GENDERED GLANCES:
THE MALE GAZE(S) IN VICTORIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

The Victorian “culture of surveillance” (Purchase 70) was dominated by the male gaze, typically understood in feminist criticism as the subjugation of the anti-male (the woman) and her recasting as an object for male dominance. However, this theory fails to adequately explain all uses of the gaze by both male and female Victorian authors, such as George Eliot, Henry James, and Charlotte Brontë.

Peter Middleton’s theory that the male gaze “triangulates vision, knowledge, and power” (7) is true, but I argue that this “power” is not always power over women in the creation of an active, dominant gazer and a submissive, objectified subject. I believe that more exploration into the ideas of vision and knowledge can produce alternative understandings of power, and that these understandings do not necessarily include a binary of dominance and repression. In the pages that follow, I will explore additional explanations for the use of the gaze by both male and female authors, especially in its use by female and “feminized” male characters.

In “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey argues that the physical absence of the penis from women’s bodies creates castration anxiety in the men that gaze upon them, and that this gaze is the embodiment of two forms of escapism for the male unconscious: “preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery)” or “complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (21). However, Mulvey’s theory, while provocative, is in the end too narrowing. I wish,
therefore, to expand upon this theoretical position and make it more flexible and encompassing.

The idea of the male gaze is problematic because it seems at once both generic and too narrow. The current theorization of the male gaze is too narrow because it limits all gazes into two categories (which Mulvey carefully outlines) and one goal (domination); it is generic because its function as the sole definition of all gazes forces certain kinds of looking into a category that does not allow for multiple motives.

I will prove the complexity of the male gaze and the psychology of the gaze in general; in doing so, I ultimately hope to detach the gaze from the notion of masculine dominance and therefore uncover possibilities for alternative forms of the gaze. My study of literature of the period suggests that Victorian writers did not confine the gaze to the desire to objectify or to demystify in order to objectify. While contemporary criticism of the gaze has made adequate arguments for these types of objectives, I believe that there are additional explanations for the gaze that extend beyond the desire to control to include the desires to understand and demystify in order to understand (without dominating) the other, the self, and the complex social structure of the Victorian era.

Much criticism links the male quest for dominance with masturbation fears and castration anxiety, with the male unconscious desire functioning as what Ellie Ragland-Sullivan calls “an inherent ‘lack-in-being’ that drives humans to seek resolutions and answers because all subjects are incomplete” (45). In her essay “Seeking the Third Term: Desire, the Phallus, and the Materiality of Language,” Ellie Ragland-Sullivan
builds on Lacan’s theories of the male gaze as the familial interpretation that the male strives to find his place as a father-figure, who is supposed to be “an ideal (in the imaginary and symbolic), but is, in actuality, the source of prohibition.” Ragland-Sullivan argues that a son is placed in “a confused position in terms of both ego and desire. He cannot be the mother. He cannot be the father. He can only await from a posture of aggressive frustration the position of power tacitly promised” (41). This characterizes all men as both empowered and repressed by the father whose role they are to fill; it also delineates the source of the male’s desire for dominance as a learned familial and social urge. However, I propose that the boundaries of this social obligation are murky and are not applicable to the women who use forms of the gaze thought to be typically “male.” Though the masculine traits of some of these women seem to reinforce that the male gaze belongs to those with male-gender traits if not to the male sex, feminine women that partake in the gaze serve to detach gender from the gaze, and the attainment of power by the object of the gaze serves to refute the claim that all gazes are wholly dominant. The desire that fuels the gaze extends beyond the constructed phallus and the need for English identification to the idea of one’s construction—not as a man, woman, feminized man, or masculine female, but as an androgynous human. In the pages that follow, I will explore how the social politics of gender contribute to the execution of the gaze by different sexes.

As the Victorian era progressed, the effects of the industrial revolution were increasingly felt, a fact which may be the source of duality in the male gazes I have studied. The idea of the world beyond England, in conjunction with the blending of
classes and fading of the social hierarchy, left British men torn between asserting dominance to preserve tradition, culture, and status, and abandoning this dominant gaze for an opportunity to question, imagine, and relate to the influx of foreign influences. According to Karen Volland Waters, the ideology of imperialism had “two conflicting facets: superiority of the self over the other and identification of the self with the other” (49). Waters touches upon the duality of the gaze without noting that the gaze may not be dual, but may rather be two separate gazes—one of superiority, the other of identification. The separation of these gazes into two different types of men creates the possibility for some to succeed and others to fail, as only those who embrace identification with the “other” will survive to create the future of England in the face of imperialism. The gaze that looks to understand succeeds and the gaze that looks to ruthlessly impose fails in an imperial society.

The gaze of objectification is only applicable to those who gaze in order to dominate; however, even this effect of the traditional male gaze seems to have varying causes. While some characters gaze to dominate the woman who embodies the threat of castration, others gaze to dominate the man who gazes to understand without eliminating. A man who uses this new, understanding gaze is a threat to the dominance of the complete (or non-castrated) male, and often appears to create a resurgence of the aforementioned typical male gaze. The gaze that desires to understand, but without the intention of dominance, is typically characterized as a feminized masculinity in its emotional and sympathetic view towards “the other.” Complications concerning the gendering of the gaze arise here, when the traditional male gaze is a reaction to another
male’s nontraditional gaze—nontraditional in the sense that it is seeking, but not to dominate.

In this paper, I will divide the representations of gazes in the Victorian novel into two different gazes: the traditional English male gaze, and the future English gaze. These appear in three stages in each novel: first, the traditional English male gaze; next, the future English gaze; and finally, another wave of the traditional English male gaze that occurs in response to the second stage. I will focus primarily on three novels: George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and Henry James’ *Portrait of a Lady*.

Clearly, if we adhere to the binary of the male gaze and the objectified female, many problems and questions arise. How do we account for a gaze utilized by a male in a non-traditional sense? A complication to the problematic “feminized masculinity” is the “masculine” female, or the women in Victorian literature who also use elements of the male gaze to attempt to dominate or, adversely, who desire to be gazed at because they understand the power of the gaze, and find strength in their role as a desired object by realizing that the male role of dominance is only effective with their subjugation. If this gaze can be used as a tool by women, many questions arise that challenge a great deal of contemporary criticism: How is this gaze an effective means to dominance when it can be used by the object? Why would the object adhere to the rules of this gaze if it is a means to self-objectification? Are there ways in which even this most traditional and dominant of male gazes can be feminized in order to serve the fetishized object? Does the feminization of the male gaze create an androgyny that is accessible
to all genders? If so, can the gaze be non-gendered to achieve the traditionally male
goal of dominance? Can an expanding androgyny of the gaze achieve effects other than
dominance and objectification? If women can use this gaze, is the male gaze no longer
solely male, or is the idea of dominance no longer solely male? If other outcomes
(besides dominance and objectification) of the use of the gaze are possible, are they
automatically feminine? Finally, and most interestingly, I wonder: If the new male gaze
is the worldly and humanely conscious gaze, is the embodiment of social consciousness
feminine?

In the chapter on Daniel Deronda, I will discuss the collision of the traditional
male gaze with the future male gaze through the objectified female. In the chapter on
Jane Eyre, I will discuss the use of the traditional gaze by the masculine female, the
conflicting forces of the traditional and future gazes in a single character, and the
complications of the objectified male. Finally, in the chapter on Portrait of a Lady, I
will explore the collision of the objectified female with the dominant female and the
confusion and danger that occurs for characters who are reluctant to believe that the
gaze is androgynous. The androgyny of the English gaze leads to interesting notions
about the achievement of international identity and a sense of self in the world in the
face of traditional family structures and gender roles and supports the possibility of the
existence of multiple gazes in Victorian literature, as I will prove in the following
chapters.
From the first words of the first page of *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot clearly designates looking as a crucial component of the novel. From the first line, “Was she beautiful or not beautiful?” (Eliot 7), the reader is forced to view Gwendolen, the main female character, through another’s eyes. Readers participate in this gaze in a complicated manner, as we are not initially sure that this is a man gazing at a woman until the second paragraph of the novel. Due to the deliberate elimination of pronouns (apart from “she” as the object of the gaze), the gaze through which readers are viewing Gwendolen may belong to a man, a woman, a narrator, or even the author. The lack of established gender of a possible narrator, and also the possibility that the author, George Eliot, is narrating, render it impossible for readers to designate this gaze a male gaze.

Further complication lies in the line of questioning itself—only the first question, that of Gwendolen’s beauty, can be interpreted as a question of physicality. The questions that follow seem as though the subject of the gaze is attempting to understand its object on a level that is more than skin-deep:

> and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (Eliot 7)

This progression of questioning serves both to link Gwendolen’s physical qualities to her character and also to place greater importance on the latter. The desire
to understand who Gwendolen is and whether her character’s good or its evil has given
her physical appearance a certain power not only disproves the idea of domination of
the male gaze (when we discover that the one gazing is indeed a man), but it also clearly
acquiesces to the idea that the woman who serves as the object of the gaze has power—
specifically, power over the male gaze. Daniel Deronda, the man who here is gazing at
Gwendolen, is questioning her character specifically because he feels coerced into
looking at her, and as he looks to question and not to dominate, he finds it necessary to
admit that his gaze is submissive to the “genius dominant” in Gwendolen’s glance.
That Deronda notes her “genius,” or some facet of her mind or character and not her
physical form, is what is arresting his gaze not only gives Gwendolen power, but in
doing so, gives her dimension and depth uncharacteristic for a woman who serves as
object of a male gaze.

However, Gwendolen’s power does not render Deronda’s gaze completely
ineffectual. On the contrary, Gwendolen has a strong emotional response when she is
conscious of herself as object of the gaze: “But in the course of that survey her eyes met
Deronda’s, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was
unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested—how long? The darting sense that he
was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different
quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and
above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling
resentment which stretched the moment with conflict” (Eliot 10).
Gwendolen’s reading of Deronda’s gaze is that he sees her as inferior. However, Eliot’s omniscient narrator does not give evidence of this in any of the long passages describing Deronda’s gazing. Perhaps because Deronda is not attempting to dominate Gwendolen and force any qualities on her character, he serves as a type of mirror for Gwendolen. Gwendolen’s interpretation of Deronda’s gaze is telling of her own insecurities and of the unique nature of his non-dominant gaze. In “The Monster in the Mirror: The Feminist Critic’s Psychoanalysis,” Jane Gallop alludes to Lacan’s theory that specular recognition is crucial to the development of identity and the ability to self-identify. Gallop argues that the first encounter with the mirror is imperative for a child’s development, as “only at this moment does it become capable of distinguishing itself from the ‘outside’ world, and thus locating itself in the world” (34-35). As Lacan argues that the gaze in the mirror stage is linked to the development of human agency, Gallop argues that “the mirror stage both affirms and denies the subject’s separateness from the other” (42). Gwendolen’s notion that Deronda is viewing her as inferior is her own reaction to the process of trying to look at herself as Deronda might see her. Deronda’s gaze, functioning as a mirror, gives Gwendolen agency to view herself, and this abdication of agency onto the object of the gaze marks Deronda’s gaze as unique.

Deronda is the only observer in the room whose gaze enables Gwendolen to experience self-identification through specular recognition. Though “many were now watching her… the sole observation she was conscious of was Deronda’s” (Eliot 11). Deronda’s type of looking problematizes the typical Victorian male gaze, as instead of looking to judge the physical qualities of the object or to subject the object to his own
idea of what she ought to be, Daniel Deronda is looking to question. His gaze prompts questions about Gwendolen’s nature and does not, as do many of the other male gazes in the novel, attempt to force character traits onto her due to man’s desire to dominate. Examples of this are plentiful throughout this same first chapter, carefully delineating Deronda as possessing a gaze quite different from his male counterparts. Eliot notes that though Gwendolen was “much observed by the seated groups” (12), “he [Deronda] alone had his face turned towards the doorway… fixing on it the blank gaze of a bedizened child stationed as a masquerading advertisement on the platform of an itinerant show” (8), thus implying that he alone was reading Gwendolen, and that he alone was concerned with her true nature. Additionally, he alone believes that he recognizes a powerful element of acting and theatricality in her massive yet gracious losing at the roulette-table. In fact, Eliot notes that upon Deronda’s initial gaze at Gwendolen, “he felt the moment become dramatic” (9), linking feeling (an emotional response) with his gaze. Others around the roulette table note her fine beauty and fashionably courageous gambling, but are largely concerned with discussing her appearance, financial state, and rank, as opposed to her nature:

“She has got herself up as a sort of serpent now—all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual.”…
“You like a nez retroussé, then, and long narrow eyes?”
“When they go with such an ensemble.”…
“She is certainly very graceful; but she wants a tinge of color in her cheeks. It is a sort of Lamia beauty she has.”
“On the contrary, I think her complexion one of her chief charms. It is a warm paleness; it looks thoroughly healthy. And that delicate nose with its gradual little upward curve is distracting. And then her mouth—there never was a prettier mouth, the lips curled backward so finely, eh, Mackworth?”
“Think so? I cannot endure that sort of mouth. It looks so self-complacent, as if it knew its own beauty—the curves are too immovable. I like a mouth that trembles more.”…
“I hear she has lost all her winnings to-day. Are they rich? Who knows?”
“Ah, who knows? Who knows that about anybody?” said Mr. Vandernoodt, moving off to join the Langdens. (Eliot 13)

Here, Eliot depicts what Purchase refers to as the “culture of surveillance” (70), a tool in what Waters, in her book *The Perfect Gentleman*, describes as the transformation between old England, when one received nobility from ancestors, to a new England, when “the idea of birth had declined as a basis for gentility, for by this time, no man in England could safely boast his ancestors” (17). This transformation was due to the permeability of the class system as “the industrial revolution fostered the creation of an upwardly mobile middle class” (Waters 17). Waters argues that “during this period, the ideology of the gentleman shifted from condition to process, and the gentlemen came to be defined as much by appearances as by material reality or ancestry” (17). Here, what applies to the English gentleman applies to Gwendolen as well—the effects of the industrial revolution were surely in her favor, as they enabled her to be held with high regard in the public eye. Here, Gwendolen does not shirk from the old English gazes of Mr. Vandernoot and his party; rather, she has crafted her appearance to their satisfaction, which shows her understanding of both her subjection to and the power of the male gaze.

Daniel Deronda, however, representing future (during and after the industrial revolution) England, can read and understand Gwendolen’s charade. Deronda’s increasing consciousness of a universal society expanding around him gives him greater
insight into the fact that “what we see cannot be believed, not only because it is external, but more exactly because it is artificial… the social environment in which we move… is a tissue of calculated deceptions, of disguises we put on and roles we play” (Morrison 12). Additionally, Deronda’s understanding of Gwendolen’s situation stems from his own ignorance of his heritage, inheritance, or “true” place in English society. Perhaps this traumatic secrecy is the cause of his more emotional, arguably “feminine,” and inarguably correct, readings of others, and of his largely compassionate, questioning, and imaginative gazes, which replace the desire to dominate with the desire to understand.

The lack of dominance in the gaze affords Gwendolen room to experience a version of Lacan’s mirror stage, and it is Gwendolen’s self-consciousness and familiarity with the old English judgment (in which one is evaluated based on ancestry) that leads to her assumption that Deronda’s questioning gazes are a show of his belief in her inferiority and of his “examining her as a specimen of a lower order” (Eliot 10). In actuality, Deronda does not appear to be chastising Gwendolen. Rather, he feels for her, and attempts, in the following scene, to perform an act of kindness to aid Gwendolen in the returning of her necklace. Though Deronda may be read as dominant in his attempt to serve as her “rescuer,” we can read this scene as the first of many actions Deronda completes with a stranger in mind; in this light, his role of “rescuer” is really an attempt to act on behalf of one he feels to be in need, which corresponds with his determination towards a greater social consciousness.
Though Gwendolen assumes Deronda is “measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior” (Eliot 10), she also recognizes that “he was of different quality from the human dross around her” (Eliot 10). Though Eliot leads us to believe that Deronda is interested in the “inward debate which she [Gwendolen] raised” in him (Eliot 10), and that it was this debate that “gave his eyes a growing expression of scrutiny” (Eliot 10), Gwendolen’s reaction is similar to that which she experiences under the traditional male gaze, as I will call it throughout this paper. Eliot writes, “the certainty she had (without looking) of that man still watching her was something like a pressure which begins to be torturing. The more reason to her why she should not flinch, but go on playing as if she were indifferent to loss or gain” (11). Eliot carefully writes “as if she were indifferent,” the use of subjunctive implying that Gwendolen feels the contrary, and that it was Deronda’s gaze upon her that convinced her to adopt a façade; however, Deronda’s is not the typical English gaze, and thus Gwendolen has misread what he might desire to see. Gwendolen’s awareness of the male gaze fulfills a main objective of the gaze, as Uttara Asha Coorlawala writes, “the gaze is situated somewhere between the eye and what is seen. Looking involves not simply the act of seeing, but also translating, interpreting, and an awareness that one is being seen” (19). Though Deronda has an atypical male gaze, as he is gazing in order to observe, to question, and to broaden his social consciousness, he still inflicts a change in Gwendolen’s actions, due to her perception that she is being watched in order to be dominated; a perception that demonstrates her experience with the old English gaze. To Gwendolen, who is primarily concerned with herself, it was better “that he should have kept his attention
fixed on her than he should have disregarded her as one of an insect swarm who had no individual physiognomy” (Eliot 11). Though the male gaze is associated with undressing, judgment, and domination, Gwendolen still desires the male gaze for the same reason she feels restricted by it—because it is controlling, and therefore powerful. She looks to it to be highly regarded, not judged or ignored. Her seeking of approval from the old male gaze and her desire for Deronda and his new male gaze to look on her favorably shows that she is aware of the power it encapsulates.

Gwendolen furthers her education of this new type of male gaze in Chapter 2 of Book II, with the return of her necklace—an event in which Eliot depicts sensitivity and emotion related to the male gaze as well as its association with heritage and (a type of national) nostalgia. Gwendolen, concerned only with her present state, does not see value in her father’s necklace apart from a monetary one. In fact, Gwendolen is repeatedly portrayed as having no consideration for—or interest in—her past, a characteristic that is reinforced by the narrator’s mention that she was not “well rooted in some spot of a native land” (Eliot 22), that she felt stricken with “world-nausea,” and that, upon selling the necklace, her “dominant regret was that after all she had only nine louis to add to the four in her purse” (Eliot 19). It is Deronda who finds and rescues a possibly sentimental object, and thus restores Gwendolen’s history and heritage, which are crucial to the social consciousness that Deronda and his future English gaze (as I will refer to this new kind of gaze throughout this paper) embody. This future, seemingly effeminized male gaze sees its role—or searches for its role—in community,
provoked by a consciousness on which Daniel Deronda first acts with the returning of the necklace.

Gwendolen’s disregard for her history, which portrays her as incredibly self-absorbed, is a connection that Eliot delineates in order to depict the close relationship between the self and the present. In the fourth chapter of the book, she depicts Gwendolen as having silly, largely materialistic passions, which “dwelt among strictly feminine furniture, and had no disturbing reference to the advancement of learning or the balance of the constitution; her knowledge being such as with no sort of standing-room or length of lever could have been expected to move the world. She meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner” (Eliot 39). Gwendolen’s concern for herself results in a lack of concern for society, knowledge, learning, and questioning.

If Eliot is arguing that individual concerns must be second to larger questions of society, and is further arguing that there is a way to change one’s nature to be most preoccupied with the latter, then Deronda is the character that most embodies social consciousness, and his gaze is his tool to inflict consciousness on those he observes, again acting as a mirror. However, as with all great political and social movements, a creed is most noble when it overcomes a resisting ideology—in Daniel Deronda, this opposing force is a resurgence of the traditional male gaze.

The rise of the future English gaze directly resulted in a resurgence of the traditional English gaze, which appears with Grandcourt in the second book of the novel, chronologically following the reader’s—and Gwendolen’s—first experience with the future male gaze in Deronda. This resurgence is a direct response to the future gaze of
England; as the future pushes to enter the public sphere and comprise different religions and ethnicities into a culture of sympathy, empathy, understanding, and “the increasing interpretation of the foreign and the domestic, of the move toward a more global economy that imperialism represents” (Lesjak 40), the resurgent traditional gaze reacts by returning to the private, specifically domestic, sphere. This is what Waters calls the “duality of gentlemanly ideology,” which results in a “breakdown of male unity” (98). Waters believes that the “duality of life and purpose” create a hypocrisy that is enabled “through the ‘mask’ of gentlemanly behavior” (105). In other words, Grandcourt and Deronda, existing in the same society, externally appear both polite and gentlemanly, and both utilize a form of the male gaze; however, their true natures (one of social consciousness and empathy, and one of dominance) are disguised by the mask they both wear as the English gentleman, creating the problem of reading male gazes which Gwendolen experiences in the first scene and throughout her courtship with Grandcourt.

Grandcourt’s new English gaze and its concentration on the private and personal, as opposed to public and universal, is his attempt to find control and stability amidst the increasingly socially conscious and emotional future English gaze, and the subsequent feminization of the male gaze in general. As Waters explains, “the late nineteenth century saw a decline of the gentleman as a figure of patriarchal power, for he embodies the potentially destructive fusion of the two paradoxes of gentlemanliness, accessibility and gender instability” (119). This pull away from the “traditional form” of male power—that of authority and dominance, especially as projected in the male gaze—caused a reactionary return to this old, dominant gaze. “In a society that increasingly
undermined traditional forms of male power, the gentleman needed to assure himself that, if he could maintain control nowhere else, he could exercise control of himself” (Waters 115), and this control was best expressed by controlling the “other,” which, in this case, is synonymous with “weaker”—the subservient wife, the subjugated daughter, the Jew, the foreigner, the lower-class English, and—in Grandcourt’s case—even the pet.

This aggressive and internally desperate attempt to cling to male power is apparent in Grandcourt’s gaze throughout the novel. The adverbs that Eliot uses to describe his gaze are more powerful than those used to describe the gentlemen by the roulette table or Deronda himself. Grandcourt looks at Gwendolen “persistently”, yet “without change of expression” (Eliot 112), which shows Grandcourt’s unfeeling nature, or his “mask,” which, in Waters’ theory, is hiding his uncivilized self (as we see later in the novel). In Waters’ theory, “The concept of the perfect gentleman is revealed to be a mask which is unable to conceal failures; this fact signifies that the dominance of patriarchy itself is vulnerable and open to attack” (98). Clearly, Waters believes that Grandcourt’s true nature cannot help but slip through his façade, and that its certain uncovering will lead to a definite attack on the patriarchal values this hidden nature encapsulates—what Waters does not clarify is how this nature slips through the façade, and I would like to assert that in Daniel Deronda, it is primarily through the traditional male gaze.

Grandcourt’s dominating gazes are also contrasted with Deronda’s sensitivity (in his feeling for others) and his expressive face. Gwendolen notes that Grandcourt
“did sometimes quietly and gradually change his position according to hers, so that he could see her whenever she was dancing,” (Eliot 118). Though this seems reminiscent of Deronda’s positioning to Gwendolen in the first scene, readers are forced to revisit this scene after Grandcourt gazes on his dog in Chapter 12; here, he toys with Fetch’s emotions by giving her “no word or look,” until at last “she could bear this neglect no longer… she gently put her large silky paw on her master’s leg. Grandcourt looked at her with unchanged face for half a minute, and then took the trouble to lay down his cigar while he lifted the unimpassioned Fluff close to his chin and gave it caressing pats, all the while gravely watching Fetch…” (Eliot 126).

Eliot parallels Grandcourt’s gaze on Gwendolen with the gaze he bestows on his dog, which shows Grandcourt’s mastery of the new English gaze, and also puts Gwendolen on par with Fetch in Grandcourt’s eyes. It is also in this chapter that Grandcourt’s gazes cause Gwendolen to begin to enter submission, which is marked in her repeatedly lowering her eyes away from his gaze (Eliot 133), turning her eyes away from him and desiring to “escape” (Eliot 136), and wondering, once he has departed, how he had “caused her unusual constraint” (Eliot 137). When Grandcourt, his eyes “upon her throughout their conversation” (Eliot 135), accuses Gwendolen of being “obstinately cruel,” she panics, feeling him “taking possession of her” (Eliot 135), and wondering what “the effect of looking at him would be on herself” (Eliot 135); in the following chapter, this situation recurs: “Grandcourt met her laughing eyes with a slow, steady look right into them, which seemed more like a vision in the abstract, and said, ‘Do you mean more torment for me?’ There was something so strange to Gwendolen in
this moment that she was quite shaken out of her usual self-consciousness. Blushing and turning away her eyes, she said, ‘No, that would make me sorry’” (Eliot 148).

Grandcourt’s power over Gwendolen—embodied by the gaze—has gone from making her uncomfortable to inflicting her with feelings of guilt, setting Gwendolen down the path of Lisa Surridge’s definition of the abused Victorian woman, as she takes on different reactions to his gazes, “embracing first the socially approved script of loyalty, self-sacrifice, and guilt, and then that of self-preservation” (123).

The concept of self-preservation here implies an inherent violence in the Victorian male gaze; its infliction of mental and emotional harm and its controlling prohibition of escape from harm are direct results of the lack of social consciousness in England at the time, a consciousness which Eliot seems to think would cure this violence. The concept of domestic female abuse was of central importance at the time, particularly to Eliot, whose Janet’s Repentance, which depicts mental and emotional abuse of women, was published during the divorce debates of 1857 (Surridge 106). During these debates, there was a push “to expand the legal definition of matrimonial cruelty under the divorce bill to include mental suffering as well as mere force” (Surridge 105). Surridge claims that some of the most effective and instrumental figures of this movement were authors, like Eliot, who portrayed the reality of emotional cruelty, especially as applicable to women, and thus depicted “wife assault as a community issue rather than a private matter” (106). Eliot brought mental abuse into the spotlight with her portrayal of Gwendolen and Grandcourt’s unhappy marriage, but Daniel Deronda was not only effective in that its publication showed the private
torments of an abused woman; within the text, Gwendolen’s repeated reaching out to Deronda, to confide in him her misery and to share her stories as a victim, portrayed the action of bringing the private domestic life into a type of public eye. It showed Deronda as a sympathetic listener and, as Deronda’s gaze represents social consciousness, it showed why it is crucial that the listener be embedded with a future English gaze, complete with empathy and power for change.

Though Mirah, like Gwendolen, has been mentally and emotionally abused in the private sphere, Deronda’s male gaze on her seems gradually less intense as the novel progresses, signifying Mirah’s increasingly strong social consciousness. When Mirah meets Deronda for the first time, she is in a situation in which she is arguably thinking only of herself. Like Gwendolen, Mirah cannot tear her eyes away from Deronda’s gaze; however, unlike Gwendolen, Mirah is receptive and even grateful for Deronda’s interference, correctly reading the “outleap of interest and compassion” (Eliot 188) in his gaze. The meeting of Mirah and Deronda also provides further contrast between Deronda and Grandcourt, in that here, we see Deronda gaze at Mirah because she is a sympathetic character, easily invoking compassion. This is a stark contrast from Grandcourt, who is interested in Gwendolen’s gaze because he finds personal interest in discovering a way to master her. While Grandcourt looks on “gravely” or “persistently,” Deronda gazes in “a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at” (Eliot 189). The image of Mirah leaning forward towards her rescuer was “unspeakably touching” to Deronda,
and thus he gazes to show compassion and humanity, and seeks to find a common
connection, as opposed to a dominant or superior quality in himself.

As Book III progresses, Eliot furthers her argument that empathy creates
community and social consciousness, as it was something in Deronda’s own experience
that “caused Mirah’s search after her mother to lay hold with a peculiar force on his
imagination. The first prompting of sympathy was to aid her in the search” (Eliot 205).
In his ability to empathize with Mirah, he has created a community to which he already
feels inextricably linked, unable to “dull this urgency of inward vision” (Eliot 205),
which is both the physical image of Mirah on the bank and the impression that he is
linked to a larger community for which he must act.

Deronda perceives Mirah as part of this diverse community, viewing her in the
exotic way that the “other” is typically viewed in Victorian fiction, feeling “inclined to
watch her and listen to her as if she had come from a far-off shore inhabited by a race
different from our own” (Eliot 225). However, Deronda has the courtesy to make his
visit brief: “with his usual activity of imagination as to how his conduct might affect
others, he shrank from what might seem like curiosity or the assumption of a right to
know as much as he pleased of one to whom he had done a service” (Eliot 225).
Deronda uses gaze as a means to understanding, as he is too respectful to demand verbal
explanations from those he assists, unlike Grandcourt’s guilt-invoking questioning of
Gwendolen earlier in the book. His gaze is the result of his desire to know and
understand others so that he might better comprehend the world and his place in it; it is
not to dominate that which is vulnerable.
Chapter 27 shows Gwendolen further experiencing this vulnerability, standing “with downcast eyelids” as Grandcourt stood “looking at her.” She “already felt herself being wooed by this silent man” (Eliot 299). Grandcourt believed he “saw in her a new phase, and believed she was showing her inclination. But he was determined that she should show it more decidedly” (Eliot 300). He searches her throughout the scene, as his “narrow, impenetrable eyes met hers, and mysteriously arrested them” (Eliot 301). Gwendolen, still using the abused woman “voices” of loyalty and guilt, allows herself to be “overcome by the suffused sense that here in this man’s homage to her lay the rescue from all helpless subjection to an oppressive lot” (Eliot 302). Gwendolen’s preoccupation with her fate—her concern for the self—blinds her to Grandcourt’s true motive of mastering her will; instead, she attempts to see his proposal as a rescue. However, it is obvious that this rescue will come at the cost of her voice, as when Grandcourt looks “straight into her eyes,” and asks “You accept my devotion?”, and Gwendolen feels that he “had shut out any explanation” (Eliot 303), which she reiterates later, saying that her “right to explanation was gone” (Eliot 328). This inability to speak is a completion of one of her abused woman “voices,” and it is this silence that signifies Gwendolen’s move from a voice of attempted loyalty to one of self-preservation.

It is in Book IV that Eliot fully moves Gwendolen into her phase of resistance and self-preservation, despite the guilt she is still subjected to feel under Grandcourt’s powerful male gaze. Grandcourt’s “looking at her with his usual gravity” causes
Gwendolen to move “to a distance with a little air of menace” (Eliot 315). Grandcourt, sensing this pull away, continues to guilt Gwendolen into submission:

“Are you as kind to me as I am to you?” said Grandcourt, looking into her eyes with his narrow gaze. Gwendolen felt herself stricken. She was conscious of having received so much, that her sense of command was checked, and sank away in the perception that, look around her as she might, she could not turn back. (Eliot 328)

Grandcourt’s gaze strikes Gwendolen with a feeling of indebtedness and humbles her; Deronda, understanding the associations with the male gaze, does not look on Mirah too long, to avoid causing her to feel a humbling and placating appreciation.

This physical silencing strikes Gwendolen with a feeling of verbal claustrophobia, which she is all too glad to escape from in her conversations with Deronda. Deronda’s gaze challenges, it does not dominate or subjugate, and is “innocent of any intention” (Eliot 332). As they converse, Gwendolen feels changes within her; feels “something like a new soul” waking, which “troubled [her] satisfaction” (Eliot 332). Her troubled conscience is only further burdened in her next meeting with Deronda, as he discusses “ugly aspects of life” (Eliot 337), including gambling, which functions as a commentary on Gwendolen’s past behavior.

Deronda’s embodiment of social consciousness seems to increase when he is in Mirah’s presence; Mirah effectively represents the positive effects of labors for the community. When Deronda sees her at the Meyrick’s, he notes “the glow of tranquil happiness” as a “contrast to his first vision of her that was delightful to Deronda’s eyes” (Eliot 369). At first, Deronda desires to make Mirah a central object of his gaze, placing himself “where he could see her as she sang”, but he “presently [covered] his
eyes with his hand, wanting to seclude the melody in darkness” (Eliot 372). This is the second time that Deronda has hesitated to look at Mirah (the first being after his embarrassment at viewing her as an exotic foreigner), as he would rather sacrifice his individual desires for the comfort of another. However, Deronda’s imagination is still provoked by Mirah: he does not need to gaze on her because her singing is a sensory impression, which applies to Karl F. Morrison’s theory about sensory impressions entailing “acts of imagination.” Morrison believes that this is when one ceases “to see with the eyes of the body, but continue[s] to imagine, continue[s] to feel” (17). There is more substance to Mirah than her appearance, and this layered aspect to her personality intrigues Deronda in the same way he was taken with Gwendolen’s “performance” in the first chapter of the novel.

Deronda is comfortable enough with Mirah—or believes enough in her character—to close his eyes near her; this is juxtaposed to Grandcourt’s ubiquitous gaze on Gwendolen in the following scene. Though Grandcourt does not blatantly stare at her, the narrator notes that: “If Grandcourt cared to keep any one under his power he saw them out of the corners of his long narrow eyes… he knew perfectly well where his wife was, and how she was behaving” (Eliot 412). This ties into Waters’ theories about the feelings of loss of control necessitating the male gaze. Grandcourt perceives Gwendolen as an “other,” and Waters asserts that the gaze on the “other” represents “the potential for exploitation in terms of profit and/or power and a projection of his fears of loss of control” (49-50). Grandcourt’s new English gaze also ties into Coorlawala’s theory that women give men some of the power in their gazes by being
aware that they are being observed; in this way, mere visibility of the male gaze ensures its success (19).

Gwendolen turns from the new male gaze to the future male gaze as she realizes that her escape from her domestic life is to destroy its private nature by sharing it with a “public,” an audience she finds in Deronda. This appreciation for the public, the community of support and sympathy that Deronda provides her with, gives Gwendolen a greater awareness of her conscience. As her consciousness increases, so does her uneasiness and feeling of subjection under Grandcourt’s powerful gaze, best illustrated in this chapter by his assertion that she wear the diamonds formerly belonging to Lydia, as he looks “straight at her with his narrow glance” (Eliot 426). After her initial refusal, he insists, with “his eyes… still fixed upon her,” and she “felt her own eyes narrowing under them as if to shut out an entering pain” (Eliot 427).

Mirah, in contrast, does not turn to the future gaze in order to escape a new male gaze; she is already thinking with the ideology of future England, but she needs Deronda to help her put words and theories to her understanding. In chapter 37, Mirah tries to explain the “beauty of the action” (Eliot 466) of the story of Bouddha and the tigress, but she cannot properly explain her sentiments to the Meyrick girls; it is Deronda who vocalizes her thoughts by saying that it “lives as an idea,” in a “flash of fervour”; when he deems it the “transmutation of self,” Mirah then believes that she can “say what [she] means, now” (Eliot 466). Deronda does not need to impress the future ideology of England upon Mirah in a gaze, he needs to vocalize her inherent understanding of the situation; Gwendolen can only try to grasp at this socially
conscious ideology by being impressed upon through Deronda’s gaze. However, the future gaze is not one of dominance and it cannot translate this idea into another’s belief, nor can it be forced upon another individual.

Deronda’s gaze cannot force a consciousness upon Gwendolen that she does not already possess; in this sense, the lack of power of the future male gaze leaves Gwendolen out of the future of England, emphasized by the fact that she has not reproduced with Grandcourt before his death, and will not produce a member of the next generation. Gwendolen is stuck under Grandcourt’s “narrow, immovable gaze” (Eliot 672) even after his death; though he is gone, she is still haunted by “a white dead face from which she was for ever trying to flee and for ever held back” (Eliot 674). Now that “his face will not be seen above the water again” (Eliot 689), Gwendolen comes to Deronda for help, asking for advice on how she should live her life, and striving to understand her place in a future world. However, by this point, Deronda’s experiences with Mirah have proven to him that he can only vocalize one’s preexisting disposition of futurity, and he avoids Gwendolen’s gaze in the final book of the novel, though the sight of her “pierces” him with “pity” (Eliot 688), as it is the nature of consciousness to sympathize with all beings.

In the final two books of the novel, Deronda’s withdrawal of his gaze from Gwendolen despite her openness to receive it signifies an attempted—but failed—transition of power in the exchange of gazes. For the first time, Deronda “shrank away from the task that was laid on him… he dreaded the weight of this woman’s soul flung upon his own imploring dependence” (Eliot 689); he “could not answer; he was obliged
to look away” (Eliot 690); he “felt impelled to turn his back towards her and walk to a
distance” (Eliot 694); he turned “his ear only” towards Gwendolen, as “her face
afflicted him too much” (Eliot 689). However, Deronda cannot escape her imploring
gaze; his “heart was pierced” (Eliot 700). Gwendolen’s depiction is masculine in the
power of her gaze: she has, in this instance, attempted to cast Deronda as the subject of
the gaze, forcing a promise that he will return to visit her again, though he does not
desire to do so.

Gwendolen’s mistake is in her attempt to use the male gaze for a female
reason—she demands Deronda to appear before her because she is dependent on him.
Eliot writes that before their next meeting, Gwendolen is “upborne by the prospect of
seeing him again: she did not imagine him otherwise than always within her reach, her
supreme need of him blinding her” (796). Gwendolen errs in believing that she may be
able to coerce Deronda into staying by her because she understands the effect of a
sympathetic gaze on his nature; however, the male gaze cannot be successfully executed
on a male of the English future, whose loyalty to social consciousness cannot bind him
to serve only one other individual. Thus, in the final book, Deronda announces his
departure for the East and his marriage to Mirah, clarifying for Gwendolen his
intentions to impact a community on a larger scale and to produce a future generation.

Deronda’s pull away from Gwendolen devastates her, as “she had learned to see all her
acts through the impression that they would make on Deronda: whatever relief might
come to her, she could not sever it from the judgment of her that would be created in his
mind” (Eliot 673). Without his gaze, Gwendolen has no one to direct her conscience.
Gwendolen voices her fear: “You cannot bear to look at me any more” (Eliot 699), and ultimately realizes that “the distance between them was too great” (Eliot 767).

It is in Deronda’s announcement of his intention to travel East that Gwendolen finally realizes her own insignificance, but she is left without an idea of what to make of herself: “the world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst. The thought that he might come back after going to the East, sank before the bewildering vision of these wide-stretching purposes in which she felt herself reduced to a mere speck” (Eliot 803). Her realization of her true selfish nature leads her to the conclusion that she is “forsaken” (Eliot 805), but she does not understand what she can do or where she can go from this moment of realization.

Deronda’s withdrawal of his gaze from Gwendolen effectively leaves her on her own. She is caught in a place between the reality of English life and the ideal of the English future—she cannot live in the former now that she has had a glimpse of the happiness that the latter might bring, yet she cannot live in the latter because she does not inherently have—nor has she been able to acquire—the ability to relate to those from all walks of life. At novel’s end, Deronda’s male gaze has failed to take Gwendolen into the future, and the male gaze of Grandcourt has also left her alone. Without the male gaze casting her role, Gwendolen is lost in a strange in-between world, completely powerless. To a certain degree, she might have been better off never having known Deronda, as she would not have the burning thought that there is more in the world, and she might have been able to thrive in English society by carrying on her act (“secrecy”), a thought that she touches upon late in the chapter: “Would her remorse
have maintained its power within her, or would she have felt resolved by secrecy, if it had not been for that outer conscience which was made for her by Deronda?” (Eliot 763).

However, the question of whether or not Gwendolen is better for having known Deronda (as she claims in her final letter to him) is not a primary concern of Eliot; rather, she desired to portray the effects of the clashing of the new English male gaze with the future English male gaze on the women in an evolving Victorian society. The fate of England is unclear at the novel’s end; it is trapped in Gwendolen’s place of uncertainty and of not knowing how to progress or carry on. The future gaze seems most universal at the novel’s conclusion with Deronda’s intention to journey East; this is complicated by the reality that he is Jewish, and not of “pure” English blood. In this respect, the future male gaze never belonged to English blood, but came to fruition in English culture, and thus Deronda can be viewed as what Carolyn Lesjak refers to as a “hybrid national reality” (35). The inability to identify with a universal humanity has left out the English Gwendolen, who was never concerned with the other, or anyone but herself, from this new hybrid reality. Lesjak believes that Gwendolen “remains as a glimpse of [the] possibility of the existence of chaotic desires, of a discontinuous sense of self, of the internal splits and ruptures that disrupt or refuse the production of a coherent, cohesive national identification” (36). It is Gwendolen’s representation of this rupture in Deronda’s imagined world of universal compassion and sympathy that renders it impossible for her to continue a relationship with him. Deronda’s effeminized male gaze is one of interest, questioning, and imagination. This
imaginative aspect of Deronda’s gaze is his desire to reach beyond his own world by influencing the future of England. To ensure the survival of future generations with this mindset, Deronda needs a vessel, which Mirah provides—only she is not merely a vessel, but a tool with which to nurture his children (the future), one who shares in his desire to bring understanding, and one who, as a Jewess, will ensure that the future is more diverse and worldly in its ancestry. Though Eliot gives every insinuation that the future male gaze that Deronda has utilized throughout the novel will eventually impact a larger community, she leaves no explanation as to the fate of Gwendolen, and thus, the fate of the victims of the opposing male gazes, who have not the strength to return England as it was before, nor the degree of humanity and selflessness required to evolve into the future.

At its core, the difference between the traditional male gaze and the future gaze is that of motive. Laura Mulvey’s claim that the male gaze works to either objectify or to demystify in order to objectify has limited motives of the male gaze to just one—domination. Mulvey’s limited definition seems to describe the traditional male gaze; however, her two definitions of the work of the male gaze do not address other types of gazes, like that of the future gaze. In *Daniel Deronda*, Deronda himself seems to have no motives of domination in his gazing, as opposed to Grandcourt, and his gazes serve not only to broaden his social consciousness, but allow Gwendolen an opportunity for specular recognition that the more dominant gazes of the other characters do not afford.

Deronda and Grandcourt have surprisingly little interaction with one another in the novel. However, their presences are felt by each other throughout the novel in their
association with Gwendolen, who serves as the object for both male subjects. The three characters form a type of “love” triangle like that studied by René Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (9). Sedgwick builds upon this theory by noting that the lines of Girard’s triangles should not be equilateral, as “the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger [and] more heavily determinant of actions and choices than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved” (21). Sedgwick asserts that Girard’s study of the love triangle uncovers more about homosocial bonds between men (the lovers of the beloved) than it does about bonds between men and women—social, romantic, or erotic. Girard’s triangle has even geometric sides, but Sedgwick implies that the identical sides of the triangle signify a mathematic interpretation of similarity that is misleading, as both the type and degree of “love” is different in each triangle. When drawing the Gwendolen/Grandcourt/Deronda love triangle, the line between Deronda and Grandcourt should be emphasized as we watch Deronda and Grandcourt relate to one another through their interactions with Gwendolen.

As the line between Gwendolen and Deronda is pulled taut in exchanges of curiosity and empathy from Deronda and discovery and reliance from Gwendolen, so too is the line between Gwendolen and Grandcourt tightened with dominance from Grandcourt and resistance from Gwendolen. As each male character pulls toward Gwendolen, they are brought closer together as well. Gwendolen is effectively reduced to the object through which the two men relate to one another and through which Deronda has challenged Grandcourt’s traditional gaze with his future gaze and
Grandcourt’s traditional gaze has had the opportunity for resurgence. In the end, Sedgwick’s theory of the triangle rings true. Gwendolen functions as nothing more than an object through which the two men have been able to challenge one another; a battlefield between the traditional male gaze and the future male gaze.

I have thus far proven the existence of more than one male gaze—the traditional male gaze and the future male gaze. In the following chapters, I will use Jane Eyre and Portrait of a Lady to explore how “male” these gazes actually are, and how they might be used by women to similar ends.
WEARING THE (FIGURATIVE) PANTS:
DOMINATION AND MASOCHISM IN JANE EYRE

In Daniel Deronda, we have seen the results of the traditional male gaze and the future male gaze on a woman, and we have seen how the emergence of the future male gaze directly produces a resurgence of a strong traditional male gaze. However, Eliot’s depictions of two types of gazes are largely focused on the woman as the object of the gaze and on how the men, as the gazers, affect one another through looking at one central object. In Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, however, woman as the object through which the gazes can relate has been, to a certain degree, removed. In the least, Girard’s triangle structure has been changed, as I will explore in the pages that follow.

Despite their differences, similarities in the introductions of the gazes in Daniel Deronda and Jane Eyre abound. One of the first lengthy conversations that Brontë shows between Rochester and Jane, in the scene in which Rochester asks to see Jane’s paintings, involves a series of questions similar to the questions that begin Daniel Deronda. The difference between Deronda and Rochester is immediately apparent, as Rochester’s initial question reads as though he has already made up his mind as to its answer. He questions Jane: “I don’t know whether they [the paintings] were entirely of your doing; probably a master aided you?” and asserts that he can “recognise patchwork.” (Brontë 156) a threat that clarifies his belief that he knows what Jane’s drawings will look like. Importantly, the objects in question are paintings, artistic expressions of Jane’s mind. In his first two questions, Rochester has assumed that the paintings, which are products of Jane’s visual and mental perception—products of her
gaze—are not hers alone. Without ever having seen them, Rochester believes—or wants to assert—that she has had assistance. This functions not only to imply that Jane is not capable of using her gaze to create the paintings, but also to imply that Jane’s gaze is somehow dishonest in what it asserts to see and understand on its own. Jane calmly refuses to let Rochester dominate her by declining to agree with his accusations.

When Rochester has finished “scrutinizing” the artwork, he glances at Jane and says, “I perceive those pictures were done by one hand: was that hand yours?” (Brontë 156). Here, Rochester rethinks his original assertion that Jane was aided by another. He shows interest in her mind when he asks, “And when did you find time to do them? They have taken much time, and some thought,” (Brontë 156) and shows further transition to the future gaze in his next series of questions:

“Where did you get your copies?”
“Out of my head.”
“That head I see now on your shoulders?”
“Yes, sir.”
“Has it other furniture of the same kind within?”
“I should think it may have: I should hope—better.” (Brontë 156)

Rochester’s most notable—and uncharacteristic—questions, “Were you happy when you painted these pictures?” (Brontë 157) and “And you felt self-satisfied with the result of your ardent labours?” (Brontë 158) show his interest in Jane’s mind and his acknowledgement that she is capable of producing the paintings. This passage shows the side of Rochester that may embody the future gaze of England in his questioning of Jane in order to understand and not objectify. However, in the midst of his interested questioning, Rochester suddenly has another sudden change of heart and character:
“You have secured the shadow of your thought; but no more, probably. You had not enough of the artist's skill and science to give it full being: yet the drawings are, for a school-girl, peculiar. As to the thoughts, they are elfish. These eyes in the Evening Star you must have seen in a dream. How could you make them look so clear, and yet not at all brilliant? For the planet above quells their rays. And what meaning is that in their solemn depth? And who taught you to paint wind? There is a high gale in that sky, and on this hill-top. Where did you see Latmos? For that is Latmos. There! put the drawings away!” I had scarce tied the strings of the portfolio, when, looking at his watch, he said abruptly—“It is nine o'clock: what are you about, Miss Eyre, to let Adele sit up so long? Take her to bed.” (Brontë 158)

Within three pages of text, Rochester has attempted to dominate Jane with his preconceived ideas of the artwork he has not yet seen, has then expressed interest in understanding Jane, and finally, has abruptly shifted away from his exploratory conversation into Jane’s mind by silencing his own questioning into her character, intelligence, and artistic ability. Here, Rochester functions as an embodiment of both the traditional male gaze and the future male gaze. Further, he has even produced a resurgence of the traditional male gaze upon his recognizance of the future male gaze he used to look at the pictures and at Jane. This complication of the three instances of the two types of gazes is an example of the inner turmoil and conflict of an English gentleman in an evolving society. Rochester recognizes Jane’s resistance to his dominance at the beginning of the conversation, as she asserts that the paintings were products of her own mind, but when he persists in his accusations, she responds, “Then I will say nothing, and you shall judge for yourself, sir” (Brontë 156). Instead of looking away or withdrawing in response to Rochester’s demand, Jane offers her paintings, personal products of her imagination and artistry, to be read by a gaze that
she believes will see that her mind produced the paintings; however, when Rochester realizes that she is willing to communicate with the future male gaze, he is ultimately concerned and possibly frightened, as this opportunity for the future English gaze inside Rochester conflicts with his typical looking as a traditional English gentleman.

Rochester’s loyalty to the views of the traditional English gaze is, of course, closely tied to his ancestry. Rochester is not a Deronda, a man without history, heritage, or known parents; on the contrary, he is more of the standing of a Grandcourt, as Miss Fairfax informs Jane upon her arrival: “The family have always been respected here. Almost all the land in the neighborhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind” (Brontë 136). A man of inherited wealth and social standing, Rochester is reluctant to use the future male gaze, although it enables him to enter into discourse with Jane.

In a way, Rochester’s inner turmoil concerning the two types of gazes relates again to the mirror theory. Rochester is self-aware and recognizes the future male gaze in himself when he begins to use it, but the socioeconomic implications of mobile social classes are threatening to his lifestyle, and so his traditional male gaze makes a full recovery of himself.

As Rochester embodies two different types of gazes in a way that makes his words and actions hypocritical and confusing, so too does Jane embody an untraditional gaze. Jane’s gazes are perhaps even more complicated than Rochester’s, as in her use of gazes that contain elements of the male gazes, her gender defies their label as “male.” (Therefore, from this point forward, I will discontinue the use of “traditional
male gaze” and “future male gaze” and refer to the gazes as traditional or future only.)

From the beginning of the text, Jane is an unusually dominant character for a female in Victorian literature, and perhaps the reason readers are quick to note her dominance and agency is through Brontë’s decision to write *Jane Eyre* in the first-person. This first-person narration indicates that as Jane is being looked at by Rochester throughout the book, as in the scene with the paintings, she is aware she is being looked at because she is retelling the story and is careful to include these scenes of Rochester observing her.

Kaja Silverman, in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, writes: “It is only at a second remove that the subject might be said to assume responsibility for ‘operating’ the gaze by ‘seeing’ itself being seen even when no pair of eyes are trained upon it—by taking not so much the gaze as its effects within the self. However, consciousness as it is redefined by Lacan hinges not only upon the internalization but upon the elision of the gaze; this ‘seeing’ of oneself being seen is experienced by the subject-of-consciousness—by the subject, that is, who arrogates to itself a certain self-presence or sustainability—as a seeing of itself seeing itself” (127). We know that Jane not only sees Rochester looking at her, but processes her own responses to his gaze, as the novel is narrated in first person and she includes these details. Here, Jane is markedly different from Gwendolen, as Gwendolen realizes that she is being gazed upon from the first scene of the novel, but gives no indication that she is processing her own reaction to the gaze—at least, Eliot’s narrator gives us no indication of such insight.

This first-person narration continues to give Jane agency in being seen that Gwendolen lacks, but it also gives her power in executing her own looking. As Jane
both narrates and takes part as a character in the novel that is named for her, the text becomes a female version of *Daniel Deronda* but with even more agency, as Deronda’s gaze was related to readers through the descriptions of the omniscient narrator. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane not only shares the objects of her gaze with readers, but specifically notes her use of the gaze as a tool, as in Chapter 17, when Jane notes that “I might gaze without being observed” when Rochester is distracted by others at his party.

However, though Jane is conscious of her use of the gaze, she is not, to some degree, completely in control of it, noting that “my eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face; I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise, and the irids would fix on him” (Brontë 203). Though Jane is actively participating in a gaze that seems like a traditional gaze, as she begins by focusing on Rochester’s physicality, noting his “colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth,” (Brontë 204) she also feels that her gaze is, in part, being controlled. Perhaps this is similar to Daniel Deronda’s feeling that his “attention was arrested” (Eliot 9) by the object. In gazing, Jane acquiesces that the power of the gaze is not solely in her control and that the object upon which she looks also has some power in being looked at. Though Jane feels “an acute pleasure in looking,” she goes on to describe this scopophilic pleasure as one “like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless” (Brontë 203). Though both Jane and Deronda feel compelled to look, only Jane experiences this forbidden element in her desire to look, which is probably due to her gender and the fact that the gaze is, in theory and practice,
traditionally male. However, Jane allows herself to gaze, and that her gaze embodies some “male” aspects of the gaze (her judgment of Rochester’s physical appearance and her initially dominant gaze on one who is not aware he is being watched) serves to disprove that the gaze can only be used by men and is therefore male in nature.

Jane’s gaze is clearly a traditional gaze, as she looks at Rochester to physically judge and objectify him. This traditional gaze is complicated by her increasing feelings of falling under Rochester’s mastery. If the traditional gaze is one of dominance, it seems strange that Jane seems to be slipping away from a dominant state, noting that Rochester’s features “were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me; they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his” (Brontë 204).

Jane is not questioning Rochester’s character or trying to understand him, nor is she wholly submissive to his person. She remains dominant throughout the scene while simultaneously submitting to the feelings she experiences while looking at his physical features. Jane is dominant enough to use Rochester to become whatever she wishes to be—in this case, it appears as though she wishes to be submissive to his appearance. In noting, “I had not intended to love him… He made me love him without looking at me,” (Brontë 204), Jane is admitting Rochester the power that Gwendolen is aware she possesses in the first scene of Daniel Deronda, and she is also willingly noting her submissiveness. Jane clearly desires some type of masochistic culmination in her relationship with Rochester, but that Jane is the one who willingly casts herself in a submissive role continues to reinforce her overall dominance. The psychological
aspects of masochism may have a root in the social norms of the Victorian era. As Mulvey writes, “Freud’s concept of masculinity in women and the ego’s desire to fantasize itself in a certain active manner suggest that as desire is given a cultural materiality in a text, for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a habit that easily becomes second nature. However, this nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes” (33). If Jane desires to imagine herself as active, which Mulvey asserts is “natural,” she must also feel “restless” about this desire and how it corresponds with her role as a woman in Victorian society on at least a subconscious level, according to Mulvey’s statement. Jane’s outwardly dominant demeanor and her secret desire to be dominated appropriately coincide with Mulvey’s theory that Victorian women were caught in an “oscillation between passive femininity and regressive masculinity.” Interestingly, Jane begins her life and her narrative outside of a social arena where she might be taught the characteristics of her role as a woman in society. Like Gwendolen, she has not been “rooted in some spot of native land” (Eliot 22). Raised by Mrs. Reed, Jane was treated as a sub-human and could not seek safety from John Reed in any sort of system that upheld justice. Whereas most children were raised in a home that acted as a microcosm for the social standards they would have to adhere to in the “real world,” Jane was not instructed on how to properly be a young lady. In a mode of self-preservation, Jane adopted a more aggressive, masculine demeanor from a young age, as evidenced in her interactions with John. Though Jane notes that she was “accustomed to John Reed’s abuse,” (Brontë 42), it is in an argument with John that Jane shows one of her first attempts to retaliate with
a dominant gaze: “John thrust his tongue in his cheek whenever he saw me, and once attempted chastisement; but as I instantly turned against him, roused by the same sentiment of deep ire and desperate revolt which had stirred my corruption before, he thought it better to desist, and ran from me, uttering execrations, and vowing I had burst his nose. I had, indeed, leveled at that prominent feature as hard a blow as my knuckles could inflict; and when I saw that either that or my look daunted him I had the greatest inclination to follow up my advantage to purpose, but he was already with his mamma” (Brontë 59). Not having fully developed the passive femininity that a mother should teach, and having no constant instigator except a boy, Jane realizes that aggression and a dominant gaze are her only hope of survival.

Jane’s dominance lies in her use of the gaze and her recognition of its power. At the beginning of the party scene, Jane sits in a liminal position next to the window, as she does in the very first chapter, when she attempts to conceal and protect herself from John Reed. However, during the party scene, this positioning is no longer simply a mode of self-preservation—it is a tactical point of vantage. Jane understands her own strength is to be slightly outside the party in order to best gaze upon the guests and Rochester. Jane can use this gaze to give her object power over herself while remaining dominant in her ability to bestow power. Jane also participates in the “culture of surveillance” (Purchase 70) at Rochester’s party in a scene that parallels the first scene of Daniel Deronda. Jane compares Rochester with his guests, contrasting “the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram,—even the military distinction of Colonel Dent” with Rochester’s “look of native pith and genuine power,” (again
attributing power to her object) and notes that she feels “no sympathy” in the appearance of the three guests, but does in Rochester. Noting that the guests do not seem as moved by Rochester’s appearance as she, Jane notes, “He is not to them what he is to me… he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;—I am sure he is…” (Brontë 204).

Jane simultaneously claims Rochester as hers while admitting not only that he has power, but that it is this power that differentiates him from the others at the party and therefore that it is this power that makes him hers. Rochester continues to be the object of Jane’s gaze through the rest of the novel, but his use of the power her gaze bestows upon him is limited. Jane continues to read only Rochester’s physical features and rarely delves below their surface to try and understand his person. When the existence of Rochester’s wife is revealed at the wedding, Jane turns to Rochester to discover the truth. Like a woman that is typically the object of the gaze, Rochester has power over Jane’s gazes, but this power is limited. The power of the object being looked at by a traditional gaze typically has power only to deny the gaze, or to change features to rebel against a reading. Jane notes Rochester’s resistance to her gaze at the wedding when she looks to him for an answer to the accusation, and his attempt to deny her reading is feminine in the sense that the power of Victorian women was often only the power to say no:

I looked at Mr. Rochester: I made him look at me. His whole face was colourless rock: his eye was both spark and flint. He disavowed nothing: he seemed as if he would defy all things. Without speaking, without smiling, without seeming to recognise in me a human being, he only twined my waist with his arm and riveted me to his side. (Brontë 318)
Rochester physically moves Jane to his side so he is no longer face to face with her. In this movement, he is preventing Jane from discovering truth because he is denying her access to his face, in the way that Gwendolen often looked away from Grandcourt in an attempt at self-preservation. Though Rochester remains the more objectified of the two, his strength at this moment is in his very objectification. Because he knows Jane can only read him physically, he blocks her reading by putting on a face that betrays no emotion and by moving out of her line of sight.

Rochester’s understanding of himself as the object of the gaze gives him the power to appropriately resist, but this power comes to a dramatic end in the most interesting change in looking in *Jane Eyre*, which is Rochester’s physical blindness at book’s end. It is Jane that notes, “perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near--that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand” (Brontë 476).

Rochester’s blindness confirms his role as object because he is now completely reliant on Jane for all vision and therefore all power. He is forced to see and experience everything through Jane, and Jane again takes pleasure in gazing on him and gazing for him, as it gives her final and absolute power, but a type of power that also allows her to cast herself as Rochester’s submissive counterpart when she desires:

He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what
he wished to be done. And there was a pleasure in my services, most full, most exquisite, even though sad—because he claimed these services without painful shame or damping humiliation. He loved me so truly, that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes. (Brontë 476)

The pleasure that Jane expresses is not in her dominance of Rochester or her ability to wholly objectify him, but in her dominance of herself—of being able to command her own subordination to Rochester when she so desires. Jane takes pleasure in conducting him where he wished to go and doing for him what he wished to be done. She wants to be made to serve, and in fulfilling this desire, she is both dominant and submissive—submissive to the whims of Rochester, but dominant in fulfilling her desire to be submissive through her control of Rochester. Jane experiences pleasure in her controlled masochistic relationship with Rochester.

The gaze in Jane Eyre is therefore firstly complicated by the woman’s use of the traditional gaze and the woman’s desire to be dominated. According to Mulvey’s theory, the man desires to objectify or to demystify to objectify. In Jane Eyre, we do see this theory come to fruition—but it is in Jane, and not Rochester, that we find this desire. In a sense, the entire structure of the novel sets up this seemingly backwards relationship: Jane Eyre does not, as do many other Victorian novels, begin with a nominative male character. The novel begins with Jane, who is so dominant from the beginning of the text, that Rochester—almost by default—must be the one to be demystified and ultimately objectified. Jane’s preoccupation with objectifying Rochester lies in her own desire to be objectified; her demystification of Rochester is
not complete until he loses his sight and is bound to submission. In his submission, he must allow Jane to serve him.

The gaze is also complicated because of Rochester’s embodiment of both the traditional and future gazes, which is clear in his interaction with Jane and her paintings. Rochester, as a single character, functions as both Grandcourt and Deronda function in Daniel Deronda, in the sense that he embodies the clash of the traditional, dominant English society and the new, understanding English society. Girard’s triangle cannot be so easily diagramed here, as the three characters in question are not, as readers might assume, Jane, Rochester, and St. John, but are instead Jane, the part of Rochester that clings to his traditional gaze, and the part of Rochester that attempts to use the future male gaze. The triangle works in some fascinating ways in Jane Eyre. The traditional, dominant, reserved Rochester is brought closer to and forced to confront the new, questioning, understanding Rochester. In the beginning of the novel, Jane does indeed serve as a sort of object through which these two conflicting sides of Rochester can meet. However, the triangle is obliterated by Jane’s position as a subject and not an object. Rochester’s dueling gazes are no longer of any consequence in the novel because they both fall submissive to Jane’s dominance. Both gazes of Rochester are literally blinded, allowing Jane to be both dominant and submissive, and forcing Rochester to be the object through which her dominance over Rochester and her willing submission to him can operate. Jane’s effective use of the “male” gaze forces us to realize that in this new English society, traditional and future gazes are not gendered,
and that the gaze has very little to do with gender, despite the historical accuracy of the “male” label to the dominant gaze.
MASCULINE MERLE AND INNOCENT ISABEL: WOMEN DOMINATING WOMEN IN PORTRAIT OF A LADY

In Jane Eyre and Daniel Deronda, we formulated versions of Girard’s triangle based on interaction of two men with one woman, and interaction with two conflicting sides of one man with one woman. In Henry James’ Portrait of a Lady, two women and one man partake in the power struggle of the exchange of gazes. This triangle is most intriguing because the center of the power struggle at first seems to take place through the use of Isabel as the passive object. However, Isabel eventually discovers that she is capable of a dominant gaze as she slowly comes to realize that gender roles in her world are not as they first appeared.

Isabel, the decidedly feminine woman, is certainly the object of many gazes in the novel, but these gazes are often difficult to properly read. Isabel is described as “looking at everything with an eye that denoted clear perception” (James 30) and as having “a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited” (James 32). However, for a woman so perceptive, Isabel clearly desires to be further educated, and so she surrounds herself with dominating or strong women. When the book begins, Isabel is under the guidance of her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, who dominates over Isabel in her official role as guardian, and takes pains to educate Isabel on proper social norms, such as informing Isabel that she “can’t stay alone with the gentlemen” (James 80) when she sits up late with her cousin and his neighbor. However, readers recognize an unnecessary dominance in lectures such as this one, as Ralph and Lord Warburton are non-
threatening male characters. Mrs. Touchett seems to have Isabel’s best interests at heart, but readers may note Mrs. Touchett’s occasional admittance of ulterior motives for protecting Isabel, as when she admits “I thought she would do me credit” (James 247). Mrs. Touchett mentions a few times that she thinks it advantageous to have a “pretty” niece in town with her for social reasons. While her dominance over Isabel does serve to keep Isabel in line with social norms, her selfish motives for caring for her niece make her untrustworthy.

Isabel also spends time with her friend, Henrietta Stackpole, who is a strong and, at times, overbearing woman. She is frowned upon by other women, especially Mrs. Touchett, because of her modern and independent attitude and her profession as a writer, which requires her to travel by herself. Isabel calls Henrietta a friend at the novel’s beginning, but she comes to find that Henrietta is not as concerned for her as she originally seemed. This is evidenced most particularly when Henrietta takes the liberty to write to Caspar Goodwin after Isabel has asked her not to. Isabel specifically refers to this incident as “Henrietta Stackpole’s treachery” (James 167).

Isabel next endears herself to Madame Merle, who she believes is taking her under her wing to educate her about society. In Madame Merle’s seemingly kind and giving character, however, there are hints of a façade, as when Madame Merle insists, “Now that you’re a young woman of fortune you must know how to play the part—I mean to play it well” (James 225). Isabel, who has already rejected two suitors, seems uncommonly weak and willing to follow Madame Merle, though this is likely because of her gender. Isabel’s position as a young woman of standing required that her closest
communication be with other women. In *Between Women*, Sharon Marcus delineates woman/woman friendship a common and necessary social subculture, as this friendship “cultivated the feminine virtues of sympathy and altruism that made women into good helpmates” (26). The world in which women carried out their friendships most freely was a specifically internal, domestic, and private world. This sense of privacy and intimacy makes Isabel’s discovery of Merle’s true character all the more terrifying. As Sharon Marcus notes, “Isabel Archer’s maturation thus depends on recognizing that the friendship she contracts in England with Madame Merle only appears to bestow the gift of marital happiness but is in fact a pretense of friendship designed to steal her fortune. Isabel thinks she is in an English novel of courtship and that her friend is her benefactor, only to learn that she is in a French novel of adultery and that her friend is her rival” (92). Isabel is surprised to learn of Merle’s treachery and disloyalty, and so too are readers. In choosing a Victorian novel with two main female characters, readers assumed their relationship would be the typical guardian/novice relationship so common in the Victorian female domestic sphere. Our discomfort and surprise at Merle’s character flaws is even greater than we experience in discovering Osmond’s less-than-favorable character, because we had expected Merle to serve as a secondary character in *Portrait of a Lady*—a helpful older woman who guides Isabel through the perils of life. In discovering that Merle has laid these dangers in her path, readers slowly become aware that Merle has more depth than initially expected. As Isabel comes to realize she was merely an object in a grand scheme, so too do readers realize that her objectification has not only served the plot, but the reading experience as well.
James has laid Isabel in our path as a decoy for Madame Merle, who is just as central—if not more so—than Isabel to the novel.

Madame Merle, who has already designated herself as well-versed and experienced in society, is undoubtedly aware that her treachery is originally unsuspected in her friendship with Isabel, and uses it to her advantage. In the women-dominated domestic sphere, Madame Merle is able to talk favorably of Osmond, and it is through Merle’s description of Osmond that Isabel first begins to admire and care for him.

The separation between the domestic and societal world may be a primary way that Madame Merle is able to manipulate Isabel, but, as in Jane Eyre, there exists an element of masochism. Isabel claims from the beginning of the novel, most notably in her conversations with Ralph concerning the ghost, that she has never experienced any great suffering. Ralph agrees with her, noting that she will not be afraid to see the ghost because “It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, and suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way, your eyes are open to it” (James 61). Isabel admits that she is afraid of suffering but that she is very fond of knowledge. It is here that her obsession with suffering first appears, and it is this obsession that will lead to her own suffering. This suffering is partially self-inflicted, as Isabel, like Jane Eyre, seems to have a fascination with masochism that influences her relationships. Though Isabel claims she is afraid of suffering, it seems to fascinate her when others suffer. For example, Isabel notes that she’s “afraid” Madame Merle has “suffered much” (James, 206) as she desires to grow
closer to Merle. Isabel’s statement about fearing suffering but being fond of knowledge may explain this strange allure she feels in others that have suffered. However unpleasant Isabel understands suffering to be, she herself has not suffered, and therefore, she has no knowledge of what it is to suffer, an ignorance that is unpleasant to so learned a woman. In an early scene with Henrietta, Isabel allows Henrietta to dictate what Isabel’s illusions are after Henrietta points out that Isabel has not suffered:

““The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You’re not enough in contact with reality—with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You’re too fastidious; you’ve too many graceful illusions.”

Isabel’s eyes expanded as she gazed at this lurid scene. “What are my illusions?” she asked. “I try so hard not to have any.” (James 231)

In her conversations with Henrietta and Madame Merle, we see that Isabel equates suffering with a kind of knowledge that she has not yet experienced. Isabel is quick to take advice from those who have suffered, as she assumes that they are far wiser than she. In a way, Isabel lives out her fantasy of having suffered in her associations with those who have, in order to be closer to the knowledge of the suffering. One of Isabel’s greatest points of pride in herself is her knowledge, and she is torn between knowing and suffering or not knowing but not suffering.

Isabel’s disdain of being out of a circle of knowledge is reflected in a pivotal scene involving a gaze, but it is not a gaze in which she partakes but a gaze that she is a witness to between Merle and Osmond:

Madame Merle was there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed, was that their colloquy had for the moment converted itself into
a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame Merle was standing on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair, leaning back and looking at her. Her head was erect, as usual, but her eyes were bent on his. What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. Then she perceived that they had arrived at a desultory pause in their exchange of ideas and were musing, face to face, with the freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them. There was nothing to shock in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected. But it was all over by the time she had fairly seen it. Madame Merle had seen her and had welcomed her without moving; her husband, on the other hand, had instantly jumped up. He presently murmured something about wanting a walk and, after having asked their visitor to excuse him, left the room. (James 427)

For the first time, we see this type of complication of the gaze—the horror of being outside the gaze. Isabel is not in any kind of power structure at all, because she is not a participant in the activity that gives power—that of gazing or being gazed upon. That Merle and Osmond stuck her as being “detected” mean that they were indeed aware of her gaze, but her gaze on the two of them is still outside their private power play. It is important to note that Isabel was first struck by the fact that Merle was standing, her eyes bent on Osmond, who was seated. This physical stance—of Merle in a dominant, looming stature—mirrors the dominance her gaze has over Osmond, and strikes Isabel as unusual, as Osmond has always been the dominant one in his relationship with Isabel.

Indeed, Isabel has increasingly felt Osmond’s dominance through his frequent use of the traditional gaze on Isabel. Throughout the text, many scenes parallel Grandcourt/Gwendolen scenes, as whenever Isabel challenges Osmond, he can silence
her with a look. For example, when Isabel wishes to visit Ralph again, Osmond refuses to let her go, and tells her she ought to be grateful that he already allowed Ralph to visit their home:

“What am I to be grateful for?”
Gilbert Osmond laid down his little implements, blew a speck of dust from his drawing, slowly got up, and for the first time looked at his wife.
“For my not having interfered while he was here.”
Isabel turned her eyes away from him; they rested upon his little drawing. (James 555)

Based on this and other experiences with Osmond’s controlling personality and dominant gazes, Isabel is certainly surprised to find him taking a submissive role to Madame Merle; however, Isabel is perhaps more surprised by Merle’s position of dominance and control over Osmond. In fact, Merle’s position in this scene is as uncanny to Isabel—if not more—than is the insinuation of something important having passed between Merle and Osmond in her absence. That Madame Merle is in control of Osmond is frightening because Isabel has trusted her as a woman like herself—equally submissive and vulnerable to the advances of the dominant gaze, and has placed herself in Merle’s hands to be instructed and guided. That Merle is masculine enough to have control over Osmond is disconcerting not only because Merle is not who Isabel assumed she was, and not only because she is defying social norms, but because her masculinity implicates Isabel as also having defied social norms through her now-tainted relationship with Madame Merle. Isabel has already learned that she is not to be alone with Ralph and Lord Warburton, but she must now analyze the time she has spent alone with the masculine and dominant Merle, sharing secrets and taking advice in a
realm she thought was centered around the female domestic, only to find that her primary role for how to be a woman is, in fact, a dominant (and therefore masculine) participant in another relationship.

As Isabel is discovering, characters’ roles change as they change relationships and become relative to different people. Osmond frequently uses the traditional gaze in his interactions with Isabel, but with Merle, he muses “face to face” with the “freedom of old friends,” implying a more equal relationship, though of the two dominant characters, Merle’s position standing over Osmond confirms that she has great power over him. When Isabel sees Merle standing over Osmond, she sees Merle unmasked, or wearing a different mask. This is Isabel’s first inkling that Madame Merle may not be who she seems to be to society and that therefore, she may not be who she pretends to be for Isabel. Isabel has seen Osmond’s dominant side and she expects him to be dominant because he is a man. Isabel does not expect Merle to use the traditional gaze and had not considered the fact that Merle did not have her best interests at heart from the beginning because, like readers, she had not been looking for that type of dominance in the female, domestic, private sphere in which she befriended Merle.

Perhaps Merle’s success in using the traditional gaze on Isabel lies in its unexpected usage in the female sphere of the home; however, her success in using the traditional gaze on Osmond lies in her masculinity, as the world of the traditional gaze is historically homosocial. As Eve Sedgwick writes, “‘Homosocial’ is a neologism meant to be distinguished from ‘homosexual’ and connotes a form of male bonding often accompanied by a fear or hatred of homosexuality” (1). This definition seems as
though homosocial activities, such as participating in the male gaze, lead to obligatory heterosexuality. Though Merle is a female in sex, she is more masculine in gender, and this statement perhaps explains why Merle has failed at all socially female roles, such as wife, mother, and guardian, and has excelled in her use of the traditional gaze.

My argument that gazes are no longer gendered seems odd when noting that the only women who use the traditional gaze are masculine women (Madame Merle and Jane Eyre). However, what makes these women “masculine” is their assertiveness, strength, and ability to dominate another—male or female—that shines through their gaze when they look and renders it dominant. The gaze is not associated with sex because these women are anatomical women. Whether or not the gaze has to do with gender depends on whether assertiveness, strength, and dominance are inherent traits of a male or are learned behaviors that are socially associated with men. Many of these attributes that we are designating “male” are used in Victorian novels by women, so regardless of what their historical implications in society were, their usage now extends to all genders, rendering the traditional and future gaze androgynous.

Beyond the problem of categorizing nouns such as “assertion” and “strength” as belonging to a certain gender in the Victorian era, regardless of what they once were, further evidence of the androgyny of the dominant gaze can be found in Isabel’s eventual use of this gaze. This occurs in another mirror scene in which Isabel and Merle finally face one another after all truths have been revealed:

Isabel saw it all as distinctly as if it had been reflected in a large clear glass. It might have been a great moment for her, for it might have been a moment of triumph. That Madame Merle had lost her pluck and saw
before her the phantom of exposure—this in itself was a revenge, this in itself was almost the promise of a brighter day. And for a moment during which she stood apparently looking out of the window, with her back half-turned, Isabel enjoyed that knowledge… She saw, in the crude light of that revelation which had already become a part of experience and to which the very frailty of the vessel in which it had been offered her only gave an intrinsic price, the dry staring fact that she had been an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron. All the bitterness of this knowledge surged into her soul again; it was as if she felt on her lips the taste of dishonour. There was a moment during which, if she had turned and spoken, she would have said something that would hiss like a lash. But she closed her eyes, and then the hideous vision dropped. What remained was the cleverest woman in the world standing there within a few feet of her and knowing as little what to think as the meanest. Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still—to leave Madame Merle in this unprecedented situation. She left her there for a period that must have seemed long to this lady, who at last seated herself with a movement which was in itself a confession of helplessness. Then Isabel turned slow eyes, looking down at her. Madame Merle was very pale; her own eyes covered Isabel's face. She might see what she would, but her danger was over. (James 573-574)

Madame Merle’s loss of her “pluck” is a figurative castration of her ability to use the traditional gaze and therefore signifies a loss of her masculinity, to a degree. Now that Isabel’s unmasking of Merle is complete, Merle cannot attempt to dominate under false pretenses (such as friendship) and therefore she is helpless. Her “confession of helplessness” is interestingly her seating herself in front of Isabel so that Isabel can look down upon her. This is nearly identical to the formation Merle and Osmond took in the scene where Isabel watches their gazes as an outsider. In Isabel filling Merle’s original position, it seems almost as if Isabel herself has learned to use the traditional gaze. Now, as she and Madame Merle stare at one another, Isabel’s gaze is in control and reduces Merle to a physically submissive position, and Merle’s gaze is decidedly ineffectual, as Isabel notes “the danger”—namely, Merle’s gaze upon her—was over.
Isabel’s use of a traditional gaze despite her undeniable femininity serves to debunk the idea of the strictly “male” gaze in a way that Merle’s use of it did not, as she was a masculine female.

Throughout the novel, we see characters take one another’s places in a similar manner, and we see the power dynamics rapidly change with each shift in relation to another character. Here, Girard’s triangle is difficult to diagram, even when making the sides different lengths and dimensions, as Sedgwick argues is more accurate (22-27). Isabel appears to be the object through which the two dominate subjects, Osmond and Merle, relate to one another, and certainly that seems to be Merle’s intention. Their use of Isabel in her most vulnerable and innocent stage (that is, before she is aware that she has been deceived) affirms Sedgwick’s statement that “In the presence of a woman who can be seen as pitiable or contemptible, men are able to exchange power and to confirm each other’s value even in the context of remaining inequalities in their power” (160).

Merle is more powerful than Osmond, as we see in the scene where she towers over him, but they are still able to relate to one another as “friends” through their common use of Isabel.

However, Merle’s desire for Osmond (and her reluctance to admit this desire) also creates a strange rivalry with Isabel that is carried out through their associations with Osmond. Though the triangle is an effective diagram of relationships and power struggles, the characters more often seem to fall in a straight line (vertical, or north to south, with the person highest up having the most amount of power). In this way, Isabel begins at the bottom, with Osmond above her and Merle above him. Osmond and
Merle seem to change positions on the line at a few points, but overall, Merle maintains her dominance over both characters, and Osmond maintains his dominance over Isabel. In the end, when the secret is discovered, Merle loses power even more rapidly than Osmond, placing her on the bottom, and Isabel leaves to attend Ralph at his death-bed, contrary to her husband’s wishes, which seems to leave Isabel on the top of the line or spectrum. However, in the end, we are not sure of the final hierarchy, as we do not know if Isabel does indeed return to her husband, or if she plans to return to rescue Pearl and then leave Osmond, or if she will indeed return at all. Isabel and Osmond’s places in relation to each other on the line are not clear because we do not see Isabel’s final resolution carried through.

One certainty at book’s end, though, is that regardless of whether or not Isabel returns to Osmond, she will certainly not take on another suitor, most especially not Caspar Goodwood. Though he proposes marriage at the end, looking at her “somewhat harder than he usually looked in public, while the others had fixed their eyes upon the churchyard turf,” Isabel “never let him see that she saw him” and “wouldn’t meet his eyes, though there was doubtless sympathy in them” as he “made her rather uneasy” (James 607). Though Isabel notes that Goodwood is seemingly full of sympathy, she also “felt him close to her—beside her on the bench and pressingly turned to her…” Isabel has to physically “disengage her wrist,” and must make her wishes clear by “turning her eyes upon her visitant” when she tell him that he has frightened her. Goodwood’s body language continues to counter his sympathetic face and his assertions that he wants to help Isabel. He leans forward into Isabel as he speaks while she stares
straight ahead. He presents arguments for her to come to his protection: “You're perfectly alone; you don't know where to turn. You can't turn anywhere; you know that perfectly. Now it is therefore that I want you to think of ME” and “You don't know where to turn. Turn straight to me. I want to persuade you to trust me.” These forceful arguments lead Isabel to do precisely the opposite, and she resolves to travel away to Rome instead of staying to entrust herself in Goodwood’s hands.

In the end, Isabel rejects Goodwood because he has attempted to use sympathy and offers of help and assistance to endear Isabel to him. These are similar tactics to those Madame Merle used in developing her friendship with Isabel. Isabel is now not sure which gazes that appear as though they want to help, assist, discover, and question—all traits of the future gaze, a gaze which Isabel assumed Madame Merle was possessor of—are actually future gazes, or if they hold dominant traits behind their masks. In demystifying in order to discover or understand, the possibility remains that the motive of demystification may be to dominate, as Mulvey asserted in her outline of the two means to the singular motive of the traditional male gaze. Isabel’s return to Rome, where Osmond currently resides, presumably means that she is electing to return to a life of submission and objectification under the traditional gaze instead of attempting to find a future gaze that attempts to demystify in order to understand and broaden social consciousness. Isabel may never be trusting of the future gaze again—she is now afraid that anyone who wants to discover who she is may use this power to their advantage. Isabel has learned that even the future gaze can be a mask behind
which the elements that make up the traditional gaze reside, and she would rather
endure the domination of the traditional gaze of Osmond because its motive is exposed.
CONCLUSION

In Victorian England, the gaze reigned as a powerful means of communication, be it to assert, understand, question, dominate, or relate. I have argued that its sole reputation as a tool of dominance was complicated by the industrial revolution; and further, that its use ceased to be limited to men as women came to understand the power of the gaze. Though I have categorized the gaze into two types, the traditional gaze and the future gaze, the way these gazes can be manipulated are numerous. In *Daniel Deronda*, we see a man communicating with a man of a different gaze through a fetishized woman. In *Jane Eyre*, we see a man internally conflicted as he embodies both the traditional and future gazes; further, we see a woman dominating a man through use of a traditionally masculine gaze. In *Portrait of a Lady*, we see a woman dominating both a man and a woman through use of a dominant gaze; a man in both a dominant and submissive role, and a woman who is able to grow from a role of subjugation to power as she learns to understand both how to use the gazes herself and also how to read the gazes which she falls subject to and which she observes others experiencing. In all three books, some gazes serve as mirror images, and in all three books, Girard’s triangle is complicated by the unevenness of the connecting lines in a supposedly equilateral shape.

As evidenced from close reading of these novels, the gaze is detached from the notion of masculine dominance in certain kinds of looking that we categorize as the future gaze; in other kinds of looking, a gaze is still attached to dominance, but dominance has been detached from masculinity as women begin to manipulate this
traditional gaze. The masculine traits of some of the women who use the traditional gaze seem to enforce a decidedly masculine gender to the traditional gaze; however, these women serve to disprove the historical relationship between the male sex and dominance. Further, feminine characters like Isabel serve to completely sever gender from the traditional gaze, while men like Deronda deconstruct the gaze of intimate spaces of questioning and understanding as feminine.

Apart from detaching masculinity from the gaze, submissiveness and subjugation have been, in part, detached from the object of the gaze, even the fetishized object of a traditional gaze. Many characters—such as Gwendolen and Rochester—find power in being the object of the gaze, regardless of their sex or gender, and still others, such as Jane, actually desire to be objectified by the gaze because of this power. With Jane, we have also see the possibility of being simultaneously dominant and submissive, and Isabel also witnesses a similar version of this in her observation of Osmond as both submissive to Merle but dominant to herself. Masochism complicates the structure of power in the gaze and can deem a gaze fulfilling when it seems oppressive. Understanding a gaze, even without scopophilic pleasure, can lead to power even when the traditional gaze seems to extract this power, for knowledge of the gaze can enable the object to preserve itself and deny partial access, or can concede to the power of the gaze in the hopes of benefiting from its control.

The success of each character’s use of the gaze can be measured by their communication with other characters at the end of their books and by their impact on the society in which they live. In Daniel Deronda, the future gaze, embodied by
Deronda and Mirah, survives to create another generation, while Grandcourt dies before books end, his death symbolic of the limited options of the traditional gaze in an imperialist society. In *Jane Eyre*, both Jane and Rochester create another generation, but this can only come about through the triumph of Jane’s domination of the traditional gaze and therefore of Rochester, and this triumph only occurs through Rochester’s physical blindness and acquiescence to a dominant woman. In *Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel’s completion of her education of the gaze, though too late to save her independence, helps secure her role as mother and wife in the place of Madame Merle, whose mask and dishonest gazes leave her an outlier of society by novel’s end. Some characters fail where others succeed, and the traditional gaze and the future gaze also share their turns of victory and defeat in accomplishing their goals. In the end, however, the most interesting facet of the gazes is that the characters that utilize them throughout the novel are of varying sexes and genders. These examples, taking from a small sampling of Victorian literature, prove the existence of alternative forms of the gaze and the importance of studying the gaze in other Victorian literature and in other genres, countries, and time periods. As the future English gaze was a direct result of the industrial revolution, there exists the possibility—the probability—of still other gazes in different time periods and economic and social situations. And just as the resurgence of the traditional gaze resulted from the future gaze, the probability that the fluctuations of these two gazes can be traced throughout literature is also an important consideration to accompany this study.
However, though I maintain my assertion that the gaze is no longer solely male by the Victorian era, as evidenced in fiction from the period, the original association with dominance and masculinity and with the traditional gaze and men is important to understanding the versatile use of the gaze by both men and women in Victorian literature. James, Brontë, and Eliot wrote these novels with the understanding of the traditional gaze as male. How they have manipulated the idea of “male” dominance is crucial to their portrayals of an evolving Victorian England in which class and gender roles were becoming mobile and easily traversable, and how these destabilizing changes could be manipulated to suit one’s own motives or to advance one in the midst of the distractions caused by these disruptions in society.
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