

## The Lost American Dream of the Peripheral

In science fiction, the future can vary from dystopia to a utopia depending on the perception of the characters. The Peripheral's far future appears to be a utopia where humanity's biological mastery appears to be at its peak with peripherals, cybernetic eye/tongue augmentations while being endowed with life-extending technologies and induced immunity. However, while the technological advances show a connection to the future, under this veneer of advancement is nostalgia for a lost past symbolized by the cosplay zones and home zoos occupied with resurrected extinct animals (Thylacines). For all its advancements, the far future inhabited by Wilf is like a video game, an empty imitation of a real world because of its lack of humanity in terms of both population and motivations of the survivors who are the Klept or serve them. It may seem that stubs are the third-world timelines created by the Klept "god club", but these continua enthusiasts do so due to lacking autonomy in a fabrication future and seek to control the past. Wilf and Ash, which may represent the future's middle class, are nostalgic towards the past to cope with an existential survivor's guilt of having so few normal people left. Then there are the lower class which are entirely absent in the future but in Flynn's timeline engage in video games in vintage historical settings, possibly as a form of nostalgic escapism.

"Can't repeat the past? Why of course you can!" is said by Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 117). This quote accurately symbolizes the mentality of the Klept where they seek to empower those in the past with their wealth in attempts to woo and control them because of their nostalgia. While having limitless material wealth, we view that the Lev, member of the Zubov-Klept family (referred to by Daedra as their one useless son), is an idler who lacks purpose for everything controlled by his family and even the assemblers and Mitchikoids performing all tasks of his daily life. Through Milagros Coldiron, Lev nostalgically attempts to live out his version of the American dream phrasing that his control of the stub is "Not a presence... It's Mine" (Chapter 24, Anathema). "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven" is another quote which explains the nostalgic appeal of Flynn's past, which is harsh and dying compared to the technological utopia of the future (Milton I. 263). There is also Wilf, who like Jay Gatsby, tries to use nostalgia to woo over Daedra, who like Daisy, is a woman who is the embodiment of the American dream. However, in *The Peripheral*, Daedra has no nostalgic longing like Daisy does, spurning Wilf and symbolizing that the dream and old America, now with a militarist government purposely erasing its own history, are victims of The Jackpot.

It is through this nostalgic loneliness and survivors' guilt that drives Wilf and Ash, members of the middle class, to be fascinated with Flynn's past. However, their understanding is limited with rose-tinted bias and, as Lowbeer phrases "Eras are conveniences, particularly for those who never experienced them." (Chapter 68, Antibody). Flynn's era is one where disease, war and corruption still are still present, which makes it odd how those living in the novel's future utopia view the past stub as less dystopic. But where Lowbeer sees suffering, Wilf, with his nostalgia, sees a way to avoid the suffering of The Jackpot and preserve the past with him stating that he "...glimpsed some

other order” (Chapter 80, The Clovis Limit). Towards the end of the novel, Wilf confesses to Rainey his feelings for Flynn, but his feelings might be a nostalgic love over what Flynn symbolizes. Throughout the novel, Flynn is the embodiment of the American dream, with the Fischer clan being filled with nostalgia filled imagery that both the reader and Wilf may associate with a history that is currently on the decline. From the decayed AirStream parked in the heart of America, to their lack of wealth and tragic military history, it is our nostalgia for the American dream that makes readers of the novel root for the Fischer clan and characters like Wilf and Lowbeer care for them. In the end, the nostalgic American dream is resurrected, with Fischers and their friends empowered with their newfound wealth, power and them seizing control of their own destiny and world.

Flynn, Burton and the Fischers' friends have their own aspects of nostalgia where their world is in decline and headed for The Jackpot. Before being empowered, Flynn escapes into nostalgia with vintage video games, fading pictures of her father (Chapter 59, Adventure Capitalists), and childhood memories of doing cannonballs (Chapter 116, Cannonball). In contrast to the affluent lives experienced by those in the future which are devoid of humanity, the Fischer clan and friends experience economic hardship and life and death struggles which brings them together. Because of this family connection, nostalgia and the pull towards the past is less strongly felt by the Fischers and friends. Burton, Leon and Connor are not so nostalgic about their military service, instead being scarred and molded by it with their new identity of being a soldier being wrongly attributed to nostalgia "Playing soldier,... Think they'dve got their fill of it" (Chapter 99, American Antiquities). The characters in the past have speed, intensity and violence of action (Chapter 33, Stupidity Tax) which makes them just accept things as the way they are and keep them grounded in the moment.

### **Works Cited**

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 1925.

Gibson, William. *The Peripheral*: Now a Major New TV Series With Amazon Prime. Penguin UK, 2014.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Edited by John Leonard, Penguin Classics, 2003.