erratic moments of presence only reinforce the more profound absence of any sense of continuity transcending the film or character.\textsuperscript{59} The result of this muddy process is that Newman’s rebel persona persists through the decade following Cool Hand Luke without providing new substance or critical/cultural

\textsuperscript{59}This sense of continuity is further complicated by the generations of performers whose rise to prominence was further removed from the star system than Newman’s. For instance, the promotion for films featuring Meryl Streep and resulting expectations of viewers are built around her disappearing into or subservience to character (a process described in chapter one). In other words, the continuity generated by Streep’s persona is actually a lack of transcendent characteristics or ideals. Streep can be contrasted by stars such as Jack Black or Vince Vaughn, whose on-screen appearances are so consistent they can be conceived of (and advertised) as copying previous specific characters rather than reiterating some version of a unifying archetype.
context for resituating our understanding of it. Newman’s performances in this period – occupying “hollow” roles in the wake of the doomed rebel’s closure – illuminate an important exchange: consistency and narrative coherence for simplicity and recognizability, all but eliminating the on-screen continuum of complex growth and self-reflexivity Newman developed throughout the 1960s.

But what follows the maximum stage is more than mere simplicity or dumbing down – Newman’s films reflect more than a distillation of his persona. Rather, this uncanny version of the doomed rebel and the flexibility enabled by it create a profound sense of extravagance and gratuitousness. This is not to say Newman’s presence during this period functions as a sequence of unsolicited gifts (that is, as some notion of gratuity versus gratuitousness). Instead, it is marked by whimsy, excess, and superfluity, giving us glimpses into how the star can be deployed in new contexts without fully engaging with the archetype that continues to delimit understanding of his presence. Instead of being typecast in the shadow of his persona, Newman actually appears a wider variety of prominent roles than ever before. But Newman is on display in these films as an idol – or even a borderline empty signifier – rather than an active, consistent symbol. In short, the draw of films such as *The Sting* and *Winning* is the spectacle of seeing Newman the star out of expected or fitting place and time: not as a determined rebel struggling against expectations, but as inconsistent con men or insecure leaders, all without real goals or principles, too willing to work with others or submit to their will. And yet these characters all maintain some part of the doomed rebel, in part because of the type’s inescapably strong connections to Newman, but also because of the limits of
coherence inherent in stardom and the impossibility of such contradictory cinematic individuality. Newman’s persona is distilled, as the expectations generated by his presence become less complex and meaningful – and therefore do less to fortify or strengthen his star image – from role to role. But this distillation is only part of the extravagant or gratuitous stage of stardom, marked by a shift from accruing meaning and value to setting it aside for the pursuit of cinematic indulgence. His presence in this era demonstrates that what comes after the archetype reaches its logical conclusion is a distinct lack of logic, motivation, or necessity. The fate of the maximized star is empty, superfluous extravagance.

This stage demonstrates that reading the development and positioning of star persona – whether Newman or anyone else’s – also means understanding the shifting manner and degree of cultural and semiotic value generated by star performances. In examining Newman’s career, the resulting complexity in relationships between his texts necessitates a different methodology for identifying and measuring their engagement with and impact on his star persona. The question shifts from how Newman roles reshape past and future incarnations of the rebel loner to whether a role coheres or fruitfully engages with the archetype at all. This slippage is compellingly addressed by media scholar Roberta Pearson, whose “Additionality and Cohesion in Transfictional Worlds” interrogates the factors affecting how new adaptations are accepted as part of a preexisting storyworlds. Using Marie-Laure Ryan’s narratological conception of tranfictionality as “the migration of fictional entities across different texts” (quoted in Pearson 113) – a near-perfect analog for examining film stardom as a narrative continuum – Pearson
interrogates the relationships between works connected by elements of a shared storyworld. For Pearson, there are important and notable differences between works that *expand* on previous material and those that simply *add* (or serve as “additions”) to it. Expansions offer meaningful variation, accumulation, or engagement relative to what has come before, creating substantive overlap with previous storyworlds. But additions don’t enlarge or expand upon what previously exists, implying no sense of genuine cohesion or modification. Looking at models such as Batman and *Star Trek*, Pearson develops a sort of litmus test for assessing whether a new work expands or merely adds to the larger storyworld canon. New iterations that cohere with preexisting materials offer more than just recognizability: coherent works of expansion, for example, demonstrate loyalty to established psychological traits or behaviors, interactions with other characters, and surrounding environments.

While Pearson’s work focuses primarily on reiterations or adaptations of characters, the reliance on narrative relationships linking discrete texts offers a clear and valuable parallel model to the method of reading stardom posited here. As she notes in discussing *Star Trek* additions, cohesion does not demand the same specific characters (such as Captain Kirk) but can instead arise from similar

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60 These distinctions are clarified by Pearson through the use of Jan-Noël Thon’s work on transfiction. Following this framework, works of addition may relate to another work within the transfiction through redundancy, focusing on new elements, or modifying previously-established details (Pearson 113).

61 Pearson attempts to address “producers’ strategies for creating additions that consumers are likely to accept as part of the previously established storyworld” (113), focusing on industrial and narrative factors affecting the connection of a new work to what has come before. This creates several categories of ways storyworlds may be changed, but she begins with a template for “measuring” coherence in new representations of character. Citing her own work on television, Pearson notes six characteristics used to measure the coherence of recognizability of a new adaptation: psychological traits, physical appearance, speech patterns, interactions with other characters, environment, and biography (114).
relationships to environment and surrounding characters, as well as narrative function (116)\textsuperscript{62}. Furthermore, in offering different ways to measure a new work’s association to the material that comes before it, Pearson reveals that additionality is its own form of superfluity. Additions merely reproduce familiar elements through hollow figures, repeating imagery without expanding or developing it – the same terms I’ve used to describe this third period of Newman’s career. Indeed, understanding the degree to which Newman roles engage with the preexisting values of his loner rebel illustrates how the star in this gratuitous stage is also in the “additional” stage, merely adding to the larger persona (by way of new appearances) instead of expanding upon it. In Newman’s case, the traits that would be reproduced (or not) in a new iteration of characters such as Sherlock Holmes or Dracula are here instead represented by the expectations and values generated within star persona\textsuperscript{63}. Newman is still recognizable as a restless rebel, resisting the influence of others, as a result of the sheer force of his established persona and the sense of embodiment inherent in the very nature of stardom. But his new appearances on-screen – both individually and as a whole – do not offer expansion or cohesion in the narrative of his rebel persona. Even in iconic films during this period, Newman is never fully deployed with this persona in a meaningful way, and his presence only

\textsuperscript{62} Function and narrative are important for applying this framework to a reading of stardom, as the transference of persona from film to film rarely relies on the same exact performers or characters. The narrative development that takes place for Newman’s persona in the 1960s does so through relationships and function(s), not actual redundancy of character, setting, and story. In those films, Newman’s doomed rebel is flanked by recurring types and relationships, lending structure and continuity to the development of his persona.

\textsuperscript{63} Pearson offers no examples of film stars in her work on transfictional storyworlds. Nevertheless, applying her framework to a figure like Newman is a compelling reminder that the star is a unique cultural and semiotic phenomenon. Here stars can be compared to franchises or characters that span decades (or even centuries) across a variety of media, but only film can produce and enable the transcendent continuity explored here, and only film stars can embody and project such profound values and ideologies without reproducing the same literal characters.
offers shallow repetition of the star we expect from the semiotic and cultural value generated in films such as *The Hustler* and *Cool Hand Luke*. Newman's literal on-screen presence – what Pearson would call his physical appearance – is the only consistent element that remains.

This developing framework and context of narrative continuity in stardom is the primary force shaping and guiding the third period of Paul Newman’s career. Instead of offering development or redefinition, Newman's films in this third era of his career chronicle the bizarre insertion of the rebel archetype into a variety of new situations in the shadow of its own apotheosis. Starting with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, his characters appear as strange would-be cousins to the rebel loner, gesturing toward elements of his persona but never seeming to fully occupy it. This shift disrupts methodologies for understanding how persona is deployed in new on-screen appearances and how these strikingly unusual roles fit into the larger continuum of the star image. Newman's roles in these era-defining “buddy” films and ensemble pieces consistently fail to genuinely replicate the defining qualities of his rebel persona. From 1969 to 1976, Newman appears in films working alongside partners and teams, pursuing goals that involve the interests of others, and reflecting a striking willingness to bear the weight of others – all highly undesirable positions for loner rebel. Even though he appeared in fewer films as a standalone star, Newman remained a highly sought-after commodity during the 1970s, topping the list of box office draws in ’70 and ’71 (Morrison 3). This popularity reflects a stage beyond the maximized star, defined by the excess and seeming incoherence of gratuitous additions to our understanding of the star and the storyworlds they have
generated. Newman’s 1970s films don’t maintain the same distinct continuum of persona seen in the 1960s, but they nevertheless draw on an understanding or recognition of the charm, impatience, and resistance at the forefront of his star image. Just as Lucas Jackson is recalled through simplified, sanitized memories in the closing of *Cool Hand Luke*, so is the archetype reflected by Luke (and embodied beyond the boundaries of any single film by Newman) distilled and made superfluous and indulgent as it is perpetuated far past its logical conclusion.

Newman’s continued and incomplete association with these characteristics introduces a profound sense of reluctance in these characters and films. Simply put, his presence throughout this period motions toward ideas of rebellion or rebelliousness but generates and foregrounds a much more profound desire to escape. In his review of 1994’s *Nobody’s Fool*, critic Richard Schickel begins by asking us to “Imagine Cool Hand Luke, the Hustler or even Butch Cassidy somehow making it all the way to his sunset years […] still a knothead, still a wise guy in revolt against the conventional wisdom, still very recognizably Paul Newman.” Of course, the *Paul Newman* referenced here is not the actual man himself but the accumulated glimpses from a coherent on-screen narrative defined by (doomed) rebellion. Yet Schickel’s telling reference to these iconic characters “somehow” making it to old age reinforces the inherent unsustainability and inescapability of Newman’s rebel persona. Newman may still reflect some elements of the doomed rebel in later stages of his career, but that persona only exists as part of a tenuous and reluctant
relationship, regardless of the luxuries it enables. As such, his films form a disconnected sequence of additions to our understanding of his persona rather than a coherent system of meaningful expansions built on self-reflexive consistency.

What narrative can be read into Newman’s post-*Cool Hand Luke* performances is expectedly and appropriately metacinematic, dramatizing the lingering shadow of the doomed rebel persona through superfluous escapades and fantasies of escape. This attempt at escape is seen most clearly in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, a film that establishes itself as a story about past glories with its prologue: “The Hole in the Wall Gang, led by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, are all dead now...but they once ruled the West!” The film tells the story of the title duo (played by Newman and co-star Robert Redford, respectively) as they build on their notoriety as train robbers and flee from unrelenting and faceless lawmen led by Joe Lefors. Butch proposes an escape to Bolivia along with Sundance’s girlfriend Etta Place (played by Katharine Ross), where they achieve a similar level of infamy as payroll thieves. Their subsequent attempt to go straight as payroll guards ends in disaster, as they find themselves ambushed and robbed. They get revenge on the bandits and return to criminal life, but are recognized after their last robbery and surrounded by the Bolivian Army. Although they pretend as if this lengthy showdown is simply the latest chapter in their legendary crime spree, Butch and Sundance eventually rush out from hiding into a hail of gunfire, and the film ends

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64 The industrial and economic motivations for this kind of additional or gratuitous stardom are clear enough: Newman was never more popular than after this crucial shift in his career. The fact that Newman’s performances demonstrate consistent (if shallow or incomplete) re-deployment of a doomed rebel archetype that has achieved full narrative resolution is another reminder of the dominance of economic and market factors in cinema. As always, there are many elements informing a star’s presence in a given film, some of them arguably more important (or at the very least, given more consideration) than semiotic or cultural value.
without completely revealing their fate(s). The nature of the film’s story (following partners in crime) is an obvious departure from Newman’s career-defining roles, suggesting a shift from the loner tendencies of his persona. But more importantly, it shows his character struggling with the enormous weight of both history and authenticity. If “The Battler” (discussed in chapter one) serves as a microcosm for identifying and analyzing the forces shaping Newman throughout the 1950s, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* has a similar function in reading Newman’s career in the 1970s and his reluctant but unshakeable engagement with his rebel persona. Here the past is both defining and inescapable, making it impossible for Butch to redefine himself or break away from the things he’s done – an allegory for the creation of the gratuitous star, offering repetitions of a hollowed-out, distilled persona.

Fitting its engagement with the notion of past glory, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* begins in sepia, running the opening credits alongside a short film showing the Hole in the Wall Gang robbing a train. The frame itself looks like a screening room, with the majority of the screen covered in darkness while we focus on the relatively small, angled projection occupying the left side of the screen – almost as if we are watching from a bad seat in a movie theater. The three-minute film – seemingly titled “The Hole in the Wall Gang” – reads as both newsreel and homage to the iconic 1903 short *The Great Train Robbery*, offering the declarative perspective of the former but lacking the narrative and formal complexity of the latter. In the short, the sepia Butch and Sundance (played by uncredited actors) spot a passing train and lead their gang in boarding it, killing an interfering engineer in
the process. They are interrupted by lawmen on horseback, and while the other members of their gang are shot or captured during the ensuing shootout, Butch and Sundance make a clean getaway together. The prologue does little to appropriately convey the outlaws’ legend or to establish the notably absent Newman and Redford as charming, rebellious sexual icons.

However, the short film within a film does introduce inconsistency and a sense of cinema – spectatorship, performance, and interrogating authenticity – into our initial understanding of the film’s content. Our first impression of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid is historical detachment: not only do we see a brief newsreel following characters played by different (non-star) actors and portraying events the film itself never repeats, but the screen connects this short play to the movie’s actual narrative in offering the questionable disclaimer that “Most of what follows is true” (emphasis added). From the very start the film establishes a profound skepticism and discontinuity, encouraging us to examine how events and characters cohere.
with what we know and what has come before. This marks a dramatic shift from the introductions to previous Newman characters, which offer more sincere and genuine first glimpses into their nature and desires. Whether purely fictional or having some basis in history, previous Newman films demonstrate an investment in authenticity. As noted in chapter one, the Rocky Graziano biopic Somebody Up There Likes Me opens with a statement from the film’s subject testifying to its honesty. And although The Left Handed Gun doesn’t offer a document attesting to the accuracy of its portrait of Billy the Kid, the film’s opening does demonstrate Billy’s mania and insecurity while serenading the audience with a song describing his contradictory character: simultaneously devilish and gentle, dangerous but deserving of mercy. These films offer narrative coherence and revelation, helping us to not only understand the character within an individual film but to recognize its place in a larger continuum. The prologue to Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid introduces a barely tenuous connection to what has come before it – whether cinematic/semiotic or historical – and only establishes the film’s qualities by vaguely previewing its anachronistic tongue-in-cheek tone. It is, like Newman’s ungrounded persona, floating along without a clear sense of origin or destination.

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65 The film cultivates and draws attention to this historical discontinuity by building our first impression around fake historical documentation that differs from the subsequent story. But in this context, it also suggests the same sort of discontinuity in the meaning of on-screen presence and stardom, allegorizing detachment from what has come before in historical and “fictional” (or “metafictional”) terms.

66 And, as noted, this pattern holds for Newman’s portrayals of fictional characters as well. Our introduction to Eddie Felson follows him as he enters Aimes Pool Hall to challenge Minnesota Fats, establishing both his charm and his unrelenting, singular desire to be the best. Cool Hand Luke opens with cutting the heads off parking meters, capturing the inciting incident for the film’s plot while providing a compelling example of Luke’s restlessness and general disinterest in the rules of others.
After the introductory short, the film’s narrative opens with a reflection of an archway blocked by a metal door, as the camera pushes forward to reveal Butch behind the window, looking – still in sepia, matching the visual presentation of the preceding short film. As he exits the building, Butch is surrounded by the imagery of the West (or the western) but, thanks to his mannerisms, dress, and inescapable Paul Newman-ness, also clearly distinct from the environment and out of place.

This simple imagery effectively foregrounds something the Hole in the Wall gang short only implies: a sense of displacement, suggesting the central idea that there is no place for Butch (or, to a lesser extent, Sundance). The only real cohesion offered by opening newsreel is, ironically, a distinct sense of separation from what surrounds it. Butch will eventually be defined by his unceasing goofiness even in the face of mortal danger and his manipulative, opaque approach to diplomacy. But from his first appearance he is visually separate: he walks slowly and lingers, dressed decidedly unlike the predominant imagery associated with the man of the West. Butch looks longingly at the bank, presumably interested only in what it contains or represents (as any outlaw or thief would be). When he enters the bank as it closes and sees alarms and an armed deputy, however, his interest in the bank seems to shift. Seeing the obstructions to an easy score, Butch bemoans the beauty

67 While not a definite man of the West like John Wayne, Newman appeared in films falling broadly along the western genre, with The Left Handed Gun, The Outrage, and Hombre coming before 1967. But these films are unified by their unconventional and challenging approach to westerns. As discussed, The Left Handed Gun is singled out for its focus on character psychology, and confuses the genre’s traditional themes of law and justice by following a violent, revenge-driven vigilante. The Outrage and Hombre share a director, Martin Ritt, who also worked with Newman on The Long, Hot Summer, Paris Blues, Hemingway’s Adventures of a Young Man, and Hud. The Outrage, a remake of Akira Kurosawa’s canonical masterpiece Rashomon, muddies its ethical and narrative concerns through its reliance on conflicting perspectives. Hombre is perhaps the most stereotypical or classical American western of this group, but similarly complicates its commentary on race and civilization through Newman’s portrayal of protagonist John Russell, an Apache-raised white man who operates as both noble savage and vanishing Indian.
of the old bank, which the deputy suggests had to be sacrificed because it kept
going robbed. Butch ends the scene by proclaiming such vulnerability a “small
price to pay for beauty.”

The result of this introduction to Butch the character (setting aside the
questionable historical figure from the opening short film) is the first articulation of
Butch’s unmatched interest in the idiosyncratic ideas and values he holds dear.
Tellingly, Butch’s first declaration about himself (just minutes after his first
appearance) is that he has vision “and the rest of the world wears bifocals.” In this
context, Butch’s self-confidence instead illustrates his capacity to take things as
natural and follow his instincts and compulsions without questioning them. Yet the
film consistently suggests Butch should be engaging in some sort of self-critique, as
he fundamentally misunderstands and/or fails to recognize the omnipresent danger
that comes with being a man apart. Throughout Butch Cassidy and the Sundance

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It’s important to note that Butch’s partnership with Sundance does not mitigate this looming
threat. Butch is obviously not the same loner we expect from Newman’s previous films, but his
attachment to Sundance does not provide the grounding that might help Butch “fit in” or mitigate the
threat he poses.
Kid, Butch’s goals and motivations alike are completely singular – even partner Sundance offers no real investment in the things that are important to Butch, whether material, practical, or inane. But regardless of whether Butch is drawn to the bank as a robbery target or simply as an object of aesthetic beauty, he finds those interests obstructed or altogether removed. As Butch, Newman is situated in the highly-structured environment of the western yet casually avoids the genre’s predominant themes: even his attempts to escape lawman Joe Lefors are far more about the indulgence of seeing Newman on the run than, for instance, engaging with the meaning of justice or resolving a conflict between good and evil. Indeed, the degree to which the film as a whole struggles within the confines of the western genre is the focus of many reviews. Writing in the New York Times, Vincent Canby refers to the film as an “alternately absurd and dreamy saga” and defines Butch Cassidy by his overwhelming amiability69 – not a trait inherent in the western hero or central to the charm of Newman’s rebel persona. Roger Ebert’s criticism is more genre-specific, as he argues the film (particularly the script) “is constantly too cute and never gets up the nerve, by God, to admit it’s a Western.” This sense of absurdity and cuteness is inextricable from the film’s frivolity: Butch sees himself as a dreamer and visionary even if inappropriate or even destructive in his environment,

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69 Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid screenwriter William Goldman isolates this as a source of the film’s generic tension, recalling the conflict of Newman’s performance in Hud: “Now, The Wild Bunch consisted of some of the more murderous figures in Western history. Arrogant, brutal men. And yet, here running things was Cassidy. Why? The answer is incredible but true: People just liked him” (192). Again, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid asserts itself as a Newman film above all else, in spite of his character’s relative lack of skill compared to those around him or complete detachment from the conventions of the genre in which he finds himself. But most importantly, the film is shaped by its fixation on Paul Newman even when the meaning of his physical presence is at its most shallow and frivolous.
a fitting start to the complex expectations and deployments of this additional stage of Newman’s career.

As shown by the short film prologue and tension in the first images of the film’s narrative, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* wastes no time establishing this sense of displacement and contextual dissonance. Critical perspectives on the film (such as those introduced above) suggest the film reinforces a profound sense of incompatibility. For Ebert, this mismatching is potentially sourced in Newman himself: he suggests the film’s promise is “buried beneath millions of dollars that were spent on ‘production values’ that wreck the show” – values specifically meant to protect the studio’s investment in Newman70. Canby too observes a “gnawing emptiness” at the heart of the movie resulting from the deliberate attempt to make a “very slick movie” rather than a conventional, recognizable, traditionally satisfying one. Unsurprisingly, Ebert and Canby both observe how much the film seems out of place and time – the former specifically noting that its heroes seem to be “consciously speaking for the benefit of us clever 1969 types” instead of in a manner remotely appropriate to the context. Canby reflects on the film as funny only in a “strictly contemporary way,” conceiving of the film as “the last exuberant word on movies about the men of the mythic American West who have outlived their day.” The title characters are, for Canby, “the fall guys of their time and circumstance.”

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70 This observation made by Ebert is particularly savvy and invaluable, as it demonstrates both the film’s unflinching focus on Newman’s figure and the limitations generated by this focus. The creeping anachronism Ebert notes is a direct result of Newman’s presence in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, reflecting how the extravagance shaping Newman’s persona at this time also engenders the same sense of detachment and dislocation in the films in which he appears.
The film makes it clear Butch and Sundance are out of time and place. Importantly, it also demonstrates they are destined to failure and downfall – again, from the very first scene. The montage of Butch looking around the bank's new interior consists of only two types of images: Newman's face and collected objects (the safe, the “closed” sign, the slide locks, the alarm, the armed guard) foretelling his demise. Moreover, some of the imagery is repeated, breaking the film's sense of linearity and realism to make it exceedingly clear Butch has no place here – in this moment, strict adherence to narrative and chronology are less important than reinforcing Butch’s doom. There is more to be said about the position of spectatorship created by the film’s emphasis on looking, but the images surrounding Butch’s introduction convey more than a sense of foreshadowing. In this context, they are indications of the frivolousness of the film in general and of Butch’s

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Figures 3.5 and 3.6. The imagery of the first scene forecloses any possiblity of escape, success, or glory – the fate of Butch and Sundance is clear from the very start. (Credit: Twentieth Century Fox)

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71 This imagery compares most readily to the opening scene of Cool Hand Luke, which cuts together shots of “violation” signs popping up in parking meters and incomplete glimpses of Newman’s character cutting the heads off before revealing the star’s figure/identity. The foreboding communicated by these similar images and senselessness situated within Newman’s characters creates a visual or symbolic connection that transcends the individual films. However, as is the case with Newman’s films in this additional period, the similarity doesn’t fully extend past appearance: as a “rebel,” Butch doesn’t reflect or deploy the same motivations in the same contexts as earlier Newman on-screen rebels.
character/story in particular. Butch’s fate is already a matter of historical record, yet the film further delimits any possibility of real glory (or eventually, escape) before the narrative even begins with symbolic imagery and an abridged version of the life story we’re preparing to see. We may enter the film with some sense of what sort of person Butch is, but the film foregrounds what will happen to him through multiple methods of visual communication. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* leaves the audience what comes in between: not story or character, but indulgence and spectacle. The resulting experience is less about audience identification— that is, finding ourselves in the on-screen storyworld or further cultivating visual culture—and more about reinforcing our role as observer, consumers separated from the gratuitousness which exists increasingly for little other than our pure amusement and escape. Of course, this is not uniformly true of all historical films or stories with predictable outcomes. *The Left Handed Gun* foreshadows Billy the Kid’s doomed fate, but it also encourages a change in perspective regarding its subject and uses characterization and performance as means to justify that change. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* simply does not: Newman’s presence at this stage of his career shapes the film as a truly frivolous exercise, existing only to fulfill potential fantasies of on-screen representation.

The intersections created by this imagery and characterization undermine our traditional understanding(s) of how the past affects the present and how legacy shapes identity. Butch is undergoing a crisis of authenticity in a shifting culture, deployed from the very start as an unsustainable rebel in two distinct but concurrent contexts. Critics suggest the tone of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*
is meant to signal the end of the western, or at the very least, the displacement of
the iconic man of the West. But both Ebert and Canby are here also articulating
defining aspects of the extravagance surrounding the gratuitous star without giving
name to it. Ebert’s criticisms are more direct in acknowledging the excess attached
to Newman’s presence, but Canby too refers to the film’s commentary on the
western not as somber or reflective but as “exuberant.” The film is such a spectacle
that, for Ebert, we “can't believe a word anyone says,” its potential greatness buried
under frivolous events and dialogue (which is to say, everything). This sense of
excess and its negative impacts on the film directly result from Newman’s transition
into the stage of additionality. Here Newman’s persona is not only distilled to an
incomplete but still identifiable remnant of the doomed rebel, it is deployed in this
vacuum as an exercise in excess. We are meant to recognize Newman but not
necessarily read or personally invest in him – at least not in the larger context of his
star persona. His presence is foregrounded and clearly communicated while any real
meaning behind it is not. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* fails to take itself
seriously or introduce serious stakes because it is an exercise in the gratuitous: the
film’s dialogue, story, characters, and performers offer fantastical escapism – that is,
the chance to simply see Paul Newman do things – in place of narrative
development or cultural commentary.

The opening scenes of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* also clearly
illustrate how much reading Butch and/or Newman also relies on the counterpoint
provided by Sundance. Newman’s presence in the film is interestingly (and
consistently) contrasted by co-star Robert Redford, who was the top box office draw
from '74 to '76 following his collaborations with Newman (including 1973’s *The Sting*). Redford’s Sundance Kid is the genuine article: an impossibly skilled gunfighter with quiet determination and suave confidence. He is in many ways a far cry from Newman’s Butch, who accomplishes more with bluster and quick talking than with his guns. This distinction is established from Sundance’s first scene, where he is accused of cheating in a saloon card game – as one of the losers in the game points out, Sundance hasn't lost a hand since becoming the dealer. The same loser (who also appears to be the game’s host) stands and tells Sundance to leave his money, but backs down once he realizes who he’s threatening. The scene ends with Butch clearing his partner’s winnings from the table and Sundance showing the cowed loser “how good he is” by deftly shooting the man’s gun across the floor. It is clear from the start that one of them is everything he is advertised to be while the other reflects a clear contrast between what something appears to be and what something truly is.

Although he suffers the same fate as Butch, Sundance is not introduced with the same doomed imagery as his Newman’s character. Moreover, while he is threatened by the man who accuses him of cheating – who tells Butch and Sundance they “both can die” – he responds with composure and resolve where Butch downplays, misdirects, or outright ignores the danger posed to him. Both introductory scenes place clear visual emphasis on the stars’ faces, relying on the

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72 Sundance – like Redford, as one might expect – is also beautiful, an important factor supplementing William Goldman’s reflection on the film’s inner conflict with Newman’s likeability. The western genre is clearly just as undermined by the handsomeness of Newman and Redford as it is by their charm, amiability, or any other factor related to character: their beauty makes it hard to accept them in the mold of true western heroes and absolutely precludes them from being identified as actual villains; western heroism demands more of the grittiness associated with John Wayne and Clint Eastwood than could ever be associated with Newman or Redford.
recognizable image(s) Newman and Redford by consistently placing them in the center of the frame. But Butch looms over Sundance’s first scene, interjecting to note a shortage of “brotherly love around here” as Sundance is being accused. Even though the scene introduces Sundance’s cool demeanor and genuine skill, Butch is a constant presence, trying and failing to defuse the situation with charm. He then succeeds at facilitating a conclusion to the standoff, however, through the simple act of identifying his partner; once his initial attempt at mediation fails, Butch says, “I can’t help you, Sundance.” This utterance – and the antagonist’s shocked response to it – brings an end to the confrontation by motivating Sundance to stand, his most dramatic movement to this point. Thematically, Butch’s interference not only
reveals that Sundance is a known quantity within the context of the film, but also establishes his partner as force of nature. As the antagonist shrinks from his challenge, Sundance points out the man would be responsible for his own death if they were to duel: Sundance wouldn’t kill him, but through his challenge, the man would actually be killing himself. If the beginning of the film suggests Butch Cassidy is just a mouth (or perhaps, based on his interest in aesthetics over practical value, also a pair of eyes), it similarly suggests the Sundance Kid is just a weapon.

The real difference between the partners, however, doesn’t derive from simple elements of character, such as one being static and the other being active or one leading while the other follows. They are more profoundly contrasted by the film’s camera and narrative structure, which follow Butch regardless of the relevance or significance of what he does. In the context of reading Newman’s stardom in the period following Cool Hand Luke, the whimsy present in the form and style of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid foregrounds the sense of gratuitousness and indulgence typifying Newman as a star in the additional stage. Like the characters themselves, this frivolousness is established from the film’s start: in spite of Sundance’s introduction as something valuable and authentic, the focus is consistently and noticeably given to Butch, even when doing so offers little coherence or value. This privileging of Newman’s figure here – in the face of another more authentic, meaningful narrative – creates a dramatic lens for recognizing the predominance of addiionality in his persona at this stage. Sundance’s first scene, for instance, reveals his aura/stature and genuine capability in dramatic (and then preposterous) fashion, but his presence is relatively minimized, as if reducing him
(and/or Redford) to a visual symbol. Sundance is a striking figure, occupying the center of the frame with minimal movement or speech – he communicates more with his eyes than anything else. And for the first half of this scene, the film responds to his eyes, just as it does with Butch in the action that precedes it. As illustrated above, the film’s opening images are driven by what Newman’s character sees: first the bank’s exterior as an object of his longing, then its formerly beautiful interior as obstacles to his desire. Sundance’s eyes too dominate his introduction, serving as the frame’s focal point – we don’t even see another face until Butch’s entrance – and even motivating the scene’s first cut. Independent of one another,
Butch and Sundance seem to project the same level of control over what we see and how narrative information unfolds.

But, as noted above, this scheme changes (for Sundance and for us) once Butch enters the scene. As the transitions in the figures above demonstrate, the focus noticeably shifts to Butch Cassidy and/or Paul Newman: the camera, which responded to Sundance/Redford immediately beforehand, breaks away from its previous subject, rising to follow Cassidy as he leaves Sundance’s side to negotiate some sort of peace. Our eyes then stay with Butch as he lays out terms for the antagonist, only leaving him as the result of another factor motivated by Cassidy: his voice. It is here that Butch mentions his partner’s name, and the camera responds by cutting first to the shocked antagonist and then to a rising Sundance, ready for action. This sequence communicates Sundance’s power as a character within the film, but it also suggests a power for Butch Cassidy that transcends the limits of character or personality. Simply, Butch is here established as a true protagonist: not simply the main character, but the force motivating the film, driving forward the story and how we see it. We have already seen that the camera can be motivated by the eyes of either title character. However, here we also see that Butch’s power not only supersedes Sundance’s, but that he has multiple methods for deploying those powers of control. Just eight minutes into the *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, the film’s form and content suggest power and meaning are situated entirely in Butch (and Newman). Even if we ignore Newman’s transcendent economic and cultural value at this moment in time, the film’s semiotics make it clear he is the
source of what this film says, shows, and means – even if a hollow and disingenuous version of what we might expect.

These two scenes initially appear as straightforward (or even standard) character introductions, and these observations illuminate only a fraction of the directions the film’s opening establishes for reading its narrative, culture, characters, and performers. But just as Sundance’s ability to direct or manipulate the film is surpassed by Butch’s, so too are other thematic elements of the film subordinated to the implications of its unflinching impulse to follow Newman’s presence. The symbiosis between the film’s almost overbearing focus on Newman’s figure and Butch’s demand for attention creates the perfect storm for growth of the additional star and our consequent observation of it. Fittingly, what follows these character introductions is another perfect storm, one that responds to our desire to simply see Paul Newman do things while crystallizing the film’s detachment from history. As Butch and Sundance ride away from town – more specifically, as they enter the sunlight of a western plateau – the color scheme brightens from sepia to full color. At this moment, any tension between engagement with the past or even the film’s subject matter and the sheer extravagance of simply seeing Newman (complete with iconic blue eyes) without a filter is completely dissolved. Eleven minutes into the film, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* has given us two distinct glimpses of what might be called history, and the rest of the film – and Newman’s on-screen presence for the next several years – follows the star as his relationship to what has come before becomes increasingly shallow and strained.
The film’s spirit of whimsical excess and detachment from our understanding of the past dramatizes the uncertain narrative of Newman’s persona. In this context, the on-screen adventures of the title duo appear as an extended montage of failed potential, lost dreams, and foreboding, framed by Butch insisting his partner recognize someday he too will be “over the hill.” It is hard to tell if Butch’s interjections and warnings are earnest attempts to encourage his partner or undermining teases, making their interactions more like an inside joke – something meant for them and not for us. We can see here how the inauthenticity of this additional stage operates in place of the transcendent ideologies of the more recognizable star persona reflected by earlier Newman films. This quality moves from role to role in this period – not unlike his rebel persona in films like *The Hustler* and *Cool Hand Luke* – but also spreads throughout the individual films themselves: in spite of his incredible skill, Sundance is unable to escape the film’s difficulty with genuineness and truth. He tells Butch the showdown with his accuser can be resolved if the man asks them to stick around, a gesture of good faith suggesting Sundance isn’t really a cheater. But Butch, acting as a sort of mediator, adds his own editorial in communicating Sundance’s offer: “You don’t have to mean it or anything. Just ask us to stick around.” Sundance’s legitimacy is maintained, in part so Butch can continue to benefit from it. But Butch’s privileging of insincerity colors the environment in a way that undermines the normally-reliable value of someone with real skills and character. As a whole, things in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* don’t have to mean anything: the film’s whimsy and gratuitousness cannot be separated from its detachment from history and authenticity.
The rest of the film chronicles this insincerity and hollow representation, both in its compartmentalized portrait of Butch Cassidy and its extending engagement with the shifting narrative of Newman’s persona. The introductions to Butch and Sundance are followed by a montage of them riding horseback (in the film’s new full-color scheme) to the gang’s hideout, again juxtaposing the duo against the western as they travel through iconic imagery of the American West. As Newman himself sets out on this new stage of stardom, Butch articulates the paradox between newness and familiarity at the heart of an evolving persona: “Every time I see Hole in the Wall again, it’s like seeing it fresh for the first time. And every time that happens I keep asking myself the same question: how can I be so damn stupid as to keep coming back here?” Butch asks the same question that would explain Newman’s increasing popularity during this additional phase and would also begin to unveil the workings of his extravagant, superfluous persona. It’s not that audiences are that “damn stupid” but rather that we are implicated in the murky system of identification at the heart of stardom and inherent in film itself as a medium. Butch returns to Hole in the Wall in spite of its seeming newness because of his problematic nostalgia and sentimentality. Butch ends the ride by offering up a move to Bolivia as his latest great idea, but it is this reflection on a place (or idea or person) being simultaneously changeable and familiar that most poignantly resonates throughout the rest of the film (and this period of Newman’s career).

When Butch and Sundance eventually arrive at Hole in the Wall, the other members of the gang are preparing to go on a raid without their knowledge – or more specifically, without Butch’s suggestion/approval. His subsequent attempt to
quell this mutiny crystallizes the film’s overwhelming whimsy and hollow embrace of the rebel. Butch scoffs at their attempt to make a plan on their own, arguing they should focus on robbing banks rather than trains. In making his case for this further departure from the film's opening short detailing his gang’s exploits, Butch seems to purposefully ignore the imposing, threatening figure of Harvey Logan (played by Ted Cassidy) and his repeated challenge for leadership: “Guns or knives?” Butch finally acknowledges and resists Harvey’s contest, insisting he formed the gang and that they would be nothing without him. He also says he only offered them the opportunity to challenge him for leadership because he assumed no one would ever actually do it. The shaky engagements with Newman’s persona and connections to the past are here foregrounded by Butch’s interactions with the Hole in the Wall Gang. Butch desires to be recognized and explicitly labeled as leader, a trait notably at odds with the resistance at the core of his doomed rebel. He also tellingly passes the hallmark of Newman’s doomed rebel onto his partner: when Harvey tells the Sundance he should stay out of the fight over leadership, Butch responds, “Well he goes his own way, like always.” This sequence makes it clear he has no chance against the aggressive, ambitious Harvey, who gladly unsheathes his bowie knife when Butch says he doesn’t want to use guns in their contest. Butch even he tells Sundance – again in his part-joking, part-earnest tone – to bet on his opponent and to seek mortal revenge if he loses. Harvey says threateningly that Butch used to be

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73 There is a key distinction to be made here about embracing the leadership role. Lucas Jackson almost certainly becomes the “leader” of the chain gang by the end of Cool Hand Luke, but never refers to himself in such terms or even seems to think of himself in that way. In fact, as I argue in chapter two, Luke’s rebellion is directed largely at the pressures and expectations that come with such positions of control and adulation, even if accepted with great reluctance.
the leader of the gang, again emphasizing the film's engagement with (however problematic) what once was. Butch used to be the leader and the one with ideas, just as Newman used to be the loner rebel who had to find his own way in order to escape the demands of others.

But, as we should now come to expect, the scene does not end with a simple, straightforward rejection of the defining qualities of Newman's star persona. Rather, the hollow embrace of additionality necessarily means that the doomed rebel cannot be wholly dismissed. Harvey's attempt to usurp control ends quickly because he cannot match Butch's cunning and is unprepared for his manipulation and insincerity. As Harvey readies for a fight, knife in hand, Butch approaches waving his arms, saying they aren't going to do anything until the rules for the contest are straightened out. Harvey is disarmed by Butch's suggestion, and after he expresses his dismay – “Rules? In a knife fight? No rules!” – Butch calmly walks to his opponent and kicks him in the groin. With Harvey reduced to his knees and his threat effectively neutralized, Butch says the fight can officially begin and knocks out his challenger with a farcical spinning two-handed punch (the force of which also

Figures 3.15 and 3.16. Harvey is centered and ready for a lethal contest, but drops his guard at Butch’s inane suggestion and immediately pays the price. (Credit: Twentieth Century Fox)
lands him on the ground momentarily). The second Butch is back to his feet, the diversion created by Harvey’s would-be usurpation evaporates: the gang drags Harvey away, (re)embraces Butch, and makes plans for their next job as if the potential upheaval in their order never even happened. Flat Nose (played by Charles Dierkop), a member of the gang who moments earlier justified Harvey’s challenge, immediately approaches Butch to say he was “really rooting” for him. Butch responds by saying Flat Nose’s support is “what sustained me in my time of trouble,” a joking yet earnest acceptance of the fandom and leadership rebelled against by previous Newman characters. Butch’s actions can only be read as rebellious because of the expectations generated by Newman’s on-screen presence: the same force both encourages us to read him as a rebel and communicates the whimsy of the additional star.

This sequence is not a sort of meta-rebellion that undermines our understanding of cinematic representations of rebels. Butch’s irreverence and capacity for manipulation instead underscore key principles of stardom and the additional stage. The difficulty in reading Butch’s character is a result of the embodied nature of star persona, muddying the interchange of projection and identification (as it did infamously in *Hud*). This process also means struggling with incorporating additionality – details and elements of new appearances that don’t necessarily (or obviously) fit with the established whole. Any sense of rebellion in the film results directly from expectations established in Newman, yet Butch simultaneously encourages recognition as a type distinctly lacking clear motivations or identifiable traits beyond goofiness and whimsy. His character is so pervasive it
makes it hard to accurately assess the threats posed to Butch and Sundance in spite of the film's seeming engagement with actual history. Although Harvey is an imposing figure and seems all-too-willing to kill Butch for control of the Hole in the Wall Gang, in retrospect it's hard to determine if he ever posed a genuine challenge to Butch's leadership, let alone his life. More than reaffirming Butch’s decidedly non-rebellious desire to be in control of a group, the further revelation of his character demonstrates the necessity of more coherent, recognizable engagement – that is, expansion – in communicating stardom. The landscape of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid is changeable before anything else: the setting and background is always shifting, plans are fickle, threats appear and are minimized (with one notable exception), and Butch’s only consistency is being shifty, untroubled, and disingenuous. The unsustainability and instability of stardom are amplified by the difficulty of situating consistency in Newman’s figure or assessing the gravity and stakes of the film’s narrative, both factors further magnified by its historical setting.

Importantly, as with the introduction to Sundance, Harvey’s challenge again demonstrates Butch’s power over the way the film’s story is communicated. In the following scenes, we are again reminded that Sundance is the man of capability and action: he is the one who jumps on the train to initiate the robbery, the one who controls the crowd during the robbery, the one who serves as lookout when they are on the run, and the one with a romantic partner. But in spite of the power surrounding his name in the film’s opening, Sundance is decidedly not the one with true recognizable star power. Harvey tells Sundance to stay out of the fight, but as seen in the above images of their contest, as soon as Harvey drops his guard – and
gives up control – the camera becomes again unflinchingly focused on Butch. During the first heist of the Flyer, Butch is recognized and referred to by name even by those who can’t see him, and the engineers gather nearby just for the spectacle of watching him in action. He is the stand-alone center of the story despite his lack of the traditional characteristics associated with a protagonist, incomplete representation of the loner rebel archetype, and sharing the film’s title with Redford’s character. Butch even concludes the contest with Harvey by stealing his challenger’s plan of robbing the same train twice despite repeatedly declaring himself a man of ideas. Again the film’s focus on Newman reflects the superfluous, excessive nature of the additional stage: there is no other way to explain the confluence of Newman’s increasing popularity, cinematic focus on his figure in spite of other surrounding stars, and whimsy embodied in his on-screen presence.

These converging forces are effectively dramatized in the scenes following the first robbery of the Flyer, laying additional groundwork for the trends dominating this third stage of Newman’s career. In response to the gang’s heist, a marshal tries to motivate the local citizens into forming a posse to seek justice for the crime. While he manages to draw a crowd, no one expresses any interest and the marshal is eventually upstaged by a salesman using the gathering as an opportunity to advertise bicycles. As the crowd murmurs about the pointlessness of the marshal’s pursuit, the camera cranes upward to reveal Butch and Sundance, drinking on a balcony and laughing at the scene on the street. This reveling in

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74 Interestingly, Harvey can be seen in the background of the ensuing train robbery, presumably relegated to being just another member of the Hole in the Wall Gang without much additional question or conflict. The film’s inconsistency means even the most physically-imposing and forward-thinking character cannot usurp Butch.
fandom – another departure from the doomed rebel – extends the conception of audience and viewership inherent in stardom. If the additional stage is about the spectacle of simply seeing Paul Newman do things, this scene shows us how this stage creates a new sense of audience: the crowd below is present but inert, and the stars (the draw of the crowd) themselves are turned into spectators. Instead of creating a figure of pure individuality (and rendering identification impossible), this eye-opening shift creates the possibility of a projection-identification exchange with an empty center. The introduction of additionality and superfluity strip the star of cultural ideology and semiotic value while simultaneously rendering the positions of subject and spectator increasingly mobile and uncertain.

In their position as would-be anonymous onlookers, Butch and Sundance engage in idle conversation, joking about enlisting in the army and even disclosing their real names (Robert LeRoy Parker and Harry Longbaugh, respectively). When Butch looks inside the saloon and sees a party for a piano player headed off to war, he offers a surprising reflection, telling his partner, “You know, when I was a kid I always thought I was gonna grow up to be a hero.” This marks an uncharacteristic
moment of introspective disclosure, suggesting that Butch has (or at least had) actual goals and desires beyond whimsy or temporary thrills. But Sundance quickly responds by saying, “Well, it’s too late now,” eliciting one of Butch’s few potentially earnest expressions of the film: “What’d you say something like that for? You didn’t have to say something like that!” Butch’s displeasure at the suggestion that his time has passed in some way interestingly coincides with the aforementioned bicycle salesman on the street, who promotes his wares by saying the horse is dead and bicycles are the future. The film’s engagement with the ideas of connection to the past and consistency over time is here expanded, incorporating the fickle changeability of its characters into the historical fiction established from the opening frames. This further complicates our understanding of who Butch is and how he relates to the whole of Newman’s star persona. Butch momentarily embraces the bicycle in the near future (as I discuss below), but it remains unclear if he really wants to go into the future and move forward or maintain some actual continuum with the past. Despite earlier imploring Sundance to recognize that getting older is a law, Butch faces the future by simultaneously acknowledging he has not become what he hoped he would, wanting to believe he can still be whatever he wants, and genuinely caring about as little as possible. His investments could scarcely be less clear: he romanticizes the past and has ideas about the future, yet seems constantly willing to sacrifice them both in the name of fame and amusement.

The complicated detachment of this character obviously informs Newman’s larger star persona: not by reshaping its central traits and ideals, but by distancing his presence from such investments altogether. The new emptiness of his on-screen
image is exposed clearly and gratuitously in the film’s most memorable sequence: Butch performing bicycle tricks for Sundance’s girlfriend Etta Place to the (non-diegetic) soundtrack of BJ Thomas singing “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ on My Head.”

First, Sundance reunites with Etta following the gang’s initial train robbery, a sequence which reflects the film’s portrayals of “pretending” in a further disturbing light (even given the film’s irreverent tone). Sundance leaves the aforementioned saloon party, saying he’s going to find a woman. We then see Etta Place for the first time, entering her home and getting undressed only to find Sundance sitting in the dark of her bedroom. He encourages her to keep undressing, saying, “Keep going, teacher lady. It’s okay, don’t mind me” and even pointing his pistol at her. After several tense moments, Etta admonishes him for being late, revealing the scene to be a form of role play. While Sundance still maintains his overall legitimacy, his capacity for insincerity and falsehood is revealed here in a troubling and potentially damning manner.

Butch shows up the next morning on a bicycle, presumably purchased from the salesman he watched the night before. Butch rides past the open windows as Sundance slumbers, chanting about Etta’s “soft, white flesh” and saying she is his in a trembling, ghost-like voice. Etta smiles and emerges from her house, and Butch introduces the bike – “Meet the future!” – before helping her onto the handlebars to take her for a ride. In the following three-minute montage, Butch pedals Etta

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75 The dramatic departure from the diegesis and narrative makes the sequence feel unusually, unrealistically long. Its insertion into the film marks something relatively unprecedented in popular American film – uniquely bizarre and disconnected, adding very little to what comes before or after. It is, particularly in the context of Newman’s career, a profound definition of superfluity, additionality, and excess.
around the neighboring farmland before leaving her at the barn where she can watch the rest of his performative ride. With Etta watching, he rides past in a series of amusing positions: hands-free with his feet on the handlebars, in a flying superhero pose lying stomach-down on the seat, standing with one foot on the seat and the other outstretched behind, and finally sitting backward on the handlebars. He crashes through a wooden fence while pedaling blindly, and is chased away by a bull after making a dismissive, “kissy” face (and after enabling its escape by breaking the boundaries of its pen). Butch and Etta walk back to the house, conversing about possible motivations for the fickle behaviors that consistently leave him broke – which she generously refers to as his “soft touch.”

This highly performative sequence typifies era-defining excess, establishing measurable changes in Newman’s persona that play out in the rest of his roles in this third period. Accordingly, this scene dramatizes several thematic threads that run throughout *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and beyond. The montage is disjointed and hard to comprehend, and not just because of its apparent lack of connection to the film’s narrative. The sequence seems constructed as a silent film: there is a complete lack of diegetic sound – even though the characters appear to speak to one another – and the performers’ gestures are exaggerated for semiotic and comedic effect. The action is jarring and lacks continuity, with Butch and the bicycle occupying seemingly random areas of the screen, undermining any sense of spatial or visual consistency. The content of the action does engage with the film’s depiction of character in one key way: Butch alternates between feigning losing control of the bicycle and almost falling off in earnest, reminding us again of the
insincerity and/or illegitimacy at the center of his personality. Etta’s responses as a spectator to Butch’s antics are similarly inconsistent, with her shifting from extreme disinterest to sublime amusement. This models the same patterns of response in the prior scene with the marshal and the bicycle salesman, but also reflects the difficulty of understanding Newman’s growing popularity during this highly frivolous period.

Lastly, the soundtrack demands attention: not just a song out of the film’s place and time, but one that depicts a character who is carefree despite not fitting in. The speaker of “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ on My Head” feels in conflict with even nature itself but dismisses his worries rather than complain. The spirit of the song is pure freedom from concern, the same problematic characterization that enables Butch and, in turn, Newman.

This series of scenes is also valuable for the introduction to Etta, a character who offers new and compelling ways for reading the title characters. After the gang’s less successful attempt to rob the Flyer a second time – the central draw of the plan stolen from Harvey – Etta joins Butch and Sundance as they flee from the
force tasked with hunting them down. As a schoolteacher, Etta brings a sense of grounding and stability to the partners’ relationship and adventures, attempting to manage their frustrations and even to help them rob banks more effectively. But, like Sundance, her genuineness is consumed by the film’s overall spirit of excess and whimsy. For all her skills and perspective, Etta is rendered relatively superfluous: Sundance only seems interested in her value as “cover” for their travels, and warns that he will abandon her if she ever whines. Regardless, Etta tellingly says she’ll go with Butch and Sundance because they are her only form of excitement and her life would essentially be over without them (despite her youth and intelligence). Her valuable insights are ignored as the situation becomes more serious and dangerous, particularly when the title duo scramble to process the possibility that the forces that dogged them relentlessly in America have made their way to Bolivia. This culminates in Etta leaving the duo to return to America, fulfilling the promise she made on agreeing to join their excursion – “I’ll do anything you ask of me, except one thing: I won’t watch you die.” Etta’s presence does reinforce Butch’s romantic failures and inadequacies, one of the only observable characteristics maintaining a connection to Newman’s doomed rebel; for all his perceived popularity with saloon girls, Butch always appears interested in something else when around potential romantic partners. Butch is adjacent to Sundance’s relationship with Etta but decidedly apart from it: he laughs off the suggestion that he and Etta could have

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76 Specifically, Butch is most consistently “distracted” by Sundance, lending the film to a variety of readings into homoerotic tensions in the relationship between the title characters. This is amplified by several factors: the stars’ transcendent handsomeness, the film’s gratuitous focus on their physical presence, their partnership in spite of potentially-disastrous differences in character and ethos, and the according competitive bickering resulting from these traits.
ended up together, and in the sequence of photographs chronicling their travels to Bolivia, Butch is consistently captured alone or in a position completely separated from or beneath the couple. The differences between Butch and Sundance reinforced in this relationship triangle translate to the broader understanding of Newman and Redford: the younger star and seeming protégé becomes the icon Newman might have been had his career started later\textsuperscript{77} rather than following in his footsteps – a key shift at the heart of the ensuing final stage of Newman’s career.

The remainder of \textit{Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid} is shaped by the form of Butch’s bike ride, appearing more like a series of montages than a coherent character-driven narrative. After using too much dynamite and blowing up the safe during their second attempted robbery of the Flyer, the Hole in the Wall Gang are attacked by a security force that spectacularly emerges on horseback from a following train car. Butch and Sundance escape, and spend the next twenty-five minutes on the run following a pretty consistent pattern: fleeing on horseback, trying to hide or misdirect the lawmen chasing them, then fleeing again when their tricks don’t work. When they can’t run any further, the duo infamously jump from a cliff into the river below, with Butch laughing at Sundance’s concern over not being able to swim – “Why, are you crazy? The fall will probably kill you!” They survive their leap of faith and again reunite with Etta, initiating a photograph-driven

\textsuperscript{77} Off-screen, Redford not only accepted his status as a sex symbol (unlike Newman, who infamously resisted such characterizations), but was also more explicitly associated with political activism throughout his career. By contrast, Newman’s politics are primarily acknowledged as evidence or result of his rebelliousness, again suggesting the degree to which his on-screen persona dominates any understanding of his actual life or biography.
montage (mentioned above) as the trio travel to Bolivia\textsuperscript{78}. Sundance is disappointed with Bolivia’s depressing appearance, but after a squabble over Butch having misled his partner about being to speak Spanish, another montage whimsically portrays their exploits as almost effortlessly successful thieves in this new context. They achieve a life of wealth and luxury, succeeding in a variety of wacky and comical heists while fighting off Bolivian security forces with little genuine contest. As with previous sequences of the film, nothing really seems to create genuine worry despite the previous danger Butch and Sundance faced or the threat their outlaw lives would ordinarily, realistically create.

These montages generate familiar metacinematic commentary through their introduction of Lefors, the archetypal unrelenting lawman in a white straw hat who the audience never fully sees. Lefors and his posse are an inescapable and largely unidentifiable force, barely visible on the horizon but consistently, unflinchingly in pursuit of the title duo. Butch and Sundance talk about the group hounding them as if they are supernatural: as the pursuit continues and none of their misdirection plans work, they not only ask “Who are those guys?” over and over again, but also “Don’t they get tired? Don’t they get hungry?” The duo speculates on the identity of those who follow them, reaching conclusions based on limited long-distance glimpses\textsuperscript{79} and self-important leaps of logic. They reason the tracker who

\textsuperscript{78} As the group finishes packing their wagon to initiate their travels (and montage), Butch sees the bicycle from his earlier ride and shoves it into a creek, saying, “The future is yours, you lousy bicycles!” Even if an isolated reflection of Butch’s contempt is for a specific type of future, this moment – not wanting things to change and not wanting them to stay the same – further complicates our understanding of what he actually wants.

\textsuperscript{79} This montage establishes the chase and Lefors as metaphors, but its pattern of presentation – which focuses heavily on shots of Butch and Sundance waiting, hiding, and looking – offers further reinforcement of the film’s extreme gratuitousness. Most of what we see during this long flight from
unflinchingly keeps the posse on their trail – which Butch and Sundance say they couldn’t do – must be Lord Baltimore, a legendary Native American who “could track anybody, over anything, day or night.” However, Lord Baltimore is also an “Oklahoma man,” supposedly never leaving the state despite the transferability of his unmatched skills. Likewise, Butch determines the leader of the group pursuing them must be Joe Lefors, who Sundance identifies as the toughest lawman but similarly stays within the confines of Wyoming. Butch says Lefors can always be identified by his white straw hat and tells Sundance to “Look at that guy out front” of the posse as evidence. But the following extreme long shot makes it impossible to identify even a hat, let alone a face. The result is that we don’t know really know who is chasing Butch and Sundance or if they are basing their conclusions on anything other than their assumption(s) that they must be pursued by the best possible lawmen.

The posse that follows Butch and Sundance is not only faceless and unrelenting, but, as Etta points out before the flight to Bolivia, assembled specifically for the purpose of hunting and killing the title duo. The inescapability and challenge of identification here are paramount, as they suggest the posse threatens more than just the lives of Butch and Sundance in this singular story. Again Newman finds himself in the recognizable paradox of stardom: recognized and pursued for something integral to his image that he cannot fully separate himself from. Butch – like previous Newman characters – is pursued by a crowd uniquely interested in him, desiring only him and doing so in spite of where they are from or what they’ve the posse is not what Butch and Sundance see or what they do, but just the luxury and beauty of their physical presence.
done before. They are compelled to their pursuit by forces outside of themselves, yet defined by their relationship to Butch and Sundance. Moreover, that crowd poses two threats, each catastrophic for the star: incorporation into a faceless crowd, or pure individuality through the reduction to a single idea (that is, Lefors’s white hat). Both result in meaninglessness, either rendering the star unexceptional and unspectacular or cultivating a singularity that is recognizable but defies identification. These fates are a particular disaster for Butch, who explicitly craves recognition as a mastermind and leader; these threats are always looming for the star, but are amplified by the sheer whimsy and spectacle pervading this period of Newman’s career. The years following Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid saw Newman’s popularity increase in spite of the additionality creeping through his on-screen presence, which makes him less semiotically and culturally special and meaningful. In other words, Newman continued to be pursued in spite of the simultaneous simplification and distillation of his star persona. As Sundance tells Butch upon learning the posse were hired specifically to pursue them, “That means they’re still after us, Butch. And it’s gonna be the same thing all over again.”

It is fitting, therefore, that Butch and Sundance are surrounded throughout the film by reminders that their exploits cannot continue – that they are, like Newman’s archetypal rebel, doomed. The montage of their robberies in Bolivia is lighthearted in music and tone, belying the life-threatening nature of their crimes – a contrast to the extended chase in the middle of the film where they can never rest and are always seemingly in danger. The sobering reality of their situation is captured most compellingly during their interaction with Sheriff Ray Bledsoe in the
middle of the initial flight from Lefors and his posse. When the duo try to say they’ve given up robbing, Bledsoe tells them what he believes must be obvious: “It’s too late. You should have let yourself be killed a long time ago when you had the chance. [...] You’re still nothing but two-bit outlaws on the dodge. It’s over! Don't you get that? Your times is over! And you’re going to die bloody! All you can do is choose where.” Butch and Sundance do not try to decide where they will die, but they do try to find a space for their outlaw tendencies despite acknowledging that things are changing all around them. Any embodiment of rebelliousness in this context merely reinforces the archetype of the doomed rebel (as opposed to the rebel loner also informing Newman’s 1960s roles). Even in the film’s final moments they are thinking of changes and new places – of a way they can sustain their rebellion – seemingly blind to the evidence that there is simply no place or future for them. This is the embodiment of excess and additionality: the narrative will continue even when it simply has nowhere left to go.

The endings of Cool Hand Luke and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid – one closing an era of Newman’s career while the other sheds light on a new period’s beginning – are remarkably similar in both content and metacinematic value. Importantly, both end without definitively showing the fate of the main character(s). In this case, Butch and Sundance find themselves in a firefight with the Bolivian Army after being recognized for their exploits, surrounded and wounded with no conceivable means of escape. As they rush out from behind cover into a hail of gunfire, they are captured in an iconic freeze frame, trapped in their attacking pose as the film transitions from full color back to sepia and then
to black. Lucas Jackson is driven away to certain death but presumably dies off-screen, and we can infer from inmates’ ensuing commentary that Luke has passed away. Likewise, we know from historical fact – even if tenuously connected to the semiotics and culture of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* – that the title duo died facing the very circumstances depicted at the film’s closing. But both films leave us with a lasting image – a piece of the star(s) that remains regardless of their fortune. It is by now no surprise that Butch and Sundance transcend death. The ending of *Cool Hand Luke* problematically reduces its protagonist to a single idea, minimizing and obscuring the complexities of his character and struggle. Here the ending of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* leaves us with iconic characters trapped in a pose that defies our own reality, frozen forever in a doomed transition that defies death but also allows them to go no further. Like Etta Place, we won’t and *can’t* watch Butch and Sundance die.

Just as Newman seems to reach the maximum stage in the conclusion of *Cool Hand Luke*, the iconic final images of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* foreground the inauthenticity of additionality while illustrating the inescapability that

Figures 3.21 and 3.22. The film ends before we can see the fates of Butch and Sundance even though they are part of historical record – then reverts to sepia as if changing that record. (Credit: Twentieth Century Fox)
predominates the final decades of Newman’s career. The transition from color back to sepia leaves us with one final reminder of the tensions between legitimacy and displacement, human presence and extravagance, coherence and additionality. The removal of Butch’s fate is also the removal of actual stakes or risk, further suggesting the film as an exercise in whimsy and superfluity. Frozen in this action pose, Butch is doubly inauthentic, denying the historical fact of his character and embodying the changeability and unstable authenticity now shaping Newman’s star persona. In the film’s penultimate showdown, Butch reveals (unsurprisingly, in retrospect) that he has never shot anyone. While Butch is a thief and not a duelist, Sundance discovers yet again – and at the worst possible time – that his partner is a pretender. This hollowness reflects the very idea of additionality, and it is here captured in Butch’s frozen image: stuck in a pose he has only pretended to occupy until forced to genuinely do so. Instead of being reduced to a distilled and simplified version of who he actually is (as in the closing of Cool Hand Luke), Butch lingers as something that hasn’t defined his identity at all, reinforcing the difficulty of measuring and understanding who he is and what he might actually represent.

This shift in Newman’s persona continues throughout the rest of the 1970s before eventually returning to more recognizable engagements with the rebel in the last stage of his career, featuring increasing reluctance and disengagement. Like the doomed rebel archetype and all broader patterns of stardom, additionality is unsustainable. Newman appeared in his only Best Picture winner in 1973’s The Sting, a film where pretending transcends the diegesis. The Sting is structured around the capers planned by Shaw and Kelly – played by Newman and again-
partner Robert Redford – inherently creating a sense of misdirection and distrust. Moreover, it draws attention to spectatorship and the profound artifice of the cinema, consistently reminding us that we’re watching a film and creating a sense of uncertainty that aligns viewers with the film’s antagonist (or “mark”). 1974’s The Towering Inferno is the very idea of spectacle, part of the decade’s trend of disaster movies and noteworthy more so for the conflict between Newman and fellow star Steve McQueen than any broader cultural or cinematic significance. The Drowning Pool (1975) sees Newman revisit the title character from 1966’s Harper, providing another example of hollow occupation of a preexisting persona or archetype and problematic engagement with past glory. This period effectively concludes with Newman’s two film roles from 1976, playing himself in Mel Brooks’s Silent Movie and “The Star” in Robert Altman’s Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull’s History Lesson. These two films engage in varying degrees of revisionist history, but more compellingly reveal the narrative of additionality; the end result of Newman’s frivolous on-screen persona reduces the potential representations for even an established superstar to “the star” or his literal self – the same two outcomes reflected by the posse relentlessly pursuing him in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

Additionality reinforces many integral principles of stardom: we see the value of ideological continuity and self-reflexivity – of expanding on what has come before – through their notable absence during this period. This stage of Newman’s career also illustrates Edgar Morin’s famous observation that the star “must nourish her own myth” (55); stardom does not magically occur or maintain itself, but accrues
and develops under specific circumstances. Newman’s career demonstrates what comes after a star persona reaches its logical conclusion, presenting a vacuum for the exchange of projection and identification in the paradoxical but familiar context of inescapability and unsustainability. We don’t see him die in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and his lingering presence and increasing popularity suggest we don’t want to see him die, even all we have is the superfluous, hollow, inauthentic remnants of the star we recognize and accept.
Conclusion
Beyond the Inescapable Star

The fourth phase of Newman’s career is obviously the longest: the three decades following his transition from buddy and partner to flawed would-be mentor in 1977’s *Slap Shot* sees Newman resume his trademark world-weariness in the aftermath of the rebel’s foreclosure as a sustainable cinematic or cultural archetype. Rather than perpetuate the superfluous additions of his career’s third stage, Newman reemerges as a more recognizable doomed rebel in a new and meaningful context: older and less acceptable as a threat to prevailing ideologies. This phase implies an inherent sense of tragedy, as the compulsion to rebel at the center of Newman films of the 1960s is again consistently projected by his presence, only now that presence is unmistakably approaching and passing retirement age. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* allegorizes the immense weight of history and authenticity in acknowledging the past, and Newman’s other films in the 1970s further illustrate the emptiness and excess of the awkward, incomplete detachment from what has come before that characterizes this era of his career. But in films such as *Slap Shot*, *The Verdict*, *The Color of Money*, *Road to Perdition*, and *Cars*, Newman’s characters more fully embrace the doomed rebel ethos but do so in a context that unflinchingly reinforces failure and inescapability. Newman characters, it seems, can’t be anything other than rebels in spite of their attempts to escape, achieve (or regain) legitimacy, and find anyone to take their place.

The last phase of Newman’s career also demonstrates a uniquely transcendent example of stardom in the replication of his image through the
Newman’s Own brand. However, the renewed development and continuity across his films offers very fertile ground for reading his career, the process of stardom, and contemporaneous cultural shifts without abandoning the methodologies I’ve used throughout this work. 1982’s *The Verdict*, for instance, revolves around a Newman character living off past glories in a manner very reminiscent of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*: Newman’s Frank Galvin is a failed lawyer clinging to his one remaining friend, a bedside picture of his ex-wife, and his class ring. But whereas past rebels resisted the pressures of partners and “fans” (in the 1960s) or curiously accepted such partnerships (in the 1970s), here Frank is the one being abandoned: he gives back nothing to those around him, and Mickey (Frank’s lone friend) constantly voices his displeasure at putting up with Frank’s “same old shit.” Newman’s presence again emphasizes charm and rebellion, but Frank is simultaneously too old to do something new and too old to be the rebel he once was (or that we expect him to be). He insists on “trying the case his way” – echoing claims made by characters like Eddie Felson and Luke Jackson – but the defendants in the film’s central case are comfortable going to court because they believe that “is where he loses.” Whereas *Cool Hand Luke* can be read as an attempt to restore decency to the doomed rebel after Newman’s portrayal of the villainous Hud Bannon, *The Verdict* is a similar attempt to redeem a lifetime of mistakes, injuries, and burned bridges. Now in a position where he can look back on his life, this version of the aging rebel exhibits new characteristics: shame, regret, and remorse. Frank’s victory is that he wins the case by doing things his way, and that means returning in some way to a previous version of himself, as he consistently makes
comments about “getting back” his skills in the courtroom. At the end of The Verdict, Frank receives fanfare for his work and expresses some satisfaction at going his own way, but he does not regain all the things he has lost. More than that, Frank’s victory in the courtroom is so preposterous and hard to believe – precisely because of his decision to do things his way – that it threatens to destroy any sense of internal logic, consistency, or verisimilitude. The final image of Frank drinking by himself all but affirms he hasn’t wiped all out his bad “old business” and still is the failure we see at the film’s opening, still with no means or opportunity for escape.

The unsustainability of this doomed rebel is crystallized most compellingly in The Color of Money, which sees Newman revisit Eddie Felson, the character who established Newman’s archetypal rebel in The Hustler. By 1986 Newman had reached the point where he could no longer acceptably embody the rebel, but here that star image isn’t just implied or communicated magically through the work of stardom and persona. Rather, the image dominating understanding of his characters is made literal through revisiting the same character he occupied before (as with 1975’s The Drowning Pool). Yet as the film’s poster tellingly suggests, “The Hustler isn’t what he used to be”: the 1986 Edie Felson is relatively accomplished, with business success and a romantic partner, but he is still “Fast” Eddie, satisfying his rebellious but clearly unnecessary tendencies by staking other pool players and selling alcohol with fake labels. These “escapes” seem to satisfy Eddie until he meets Vincent Lauria (played by Tom Cruise), who provides two unique (if paradoxical) opportunities: for Eddie he offers a chance to hustle and embody the rebel again, but for Newman’s rebel he offers a possible replacement and the chance to be fully
relinquished from the rebel role. With the benefit of hindsight, we know Tom Cruise will never occupy be recognizable as this doomed rebel archetype, but the film dramatizes Newman’s inability to escape or continue to fully occupy his established persona. Moreover, as Vince withdraws from inheriting the rebel role – just as Eddie resisted the mentorship of Bert Gordon in *The Hustler* a generation earlier – Eddie finds himself increasingly drawn back into it. Eddie begins to find a sense of renewed excitement and control but when he is overwhelmed with frustration after being hustled himself, he accepts that he can’t be anything but a rebel. This era of Newman’s career reveals the most significant changes in American film stardom and culture: not only are there no rebels to take up (or inherit) the role for Newman as he did for Dean and Brando, but trends in this era and beyond reflect a distinct lack of similarly larger-than-life, continuous star images. After Eddie demonstrates some of his trademark dedication from *The Hustler*, it is little surprise that he ends the film by declaring, “I’m back” – fully embracing the rebel he always was (and must continue to be).

While the conclusions I reach about Newman’s career are not limited to understanding his star persona or process alone, the broken lineage of on-screen rebels dramatized in *The Color of Money* foregrounds some of the limitations of this project. For generations of film performers further removed from the studio system, these patterns of star development and deployment don’t overlap in the same way they do for stars like Clint Eastwood or Dustin Hoffman. In simpler terms, there don’t seem to be stars like Paul Newman any more, and none appear to be looming on the horizon. In fact, outside of genre-specific performers, American cinema is
virtually devoid of stars who embody on-screen continuity, recognizable cultural ideologies, and reliable economic viability. But these limitations also apply more broadly to female stars: the institutional boundaries placed on women in American film have minimized their ability to embody semiotic and cultural value as evidenced through careers like Newman’s. Iconic women performers are, with rare exception, noted for their talent or only identifiable as stars within the ideological confines of specific genres, namely romantic comedies. The careers of well-known, award-winning performers such as Meryl Streep, Charlize Theron, and Hilary Swank reflect few coherent, consistent qualities in spite of their iconic roles and general popularity. Instead, these actresses are known for “disappearing” into roles, minimizing their presence and further reflecting the dynamic between stardom and talent outlined in my first chapter. These examples can be contrasted by Meg Ryan or Julia Roberts, whose stardom is limited and compartmentalized within a specific genre and characters so similar they illustrate a near complete absence of any narrative development. Dyer’s work on Marilyn Monroe thoughtfully reveals the possibility for female stars to transcend film and embody cultural ideals and value. However, it is worth reiterating that Monroe’s example is profoundly singular: she is far more essential to cultural understandings of sexuality than Newman ever was for our identification with rebellion, charm, or any other quality essential to his persona. Attempts to read the same kind of stardom in contemporary stars such as Jennifer Lawrence are less productive, not because she lacks talent or economic viability but because readings of her persona primarily serve to reassert the unavoidable forces of mediation limiting access to the star (as a result of their
reliance on public appearances and social media). I believe my work has ramifications for reading the trends and structures in female stardom, but it is absolutely necessary to acknowledge the systemic limitations restricting women and discouraging further work in the development of female stars (and perhaps even encourage focusing on a subject like Newman).

The landscape of contemporary popular American film reveals further limitations, reaching past my project to the fields of star studies and film studies more broadly. Cinema has relied so much on the deployment of transcendent values and expectations embodied in stars; now that stardom appears to be largely superseded by story content and character, our understanding of human presence in film must be realigned on both semiotic and economic terms. The twelve highest-grossing films of 2017 were reboots, sequels, or expansions to cinematic universes. While this is bemoaned as a lack of creativity or originality, the last two decades of American film reflect a more noteworthy and serious shift in the power center(s) of production. Whereas stars had been the most predictable and reliable commodities since performers first received screen credits by name, now a growing majority of the highest grossing movies are expansions of franchises or “cinematic universes,” even if featuring performers who lack any established on-screen persona or economic value. These shifts are undoubtedly the result of multiple changes in film culture, such as more casual viewing patterns, new methods of distribution, and expansions into international markets. This increasing investment in preexisting intellectual properties, narratives, and characters may – but likely will not – manufacture new stars. More importantly, it demonstrates what can easily be
construed as a crisis for star and cultural studies: the privileging of character and preexisting storyworlds over transcendent persona and essentially “human” factors potentially demands an entire new understanding of the economic viability of stars and new complexities in grasping the role of human presence in cinema.

But as the Newman’s Own brand and the “Paul Newman” Daytona reveal, stars remain unique and integral to film art, and dramatic changes in stardom may destabilize the way films signify and even the way we construct our identities. Close, film-focused examination of Newman’s career does far more than enable insights into characters and contemporary social moments: it provides a lens for reading stardom broadly (owing to the unique trajectory of Newman’s rise), it uncovers structures and patterns of stardom that challenge constructs taken for granted in popular and critical renderings of the star, it reaffirms consistent human presence as the most valuable source of film meaning, and it reasserts the role of film and the star as transcendent projections and reflections of shared culture. Our ability to go our own way(s) has been and still is be shaped by the unique phenomenon of stardom, and events today continue to reiterate the need to better understand and assess mythic and otherworldly significance of stars like Newman – even if he is just Paul Newman, anyway.
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VITA

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**Publications**


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