
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reading *Fraud* from the Gaze Theory: The Gaze and Anti-Gaze in Anna Durrant

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| ABSTRACT

The loneliness and isolation experienced by older women have frequently been the focus of Brookner's writing. *Fraud*, one of her typical novels, provided a provocative perspective on age and gender. In light of a number of previous studies, this article aims to contribute to the study of feminist fiction that focuses on older women and to encourage more academic inquiry and study in this area. Based on the method of literature research and detailed reading of *Fraud*, the essay demonstrated the dual gaze that Anna, the protagonist of *Fraud*, experienced from both sexes, particularly from her mother and Lawrence Halliday, in accordance with the gaze theory. The gaze showed exterior control in Anna as well as how she internalized those gaze and molded herself into the object of others' sight. Though she was observed by others and lived by their expectations for half of her life, Anna "counter-gazed" the overall look in her own unique way. She was liberated from the ongoing fraud thanks to her anorexia, dreams, straight look, and clothing design. Finally, the once-submissive Anna developed into an independent woman, speaking up forcefully for women to follow their own aspirations. By examining the gaze and anti-gaze that Anna experienced, the essay empowers all older women to recognize that new routes are open to them and inspires all women to confront the oppressive gaze and live their lives to the fullest.

| KEYWORDS

Anna Durrant, gaze, "counter-gaze", woman

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 October 2022

PUBLISHED: 06 October 2022

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.10.5

1. Introduction

1.1 Literature Review

Anita Brookner (1928–2016), an English art historian and author, offered a somber outlook on life in her fiction. Many of her stories center on the loneliness felt by middle-aged women who date romantically unsuitable men and feel increasingly isolated from society. *A Start in Life*, her debut book, was released in 1981. *Providence* (1982) and *Look at Me* (1983) came after it. The novel *Hotel du Lac*, published in 1984, received the Booker Prize for Fiction, and in 1986 it was made into a television series. Unlike her other novels, *Fraud* (1992) presented itself as a mystery narrative but, in reality, followed the typical subject of Brookner's works. *Strangers* were her most recent novel (2009).

Brookner was an expert at crafting stories with characters and specific details. In that they are sharp comedies of manners focused on the experiences of a small group of individuals, her novels have been compared to those of Jane Austen. She carries on Austen's legacy in terms of writing style, using conventional realistic methods to delicately explore the psyche of the characters. As Skinner illustrated in "The Fictions of Anita Brookner: Illusions of Romance," Brookner blurs the lines between realism, modernism, and postmodernism in the literary canon by substituting repetition and intertextuality for parody and other often employed postmodernist techniques(3). She has frequently been referred to in print as a writer whose interests are limited and whose skills are those of a miniaturist (Phyllis Lassner, Ann V. Norton, and Margaret D. Stetz 2), much like her greater predecessor. However, Margaret D. Stetz argued that Brookner's classification as a "miniaturist" doesn't fit her well and does her equally as little honor as it did for Austen. She is a writer who both invents her own universe and maintains a connection to the outside world by frequently

referencing the history of Western visual art. In the books, Brookner has been open about her expertise in art history and frequently puts pictorial metaphor front and center. Her fiction writing techniques are a direct result of her work as an art historian (35-46).

Brookner frequently offered a grimmer outlook on life. The concentration on the emotion and marriage of single intellectual women seems to be Brookner's distinctive literary prototype, according to Scholar Wang, who believes that Brookner's books portray a series of brilliant and lonely single professional women(34). Brookner's concern for women's survival status extends beyond single women's emotions and marriage to include their psychological development. The middle ground Jamison seeks—between rejecting wounding and drowning in it—is shown in Brookner's works, according to Ruth Hoberman, in which the protagonists embrace their own woundedness while keeping their dignity and insisting on their ability to endure (221). "Anita Brookner Reads Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Problem of Moral Imagination" by Ann V. Norton explicitly looked at Brookner's similarities to Wharton and James through an analysis of some of their key writings. The comparisons contrast modernist and postmodernist theories of ways of knowing and being, and they also reveal Brookner's preoccupations with miniature. By analyzing the relevance and significance of anorexia in the heroines of Anita Brookner's *Fraud* as well as in some other books, Giuliana Giobbi explores the influence of anorexia, a kind of self-starvation growing throughout the Western world, mostly among the female population (73-75). It's novel and thought-provoking to see how anorexia is interpreted in fiction. According to Ann Fisher-Wirth in "Hunger Art: The Novels of Anita Brookner", the tragedy of Brookner's female protagonists is actually a result of how fervently they accept the symbolic order that excludes them. Her characters are much like starving artists who couldn't get the food they liked and remained outcasts from society (1-15).

Anna Durrant, the protagonist of *Fraud*, is a classic because she embodies women who are older and are battling desires, enmities, nostalgia, and loneliness. *Fraud* demonstrates Brookner's concern for women's individual identities and purposes in life. Based on a detailed reading of *Fraud*, Professor Du examined Anna's development, from losing herself to reflecting on herself to finding herself again, and found that social and individual frauds cause Anna to experience suffocating loneliness and isolation(121). Peter Bien also discussed the fraud around Anna, which clarifies the novel's enigmatic title (824). Brookner's work also delves deeply into the utter loneliness of a sensible woman under stunning feminine care. Anna is such a tough woman who repressed her loneliness deep inside her heart even though she yearned to be free of it (Lin Jiang, 12-13). After a long battle of wills, Anna decides to stop living up to other's expectations and embarks on a new journey of life (Xiong Wenyan 13). When Anna was around 50 years old, she decided to leave her upbringing and adopt a new lifestyle. According to Aranzazu Usandizaga, Anna's transformation does reflect women's awakening from tradition to modernity, giving Brookner's book the feel of a female Bildungsroman (325-40). Professor Yang offers a fresh viewpoint on the study of *Fraud*. He examines the historical context and significance of the pictures mentioned by Anita Brookner in the book from the perspective of art history and then illustrates that the artwork connected to the book's topic underscores Anna's feminine authority (104).

Based on the aforementioned study, the article demonstrates the dual gaze that Anna experienced from males (Lawrence Halliday, George Ainsworth, Nick, Marie-fiancé France's Dunoyer) and females (her mother, Mrs. Marsh, Philippa, romantic rival Vickie) according to the "gaze" theory. Sartre's concept of the "look of the other" demonstrates the power struggle suggested by the gaze as well as how we internalize others' gaze and shape ourselves into the subject of the other's eyes through self-censorship. Foucault began his analysis of the aspect of power in seeing with the medical gaze. He then examined how seeing functions as a control in a social environment. Through multiple gazes, the disparities and shifts in power relations are reflected. In *Fraud*, the discipline power had been projected onto Anna through the gaze of her mother, the doctor Halliday, Mrs. Marsh, and other people, modifying her body, conduct, and thinking. Anna, nevertheless, "counter-gazed" all the looks via her anorexia, dream, straight looking, and outfit design. The tamed and imprisoned Anna finally escaped the frauds that imprisoned her constantly and grew into a newly independent woman, voicing the powerful voice for women to pursue themselves.

2. The Dual Gaze Anna Received

2.1 Female gaze

A network of social regulation extends as far as the sight can reach. In our daily lives, the gaze is everywhere. The communal, anonymous gaze allows power to circulate even through tiny channels of greater continuity, straight to individuals, their bodies, their gestures, and their everyday behavior (Foucault 154). At age 5, Anna's father passed away, and she and her mother shared an apartment while reliant on one another. With the exception of moving away for college and an annual trip to see her friend Marie-France in Paris, Anna took care of her mother when she grew weak at the age of fourteen, receiving visits from physicians and her mother's friend. Anna was unavoidably in her mother's line of sight because they shared an apartment. The gaze is ubiquitous, as Foucault shows. Since Anna needed to care for her frail mother, she was trapped in her home, creating a kind of spatial isolation and closure. "The allocation of space is ultimately a compartmentalized power" (Wang Min'an 444). Trapping her daughter in the home achieved the mother's control over Anna's personal freedom. And Anna appeared to embrace this position of being dominated by acting like "a daughter in a Victorian novel" (15) and "a perfect daughter" (49). It is obvious that the stare indicates an imbalance of power between the observer and the object of the look (Yu Qiulan 52). Furthermore, the mother's health

condition restricted Anna's daily activities and imposed strict time constraints on her, leaving her with no "time to herself". Oddly, Anna's childhood continued into her early 20s. She was conscious of this because she had taught her mind to be observant, but she perceived it almost as a virtue(45).

Power is used not just over place and time but also over mind. It permeates people's daily lives in contemporary society. Through the everyday infiltration of ideas or the training of various normative behaviors, it progressively shifts away from the rather direct violent nature of power in traditional cultures to govern people's behavior and even create it (Du Yeyan 123). This is the way how Anna's mother disciplines her daughter. She frequently imparted and emphasized traditional values and social order to Anna. The finest things in life are worth waiting for, according to Anna's mother, who assured her that she would be content in due time (227). However, it turned out to be a fraud, which made Anna lose her youth and her identity.

Although Anna's mother did not intentionally try to rule her, it's clear that she did. Growing up with that mother who was sadly smiling had made Anna aware of her need to shield herself from additional harm. She, in turn, had benefited from defense, loyalty, and the utmost selflessness. They had coexisted in harmony with their illusions, each of them knowing within that she was sacrificing herself for the other(70). Yet. The bond between Anna and her mother had shifted since George Ainsworth entered their life. They're no longer as close or as trustworthy as they once were. Even though Anna could see through her mother's lover's wicked intentions, Anna could only do what she could to lessen the harm her mother felt. She had not talked freely in a long time due to living with her mother, which limited her voice. She had always known that she had to shield her mother from harm, and that included the truth (70). Under her mother's continual observation throughout the years, her life purpose of Anna was to be a good daughter.

The gaze of the mother is a strong and covert pattern of control over Anna in place, time thought, and behavior, making her an obedient daughter. Mrs. Marsh's stare soon replaces that of Anna's deceased mother. According to Sartre, we are watched; just like everything else around us, we are the object of other people's gaze. Our free will and limitless potential are restricted by the looks of others, and we are reduced from "subject-me" to "object-me," being projected onto others(470). From the time when Anna's mother was still alive, Mrs. Marsh visited, her eyes scanning the furnishings of Anna's home. Instinctively she looked around for indications or even remnants of a male, but she was unable to find any. In her belief, all women were victims and could only be saved from their tragic fate by marrying a good man(56). She then constantly judged Anna's appearance, considering that Anna would never be a pretty woman: her face was too broad, her eyes too flat, and her mouth too wide for anything like beauty(33). Anna's sempiternal outfit was made of rust-colored wool, matching her thick and deftly styled hair, beneath which her open childish-looking face beamed with joy. Mrs. Marsh noticed a secret power in Anna after probing her thoughts by looking at her outward appearance. She thought Anna wasn't powerless, even if that power was confined to the mystery she both contained and partly concealed. The power was there, although latent: it had failed to come to the surface of her life and was therefore not a subject for discussion(32).

Despite being aware of these looks, the sensitive Anna continued to portray the role of the virtuous woman for many years. Sartre's idea of the "look of the other" illustrates how Anna absorbed Mrs. Marsh's gaze and, via self-censorship, transformed herself into the object of her eyes. She disliked Anna; therefore, despite the kindness and consideration she received from Anna, Mrs. Marsh remained unmoved. She preferred to be addressed by her first name and didn't even want Anna to call her Aunt Vera (25). Since her son needed a wife and she needed Anna's assistance in life, Mrs. Marsh wanted Anna to marry her recently divorced son, Nick. Instead of seeing Anna as a unique person, she viewed her as a tool to help her satisfy the requirements of her own life and those of her son. Despite the fact that Anna treated Mrs. Marsh like her own mother, she encountered apathy in return. Mrs. Marsh totally disregarded Anna's desires.

Even Philippa, Mrs. Marsh's daughter, thought that her mother could make good use of her. She saw Anna as "a way of discharging her obligations"(40). As she observed her thin, bony frame, Philippa kept telling Anna, "You are most frightfully skinny, you know" (36). The human body gets downgraded from "body" to "flesh" with the continual reproduction of contemporary knowledge and the development of the rational subject. It not only changes from a subject of knowledge to an object of knowledge but it is also identified and classed under the rational gaze (Ou'yang Cancan). Philippa didn't truly know or care about Anna. She was simply evaluating her through the perspective of worldly aesthetics. The fact that Anna left the old flat so soon after her mother's death surprised her. She had always believed that Anna was content with her life, but when Anna responded negatively, she accused her of being a fraud. "What a fraud you are, Anna," said Philippa uneasily(226). Philippa's expression embodied how others saw Anna: she lived to care for her mother. Nobody else was interested in or aware of what she was truly thinking.

Vickie, the doctor's wife, wore a short red dress with big shoulder pads. At Mrs. Marsh's evening party, her gaze was withdrawn almost immediately when she greeted Anna(67). However, Anna subconsciously compared herself to Vickie and unintentionally walked into her line of sight. She had only met Vickie a few times and thought she looked ridiculous. But because she was so

enthusiastic and self-assured, Vickie quickly had a sizable audience gathered around her. All the elderly men from the surrounding flats thought her marvellous(65). Anna was upset because Vickie was more popular and stylish than her. "I'm ridiculous, " Anna thinks. "Women don't live like this anymore. ...They go down into the marketplace, whereas I pay the price of staying out of it"(123). Fraud is centered on this conflict between traditional and modern fashion, as Anna's "sempiternal" brown corded suit disastrously fails to impress in contrast to her opponent Vickie's short red dress with prominent shoulder pads. The nicely tailored suit, worn in a variety of colors, together with Anna's broad, innocent face, identifies her as being out of touch (Ruth Hoberman 10).

Vickie Halliday had consistently been a rival of Anna's. She was the one Anna instinctively disliked at first glance because she represented the sexual predator who had quite easily seized Lawrence Halliday. Vickie, though, saw Anna as a threat as well. She had greeted Anna with a tone that clearly expressed her sympathy and contempt for her apparent spinsterhood. Afterward, Vickie invited Anna to her home for dinner. She put Anna under her gaze and conveyed her message as a hostess to Anna with a triumphant look. They had the following conversation over dinner :

'You know, I hate to see you so unhappy.'
'But I'm not unhappy.'
'But you're alone! No one should be alone. What would happen if you were ill?'
'I suppose I should send for Lawrence.'
It was the wrong thing to say, although it was innocently meant.
Vickie's gaze hardened.
'My poor husband is at everybody's beck and call. I try to shield him from the nuisances.'(209)

Vickie's gaze at Anna was, in fact, tentative. Her gaze hardened instantly when she heard Anna's joke. This reflects the fact that she was not simply looking at Anna but probing her. Between these two ladies, there was competition because of Dr. Lawrence. Vickie effortlessly won Dr. Lawrence over with her beauty, while Anna's modest and collected demeanor further enhanced her appeal to Dr. Lawrence. Vickie's attitude shifted from sympathy to hostility towards Anna as her look shifted from initial dislike to harsh glare. "Without this dinner, Vickie could continue to ignore her completely, and she, Anna, could avoid the glimpses of domesticity which they (the Hallidays) both, in their various ways, and for diverging reasons, proposed to offer her"(201).

2.2 Male gaze

The term "male gaze" refers to a psychological process wherein women are objectified, reduced to a landscape, and made to appear as appealing items. In patriarchal civilizations that pride themselves on being "cultured," this gaze is pervasive but frequently concealed. It is a way to control power as well as an expression of the entwinement of desire. In the power mechanism of the gaze, women become the object and the other. They also internalize this gaze, regulating their own bodies and minds(Yu Qulan 51). Since Dr. Howarth, the senior partner of the practice, had retired, Lawrence Halliday had been caring for Anna's mother. He was nice, kind, and pretty handsome. But from the time Lawrence entered Anna's house, his stare at her family was unmasked and evident.

In a patriarchal society, the male gaze is projected onto the female body and creates their standards of beauty. In an effort to win men's attention, women utilize clothing to display themselves more attractively. "It was a pity that I had no such clothes with which to confront the Hallidays. The sketches were satisfactory; the time flew"(204). The fact that Anna chooses her outfits carefully to catch Lawrence's attention is evidence that she has evolved into a woman under the sway of the masculine gaze. In order to conform to male aesthetic standards, women constantly looked at themselves to see if they were attractive and if they could impress men. A prime illustration of this is Anna, who eagerly anticipated seeing Lawrence Halliday and wanted to catch his eyes sparkling with compassion and adoration(122).

The medical gaze, in addition to the masculine gaze, is present in Lawrence's connection with Anna because of his position as a doctor. According to Foucault, the medical gaze also functions in the context of the power imbalance, which exists between the doctor and the patient as a result of the doctor's specialized expertise and political identity. Lawrence asked Anna questions as he looked at her body and still-pale face. Having faith in the doctor's knowledge, Anna made her confession to him more as an emotional outburst. The glance of a male doctor not only displays the power bestowed upon him because of their gender but also the power bestowed upon doctors by virtue of their medical training(Chen Li Ping 83).

The medical gaze also serves a communicative purpose at the same time; however, the senses that make touch with the look are not the ears but rather the fingertips. This leads to the concept of "palpation," which physicians employ to describe their

looks (Foucault 136). As Lawrence examined Anna's body, his hands pressed firmly down on her abdomen. He thought Anna's body beautiful, fine, and gracile, in sharp contrast to the rather coarse skin of her face. He was reminded of Degas's *Jeunes Spartiates s'exerçant à la guerre* (135). As he touched her, Lawrence actually treated Anna like a more material and objectified body, as if she were a painted figure. He thought of his miserable marriage during his last examination of Anna. While on his honeymoon in Rome, he recalled how he had been captivated by Titian's painting *Sacred and Profane Love* at the Borghese Gallery. The picture showed two beautiful women sitting on the edge of a marble wellhead. One is naked; the other is clothed. Lawrence thought the richly dressed was solemn, symbolizing divine love, while the naked woman represented secular love. But the truth explains the opposite of what he understood. In Lawrence's eyes, Anna was a divine but seemingly indifferent love who would not satisfy his wants. Yielding to his materialistic ambitions, he married Vickie. "Vickie was attractive principally because she was greedy; her greediness was intimately bound up with, even redolent of, sexual appetite" (221). However, years of marriage show that Lawrence could have made the wrong decision, just as he misread the picture. Anna might be the best partner for him. "Were it not for his father-in-law," he thought, "his marriage might not have taken place" (173).

The look exchanged between Lawrence and Anna suggests a further complicated emotion. In Lawrence's eyes, Anna, "like the Spartan boy with the fox beneath his shirt", had pretended to feel nothing and had turned away slights with the same patient, considered smile. She was a strong character. Yet, gone were the days when men preferred women to be compliant and passive. Anna was no longer compelling. "Mrs. Durrant and her unfortunate daughter were too hopelessly old-fashioned to compete in the market-place with other more hard-headed and enlightened members of their sex" (24). Anna maintained appropriate manners for Lawrence while attempting to repress her affection for him since she was certain of the virtues her mother had instilled in her. Lawrence, in turn, also had an affection for Anna and was aware of her mother's wish for her to be with him. He noticed the worry in Amy Durrant's eyes along with her warm greeting, as if she had intended to be receiving him in a different position. However, Lawrence gazed at the lives of Anna to perceive her suitability for the role of his wife from the beginning. And it turned out that Anna was not the one he finally chose, as he informed her that he was going to marry Vickie.

Anna appeared to be in a precarious situation in terms of gender relations, being the object of the male predatory gaze (Zhang Shiyuan and Yang Jincai, 105). Along with the previous Lawrence, Ainsworth aggressively intervened in her life, shattering the once solid and intimate bond between Anna and her mother. His hostile gaze was directed toward Anna. Once, Ainsworth's eyes had met Anna's. "His gaze hardened; he had straightened up, removed his hands from Amy's shoulders, and said, 'We are shocking your daughter.' His dislike was manifest" (113). The force of the gaze disciplines, dominates, dissociates, and breaks down interpersonal relationships in the person being seen. In Anna's case, the gaze of Ainsworth split her mother from her. Even though Anna could sense the harm this man would pose to her mother, Ainsworth's stare separated her mother from her. She ignored Anna's persuasion and kept her quiet. Mrs. Duncan had felt Anna's hostility throughout the Ainsworth affair and that the hostility would be directed towards anyone who was a witness to her mother's frailty after Ainsworth vanished (61). Since her father's death, Anna and her mother have been reliant on one another. The brief presence of Ainsworth, however, deprived her of her mother's love and trust, leaving a gap that could not be filled.

Anna frequently felt frustrated and uncomfortable around men, but as that imagined other women would have done, she assumed a look of sparkling animation and darted forward. She sought to please Nick. While Nick had maintained a fixed gaze in front of him as if to obstinately reject her existence. "She was aware that she was uncomfortable to be with and had little to offer but her maidenly accomplishments, letter-writing, and too careful clothes. Nothing there for a man like Nick, or perhaps for any man" (68). Anna perceived herself without any sign of the traits that appeal to males, which demonstrated her submission to the male gaze. She became an alienated other and lost her own subjectivity in her attempt to please Nick.

Dani Cavallaro has noted: "The concept of the gaze describes a form of power associated with the eye and vision. When we gaze at someone or something, we are not simply 'looking'. It is simultaneously probing and controlling. It inspects and objectifies the body" (139). Philippe Dunoyer, Marie-France's fiancé, turned to look at Anna, and as he did, Anna noticed that he looked eerily like George Ainsworth. Through the projection of his stare, Dunoyer genuinely examined Anna's body, turning her into the object of his desire. From a distance, he admired, toyed with, and possessed Anna. When Anna left, Dunoyer came after her to say goodbye, "his hand which he had placed in the small of her back slipped lower and finally gave Anna a little pat" (151).

3. The Anti-gaze from Anna

The gaze is a mode of watching that contains the operation of power or the entanglement of desire: by this power, the viewer gains the privilege and subjectivity of "seeing"; while being reduced to the object of "seeing," the seen frequently objectifies or alienates themselves by internalizing the viewer's values under the repression of the viewer's gaze (Chen Rong 34). Under both the male and female gaze, Anna spent most of her life taking care of her mother, being amiable to everyone, and trying to please everyone, ultimately alienating herself and losing herself. However, Anna's "disappearance" revealed that she was, in fact, subtly "counter-gazing" all gazes in a different manner.

Since Lawrence revealed his engagement to her, Anna has steadfastly requested that he keep it a secret from her mother and changed her family doctor in an effort to reject Lawrence's gaze. "It's not what I'm looking for"(16, 17, 23, 39, 51, 70, 82, 104), Anna said on several occasions. She had been searching for the man who would instantly understand her without explanation, which was precisely what she called her fate. Once she thought this man was Laurence Halliday, but to her dismay, he married someone else. When Anna turned to him for support since she was estranged from her best friend Marie-France, he also let her down. After experiencing several setbacks, Anna came to the conclusion that Lawrence could not possibly comprehend her. This impossibility had a significant role in Anna leaving her former life behind.

When Anna had her most recent examination, "She caught his eye then, and saw it steadily fixed on her. She returned his look: his own eye wavered and slipped away"(177). In Spartiates s'exerçant à la guerre, the young girl on the right, with her arms outstretched, looks boldly and firmly at the youths, while the boy with his arms raised dares to peek out with only one eye. Anna's rejection of the sight of men is powerfully shown by Brookner in the picture (Zhang Shiyuan and Yang Jingcai 106). By gazing straight at Lawrence during their conversation, Anna also exhibited her own feminine power. "She had probably bored him, she thought and had to assume a particularly bland expression in order to meet his eyes. When she did, he flushed"(178). In fact, Anna remained calm and sober under all the male gazes. Her anti-male gaze is also evident in her questioning of Ainsworth and Philip's initial intentions and in knowing full well Nick's ploy of flirting even though he found her bored.

Under the gaze, the body becomes a type of "flesh" that is divided and disciplined, with a productive nature. They are compelled to acquire body consciousness under the gaze of authority in certain social situations, continually changing and reshaping their own bodies (Ouyang Cancan 4). People can modify their bodies via anorexia as well. Anorexia is a purposeful self-starvation situated in the complex period of adolescence, which strikes girls who are dissatisfied with their bodies and probably wish to stop their growth so as to delay and escape the trauma of becoming an adult woman and facing up to life. Although Anna was nearly 50 and was already far away from her adolescence, her anorexia reflected her psychological resistance to others' gaze. Anna was excessively thin, and people kept worried about her health. But Anna responded that she was fine. Being thin was basically Anna's self-destructive reaction to her displeasure with the outside world, as well as a way to get away from everyone's gaze, which was technically emotional control. She was forced to navigate her barren emotional environment in pursuit of love and, as a result, lost her weight. Yet Anorexia is also a form of restraint on women's desires. In transforming her body and winning the battle of denial against desire, the anorexic woman hopes to control her emotional needs, too(Giobbi 3). The anorexia exposes Anna's attempts to repress her inner wants as well as her need to regulate her emotions.

Anna's desire can be traced to her dreams. She had a recurring dream. In the dream, "she was seated tidily and expectantly before a slice of cake, but not an ordinary cake: this was a dream cake, iced and filled and crowned with crystallized grapes. She took up her fork and plunged it into the cake, which immediately fragmented and revealed a gold wedding ring. Time and time again, in her dream, she heard the ring clatter onto the plate while the cake, uneaten, vanished into thin air, its purpose achieved. It was somehow important not to eat the cake for fear of swallowing and therefore missing the ring, which seemed to have been going on for many years and which must date from some time in her adolescence, since it bore all the marks of an adolescent fantasy"(42). Since having this dream, she had avoided having too voracious appetites and had approached eating cautiously, at times even giving it up completely. For fear of losing the ring, she refused to let the fork cut through them and kept her eyes fixed on her plate so she could quickly scan what the food may be hiding.

A recurring scene in the dream gives us a glimpse of Anna's true quest. The dream omitted many of the details and instead condensed them into a wedding ring, reflecting the condensing effect of dreams. The wedding ring in the dream alludes to Anna's expectations of love, marriage, and independent life (Wang Shuyan 76). However, Anna's affection and responsibility for her mother did not allow her to have such selfish thoughts. Subconsciously, she saw her mother as a burden to herself, but she refused to acknowledge this and therefore turned this burden into a delicious cake in her dream. Over the years, the dream persisted, and even when Anna was awake, she could still picture the cake and the ring. It was previously said that Anna strives to control her deepest urges. Here, her wish to get rid of her mother is clearly explained. Although her mother was dead, Anna could still feel her influence: even when no one else was there, we can still sense their gaze through the rustling of trees, the sound of footsteps in the stillness, the slit of the blinds, and the small swing of the curtains(Sartre 342). The old flat and her mother's belongings were symbolic of her mother's omnipresent gaze, which depressed Anna even after her mother's death. Therefore, she moved out of the old flat as soon as possible. She did not even want to open her mother's letters and took off her mother's coat. All her behavior illustrated Anna's resistance to the gaze of her deceased mother.

The brown corded silk suit that Anna wore on formal occasions is, in fact, a symbol of the way she portrayed herself under the gaze of others. But she knew that sooner or later, she would throw it away and replace it with something more beautiful and less formal. In the end, Anna took off the brown suit and made it into a parcel which she would leave for Mrs. Duncan, with a note, on the following Wednesday(21). Giving the suit away and making garments were ways for Anna to "counter-gaze". According to

Ruth Hoberman, to the extent that Brookner's protagonists "work on themselves," their aim is self-protection, not self-improvement. Like Fraud's Anna in her "beautifully cut tan suit," they are "determined never to be perceived as a victim," no matter how they are riven by romantic yearning or bodily decay(11). She always created her own clothes, so it was not strange that she came to make it into her profession. However, the garments she produced herself were considered by others to be too formal and out-of-date, which in reality rejected her values and uniqueness. But Anna persisted in pursuing her dream of designing costumes. The highly charged choices Brookner's protagonists make in clothing themselves, through fashion and anti-fashion statements, reflect their acceptance or rejection of norms of femininity(Phyllis Lassner, Ann V. Norton, and Margaret D. Stetz 17).

The loudest voice for women seeking themselves was Anna's voice on the streets of Paris. No one had ever questioned her about what she wanted for herself since she had always been the type of person that people wanted her to be. She has now made the decision to stop being that person. "I rather think I have stopped being one, a fraud, I mean. Fraud was what was perpetrated on me by the expectations of others. They fashioned me in their own image, according to their needs" (226). Philippa was really affected by what she said and decided to leave her lover. She stepped on the route toward discovering her true self as Anna did. Like the delicate cake, the fraud that bound Anna was shattered, and the omnipresent gaze was correspondingly removed. "She had escaped as from a prison cell, and she was determined never again to be imprisoned" (117). Finally, Anna's own feminine power manifests itself, inspiring the reader to pursue their own happiness.

4. Conclusion

The subject of female aging does not receive enough attention in the sphere of feminist literature. In the book *Visitor*, Brookner depicts Dorothea May, an elderly female character, illuminating how a traditional older woman gradually comes to grips with changes in her life. Yet this paper offers a fresh viewpoint on the study of aging women through the gaze theory and presents readers with Anna, an older woman that subverts traditional stereotypes.

It is revealed on the pages that the way Anna's mother and other people look at her is a tremendous fraud, which forces her to live up to others' expectations. Anna's mother gave her the traditional feminine gaze, making her focus on being a good daughter rather than on herself. Mrs. Marsh and Philippa regarded Anna as a tool to help them achieve their goals, while Vickie treated Anna with scorn and antagonism. In addition to the female gaze, Doctor Lawrence's double gaze, which reflected the power imbalance and complex feelings between them, was the strongest masculine gaze. The lack of a father provided Ainsworth the chance to meddle in Anna's life. He gave Anna a hostile glance, severing the bond she had with her mother. In contrast, Nick and Philip saw Anna as the object of their desire, which satisfied their masculine ego. All the males in Anna's life had come to stand for absence, from the deceased father to the evading Ainsworth to the "disappearing" Lawrence. The protagonists in Brookner's works never actually find Mr. Right, as Ruth Hoberman noted(4). Anna might not want the ring on the cake anymore because she was determined to live freely. She "disappeared." Along with the wind, the fraud that held other people's eyes and expectations vanished. A fresh Anna Durrant was born in Paris.

This article provides readers with a new perspective on the novel, deeper comprehension of the characters' psychological activities, and a reminder to pay attention to the inner changes that older women experience. It is an innovative approach to analyzing the book using gaze theory. Yet a more thorough and in-depth examination of the traits of Brookner's fictional writing might be paired with the future study because there are still many details in the book that have not been thoroughly examined.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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