5-2022

The Past and Present: Issues of Male Patriarchy Throughout Historic Literature and Dominance in Media Today

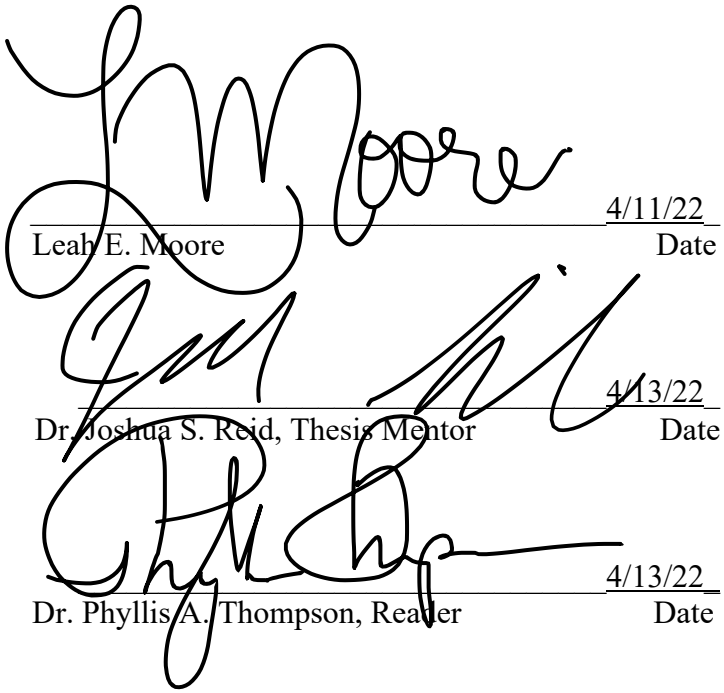
Leah Moore

The Past and Present: Issues of Male Patriarchy Throughout Historic Literature and Dominance in Media Today

By

Leah Elisabeth Moore

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
English Honors in Discipline Program
East Tennessee State University



4/11/22
Leah E. Moore Date

4/13/22
Dr. Joshua S. Reid, Thesis Mentor Date

4/13/22
Dr. Phyllis A. Thompson, Reader Date

Abstract

Women's subjugation to the objectification of men is a traced theme throughout the history of Western culture. In this thesis, the attributes of the male gaze will be explored via the patriarchal pioneers of literature: Dante to Petrarch to Shakespeare. The solidification of the male gaze takes place during the late middle ages as Dante Alighieri writes an infatuated love for Beatrice throughout *La Vita Nuova* and *Inferno*, demonstrating the virgin-whore dichotomy with Francesca. Similarly, Francesco Petrarch's poetry of *Rime Sparse* describes the objectification and dismantling of woman for erotic pleasure and patriarchal power. The shift from early to late renaissance displays William Shakespeare's presentation of women in *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* as a denunciation of women through the male gaze. These themes of patriarchy developed throughout historic literature will help us analyze media advertisements today as women are silenced, dismembered, and exhibited through the male gaze.

Introduction

The objectification and sexualization of women throughout history is an issue prevalent in society—from past times to present. History offers one an opportunity into past culture through art and literature. In literature, women struggle in escaping stereotypical characterization and objectification that male authors write these women through: virgins and whores. Authors' responsibility lies capturing an accuracy of woman rather than writing femininity as a mold of stagnancy. Men blaming women is a theme throughout history as it shifts through the lens of pioneers of patriarchy: Dante Alighieri in the Middle Ages; the Middle Ages to Renaissance with

Petrarch; the Renaissance with Shakespeare. These authors and their renowned works exhibits the underlying issues of the male gaze once one looks past the glamour of the eminent work.

The immense gap between the renaissance and today displays that the issue of the male gaze has not been amended. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing (1976)* helps clarify the position of women in art, literature, and media by identifying the strategies of the male gaze in advertising. This thesis defines the male gaze as the, "presumed sex of the viewer is male, and even when the viewer is female she views herself through men's eyes. Berger's observation is quite similar to the point made by objectification theory: Women are seen as objects—things to be looked at rather than people who can act" (Palczewski, 230**).** The objectification lies in seeing women as an envied commodity for the appeasement of the male viewer.

The question then proposes: what is the significance of discerning literature from the past to understand media today? Having an awareness of the famed authors' motivations behind writing women will help understand the strategies that media advertising demonstrates: displacement, dismemberment, dissolving, denouncing, and silencing. The characterization and articulation of women in historic literature helps one understand the framework of the male gaze and its dominance in media today.

Dante Alighieri's Displacement

Dante Alighieri, Italian poet and philosopher during the Middle Ages, demonstrates the male gaze in his famous works of *La Vita Nuova* and *Inferno*. Dante's most famous poem, *The Divine Comedy*, takes the reader through stages of the afterlife, meeting historical figures along the way. For this thesis there will be a narrow focus on the first cantica, *Inferno*, as well as the precursor to the poem, *La Vita Nuova*, to enhance the distillation of medieval thought, adding a testimony to the presence of the male gaze. Both works unveil Dante's use of the virgin-whore

dichotomy in characterizing Beatrice and Francesca de Rimini through the polarizing inverse of attitudes.

Before understanding the spectrum in which these women span across, one must identify the dichotomy between virgin and whore in *La Vita Nuova* and *Inferno*. The polarizing extremes between both terms are labeled good and bad:

> The main idea is that men and/or societies divide women into two binary types: virgins and whores. The former type encompasses characters who are nurturing, 'good,' and who express their sexualities within culturally sanctioned bounds…within marriage or another type of culturally sanctioned monogamous union. Women who fail to embody this ideal are 'whores': they are explicitly or symbolically immoral and dangerously concupiscent (Gottschall, 1-2).

Women are held accountable to this continuum for acceptance. In a society that is masculine dominated, men write the history and the standards of women. The middle ground between the two extremes grows obscure through the lens of the author: Dante Alighieri. The goodness of beauty and purity are present in the depiction of Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova*, while accentuating the bad-natured behavior of Francesca in *Inferno,* establishing the two diverging archetypes of virgin and whore. This displays one strategy of the male gaze as Dante demands you to see these women as he intends, either good or bad, instead of through the reality of the middle ground.

Decency in *La Vita Nuova*

Dante Alighieri demonstrates the virgin archetype through Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova*. Dante's personal exploration of emotions in *La Vita Nuova* is an exaltation regarding Beatrice's righteousness and virtue. The Dolce Stil Novo movement in Italy during the late middle ages

reinforces the poesy and praise of woman in literature. *La Vita Nuova* is a form of this praise as it refers to the theme of Divine Love and purpose toward Beatrice. Dante's style of writing reflects much of this era and structure as he exalts Beatrice and idolizes her virginal qualities.

The introduction of *La Vita Nuova* was added after Dante wrote the sonnets and praise, protecting the identity of Beatrice. In Dante's use of, "screen ladies represent a kind of desire—a conventional, courtly desire— that is fungible and can be transferred from one beloved to another based on her interest and availability. Love for Beatrice, however, is non-transferable: because she herself is extraordinary…the kind of love she inspires, as the protagonist will eventually discover, is utterly unique" (McLain, 2). The protection and concealment of her identity is an approach in guarding her virginal qualities—protecting her from society enables Dante's supervision over her virtue. Dante projects Beatrice as a woman to be gazed upon without regard to her identity. This is another instance of the male gaze as it demonstrates Beatrice as a woman to be looked at instead of taking action.

At the onset of the verse, Dante begins his life—in medias res—taking a look into the past. Dante's state of remembrance of a past moments with Beatrice takes the audience into a trance of wonderment and questioning why he is in the past. The onset of the verse begins with Dante in remembrance of acknowledging Beatrice in their ninth year, where she is dressed in "goodly crimson" (Alighieri, 24). When color coding, crimson symbolizes the presence of God and virtue, as well as love and desire. However, as nine years pass, Dante sees Beatrice once again, and she is more virtuous at the age of eighteen:

> "After the lapse of so many days that nine years exactly were completed since the above-written appearance of this most gracious being, on the last of those days it happened that the same wonderful lady appeared to me dressed all in pure white, between two gentle

> ladies elder than she. And passing through a street, she turned her eyes thither where I stood sorely abashed: and by her unspeakable courtesy, which is now guerdoned in the Great Cycle, she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing that I seemed then and there to behold the very limits of blessedness" (Alighieri, 27).

The symbolism behind clothing used to adorn and describe the first instances of Beatrice brings awareness to her godly nature and virtuous beauty. Crimson standing in place as the presence of God and white demonstrating purity and peace each signify virginal virtue. Dante's contrition to the past details of physical beauty are adorned by Beatrice's saintly beauty from within. Dante's meeting with her took place through looking and admiring. His response conveys the hierarchy of blessedness that she effortlessly ascents. Moreover, these conventions transcended Dante's determination, leading him to dream, write, and mourn the disoriented past times. The adulation of Beatrice takes place through a salutation toward Dante, and he praising her as the Virgin Mary. Beatrice is reproduced as a goodly natured woman to be praised and held high for her holy reverence.

Dante's searching for purpose and reason leave him regretfully longing for not taking chances with Beatrice. Mastered to Love led Dante to write as many did in throughout history to grasp the pain of Love without reason. Dante's approach led him to write sonnets, which capture raw emotion and description. Not moved to act, but to write, Dante found himself focused on Beatrice's beauty and purity rather than who she was, for he has yet to make this connection. Dante, enraptured by Beatrice's beauty, writes, "From that night forth, the natural functions of my body began to be vexed and impeded, for I was given up wholly to thinking of this most gracious creature" (Alighieri, 32). Acknowledged as high and virtuous, Dante removes himself to observe Beatrice as "creature." Mastered to Love is Dante's reason for obsession, leading him

to gaze upon Beatrice in observation of her good nature. Dante uses attractive language toward Beatrice with words of high affirmation and otherworldly—removing himself and interjecting his emotions at her death as, "out of this world thou hast driven courtesy, And virtue, dearly prized in womanhood; And out of youth's gay mood" (Alighieri, 40). Remembrances of Beatrice are conveyed through her virtue, which is profoundly prized for women.

Beatrice's death relays the regret that Dante writes through poetry. Encapsulated by raw emotions of regret, longing, and pain, Dante conveys to the reader the hurt that was inflicted by a lack of communal love. Her high state of purity, virtue, and humility cast her far above than any woman to have ever lived:

"My lady is desired in the high Heaven:
Wherefore, it now behoveth me to tell,
Saying: Let any maid that would be well
Esteemed keep with her: for as she goes by,
Into foul hearts a deathly chill is driven
By Love, that makes ill thought to perish there:
While any who endures to gaze on her
Must either be ennobled, or else die.
When one deserving to be raised so high
Is found, 'tis then her power attains its proof,
Making his heart strong for his soul's behoof
With the full strength of meek humility.
Also this virtue owns she, by God's will:
Who speaks with her can never come to ill" (Alighieri, 75).

His words breathe into existence his state of passion toward Beatrice and her unattainable assets as an upright woman. Dante regards Beatrice's virtue unattainable for any maiden after Beatrice. Her inaccessible holiness projects her as an idol of what Dante desires for all women: righteous. Additionally, Dante remarks that any who are to 'gaze' upon Beatrice must have the right qualifications, proposing the question: does Dante have the right? Dante holds power through creating his own language to define Beatrice through his perception, giving him the utmost power: the male gaze.

Through the reading of mourning and pain caused by loving Beatrice, the reader becomes aware of Dante's use of the screen—concealing the identity of Beatrice. This heightens the mystery as well as the excitement for the readers. The use of the screen was to keep Beatrice to himself as a possession and desire:

> The screen, hiding the truth 'for this great love of mine', is what the majority must see, to prevent them from gazing at what Dante is really interested in— Beatrice—and to direct their attention elsewhere, i.e. to make them believe that they know what actually remains a secret. It is a defensive, concealing device, but it serves that purpose also because it enables representation, monstration: tanto ne mostrai, writes Dante—'I made such a show over it'. It is one and the other, at the same time: it protects by showing something different" (Avezzú, 5).

Dante's obsessive nature to conceal the identity reveals his possessive nature to maintain power over Beatrice to keep her for himself, so that no one else may enter this realm of ecstasy and pain. Dante's infatuation with Beatrice's unearthly purity heightens his need to conceal her identity. This possessive nature indicates the gaze through Dante's expectations of women as holy beings, according to his own framework of desire.

The screening of Beatrice leaves Dante, the poet, to gaze upon her—no longer the reader. Guarding the true identity of the character leaves the audience to only know the woman through Dante's gaze and descriptions of virtue: "The whole episode is characterized by a tangled web of intersecting sight lines, and seems designed to inspire confusion both in the reader and in the spectators in the church…this awareness gives rise to the idea of using this woman as a screen for his love for Beatrice" (McLain, 7). Through the concealment of identity, Dante preserves power in description by diverting the audience's attention to a creature of beauty. These unrealistic expectations are placed upon women to captivate men by their beauty, purity, and angelic qualities that are impervious to society, as they transport the reader to want what Dante writes.

Dante's mournful, infatuated gaze follows the screen of a woman—Beatrice—displaying the desire and birth of Beatrice. The audience is left to believe the words and perspective of Dante as truth and accept the notions of her virtue. This perspective allocates power to Dante through words rather than an accurate representation. The work is an origination story of Divine Love with Beatrice, yet she remains silent and at disposal through the gaze. Beatrice's good nature and godliness expose her qualities of inaccessibility by Dante; therefore, he uses the verses of *La Vita Nuova* to access her through observation.

Damned in *Inferno*

After screening and praising Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova*, Dante reveals her virtue in *Inferno* through her position in the heavens. Furthermore, Beatrice's location reveals the dichotomy between the virgin and whore archetypes. The contrasting effects between the first cantica, *Inferno*, and *La Vita Nuova* argues the issue of the diverging views between feminine

archetypes, keeping both women in Dante's gaze. In *Inferno*, the question of the male gaze is in Dante writing the sin, creating the contrapasso, and placing individuals within the circle that corresponds to their downfall—elevating himself to play God.

With the help of Virgil, Dante realizes the weariness of the journey ahead, willing to endure hell to eventually ascend to Beatrice. The first canto of Dante's *Inferno* presents Dante entering a dark wood in the middle of his life to resemble a dead end. Through realization of no other way, Dante the Pilgrim descends to hell with his guide, Virgil. One may read this to see Dante choosing a life worth living—but the motivation is not for himself—it is to be with Beatrice: "To whom then if you shall wish to rise, there will/ be a soul more worthy of that than I; with her I shall/ leave you when I depart" (Inf.1.121-123). Virgil's words are to encourage Dante to take the journey alongside him with a comforting touch in knowing that Virgil will take Dante to Beatrice, high above their estate. Beatrice's reference refers to her praiseworthy position of the high heavens. Dante's agrees to endure the depths of the world to spend his life with Beatrice—she is his motivation.

The second canto of the *Inferno* displays the purpose of the journey ahead and the commendable inspiration bestowed to Virgil from Beatrice. Beatrice's action of descending to Limbo to speak with Virgil regarding Dante's soul demonstrates her humble desire for Dante. The fictitious characterization assigns Beatrice's beauty and virtuous nature to the high heavens—where she was left in *La Vita Nuova*. As Beatrice approaches Virgil to commend Dante, Virgil explains, "a lady called me, so blessed and beautiful that I begged her/ to command me./ Her eyes were shining brighter than the morning/ star; and she began to speak gently and softly, with/ angelic voice in her language:/" (Inf.2.52-57). Virgil's description of Beatrice, authored by Dante, reveals her high, virginal state as holy and righteous in action and word.

Moreover, the phrasing and description of Beatrice's approach reveals, "the style of Virgil's description of Beatrice derives from the lyric poetry of the *dolce stil novo* (itself deriving from the long medieval tradition of narrative and lyric exaltation of ladies) and especially the *Vita Nuova*" (Durling, 51). Dante, the author, reveals his partiality of love to Beatrice through the dialogue, descriptions, and location used to describe her: goodly natured.

Understanding the characterization of who Beatrice is in *La Vita Nuova* and the onset of *Inferno* helps pave the way of seeing Francesca de Rimini in canto V. Dante's journey of descension reveals the inverse of morals between the virgin and the whore. Francesca's contrapasso in canto V is not just inhabiting eternity at the side of Paolo, after sharing a kiss as they were "reading one day, for pleasure, of/ Lancelot, how Love beset him," but through the constant buffeting of lustful winds blowing her about in hell (Inf.5.127-128). This contrapasso is a direct comment upon her inability for self-control and thirst for lust. Francesca, left to defend herself against Dante the Pilgrim, shares her desolate story that led to her ultimate damnation. Francesca reveals the line in which she straddles between love and lust:

> Love, which is swiftly kindled in the noble heart,
> seized this one for the lovely person that was taken
> from me; and the manner still injures me.
> Love, which pardons no one loved from loving in
> return, seized me for his beauty so strongly that, as
> you see, it still does not abandon me.
> Love led us on to one death. (Inf. 5.100-106).

Francesca's befall was the confusion between love and lust—thus placing her in this circle of hell. Her misrepresentation of desire that had dominion over her actions damned her.

Understanding Francesca allows one to understand Dante's reaction to her lowly state. Dante responds in question, "But tell me: in the time of your sweet sighs, by/ what and how did Love grant you to know/ your dangerous desires?" (Inf.5.118-120). Dante's reference to love as a character itself is the same pattern found in *La Vita Nuova*; however, in the *Inferno* it grants the dangers of lust, desire. Francesca's damnation leaves Dante the Pilgrim piteous, "fainted as if I were dying,/ and I fell as a dead body falls" (Inf.5.141-142). The impact of Francesca's story weighs heavily upon Dante because of his own recognition to the sin itself. Dante's one-sided affair with Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* demonstrates how he struggles with lust in longing for Beatrice, thus prompting the double-standard. Dante is allowed to struggle with lust and passion; however, for Francesca, she is damned for her dangerous desire.

Pursuing passion equates to damnation, according to Dante. The characterization of Francesca, sinful and separated, expresses the whore dichotomy as she pursues a moment of passion that is defined as bad:

> "In theologized terms, to enter the frame of romance signifies entering a context in which moral responsibility and personal agency are suspended by an all-consuming sentiment, where passion rules untrammeled by reason. In this context Francesca's passivity…reflects her sinful refusal of moral agency, her refusal to fashion herself as a Christian agent. She consistently produces herself as an object, and the critical tradition has responded by reading her story, and even her syntax, as a symptom of the lust for which she is damned" (Barolini, 312).

Francesca's inability to conform to Christian traditions and to objectify herself wass written by Dante. Therefore, it is not Francesca constructing herself as an object, it is Dante. The patriarchy displayed by Dante lies in placing of Francesca with the lustful from a moment of passion. Her

passive state of desire defines her humanity, resulting in eternal damnation. Dante distinguishes polarizing archetypes between Beatrice and Francesca as good and bad, virtuous and whore. Francesca is devised as whore because of her failure to "fashion herself as a Christian agent" while Beatrice is praised through the Christian lens. The femme figure of hell highlights the presence of the male gaze in how Dante controls the reader's perspective through characterization. Placing Francesca in hell as she strayed from the path invites the reader to view women in this same way. The power lies in language that Dante embraces through the polarizing placement between Francesca and Beatrice. Francesca is defined by passion and left behind as Dante continues his ascension to what matters: Beatrice.

Dante the Pilgrim makes clear that the virgin is worth the journey, and the whore is who you pass on the way to something better. Women who act upon their desire become marked by passion and damnation. As Francesca and Beatrice display the polarizing archetypes between virgin and whore, the audience must question, where is the middle ground? Dante's *Inferno* displays an inverse of morals through the characterization of both women: one who adheres and one who neglects. Dante pins passivity and passion upon Francesca with praise and propriety upon Beatrice—heightening the opposition between the women. He invites the audience to gaze upon Francesca as a damsel, damned by passion, while inviting the audience to revere the gaze upon Beatrice in *Inferno*.

Dante Alighieri's historical impact weighs heavily in the late Middle Ages. His renowned works, *La Vita Nuova* and *Inferno*, display the male gaze through the dichotomy and depiction of women. Dante writes Beatrice unattainable, virginal qualities, demonstrating the polarization between she and Francesca, a woman controlled by passion. The virgin-whore dichotomy is existent in *Inferno*, after one understands the holy nature of Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova*. Dante

parades patriarchy in how he writes these women to enhance the preference of men and how they gaze upon women. The differentiating aspects between the women invites the reader in how they are going to take action: will one participate with Dante or take action against the dichotomy?

Francesco Petrarch's Dismemberment

The journey of love is an undeniable theme throughout life and literature; however, the difference between Dante and Petrarch are the descriptions in language used to dismember and describe the beauty of women. Hiding their subject behind the screen resembles the nature of Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* as well as Laura in *Rime Sparse*. Laura's name, scattered throughout *Rime Sparse* in puns and language plays, is the screen in which Petrarch obscures his love through sonnets. The sonnets remark upon Laura's beauty, mirroring the theme of retaining power through the gaze by concealing identity. Petrarch puzzles the beauty of Laura through individual poems in *Rime Sparse*. Each puzzle piece is a poem that points to the overall image of love and lust. For this thesis, there will be a narrowed focus on Petrarch's sonnets that heighten dismemberment of the screen, Laura.

Disjointed in *Rime Sparse*

Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* scatters the physical beauty of Laura throughout the collection of 366 poems. Petrarch's fixation on descriptive storytelling on his and Laura's affair include everything about her, except her name. He scatters her body parts throughout the sonnets: hands, feet, footsteps, eyes, breast, and face, displaying the, "obsessive insistence on the particular, an insistence that would in turn generate multiple texts on individual fragments of the body or on the beauties of woman" (Vickers, 266). This focuses on specifics that reveal to the audience that the screen is meant for observing. Dante writes with surveillance in *La Vita Nuova* toward

Beatrice; however, Petrarch approaches this differently through the lengthy collection of poetry, *Rime Sparse*. Without giving voice to Laura, Petrarch diverts attention to her physical features so that, "he cannot allow her to dismember his body; instead he repeatedly, although reverently, scatters hers throughout his scattered rhymes" (Vickers, 279). This scattering enhances the gaze, and the desire for the audience to look at Laura. There is no harm in admiring beauty, the insistent issue lies in the dismemberment and screening of the woman.

Petrarch's sonnet *Chiare, fresche et dolci acque* displays the gaze through dismembering her body to capture the theme of love in nature. Moreover, this sonnet captures a reflection on a past time with Laura, as it is filled with remorse, regret, heartbreak, as well as beauty through the lens of love for Laura in a past time. The language used in the sonnet begins with referring to her limbs as an object in nature:

> Clear, sweet fresh water
> where she, the only one who seemed
> woman to me, rested her beautiful limbs:
> gentle branch where it pleased her
> (with sighs, I remember it)
> to make a pillar for her lovely flank:
> grass and flowers which her dress
> lightly covered,
> as it did the angelic breast:
> serene, and sacred air (Petrarch, 126. 1-10).

The theme of women in nature are written throughout history as women are captured through the lens of soft, natured, frail—just like flowers, grass, and the air. Petrarch refers to Laura as the

subject in nature at his disposal, representing an object of beauty in his poem. The observation of Laura in nature is Petrarch's way in remembering her through superficial comparisons. Furthermore, Petrarch uses this gaze of comparison later in the sonnet:

> A flower fell on her hem,
> one in her braided blonde hair,
> that was seen on that day to be
> like chased gold and pearl:
> one rested on the ground, and one in the water,
> and one, in wandering vagary,
> twirling, seemed to say: 'Here Love rules'.
> Then, full of apprehension,
> how often I said:
> 'For certain she was born in Paradise.'
> Her divine bearing
> and her face, her speech, her sweet smile
> captured me, and so separated me,
> from true thought
> that I would say, sighing:
> 'How did I come here, and when?' (Petrarch, 126. 36-51).

The objects of nature are used in continuation in describing Laura. Dismembering the beauty of nature to mere objects is the viewership bestowed upon Laura: 'blonde hair,' 'her face, her speech, her sweet smile,' and 'divine bearing.' Petrarch is not gazing upon Laura as a whole, nor remarking upon her character—instead he comments upon specific details that invoke erotic

love. Moreover, the placement of she being 'born in Paradise' convey sthe theme of virtue and beauty, as he idolizes Laura. Additionally, Laura's name is never used in this poem, for Petrarch references Laura as 'her,' which guards her identity from the audience—placing her in the gaze. The audience is left to observe Laura as an object rather than a woman to take action.

The continued theme of dismemberment in nature is seen in *Amor et io sí pien' di meraviglia* where Petrarch gazes upon Laura as his subject of pleasure. The short sonnet covers the bases in observation of her body by paying close attention to specific details—dismembering her body for his own satisfaction:

"Love and I, as full of amazement
as ever anyone who saw a marvellous thing,
gaze at her when she speaks or smiles
who is like herself alone, and no one else.
Under the lovely peace of her tranquil brows
those two faithful stars of mine so sparkle,
that no other light can inflame and guide
him who consigns himself to love nobly.
What a miracle she is, when she sits among
the grasses like a flower, or when she
brushes against a green bush with her breast!
What sweetness in the newborn season
to see her walk alone, her thoughts for company,
weaving a garland for her clear curling gold!" (Petrarch, 160).

The entire sonnet refers to Laura's physical traits as specific details of desire. Petrarch claims to gaze at her while she 'speaks' or 'smiles' while also referring to her eyebrows, her eyes, her breast, and her walk. Petrarch uses a simile to compare Laura to a flower among grass in nature to bring women back into harmony with nature. He remains removed as the spectator, gazing upon her for his satisfaction. Petrarch finds his desire in watching her walk and sit in nature. The beauty of love displayed in verse captures the inimitable beauty of Laura, while diverting the audience's attention to her objective qualities: her body. Petrarch and Dante write through observation of women through dismembering and displacing them by creating unrealistic standards of beauty, instigated by the male gaze.

Petrarch's patriarchy lies within how he writes Laura through his pleasurable gaze. The power of Petrarch's misogyny is captured through his constant dismemberment and scattering of Laura throughout the sonnets of infatuation. Petrarch reveals his lack of deference for Laura by withholding her identity and ability to be known. The dismemberment and concealment of identity returns the power of the author, showing that even though he writes his love, he still holds the power. As Petrarch bridges the gap between the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance, he encompasses the opportunity to change Western literature's understanding of women, but reproduces the gaze through patriarchy toward woman.

William Shakespeare's Denunciation

William Shakespeare, a playwright of the Renaissance, holds power in denunciating women in his tragedies. His voyeuristic representation of woman is represented through the lens of misogyny in tragedy. The women of Shakespeare's *Othello, Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet* embody a patriarchal, misogynistic lens of woman that needs male supervision.

The fatalities of each woman mirror the silencing of women throughout history by suppressing their opportunity to speak against patriarchy. The constant theme throughout the pioneers of patriarchy is the screening of a woman's identity. Shakespeare takes an innovative approach by silencing the females of his tragedies instead of screening them. Each of the women represent the maiden archetype as each yearn for marriage, love, and a life of desire with their lover. This middle ground for women obscures as each woman becomes tainted by their desire and murdered by man. Furthermore, women in Shakespeare are continually entwined with a patriarchal figure, whether that be a lover, brother, or father: "In the plays of Shakespeare that depict a father-daughter relationship, the issue of a woman's relationship to patriarchy inevitably gains a special kind of prominence. Marriage becomes the focal point" (McEachern, 272). As one will take notice of these themes, they will also become aware of the toxicity in each patriarchal relationship. Shakespeare's leading ladies of tragedies are dismembered, disempowered, and dissolved by the patriarchy of male protagonists placing them there.

Denunciation in *Othello*

Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello*, portrays patriarchy as divinity and the denunciation of Desdemona through smothering. Desdemona and Othello's forbidden love affair blossoms into a fortified marriage with the approval of her father, Brabantio. However, through a revenge ploy in plotting infidelity, Othello loses his nerve and enters patriarchy as divinity in demanding confession of her sinful nature. Exploring these themes presents the patriarchal rule over Desdemona and the gaze she is written in. Desdemona's purpose in *Othello* is love, marry, and die by the madness and folly that tragedy entails.

The matters of love and marriage are discussed by the patriarchal forces of *Othello*. Othello and Brabantio discuss the matters of love without Desdemona's presence. Brabantio finds lunacy

within the marriage and dismisses the matrimony due to Othello's status and Desdemona's maiden nature:

> BRABANTIO. O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?
> Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;
> For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
> If she in chains of magic were not bound,
> Whether a maid, so tender, fair, and happy
> So opposite to marriage that she shunned
> The wealthy curlèd darlings of our nation,
> Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
> Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
> Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight?
> Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense,
> That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,
> Abused her delicate you*th with drugs or minerals (Othello, 1.2.61-75).

Brabantio defends Desdemona's virtue and status from Othello, a moor. The question lies within how she is presented through the male gaze: fair, maiden, tender, oblivious, and under a spell. Without Desdemona's presence, the argument between Othello and Brabantio comment upon her virtue, socioeconomic status, as well as her folly if she were to marry a moor. Furthermore, Brabantio continues in disbelief of his daughter's actions and admits there must be lunacy or against "all rules of nature" (Othello, 1.3.103). Whenever Desdemona enters, she admits to her father her admiration and loyalty to him as well as to her now husband. Brabantio accepts her perspective and welcomes Othello into the family. Brabantio's polarized opinions of Othello and

Desdemona quickly shift after she gives her word. However, before the turn of events, he ruled his daughter a lunatic who is oblivious to the dark spell she is under. Shakespeare writes this to dismiss women and their nature when they are unable to speak for themselves.

The overarching theme of misogyny rules as Desdemona is moved as a chess piece in a game between Othello and Iago. Iago's hatred and jealousy toward Othello motivates his deceitful ploy of infidelity between Cassio and Desdemona as lovers. Iago swindles Othello into believing him which leads to ultimate betrayal to Desdemona. Instead of questioning his wife and asking her of infidelity, Othello believes the absurdity as truth. The gaze upon Desdemona shifts from wife to whore as she faces accusations that challenge her virtue and honesty:

> IAGO. Why, go to then!
>
> She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,
>
> To seel her father's eyes up close as oak—
>
> He thought 'twas witchcraft—But I am much to blame;
>
> I humbly do beseech you of your pardon
>
> For too much loving you.
>
> OTHELLO. I am bound to thee forever. (Othello, 3.3.212-217).

The dialogue between the men bestow Othello's loyalty belonging to Iago rather than his wife. He takes the deceptive word of Iago as fact rather than questioning the motives behind the accusation. Shakespeare writes this dichotomy for Othello to gaze upon Desdemona. Othello's desire for Desdemona shifts from virgin to whore, motivating him to dispose of her. This raises Dante's manifestation of the virgin-whore dichotomy in *Inferno*, for there is no middle ground for women. This demonstrates that the male gaze operates corruptly throughout eras. Othello, blinded by jealousy and hatred by believing Iago's framework of duplicity, turns Desdemona

into accuser, not lover. Moreover, Othello's strong belief of Iago's words portray the male gaze as men are revered, trusted, and upheld. Othello takes Iago's word and dismisses his love for Desdemona: "Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted" (Othello, 5.1.35). Othello plots Desdemona's death before hearing her viewpoint, while also stripping their title of love to mere lust.

Shakespeare writes patriarchy as divinity in taking one's life to restore virtue through the death of Desdemona. The tragedy is Desdemona never committed the allegations assumed and dies for loving him. As Othello approaches Desdemona, she is asleep in their bed. His blazon over her resting body draws attention to her fair skin and proceeds to kiss her lips—all the while plotting her death. This objectification makes Desdemona an entity for ruin as Othello treats her body as a lifeless form, thus implementing the male gaze through diminishing her body. Desdemona's defense weighed heavily on her word and Othello negates to ask. Instead, he demands her to confess her sins and pray—mirroring patriarchy as divinity as man assumes the status of God. This mirrors the approach of Dante writing Francesca's contrapasso of sin and assigning her to hell in *Inferno*. Othello asks her throughout their dialogue: "have you prayed tonight Desdemon?" (Othello, 5.2.24), "If you bethink yourself of any crime/ Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace,/ Solicit it straight" (5.2.26-28), and "Think on thy sins" (5.2.40). This constant rendering of confession displays the notion that Othello finds it fair to murder Desdemona—and he does. Her death by smothering mirrors the issue of silencing women to death. Desdemona's last words before her death commend her honesty and virtue: "A guiltless death I die" (Othello, 5.2.124). And just like that, she is silenced by the hands of the man she loved.

Shakespeare writes the male gaze through dismissing women and leaning into man's word as God's truth by writing divinity as patriarchy. Dante's *Inferno* displays the theme of divinity and patriarchy as Dante places individuals in hell with their deserving punishments. Shakespeare writes with the theme of man to remain above women. Moreover, woman's purpose within literature is to appease and raise the status of man. Desdemona's focal point of the play is her marriage to Othello, daughter to Brabantio, chess piece amidst scandal, and her death by Othello's hand. Her final opportunity to defend herself is dismissed as she is smothered—forever silenced.

Dismembered in *Titus Andronicus*

Shakespeare's first tragedy welcomes the gory and ferocious plot that dismembers and silences woman with a revenge plot that sours into dismemberment and defilement: *Titus Andronicus*. As the tragedy unfolds, the evil nature of the play does as well—cannibalism, rape, madness, and slaughter. However, the innocent who reaps defilement and murder is Lavinia, Titus' daughter. A theme found in the tragedy is how both women, Lavinia and Tamora, mirror the patriarchal figure: Titus. The tragedy lies within the male gaze used as supervision over the women in the play: "Shakespeare's notable and notorious female characters are here made to serve the construction of Titus-patriarch, tragic hero, and, from our vantage point, central consciousness" (Green, 319). As the tragedy unfolds, so do the layers behind why women are present—to uphold patriarchy. Moreover, the continued theme of women under male supervision is conveyed through how Lavinia is defiled, mutilated, and murdered.

Lavinia's purpose in *Titus Andronicus* is to serve as an objectified offering for the revenge plot. Queen of the Goths, Tamora, plots the death of Lavinia to avenge her son's slaughter at the hand of Titus. As Lavinia stumbles into the woods with her newlywed husband,

Bassianus, vengeance is satisfied. Tamora has her two sons execute Bassianus and allow them to steal Lavinia for their lustful hate:

> LAVINIA: "O keep me from their worse-than-killing lust/ And tumble me into some loathsome pit" (Titus, 2.3.175-6)
>
> TAMORA: "So should I rob my sweet sons of their fee./ No, let them satisfice their lust on thee" (Titus, 2.3.179-180).

Lavinia's tragedy lies in the hateful action of rape and mutilation as her hands are cut-off and tongue removed. Lavinia acts as the displaced and dismembered daughter as she receives the outcome that Titus, the patriarchal figure, deserves. This reveals the dismembering and scattered theme of the male gaze that Petrarch conveys in *Rime Sparse*. Lavinia becomes subject to description, a sum of her removed parts. Chiron and Demetrius cut out Lavinia's tongue, mutilate her hands, and defile her innocence, alluding to the impactful silencing of Lavinia to withhold the truth. Lavinia's inability to convey the gruesome details reveals Shakespeare's theme of the male gaze in displaying women as silenced, scattered creatures. Chiron and Demetrius would not be able to dismember Lavinia without Tamora's help. Tamora's passivity toward the dismemberment of Lavinia reveals the immorality behind the opposing characterization of the women. Moreover, the theme of silencing women from truth is displayed from Desdemona's silencing in *Othello* to Lavinia's silencing: neither are able to share their truth.

Shakespeare presents the polarization of women as in *Titus Andronicus* through the characterization of Lavinia and Tamora. Both Lavinia and Tamora are on a spectrum from virginal to devouring, for there is no middle ground. Tamora's characterization follows the framework of the devouring mother where she is fueled with hate, driven by revenge, and

slaughtered by the schemes she has created. Moreover, Shakespeare plays with this archetype as he writes her devouring of her two sons in a pie. Tamora's hatred toward Titus mirrors his own attitude in the revenge plot, for each thirst after power and blood: "On the other hand, Tamora also illustrates and demarcates the extremes of Titus' character, measures the evil to which this patriarchal avenger has resorted and must resort" (Green, 320). Shakespeare writes Tamora as a villain as she refuses to conform to the common matriarchal figure. The male gaze toward Tamora lies in the drastic measures of depravity and failure to adhere to the matriarchal figure, representing Tamora's desire of patriarchy to mimic the behavior of Titus.

Lavinia is under the rule of Titus as her father, Demetrius and Chiron as her rapists, and then murdered by her father—always oppressed by patriarchy, eventually killing her. The continued theme of projecting the patriarch upon the women of the play is present in the outcome of Lavinia. The irony behind the father-daughter relationship is portrayed as Titus saws his own hand off standing for, "Her mutilated body 'articulates' Titus' own suffering and victimization" (Green, 322). Titus mourns his daughter's situational defilement and takes it into his own hands to cut his off. This shifts the focus from Lavinia, recentering the tragedy around Titus, the patriarchal figure. This bestows the argument of Shakespeare's primary reason in characterizing these women is to elevate the patriarch, resulting in their death by silencing woman through slaughter once their purpose is fulfilled.

Patriarchy defiled and killed Lavinia as well did the immorality of Tamora, a devouring mother. Lavinia suffers not only as a displaced daughter, but also with an absent mother. The only matriarch present in a scene of vulnerability was Tamora, who sent her off to savagery, leaving her defenseless to what patriarchy could attack. However, despite the evils within the

feud between Titus and Tamora, Lavinia's undeserved outcome emulates the elevation of man through the silencing of women.

Dissolved in *Hamlet*

Shakespeare's renowned *Hamlet* displaces the patriarchal themes of the male gaze through representation of Ophelia as lover and lunatic. Ophelia dissolves into the background as she is dismissed by the patriarchal figures in *Hamlet*. Moreover, Ophelia struggles with the absent-mother archetype, where she leans into the men in her life to guide, love, and nurture her. The characterization of Ophelia is through the lens of patriarchy—Hamlet, Laertes, Polonius, and Shakespeare. Ophelia's breaking point proves tragic as her purity is questioned, dismissed, and valued as her worth. As the play progresses, Hamlet's inner struggle becomes the focal point, while Ophelia dissolves into the tragedy and is silenced in drowning.

The tragedy of Ophelia lies within her only desiring love. Defined by her virtue and expectations regarding her sexuality, Ophelia becomes tainted as unworthy. As Hamlet's dynamic characterization unfolds, Ophelia's representation is dismissed as a pawn to the plot. Her voice echoes and pangs against the patriarchy that silences her. Her fit of lunacy resembles a senseless prattling that is expected from women in hysteria that mirrors, "The horrible implicit paradox lies in the voice of Ophelia that was never heard, and the resounding voice of Hamlet, which outlives even the body that housed it" (Fischer, 8). Ophelia's character is presented through the male gaze as a hysterical woman for the appeasement of Hamlet and to affirm the masculinity of her family. Furthermore, Ophelia's characterization and struggle mirrors Hamlet's as her only purpose is to reinforce the plot of patriarchy—except she lacks opportunity to speak against the patriarchy.

Hamlet's dismissal of Ophelia reveals that her presence is for sexual pleasure. Ophelia finds herself both embarrassed and heartbroken as Hamlet dismisses their love: "I/did love you once" (Ham. 3.1.113-4), "Get thee [to] a nunn'ry, why wouldst thou be a/ breeder of sinners?" (Ham. 3.1.120-1). Hamlet sidesteps Ophelia's virtue by demeaning their shared intimacy as something of the past and diminishing her femininity. Hamlet's denunciation and dismissal dissolves Ophelia into the background of the plot, continuing to gratify his own needs.

Outside of Ophelia's love affair, she faces caveats from her family to protect her virtue. As her lover dismisses their affair, the reader is reminded of the consistent dialogue surrounding Ophelia's virtue as it is dismissed and upheld. This inverse of morals regarding innocence presents the polarizations of male expectations surrounding women's bodies and sexuality. Ophelia's fit of lunacy is created by the confusion of the inverse of morals and denunciation of men in her life that value her innocence before all. Polonius, her father, warns Ophelia of the dangers of giving into sexual pleasure with Hamlet:

> Polonius: "For Lord Hamlet,/ Believe so much in him, that he is young,/ And with a larger teder may he walk/ Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,/ Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers" (Ham. 1.4.123-7).

Polonius' warning takes place after Ophelia's affairs with Hamlet. She is caught in the midst of regret, love, and fear of what might happen with Hamlet, while also hindering the truth from her father. Polonius' commentary upon her love life is without reason. Moreover, early in the play, the audience becomes aware of the importance of Ophelia's purity by recognizing the closeness between she and Laertes, her brother. His scornful warning impedes Ophelia from expressing her true feelings as he states, "Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open/ To his unmast'red importunity./ Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,/ And keep you in the rear of your affection,/

Out of the shot and danger of desire" (Ham. 1.3.31-5). Laertes remarks on her virtue as something to keep hidden and fear, for without purity, Ophelia is in danger of desire. The continued theme of men commenting on women's purity and intimate details are redundant, as it provides nothing to support Ophelia, instead to guilt and shame her of something beautiful.

Ophelia's fit of lunacy directly relates to the traumatic impact induced by the patriarchy in her life. Dismissed by her love, mourning her father, and lead to believe her brother is dead, Ophelia's hysterical state is brought upon by stress from the men of her life. Her babbling represents her inability to address the issues in her life while being driven over the edge with tension. Ophelia's death invites her to, "dissolve her into female symbolism of absence is to endorse our own marginality; to make her Hamlet's anima is to reduce her to a metaphor of male experience" (Showalter, 223). Her death by drowning resembles the lunacy women are driven to when men oppress and silence them. Ophelia's purpose within the text is to uphold Hamlet and belittle her relevance. Moreover, her fit of lunacy captures the befall of woman in literature, leading to forever silencing in death by drowning. The patriarchal standards set by the men in Ophelia's life project the male gaze by placing women into accepted boundaries. Once Ophelia steps outside of these boundaries, Shakespeare writes her as a lunatic amidst hysteria and drowns her, silencing her forever.

The continued theme of silencing written through the male gaze of Shakespeare is demonstrated as women are identified by the patriarchal figures within their lives. As each of the women depend on the men of their lives, these men abandon their women to uphold their own status and emotions. The constant centering of man as the focal point demonstrates the concept of the male gaze: women are there to appease, uphold, and to see themselves as objects for men. These women dissolve and never take action as they are silenced, midsentence.

The strategy of silencing derives from the male gaze, for this theme is conveyed throughout *La Vita Nuova* as Beatrice is unable to speak; *Rime Sparse* as Laura does not speak; *Othello* as Desdemona as she was unable to convey her truth; Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* as she was unable to communicate her defilers; and Ophelia in *Hamlet* as she becomes a product of silencing through drowning. Women are pinned as silenced creatures throughout literature; however, a crusader for women's rights takes up her pen.

Aemilia Lanyer's Defense

In the shift between the patriarchal pioneer's ages and times—women took up a defense strategy: a pen. Aemilia Lanyer defends the name of woman that so easily dissolved into the words of man. Her presence during Shakespeare's influential era played a role in diversifying the literature written and women represented. Her famous work, *Eve's Apology in Defense for Women*, covers issues on using religion as a crutch in blaming women for the wrongdoings of culture. In the midst of pioneered patriarchy, women's voices echoed against the male gaze. The the publishing of this poetry, Lanyer was able to convey her stance for women and against patriarchy in the Renaissance. For this thesis, understanding women's fight against the gaze aids in understanding the responsibility for many today.

Lanyer's *Eve's Apology in Defense of Women* proposes a vindication for women regarding the fall of man in Genesis 3. The blame against women has been a crutch for man to hinder them and remain sexist in ideals. However, through Lanyer's pen, women were provided hope in acknowledging, "'But surely Adam cannot be excused;/ Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame./ What weakness offered, strength might have refused;/ Being lord of all, the greater was his shame" (Lanyer, 33-36). Lanyer conveys a transparent truth to the situation of the fall of man—if Eve was created after, should Adam not know the truth before she bestowed the

fruit to him? This provides the ultimate defense in knowing that although Eve did eat first, man still took. Furthermore, Lanyer provides the final element in clarifying the gendered blame game in bestowing the argument of Eve, "Her weakness did the serpent's words obey,/ But you in malice God's dear son betray" (Lanyer, 71-72). Lanyer's argument behind this defense is to not belittle men nor blame them for all historical wrongdoings, instead, she proposes arguments to level the playing field. Lanyer proposes equality by clarifying issues from the Holy Bible. If men use the Eve as an excuse to pin women under man forever, Lanyer deemed this inaccurate: woman ate the fruit and man crucified Christ.

Lanyer's defense for women proposes opportunity for society and generations ahead to consider: equality. Moreover, through taking the defense to paper, Lanyer paves the way of thinking and opportunity for women ahead of her time. In an age where men's word took superiority and the church showed women as the weaker sex, Lanyer uses theological themes to argue the origination of sexist principles. History of Western culture reveals sexist traditions in literature; however, women of the time were arguing against patriarchal prejudice:

> "Given that for the female imagination the so-called Dark Ages persisted well beyond the male-defined Renaissance, it is impressive enough that an extraordinarily talented set of writers implicitly chose to declare, with Aemilia Lanyer, that 'Our mother Eve, who tasted of the tree…Was simply good' and therefore to dream, as Lanyer did, that women might 'have our liberty again.'" (Gilbert and Gubar, 17).

Lanyer paved the way for women in her time and continues to make an impact. Her words help shape the direction women are headed in equality of the sexes. Moreover, her defense encourages readers to challenge oppressing norms of society to pursue a better future for culture. In a time where Shakespeare silences the women of his tragedies, the potential tragedy for future

audiences is women remaining silent. That is where Lanyer turns the page and demands change. That is where readers are encouraged to do the same, it just looks different: through media advertisements.

Presence of the Male Gaze in Media

Why do these past authors and their works demand understanding? What does this mean for me? Each of the pioneers of patriarchy display the strategies of the male gaze as the women within their works are pinned as passive and silent and are written as dismembered, damned, denounced, dissolved, and silenced. The absurdity lies within the timeline of male gaze. Going from the middle ages to the renaissance to present day, the male gaze remains a prevalent issue through the depiction of women in advertisements.

Technology proves an asset to many today; however, the detriments are that media is everywhere. Since the Coronavirus pandemic, technological uses have increased as individuals have used their devices for grocery shopping, finding clothing, ordering online, and contactless payments. Society has become dependent upon technology to remain healthy and to stay connected. Along with the technological advancements, the use of social media platforms has increased since COVID-19. Although social media provides opportunities in growing community and staying connected, it invites friends and users to become active spectators. Although this notion is not new, it provides clarity in how present day individuals interact with one another and advertisements. Advertisements find themselves everywhere in society: “The publicity image belongs to the moment. We see it as we turn a page, as we turn a corner, as a vehicle passes us. Or we see it on a television screen whilst waiting for the commercial break to end…We are now so accustomed to being addressed by these images that we scarcely notice their total impact” (Berger, 130). Whether or not one is interacting with an advertisement, these

images surround and define how one buys, shops, and sells. Advertisements are everywhere, for it is unable to tune them out. In a world that taps into media on all platforms, ignoring advertisements is impossible.

Aversion of Advertisements

The malevolence of marketing lies in how one displays an advertisement. Unfortunately, most advertisements in media exhibit the male gaze to promote women as objects alongside the product they are selling. Placing women alongside objects conveys the understanding of equality between them. Additionally, the presence of woman beside an object helps endorse the desirability to audiences. Women's worth and identity are captured in how the audience perceives them through a superficial context of consumerism that remains in the male gaze:

> The power of ads shapes men's expectations for finding women who are over five feet and six inches tall, but still weighing less than 100 pounds, who look great in tight clothes and demure and submissive. This is not a practical or reasonable expectation. In real life situations, it creates a downward spiral of disappointment and disillusionment" (Rajagopal, 3334).

Unfortunately, society retails attitudes, luxury, and an allusion of beauty for both female and male audiences to aspire. These advertisements are found on social media platforms, billboards, magazine covers, and while reading news online. One cannot simply avoid them, for these advertisements impact one's life decisions: what to eat, what to wear, what to drive, where to eat, and how to look in a bathing suit. The assiduous cycle spirals for society to drown in.

Though these advertisements exist, it is the presence of woman in the ads. Women are bought and sold as a commodity and plastered silently upon a billboard and in commercials. This

deathly advertisement mechanism is nothing new, for this has been conveyed throughout all of time, all literature, and art. The literature written by the previously mentioned pioneers of patriarchy, the male gaze is prevalent in silencing woman to uphold the desires of man. In advertising, the issue of the male gaze, "persists, where women are treated as objects of desire, rather than as agents of action" (Palczewski, 243). The passivity of women in advertisements are projected from the male gaze, for the observation of women is imperative. The image below "How People Read Codes of Gender" reveals the framing of men and women throughout media (Palczewski, 232). The differences in framing male and females in media presents the issue of the stillness of woman and the virgin-whore dichotomy to sell their bodies as an envious object.

Table 11.2 How People Read Codes of Gender

	Male	*Female*
Whole-body posture	More often shown standing and moving	More often shown lying down
Head	Straight and positioned directly at the camera	Tilted at an angle or looking away from the camera
Eyes	Focused and watching the world around them	Not paying attention, spaced out
Hands	Controlling and assertive; hands use the objects to do something; men touch others	Passive and controlled by environment; objects rest in them; women touch themselves
Legs	Legs are straight, in motion, or solidly planted	Knees are bent so that the body is tilted and off-center; legs are crossed or women hold one of their feet
Performance of age	Mature and manly	Infantile, shown snuggling into men; women presented as looking like girls, and girls presented looking like women

*How People Read Codes of Gender, (*Palczewski, 232)

The comparison between body posture, head, eyes, hands, legs, and performance of age between women and men in advertising differ significantly. Women are docile while men display assertiveness. The inverse of advertising men and women demonstrates how women are asserted

through the gaze while uplifting masculinity. Moreover, this chart adds the focus on dismembering body parts to sell an idea or object through the posturing and situating men and women for the audience.

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing, 1976*

John Berger opens discussion surrounding how society interacts with both art and media, and how the illustration of women is represented. Berger's work consists of observing art while shifting into a modern approach on advertising. The male gaze endures as women are objectified and observed through the lens of the viewer:

> "But the essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in quite a different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him" (Berger, 64).

The role of the spectator in perceiving women in art, literature, and media is through the lens of the male gaze—how women can offer men something. In media, the spectator is expected to be male or desire what men want. The male gaze withing advertising wants to sell women as a commodity and desire. As for women, they desire to look like the depicted woman within the ad because that is what men desire—the system is cyclical.

Moreover, Berger uses the term 'publicity' to refer to public advertisements to help sell and convey a desirable image of what one must attain. Understanding the cyclical nature of the male gaze in advertising reveals how women respond to these ads: "Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour" (Berger, 131). Women in advertisements act as objects of

envy, creating desire of woman toward the image. Women interacting with these advertisements find themselves wanting to look like them, for this is the definition of beauty and desire: glamour. The impact this has upon women is the onset of comparison, body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and depression. Women cast off their own self to look desirable as women who are deemed enviable by society. The advertisement below questions women if their body is fit enough for the beach and promotes weight loss through purchasing protein powder. If women do not meet this standard, they are invited and encouraged to alter themselves through purchasing weight loss protein powder to look like the woman in the image:

Protein World, 2015

Aside from the response of the spectator, publicity of ads create desire to want the product by using sex appeal. This strategy reveals that women in media are seen as what can be offered and enviable: “Publicity increasingly uses sexuality to sell any product or service. But this sexuality is never free in itself; it is a symbol for something presumed to be larger than it the good life in which you can buy whatever you want” (Berger, 144). Many ads demonstrate

women as sexual beings, without blatantly stating it. The suggestive nature behind advertisements allows the viewer to see what they want to see, usually responding to a sexual nature. The ads below are for food and drink, relaying a suggestive, sexual nature inlaid in the advertisements:

Santo Mezquila, 2017.

Burger King (Singapore), 2009

The suggestive nature of advertising is not a mistake. The framing, wording, and purpose is the perspective of the male gaze. Santo Mezquila's "There are still places your tongue has never been" advertisement as well as Burger King Singapore's "It'll blow your mind away" advertisement reference sex pined against a passive woman to promote their product. Aside from the uncomfortable notions and invitations, the overarching theme of media's impact on selling an ideal life is not only through sexuality, but through capitalism. Berger's final claim in *Ways of Seeing* is that it is the culture of capitalism offers nothing except power to attain (153). The objectification of women in media and advertisements are to convey that they can be bought—by both male and female audiences. Displaying advertisements that weaken, sexualize, objectify, and make women enviable are all through the distorted male gaze that is to uplift male spectators.

The Impact

Berger's outlook of how society interacts with media and the display of women as an object to be desired affects how women view themselves. Female spectators desire to change self to fit the mold of the enviable object, thus giving into the desire of man. Moreover, not only do most advertisements distort the reality of women, but also, "the sexualization of women affects how women see themselves" (Palczewski, 245). The male gaze is a concept briefly mentioned throughout one's life; however, if women were to fully understand the gaze and it's structure, how would this change women's interaction with media advertisements? The afflictions women face result in their comparison to others, envying unrealistic body expectations, and leading to sexually objectify themselves because that is what the gaze wants. On the other hand, the reality is that most individuals desire attention in some aspect of livelihood. Unfortunately, seeing one way of performing the female gender is through the lens of the male gaze in media

advertisements, for "the prevalence of the sexual objectification of women has so dominated media, it should be unsurprising that people self-objectify when they become producers of mediated messages" (Palczewski, 246). The language that surrounds these messages invitse women to body shame and to shame others. The language barrier, however, is that men and women are unable to understand the language mediated through the male gaze.

Aside from female spectators, male viewers hold expectations toward women after viewing objectifying media. Male spectators suffer with the distorted view of the realities of woman and their expectations are beyond them. Language weighs heavily in how men read these messages, for language, believed by French feminists, is "phallocentric: it privileges the phallus and, more generally, masculinity by associating them with things and values more appreciated by the (masculine-dominated) culture" (Murfin, 209). Society is masculine-dominated as it overflows with the male gaze: advertising, social media, film, and literature. When associating meaning to an advertisement, the weight of words impact all viewers—revealing that it is a man's world. This becomes detrimental as men are raised in viewing mediated messages, expecting women to fit this mold as well. Once women do not adhere to the standards of the male gaze, men are perplexed and outcast the imperfections that do not align with the gaze.

Analyzing Advertisements

The following advertisements are examples to demonstrate the multifaceted themes the male gaze promotes. The Mr. Clean advertisement invites women back into the domestic as their purpose in life

is cleaning and raising children as an expectation of motherhood. The male gaze demonstrates that women are to be clean, at-home mothers, as well as maintaining the only job that "really matters." If the roles reversed, a man replacing the woman, the ad would not have the same impact, for the male gaze wants to belittle women.

Pop Chips, 2012.

Secondly, Katy Perry helps further the message behind Popchips that snacks can be guilt free because of their wholesome ingredients. The left-sided ad draws attention to her breasts with a statement to heighten the sexual appeal: "nothing fake about 'em," (2012). This objectifies Perry as she becomes the equal object to provide a satisfactory answer to spectators—removing herself but leaving her chest. Her statement reads upon the right-sided ad as: "I curl Popchips straight to my lips, good thing they don't go straight to my hips," (2012). This buys into the obsessive nature of women and dieting that allows them to get the *right* body that the gaze permits. Perry's series of Popchip ads reinforce the male gaze upon women as notorious to give

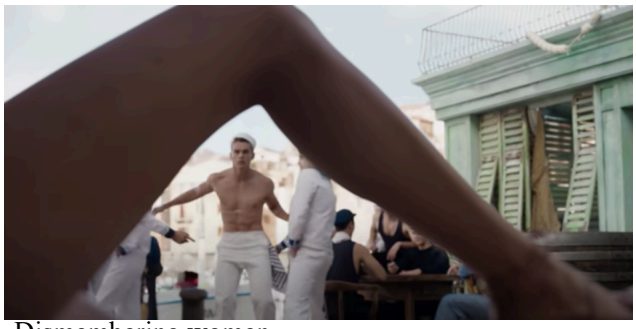
into pleasure, ridden with guilt. These advertisements are clearly established through the male gaze as women are displayed through the lens of domesticity and body conscious to keep the figure trim.

These advertisements and issues of the male gaze have occurred throughout time, and many may say that this issue no longer is permissible. However, Le Male Le Parfum by Jean Paul Gaultier's advertisement released in 2020 reveals the patronizing male gaze as the leading male is portrayed as strong, revered, fluid in movement, focused, and touching others around him. The siren call of a woman echoes gripping his attention and he makes it a mission to reach her. The female remains stagnant, dressed sexually in a corset, acts as a damsel, and kisses him once he reaches her. Furthermore, there are many women in the advertisement dressed in revealing clothing, cascaded over men. As the male makes his way to the lighthouse, the viewer notices the objectification of the lighthouses as a woman's body. The women withing the ad do not speak, for they are silenced to uphold the patriarchy. Moreover, the framing of the men upholds masculinity, while in another frame, women are dismembered for the appeasement of man. This recent advertisement displays the issue that the male gaze is present and will continue if it does not stop.

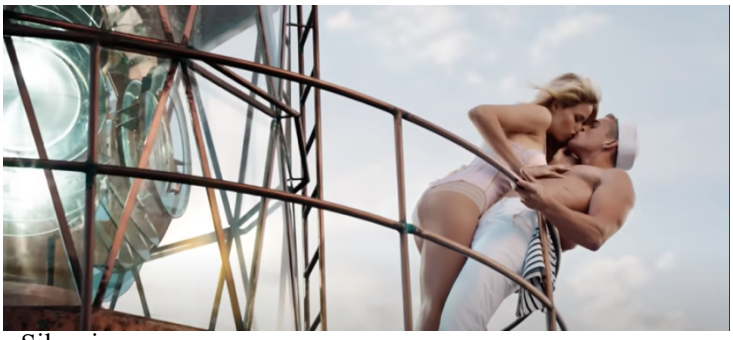
Le Mele Le Parfum by Jean Paul Gaultier, 2020.

Upholding masculinity

Objectification of women's bodies



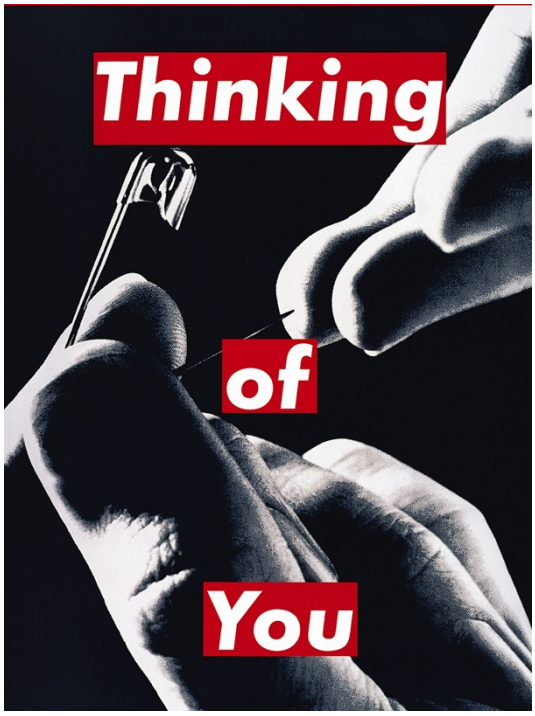
Dismembering women



Silencing women

This thorough examination helps one understand that the male gaze dominated media through upholding masculinity of man and objectification of woman. Once the male reaches the final destination, he is awarded a passionate kiss that shows the journey of man is for sex and women are merely the driving force to that nature.

Each of these advertisements range from domesticity to fitness to food to objects of sexual desire. The male gaze's elusive ability to disengage women in many areas of life shows the power it has through capitalism, envy, and language. How society knowledgably reacts to these advertisements will aid in removing women as the object of desire to diminish unrealistic expectations toward male and female viewers. The urgency lies within being an active listener, participative viewer, and taking action against the male gaze. Luckily, there is a present-day activist taking a stance against media engagement issues: Barbara Kruger.



Against Today's Advertising

Barbara Kruger's approach in advertising is bringing an awareness to the negative nuances in advertisements that uphold unattainable beauty standards. Kruger takes advertising and adds a flare of reality and sarcasm that

invokes a response from the viewer. One may ask why she takes this approach? What is the significance? Kruger uses different tactics to spark the viewer's active participation in acknowledging the downfall of capitalism in ads as well as objectification of women.

Untitled, (Your comfort is my silence), 1981

Untitled, (I shop therefore I am), 1987

The image "Thinking of you" demands the viewer to acknowledge pin-up art as women are depicted as voiceless and objectified for viewership. Kruger's "Your comfort is my silence" comments on the silencing of women as an appeasement and comfort for men. This advocates for the acknowledgement of women's voice and identity within advertising. Lastly, Kruger notes the tragedy of capitalism within society with "I shop therefore I am," for this is what drives advertising. Without advertising, there would not be the interest or opportunity to buy at every turn, for people would not see the importance in buying.

Kruger's approach to advertising speaks against the notions of silencing, objectification, and capitalism—much like Lanyer. The first step in making an impact in viewership and speaking against the male gaze is education. Society follows the common belief of *ignorance is bliss*—rather, it is ignorance stunts action. Acknowledging Kruger's approach in contrasting

advertising positions herself as an agent of action amidst a stagnant approach in advertising by reproducing an issue since the middle ages: the male gaze.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of Western literature, the rebirth of the male gaze continues to perpetuate. The opportunity for each patriarchal figure to write women differently lies within what they do with the pen. The disparaging of women through the male gaze proves an issue at the turning point of literature with Dante. Moreover, as the dichotomy moves from the Middle Ages into a new era, Petrarch's poetry dismantles and dismembers beauty. The tragedies Shakespeare unveils presents the real tragedy: disempowering and silencing women. The theme of screening Beatrice's and Laura's identity reveals the patriarchal power scheme to retain the identity of a woman of virtue. This un-naming reveals silencing by never offering an opportunity for women. Contrastingly, Dante divulges the identity of Francesca by identifying her through her downfalls—lust. The inverse of morals between Francesca and Beatrice presents the polarizing dichotomy between virgin and whore, conveying there is no middle ground. The same dichotomy and polarization is found in Shakespeare's tragedies as he dismisses, dissolves, and dismembers women. Desdemona, Lavinia, and Ophelia each struggle with patriarchal smothering as well as failure to adhere to an ideal virtue. Desdemona's assumption of infidelity leads to her silenced, biased death. Lavinia's death reinforces Titus' characterization and she is murdered for her ruined innocence and suffering. Lastly, Ophelia is driven from lover to lunatic as she endures the confusing, unrealistic expectations and shaming from the patriarchy in her life.

Each of these renowned works are viewed and studied for the literary significance they entail. However, the responsibility of the reader is to remain active in asking questions, rather

than accepting what to believe. Through examining Dante, Petrarch, and Shakespeare's works, the presence of the male gaze is written through dismembering, silencing, scattering, denouncing, dissolving, and identifying women as virgins or whores. Throughout history, these women have been spoken for as they are dismissed by the patriarchy telling their stories. The current issues of the male gaze are being reproduced in today's media.

The themes of silencing by patriarchy are displayed in advertisements as they dismember, objectify, and sexualize women for the appeasement and praise of man. The appreciation of beauty is not wrong, but it is the objectification of seeing women as sexualized objects to promote capitalism—that is the issue. Women are exquisite when operating in their own identity, rather than fitting the frame created by the male gaze. Instead of both men and women envying an objectified, retouched version of glamour, society must represent what is honest and empowering. The detriments of believing the misrepresentation of women affects male and female spectators as they dismiss women. Much like Lanyer and Kruger, society must take responsibility and action against these detriments against women. Both offer a scope of clarity by redefining the blame game between men and women, leveling the playing field.

As an aunt to two nephews and a niece, my responsibility lies within affirming and informing them of the strategies behind advertising. I fear that they will grow up developing wrongful expectations, body dysmorphia, a lack of confidence, and comparison because that is what advertising invites. From a young age, I was surrounded by these advertisements and invitations to change myself to fit the societal mold. However, through becoming educated on the male gaze and sifting through literature and advertising, I noticed a trend. Both represent the male gaze as truth; however, instead of rejecting these notions, altering bodies and mindsets to meet these standards are upheld. I found that it is my responsibility not to reproduce myself as an

idle individual who stands on the sidelines, silent. Instead, it is essential to inform, educate, and continue to speak against male patriarchy within society to be the change for the youth, for our peers, and for my niece and nephews for a better tomorrow. It is time to break the chain of dysfunction in misrepresenting and silencing women. This is an invitation for your participation in freeing the woman, and yourself, from the gaze.

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. “The New Life (La Vita Nuova).” Translated by Dante Gabriel Rosetti. The Project Gutenberg eBook #41085, Siddal edition. *Elvis and Elvey, London* 1899. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41085/41085-h/41085-h.htm

Alighieri, Dante. “Inferno.” Translated by Robert M. Durling, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.41-53 (Canto II), pp.87-99 (Canto V).

Avezzù, Giorgio. “The deep time of the screen, and its forgotten etymology.” Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 11:1, 2019. 1610296, DOI: 10.1080/20004214.2019.1610296

Barolini, Teodolinda. “Dante and Francesca Da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender.” *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, Fordham University Press, 2006, pp. 304–332, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt14bs01r.17.

Berger, John. “Ways of Seeing.” *A Richard Seaver Book/ The Viking Press*, 1973.

Durling, Robert. “Notes: Notes to Canto 2.” The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 1, *Inferno*. Translated by Robert M. Durling, Oxford University Press, 2003. Pg. 50-53.

Fischer, Sandra K. “Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in ‘Hamlet.’” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, vol. 14, no. 1, Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme, 1990, pp. 1–10, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43444750.

Gottschall, Jonathan, et al. “Can Literary Study Be Scientific?: Results of an Empirical Search for the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy.” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, Penn State University Press, 2006, pp. 1–17, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41209939.

Green, Douglas E. “Interpreting ‘Her Martyr’d Signs’: Gender and Tragedy in Titus Andronicus.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3, Folger Shakespeare Library, The

Shakespeare Association of America, Inc., Johns Hopkins University Press, George Washington University, 1989, pp. 317–26, https://doi.org/10.2307/2870726.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton & Co., 2007, pp. 1-17.

Lanyer, Aemilia. "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, Gilbert and Gubar. W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, pp. 317-318.

McEachern, Claire. "Fathering Herself: A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism." Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 39, no. 3, [Folger Shakespeare Library, The Shakespeare Association of America, Inc., Johns Hopkins University Press, George Washington University], 1988, pp. 269–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/2870927

McLain, Carin. "Screening the Past: Shifting Desire in the Vita Nuova." *Italian Culture* (Michigan State University Press), 2008, pp. 1-20. https://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=35012524&S=R&D=hus&EbscoContent=dGJyMNXb4kSep7E4v%2BbwOLCmsEqep7VSsq%2B4SbeWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMOPq8Y2549%2BB7LHjgO3p8nfx6eoA

Murfin, Ross C. *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*: *Hamlet.* Ed. Susan L. Wofford. p.208-215. Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Palczewski, Catherine H., et al. "Chapter 11: Media." *Gender in Communication: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed., Sage Publications, 2019, pp. 221–251.

Petrarch, Francesco. “Petrarch: The Canzoniere, Poems from The Canzoniere.” Poetry in Translation, poems 1-366. A.S. Kline, 2002. https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Petrarchhome.php.

Rajagopal, Indhu, and Jennifer Gales. “It’s the Image That Is Imperfect: Advertising and Its Impact on Women.” Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 37, no. 32, Economic and Political Weekly, 2002, pp. 3333–37, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412464.

Shakespeare, William. *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*: *Hamlet.* Ed. Susan L. Wofford. Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello, the Moor of Venice.* Ed. Michael Neill. Oxford University Press, Kindle Ed. 2006.

Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus.* Ed. Alan Hughes. The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press, 2009

Showalter, Elaine. *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*: *Hamlet.* Ed. Susan L. Wofford. p.220-238. Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1994.

Vickers, Nancy J. “Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 2, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. 265–79, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343163.

Advertisements

Burger King (Singapore), “It’ll blow your mind away.” 2009. http://www.themost10.com/wpcontent/uploads/2012/04/Burger-King-It-will-Blow-Your-Mind-Away.jpg?354d8b%20[Accessed%2021%20March%2014].

Kruger, Barbara. “Untitled (I shop therefore I am).” 1987.

Kruger, Barbara. “Untitled (Thinking of you).” 1999-2000.

Kruger, Barbara. “Untitled (Your comfort is our silence).” 1981.

Le Male Le Parfum by Jean Paul Gaultier, 2020. Accessed on YouTube, 22 March 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHONNUWnE44

Mr. Clean, “This Mother’s Day, Get Back to the Job That Really Matters.” 2011.

Pop Chips, “Love. Without the Handles” and “Nothing Fake About ‘Em,” 2012. https://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2012/08/29/article-0-14BDB54A000005DC-394_634x811.jpg

Protein World, “Are You Beach Body Ready?” 2015. https://image.cnbcfm.com/api/v1/image/102629646ad_2.jpg.png?v=1430287902&w=1600&h=900

Santo Mezquila, “There are places your tongue has never been.” 2017. Accessed YouTube, 22 March 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZhcnUG_Kic