

“Who the devil wrote that?” Intertextuality and Authorial Reputation in Georgette Heyer’s *Venetia*

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Abstract: This paper examines Georgette Heyer’s 1958 novel *Venetia*, a work notable for its frequent use of quotation and other forms of intertextuality. I describe the different purposes for which characters within the text refer to and quote from various literary works for a number of different purposes. Additionally, I argue that Heyer herself utilizes quotation to the degree that she does in order to elevate the perceived “quality” of her writing. Because Heyer’s writing was frequently dismissed by her contemporaries, she was forced to rely upon inclusion of respected, canonical writers in order to lend her work gravitas.

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During a career that spanned the years 1921 to her death in 1974, British author Georgette Heyer wrote fifty-six novels and achieved enviable fame and fortune. However,

despite her commercial success, Heyer was never seen to belong in the higher literary circles, and, to this day, her work has been largely dismissed as escapist romantic nonsense.^[1] This exclusion irritated the author; as biographer Jennifer Kloester notes, Heyer “hoped that her novels were better than she was willing to admit publicly. By the late 1930s she increasingly wanted others to acknowledge their worth and the quality of her writing . . . [and] wanted genuine, spontaneous praise from people whose opinions she respected” (*Biography* 125-26). This is most apparent in Heyer’s acclaimed novel from 1958, *Venetia*. Besides containing the intricate details and authentic speech of Regency daily life^[2] that were Heyer’s trademark, *Venetia* is notable for its unconventional love story and a plot that is furthered by frequent quotations and other uses of intertextuality. In *Venetia*, Heyer utilizes quotations from classic works and authors considered to be “more serious” than herself in order to situate herself amongst more traditionally “literary” company. The plethora of clever quotations and obscure references in *Venetia* sprang from Heyer’s yearning for acceptance into the canon and by the *intelligentsia*. Alluding to some of the great works of literature was, to some extent, a seeking of attention for herself and acknowledgment of her own talents. Additionally, Heyer simply enjoyed showing off her knowledge, playing with the literature and poetry she loved, and bending it to her own purposes.

Andrea Kempf points out that, in many ways, the brilliance of *Venetia* could be due to Heyer’s frustrations with the genre she had been “forced” to write:

Venetia was the antithesis of the novel Heyer really wanted to write. Although it is one of her most perfect creations because she used all of her knowledge of the period to create a totally authentic setting for a devastating examination of what was proper in society, the author’s real desire was to write histories in the form of novels. (41)

I believe that this goes far in explaining just why *Venetia* is so well-written: it is the product of its author’s desire to transcend the type of historical romance formula(s) she invented and practically patented with popular works such as *Friday’s Child* (1944), *Arabella* (1949), *Cotillion* (1953), and *Sprig Muslin* (1956). Heyer’s fans demanded novel after novel of the same stamp, trapping the author into writing formulaically. Therefore it is not surprising that *Venetia* stands as one of the strongest examples of Heyer’s talent: it is the most intertextual of her novels, and in it we see Heyer’s most complex and creative use of other authors and their traditions. Feeling confined by her own formula, Heyer manipulated her writing of *Venetia* so as to please her fans with the romantic and historical elements that they expected from her, while still satisfying her own intellect (and trying to appeal to other intellectuals) by including frequent references to canonical literary works. By so doing, she was able to please herself and hoped to please other “high-brow” readers like herself. With *Venetia*, she was able to insinuate herself into a higher level of literary achievement—or, rather, she brought the great works to herself, incorporating them into her own creation.

In *Palimpsests*, his seminal work on intertextuality, Gérard Genette defines the topic most simply as “the actual presence of one text within another. In its most explicit and literal form, it is the traditional practice of *quoting* (with quotation marks, with or without specific references)” (2; emphasis added). Simply put, intertextuality occurs whenever one

text refers, whether explicitly or implicitly, to another text. In her study of the subject, Mary Orr gives detailed attention to quotation and highlights the individual aspects of quotation against other types of intertextuality, calling quotation, “the most condensed form of paradigm shift, transmuting the context, form and meaning of the items both inside and outside the quotation marks. It is always enrichment by inclusion, integration and proclamation of otherness, a dialogue not a monologue” (133). Thus, when writers explicitly quote another author, they are putting their own work into discourse with the work or the author they are quoting. As I will discuss later, this quoting serves a dual purpose—one inside the text, and one outside. A character who quotes something is positioning him or herself as culturally aware or drawing upon some shared understanding of what the quotation means or to what it is referring (relying upon a kind of literary/linguistic shorthand). The person to whom the character is quoting is expected to recognize the source (or at least that the source is not the speaker) and understand the referential language. If the listener-character does not recognize the quotation, he or she is “excluded from an understanding of the text” (Eco 214). When, however, a speaker-character quotes something, not expecting the listener-character to recognize the quotation, if the quotation is understood, the speaker-character is surprised and forced to reconsider his or her assumptions about the listener-character. This type of surprise occurs in *Venetia*, most notably when Damerel and Venetia first meet. Similarly, a reader who recognizes what a character has quoted is aware of the significance of that quotation to some degree—perhaps merely recognizing that it is a quotation rather than spontaneously produced dialogue—and feels in harmony with the culturally-aware character. A reader who does not recognize a quotation, however, misses the information that the context or meaning of the quotation was intended to convey.

Quotation thus serves not only the character who uses it, but also those within the text who hear it, the author who includes it, and the reader who either does or does not recognize it. The degree to which any of these participants recognize or value the quotation’s significance becomes a test of cultural literacy. Therefore, I contend that Heyer continually references and quotes classic poets and authors as a way of putting her work in conversation and on a level with those who are acknowledged as great writers. By so doing, Heyer attempted to raise the cultural value of her work in her own eyes and in the eyes of literary critics and the reading public. And her characters do the same thing, using quotations to take the measure of each other’s personalities and education.

In *Venetia*, quotation functions in a variety of sometimes overlapping ways. The most frequent use involves references, characters, or situations used ironically to mock established romantic tropes and conventions. In Oswald Denny, Heyer created the perfect means of satirizing the melancholy pretensions of the Byronic hero. Oswald desires nothing more than to appear just like Lord Byron. A ridiculously romantic boy, five years younger than Venetia but pining after her, he suffers delusions of heroic, knightly grandeur in addition to his ridiculous pretensions of experience and turmoil. The silliness of Oswald’s attempts at romance (or, more properly, his attempts at becoming a romantic hero) becomes even clearer when contrasted with the truly Byronesque figure cut by Lord Damerel. But rather than being afraid of Damerel, Venetia is surprisingly amused by his brooding countenance, his stereotypically rakish looks, which makes her recall a line from Byron’s *The Corsair*: “Then, as she stared into his eyes she saw them smiling yet fierce, and a line of Byron’s flashed into her head: *There was a laughing devil in his sneer*” (Heyer 35).

However, Damerel is far more than a simple cardboard cutout rakehell, as can be seen by his horrified and amused reaction to Venetia's comparison.

Venetia also uses quotation satirically to deflate Damerel's attempts to paint her as beautiful or romantic. Significantly, for these endeavors she relies upon one text as her source: Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Rather than playing along with Damerel's perception of her as mysterious, Venetia admits that she is very inexperienced and has no real past: "As for telling you about my life—why, there's only one answer to that, and it's *A blank, my lord!*" (60). Venetia quotes from *Twelfth Night*, which, according to Jennifer Kloester, was one of Heyer's favorite Shakespeare plays (84). The line comes from the scene in which Viola, disguised as Cesario, describes to Orsino the pain of her unrequited love for him, masking the significance of her words by claiming that she is telling the story of "his" dead sister. It begins with a prompt from Orsino, asking, "And what's her history?" (2.4.108), to which Viola replies,

A blank, my lord. She never told her love
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. (2.4.108-14).

Thus, when Venetia tells Damerel her life is "A blank," he recognizes her reference and challenges it, remembering and paraphrasing the rest of Viola's original quotation: "Am I to understand that you pine in thought? I hope you don't mean to tell me you have a green and yellow melancholy, for that I'll swear you have not!" (60). Venetia, with no desire to appear heroic, quickly clarifies by saying, "Good gracious, no! Only that I have no history! I have passed all my life at Undershaw, and done nothing worth the telling" (60). In this instance of quotation, Venetia has to backtrack somewhat and to clarify her words so they do not appear melodramatic or self-pitying. She may be willing to engage Damerel in exchanges of quotation and attempts at stumping each other with particularly good quotations, but she does not stoop to misrepresentation of herself in order to keep the context of the quote intact.

When Damerel and Venetia are reunited at the end of the novel, Venetia utilizes the romantic imagery of Viola's "willow cabin" speech in *Twelfth Night* while continuing to mock the dramatics of it. In his drunken state, Damerel stubbornly tries to be noble; having made the sacrifice of giving up Venetia, he will not allow her to ruin herself for him. Furthermore, he recognizes the utter impropriety of her being alone with him in his house and tries to send her away, a move that Venetia just will not allow. She paraphrases the disguised Viola's wooing speech to Olivia, telling Damerel: "Well, I warn you, love, that if you cast me out I shall build me a willow cabin at your gates—and very likely die of an inflammation of the lungs, for November is *not* the month for building willow cabins!" (351).^[3] Venetia is thus able to demonstrate the firmness of her resolve while teasingly reminding Damerel of the unpractical nature of romantic declarations. It may seem contradictory that Venetia and Damerel fall in love while they so consistently scorn the extreme dramatics and tropes of literary lovers, but the way in which they refer to these things presents their love as more realistic and self-aware.

In counterpoint to Venetia's Shakespearean allusions, the Nurse (Mrs. Priddy) deploys biblical quotations, which serve an interesting purpose in the novel. First, the fact that she—the lower-class servant—borrows only religious language, while Damerel and Venetia—members of the gentry—rely on heavily secular, often suggestive works, puts the two classes in opposition on a literary level and cements prevalent beliefs about the conservative nature of servants versus the more temporal concerns of the aristocracy.^[4]

In one such instance, Nurse responds to the suggestion that Venetia set foot in the contaminating doors of the Priory, even just to see Aubrey, by interweaving biblical quotations into her speech: "The Lord may see fit to turn an old woman over into the hands of the wicked, but it says in the Good Book that many are the afflictions of the righteous,^[5] and, what's more, that they shall be upheld,^[6] which I do trust I shall be, though never did I think to be forced to stand in the way of sinners!" (52-53). This employing of religious language seems to be rather common to Nurse, judging by Venetia's reaction to it:

Recognising from the sudden Biblical turn of the conversation that her guardian was strongly moved, Venetia applied herself for the next twenty minutes to the task of soothing her agitation, pointing out to her that they had more reason to liken Damerel to the Good Samaritan than to the wicked, and coaxing her to accept her own determination to go to Aubrey as something as harmless as it was inevitable. In all of this she was only partially successful, for although Nurse knew that once Miss Venetia had made up her mind she was powerless to prevent her doing whatever she liked, and was obliged to admit some faint resemblance in Damerel to the Good Samaritan, she persisted in referring to him as The Ungodly, and in ascribing his charitable behaviour to some obscure but evil motive. (53)

Thus, while Damerel and Venetia do not share Nurse's enthusiasm for Biblical texts, their analysis of her quotations furthers the developing dynamic between them. Damerel, well aware of Nurse's dislike and distrust of him, raises the issue with Venetia, and she responds by telling him of Nurse's judgments:

"At least, I never heard her say, even of the laundrymaid, that she would be eaten by frogs!"^[7]

He gave a shout of laughter. "Good God, does that fate await me?"

Encouraged by the discovery that he shared her enjoyment of the absurd she laughed back at him, saying: "Yes, and also that your increase will be delivered to the caterpillar."^[8] (58)

The significance of this conversation, beyond its continuation of the religious dialogue, will be discussed later on.

Despite her initial aversion to Damerel, Nurse revises her opinion quite quickly after Venetia's first visit to the Priory. Optimistically, she selects more forgiving Bible verses, telling Venetia "[Damerel] couldn't behave kinder to Master Aubrey, not if he was the Reverend himself . . . there's no saying that the Lord won't have mercy on him, if he was to forsake his way^[9]—not but what salvation is far from the wicked,^[10] as I've told you often and often, miss" (76). This is high praise from Nurse, and it allows Venetia to visit

Aubrey and Damerel daily for the several weeks Aubrey must spend in recuperation. Much to the dismay of the neighbors, Damerel continues the acquaintance after the Lanyons return home, paying visits to Undershaw whenever he wishes. Aubrey, usually happily unaware of everything going on around him, catches on to the humor of Nurse's change of heart, sharing with Venetia one of Nurse's previous comments:

"Up till then she wasn't talking about his kindness, I promise you! She said he roared in the congregation." [11]

"She didn't!" Venetia exclaimed, awed.

"Yes, she did. Do you know where it comes? We could not find it, though we looked in all the likeliest places."

"So you repeated it to Damerel!"

"Of course I did! I knew he wouldn't care a rush for what Nurse said of him."

"I expect he enjoyed it," Venetia said, smiling. (76)

This exchange serves as a reminder of just how far Nurse has come in her opinion of Damerel, paralleling Damerel's own shift from would-be seducer to valued friend for Venetia and elevation from mere sinner in the eyes of Nurse. In addition, this exchange further highlights the discrepancy in morality and what is considered important between the servant class and the nobility: Aubrey and Damerel are the two most educated men in the novel, [12] but neither recognizes Nurse's allusion to a verse from Psalms. Thus, Nurse serves as a voice of religion and morality in the novel, and her choice of quotations about Damerel shifts along with Damerel's attitudes, and the changing language she applies to him traces his reformation. Damerel himself recognizes this shift and relies upon Nurse's judgments of him, as he confesses to his valet:

Damerel lifted his glass again, and sipped meditatively. "The King of Babylon, or an Ethiopian?" [13] he said. "Which, Marston? Which?"

"I can't tell you that, sir, not being familiar with the King of Babylon."

"Aren't you? He stood at the parting of the way, [14] but which way he took, or what befell him, I haven't the smallest notion. *We need Mrs Priddy to set us right.*" (157; emphasis added)

The references he makes here are particularly apt, for he is himself at a parting of the ways, stuck between his past life of wickedness and a future with Venetia that would require reformation. Damerel is forced to question whether or not he can change his internal character as the leopard or the Ethiopian would wish to change externally. Having become accustomed to Nurse's biblical comments and her position as the moral compass of the novel, Damerel figuratively turns to her as a gauge of where he stands. However, he recognizes that she would probably view him as a hopeless case, too far gone to reform. He continues:

"Not that I think she would take a hopeful view of my case, or think that there was the least chance that the years that the locust has eaten [15] could yet be restored to me. She would be more likely to depress me with pithy sayings

about pits^[16] and whirlwinds,^[17] or to remind me that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.^[18] Would you care to reap any crop of my sowing, Marston? I'm damned if I would!" (157)

Damerel's brief foray into biblical quotation ends abruptly as the significance of his regrets sink in. Finishing off, Damerel returns to secular works to express his intentions:

He tossed off the rest of his brandy, and set the glass down, thrusting it away. "To hell with it! I'm becoming ape-drunk. I can give you a better line than any you'll get from Mrs Priddy! *Learn that the present hour alone is man's*^[19] – and don't ask me when I mean to leave Yorkshire!" (157)

Damerel, finding no comfort in taking a page out of Nurse's book, returns to his own artillery of poetry. He is still uncertain of his future with Venetia, trusting not in God and the homilies of the Bible, but in man and the language of quotation that has brought him and Venetia together.

Significantly, all the biblical references in *Venetia* come from the Old Testament, with only two exceptions. Nurse quotes only once from the New Testament instead of the Old, when she is weighing her opinion of Damerel against what has been spoken about him:

Perhaps it was wrong to let them form the habit of such easy intercourse with a sinner, but although the Scriptures warned one that the wicked were like a troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, they also yielded some pretty pungent warnings against backbiters and unrighteous witnesses. *Every neighbour will walk with slanders*, said the prophet Jeremiah, and one had only to cast an eye over the district to know how true that was. Nurse was much inclined to think that his lordship had been a victim of false report. (112)

While Nurse draws most of her allusions from the Old Testament, she counterbalances her warnings about the wicked with an allusion from the New Testament. The "warnings against backbiters" seems to be a reference to Romans 1:29, which says, "Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents." Then Nurse returns to the Old Testament: "put not thine hand with the wicked to be an *unrighteous witness*" (Exodus 23:1; emphasis added). It is generally accepted that the Old Testament God is vengeful, while the New Testament God is merciful, so it is crucially important that the only time Nurse quotes from the New Testament is when she is advocating the possibility that Damerel is innocent of the slanders uttered against him. While the reader knows that this hopeful perspective is not fully accurate, it does introduce an opportunity for forgiving a reformed Damerel, which the Old Testament passages would not allow. The second allusion to a New Testament quotation occurs when Damerel is hypothesizing what Nurse may think of his hopes for reformation. By pointing to a less forgiving passage than did Nurse,^[20] Damerel indicates his fear that he will reap the results of his wicked sowing. In Damerel's own opinion, redemption is not a possibility for him because he is not worthy of it.

In Venetia and Damerel's relationship, quotation most often serves as a vehicle through which they can speak unreservedly and without censorship. The practice of quotation provides them with freedom from the constraints of polite society conversation. Venetia in particular is freed from having to speak and behave like a proper lady, and her quotations and references often carry her away into what would not be socially acceptable and what would very likely distress religiously-minded Nurse. For instance, when Venetia and Damerel laughingly joke together about Nurse's biblical condemnations of Damerel,^[21] the subject becomes improper:

"Oh, I've no objection to that! The caterpillar is welcome to my increase!"
"No, how can you be so unnatural? Increase *must* mean your children!"
"Undoubtedly! Any side-slips of mine the caterpillar may have with my good-will," he retorted.
"Poor little things!" she said, adding thoughtfully, after a moment: "Not that it is at all easy to perceive what harm one caterpillar could do them." (58)

Beyond illustrating the couple's shared sense of humor, this section allows Damerel and Venetia to speak outside the constraints of polite conversation, cementing the style of communication that they began in their first improper encounter. A gentleman and a lady do not discuss "side-slips,"^[22] as Venetia embarrassedly recalls a moment later. Rather than checking her conversation as every other man she has ever met has always done, Damerel encourages Venetia to be free and open with him: "Don't set a guard on your tongue on my account!" he said, ushering her into the dining-room. "I like your frankness—and detest damsels who blush and bridle!" (59). The fact that these two can speak to each other without constantly worrying about the codes of proper society conversation allows them to fall into an almost anachronistic level of friendly intimacy.

Venetia explains that, as a child, she was never told much of Damerel, due to the salacious nature of the details. She draws on a speech from *Hamlet* to describe the censored story she received: "It was always *We could an if we would* whenever we tried—Conway and I—to discover why you were the Wicked Baron" (96). The italicized phrase comes from *Hamlet*, after the prince has seen the ghost of his father and is explaining to his friends how he shall behave once he "put[s] an antic disposition on" (1.5.173), pretending to be mad by "pronouncing of some doubtful phrase / As 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would' / Or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might'" (1.5.176-178). While Hamlet pretended to be mad in order to avenge his father, Venetia decides that Damerel resolved to act the part of a rake in order to mask his crushed feelings after the abandonment of his ladylove.

Damerel speaks candidly and scathingly of his former love affair and describes his studiousness (and therefore his aptness to quote) as being part of why he was abandoned for a wealthy, foppish Italian:

"There were no bounds to my folly: if you can picture Aubrey tail over top in love, I imagine I must have been in much the same style. Chuck-full of scholarship, and with no more commonsense than to bore her to screaming point with classical allusions! I even tried to teach her a little Latin, but the only lesson she learned of me was the art of elopement. She put that into

practice before we had reached the stage of murdering one another—for which piece of prudence I’ve lived to thank her. She had her reward, too, for Vobster [the lady’s cuckolded husband] was so obliging as to break his neck before custom had staled her variety,^[23] and her Venetian was induced to marry her.” (99)

Rather than being horrified by Damerel’s story, Venetia disapproves only of his erstwhile mistress (probably especially because she did not appreciate Damerel’s “classical allusions!”) and the way Damerel was treated by his parents. Thinking practically, she points out that the former Lord Damerel would have done much better by not “behaving in a very foolish and extravagant way, exactly like a Shakespearian father,” rhetorically asking, “Pray, what good did it do old Capulet to fly into a ridiculous passion? Or Lear, or Hermia’s absurd father!” before reasoning, “But perhaps Lord Damerel was not addicted to Shakespeare?” (101). Though Damerel is much amused by this response, replying, “It seems he cannot have been!” (101), Venetia again understands that she has said more than what a lady in society should by disparaging the deceased Lord Damerel. Since Damerel is an educated man, he would assume that Venetia was intentionally insulting his father with Shakespearean comparisons. When she tries to apologize for her forthrightness, Damerel stops her with another quotation, for once using a source that Venetia does not recognize, and seizes the opportunity to comment on her beauty and renew his attempts at flirtation:

He raised his head, still choking with laughter, and said: ‘Oh, no no! *Sweet Mind, then speak yourself...!*’^[24]

She wrinkled her brow, and then directed a look of enquiry at him.

“What, lurched, O well-read Miss Lanyon?” he said provocatively. “It was written by Ben Jonson, of another Venetia.^[25] I turned it up last night, after you had left me.”

“No, is it indeed so?” she exclaimed, surprised and pleased. “I never heard it before! In fact, I didn’t know there had been any poems written to a Venetia. What was she like?”

“Like yourself, if John Aubrey is to be believed: *a beautiful desirable creature!*”

Quite unmoved by this tribute, she replied seriously: “I wish you won’t fall into flowery commonplace! It makes you sound like a would-be beau at the York Assemblies!” (101-102)

Heyer’s characters additionally use quotations to grab the attention of another character—most often Venetia, when trying to capture Aubrey’s ear. Venetia, having unsuccessfully attempted to gain Aubrey’s attention at the breakfast table, manages to alert him to her presence by “quizzing” him on his choice of reading material:

“Ah, Greek! Some improving tale, I don’t doubt.”

“The *Medea*,” he said repressively. “Porson’s edition, which Mr. Appersett lent to me.”

"I know! She was the delightful creature who cut up her brother, and cast the pieces in her papa's way, wasn't she? I daresay perfectly amiable when one came to know her."

He hunched an impatient shoulder, and replied contemptuously: "You don't understand, and it's a waste of time to try to make you."

Her eyes twinkled at him. "But I promise you I do! Yes, and sympathize with her, besides wishing I had her resolution! Though I think I should rather have buried *your* remains tidily in the garden, my dear!" (1-2)

Making light of the mythological heroine's story, Venetia turns Medea's murder of her brother, committed to delay her father's pursuit and aid her flight with Jason, into a joke (furthermore, ignoring the later, tragic consequences documented in Euripides's play). Almost immediately, Venetia again relies on literature to capture her brother's attention, paraphrasing Antony's famous speech from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Aubrey! Dear, *odious* Aubrey! Do lend me your ears! Just *one* of your ears, love!" (8). From these exchanges, it becomes clear that, despite their mutual affection, Aubrey and Venetia are not the best of companions, the former being far too engrossed in his studies to attend to the latter, unless she speaks to him in his own language, the language of literature. This is a striking parallel to how Heyer herself was attempting to attract attention: like Venetia, she uses literature to demand acknowledgement.

Related to these ploys for attention are utterances that appear to be offhand and that indicate hidden intent and the transformation of characters. When Damerel first meets Venetia, when she is trapped amongst the blackberry bushes, he sets the tone of their relationship by what might have been a throwaway comment: "She had been making her way round the outskirts of the wood, and had paused to disentangle her dress from a particularly clinging trail of bramble when an amused voice said: '*Oh, how full of briars is this working-day world!*'" (30). Damerel is borrowing the exclamation of Rosalind from Act I, Scene III of *As You Like It*, after she has fallen in love with Orlando, changing the meaning of briars from figurative to literal. Venetia immediately recognizes that this brooding stranger must be Lord Damerel himself, so perfectly does he fit the part.^[26] Seeing what he presumes to be a simple country maiden stealing his blackberries, Damerel grabs her, exclaims, "*But beauty's self she is...!*" (31), and then kisses her. Once again, Damerel borrows his words, this time from an anonymously-composed Renaissance sonnet, which quite naughtily reads in full, "No beauty she doth miss / When all her robes are on / But beauty's self she is / When all her robes are gone" (Garrett). Clearly, Damerel is intent on debauchery.

Later, Damerel's mutterings to his horse reveal how conflicted he has become about his relationship with Venetia. Despite Oswald's envy of the Byronesque figure that Damerel presents, Damerel himself grows to regret his reputation, which he views as an impediment to marriage with Venetia. After Aubrey's interruption prevents Damerel from kissing Venetia in a heated moment, he rides home from Undershaw and broods over the situation, speaking aloud to his horse:

"Old fool!" he said. "Like your master—who is something worse than a fool. *Would she could make of me a saint, or I of her a sinner—* Who the devil wrote that? You don't know, and I've forgotten, and in any event it's of no

consequence. For the first part it's too late, old friend, too late! And for the second—it was precisely my intention, and a rare moment this is to discover that if I could I would not!" (147)

Though Damerel's usually encyclopedic brain is too distraught to think of the quotation's source, it comes from a song written by English dramatist William Congreve, usually titled "Pious Selinda Goes to Prayers." Obviously touching upon the problems of a man of experience in love with a virtuous woman, the section Damerel recalls reads: "Wou'd I were free from this Restraint / Or else had hopes to win her / Wou'd she could make of me a Saint / Or I of her a Sinner" (Congreve 78). After originally deciding to stay in Yorkshire in order to seduce Venetia, Damerel finds himself affected more than he thought possible and is unable to see a way of making the relationship work either on his original terms (seduction) or the only respectable offer he could make her (marriage).

A complex sub-category of these references involves instances where Damerel is trying to make Venetia think that he is using quotation offhandedly as a sign of his disinterest or lack of concern at their parting. In actuality, Damerel is trying to hide his own emotions, sending Venetia away thinking that he has appropriated the manner in which they had used quotation as a signal of their ease with each other. Venetia perceives that he has changed it into a more cynical, almost brutal distancing mechanism. He does this with the rapid-fire way in which he shifts from quotation to quotation in his farewell scene with Venetia in order to disguise his real feelings of despair, trying to make her able to forget about him and move on:

" . . . Let us agree that it was a lovely interlude! It could never be more than that, you know: we must have come to earth—we might even have grown a little weary of each other. That's why I say that your uncle's arrival is well-timed: *parting is such sweet sorrow* [27]—but to fall out of love—oh, no, what a drab and bitter ending that would be to our autumn idyll! We must be able to look back smilingly, my dear delight, not shuddering! . . . the day has brought your uncle—and there let us leave it, and say nothing more than *since there's no help, come let us kiss, and part!* . . . " [28] (258-59)

Practically shoved out the door by Damerel, Venetia numbly watches as her love turns truly Byronic and scoffs: "be grateful to me for opening your beautiful eyes a little! So very beautiful they are—and about the eyelids much sweetness!" (259). Damerel again paraphrases, rewording John Aubrey's description of Venetia Digby's "dark brown eyebrow, about which much sweetness, as also in the opening of her eyelids" (106). Venetia sees that Damerel is eager to get her out of his life (which, of course, is exactly what he wants her to believe):

He was holding open the door, a suggestion of impatience in his attitude. The second line of the sonnet he had quoted came into her mind: *Nay, I have done: you get no more of me.* He had not spoken those words; there was no need: a golden autumn had ended in storm and drizzling rain, an iridescent bubble had burst, and nothing was left to her but conduct, to help her to behave mannerly. (261)

Recognizing the context of Renaissance poet Michael Drayton's Sonnet 61 from his sonnet cycle *Idea* (1619) helps to explain why it was not necessary for Damerel to quote the poem's second line, since it is about a man who seems to be happy about getting rid of his lover: "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part / Nay, I have done: you get no more of me / And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart / That thus so cleanly, I myself can free" (lines 1-4). Convinced that Damerel has no serious intentions, Venetia leaves for London, heartbroken.

Because Damerel uses quotation to hide his feelings as he parts from Venetia, it is particularly significant when he chooses to use his own words to express his emotions, most notably when he first confesses his love for her: "He released her hands, but only to pull her into his arms. 'When you smile at me like that, it's all holiday with me! O God, I love you to the edge of madness, Venetia, but I'm not mad yet—not so mad that I don't know how disastrous it might be to you—to us both! You don't realize what an advantage I should be taking of your innocence!'" (235). The moment at which Damerel fully, honestly and desperately proclaims his love for Venetia, he avoids any use of quotation. His feelings are too raw to be expressed using the words of anyone but himself. He cannot hide behind someone else's words, nor can he use them archly in order to speak to Venetia outside the conventions of polite society.

In *Venetia*, Heyer also makes literary allusions that reinforce the fact that Venetia relates to the world through the books she has read. Heyer frequently reminds us of this point: "[Venetia] had never been in love; and at five-and-twenty her expectations were not high. Her only acquaintance with romance lay between the covers of the books she had read; and if she had once awaited with confidence the arrival on her scene of a Sir Charles Grandison[29] it had not been long before commonsense banished such optimism" (23). Heyer emphasizes again and again how little experience Venetia has had with the world and how everything she knows about it and human nature comes from what she has read: "Venetia had no guile, and no affectations; she knew the world only by the books she had read; experience had never taught her to doubt the sincerity of anyone who did her a kindness" (53).

Heyer also makes literary allusions in subtler ways, consciously paralleling her characters with famous literary characters in order to demonstrate her own knowledge. For instance, the fact that Venetia is an "energetic walker" (20) puts her in league with Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. Various critics—including Jennifer Kloester—have noted the similarities between several of Jane Austen's characters and Heyer's. Celeste Warner has particularly noted the parallels of *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Collins with the insufferable Edward Yardley (23-24). In addition, Lady Denny and Mrs. Hendred are both reminiscent of many of Jane Austen's sillier matrons, such as Mrs. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Jennings from *Sense and Sensibility*, and Mrs. Allen from *Northanger Abbey*.

Given Heyer's acknowledged opinions about the Brontë sisters[30], the situations in *Venetia* evocative of *Jane Eyre* are likely intentional. Indeed, Heyer referred to Mr. Rochester as an enormous influence on her own heroes (Kloester 309). Like Rochester, Damerel shuns his ancestral home, only deciding to stay once he has met Venetia.[31] In addition, Damerel's recollection of himself at twenty-two—young, innocent and fully in love with a woman who proved to be fickle—echoes Mr. Rochester's bitter remembrance of

his affair with Celine Varrens, as recounted to Jane Eyre (Brontë 120-24). Finally, Venetia's reunion with Damerel is rather like a bizarre version of Jane's return to Rochester in *Jane Eyre*: Venetia comes upon Damerel, sitting alone in the dining room, but instead of finding him blinded and depressed—as Jane found Mr. Rochester—she discovers that he is brooding[32] and utterly drunk. He is so drunk in fact that, upon first seeing Venetia, he is convinced she is an apparition. As Jane Aiken Hodge notes, "Jane Eyre would have turned and fled, but Venetia stands her ground" (136), and she manages to convince Damerel of her substantiality.[33]

Heyer uses quotation not only as a device through which to demonstrate the compatibility of her romantic leads, but also in an attempt to reach out to her educated, literary audience. She uses quotations often with great subtlety, thus appealing to a higher quality of reader than usually read her novels (the fans she constantly abused and dismissed). Her moderately educated readers might chortle at her Shakespeare references and feel self-congratulatory for recognizing them, but a true scholar or the *literati* (her dream audience) would appreciate the less obvious allusions. For example, the first exchange of quotations between Damerel and Venetia, which occurs after the hysterical barking of her dog, Flurry, rescues her from Damerel's unwanted embrace. As soon as she breaks free, she stays to berate Damerel, dismissing his flowery speech and countering with a quotation of her own: "your quotations don't make your advances a whit more acceptable to me—and they don't deceive me into thinking you anything but *a pestilent, complete knave!*" (32). This insult, taken from *Othello*, amuses Damerel, who laughingly replies, "Bravo! Where did you find that?" (32). Embarrassed to remember the original context, Venetia refuses to tell him. Heather-Joy Garret explains the quotation's context: "Iago is planting the seed that Desdemona is unfaithful (with Cassio) to Othello. Hence Venetia feeling the context did not suit the situation." Because this is before they have fallen into the habit of speaking freely with each other, Venetia is uncomfortable discussing such things with him. Damerel responds to Venetia's reticence by saying, "Oho! My curiosity is now thoroughly roused! I recognize the hand, and see that I must carefully study my Shakespeare" (32), before introducing himself in a blunt fashion. Venetia, of course, already knows his identity and so she tells him—"Yes, so I supposed, at the outset of our delightful acquaintance. Later, of course, I was sure of it"—a jab that prompts Damerel to quote again from *Othello*: "Oh, oh—! *My reputation, Iago, my reputation!*" (33) Laurie Osborne, who has examined the Shakespearean allusions in Heyer and this scene in particular, suggests that Damerel's return to *Othello* indicates that he already knew the source of the insult that Venetia refused to reveal to him. As Osborne concludes, "Although the *reader* may not get the joke or the subtle suggestion that Damerel, like Cassio, has lost his reputation for an indiscretion provoked by another, this Shakespearean bantering shows that the characters understand one another" (50). Heyer's hope, of course, was that an educated reader would, indeed, get the joke.

A second example of Heyer's subtle use of literary allusion occurs in the same scene. The couple quibbles over poetry to describe Venetia's beauty and end up becoming confused[34] as to what they are quoting, effectively testing the reader's ability to correctly identify the lines:

"I'm not complaining, but I wonder at such a little beauty's venturing to roam about the country alone. Or don't you know how beautiful you are?"

“Yes,” replied Venetia, taking the wind out of his sails. “*Item, two lips, indifferent red—*”

“Oh, no, you’re quite out, and have gone to the wrong poet besides! *They look like rosebuds filled with snow!*”

“Is that from *Cherry-ripe?*” she demanded. He nodded, much entertained by her suddenly intent look. Her eyes sparkled with triumph; she uttered a tiny gurgle of laughter; and retorted:

“Then I know what comes next! *Yet them no peer nor prince can buy, Till Cherry-ripe themselves do cry!* So let *that* be a lesson to you to take care what poets you choose!” (34)

Venetia, attempting to curtail Damerel’s honeyed words, utilizes the lines originally spoken by *Twelfth Night*’s Olivia when she trying to put off Viola (disguised as Cesario). Switching tactics, Damerel borrows some of the blazon from Thomas Campion’s “The Garden,” but he seems to enjoy sparring with Venetia too much to correct her when she misidentifies it as coming from Robert Herrick’s “Cherry Ripe” (Garrett). However, her response—and her lesson for him—is also from Campion, not Herrick. That she unwittingly finishes the same couplet Damerel began, while being mistaken as to its source, is perhaps a sign of how attuned her mind and Damerel’s have already become. Heyer shows that, even when they have become confused as to what they are quoting, Damerel and Venetia (and, hopefully, the reader) are able to correctly complete the quotation.

As a voracious reader, Heyer had a huge store of literary knowledge from which to draw inspiration and quotations. Hodge argues that Heyer had forced herself to avoid using quotations in her previous work for fear of alienating her audience, but, in this novel, released herself from such constraint and effectually flaunted her own reading habits:

[Damerel and Venetia] are launched on a volley of quotation and cross-quotation in which Georgette Heyer makes up for her past abstemiousness. She had been re-reading Shakespeare’s plays, Restoration drama and related works. . . . The book is thick with [quotations], used like the Regency language as a kind of distancing for the serious romantic plot. (134-35)

I fundamentally disagree with Hodge’s assertion that Heyer’s quotations function exclusively as a distancing method, but, regardless, it seems clear that Heyer very clearly enjoyed including them. Hodge continues: “[Heyer] allowed herself a volley of quotations, obviously aware that she had her audience totally in hand, and would be forgiven the highbrow indulgence” (141). Contrary to Hodge, I believe that Heyer was not just indulging herself, but, rather, trying to appeal to a higher level of audience. In a letter to her publisher at Heinemann, A.S. Frere, she acknowledges her inclusion of the quotations:

You may think this frivolous of me, but have you ever read what Aubrey said of Venetia? “A beautiful, desirable creature” Also, “about the eyelids great sweetness.” Well, you see what I mean? But Johnson has one or two nice phrases, & I think I may find something in Aurelian Townsend, & Habingdon, both of whom wrote poems to her. My hero, I should add, is rather given to quotation. (Letter, 7 March 1958)

That Damerel is “given to quotation” is the most crucial aspect of his character and the essential element in the development of his relationship with Venetia. This character trait of his also gave Heyer the opportunity to present her readers with evidence of her own research, education, and literary prowess. When authors make any kind of intertextual reference, they are, Judith Still and Michael Worton tell us, “inscribing themselves in *Tradition* and making public a loving gratitude to ancestors—but their works are equally witnesses to an agonistic impulse to demarcate and proclaim their own creative space” (13). Thus, the profusion of highbrow quotations in *Venetia* allowed Heyer to pay tribute to authors that she admired as a reader and to use them in order to assert her own worth as a writer.

Venetia’s ability to utilize quotation is what enables her to earn a happy ending, using narratives borrowed from other literature to communicate in a male-dominated world. Similarly, Heyer borrows the words and narratives of other (mostly male) authors while working within the narrative expectations of her own readers in order to shape her novel into something that both appeased her audience and reached out to the people and literature with which she wanted to be identified. Ultimately, when Damerel and Venetia quote back and forth to each other, they demonstrate their suitability as a couple, speaking the same language and viewing the world in the same way. Contrary to S. A. Rowland’s declaration that Venetia and Damerel “continue the distancing role of manners by use of quotations” (310), I do not see the use of quotation as distancing, in most cases. Rather, their quotations show that their minds are of the same stamp. This mental likeness is most forcefully illustrated when Venetia is able to complete the couplet of an Alexander Pope sonnet, once prompted by Damerel, who provides the first line:

“You call me your friend, but I never called you mine, and never shall! You remained, and always will, *a beautiful, desirable creature*. Only my intentions were changed. I resolved to do you no hurt, but leave you I could not!”

“Why should you? It seems to me a foolish thing to do.”

“Because you don’t understand, my darling. If the gods would *annihilate but space and time* [35]—but they won’t, Venetia, they won’t!” (230)

Damerel believes that he does not deserve Venetia because of his rakish past and that it would require an act of the gods to make him worthy of her. Venetia, recognizing the quotation, attributes it and finishes it off, clearly indicating that she disagrees with Damerel’s assessment of the situation: “‘Pope,’ she said calmly. ‘*And make two lovers happy*. Aubrey’s favourite amongst English poets, but not mine. I see no reason why two lovers should not be happy without any meddling with space and time” (230). This back-and-forth illustrates that they quite literally (or literarily?) complete each other.

Venetia and Damerel understand how each other’s minds work, so while Venetia’s uncle may be shocked at her knowledge of the Oedipus myth, Damerel recognizes immediately what she is trying to say and laughs at her blundering mix-up of the story’s specifics:

“Do but recollect a little! Damerel may be a *rake*, but at least he won’t turn out to be my *father*!”

“Turn out to be your father?” repeated Mr. Hendred, in a stupefied tone.
“What, in heaven’s name—?”

Damerel’s shoulders had begun to shake. “Oedipus,” he said. “At least, so I apprehend, but she has become a trifle confused. What she means is that *she* won’t turn out to be *my* mother.”

“Well, it is the same thing, Damerel!” said Venetia, impatient of such pedantry. “*Just* as unsuitable!” (366)

Mr. Hendred might be appalled by the indelicate nature of Venetia’s reference, but Damerel is not, and his comfort with her allusion only serves to further Venetia’s point about the suitability of the match. She says, “But you must surely see, sir, that Damerel isn’t in the least shocked! . . . Doesn’t that circumstance help you to understand why he would be the most *suitable* of all imaginable husbands for me?” (367). As Venetia tells her Aunt Hendred before leaving London, “there’s nothing I couldn’t say to him, or he not understand” (342).

At the end of the novel, the rake has been reformed; Damerel, whose previous attempts have been interrupted or aborted, proposes marriage to Venetia for the fourth time. Finally able to accept the reality of his relationship with Venetia rather than wishing he could change the past, Damerel tells her, “You may regret this day: I could not! What I regret I can never undo, for the gods don’t annihilate space, or time, or transform such a man as I am into one worthy to be your husband” (374). This time, Damerel’s use of the Pope quotation is not wistful or despairing; he accepts his past, as Venetia does, and looks forward to the future. And, after all, Venetia reminds him, had he been a better man they would never have met: “Well, if you hadn’t behaved so badly you would probably have married some eligible girl, and by now would have been comfortably settled for *years*, with a wife and six or seven children!” (374). Uttering the last reference to a quotation in the novel, Damerel reminds her of Nurse’s early predictions, “No, not the children! The caterpillar would have had them” (374). Damerel, leaving off his gloomy use of the Pope poem and jokingly reminding Venetia of Nurse’s earlier condemnation of him, shows that he has finally come to terms with himself and his situation. If Venetia can love him as he is, he need not lament that the gods will not annihilate space and time, nor does he have to fear or regret the past that elicited Nurse’s predictions of fire and brimstone. Once Damerel makes peace with his past and begins to look forward to a happy future, quotation in the novel ceases, as least so far into the future as we readers are allowed to see.

Just as Venetia and Damerel’s similar taste in literature demonstrate their compatibility, so do Heyer’s literary allusions in *Venetia* demonstrate her own attempt to prove her suitability for the title of “serious author.” Heyer, ultimately, faced the same situation in courting her educated audience as did Damerel in his pursuit of Venetia: Heyer and Damerel both used literary references and highbrow quotation in order to woo their desired targets (an educated audience and Venetia, respectively). Venetia skillfully combated Damerel’s initial perception of her as an easy mark for a quick and sordid liaison by exhibiting her literary knowledge and genteel education. Similarly, Heyer demonstrated with *Venetia* that, because of her tremendous literary knowledge and skillful references to classic works and authors, readers should not mistake her for a trashy romance novelist. Thus, both Venetia, the character and *Venetia* the novel allowed Georgette Heyer to proclaim herself a serious literary force, capable of taking on and repurposing some of the great works of literature—all with her trademark wit and style.

[1] In a 1955 review of *Bath Tangle*, Henry Cavendish labeled her “mistress of the sheerest kind of romantic fluff” (3).

[2] As Michael Dirda notes, “Her characters wear the correct clothes, use the appropriate slang, visit the properly fashionable coffeehouses, and move smoothly in the society of the time” (85).

[3] In answer to Olivia’s query as to what he [she] would do in love, Cesario/Viola replies: “Make me a willow cabin at your gate / And call upon my soul within the house; / Write loyal cantons of contemned love / And sing them loud even in the dead of night” (1.5.268-271).

[4] This issue of different standards of morality for different social classes is raised at Venetia and Damerel’s first meeting. Assuming that because Venetia is walking alone she must be a lower-class girl, Damerel does not hesitate to kiss her against her wishes. As Helen Hughes explains, “There are, of course, implications about class attitudes in this ‘stolen kiss’ motif, which is found frequently in Heyer’s work and other female romances. The lower classes, it is implied, are fair game for the wealthy” (119). Lillian Robinson continues, arguing that Heyer’s heroines “kiss passionately only at the end of the books when love has terminated in betrothal, and they are revolted by sexual advances made on the mistaken assumption that they are of the class that is assumed to be universally available to gentlemen” (213).

[5] A paraphrase of Psalms 34:19: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.” Bell, Mabey and Shea have identified the majority of these Bible verses, and I have verified the specific sections and cited the original passages in the King James Bible.

[6] Psalms 37:17: “The Lord upholdeth the righteous.”

[7] Psalms 78:45: “He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.”

[8] Psalms 78:46: “He gave their increase to the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust.”

[9] From Isaiah 55:7: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

[10] Psalms 119:155: “Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.”

[11] Psalms 74:4: “Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations.”

[12] Aubrey’s status as a prodigious scholar is an accepted thing, and, despite the slothful life Damerel lives, Aubrey reveals that he had “read classics . . . [at] Oxford”; while his lordship might claim he “has forgotten all he ever knew,” Aubrey sagely recognizes that as “humbug” (72).

[13] This is probably a reference to Jeremiah 13:23: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *Then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”

[14] Ezekiel 21:21: “For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways to use divination: he made *his* arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver.”

[15] Damerel is again bringing up Nurse’s declaration about sinners (borrowed from Psalms 78:46) that “He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labour unto the locust.”

[16] Possibly Damerel is referring to Psalms 140:10: “Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again.” Of course, Damerel is trying to rise up again to be worthy of Venetia.

[17] There are two references to whirlwinds in the King James Bible. The first is Isaiah 21:1 – “As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land” – and the second is Zechariah 9:14 – “and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.” Damerel is quite possibly just speaking of whirlwinds in the abstract rather than thinking of one quotation specifically.

[18] Galatians 6:7: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

[19] Damerel is slightly misquoting a famous phrase by Samuel Johnson, originally from his play *Irene; A Tragedy*: “Learn that the present hour is man’s alone” (Garrett).

[20] See footnote 18.

[21] See page 5.

[22] Regency slang for illegitimate children.

[23] A sarcastic reference to the famous description of Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*: “Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety” (2.2.240-41).

[24] As Damerel explains, the line is from a set of poems about Lady Digby composed by Ben Jonson in 1633, the year of her death, called *Eupheme; or The Fair Fame Left to Posterity of That Truly Noble Lady, The Lady Venetia Digby* (Garrett). The full quotation, from the section titled “The Picture of Her Mind,” reads: “Sweet Mind, then speak yourself, and say / As you go on, by what brave way / Our sense you do with Knowledge fill / And yet remain our wonder still” (lines 17-20).

[25] Venetia Stanley (later, Lady Digby), “Born 1600 and died 1633 mentioned amongst other places by John Aubrey in his ‘Brief Lives’” (Garrett) which Damerel goes on to quote.

[26] Heyer’s description: “He was taller than Venetia had at first supposed, rather loose-limbed, and he bore himself with a faint suggestion of swashbuckling arrogance. As he advanced upon her Venetia perceived that he was dark, his countenance lean and rather swarthy, marked with lines of dissipation. A smile was curling his lips, but Venetia thought she had never seen eyes so cynically bored” (31).

[27] Of course, the oft-quoted and therefore hackneyed utterance of Juliet in the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*: “Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow/That I shall say good night till it be morrow” (2.1.230-231).

[28] A quotation lifted from English Renaissance poet Michael Drayton’s Sonnet 61, from his sonnet sequence “Idea” (1619) (Garrett). Venetia thinks of more of the sonnet as she departs.

[29] The eponymous hero of a novel by Samuel Richardson: *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753).

[30] She wrote an article about them for *Punch* in 1954.

[31] A similarity pointed out by Celeste Warner in her master's degree thesis on the Heyer hero (14).

[32] Every inch Byron's *Corsair*: "The harsh lines of his face seemed to be accentuated, and his sneer was strongly marked" (Heyer 348).

[33] "She exclaimed: 'Oh, Damerel, *must* you be foxed just at this moment? How *odious* you are, my dear friend!' . . . His hand fell; for one instant he gazed at her incredulously, then he was on his feet, knocking over his wineglass. 'Venetia!' he uttered. 'Venetia!'" (348).

[34] There is, of course, the slight possibility that it is Heyer herself who has become confused, but, in light of her talented management of quotations elsewhere in the text, I think this move is deliberate.

[35] In full, the short poem reads "Ye Gods; annihilate but Space and Time / And make two lovers happy" (Pope 169).

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