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Quai des brumes: An American Appeal

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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

Hollywood films" to the broadest domestic and international market (100), 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 and reflective of the mentality of the French audience was markedly antithetical to the ideology most commonly depicted in Hollywood cinema. Consequently, I would ultimately like to suggest a number of particular tendencies in American film production, aesthetics, reception, and critical discourse in the 1930s and into the 1940s and 50s that could lend significant insight into the appeal of Carné's *Quai des brumes* 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 convolution 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).

While the fatalism so perceived in *Quai des brumes* may seem to directly oppose the tenets of American optimism, I would propose a number of ways the film may have spoken uniquely to the ideals of the American audience. To begin with, the American cinema – and the American ideology as a whole – has a long tradition of glorifying the individual over collective society. According to John Bodnar, the gangster hero of early 1930s American film, such as Rico Bandello of *Little Caesar* (1931), "exemplified the doctrine of an independent man," one able to "pursue" his "personal dreams" despite the realities of "economic and political exploitation in the nation" at the hands of the "unregulated capitalists" (11). While he achieves success by subverting "conventional standards and morals" (10), Lary May, in his book on *Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*, notes that the '30s gangster hero encourages the audience to "shift" its "moral viewpoint," a suggestion that the criminal protagonist actually adheres with honor to his own particular ethical code (142), one chiefly characterized, according to Mike Chopra-Gant, as an "unwavering self-belief" (158). Chopra-Gant goes on to equate the gangster hero with "the pattern of the classic western," believing that the films' "affirmat[ion] of the deep-rooted American value of individualism" is reflective of "the fundamental tenets of American libertarianism." R. Barton Palmer

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 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 entranced by Humphrey Bogart and his seduction by the "rising and very lovely" Bacall (161-162). In this way, it's very probable that the American audience may have dismissed the gloomy pessimism of *Quai des brumes* in favor of its suggested romantic possibilities.

Lastly, I would propose that Carné's *Quai des brumes*, because it resonated so essentially with French political thought at the onset of the Second World War, may have appealed to the American audience as evidence of the righteousness of political isolationism. As Colin Crisp describes, Jean's initial desire is to be left alone, a desire which is undermined from the film's beginning by the attachment of the "spotty dog" and then by his own increasing attachment to Nelly (372). According to Andrew Dickos, Jean's death is that of "an outsider who [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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