Film Evaluation and Three Temporal Notions in Hume

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This paper concerns a phenomenon I hope film viewers will easily recognize. It will be referred to as film dating or aging, which has to do with changes in the reception of films over time. The paper pays philosophical attention to this common experience for several reasons. For many viewers, the experience of watching a film that has aged may be a certain *je ne sais quoi*. Moreover, there is a growing interest in the topic of film evaluation among philosophers of film (Carroll 2009, 2008, 2003; Freeland 2006; Wartenberg 2005). Since evaluation is an important part of aesthetics, it is crucial for an aesthetic theory of film to understand how we evaluate films. Moreover, as Noël Carroll notes (2008, p. 192), our engagement with films often involves an assessment of them. He adds: "It would be a grave mistake to think of moving picture evaluation as exclusively a professional affair. Evaluating movies is something that we all do all of the time" (2008, p. 193).

I will begin with an overview of my account of film aging, defining my use of the concepts of aging and related terms. I then look at David Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757) while referring to his less discussed essays, "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing" (1742) and "Of Eloquence" (1742). I shall propose that we distinguish three main kinds of aging in Hume's work: (i) passing the test of time, or retaining value as an artwork (ii) repeated viewing of the work, and (iii) the personal aging of the viewer, which Hume thinks influences our appraisals of artworks.

A word about scope is in order. My discussion is meant to refer only to standard,

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commercial, narrative films such as suspense thrillers, comedies, dramas, action and adventure films, and horror pictures. It is not meant to take into account "non-narrative" films, which is broadly conceived to encompass avant-garde, minimalist, postmodernist, abstract, and reflexive motion pictures. For, when non-narrative films have aged, it can be difficult to separate their "abstract" nature from the effects of aging. The distancing effect that non-narrative films often have on viewers is distinct from the one caused by aging. Indeed, non-narrative films may not be intended to be "interesting" to the viewer, but rather to engage one's intellectual and cognitive abilities with either very little emotional engagement, or at least little engagement of a positive timbre or valence. Non-narrative films may deliberately aim to evoke distress or confusion. I focus on narrative films since these are more likely to be intended to move, compel, interest, and engage viewers. I propose we understand this kind of film before we examine non-narrative films, the importance of which I do not deny or wish to downplay.

Types of Aging and Emotional Responses to Aged Films

Why do artistically excellent films sometimes become less enjoyable with time? Why are we attracted to or fascinated by aged films? How should we understand our response of laughter or comic amusement when we think an aged film is ridiculous or laughable on account of the effects of aging?

I would like to introduce the idea that the concept of film aging can help us better understand what is going on in these questions. The first question touches on the phenomenon I call negative aging, the second on positive aging, and the last on mixed or ambivalent aging.

What, then, is film aging? First, it should be noted that it is the *cinematic* elements that are responsible for film aging. This includes: close-ups, camera movement and angles, trick photography, CGI, fades and wipes, superimposition and other visual devices, music, sound recording, dialogue, acting style, costume, *mise en scène*, sets, makeup and hairstyling, editing, screenplay, plot, and other filmic elements – one could go on and on. Even color-coding and symbolism can look dated. (I use "aged" and "dated" as synonyms throughout this paper.)

Film aging is caused by at least two features of filmic art. The first is the industrial and commercial nature of cinema, which implies that film is largely subject to fashions, which come and go quickly, but can also come back at a later date.

The second reason, usually working conjointly with the first reason, is the indexical nature of the film image. A film offers viewers a depiction of the real world on screen in all of its architectural, technological, linguistic, and cultural detail. Each of these detailed elements date at its own pace, but the cumulative effect of these can be the very rapid dating of the film.[1]

On this issue, a claim made by Carroll is instructive. To overcome cultural gaps

[1] I would like to thank an anonymous reader for suggesting this point.

between viewers and the screened worlds found in films from previous eras or different cultures, viewers ought to be educated in film, ethnography, and film history.

> Often when we are watching films that are remote from us in time and place, we will not be able to depend on our own emotional responses to the film because we do not have the appropriate cultural background. This is exactly where film history and the ethnographic study of film have an indispensable role to play. Film historians and ethnographers can supply us with the background necessary to make the emotive address of films from other cultures and other periods in our own culture emotionally accessible to us (Carroll 2003, p. 73).

Filmgoers should be suitably educated, informed, and "suitably backgrounded" (Carroll 2008, p. 195) so that the world presented to them does not seem foreign or strange after all, or so they know what emotions the filmmakers intended to evoke. Viewers would then be in a position to judge to what extent the filmmakers achieved those aims.

Not all emotional responses are intended, however. My hypothesis, which I cannot fully defend in this paper, is that the three kinds of aging (positive, negative, and ambivalent) map onto three kinds of unintended affective[2] responses: nostalgia, boredom, and comic amusement. Let me explain what I mean by these terms.[3]

1. Let us call a film aged in a *positive* sense if and only if the enjoyment[4] it provides increases on account of the effects of dating. One of the main ways we respond to such dated films is with nostalgia. I use "nostalgia" in an uncomplicated sense to refer to the pleasant affective state that accompanies finding something charming that is associated with the past. The screened world, in other words, evokes nostalgia in this case.

2. Let us call a film aged in a *negative* sense if and only if, due to the effects of dating, the enjoyment it brings about decreases. In the case of negatively aged films, the viewer is less engaged by the film. It would move him less or at least in unintended ways. This can take a variety of forms: the viewer can be less fascinated or compelled by the film. The filmgoer may struggle to feel wonder, admiration, curiosity, suspense, or other emotions. This can lead to, or at least border on, boredom. "Boredom" is here used in a straightforward way to refer to the affective state associated with increased distraction and inattention as well as the self-perception thereof (Damrad-Frye 1989, p. 315). Such a state results in a diminished interest in the events screened.

As an example of negative aging, consider *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984). When it was first released, its make-up and visual effects were mesmerizing and

[2] I use "emotions," "affective responses," and "affects" as synonyms in this paper.

[3] I pass over the ontological question of whether the aesthetic properties that constitute a film change with time. The issue of film identity across time is quite complicated and merits a fuller discussion than I can give here.

[4] Note that what is at stake here is enjoyment, not evaluation, of the film.

absorbing. But, as reviewer James Berardinelli notes (2009), "Key special effects, which were cutting edge in 1984, appear dated by today's standards. Stan Winston's stop-animation Terminator, which takes over for Schwarzenegger at the end, looks like what it is: the product of a special effects lab." *The Terminator* may hold up well overall and retain its artistic value, but it would do so *despite* this negative aging, which makes the film less enjoyable to a certain degree.

3. Let us call a film aged in an *ambivalent* sense if and only if i) it is more enjoyable due to the effects of dating, and ii) it is viewed in a way that the filmmakers did not intend, that is, against the intentions of its creators. I call this mixed or ambivalent aging since the film is still enjoyable, yet is enjoyed in a way that goes against the grain.

We might see a horror film or thriller for kicks it was not intended to give. The US television comedy series *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988-99) offers many examples of this form of enjoyment of inferior films from an earlier era. RiffTrax (2006-present), which provides heckling audio commentaries of films that are (usually) dated, continues this tradition of feeling mixed pleasures in response to aged motion pictures.

The French language even has a word for this type of viewer: the *nanard*. A *nanar* is an inferior film that, due to weakness of plot, acting, special effects, and the like, or a combination of such cinematic elements, becomes exquisite on another level or in another sense, that is, when seen against the grain or in a way that runs counter to the intentions of the filmmakers. It is worth pointing out that *nanard*s are typically very knowledgeable about film and its history.

Note that all three kinds of aging can occur even when the viewer has not previously seen the movie. Aging does not require previous viewing of the film. It *may* touch films one has already seen, but repeated viewing is not necessary. A film from the past can look aged the first time one watches it.

What does all of this have to do with evaluation? Although I cannot fully defend this claim here, one of the premises of this paper is that we should separate our enjoyment of a film from our evaluation of it. I understand "evaluation" in terms of a success-value model according to which the critic appraises what was actually achieved by the artist (filmmaker) and this achievement is understood in terms of the artist's aims.[5]

Passing the test of time is not to be confused with what I called positive aging, for the latter has to do with our enjoyment of a film, not our evaluation of it. To say that a work passes the test of time is to say something about its value as a work of art. Lamarque describes our interest in an artwork that we esteem or give high artistic marks: "Much of this interest lies in the artist's achievement, how aims are realized, problems solved, themes developed, how a subject matter emerges from, and melds with, the materials used" (Lamarque 2010, p. 213). We understand the artist's achievement in terms of how her aims are realized, and, accordingly, we evaluate how well she executes her task.

[5] My account of evaluation is indebted to the work of Noël Carroll and Peter Lamarque.

Insofar as nostalgia, boredom, and amusement are *unintended* and thus beyond the control of the filmmaker, they have little influence on the film's artistic value, which is here understood in terms of what the filmmaker actually achieved and thus in terms of his or her intentions. (Although one's actions may have unintended consequences, it does not make sense to say that such unintended consequences are "achieved" by, or the "achievement" of, one's actions.) In contrast, nostalgia, boredom, and amusement affect a viewer's level of enjoyment. Insofar as these three states are unintended, they would affect our enjoyment of the film but not our evaluation of it. By recognizing this, I submit, we can rationally resolve disagreements that are grounded on these unintended affective responses to dated films.

In other words, this account can help us resolve disputes in which one filmgoer feels boredom in response to a dated film while another feels nostalgia. By properly understanding and explaining their different responses, the two viewers can realize that they are responding to the film with different levels of enjoyment and that this has little to do with the film's artistic value. The film's artistic value is located elsewhere, as noted above.

Let me try to avoid a possible confusion. I think that evaluation can and should take into account, when relevant, intended garden-variety emotions evoked by the film being judged. Evaluations ought to take into account the extent to which the film in question evokes the emotions that films of its genre typically elicit and that the film was intended to elicit. For instance, a suspense thriller that is gripping and enthralling is in some degree good since that is what suspense thrillers typically do – that is what they are supposed to do.

Following Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste," we might wish to formulate this claim as one of the "laws of criticism" (Hume 1985, p. 231), "general rules of art" (ibid, p. 232), "general principles" of art (ibid, p. 236), or "avowed patterns" (ibid, p. 235) derived from established models and empirical observation of what works and what fails. Although I do not wish to defend the validity of the principle-based approach here, I will state how it might look. Assuming one wanted to offer such an empirical rule, one could formulate this as a general principle that applies to the genre of thrillers (with the necessary *ceteris paribus* clause): "Suspense in a thriller is always good in some degree."[6] This principle would refer to the suspenseful quality in isolation from other properties of the work. Thus, it leaves aside how suspense might interact with other aesthetic properties such as humor, which might make the film better or worse or leave it about the same (cf. Dickie 1997, p.164).

This brings us to another distinction. How is "oldness" different from aging? An object's being old is a matter of the passage of time. Such oldness is an external, not an aesthetic, property; it can be measured by scientific instruments. Aging is an aesthetic phenomenon and is response-dependent. It requires a viewer to be affected in some way and to be acquainted with the film. It would be hard to

[6] I am adopting the structure of the formula used in George Dickie's summary of Monroe Beardsley's account (Dickie 1997, p. 144).

determine beforehand or *a priori* how films will age, and how much. Experience shows which movies have aged and how they have done so. There is no equation that will give us a determinate answer if we wish to know if a film will appear aged, what kind it might have, or to what extent it will have it. A viewer has to assess such matters on a case-by-case basis.[7] In addition, we don't know how long or short the time scale of aging would be for a particular film.[8]

It seems to me that the objective passage of time is a logically *necessary* condition of aging. A discussion of a counterexample might help me elucidate this idea.

Perhaps some will object to my claim that the passage of time is a necessary condition of aging by referring to new releases that look dated, such as Woody Allen's *Zelig* when it was first released in 1983. Surely it was dated when it premiered, one might object. However, this black and white mockumentary was produced long after the filmworld was releasing color films, which had been around since the 1930s. Allen made a "sylistic" choice, in Thomas Wartenberg's sense of the term (Wartenberg 2005), to shoot the film in black and white, and informed viewers will know this. Allen adopted one of many possible options available to him; he could have made a color film had he desired. Educated viewers of *Zelig* will know that the film, even if it is designed to look aged, is going for a dated look. They therefore will view the film as a new release that is attempting to appear aged. (Of course, the ways in which a film tries to look dated, the filmic means it uses, could appear aged at a later date.)

With this account in place, let us turn to Hume.

Three Temporal Notions in Hume's Account

Although I do not wish to provide an elaborate interpretation of Hume's essays in aesthetics, I would like to anchor my discussion in his work. After all, it is the Scottish philosopher who introduced to modernity the philosophical puzzles associated with passing the test of time.

Hume's account contains three related notions: passing the test of time, the personal aging of the critic, and repeated viewing. Before explaining each of these, I will give a brief word about Hume's theory of evaluation, a taste-aesthetic according to which experts or critics are said to make judgments of beauty or taste.

Hume understood artistic appraisal in terms of taste and beauty. For Hume there is an analogy between the tongue's "taste" and Taste (with a capital "T"), the faculty of judging artworks and finding what is valuable in them (Carroll 2009, p.

[7] In saying that judging a film's aging requires acquaintance with the film, I mean neither to affirm nor to deny an "intuitionist" position. I am not claiming that there is an intuitive faculty that apprehends or senses aging.

[8] Moreover, aging is not to be confused with a film stock's decomposition, deterioration that would require restoration or preservation. Datedness does not concern the physical degradation of any material substance.

156f.). Even if Hume himself did not take "subjective" to mean what is private, individual, or idiosyncratic, several later interpreters unfortunately read him as claiming just that. Hume himself thought there was a faculty of taste that allowed critics to make accurate and correct judgments. Hence their judgments were subjective in that they depended on the sentiment of the critic, yet inter-subjective in that there were shared by fellow informed critics and were not merely private or whimsical.

Hume's evaluating judges ("critics") are supposed to be sensible, experienced, informed, and unbiased. Specifically, the critics are to have at least five qualities that are necessary if they are to make accurate judgments and if they are not to be "unqualified" as critics (Hume 1985, p. 238): delicacy of taste, frequent practice in a particular art, freedom from prejudice, good sense, and experience in comparing artworks with other ones (ibid, p. 241). In addition, Hume thinks that qualified critics will possess "a perfect serenity of mind" and "a recollection of thought" and that they will give "due attention to the object" (ibid, p. 232).

The notion of "comparing" artworks raises the question of the passage of time, for the critic is supposed to compare works from different nations and ages. Thus, this brings us to the different temporal notions, which, in my view, the literature on Hume's aesthetics has neither sufficiently examined nor properly distinguished. Let us turn to each of these notions.

First, what has been called "passing the test of time" (Savile 1982) involves a work's being valued and esteemed by different *generations*. A work that passes the test of time will evoke "durable admiration" and survive "all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy" (Hume 1985, p. 233). Thus, Hume continues: "The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory" (ibid). And: "A real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with" (ibid). I interpret Hume's point to be similar to what Lamarque has in mind when he writes: "Artistic value, then, is the value that survives across time when a work continues to be valued beyond its context of origin. Many works that initially seem important simply fade from view when the context changes" (Lamarque 2010, p. 212; cf. Silvers 1991, p. 213).

The critic should see many other works so that that he can compare the judged work to these other artworks, allowing him to contextualize the work better. He should be acquainted with many "species" of beauty and know his art form. The critic's comparing activity seems to involve examining works in the same category or genre. Thus, Carroll seems right to discuss Hume's claim in terms of genre (Carroll 1984, pp. 184f.).

Hume explicitly holds that comparative judging would involve works from different *ages*. "One accustomed to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations, can alone rate the merits of a work exhibited to his view, and assign its proper rank among the productions of

genius" (Hume 1985, p. 238). Some works will not hold up well when so examined.

He thinks we are inclined to be more pleased by those works from our own age because they will resemble and depict subject matter that is familiar to us. Hume recognized that a critic's noticing a resemblance between the depicted fictional world and her own world is enjoyable. He then claims that a critic's preferences for, say, comedy over tragedy are "innocent and unavoidable" and can never reasonably be the object of dispute because there is no standard by which they can be decided.[9] He continues: "For a like reason, we are more pleased, in the course of our reading, with pictures and characters, that resemble objects which are found in our own age or country, than with those which describe a different set of customs" (ibid, pp. 244-245).

This last point is related to the aforementioned indexicality of films, one of the characteristics of film that gives rise to its tendency to become dated. Carroll rightly points out that film education can largely make up for the human tendency to find delight in cultural and linguistic phenomena that are familiar to us. Hume rightly endorsed the principle that our appraisals should not be anachronistic. He explained his "freedom from prejudice" condition by referring to a critic who comes from another era than that of the work. Such a critic (of oration, in this case) should "place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment of the oration" (ibid, p. 239). The principle that the critic should attempt to overcome anachronism while making judgments seems plausible indeed.

Hume himself compares artworks from different eras. He juxtaposes ancient and modern oration in "Of Eloquence." Unlike the modern kind, prevalent in England, ancient eloquence is "sublime and passionate" (Hume 1985, p. 108), and it is superior to its modern counterpart (ibid, p. 98). Ancient eloquence "is of a much juster taste than the modern, or the argumentative and rational; and, if properly executed, will always have more command and authority over mankind" (ibid, p. 108). He adds: "We are satisfied with our mediocrity, because we have had no experience of anything better" (ibid). That is why the critic must be familiar with many instances of an artform and with several models of artistically successful works, including works and models from different nations and ages.

Let us turn now to the second temporal notion. Hume refers to the viewing of a work by the same *person* who ages over time. This is what I call the personal aging of the viewer or critic. "A young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who takes pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections concerning the conduct of life and moderation of the passions. At twenty, Ovid may be the

[9] Hume seems to be overly pessimistic here. For one genre likely has more significance for the culture than another. A cultural critic, taking a broader perspective than the film critic, can plausibly argue that realistic drama is more valuable than slapstick comedy insofar as realistic drama has more importance to the culture. But this would bring us beyond the realm of aesthetics and into other kinds of value theory. Carroll offers an account along these lines (2008, pp. 223-226).

favourite author; Horace at forty; and perhaps Tacitus at fifty" (Hume 1985, p. 244). As any marketer of films knows, viewing preferences typically change as viewers grow older. (Hume himself thinks that these preferences are beyond rational dispute, but he may be wrong about that.[10]) The concept of personal aging is meant to reflect the changes a person undergoes over time, including developments in his or her physical, moral, intellectual, psychological, and emotional character. Since personal aging in Hume's account is relatively straightforward, we can turn to the third notion.

Hume suggests that the critic see the work more than once. He recommends the "frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty" (ibid, p. 237). He says that before we can "give judgment on any work of importance," the "very individual performance [must] be more than once perused by us and be surveyed in different lights with attention and deliberation" (ibid, pp. 237-238). I call this repeated viewing.

A few lines later, Hume adds: "There is a species of beauty, which, as it is florid and superficial, pleases at first; but being found incompatible with a just expression either of reason or passion, soon palls upon the taste, and is then rejected with disdain, at least rated at a much lower value" (ibid, p. 238). This repeated viewing is not to be confused with passing the test of time over a period of decades or centuries, the enduring of a work across generations. Rather, repeated viewing is carried out by the same viewer or critic. An artwork that first impressed the critic may not do so after a second or third viewing. It "soon palls upon the taste" on account of its artistic demerits.

Let us leave aside that Hume focuses on beauty and taste. Beauty is too limited a concept for film evaluation, since many films are intend to evoke disgust, fear, sadness, pity, suspense, and many other kinds of emotions. Nevertheless, Hume's point about repeated engagement with the artwork can be expanded and applied to films, as we shall see in a moment. Some movies that once struck the critic as well executed in terms of their genres can, after re-watching, strike him or her as having less artistic value. This is true of films from the past and present alike.

In "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing," Hume compares ancient and modern authors. It is as if he is fulfilling the "comparison" condition he would later defend in "Of the Standard of Taste." Moreover, he points out that repeated engagement with the work can lead us to devalue it – in this case, an epigram that aims for wit and refinement rather than simplicity.

[10] Hume's view of preferences based on "humours of particular men" (1985, p. 243) or "diversity in the internal frame" (ibid, p. 244) seems too extreme. A cultural critic would be in a position to judge the value of action films (often enjoyed, let's assume, by adolescent males) *vis-à-vis* realistic dramas in which serious social issues are presented (typically appreciated by viewers with more "life experience," let's say). The action films would presumably be judged to be less valuable or significant for the culture. Of course, such an estimation would be supra-generic and lead us beyond genre-based appraisals. It would bring us out of the realm of aesthetics and into cultural criticism. Cf. the previous footnote.

> If the merit of the composition lie in a point of wit; it may strike at first; but the mind anticipates the thought in the second perusal, and is no longer affected by it. When I read an epigram of Martial, the first line recalls the whole; and I have no pleasure in repeating to myself what I know already. But each line, each word, in Catullus, has its merit; and I am never tired with the perusal of him. It is sufficient to run over Cowley once: But Parnel, after the fiftieth reading, is as fresh as the first (Hume 1985, p. 195).

The critic should view the work more than once in order to catch parts or elements he may have missed the first time, and to see the artwork for what it is.

Poems that have plainness and simplicity, and are not glaring and dazzling, hold up after repeated viewing, Hume claims. For him, this is not merely a matter of enjoyment (or the lack thereof). Repeated viewing devalues the inferior artwork; the work *deserves* to be demoted. The able critic, he implies, judges the epigrams of Martial to be inferior to those of Catullus. That Martial's poem does not please us upon repeated reading is a consequence of its artistic demerits.

Let us see how this would be applied to film. Roger Ebert claims that *Taxi Driver* holds up after repeated viewings. In a 2004 review of *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), Ebert comments on how the film endures over the years: it "is a film that does not grow dated, or over-familiar." I read this as passing the test of time. In addition, he describes his experience of watching the film repeatedly: "I have seen it dozens of times. Every time I see it, it works."

Consider another example, *The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du Jeu*, Jean Renoir, 1939). André Bazin held that it is only after repeated viewing of the film that its excellence emerges.

> *The Rules of the Game* is a work which should be seen again and again. As it is necessary to hear a symphony more than once to understand it or to meditate before a great painting in order to appreciate its inner harmonies, so it is with Renoir's great film. The fact that *The Rules of the Game* was so long misunderstood is not simply the result of its originality and the public's psychological inertia, but also because it is a work that reveals itself only gradually to the spectator, even if he is attentive (Bazin 1992, p. 83).

After repeated viewing, this film is more clearly seen for the superior film that it is. François Truffaut claimed that at the time of its release, *The Rules of the Game* was "the greatest failure of Renoir's career," yet, in retrospect, his "masterpiece" (in Bazin 1992, p. 257). Truffaut added that the two re-releases of the film, in 1945 and 1948, met with "complete commercial failure" before the great success of the release of the definitive version in 1965 (ibid).

Finally, we see these three temporal notions in the following review of *E.T* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), a short piece written by Charles Taylor in 2002. To facilitate my commentary, I break up Taylor's paragraph.

> Returning to a movie that delighted you when you were younger can be a dicey proposition. We've all re-viewed some once-beloved picture only to find that we no longer connect to it, that our previous affection was based on who we were

> and where we were in life when we first saw it, that experience has shaped our outlook in a different way.

Note the implicit reference to personal aging ("who we were"). Taylor admits that the film might have delighted him merely because he was a young man at the time.

In addition, he explicitly mentions repeated viewing ("re-viewed"). (The fact that we find personal aging and repeated viewing discussed together should not be surprising, for the notions can be easily related to each other: during the period of time that separates two viewings, filmgoers may very well have changed or developed.) The film might pall "upon the taste" after repeated viewing. Does it? For Taylor, *E.T.* holds up. But for other viewers it may not.[11]

> Watching *E.T.* 20 years after it was first released (half my life ago), I can't say that the movie holds the same sense of discovery it did in 1982. (Narrative discovery is a casualty of knowing what's going to happen in a story, for one thing.)

Since the filmgoer knows what is going to happen in the film, it does not move him in the same way or as it once did. Repeated viewing causes this. The jokes might be not as funny, the thrills thrilling, or the surprises surprising.

> But for people who saw *E.T.* on its first go-round, particularly moviegoers who were kids back then, the pleasure of seeing it now is the joy of feeling your responses deepen.

My conception of the nostalgia that is evoked when viewing a dated film sheds light on this claim. Taylor's viewing experience is clearly pleasant ("joy"), just like nostalgia as I have characterized it. If years have passed after our previous viewing and the earlier era was a good one for us, we are likely to feel some degree of nostalgia when re-watching the film. When we see a film we first saw when we were young, it is apt to evoke pleasant associations, assuming the time of that earlier viewing was a happy one.

> It's no news to anyone that *E.T.* is one of the loveliest and happiest of American movie entertainments. It's also a greater picture than we could have known.

In other words, *E.T.* passes the test of time and its artistic value endures. Taylor's claim here seems to suggest that *E.T.* holds up across generations: it is a great film in the sense that it continues to do for filmgoers what it did for previous ones. Thus, Ebert describes how the film "worked" the first time his young grandchildren saw the film, in 1997, just as it worked for viewers in 1982 (Ebert 1997). In short, all three temporal notions are at work in this single paragraph.

[11] In personal correspondence, philosopher Craig Fox commented: "I can remember watching *E.T.* as a kid and being thoroughly mesmerized by it. I had occasion to see a few minutes of it within the past few years and I was struck at how almost unwatchable certain scenes were. (The same might apply to the TV show *Alf*.) Audiences today won't accept special effects that impressed in 1982. It seems of note, though, that we're almost embarrassed by being taken in at something so comparatively crude years ago. We say—of this or of other similar examples—that we were wrong, that 'we *thought* it was a good movie.'" I am indebted to Craig Fox for his comments and suggestions.

Conclusion

I have described my account of how nostalgia, boredom, and amusement are each associated with positive, negative, and mixed aging. I then characterized three temporal notions in Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste," "Of Eloquence," and "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing": passing the test of time, personal aging, and repeated viewing of the work. I close with an irony that Hume's remarks seem to imply.

Repeated viewing, as we have seen, can lead to increased boredom with a film. I do not mean *intended* boredom, the sort Michelangelo Antonioni aimed for with *La Notte* (1961), which was meant to "articulate the theme of the pointlessness of modern life" (Carroll 2008, p. 193). Rather, what I mean is this: if we follow Hume's implication that we should watch a film repeatedly before we judge it, it might not work as well for us or have the same effect. For instance, if we know that the killer is lurking behind the door, we will no longer jump and scream when he appears. When we are familiar with the film's jokes, it will be hard (or at least harder) to make us to laugh. Is our failure to be moved or engaged evidence of the artistic shortcomings and demerits of the film, or is it just that we have seen the film too many times?

If my hypothesis about evaluation and enjoyment is correct, then, insofar as this response (lack of engagement) is an unintended consequence of seeing the film repeatedly, it would have no bearing on the film's artistic qualities or merits. Yet it would bear on how much we enjoy the film. If this is correct, the fact that, due to the numerous viewings of a comedy, jokes become stale or gags worn out has no bearing on the film's artistic value. Thus, such a case would be unlike Hume's ranking of Martial below Catullus, since the latter judgment was an assessment of the artistic value of their poetry.

Sometimes it is due to the films artistic success that we are so familiar with it. On account of its *excellence* (which leads to repeated viewing), it fails to move us as it was intended to move us and as it once did. If we watch an excellent action film over and over again because it is a superior work, we will be prepared for what is about to happen in the film. This is likely to decrease our enjoyment of it. It is rather ironic that we would not enjoy a classic as much because we have seen it so many times – a repeated viewing that, *qua* classic, it well deserves.

I close with an example of this. Consider Peter Stack's review of the 1997 re-release of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977).

> So many years, so much exposure, so many spin-offs, special-effects trends and continuous warp-speed hype have made it nearly impossible to look at *Star Wars* as just a movie anymore. It remains an icon on the ever-changing pop culture landscape – but there's no going back to the young eyes that glowed with awe when the film landed in May 1977 (Stack 1997).

Is the fact that "there's no going back" an artistic shortcoming of *Star Wars*? That seems quite unfair to this influential and significant action and adventure film. But our exposure to and familiarity with the film may very well affect our enjoyment of it.

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