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Articulâte is published in the spring semester of each academic year and features student essays of literary and cultural criticism. Articulâte will consider papers written by Denison undergraduates in any area of literary and cultural criticism and from any department or discipline.

Faculty members are encouraged to recommend particularly strong essays from their classes for publication in Articulâte. As a special feature, Articulâte publishes each year's winner of the Robert T. Wilson Award for Scholarly Writing.

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Initial submissions should be in hard copy. Those writers selected for publication will be asked to submit an electronic manuscript of their work. Please submit your essay with cover sheet including your name and Slayter box. The journal accepts submissions at any time during the academic year.

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The marked eccentricity of Sherlock Holmes has been long remarked upon by Holmesian scholars and readers, becoming a trademark of his timeless allure. Simultaneously unsettling and attractive, the peculiarities of Holmes have caused much bemusement, settling as a smoky veil even as the story’s mystery is expertly cleared up. Holmes appears ripe with contradictions, ordering the world in a Platonic fashion, assuredly finding an objective truth while centralizing himself in a Nietzschean chaos of possibilities. The ease with which he repeatedly unravels the plot of various crimes demonstrates, with infuriating smugness the essential simplicity and predictability of human nature. Yet Sherlock himself slips between our fingers, remaining unpredictable by transgressing the “normative” social, sexual, professional, and gendered boundaries. This seemingly inexplicable queering or refutation of the normative by Sherlock can be better understood, in my opinion, when detection is viewed as a machinery of Foucault’s Panopticism. Inspired by Bentham’s prison system, Foucault envisioned a transparent world of continuous supervision from atop a central tower such that those policed are permanently visible, while those policing become obscured so as to remain unverifiable and yet omnipresent. This system would presumably lead to self-regulation by the unconscious internalization of this policing. Sherlock’s “super-vision,” as D.A Miller calls it in clever pun, appears to mirror this idealized panoptic policing, centralizing him while simultaneously necessitating his obscurity (Miller 35). While in an ideal, fully effected Panoptic state, everyone polices themselves, the occurrence of crimes demonstrates the realistic failures of Panopticism, and therefore necessitates calling upon the services of the omniscient Sherlock Holmes. Thus it appears that Sherlock’s privileged position in the Panopticon allows and even requires his queering, so as to keep him undefined, which effectively serves to undermine the very boundaries and binaries by which he orders society and thereby subvert the soundness of the social order he seeks to uphold. To demonstrate this reading I will use various Holmesian short stories and novels by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, first focusing on Sherlock’s omniscient and omnipresent “super-vision” of the characters, demonstrating his alignment with an indefectible policer of the Panopticon. Next, I will outline Sherlock’s “normative” ordering of the world, depicting his centrality in the maintenance of a rigidly regulated and patriarchal social order. Finally, I will analyze the contrary queerness of Sherlock, bringing to the fore his paradoxical position of being central to, and peripheral within a society, undermining the boundaries he seeks to uphold.

Foucault’s conception of Panopticism is founded upon the idea of complete and constant unilateral visibility of those policed such that it is a “machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference” (Foucault
202). In concert with this idea, Sherlock demonstrates his “super-vision” from the very outset of the story, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band.” which centers on the investigation of the mysterious death of Julia Stoner. Hired by her concerned sister Helen, lest she meet the same fate, Sherlock uses his unparalleled powers of penetration upon their first meeting, running “her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances” (Doyle 213). Needing no introduction, Sherlock is able rapidly to make wholly accurate deductions based solely on his keen observations, noting nonchalantly that Helen must have arrived by dog-cart for the “left arm of [her] jacket [was] spattered with mud in no less than seven places...[and] there is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when one sits on the left hand side of the driver” (Doyle 213). Mirroring the arrangement of prisoners in the Panopticon, in which those “in the peripheric ring [are] totally seen, without ever seeing” (Foucault 202), those supervised by Sherlock are unable similarly to penetrate his behavior, and are left in the dark with regards to his reasoning and, even more generally, his character. Helen is thus depicted as giving “a violent start and star[ing] in bewilderment at Sherlock,” being unable to fathom such seemingly impossible astuteness (Doyle 213). But it is precisely because of his unique astuteness that he is called upon by Helen and multitudinous others, having heard that he “can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart” (Doyle 214). Sherlock’s singular omniscience is further highlighted, when having heard an incomplete recountal of the case from Helen, he exposes “five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and thumb, printed upon [her] white wrist,” and thus probes beyond the simple facts (Doyle 220). Interestingly, the bedrooms within which the investigation occurs lie adjacent to each other with “no communication between them but they all open out into the same corridor” (Doyle 217). This architectural design parallels the configuration of the peripheral ring of rooms opposite the central tower in the Panopticon, which “impose on [the individual] an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility” (Foucault 200). Upon careful examination of each room with his companion Dr. Watson, Sherlock makes key deductions that have escaped the attention of Watson, who confusedly remarks that Sherlock had “evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to [him]” (Doyle 231). While Sherlock demonstrates a painstaking attention for detail, inspecting even the most seemingly trivial object and crevice, he appears to require none of it, finding a solution long before the details align in concurrence. Exclaiming that he “knew that [they] should find a ventilator before ever [they] came to [the house],” Sherlock displays his amazing deductive abilities without the aid of actual investigation, suggesting of a transparency in nature as envisioned in the Panopticon (Doyle 237). Sherlock’s timely surveillance of Helen’s well-lit room from the uppermost opposite window where “he could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing” in which the rooms lay to prevent her further crime appears analogous to architecture of the Panopticon (Doyle 230), wherein “by the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery” (Foucault 200).
Sign of Four wherein Sherlock saves the damsel in distress, Miss Morstan, from the disruptive and dangerous effects of colonial India. Thus Sherlock appears to order society along pre-established rigid boundaries, carefully upholding the “normative” while re-assembling society after the chaos of crime.

A closer analysis of Sherlock himself, however, depicts a reality far removed from the “normative” society he rigidly polices. If we are to believe that his “super-vision” corresponds to the functioning of the Panopticon, entitling him to the power of the gaze in the central tower, his contrary reality can be understood as a function of his role as “one [who] sees everything without ever being seen” (Foucault 202). Requiring obscurity, Sherlock’s Panopticism produces in him an indeterminacy such that Sherlock paradoxically fringes himself from the society he is central to. Sherlock can thus be seen to “queer” himself, in that queer theory challenges a “stable concept of the self or selfhood because both terms are subjective and unstable,” consequently embracing indeterminacy (Bressler 258). Transgressing various “normative” boundaries, Sherlock’s identity appears fluid and undefined, impenetrable to those around him. In this story, as scholar Michael Atkinson highlights, Sherlock is seen to undergo “a series of migrations,” crossing gender boundaries and changing positions in the process of solving the mystery (Atkinson 35).

Blurring gender binaries, Sherlock employs the traditionally masculine domain of rationality within the feminized profession of detection, unmindful of the supposed disconnect between the two. When Sherlock is emasculated by Helen’s father who not only calls him “the meddler” and “the busybody” due to his ostensibly feminine profession, but also threatens him, placing him in the probable role of (female) victim (Doyle 223), Sherlock responds with a display of masculine physicality, straightening the poker once bent by Helen’s father and thereby simultaneously bending the gendered boundaries imposed upon him (Hall 300). This mobility between genders and roles becomes apparent in the final scene of the story, when the mystery unravels itself with a fatal battle in Julia’s room, where Sherlock triumphs over Helen’s father, using the very snake used to kill Julia. Convincing Julia that he “must spend the night in [her] room” (Doyle 229), Sherlock appears to inhabit the role traditionally held by her fiancé without any qualms about the impropriety of his request. Atkinson cleverly points out that, by taking Julia’s place in her room to apprehend her killer, Sherlock then migrates into the role of the victim, fearing as she did, essentially becoming Julia, “waiting in her room, immobile on her bed, striking a match as she did, seeing the same snake she saw, and finally speaking her very words—‘the band! the speckled band!’” (Atkinson 35). Migrating further, Sherlock “moves through the role of the villain as well,” eventually driving the snake to bite Helen’s father, becoming indirectly responsible for his death (Atkinson 36).

It appears then that Sherlock continually shifts genders, occupying first the hetero-normative role as Julia’s masculine bedfellow, proceeding towards the accustomed female role of a silent and passive victim, waiting for attack without “a sound, not even the drawing of breath...in a state of nervous tension” (Doyle 233). Finally, Sherlock dons the dominant and aggressive masculine position, actively killing Julia’s father to demonstrate to him that Sherlock’s “grip was not much more feeble than his own” (Doyle 223). Thus, Sherlock’s gender lacks coherence, as he is able to effortlessly transition from it, demonstrating a revealing discontinuity. In alignment with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity that challenges essentialism, positing instead that gender is performative and is naturalized through its repetition, Sherlock appears to adeptly perform both genders, calling into question the “reality” of gender. Sherlock’s various migrations demonstrate the theatricality and flux of selfhood that Butler’s theory is founded upon.

Refuting more than just gender normativity, Sherlock appears to transgress sexual boundaries imperturbably, seeming to develop homosocial relations with Helen’s father. Eve Sedgwick’s conception of homosociality as being inextricably entwined with homoeroticism is in keeping with Sherlock’s relationship with Helen’s father (Bressler 259), wherein their overt rivalry appears to be underpinned by homoeoroticism. As suggested by Hall, the final battle scene becomes a stage upon which this homoeroticism plays out if the cane that Sherlock “lashed furiously with at the bell pull” (Doyle 234), beating the serpent unleashed by Helen’s father, is interpreted as the clashing of erect phalluses (300). Suggestive of this homoeroticism is Sherlock’s triumphant proclamation that while Julia’s father “strikes even deeper...he shall be able to strike deeper still” (Doyle 232). Similarly, the intimacy between Sherlock and his companion Dr. Watson has often been observed, becoming evident when they wait fearfully in Helen’s room as Sherlock’s “hand closed like a vice upon [Dr. Watson’s] wrist in his agitation” (Doyle 232). Furthermore, Sherlock transgresses even professional and lawful boundaries, for despite being an officer of the law, Sherlock refuses to be bound in that position, thinking it “insolent for [Helen’s father] to confound [him] with the official detective force” (Doyle 233). Sherlock appears unafraid to transcend the boundaries of the law, seeing himself apart from it, and thus readily trespasses upon Helen’s father’s house, having “little difficulty in entering the grounds for unrepaid breaches gaped in the old park wall” (Doyle 232). Unfettered by social and ethical norms, Sherlock casually absolves himself after indirectly killing Julia’s father, remarking unashamedly to Dr. Watson that he “cannot say that [this death] is likely to weigh heavily upon [his] conscience” (Doyle 237). Sherlock therefore appears to consciously reject all boundaries, queering himself to remain undefined and impenetrable to the society he polices.

It is then noteworthy that Doyle appears to consciously invert the “normative” physics of power, depicting a society in which the center paradoxically is dependent on and regulated by the periphery. Sherlock epitomizes the power of the peripheral gaze which runs counter to the common epistemological dominance of the central insider. Situating the omniscient Sherlock within the category of outsiders “who have been systematically frustrated by the social system: the queer, disinheritied, deprived, disenfranchised, dominated, and exploited,” Doyle appears to turn this system on its head by highlighting the often overlooked powerful privilege this perspective offers (Merton 29). Drawing upon Plato’s allegory of the cave, the English philosopher Francis Bacon depicts the limitations of a central
perspective within the cave which causes the perceiver to be mired in shadowy illusions, forever deceived by an erroneous view of reality (Merton 30). As an outsider, Sherlock mirrors the man who escapes the cave and finds authentic knowledge, becoming uniquely exempt from “the myopia of the cave” (Merton 31). His success is dependent on his perspective of vision for society can only be protected by someone who does not share its orthodoxies, who sees through the disciplines of respectability, who despite his patriotism has little reverence for popular superstitious, who stands outside the normal system of rewards and punishments, who cares nothing for status and depends only on himself. (Clausen 63)

Thus Sherlock’s peripheral position as a result of his queering is integral to his centrality to the regulation of society, facilitating a perspective of prime observability afforded to the policer of the Panopticon.

This “super-vision” figures greatly in all the Holmesian mysteries, becoming Sherlock’s key characteristic that evokes the awe of characters and readers alike. This characteristic becomes evident from the start of the short story, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” in which Sherlock attempts to save the king of Bohemia from being blackmailed by his mistress Irene Adler so as to avoid the resulting scandal that could effectively taint the King’s rule. Mirroring the obscurity of the policer in the central tower from those in the peripheral, Sherlock remains inscrutable to even Dr. Watson, who upon coming to visit him sees that “his rooms were brilliantly lit, but, even as [Watson] looked up, [he] saw only his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind” (Doyle 6). Long before the case is brought before Sherlock, he is depicted as constantly exercising his penetrative powers in his everyday life, “look[ing Watson] over in his singular introspective fashion” upon his usual morning visit (Doyle 8). Needing no prior discussion of the recent occurrences in Dr. Watson’s life, Sherlock is quickly able to deduce them using his keen observation, proclaiming, “I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl” (Doyle 9).

Despite Watson’s familiarity with Sherlock’s unique observational skills, Sherlock’s methods remain impenetrable to him, causing him to flippantly highlight Sherlock’s unfathomable omniscience by remarking that Sherlock “would certainly have been burned, had [he] lived a few centuries ago” (Doyle 9). Telling of the ease with which human nature unfolds before him Sherlock responds by saying that “it is simplicity itself,” having effortlessly noticed “the inside of [Watson’s] left shoe” and “a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right-forefinger” which quite plainly brought his deductions to light (Doyle 9). Upon such simple explication, Watson wonders at his own inability to perform similar deductions “believ[ing] that [his] eyes are as good as [Sherlock’s],” bringing to the fore the essential importance of Sherlock’s peripheral perspective (Doyle 10). Later faced with an anonymous letter, Sherlock single-handedly deduces its author from his observations of its penmanship, going as far as to announce his arrival minutes before the author appeared, thereby indubitably establishing his rare omniscience. Despite the black vizard mask that covered the visitors face, Sherlock was unhindered in his assessment being able to see beyond that which met the eye, finding the visitor’s “long straight chin [as] suggestive of resolution pushed to the length of obstinacy” (Doyle 14). Upon prefacing his story with information regarding the secrecy and delicacy of the matter, Sherlock continually responds by saying that he “was aware of it,” demonstrating his infinite knowledge without the need for any guidance from others (Doyle 15). Unmindful of alias the visitor had carefully constructed for himself, Sherlock effortlessly reveals his true identity, coolly remarking, “your majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Willhelm Gottreich von Ormstein, Grand Duke of CasselFelstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia” (Doyle 16). In an attempt to ascertain the location of the compromising photograph, Sherlock follows Irene Adler almost perfunctorily, as “it was [already] clear enough what was in the wind” (Doyle 24). Sherlock, in an unprecedented move, switches roles with Watson, asking him to position himself in front of an open window in order to observe his interaction with Irene Adler, saying “you are to watch me, for I will be visible to you” (Doyle 27).

Sherlock thus appears to allow Watson to temporarily take his privileged place within the central tower of the Panopticon, putting himself into view for the sake of the case. Watson’s vision however, is limited to that which Sherlock makes visible to him, and he is thus unable to completely take Sherlock’s place, which is perhaps a reflection of the myopia of the central perspective in juxtaposition to the infinite observability facilitated by the distance of the peripheral gaze. Thus it appears that Sherlock’s “immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation” resemble that of the policer of the panopticon (Doyle 6), making him, as Watson plainly states, “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen” (Doyle 5).

In Plato’s allegory of the cave, he nobly envisioned the escaped man who finds the real truth to proceed to liberate those within the cave from their shackled perception. Sherlock however, having escaped the cave, appears unwilling to relinquish his newfound power, acting instead as a keeper of the cave, ensuring those inside remain locked within the rigidity of fallacious boundaries. While Sherlock overtly appears to help rescue the King of Bohemia from the clutches of the shrewish Irene Adler, a closer analysis reveals that Sherlock merely attempts to aid the King conceal the indiscretions of his youth, readily silencing the desperate efforts of a heartbroken woman. Described as a “well-known adventuress” to Sherlock, Irene Adler is given a grotesque portrayal and is doggedly persecuted by Sherlock for merely attempting to make public her affair with the king so as to highlight his callous disposal of her affections once having had his way with her (Doyle 17). Despite knowing that the King’s rejection of Irene was unjustly propelled by no want of affection but rather her low social status having said “I wish she had been of my own station! What a queen she would have made,” Sherlock agrees to do the King’s bidding without it being warranted (Doyle 36). He thus appears to condone the King’s frivolous treatment of women by helping to conceal his seemingly tainted past, facilitating a more “appropriate” union for the King, thereby also legitimizing and deepening the unfounded stratification caused by socio-economic boundaries. There appears to be no illegality in the behavior of Irene Adler, and
as James Edward Holroyd in Baker Street By-Ways points out, “One may fairly claim that only dubious and questionable aspect of the adventure was the conduct of the three men principally concerned” (38). Sherlock then demonstrates the effects of the long arm of the patriarchy, seeming to need little excuse to silence the voice of women. He even goes as far as to attempt to steal the photograph from her, playing on her kindness by pretending to a “poor gentleman much hurt” and in need of her assistance (Doyle 31). While even his heartiest companion, Watson, had “never felt more heartily ashamed of [him]self in [his] life than when [he] saw the beautiful creature against whom [they] were conspiring,” Sherlock remains resolute in his determination to deceive Irene Adler for the good of the King (Doyle 32). Sherlock appears unwilling to blur “normative” gender binaries, helping to perpetuate them himself. His unfounded readiness to take Irene Adler to task appears to stem from his own rigid gendered beliefs, thinking all women to be “naturally secretive...[preferring] to do their own secreting” (Doyle 30). Thus Sherlock serves to merely reestablish the selfsame boundaries after the disorder of crime, engaging society within their rigid limits while attempting to keep them in the dark about the possibility of life beyond.

Situated outside the confines of these boundaries as a function of his observational role, Sherlock flouts the boundaries he adamantly policies, enjoying the very possibilities he denies others. Unencumbered by “normativity,” Sherlock is able to embrace a shifting sense of selfhood and identity that queer theory seeks to explore, producing in him a marginality that, as Watson admits, is “admirable for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions” (Doyle 5). Sherlock resists all kinds of conventionality, transgressing social and physical boundaries in his everyday existence by “remaining in [his] lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drossiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature” (Doyle 6). He then literally distances himself from the center, residing in the outskirts of London, while also blurring the boundaries of social acceptability, mixing pleasure with professionalism. Seemingly unconcerned with illegality despite attempting to enforce the law, Sherlock appears to transgress professional and legal boundaries, committing the felony of false alarm and attempted burglary in order to do what is right, even coaxing Watson into criminality by saying, “you don’t mind breaking the law?...nor running a chance of arrest?...[if] the cause is excellent!” (Doyle 26). Resisting the commonality of love, Sherlock “never spoke of the softer passions, save with gibe and sneer,” choosing instead a life of isolation over the idealization of love and the heteronormativity it presupposes (Doyle 5). He thus refutes the exalted passions for the cold preciseness of reason because love acts much like “grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one own high-power lenses,” detracting from his supreme observational function as the central cog in the panopticon machinery (Doyle 5). While less evident in this story than the aforementioned, Sherlock’s homosociality, a term which “hypothesizes the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (Sedgwick 1), with his companion Watson can be seen when

Sherlock fervently insists on Watson’s presence despite the client’s disapproval, saying “Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell...never mind him” (Doyle 12). Thus Sherlock crosses sexual boundaries with ease, unmindful of popular censure, demonstrating with this discontinuity that “desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender...[and thereby] disrupting the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (Butler 173). In alignment with this revealing discontinuity, Sherlock performs a series of roles in this story, telling of the performativity and discursive origin of identity and gender. Upon deciding to follow Irene Adler, Sherlock disguises himself as a “drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes,” giving such a realistic portrayal that even Watson “had to look three times before [he] was certain that it was indeed he” (Doyle 20). Performing the gender and identity precisely called for by the role, Sherlock is able to mingle freely amongst hoary men, effectively “be[coming] one of them...[so as to know all there is to know] about Irene Adler (Doyle 20). Later in the story Sherlock plays the part of a “amiable and simple-minded” Nonconformist clergyman with an exactitude that causes Watson to remark that “the stage lost a fine actor, even as science lost an acute reasoner, when [Sherlock] became a specialist in crime” (Doyle 30). He performs this character with “his sympathetic smile, and general look of peering and benevolent curiosity” (Doyle 29), adding a pronounced dimension of femininity to this role from the last, so as to elicit a caring response from Irene, thereby demonstrating that “gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” (Butler 174). Thus Sherlock depicts the theatricality of gender and identity, effortlessly changing not merely his costume, but “his expression, his manner, [and] his very soul...with every fresh part that he assumed” (Doyle 29-30). In the end, Irene Adler is able to get the better of Sherlock, slipping past him by adopting a fluidity of gender and identity, similarly transgressing these boundaries. Dressing in an ulster, she easily performs the role of a man, for, as she admits to Sherlock later, “male costume [was] nothing new to [her]...often tak[ing] advantage of the freedom which it gives” (Doyle 38). Thus Sherlock’s paradoxical refutation of “normative” boundaries serves to undermine their legitimacy, allowing Irene Adler to capitalize on the selfsame possibilities, thereby making her a formidable opponent to Sherlock.

Thus, Sherlock’s role as the policer of the Panopticon helps illuminate and explain his distinct queerness, requiring that he remain an enigma himself, paradoxically causing Sherlock to refuse to be pigeonholed by the very boundaries he imposes on society. The ease with which he transgresses these boundaries however, simply serves to demonstrate the “temporality and contingent groundlessness” of their application (Butler 172), thereby undermining Sherlock’s power and the validity of the order for which he stands. Sherlock’s necessary queering then proves to be counterproductive, seemingly providing opportunities for “deviance.” If, as sociologist Howard Becker points out, deviance is seen as “publicly labeled wrongdoing—[that] is always the result of enterprise in that though a practice may be harmful in an objective sense to the group in which it occurs, the harm needs to be discovered and
pointed out,” Sherlock appears inadvertently to not only facilitate “deviance” through his personal resistance of boundaries, but also, in some senses, to create it (162). Sherlock then seems to be a conjurer of cheap tricks, merely apprehending “deviants” of his own fabrication.

If the signification of deviance ironically creates it, Sherlock appears to be guilty of making monstrosity of deviance for his Panopticon society in which “polymorphous conducts [are] actually extracted from people’s bodies and from their pleasures…[to be] drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices” (Cohen 14). As insightfully pointed out by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, monsters become defined and highlighted as such, to serve as “vehicles of prohibition,” enacting the seeming grotesqueness of that which is tabooed to enforce the normativity that they stand at odds with (15). Theorizing on the utility of monsters, Cohen draws upon Becker’s aforementioned stance by viewing the monster as a “construct and a projection…exist[ing] only to be read…signifying something other than itself,” standing as a warning against hideous effects of deviance (Cohen 4). Crime and thus those “monsters” who perpetrate it, reappear continually, despite Sherlock’s ingenuity at detection, functioning to constantly reinforce and regulate normative boundaries. Sherlock therefore is indebted to the monsters he ritually begets and destroys, scapegoating them to his disciplinary cause (Cohen 18).

Nowhere does the grotesque corporeality of these fabricated monsters figure more greatly than in the classic novel, “The Hound of the Baskervilles,” in which Sherlock bravely defeats an allegedly supernatural hound that is believed to haunt the Baskerville family after the misdeeds of Hugo Baskerville, saving the incumbent heir Sir Henry, from its master’s murderous grip. Since deviance is a “product of enterprise…[needing the offender to be] discovered, identified, apprehended and convicted” (Becker 163), Sherlock’s “super-vision” is integral to his success, becoming evident from the very outset of the narrative. Despite Watson’s back being turned to Sherlock, the latter is able to accurately surmise Watson’s actions, startling Watson into asking, “How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head” (Doyle 49). Upon finding an anonymous walking stick in his living quarters, Sherlock carefully discounts Watson’s conclusions regarding its owner, surmising only through examination of the stick that its owner was “a young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the professor of a favorite dog, which [he] described roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff” (Doyle 54). The accuracy of his description is brought to the fore when the same visitor makes an appearance a little later, highlighting Sherlock’s almost divine omniscience. Using his “super-vision” to scrutinize every inch of the visitor before he had had the time to sit down, Sherlock coolly remarks that he hoped the visitor would have hesitation in smoking, having “observe[d] from [his] forefinger that [he] made [his] own cigarettes” (Doyle 56). Dating an important manuscript from the inch or two of it that protruded from the visitor’s pocket, Sherlock proclaims it to be from the “early eighteenth century, unless it is a forgery,” demonstrating his incredible powers of penetration (Doyle 56). Sherlock deduces, with unnerving exactitude, the activities of Watson upon his return, confidently commenting that he perceived that Watson “ha[d] been at the club all day” (Doyle 75). Despite Watson’s familiarity with Sherlock’s observatory powers, he is unable to similarly penetrate Sherlock to comprehend his methods, left mumbling “certainly, but how—?” in bewilderment (Doyle 75). Having heard a recountal of the mysterious death of Sir Charles Baskerville, Sherlock is extraordinarily able to make sense of the seemingly disconnected clues, discounting a popular theory by stating with certainty that Sir Charles had been “running desperately, running for his life, running until he burst his heart and fell dead upon his face” (Doyle 77). A cursory examination of a note composed with printed words pasted together, warning Sir Henry away from the accursed house in Devonshire, led Sherlock to make some key deductions to the sheer puzzlement of his company, causing Dr. Mortimer to remark that he “could understand anyone saying that the words were from a newspaper; but that [Sherlock] should name which, and add that it came from the leading article, is really one of the most remarkable things which [he had] ever known” (Doyle 81). Going beyond these observations, Sherlock is able to penetrate further into the minute preparatory details of the note, deducing not only that it was made using gum and nail-scissors, but also that “the pen has spluttered twice in a single word and has run dry three times in short address, showing that there was very little ink in the bottle…[usually the product of] hotel ink and the hotel pen” (Doyle 84). In alignment with the power and supremacy endowed to the policer of the Panopticon, Sherlock god-like authority as the “dealer of justice and arbiter of life and death” (Gorman 93) is made implicit when he remarks that he “holds several threads in [his] hands, and the odds are that one or the other of them [will] guide him to the truth” (Doyle 93). When attempting to interrogate the cabman, Sherlock begins by revealing all he knows, startling the cabman into saying, “why there’s no good my telling you things, for you seem to know as much as I do already” (Doyle 98). Seemingly unable to accompany Sir Henry to Devonshire, Sherlock allows Watson to fill his shoes, instructing him to “simply report the facts in the fullest possible manner to [him]” (Doyle 102). However, as is later discovered, Sherlock continues to secretly observe everything, seen “standing motionless and gazing after [them], being unable and unwilling to relegate his unparalleled powers to anyone” (Doyle 103). It comes as no surprise then that Watson staggers as Sherlock, and yearns for Sherlock to “come down and take this heavy burden of responsibility from [his] shoulders” (Doyle 113). The self-regulating effects of Sherlock’s Panopticon is depicted through the strait-laced character of Watson, who follows Sherlock’s instructions to the tee by “imagin[ing] what [his] feelings would be if [he] had to return to [Sherlock] and to confess that some misfortune had occurred through the disregard of [his] instructions…[causing his] cheeks to flush at the very thought” (Doyle 133). Keenly aware of Sherlock’s constant surveillance as one should be in well-effected Panopticon, Watson realizes that “possibly he had taken no step since [he] had been upon the moor which had not been observed and reported [for] always there was a feeling of an unseen force” (Doyle 166). Sherlock appears to treat interrogations as a mere formality, expediting the process with Laura Lyons by simply “tell[ing] her what occurred, and [she]
could check [him] if [he made] any material mistake” (Doyle 187). In juxtaposition to Watson’s inability to make sense of the mystery of the hound in Devonshire, perhaps on account of his central perspective, Sherlock is depicted as having “made certain of the hound, and hav[ing] guessed at the criminal before ever [he] went to the West country” (Doyle 207). Thus Sherlock’s singular omniscience places him in the privileged role of the policer of the Panopticon, allowing him to reign over society with his godlike surveillance.

In true Platonic fashion, Sherlock reestablishes order in society by upholding fixed Truths, enclosing society within their rigid boundaries. So as to maintain the supposed “natural” order of things, Sherlock exercises society of its disrupting deviants, demonizing, in all forms, the rejection of normativity. The apparent monstrosity of deviance is caricatured by the hound who is described as a “huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral” (Doyle 71). Acting as the grotesque face of deviance, the hound is considered to be supernatural because it is “hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature” (Doyle 71), making it dangerous as a “form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” and bring about a category crisis (Cohen 6). Refusing easy categorization by normative boundaries of “scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality” (Cohen 7), the hound is monstrous as it “could not possibly be any animal known to science” (Doyle 71). In order to prevent the chaotic fragmentation of a disciplinary society that the “deviant” offers, presenting “an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world” (Cohen 7), Sherlock dehumanizes them by making them appear monstrous, thereby justifying his eventual persecution and destruction of them. It is then an obvious progression when Sherlock “emptie[s] five barrels of his revolver into the creature’s flank” upon the first chance he gets (Doyle 193). When the murderous master of the hound Stapleton, first makes an appearance, he disguises himself with a “bushy black beard” (Doyle 87), which has a destabilizing effect, calling into question the fixedness of reality. While originally a descendant of the Baskervilles, Stapleton performed a series of convincing roles, finally adopting the name Stapleton to play a meek-mannered and amicable naturalist, even going as far as to have his wife pretend to be his sister. Effortlessly performing this new identity without drawing any suspicion from those around him for most of his life, Stapleton’s performance functions to denaturalize and subvert the seeming inherency of identity, rupturing normative boundaries and thus becomes more of a threat to Sherlock’s disciplinary society (Butler 133). In alignment with the monsters it bears, the moor of Devonshire is depicted as being equally grotesque, appearing as a “gray melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance...and in the middle of it rose two great stones, worn and sharpened at the upper end until they looked like the huge corroding fangs of some monstrous beast” (Doyle 104, 126). The marked absence of light not only makes Devonshire a more ominous place, for it is in the “hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted” (Doyle 103), but it also suggests its deviation from the normative Panoptic society in which visibility is key. Depicted as a refuge for all that is primitive and monstrous, having housed prehistoric man with his “little arrangements [still found] exactly as he left them” (Doyle 118), the moor also becomes home to the escaped convict Selden, who is then unsurprisingly made to appear conspicuously savage with “an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions...and small, cunning eyes which peered fiercely to right and left through the darkness like a crafty and savage animal” (Doyle 144). Selden’s accidental death is therefore met with much relief and triumph from Sherlock who sees it as an inevitable sacrifice for the maintenance of a disciplinary society.

In keeping with the liminality of the dissociated monster, Devonshire is described as being “the most God-forsaken corner of the world...so vast, and so barren... [such that] its mysteries and its strange inhabitants remain as inscrutable as ever” (Doyle 116, 145). Devonshire is thus queered, in that its landscape and its inhabitants resist normativity, made explicit when Stapleton refers to it as a “queer place... [with] queer hills breaking...[and] bogs that make queer noises sometimes” (Doyle 116, 118). Free from the shackles of normativity then, Devonshire is all the more alarming because “all things are possible upon the moor” (Doyle 118). The queer is thus made monstrous, threatening with its presence which “demands a radical rethinking of boundary and normality” (Cohen 6) that to give way to a dizzying and chaotic array of possibilities. Unwilling to disrupt the status quo of society, Sherlock upholds normative sexist notions, treating both Laura Lyons and Mrs. Stapleton as extraneous characters, present merely to facilitate the capture of the “monstrous” Stapleton. While Sherlock overtly appears to be the rescue Laura from the tyranny and deception of Stapleton, a closer analysis depicts that he does so that he “may find the lady of service” (Doyle 171), undeceiving her to get to reveal information which would aid his apprehension of Stapleton. In the same vein, upon finding Mrs. Stapleton whipped and bound by her ironhanded husband, Sherlock’s first inquiry upon untying her is regarding the whereabouts of his dead brother. In the same vein, Sherlock makes mention of both women, leaving them emotionally crippled and alone. Thus Sherlock serves to purge society of its monsters, rescuing it from their grip, to leave it enmeshed by normativity.

In his quest for the maintenance of normative boundaries, Sherlock necessarily queers himself to remain undefined, hypocritically utilizing the infinite possibilities he disallows others. Having familiarized himself with Sherlock’s unconventionality, Watson takes no offense when asked to leave by Sherlock, “know[ing] that seclusion and solitude were very necessary for [his] friend” (Doyle 74). While claiming to send Watson to Devonshire to keep watch for him, Sherlock never really relinquishes his observational role, keeping a necessary distance from the centrality of Baskerville Hall by literally living on the moor. He was often seen as a “black ebony statue on that shining background” (Doyle 144) allowing for the unverifiable omnipresence of the policer of the Panopticon. Choosing to live sparsely in a hut with “some blankets rolled in a waterproof...some cooking utensils and a bucket half-full of
Sherlock appears to consciously abandon creature comforts for the hard life of Neolithic man, shifting roles with ease. Describing his seemingly inhospitable abode as an "occasional retreat" (Doyle 168), Sherlock reveals the performativity of selfhood and the liberation found in its infinite possibilities (Butler 173). Sherlock appears to treat the law frivolously, taking gross liberties by allowing the Barrymores to aid in the convict, Selden's escape, acknowledging that as a seemingly "conscientious detective [his] first duty [should be] to arrest the whole household" (Doyle 180). It is no wonder that Sherlock describes Stapleton as "a foil as quick and supple as [his] own" (Doyle 99), as Stapleton is able to similarly transgress normative boundaries, turning the tables on Sherlock. This becomes very evident when Stapleton embraces a shifting sense of selfhood like Sherlock, going as far as to introduce himself as Sherlock Holmes, causing the real Sherlock to become "white with vexation" (Doyle 87). Literally following in Sherlock's footsteps, Stapleton surveys Sherlock, causing Sherlock to "twice stroll over to the window" to check for Stapleton's gaze (Doyle 88), suddenly appearing like those in the peripheral rooms of the Panopticon who are subjected to constant observation. Thus while Sherlock's queering appears necessary for him to remain unverifiable and maintain an essential peripheral perspective, it also inadvertently invites a similar resistance to normativity in some those he polices, thereby undermining his objective. Thus by the signification of the queer as monstrous, Sherlock in turn holds a mirror to himself, appearing a monster as well. Adamantly circumscribing society within normative boundaries, Sherlock becomes more monstrous by "prevent[ing] mobility (intellectual and sexual), delimiting the social sphere through which private bodies may move" (Cohen 12). Sherlock's monstrosity is made implicit when he informs Watson that he "must cast around for another scent" (Doyle 98), suggesting of his similarity with the hound. Sherlock then appears to "police the borders of the possible" (Cohen 12), attempting to stitch society in to a contained and seamless whole while reveling in the fragmentary and disparate nature of himself.
"We must not look at goblin men. We must not buy their fruits":
The Politics of Feminine Consumption and Sexuality in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"

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The politics of food and consumption, and its partnership with sexuality and the erotic element in literature, is not a novel concept of study; however, its presentation in various texts evokes questions of cultural and historical significance. Christina Rossetti's 1859 poem "Goblin Market" is an exemplary—and certainly complicated—example of the ways in which food and sexuality can powerfully interact and inform the reading of a text. This long fable poem has an overt sexual tone, as well as language and scenes suggestive of rape and incest—all of which are inextricably linked to the politics of female consumption and desire. I argue that Rossetti's creation of the evil goblin market presents a clear connection between Victorian traditions of consumption and the performance of female sexuality and purity. She clearly fleshes out the price(s) of temptation within an Edenic trope of the fruit garden. Thus, the politics of consumption become equated with sin and temptation; yet, this equation is complicated as consumption also becomes associated with incestual love and unfailing sisterly devotion. Specifically, the role of the cornucopia of fruits, which the goblins offer to Laura and Lizzie contribute to the effective eroticism in the narrative and complicate the definition of forbidden within a Victorian context. Rossetti's poem is an essential contribution to the discourse of food studies in literature, as it sheds light on the evolution and universality of the literary conversation between food and desire—and specifically, food and desire in poetry.

"Goblin Market" is especially rich as a text because it invites numerous, conflicting readings, the earliest positing the long poem as a fairy tale or fable for a younger readership, but further study prompted critics to recognize the complexity of the work, and acknowledge its theological discussion of temptation (Christ and Robson 1460). While conceding to the poignancy of religious readings of Rossetti's poem, for the sake of focus, my arguments will be restricted to the erotic elements and relationships within the text, concentrating specifically on Rossetti's characterization of Laura and of Laura's troubling physical relationship with Lizzie. My reading of the text, as it concerns the connection between the alimentary and the sexual, negates the depiction of Lizzie as a Christ figure, and negates the embrace between Laura and Lizzie as purely indicative of sororal love (Arseneau 128-129). The presentation of food, namely the enticing array of fruits, which the goblins present to Laura and Lizzie, substantiates the seductive reading of "Goblin Market"; it is impossible to deny the length and devotion given to the erotic within the textual passages that examine the goblin wares. Richard Menke examines this relationship further by identifying that the reader's own experience in reading/tasting the textual passages pertaining to the fruit is itself orally erotic (110-111). Thus, Rossetti not only successfully establishes the narrative text and interpersonal relationships as erotic, but she also effectively translates her poetry as an oral and auditory erotic experience for the reader—cementing the significant interaction between food and sexuality in the poem.

Framing "Goblin Market" within its Victorian context and within the context of Rossetti's highly pious lifestyle is integral to grasping the work's major themes and arguably, its contradictions. But primarily, Suzanne Daly and Ross G. Forman highlight the important ways in which food studies in Victorian literature contribute to a broader cultural and historical cognition, arguing for the legitimacy of the culinary element as integral to the canon of literary scholarship (363). Daly and Forman underline the emergence of a "commodity culture" in Britain and how this, along with the continued growth of imperial strength and trade, "placed food and drink at the center of cultural politics" (364-365). Food, and how it changed hands, became an entity around which social and cultural practices were based, identifying the notion of "food as commodity, [as] significant aspect of the economic life of the period; the social history of food as part of Victorian domestic life" (Daly and Forman 365). Daly and Forman also note its literal and symbolic importance in the quotidian performance of religion and social class/status, certainly a social construction that would have not gone unrecognized or unaffected by Rossetti (371). The characterization of Rossetti's personal life, as broadly acknowledged by English scholarship, is reduced to a commentary on her intense piety, which twice forbid her from entering into marriage (Christ and Robson 1459). The central role that religion played in Rossetti's life informs the way in which most scholars interpret the themes and symbols in "Goblin Market," viewing the poem as a "moral fable" which warns of the surrender to temptation via Laura's physical and spiritual decline as a fallen woman, and praises the concept of sacrifice for sororal devotion via Lizzie's procurement of the antidote from the goblin men (1460). However, I would cite Virginia Woolf's estimation, as noted by Christ and Robson, of Rossetti's narrative style, which is distinguished by "the distinctive combination of sensuousness and religious severity" (1460). It is particularly the former quality of Rossetti's writing which is arguably the most sensational and surprising given her religious foundations; which is to say, she seems to beautifully exemplify the erotic relationship between food and sexuality in the narrative of "Goblin Market," while simultaneously seeming to rebuke and forbid this relationship.

An (female) erotic reading of the text necessarily revolves around Laura's economic encounter with the goblins, where she tastes their sensual fruits and likewise the consequences of mature sexuality outside the bounds of social propriety. Martine Watson Brownley, like many other scholars, emphasizes the significance of this scene in the promulgation of varying theological and sexual themes, stressing that not only is the language of the fruit important, but so also are the characterization of the goblins themselves (179). The opening stanza of Rossetti's poem is concerned entirely with the itemization of the fruits, which the goblins sell, the language of which is highly erotically charged, while it
concurrently highlights the relationship of consumer to product—in this case, Laura's purity and innocence exchanged for mature sexuality, experience. Victor Roman Mendoza's extensive essay on the poem catalogues this "consumer desire" by referencing the repetitive, purposeful incantation of "Come buy, come buy" ushered from the goblins to Laura (920). According to Mendoza, "The listing of the various fruits promises and provides pleasure, then, as the list is both framed with the phrase assuring consumer enjoyment (again, 'Come buy') and is itself visually alluring and poetically seductive. The text incites one to consume conspicuously, to abide by the appeal to one's senses uncritically" (921). This is highly reminiscent of the aforementioned Menke's depiction of the text as an erotic experience for both the sisters, Laura and Lizzie, and the reader himself as taking part in the visual and auditory literary experience.

A mere skimmed reading of Rossetti's first stanza not only evokes a symbolic feminine sexuality, but it also, as Mendoza and Menke suggest, invites the reader to salivate; Mendoza further suggests that, "The act of reading then is intimately related to the act of eating" (922). The exotic list of fruits is littered with insinuated erotics, the "Plump unpecked cherries" (line 7), the "Wild free-born cranberries" (11), the suggestiveness of ripeness, and the alluring gesture of the goblins asking Laura to "Taste them and try.../to fill your mouth, / Sweet to tongue and sound to eye" (25; 28; 30). The overall eroticism and orality suggested by Rossetti's language informs the reader's ultimate interpretation of the text and in its divination of its moral and social ethics. I would suggest that Rossetti's overt sexual tone taken throughout the text is troubling to the popular uncritically" (921). This is highly reminiscent of the aforementioned Menke's (again, 'Come buy') and is visually alluring and poetically seductive. The text incites one to consume conspicuously, to abide by the appeal to one's senses uncritically" (921). This is highly reminiscent of the aforementioned Menke's depiction of the text as an erotic experience for both the sisters, Laura and Lizzie, and the reader himself as taking part in the visual and auditory literary experience.

Returning home alone from her feasts at the goblin market, Laura is met by a very worried sister Lizzie who, as the voice of reason and sacrifice throughout the poem, offers the tale of Jeanie to her beleaguered sister—another woman felled by the tempting shouts of the goblin men. Rossetti's insertion of a mini-fable within her larger text is significant—if not overdulgent, too—in that it informs the reader of the social and moral ramifications of Laura's impulsiveness. Jeanie, like Laura, ate the fruits of the goblin men, but was afterward unable to seek them out and eventually died from unfulfilled desire and curiosity (Rossetti 1469). Finally, Lizzie somberly notes that where Jeanie had fallen, no plant life will grow, suggesting a threatening image of infertility, notwithstanding slow decay and death, that touches upon the personal and social ramifications of giving in to pre-mature, selfish sexuality (1469). Brownley claims that Laura's initial taste of the goblins' fruits has destroyed her ability to act and react normally within society, which wholly isolates her from society and from her sister (180). She goes on to claim that the reason for Laura's prolonged sense of unfulfilled desire comes from her lack of recognition of its "dangerous emotional and intellectual dimensions inherent in the experience with the fruit" and that her fever in effect may only break once she is made aware of this (Brownley 181).

However, Lizzie's warnings are not heeded by Laura, whose "mouth waters still" and intends to return to the goblin market the following night, despite the alarmingly obvious parallels between her intentions and that of the ill-fated Jeanie (line 166, Rossetti 1469). And though she returns the following night, she, like Jeanie, is unable to hear the goblins' cry and is much afflicted,
while Lizzie is tormented by it and pleads with Laura to return home. As Laura realizes that only Lizzie is susceptible to the goblins’ charms, she reacts hysterically, provoking a parade of dramatic, fatalistic questions:

Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?
Must she no more such succous pasture find,
Gone deaf and blind?
Her tree of life dropped from the root:
She said not one word in her heart’s sore ache; (257-261)

Laura laments the loss of such succulence and “gnashe[s] her teeth for baulked desire, and wept / As if her heart would break” (lines 268-269, 1472). Constance W. Hassett comments specifically on Laura’s “baulked desire” as the thematic core of the piece, as the intercession of her insatiable desire as a result of her moral (read: sexual) turpitude (20). For Hassett, it is significant that not only is Laura, at this point in the text, unable to find the fruits which so recently fulfilled her, but she is also knowledgeable that they are being kept from her, for Lizzie can still hear the goblins’ call (20). Further, she claims that, “Rossetti’s goblins are not just tempters, they are desire, or rather the agents of desire’s paradox; they deal in what arouses, exhilarates, and injures appetite, and the sisters experience them differently. Each in her own way is a desirer of the goblins’ fruit, and each discovers for herself the convulsive, self-divided nature of her yearnings” (Hassett 20). And as Lizzie witnesses her sister’s decay, perhaps Rossetti’s commentary on the moral decline of the sexually compromised woman in Victorian society, she deduces that she must get for her sister what Laura cannot obtain herself—a further foray into sexual experience and oral indulgence (Rossetti 1472).

I would argue that Lizzie’s sacrificial act in allowing Laura to suck from her body the succulent juices of the goblins’ fruits—identifiably an incestual-erotic which receives more attention later—is injurious to Rossetti’s themes of religious redemption and negation of sexual temptation. Brownley argues that the only ways in which Laura’s emotional and physical “baulked desire” can be reversed is either through death or “by another kind of love more powerful than the sexual one she has discovered with the goblins” (182). This, as Brownley claims, is the love imbued in Lizzie’s selfless act in procuring the fruits and fruit juices from the goblins (182). I wholly disagree with Brownley’s assertion that Lizzie’s act remains entirely unselfish, evidenced by the erotic interaction between the sisters as they reunite upon Lizzie’s return from the goblin market. Furthermore, I find Brownley’s assessment conveniently ignores the violent intimacy portrayed in Lizzie’s interaction with the goblins, a scene whose language and positioning encourages this critic to deem it a rape scene. As Hassett notes, the goblins initially appear to Lizzie as benevolent, amiable even, but they ultimately force Lizzie to imbibe the poisonous juices of their fruits alone, in much the same way that Laura did (21). However, in Laura’s case, Rossetti’s language certainly conferred a sense of her own enjoyment into the scene; she longed to suck their fruits, Lizzie clearly does not.

Rossetti spends lines 390-398 evoking for the reader the true nature and physicality of these goblins, what their intentions really were for Lizzie as she wanted only to buy fruit to save her sister’s life. The language is undeniably violent and suggestive of rape:

They trod and hustled her,  
Elbowed and jostled her,  
Clawed with their nails,  
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,  
Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,  
Twitched her hair out by the roots,  
Stamped upon her tender feet,  
**Held her hands and squeezed their fruits**  
*Against her mouth to make her eat.* (399-407, my emphasis)

Disturbingly, Rossetti spends a considerable amount of time, four long stanzas, to develop this scene and reiterate the forcefulness with which the goblins attacked her with their fruits, force-feeding her as Hassett notes (21). In the interest of space and scope, it is not prudent to reproduce all passages here that suggest Lizzie was raped, suffice it to say that Rossetti continually offers parallel phrases wherein the goblins, “Cuffed and caught her” (424), “Bullied and besought her, / Scratched her, pinched her black as ink, / Kicked and knocked her” (426-428) until they were “Worn out by her resistance” (438).

Hassett comments that Lizzie, unlike Laura, takes care not to open her mouth, not inviting the fruit into her mouth and body, or biting it decadently (21-22). Instead, she is *resisting* the fruits the goblins offer her, and while her act still remains unselfish, she certainly does not return from her encounter with the goblins with a sensation of “exaltation that her love for Laura has triumphed over evil” as Brownley suggests (182-183). I would argue that this seemingly trivial estimation of Brownley’s is highly problematic, as well as her and many other scholars’ contentions that Lizzie was not sexually assaulted by the goblin men.

I would align myself primarily with Hassett, who declares that:

There is no question that ‘Goblin Market’ offends against the code of maidenly decorum and challenges the equation of bodily indulgence with irrevocable harm. Not only does ‘Goblin Market’ resist ambigious endorsement of the wisdom of avoiding ‘the haunts of goblin men,’ it insists on Laura’s recovery in a rapturous scene that begins its many offenses with a nearly blasphemous sacramental invitation. (22)

This delves into the latter portion of my argument that the erotic element in Rossetti’s “Goblin Market,” as associated with the politics of consumption, not only drives the text itself but it invites the reader to respond—in this case, with confusion and perhaps bewilderment at the incestual suggestiveness of Laura and Lizzie’s consummation scene.

This “nearly blasphemous sacramental invitation” of which Hassett speaks, wherein Lizzie drenched in the fruit juices of the goblin market beckons her spoiling and unfulfilled sister Laura to literally drink from her. Again, the tone of Rossetti’s language is undeniable in its evocation of sororal love, and yet, it seems to be the kind of physical, sororal intimacy, which smacks of incest.
and certainly, immorality within a Victorian context. As she returns home, having run from the violent sexual attack she incurred, she seeks solace for the guilt and shame of her ravishment to be washed from her body, both literally and metaphorically. Strangely, she calls to Laura and asks, “Did you miss me?” (465), a line likely included at Rossetti’s impulse and necessity for rhyme, for it would otherwise seem unusual that Lizzie should utter this odd phrase, either after having been attacked, or after supposedly performing a wholly unselfish, Christ-like act. Lizzie’s enticement of Laura completes the stanza in a way of troubling language:

‘Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me:
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men.’ (466-474, my emphasis)

Hassett comments on the interaction between Laura and Lizzie as “an uninhibited consumption scene in which Laura is transported with pleasure and pain” as a favorite with illustrators and visual theorists who identify the (re)presentation of this scene as indicative of the text’s troubling relationship with the male gaze (Hassett 23; Kooistra 140-141, 159). Hassett characterizes Laura’s reaction to the fruit juices as “a gorging consumption” that turns from sexual pleasure into a sort of painful healing—despite the fact that Rossetti’s language makes it sound like an orgasm. But, Hassett does argue, and I would agree, that the poem is at best conflicted, entirely unable to decide whether to relish or to chide those who are given to temptation (24). As a result of this, I find that the readerships are drawn into this conflicted relationship to the text, which is likely responsible for its continued, universal interest by scholars and my own disbelief in the poem’s legitimacy as a religious fairy tale for children.

In a literary assessment of sororal desire in both “Goblin Market” and Beloved, Leila Silvana May characterizes the consummation scene between Laura and Lizzie as decidedly erotic, insomuch as it becomes a form of resistance or insubordinate sexuality that effectively undermines the social structures which would stifle feminine desire (134). In her discussion of feminine and sororal sexuality in the context of constrictive and fearful Victorian propriety, May claims that, “there was something about sibling relations which was troubling, and it was not simply the scarcely mentioned (though very real) fear of incest which provoked this worry; even (or perhaps mostly) the relation between sisters was to be feared and strictly disciplined at the same moment that it was eulogized and monumentalized” (135). Stemming from this, she notes that in fact, frequent literary representations of the idyllic sororal relationship often implicitly demonstrated “another kind of passion and another kind of ‘sister’ than those they seem to believe themselves to be eulogizing—one who is not the creation of the patriarchal organization of desire” (135). May’s convoluted discussion of masculine and feminine desires within the Victorian context of patriarchy ultimately yields the assertion that Laura and Lizzie desire one another and that, interestingly, Rossetti’s textual consideration of the consummation scene between Laura and Lizzie is given much more length and depth than the initial scene wherein Laura engorges the goblins’ fruits (138). May goes so far as to suggest, through a theological reading of the text, that through their act of mutual consumption, the two sisters have fallen and are essentially rendered as the same entity—which is to say, they are stripped of their own individual identities and desires (139). However, my own argument and the scope of this paper precludes any serious consideration of this portion of May’s thesis, though I would certainly agree that Rossetti’s intention may have been to mark the two sisters as similar after the consumption scene, in that Laura resembles Lizzie as reborn and pure of sexual urges and temptations.

May also asserts, as I do, that the consummation scene concludes with Laura’s own erotic climax, “swoon[ing] from this orgy of orally incestuous consumption and cannibalism, and awakens to a renewed innocence and life” (140). But more importantly, May comments upon the complication of this incestuous erotic relationship due to the performance of Laura and Lizzie’s consumption of the goblin fruits. She equates the action of consumption with oral sexuality and draws upon the connotations of the English language, which invariably mimic this equation between food and sex. May cites the language employed to describe desire, either sexual or alimentary, such as “appetite,” “desire,” “craving,” and “hunger,” interchangeably, with no substantial alteration in meaning. The sensual satisfaction derived from language or from food is often described in precisely the same terms” (145). This explicitly draws connections between literary representations of consumption and sexuality, and how they interplay and inform each other in the reading of a text. In the case of “Goblin Market” the erotic tone in Rossetti’s language is essentially omnipresent, and I would argue that the hint of same-sex, incestuous desires in the consummation scene between Laura and Lizzie, and Laura’s eventual orgasm into purity—also problematic—mark the scene as more significant than mere testimony to the value of sororal love. Hassett agrees that the “tidiness of this adage leaves many readers dissatisfied and sends them back into the poem to further explore the gap between Laura’s vividly represented experience and its blandly compact summation” (29). Laura herself asks, post-climax, “Pleasure past and anguish past, / If it death or is it life?” (522-523). Her sister may have saved her from a rapidly declining life defined by “baulked desire” but to what alternative? May would likely argue that she was reborn in the context of dominant Victorian patriarchy, returning both Laura and Lizzie to constrictive models of femininity and (a)sexuality.

The rapidly summarized ending of “Goblin Market” not only intends to mark the poem as a moral tale which women should tell to their daughters and sisters, but also to definitively mark the longstanding relationship between food and desire. Despite the prescriptions of Victorian propriety—whether along
sexual, social or familial axes—Laura, now a mother with children of her own, still recalls the goblin market with nostalgia. She speaks to her children of:

Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood;
(Men sell not such in any town;) (550-556)

Hassett comments on Laura’s recollective relishing of the goblins’ fruits, effectively re-experiencing the acts of consumption which betray her own “pleasurable yearning” and belies her attempt to discourage her own progeny from repeating her selfish foray into feminine sexuality (29). While Hassett suggests that Rossetti’s mindful presentation of the role which temptation and sexuality play in Laura’s present life is meant to add “texture to the innocence that has triumphed over ‘poison in the blood’” I would argue that this only negates the nature of the innocence that Laura truly has achieved through the orally-incestuous scene with Lizzie (29).

Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” has endured countless interpretations and in-depth analyses of thematic elements and their connection to what is known of Rossetti’s personal life, yet Mary Arseneau cites a contemporary trend in Rossetti scholarship which invites critic to “read her poetry against the grain of this Victorian cultural understanding that symbols and emblems are coherent and interpretable, emphasizing instead Rossetti’s resistance to interpretation” (107). By this rationale, then, the venture of inscribing meaning to symbols in Rossetti’s poem would be futile in the name of reading Rossetti as intended. This impulse rings false to me, evidenced simply by again invoking Daly and Forman’s insistence that food studies are a legitimate component of culture studies, certainly at the time in which Rossetti was writing (365). They vehemently suggest that, “the study of food and drink can—and should—take us anywhere in the Victorian period that we wish to go” (372). It is with sentiment in mind that I argue for the analysis and interpretation of Rossetti’s text as indicative of not only her own personal beliefs, but also—and more significantly—indicative of the culture of propriety and moral coding in which she lived and wrote.

The primary problem of interpretation, Arseneau argues, is the symbolic rendering of the goblin fruit (122). She notes that many scholars attribute it simplistically to a marker of sexual temptation and deviance, but that the more correct analysis in light of Rossetti’s text is the recognition of the goblin fruit as “a sign of disobedience rather than one of sexual transgression” (122). However, this distinction seems irrelevant. I would argue that the operative emphasis in Arseneau’s line of thinking is the primacy of fruit and the politics of (feminine) consumption in Rossetti’s poem. “Goblin Market” underscores both the evolution and the universality of the literary conversation and negotiation of food and desire, and specifically, food and desire in poetry. Kooistra, in a substantial sociohistorical rendering of the illustrations accompanying volumes of “Goblin Market” noted the “reader/viewer’s position as sexual voyeur” that was introduced by Rossetti’s brother, Gabriel Rossetti, further identifying the erotic element in the literary experience of Rossetti’s text (144). Ultimately, Rossetti’s text remains a significant contribution to the realm of food studies, its Victorian conversation between the erotic goblin fruit and the role of the feminine consumer’s desire providing proof that consumption and desire are indeed valuable courses of study.
Fade to Black: Effects of the White Gaze in Nella Larsen’s Passing

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In the novella Passing, author Nella Larsen rejects racial “otherness” by completely stripping race of its visual power. Forcing her audience to grapple with external and internal classifications of racial identity, Larsen explores unchallenged constructions of whiteness and blackness through the gaze of the prejudiced white world. Drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of double-consciousness, Larsen confronts the humiliation and warped self-consciousness of being “born with a veil” of separation between the “correct” race and all others. Upon realization of one’s blackness (inclusion in the “Negro problem”) a split in identity occurs, in which the African-American begins to “see himself through the revelation of the other world” (Du Bois 334-5). In Passing, Nella Larsen attempts to merge this “double self into a better and truer self” and “in this merging...wishes neither of the older selves to be lost” (335). Using light-skinned racial “passers” to represent the conflict of “two-ness,” the Negro and the American (here ‘American’ defined in whiteness), Larsen constructs the novella itself in a masked format – structured much like the three Acts of a play (335). Through the twinned relationship of Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry, Larsen illustrates the struggle to remain visible beyond the suffocations of internalized oppression. Dissatisfaction with their chosen identities leads these two characters to test the boundaries of racial identity, each comprising one-half of an incomplete whole, and ultimately fading beneath the scrutiny of the White gaze.

The audience is first introduced to the White gaze as light-skinned Irene Redfield passes for white (out of convenience) in order to escape a fainting spell in the stifling streets of Chicago. Upon her arrival to the upper-class Drayton hotel for a cooling glass of tea (and disguised as white), Irene feels the burning eyes of a white woman piercing her racial confidence. An intense fear of expulsion arises within Irene: “It was the idea of being ejected from any place...that disturbed her” (Larsen 16). The threat of Jim Crow instills intense fear of expulsion arises within Irene: “It was the idea of being ejected from any place...that disturbed her” (Larsen 16). The threat of Jim Crow instills fear of humiliation in connection to the disgusting black identity she currently rejects.

Carrying on the theme of removal (a loss of identity by force), Irene moreover reveals an intense preoccupation with manners and appearances. She begins to feel her “two-ness,” second-guessing every aspect of her outward identity for blatant signs of exposure. Nervously returning the “attractive” woman’s stare (in an attempt to address her rudeness), Irene alludes to the woman’s desirable “dark...eyes and that wide mouth like a scarlet flower against the ivory of her skin” (14). An obsession with social niceties and suppression of female sexuality is represented in Irene’s returned gaze. She judges both the white woman’s sensual nature as well as her evident lack of social graces in staring. With this Irene creates a reverse black gaze on
whiteness (though she is outwardly presenting herself as white). Bell Hooks pinpoints the modern black gaze on whiteness as one of a similar terror, describing it interestingly as the prominent “representation of whiteness in the black imagination” (174). Irene projects those suppressed aspects of herself onto the white woman as improper, yet is simultaneously attracted to them.

Irene’s fear climaxes as the woman approaches, though her face is unthreatening. The two soon realize a shared dark past, that the “white” woman is really a childhood friend of Irene’s (also passing as white), and obviously shares a similar internal conflict. Clare Kendry is sincerely delighted to be in the presence of an old acquaintance, and openly presents herself — perceived by Irene to be her complete opposite in character. However, Irene continues to construct herself as the “blacker” one of the two as they converse and Clare reveals that she has permanently “passed over” into the white world. Literally reading Irene’s thoughts, the audience is led to believe that by externally remaining “within her race” Irene is somehow racially superior and secure in her black identity (through marriage to a black man and living in a black community). A good black would embrace their inherent racial identity, and limit themselves within a system that naturally limits them anyway. Irene’s actions in passing as white obviously prove otherwise. In a similar resolve to Du Bois, both women have decided to take advantage of their pallor (whether they admit it or not), that the white world “should not keep these prizes, some, all, [they] would wrest from them” (335).

During this first meeting, Clare describes “when the shadow swept across” her and the realization of her two-ness struck “with a certain suddenness” after living with her racist white aunts as a teenager (Du Bois 335). They enforced concepts of race as an internal inferiority, resulting in a serious loss of consciousness in young Clare: “to their notion, hard labor was good for me. I had Negro blood, and they belonged to the generation that had written and read long articles headed: ‘Will the Blacks Work?’” The hateful old women continually condemned Clare as daughter of Ham, cursed by God for all time. In rebellion against the objectified black persona, Clare sheds her black identity in order to be human, declaring that she is “determined to get away, to be a person and not a character or a problem, or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham” (Larsen 26). In this way, Clare is less concerned with perceptions of the black world, but instead attempts to discover her humanity in the opposite identity than the one which was forced upon her in childhood. The “privileged” paleness these two women share leaves them in a racial limbo, cursed in their ethnic fluidity.

However, Irene only rejects external whiteness to maintain appearances, still living her life through white ideologies and judgments. Irene’s desire for the “security” she feels denied as a black proctors her white mentality and lifestyle. Irene is manipulative, deceptive, and most dangerous in her desire to “merge” her double self. Far too concerned with her facade as the “blacker” of the two, and judging Clare based on outward standards of blackness (ironically created through the White gaze), Irene suffers quietly within her slowly deteriorating mind. To admit insecurity in her black heritage would shatter the walls of “safety” she has painstakingly built around her life. Larsen even alludes to Irene’s highly unstable identity through her inability to narrate the novella in the first person. Instead, the reader learns the story through the revelation of Irene’s denial and insecure thought processes.

She is in consistent denial of her white-identity, always thinking purely in terms of the external (much like the whiteness she claims to reject). Irene describes her relationship with Clare as “Strangers in their means of living...their desires and ambitions...even in their racial consciousness...the barrier was just as high, just as broad, and just as firm as if Clare did not run the strain of black blood” (Larsen 63). Here Irene demonstrates the depth of her white internalizations as she defines race internally, in Clare’s “strain of black blood.” Through Irene, Larsen illustrates the irreparable damage and self-hating effects of the white gaze, in line with Du Bois’ double-consciousness.

Irene’s physical attraction to Clare is perhaps an attraction to outward whiteness and all that it encompasses in lifestyle and opportunity. Clare’s enthusiasm in seeing Irene is similarly an attraction to the blackness her life lacks in the external realm. Both women reveal a masked dissatisfaction with their separate attempts to merge conflicting selves. A mirroring effect takes place in which each woman identifies the lacking whiteness or blackness within her life reflected in the other. So despite their “better judgment,” Irene (subconsciously) and Clare (openly) create opportunities to see one another again. Irene outwardly claims to hate Clare and her blatant rejection of her heritage, however Irene also finds herself unable to control her desire to keep Clare in her life. Clare becomes a necessary scapegoat for both Irene’s unwanted projections, as well as a link to whiteness — the white world that Irene cannot blatantly embrace, but instead follows in ideology and lifestyle.

Furthermore, Larsen underlines Irene’s internalization of white slants of black femininity as hyper-sexualized temptresses, an image rejected as extremely negative. She similarly over-mothers her children and husband in an attempt to refute stereotypes of black females as detached mothers. Because they are representative of the white lifestyle she desires, Irene finds stability in her “picture-perfect” marriage, children, and suppressed female sexuality. In an effort to achieve Hazel Carby’s “true womanhood” defined as “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity... With them was promised happiness and power” (23). Irene’s need to refute stereotypes of black women are an answer to those created in slavery. She models herself after the white ideal of “proper” womanhood during that time period by repressing and overcompensating for the “shortcomings” of her chosen external race. However, writer/poet Audre Lorde challenges Irene’s mode of handling racial and gendered oppression:

We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings... for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women...satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the
n ubpression of her "deepest cravings" and caught in a sacrificial mentality (for all black women, she alone must suffer), Irene allows her needs to fester within her conflicted mind. She is completely swallowed up in her external identity, designating the internal as secondary. Continued repression of black female identity ultimately leads to the violent expulsion and disappearance of identity at the close of the novella, as Irene's loss of control becomes unbearable.

On the other hand, Clare embraces her black femininity wholeheartedly, empowered in her sexuality and aware of her affect on men of all races. In line with Lorde's analysis, Clare indulges in her desires as a black woman, but is unable to escape the grasp of a constricted white life. In contrast to Irene's over-mothering, Clare resents her only child as the sole factor chaining her to her marriage and white society lifestyle. When Clare claims that "children aren't everything," Irene's hasty response is in accordance with her fake identity — what she is expected to say (as a good black mother). Clare adopts the actual ideologies of white women of the antebellum period: "white women...were not living embodiments of true womanhood, but...paid little attention to the analysis of the function of the ideology" (Carby 25). Clare welcomes repressed concepts of blackness. Once again, just as Clare openly passes and honestly conducts herself (minus that one big secret), Irene always thinks in terms of disproving stereotypes of black femininity and masking her true self (Larsen 81).

While the Clare and Irene persistently claim their differences, Larsen goes one further stripping the two women of disparity in the economic circumstances of their lives. While Irene resides in bourgeois Harlem, she does not work to support her family, but leads a very comfortable life married to a successful doctor (as does Clare, but within the context of a white society). Irene is financially stable and socializes with elite black (and some white) societies, even employing black maids within her home (which Clare refuses to do). Furthermore, she willingly adopts white standards of beauty, often seen powdering her nose or thinking of her outfit for upcoming events. As Irene becomes absorbed in her white identity and dispaves the prejudice of the white gaze, she is able to further distance herself from the blackness she so abhors. The two women truly are twins — two halves to one whole — both employing their racial ambiguity in a semi-permanent sense: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 334). They are only separate in opposing racial ideologies and direction. However, this relationship proves too conflicted to survive being "torn asunder," an identity crisis on the brink of implosion. Clare is portrayed as the one true lover of blackness, trapped in her chosen white identity; whereas Irene reviles her unbalanced dark self, longing for the superficial white life she is denied as a black woman.

When first placed in Clare's white world, Irene plays the part of the "good black," yet is somewhat exhilarated by the experience, feeling the imbalance of her two-ness shift in favor of whiteness. Lying to the reader, Irene claims "when she examined her feeling of annoyance...that it arose from a feeling of being outnumbered, a sense of aloneness, in her adherence to her own class and kind...in the whole pattern of her life" (Larsen 34). Even as she is forced to embrace external whiteness, Irene disguises her guilty fulfillment in self-denial. Additionally, Larsen notes Clare's role as a racial "risk-taker," for which Irene jealously aches but simultaneously rejects. Clare is aware of those who reflect a similar racial conflict, purposely surrounding herself with women who are able to physically pass for white. She is similarly exhilarated in her racial ambiguity, enjoying her ability to temporarily merge her two selves—the white socialite and her black roots—functioning as both observer and concurrently inhabiting the "exotic" other. However, the "white" gaze is flipped on Irene as she feels ashamed of being associated with blackness when Gertrude and Clare discuss it openly and negatively. In the elitist company of externally "white" women, she is confronted with her own demons as the other two discuss their fear of birthing a dark child, and thus being discovered as black (36-7).

Upon Irene's first meeting of Clare's oblivious and blatantly racist white husband (John Bellew), Irene cringes as he shockingly greets Clare, "Hello, Nig," cheerfully explaining that when the two married "she was as white as...a lily. But I declare she's getting' darker and darker. I tell her if she don't look out, she'll wake up one of these days and find she's turned into a nigger" (39). Bellew unsuspectingly cites the progression of Clare from whiteness to blackness, her initial split in identity to reclaim a "white" humanity, and present attempt to salvage her black roots and become whole once again. Irene is set into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, a sign of her internalization of Bellew's remarks. She begins to adopt the white gaze as her own, and an intensification of inner division takes place. Here begins Irene's mental breakdown which ultimately prompts the fading of identity in both women.

Parallel to Clare's white Aunts, Bellew becomes representative of white American racism — the white gaze — bell hooks' terrorist of the black world. When asked how he feels about African-Americans, he laughingly replies "I don't dislike them, I hate them. And so does Nig, for all she's trying to turn into one" (40). The situation becomes ever more absurd with each ignorant word Bellew utters. In her "escape" to whiteness and rejection of black prejudice, Clare has ironically jailed herself in a similar environment to that of her Aunts, triggering a romanticized love of blackness through Irene. As the conversation progresses Bellew gets serious: "I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be" (40). His ironic and prophetic line perpetuates the concept of race as internal. In disregarding race through skin color, (much like the Aunts) Bellew also defines racial inferiority in blood. The source of Clare's identity crisis is revealed, as she is masked in "an expression so dark and deep and unfathomable that [Irene] had for a short moment the sensation of gazing into the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart" (41). This fleeting fading of consciousness, an expulsion of sorts, is the only sign of Clare's loss of white identity within this environment. As the 'Nig' identity becomes prominent, Clare is reminded of childhood humiliations,
and removes herself from the situation—another escape, but this time into blackness (Sullivan 375). A similar fear of external humiliation builds within Irene as she witnesses Clare’s separation.

A masked anger (probably out of envy rather than racial insult) overtakes Irene once she leaves Clare’s home. However, she rationalizes the situation thinking that “She had to Clare Kendry a duty...bound to her by those very ties of race, which, for all her repudiation of them, Clare had been unable to completely sever” (Larsen 52). This statement conceals Irene’s true motives in maintaining the relationship, while portraying her still as the sacrificial character in the novella. The back and forth tug-of-war in Irene’s thoughts leads her to later sarcastically claim that she has “no intention of being the link between [Clare] and her poorer darker brethren” (55). These are a clearer expression of Irene’s honest opinion of her own race, rather than Clare’s supposed “uppity” elitist mentality. In either case, the relationship is reciprocally structured, and manifests with greater strength in spite of Irene’s professed martyrdom and phony whining.

As Clare becomes a more permanent fixation in her life, Irene finds a peculiar sense of completion in the relationship. She gives into the friendship to a certain extent, each woman partially achieving the wholeness they seek in the other. The merging of selves is somewhat solidified when Clare visits Irene after a long period of separation. Irene is clearly still dealing with conflicts in their relationship, ever-critical of Clare’s blatant disregard for external heritage. Prior to Clare’s arrival, Irene is obviously dissatisfied with her reflection in the mirror, but as soon as Clare enters the mirrored image, Irene’s accepts the addition with an overwhelming enthusiasm. Clare is again confirmed as Irene’s racial and sexual ideal: “Looking at the woman before her, Irene Redfield had a sudden onrush of affectionate feeling...with awe in her voice: ‘Dear God! But aren’t you lovely, Clare!’” (64-5). Here Irene admits her desire for them to be one—her idolization of Clare. This is the reflection she wishes to see—the other half of her two-ness, her second self.

Clare’s attendance at a “Negro Welfare League” event organized by Irene once again demonstrates her willingness to get caught in her passing, a risk-taker exhilarated in her ambiguity. She enjoys the experience of both being the “exotic” other (under the curious black gaze), and yet is allowed to view the “exotic” other through a white gaze on blackness. Irene comments on this contradiction of double-sight in passing: “I think what they feel is...a kind of emotional excitement...the sort of thing you feel in the presence of something strange...perhaps a bit repugnant to you; something so different that it’s really at the opposite end of the pole from all your accustomed notions of beauty” (Larsen 76). Irene speaks as much of her own perceptions of race as all other attendants to the event (her repugnance to blackness, her white gaze). She even admits that she knows “colored girls who’ve experienced the same thing—the other way round, naturally” (76). This statement is the closest that Irene ever actually comes to speaking the words she has so long repressed within herself, admitting her allegiance to whiteness over her chosen race.

When discussing methods of discerning the race of the racially ambiguous, Irene’s developing white gaze becomes evermore prevalent. Chatting with white friend Hugh Wentworth, Irene claims that there are some things inherent to race that all “blacks” or “whites” possess, but cannot define or place this into words. However, based on this definition, Irene was completely fooled by Clare’s passing at the Drayton, leading the reader to doubt her reliability of opinion. A belief in this imperceptible “feeling” is a belief in the inherency of race itself, rather than a definition of race as a social construction of white supremacy (77-8). Irene is quickly spiraling into dangerous territory as her internalized white gaze takes precedence in her life.

Tensions rise in the relationship as Clare begins to show “an exasperating childlike lack of perception” (79) spending her visits conversing with the black maids—confirming their humanity—and rejecting Irene’s perceptions of correct conduct of white status. Clare is more concerned with racial sisterhood, rejecting the ‘nig’ identity in herself and others, and upsetting Irene’s “ideal” image of Clare in whiteness. However, Clare “still remained somewhat apart,” and their merging becomes obviously unfulfilling. The twinning effect continues as Irene’s thoughts are reflected in Clare’s willingness to “hurt anybody, throw anything away!” to achieve her desires (81). When Irene begins to fear that her personal life and sources of stability are threatened by Clare (her marriage to Brian), similar thought processes cross her mind. She literally throws Clare away to maintain the security and repression of self that Clare represents in reflection. However, Irene fails to realize that she cannot survive without her other half.

With vengeful thoughts at the core of her mind, Irene runs into Bellew on the street with dark-skinned friend Felise Freeland linked on her arm. Felise immediately becomes Irene’s dark mirror as well as recognition of Clare’s black identity through Irene’s literal linkage to Felise. Bellew’s smile fades as the chain of connection between Irene to his “white” wife becomes apparent; the illusion is gone in proximity to Irene’s dark friend. Moreover, just as Clare once retreated within herself through Bellew’s racist spouting off, Irene also suffers a fade in consciousness. As recognition crosses his features, Irene withdraws inward: “her face had become a mask” (99). The white gaze connects her to his “Nig” character of blackness, and yet another split in identity occurs. Irene evidently “could not separate individuals from the race, herself from Clare Kendry” (100). They are forever linked, and Irene does not really want to be separate from Clare, hence her sabotage of every opportunity to break their connection.

Sexual tensions rise, and Clare’s black identity begins to overpower her white identity (consequently Irene’s white identity and ambitions become threatened). Irene hates to think of Clare being “free” (divorced) of Bellew, free to re-adopt a black identity, while Irene is to be forced to continue unfulfilled in her whiteness. Irene’s only link to the pale world begins to pass back over the racial divide, and a terrifying awareness of her weakening control over Clare leads Irene to begin plotting her murder. “If Clare should die! Then—Oh, it was vile! To think, yes, to wish that!...But the thought stayed with her” (101).
Murder becomes the only alternative in order to completely remove the threat without freeing Clare to be an openly black woman. “Freedom” entails the unleashing of all of Irene’s repressed projections on Clare, shattering the forced “stability” of her life. For the first time she hates her chosen blackness aloud: “Irene Redfield wished...that she had not been born a Negro. For the first time she suffered and rebelled because she was unable to disregard the burden of race...Surely, no other people so cursed as Ham’s dark children” (98). She has hit rock bottom, and is willing to “hurt anybody, throw anything away” to achieve her means. Little does she know that in killing Clare, she ultimately kills herself.

Clare is finally revealed at a gathering at the Freelands. Bellew’s bellows break up the lively party, accusing his wife: “So you’re a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!” His words reaffirm the humiliations that Clare was unable to escape in childhood, as well as Irene’s feared humiliations (which have yet to ensue if Clare is freed). Clare is once again the “exotic” other, standing by the window, the mask threatening to cover her face. However, she appears unaffected, “composed as if everyone were not staring...as if the whole structure of her life were not lying in fragments before her. She seemed unaware of any danger or uncaring” (111). A realization of her freedom from whiteness strikes all three concerned individuals – Bellew, Clare, and most of all – the unstable Irene. Liberated, Clare smiles faintly – Irene, running to her side, “couldn’t have her free,” and the final violent ejection (and the ultimate sacrifice) takes place as Clare is pushed out the open window. Clare’s body disappears as Larsen exclaims: “Gone!...That beauty that had torn at Irene’s placid life” (111). Irene’s white ideology overpowers her sanity as she hopefully and fearfully wonders if Clare is dead on the street below.

Driven down to the street out of a fear of exposure, Irene struggles against the blackness that overwhelms her, “pitching downwards” to Clare’s mangled body. “How she managed to make it without fainting she never knew” (113). A psychological death is taking place as Irene begins to fade out of consciousness, both fighting the literal urge to faint (in shock), but also dying with the loss of her other half – an unresolved “two-ness” which is at last “torn asunder.” Irene’s fear of ejection that originated the first day in the Drayton comes full circle, resulting in the most cruel and blatant form of removal possible in death. The fainting which brought her to the uppity hotel is reiterated as Irene struggles against unconsciousness. Clare’s removal is similarly attributed to a fainting spell, and Irene disappears, torn apart in her efforts to resolve her dual identity. Just as she attempts to assert the “I” she had so long been unable to confirm, Irene too is gone, engulfed in her own darkness (114). The curtain falls, and all fades to black.

By stripping race of its external power, Nella Larsen’s rich novella forces her audience to grapple with inner conflicts of racial identity, while simultaneously wading through the thought processes of an unbalanced narrator. W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of ‘Double-Consciousness’ strengthens Larsen’s arguments against race as internal, turning to destructive societal forces as the source of broken cultural identity. Ultimately, Passing illustrates the destructive effects of this split in consciousness and resolutions to merge “two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois 335). In an effort to reverse the damaging influences of the White gaze, bell hooks calls for a white Double-Consciousness in which “white people...shift locations...[and] see...the way in which whiteness acts to terrify without seeing” (177). By reversing the direction of the gaze, the white world will (hopefully) become mindful of the power of racist oppression – the psychological impact of prejudice on the black imagination. Until a white self-awareness is achieved, the passers of the world will continue to fade out of consciousness, “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others...measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 335).
We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes, ---
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

—Paul Laurence Dunbar
(1872-1906)

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Our senses are the foundation of our existence. If we lost all the information given to us by our senses, then the world around us would, for all intents and purposes, cease to exist. Without our senses, we would be suspended in a dark, silent void. It is no wonder that Shakespeare constantly refers to the senses in all their different manifestations. How could something so important fail to make it into plays with such universal themes? And yet—the information we receive from our senses is by no means foolproof. In fact, at times it can be ridiculously easy to deceive them, though some are admittedly harder to fool than others. We must constantly interpret the reports given to us by our senses and decide: how reliable are they? This theme of unreliability is one that Shakespeare addresses over and over again in his plays, including *Much Ado About Nothing*. For the most part, it is the eyes that he deems unreliable, and the ears, which are relied on for the truth. At first, *Much Ado* appears to follow that pattern: the ears reveal truth where the eyes deceive. However, as the deceptions of the play multiply, even the ears appear to be wanting, and it is unclear what faculties remain to discover the truth.

Shakespeare was by no means the first to classify and rank the human senses; on the contrary, the senses have been a subject of study, speculation, and debate from antiquity to modern times. The traditional hierarchy of the senses began with Aristotle's ranking in his *De anima*: sight came first, then hearing, smell, taste, and last of all, touch (Jütte 61). Sight and hearing were held above the others as the "higher" senses in terms of usefulness; Charles Bouvelles, a French mathematician and theologian, believed sight and hearing "serve the higher purpose of educating mankind and providing it with spiritual nourishment" (Jütte 61). They are the main vehicles of observation, a quality that certainly makes them the most important senses in the context of *Much Ado*. However, they are not generally considered to be on equal footing, either in Shakespeare or early modern physiology.

Sight has been considered the premier sense by scholars and philosophers since Plato (he described it once as the "divine" sense) for a variety of reasons (Jütte 35). Aristotle and Plato cited its "cognitive value", while Charlemagne's adviser Alcuin credited the eyes' physical placement in the body as the highest of all the senses (Jütte 64). The most common reason for the eye's high status was its ability to see over long distances and perceive and identify objects more readily than the other senses (Jütte 65). Visual images were used in education throughout the medieval and early modern periods, and sight was also regarded as the primary source of truth from independent observation (Jütte 67).

Hearing, though seemingly forever doomed to be sight's "runner-up," was nevertheless held by medieval Arab and Christian scholars as the primary sense for religious instruction and practice, and was the sense most associated with "knowledge of divine truth" (Jütte 67). Medieval Jewish scholar Bachja be Ascher listed the four main advantages of hearing: it favored those who could be taught only through oratory; anyone could learn by it; it helped resolve any doubts left by visual perception; and when backed up with concrete examples, even oral instruction gains a degree of solidity (Jütte 67). In these cases, hearing and sight might be said to be weighed on different scales, and therefore might be considered equal, as each was the primary sense in a certain field. For the most part, however, Aristotle's hierarchy held, and sight was generally considered superior to all the other senses, including hearing.

These views did not change much through the early modern era; indeed, they may even have been more widely known in Shakespeare's time than the Middle Ages. With the advent of the printing press and the renewed interest in classic texts such as those of Aristotle, it is more likely that Shakespeare knew of, or had at least heard of, these scholarly views than if he had lived in an earlier time. However, Shakespeare seems to focus neither on the strengths of the senses nor on which one is the "best," but rather on their weaknesses, particularly when they are relied on for information without corroboration from another source. For example, in *1 Henry IV*, Prince Hal requests verbal confirmation that Falstaff is indeed alive after all, for, he says, "we will not trust our eyes without our ears" (*IHIV* V.v.134-5). Hal mistrusts the evidence of a single sense: sight. He requires confirmation from another source—in this case, his ears—before he will believe what his eyes tell him.

*Much Ado About Nothing* continues this theme through the multitude of deceptions and "mis-notings" that take place throughout the play. (So many writers have already analyzed the renowned pun of "nothing" and "noting," which were pronounced the same in the Renaissance, that this writer will simply "note" it, and move on.) Throughout the play, characters are gulled by their senses, a deception that, depending on the situation, either pulls the characters deeper into the mire of conflict, or works to haul them back out again. At first glance, the line between these two types of deception seems to fall between the two main senses in question: sight and hearing.

The seeming dichotomy between eyes and ears in *Much Ado* can be neatly represented by the two couples of the play: Claudio and Hero’s entire relationship is based on evidence of the eyes, and they quickly find themselves awash in a sea of troubles, while Beatrice and Benedick’s much more solid relationship is a verbal one that relies on hearing to shape its course. From the very beginning, Claudio’s affection is based solely on what he sees. After catching sight of Hero at Leonato’s, Claudio declares to Benedick, “In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on” (I.i.179). Later on, in his consultation with Don Pedro, he says he has seen her before, but merely “looked on her with a soldier’s eye” (I.i.282). From this we may infer that Claudio has done nothing more than look at his intended bride. He knows nothing of her but what his eyes can tell him: she is pretty. The situation is reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*, another play in which Shakespeare questions the prudence of relying only on one’s eyes. Claudio, like Romeo with Juliet, has no evidence beyond
that of his eyes to confirm whether Hero is “well worthy,” as Don Pedro says (I.i.210), yet he resolves to marry her. He may as well quote Romeo: “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight. / For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (R/ I.v.53-4).

By contrast, Benedick and Beatrice have been long engaged in a “kind of merry war”, sparring with words that might well conceal some deeper feelings for each other (I.i.57). Not only have they known each other much longer than Claudio and Hero, they rely on more than visual appearances to form the basis of their relationship (though Benedick does notice that Beatrice “exceeds [Hero] as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December” (I.i.183-4)). Their hidden feelings are finally brought to the surface when they overhear their friends’ good-natured deception and believe it, thus removing the only obstacle to releasing their own love. David Horowitz describes true love as a religion in which the two people involved are completely committed to each other (51). In the gulling scenes, Beatrice and Benedick’s ears fulfill their traditional role as per medieval scholars and reveal the “divine truth” of the couple’s love for each other. The deception, in fact, is not a true deception after all: it has merely served as a catalyst to bring about an event that Beatrice and Benedick have been dancing around for some time.

In the second and more serious half of the play, this dichotomy at first seems to continue. It could be said that the reports of the eyes—and various characters’ trust in them—are the cause of all the trouble, and the evidence of the ears sets everything right again. Claudio sees “Hero” at the window with another man, and on that evidence denounces her as a wanton; later, the watch overhears Borachio telling Conrad about the deception, and that discovery, along with the hearing held after the wedding, sets the play back on track for a happy ending.

But there are holes in this argument, many and gaping. It overlooks several key scenes in which the ears are just as deceitful as the eyes, or at least are accomplices in the eyes’ deception. Often, as pointed out by Nora Myhill, the characters seem to assume that anything they overhear, or that they are told while disguised (as at the masking) must be true, especially if it concerns them: since the person speaking does not know they are listening, they have no reason to dissemble (295). This is obviously not always the case; in these instances, it is the ear that is deceitful.

Claudio is particularly susceptible to these deceptions. He is taken in multiple times by Don John’s verbal lies before his eyes ever lead him to believe that Hero has been unfaithful. At the masking, Don John tells him that he “heard [Don Pedro] swear his affection” for Hero (II.i.160). Claudio thinks that Don John took him for Benedick, and with that insurance against deceit, he believes the report without a second thought.

At other times, the characters allow an account given to them earlier to color their interpretation of the information their senses give them. This is what Jackie Shead calls the “power of report”: a trust in what one has heard that overrides other considerations. Shakespeare uses it in The Winter’s Tale in the scene with the “statue” of Hermione. Leontes has been told that Hermione is dead, and that the figure in Paulina’s gallery (in truth the living Hermione) is a statue. This causes him to reinterpret the evidence of his eyes, and he sees nothing but a magnificently lifelike statue (WT V.iii). Benedick succumbs to this same type of deception after overhearing Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato’s conversation in the garden. He believes what he has overheard; that is, that Beatrice is in love with him, and he imagines that he sees “some marks of love in her” (III. i.223). Thus the evidence of the ears becomes an accomplice in the gulling of the eyes.

The most notable of the visual and aural deceptions of the play—and one of the instances where the power of report holds sway—is, of course, the window tableau that Don John arranges for Claudio’s benefit. It takes no more than the sight of what appears to be Hero with another man to send Claudio into a rage, although the audience knows that what Claudio thinks he saw was indeed nothing of the sort. Another perfect example of fallibility of sight, one would think—except that, in truth, Claudio plans his revenge on Hero before he has actually seen anything. Even before the actual event, when Don John simply tells him that he knows something to Hero’s discredit, Claudio vows, “If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her tomorrow, in the congregation where I should wed there I will shame her” (III.ii.111-113). He expects to see an unfaithful Hero, and so does not question the likelihood of the scenario, but simply accepts it. He, like Benedick and Leontes, has allowed a simple report to influence how he interprets the scene before him.

There is one other problem with attributing the window deception all to the eyes. This is that, in fact, Claudio’s and Pedro’s ears are deceived, as well. When they are hatching the plot, Borachio tells Don John that Claudio will not only see him at the window, but also “hear [him] call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term [him] Claudio” (II.ii.39-40). Later, at the wedding, Pedro tells Leonato that he and Claudio “did see her, hear her” at the window (IV.i.89). The ears played just as much of a role in this deception as eyes, perhaps more—the addition of that extra sense helped improve the illusion and may have helped convince Claudio and Don Pedro that what they were seeing was true.

All this raises a question: if neither the eyes nor the ears can be relied on to reveal the truth of this situation, then what faculties are available? What is it that eventually rights all the wrongs and brings about the happy ending?

Many of the critical essays written on deception in Much Ado credit some sort of instinctual response: intuition, faith in human nature, trust. The problems in the play arise when the characters put too much stock in appearances, in the reports of the senses; these problems are resolved by characters who base their actions on their intuition and faith.

By this argument, Beatrice’s belief in Hero’s innocence stems from faith. She has no hard evidence that Hero did not speak with a man out her bedroom window, but she trusts, “on her soul” that she did not (IV.i.147). In turn, Benedick’s belief in Hero’s innocence stems from his newfound love and faith in Beatrice. He trusts Beatrice when she says that Hero has been wronged, so completely that he agrees to challenge—and possibly kill—Claudio, one of his best friends. The argument can also go the other way, to explain Claudio’s
behavior. He bases his actions not on trust, but on the information he gleans through his own observation. He does not trust Hero, and so he is easily beguiled by Don John's trickery.

However, intuition and faith alone seem somewhat flimsy to be the only source of truth. Trust must have some basis in fact, something concrete that the trust has grown from. What gives Beatrice such faith in Hero? What is this knowledge” are what inform the actions of the characters (158). For example, only source of truth. Trust must have some basis in fact, something concrete that beguiled by Don John's trickery.

through his own observation. He does not trust Hero, and so he is easily behavior. He bases his actions not on trust, but on the information he gleans through his own observation. He does not trust Hero, and so he is easily beguiled by Don John's trickery.

Ergo, it is not simply instinct, but judgment based on previous knowledge that informs Beatrice and Benedick’s faith. Beatrice may not have first hand knowledge of what Hero did on the night in question, but she has “this twelvemonth been her bedfellow,” and in this time has most certainly learned something of Hero’s character (IV.i.149). Beatrice’s trust is based on previous assessment and knowledge of Hero—she knows that Hero would not have done this.

Benedick, once convinced of Hero’s innocence by Beatrice, uses his own knowledge of Claudio and Don Pedro in an attempt to discover the truth of what happened. Having fought with them throughout the war, he knows them as well as Beatrice knows Hero, and he is sure that they both “have the very bent of honor” (IV.1.186), and that there is some other sort of mischief at work (namely, Don John). The fact that Don John was the enemy that they were fighting against further supports this conclusion.

This is not to say that the senses are never to be trusted or may never be used to discover the truth. The friar does rely on observation to form his conclusions: he watches Hero and “mark[s] a thousand blushing apparitions—a thousand innocent shames” flit over her face (IV.1.158-160). But unlike Claudio, he uses his prior experience (the “experimental seal” that “doth warrant the tenure of [his] book” (IV.1.164-5)) to interpret what he sees and form a sound judgment (Berry 161).

It is true that, by themselves, our eyes and ears can distort our perception and affect the way we interpret the events around us. A belief that everything we see and hear is the absolute truth would be naïve at best. Shakespeare recognizes this weakness of the senses and addresses it throughout his career. In Much Ado, Shakespeare explores this theme at first through a dichotomy between eyes and ears (in the comparison of the two couples), but he then moves on to the idea that all the senses, not just the eyes or the ears, are at times unreliable, and must be tempered with sound judgment based on what is already known of the situation. Without that judgment, the senses do no more than help the villains “verify unjust things,” as Dogberry has it (V.i.211). In the end, it is not the ears that trump the eyes to discover truth, but the brain that outdoes both and reveals the reality behind the play’s manifold façade.

Bibliography


It has been most commonly noted in critical discourse on Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes* that the fatalism of the narrative spoke almost explicitly to the social and political climate of France and the French audience at the end of the 1930s. The growth of Muslim immigration from Northern Africa and the resonant social implications that remained from the Sino-French war at the end of the 19th century put in question the very nature of the French national identity. The Popular Front had fallen with the end of the Blum administration in 1937, taking with it the hope of the working-class man to overcome economic depression through socialist and communist ideals. Fascism was spreading through Europe, the Nazi regime had begun to amass neighboring territory, and, by the release of Carné’s film in May of 1938, the German occupation was widely considered to be inevitable. As a result, according to film historians like Rodney Whitaker in his 1966 dissertation, *The Content Analysis of Film: A Survey of the Field, An Exhaustive Study of Quai des Brumes, and a Functional Description of the Elements of Film Language*, the themes of escape, fatalism, the invalidity of action, and the pervasive fear of isolation so prevalent in poetic realist films really resonated with the pessimism, the defeatist hopelessness of the French audience (239).

The critical and financial success of Carné’s *Quai des brumes* among American audiences in the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, is something much less discussed by film historians, as well as something much less immediately understandable. Unlike the economically fragmented and ultimately more artistically-inclined French film industry that produced works like *Quai des brumes*, the American film industry in the 1930s, then trapped in the confines of the classical, vertically-integrated Hollywood Studio System, was very much a business, which responded most immediately to economic concerns. Peter Stead, in his critical analysis on *Film and the Working Class*, argues that films produced in Hollywood during the Great Depression, so dependent upon the “financial wizards” of the Chase Manhattan and other banks,” (77) reflected conservative upper-class “values and ethos” almost exclusively, sometimes those “of Washington, nearly always of Wall Street, and more often than not the views of Californian business interests” (82). Gregory Black, in his book on Hollywood censorship describes the way American film production, “as long as the industry was determined to reach the largest possible market,” remained “susceptible to economic blackmail, whether it came in the form of a Legion of Decency, state censorship boards, American businessmen, or foreign governments” (118). In this way, many historians note that the Production Code implemented by the MPPDA, which carefully regulated film content, was developed in effort “to maximize the worldwide appeal of
believing that the elimination of all material that could be considered politically, socially, or morally controversial would prevent the marginalization of any particular demographic, “including foreign viewers” and not limited to differences in “age, religion, or political opinion” (Palmer 3). The result, according to Stead, was a tradition of American film as “slick and meaningless entertainment running along well-established and endlessly repeated lines,” often relying on social escapism and the praise of armed forces and other well-established institutions (77). As suggested by Georges Sadoul, possibly the first and most influential French film historian, the American audience, so accustomed to optimism, inspirational government and social propaganda, and neatly coherent narratives, should have reacted with hostility to the moodiness and pessimism of Carné’s film (Palmer 10). In a review by Frank Nugent in the New York Times in anticipation of an American screening in October 1939, “the theatre’s old habitués” were expected to respond with “profanity” to the “sordidness and futility” of Jacques Prévert’s screenplay, as well as to the film’s departure from the formal “requirements… usually [made]” by the American viewer: “swift tempo, a tidy dove-tailing of plot, with the conflict clearly described and resolved and all the little plus and minus marks coming out even.” The Variety magazine review in June of the same year suggests that, as a result of the film’s “spotlight” on “despicable characters” and its “sordid and unreasonable” story, the “success” of Quai des brumes was “doubtful outside of France” (“Le Quai”).

My intention, then, is to attempt to justify the success that Quai des brumes had with an audience so ideologically and culturally different from the audience for which it was created. It will be necessary, initially, to examine analysis by both French and American film historians of the social and political appeal of Carné’s film to its domestic audience, notably the ways in which it spoke to the disappointment of French progressives after the dissolution of the Blum Administration and to the anxiety of the general population toward the approach of the war. By then considering the economic and industrial conditions of Hollywood film production in the same period, those that necessitated and perpetuated the conventional optimism and ideological conservatism of American film in the 1930s, it will be clear that the defeatism so appealing to the American audience.

To begin with, the theme of isolation, as proposed by Michael Temple and Michael Witt in their introduction to the “Classicism and Conflict” of the 1930s-1960s, expressed the disappointment of French leftists, a feeling of abandonment after the fall of the Popular Front (96). According to Dudley Andrew, in his exhaustive exploration of Culture and Sensibility in French Film, the characterization of Nelly as something of an orphan reflects this feeling of abandonment, of having been “betrayed by the fathers of the Republic,” and, what’s more, she is left in the hands of Zabel, a tyrant, a symbol of the Nazi and fascist governments under which the French people would inevitably find themselves (331). In this way, the victory of Jean over Zabel at the film’s end would have felt like vengeance to the French people, vengeance against both the inefficient Populists who had left them behind – in the words of Robin Bates, the “authority” that had failed at “protecting them” – as well as vengeance against the oppressive forces by which they were presently confronted (37).

Many contemporary commentators on Quai des brumes suggest its appeal to the French ideology during a period of masculine crisis, as men of the French military and government felt their masculinity threatened by the political upsets of the late 1930s. The Third Republic, which had been posited as the patriarch of a new French society, ultimately found itself unable to protect Marianne – the traditional maternal symbol for the French nation (Slavin 184). Furthermore, according to Robin Bates’ article on “Male Anxieties and Late 1930s French Film,” powerful individual leaders like Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini posed a threat to the masculine image of the French military, and it appeared that the only solution would be faith in a French fascism, under the power of Maréchal Pétain, another solitary masculine force (26, 27). In this way, Jean’s victory over Zabel – an effort to protect a feminine innocent – suggested not only the re-affirmation of French masculinity, but the protection of the motherland from the tyrannical men who threatened to oppress her.

Rodney Whitaker, in his dissertation on Quai des brumes, describes a somewhat self-deceptive calm in French society – particularly among members of the French military – just before the German occupation in 1940. This drôle de guerre as it was known expressed the refusal of the French people to directly confront the harsh reality of their political condition (248). Whitaker notes that this ideology is apparent in Quai des brumes in both the theme of escapism and the sort of convolusion of the idea of social realism. According to Colin Crisp, in his 2002 book on Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, the port setting of le Havre represents a confrontation, or “mediat[ion],” between the darker “social reality of France” and its fundamental obsession with fantasy, the belief that there may be an escape, a pathway to a better life (96). Dudley Andrew believes that, although Quai des brumes is often described as “realist” for its depiction of working-class issues, the truth is that these issues are never directly addressed by the film. Instead, according to Andrew, Quai des brumes has only situated the common, recognizable dilemmas of the “petit-bourgeois moral code” – love, betrayal, despondency, virginity – in a working-class milieu (16). In his celebrated biography on Marcel Carné, Edward Turk takes a similar stance, noting that while MacOrlan had written his 1927 novel Le Quai des brumes – adapted for screen a decade later by the poet Jacques Prévert – to expose the gritty social implications of the First World War, Carné “barely acknowledge[s] class differences,” merely exploiting the atmosphere of unrest among the middle-class to explore more traditional and universal human themes (109). Altogether, this abstraction of real, contemporary issues and characters...
allowed the French audience an escape from direct confrontation with the realities of their social condition.

Some critics point to the racial and social tensions of the 1930s, believing that the French were in a fundamental crisis of national identity, particularly in response to the rise of Algerian immigration. Jonathan Driskell, for example, in his essay on “The female ‘metaphysical’ body in poetic realist film,” notes the way the Michèle Morgan’s Aryan softness – “fair hair and blue eyes” – is contrasted with the darker, more ethnic features of Michel Simon’s Zabel, the characterization of whom, as a cowardly, conniving smalltime merchant and pretty criminal, is reflective of certain conventions of anti-Semitic discourse and literature (64-65). In attempting to synthesize the nature of “French National Cinema” in the 1930s, Christopher Faulkner describes the perceived threat that colonization served to the French understanding of its national identity. The fog of le Havre, in this way, becomes a symbol of dissolved racial and geographic borders (13).

The most significant theme in Quai des brumes, however, as far as its appeal to the French audience at the time of its release, was its depiction of the inevitability of man’s fall to a tragic fate. According to Pierre Leprohon in his Presences Contemporaines, the protagonist in poetic realist films “is not at all inherently evil; destiny has got him in its grip and traps him in a criminal act alien to both his nature and his intellect” (Crisp 244). In this way, Jean is a sympathetic character who exists with dignity in context of the relative moral system of the underworld – taking the righteous, necessary social retribution of Zabel into his own hands, for example – but he is a powerless victim of his social condition, unable “to escape from the trap of social reality” (96). Most prominently, as a veteran of the colonial army, Jean is a victim of a corrupt, exploitative military institution, and he reflects, in the words of Carole Aurouet, “the demoralization and the profound pessimism of men who were... requisitioned” after the fall of the Popular Front (194). According to Edward Turk, Jean’s description of the fog of Tonkin in the opening scene is emblematic of the conditioned mindlessness of military violence: “When the truck driver asserts that Tonkin never has fog, Jean responds by thumping his finger against his forehead: ‘No fog? There certainly is. All within there’” (113). He goes on to describe his incongruously absent mentality in combat, in the words of Turk, “how war normalizes horror.” “It’s nothing to shoot,” Jean explains. “You no longer understand anything... It’s as if reality were slipping away.” In this way, Carné’s hero is pushed to murder through social injustice. Unlike the criminality of Lucien, attempted as an act of personal empowerment to “cloak his insecurity” (Turk 118) and purposely villainized by Carné for its resemblance to the cowardice of Hitler’s S.S. (115), the violence of Jean against Zabel is an unfortunate necessity, described by Georges Sadoul as another “petty social injustice,” “an added misfortune” (83). Furthermore, even Michel Krauss – who speaks to the French romantic ideal of the engaged artist – falls victim, in the words of Sadoul to “a world that cannot support the highest aspirations of man” (Faulkner, “Debates” 174). Instead, he is socialized to perceive and to experience nothing but tragedy. “Despite myself,” Krauss describes in the film, “I always paint the things that are hidden behind other things. A swimmer, to me, is a drowned man.” According to Alan Williams in his book on the Republic of Images, in the convention of tragic heroes, the flaws of the protagonists in poetic realist films “may be seen as unwitting internalizations of their social conditions” (238).

The sort of dual representation of Nelly as an idealized innocent and an inadvertent agent of her lover’s end presents women as another scapegoat, another inescapable force working against the tragic hero. Such a depiction speaks to centuries of French literary tradition and resonates with both Catholic and French national sentiment. According to Robin Bates, Nelly is a symbol of purity threatened by a corrupt oppressor, and Jean shows himself a hero when he “assert[s] his... manhood,” sacrificing his own goal of escape in order to save her (35). In this way, she becomes an agent of his moral redemption; she is a woman who facilitates his transcendence, and, as “product of her combination of the humble and the divine,” she “conform[s] to the Christian female archetype” of the Virgin Mary and Joan of Arc, both figures with “strong national resonances” in French culture (Driskell 63, 64). More importantly, however, because his return to Zabel’s apartment leads incidentally to his murder by Lucien, Nelly takes on the role of the femme fatale, and, as Susan Weiner describes, the woman is posited as a scapegoat, one of the many unstoppable “metaphoric forces in contemporary life” contributing to the inevitable fall of man (141).

Altogether, the fatalist tone of Quai des brumes was appeasing to the French audience in its particular historical moment. According to Williams, the message of Prévert’s screenplay is that “for the most wretched of the earth (those, precisely, with the greatest need of a redeeming transcendence) nothing of any value can be done, no change effected at this time, in this world. They can only die, or come to accept their prisons” (242). As protested by a number of leftist leaders after the Occupation, including notably the filmmaker Jean Renoir, the thought that there can be no independent action taken against the destructive forces of fate allowed the French people to surrender to their German occupiers with dignity. According to Michael Temple and Michael Witt, “Jean Gabin’s wait for his inevitable death at the break of day is clearly an allegory for Europe’s expectation of war after the Munich compromise with Hitler in 1938” (96). Edward Turk suggests that Gabin’s acceptance of his fate with silent resignation, as a victim of unstoppable social forces and at the same time as a self-sacrificing hero in the salvation of Nelly, affords him an “admirable” dignity – unlike Lucien and Panama, the respective childish rebellion and hysteric self-delusion of which are really mocked in the film as symptoms of cowardice and insecurity (114). In a similar way, Robin Bates argues that the box office failure of Renoir’s critically acclaimed Règle du jeu in 1939 is a result of its ultimate refusal to allow the French audience fall to self-pity and a feeling of fatalism. Renoir’s Octave, at the end of the film, “tak[es] responsibility for his own failure... acknowledges his shortcomings and refuses to blame scapegoats or fate” – which is exactly what the French people in general were trying so hard not to do (49).
Even so, Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes* is inseparable from the atmospheric gloom and fatalist ideology that so contrasted the optimistic and reaffirming Hollywood films of the 1930s. In order to justify its critical acclaim and relative popularity among American audiences at the time of its release, I would begin with the most obviously appealing attribute. As described by Ginette Vincendeau in her article on the "Aesthetics of French Cinema," films like *Quai des brumes* contained a "formal visual beauty" and "cultural prestige" that "formed a strong contrast to Hollywood" (147), particularly as the American cinema in the 1930s had come to represent, in the words of Jonathan Munby, "the Golden Decade of formula and genre consolidation" — the formal and thematic "standardization" of brightly-lit and systematically produced "Western, Musicals, and Gangster" films — in order to maintain economic stability (83). Dudley Andrew cites the reaction of Italo Calvino to Duvivier and Jean Gabin's 1937 film *Pépé le Moko* as an indication of contemporary awareness of the essential distinction between French and American film: "The French cinema was heavy with odors whereas the American cinema smelled of Palmolive" (188). Frank Nugent, of the *New York Times*, while apprehensive toward audience reception of Carné's fatalist tone, praises *Quai des brumes* as "a remarkably beautiful motion picture from the purely pictorial standpoint." His review is emblematic of the tendency of American critics in the 1930s to increasingly praise French films, "often for outscoring Hollywood in artistry, taste, and maturity of content and execution" (Andrew 13). Andrew notes as well the continued popularity of poetic realist films among artistic and intellectual circles in America into the 1940s, those that found its expressive pessimism toward social issues to be a mark of culture, of higher sophistication than the blatant, somewhat propagandistic imagery of social and psychological realism. As previously noted — while realist genres were supposed to contain a significant level of historical and regional specificity, and although *Quai des brumes* had a lot of political resonance and sparked a lot of political controversy for the French audience — Carné's adaptation of MacOrlan's novel focused much more on universal human themes than on contemporary social realities. In this respect, according to Naomi Greene, the essential "mood" and "atmosphere of melancholy poetry that corresponded to deeply felt emotions" in *Quai des brumes* could speak just as effectively to nonregional audiences (174). Along these lines as well, Georges Sadoul, and even Frank Nugent of the *New York Times*, suggest that the turn toward a moodier, more pessimistic tone could appeal as "novelty" to the American audience so overwhelmed with the optimism and moral uplift of Hollywood film (Sadoul 114). "As a steady diet," wrote Nugent, Carné's "strange haunting drama" would "give us the willies," but "for a change, it's as tonic as a raw Winter's day."

This essential American optimism, of course, was a result of the political and economic dependencies of the American film industry, which wished to blind its audience to the poor social and economic conditions resulting from the Great Depression. John Bodnar, in his book on *Blue Collar Hollywood*, suggests that this relative political conservatism, bordering on neutrality, resulted from the industry's fear that "disturbing social scenes and explicit politics" or any "extreme forms of partisanship" could marginalize key demographics (47), as "no single political doctrine – conservative or radical – could generate mass support at either the ballot box or the ticket booth" (3). Other critics suggest that influence from advocates from either political faction led to the strategic construction of film morals and politics. Bodnar also proposes, for example, that the progressives on the left called for films that "expressed a republican creed" and promoted faith in socialist ideals of diversity, inclusiveness, and cooperation (xx), while the political right intended to instill audiences with a faith in the "old virtues of personal integrity" and the restorative democratic power of FDR and the New Deal (Stead 91). John Ford's immensely successful epic Western *Stagecoach* (1939), for example, was praised by socialists for its depiction of "diverse racial and social groups" in "a community of free" and "tolerant" citizens (Bodnar xx), those who could "trust their resources to achieve common goals and success through collective efforts" (May 149). By contrast, his acclaimed 1940 adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* dismisses the socialist solution presented by John Steinbeck in his novel, opting instead for the message that "there was no real threat to America as long as faith was put in the ordinary American and in particular in the ordinary family unit" (Stead 95). Altogether, films of the 1930s reflected a desire to garner faith in established social and political conventions and to "offer hope" that the American people "could endure hard times" (Bodnar 46). According to R. Barton Palmer, in his study of the American film noir, the Production Code implemented by the MPPDA was specifically tailored to approve only films that ended cleanly, restored social harmony, and promoted faith in the status quo (5). Even Frank Capra described the particular nature of Hollywood realism as the depiction of social issues for the purpose of instilling audiences with faith in the uplifting power of American integrity (Bodnar 53).
describes the 1930s detective protagonist in the same way, believing that he successfully navigates — and ultimately overturns — the underworld only by understanding and applying its particular system of moral regulations (3). Dudley Andrew suggests that, while the French audience had interpreted Jean Gabin in *Quai des brumes* as a metaphor for the universal man, inescapably overcome by a haze of indeterminate forces, the American audience would have viewed him as “an individual against a background of poverty, crime, [and] violence,” who, by taking it upon himself to avenge the woman he loves, operates with integrity within his particular moral system, according to his “wholly personal moral code” (269).

Furthermore, despite the death of Jean at the end of the film — and despite his lapse into violent criminality in the murder of Zabel — many critics suggest that *Quai des brumes* may present a possibility of moral redemption. In the words of Georges Sadoul, Gabin’s triumph over Nelly’s corrupt guardian represents “a sense of revolt against the society which has produced this inhuman world, and hope in the people who wish to free mankind” (Faulkner, “Debates” 174). Sadoul elsewhere proposes that this hope can be found in the love between Jean and Nelly — as a delusion of the possibility of a better world (115), and in a 1939 review by the British *Monthly Film Bulletin* notes that the departure of the ship at the end of the film, as well as the escape of the spotty dog, “breaking away from its lead to run after its dead master,” may represent a possibility for the rest of us, if not for the protagonist, to “[transcend] mere hopelessness” (“Quai”). While this restoration of optimism may seem like a stretch, it gains new validity when compared to the fall of the noir hero in 1940s American film. While *Quai des brumes* elicits sympathy from the audience — pity for the fated characters and pity for their own condition — the noir, according to Palmer, offers nothing by way of moral restoration, nothing “sympathetic or redeeming about the grasping, venal, and perverse characters” (10). While Jean’s violence is yet another symptom of his victimization by societal forces, the morbidity of the noir hero is the result of an active, somewhat masochistic curiosity (20). John Houseman, in his influential 1947 article on “Today’s Hero” in the *Hollywood Quarterly*, defines the noir protagonist as one with “no discernable ideal to sustain him,” an “aimless [creature] without brains, without skill, without character, without strength, without courage, without hope” (162). In this regard, the ultimate destruction of the noir hero was rejected by critics like Sadoul as “repulsive and pessimistic,” the depiction of an “exterior world” without possibility for resolution or regeneration, “without being illuminated at the end by a small ray of light” (10). While the French audience, as before observed, relied on the depiction of human weakness in the late 1930s in order to excuse defeat and justify surrender, among an American audience, “human weaknesses and passions,” according to Andrew Dickos, “receive[d] no kind reception in a social order structured to deny their existence” (65). Recognizing the possible redemptive morality of Gabin’s love and self-sacrifice is thus essential to understanding the appeal of the fatalism of *Quai des brumes* to an otherwise unforgiving and self-empowered American audience.

There is a possibility, however, that the American audience may have simply ignored the fatal outcome of *Quai des brumes* in favor of its romantic hope and the moral fulfillment of the death of Zabel. Although the 1930s gangster hero was ultimately punished at the end of the film for his moral transgressions — a restorative ending required by the PCA, who also inserted a disclaimer at the beginning of films like *Public Enemy*, assuring that the picture was posited as an indictment of criminality rather than a glorification of violence (Munby 51) — these measures were arbitrarily implemented by the film industry as a means of catering to audience demand for unsavory content, “lur[ing] back reluctant patrons with the erotic, the naughty, and the violent,” while at the same time avoiding the contestation of moral reformers (Palmer 3). In reality, according to Jonathan Munby in his book on *Screening the Gangster*, the gangster hero’s “misfit status was key to his attraction” (54). Peter Stead similarly asserts that the rebellion of the gangster is what ultimately resonated with and appealed to the audience, regardless of the punishment he is met with in the end: “Audiences always remembered their initial ‘brio’ rather than their ultimate demise” (176). The same applies to rebellious heroes throughout film history, including Marlon Brando and James Dean, the “rebellion” and “confusion” of whom were more fascinating to and more often recalled by audiences than their “ultimate socialization” and the “sanctification of authority.” As a result, there is a definite possibility that the pessimistic tone of *Quai des brumes* differs from the restorative tendencies of similar American films only in that it refuses to arbitrarily answer the questions it raises for the sake of narrative clarity or social conservatism. Carné himself expressed his refusal to interject his own voice between the film and the audience, to attempt to impose a preferred reading on his work (Andrew 325). John Bodnar speaks to this possibility as well, when he proposes that the moral outrage expected and depended upon by the PCA — those who used censorship as a fulfillment of the political and economic motives of the industry and institutions of power — the reactions of viewers and critics in the 1930s actually suggest approval of political messages, acceptance of moral ambiguities, and interest in controversial issues and themes. “Seldom,” he notes, “does one find in reviewer’s reactions any sense of real moral outrage like the kind that could be found in censorship debates during the production or in reform or religious groups who often reacted to films with hostility” (46). In this way, the difference in tone between fatalistic poetic realism and optimistic Hollywood genre films is more likely a result of the intervention of the American film industry than a difference in audience ideology or desire.

It is possible here, as well, that the sense of moral redemption achieved through Jean’s love for Nelly, as suggested by Georges Sadoul, may have influenced the rhetoric used in marketing Carné’s tragedy to the American audience. It is often noted by historians like Mike Chopra-Gant that American noir films were frequently advertised, as evident in available pressbooks and reviews, as “lighter, more optimistic genres” (14) — romances, comedies, or musicals. The 1946 film *Notorious*, for example, was promoted in its pressbook as a “suspense and romance” and reviewed in the *New York Times* as a
“romantic melodrama” (13). According to Chopra-Gant, the “contextual
surround for Notorious” significantly suggests that it “more likely... would have
been understood as a romance by contemporary audiences.” Palmer describes
the advertising of noir films with a similar conclusion, asserting that because
“films now thought of as dark were marketed for American viewers like all
other Hollywood products,” it was “difficult” for the contemporary audience “to
see them as different in any substantial way” (28). According to John
Houseman, while Raymond Chandler’s 1939 novel The Big Sleep had been a
cynical, hardboiled, and quick-moving” narrative, “the unraveling of an
elaborate tangle of interrelated events,” the approach to the 1946 film “is
basically romantic,” a pretext for the voyeurism of the American audience so
that “[has become] involved” in the struggles of those around him, sacrificing
himself in the process (45). Although FDR was advocating rearmament and
economic support of the war effort years before the United States joined actively
in the combat – and although the American public was in no way instilled with
the immediate, looming anxiety of possible domestic conflict – if one can
justifiably suggest so much about the social, political, and ideological
resonances of Quai des brumes with the French audience, it is not completely
unreasonable to suggest some political implication for the American viewer.

Altogether, I would conclude that the formulaic genre films and
optimistic, restorative narratives of Hollywood cinema in the 1930s resulted
more from the political, industrial, and economic conditions of the industry
in the period than from any particular preference by the domestic audience. As a
result, the somewhat unexpected popularity of Marcel Carné’s Quai des brumes
can be attributed to the appealing novelty of its rich visual artistry and
sentimental pessimism, especially as the dignified romanticism of Jean Gabin
may have allowed the American viewer to transcend or to ignore the otherwise
disorienting tone of fatalistic defeatism – the tone which, as exhaustively
discussed by film critics and historians, resonated so profoundly with the French
audience just before the German Occupation.

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