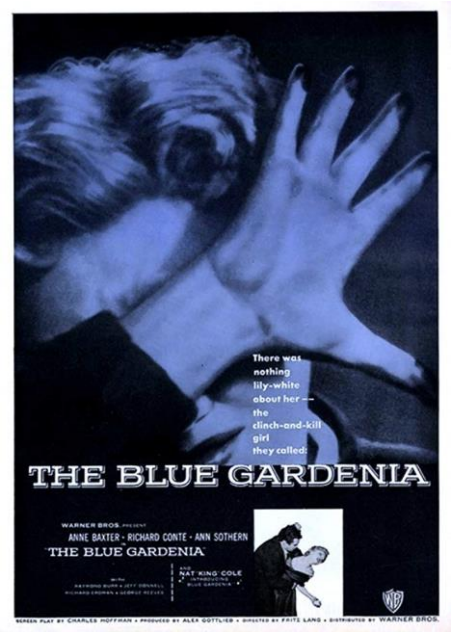
HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Burak Sevingen, MA

The Blue Gardenia 1953

Fritz Lang (1890-1976)



OVERVIEW

There was nothing lilywhite about her …
The clinch and kill girl they called the blue gardenia.

In *The Blue Gardenia*, a bachelor is found murdered, the culprit is the unidentified last date of the Casanova and a woman-hunt ensues. Media devours the story of the alleged murderess tagged the Blue Gardenia. The sensationalism is echoed even with the original posters for the film. Is she really the wanton killer that the popular imagination constructs her to be? As gripping as the taglines may sound, the story told from the woman's viewpoint will reveal their inaccuracy to the viewers of this 1953 film noir.

The Title. Like its poster, the film's title was a conspicuous choice that sounded curiously similar to the *The Blue Dahlia* released six years ago. This name achieved notoriety in 1947 when the real life victim of an unsolved murder case was dubbed the "Black Dahlia"—which has fascinated true crime buffs to this day. *The Blue Gardenia* had no connections to the infamous case or the 1946 film and the title was probably intended to cash in on the hype.

An Unusual Film Noir. The film is based on a story named "Gardenia" written by Vera Caspary.[1] Caspary is known for the novel adapted into the high-profile film noir, *Laura.* Otto Preminger's 1944 film had a narrative woven by multiple viewpoints. *The Blue Gardenia* is similarly distinctive with its privileging of the female perspective and the way this perspective contrasts with patriarchal notions. This distinguishes it from two film noirs with vaguely similar themes, 1944's *Phantom Lady* with its search for an elusive woman and *Reckless Moment* (1949) whose heroine struggles for exoneration.

Cinematography. Visually, some scenes in *The Blue Gardenia* (e.g. the bachelor's studio and *The Daily Chronicle*'s offices) display great film noir cinematography. Then again, there are lots of bright and sharp shots with little contrast that resemble "the harsh glare of television" aesthetics[2].

Cultural Connections. A television set is not seen in *The Blue Gardenia*, although the technology was on its way to becoming widespread. A popular TV show of the decade was the series *Adventures of Superman* and its star, George Reeves appears here in a supporting role as Police Captain Haynes. A music icon, Nat King Cole also makes an appearance. Apart from minor parts in *Scarlet Street* and *Clash by Night*, this is the first instance of a black character appearing prominently in a Lang film. Cole sings the titular song at the exotic restaurant that has the same name. The song is heard again twice, played by the bachelor's turntable and the diner's jukebox. Also, a tune from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* plays from the loudspeakers at the airport.

Mass Media. In Lang's earlier films, newspapers simply introduced developments in the narrative and acted as a chorus[3]. *The Blue Gardenia* reflects the growing importance and proliferation of mass media. Instead of police detectives, newspapermen are central to the plot. In a scene, a printing press is presented as an impressive piece of machinery. If functions as a technology that molds individuals into a community on a daily basis.

The Cold War and the Atomic Age. Communications are at the foreground while the single most important technology of the 1950s—nuclear power—is mentioned in passing. The reporter and his photographer partner are told that their next assignment would be to observe a hydrogen bomb test in the Pacific. It is after all, an important moment during the Cold War, just a few months before the end of the Korean War. Lang's *Human Desire* would be released the following year—featuring a Korean War veteran returning home to find how things had changed. In *The Blue Gardenia*, it is the leading woman who faithfully waits for her beloved, "one of hundreds of thousands" soldiers in service. The story takes its turn after she finds out that he had began seeing a nurse while recuperating in a hospital in Japan after taking "a load of commy shrapnel".

Anti-communism Context. A popular culture icon of the era was the private investigator Mike Hammer. One of the female lead's roommates is crazy about the mystery books of Mickey Mallet—which recalls Hammer's author Mickey Spillane. Mike Hammer was not only very violent; he was also an ardent anti-communist in a decade marked by communist witch hunts. In the USA, the House Un-American Activities Committee had set out to investigate the so called subversive activities. Many Hollywood personalities were blacklisted and some had to leave the country. Fritz Lang himself felt that he was "grey listed"[4].

A Venemous Streak. Peter Bogdanovich's *Fritz Lang in America* includes his interviews with the director, typically with a few questions about each of his films. For *The Blue Gardenia*, Lang apparently only had one thing to say. When asked to comment on what Bogdanovich considered to be a venomous streak in the film, he responded that he had felt that way after the menace of the HUAC[5]. Such a sentiment could also be observed in his forthcoming exposés in the 50s, *The Big Heat, While the City Sleeps* and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*.

CHARACTERS

Norah Larkin. Like her roommates, Norah works as a telephone operator. The blind flower seller of the Blue Gardenia restaurant describes her voice as friendly and quiet. Unlike her roommate Crystal, she is a small town girl and is waiting for her childhood sweetheart to come back from Korea. His decision to leave her triggers an eventful evening which starts as a fun blind date, takes a turn as she fights back against rape and ends with the death of a man.

Casey Mayo. The celebrity columnist's ambitious media campaign creates hype but hardly produces any solid results—the real criminal is unresponsive to his public "letter to an unknown murderess"—it only leads Norah to panic. On the other hand, as an investigator, he is more efficient than the police: He finds out more about Norah's outfit on the night of the murder and points to a major clue—the record that was playing during the murder—when he identifies Wagner's music.

Harry Prebble. Sketch artist and illustrator Prebble is a womanizer. He doesn't have the celebrity status of Mayo and is evidently regarded as much less appealing. He gets Norah drunk and eventually their date turns into a rape attempt. He is killed by his former girlfriend Rose Miller that same evening. Prebble is slimy and can be vicious. After all, the actor Raymond Burr played Lars Thorwald, the dangerous neighbor of James Stewart's observant character in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*.

Crystal. "Mid-twenties, (from) Chicago, Granite 1466" is how she identifies herself (for the benefit of the famous journalist Mayo. The wisecracker is a chain smoker who likes to take care of her roommates. Crystal is dating her ex-husband and says she is satisfied with this arrangement since "Homer had a husband's faults and now he has a boyfriend's virtues". Flirting with celebrity newspapermen is apparently a bonus.

Sally. Easy going and supportive Sally is a pulp fiction buff. She is particularly fond of Mickey Mallet mysteries and has little interest in romantic relationships in real life.

Police Captain Haynes. Captain of the Homicide Division is in good terms with the celebrity reporter

Rose Miller. She appears early on, calling Prebble in distress and is brushed off. The ending reveals her to be the murderer. She had come to the apartment the evening that Norah had resisted his rape attempt. Rose is depicted as a somewhat hysterical woman who is hopelessly in love.

SYNOPSIS

Star reporter of *The Daily Chronicle* Casey Mayo stops by a telecom office for a news story. He ignores the attention of the female switchboard operators, and when one of them, Crystal, gives him her phone number, passes it to the illustrator Harry Prebble. Crystal shares an apartment with co-workers Sally and Norah—whose fiancé is serving in Korea.

On her birthday, as she feels alone and sad, Prebble calls the apartment and assuming that she is Crystal, invites her to dinner. She agrees and they meet at the Blue Gardenia Restaurant. Prebble couldn't care less when he sees that it is not Crystal who arrives but Norah—he makes sure that Norah drinks as many tiki cocktails as possible. Not before long, she is noticeably drunk and they are driving to his apartment. Once there, she dozes off; later, he makes his move on her. Norah gets hold of a poker and swings it wildly before passing out.

When Norah comes to her senses, no one seems to be around and she exits the apartment, leaving behind the blue flower and her laced handkerchief. The next morning she wakes up with a hangover and all she remembers is the physical struggle and the background music—The Blue Gardenia. The police suspect Prebble's date, but have not yet identified her. The case promises to have all the ingredients of a sensational news story and reporter Casey Mayo steps in. He pens a public letter intended for the culprit. In his "Letter to an Unknown Murderess", he addresses her as "Blue Gardenia" and appeals her to contact him before she is caught. Norah reads the letter; she gets more and more confused and apprehensive. She contacts Mayo and they eventually meet. He is now enamored by this woman who he believes is the killer's friend. She promises to come back again the next day with her friend. Next day, Casey and Norah meet once again at the diner. She finds that the police—tipped by an eavesdropping waiter—had been waiting to arrest her.

By coincidence, Casey identifies the record that had been last played at the crime scene. Together with the police detective, they find out that Prebble had bought the record from his one-time girlfriend Rose. As the police approach her, she commits suicide; she is saved and placed in the prison's infirmary. Rose recovers enough to make a confession and recounts how she got enraged and killed Prebble with the poker. Norah is released, things return to normal, with the possibility of romance with Casey in the offing.

SCENES



A Human Interest Story. Star reporter of *The Daily Chronicle* newspaper is on his way to a telecom company for a human interest story. His coupe crosses Los Angeles Freeway's overpass and pulls by the West Coast Phone Co. Casey Mayo hops out and enters the building to go right into its hub. The operating room is packed with women in their 20s who are rapidly puling and plugging cords.

Three Women, One Phone Number. In a corner, an illustrator named Harry Prebble is drawing the portrait of one of the operators to be used in the company's advertising campaign. His model Crystal has been giving the cold shoulder to the flirtatious Prebble. She is gleeful by the presence of the famous journalist and gives her phone number "Granite 1466" before he even asks. The popular columnist is known for his "little black book" full of women's names and numbers. He shows little interest in Crystal; instead courteously passes the number to Prebble who notes it next to the sketch. When her co-workers Sally and Norah complete their shift, they pick her up and the three women leave.



Granite 1466 Sisterhood. The three switchboard operators happily share a tiny apartment. We get to learn a bit about them as well as their different perspectives on romance. Tough-talking Crystal is the motherly figure taking care of the others and she has recently started dating her ex-husband. Sally is almost always engrossed in the world of pulp fiction and has little interest in relationships except those in "Mickey Mallet" mysteries. Finally, the friendly Norah is in love with her childhood sweetheart who is a soldier serving in Korea—what follows will be Norah's story.

Candlelight Dinner for One. It is Norah's birthday and she plans to spend it toasting champagne with a photo of her fiancée. She has dressed up for the occasion and is looking forward to open his last letter. However, a bad surprise awaits her as she reads that Johnny has broken up with her. He lets her know that he is now seeing the nurse who has cared for him after he got wounded.

A Blind Date for Norah. Norah is in shock and still trying to digest the last line of his message—"with affection and best wishes"—when the phone rings. The sketch artist Prebble is calling to ask Crystal out. He doesn't recognize that he is talking to the wrong roommate and Norah is too dazed to explain. She accepts his invitation on a whim and heads out to the Blue Gardenia restaurant.



Nat King Cole Sings While... Prebble couldn't care less when he sees that it is not Crystal who arrives but Norah—he is delighted and resumes executing his plans for the evening. A blind flower seller gives Norah a blue dyed gardenia while Nat King Cole sings the titular song. Prebble makes sure that Norah drinks as many tiki cocktails as possible. Not before long, she is noticeably drunk and they are driving to his apartment.

Norah and Prebble at the exotic themed the Blue Gardenia Restaurant. The actress playing the blind flower seller is Celia Lovsky. Lovsky was the wife of actor Peter Lorre who had starred in Lang's *M* in 1931. Lovsky appears in another Lang film as a portrait painting, the portrait of Lagana's mother hanging in the mobster's study In *The Big Heat*.

At the Wolf's Lair. On the way Prebble blurts something about inviting his friends so they will have company and celebrate her birthday—which turns out to be a lie. Once in his apartment he keeps serving her champagne and liquor-spiked coffee. Meanwhile, Cole's song from the earlier part of the evening plays from a record. Getting sleepy, she kicks off her shoes and lies down on the sofa. Norah looks happy and seems to have forgotten her heartache. Prebble appears to be leaving her to alone, wishing her happy birthday and turning off the lights.

Date Rape turns into Homicide? Things don't go that way however, as he makes his move on her. She resists and screams but can't get him to let her go—eventually gets hold of a poker and swings it wildly. A mirror shatters, Prebble yelps, there is glass on the floor and Norah passes out. When she comes to her senses, no one seems to be around and she doesn't care. Still dizzy, she dashes out without putting on her shoes, also leaving behind the blue flower and her laced handkerchief.

"Killer Amnesia?" The next morning she wakes up with a hangover and all she remembers is the physical struggle and the background music. Norah has no recollection of what took place subsequently. Soon, she hears about the murder and learns that the police suspects Prebble's unidentified date. She is unsure of her own innocence.

Two Investigations. As police start working on the crime scene, they face some obstacles. Much of the conventional evidence had been wiped clean—by the cleaning lady—so Captain Haynes has little to work on except for the pair of pump shoes, the laced handkerchief and the gardenia. Pretty much all they know is that Prebble was seen dining with a blond at the Blue Gardenia. The case promises to have all the ingredients of a sensational news story and reporter Casey Mayo steps in. He is on good terms with the police captain and gets to learn the few known facts. His investigation turns out to be more fruitful as he quickly finds out—from the flower seller—that Prebble's date was wearing a black taffeta dress.

Norah Gets Desperate. Overwhelming media coverage makes Norah increasingly apprehensive. In the evening, she barely manages to burn her taffeta at the porch—a vigilant patrolman suddenly shows up at scene but luckily not in time to understand what's going on. He rebukes her for the fire and the incident leaves her even more agitated.

Her Self-doubt. At this point it is not just the question of guilt that bothers Norah. While she continues to question her own culpability, she feels that her decency is also at stake. Her roommates get judgmental about the morals of the woman dating Prebble and they have a quarrel.

A Public Letter to the Killer. Casey's editor gives him a new assignment. He is to leave the city soon to observe an H-bomb test explosion in the Pacific. He is told to wrap up the murder story. As a last ditch attempt, he pens a public letter intended for the culprit. In his "Letter to an Unknown Murderess", he addresses her as "Blue Gardenia" and appeals her to contact him before she is caught—which can be anytime, he adds intimidatingly. He crowns the letter with his offer to help. We know that he is not sincere—Mayo admits to his photographer buddy that he simply wants to "nail her" and "hand her to the police with best wishes for her future".

Responses to the Letter. People from all walks of life read the letter with interest and it is the talk of the town. Bored or attention seeking women call Casey, who uses his knowledge about the pumps' size to filter the calls. It turns into a Cinderella story with an amusing dialogue between him and a woman who gets told that her feet are too big to match the suspect.

Norah Steps Forward. Meanwhile, Norah also reads the letter—the second one she has read in distress. She has no idea that all Mayo cares about is making a sensational headline. He is good with words and Norah trusts him enough to accept the invitation. In the evening, Norah goes to a gas station and reluctantly calls Casey from a booth. She persuades him that he is talking to the real "Blue Gardenia". Just then, she is alarmed by a police car approaching. She flees, leaving behind another laced handkerchief identical to the one she had left behind the crime scene.

An Unexpected Romance Brews. She walks downtown and calls Casey again when she is close to the *Chronicle*. He assures her that there is no one left in the offices and invites her upstairs. When they meet, she introduces herself as a friend of the culprit and a messenger. They continue talking at a diner where he reiterates his pledge to help. It is clear that he is now enamored by this woman who he believes is the killer's friend. The two listen to "The Blue Gardenia" from the jukebox and chat under the watchful eyes of the waiter. She promises to come back again the next day with her friend and slips into the foggy evening.

Female Bonding. Back at home, she is confronted by Crystal who has finally figured out that her roommate is somehow associated with the sensational crime. Norah explains herself and Crystal wows to stick by her.

Norah Walks Into a Trap. Next day, at the time of the rendezvous, Norah shows up at the diner. Crystal initially pretends to be the Blue Gardenia, and then directs Casey to Norah. Casey is perplexed to see the sweet woman and the target of the investigation—a wanton murderess—are one and the same. He turns silent and Norah is infuriated when she realizes that his commitment to help was a lie. She gets up to leave the diner but finds the police waiting outside to arrest her. It is revealed that the person who tipped the police was not Casey but the diner's eavesdropping waiter.

Poster for *The Blue Gardenia* shows an image from the scene in which the main character is held in custody and photographed by reporters. She is blinded by the flashes of their cameras.

The Real Culprit is Identified. Casey's time to leave for his overseas assignment comes and he heads to the airport. At the lounge, the music playing from the loudspeakers—Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*—sparks an idea. He realizes that this was the record that the police had found to be the last one Prebble had played—and not "The Blue Gardenia" that Norah remembered. Together with Detective Haynes they go to the record store where Prebble had purchased the vinyl. It turns out that the employee who sold the record to Prebble was his one-time girlfriend Rose. When she sees that the police are looking for her, she attempts suicide but is saved and placed in the prison's infirmary.

Norah Triumphant. Rose recovers enough to make a confession and recounts how she got enraged and killed Prebble with the poker (while Norah was lying unconscious in another room). After being released, Norah happily reunites with her two friends. Casey Mayo continues to be enchanted by her but she walks past him as she leaves the courthouse. "I did what you told me, I played hard to get" she tells Crystal. However, it is clear that the two will see each other soon. Casey discards his playboy's notebook of phone numbers, which makes it plausible that marriage is in the offing.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

NORAH LARKIN Emotional (Insecure, Confused, Trustful, Nurturing)

All Norah remembers of that fateful evening was that "The Blue Gardenia" was playing on the turntable. Does she suffer from killer amnesia as they claim? And what was she thinking when she went to that lothario's studio?

*Insecure***.** Norah is unsure whether she was the one who killed Prebble.

*Confused***.** Twice, Norah reads letters addressed to her. She is upset reading her boyfriend's breakup letter and panics when she reads Casey Mayo's open "letter to an unknown murderess". Not only men's messages but also their language seems to perplex her. In both instances, she pauses over the final words. After reading her boyfriend's "with affection" and "best wishes for your future", she comes up with the variations "yours very sincerely, very truly". Later, Casey's letter to her ends with "yours very earnestly". Again she ponders about these expressions—which are ironic because the journalist is actually planning to get her arrested.

*Trustful***.** Despite the insincerity of his letter, Norah believes that Casey will help her. At least he won't be the one to turn her in to the police because the eavesdropping waiter does that before.

*Nurturing***.** According to Janey Place, female characters in film noir are either "spider or nurturing women[6]. For a moment, the society casts Norah as a spider, a wanton character and a murderer. She

comes clean of the manslaughter charge and at the same time proves her integrity. The ending hints at marriage.

CASEY MAYO **Disagreeable** (Deceptive, Ambitious)

"When I say I, I mean me and my newspaper" Casey Mayo assures the unknown murderess. Casey is not only an asset of his influential newspaper, he identifies with it.

*Deceptive***.** Mayo's public letter is basically a trap to catch the murderess. It generates interest—and of course revenue—but achieves nothing. Under pressure, Norah comes forward, unsure about her own innocence.

*Ambitious***.** "Lesson number one: sudden death sells papers; Lesson number two: add the element of sex", Mayo advises an apprentice. Mayo's predatory tactics raises ethical questions about news media.

Parallels

Journalism and Newspapers in Lang's films. In *M*, Beckert's letters to the newspaper offer some insight into his mind. In *Scarlet Street* and *Women in the Window,* newspapers function as intertitles. *The Return of Frank James* has a female journalist who is a smart and sympathetic character. *The Blue Gardenia* recognizes the news media's power, but has a rather negative view of its ethics. This tendency will become more clear in Lang's two 1956 films, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt and While the City Sleeps*—particularly the latter, with its array of greedy media executives and editors looking to exploit the case of a serial killer.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Morality, Modern Woman, Modern Workplace, 15 Minutes of Fame, Fantasy Worlds, Society of the Spectacle, Communication and Mass Media, Mass Culture, Modern Networks, Critique of Modernity?)

Morality. The popular narrative dispersed by the powerful media asserts that the culprit is a "high voltage … flashy blond putting on an act as a lady". Even her supportive roommates admonish the hypothetical profile of the mystery woman as "that type of girl". Norah finds herself defending the actions of the "Blue Gardenia Girl" that evening—her acceptance of the bachelor's invitation to go to his studio (being lonely, "seeking some excitement") as well as killing him ("defending her honor", "maybe he deserved"). These are all curtly dismissed by her friends. Norah's struggle to defend her integrity is a subtext of the murder story. Or maybe it is the other way around since the solution of the mystery is dealt with hurriedly with a quick flashback of the real killer.

Modern Woman. Norah finds that she not only needs to prove that she is not the culprit, but has to provide explanations for trivial things at every stage of that evening. "You bought champagne for yourself?" her roommate asks. Her friends find the idea strange—same with the dress she bought for the evening. Champagne and dress are for Norah's birthday, which she plans to celebrate on her own. If the photo of the boyfriend is ignored, the scene shows a woman trying to enjoy herself.

Modern Workplace. The switchboard operators of the West Coast Phone Co. are energetic and have a positive attitude towards their job—displaying no signs of discontent whatsoever. They swiftly pull and plug cords while they are monitored and closely supervised. Their interaction with the caller is limited to learning the number and the routine continues as a manual (and monotonous) task. Nonetheless, the brightly lit, youthful mise-en-scene has a cheerful appearance—one can't help but recall the dreary shifts of *Metropolis*' workers. While the women work en masse, men's jobs seem to allow a degree of individuality—e.g. policeman, journalist, waiter.

15 Minutes of Fame. "If you want your picture in the paper, you'll have to go out and kill somebody first" Mayo tells one of the fake Blue Gardenia callers. Newspapers play a central role in social life and

everyone seems to want to be on the front page. “Last time I had my picture in the newspaper I had to get bitten by a dog” Sally says when photographers gather for Norah’s release. Everybody, it seems, wants to be famous.

Fantasy Worlds. Sally finds Mayo’s report about the blue gardenia murder engaging—“almost as good as Mickey Mallet”. Her roommates think that she is “living in a dime store novel”. She may be the only one obsessed with popular fiction but an element of fantasy permeates the film. It nods to three fairytales. First, there is The Sleeping Beauty, and Casey Mayo makes a reference to it by calling his photographer “sleepy”; next he jokes with the supervisor at the telecom company about the wolf—Prebble—among the red riding hoods—the young telephone operators; and finally, the idea of trying to identify the mysterious woman by shoe size recalls Cinderella.

Society of the Spectacle.

> *These aren't really drinks. They're trade-winds across cool lagoons. They're the Southern Cross above coral reefs. They're a lovely maiden bathing at the foot of a waterfall.*

Prebble’s performance at the tiki restaurant—he is quoting the poetic entry in the menu from his memory—gets Norah to drink half a dozen “Polynesian Pearl Diver” cocktails. Reality is often embellished for consumption. Newspapers are no exception. The ending shows Norah enjoying her temporary fame as she is released from jail. As she leaves the courthouse, many photographers gather around her—“how about a big sigh of relief?” one of them asks. She already looks rejoiced, having been exonerated from a manslaughter charge. Still, she complies to act—“how about this” she asks and performs a gesture of being relieved.

Communications and Mass Media. Different forms of media are featured: Letters, illustrations, photography and newspapers. Letters are featured twice, that of the fiancée and the journalist. Prebble draws portrait sketches of the operators to be used in an advertising campaign. When he is found dead, a newspaper photographer covers the entire crime scene, making sure to get a shot of the victim. Photography—Norah dines with a photo of her fiancée and is subsequently photographed herself by newspapermen. She is subject to their blinding flashes twice: first, after her arrest and later when she happily leaves the courthouse following her exoneration. And of course newspapers—the printing press gets the spotlight as an impressive instrument of mass production. Newspapers’ eager consumers await their delivery—packed in bundles like other industrial products.

Mass Culture. Nat King Cole sings “The Blue Gardenia” live at the restaurant. The song is heard playing two more times via a phonograph and a jukebox. “Canned music, they can everything these days” remarks Mayo’s photographer sidekick, referring to the tunes emanating from the loudspeakers at the airport lounge—this time, Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* is playing. Wagner and Cole—both are commodified and consumed. No wonder, the record store will be where the loose ends of the mystery are tied.

Modern Networks. “Busy signal?” Mayo teases Prebble—he is not referring to a phone call but Prebble’s failure to catch Crystal’s attention. Telephone technology is at the heart of the story but it is also an allegory for social relations. All individuals and entities are indexed as nods in system of numbers: The working women’s apartment is Granite 1466, the police are Michigan 5211 and Casey Mayo is Madison 60025

Critique of Modernity? The film begins and ends with a shot of the massive concrete overpass—not necessarily an attractive sight but an impressive feat of modernity nonetheless. In between the two scenes technological advances make a procession. It looks like a celebration of progress—except the brief reference to the H-bomb. Mayo is sent to the Pacific to cover the test explosion—possibly the “Ivy Mike”, the first full-scale test of a thermonuclear weapon. Everything else sounds trivial in comparison but the bomb is mentioned just in passing. This subtlety is one example of the ways that makes *The Blue Gardenia* disturbing.

Discussion questions

According to Ann E. Kaplan, “film noir conventions are turned upside down” in *The Blue Gardenia*. The dominant male discourse of film noir is “undercut” as “Norah is allowed to present herself directly to us”.[7] How is this made possible? Could you point to specific scenes and moments that support or contradict this thesis?

The flower seller of *The Blue Gardenia* restaurant is a minor character who plays an important part. She provides factual information about Prebble’s date, describing her voice and the texture of her dress. She is not the first blind character to play such a role—blind men in *M* and *Ministry of Fear* being other examples*).* Can you think of other films which similarly privilege senses other than sight—touching and hearing?

A technical innovation used in the film is the “crab dolly”[8] that has the camera moving on rubber wheels (as opposed to rigid metal tracks). The objective of Lang and his cinematographer was to increase the movement range of the camera. Do you observe the contribution of this technique to the film in specific scenes?

In his interview with Fritz Lang (published in *Fritz Lang in America)*, Peter Bogdanovich remarks that the film is “a venomous picture of American life”[9]. Apparently, Lang agrees. Do you agree? What do they refer to as being venomous?

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[4] ibid, 390
[5] Bogdanovich, Peter. *Fritz Lang in America.* NY: Praeger. 1967, 84
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[8] Jay Steinberg. “The Blue Gardenia (1953)”. *Turner Classic Movies.* http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/69212/The-Blue-Gardenia/articles.html. Accessed on October 28, 2019
[9] Bogdanovich, 84

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