GLOBAL MASCULINITIES

READING THE MALE GAZE IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

STUDIES IN EROTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

JAMES D. BLOOM

Global Masculinities

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Reading the Male Gaze in Literature and Culture

Studies in Erotic Epistemology

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Let him gaze
—Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Shelf Life of a Meme

The Title

Since the 1960s the phrase "the male gaze" has migrated beyond academe and become a commonplace in works of fiction, art exhibits, and movie reviews. "The male gaze" now reverberates throughout cultural conversations across disciplinary and national boundaries. Coincidentally, I completed the first draft of *Reading the Male Gaze* only weeks before the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ran a special section titled "The Male Gaze in Retrospect," commemorating this meme's fortieth anniversary. During the same week, an interviewer in the *New Yorker*, Ariel Levy, quoted Jill Soloway, the creator of the controversial Amazon TV hit *Transparent*, claiming "complete access to the male gaze" for women as well as for men. By this time, male gazing had become commonplace enough among the culturati for another *New Yorker* writer to refer knowingly to what he called simply "the stereotypical male gaze" (Brody). This reviewer's use of the definite article serves to remind, even to reassure, readers that "being in the know" now entails recognizing male gazing as a ubiquitous meme, essential in any diversified portfolio of cultural capital. *Reading the Male Gaze* documents this diffusion and explores its implications.

When I first read and heard the phrase "the male gaze," it struck me immediately as aptly—and embarrassingly—applicable to the way I had been observing and exploring the world around me at least since my age hit double digits. I say embarrassingly because when I began

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looking over the scholarship I was obliged to read during my professional apprenticeship, I learned that the phrase was being used critically, polemically, and even disparagingly. Wherever the phrase appeared, male gazers were being stigmatized, vilified as complicit in "the crime" that novelist Yiyun Li describes in a 2008 *New Yorker* story as a transgression that "amounted to nothing more than a few moments of gazing." Li illustrates the extent to which, as Linda Williams observes, the male gaze now functions as a "totalizing concept," as a "largely unchallenged … orthodoxy … something akin to a popular villain whose specter has haunted the field of visual representation ever since" the 1970s (2–3).

As both an effort to resolve these tensions between this concept's clarifying richness and its stupefying hegemony and as a plea for exoneration, *Reading the Male Gaze* represents an effort to legitimate at least one aspect of male gazing by demonstrating how it operates as an epistemological practice integral to the conceptual sophistication I've aspired to cultivate as a teacher and writer and to reconcile this practice with political and ethical imperatives customarily treated as antagonistic to the "objectifying" impetus associated with male gazing. Throughout what follows I'll be arguing that this impetus is too complex, its effect too variable, for it simply to be dismissed and disparaged. In 1975, the same year that Laura Mulvey coined and launched the phrase "the male gaze," Helen Bishop, less influentially, introduced a collection of pioneering photographs by Garry Winogrand ("Winogrand's"). Writing from the perspective of a gaze object, Bishop praised male gazing, at least Winogrand's male gaze, as the work of an "artist [who] has caught the conflict … the body as object vying with the self as person" and goes on to voice an aspiration "to enter the world of the Winogrand women." My argument for probing rather than censuring "the male gaze" builds on Bishop's heterodox understanding of the relationship between gaze objects and gazers.

Even the opprobrium typically aimed at male gazers can suggest, however scathingly, intellectual or at least cognitive development as a possible motive for gazing. In Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1902 novel *The Sport of the Gods*, for example, Dunbar's narrator observes a southern barber newly arrived in Manhattan. During his first visit to the theater, a cultural rite of passage, he "gazed steadily across the aisle at a girl" and convinces himself that "he had made a decided advance in knowledge." My argument on behalf of male gazing rests on the hope that readers will at least consider the possibility that Dunbar—however sardonically—acknowledged over a century ago.

Considering male gazing in this light, that is, as an intellectually engaging, cognitively demanding reading practice, aligns it with the legacy of Dunbar's contemporary and pioneering *female* gazer, the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, who described "the history of the human face [as] a book we don't tire of, if we can get its grand truths, & learn them by heart" (Lane, "Names"). Over a century later, the Irish novelist Deirdre Madden renewed Cameron's legacy by showing the male protagonist of *Time Present and Time Past* realizing how a woman "fascinating to both men and women" can exhibit a "beauty [that] can suggest more than what she is." In the wake of this realization, he turns to a photograph reminiscent of Cameron's work: "a post card-sepia … studio portrait of a young woman from the early years of the twentieth century or the end of the nineteenth." Though Madden notes this gazer's predictable attention to the portrait subject's "full mouth … and abundant hair," she shifts his attention from these hereditary or cosmetic attributes to the cultivated, perhaps hard-earned traits her beauty, particularly her "strange smile" expresses: "knowledge, complexity … a sort of power" (48–49). In this spirit, *Reading the Male Gaze* will look to bodies, faces included, and the ways in which writers, moviemakers, and other artists and theorizers have represented bodies and faces over the centuries for the kinds of truths and lessons that Cameron extolled and Madden has more recently has promoted.

In draft form, *Reading the Male Gaze* bore the title *The Male Gaze Reader*. The change in title aimed to forestall some anticipated confusion over where to shelve and how to sell *Reading the Male Gaze*, yet the completed version retains the spirit of the wordplay of my initial title phrase, at least to the extent that the noun "reader" can refer to both a person and a kind of book. (Perhaps most familiar to Americans or at least among Americanists is William Holmes McGuffey's pedagogically oriented *McGuffey's Reader*, ubiquitous in American schoolrooms beginning with its first edition in 1836.)

Like anthologies, books designated "readers" strive for representativeness and focus on defined topics or widely acknowledged questions. But in contrast to anthologies, the books we call readers favor ad hoc selection choice over coverage. Considered either as a reader or as an anthology, *Reading the Male Gaze* was written in the hope that my reflections and analyses will matter less than the words of the writers quoted and in the belief that often, as Ralph Waldo Emerson assured his readers, "a writer appears more to advantage in the page of another book than in his own" ("Quotation").

In assembling the work of the writers and other artists included in *Reading the Male Gaze* I have set out to do the work of what we now call aggregators as well as the more traditional work of annotators. Cumulatively, these writers, along with the image-makers whose work *Reading the Male Gaze* addresses, speak to the cultural practices that Denis Donoghue calls attention to in observing that, inevitably, all "cultural practices are anthologies" (18), including male gazing. I occasionally turn in the following pages to recount how I came of age as a male gazer and how during the years in which I grew increasingly conscious, as a consumer and a critic, of the narratives, tropes, and images that surrounded me, my own male gazing, as an idiosyncratic, individual practice, came to converge with male gazing as an age-old, trans-genre, multimedia legacy.

Past Mastery: Choices and Impediments

For anthologizers, the simple act of choosing becomes an argument in favor of particular "cultural practices"—at least an argument for studying, though not necessarily emulating, such practices. Thus, *Reading the Male Gaze* also functions as a discursive commonplace book that always amplifies, sometimes dissents from, and sometimes treasures influential accounts of male gazing and memorable critiques of male gazing. This amplifying, criticizing, and cherishing necessarily eclipses my curatorial project. For all my eagerness to share male-gaze material gathered over years of reading and reflection, the primary motive at play in these pages rests on an argument—or counterargument—over what we mean and what we might mean in using the very phrase "the male gaze."

A more practical reason for restraining my anthologizing impulses will be familiar to fellow scholars and writers who have edited anthologies or readers and to anyone who has published an evidence-based study of copyrighted texts and images. Like me, they've labored under the constraint to quote and illustrate parsimoniously so as not to run afoul of intellectual property laws and misnamed "fair use" guidelines.

In order to work around these institutional constraints and to make my occasional autobiographical turns integral to my conceptual argument, I have sought throughout *Reading the Male Gaze* reader to follow anthropologist Michael Taussig's recommendation to practice what he calls "Nervous System" writing. Taussig disparagingly contrasts this with conventional academic writing, or "agribusiness writing," which he defines as writing that "wants mastery," that operates as "a mode of

production," and at the same time "conceals the means of production." Agribusiness writing reflects a purely "communicative" view of "writing as information to be set aside from writing that has poetry, humor, luck, sarcasm, leg pulling, the art of the storyteller" and functions as "a source of experience for reader and writer alike." Nervous System writing also

> finds itself implicated in the play of institutionalized power as a play of feints and bluffs and as-ifs taken as real in which you are expected to play by the rules only to find there are none and then, like a fish dangling on the hook, you are jerked into a spine-breaking recognition that yes! after all, there are rules. (31)

Therefore, according to Taussig, Nervous System writers keep feinting and bluffing, quixotically, to stay "one jump ahead of the rules." My most transparent "feint" is a reaction to the realization that accounting for the experience of a male-gaze reader necessitates detailed consideration of images that have long shaped, inspired, and disciplined male gazing. Hence, readers will notice my use of URLs instead of actual illustrations, indicating where readers might find the images that museums and media conglomerates have priced above nearly every individual writer's and even many publishers' means.

Beyond this economizing tactical feint, my adoption of Nervous System writing speaks more conceptually to Taussig's prohibition against "mastery" and his corresponding endorsement of "the mastery of nonmastery." As an intervention in the now-ubiquitous male-gaze conversation, my reflections aim to advance an understanding of gazing as an expression of curiosity and a bid for reciprocity. While at the beginning of this conversation Laura Mulvey introduced gazers as invariably playing a commanding or mastering role in images of and narratives about women, my evidence and reflections on this evidence complement this prevailing view with accounts of male gazing as often entailing act*s* of submission and accounts of male gazers relinquishing, surrendering, or simply lacking the mastery Mulvey and the conversations she spawned ascribe to male gazing.

The Post-Mulvey Conversation

Questions raised throughout *The Male Gaze Reader* about whether the actual experience of male gazing as well as numberless accounts of and remarks on male gazing correspond to Mulvey's critique—the argument

that produced the phrase—target two very different kinds of reader. Readers accustomed to the phrase "the male gaze" typically treat it as a critical judgment, even an expression of indignation, and are likely to have a political, moral investment in what Stuart Hall, writing a generation after Mulvey introduced academia to "the male gaze," designated as "the displacement of the masculine gaze" (201).

Beyond academia, curious lay readers may be familiar with the phrase "the male gaze" without knowing about its 1975 coinage in Mulvey's groundbreaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Now, however, that both lay and academic readers have been long accustomed to encountering the phase, the time may have come to record and explore its durable impact and ubiquitous iterations, its status as a conversational commonplace. My imagined audience as I composed *Reading the Male Gaze* included everyone ever touched by this conversation—anyone who has used, heard, or read the phrase "the male gaze."

The way this conversation has unfolded over the past five decades shows that what started out as a narrowly focused, arguably esoteric academic insight has apparently come speak to an abiding preoccupation. Simply to utter the phrase "the male gaze" now entails at least alluding to and often betraying a fascination with sexual desire, both reciprocal and unidirectional, opposite-sex as well as same-sex. In her recent review of the controversial French movie *Blue is the Warmest Color*, the novelist Lorrie Moore argued that the time has come to reconsider what we mean when we refer to "the male gaze." Moore's call for reconsideration acknowledges the rich complexity of Mulvey's concept while exposing what has, too often, become its "antique" polemical, pseudo-explanatory convenience:

> Can a moviegoer set academic theory aside and still ask, What is the cinematic male gaze, and is it so very different from the female one? Is the camera inherently masculine, a powerful instrument of anxiety, and lust, forever casting women as objects? (The phallic pen has never once deterred a woman writer.) And when is a gaze not a gaze but something else—something prurient or false or constructed as if through a rifle sight, or, as one filmmaker friend of mine has said, "as something to be viewed in the safety of a dark theater"? Moreover, is "gazing," with its fraught exile and exiling, what a camera should be doing anyway? Shouldn't the camera instead be trying to get past the gazeness of its gaze—that is, its condition of exclusion—and engage with the observed, knitting together an alliance between viewer and viewed? Is looking necessarily a form of desire? Of covetousness or envy? Was not the ultimate male gazer Hans Christian Andersen's

> poor Little Match Girl? … 1970s film theory (Laura Mulvey, John Berger, and others) sometimes had it that the male gaze is directed at a woman, and the female gaze is directed at the male gazing at the woman (Hitchcock's *Vertigo* builds its entire plot on this dialectic between viewer and viewed). Yet from the current vantage point, in this somewhat antique model, the female gaze may consist of a composite vision and be the more complex and authoritative, by virtue of containing additional information. Then again, of course, the male gaze may be watching the female gaze as well, which adds an additional layer of power and perception, becoming a tertiary gaze, and then the female may gaze back, ad nauseam, in the nature of a hand-slapping game or the infinite regression of a Quaker Oats box or the badinage of Abbott and Costello. (Moore, "Gazing")

The Male Gaze Reader aims to continue the conversation Mulvey inaugurated while integrating into this conversation the rethinking that Moore advocates.

The Apprentice

> The world is full of renunciations and apprenticeships, and this is thine: thou must pass for a fool and a churl for a long season. Ralph Waldo Emerson

This hope for sustaining and transforming the male-gaze conversation grows out of several decades spent living as both an amateur, occasionally amatory, "male gazer" and as a professional reader. During my half-century as a professional reader, beginning soon after "the end of the *Chatterley* ban and the Beatles' first LP" that Philip Larkin so famously commemorated (34), sexual desire became an approved and even essential subject in literary study (see Chaps. 4 and 5). Arriving on US campuses as a French import labeled *desir* and often tied to Roland Barthes' supposedly not-quite-translatable synonym for orgasm, *jouissance* (Gallop 566), this liberating approach to reading developed, perhaps paradoxically, into a subdiscipline: "an anti-normative, anti-institutional erotics," in Jane Gallop's phrase (565). This subdiscipline bore both the cultural prestige and the whiff of scandal that made it catnip to an intellectually aspiring, incurably horny twenty-something academic wannabe just beginning an apprenticeship as a literary scholar.

A conceptually appealing English import, Mulvey's phrase "the male gaze" stood out; her "male gaze" argument held its own among all this

seductive Francophone *richesse*. "The male gaze" quickly became, in spite of its censorious edge, part of every apprentice critic's must-know conceptual repertory. Unlike much of the "theory" in which I immersed myself as an apprentice, Mulvey's coinage has proven durable enough to continue at once to inspire and antagonize this male-gaze reader.

I knew as soon as I first saw the phrase "the male gaze" that it applied to me. I also realized that, at least as Mulvey framed the concept, male-gazing as customarily practiced was wrong or at least retrograde and perhaps even unfair to many of the women who drew my gaze. After decades of gazing and almost as many years of knowing myself as a gazer, the time seems ripe for a reckoning with these contradictions, for sorting out and holding myself and my fellow gazers accountable.

The Material and the Setup

Conversations about accountability run the risk of sounding bureaucratic and grimly legalistic. But they needn't be. In the hope of keeping the conversation lively, my argument and my reflections throughout *Reading the Male Gaze* encompass a diverse selection of quotations and images that I hope readers will savor and ponder while challenging and questioning my own inferences and the analyses on which they rest. Much of the material cited has provoked both lust and, often, more gradually and more durably, reflection. Therefore, making inferences and drawing conclusions from what I quote has entailed reliving the pains and pleasures of these provocations and revisiting the writers and artists who have over the years played the all-important role Walt Whitman ascribed, in "Song of Myself," to the "prurient provokers" who "stiffen[ed his] limbs" and "strained the udder of [his] heart." About a century later another poet of the American city, LeRoi Jones (soon to become Amiri Baraka), in his perennially provocative drama *Dutchman*, conferred intellectual legitimacy on gazing or at least attributed to it some cognitive merit by characterizing this ubiquitous activity as the disposition to "run your *mind* over other people's flesh" (7; emphasis added). With such precedents in mind, my argument in *Reading the Male Gaze* will proceed by treating gazing as a mindful activity belonging to the multitude of minds whose work I've aggregated in the following pages.

This diverse array of writers, artists, and performers includes James Baldwin, Titian, Rembrandt, Bob Dylan, Theodore Dreiser, Emily

Dickinson, Italo Calvino, Charles Chesnutt, Jeffrey Eugenides, Søren Kierkegaard, Jules Feiffer and Mike Nichols, John Berryman, Shulamith Firestone, Philip Roth, Sarah Silverman, Henry James, Robert Stone, Gary Shteyngart, W.B. Yeats, Flannery O'Connor, J.M. Coetzee, John Dos Passos, D. H. Lawrence, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, John Schlesinger, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Andrew Wyeth, Colm Tóibín, Tim O'Brien, Elif Batuman, James Joyce, Zora Neale Hurston, Geoff Dyer, Elizabeth Bowen, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Don DeLillo, William Golding, Chester Himes, Gertrude Stein, Nell Zink, Ernest Hemingway, Joyce Carol Oates, Sinclair Lewis, Ingmar Bergman, and Dana Spiotta, among others who come and go throughout the following chapters, with several making encore appearances.

Reading the Male Gaze consists of six chapters including this introductory first chapter. Chapter 2, "Coming Clean: Readings, Confessions, Shortcuts," recounts the convergence between my own unintended and often unwanted career as a viscerally driven male-gazer, from adolescence on, and my interests as a literary critic and cultural inquirer. Chapter 3, "American Fiction: Gaze Canon," surveys American fiction since the incubation of a distinctive American literary culture early in the nineteenth century. Chapter 4, "Scopes on Trial," reflects on a selection of male-gazing poets and novelists and their relationships to technologies of seeing and framing beginning with Galileo's telescope and extending to the role of kaleidoscopes, microscopes, and astronomical observatories in literary representations of gazing. Building on the broad survey of American literature in Chap. 3 and on brief readings of contemporary novels by Eugenides and Calvino in Chap. 4, the more narrowly focused approach to American fiction in Chap. 5, "American Fiction After Mulvey," examines work by two eminent novelists, one recently retired and the other recently deceased: Philip Roth and Robert Stone. This chapter treats both novelists' oeuvres as responses to feminist criticism in general and to "male gaze" theorizing in particular. Chapter 6, "British Invasions: Post-Bar Mitzvah," revisits the autobiographical narrative with which Chap. 2 opens and looks to the 1960s and the cultural ferment that gave rise to Mulvey's theorizing. The contextual coordinates in this chapter include this decade's twin British invasions: popular songs by the Zombies, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones and the controversial movies by John Schlesinger and Lindsay Anderson that once shaped my own coming of age as a male gazer.

CHAPTER 2

Coming Clean: Readings, Confessions, Shortcuts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I'm still waiting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After and Before

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

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