

“Eye,” “Stain,” and “Gaze” in Khosro Hamzavi’s *A City that Died Under the Cedar Trees*: A Lacanian Reading

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Abstract

By achieving new horizons in structural psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan revolutionised post-modern criticism. ‘Eye’ and ‘Gaze’ are among his key terms. According to Lacan, the gaze represents the impossible desire of the unconscious, while the eye has a visual nature and points to the conscious. The possibility of becoming visible under the gaze, imprints a ‘stain’ on the visual order. The stain draws in every moment of the image, and makes the subject anxious. Without a psychological reading of *A City that Died Under the Cedar Trees*, one cannot fully understand Khosro Hamzavi’s position among Iranian authors. This study aims to employ the Lacanian conceptualisation of gaze, eye, lost object, the Other, and stain to analyse the aforementioned novel. According to the results, the character Jarir serves the same purpose as the lost object. Kian’s eye is after something which is beyond the lost image; on the other hand, under Jarir’s gaze, the image becomes a stain. Due to its psychological complexities, the aforementioned novel is suitable for a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading.

Keywords: Gaze, Eye, Lost Object, The Other, Stain

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Khosro Hamzavi’s *A City that Died Under the Cedar Trees* tells the story of a neurotic man who enters a village called Salian Sofla to become a teacher. The village is the bridge which connects the subject’s childhood/past to his current identity. His pathological dependency on the village and its inhabitants becomes increasingly paradoxical and challenging and this leads to his demise. The aforementioned novel is suitable for a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading.

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2. Methodology

The present article employs Jacques Lacan's theories to analyse Khosro Hamzavi's *A City that Died Under the Cedar Trees*. It employs Lacan's gaze, eye, lost object, the Other, and stain to highlight the dark corners of the aforementioned novel. Nowadays, psychoanalysis is a means of literary criticism which in turn necessitates the analysis of such a well-written novel.

3. Theoretical Framework

In 1950, Lacan illustrated that men get their true form of desire as a coded message from women. In this regard, he must channel/divert his desire to maintain himself. According to this anti-feminist theory, a woman's existence is defined by her ability to divert and maintain the men's gaze. Later on, Lacan revisited this idea and reformulated it in an Oedipal context, according to which, a woman is defined in relation to the father figure's presence, absence, or transition. At first, a woman's desire presents itself as an unresolved mystery, but as soon as it is decoded, in terms of a man's existence, and fulfilled, it becomes ominous and tries to overthrow the father figure. That is why Lacan's second seminar revolves around the woman signifier. In this regard, the gaze becomes both the object and the subject.

4. Discussion and Analysis

According to Lacan, the gaze represents the impossible desire of the unconscious, while the eye has a visual nature and points to the conscious. In other words, the gaze is the subject's illustration of how the Other views itself or the objects around it. One can trace the gaze back to the Imaginary (pre-mirror stage) where the mother-child unification is still intact. In this regard, it is the mother's gaze which guides the child's desires and horizons of expectation. While the active presence of the gaze makes other objects visible to the subject, it evades the subject because of his/her fabricated, deluded, and unstable unification with the mother. To uncover its true identity, the child must overlook its desire toward the mother which in turn creates a void. By channeling its desire to other objects, the child creates a chain of endless substitutions. While the subject is able to see other objects through the mother's gaze, it imprints a stain on the subject's perception. The concept of the stain becomes clearer in the Oedipal context in which the father figure or the Other, from an absent position, replaces the mother's gaze. In other words, the father's gaze occupies both the subject's and the object's positions. Although this gaze does not refer to an actual eye, it leaves a stain and provokes an anxiety which the subject cannot bear.

5. Conclusion

According to the results, there is a significant relation between the gaze and the desire of the subject. The subject's desire is monopolised by the Other and presents itself as a void which in the novel presents itself in the form of guilty threats and suppressed internal elements of the subject's life. The threat is represented by the stain which in turn covers the subject's real life and prevents any access to desired objects or emotional connections. In this regard, any confrontation between the subject and any object becomes a threat to the subject's ontological unity. The subject tries to fill its void by symbolically signifying other objects, but the social and symbolic dimensions are a closed loop of voids which in turn render this process impossible.

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