

## Coming Clean: Readings, Confessions, Shortcuts

During first decade of our millennium memoirs filled bestseller lists. Readers were apparently counting on the memoir writers' therapeutic good faith and trusted them not to be *in denial*—or at least to avoid appearing so. The spirit of the age seems to demand that even an intellectual inquiry like *Reading the Male Gaze* ought to open with a soul-cleansing revelation. Even if what's confessed couldn't have happened, what I'm about to confess needs to have happened so that readers know what's at stake in the following inquiry.

Marianne Moore memorably insisted that poetry should show a “real toad in an imaginary garden.” However, the “real toad's” reflections that follow never managed to find a home genre or home shelf like those that libraries and book retailers afford poems and novels, biographies and cookbooks. Moreover, my Christian–Jewish heritage revoked my garden privileges about 6000 years ago (at least according to some pious accounts). Therefore what follows begins as the account of a real toad (not even a kiss-redeemable frog prince) neither in a bookstore nor in a garden—and certainly not in *the* garden—but in another kind of sanctuary. It begins in a suburban church basement.

I stood up as if stepping from my grave, nursing a Styrofoam cup of cold black coffee. It was my first time inside the Treat Avenue Methodist Church, a suburban landmark I'd passed a thousand times. Struck by its Romanesque Revival gravity—its limestone masonry, its cobalt-bright stained glass, its rounded, pillared portico—I'd also imagined it as more eclectic than architectural historians would allow. In contrast to all this

intriguing busyness, Treat Avenue Methodist's basement "social room", all plywood, sheet-rock and linoleum, seemed to boast of its charmlessness. This difference between what I saw on the outside of Treat Methodist and what I felt on the inside was apt preparation for joining my new community, the community for whom this book aims to speak.

The organization, unknown to even my best-informed readers, resembles the many organizations we all know about, organizations based on regular meetings and candid anonymous sharing: groups committed to healing the millions overwhelmed by addictions, dependencies, ungovernable compulsions to seek pleasure whatever the consequences. Following the familiar protocol, I made my ritual declaration:

My name is Jim and I'm a male gazer.

No catharsis followed. My soul—or psyche, or whatever intangible organ I was supposed to be fixing—would remain uncleansed. Confessing my compulsion and enlisting in this community of regretters would oblige me to make amends to anyone my gazing had harmed. I couldn't shake my conviction that my gazing has always been pure or at least innocuous, untainted by consequence.

Had I shared these protestations with my fellow addicts they would have called me out for being in a place familiar to all catharsis-seeking therapeutic self-cleansers: *in denial* about "objectifying" and therefore harming the women I've gazed at. Objections that a lifetime of restrained behavior doesn't let me off the hook would have reverberated from the sheetrock to the linoleum and back. Though steering clear of equating explaining with excusing, what follows addresses these objections, even if it fails to quell them.

These explanations rest on the midlife realization that the compulsion to gaze grew apace with another less stigmatized compulsion, another besetting and besotting obsession: reading. Both obsessions date back at least to puberty and to the onset of the accompanying endocrinal dysfunction from which I'm still convalescing. Medical science, we can only hope, will some day learn to diagnose and treat what we sufferers recognize as early onset testosterone poisoning. Though the nursing chart makes no mention of the ailment, this condition contributed to at least one of my several hospital stays.

During the third of several lifetime hospitalizations, the week I turned sixteen, my testosterone poisoning was probably at its most lacerating.

Oblivious and cruelly insensitive to what most ailed me, an orthopedic surgeon was treating me for a sports injury. Lest readers get the impression that I had any athletic talent or successes, I should hasten to add that for teenage boys at the time, in the 1950s and 1960s, sport was a fate, not a choice. No computers, no videogames, no Fenders (couldn't carry a tune to save my ears), Cold War virility and normality anxieties dinning in my ears, JFK's reverberating insistence on moving forward with great vigor resulted in countless hours devoted to such baseball variations as hardball, wiffle ball, softball as well as to tennis, wrestling, basketball, and football (English and American)—and always playing badly.

In only one sport did I come close to excelling, probably because it took place hundreds of miles from home, because it was unconscionably expensive and required no teamwork, and I could do it with girls: skiing. Unlike all my other sports, skiing also afforded an elevated, permissible perch for male gazing. From a ski lift I could follow my gaze object plummeting down the mountain. During that run, on an Easter morning some fifty years ago, my gaze fixed on Lauren Willow as she managed, all at the same time, to sway and plummet headlong, more recklessly than I dared, about a foot of thick yarn-like black hair flying behind her tangling with a Valencia orange scarf in the wind tunnel she opened before her. What my gaze couldn't catch from the lift, including dark eyes sunk so deep as to make her look precociously dissolute, necessitated keeping up with her fleet schuss back down to the lift line.

Finally, in my eagerness for a close-up view daring to ski in front of Lauren, I lost control of my left ski's inside edge against a mogul. Hard on my tail sped the dark-lady-in-training. One of her ski's steel edges sliced through my Levi's and into the side of my left calf. Bound as I was by (male) peer pressure and compromised as I was by testosterone toxic shock, I secured some peroxide and a large gauze bandage and skied on. A week later another of my chronic adolescent maladies complicated my condition: weekend binge drinking. After I slipped in the dark down a steep dusty, root-snared bluff while stumbling home, the difference in the sizes of my two shins became unconcealable. My diagnosis the reader in me heard as a clumsy coupling of Greek and Latin facilitated by an unassuming Saxon preposition: *hematoma with contusions*. Hospitalized for a couple of days as a surgically inserted drain sucked out my puss, I turned to the only consolation I knew: to my only absolutely reliable friend, the printed word. The words belonged to 35-cent Mentor paperback I had probably filched from a sibling's bedroom titled *A Primer*

of *Freudian Psychology* from the hand of a WASP-y sounding eminence named Calvin S. Hall. Hall's explanations both mesmerized and agitated me. Back to the hormone-infested world of a huge public high school, I brought the hope that, by means of what Freud (with as much optimism as he could ever muster) called sublimation, I might someday find release from gazing and the cravings that spurred and that it in turn fed.

I'm still waiting.

Instead of looking to find cold comfort in Hall's distillations of Freud's insights, my reader's gaze would have done me more good had I aimed it toward work by some of the decade's darker novelists. They would have thrown needed ice water on my fantasy that I could read my way out of my addling compulsion to gaze. In a 1961 essay by William Golding, now renowned for such provocative novels as *Darkness Visible* and *Lord of the Flies*, Golding reminisces about the schoolmaster who taught him a lasting lesson about the incurability of male gazing.

Mr. Houghton was given to high-minded monologues about the good life, sexless and full of duty. Yet in the middle of one of these monologues, if a girl passed the window, tapping along on her neat little feet, he would interrupt his discourse, his neck would turn of itself and he would watch her out of sight. In this instance, he seemed to me ruled not by thought but by an invisible and irresistible spring in his nape.

Golding introduced Houghton's tic derisively, as illustrating the most primitive kind of thinking in Golding's hierarchy of thought processes, topped apparently by practices that fall under the heading "discourse," most notably "high-minded monologues." While this remembrance begins by seeming to uphold higher order "discursive" intellection, at Mr. Houghton's expense, Golding ultimately came to honor this distractible mentor as a kindred spirit, conceding that his own gaze reflex turned out to be as incurable as Mr. Houghton's: "I was growing toward adolescence and had to admit that Mr. Houghton was not the only one with an irresistible spring in his neck." Luckily, Golding also realizes that his gaze can be harnessed to the higher-order thinking needed to contend with life's cognitive challenges and moral quandaries, with "contradiction" and "hypocrisy." Golding's reminiscence held out at least the possibility that, once on the lookout for liaisons, male gazers might also look forward to discovering relationships between male-gazing as

mindlessly visceral and impulsive and the opportunities male gazing provides for cognitive-enhancement and conceptual enrichment.

In a far darker vein, in his monumental 1960s narrative *The Gulag Archipelago* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn recalls making such a discovery from within the depths of the Soviet prison-camp system. Dire as their circumstances were, Solzhenitsyn and his fellow *zeks* also found themselves in the grip of the same mechanism Golding recollected. Despite their diametrically opposite material and emotional circumstances, these *zeks*, in Solzhenitsyn's account, bear a pronounced resemblance to the pampered socialites of yore whom Cole Porter once playfully rebuked for the frisson they enjoyed from a mere "glimpse of stocking." That few twentieth-century legends could differ more than Porter and Solzhenitsyn, with respect to what they accomplished and what they represented, underscores the value of male gazing as an artistic and intellectual resource. Identifying himself with Porter's glimpsers, Solzhenitsyn recounts the brief, serendipitously thrilling *frisson* he experienced when a "jailer was fussing with a lock" and routine discipline lapsed, allowing male prisoners an unprecedented opportunity: thirty seconds to peer out of part of a "corridor window":

...we suddenly saw, down below, in the  
little green garden on a corner of asphalt ... women's shoes and  
ankles!  
All we could see was shoes and ankles,  
but on high heels! And it was like a  
Wagnerian blast from *Tristan and  
Isolde*....the jailer was already  
driving us into the cell, and once  
inside we raved there, illumined  
at the same time beclouded,  
and we pictured all the rest to ourselves, imagining them as heavenly  
beings .... (II, 227).

The horrors he endured notwithstanding, Solzhenitsyn even found an opportunity to particularize such idealizing and place one "young girl—a real genuine heroine of labor" on a proverbial "pedestal" where she "stood like the queen of the shop," and where "she moved at the speed of fast gymnastics ... like a beauty queen" so that "every-one could see her strong, bare legs below her hitched-up skirt and the

ballet-like elasticity of her waist" (III, 191). During his post-Gulag exile in Kazakhstan, Solzhenitsyn was grateful and felt lucky in getting a well-paid office job, but saved his most rapturous hyperbole for the clerk who bestowed this blessing, "the exiled Greek girl of cinematic beauty" who processed this reassignment (III, 424).

This passionate idealizing of gaze objects contrasts painfully with Solzhenitsyn's depiction of his jailers, men and women alike, as gazers (I, 105) who stripped a prisoner "locked her in a 'box' [cell] naked" so they could "peer through the peephole and appraise her female attributes with loud laughs ... with but a single purpose" in mind: "to dishearten and humiliate" (I, 105). This recurring attention to gazing throughout a decade of prison-camp labor and nearly 2000 pages reveals the extent to which both the motives for gazing and consequences of gazing can differ as much as jailers differ from prisoners or as much as torturers differ from their victims. What motivates gazing and the thinking it produces, as Solzhenitsyn and Golding illustrate, may be more varied than the current penchant for discrediting the male gaze allows.

#### AFTER AND BEFORE

Such reflexive disparagement seems to have become a corollary of the very ubiquity of the phrase "the male gaze." Consider, for example, the reception of Joe Treasure's 2007 novel, which bears the Mulveyque title *The Male Gaze*. In reviewing the novel Nicola Smyth fretted that "it is very difficult to write a book about the male gaze without female readers (or perhaps just readers) finding it just a little bit creepy." This complaint comes at the very end of the review, so the reader never learns whether this admission constitutes an aesthetic judgment or a representative objection on behalf of gaze objects. Wise gazers expect such objections and prepare for the likelihood of seeming "creepy." Alice Munro, for example, recalls "the men who made me sick" with "the looks they gave me, of proper disapproval and sneaky appraisal ... as the level of sludge rose in their heads" (202). James Salter numbered himself among these sludged-headed "creeps" when he complained that he "could not look at" an arresting gaze object without feeling "embarrassed" and "dismayed" by his "long[ing] to stare at her" (48–49).

Advertising, perhaps the business traditionally most dependent on male gazing and most complicit in sustaining male gazing as a

male-subject-to-female-object transaction, has been increasingly held accountable for its complicity in confirming familiar aspersions against male gazing. As depicted on AMC's now canonic TV series *Mad Men* (a series lavishly praised for its documentary accuracy), advertising began in the twentieth century to challenge the prevailing, constraining understanding of gazing as a male-subject-to-female-object transaction. Thus in *Mad Men*'s fourth season one of the series' few inspiring main characters, the glass-ceiling-shattering copywriter and later copy-supervisor Peggy Olson, enters a room full of male "creatives" and turns to a colleague whom she spots perusing a copy of *Playboy*. Peggy then asks confrontationally "Are you gonna work or just stare at pictures of women who can't stare back?" ("Waldorf"). As both *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner and James Salter demonstrate, for all its ubiquity as a phrase and a concept "the male gaze" seems disturbing—"creepy," "embarrassing," "dismaying"—both to women and men in ways that its glib familiarity seems to belie.

This disparity between the current status of "the male gaze" as a readily handy stock phrase, as a mindlessly adaptable received idea, and its disturbing, provocative charge may parallel a conflict between its *au courant* availability as a phrase and its boundless legacy as a concept. As a conversational staple, "the male gaze" has been around for about forty years. It has become such a commonplace that its uses now extend far beyond its origin and its initially limited scope as a tool early in the evolution of Film Studies as an academic discipline. When Laura Mulvey introduced the concept in 1975 as a "political weapon," she aimed to expose the oppressive "freedom exhibited by" male protagonists in narrative movies "to command the stage," "control events," and "create the action." Mulvey set out to challenge the power of the male spectators whom conventional movies encouraged to identify with these protagonists. The male gazer's "contact with the female form displayed" onscreen "for his enjoyment," in Mulvey's account, not only fosters exclusively "male fantas[ies]"—it also enables gazers to "gain control and possession of" women. Mulvey's core argument, that this male gaze sustained an exclusively male freedom "to command the stage," envisions a "stage of spatial illusion in which" the gazer's desire "creates the action" on screen. Though Mulvey's male-gaze argument treats a quintessentially twentieth-century form of cultural production and though it came to be regarded as making daring, pioneering contributions to a powerful cultural

insurgency, it also seems to rest on a Victorian view of gender relationships. Mulvey's polemic seems to assume that despite the movies and modernism, the suffragists, Roe vs. Wade, the integration of higher education, "women's liberation" in the 1960s, sexual politics had changed little since the 1860s when the male gaze was as imperious as she claims. In his 1869 novel *Phineas Finn*, Anthony Trollope portrayed this imperiousness, describing a commanding, self-seeking, overprivileged British lord as "looking at her still with the same gaze, and there seemed to be a power in his eye from which she could not escape." More often than not this Trollopian gazer seems to be the character or caricature contemporary commentators have in mind whenever the male gaze is mentioned.

First appearing in the UK journal *Screen*, Mulvey's formulation marked a watershed in Film Studies, literary theory, and art history (Kipnis, *Ecstasy* 8). Its indelible imprint continues to be felt throughout academe and beyond (Walters 53; Lane, "Lady"; Butterfield 14). This discursive diffusion extends beyond naming and describing the male gaze. Mulvey's argument and analysis aimed to make both heuristic and "political use" of her concept to explain and resist the impact of male gazing. Some critics now argue that as an instrument of both resistance and explanation Mulvey's 1975 case for an "alternative cinema" still functions as a manifesto for a more encompassing movement, a rallying cry for the nebulous sensibility that Laura Kipnis has characterized as an ideologically contradictory "left aesthetic vanguardism" (*Ecstasy* 108). As a result, refreshing and provocative as it once was, the phrase "the male gaze" now confounds at least as often as it clarifies.

Therefore acknowledging my debt to Mulvey and voicing my appreciation of her work's significance as both a student and practitioner of the male gaze, my fascination with the male gaze has little to do with my views about the accuracy of her analysis or rigor of her argument. Fifteen years after its publication, even Mulvey reconsidered her argument, describing it as "ephemeral ... polemic ... not likely to last." She had aimed primarily to introduce a "line of thought" (*Visual* vii) and thus offer the opportunity, which I'm taking here, to sustain a conversation. Mulvey's reconsideration frees us from treating her concept, as first envisioned, as "a weapon." Her reconsideration also sundered her argument from its initial "proselytizing mission" and thus freed readers to treat her concept as an "interpretive" goad, a chance "to arbitrate controversies" rather than as a "legislative" and adjudicative critical instrument (Bauman 5, 108).



Mulvey seems to have disappeared from this endlessly renewable conversation that she inaugurated. In the wake of her disappearance, the “the male gaze” now seems to operate not only as shared cultural capital in the public domain, but often as merely a floating signifier. An art dealer writing in the *New York Review of Books* in 2009 observed, matter of factly and intransitively, that “in recent decades there has been considerable discussion of the male gaze” (Butterfield 13). No longer do male-gaze conversations even need to acknowledge women as the assumed object of male gazing. In 2007 the *New York Times* registered this escape of male gazing from Mulvey’s invidious heterosexual binary when its review of a Brooklyn art exhibit celebrated “a burgeoning of gay male art” in an exhibit titled “The Male Gaze” (Trebay).

After the millennium, in fact, the *Times* became a prime mover in promoting this escape of male gazing from Mulvey’s polemic. According to another *New York Times* writer, the male-gaze conversation has reached a self-negating inflection point. Thus Daphne Merkin, also neglecting to credit Mulvey for “inventing” “the male gaze,” proclaimed the obsolescence of male gazing as a notable controversy and treated the problem Mulvey’s essay addressed as solved. Merkin’s profile of the Hollywood director Nancy Meyers touts Meyers’ achievement, the way her movies portray men, as being “as subject to critical scrutiny via the female gaze as women are subject to the male gaze.” On behalf of male gazers everywhere, Scheherazade-like, the conversation I’m orchestrating here represents a plea for a reprieve from Merkin’s “end-of-conversation” death sentence.

Writing in the same year as Merkin, yet another *Times* reviewer, Roberta Smith, at least acknowledged Mulvey when she tracked changes in these ongoing male-gaze conversations, reflecting that “a lot has happened since 1975, when Laura Mulvey’s groundbreaking essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ made the ‘male gaze’ an art theory staple.” Accounting for both the impact and the elusive malleability of Mulvey’s concept, Smith elaborates that what “happened” has prompted a realization that “who is looking at whom with what kind of gaze at any given moment is not always easily pinned down.”

### *Avant La Lettre*

“A lot” had also happened in and to this conversation *before* 1975 and before the *Times* certified the concept as “groundbreaking.” So much

gazing and so much discussion of gazing occurred that the French phrase *avant-la-lettre* seems in order in accounting for the overwhelming appeal of Mulvey's concept since its introduction. The French phrase *avant-la-lettre* (literally "before the letter") refers to ideas and practices widely known well before they've been conveniently named, let alone thoroughly "theorized"—and then often neutralized and co-opted upon reaching a horizon of ubiquity. My own experience as a male gazer, who began gazing before Mulvey's *Screen* article appeared and has continued to do so since its publication, has prompted me to wonder how much better (or worse) off I am now, cognitively and conceptually, *après la lettre*, secure in the knowledge that I'm an inveterate male gazer.

Without ever being decisively answered, this question can help clarify the relationship that, the very phrase "the male gaze reader" insists, is central to sustaining the male-gaze conversation: the relationship between gazing and reading. In her second novel, the coming-of-age narrative *Bitter in the Mouth*, Monique Truong raised—and left open—this question with her narrator's realization that, once introduced, "the word" can't contain "the entire body of" the "experiences" it's meant to hold (257). Reading as a male-gaze reader means looking incessantly and so far never finding whatever "word" or "words" Truong had in mind. Nevertheless, questions about the uncontainable experiences Truong cites inform my own seemingly endless recognition of myself as an arch-gazer and my goal of searching out such elusive "words" has inspired the inquiry I'm pursuing in these pages.

### INVOKERS AND PROVOKERS

Joyce Carol Oates' 2013 short story "Lovely, Dark and Deep," another first-person coming-of-age retrospect, depicts an *a-clef* Robert Frost as at once a boorish lech and as an astute, cultivated observer of beauty and value "whose gaze moved up and down" the narrator's "body with the finesse of a practiced gem appraiser." This discomfiting balance between the "finesse" Oates' narrator can't avoid noticing and the threat of exploitation this cultivation abets belongs to the contradictory heritage linking the erudition much male gazing rests on and has produced with the threat male gazing has often—and often accurately—been accused of posing. Therefore recognizing this legacy and weighing its intellectual richness against the harm it has done and has threatened to do entails untethering male-gaze conversations from facile polemics and

familiar controversies and articulating instead the aesthetic and heuristic legitimacy of male gazing as a long-lived, multifaceted cultural practice, a practice that men and boys have by no means monopolized. In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, for instance, Terry Castle voices the very claims of command, control and even possession that Mulvey ascribed to male gazers in 1975. Castle's description of her own "transfiguring" female "gaze" focuses on Castle's discovery of her converging identities as both a gazer and a gaze object, a discovery integrating submission, new knowledge, and intellectual humility. Her partner in gazing, she recalls, "had become ... less than herself ... her eyes seemed to say I own you now. And I realized, too, though I had no words for it at the time, how much I adored her, and what tumult lay ahead" (26).

Castle's reminiscence exposes one too-obvious-to-mention blind spot in Mulvey's theorizing. As the texts I've been citing illustrate, glib invokers of "the male gaze" seldom consider the implications and limitations of the concept's origin: Mulvey's narrow focus on the movies as the primal scene of male gazing. Since Mulvey confined her argument to cinema, to second-hand *mediated* gazing at images on a flat screen, it seems ahistorical and myopic to treat her account of gazing (as we often do now) as all-encompassing or paradigmatic, as unequivocally applicable to gazing at printed and painted images of women and to unmediated, direct, three-dimensional, "real-time," *in the flesh* gazing. Nowadays one needn't be a pedantic "postmodernist" to concede that all perception is mediated and that gaze objects are mediated not only by the movie and TV screens, the picture frames, shunga boxes, and vitrines we pay to view and own, but also, willy-nilly, by ubiquitous windows, and, with more consistent calculation, by the positioning of fixtures and furniture in institutional spaces like malls, museums, classrooms, theaters, offices, restaurants, and sanctuaries.

## HUMANITIES GAZER

The most durable account of European or "Western" literature looks back to the ancient Mediterranean traditions that, in 1869, Matthew Arnold memorably named Hellenism and Hebraism. Almost a century later, Erich Auerbach illustrated this pairing by contrasting Homer's style with that of the Hebrew Bible. Such contrasts notwithstanding, narratives in both traditions famously pivot on scenes of male gazing. The most memorable example may be the reaction to what Christopher

Marlowe calls “the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium”: Paris’s sighting and subsequent abduction of Helen, the gaze that provoked the Trojan war. Adherents of Abrahamic creeds, though, may be more readily familiar with Isaac’s genealogically pivotal sighting of Rebecca at her father’s well in Genesis or King David’s fatal sighting in second Samuel of Bathsheba bathing on her Jerusalem rooftop.

During the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, such images became staples of European painting. Rembrandt’s 1654 portrait *Bathsheba at Her Bath* shows the king’s gaze object not merely naked “at her bath” but as a naked reader, apparently having just perused her summons from her king, even though scripture (2 Samuel 11:4) neither specifies whether the summons borne by the king’s messenger was oral or written nor whether Bathsheba was clothed or bare when the summons arrived. By showing Bathsheba as a reader, Rembrandt moves to turn this gaze object into a subject and not simply an exploited object. This literate Bathsheba, Simon Schama argues, appears to be a “meditative ... self-interrogatory” thought-burdened agent (551–552). Imputing agency to Bathsheba, by showing her reading and therefore considering—even judging—the royal summons, Rembrandt suggests the possibility of resistance to or at least compromise with her monarch’s absolute sovereignty. In portraying Bathsheba as a deliberating agent, Rembrandt also raised questions about his relationship with his model, perhaps even inviting viewers to regard *her* not simply as an object but as a collaborator in the production of what Mulvey calls “visual pleasure.” By allowing for these ambiguities, *Bathsheba at Her Bath* may represent male gazing dialectically, as both “crudely sensual” (551) and as intent on liberating its object.

In his art history classic *The Nude*, Kenneth Clark explains this dialectic. Clark reads this portrait of Rembrandt’s mistress (his “whore,” according to Amsterdam officials), Hendrickje Stouffels, as an instance of non-objectifying male gazing. Clark argues that the subject’s “thoughts” appear as “indissolubly part of her body,” and that Rembrandt was conducting a respectful inquiry rather than producing a reductive objectification (441). Rembrandt’s “full-frontal nude,” in Clark’s view, shows “an expression of reverie so complex that we follow her thoughts far beyond the moment depicted.” Even though Rembrandt “was painting in a period when hierarchical gender and sex roles were understood as ... divinely ordained,” Mary Winkler argues, he “succeeded in according

respect to this woman by acknowledging the limits of observation and objectivity.” In Rembrandt’s work, according to Clark’s and Winkler’s accounts, the gazer renounces the authority and power that “objectivity” confers. Hence Rembrandt’s male-gazing aims, modestly, at once to complicate the gaze-object and chasten the gazer himself, perhaps to humble rather than empower him. Though challenging Clark, John Berger has argued that Rembrandt, along with Rubens, resisted becoming typically objectifying gazers because they achieve a “particularity” that “transcends” objectification by embracing the “banality” of their own desire for the women they paint (53–54; Williams 3).<sup>1</sup>

Instead of circumspectly chastening gazers, eighteenth-century paintings of Paris and Helen by Jacques-Louis David and Benjamin West treat gazing more punitively. These works show Helen clothed (but not fully covered) instead of fully naked like Rembrandt’s Bathsheba. David and West both show the gazer, Paris, *inside* the frame gripping Helen as he beholds her.<sup>2</sup> Apparently lacking the wherewithal to “command” his gaze object, which Mulvey imputed to male gazers, both David’s Paris and West’s Paris grip their gaze object loosely as if waiting for a cue from Helen. David, moreover, depicts the man in the picture rather than Helen in the nude and therefore, as John Berger argues, as diminished in status (54–60): Thus Paris appears in David’s painting wearing only sandals, a crimson cap and a cloak thrown over his shoulders. The nudity of the gazer rather than of his gaze object might arguably reflect absolute confidence in his power to seduce or subdue. But Paris’s nudity may also intimate anxiety over the limits of a gazer’s control. By highlighting Bathsheba’s intellectual competence, as a reader, Rembrandt seems to have allowed for a degree of equality between the gazer and the gaze object and thus dispensed with the need for such assertions of mastery.

One needn’t be a Classicist to recall that Paris earned his preeminent role as a male gazer prior to his catastrophic abduction of Helen. When Zeus authorized Paris to extend his gaze far beyond that of any other mortal, Paris became perhaps the only divinely authorized male gazer in

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<sup>1</sup>Rembrandt, *Bathsheba at Her Bath*. <https://mydailyartdisplay.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/bathsheba-by-rembrandt.jpg>.

<sup>2</sup>Jacques-Louis David, *The Love of Paris and Helen*. [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/Helene\\_Paris\\_David.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8d/Helene_Paris_David.jpg). Benjamin West, *Helen Brought to Paris*. <http://uploads4.wikiart.org/images/benjamin-west/helen-brought-from-paris-1776.jpg>.

legend or in history. Judging him superlatively impartial or “objective,” Zeus delegated Paris to judge a beauty contest among three goddesses: Aphrodite (sex), Athena (wisdom), and Zeus’s own consort, Hera. Paris’s choice of Aphrodite and his preference for her promise of the life of a voluptuary fueled his obsession with another man’s wife, Helen of Sparta, and so precipitated the Trojan war. The Judgment of Paris also implicitly established Paris as “Western Civilization’s” Ur-gazer and set a precedent, nearly three thousand years before Mulvey’s essay, for male gazing as a staple of European mimesis.

Though Paris and Zeus seemed, in Mulvey’s phrase, to command the stage, a closer look at these foundational narratives exposes this command to be more precarious than Mulvey and her influential lock-step followers have supposed. The three goddesses whom Paris judged, along with a fourth Olympian, Eris (goddess of discord), controlled the action by shaping the narrative outcome of the judgment of Paris. Notwithstanding our understanding of three millennia of European folk and elite culture as largely men’s work, at least in these Hellenic Paris narratives, these goddesses determined both the identity and position of the gazer, as well as the consequences of his gaze.

Thus Paris, the gazer-turned-supreme judge, can serve as a convenient stand-in for generations of painters and their patrons. But even work by painters famous or infamous as connoisseurs of women’s bodies, like Botticelli, Ingres or Modigliani, sometimes betrays the difficulty of maintaining this supremacy, the sense of omniscience it entails, and the sovereignty Mulvey associates with male gazing. In such work, the gazer’s mastery collides with the painter’s dependency on the gaze object as a muse and as a source of frustrated curiosity—as desired but unattainable. In 1876 Edmond de Goncourt identified this transformation of gazers into dependents or supplicants as a commonplace response among painters, novelists, and other gazers. Apparently striving to sublimate his own drawing-room lechery and to identify a muse, Goncourt turned to two masters of European painting, Anthony Van Dyck and Titian to validate his own connoisseurship as a gazer:

The Jews retain, from their oriental origin, a peculiar nonchalance. Today I was I was charmed as I observed Mme. Louise Cahen ... she moved like a lazy cat ... when they are blonde—these Jews—there is, at the heart of their blondness, something golden, like [Van Dyck’s] painting of *The Mistress of Titian* ... the Jewess dropped onto a chaise longue, her head

flung back to one side ... revealing ... a coil of hair that resembled a nest of snakes. Pulling various amused, questioning expressions, and wrinkling her nose, she complained of the unreasonableness of men and of novelists expecting women not to be human creatures and not to have, in love, the same disgust as men. (DeWaal 45)

Goncourt's sublimation begins with what Freud called over-intellectualization, and his art-history musings begin as an endorsement of his century's pseudo-anthropological "race science." When he cites the seventeenth-century Van Dyck's engraving of a cinquecento predecessor's mistress, Goncourt aligns his perspective with a venerable artistic and ideological legacy. Goncourt is reaffirming the power of gazers in general and the power of artists in particular over their gaze objects, since "mistresses"—like models—can be readily treated as silent and subservient gaze-objects. Titian, the painter whom Van Dyck pictured, moreover, stands out not only as an art-historical legend but as an influential pioneer in the annals of male gazing who became "famous across Europe for the overt sensuality with which he portrayed the female nude" and as the first artist "known to use living, breathing women as models" (Wullschlager). But when Goncourt recognizes his gaze object as a subject rather than an object he swerves from this tradition. Goncourt identifies his gaze object as the member of a group long oppressed and despised by most Europeans and then identifies her as entitled, arresting, insouciant, and even threatening. Finally, after what begins as a put-down, a snarky move to objectify the blonde feline and ophidian Jewess, Goncourt yields to Mme. Cahen's authority as an arbiter of literary convention.

Van Dyck's etching inverts the customary relationship between a gazer and his gaze object.<sup>3</sup> The portrait shows Titian looking *up* at his mistress, who appears conspicuously larger than him, while soliciting *her* gaze. Like many of his Renaissance contemporaries Titian often painted scenes from classical mythology, the tradition from which European writers and painters derived their lasting faith in muses as a source of inspiration. Therefore *Titian and His Mistress* might arguably be read as an account of the artist soliciting his muse and as an up-close evocation of the gazer's dependence on, perhaps even his subservience to, his gaze

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<sup>3</sup>Attributed to Van Dyck, *Titian and His Mistress*. [http://everypainterpaintshimself.com/article\\_images\\_new/Ttmis.jpg](http://everypainterpaintshimself.com/article_images_new/Ttmis.jpg).

object, thus offering a cautionary object lesson about the self-subjugating perils of male gazing.

A generation after Goncourt called upon Van Dyck and Titian to transform Mme. Cahen from a gaze object into an influential subject, Henry James turned to exploring male gazing in another Renaissance master: Hans Holbein. At this point in his career, James had already established himself as an attentive student of male gazing. His best-known “tale,” the 1878 “Daisy Miller,” features a viewpoint character who epitomizes the post-Mulvey understanding of male gazing that *Reading the Male Gaze* illustrates: male gazing as a cognitively demanding, conceptually sophisticated intellectual practice. James introduces this understanding by attributing to Winterbourne, the viewpoint character in “Daisy Miller,” such a “great relish for feminine beauty” that “he was addicted to observing and analyzing it.” A generation later, in 1903, in another first-person narrative “The Beldonald Holbein,” James shows a similarly attentive and “analytic” gazer overpowered by his gaze object.

The painter who narrates “The Beldonald Holbein” and whom a colleague compares to Titian introduces himself as inclined to “collect all the beauty I could.” Upon receiving a commission to paint a friend’s elderly sister-in-law, sight-unseen, he hears his patron, Mrs. Munden, rank her sister-in-law, Lady Beldonald, among the “great beauties.” Mrs. Munden adds, metaphorically, that her beauty has been “only preserved—oh but preserved, like bottled fruit, in syrup.” Soon after closing the deal, Lady Beldonald hires a distant cousin, “a certain Mrs. Brash,” as a companion. Mrs. Brash’s primary qualification for the “special service” she can provide Lady Beldonald is that “she was ... ugly enough ... consistently, cheerfully, loyally plain ... unfortunately ... dreadfully plain.” James’s narrator, however, dares to speak to Mrs. Munden and Lady Beldonald of “the esteem in which [he] held Mrs. Brash’s appearance,” and even “of her beauty.” Overwhelmed by his “aesthetic need of giving life to my idea,” he shocks Mrs. Munden and Lady Beldonald by proposing that Mrs. Brash also “sit for” him because, he recalls,

She was a good, hard, sixteenth-century figure, not withered with innocence, bleached rather by life in the open ... in short, just what we had made of her, a Holbein for a great museum; and our position ... rapidly became that of persons having such a treasure to dispose of. The world—I speak of course mainly of the art-world—flocked to see it.



As James's narrator envisions the possibility of enhancing his gaze object's prospects and of improving her state of mind the anticipated popularity of this portrait—along with the profits it promises—expands the range of male gazing beyond simple domination. At least James's narrator imagines such a possibility in speculating that Mrs. Brash's

nature had been pitched in the key of her supposed plainness. She had known how to be ugly—it was the only thing she had learnt save, if possible, how not to mind it. Being beautiful took in any case a new set of muscles.

As envisaged by James, male artists who promote male gazing can pose the kind of threat to traditional male gazing that Goncourt found in *Titian and his Mistress*. In favoring an appearance that flouts the conventions of gazing and the role of commissioned portrait painting as an instrument for sustaining conventional understandings of female beauty, James seems to be allowing for both the self-aggrandizement—money, fame, reassurance—that artistic male gazing has customarily yielded and for open-ended mutually beneficial give-and-take between gazers and gaze objects.

Flannery O'Connor's 1952 novel *Wise Blood* encapsulates and perhaps even provides a model for such give and take between the gazer and his object. With her genius for dialect and wordplay, O'Connor coins a formula for pushing back against what the gaze object in the following exchange calls, in an unwitting pun, "looker indignation" (104). (As dialect, of course, "looker indignation" reads as "look of indignation"; read literally, though, it allows for the gaze object, often a "looker" in the slang of the era, to gaze back, fiercely, at the male gazer, who is also, literally and transitively, a *looker*.)

'What I gave you the other night,' she said, 'was a looker indignation for what I seen you do. It was you give me the eye. You should have seen him papa,' she said, 'looked me up and down.' (56)

So authoritative is the voice of this gaze object, a wayward teen named Sabbath Lily Hawks, that Hazel Motes, the gazer who bills himself as the founder of the "Church Without Christ" and consequently had "expected a secret welcome," ends up instead finding the Hawks' household's "door shut in his face." While Sabbath Lily gazes on him through

a crack in the shade, she confesses to her father that she's "just crazy about him" and aims to "get him" (105–106) on her own terms, as a gatekeeper inside rather than as the supplicant on the outside.

### THE UPHILL *CUL-DE-SAC*—PARDON MY FRENCH

Bosky Hollow Court rose to a dead end. Fifty years ago, when the late-lamented elms that helped make the area so bosky and gave the town its name still loomed over the curb that closed off this "dead end," Bosky Hollow Court lost its official designation as a dead end. By posting a new sign, thanatophobic municipal officials transformed Bosky Hollow Court from a "dead end" into a NO OUTLET byway. For a teenage boy, the very phrase "no outlet" proved all too apt at the time. Years after this rechristening, I learned that in the US cognoscenti call these roads "cul-de-sacs." Well into midlife, though, I learned from a Parisian street sign that actual French-speakers less metaphorically refer to a road leading nowhere simply as an *impasse*. The more fancifully named impasses we call cul-de-sacs widen circularly where they stop, having once-upon-a-time reminded some long-ago trendsetter of the bottom of French bags or *culs-de sac*.

Facing this cul-de-sac stood the last house on the south side of Bosky Hollow Court. A three-story colonial with a stone chimney, it looked west through two living-room windows into a shadowy copse. All second-growth hardwoods, the expanse was leafless—providing long sightlines—for most of the September-to-June school year, during which it served as one of my homeward shortcuts and met our unspoken routing rule: never travel along streets when you can cut across backyards, where more secrets and mysteries are likely to appear.<sup>4</sup> Decades later, thanks to the *New York Times*, I learned what makes the backyard so much more compelling than the street side and how routinely, with my shortcutting, I was plumbing the heart of darkness:

while the front lawns of suburbia reflect how residents choose to present themselves to the outside world, their backyards are Freudian maps of their unconscious lives. (Holden)

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<sup>4</sup>New Jersey Backyard. [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/\\_OBcBbXOBT-Y/S8EIRLJMqsI/AAAAAAAAABEQ/Pwv1e\\_QYUOA/s1600/Crooked47.jpg](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_OBcBbXOBT-Y/S8EIRLJMqsI/AAAAAAAAABEQ/Pwv1e_QYUOA/s1600/Crooked47.jpg).

Late fall's early twilights often found me crossing these yards and passing the windows that looked out on the hillcrest where Bosky Court Hollow dead-ended. Here I was tempted and here I succumbed to temptation, lapsing into a condition Freud called scopophilia (*Three* 58). On the other side of the window sat a girl I knew from school. Her name was Ginny. Or maybe it was Jenny, since there were even fewer Virginias than Jennifers in our mostly Jewish neighborhood. (I speak as a member of a Jennifer-deficient generation, with dozens of Susans, Carols, and Ellens filling the rosters of the schools I attended.) To this day I don't know for sure whether I had in my sights a Ginny or Jenny, since I had never had anything to do with her except maybe to wave "hi." Maybe I only knew *about* her. I knew she was one of a group of similar-looking sisters because, inevitably, my mother of "knew the family." My parents seemed to have gone to high school with or done business or served on the PTA or the UJA with someone from every family (at least with every Jewish family) in the neighborhood and decades *avant la lettre* (the letter being Z for Zuckerberg) my mother was the consummate social networker.

Did my parents' and my community's influence, my meta-erotic frame of reference, compromise or enrich my experience as a gazer? Did leavening my lust with some homespun sociology make me less of creep or simply less of an aesthete? About a decade later, soon after completing college, I took a test to become a pornographer. Answering an ad in a Manhattan weekly called the *Village Voice*, I found myself in a huge sunlit office overlooking Sheridan Square facing an industrial-strength manual typewriter and the landmark Village Cigar store—a source of TE AMOs at the time—across Christopher Street, hunting and pecking while concocting a character named Maria. Though I had eloquently blazoned the tiny gold cross nesting in her cleavage, her irresistibly rolled contralto Rs, the rough weave of her Dodger blue denim skirt, I wasn't hired. My incorrigible habit of adulterating gazing with religion, linguistics, cotton-consciousness, etc.—an inclination dating back at least to my Bosky Hollow Court reveries—seems to have tripped me up and nipped in the bud a promising career. My dreams of such a career had been fueled when a few years earlier a friend gave a copy of Kenneth Patchen's *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer*. This 1945 novel's eponymous narrator serendipitously succeeds (24) by publishing a book, which he titled *Spool of Destiny* and his publisher retitled *Spill of Desire* (23), assigning the work genre heretofore unknown to the novelist:

‘What do you do?’ the young lady asked.  
 I tried hard to remember what type of book My Agent told me my  
 book was. The word wasn’t in my dictionary—sort of a long one ...  
 Then I remembered.  
 I write pornography. (Patchen 27)

His pornography proves so successful, both commercially and critically, that Patchen’s pornographer realizes “Now I can do anything in the world I want to do” (24). In the wake of his success, he meets a Vassar woman who calls *The Spill of Desire* a book about which she dreams and extols it as “the most beautiful innocent story I’ve ever heard” (31). Patchen’s hero notwithstanding, pornographers may never be innocent. But questions about whether male-gazers, Mulvey notwithstanding, can gaze innocently remains open for debate.

### ROMANTIC GESTURES?

I can’t remember for sure if watching Ginny—or Jenny—strum was a one-off transgression or became a regular stop on my daily homeward trek. In either case, watching Ginny has come to have, at least in retrospect, a greater impact than most of the more documented, more public rituals I was obliged to engage in growing up. As a grownup, as a parent, as a teacher, and presumably as some kind of “role model,” I’m probably obliged to look back on my window-gazing as a misdemeanor or at least as an unneighborly breach of propriety. As a nearly mindless teenage ritual, though, my gazing has a canonic imprimatur and qualifies as more of a Romantic gesture. As a developmental watershed this window reverie carries the endorsement of the eminently gentlemanly Romantic gazer William Wordsworth. Himself a habitual beholder of arresting peasant girls, like the one he extolled as a “highland lass,” and an anatomizer of a “sportive” grace-molded “maiden’s form,” Wordsworth designated such solitary reflective occasions as “spots of time” (see Chaps. 3 and 5). Mind-nourishing and spirit-renovating, these moments of “distinct preeminence” serve at once to disrupt the round of ordinary intercourse and to stretch the range of our sympathies, all the while pleasurably sensitizing us to our surroundings.

From the perspective of a later Romantic, D.H. Lawrence, “my spot of time” became part of a series of moments that Lawrence described in his 1920 novel *The Lost Girl*. In a characteristically Lawrentian move, introducing voices ranging from priestly to pastoral to scriptural, Lawrence’s

narrator recalls watching a stranger “as if she were Woman itself” and characterizes his own “gazing” as “the sort of je-sais-tout look of a private swain.” This phrase, “the sort of je-sais-tout look,” seems to ascribe omniscience and therefore a position of command to this gazer, a position of authority, which Lawrence confirms when this gazing ends with the gazer approaching his gaze object “like a policeman.” Throughout the novel Lawrence subjects the heroine, Alvina Houghton, to various forms of male gazing, not all of which prove effective at subduing her. For example, a subsequent gazer—and lover—endows Alvina with Eve’s power to do harm by looking upon her “the same way he might have watched a serpent.” My neighbor Ginny or Jenny, or one of her sisters, might have moved me to such Lawrentian mythography had I known fifty years ago that such opportunities existed. Unlike Lawrence’s, though, my gaze was more prone to idealizing than to subduing or “policing.”

The object of my idealizing gaze sat by the window playing a gilded two-yard-high harp. It never occurred to me to seize on the harp and to make the customarily transcendent leap, to associate what I saw with what I’d later learn to call a seraph. Some thirty-five years on, this formative, viscerally unsettling watershed moment as a tyro male gazer found a narrative correlative, a conceptual anchor, in my lifelong education as a male gazer and especially in my eventual transformation into a “mature” male-gaze reader. I reached this watershed while reading Philip Roth’s 1998 novel *I Married a Communist* (see Chap. 5) in which Roth’s narrator recalls how he once believed that “if I looked long enough” at a celebrated stage beauty “a *meaning* might emerge” (53). My faith in such a result and my fascination with the harpist in the window, it turned out, exposed me not simply as a peeper. Worse than a gazer, I was, in Roth’s view, a snob. *I Married a Communist* features an acerbic harpist who frames her musical calling as primarily a gaze-enhancing, hyper-feminizing ritual: “Most little girls who start the harp start the harp because Mommy thinks it’s such a *lovely* thing for them to do. It looks so pretty and all the music is so damned sweet, and it’s played politely in small for polite people who aren’t the least interested .... Really refinement” (135–136).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harpist. <https://abstract.desktopnexus.com/get/360301./?t=8c756h4m1nca3mq8d807sbu7i059009b2c3a0e9>.

It never would have occurred to me, fifty years ago, to transform Jenny or Ginny into a symptom of my refinement or an affirmation of my “*je-sais-tout*” omniscience. Entirely unfamiliar with D.H. Lawrence at the time, I would never have thought to see her as Eve either, or to view my peeping as a reenactment of a primal biblical encounter between a serpent and an Ur-temptress—as an eternal lesson for all humankind. Nor would it ever have occurred to me to do the opposite to the gaze object: intensify her materiality and distill her earthiness. This kind of anti-idealizing downward gazing, a view of gazing as slumming, appeared in the same year as Lawrence’s *The Lost Girl* in John Dos Passos’ novel *Three Soldiers*. Dos Passos’ gazers, World War One dough-boys, collectively examine a *mademoiselle* who appears before them:

Several soldiers lounged awkwardly against the counter  
and the jambs of the door, following her movements  
with their eyes as dogs watch a plate of meat. (Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers*)

Just as I didn’t know enough to idealize or demonize, like Lawrence’s gazers, or to demean and belittle, like Dos Passos’ gazers, I didn’t even know enough to make the most of my gaze object’s props or her *mise-en-scène*: the harp, the grand piano and the built-in bright white bookshelf flanking it or the plush forest green carpet under it. I didn’t know enough, in a word, to aestheticize what I saw. Fifty years ago, the harpist was simply tall; now, as a trained aesthete, I’d be obliged to call her “statuesque.”

Meat or capital *W* woman? Tall or statuesque? Passing glance or epiphany? Fifty years after Dos Passos and Lawrence raised these questions, Don DeLillo finally demonstrated for me how a novelist can explicitly introduce his gaze object as prompting a capital *E* “epiphany.” In his 1973 novel *Great Jones Street*, DeLillo shows a gaze object as at once earthy in her demeanor and transcendent in the legacy she incarnates, as overwhelmingly eroticized and in full command of her surroundings.

A young black woman stood in the hall, legs well apart, hands on hips. She was arrayed in burnishings and pleated streaks, and there was a trim glitter about her, a commercial grace, evident in the seamless way she shifted weight to orches-trate a sort of stylish body violence ...

“Who’s the nice lady?”

“Security,” he said. “Her name’s Epiphany Powell.” (181)

The very name Epiphany holds out the promise of illumination, even transformation. It nods to the familiar literary tradition, with the promise and expectation of *epiphany* in fiction and poetry. DeLillo's contemporary, novelist Charles Baxter, has argued that "epiphany" has become most familiar as a tool used in "marketing and therapy" (76). In Baxter's account, the epiphany tradition rests on the belief "that a character's experiences ... have to be validated by a conclusive insight ... a visionary stop-time moment" (66). Epiphanies therefore promise the "security" DeLillo's "glittering" Epiphany claims as her calling, including the cognitive and emotional security afforded by "conclusive insights" such as male gazing can sometimes foster.

This tradition weds James Joyce's famous explanation of epiphany in *Stephen Hero* (211) and Wordsworth's "spot of time" ideal with "male gazing" at its most idealizing, its most self referentially poetic. When Joyce's early alter-ego Stephen Hero spots "a young lady ... standing on the steps," this seemingly "trivial incident set him composing some ardent verses which he entitled a 'Villanelle of the Temptress.'" Joyce's Hero also looks to epiphany for "security," relief from "the dance of unrest in his brain." More highmindedly, Stephen seeks sublimation of his carnally prompted unrest into an emotionally reassuring evanescent spiritual epiphany:

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments ... all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany ... Your mind to apprehend that object divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object. To apprehend it you must lift it away from everything else: and then you perceive that it is one integral thing, that is a thing. You recognize its integrity. (212)

Separating himself from his hero, Joyce shows Hero repeatedly interrupting his own comforting reflections with undermining questions: "Isn't that so? ... And then? ... You see?" Likewise, the promise embodied in DeLillo's Epiphany falters, even more decisively, disintegrating on the page into a litany of sentence fragments:

Hair worn short. Caved face. Slender imperial neck.  
Hurdler's fused body. All in all a well-crafted piece of  
smoked glass and chrome. (184)

Instead of looking to transcend her condition as an object, DeLillo's narrator revels in Epiphany's status as an object—"a well-crafted piece." Instead of appearing "lift[ed] away from everything else," Epiphany's aesthetic appeal as a gaze object rests on her embeddedness in decidedly material, earthbound processes of design, manufacture, and marketing—processes that encompass marketing herself as a gaze object:

Epiphany used to sing in supper clubs, according to the data on her. Did I tell you that? Supper clubs. I didn't know places like that existed anymore. Must have been a weird scene. She acted in exploitation movies for six or seven months. A real pro-fessional. She did some modeling here and there. It's been a hard road. All that professionalism. It does things to people. Makes them hard. (184)

As if intent on discrediting the very facts of Epiphany's life and his own account of her demeaning work experience, especially her "exploitation" as a sex object, the "manager" describing Epiphany looks to what "the data on her show" in reaching for a transcendent story or at least a redeeming myth, an experience-validating fable that might establish how her tribulations have made her stronger. Joyce's Stephen Hero, by contrast, lacked such data. Perhaps because he only overheard the "young lady standing on the steps," without the benefit of any conversation, the reflections she prompted remained scattered and uninterpretable, unlikely to produce any epiphany:

as he passed on his quest heard the following fragment of colloquy out of which he received an impression keen enough to afflict his sensitiveness very severely.

The Young Lady-(drawling discreetly)... 0, yes... I was... at the... cha... pel.... (211)

By contrast, DeLillo delivers an informational cornucopia in *Great Jones Street*. Nevertheless, DeLillo also severs gazing from the epiphanic promises gazers customarily seek. DeLillo's disconnect differs from Joyce's, though, in that the gaze object herself claims and emphatically articulates the last word and not simply some garbled first words. Biding her time,



listening to herself being discussed by the two men in the room, the “nice lady” dismisses the manager’s seemingly benevolent myth-making:

‘It don’t faze Piiffany,’ she said. ‘Nothing faze Piffany.’  
Azarian looked at her a while longer, then turned to me. (184)

With this disclaimer Epiphany frees herself from the gaze to which the men in the room and especially the explanation-hungry manager, Azarian, are subjecting her. By dropping the first syllable of her name, Epiphany has pointedly refused to serve as any man’s experience-validating epiphany.

Only when I had been a literature professor for a decade or so and had prepared classes on works such as *The Lost Girl*, *Three Soldiers*, and *Great Jones Street* did I begin to realize what it was that I’d been doing on Bosky Hollow Court, solitary but not knowing enough to be furtive in the gloaming way back in the middle of the twentieth century: I had to learn from wiser minds that I’d been male gazing *avant la lettre*.

## ROCK OF GAZES

As crucial as trespassing across suburbia proved in my initiation as a gazer, more consequential was the bombardment from far beyond the neighborhood of mass-manufactured sounds and images. During these years my go-to authority on what was supposedly occurring beyond the backyard shortcuts I trod became a man who “comes on radio telling me more and more” in order to “fire my imagination.” Day after day, almost hourly, my radio blared the Rolling Stones’ denunciation of this overpowering authority figure in their 1965 breakout hit “Satisfaction.”<sup>6</sup> Such bodiless voices from afar spoke to me repeatedly, insistently, in many guises and in hundreds of different announcements and (most influentially) in countless songs. The most memorable song, not surprisingly, harped on the promise and pitfalls of male gazing, on the condition diagnosed in Manfred Mann’s eloquently titled 1964 hit “Do-Wah-Diddy.”<sup>7</sup> In this epiphany narrative, the singer discovers that

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<sup>6</sup>“Satisfaction.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgYbIVYEldY> ‘date accessed’ [9th May 2017].

<sup>7</sup>“Doo Wah Diddy Diddy.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43vOAaw2sAFU> ‘date accessed’ [15th August 2017].

the woman to whom he ends up betrothed after three verses “looked good, looked fine.” But the singer also recalls, more darkly, with an off-rhyme (with “*fine*”), that before a happy ending (when “wedding-bells” were “gonna *chime*”) could come to pass, he had to endure having “nearly lost my *mind*.” Over a decade before Mulvey conceptualized and indicted male gazing as an instrument of gender inequality, this song’s co-writers, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, ended “Do-Wah-Diddy” with this affirmation of gender equality: “I’m hers. She’s mine.”

As a ubiquitous source of information and insight, these songs of my boyhood argued, implicitly and incessantly, for an understanding of gazing as reciprocal. This message came from both the elite and lowest-common-denominator ends of my cultural spectrum: from subtitled black-and-white European “art cinema” and from top-40 AM radio, which woke me up each morning, often failed to lull me to sleep each night, and accompanied every car trip I took. One of the more obscure “gold” top-ten hits during 1968—a year full of still-familiar hits by the Beatles, Eric Clapton’s “supergroup” Cream, Simon and Garfunkel, The Doors, and Otis Redding—came from a one-hit-wonder band out of North Carolina who called themselves the O’Kaysons. Titled “Girl Watcher,”<sup>8</sup> the song recalled Frank Loesser’s Broadway and radio hit from a decade earlier, “Standing on the Corner Watching All the Girls Go By.” The O’Kaysons’ vocalist, Donnie Weaver, confessed unambiguously and repeatedly in their song’s refrain that “I’m a girl watcher, watching girls go by.” While the singer in the antecedent Loesser hit occupies a similar social space, his gaze yields nothing tangible:

Haven’t got a girl, but I can dream  
 Haven’t got a girl, but I can wish  
 So I take me down to Main Street and that’s where I select my  
 imaginary  
 dish.<sup>9</sup>

“Standing on the Corner” presents gazing entirely as a subject-to-object reciprocity-free encounter. As its defensive last verse insists, “Standing on the Corner” confines the act of gazing to consequence-free male bonding: “Brother, you can’t go to jail for what you’re thinking.” The 1968 “Girl

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<sup>8</sup>“Girl Watcher.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raJWuz7qQVc> ‘date accessed’ [9th May 2017].

<sup>9</sup>“Standing on the Corner.” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlbGQ0xKZbY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlbGQ0xKZbY) ‘date accessed’ [9th May 2017].

Watcher” song, by contrast, allows for the possibility of reciprocity. The lyrics acknowledged that Loesser’s “imaginary dish” might actually be an actively complicit, fully conscious participant in the gaze-encounter, with the singer musing “I wonder if you know that you’re putting on a show.”<sup>10</sup>

At about the same time that the now-obscure O’Kaysons speculated about the desirability of a rebalancing or a concession of power by the traditional male gazer, the legendary “Jersey Boy” Frankie Valli (and his songwriters Bob Gaudio and Bob Crewe) introduced a male gazer in the throes of a crisis of confidence, abjectly surrendering his supposed authority, forswearing manly autonomy, abandoning the commanding position that Mulvey would identify as male gazing’s *raison d’être*. In “Can’t Take My Eyes off of You,” Valli’s first (post-Four Seasons) solo hit, which reached number two on the Billboard charts and went gold in 1967, the gazer speaks subjunctively about how his gaze object “*would* be like heaven to touch” (emphasis added). After *begging* “pardon” for “the way that I stare,” the singer concedes that “the sight of you makes me weak” and has silenced him so much that “there are no words left to speak.”

The durable popularity of “Can’t Take My Eyes off of You,” in numerous cover versions and as a soundtrack favorite, illustrates the extent to which, at least in one widely popular view, male gazing may be as much an occasion for renunciation and surrender as it is an instrument of command. This anguished account of male gazing became especially pronounced about a decade later with the inclusion of Valli’s hit in Michael Cimino’s acclaimed Vietnam trauma spectacle *The Deer Hunter*. A barroom shot showing only young men—no women in the frame—cuts between a group around pool table and actor John Cazale standing up at the bar trying to sing along with “Can’t Take My Eyes off of You” as the bar’s jukebox vies with the noise of his friends. As a memorable set piece in what arguably became Hollywood’s most harrowing account of the traumatic impact of the Vietnam war, this scene links the impotence of the single gazer to an entire nation’s geopolitical debacle and to the thousands of private traumas that became that war’s most lasting legacy.

Whether celebrating men’s power or lamenting its absence, male gazing permeated the most durable hit songs of the twentieth century from “Ain’t She Sweet (See Her Walking Down the Street)” to “Do-Wah-Diddy.” Norman Gimbel, lyricist for the US version of “The Girl from Ipanema,” singled out male gazing as “the oldest story in the

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<sup>10</sup>“Girl Watcher.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raJWuz7qQVc> ‘date accessed’ [9th May 2017].

world,” arguing that “the beautiful girl goes by, and men pop out of manholes and fall out of trees and are whistling and going nuts, and she just keeps going by. That’s universal” (Vinciguerra). Even as the 1960s stretched the boundaries of the permissible with hits like the Rolling Stones’ “Let’s Spend the Night Together” and the Troggs’ “Wild Thing,” I had to turn to the big screen for the starkest and most candid answers to the girl-watcher song’s question: “I wonder if you know that you’re putting a show.” Ingmar Bergman’s 1966 *Persona* addressed this question relentlessly by “playing with the paradoxical nature of film”, characterized by Susan Sontag as “the illusion of having a voyeuristic access to an untempered reality” (“Persona”). This homage to Bergman followed Sontag’s call, in her landmark 1966 essay “Against Interpretation,” for “an erotics of art” instead of a “hermeneutics” (*Against* 14) and for treating responses elicited by all cultural work—texts, sounds, images (moving and still), every product accepted as art or “merely” as entertainment—as invitations to sexual if not exclusively “male” gazing.

As a sustained invitation to gaze, *Persona* illustrated how “an erotics of art” might work. One scene in particular struck me as especially apt in illuminating the implications of the O’Kaysons’ conjecture—or fantasy—about reciprocal gazing and in pressing their question about gaze objects’ awareness of their impact as performers. A nighttime conversation between a reminiscing, convalescing actress named Elisabet (Liv Ullman) and her psychiatric nurse, Alma (Bibi Andersson), turns Alma into a performer and turns her nearly catatonic patient into an audience of one. Alma’s performance consists of recounting her deliberate, arguably heedless decision some years back to revel in and exploit her position as a gaze object. Contrary to Mulvey’s static scenario, instead of passively accepting her status as the object of male gazing, Alma recalls seizing “command” of the scene in which she found herself and “creating the action.” Describing a day at the beach with “another girl” she recalls how

We lay there  
completely naked and sunbathed...  
Suddenly I saw two figures on the rocks above us.  
They hid and peeped out occasionally.  
“Two boys are looking at us,”

I said to the girl ...  
 "Let them look," she said,  
 and turned over on her back.  
 I wanted to jump up  
 and put my suit on,  
 but I just lay there on my stomach  
 with my bottom in the air,  
 unembarrassed, totally calm ... next to me with her breasts and big  
 thighs.  
 She was just giggling.  
 The boys were coming closer.  
 They just stood there looking at us ...

In response to the gazing boys' mute stillness, the "other girl," Katarina, begins scripting her own scenario:

Suddenly Katarina said ... "Hey, you, why don't you  
 come over here?"  
 Then she took his hand and helped him  
 take off his jeans and shirt.  
 Suddenly he was on top of her.  
 She guided him in ...  
 The other boy ... sat and watched ...

In response to this additional instance of gazing, the actress follows suit and begins to collaborate with Katrina:

Suddenly I turned and said,  
 "Aren't you coming to me, too?"  
 ... Katarina said,  
 "Go to her now."  
 He pulled out of her and...  
 then fell on top of me,  
 completely hard ...  
 I was overwhelmed and came almost immediately ...  
 I came over and over.

This encounter leaves the boy and two women not only sated but entertained, "laughing," as the two women affirm their command of the scene by "calling over to" and summoning "the other boy" for a second act.

The lighting and camerawork serve as adjuncts to the male gazers for whom, theoretically at least, narrative movies are produced. These filmic elements accentuate the two gaze objects' "command" of the scene as well as Alma's burgeoning sense of control over her choices. The camera's gaze follows her around the dark bedroom, as she passes back and forth in front of a shadeless night-table lamp that functions intermittently as a spotlight. As she speaks, she occupies multiple vantage points. Appearing in a close-up, in a few medium-shots, and in a long shot, she moves away from the camera, calling attention to her control over how the camera and her audience view her. Alma also manipulates the light and the window curtain in the room and thus controls how dimly or clearly she's seen. With her pale skin, light hair, and sheer white night-dress, she moves freely—sipping wine, sitting, standing, pacing, turning her head, closing a curtain, lighting a cigarette—against the night-blackened bedroom walls, while her listener remains silent, never blinking.

To be sure, the ways in which women take "command," both in the O'Kaysons' hit and in Bergman's art-house classic, reflect men's fantasies. Often such fantasies serve to perpetuate self-flattering ignorance. In *Persuasion*, Jane Austen memorably summed up this long-standing obstacle to women's "command" of self-representation, with the heroine's reminder that "men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story ... the pen has been in their hands" and the conclusion that follows: "I will not allow books to prove anything." Despite her heroine Anne Elliott's protest, Austen's own books have at least demonstrated, if not "proven," the capacity of gaze objects to become effective actors and agents *sometimes*.

A century later Virginia Woolf metaphorically illustrated the impact of the misleading stories Anne Elliott denounced. She explained that that "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" and amplified this understanding by expressly identifying men's age-old entitlement "to rule over other people" as their "source of power," as a means of limiting women's aspirations to "command" and as one of "the pathetic devices of the human imagination." In Woolf's view, this looking-glass gaze and the command it authorizes guarantees "the enormous importance" of the "patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule half the human race" and represent this female half as "inferior to himself."

If the looking glass Woolf describes does distort and exaggerate as much she claims, then some male gazers are likely to notice such grotesqueries. Reasoning aesthetically, if not morally, such attentive gazers may, in turn, recoil at the sheer the shabbiness of the “devices” Woolf describes and consequently find ourselves pressed to challenge and undermine the gaze-imposed and gaze-enforced domination Austen, Woolf, Mulvey, and others have exposed and justly protested. Men who thoroughly *objectify* women (see Chap. 4), who gaze intently enough, may begin actually to aspire beyond objectification, to a rigorous *objectivity*, when they’ve come to recognize the disparities and grotesqueries such writers have exposed. These male gazers may come to understand the narrative that Edna O’Brien once identified, explaining that “the body contains the life story just as much as the brain” (Roth, “Conversation”). Instead of gazing in pursuit of command and control, conceptually and aesthetically minded male gazers might come to gaze in pursuit of stories and even explanations.

The art historian Julian Bell recently encapsulated and amplified this distinction, arguing that even when “sex-driven” the male gaze often reflects an analytic impulse, a perspective inevitably tempered by a humbling appreciation of the limits of gazer’s powers of perception:

Objects, whether they be fruit or fruit trees or female bodies, are indefinitely various in appearance, since each has a separate history that causes it to pick up light in unique combinations of color and sheen ... There is to be no disguising, either, the conditions that separate the viewer from the object. The picture-maker can only observe things aspect by aspect, often obstructed ... He should acknowledge and analyze this partiality of vision. Equally, he should declare his interests, as a sex-driven voyeur: lay them on the table, submit them to intelligence. (“Great”)

Consequently simply accepting the static views of male gazing as inevitably an instrument of domination, the view Mulvey has made so influential, begs the questions both Bergman and the O’Kaysos raised. In mass entertainment as in elite cultural marketplaces such performances address sexually mixed audiences and not only the male gazer, the masculine commander, Mulvey postulated. What she labeled “visual pleasure,” along with the other pleasures movies, other images, and narratives provide also include pleasures that can threaten domination, sexual and otherwise. Even in Bergman’s dark saturnine *Persona*, the gaze object Bibi Andersson plays includes “giggling” and “laughter” as part of her

experience as a performing gaze object. The gaze object's giggle-worthy complicity in Bergman's male-gaze fantasy at least holds out the possibility that male gazing might, under some circumstances, work as a collaborative performance rather than invariably to reinforce gender hierarchy and sexual subjugation.

Male gazing can't always follow the same simplistic and inevitable script Mulvey described because gazers and their objects are invariably embedded in other kinds of social—economic, institutional, tribal, “racial”—relations. *Kingsblood Royal*, Sinclair Lewis's dark midcentury satire of race-thinking, for example, illustrates the extent of this embeddedness by exaggerating what Mulvey deems the male gazer's supposedly inevitable inclination to “command” the scene and “create the action.” Lewis mocks the gazer's claims to command as simultaneously irresistible *and* clownishly marginal. His narrator introduces this gazer, Borus Bugdoll, as a “Negro” sporting “bright-blue trousers, a sports-jacket in wide checks, and a shrimp-colored bow tie ... standing upright yet seeming to lounge.” Striking this pose, the gazer “did not suggest cotton-fields but the musical comedy, the race track, the sweet shooting of craps.” With the “hands and the poised shoulders of a middle-weight prizefighter,” he conveyed “an animal beauty made devilish by his stare,” the “bold and amused” gaze he aims at his hostess, a (white) suburban housewife named Vestal Kingsblood. Vestal, the novel's heroine, senses that Bugdoll is “laughing his head off at me,” that “he had known every woman from Sappho to Queen Marie and had understood them all perfectly,” and that “his eyes did not merely undress Vestal; they hinted that, in a flustered and hateful way, she was enjoying it.” Despite this fascinated reaction, she ends up “saying to herself, ‘I’ve never in my life seen such a circus-clown get-up,’ while wishing that her husband ‘could wear clothes like that and still look romantic.’” Encountering the male gazer, paradoxically, as a charismatic laughing stock, drives Vestal from the room, from her own kitchen, “mumbling” and feeling intellectually discredited: “Vestal quaked, and with a mumbled something which did no especial credit to her intellectual superiority, she bolted from the kitchen.” But Bugdoll's gaze also leaves her “grinning ... not displeased.” Becoming defiantly out of step with her milieu's racial and sexual decorum, Vestal ends up describing her gazer as a “gentleman.” By accentuating Bugdoll's “race” and place, in the kitchen with “the help,” Lewis prompts questions about the extent to



which Bugdoll's male gaze serves to promote equality and challenge segregation and perhaps even to subvert all assumptions about external, readily performed social distinctions. Lewis leaves readers wondering whether Vestal's reference to him as a gentleman, despite his apparent boorishness, illustrates the conceptually and politically liberating potential of the male gaze—or, less sanguinely, whether Vestal's unease is simply another example of the unfairness of the male gazer's advantage or another symptom of feeling her relatively advantageous *racial* status threatened. By satirically raising these questions, Lewis confronts readers with more encompassing questions, the *cui bono* questions that male gazing (and racial gazing—"the white gaze") inevitably raise.

### CLOWNING VS. GAZING

Lewis's view of the gazer as "a circus-clown" and of the experience of being gazed upon as an occasion for "grinning" suggests the extent to which for gaze-objects and gazers alike comedy and humor can level and disarm male gazing. Feminist scholars such as Cynthia Willet and Suzanne Lavin have documented the impact and reach of this equalizing challenge by women stand-up performers standing up to the male gaze over the course of the late twentieth century (Lavin 91).

Since the millennium, Sarah Silverman has perhaps done the most to sustain and enrich this legacy, which Lavin characterizes as "the shift of the woman performer as subject rather than object" (92). Caricaturing the object of male gazing, Silverman preempts the authority gazing has customarily afforded Mulvey's "command and control" male gazers. In 2007, on David Letterman's *Late Show*, Silverman equated herself with two of the millennial decade's most storied gaze objects, Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. Insisting that she'd prefer to discuss her perfume rather than her time in prison, Silverman claimed a superlatively feminine identity and objectified herself as a delicate source of aromatic sensory pleasure. Silverman then recalled telling her husband how fat and charisma-deprived she finds him. By thus transforming herself into an objectifier rather than an object, Silverman had forestalled the very prospect of objectification by both her spouse and by her audience, the very attitude she had encouraged in the first place with her references to Spears and Hilton.

A few months before Silverman performed this routine she appeared on the cover and as the subject of a photo spread in the October issue of the unabashedly sexist “lad” magazine *Maxim*.<sup>11</sup> In one photo Silverman poses “femininely.” Clothed in a candy-cane striped bikini bottom and a white tank top and with her lips puckered, she gazes at the head of a gorilla whose skin wraps around her legs. This outré posturing extended Silverman’s persona’s sexual curiosity and the possibilities of sexual attraction beyond her own species. With this pose, she ratcheted up her eagerness to cast herself as a sexual agent rather than as sexual object. This self-objectifying gorilla-girl stance vividly illustrates Laura Kipnis’ account of how Silverman’s anti-cathartic “comic sensibility” produces performances that “leave nothing exactly the same” (*Men* 86). The seemingly clashing personae on the *Maxim* cover gel to reflect the motive for stand-up iconoclasm encapsulated in Sandra Bernhard’s generalization about the male spectators who frequent her shows: “They’ll look at you twice. Once to see your tits, the other to see what you’re doing” (Lavin 91).

Such boundary-pushing became Silverman’s trademark early on her career. One of her earlier routines, for example, opens with her disclosing that “I like having sex.” Then she asks: “Any sex people in the room?” In identifying herself as one of the “sex people” and in soliciting kindred spirits, Silverman casts herself simultaneously as gazer and gaze object and grants her audience permission to do the same. The 2007 *Maxim* spread stresses Silverman’s double identity as gazer and gaze object by offsetting poses signaling compliant femininity (like the candy-cane stripes-and-puckered-lips pose) with poses casting her as a masculine aggressor. The fear-mongering sloganeering on the cover, for example, designates Silverman a “SEXY BEAST” while a smaller subscript reemphasizes the larger-than-life threat she poses by heralding her as “The New Kong of Comedy” in a double allusion to the simian title character of America’s most popular beauty-and-the-beast fable and to the fevered masculine aggressiveness and impotence Martin Scorsese searingly probed in *The King of Comedy*.

The overall effect of the images and captions in the *Maxim* feature is to wed girlish submissiveness with the rampaging, royal—“commanding”—hyper virility evoked by Ken Kalfus minimally fictional

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<sup>11</sup>“Sexy Beast”, *Maxim* cover. [http://i.ebayimg.com/00/s/MTA1Nlg4Nzc=/z/wncAAOxy3zNSH7G0/\\$\\_35.JPG](http://i.ebayimg.com/00/s/MTA1Nlg4Nzc=/z/wncAAOxy3zNSH7G0/$_35.JPG).

effort to enter the mind of one of our era's most controversial embodiments of imperiously rampaging virility, the French statesman–financier and alleged rapist Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Kalfus's Strauss-Kahn boastfully analyzes male gazing by promoting himself as its “paragon”:

Not every man has my determination, but every man is just as concupiscent, whether he's married or single, getting it regularly or not. He may be the perspiring comb-over with a somber, heavy-lidded demeanor, or the goofy, buck-toothed busboy whose bedroom is posterized with images of footballers, or the wise, soft-spoken rabbi, or the hideously maimed war veteran. Every one of those men who is heterosexual is watching you and your sisters, Mariama, surreptitiously or candidly, judging the outline of a breast and then extrapolating, or assessing a tush, an ankle, or a pair of full, vermilion lips. The turn of a head and its momentary reveal of a long, slender neck give us a deep and abiding pleasure, regardless of what happens next. Count on it.<sup>12</sup>

By appropriating the traditionally “male” candor that Kalfus's Strauss-Kahn voices, Silverman's comedy illustrates the extent to which, by century's end, the concept of male-gazing remained an instrument of critique. The critique, however, had turned more dialectical and ironic than polemical in response to the widespread recognition that Mulvey's critique has “become something of an orthodoxy” (Gamman and Marshment vii).

This ironic turn reflects a consensus among influential critics including Michel Foucault, bell hooks (116, 125–126), and Stuart Hall (201) that every orthodoxy contains its own tacit rebuttal and that rigorous critical thinking obliges us to inhabit the space between beliefs that tempt us and insights that frustrate such temptations. Consequently, our indebtedness to Mulvey for the timeliness and accuracy of her account of gazing as a traditional instrument of men's control of women needs to be complemented with the recognition that however much such controllers, the men in “command,” exercised this power for purposes of subordination, women and men alike can readily adapt and transform traditional male gazing into the oppositional gazing bell hooks has proposed as a form of resistance.

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<sup>12</sup>Compare: “Whistle, You Dumb Bastard!” cartoon George Booth, *The New Yorker* (27 August 1973). <http://www.art.com/products/p15063518123-sa-i6848715/george-booth-whistle-you-dumb-bastard-new-yorker-cartoon.htm>.

## THE LIMITS OF RECIPROCITY

This resistance became a staple of American fiction during the twentieth century and spanned the spectrum that Philip Rahv famously introduced in 1939, crudely but pithily dividing American literature's refined, cultivated, and implicitly effeminate "Paleface" writers and blunt, demotic, implicitly masculine "Redskin" writers. Among the twentieth century's most paradigmatically "Paleface" writers Edith Wharton and Willa Cather (Pinsker 484) were particularly attentive students of thwarted male gazing and of the accommodations and compromises that often result from such frustrations.

Wharton's 1919 novel *The Age of Innocence* prominently features two male gazers. The first of these, a well-born young New York lawyer, opens Wharton's narrative by admiring his fiancée. "The darling!" thought Newland Archer, his glance flitting back to the young girl" who, he assumes, "doesn't even guess what it's all about" as "he contemplated her absorbed young face with a thrill of possessorship," a thrill Wharton attributes to Archer's "pride in his own masculine initiation" (see Chap. 4). Halfway through the novel, Archer spots another gazer, his nemesis and seeming romantic rival "Beaufort," who stands "tall and red-faced, scrutinizing the women with his arrogant stare." Neither gazer wins the affections of the same exotic beauty, Ellen Olenska, whom they pursue over the course of the narrative. While Archer's affection ultimately seems reciprocated (if unconsummated), Beaufort's "commanding" wealth and *chutzpah* overshadow this reciprocity for much of Wharton's story. Beaufort's advantages have little bearing on what sunders Archer from Ellen Olenska. Far more effective in keeping them apart is the "tribal" resistance, especially the gaze (the "countless silently observing eyes") of the matriarchy that governs this rarefied New York milieu. This resistance, Archer comes to realize, has relieved of him of the sense of command he may have assumed as a privilege and obligation as a young man. What began as Archer's "masculine" prerogative, his entitlement to "possessorship," leaves him finally "shy, old-fashioned, inadequate: a mere grey speck of a man compared with the ruthless magnificent fellow he had dreamed of being."

Six years later in "Soldier's Home" the consummate "Redskin" Ernest Hemingway (Pinsker 485) showed readers another defeated gazer, one thwarted far earlier in his life and more traumatically than Newland Archer. Hemingway's hero, a combat-seasoned warrior named (far more prosaically than Newland Archer) Harold Krebs, at first cut

a more conventionally masculine figure than Wharton's protagonist, at least until Krebs realizes the futility of his prerogative as a gazer. When Krebs returned home to Oklahoma from combat on the Western Front and occupation duty along the Rhine, he considered himself a seasoned gazer. Hemingway opens "Soldier's Home" by describing two photographs. The first photo shows Krebs in the exclusively male company of his fraternity brothers. The second shows him sporting his Marine Corps NCO stripes, a sign of having at least begun his apprenticeship as a "man-in-command." Krebs appears in this photo standing "on the Rhine with two German girls." Even though "they were not beautiful," he recalls feeling at ease in their company because:

There was not all this talking. You couldn't talk much and you did not need to talk. It was simple and you were friends.

Gazing back home in Oklahoma, by contrast, Krebs *does* find beauty: "so many good-looking young girls ... he liked to look at." Sharpening this contrast, Hemingway registers what an attentive, analytic, and even fashion-conscious gazer Krebs has become among these "good looking girls":

Most of them had their hair cut short. When he went away only little girls wore their hair like that or girls that were fast. They all wore sweaters and shirt waists with round Dutch collars. It was a pattern. He liked to look at them from the front porch as they walked on the other side of the street. He liked to watch them walking under the shade of the trees. He liked the round Dutch collars above their sweaters. He liked their silk stockings and flat shoes. He liked their bobbed hair and the way they walked.

The more detailed these observations become, though, the more removed Krebs feels from the objects of his sharp gaze. Close up, he feels defeated by what he takes to be *their* rules of engagement:

... their appeal to him was not very strong. He did not like them when he saw them in the Greek's ice cream parlor. He did not want them themselves really. They were too complicated ... Vaguely he wanted a girl but he did not want to have to work to get her. He would have liked to have a girl but he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics. He did not want to have to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it.

In “Soldier’s Home,” as in *The Age of Innocence*, male-gazing seems to have proven more demoralizing than empowering, a reason to surrender rather than a basis for command.

### AS THE GAZER AGES

Now a familiar cultural staple, Mulvey’s male gazer appears to have exercised far less of the authority to “command” and “create action” that Mulvey had ascribed to him. Likewise, Mulvey’s catchphrase has lost much of its conceptual force and polemical edge. Regrettably, the very phrase “the male gaze” seems bound to serve more and more as a cue for cheap shots.

An exchange in Geoff Dyer’s acclaimed 2009 novel *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanese* illustrates the extent of this repurposing. Throughout its two-generation run, the phrase “the male gaze” has usually referred to someone else’s gaze, often despairingly, polemically, or at least warily. Dyer’s narrator, by contrast, speaking in the first person, concedes his complicity as a gazer. Like one of Henry James’s floundering couriers, this narrator travels abroad in order to secure a rare picture, a drawing of aging beauty and renowned muse:

He looked at her face in the drawing, but was unable to look at the face of the person who had handed it to him. There was the startling fact of the drawing showing her naked, but there was also an unsettling psychological quality to the picture ... She was letting this man, her lover, look at her and draw her. To gaze at their lover, naked: it was what men had always wanted to do. If the man was an artist—or just a teenager with a camcorder—then what he painted or filmed was not simply what he saw but the unchanging strength of that desire, that hunger to see ... Any love in his gaze was unreciprocated ... Look all you want, her expression said. You can see everything and you will see nothing except what I have in common with every other woman on earth. (Dyer 73)

As he shows the drawing a few hours later to a woman he’s wooing, she warns him:

‘You’re not going to say something boring about “the male gaze” are you?’  
 ‘I was actually,’ he said, looking at her. ‘Did you only say that to make  
 me look at you?’ Which was all he wanted to do for the moment. (83)

“The male gaze,” a phrase and a concept now both banal and ubiquitous, belongs in this exchange to everyone: to the admitted gazer, to the object of his gaze, and to critics and teachers who taught Dyer’s narrator and his companion about the male gaze.

This understanding of gazing as collaborative rather than as invidiously uni-directional not only antedates Mulvey’s coinage. It seems to have been central to modern and contemporary fiction for the past century. Perhaps the most famous or at least most extravagant example appears at the end of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in Molly Bloom’s famous soliloquy. On her 1989 album *Sensual World* and on the accompanying video the British singer Kate Bush cast herself as Molly Bloom in the guise of a “Machiavellian girl wear[ing] a sunset.” By identifying with Machiavelli, Europe’s most influential and most misconstrued student of power, *and* with Joyce’s heroine, an ardently desired, repeatedly objectified, scandalously venturesome wife and mistress, Bush seems to have adopted a persona at once subject to and yet complicit in what she calls the gazer’s “powers o’er a woman’s body.”<sup>13</sup>

While recalling Joyce as a flagrant male gazer and disclosing the complicity between male gazers and the objects of their gazes, Bush seems to be arguing that women may have perennially acted as active partners in the male gazing that *Ulysses* and other classic “male” narratives famously depict. As Joyce presents her, Molly Bloom appears to insinuate and embed her own desired and desiring body, her “breasts all perfume” in particular, into its surroundings, both natural and human-made—“into an enveloping landscape consisting of both “mountain flowers” and a “Moorish wall.” Bush’s rereading of *Ulysses* echoes Richard Pearce’s “male feminist” account of the novel as a series of dialogic parodies in which “the male gaze is continually broken,” its “power” broken “most importantly, by Molly’s monologue” (41, 45–46). According to Pearce’s argument, Joyce ultimately reverses the gaze so that the ostensible gaze object, Molly Bloom, “turns the men around her “into objects” and exercises an “all-embracing” and “independent” gaze of her own (46–49).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>“Her Greatest Lyric.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASb7SyoWyeE> ‘date accessed’ [9th May 2017].

<sup>14</sup>Compare “When She Catches Me Staring,” Borus & Feinstein, *Girls & Sports* cartoon (21 February 2008) (no longer available online).

## JOINT CUSTODY

The prevalence of the phrase “the male gaze” and its conceptual appeal seems to rest on a simple and compelling insight that has over years too often degenerated into facile oversimplification. For male-gazing, both the idea and the practice itself, to remain conceptually compelling as a conversation stimulant and as an opportunity for inquiry, writers, teachers, and male-gaze readers need to keep in mind the “reciprocal curiosity” that F. Scott Fitzgerald described as a prime goad to gazing almost a century ago in *The Great Gatsby* (see Chap. 4):

I looked at Miss Baker, wondering ... Her gray, sun-stained eyes looked back at me with reciprocal curiosity.

Fitzgerald’s early fiction presents a particularly apt illustration of how male gazing embeds itself in more ambitious moves toward cultural, historical, or philosophical reflection. In 1920 the monthly magazine *Smart Set* ran a Fitzgerald story titled “May Day” about a failed artist who “had loved to” sketch a woman whose “cherished ... pert arresting profile” he could draw “with his eyes shut” (*Stories*). During the five-year interval between the appearance of “Mayday” and the publication of *Gatsby* the young Fitzgerald seems to have grown from understanding gazing as form of solipsistic self-gratification to recognizing gazing as a reciprocal inquiry. Stewart O’Nan’s *West of Sunset*, a fictional account of the end of Fitzgerald’s career and his end-of-life stint in Hollywood as a screenwriter, details the extent to which Fitzgerald eventually came to regard rigorously curious gazing (including the kind of fashion-conscious attentiveness Hemingway described) as a professional necessity.

The first thing he needed to figure out was how to use Joan Crawford. He studied her like a test subject ... in the flickering dark of Thalberg’s old projection room ... watching her arch her eyebrows and smirk her way through *Possessed* and *Chained* and *Forsaking All Others*, trying to discern her strengths ... Bullock’s Schwab’s—the Troc—everywhere he went he pictured Joan Crawford, imagined her character parsing other women on the street. He began to pay attention to fabrics and headlines and to be dismayed at the epidemic of slacks. (O’Nan 157–58)

During the same year that “Mayday” appeared, *The Smart Set* also published Willa Cather’s novella “Coming, Aphrodite!” In this story, far



more extensively than Fitzgerald, Cather critically and sympathetically validated meticulous and reciprocal gazing. To the extent that the male gazer who serves as her viewpoint character comes to epitomize what, in Cather's view, modern artists, male painters, and perhaps women novelists alike ought to aspire to, Cather even comes close to idealizing male gazing. One obstacle Cather initially faced in getting the story published also suggests how discomfiting it may have been a century ago for a woman to write from the vantage point of a male gazer. Exerting pressure that verged on censorship, Cather's supposedly urbane editors at *The Smart Set* pressed her to replace the innocuous adjective "unclad" with the "girlish" circumlocutory euphemism "clad in a pink chiffon cloud of some sort" in characterizing a gazer's first impression of the arresting female body that comes to obsess him.

More provocatively, in "Coming, Aphrodite!" Cather stages a fraught conflict over the role of artists and the value of their work, working a much-mined vein among Victorian and early twentieth-century writers such as Dickens, George Gissing, Henry James, Jack London, Joyce, Woolf, Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, Nathanael West. The antagonists in "Coming, Aphrodite!" are two heartland-born aspiring artists who find themselves next-door neighbors in a Washington Square walkup at the close of the nineteenth century. Over the course of the story Eden Bower (née Edna Bowers), a singer and actress who aspired as a girl to become "the czar's mistress" (a newly unlikely prospect when the story was published in 1920), rises to theatrical stardom. During her brief Village sojourn, Eden falls under the gaze and briefly under the spell of a contrarian painter in the adjoining flat. The painter, Dan Hedger, also becomes "successful," reputedly "one of the first men among the moderns," while eschewing Eden's more commonplace understanding of career success.

In a veiled autobiographical turn Cather depicts Hedger, paradoxically, as an anti-modern modernist who strove to "get away from all that photographic stuff." Recalling such cherished male gazers as Matisse and Renoir, Cather shows Hedger beset by what one commentator on these painters' work called "Arcadian obsessions, the longings of a modernist who didn't want to be modern" (Cotter). Recollecting his sojourn in France, for example, Hedger stresses that he had "never been in Paris," spending his entire French sojourn "in the south of France ... studying with C—... biggest man among the moderns." This geographical reference and the chronological frame of "Coming, Aphrodite!" indicate that

“C” probably alludes to Paul Cézanne. Cather’s description of Hedger’s epiphanic discovery of Eden, moreover, recalls the full-frontal extended pose of Cézanne’s 1899 portrait “Nude Woman Standing”<sup>15</sup> painted around the same time Hedger studied under “C’s” tutelage. Though not evidently standing “in a pool of sunlight,” Cézanne’s model does face the viewer from the most brightly lighted area of the canvas. In “Nude Woman Standing” Cezanne’s palette favors the lower end of the color spectrum—brown, yellow, orange—an effect Cather encompassed with a reference to a “golden shower” and “helianthine fire.” The attributes that draw Hedger’s gaze—Eden’s appearance as “wholly unclad, doing exercises,” swinging “her arms” fully in action—recall the way Cezanne shows his “Nude Woman’s” arms bent over her head, with one arm higher than the other, and with her feet appearing to move, one foot in front of the other, toward the gazer. Cather’s apparent move, like that of her male-gazing alter-ego Hedger, to align herself with the provocative candor that nudes by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French painters (Cézanne, Courbet, Matisse, Picasso, Renoir) brought to male gazing may be glimpsed in the *The Smart Set* editors’ aversion to the adjective “unclad” (which Cather made of a point of restoring when “Coming, Aphrodite!” appeared in her second story collection, *Youth and the Bright Medusa*).

Despite this connection to modernity and modernism, Hedger sums up his apprenticeship in modernity with a nod to Golden Age nostalgia. Being in France, “Hedger concluded,” “was being in Paradise.” When asked whether French women are “very beautiful” and whether he had “awfully good things to eat and drink,” Hedger calls to mind the extent to which male-gazing modernists and their successors tended to embed the gaze object in an encompassing context, in still life close-ups and in wide-angle landscapes.

In his *Diary of a Bad Year*, Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee assiduously illustrates this embeddedness. After registering “my first glimpse of” a “startling young woman” wearing a “tomato red shift startling in its brevity,” Coetzee’s gazer becomes a pained philosopher and a speculatively mind-reading psychologist, recounting how “as I watched her, an ache, a metaphysical ache crept over me ... and in an intuitive way

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<sup>15</sup>Paul Cezanne, *Nude Woman Standing*. <http://uploads7.wikiart.org/images/paul-cezanne/nude-woman-standing-1899.jpg>.

she knew about it [but] did not particularly like [it] ... though it was tribute to her beauty and freshness as well as to the shortness of her dress" (3, 7). Much later in his diary, Coetzee's narrator recounts a lesson in gazing from a dead friend. A consummate "womanizer ... keenly receptive to feminine beauty," the friend taught him that most powerful gazers confine their gazing to "the realm of imagination" (175). They learn to forgo material contact with the objects of their gaze and thus renounce any actual or imaginary claims to command them. Such consummate gazers opt instead to enjoy the pleasure of curatorial connoisseurship, "to capture a 'living image' of the beloved and make it their own." Some far-reaching benefits of this curatorial approach registers in the confession by one of our era's most renowned museum curators, the Metropolitan Museum's emeritus director Philippe de Montebello, that

It was in displaced desire ... that his personal engagement with art began: by falling in love, in his early teens, with a black-and-white photograph of the thirteenth-century limestone head of Marchioness Uta in Naumburg Cathedral, with "her puffed eyelids, as though after a night of lovemaking ... I still think she's one of the most beautiful women in the world." (Bell, "There")

In Coetzee's account, this aestheticizing sublimation of gazing becomes a "technique" of inquiry and surveillance, an opportunity for "the erotic imagination" to "explore at leisure until the woman's every last secret was laid open" (175, 177).

Part of what makes Cather's "Coming, Aphrodite" such a crucial story in the male-gaze reader canon is that it shows a gazer integrating the gaze with his professional calling, treating gazing as a conceptually dense, emotionally fraught "exploration." Hedger thus serves as an exponent of inquisitive, socially alert, information-rich and ultimately life-changing gazing. In an exchange early in his and Eden Bower's courtship, Cather shows Hedger sounding like a careful professional observer of the life of the senses in which his artistic calling necessarily engages him. In answering Eden's trite question about the legendary charms of French women—"Are the women very beautiful?"—Hedger replies like a reporter or a traditionally meticulous "realist" novelist:

Hedger said some of the women were fine looking, especially one girl who went about selling fish and lobsters. About the food there was nothing remarkable,—except the ripe figs, he liked those. They drank sour wine, and used goat-butter, which was strong and full of hair, as it was churned in a goat skin.

Then he adds that “it’s a beautiful country” and in answering the question “How, beautiful?” offers to “show” Eden “some sketches” he made of the Provencal landscape. For Hedger the beauty of the women around him is apparently inextricable from Provencal landscape, cuisine, and agricultural practices, as contexts and circumstances are for every accomplished male-gaze reader.

Conjectural evidence indicates that Hedger may be based on William Glackens, who hailed, like Hedger, from Pennsylvania, who was almost an exact contemporary of Cather; who studied in France, where he fell under the influence of Renoir (instead of “C”) and developed a lifelong attachment to Provence; who became part of the emerging Greenwich Village “scene” at about the same time as Cather and her characters; who worked as a commercial illustrator like Hedger; and whose best-known portrait, *Nude with an Apple* (1910),<sup>16</sup> associates male gazing with Christendom’s Ur-pursuit-of-knowledge narrative, the story of a couple that “ate apples ... and, after a while ... knew it all” (Foer).

Cather’s representation of Hedger as a bohemian paragon as well as her authorial alter-ego helps establish his gazing as the plot pivot in “Coming, Aphrodite!” Cather’s barely ambivalent preference for what Hedger represents at the expense of what Eden, his gaze object, represents privileges unapologetic gazing as integral to the view of artistic conviction and achievement Cather’s narrative promotes. Hedger’s gazing begins fortuitously when he discovers a previously hidden knothole “in the closet that was built against the partition separating his room from Miss Bower’s”:

When he took his overcoat from its place against the partition, a long ray of yellow light shot across the dark enclosure, a knothole, evidently, in the high wainscoting of the west room. He had never noticed it before, and without realizing what he was doing, he stooped

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<sup>16</sup>William Glackens, *Nude with an Apple*. <http://uploads4.wikiart.org/images/william-james-glackens/nude-with-apple-1910.jpg>.

and squinted through it. Yonder, in a pool of sunlight, stood his new neighbor, wholly unclad, doing exercises... before a long gilt mirror. Hedger did not happen to think how unpardonable it was of him to watch her. Nudity was not improper to anyone who had worked so much from the figure, and he continued to look, simply because he had never seen a woman's body so beautiful as this one, positively glorious in action. As she swung her arms and changed from one pivot of motion to another, muscular energy seemed to flow through her from her toes to her finger-tips. The soft flush of exercise and the gold of afternoon sun played over her flesh together, enveloped her in a luminous mist which, as she turned and twisted, made now an arm, now a shoulder, now a thigh, dissolve in pure light and instantly recover its outline with the next gesture.

Cather shows Hedger occupying the position Bob Dylan, another Greenwich Village *wunderkind*, sang of in visualizing a condition to which male gazing often leads. Contrary to Mulvey's account of male gazers as in command, Hedger "winds up peeping through a keyhole down upon [his] knees," as in Dylan's ironically titled gazer's lament "She Belongs to Me" (see Chap. 4). According to Cather, this abjection has its compensations. "Stooping" and "groping in the dark for the eyehole" that "makes everything otherworldly," "enchanted" and "remote," Hedger completes but then transcends the transformation Mulvey and feminist successors ascribe to gazing. Aestheticizing Eden into an object of enchantment, he manages, in Mulvey's phrase, to "produce the woman as object." Eventually, as a suitor, though, he also manages to engage with her as an autonomous agent.

As Cather's narrative unfolds, this balance proves unsustainable. Cather elicits sympathy for Hedger by showing his artistic convictions undermining his affections as a lover and complicates what Hedger represents while leaving Eden Bower one-dimensional and self-objectifying. As a counterpoint to Eden's complacent stability, Cather's compounds Hedger's talent and status as a painter by highlighting over the course of his narrative his up-from-nowhere orphan-boy backstory, his commercial adroitness, his venturesomeness as a traveler, and his panache as a raconteur. As a painter, suitor, and storyteller, Hedger comes to incarnate what John Berger defines as "embodied" male power, which, Berger hastens to add, the embodiment may claim without possessing, but can nevertheless exploit simply because he's male (45–46).

With an extreme close-up view of his hands, Cather shows Hedger signaling, and barely containing, the bodily assertiveness Berger identifies. Glued to his peephole while Eden “turned and twisted ... now an arm, now a shoulder, now a thigh ... with the next gesture,” Hedger reaches the limit of Berger’s truism about the “promise” of “men’s power” over female sex objects—“men act and act and woman appear”:

Hedger’s fingers curved as if he were holding a crayon; mentally he was doing the whole figure in a single running line, and the charcoal seemed to explode in his hand at the point where the energy of each gesture was discharged into the whirling disc of light, from a foot or shoulder, from the up-thrust chin or the lifted breasts.

This “discharge” or release seems to promise, paradoxically, liberation through obsession.

The liberating obsession available to scrupulous, assiduous male gazers, which Cather ascribes to Hedger, reverberates even more viscerally in an account by Andrew Wyeth of his discovery of his favored gaze object: Helga Testorf.<sup>17</sup> Like Eden in “Coming, Aphrodite,” Helga was a close neighbor of the artist. Helga, however, “sat” for Wyeth over a fourteen-year period. She recalls feeling transformed and aroused, “filled up” and “in love,” as a result of being subjected to Wyeth’s gaze (Meryman 336, 338). Eden Bower seems to have felt similarly aroused by Hedger’s gaze. Upon learning about Hedger’s “peeping,” however, Eden Bower comes to treat her arousal as a challenging epiphany. After “Hedger confessed his crime,” he “was reproached and forgiven, and now Eden knew what it was in his look that she had found so disturbing.”

This move from reproach to absolution may second the observation of a the narrator in “In the Cage,” a 1898 novella by Henry James, the precursor Cather honored as “a mighty master of language and keen student of human actions and motives” (Curtin 248). James’s nameless protagonist in “In the Cage,” herself an aspiring student of human actions and motives, acknowledges both the imperative to express indignation at the gazer’s leer (“the male glance”) and the contingent disingenuousness of such outrage:

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<sup>17</sup>“Andrew Wyeth’s Stunning Secret.” *Time Magazine* (18 August 1986). Cover. [http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/images/2009/01/15/time\\_magazine.jpg](http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/images/2009/01/15/time_magazine.jpg).

When she watched, a minute later, through the cage, the swing of her visitor's departing petticoats, she saw the sight from the waist down; and when the counter-clerk, after a mere male glance, remarked, with an intention unmistakably low, 'Handsome woman!' she had for him the finest of her chills: 'She's the widow of a bishop.' She always felt, with the counter-clerk, that it was impossible sufficiently to put it on; for what she wished to express to him was the maximum of her contempt, and that element in her nature was confusedly stored. 'A bishop' was putting it on, but the counter-clerk's approaches were vile.

No such outrage follows from Hedger's surprisingly exculpatory confession of his own "vile" male glancing. Instead when the couple finally acts on their mutual attraction

faces were lost ... blurred in shadow, but the figures were a man and a woman, and that was their whole concern and their mysterious beauty,—it was the rhythm in which they moved, at last, along the roof and down into the dark hole; he first, drawing her gently after him. She came down very slowly. The excitement and bravado and uncertainty of that long day and night seemed all at once to tell upon her. When his feet were on the carpet and he reached up to lift her down, she twined her arms about his neck as after a long separation, and turned her face to him, and her lips, with their perfume of youth and passion.

Though Wyeth biographers report that, unlike Hedger and Eden, Wyeth and Helga never had sex, Helga did reciprocate Wyeth's gaze-inspired desire. According to Helga, simply sitting for "Andy" resulted in her falling in love with him. Another Wyeth subject recounts the frisson of being an artist's gaze object far more graphically than Helga recollected her "love" for "Andy" or than Cather's narrator describes Eden Bower's attachment to Dan Hedger:

...the second he started to sketch me ... I could feel him *really* looking—I felt the color going right to my face. That's the intensity. My nipples were erect three-quarters of the time (Meryman 338).

Like Hedger, Wyeth found this heady mixture of artistic inspiration and erotic excitement both freeing and consuming:

And now I meet this girl and I get right up to her crotch and really draw it. With no feeling of, oh, you can't do that. She was an image I couldn't get out of my mind (Meryman 338).

In the penultimate section of "Coming, Aphrodite!" in an exchange that ends up initiating Hedger's and Bower's mutual seduction Hedger fortifies the liberating force of his untoward gaze by becoming a vividly embodied narrator, a verbal as well as a visual artist, who wears a "savage and determined expression" while narrating a "brutal story." Reacting to his Mesoamerican folktale about a sexually voracious rain-goddess queen

Eden Bower sat shivering a little as she listened. Hedger was not trying to please her, she thought, but to antagonize and frighten her by his ... Now she was looking at the man he really was. Nobody's eyes had ever defied her like this. They were searching her and seeing everything; all she had concealed ... He was testing her, trying her out, and she was more ill at ease than she wished to show. "That's quite a thrilling story," she said at last, rising and winding her scarf about her throat.

Adhering to widely accepted imperatives of modern art, Hedger has discomfited his audience. But he also fails over the course of "Coming, Aphrodite!" to command his gaze object or exercise any control over her actions, despite the sexual attachment that follows from the combination of his gazing and his adroitness as a storyteller.

Cather associates Hedger's art and his gaze with yet another dimension of modernism, with the modernist view of the artist's calling not simply as an antagonistic storyteller—a narrative provocateur—but as an experimental adventurer. Constantly "outliving a succession of convictions and revelations about his art" and "getting rid of ideas" he once embraced, Hedger embodies Cather's own understanding of artistic integrity, in opposition to Eden's male-gaze-sanctioned view of herself as a "marketable product" and of the commercial "success" that Eden embraces and then futilely presses on Hedger as a worthy aspiration. "Coming, Aphrodite!" ends a generation after Eden and Hedger's abrupt parting. Returning to Manhattan after a triumphant European stage career, Eden asks a carriage-trade 5th Avenue gallery owner whether Hedger "had great success."

"Certainly. He is one of the first men among the moderns. That is to say, among the very moderns. He is always coming up with something different.



He often exhibits in Paris, you must have seen.” ... M. Jules pulled at his short grey moustache. “But, Madame, there are many kinds of success,” he began cautiously. Madame gave a dry laugh. “Yes, so he used to say. We once quarreled on that issue. And how would you define his particular kind?” M. Jules grew thoughtful. “He is a great name with all the young men, and he is decidedly an influence in art. But one can’t definitely place a man who is original, erratic, and who is changing all the time.”

Hedger’s market-flouting commercial success as a painter and his authoritativeness as a storyteller, who leaves his audience “shivering a little as she listened,” underscore the extent to which *he* rather than Eden Bower serves as Cather’s viewpoint character and alter-ego.

It stands to reason, therefore, that the story implicitly but not very ambiguously makes a case *for* male-gazing, as not merely biologically determined or socially conditioned—as something that, in Mulvey’s view, men do to women—but as an artistic resource and perspectival option. According to *New Yorker* theater critic Hilton Als, “few feminists have articulated the ways in which some women may find stereotypical male behavior necessary, if only because it enables them to act out its supposed counterpart, femininity.” Als’ reasoning echoes the understanding of gazing voiced by Cather. If we must, as the prevailing wisdom argues, treat “femininity” and masculinity as gender-producing performances rather than genetically coded identities, then male-gazing belongs to this larger repertory of gender-making and gender-bending performances and opportunities for exploring and staging the effects of desire both within and between the sexes.

### ATTENTION/AT-EASE

Early in her 1948 novel *The Heat of the Day* Elizabeth Bowen demonstrates what happens when characters and narrators set out, at cross purposes, to stage male gazing. Bowen has her narrator fix the reader’s attention on “an Englishman in civilian clothes” attending an *al fresco* concert in London’s Regent’s Park. “At every interval” he “would cast about his neighbors with a baited look” (*Heat* 5–6) making a point of not looking at any particular audience member. Next to him sat an orphaned teenage war widow and self-identifying “movie-goer” (168) androgynously named Louie. Louie, Bowen’s narrator reports, appeared dressed and made-up in order to have an “effect.” Habitually looking

for company, Louie seeks to elicit her fellow concert-goer's withheld gaze by starting a conversation. Bowen, however, repeatedly thwarts this gaze-soliciting initiative. She not only sets this encounter in a formal performance space, an amphitheater; she also characterizes Louie as constrained to keep rehearsing, without ever actually getting to perform, for her new audience. This thwarted performance would consist of what to her mind she's already established as a successful routine for achieving "the effect she hoped to convey" (8). In setting up this failed performance, Bowen describes one of the Englishman's first reactions to having his gaze solicited: "he at once looked, distasteful, the other way" (6). "Discountenanced" by "the feeling of being looked at twice—being viewed then checked over again in the same moment" Bowen's gaze-seeking ingénue experiences a failure of "perseverance." Instead of a gaze, Louie's performance elicits only a "frown" and an "unkind tone" (9–10). She later remembers this "disheartening farewell" as "a smack in the face" (159). Despite the rebuff, Louie continues to "keep a lookout" for this stranger whom she describes to a neighbor as "funny," as if *he* had been performing for *her*.

Notwithstanding his aversion to Louie's come-on, Bowen does show the "Englishman" as knowing that he's supposed to gaze and as steeped in "the sense of being watched" (38). Despite his aversion to gazing, Bowen ends up identifying the Englishman as constitutionally inclined to perform, with "routine alertness," (9) his role as a male gazer. Apparently unavoidably, Louie's "caked" lips "struck him and could have moved him, only they didn't" (8). Through his refusal to play the role of the male gazer as it's customarily scripted, "the Englishman" seems so astute about playing this role that knows how to downplay it with devastating effect.

Much later in *The Heat of Day*, when the primary star-crossed lovers plot has usurped Louie and "the Englishman" as the narrative's focal point, Bowen shows this gaze resistance at work between intimates, in a private space, rather than between strangers in Regent's Park. The heroine's lover becomes momentarily dissociated, disavowing his status as gazer when "with an effect of deliberation, he fixed his eyes on her face—though somehow not, it appeared, on her. Nor did those eyes appear to her to be his" (228). In both passages Bowen positions men (known heterosexuals in each instance), who are socially scripted for gazing as their default stance, in circumstances where they disclaim the gazer's role. As Cather did a generation earlier, Bowen shows gazing as

a performance, a solo or a duet, available to women as well as to men. Most broadly, what stands out in both Bowen's and Cather's narratives is the desire and capacity among women novelists to stand in as male gazers—to male-gaze on behalf of their readers.

Bowen also raises the stakes by stretching the possibilities of what both gazing and refusing to gaze might tell readers about a man's intimate and civic relationships. Both the male non-gazers in *The Heat of the Day* turn out to be morally compromised and less than persuasive in rationalizing their compromises. Robert, the heroine's lover and a wounded Dunkirk veteran, turns out to be working for the Third Reich. Harrison, the rude concertgoer in the park, is the government agent pursuing Robert. In performing this patriotic duty, Harrison sets out to blackmail the novel's heroine, Robert's lover Stella. In exchange for sex, Harrison promises not to arrest Robert.

A movie reviewer as well as a novelist—"a fan, not a critic" ("Why" 207)—Bowen makes a gazer out of Stella by depicting her and Louie as moviegoers. Just as Mulvey shows her male gazers confirming their identities by looking at screens, Bowen shows Stella discovering the story of her life with Robert in "Technicolor" (*Heat* 125). Her unvoiced misgivings about Robert surface when her view of him calls to mind what happens "in the cinema when some breakdown in projection leaves one shot frozen, absurdly, on the screen" (106). From Stella's perspective, Robert becomes an on-screen "celluloid" gaze object. After describing her view of Robert as telescopically distant, Stella shifts metaphors, so that the light by which she sees Robert takes on the "glossy thinness of celluloid" (124–125). Once she's established this perspective, Stella takes "command" of the *mise-en-scène*—of what Mulvey calls the "stage"—and the "action." Changing both the shot and the lighting, Stella assumes the role of a director, not simply a moviegoer like Mulvey's male gazers, and thus an agent far more in command than any of the onscreen gaze objects Mulvey described. Instead, Stella "brought the scene back again into focus by staring at window reflections in the glaze of the teapot" (125). More decisively if more obliquely than Cather, Bowen has turned the male gaze and her women characters' appropriation of it into far more than a spectator's instrument of domination. Showing Stella at the movies—an exclusively male activity according to Mulvey—and metaphorically making her own movies in whatever space she chooses, Bowen transforms gazing and the counter-gazing it elicits into cues for

managing and manipulating one's social position and for negotiating questions of personal and civic loyalty.

When Louie last sees Harrison, dining with Stella, who is now primed to accept his extortion deal, she brings "her gaze to bear upon Harrison, re-assessing him, from the finger nails to the crown of his head, in a new and important light" and judges "that Stella should do better" (266). Bowen complements Louie's penetrating gaze with an ear for implication. Recalling Harrison's "remark" that he "seldom forgot a face," Louie extends her gaze beyond his hand and head and determines that "considering what a number of" faces "there are, it ought to be quite funny inside your head by this time." Stella's concurrence—"you're right ... it is quite funny inside his head"—prompts Harrison to reassert his control of the scene with his male gaze by "fixing his eyes on her." This move fails because, as the narrator notes, Harrison's response proved ambiguous, abject and thus easily ignorable.

With a reaction Bowen characterizes as "an either equivocal or tormented expression," Harrison joins a millennia-old line of flustered, flouted gazers. His position, as a Crown security agent, a representative of established authority backed by the force of law during wartime, makes a cruel joke of his ineffectiveness. This comeuppance makes for an unmistakable caution against reflexively associating male gazing with domination.

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