

Power, Self-Transformation, and Looks: Capturing the Gaze in Jane Austen

Chancellor's Honors Program

Honors Thesis

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May 6th, 2014

I.

Introduction

In 1975, the feminist film critic Laura Mulvey published a paper in the journal, *Screen*, on the revolutionary concept of the “male gaze” in film. The premise of “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” posited that films were shot from a distinctly male perspective, and the way the camera would pan down a woman’s body illustrated the intentional objectification and a desire for pleasure. Mulvey continued to argue that males were the active “gazers”, while women were the passive “looked-upon”, and thus, women had no agency of their own. She divided the male gaze into two separate types: the voyeuristic, which gazes because a woman is something to be looked at, and the fetishistic, which gazes because a woman is seen as a way to compensate for “the lack” (or the fear of male castration). To remedy this problem in the classic films of the time, Mulvey suggested that films instead be shot from a feminist perspective, and the male gaze be interrupted, and no longer a part of the tradition of film-making. Mulvey released in response to her original 1975 article later another article titled “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)”. It discussed the phenomena of the “female gaze”, and how in Mulvey’s opinion it was a concept of ‘transvetism’, in which the female viewer looks in lieu of the male perspective. To elaborate, this means the female never has her own gaze, but only looks at other women, as well as herself, in the same way that a man may look at her – to objectify. In relation to modern day life, this could equivocate to the thought that women have when dressing in the morning, and deciding what to wear based on how they feel the men in their lives may react to it. Consciously, and even subconsciously, this seems to be the normative for most heterosexual women, which most have accepted as a part of life. In regards to the concept of the male gaze and female gaze in literary

theory, it has in recent years often been applied to both literature and art, thus expanding past the scope of just film theory.

Jane Austen, the classic debutante of nineteenth century literature, created dynamic female characters in her novels, who seem to sometimes embrace the concept of the male gaze, while also at times interpolating their own version of the gaze. Austen is not usually touted as a feminist author, but under the dialogic layers, and interpretative analysis of the texts, many strong female characters emerge, who come into conflict with the traditional gender norms of the day, and redefine their own roles in the world. Fanny Price of *Mansfield Park*, Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*, and Anne Elliot of *Persuasion* are all Austen characters who are involved with the gaze, and use it to create their own agency, though in all different outlets. Fanny Price is able to utilize the objectifying male gaze of Henry Crawford to transform herself from a half-self to a whole self, and so become a fully empowered woman. Elizabeth Bennet who is subject to the judgmental gaze of Fitzwilliam Darcy, interrupts his gaze and returns it with her own, which allows both Darcy and her to grow in their views of each other, and ultimately unite in a blissfully equal marriage. Anne Elliot directly gazes through her female perspective with pleasure and trepidation upon Captain Wentworth, and uses her own ability to read people's internal thoughts and external actions towards her as a means to complete her own emotional transformation. Overall, the concept of the male gaze, and the revised modifications that go along with it, are able to be most accurately applied to and analyzed in the works of Jane Austen.

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II.

The 'Male Gaze' and Fanny's Transformation of Self in *Mansfield Park*

Fanny Price is commonly known among Austenites and fellow English scholars as one of the more unlikeable of the Austen heroines. Fanny does not have a lot of charisma, and initially is viewed as a timid little girl afraid of anything and everything. Because she does not have the vivacious personality of her cousins, and is already a "sort-of" adopted addition to the family, her sense of self is not full. Instead, she seems to embody a kind of half-self, fitting in nowhere, and having no sense of true place in the family. As she gets older, Fanny becomes more settled in her role, and is able to somewhat bridge the gap between herself and the Bertrams, though not quite completely. Consequently, Austen does not allow Fanny to have a fully defined sense of self, until Henry Crawford notices her and begins to pay attention to her. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny is defined by the 'male gaze' of Henry, and it is only then that she begins to really be acknowledged by the rest of the family and take ownership of herself as a whole person. The concept of the 'male gaze' is a feminist theory commonly found in analysis of films and television, but is appropriately applied to Fanny as well. In film, the theory explicitly states that the 'male gaze' is when "the camera puts the audience into the perspective of a heterosexual man... it is a feature of gender power asymmetry and objectification" (Mulvey 17). As soon as Henry turns his eyes to Fanny, and sees her as a sexual object, the rest of the family also turn their view to her and see her through this unique perspective as well. After Fanny's coming out ball and soon thereafter Henry's proposal, Fanny is treated as one of the family, and berated as such for not accepting his hand. Coming into herself also finally enables Fanny to speak up and have a valued opinion, as well as understand what kind of treatment she ultimately deserves. And, it is only finally after Henry's gaze on Fanny, can Edmund see her in this way, and

ultimately as worthy of being his partner in marriage. Initially through the 'male gaze', and then the acknowledgment of her family, and valuing of her own worth, Fanny is able to release her meager half-self, and come into full possession of herself as a whole person.

In the beginning of the novel, Fanny Price arrives to Mansfield Park, a young and naïve girl of ten, uncertain of everything in the world around her. The Bertram family, though attempting to be kind and welcoming, soon begin to realize that she is not a normal young girl. Though never termed specifically in the novel itself, it is clear that Fanny is not in full possession of herself – instead she seems to inhabit only a half-self. Her circumstances correspond to this – she comes from another family and is clearly not a part of the Bertrams. Emphasis is put on by Mrs. Norris and her female cousins that she does not belong to their family, and there must be some kind of difference and deference in her behavior. The Austen narrator describes her as “unworthy, from inferiority of age and strength”, of being equal to the two girls, and Mrs. Norris declares early on that it “much more desirable there should be a difference” and “it is not at all necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are” when talking to Maria and Julia (Austen 417). From the early moments of the novel, the language used emphasizes the sense of “half-self” – Fanny is called not by her name, but instead by terms that do not confer a sense of ownership – “little girl” or “little visitor” are used frequently (Austen 413). The text goes on to describe Fanny as “exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice” and “afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying” (Austen 414), and “finding something to fear in every person and place” (Austen 415). This extreme fear of everything shows that she has no confidence in her sense of self. Margaret Anne Doody, a feminist literary critic, humorously refers to Fanny’s character as “a child who died and that it is her ghost, rather

than a living girl who haunts the novel” (Murray 14). Further literary criticism of Fanny points out that her fear of being looked at, contributing to her half-self existence, seems to be more of a threat to her than even cruelty from others. But, as is poignantly observed, “taking on flesh, moving into adulthood, and “coming out” are rituals that require being seen” (Murray 15). Ironically, that which she most fears of, “the male sexual gaze turned upon her” through these rites of passage, is what ultimately will define her as a person, and aid in her self-actualization.

When looking at the deeper cause behind Fanny’s half-self, it does not seem to stem from the Bertram’s treatment of her, but rather her own treatment of herself. The Bertram’s behavior towards her is just a reaction to what she is exhibiting to them, and illustrative of her own self-image. Then as time moves along, it is a vicious reinforcing cycle, where both herself and the Bertram’s treatment of her continually contribute to her half-self. According to the psychological “theory of self”, the self is divided up into three parts: self knowledge, interpersonal self, and agent self. Self knowledge is made up of several components, including self-awareness, self-esteem, self-knowledge, and self-perception. The interpersonal self refers to the “public self”, or the individual image that is displayed to the world and allows for social interactions with others. The agent self is the basic and instinctive part of the individual which controls actions, makes choices, and undergoes self control. Breaking the self down into these parts we can see that Fanny’s half-self is so pervasive because the self-esteem, self-perception, and perhaps most conspicuously, the interpersonal self are absent (Baumeister 75). Fanny is not just metaphorically a half-self but also psychologically, until Henry’s gaze is upon her.

Even when Fanny is fifteen, moved into the realm of adolescence, and has been living at Mansfield Park for five years, we can see her view of herself, and her absence of self-esteem, through her conversations with Edmund; she says, “I can never be important to anyone”, and “it

would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to anybody.. *Here* I know, I am of none..” (Austen 421). Sir Thomas’s notice of her right before he leaves to Antigua also reinforces this cruel half-self mind set of the Bertram family, by Sir Thomas stating that “if William does come to Mansfield, I hope you may be able to convince him that the many years which have passed since you parted have not been spent on your side entirely without improvement – though, I fear he must find his sister at sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten” (Austen 424). Fanny’s small physical presence is alluded to several times in the beginning of the novel, and an interesting scholarly interpretation of the reason for being so small and ghostly, and thus contributing to her half-self appearance, is that she suffered from a condition termed “chlorosis”. Chlorosis was commonly known as the “virgin’s disease” and is in modern day equated to a type of anemia. It was only found in girls in the stages of puberty, and usually resulted in irregular menses. Described by a physician of the time, John Hooper, girls had a “better complexion, an expressive countenance, and a womanly plumpness” after having their first menarche. Fanny cannot be said to have this described countenance until the occurrence of her menarche, which probably arrived between the departure of Lord Bertram and the spring of the following year. Compared to her cousin’s (based on the differences between described countenances) this is late, and results in Fanny being a late bloomer, and having difficulty in recognizing her own sexuality. But once her menarche becomes regular, and she is in good health, this is exactly when Henry Crawford begins to notice her, and her beauty (Takei 690). Taken this way, her lack of a menarche and being able to reproduce could also contribute to a lack of Fanny’s full sense of self, especially as a woman.

Numerous more instances throughout the first half of Mansfield Park continue to emphasize Fanny’s half-self existence. Even in the writing itself, in many of the chapters Austen

does not even mention Fanny, or she is in the scene, but does not talk. Austen purposely has to bring her up of her own accord for her to be noticed, such as on the arrival of the Crawfords to the Mansfield Park neighborhood. Everyone has an opinion of Mary, and especially of Henry, but we do not get to hear Fanny's until the Austen narrator has let everyone else speak, and then brings it up: "And Fanny, what was *she* doing and thinking all this while? and what was *her* opinion of the newcomers? Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called on to speak their opinion than Fanny" (Austen 432).

Later in the same passage, Mary Crawford enquires about Fanny, and asks because she is confused about her status of coming out, saying "Pray is she out, or is she not – I am puzzled – She dined at the Parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being *out*; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she *is*" (Austen 433). Again the in-between status and half-self of Fanny is echoed, belonging to the Price family through blood, but living with the Bertrams who do not treat her as full family, seeming like she is out because of eating dinner, but also not because she is so quiet. As the novel continues along to Henry's first notice of Fanny, a few more moments along the way confirm her not being regarded as a whole person, including not being considered at all as being allowed or wanting to go on the Sotherton trip, and having her own horse deprived from her by Edmund, for four days consecutively for Mary Crawford's pleasure of riding. Additionally, as love interests and triangles begin to develop among all of the characters, Fanny is frequently talked about as if she is not even there, or the others are talking between themselves privately as if her presence does not matter at all. On the Sotherton expedition Mary and Edmund talk in depth about the merits of Edmund's taking orders, with scarcely an interruption from Fanny, and then when they realize that she is tired, Fanny is talked about as if she is not immediately present, with language from Edmund such as "every sort of

exercise fatigues **her** so soon, Miss Crawford, except riding”, and a response from Mary, “that **she** should be tired now, however, gives me no surprise” (Austen 460). Another instance between Mrs. Norris and Edmund when arguing about Fanny playing a part in *Lover’s Vows*, finds her being referred to in the third person, though she is sitting by the fire along with them (Austen 485).

With all of this, it seems miraculous that Fanny ever achieves any sense of self, or confidence, when at almost every possible moment it seems that she is overlooked, ignored, belittled, chastised, and just generally unacknowledged. But, interestingly enough, the catalyzing moment for Fanny becoming recognized as a full self is the moment that Henry Crawford directs his distinctly male gaze upon her. The theory developed by Mulvey states that women are passively on display, and men are active looker and that the “male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 19). With Henry and Fanny, we can see that Henry’s gaze projects onto Fanny, not quite a fantasy, but as a real life sexual object. He expresses to his sister that “she is now absolutely pretty...in that soft skin of hers, so frequently tinged with a blush as it was yesterday, there is decided beauty” (Austen 527). This objectification, rather than oppressing Fanny, gives her the attention, and acknowledgment that she needs to exist no longer as a half self, but a whole person.

When Fanny is invited to the Grants for dinner and dines with them along with Edmund, Mary, and Henry, this is the first moment the gaze of Henry is put in full force upon her. While others are talking after dinner, Henry begins to talk to her about his “never having been happier” than when he recollected being in the play, and all that it involved and mourning Sir Thomas’s timely return. After allowing him to wax sentimentally on it for some time with no response, Fanny has finally had enough, and retorts with a “firmer tone than usual, “as far as *I* am

concerned, sir, I would not have delayed his return for a day. My uncle disapproved it all so entirely when he did arrive, that in my opinion, everything had gone quite far enough” (Austen 525). Immediately we can begin to see the effect of the male gaze on Fanny – she feels secure enough to express her own opinion, and it is quite new for her, seeing as “she had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so angrily to anyone...she trembled and blushed at her own daring” (Austen 525). One of the quality identifiers of becoming a self, as confirmed by the psychological self theory, self-expression, is illustrated through feeling that one’s opinion is valid, and vocalizing it (Baumeister 78). Beginning with this moment, Fanny feels able to do so.

Once Henry’s gaze is turned upon Fanny, and is noticed by others, a change can be seen in the behavior of everyone else towards Fanny. The male gaze has defined her, and now is helping to lead her toward her transition into a full sense of self. Sir Thomas begins to notice her as a result of noticing Henry’s attention of her, and so his gaze is drawn upon her as well, though not necessarily in the same sexual sense. When Henry talks to her after one of their dinners when William has just arrived at Mansfield Park, it can be seen throughout the chapter that during the whole evening Sir Thomas is watching Henry and Fanny. When Henry talks about Thornton Lacey at length, and wanting to maintain his connection with Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas notices that despite the implications of his words, “...Fanny’s reception of it was so proper and modest, so calm and uninviting, that he (Sir Thomas) had nothing to censure in her” (Austen 536). And again when Henry notices Fanny later, while she is in the midst of conversation with William, we find that they are also “observed by Sir Thomas, who was standing in chat with Dr. Grant” (Austen 537). That same night, when William asks whether Fanny likes to dance, we see the full effect of the gaze upon her, in which Sir Thomas states that he unfortunately has never

had the chance to see Fanny dance, and Henry counters with his expression of *loving* to talk about Fanny's elegant dancing if she would only allow it. Sir Thomas takes this as an admiration of her dancing, and seeing that Henry is so struck with her, and he not at all "displeased" about it, decides to allow Fanny to have a ball at Mansfield Park, where she will be the host - Henry's gaze has enabled Fanny to be acknowledged. Since Fanny had never been given this distinction before, in a way this also serves as a "coming out" ball for her. Coming out balls were traditionally done for females of the middle class who could not afford to be presented at court to the Queen, as tradition called for. Once women went through this ceremony and "came out" into society, they were viewed no longer as a young girl, but as a marriageable woman (Debrett's). In this way, historically it is fitting that the Mansfield Park ball is the scene at which Fanny's transformation into a whole self takes place.

As the ball approaches, treatment of Fanny is still changing. The dilemma of Fanny being able to wear her brother's cross pendant is solved not by one character, but two. Both Mary and Edmund notice that she does not have a gold chain. Mary even noticing Fanny does not have a gold chain to use indicates a lot about the altering view of Fanny – when before Mary would not have noticed or possibly even cared that Fanny did not have a chain, she now has become aware of this small detail. Critics of the male gaze theory retort that the gaze upon women is not necessarily always of a distinctly male perspective, and that women's bodies are gazed upon with pleasure from a female perspective as well. In this field of thought, females have an unique gaze too (Snow 32). Problematic as it may be, Mary's gaze on Fanny could also be said to help define her – whether viewed as through a homoerotic lens, or as Mary taking on a masculine gaze (Anderson). Mary and Fanny's relationship evolves over time, and its development aligns with Fanny's progression as a self. Leaving this open to interpretation, perhaps it is not solely a

male gaze which defines Fanny, though for the purposes of this essay, we will leave it as such, and keep it open only as a possible contributing factor.

At this point in the novel, behavior towards Fanny is still changing, but not yet completely altered. Edmund is enamored with Mary, and though he no longer notices Fanny and her feelings as he used to, he does also become aware of her not having any chain for her cross pendant, and buys her one. We can see how Henry's gaze upon Fanny has started to turn Edmund's own gaze upon her as well. Proceeding from this gift giving, Edmund begins to open his heart to Fanny about his feelings towards Mary. Before this moment, they had had brief conversations about her, but this is the first time that they have ever had a real in-depth discussion of his love (Austen 548). This notice of Fanny allows her to continue into her development of herself, and with it will also grow Edmund's attention to her. Lady Bertram also thinks of Fanny, unprompted, in relation to the ball, and sends up her own housemaid to help Fanny get dressed and ready for the ball. Such an attention was unusual in Lady Bertram, and "Fanny felt her aunt's attention almost as much as Lady Bertram or Mrs. Chapman (the maid) could do themselves", signifying this as a large alteration in behavior (Austen 549).

The Mansfield Park ball can be viewed as the climax of Fanny's "seen-ness". In this brief evening, she is finally seen by everyone, officially comes out into the world, and completes her transformation from a half-self into a whole one. From the beginning of the night, when she is viewed by her aunts and uncle in the drawing room, Fanny is gazed at and appreciated – Sir Thomas states on the "general elegance of her appearance and her being in remarkably good looks", as well as "spoke of her beauty with a very decided praise" (Austen 550). What makes this moment different from the others, and completes her development, is that Fanny instead of shying away from the gaze as she had been used to doing in the past, fully accepts it. When

everyone sits down at the table, we see that she realizes the “eyes of the two young men”, Edmund and Henry, were on her as well, and that “she was approved; and the consciousness of looking well, made her look still better” (Austen 550). Though she still struggles with the full possession of herself at moments, such as when Sir Thomas says she must be the one to lead the way and open the ball, she has enough fortitude to protest against him, and “actually look him in the face” which is not something she could do before (Austen 552). Finally, along with Mr. Crawford, she does indeed, open the ball, and with it Fanny fully feels the attention being paid to herself by the Bertrams – “she could hardly believe it! To be placed above so many elegant young women! The distinction was too great. It was treating her like her cousins!” (Austen 552). Being looked at by everyone, she was appreciated; the general consensus was that she was “young, pretty, and gentle...she was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas’s niece, and she was soon said to be admired by Mr. Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour” (Austen 552). This can be seen as Fanny’s moment of realization of self and self-worth – because others see her this way, she is able to see herself this way, and become the more assured and confident individual she should be. For her, she was now “happy in knowing herself admired” (Austen 553). Though the male gaze is generally thought to be oppressive, here it is empowering for Fanny. Instead of cowering away from it, Fanny’s acceptance of her sexuality and desirability means she acknowledges she has a power over men. And accepting and even wanting their gaze helps to fulfill, the “narcissistic self-involvement”, which if Fanny is going to become a full self, she needs (Snow 32) (Baumeister 77).

The possession of a whole self is work to maintain, but Fanny continues to do so throughout the remainder of the novel. From the ball on, we can see she is a changed individual, and the way people react to her changes as a result of that as well. Immediately after the ball, we

view Fanny forcing conversation with her aunt Bertram, which was unusual, but necessary because she felt the compulsion that “she must talk to somebody of the ball” (Austen 555). Soon after, Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas also clearly express their affection for Fanny, which has not been stated in so straightforward a manner before, at any part of the novel. Lady Bertram says “I am very glad we took Fanny as we did...I cannot do without her”, to which Sir Thomas generously replies, “Very true. We show Fanny what a good girl we think her by praising her to her face – she is now a very valuable companion” (Austen 556).

As the psychological theory of self states, one of the components of the interpersonal self is being “able to engage in social interactions and express an opinion” (Baumeister 70). Fanny, the “invisible ghost” in the beginning of the novel, who only had her opinion heard if specifically asked by the Austen narrator, and who could not refuse anything of anyone who asked her, is now charged with the first test of her whole-self-state: Henry Crawford’s proposal. Though his gaze upon her has defined her as the person that she is, and he has been the main force in advancing William’s promotion, as well as generally encouraging her and supporting her opinion, Fanny still refuses him in his offer of marriage. She even has the self-assurance, another psychological facet of self, to realize that the way and when Henry is proposing to her, is not quite appropriate and she does not warrant this behavior – “she could not but feel that it was treating her improperly and unworthily, and in such a way as she had not deserved”(Austen 565) (Baumeister 75). Fanny through becoming a whole self, and gaining self-esteem realizes she is better than this, and worth more than a manipulative proposal, which is something she would never have acknowledged previously. She even verbally expresses this opinion of her interpersonal self to Henry, saying “no, no, don’t think of me. But you are *not* thinking of me. I know it is all nothing” (Austen 565). And in the end, Fanny finds it within herself, to refuse

Henry multiple times - even when Sir Thomas comes to her room and pressures her to accept him, when Edmund relates all of the benefits of a marriage to him, when Mary writes to her as a hopeful sister-in-law, and when Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris express their disapproval of her rejection.

More and more instances of Fanny expressing her opinion and making judgments that are mentally and audibly expressed, instead of only mentioned by the author, litter the latter chapters of the novel. One such moment is when Fanny expresses to Edmund her view that women should be allowed to refuse a man, and that a man may not always be seen as “acceptable” to a woman, even if he is generally liked (Austen 592). Another instance is when she feels free enough to mentally censure her aunt and uncle when they do not come for her after several months at her home in Portsmouth, and then expands the censure to her own family, believing that they should treat her better than they should (Austen 600). Fanny’s recognition that she is worth something and deserves better treatment than she is getting is a strong confirmation in her process of becoming a whole self (Baumeister 76). We can even see by the end of the novel, the Austen narrator can now acknowledge Fanny as a whole self, devoting entire pages to her internal rhapsodies, and featuring her in almost every page of final chapters, with hardly an interruption in focus on anyone else - vastly different from the early parts of *Mansfield Park*. And in the end, becoming this whole, unadulterated self is ultimately what attracts Edmund’s gaze to Fanny, and aid him in realizing his love for her and desire for marriage.

What Henry does for Fanny is simple- he notices her. And through his male gaze, he turns the gazes of the other characters in the novel upon her, helping to transition her from her meager half-self, “afraid of everyone and everything”, into a whole person, confident in her opinion, appearance, and place in society. Henry Crawford’s gaze “to a certain extent sways her

code of conduct”, and Fanny changes herself behaviorally; instead of hiding any longer from the gaze, she accepts it, as we can view at the Mansfield Park ball and forward through the remainder of the novel (Despotopolou 575). Recanting the first sentence of this essay, now through Fanny’s transformation, we no longer see an oppressed or unlikeable heroine, but instead, a strong woman, who knowing she cannot control the presence of the male gaze, becomes empowered through it, and uses it complete her development into a full, secure, self capable of self-assurance and self-expression. Acknowledged and accepted by friends and family, Fanny Price emerges as a realistic, painfully human, but also victorious Austen heroine.

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III.

Pride and Prejudice, Interruption, and the Equal Gaze

Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy are two of the most iconic characters in recent English literature history, and one could argue perhaps even the most fawned-over movie characters in film adaptations. Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, seems to have reached stellar heights of popularity, causing hundreds of spin-off books, videocasts, short stories, and any other manner of Austen "schtick", which is an attribute to both the timelessness and relevance of the story. Modern day fans seem to be no less infatuated with Austen than fans of the time of her novels' releases, and it could be argued possibly they are even more so than in those days. As for the reason of its lasting status in society – there may be varying answers, but many would likely cite that it is the irresistibility of the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy (Donahue). Their attraction is palpable, their dialogue is sparkling, and their tension is quite entertaining, even hilarious at times. But what most readers may not pick up on, which inadvertently attracts them to *Pride and Prejudice*, is the equality of power between the two main characters. Mulvey's theory of the male and female gaze is again utilized here, but it is modified from her original tenets. Instead of a dynamic where one character (namely, usually the male) has more power over the other through the gaze, we see instead that both male and female have a gaze, and direct it on each other equally. Through the gaze, Elizabeth and Darcy are transformed in their characters - though not so much in who they are essentially, but in who they think the other one is, how it changes over the course of the novel, and what it means for the balance of their ultimate relationship.

Women in the late 1700s and early 1800s were virtually economically powerless, even when they came from families with a large amount of wealth. As is seen through the custom of primogeniture, illustrated through the odious character of Mr. Collins, women could not inherit estates (Pemberly). None of the Bennet daughters, though they are the direct children of Mr. Bennet, the owner of Longbourn, will be allowed to inherit it after his death, and it will pass on to their next closely related male heir, their cousin Mr. Collins. Even in a family of the landed gentry, as the Bennets are, women are left with a low number of options for escape from their powerless state. The solution to freedom, then it seems, lies in marriage. But with no money, and nothing but the ability to present themselves as favorably as they can to men, the women of *Pride and Prejudice* have not much to offer. Though the circumstances are not entirely favorable, women do still retain the one power, which is to choose – to accept the man that proposes, or to decline and wait for another offer, which may or may not come. This is the world that Elizabeth Bennet lives in, and yet the reader is still left with the feeling that despite it all, she is powerful. The source of all of this power can be traced to her interrupting gaze, upon Darcy, and then introspectively upon herself.

Judith Lowder Newton stated that men at this era possessed a mobility, autonomy, and mastery that women did not have, and yet the “power” the men have in *Pride and Prejudice* seems to only render them subject to ridicule, and ultimately so the readers can laugh at them for their inability to turn “potential control into ineffective action and [thus are forced to] submission to the power of others” – it is in fact, just a “preparation for sweet poetic justice” (Newton 28). Examples include Mr. Collins kowtowing to Lady Catherine de Bourgh and her ever-present opinions, Mr. Bennet’s bumbling lack of order with his daughters, and Mr. Darcy’s unmanageable pride and ego. Newton goes on to elaborate, and state that Elizabeth has the true

power in the novel because she is intelligent and witty and she is able to put things into action, which eventually actually changes Darcy's behavior (Newton 35). Though Newton assigns this ability of Elizabeth in part to being an Austen fantasy, which Austen wishes she could act out in the real world, Elizabeth is still believable, at least in the fictional world she inhabits, and it is her very ability to critique, to act as she wishes, and to actually transform a man, that makes her move "against traditional notions of feminine behavior and feminine fate" (Newton 35). And that is where Elizabeth's gaze comes into play.

As soon as an eligible bachelor is present in the neighborhood of Hertfordshire, a dance is arranged for and all of the Bennet sisters attend. Immediately, we are introduced to Mr. Darcy, who is assessed by the general population, with "the gentlemen pronouncing him to be a fine figure of a man, ladies declaring he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and... looked at with great admiration for about half the evening..." (Austen 205). Then the gaze of both Elizabeth and Darcy sets in. When Bingley urges Darcy to dance with Elizabeth (who is sitting just behind, supposed to be out of earshot), he looks, "for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*..." (Austen 205). As Darcy looks at Elizabeth for the first time, and observes how she looks, Elizabeth returns his glance, with her own eye. Though she does not insult his appearance, she criticizes his behavior, and remains with "no very cordial feelings towards him" (Austen 205). Austen portrays both judging the other's actions, in order to assess their merit and also their physical and behavioral worth.

At the second encounter between Darcy and Elizabeth, the same sort of exchange happens again. This time though, Darcy finds his opinion of Elizabeth changing – when he looks at her, we hear it described, by Austen that

“Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry of her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. Of this she was perfectly unaware; - to her he was only the man who made himself agreeable no where, and who had not thought her handsome enough to dance with” (Austen 211-12).

As Darcy approaches her to try and start a conversation, Elizabeth immediately notices, and wonders at him doing so – and decides to try and address him directly, so she can “let him know that I see what he is about. He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow very afraid of him” (Austen 212). When Darcy has come to try and talk to her, and probably also look at her, Elizabeth allows him to do so, but not quite without pushing him. Again, he is interrupted; Elizabeth is not afraid to gaze back. Later when couples start dancing, and Darcy approaches Elizabeth to ask her to dance, she says that she does not wish to, even when Sir William Lucas insists, and then she “looked archly, and turned away” (Austen 213). As Elizabeth again interrupts Darcy’s attempts to capture her, she only serves to captivate him more, and he later reflects on “the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow”. Subconsciously, this could be seen as a reference to

Darcy's appreciation of Elizabeth's gaze. Because she has "fine eyes", she looks back at him, interrupts his schemes, and even supersedes his agenda with her own.

As we watch the gaze unfolding within the context of the story, it is clear that it is represented equally between the two characters within the novel. Any time that Darcy looks, Elizabeth looks back – any time one notices the other looking, it means they are looking as well. But introspectively, it is a little different. The equal gaze means unequal judgments of the other – when Darcy gazes at Elizabeth he judges her to be audacious and captivating, but also surrounded by "unequal relations" who bring her worth down. When Elizabeth gazes at Darcy she sees a proud and handsome man, who cannot humble himself to dance with others, and who thinks he is one cut above the rest, which is intolerable. The crux of it all is that both judgments have some grain of truth in them, but are overwrought in some ways as well, and it is only through looking at each other that retribution can be found. We see the bewilderment of handling the change in judgment over time, most vividly between the scene of Darcy's first proposal and the subsequent letter scene. Elizabeth throws out her explanation of her first refusal to Darcy's proposal, with the reasoning that: "from the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form a that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike..." (Austen 302). For Elizabeth, the judgments against her are surmised in her review of Darcy's proposal – "his sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding" (Austen 300). We know each to be right in their own way; Elizabeth's relations are an embarrassment she has even "blushed and

blushed again with shame and vexation” at their behavior, and Darcy for her part has been thought by others, to be that, “tall, proud man” (Austen 375). But there is still more to learn and be revealed about each other.

The chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* which is devoted solely to the revelatory letter, reads as an internal re-reading, as the reader scans the page we learn alongside Elizabeth, and marvel at the realizations she has about Darcy’s character and her utter lack of understanding of him. Because of the previous judgments she has made Elizabeth is shocked, and berates herself, saying “How despicably have I acted!” she cried. – “I, who have prided myself on my discernment! – I who have valued myself on my abilities!” (Austen 310). She even goes so far as to say, that “till this moment, I never knew myself” (Austen 310). Though we do not get an internal revelation on Darcy’s account, from his own reactions to Elizabeth’s accusations against him in the proposal scene, one can imagine that he feels something along the same lines. He is described as having, “a disturbance of his mind [which] was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure...”, he also “changed colour”, and, “he looked at her with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification” (Austen 302). Darcy also exclaims somewhat loudly, and with apparent agitation when he realizes what Elizabeth’s assessment of him is – “And this,” cried Darcy, as he walked with quick steps across the room, “is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation are heavy indeed!” (Austen 302). The gaze of each has misjudged the other, and now it must turn inwardly, to inspect their own actions and behaviors.

Almost as Queen Gertrude cries in anguish to Hamlet, “Thou turn’st mine eyes into my very soul”, so do Elizabeth and Darcy, both upon the other. Because Elizabeth and Darcy realize they have judged the other one incorrectly, or even too harshly, it causes self-introspection. They

turn the outer gaze into an inner gaze upon their own actions, and what it is they may have done or said to cause the other to think about them in the way each described. The inner reading of themselves makes both Elizabeth and Darcy realize that they were at fault in some way, and they strive to change for the other. It is balanced and it is not all on only one of them to change. Because both unconsciously acknowledge that love must be egalitarian, they internalize their gazes onto themselves - the internal gaze onto the individual self is then able to be externalized, in their behavior towards the other, and the ultimate result of a mutual understanding of each other. This realization of understanding is symbolized through the all-knowing, all-seeing blush.

The moment is unforgettable, perhaps even one of the most memorable of English literature, because of the enormity and intensity of this blush between Elizabeth and Darcy. After all of their misunderstandings, Austen sets up the scene for their meeting, saying “their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush” (Austen 331). Because of this, for the first time in the whole novel, the way the two of them react to each other is finally equal. When Darcy sees Elizabeth he “absolutely started, and for a moment seemed immovable from surprise”, while Elizabeth “had instinctively turned away; but, stopping on his approach, received his compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome”. Even from Elizabeth’s point of view, she acknowledges her own embarrassment, and takes note of his – “nor did he seem much more at ease...he repeated his enquiries...so often, and in so hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of his thoughts” (Austen 332). Mary Ann O’Farrell claims that blushing is the body’s way of illustrating what would otherwise be left unsaid, perhaps because of fear, or because of societal constraints. It is necessary for “uncovering a truth yielded against one’s own well-behaved will” (O’Farrell 127). She continues to state that through mutual

mortification, embodied by that one epic blush, (but also implicit throughout the novel in varying levels of embarrassment between them, usually as a cause of one interacting with the other) it leads to a process of learning, and eventually knowledge. As O'Farrell so eloquently states, "as Elizabeth is conclusively mortified, proven wrong by Darcy's letter... and led by that mortification to be able to love Darcy, Darcy is himself conclusively mortified by Elizabeth's reproach that he has not been the gentleman he has thought himself" (O'Farrell 133). In love, as in any relationship, all that is really desired is to be completely understood. The psychological theory of attraction states that though appearance and personality lead to initial attraction, all humans desire someone who will accept them for who they are, because they truly do understand who they are (Bryne). And that is what Austen has provided us in her portrayal - because "love is a response to being known and, further, of being known in the way finally most credible - as that which one might not want to be known to be" (O'Farrell 134). Each lover can take pleasure in knowing the worst of the other, the embarrassing moments, the mortifying exchanges, and in Darcy and Elizabeth's cases, dealing with the family members who "expose" themselves and wading through the storied lies of Wickham. Elizabeth and Darcy have seen each other at their absolute worst, have gazed upon the other in the most unflattering of situations, yet they can still love each other. O'Farrell argues that there is even a distinct pleasure in knowing one another in this way. It is a pleasure that is similar to the one of embarrassment, but is really a true pleasure of love, and a result of being in love and being loved. Mortification is tied in with knowledge, all mediated through the medium of the gaze.

Now that Elizabeth and Darcy are on equal terms, they can revel in their newfound knowledge of the change in themselves and in one another. They are comfortable in its existence, but not comfortable in regards to each other, because they are still not sure of the other's regard.

Elizabeth and Darcy know themselves and they understand their respective views, but it is not known what the other one thinks of them. So the gaze then enables them to finally elucidate the hidden truth about each other. After the “blush meeting” in which both were mutually shocked by the other one, Elizabeth looks at Darcy at their next meeting to ascertain his behavior. The way Austen describes her, we can see that she is vying to look at him, for “it was not often that she could turn her eyes on Mr. Darcy himself; but, whenever she did catch a glimpse, she saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that he said, she heard an accent so far removed from hauteur or disdain of his companions” (Austen 337). Before, when Elizabeth looked, she looked to judge, and to further the argument against his character; now she looks to confirm what she already knows, and what her first hasty judgment has informed her was wrong, and to see if it is possible that he may still love her again. Quite often in the last chapters Elizabeth looks at his face, and observes his actions to see if she can surmise anything from him. In the course of several final scenes, she fluctuates in the uncertainty of his love, and so continues to gaze at him – “she had ventured only one glance...she raised her eyes to his face”, and “she followed him with her eyes” (Austen 376). Darcy looks at Elizabeth as well, but his seems more bent on wondering whether Elizabeth may ever love him at all. After the moment when Elizabeth opens the letter from Jane telling her of Lydia’s elopement and Darcy stumbles in upon her, he is described as attempting to comfort her, and then leaving with, “only one serious, parting, look” (Austen 345). Later he exclaims that he came to Longbourn, specifically, for the “purpose to see *you*, and to judge, if I could, whether I might ever hope to make you love me” (Austen 401). Both gazed upon the other, and the result was a realization of a love that had been buried beneath the uncertainties and blindness of previous judgments.

Finally then, Elizabeth and Darcy are united in the equality of their love. As Elizabeth says after Darcy's second proposal, "we have both, I hope, improved in civility", and that "we will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed..." (Austen 394). Other phrases litter the passage, alluding to the shared faults between the two – "your surprise could not be greater than mine in being noticed by you", and "the feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then" (Austen 394). The two have changed, first in their views of the other, and then in the views of themselves, by the power that is the external and internal gaze.

Thus, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy have reached the epitome of perfection in their own coupledness. The iconic lovers who have been loved for generations, we admire them precisely because their marriage is a "union of rationality and emotion" (Chandler 102). They are balanced because one's wrongs are righted within the others. Though Lionel Trilling would argue, that the ultimate conflict of the novel is between, "her female vivacity" and "his strict male syntax", as a result of an argument between their "heart and head, control and spontaneity," elitism and egalitarianism", I would say that it is truly between the combating gazes of Elizabeth and Darcy (Chandler 97-8). It is a gaze of the one looking upon the other, of seeing first to make judgment, then to understand, and finally to ascertain of the other's love for themselves. Though Austen is oftentimes read as anti-feminist, Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage, and subsequent relationship can even be viewed as a foreshadowing of the modern day egalitarian marriages to come (Gottlieb). No other relationship in the novel is quite as equal as the one between the two, not in Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet, nor Lydia and Wickham, nor even Jane and Bingley. Perhaps one could make a case for the Gardiners, who are credited with ultimately bringing Elizabeth and Darcy together, but we have not enough information, nor are they quite as

charming and romantic as our own and already beloved couple. The gaze allows for alternation of power between the two, throughout the novel, but never swaying farther on one side than the other. It is ultimately empowering and enlightening, and manifests itself finally in a wonderfully equal union between one Elizabeth Bennet and one Fitzwilliam Darcy.

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IV.

Persuasion, the Look on the Stairs, and the Perceptive Female Gaze

Anne Elliot, the most unsung heroine of all of Austen's novels, is often seen as unrelatable because she is just profoundly sad. And for good reason, because *Persuasion* is a heart-breaking novel, full of an intermingling between pain and pleasure, which is accentuated by something that is uniquely Anne – her gaze. Through her female spectatorship she is able to gain knowledge, understand others, and ultimately read the man who is the love of her life. According to Mulvey's theory, the "female gaze" focuses only on the view of women on themselves, and is objectifyingly equivalent to the male gaze. It is simply a reincarnation of the male gaze, and a way for women to view themselves in the eyes of men – this indicates that women do not even gaze upon men, but only on their own female bodies and how they are portrayed to men (Mulvey 21). Other critics define the female gaze as a completely separate entity, and a way for women to directly gaze upon men, and their bodies. It is "an antidote to the male gaze" and an outlet for women to "take control of their sexuality...and reconstruct the male image of women" (Bowers 218). Robyn Warhol proposes that the female gaze in *Persuasion* may even be a new distinct language, which does "cross-dress or adopt a male subject position, but...involves a whole variety of looks and glances – an interplay of possibilities" (Warhol 7). One can even read Anne Elliot, with her gaze as a revolutionary feminist, because she is one of the first female protagonists of Austen's time who directly takes on the role of the gazer, rather than being the one who is gazed at (Warhol 11). But what differentiates Anne's gaze from the typical gaze of others is that she is able to look at people, for both their internal and external worth. Because she is able to evaluate the people around her for their physicality and emotional-mental intelligence, she is able to perceive their own reactions to her. Anne's enhanced ability to perceive and

understand others is then able to be utilized by her, for her own physical and emotional self transformation.

Because Anne's gaze involves an analysis of the inward and outwards of a person, she is transformed through her own gaze in both aspects of herself as well. Anne seems to be not quite emotionally stunted, but she also does not know how to feel happy. She feels content, but never quite joyful, and everything she filters emotionally is tinged with a sort of pain or agitation. When she gazes at Wentworth, she learns to feel happiness again, and this enables a significant emotional transformation. But, almost ironically, Anne's transformation is catalyzed by the gaze of another man first – Mr. Elliot. Mr. Elliot's gaze on the stairs is what initially empowers her, and she visually alters under his eye – but only because his notice of her draws Wentworth's notice too.

From the beginning of *Persuasion*, appearances are emphasized. Sir Walter Elliot is introduced to us as a man who was “remarkably handsome in his youth”, and who was thinking of his appearance more than even most women (Austen 1043). He is a constant critic of others for having less than perfect appearances, compiling a list throughout the novel: sailors for having “the most deplorable personage... rough and rugged to the last degree”; Mrs. Clay for having “abominable freckles”; and the women of Bath for “being plain” (Austen 1052, 1059, 1114). His obsession with the appearance of others, leads him to most humorously count as he walks in Bath and observe “that one handsome face would be followed by thirty, or five and thirty frights” (Austen 1114). Elizabeth, Anne's sister, is not much different from her father, and she spouts off the same sort of censures of others, while being “fully satisfied of being still quite as handsome as ever” of her own appearance (Austen 1045). Anne's outward appearance is also noticed by her own family, and she is described at the beginning of the novel as one who has

“lost her bloom” and become “haggard” (Austen 1044-45). It is clear then that the Elliot family is a family of lookers, but the way they look is different. While Sir Walter and Elizabeth look only at the outward appearance of people, and assess them to see how others may benefit themselves through title, money, or status, Anne can see the outward appearance of others, as well as their inner mental and emotional worth, to ultimately ask how it may impact herself and those around her (Warhol 14).

Robyn Warhol states that the “gaze” and the “look”, both of which Anne possess, are different from each other, though quite similar in various ways. The look can be divided into two categories: the “extradiegetic” which focuses on the “outside world of the story”, and the “intradiegetic” which happens inside of the story and is representative of looks between characters (Warhol 6). Warhol goes on to illustrate that when a book such as *Persuasion* has its story focused and filtered through one character, such as Anne, the way the novel is read is through the way Anne gazes – and so, “the extradiegetic gaze and Anne’s intradiegetic look are often identical” (Warhol 7). For Anne, looking and gazing are intertwined, and one is never used without the other in the observation of the various characters of *Persuasion*.

Both Anne’s outward gaze and inner look upon others throughout the novel is almost organized into a catalogue of characteristics – most likely a by-product of the upbringing of her vain father and a rubbing-off from her younger sister. Austen filters the description of characters through Anne’s narratological view, and the reader sees and learns the characters just as Anne does. The introduction of Mrs. Croft, both to Anne Elliot and the reader, reads off as a concise list, “...though neither tall nor fat, [she] had a squareness, uprightness, and vigour of form, which gave importance to her person. She had bright dark eyes, good teeth, and altogether an agreeable face...” (Austen 1066). Another passage thoroughly describes Mrs. Musgrove through Anne’s

eyes, as one of “a comfortable, substantial size, infinitely more fitted by nature to express good cheer and good humour, than tenderness and sentiment” (Austen 1077). For Wentworth, though we do not quite hear a categorizing, we do see an acknowledgement of his attractiveness, in both person, and character. . When Anne and Wentworth lock eyes on each other for the first time after 8 years separation, they exchange a look, and the reader hears Anne observe that “the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages” (Austen, 1073). Other physical descriptions of Wentworth litter the novel’s space – “a glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth”, “he looked very well”, and even “with what difficulty it must be for her to withdraw her eyes [from him]” (Austen 1073, 1076, 1134). And for the charms of his own personality, there are numerous accounts – when he notices Anne’s fatigue and hands her into the carriage after the rambling walk – “that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest”; when he helps to get the child off of her, “his kindness in stepping forward to her relief”; and when he is distressed about Louisa’s fall, “the appeal remained a pleasure to her, as a proof of friendship, and of deference for her judgment” (Austen 1083, 1089, 1103). This could be read as Wentworth’s own version of the gaze, in which he is able to look beyond surfaces, and perhaps appreciate what is underneath as well, though he is not quite as perceptive as Anne, as we will discover later.

There is even the possibility of subversively explicit references to Wentworth’s appearance and a frank pleasure Anne takes in looking at his body in the novel. Jill Heydt-Stevenson suggests that this occurs in the scene where Anne and Lady Russell are walking down the streets of Bath and Anne spots Captain Wentworth. Anne is sure that Lady Russell sees and admires Wentworth too, when instead she realizes Lady Russell has been staring at curtains in a

window. Lady Russell describes the curtains as the “the handsomest and best hung in any of Bath”, and it is possible this could covertly be interpreted as a reference to Wentworth’s own body. In the early 1800s, the term “well-hung” was often used to allude to a man “furnished with large pendent organs”, or large genitals (Heydt-Stevenson 329). It could also be argued that a fear of this “sexual potency and masculine vigor”, which the size of his genital organs represent, are what Lady Russell fears when she first tells young Anne to refuse Wentworth, and the reason that she does not want to later notice him on the street (Heydt-Stevenson 330). Wentworth’s body is the “site of his sexual ardor and power”, and Anne fully appreciates it (Heydt-Stevenson 330). Her appreciation and pleasure in his body suggests that she is becoming a powerful woman, one who is capable of sexual agency. Through her gaze, she objectifies him, which is able to almost bounce back and invigorate herself, into her own “sexual volition” (Heydt-Stevenson 331). Though gathering all of this just in reference to curtains may seem to be implying too much, Austen has made allusions similar to this one before. In one of her letters to her sister Cassandra, she refers to a joke from one of her favorite novels of the time, *Tristram Shandy*, written by Laurence Sterne, which uses “well-hung” in the same way. It could also mischievously be supported by evidence of other hidden but bawdy humor throughout her works (Heydt-Stevenson 332).

As evidenced from these examples, since Anne is neither solely a “gazer” or a “looker”, but a combination of the two, she can be termed more accurately to have a “perceptive gaze”. Almost as if she were reading a book, she objectifies the outside of a person’s body, while also understanding and appreciating the inside of them, their spirit and thoughts. She only has to put her all-knowing, all-seeing eyes upon anyone at all, and she can completely understand them. But because of Anne’s perceptive “gaze-iness”, she often seems so wrapped up in her own

thoughts, having internal conversations with herself, that she is perceived as silent, and quiet. This is often because Anne feels almost too deeply – she must take time to process her emotions, because they are so full for her, so whole with both pain and pleasure, that she must internally analyze and then store them. Her external and internal gaze upon Wentworth, then emotionally affects her, and eventually brings an assurance of herself being loved, which becomes incorporated into her own kind of sexual and emotional agency.

For Anne there are two climactic moments that alter first the way she is portrayed, and then the way she feels, both through the gaze. The first occurs when Anne and Mr. Elliot first see each other on the staircase, before either of them knows who the other one is, and Wentworth watches nearby. The moment is described as one of significance for all three characters –

“...and as they passed, Anne’s face caught his eye, and he [Mr. Elliot] looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of. She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of the eye it had produced. It was evident that the gentleman, (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which showed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance, a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, “That man is struck with you, and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again”” (Austen 1096).

For Anne, Mr. Elliot’s gaze is the external acknowledgment of her self-worth - she is surprised that someone has actually looked at her and appreciated her for what she offers. Because of the shift from the female narratological perspective of Anne into the Austen god-narrator, though she

is described as looking well, we do not know if Anne knows that she herself looks well. So when Mr. Elliot looks at Anne, he is providing her with a sense of appreciation. Her self-doubt is somewhat alleviated, and she feels “approved of”. Though Elliot’s acknowledgment of her is welcomed, the one whose approval is really required is Wentworth, and his is the one who really serves to transform Anne. We do not see Wentworth gazing at Anne voyeuristically; instead we can envision it as Anne perceptively gazing at him to see what he thinks of the exchange – and because she can read him so well, she is able to interpret what his returning look to her is. Anne’s appearance is then immediately transformed after this occurrence. As we have noted previously, before this moment she is described as having “an early loss of bloom”, a “destroyed youth and bloom”, and “altered features” (Austen 1056, 1073, 1078). She even references herself, as having a “ruins of a face which had once charmed him” demonstrating that she does not view herself in a positive way (Austen 1078).

But, beginning with this exchange of glances upon the stairs, Anne’s appearance starts to alter, at least it seems so to those around her – “...either Anne was improved in plumpness and looks, or Lady Russell fancied her so; and connecting them with the silent admiration of her cousin, and of hoping she was to be blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty” (Austen 1105). Additionally, “in the course of the same morning, Anne and her father chancing to be alone together, he began to compliment her on her improved looks; he thought her “less thin in her person, in her cheeks; her skin, her complexion, greatly improved – clearer, fresher” (Austen 1116). Elliot even again affirms this when gazing a second time upon her, with “he gave her to understand that he had looked at her with some earnestness. She knew it well; and she remembered another person’s look also” (Austen 1118). Here the interplay of one gaze upon her, and her returning gaze upon Wentworth, shows how through this connection, under our own

eyes, Anne is transformed. The film adaptation of *Persuasion* also even accentuates this, by making the character of Anne look in the mirror after the first meeting of her and Wentworth, since their 8 years of separation. She views her reflection and “examines the tolls of her grief: the weary eyes, the lines in her forehead, the lack of “bloom”” (Groenendyk 12). Then after exchanging glances with Elliot on the stairs, in the film she looks in the mirror again, and both she and the viewers note her “improved looks”, because “she has regained her former appearance and confidence” (Groenendyk 12). Heydt-Stevenson interprets the passage in the novel in the same manner, stating for Anne that “a look pushes her from the background to the foreground... while beginning to appear more as she used to in the distant past, she also simultaneously inhabits the present, for it is at this point – when she most resembles what she used to be – that Wentworth becomes aware of her and of Elliot’s admiration” (Heydt 19).

For Anne Elliot, the great analyzer, the reader of glances, and the woman of looks, it can even be supposed that she, with her constant reading of others, compares herself to them. There is only subtle evidence as to this, but we do get a sense of a contrast in Anne’s mind between herself and Louisa, which causes her to twinge with pain. When Anne accidentally overhears Louisa and Wentworth’s conversation in the grove and they are talking about firmness of character, and the benefits of having such a strong persona as that – “[not] be turned back from doing a thing that I had determined to do, and that I knew to be right, by the airs and interference of such a person...no, I have no idea of being so easily persuaded. When I have made up my mind I have made it...It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character...let those who would be happy be firm” – Anne is immediately overcome with painful sensations, partly because she believes Wentworth is thinking of her when talking, but also because she is likely comparing her own characteristics with the ones Louisa touted, and how Wentworth thinks about

them (Austen 1087). What matters the most is how Wentworth sees her, and after this, Anne, “saw how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth, and there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner which must give her extreme agitation” (Austen 1088). After Louisa’s fall on the stairs at Lyme, we even internally hear Anne herself wonder, “whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character; and whether it might not strike him that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits” (Austen 1103).

As Anne is struggling with her emotions, it can also be read that she may be simultaneously struggling with her inner worth. According to the psychological theory of social comparison, there is an inherent “drive within individuals to gain accurate self evaluations... individuals compare themselves to others in order to reduce uncertainty in these domains [opinions and abilities] and learn how to define the self” (Festinger 121). Sociological research on this phenomenon has expanded into the social comparison of oneself with others as a way to socially enhance or detract from one’s view of oneself (Wills 99). Through her perceptive gaze, Anne does this at first negatively, but eventually comes to a more positive view of herself. The push of the male gaze was just first needed to boost it, and eventually empower her, physically, and then emotionally.

The final climactic event, which serves to complete Anne’s internal and external transformations is the moment in which Anne and Wentworth are together in the drawing room, when the infamous letter of *Persuasion* is written. Before that can occur, though, the scene must be lead up to, in the passage where Anne sees Wentworth at the concert – “...his half-averted eyes and more than half-expressive glance, all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at

least; that anger, resentment, avoidance were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past. Yes, some share of the tenderness of the past. She could not contemplate the change as implying less. He must love her” (Austen 1136). Anne’s realization of Wentworth’s love is it. She knows. Or at least, we are led to believe that she does know in the moment, though she seems to encounter some self doubt later. Through her perceptive gaze, she was able to capture his unadulterated feelings, understand him, and realize the true extent of emotional transformation. After this revelation she has “thoughts...which occupied and flurried her too much to leave her any power of observation... she must consent to be happy” (Austen 1138). Psychological theory can also be applied to this as a step towards self-actualization occurring in Anne. Self-actualization is defined as “reaching one’s full potential”, and “the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are essentially fulfilled and the “actualization” of the full personal potential takes place” (Maslow 33). Anne is immediately emotionally changed - she is described as having her “mind in a most favourable state for the entertainment of the evening; it was just occupation enough; she had feelings for the tender, spirits for the gay, attention for the scientific, and patience for the wearisome” (Austen 1139). But she is still a bit uncertain, and we hear her internal musings back and forth. At one moment, she feels fearful, because of his “looks”, and because of the “inadvertencies and misconstructions” that could happen, while at another, she comforts herself that it will work out, because if “there be constant attachment on each side, our hearts must understand each other ere long” (Austen 1157). Again the next day, when she has time to herself in between the social schedule of Bath, she sits down to “feel herself plunged at once into the agitations... she was deep in the happiness of such misery, or

misery of such happiness” (Austen 1162). Anne has started to feel the joy again, but it is still intermingled with a succinct pain.

Now, as Austen transitions into the ultimate moment of transformation for Anne, many little looks, glances, and Anne’s direct gaze lead up to it. As Wentworth sits at the table writing his letter for Harville to Benwick, Anne is by the window, at first standing by herself, and then talking to Captain Harville. When Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Musgrove are chatting on the other side of the room about long engagements, Anne looks at Captain Wentworth, and we see him, “pausing, listening, and he turned round the next instant to give a look, one quick, conscious look at her” (Austen 1162). Then as the conversation between Anne and Harville continues, and they debate back and forth about the strength of a man or woman’s love, Anne’s gaze upon Wentworth is evident. Even while engaging in conversation, she is looking at him out of the corner of her eye, trying to read him. When he drops his pen, she surmises that she was “inclined to suspect that the pen had only fallen because he had been occupied by them, striving to catch sounds...” (Austen 1164). Anne and Captain Harville’s conversation reaches the pinnacle, where both have expressed that their own respective sex will love longest and deepest, and they have finally agreed to disagree, when Captain Wentworth rapidly finishes his letter, and leaves – with Anne watching – and proceeds to walk out the door, without a “word, nor a look! He had passed out of the room without a look!” (Austen 1165). For Anne this is significant, because she is able to read him only through his looks. He did not allow her to see his look before exiting, and she is clearly distraught. We are not privy to her internal monologue at this point, possibly because it is such a short window of time, but she seems to have been thrown into the throes of self doubt and unhappiness again – because who would not under such circumstances? But, quickly, Wentworth enters the room again, hands her a letter, and practically runs out, moving swiftly.

Anne is shocked, but recovers enough to run the possibilities through her mind, of what the letter may contain, and what it may mean for her. The next second she “devours” the letter, and finds that Wentworth is feeling much the same way she has been for the whole of their separation - “half agony, half hope”, - but that he truly still loves her (Austen 1166). Immediately, Anne’s emotional transformation unfolds. She feels that “each new moment brought agitation. It was overpowering happiness” (Austen 1166). This description can be read as the happiness attempting to take over, and a release of the pain that has been kept for so long. Austen even continues to portray Anne as having to go through this transformational process of feeling, saying that “before she was beyond the first stage of full sensation, Charles, Mary, and Henrietta came in” (Austen 1166). Because they interrupt her emotional developmental process, Anne must then rush away, and coincidentally, along the way she runs into Captain Wentworth, who aids her in making the transformation complete.

When after this they encounter one another, and Anne reveals her mutual feelings to Wentworth, Austen can render the emotional transformation finished. While before everything for Anne, whether pleasurable or fulfilling, was still tinged with pain, now she is finally free to feel true unadulterated joy. Austen does not even use any dialogue to express this, because there for them both, it is almost inexpressible – instead she says that with “smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture”, the “power of [their] conversation would make the present hour a blessing indeed, and prepare it for all the immortality which the happiest recollections of their own future lives could bestow” (Austen 1168). Anne’s raptures are continued throughout the remainder of these moments, and she is described as “exquisitely happy”, “glowing and lovely in sensibility and happiness”, and even “having cheerful or forbearing feelings for every creature around her” (Austen 1169-70). Though this reign of joy is ultimately liberating for Anne, it is

almost too much for her at once, and one can read it as a final climax of her transformation – it is said that she entered her home, and “all the surprise and suspense, and every other painful part of the morning dissipated by this conversation, she re-entered the house so happy as to be obliged to find an alloy in some momentary apprehensions of its being impossible to last...an interval of meditation, serious and grateful, was the best corrective of everything dangerous in such high-wrought felicity; and she went to her room, and grew steadfast and fearless in the thankfulness of her enjoyment” (Austen 1170). The typical old Anne re-emerges here again, being practical and staid in the face of the fulfillment of everything that she had hoped and wished for, but she has come out different - because the constant agitation and pain, which has dogged her through the course of *Persuasion* has finally, joyfully, evaporated.

Without her perceptive gaze, Anne would not be able to feel both the pain and the joy, because she would not have been able to appreciate Wentworth’s physicality, nor read the meanings behind his words and actions. Her gaze was necessary for her to feel her own emotions, and to allow for them to eventually transform her physical ruins to an effervescent bloom and transform her from a world where happiness only exists with pain, to a world where happiness alone can be freely felt. As Warhol stated, in the end, Anne’s “gaze is not just lucid, but empowering,” and allows for her “enjoyment of visceral experience [to] return, along with her bloom, to make *Persuasion* end as a celebration of life in the female body” (Warhol 90). Indeed it is, and Anne Elliot emerges as stronger than we first perceived, a heroine of more stamina than we initially thought, and one who should no longer be unsung. The Anne of *Persuasion* reminds all of us that pain is often accompanied by pleasure, that sometimes we may have to be subject to our inner gaze to remedy our own faults, and that loving others, though often difficult, makes us grow and change, which is always worth our time.

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V.

Conclusion

It could be said that in all of Austen's novels, Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze may be able to be applied, and one would be correct. In the world of Austen, and thus the world of the early nineteenth century, social behaviors and correct manners were highly valued. As a result, the modern day practice of talking about love, emotions, and even uncomfortable situations publicly was not as accepted. The ritual of courtship was a game, and the least controversial way to play it was through the use of glances, looks, and possibly even gazing. One could argue that the silent language of looks, became a unique tongue all its own, and was spoken only by the most prominent and skilled players in the game of love. In the concept of the male gaze, the equal gaze, and the female gaze, all of the exchanges whether reciprocal or not, are between sets of lovers, and used to both communicate to the other, as well as communicate to themselves. Many of the interactions caused by the gaze force the characters to evaluate their own internal thoughts and external actions, and allows for them to change, and ultimately become transformed. The female characters of the Austen novels emerge transformed in different areas - wholly, prejudicially, and emotionally - but perhaps most importantly, as empowered women who are able to stand up as equals to the male characters in the novel, and yet still maintain their own individuality and integrity. The ultimate attractiveness of Mulvey's theory is that it allows for the female to be repressed, but also enables her to subvert the suppression, and turn it into her own form of power - which is exactly what Fanny Price, Elizabeth Bennet, and Anne Elliot are able to accomplish - and perhaps can be attributed to the reason that we still love them, and Austen so much, even after all these years.