

# Theories of The “Gaze”

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**Abstract:** The paper, **Theories Of The Gaze** insights, women to be an equal in the aspects of looking at literal and metaphysical. With reference of serious writers, the theory associates with ideas and concepts from movements and theories. John Berger's "Essays of Seeing" outlays the theory and Hawthorn elaborates the theory in the aspects of interpersonal looking. Michael Argyle and Mark Code's Gaze and mutual gaze look in Lyads and cultures in looking behaviour. Writers, Simone de Beauvoir, Ruth Sherry, Elaine Showalter and Margaret Atwood are gazed women in all aspects of social, political and cultural also they portray woman characters in superior stance and exhibit power to overcome the obstacles in daily life. The Gaze like mirror reflects in what aspects of looking at a person, especially woman in society and culture. The theory has made critics and readers of literary works more self aware and conscious. The focal of theory is to look at equal power relationship in our contemporary world.

**Key words:** gaze, look, female, literary, psychology, sociology.

The Dictionaries in general define gaze as "to look steadily or intently" "to look with curiosity, wonder etc", "a fixed look", "the object gazed at" (Chambers, 519, Macmillan, 308). Gaze by itself is a gender retrieval activity, being something shared by both sexes. Jeremy Hawthorn differentiates gaze as forms of "literal and metaphysical looking. It is older version of "point of view" is mostly its application to the narrative techniques, a visual manifestation of projecting the layers of consciousness embedded within the authored vision. Hawthorn further elaborating on the theories of gaze draws attention to the aspects of interpersonal looking, he points to its significant characteristics:

- ◆ Gaze being an exchange between two individuals as an interactive, two-way process and in looking and searching for information or contact, we reveal a lot about ourselves.
- ◆ Looking is a cumulative process—each look is a buildup as the previous looks eyes that absorb and those that have learned their lesson never forget.
- ◆ Looking is far from being a neutral process of gathering information, our looking is saturated with the residues of our social and cultural existence—those relating to class, sexuality, economics. (Hawthorn 508)

Theories of gaze cannot be traced back to a theoretical or critical movement, though it has been scattered along with associated or related ideas and concepts from movements and theories as psychoanalysis, discourse studies and film studies. Hardly more than a quarter of a century old, gaze cannot be given a specific period of genesis or a historical origin. As an umbrella term, it emerges as a method like 'discourse' as a way of considering a text or an utterance.

John Berger's influential book "Ways of seeing" (1972) partially prepared the ground for the development of the theories of the gaze. Berger's readings and interpretations may have altered since 1972, but the crux of his book on "The way we see the way we see" has been very substantial. However, it was Laura Mulvey's 1975 article "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" which popularized the term leading to the formation of a new theoretical area of academic study. Mulvey based these key ideas from psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and further applying the theory to the political aims of feminism. Freud had cited the term "Scopophilia" in his "Three essays on the theory of sexuality" (1905) as "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (510). Like Simone de Beauvoir, Mulvey argues that woman is often an object that is objectified and in a world underlined by a sexual imbalance, the gaze is split between the active male and the passive female. In the same year of Mulvey's article Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1975 in French, 1977 in translation) introduced the term "panopticism", meaning "all seeing", a concept taken from the writings of the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. For both Foucault and Bentham, the owner of the gaze is unambiguous, a means of control. The gazer decides who is in charge and who is in control. Following this Michael Argyle and Mark Cooks' 1976 book "Gaze and Mutual Gaze" gives a lot of information about looking in dyads (pairs of interacting individuals) and about cultural variations in looking behavior.

Simone de Beauvoir's main thesis in her epochal work is that throughout history women have been reduced to objects for men. "Woman" has been constructed as man's other, denied the right to her own subjectivity and to responsibility for her own actions. She defines woman as immanence and man as transcendence. According to her, this fundamental assumption dominates all aspects of social, political and cultural life and how women themselves internalize this objectified faith. Beauvoir thundered her statement that "one is not born a woman, one becomes one." Freud's own text, particularly "the uncanny" theorize the gaze as a phallic activity linked to a sadistic mastery of the object. As long as the master's Scopophilia (love of looking) is satisfied, his domination is secure. For Freud, as for other Western philosophers, the woman becomes a mirror for his own masculinity.

The article "Theories of Gaze" Jeremy Hawthorn asserts that the theories of the gaze may have originated from a range of different sources they can however, he applied and developed in a number of different bodies of theory. He points out that feminism is a concept that can gain immensely from the theories of gaze, as both the literal and metaphorical gaze may be associated with differential gender roles.

In any situation the men look and women are looked at. The looker assumes the superior stance, exhibits control and power and can easily disempower the “looked at”. The ‘looked’ can occupy an object position, a victim passively, conditioned by the ‘gaze’, The gaze he asserts can both be the “product of patriarchy” (the power exercised by men over women) and also a way of surfacing male dominance, this particularly relates to the woman as a spectacle.

Ruth Sherry makes a very keen observation when he points out that books written by a male writer is targeted at a general audience, while those written by a woman writer is meant for a specialized audience. As Elaine Showalter refers to women’s adaptation of male names to escape the notion of the book being written by a woman so as to ensure a wider reading public. The Woman produced text generally occupied a totally different status and space from the ‘male’ text. This being the measure of suspicion in the “psychodynamics of female creativity”. It is after a gendered mannerism to find the characters cast in a book to reflect the tendencies of its creators. In the male produced book, Women characters tend to be assigned a limited, restricted scope and space as well as a dimensional size and structure to male centric characters who populate a major segment of their books. Perched at an enviable angle, the male gazer both as writer and creator of character conceives situations and circumstances that ----the women into a non-functional entity. Lisa Harper has argued that “Theories based on the work of the French psychoanalyst. Jacques Lacan reflect the fact that he has little to say about the gaze of a Woman”(qtd on Waugh, 513).

Further she comments in most---

The desiring gaze is constructed as the gaze

Of a male subject at a female object, so

That little room is left for the active gaze

Of a desiring woman and no place for

Her desire (513).

Most male written literature displace the woman from the consciousness of her feminine sensibility and is forcibly made to posit the position of the male perspective. The feminist critic cautions the female readers to adapt a ---- and to resist that particular “immasculation: the pressure on a female reading”(513). This emerges as one of the patriarchal strategies to debunk the woman as a writer and thus limit her experimental aspects as a woman creating her own texts. While this “interactive gaze of a man and a woman is recurrently portrayed by authors of both sexes as a space of mutually perceived equality”(514), looks assume a site that is often unequal, or at least prompts a notion of being inferior. Women have traditionally been held as being more skilled in using their senses, particularly in using their own eyes and observing the eyes of others than have men, and that such skill can be traced to the works of women authors. However, there might be

democracy in the unaggressive, shared look, a democracy that serves many authors as a model of what the relationship between man and woman, and a man and a woman might be but rarely is" (513). Eyes on a 'gaze' may be a window to indeeplly embedded inherent characteristics and reflect the kind/type of person who owns the gaze. A gaze cannot typically be categorized and that amounts for a range of reflections that are gender specific.

Theories of Gaze can also be applied to the narrative theory or 'narratology'. When a woman is forced to assume the reading position, and if the gaze of a fictional narrator is a male gaze, and if the narrator is 'explicitly or implicitly gendered' as male (for eg Mary Ann Evans adapting the pseudonym George Eliot), then the point of view is not longer a "technical matter" but "an assumption of a looking perspective that carries with it a lot of ideological and political baggage" (514). Then there is the imperial look which has been associated with post-colonialism, E. Ann Kalpan defines the imperial gaze as one-way, the rulers look and those ruled-the 'subject race' of oppressed people avert their eyes. It was Edward W. Said's book on orientalism (1978) that the use of the look to empower the colonizes and disempower the colonized began to be theorized more actively. Following said, theorists have been able to develop the idea of orientalism as a way of looking that links the empowered 'lookers' and the disempowered 'looked-at'. Ann Kalpan used these concepts to include the insights of feminist appropriations of the gaze. "The imperial gaze reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject" (78).

Margaret Atwood's novel "Surfacing" has published in the year 1972 the same year of John Berger's book "Ways of Seeing". Atwood's novel documents "the violence congealed with the ways in which men see women" is painstakingly and painfully revealed. When one of the male character David forces his wife Anna to strip naked for the making of a film entitled 'Random Samples', Anna's collaboration in her recreation as the image that David forces her to be. Strongly collocated with the image she want to be. In between the two, the real "who she is" appears to be last, and at the end of the novel, she keeps changing until she cannot see herself, before being forced to confront who she thinks she is. There are many ways in which images can be created and manipulated electronically but the strong belief is "Seeing is believing".

Jeremy Hawthorn neatly sums up the connection between literary criticism and the concern with 'gaze' between the literal and metaphorical looking processes.

...the mutual and one-way looks directed by  
Fictional characters at one another, the gaze  
of author and narrator at these same fictional characters and their actions,  
and the gaze of readers at the events that unfold in literary works (516).

With emerging number of recent theoretical developments, the theory of 'gaze' has made critics and readers of literary works more 'self-aware', and more 'self-conscious'. It has also forced as to confront the fact that

‘looking’ or ‘gazing’ is simply not just connected with gathering information but also signals” complicity in on opposition to unequal power relationships in our world”(517),perhaps to the understanding question of will ever ‘a gaze’ be an equal one.

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