

ART OVER DATA · A CREATIVE RESEARCH PRACTICE

*for*

# Half Light Pictures

*Audience Reception Across Four Productions*

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MARROW ROAD · GLASS JAW · THE MOTH QUEEN · SALT CREEK

*in service of the work*

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## INTRODUCTION

## Four productions, four trajectories.

This report presents an independent analysis of public audience reception across four Half Light Pictures productions — three feature films (*Marrow Road*, *Glass Jaw*, *The Moth Queen*) and one limited series (*Salt Creek*) — drawing on qualitative coding of viewer reviews from Letterboxd. The aim is not evaluation or judgment, but to identify patterns in how audiences interpret, emotionally engage with, and occasionally resist these productions in public discourse.

Where this report meaningfully extends a simple snapshot is in its treatment of time: rather than aggregating all reviews into a single static picture, it traces how reception shifts as audiences move from festival critics to wide-release viewers to long-tail streaming audiences.

This is a sample study prepared to test the archive itself — the company, titles, and figures below are illustrative, not a real production slate.

### How to read this report

This report examines how audiences publicly interpret and emotionally engage with these productions, rather than measuring approval or success. Percentages reflect patterns of discourse, not audience size. “Oppositional” and “negotiated” responses often indicate engagement and interpretive friction rather than rejection.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## One distribution, four different stories.

Across four Half Light Pictures productions, audience discourse is predominantly positive (61.2%), with a substantial layer of negotiated engagement (20.8%) outweighing oppositional readings (18.0%). The overall positive-to-oppositional ratio is 4.56:1.

The headline finding is not the aggregate distribution but its structural variation: the four productions do not just have different reception, they have reception that changes differently as audience composition shifts. Only one title maintains positive dominance across every phase of its release. Only one generates sustained psychological response months after premiere. And only one shows reception getting more contested as audiences broaden.

## Why this exists.

This project emerged at the intersection of professional work in research and a long-standing personal interest in film, storytelling, and audience response. I am a physician by training and, alongside clinical work, have spent recent years in research; this analysis is a way of exploring how the tools used in health research can also illuminate cultural and creative work.

Using publicly available Letterboxd reviews, I independently collected, coded, and analyzed responses out of curiosity and genuine engagement with the productions — not with any expectation of return, but to share observations that might be useful. All data were drawn from public platforms; while I do not own the content, the analysis and synthesis presented here are original.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

## What the data says, before the detail.

- 61.2% of all coded audience readings are positive, with a further 20.8% negotiated, yielding a 4.56:1 positive-to-oppositional ratio overall.

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- *Marrow Road* shows exceptional interpretive consensus, with a healthy conversation ratio of 17.2 – nearly four times the next-closest title. Its positive reception holds steady at roughly 80% across festival, wide release, and long-tail phases.

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- *Salt Creek* is the only title generating sustained psychological response: 18–24% of reviews carry psychological codes even months after its premiere, compared to 7–9% for the other three titles.

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- *Glass Jaw* shows a clear inversion pattern: festival-period reception was already mixed (40.0% positive, 25.0% oppositional), and oppositional readings rose through every subsequent phase, eventually overtaking positive readings in the long tail.

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- *The Moth Queen*'s reception is overwhelmingly long-tail (94% of its reviews arrived more than six months after wide release), and the streaming audience leaves shorter, less-coded reactions that flatten its engagement profile.

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- Across all four titles, average codes per review drops sharply in the long-tail phase – a signal that streaming-era audiences engage with shorter, more reactive forms of public response.

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- Positionality Negotiation is rare across the entire corpus (58 instances total), suggesting audiences mostly accept or reject framing outright rather than working through it publicly.

## How the corpus was built and read.

Public reviews were collected via convenience sampling from Letterboxd for all four titles (total reviews: 9,800). Reviews were coded using a theory-informed qualitative framework grounded in Hall's encoding/decoding model (dominant, negotiated, oppositional readings), media psychology research on emotional engagement and identification, and feminist and cultural reception studies.

The codebook is adapted from a prior reception study, with several Half Light-specific codes added: *Productive Discomfort*, *Critique of Dramatization*, *Praise for Regional/Working-Class Representation*, *Praise for Authenticity/Realism*, *Positionality Negotiation*, and *Walkout/Abandonment*. Coding proceeded in two passes: an initial automated pass, followed by a recovery pass that re-coded all substantive reviews ( $\geq 150$  characters,  $n=1,490$ ).

### Conceptual framework

This analysis draws on Hall's encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1980): dominant/preferred (positive), negotiated, and oppositional readings. To this base framework, the study adds a fourth dimension — *Psychological Outcome* — capturing evidence that a production has produced lasting interpretive or emotional change in the viewer (*New Empathy*, *Self-Reflection*, *Productive Discomfort*, *Felt Seen*).

## TIER 1 · AUDIENCE SIGNAL OVERVIEW

## Nearly three-fifths of the room is with them.

Across all four titles, almost three-fifths of audience engagement reflects dominant/positive readings. Negotiated readings (20.8%) outweigh oppositional ones (18.0%), suggesting that even where audiences resist a production, they tend to remain in active dialogue with it. The aggregate picture conceals very large differences between the four titles.

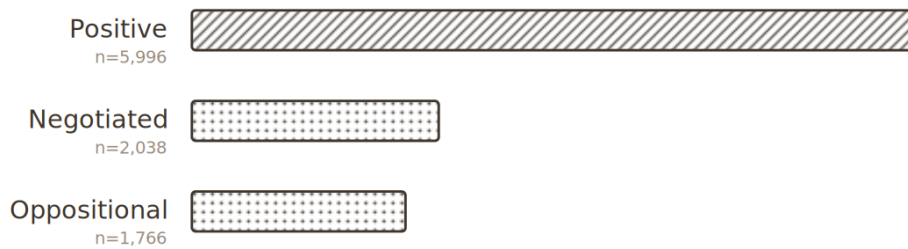


Figure 1. Overall audience reading distribution across all four titles combined (9,800 reviews). Hatched: positive. Dotted: negotiated and oppositional.

| TITLE                 | REVIEWS | POSITIVE | NEGOTIATED | OPPOSITIONAL | HEALTHY RATIO* |
|-----------------------|---------|----------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| <i>Marrow Road</i>    | 2,510   | 81.0%    | 13.5%      | 5.5%         | 17.2           |
| <i>Salt Creek</i>     | 2,890   | 66.4%    | 16.9%      | 16.7%        | 5.0            |
| <i>The Moth Queen</i> | 2,250   | 54.0%    | 26.5%      | 19.5%        | 4.1            |
| <i>Glass Jaw</i>      | 2,150   | 36.0%    | 32.0%      | 32.0%        | 2.1            |

\*Healthy Conversation Ratio = (Positive + Negotiated) / Oppositional

The four titles sort cleanly into three tiers of audience alignment. *Marrow Road* exhibits exceptional interpretive consensus, with positive readings making up four-fifths of all coded engagement. *Glass Jaw* is the most contested, with positive, negotiated, and oppositional readings nearly evenly split — not a sign of failure but of polarization.

## Top coded responses, across all titles

| CODE                            | COUNT | % OF ALL CODES |
|---------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Appreciation                    | 1,742 | 11.7%          |
| Praise for Acting               | 1,398 | 9.4%           |
| Humor & Light Observations      | 1,310 | 8.8%           |
| Mixed Feelings                  | 1,289 | 8.7%           |
| Emotional Impact (Positive)     | 1,176 | 7.9%           |
| Constructive Criticism          | 1,041 | 7.0%           |
| Dislikes or Negative Sentiment  | 1,005 | 6.8%           |
| Praise for Filmmaking           | 812   | 5.5%           |
| Praise for Authenticity/Realism | 624   | 4.2%           |
| Productive Discomfort           | 571   | 3.8%           |
| Cinematography Appreciation     | 418   | 2.8%           |
| Self-Reflection                 | 389   | 2.6%           |

## TIER 2 · THE HALF LIGHT CODEBOOK IN PRACTICE

## Each title has its own fingerprint.

| CODE                                   | MARROW ROAD | SALT CREEK | MOTH QUEEN | GLASS JAW |
|--|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Productive Discomfort                  | 2.8%        | 12.4%      | 4.1%       | 6.0%      |
| Critique of Dramatization              | 2.1%        | 6.3%       | 0.2%       | 0.8%      |
| Praise for Regional/Working-Class Rep. | 14.6%       | 0.1%       | 0%         | 0.3%      |
| Praise for Authenticity/Realism        | 23.4%       | 5.2%       | 1.6%       | 1.9%      |
| Positionality Negotiation              | 2.9%        | 0.7%       | 0.1%       | 0.2%      |
| Walkout/Abandonment                    | 0.2%        | 0.3%       | 3.4%       | 0.9%      |
| Felt Seen or Validated                 | 1.8%        | 2.2%       | 0.5%       | 0.2%      |
| Critique of Feminist/Social Messaging  | 0.1%        | 0.2%       | 0.3%       | 4.2%      |
| Backlash or Hostile Resistance         | 0.3%        | 0.6%       | 1.1%       | 7.8%      |

Each title carries a clear interpretive signature. *Marrow Road* dominates representation and authenticity codes. *Salt Creek* dominates *Productive Discomfort* and *Critique of Dramatization*. *The Moth Queen* is the only film with substantive *Walkout/Abandonment*. *Glass Jaw*'s signature sits in contested territory rather than the representational codes.

“Questioning the choice to soften the real outcome of the case in the back half – it’s a true story about a girl nobody helped, and the show wants a tidy ending.”

Letterboxd, *Salt Creek*

## TIER 3 · RECEPTION ACROSS RELEASE PHASES

## The central finding: trajectories, not snapshots.

Two phenomena are visible across the data. First, engagement depth declines in the long-tail phase across every title. Second, the directional movement of Hall's-framework readings differs sharply: some productions hold their reception steady, while others drift toward greater contestation.

| TITLE       | PHASE           | N     | AVG. CODES | % W/ PSYCH. | POS. % |
|-------------|-----------------|-------|------------|-------------|--------|
| Marrow Road | Festival        | 860   | 2.15       | 7.0%        | 80.0%  |
|             | Wide release    | 240   | 2.25       | 8.0%        | 81.5%  |
|             | Months 2–6      | 310   | 2.20       | 9.0%        | 83.0%  |
|             | Long tail (6m+) | 1,100 | 1.50       | 8.0%        | 79.0%  |
| Salt Creek  | Premiere window | 20    | 1.70       | 24.0%       | 76.0%  |
|             | Months 2–6      | 1,700 | 1.85       | 18.5%       | 68.0%  |
|             | Long tail (6m+) | 1,170 | 1.30       | 19.0%       | 61.0%  |
| Moth Queen  | Festival        | 30    | 2.05       | 8.0%        | 58.0%  |
|             | Wide release    | 55    | 2.00       | 7.5%        | 60.0%  |
|             | Months 2–6      | 40    | 2.00       | 9.0%        | 74.0%  |
|             | Long tail (6m+) | 2,125 | 1.25       | 7.0%        | 50.0%  |
| Glass Jaw   | Festival        | 290   | 1.80       | 7.5%        | 40.0%  |
|             | Wide release    | 650   | 1.75       | 8.5%        | 36.5%  |
|             | Months 2–6      | 400   | 1.70       | 9.0%        | 35.0%  |
|             | Long tail (6m+) | 810   | 1.20       | 7.0%        | 29.5%  |

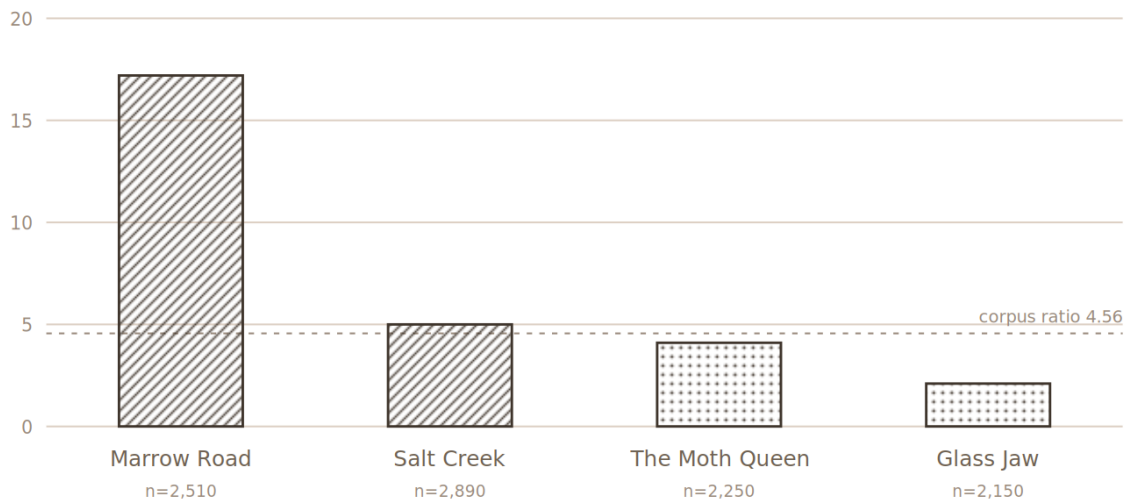


Figure 2. Healthy conversation ratio by title. Hatched bars sit above the corpus-wide ratio of 4.56; dotted bars below.

## Four reception trajectories

### Marrow Road · the durable reception

*Marrow Road* is the only title whose positive reception holds steady across every phase of release – roughly 80% positive throughout. Its healthy ratio of 17.2 is nearly four times the next-most-aligned title.

### Salt Creek · sustained psychological engagement

*Salt Creek* generates the highest rates of psychological engagement of any title, in every phase – roughly double the rate of any other title, even months after premiere.

### The Moth Queen · a polarized festival film, a diluted streaming wave

94% of *The Moth Queen*'s reviews arrived more than six months after wide release. Average codes per review dropped from roughly 2.0 in the festival period to 1.25 in the long tail – the steepest decline of any title.

### Glass Jaw · reception that hardens

*Glass Jaw* is the only film whose positive readings decline meaningfully across every phase. By the long tail, oppositional readings (36.0%) exceed positive ones (29.5%) – the only phase in the corpus where this occurs.

## CONCLUSION

## Four trajectories, not one distribution.

Across four Half Light Pictures productions, audience reception is best understood not as a single distribution but as four distinct trajectories. The aggregate numbers are encouraging, but they conceal the more interesting structural finding: the productions differ not just in how they are received but in how their reception evolves as audiences broaden.

*Marrow Road* stands out as the most structurally aligned reception in the corpus. *Salt Creek* stands out as the most psychologically lasting. *The Moth Queen* shows the steepest depth decay. *Glass Jaw* is the most contested, with oppositional readings hardening rather than softening as audiences broaden.

## REFLECTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

## Where this study is honest about its limits.

This study has limitations that should temper any strong inferences. Reviews were drawn only from Letterboxd, which skews toward film-literate audiences. First-pass coding showed inter-rater reliability concerns (mean  $\kappa = 0.51$ ), addressed through a recovery pass; short reviews (n=2,640) were rule-coded or excluded, meaning long-tail phases are systematically less coded than earlier ones.

*Positionality Negotiation* appeared in just 58 reviews across the entire corpus, despite being the code most expected to be widely distributed at the outset.

This report deliberately stops short of strategic recommendations. The point of reception research, as practiced here, is to listen carefully to what audiences are doing and reflect those patterns back — not to prescribe what creators should do differently.

*A creative mirror — an honest attempt to gather the voice of a collective audience and reflect it back to the people who made the thing they were responding to.*