

THE DILEMMA OF THE GAZE IN ANGELA CARTER’S *NIGHTS AT THE
CIRCUS*
AND ELİF ŞAFAK’S *MAHREM (THE GAZE)*

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ABSTRACT

THE DILEMMA OF THE GAZE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS* AND ELİF ŞAFAK'S *MAHREM (THE GAZE)*

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This thesis analyzes and compares Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)* from the perspective of theories of the patriarchal gaze. The study argues that the female protagonists in *Nights at the Circus* and *Mahrem (The Gaze)* have a dilemma in relation to the gaze. On the one hand, the gaze makes these characters passive spectacles in front of the audience and objectifies them. On the other hand, the gaze appears to be a necessity for a sense of identity and order. The theoretical framework used to analyze the novels from the perspective of the patriarchal gaze includes John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, which is about visual representations in Western art and Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", which analyzes women's position in Hollywood movies. In order to explore the dilemma the protagonists find themselves in, on the other hand, Sigmund Freud's theory of scopophilia, Jacques Lacan's discussion of

the role of the gaze in psychosexual development and identity formation and Mich  l Foucault's evaluation of the gaze as a tool for discipline have been made use of. The comparative analysis of the two novels within this theoretical framework aims to demonstrate the complexity and universality of the issue and provide further food for thought for feminist thinking on this topic.

Key words: Gaze, Patriarchy, Objectification, Angela Carter, Elif   afak

ÖZ

ANGELA CARTER’İN *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS* VE ELİF ŞAFAK’IN *MAHREM* ROMANLARINDA BAKİŞ İKİLEMİ

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Bu çalışmada Angela Carter’ın *Nights at the Circus* romanıyla Elif Şafak’ın *Mahrem* romanı ataerkil bakış açısından ele alınmakta ve karşılaştırılmaktadır. Çalışmada, *Nights at the Circus* ve *Mahrem* romanlarındaki kadın başkarakterlerin ciddi bir bakış ikilemi içerisinde olduğu savunulmaktadır. Bir yanda ataerkil bakış onları seyirci önünde edilgen bir nesne haline getirirken, diğer yanda aynı bakış, bu karakterlerin benlik bilinci ve toplumsal düzen duygusu için gerekli hale gelmektedir. Romanları ataerkil bakış kuramları açısından incelemek için kullanılan kuramsal çerçeve, John Berger’ın *Ways of Seeing* başlıklı eseri ve Laura Mulvey’nin “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” adlı makalesinden oluşmaktadır. Başkarakterlerin içine düştüğü ikilemi incelemek için ise, Sigmund Freud’un “scopophilia” (bakmanın verdiği haz) kuramı, Jacques Lacan’ın benlik oluşumu ve bakış ilişkisi ve Michél Foucault’nun bakış ve toplumsal disiplin ilişkisi kuramları

kullanılmıştır. Bu kuramsal çerçevede yapılan karşılaştırmalı çalışma, bakış konusunun karmaşıklığına ve evrenselliğine dikkat çekmeyi ve feminist düşüncenin bu konuya yaklaşımına katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bakış, Ataerkil Düzen, Nesneleştirme, Angela Carter, Elif Şafak

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. FEMINIST AND OTHER THEORIES OF THE GAZE	5
2.1 Feminist Approaches to the Gaze.....	6
2.2 Psychological and Cultural Accounts of the Gaze.....	13
3. THE DILEMMA OF THE GAZE IN ANGELA CARTER’S <i>NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS</i>	20
3.1 The Protagonist as Spectacle in <i>Nights at the Circus</i>	23
3.2 The Dilemma of the Protagonist in Relation to the Gaze.....	35
4. THE DILEMMA OF THE GAZE IN ELİF ŞAFAK’S <i>MAHREM (THE GAZE)</i>	44
4.1 The Protagonist as Spectacle in <i>Mahrem (The Gaze)</i>	46
4.2 The Dilemma of the Protagonist in Relation to the Gaze.....	57
5. CONCLUSION.....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	73

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyze Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)* in terms of the theories of the gaze. This study makes use of both feminist and other approaches to the gaze to analyze the predicament of the female protagonists and the dilemma they find themselves in. The thesis argues that in both *Nights at the Circus* and *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, the protagonists find themselves in a dilemma in relation to the influence of the gaze. On the one hand, both protagonists are spectacles in the patriarchal order, and they are seriously disturbed by being the objects of the male gaze. On the other hand, however, they are aware of the inevitability of the gaze. The more they try to rid themselves of the influence of the gaze, the more aware they become of the power of the gaze and the difficulty of existing without it. The thesis will look at how the protagonists deal with this dilemma and to what extent they can find a solution to it.

In order to analyze Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, this study will make use of feminist theories of the gaze which focus on woman's objectification under the male gaze in patriarchal society. The theoretical and critical works that will specifically be used are John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), which is about visual representations and their political and gender-related implications in Western art, and Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which focuses on the use of women's images in classic

Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, since this study will also be focusing on the power of the gaze in life and society, it will also resort to psychological and other cultural accounts of the gaze. More specifically, Sigmund Freud's discussion of scopophilia, Jacques Lacan's evaluation of the role of the gaze in psychosexual development and Michél Foucault's argument concerning the role of the gaze in creating discipline will be part of the theoretical framework of this study. Close textual analysis of both novels will be made within this theoretical framework.

Angela Carter has been chosen in order to analyze the dilemma of the gaze because Angela Carter is a modern woman writer, who is also famous for her feminist sensibility as she always questions received notions of patriarchal understanding. In her novels, she tries to subvert and deconstruct these patriarchal patterns. *Nights at the Circus* is one of the novels in which she deconstructs such patterns and deals with the issue of the gaze. The novel is about a winged woman who works at a circus. Her journey as a woman aerialiste in three different countries is told. She grows up in a brothel and works in a woman's museum as an extraordinary woman figure. At the end, she becomes a winged woman aerialiste at a famous circus and tells her life story to the journalist Walser.

Elif Şafak has been chosen for similar reasons. She is a modern Turkish woman writer who is again known for her feminist sensibility and her questioning and subversive style. In *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, she tells the story of a fat woman who is very self-conscious and who, therefore, is very much involved with issues concerning the gaze. It is also important that Şafak is Turkish: it will be interesting to compare her with an English writer and identify the similarities and differences in which two modern women writers from different parts of the world approach the

gaze. Furthermore, Şafak is not a local Turkish author only. She is a writer with international dimensions; many of her works have been translated into English, and she is known widely abroad, too. The quotations given from *Mahrem (The Gaze)* throughout this study will be taken from the translated edition of the novel published by Marion Boyars in 2006.

In both of the novels this study aims to analyze, the protagonists are exposed to the male gaze. In *Nights at the Circus*, Fevvers, as a winged woman aerialist, is watched by the audience and she also takes pleasure in this. Therefore, being watched is both her occupation and a part of her identity. Similarly, *Mahrem's (The Gaze)* protagonist is a nameless fat woman over one hundred kilos. As she is very fat, she is highly self-aware and disturbed by the gaze of the other people around her. In these novels, both of the protagonists are different and extraordinary characters. One of them is a winged woman, and the other one is an overweight woman so they both present visual abnormality to the reader. In this sense, they are similar to each other.

In both novels although the other characters may also be conducive to an analysis from the perspective of the gaze, this study will be focusing only on the female protagonists. This will help to narrow down the scope of the discussion and allow for a clearer and more unified discussion. Also, *Mahrem (The Gaze)* is made up of two separate-looking narratives. One of these is about Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi and his circus. The first narrative, on the other hand, focuses on the fat woman and her experiences. The analysis in this study will focus mostly on this narrative. Details in the other narrative can also be very convenient for an analysis from the perspective of the gaze and will be referred to briefly when necessary, but a

full focus on this is beyond the scope of this thesis. This study narrows its focus down to the female protagonists only in order to explore the dilemma they experience in relation to the gaze.

Furthermore, since the study will be conducted using a variety of theories of the gaze, no single theory will be dwelt on in great depth and detail. Instead, an overview of these theories will be presented in order to demonstrate how they serve the argument of this thesis. Furthermore, although psychological discussions of the gaze will be a part of the theoretical framework, the thesis will not go too deeply into psychoanalytical accounts. Such discussions and distinctions are not relevant to the purpose of this study and would also be beyond the scope of this thesis.

In the first chapter of this study the theoretical background will be discussed by focusing on feminist and other theories of the gaze. Then Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* will be analyzed in terms of the protagonist's dilemma concerning woman's objectification. Following *Nights at the Circus*, Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)* will be analyzed in this regard and compared with Angela Carter's work. The chapter will attempt to trace the similarities and differences between the two protagonists in the way they approach the gaze. The last chapter will wrap up the discussion together with concluding remarks and make suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

FEMINIST AND OTHER THEORIES OF THE GAZE

Dictionaries define the word ‘gaze’ in similar ways. The Penguin English Dictionary defines the gaze as “to fix the eyes in a steady and intent look” (580). Oxford English Dictionary, on the other hand, says “to look steadily for a long time” (617). Although the gaze appears as just a certain way of looking, the issue is not as simple as it seems. The gaze is not a simple act of vision as defined but an area of research. Looking is not a neutral observation. “Looking and being the object of a look are in themselves a meaning - mediating social activity which in many ways affects us, or, to put in the language of research, the construction of subjectivity” (Seppanen 4). The gaze has a significant influence on our perceptions, sense of identity, personal behavior, and relationships with the others. Furthermore, the gaze implies a hierarchy between the subject who looks and the object who is looked at. The subject is the powerful one, whereas the object is the weaker because the active role belongs to the subject and the passive role belongs to the object. There is an inequality between them. That is why this issue has drawn the attention of researchers in a variety of disciplines such as feminist theory, philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, and film studies.

2.1 Feminist Approaches to the Gaze

Feminist critics have argued in the 1970s that the gaze is dangerous in terms of woman's objectification and power relations because the gaze is cited in male pleasure, desire, and subjectivity. The sign of power and means of control belong to men because they own the gaze. Perhaps the first study that drew the attention of feminist research in this area is John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, which was first published in 1972 and contributed to feminist readings in visual culture. *Ways of Seeing* is a study of Western art and ways of seeing. The book consists of seven articles which criticize culture and visual representations of it in different ways. The book is not written entirely with feminist concerns, but a significant part of it focuses on how women are depicted in popular culture products such as advertisements and paintings. Berger focuses here on the male audience as the ideal audience and the patriarchal ideology behind the visual images in Western artistic representations.

Berger argues that women have been passive objects of representation from the Renaissance to the present. A woman's presence is nothing without a man since the active role belongs to man. He says, "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves" (Berger 38). Thus, not only men but also women objectify themselves as they are under the effect of the patriarchal male gaze. Woman gradually loses her own sight. There is a kind of assimilation into the male gaze.

In this study Berger also explains how the male gaze has controlled and subjected women. As the male gaze is active and dynamic, it creates a limited position for woman, which is filled with sexual desires, pleasure, and beauty.

Woman has certain roles, and she has to realize only these passive roles. Thus, the male gaze specifies the social visual norms. According to this, woman's and man's presence is defined:

The social presence of woman is different in kind from that of man. A man's presence is striking. The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual – but its object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. He pretends to be capable of what he is not. But the pretence is always towards a power which he exercises on others (Berger 37).

So, a man's presence means a multi-dimensional power exercise that makes him a powerful subject in the environment because he has the power over everything and is capable of directing this power. Male subjectivity forces him to use his power for the others. Woman's situation, however, is different:

By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste – indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost accompanied by her own image of herself (Berger 37).

Unlike a man's presence, woman's presence is totally related with herself. Her presence is intrinsic, that is, natural. Her social presence is limited with herself because she has to watch her own image at every moment of life. Berger resembles this process to a long survey. She not only watches herself but also how she appears to the others. Actually, this is very important for identity formation since how she appears to others will determine how the others will treat her. In this case, Berger gives the example of glass. If a woman throws a glass suddenly, this refers to

something intrinsic to the woman. This specifies a certain kind of treatment she would expect to receive, again putting her in a passive position. However, if a man throws a glass suddenly, this shows expression of anger (Berger 37). The reactions are determined and analyzed according to a person's sex. This means that there are specific roles for both man and woman in a society which are regulated by patriarchal norms. Society evaluates a person's behavior according to his/her sex and responds according to this.

This also exemplifies how the dominant gaze is male, dominating and controlling the female. For a woman, being an object of the male gaze is inevitable. Man looks at woman and woman is looked at by man. The problem is an increasing hierarchy between the spectator and the spectacle, that is, between man and woman. At the end, woman becomes an object of patriarchal vision. Within this heterosexual division she becomes the passive side whereas man becomes the active side. Actually such a division not only creates a hierarchy between the two sexes but also contributes to the continuation of patriarchy like a vicious circle and a trap. Man's active participation will lead to woman's passive and limited position as spectacle and woman provides an ornamental passive look because woman's beauty has been the most important thing since the Renaissance.

Following John Berger, Laura Mulvey analyzed the gaze in the context of cinema from a feminist perspective and she focused specifically on Hollywood movies. Laura Mulvey's well-known article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", was first published in 1975. In this article, Mulvey discusses the influence of the male gaze on classic Hollywood cinema by drawing attention to the opposition between the active male and the passive female in Hollywood movies.

Basically, Mulvey argues that in culture as well as in cinema pleasure is organized to console the male ego and for this purpose women are used deliberately. Within the socially constructed order, patriarchy controls the images that are created and contributes to erotic ways of looking and hence to pleasure:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning (Mulvey 15).

Laura Mulvey criticizes the silent, passive, and sexy image of woman, which makes her subordinate to her male counterpart because the image of the woman is identified with erotic pleasure, and is derived mainly from beauty and sexuality. Therefore, woman's images are used for the desire of the male audience. Woman, who holds the look, signifies the male desire, becomes the spectacle, whereas man becomes the spectator. In this process, man looks at woman with his male gaze and woman watches herself being looked at. Consequently, the male gaze renders the woman passive and controls and subjects woman (Visser 283). This creates a sexual imbalance between active male and passive female. Patriarchy ensures that women are used as sexual objects for the sake of giving pleasure to a superior male audience.

Furthermore, man does not want to be the object of the gaze in any way and Hollywood cinema has been structured to protect man in this regard, contributing to this heterosexual division. Mulvey claims that

The male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. The split between the spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy as the bearer of the look of the spectator. A male movie star's

glamorous characteristics are not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more powerful ideal ego (Mulvey 20).

As the movie spectator identifies with the male protagonist, s/he adopts his look. Woman also starts to look with a male gaze. She is influenced by the male protagonist and “becomes his property, losing her outward characteristics, her generalized sexuality; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too” (Mulvey 21-22). Thanks to the active look of the male protagonist, he controls the events. Woman should not be involved as a controller because she is a serious threat. The problem is that woman’s active participation would symbolize castration and threaten male subjectivity, power and dominance. In this sense, woman’s active participation should be limited as much as possible. Otherwise, it will be against the patriarchal heterosexual division of gender roles.

Laura Mulvey’s criticism of the gaze and her contribution to feminist film theory in this respect have been very influential, causing the proliferation of feminist studies of the gaze, not just in film studies but also in cultural studies in general and in literary studies in particular. Literary theorists and critics have also criticized the male gaze from a feminist perspective. They have argued that male literary history and male tradition have dominated woman’s literary creativity and tradition. Adrienne Rich says that “No male writer has written primarily or even largely for woman, or with the sense of women’s criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language” (Rich 485-486). Therefore, literature is dominated by the male gaze and a male-centered way of thinking, which leads to women’s repression. Also, in literary texts women are shown in certain patterns -

primarily as angel and monster - which can again be regarded as the representation of the male gaze. Male authors and artists represent women within these patterns as passive, submissive, and limited. These images also affect women readers, and if a woman feels that she does not fit any one of these categories, she feels guilty. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that such “extreme images of angel and monster which male authors have generated for her” should be examined by a woman writer (Gilbert and Gubar 596).

The dominant male gaze has affected literary texts profoundly and women’s literature has been subsumed by the dominant male literature. In her study of American literature, *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterley “argues that not only is the gaze male, but classic American literature is male, and its readers are trained to adopt the male gaze” (qtd. in Visser 284). For this reason, feminist critics all agree that an alternative reading and looking is necessary for engendering the understanding which is very important for women’s identity. For example, Adrienne Rich suggests that “revision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (Rich 483-484). Such a revision will not only provide self-knowledge for women but also lead to the refusal of the male-dominated gaze and patriarchy. Women’s writing will have importance because if women revise and re-read early texts, they can reconstruct their own position in literature. In this sense, Hélène Cixous calls for the female gaze, which is “creative, liberatory, associative, dialogic, based on principles of respect and pleasure” (Visser 285). Due to such awareness, women can both be more aware concerning literary history and hence more independent in creating their own artworks. Feminist

awareness has to be destructive of patriarchy, deconstructive, and revisionary for women. As Visser suggests, “The pleasures of the feminist gaze have been set out as deconstructive and reconstructive: of exposing and undermining the regime of the male gaze and of bringing to the centre those texts ignored and or suppressed under this regime” (Visser 285). There should be an alternative for the male gaze and its controlling power mechanism on society, especially on women. Thanks to revision and reconstruction, there would be a chance to analyze older texts and write new works with an entirely new and critical approach. Many scholars of literature have been influenced by these theories and focused on the rule of the gaze in literary texts. Also, modern women authors have attempted to write in this way. Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* is such an example, which is a re-writing of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* from a feminist perspective. Here Rhys focuses on the repressed Antoinette Mason and her experiences. In *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette is the mad wife of Edward Rochester shut up in an attic but in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the focus is primarily on the life story of this repressed and silenced woman. It can be said that the effect of the male gaze is quite powerful in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* as Jane sees the events mainly from a male perspective. This also shows how patriarchy has the potential to lead even women to adopt a male gaze, which should normally be foreign to them. Jean Rhys, however, as a modern and aware woman writer, re-writes *Jane Eyre*. The women authors and their works that this study aims to analyze are also such texts written with a feminist awareness and an awareness of the dangers of the patriarchal gaze.

2.2 Psychological and Cultural Accounts of the Gaze

In spite of all these attempts on the part of feminist theorists, critics, and authors to expose the gaze as a tool of patriarchy, there is still a significant problem and a dilemma involved here, which requires serious attention. The gaze is not something that can be easily discarded since it is everywhere and very powerful. It is there for both women and men creating a sense of existence and identity. Berger, in his study, also focuses on this aspect of the gaze:

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also other sense in which seeing becomes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it (qtd. in Seppanen 68).

An individual looks from one point but s/he is looked at from all over. In this respect, to be looked-at-ness is a multidimensional process. There is no limitation, so the gaze is everywhere. A person watches and is watched by others. Looking is necessary because by looking, a person can be identified easily. Seeing is the first condition of perceiving and believing. Otherwise, words would not be enough to comprehend the world fully. In this sense, the power of the gaze starts from childhood. The infant recognizes him/herself thanks to the gaze at the beginning. To be seen is necessary for identity formation because the human psyche needs to be looked at in order to have a sense of identity.

Furthermore, though unhealthy, the gaze can sometimes become pleasurable. Sigmund Freud touches upon this issue in his book *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). He introduces the term “scopophilia”, which means love of watching. Freud introduces the term primarily as a drive appearing in the anal stage

of psychosexual development. This is the time when the child directs its attention “towards an extraneous object” (J. L. Russo 137) and subjects it to his “controlling and curious gaze” (Mahon 1). This drive should not make itself apparent in a healthily developed adult, but it can still be observed as a psychological problem and perversity among many adults, and especially among men in patriarchal society. Laura Mulvey also explains that scopophilia has a narcissistic aspect for drawing attention to the human form and getting pleasure from the image. According to this, “sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other” (Mulvey 46). In Mulvey’s words, “His [Freud’s] particular examples centre on the voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and forbidden” (Mulvey 17). In her discussion, Mulvey focuses on the effect of patriarchy here as the male gaze objectifies women through scopophilia. Men are the bearers of the look, so woman’s position is like an erotic leitmotif. Patriarchal society, then, promotes this unhealthy situation, encouraging the pleasure of looking especially for men. Sometimes, this may even be the case for women, who unknowingly adopt and internalize patriarchal norms.

As a later psychologist, Jacques Lacan was also interested in the gaze and its role and importance in identity formation. His theory of psychosexual development following Sigmund Freud also draws attention to the gaze. He suggested a psychological and linguistic model for the human being’s entrance to the social order which eventually provides an imaginary perception of the self. Lacan divides psychosexual development into two stages. These are the Imaginary and the Symbolic Order.

The Imaginary is the earliest stage of development. At this stage, the infant cannot distinguish itself from the mother and the environment. There is a symbiotic relationship with the mother in which boundaries are lost. The infant wants to satisfy its needs with oneness or fullness as there is a strong connection to the mother. Since there are no boundaries, the infant does not have a clear identity. In this sense, Jacques Lacan uses the “l’hommelette” metaphor, which means in French the combination of “little man” and “omelette”, suggesting the nature of the infants’ identity. Identity is dispersed like an omlette and there is no clear conception of the self (Madran 87).

After six months, the mirror stage starts.

The child who is still physically uncoordinated, finds reflected back to itself in the mirror a gratifyingly unified image of itself; and although its relation to this image is still of an imaginary kind-the image in the mirror both is and is not itself, a blurring of subject and object still obtains- it has begun the process of constructing a centre of self. This self is essentially narcissistic: we arrive at a sense of an ‘I’ by finding that ‘I’ reflected back to ourselves by some object or person in the world (Eagleton 164).

The identification with the image in the mirror is a part of us. The child misrecognizes it as representing its identity. For Bertens this “misrecognition is the basis for what we see as our identity. Our subjectivity is constructed in interaction with others. We become subjects under the gaze of the other” (Bertens 126-127). Imaginary identifications will shape its identity as the infant grows up. “Identity is the product of a series of partial identifications, never completed” (Culler 114). This stage is influential for identity formation, which is caused by the infant’s misrecognition of itself in the mirror. Although the image in the mirror can never fully represent the infant and can never fully reflect its identity, the infant still needs

this image for a sense of self. This points to the necessity of the gaze for a sense of identity, even though this may be an imaginary one:

In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. (qtd. in Seppanen 76).

For Lacan, subjectivity coincides with the image in the mirror. By looking in the mirror, we start to form our sense of self. Similarly, when somebody looks at us, this contributes to our sense of identity. This sense is illusory but still necessary. The gaze, therefore, has a dimension that is necessary for self-perception. As Beth Newman also points out, “Though another’s look can be experienced as threatening – as a bid for mastery or an assertion of power – that other’s look is also necessary to one’s sense of self” (Newman 45).

It is with the gradual formation of identity that the child can enter the Symbolic Order and become a part of society. Following the Mirror Stage, the Symbolic Order starts which is related with language. When the baby acquires the language, it also accepts the name of the father which symbolizes restrictions, power, and control. Actually the mirror is a metaphor for the human being through all of life, not just childhood. As Morris points out, “This is an intellectual and visual cognizance of self as a specular image which could originate in an actual mirror reflection, or a reflection in its mother’s eyes, or even an image of self projected on to another small child” (Morris 103). The imaginary perception of the self is thus established, so we need other people’s look in order to have a sense of identity and

personality, no matter how illusory. Therefore, the gaze is very hard to discard, even when perceived as a patriarchal threat.

In addition to the pleasurable quality of the gaze and its relationship with having a sense of identity in patriarchal society, the gaze is also related to social order and discipline. In a modern, civilized society, looking serves as a discipline and controlling mechanism. The gaze is an effective tool in creating this. Michel Foucault is an important name who has dealt with this social aspect of the gaze by analyzing Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon model. Jeremy Bentham was a social reformist and English philosopher, also known as the founder of pragmatism, and he was famous for designing the panopticon model for prisons in the nineteenth century. The design of the panopticon is very important in this analysis because with its circular architecture, the panopticon is a discipline mechanism.

The building is circular. The apartments of the prisoners occupy the circumference. You may call them the cells. These cells are divided from one another, and the prisoners by that means secluded from all communication with each other. The apartment of the inspector occupies the centre, the inspector's lodge. Each cell has in the outward circumference a window large enough to the corresponded part of the lodge (Bozovic 35).

The point is, the prisoners cannot communicate with each other or the inspector. They think that the inspector is watching them in the tower all the time but this is not certain. The prisoners have to stage their own guilt without knowing whether they are watched or not permanently. The key concept is "the gaze" again because "It is for the gaze of the innocent – that is for the gaze of those to be deterred from offences – that the guilt of the prisoners in the panopticon is staged" (Bozovic 6). In the panopticon the gaze provides a kind of a discipline and order mechanism. If the guilty person's punishment is exhibited, innocent people will be discouraged

from committing similar offences undesired by the social order and the dominant ideology.

Furthermore, the panopticon model has another dimension. Feeling that they are under the inspector's gaze all the time, the prisoners behave properly and do not engage in actions that could disturb the order. Even if the inspector is watching them or not, the prisoners feel that they are being watched. The inspector's Godlike quality gives the effect of discipline and order through observation and examination. For this reason, the inspector's lantern produces the gaze and the gaze produces the effect of discipline on people. This can also serve as a kind of metaphor for life in general. Although Bentham's model is for a specific purpose, it can be used as a metaphor to apply to all society. In our daily lives when we feel the gaze, we feel its power and act more in line with the requirements of the social order and dominant ideology. Foucault says that the panopticon has been useful in the creation of a modern society. The dominant ideology exercises power in this way and it is very difficult to escape this gaze. "Foucault not only is interested in the origin and development of prisons but also wants to show how the disciplines, as they were implemented or even only imagined, were applied to a broader social setting" (Ransom 33). The effect of discipline and order is, then, created by observation and examination. In this respect, the gaze is everywhere and hard to get rid of. Furthermore, we internalize the gaze and learn to discipline ourselves in line with the dictates of the dominant system. As David Lyon suggests, "The panoptic urge is to make everything visible, it is the desire and the drive towards a total gaze, to fix the body through technique and to generate regimes of self-discipline" (Lyon 44). The power of visibility and the gaze provides self-discipline for people and guarantees the continuation of social order.

In the light of this discussion, it is now clear that the gaze is a highly complex issue. In the 1970s, feminists started to discuss the effects of the gaze. Due to the gaze woman is objectified by man. Therefore, man becomes the active and woman becomes the passive side. Women are shown as erotic spectacles so critics such as John Berger and Laura Mulvey argued that images are organized for the male ego. These arguments are all valid and very important, but this discussion has also shown that escaping the gaze completely is almost impossible. The gaze is everywhere and it is a very effective patriarchal tool not only to create a sense of identity but also to maintain discipline and ideology. The rest of this study will analyze this dilemma as depicted in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)*. It will try to demonstrate how the protagonists of both novels are on the one hand seriously disturbed by the patriarchal influence of the gaze while they are aware on the other hand, of the difficulty and even impossibility of escaping gaze altogether. This dilemma, which the protagonists live through, will be analyzed through a close reading of both novels.

The next chapter will discuss Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* in terms of the female protagonist Fevvers' dilemma of being the object of the gaze as an aerialist winged woman. After that the thesis will focus on Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)* by evaluating the nameless female protagonist, who is very fat. As she is an overweight woman, she does not want to be looked at but at the same time she goes through a similar dilemma, enjoying the gaze and feeling the dominance of the gaze and its necessity for a sense of self. This discussion will eventually point to not only the role and influence of the gaze in patriarchal society but also the immense difficulty for women of rejecting the gaze altogether.

CHAPTER 3

THE DILEMMA OF THE GAZE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *NIGHTS AT THE CIRCUS*

Nights at the Circus is unique in its depiction of relationships between women as spectacle, and women as producers of spectacle (149).

The Fiction of Angela Carter
Sarah Gamble

The gaze is not a simple act of vision but a powerful tool of control and dominance. It is closely related with the construction of gender and patriarchy because the gaze is claimed to be used by men against women. As John Berger and Laura Mulvey suggest, the gaze is cited within male pleasure and desire. Men look at women, and similarly women watch themselves through male eyes. For this purpose, women are objectified and used as objects of the male gaze. As woman becomes the passive spectacle, man becomes the bearer of the look and the active spectator. This chapter will first focus on woman's objectification within the male gaze by analyzing Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. It will then explore how the novel presents this as a highly complex issue by focusing on the dilemma the protagonist goes through in relation to the gaze.

Angela Carter is an important contemporary author, who writes with a feminist awareness. In her novels, she uses the themes of women's liberation, social

formation, resistance to patriarchy, gender and its construction in patriarchal society, male power, deconstruction of femininity and masculinity, female body and experience. *Nights at the Circus* was first published in 1984. As a fantastic novel, it is an example of magic realism, making its feminist statements through magical elements. The novel is about Sophie Fevvers, a winged woman and a famous aerialist, and her adventures. It is composed of three parts set at three different geographical locations. The novel starts in London, continues in St. Petersburg, and ends in Siberia. In Part I, Fevvers meets Jack Walser in London. As a journalist, he has come for an interview. Throughout this part, she tells her life story as a winged woman to Jack Walser. In Part II, Walser decides to follow Fevvers on her circus tour to St. Petersburg so that he can write an impressive news story about her. He takes a job as a clown in Colonel Kearney's circus, and the reader is told about his as well as Fevvers' and other characters' adventures in St. Petersburg. In Part III, Fevvers and Walser travel to Siberia with the circus. During the travel, their train is attacked by ex-convicts who call themselves "brotherhood of free men", and who want the help of Fevvers, thinking she is related to the Queen. After the attack, many of them die; the remaining ones are kidnapped and find themselves among the ex-convicts in an isolated area. Walser remains behind, lost under the train rubbish. Then, he is found by women who have just escaped from a panopticon prison. They want to use Walser in order to establish their own female community, but Walser has lost his memory and has become child-like. Then, Walser is found by a Shaman and lives with him. At that time, one of Fevvers' wings is broken and she cannot fly properly anymore. She understands that she has fallen in love with Walser. However, she cannot find Walser for a long period of time. Eventually the two find each other

and the novel ends with their marriage and Fevvers' laughter. Then, a new century starts.

3.1 The Protagonist as Spectacle in *Nights at the Circus*

As Easton suggests, “[Angela] Carter identified herself as a feminist, and saw her writing and life as informed by feminist principles” (Easton 2). *Nights at the Circus* is a symbolic novel in which feminist elements are clearly observable. There is the deconstruction of patriarchy and patriarchal norms through symbols and allegories. In the novel, the issue of the gaze is very vivid. The female protagonist, Fevvers, is an aerialist who works at a circus and is watched permanently by the audience. She is apparently the object of the look. Because of her extraordinary body, she presents it as a visual material to the audience, who come to watch her. Therefore, she is objectified due to her physical qualities as well as her profession.

Fevvers is a giant woman who is very tall and weighted. She seems bigger than a well-built man. When the skeptical American journalist Jack Walser comes for an interview, which will contribute to his series of interviews titled, “Great Humbugs of the World”, he is surprised because as an aerialist, Fevvers should be slimmer and shorter. However, she seems bigger than Walser. It is expected that she should be like an angel owing to her wings but she has such a giant body that nobody resembles her to an angel:

At close quarters, it must be said that she looked more like a dray mare than an angel. At six feet two in her stockings, she would have to give Walser a couple of inches in order to match him and, though they said she was ‘divinely tall’, there was, off stage, not much of the divine about her unless there were gin palaces in heaven where she might preside behind the bar. Her face, broad and oval as a meat dish, had been thrown on a common wheel out of coarse clay; nothing subtle about her appeal, which was just as well if she were to function as the democratically elected divinity of the imminent century of the Common Man (Carter 9).

Fevvers' face is not extraordinarily beautiful, either. She has an oval face with an exaggerated make-up. When her make-up is cleaned, she becomes like a representative of the "common man". In this respect, Walser watches her very carefully because if he understands that she is lying, he will report it in his news story. His aim is "to 'puff' her; and, if it is humanly possible, to explode her" (Carter 9). It can be said that the closest audience who watches her like an interesting object is Walser. He is fascinated by her huge appearance as a woman. When they are alone in Fevvers' room in London, he feels this: "As she raised her arms, Walser, confronted by stubbled, thickly powdered armpits, felt faint; God! She could easily crush him to death in her huge arms, although he was a big man with the strength of Californian sunshine distilled in his limbs" (Carter 57). In a sense, he is disturbed by her strong and big body despite his own well-built body. She is beyond standards so this situation creates a physical strangeness. Although Walser feels awe and is disturbed, still she becomes a spectacle in his eyes as in everybody's eyes. It is as though Walser knowingly or unknowingly uses a typical patriarchal strategy. By making her a spectacle, he overcomes the fear and the sense of threat he feels when she is near. As a woman and because of her profession, Fevvers seems doomed to this situation.

In addition to her huge body, Fevvers has wings like a bird. She has both arms and wings. Walser cannot believe her because he thinks that "wings without arms is one impossible thing; but wings with arms is the impossible made doubly unlikely-the impossible squared" (Carter 13). In order to prove the reality of her extraordinary physical appearance, Fevvers starts to tell her life story to Walser. She has been found and raised by Lizzie who works in a brothel. Lizzie first notices that she has

yellow fluffs on her back. Seven years later, she starts to feel an irritation and itch on her back. At the end, they understand that her wings are growing. From then on, she becomes a visual material due to her grotesque body and wings. She represents the fetishistic object of the male gaze. As Gamble points out, “the unique peculiarities of Fevvers’s wings make her more vulnerable than most women to being considered purely in terms of ‘form’. Throughout the book, they become the focus for male speculation, and thus function as a way in which the impulse to inscribe transcendental meanings upon the surface of the female body can be satirized” (Gamble, Angela Carter 159).

The novel begins with a detailed description of the American journalist Jack Walser watching Fevvers. Although he has come just for an interview, he is so impressed by her that he decides to join Colonel Kearney’s Circus in order to follow her. At the circus, he gets a job as a clown who is inexperienced and awkward. His primary aim is to prepare a news story about her, but he cannot help falling in love with her either. Throughout this journey, he becomes the spectator who watches Fevvers as a winged woman aerialist. He objectifies her from the beginning to the end. The first thing that he sees is the poster that shows off Fevvers by using the slogan, “Is she fact or is she fiction?” (Carter 3).

Something hectic, something fittingly impetuous and dashing about that poster, the preposterous depiction of a young woman shooting up like a rocket, whee! In a burst of agitated sawdust towards an unseen trapeze somewhere above in the wooden heavens of the Cirqued’Hiver. And she was a big girl (Carter 4).

Walser looks at the poster and thinks whether she is real or not because in the poster, the artist had drawn her with huge and colorful wings like a rocket in the air.

When he looks at her, he sees that the wings are trembling under her blue robe. Therefore, Walser tries to identify her by looking at the poster and asks himself, “How does she do that?” (Carter 4). According to the journalist, Fevvers is a visual material who takes people’s interest due to her bird-like body. Mary Russo suggests that “A woman with wings, she is no ordinary angel – if there could be such a thing – but rather an exhilarating example of the ambivalent, awkward, and sometimes painfully conflictual configuration of the female grotesque” (M. Russo 137). Everything about her is related with her visual qualities such as her size and her wings. She presents an interesting visual material to the audience, and the audience watches her like an object. Actually the aim of the poster is objectifying the person. Fevvers is objectified within patriarchal culture through such a poster because she is represented in a very colorful and attractive way, and “she didn’t let you forget it for a minute” (Carter 3). Walser is affected by the poster and wants to question her. The poster artist has depicted her “in a steatopygous perspective, shaking out about her those tremendous red and purple pinions, pinions large enough, powerful enough to bear up such a big girl as she” (Carter 4). She is so attractive that she can affect everybody very quickly in the poster. She is not only a big woman but also a winged woman, who may disturb the male audience as a threat in a patriarchal society. Her becoming a spectacle can be considered in the light of the need to suppress this sense of threat. Walser’s obsessive curiosity about her can also be interpreted in this way.

Fevvers’ first show on the stage of the Alhambra is one of the important parts of the book in which Fevvers totally dedicates herself to the show as a colorful spectacle in front of the audience.

LOOK AT ME! She rose up on tiptoe and slowly twirled round, giving the spectators a comprehensive view of her back: seeing is believing. Then she spread out her superb, heavy arms in a backwards gesture of benediction and her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully six feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess on the same diet that makes flamingoes pink (Carter 13).

The audience and Walser, all look at Fevvers and her magnificent wings with astonishment. Especially Walser cannot believe her because he compares Fevvers' body with a bird's body. She has a normal human body together with wings. Moreover, her motions are slower than an ordinary aerialist on the air. She should be very fast and fluent. When she is performing the triple somersault in the air, she is very slow, and Walser feels as if he is watching a film sequence in slow motion. In addition to her huge body, her slowness takes the audience's attraction, too. "What made her remarkable as an *aerialiste*, however, was the speed – or rather the lack of it with which she performed even the climactic triple somersault" (Carter 15). Although Walser suspects her, he watches very carefully. She is not fast "so that the packed theatre could enjoy the spectacle, as in slow motion, of every tense muscle straining in her Rubenesque form" (Carter 15). Walser cannot decide whether she is real or not. However, Fevvers wants him to believe what he sees as seeing is believing. As Laura Mulvey suggests, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 47-48). In this situation, Fevvers takes the exhibitionist role as a woman and she is watched in this way by the male audience at the circus.

Fevvers is not only an aerialist at the circus but also an ornamental object in various instances throughout her life. She has been used in different places for

different purposes as a spectacle. When she is seven years old, Lizzie and Ma Nelson, who is the owner of the brothel, see the fluffs on her back, and Nelson resembles her to Cupid, the God of love, as they both have wings on their back. Nelson gives her a toy bow and arrow and wants her to become an ornamental object in front of the eyes of the male clients of the brothel. This is the first job which makes her a spectacle when she is seven years old. She says,

It was my job to sit in the alcove of the drawing-room in which the ladies introduced themselves to the gentlemen. Cupid, I was. And for seven long years, sir, I was nought but the painted, gilded *sign* of love, and you might say, that so it was I served my apprenticeship in *being looked at* – at being the object of the eye of the beholder (Carter 22-23).

Until her menstruation period starts, she sits in the shape of Cupid like a sign and serves for the male clients like a picture on the wall. She has been the natural object of the gaze due to her physical qualities. As John Berger points out, “Men act women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object-an object of vision: a sight” (Berger 38). In this respect, Fevvers becomes the object of the gaze at seven years old. After her wings spread out, she takes on another role in the brothel, that is, Winged Victory.

Ma Nelson notices that their little bird is changing day by day. Fevvers says, “We threw away the bow and arrow and I posed, for the first time, as the Winged Victory, for, as you can see, I am designed on the grand scale and, even at fourteen, you could have made two Lizzies out of me” (Carter 25). As a big girl, Fevvers

becomes the Victory statue in the brothel. Although the statue of Winged Victory seems like a development in Fevvers' life, she is still a spectacle for the male gaze ironically. She says, "I played the living statue all my girlhood" (Carter 26). As Gamble suggests, "Fevvers will no longer pose as Cupid with a bow and arrow, but will now act as the Winged Victory, a static performance of her femininity 'on the grand scale', but hardly a pure or transformative vision" (Gamble, *The Fiction of A. Carter* 150). This transformation cannot take her out of the male gaze. She is still a fetishistic object in the brothel. Again, as Laura Mulvey suggests, men are the active bearers of the look whereas women are the passive objects of the look. Fevvers is watched permanently in different costumes and she serves as an ornamental object on the first floor of the drawing room. By saying, "I played the living statue all my girlhood", Fevvers proves her objectification in the brothel (Carter 26). From fourteen to seventeen years old, she is the winged victory of the house. She says, "I existed only as an object in men's eyes after the night time knocking on the door began" (Carter 42). Similar to what Laura Mulvey suggests, she carries the burden of sexual objectification as a female figure. Fevvers is the passive one who is the spectacle. She watches herself being looked at, which leads to a sexual imbalance between men and women through the gaze.

After being the Winged Victory, Fevvers becomes a part of a museum. When Ma Nelson, the owner of the brothel, dies, Fevvers and Lizzie's lives change dramatically. The women who work at the brothel leave one by one. At that time, Fevvers and Lizzie cannot earn money, and they are almost penniless. Madame Schreck, who seems like a strange woman, offers her a job by saying, "I want you for my museum of woman monsters" (Carter 61). Although the people around her do

not approve of such a job in the museum, Fevvers accepts it for the sake of money. “Female figures such as Madame Schreck, ‘the scarecrow of desire’, organize and distribute images of other women for the visual market” (Gamble, *The Fiction of A. Carter* 149). Her job is to show off her body. The other spectacles in the museum are, as Fevvers says, “Dear old Fanny Four-Eyes; and the Sleeping Beauty; and the Wiltshire Wonder, who was not three foot high; and Albert/ Albertina, who was bipartite, that is to say, half and half and neither of either; and the girl we called Cobwebs” (Carter 66). Actually, she has to join such a museum for the sake of money as patriarchal society does not leave any other way out.

Male clients come to the museum every night and wear their costumes in line with their fantasies. Then, they can visit the “Black Theatre” in which they can have sex with some of the women such as Albert/Albertina or Wiltshire Wonder. When Walser asks about what she used to do there, Fevvers says “The Sleeping Beauty lay stark naked on a marble slab and I stood at her head, full spread. I am the tombstone angel, I am the Angel of Death” (Carter 79). The Sleeping Beauty and Fevvers are the “tableaux vivants” of the museum who use just their appearances. Like the other women in the museum, Fevvers shows off her wings to the male clients who come every night in order to observe different women “monsters”. She is watched like a passive object by the male clients as in her previous jobs. As Russo suggests,

Fevvers has performed in meretricious spectacles her entire life, beginning with the tableaux staged in Ma Nelson’s whorehouse and moving on to a less hospitable institution, the Museum of Female Monsters, directed by the gruesome Madame Schreck, who kept her anatomical performers in niches in an underground cave, stacked like wine bottles, for private viewings (M. Russo 137).

Fevvers exhibits herself in order to satisfy male desire because she is in the position of a visual material in a museum. Due to her different body, she is evaluated in the category of “women monsters”. That is why she has been chosen by Madame Schreck. Not only Fevvers but also the other women monsters are gazed at by the male gaze as they are exhibited by the owner of the museum. They are all silent and passive. Their visual qualities are foregrounded in such an exhibition. Actually “Fevvers is imprisoned by the male gaze” (Sceats 87). Also, such a female monsters museum has the implication of the patriarchal idea of the “femme fatale”, who is terrifying but is still kept under control by the male. In order to keep women under control, such stereotypical images are used by men deliberately. The women in the museum are all objectified and hence suppressed, no longer posing a threat to male dominance.

While working at Madame Schreck’s museum, Fevvers meets a rich man named Christian Rosencreutz who resembles her to Azrael. As a very rich man, Christian Rosencreutz has everything but as he wants to be immortal, he needs the body of Azrael so he wants to use Fevvers’ body in order to take the essence from her. She says, “He tells me how he thinks that, by uniting his body with that of Azrael, the Angel of Death, on the threshold of the spring, he would cheat death itself and live forever while Flora herself will be forever free of winter’s chill” (Carter 91). Rosencreutz thinks that Fevvers has such a flora in her and if he sacrifices her, it will be his essence. Therefore, he persuades Fevvers to sexual unification, but Fevvers understands at the last moment that he intends to kill her. However, when she is about to be killed by Rosencreutz, she uses her sword, which she always keeps hidden on herself, and escapes from his house. He attacks and stabs

her on her foot. At the end, she is injured. This time Fevvers is used as an object due to her extraordinary body which will contribute to a man's immortality. Actually not only immortality but also Rosencreutz's patriarchal wish for eternal power force him to kill her.

Throughout her life, Fevvers is the object of the male gaze. She is gazed at and used as a tool of pleasure. The Grand Duke is another man who tries to exploit Fevvers before she goes to Siberia with the circus staff. As a wealthy man, the Grand Duke invites her to dinner by offering a lot of money. Fevvers cannot reject such a big offer because she earns her life by showing off her extraordinary body to wealthy men. She has the feeling that she is in control of the events around her and does not question it. Lizzie says, "All you can do to earn your living is to make a show of yourself. You're doomed to that. You must give pleasure of the eye, or else you're good for nothing" (Carter 217). When she goes to the Grand Duke's house, she sees an ice-sculpture and understands that the sculpture is in the shape of herself. She is fascinated by the image of the sculpture because it carries a precious necklace. Therefore, as a woman, she also becomes an art object in the eyes of men. Actually, the Grand Duke is a collector who collects art objects and exhibits them. He likes especially extraordinary objects. Fevvers is very convenient to this gallery as an extraordinary creature as she is half-bird and half-woman. For this reason, the Grand Duke wants her to become a part of his gallery. "The gallery was lined with glass cases lit up in such an ingeniously subdued way that each one glowed like a distinct little world. 'My eggs' said the Grand Duke, 'are full of surprises'" (Carter 222). Then, he starts to show the objects within the glass boxes on condition that she shows him her wings. Again, Fevvers is under the control of the male hegemony

through the gaze. He just watches her wings without touching them. They look at all the glass boxes and the last white golden box shocks Fevvers: "It contained a cage made out of gold wires with, inside, a little perch of rubies and of sapphires and of diamonds, the good old red, white and blue. The cage was empty. No bird stood on that perch, yet" (Carter 225). As soon as she understands the Grand Duke's cruel plans, she is disturbed and afraid of being imprisoned by him because the Grand Duke breaks her little sword, too. Therefore, she becomes defenseless. At the end, she escapes from his palace with great difficulty and goes to Siberia with Colonel Kearney's circus. This time she realizes that she cannot really escape and use this patriarchal power because she is a part of it, and although she wants to believe the opposite, she is always the weaker, exploited side of the system.

The men who see Fevvers as a spectacle are not only eccentric people like Christian Rosencreutz or the Grand Duke; Colonel Kearney, the owner of the circus, also sees her as a spectacle in the circus. He uses Fevvers as an extraordinary woman who foregrounds her visual qualities. He makes money out of her, foregrounding her unique qualities to the audience. Furthermore, she attracts him, and the Colonel starts to look at her from a masculine perspective: "The Colonel doffs his billy-cock hat with delighted glee as Fevvers, looking not in the least like India-rubber but very much flesh for the Prince of Wales. She is as ugly a walker as an unhorsed Valkyrie but her amazing curves promise delights of which the Colonel often dreams" (Carter 175). In a typical male fashion, the Colonel objectifies her sexually and dreams about her curves. "The Colonel's admiration for Fevvers grew in direct ratio to her indifference and the advance bookings" (Carter 176). Fevvers is not only a spectacle at the circus, but she also becomes an erotic leitmotif for the owner of the circus.

From the beginning until the end, Fevvers has been the object of the male gaze, fascinating everybody with her extraordinary female form. For this reason, she offers pleasure to the male audience who watch her. As Laura Mulvey points out, there is a pleasure in looking, that is, scopophilia. Fevvers represents the object of the curious gaze in every event due to her body. She is watched by the male audience as a silent and passive spectacle. In the brothel, the male clients watch her in two different positions: as Cupid, the God of love, and as the Winged Victory. In the circus, she is watched by the audience and the American journalist Jack Walser. Then, she becomes a part of Madame Schreck's Museum of Female Monsters, and Christian Rosencreutz wants to become immortal through her. Similarly, the Grand Duke wants to make her a part of his gallery. The male gaze affects and controls her profoundly throughout her life. Fevvers is directly related with male scopophilia because she gives pleasure to the male audience who watches her in different locations and circumstances. She is the object of the gaze because the male audience who holds the look is the active side; she has been the object of the look as the passive side. In this respect, the gaze creates an imbalance between the spectacle and its spectators. As Peach suggests, "The male protagonists impose on Fevvers, stereotypical interpretations of femininity invented by a patriarchal culture: 'Angel of death', 'queen of ambiguities', 'spectacle', and 'freak'" (Peach 141). For this reason, Fevvers is the object of a typical patriarchal gaze due to her extraordinary body.

3.2 The Dilemma of the Protagonist in Relation to the Gaze

Reading *Nights at the Circus* from a feminist perspective, the reader is seriously disturbed by Fevvers' situation of being the object of the gaze. Furthermore, she herself is sometimes disturbed by this, trying to regard herself as independent, unique, and 'above' the patriarchal system. Perhaps her eventual aim is to use the system, earn enough money and live happily, but throughout the novel both the reader and Fevvers realize that the issue is much more complicated than that. The rest of this chapter will focus on this.

It has been discussed in the previous chapter that the gaze does not just involve men objectifying women but that it also serves as an important patriarchal tool to create a sense of self and a sense of discipline. This aspect of the gaze can also be observed in the novel.

The previous section focused on how Fevvers is watched and turned into a spectacle all the time. However, the novel also presents Fevvers herself as enjoying to watch the other people and especially the men around her. This brings to mind Freud's discussion of scopophilia. Fevvers seems to have a scopophilic tendency that urges her to watch people. In this regard, Fevvers seems to have internalized patriarchal norms and been unable to leave this infantile drive. She loves looking and objectifies others. She tries to watch everybody around her and evaluates their performances. Especially she has a special interest in the journalist Jack Walser, who joins the circus in St. Petersburg. Walser's show is with the tigers, and he dances as a clown. Fevvers watches him very carefully and enjoys his performance. When the performance ends, "The Colonel sank right down in his seat and kicked his little legs in the air with delight. Fevvers toasted Walser with the empty brandy bottle" (Carter

192). She takes great pleasure in watching Walser. Also, from time to time her female desire for the journalist can be seen. She watches him, thinking about him at the same time:

What is it this young man reminds me of? A piece of music composed for one instrument and played on another. An oil sketch for a great canvas. Oh, yes; he's unfinished, just as Lizzie says, but all the same—his sun-burned bones! His sun-bleached hair! Underneath his make-up, that face like a beloved face known long ago, and lost, and now returned, although I do not know who it is I then remember, except it might be the vague, imaginary face of desire (Carter 239-240).

Fevvers desires Walser sexually while she is watching him. This is related to the love of watching, and she objectifies Walser by looking at him erotically. In this quotation especially the terms “sun-burned bones” and “sun-bleached hair” illustrate how Fevvers makes Walser the object of her erotic desire. As a woman, then, she also takes pleasure in looking and making an object of others.

Also, in *Nights at the Circus*, the winged aerialist Fevvers presents herself as visual material at Colonel Kearney's Circus. She is very popular and her show is watched by a lot of people every night. Everybody is curious about her reality and questions whether she is fact or fiction. Some people directly believe that she is a bird-woman, but some of them, such as the American journalist Jack Walser, suspect her. Actually, Fevvers does not seem entirely disturbed by her situation of being a visual spectacle, and she imagines she is using the system and that she is above the system. She likes to be watched because she affects everybody through her wings. When her show is about to finish, she is appreciated by the audience with a lot of applause: “After she'd pulled off the triple somersault, the band performed the coup de grace on Wagner, and stopped. Fevvers hung by one hand, waving and blowing

kisses with the other, those famous wings of hers now drawn up behind her. Bouquets pelt the stage. She kisses her free hand to all” (Carter 16-17). The audience is fascinated by her extraordinary appearance. They are all surprised by the winged woman’s show. Fevvers greatly enjoys such an interest because without the audience and their gaze, she cannot present her show. Although she is not very beautiful, it can be said that she is a well-groomed lady. She dyes her feathers to different vivid colors in order to appear even more attractive on the stage. Also, her make-up is indispensable for her as she is always under the gaze. Not only her-make up but also her hair is an important element of her show. After the show, Lizzie ties them all: “It was a sufficiently startling head of hair, yellow and inexhaustible as sand, thick as cream, sizzling and whispering under the brush” (Carter 18). Actually, her hair is symbolic because it is a part of her show like her wings. She takes pleasure in dealing with her feathers, hair, and make-up. Her job, which is to be watched, has become a part of her identity. She lives with the gaze and enjoys this as a famous extraordinary aerialist. This is a dangerous situation and serves for the dictates of patriarchy, but, it also shows how powerful and hard to escape the whole system is.

The gaze, then, seems necessary for Fevvers’ sense of identity. Following Freud, the psychologist Jacques Lacan pointed out the importance and influence of the gaze on the human psyche and on identity formation. The gaze is necessary for a sense of self, although this is illusory. An infant’s sense of identity is blurred before the gaze. In the Mirror Stage, the infant starts to recognize him/herself. This is actually a misrecognition, but with the help of the image of him/herself reflected by others, s/he forms a self-image and a sense of identity. In the novel, Fevvers also uses the gaze to create her own imaginary sense of identity. As a famous trapeze star,

she definitely needs the audience's gaze. Furthermore, she does not want to be lonely and without attention. She needs somebody around her every time because of the need for the gaze. When they are traveling to Siberia, they have a long journey within the train so she cannot show herself to anyone apart from Lizzie. Time passes and she gets bored. She says, "I hate to be where the hand of Man has badly wrought" (Carter 231). There is nothing to do for her. She does not even bother to change her clothes:

Fevvers, in her petticoat, stockingless, corsetless, dug in Lizzie's handbag for a pair of little scissors and began to clip her toenails for want of anything better to do. She presented a squalid spectacle, a dark half-inch at the roots of her uncombed hair which tangled with the dishevelled plumage that had already assumed a dusty look. Confinement did not suit her. For no reason, she began to grizzle (Carter 235).

She feels very desperate and starts to cry due to the feeling of loneliness and the lack of attention in the train. When the train crashes because of the ex-convicts, she loses Walser, who used to be a constant spectator for her, and she is depressed totally. Her right wing is broken in the crash so she loses the most important equipment of her performance for a while. She suffers from not only physical pain but also emotional pain because Walser has gone and they do not know what has happened to him. In addition to this, they are kidnapped by convicts who name themselves as the "brotherhood of free men". She misses the days when she used to be very popular. "Although from a distance, she could still pass for a blonde, there was a good inch of brown at the roots of Fevvers' hair and brown was showing in her feathers, too, because she was moulting" (Carter 321). Lizzie tries to make her as beautiful as in

the circus days but it is all in vain as Fevvers is away from Jack Walser's gaze and the others' gaze.

Fevvers is miserable when she cannot find Walser. She does not care about her appearance at all. She starts to lose her looks and becomes uglier day by day. Although Lizzie tries to help, there is something incomplete about her:

Her misery was exacerbated by the knowledge that the young American to whom she'd taken such a fancy was so near to her and yet so far away. Exacerbated, but not caused. Her gloom had other causes. Did the speed with which she was losing her looks dismay her? Was it that? She was ashamed to admit it; she felt as though her heart was breaking when she looked in the mirror and saw her brilliant colors withering away (Carter 323).

Fevvers thinks about the reason for her hopelessness. One of them could be her broken wing. The other one could be the journalist that she has fallen in love with. Both are possible but in the meantime Fevvers melts like a candle. The reader understands that a major source of her hopelessness and depression is that she has lost all attention that she is no longer under the gaze. She perceives her identity as crippled and lonely: "Now she looks more like one of the ruins that Cromwell knocked about a bit" (Carter 324). She watches her own body by pitying herself:

She lacked the heart to wash her face and so there were still curds of rouge lodged in her pores and she was breaking out in spots and rashes. She had screwed up her mostly mousy hair on top of her head all anyhow and pinned it securely in place with the backbone of a carp. Since she had stopped bothering to hide her wings, the others had grown so accustomed to the sight it no longer seemed remarkable. Besides, one wing had lost all its glamorous colours and the other was bandaged and useless. Where was that silent demand to be *looked* at that had once made her stand out? (Carter 328).

At this point, she is also useless for Colonel Kearney, the owner of the circus, because she is so shabby and ugly that nobody wants to watch her. Furthermore, she cannot perform due to her broken wing. Lizzie warns her by saying, “You’re fading away, as if it was only always nothing but the discipline of the audience that kept you in trim. You’re hardly even a blonde any more” (Carter 332). Actually she needs the others’ gaze in order to prove and complete her identity. Otherwise, she will feel incomplete. Even Colonel Kearney is disturbed by Fevvers’ situation because she is not beautiful and attractive anymore. Although he was almost in love with Fevvers’ charming beauty at the beginning, now he does not even want to look at her face. “The Colonel ground out that last stub of the last cigar on the sole of his shoe, cast a look of infinite regret at the shredded remains and, for want of a fresh cigar, rolled a strip of manuscript paper into a tube and chewed on that. He eyed his former star askance. The Feathered Frump” (Carter 328). By thinking about her as “frump”, Colonel Kearney disdains Fevvers apparently. She is not the star of the circus with such shabby looks and he loses his admiration for her. This again demonstrates that Walser’s gaze and others’ gaze are very precious for Fevvers’ self-perception. As Sceats suggests, in relation to the scene in which Fevvers and Walser make love at the end:

Though she is not remade by her experience, she is restored and, as she had imagined, the admiration in Walser’s gaze is what makes her feel whole. More than that, it causes her to expand physically, so that she seems about to burst the roof of the hut. All the elements of her identity are here: Performance, singularity, the relation to a beloved and triumphant material presence (inhabitation of her body) (Sceats 93-94).

Without Walser's gaze, she loses herself day by day. She feels confident, happy, and beautiful with the gaze. Therefore, the gaze has become a necessity for her. Actually Jack Walser may be said to represent a kind of mirror image for Fevvers. She defines her identity with the help of Walser and others. Without the gaze, she feels undone.

Day by day she felt diminishing. The young American it was who kept the whole story of the old Fevvers in his notebooks; she longed for him to tell her she was True. She longed to see herself reflected in all her remembered Splendour in his grey eyes. She longed; she yearned. To no avail. Time passed. She rested (Carter 323-324).

At the end of the novel, Fevvers experiences a serious identity crisis. When she meets Walser, who has now lost his mind and returned to childhood, she tries to remind him of herself. She looks at herself through Walser's gaze. "She felt her outlines waver; she felt herself trapped forever in the reflection in Walser's eyes. For one moment, just one moment, Fevvers suffered the worst crisis of her life: 'Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or am I what he thinks I am?'" (Carter 344). As Fevvers is accustomed to be defined by the audience's gaze, now she realizes that she is in a dilemma of identity and she cannot define her own self. Lizzie helps her by telling her to show her feathers and wings, which may remind Walser of Fevvers. After she shows off her wings, "the eyes fixed upon her with astonishment, with awe, the eyes that told her who she was" (Carter 345). Walser remembers her and his past with her. Then she feels complete again. It is only through Walser's gaze that she recovers her sense of self.

Apart from all this, the gaze is also a powerful tool to maintain order and discipline. Social reformist Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon model is a prison which is administrated through observation. The prisoners are observed in this building by an

inspector. It creates a kind of control mechanism through the gaze. The gaze, then, provides order and discipline in a modern society. *Nights at the Circus* presents this complicated situation as well, especially in Part III when the location shifts to Siberia, a geography divorced from civilization. In the novel, Fevvers as well as the others with her are not only shabby but also become more “uncivilized” while they are away from the gaze. After the train crash in St. Petersburg, they escape from the convicts who have kidnapped them and find a new but abandoned house to live in. Fevvers and the others are very hungry, and they do not know what to eat. There is nothing in the refrigerator apart from a dead mouse. At that time, Colonel Kearney’s pig, Sybil, is noticed by someone. Although the Colonel rejects such a decision furiously, they want to vote on it. Fevvers says,

Just as he, Liz, me and Samson formed a reluctant majority, the clown-dog, who’d tagged along with us thus far, now foolishly drew attention to himself by whining at the door to be let out, perhaps thinking to make a getaway, but we forestalled that, we ate him instead of Sybil, boiling him in melted snow because he was too tough to roast, so there was a bit of broth as well (Carter 294).

The clown-dog is eaten instead of the pig in a disgusting way. If they stayed longer in the house, they could even eat the rotten things such as the mice around them and perhaps even Colonel Kearney’s pig Sybil. It may be argued that the lack of the gaze leads these people to act in ways that would normally be highly unacceptable. Therefore, the more they are isolated from the gaze, the more they ignore civilization and social rules. It could be argued that this is good and that it would be great if the patriarchal system, which is almost synonymous with civilization, collapsed, but there are no indications in the novel as to what this system will be replaced by. In the depiction of the primitive people in Siberia, patriarchy still exists but this time with

less of civilization and greater danger and disorder, which is again very disturbing. Hence, this is a serious dilemma.

In the light of this discussion, it can be argued that the effect of the gaze is an important theme in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. The female protagonist Sophie Fevvers is a winged trapeze star who works at Colonel Kearney's Circus. She has been treated like a visual object from her childhood on. She has been watched by the male audiences as an object throughout her life. She has an exhibitionist position in front of the male gaze. This is a highly disturbing dimension of the novel, especially from a feminist perspective. However, the novel also illustrates how Fevvers has been unable to overcome her infantile scopophilic drive, enjoying the gaze and forming her sense of identity as an aerialist in this way. Without the (male) gaze, she feels lonely, desperate, and miserable. She does not care about her hair, feathers, make-up, clothes, and body. The gaze turns out to be indispensable for her and for her sense of social order. Unfortunately, the patriarchal system involving the gaze is so strong that she cannot move out of it. This is a complicated issue and a major dilemma which Carter presents.

The following chapter will focus on Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)* and compare it with Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. *Mahrem (The Gaze)* will be analyzed primarily in terms of the nameless female protagonist's dilemma of being the object of the gaze as a very fat woman.

CHAPTER 4

THE DILEMMA OF THE GAZE IN ELİF ŞAFK' S MAHREM (*THE GAZE*)

When your privacy is gone, you should leave at once!
(18).

The Gaze, Elif Şafak

Elif Şafak is a contemporary Turkish author, who writes with gender and feminist awareness. In her novels, she uses the themes of sufism, Rumi (Mevlana), love, social structures, resistance to patriarchy, female beauty, gender constructions in patriarchal culture, male hegemony, femininity, masculinity, motherhood, women's literature, female body and experience. *Mahrem (The Gaze)* was first published in 2000, and it is a fairy-tale-like novel with fantastic qualities like Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. The novel is often told in a dream-like quality and is composed of two narratives, which are set in different times and locations. The first narrative takes place in Istanbul in 1999, and it is about an overweight woman and her love affair with a dwarf man. As she is very fat, she is always disturbed by the people and their gaze around her. She falls in love with a dwarf who seems to change her life and perceptions but then she realizes that he is preparing a dictionary of gazes. At the end, she commits suicide when she understands that she is just a material used for the dictionary. The second narrative takes place in Pera in 1885, and it is about a strange man named Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi and his

show tent. He creates a visual show that exhibits both very beautiful and ugly and grotesque creatures. The ugliest figure he exhibits is the Sable-Girl who is half-human and half-animal. The Sable-Girl's history goes back to Siberia in 1648. She is discovered by the sable hunters. She is so ugly that it is said that she has to be used as a visual material. Therefore, Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi shows off her ugly grotesque body to the female audience in his show tent in Istanbul. In addition to the Sable Girl, Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi exhibits the most beautiful woman, La Belle Annabelle, to the male audience in his show tent. Her story and how she came to be so beautiful are also told to the reader. The second narrative, which includes the story of Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi, is more fairy-tale like. These two narratives appear to be unconnected to one another but a careful reading reveals that there are some meaningful links between them. For the sake of convenience and proper comparison with *Nights at the Circus*, this chapter will mostly focus on the first narrative, which is about the fat woman. Where necessary, however, the second narrative will also be referred to.

4.1 The Protagonist as Spectacle in *Mahrem (The Gaze)*

Elif Şafak writes with a feminist awareness and uses symbols, allegories, and exposes gender issues in her novels. *Mahrem (The Gaze)* is such a novel that deals with gender constructions. In the novel, the issue of the gaze is depicted from the beginning to the end. The novel has been translated into English under the title of *The Gaze*. For this reason, the gaze is perhaps the most important theme of the novel. The female protagonist is a very fat woman, who draws attention to her extraordinary body. She becomes the object of the look wherever she goes because she presents an interesting visual material to the people around her. In a sense, she is objectified, so she is disturbed by this situation. Similar to Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, the female protagonist here has an extraordinary body that draws more attention than ordinary people. Unlike the protagonist of *Nights at the Circus*, however, she is more acutely aware of the negative effects of the gaze on herself. Fevvers' extraordinary body often draws attention through its beauty, whereas in this novel, the fat woman constantly feels the disapproving gaze of the society, reminding her that she is ugly.

The nameless protagonist in *Mahrem (The Gaze)* is a very fat woman who is about one hundred and thirty two kilos. She seems like a combination of three or four women. Although she tries to lose weight from time to time, she cannot be successful as she cannot break her unhealthy eating habits. Therefore, all her struggle is in vain. Actually, she is not greatly disturbed by her huge body when she is alone. However, she gets bored and disturbed by the others' gaze. At the beginning of the novel, she is travelling on a minibus and falls asleep in it. When she wakes up suddenly, she realizes that the minibus is full and the other passengers are disturbed by her body. Especially the woman who has taken the seat next to her makes exaggerated

movements in order to sit with her child. For this reason, the fat woman is very much disturbed by their gaze on her. She is objectified by the passengers around her and she does not want to be an extraordinary visual material due to her body. She says,

I like sitting next to the window. Next to the window, I'm less aware of the other passengers, and can spend the trip watching people outside. Sometimes it's impossible to get near the windows either. Then, in order to escape the stares of the people surrounding me, in order not to guess what is on the minds of the people who are looking at me, I look for a spot that I can stare at vacantly until I reach my stop (Shafak 22).

Although she does not want to be the object of the look, this is inevitable due to her obesity. Her big body is the most important thing that makes her an object in front of the people. Some people love her, some people pity her, and some of them are afraid of her, but in all cases she is treated like a spectacle. When she goes to an aerobic saloon, everybody loves her as she is the fattest, and makes her the mascot of the saloon as there is no fatter woman than her¹. Also, she is so fat that people do not want to use the elevator with her. She says, "Crowded together in that narrow space, even the politest people look at me from the corners of their eyes, and then at the sign that tells the maximum weight the elevator can carry. I'm not fat enough to put the elevator in danger. But my appearance becomes more important than anything" (Shafak 85). They treat her like a dangerous object which is harmful to the system of the elevator. Hayalifener Apartments is the place where she lives together with B-C, her dwarf lover. This building does not have an elevator, so she has to use the stairs. In this sense, the neighbors do not care about her body as a danger. Instead, they give some food or delicious meals to her as if she is always hungry. The only problem

¹ There are some small differences between the Turkish version and the translated version of the novel. In the Turkish version, the aerobics saloon is more foregrounded.

here is the front door of the apartment, which is too narrow for her huge body. She says,

I was waiting motionlessly because I was stuck in a door again. This kind of thing happens to me all the time when I pass through those double doors and only one side is left open. If I have to confess, I don't fit through this type of door. I have to go through sideways. And even then I get stuck. The front door of the Hayalifener Apartments is one of those double doors. One of the wings was bolted to the floor and ceiling, and only a narrow space was left to pass through. I was caught there by the threads of my sweater, I was caught by the neighborhood ladies returning with their bags from the market. As always, they examined me from head to toe (Shafak 76-77).

When she is stuck in the front door of the apartment, the neighbors see her like a fly entangled in a spider's web. They all look at her carefully and examine how obese she is. Her obesity makes her the object of the look. In *Nights at the Circus*, especially at the beginning, Fevvers does not always understand the gaze in a negative way and she even enjoys it because everybody admires her beauty and skill. The fat woman, however, understands the negative aspect of the patriarchal gaze more easily than Fevvers.

Even during work and among children, she is exposed to the gaze. She works at a kindergarten and as she is fat, the parents of the children trust her more than any other employee in child care. She knows that they all trust her due to her appearance only, i.e. her fat and more motherly-looking body and for no other reason concerning her skills in her job. Also, as she is fat, she can help some children to eat. The children have a special interest in her body. They all look at her movements and body. She draws attention directly on herself, and she does not like this. She says, "The nursery made me nervous. I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible, and I couldn't breathe easily until I was back at the Hayalifener Apartments. I liked being

at home” (Shafak 176). Whenever she comes to the Hayalifener Apartments, she feels comfortable as there is no gaze around her. For this purpose, she wants to quit her job as soon as possible and stay at home:

At home I’m comfortable, more comfortable than I ever am outside. I loved the newspapers, books and pictures that accumulated day by day, the hundreds of photographs that are scattered willy-nilly throughout this heaven [home]; that no piece of furniture has a fixed or obligatory place; the ability to hide from outside eyes; the privacy, the intimacy (Shafak 176).

After she leaves her job in the kindergarten, she starts to spend all her time at home. Thanks to this and to the initial positive attitude of her lover, she does not care about the people’s gaze on her and manages to go on a diet and lose weight. She buys a sunshade and stays on the terrace of the apartment throughout the day. As she suggests, “I hadn’t had to be strangled by other people’s eyes. It was so nice not to be seen by anyone! I was in good spirits!” (Shafak 183). The gaze and people’s objectification make her more nervous but now she is fine and relaxed. She hates the gaze.

Like the female protagonist Fevvers in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, both of the protagonists are the object of the gaze due to their extraordinary appearances. Similar to Fevvers’ winged and huge body, this nameless woman is foregrounded by her obese body which is about one hundred and thirty two kilos. Therefore, they draw attention to their strange bodies when people look at them. In a sense, they are objectified by the people around them. Their abnormality makes them visual materials in front of the audience. Therefore, compared to ordinary women, they are even more under the patriarchal gaze. Actually, this is a strategy which both authors use to foreground the problem of the gaze.

The gaze is also an issue that concerns B-C, the fat woman's dwarf boyfriend. He works as a nude model in a studio. He poses, wearing a purple velvet cape on top of a stool. After ten minutes' break, he takes off the purple velvet cape and becomes totally naked in front of the eyes of the students. As she herself states, the fat woman is greatly surprised at her boyfriend's ease in doing this: "His whole body was exposed. I would have fallen through the floor in embarrassment" (Shafak 80). Instead of B-C, she is disturbed by the students' gaze in the studio. However, B-C does not care about the gazes on his naked body around him. He suggests the fat woman do a similar job because if she accepts to be a nude model, she can earn a lot of money through posing:

B-C used to tell me that I should do the same thing. Since I was already fat enough to attract the attention of anyone who saw me, and since I was already being watched, then I should go and display myself out of spite. While even the thought of standing there naked and motionless in front of their eyes was enough to freeze my blood, B-C would insist on repeating, 'That's how it is, out of stubbornness' (Shafak 81).

In fact B-C is very similar to the fat woman since he also has a physical abnormality and even more so. However, he does not feel as uncomfortable. As a male, he is more comfortable as there is no such potential pressure on him, even though he is a dwarf. Also, he is an intellectual man. He thinks about the gaze and reacts when he is angry, but the fat woman cannot do what he does. She is more limited than him. B-C believes that if someone has an interesting quality to show, there is no need to hide it. On the contrary, s/he should exhibit it without shame or embarrassment. He says he does this "out of stubbornness" (Shafak 81), but the fat woman does not agree with him. It seems, as a man, it is easier for B-C to intellectualize this issue and react to it.

Not only B-C but also the owner of the studio wants the fat woman to be visual material in the studio as she has an extraordinary body to draw. The owner offers her money but it is useless. She feels so uncomfortable in front of the others' gaze and does not want to be the nude object of the gaze. The owner of the studio says, "Of course, you won't have to use the stool. We'll arrange a sofa for you" (Shafak 81). According to her body's size, she will display herself on a big sofa, unlike B-C and she will be the visual material of the students.

As the fat woman is disturbed by the gaze around her, she feels great social pressure, which comes from society's expectations. According to this, there are certain categories for women in a patriarchal society. As women's beauty and sexuality are foregrounded in cultural texts, a woman's primary task is to be beautiful, that is, keeping her body thin. In this sense, the female body creates an obsession for a woman throughout her life. As her life and happiness depend upon her physical appearance, she has to be young or seem young all the time. Otherwise, she will be excluded not only from society and men but also from herself. At this point, the fat woman is obsessed with her kilos and does not want to contact anybody. She excludes herself from the society, which imposes patriarchal stereotypical images. She cannot get rid of the expectations of the society, so she decides to be far from them, but this is impossible. She feels the pressure of the others, who always express her abnormality through their looks. In order to satisfy the patriarchal social expectations, she tries to lose weight in various ways. She goes to different aerobic saloons, goes on a variety of diets, takes weight-reducing pills, visits doctors, calculates calories, drinks a lot of water, eats fat-free food, drinks weight-loss herbal teas, and wears sweaty pullovers. She tries to be a "normal"

woman in the first place although it is very difficult. Everybody treats her according to her big appearance. She is in a worse situation than B-C because B-C suffers only physically but the fat woman suffers both physically and mentally due to the gaze. She also has to deal with social pressure and patriarchal expectations. As the people all concentrate on her appearance, she has two choices: either she will lose weight and become normal or she will isolate herself from them. Naomi Wolf, who wrote the influential article titled “Beauty Myth” in 1991, criticizes women’s focus on physical appearance and beauty. She thinks that patriarchal ideology uses women’s beauty as a tool for women’s imprisonment. It is a kind of trap for a woman who wants to be in the public sphere. In this sense, she argues that women have to be careful about this trap under the beauty myth. As Wolf points out,

Images of female beauty [are used] as a political weapon against women’s advancement. As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control. The beauty myth is not about women at all ... It is about men’s institutions and institutional power (Wolf 102-104).

Considered from this perspective, the fat woman’s problem in Şafak’s novel depends upon this beauty myth. As she cannot lose weight despite her struggle, she isolates herself from the people and chooses to be alone. This beauty myth is an enforcement of the patriarchal society, which keeps her at home and makes her feel uncomfortable. Especially women take on this role even more than men.

This issue in the novel is also dealt with in the second narrative, which is the story of Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi, who has a show tent in which he exhibits the most beautiful woman, La Belle Annabelle, to the male audience and the ugliest woman, the Sable-Girl, to the female audience: “He was aware that women

were deeply pleased to see women uglier than themselves. He was going to show them what they wanted to see” (Shafak 45). The Sable-Girl is a spectacle because of social expectations: “No matter how ugly she was, she might not have become a spectacle, and had the right not to be seen, and keep herself distant from curious eyes. Indeed she wouldn’t have been so ugly if she hadn’t been seen” (Shafak 46). She is ugly due to the gaze. Women internalize the beauty myth and the expectations of the patriarchal society so they become pleased when they see a woman uglier than themselves. On the other hand, men want to watch the most beautiful woman, La Belle Annabelle, and objectify her like visual material. Their male gaze makes La Belle Annabelle beautiful: “No matter how beautiful she was, she might not have become a spectacle, and had the right not to be seen, and keep herself distant from curious eyes. Indeed she wouldn’t have been so beautiful if she hadn’t been seen” (Shafak 125). Here, too, the men in the show tent act in accordance with the expectations of patriarchal society, greatly enjoying to watch and to make a spectacle of a very beautiful woman. Therefore, Keramet Mumi Keşke Memiş Efendi’s show tent is also closely related to patriarchal social structure. Similar to Madame Schreck’s Museum of Female Monsters in which Fevvers and other grotesque women are shown in *Nights at the Circus*, extraordinary female characters are exhibited in the tent and the audience takes pleasure in watching them.

At first, the only reassuring person who does not disturb the fat woman with his gaze is her boyfriend B-C. She does not feel disturbed with him. She says, “B-C and I had made an unspoken pledge to each other. What we would say about each other’s appearance was decided the day we first saw each other. From that moment on B-C hadn’t said a word about my appearance. From that moment on I hadn’t said

a word about B-C's appearance" (Shafak 186). They do not talk about their appearances so she is not disturbed. As a dwarf of about eighty centimeters, B-C does not feel as disturbed when somebody watches him. He tries to persuade the fat woman about this issue, but she does not accept the idea of being watched. B-C seems to have intellectualized this problem actually because he prepares his "Dictionary of Gazes" in order to write about the relations between appearances and the gaze. Although she is very curious about the dictionary, B-C hides it from her. Therefore, she decides to ask about the dictionary by saying, "Where did it come from?" (Shafak 91). B-C answers that it is always with them in fact because it is related with seeing and being seen. He says, "All of our troubles, worries, obsessions, our happiness and our memories ... our very existence in this world, too ... and also our love...everything has to do with seeing and being seen. The Dictionary of Gazes is going to demonstrate this entry by entry" (Shafak 91). Although these entries seem to be unrelated, actually they are all linked together through the theme of seeing and being seen. B-C is very passionate about this dictionary so he does a lot of research on this issue. He needs a lot of material to use in his dictionary. Dreams and films are some basic materials for him. She thinks that he loves films and dreams as they provide material for the dictionary. She gradually becomes more nervous as B-C starts to become interested solely in the Dictionary and in materials he can collect for it. She says,

I was becoming increasingly anxious. I was anxious because I thought that everything B-C did and said had to do with the Dictionary of Gazes. Since he didn't show me what he'd written, the Dictionary of Gazes was an enigma to me. And with every passing day this enigma distanced him further from me. I also suspected that all of those strange things were taken from the Dictionary of Gazes. As if his

contact with me and with life itself was through the vehicle of, and by leave of, the Dictionary of Gazes (Shafak 162).

For this purpose, he collects some materials from films, newspapers, dreams, articles, and other sources. When he uses his material, he does not look at it for a second time. She starts to suspect that B-C can use her as a material in the dictionary because she is very suitable for the dictionary. She has an extraordinary body apparently, and this is enough for her to become material for the Dictionary of Gazes. However, she trusts him and does not want to think about the possibility of objectification.

After starting work on the Dictionary, B-C leaves his job, so he is not a nude model in the studio any more. The fat woman feels that there is something strange about B-C's behavior. He becomes stuck with the dictionary and there is nothing left to do with the fat woman. They no longer talk. She used to love and trust him more than any other person in her life. However, she now understands that B-C is using her only as visual material for his dictionary. As she says, "I understood that at first I had been the source of this detestable dictionary, its substance, and that later I had become one item among many" (Shafak 242). The fat woman understands that B-C had always been in search of a material for his dictionary, and he had found what he was looking for when he met the fat woman who drew his attention with her extraordinary body. She says, "When he'd finished observing me and found what he was looking for, I might have been the most interesting item in the Dictionary of Gazes. I was the fatty whose childhood he was going to research" (Shafak 242). Therefore, the closest person whom she relies on, B-C, cheats on her and uses her as an object from the beginning to the end. She learns that she has been the visual object

of her lover throughout. Even B-C, who seems an extraordinary character himself, is revealed to be a part of the same patriarchal system, making others and especially women the object of the gaze. This disappointment leads to her suicide at the end. She wants to kill herself due to this objectification even within the eyes of her lover.

As in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, both of the female protagonists are objects of the look of their lovers. In *Nights at the Circus*, Walser wants to use Fevvers as material for his interview. Here, the dwarf man B-C similarly objectifies the fat woman and uses her as visual material. In the case of the fat woman, however, the situation is even worse because in *Nights at the Circus*, Walser changes by falling in love with Fevvers and he starts not to see her as a spectacle any longer. This, however, does not happen in the case of B-C. Şafak's protagonist, therefore, represents the gaze and its effects even in a more pessimistic way.

4.2 The Dilemma of the Protagonist in Relation to the Gaze

From a feminist perspective, the reader is disturbed by the situation the fat woman in *Mahrem (The Gaze)* finds herself in. She herself is also seriously disturbed by the gaze of others, which makes her an undesired object throughout the novel. Moreover, she decides to overcome this situation by isolating herself. She prefers loneliness and she does not even have a close friend apart from her lover the dwarf man, B-C. No matter what she does, she cannot solve the problem as in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. This issue, however, is more complex than the characters' just being a spectacle in front of the (male) gaze. The rest of this chapter will focus on this issue.

The previous section focused on how the fat woman is seen as a spectacle and how she is disturbed by this situation. Her private efforts to isolate herself and remove the gaze are very difficult for her. The solution that comes to mind at this point is an undermining of the patriarchal system and the removal of the cultural associations of the gaze, if at all possible. However, this is very difficult since there is a serious dilemma involved here. Even though she herself suffers most from it, the gaze is sometimes pleasurable for the fat woman. Furthermore, she has become such an integral part of the patriarchal system that she herself sometimes finds the gaze necessary for a sense of identity.

The gaze is pleasurable for the fat woman as she herself enjoys watching the other people and especially her boyfriend B-C. In this regard, she has been unable to overcome the infantile scopophilic drive Freud discusses. She loves looking and making the people around her the object of her look. Although she herself is disturbed by being the object of the look, she likes watching others. Until she meets

with B-C in a ferry, as she is disturbed by the gaze, she hides herself from the gaze of the others. When they first meet, B-C starts taking her photographs without permission. She warns him by saying, "Please! I don't like having my picture taken" (Shafak 232). After that, she notices that he is a dwarf of about eighty centimeters. He has an extraordinary body like her so they have a common point but unlike her he does not hide his strange body. She is confused but she cannot control herself and starts to watch him carefully. As she points out,

The dwarf across from me looked as comfortable as could be. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I who was always made uncomfortable by the glances of others, found pleasure in watching someone for the first time in my life. As I watched, I began to worry that he might get up and go, that he would become offended and withdraw from me. Indeed, perhaps, from the moment I saw B-C, I feared never seeing him again (Shafak 233).

She takes pleasure in watching B-C apparently, and she likes it though she does not want to confess this even to herself. She cannot give up looking at B-C, and she is afraid of losing him suddenly. The fat woman is fascinated by B-C's appearance in their first meeting. She says, "I watched how as he enthusiastically explained something, it came alive in his eyes, he explained it with enthusiasm" (Shafak 237). His enthusiasm gives her pleasure. Life is more enjoyable with him as she suggests, "I saw neither intimacy nor rejection in his eyes. Life was livable; I was loveable when I looked into B-C's eyes" (Shafak 241).

Throughout their relationship, the fat woman watches B-C with a scopophilic desire and she takes pleasure from this. When B-C is working in a studio as a nude model, she goes there and watches him carefully. She confesses, "Despite these things, I can't keep myself from dropping by once in a while. Every time I go to the

studio, I go off into the corner and watch him and the watching” (Shafak 81). She also watches the students who are drawing B-C’s pictures. Also, she watches him when he is naked, which can again be related to female desire. She directly objectifies B-C in the studio. She watches him not only in the studio but also at home. Especially she prefers to watch him while he is not aware of this. As she says, “When B-C was asleep in front of the television, I would take the opportunity to watch him” (Shafak 158). His body is very interesting for her, especially his hands, toes, feet, the curls of his chest hair, mouth, and tongue. Looking at him gives pleasure to her.

The fat woman’s situation, then, is very similar to Fevvers’, who also likes watching Jack Walser in *Nights at the Circus*. When he joins the circus, she watches her body carefully and admires his hair and muscles and gazes at him with female desire. Similar to what Fevvers does in *Nights at the Circus*, the fat woman watches a man and takes pleasure in this situation.

Furthermore, not only B-C but also the other people sometimes become the object of the fat woman’s gaze. If there is an opportunity to watch somebody, she watches. In the terrace, she looks at the people under her sunshade: “I watched people going up and down the hill; I slurped diet cola and tried to guess which of my three bellies was melting faster” (Shafak 183). Also, the novel ends with a scene in which she watches the people in the street by saying “I hold my breath, and watch very carefully” (Shafak 264). When she gets depressed, realizing that she has been used only as visual material by B-C, the narrator describes her in a dream-like way, suggesting that she has committed suicide and is now flying in the sky like a balloon,

watching others. Her love of watching, then, becomes apparent even at the end of the novel.

Moreover, in order to watch other people, the fat woman and her dwarf boy friend go out and change their costumes not to be recognized. By changing their costumes, they will also change their identities. B-C claims that this is a royal tradition. The fat woman says,

To go out in disguise is to change your appearance. All of the Sultans used this method to see in person what their empires really looked like. Now we were going to follow this royal tradition, and change our appearance. If we don't look like ourselves, we'll be able to go out together. No matter what we wore, how much could we hide from the eyes of others, and for how long? We didn't please anyone's eyes. Even if we were in disguise, and even at night, we didn't suit each other (Shafak 98-99).

Unlike B-C, the fat woman is very shy about going outside. However, B-C shaves carefully and wears one of her bras. When she sees him, she is shocked because she cannot take her eyes off B-C and says, "I watched with alarm. It struck me with terror to see the man I love display an attitude I'd never seen him display before. As if his personality changed with his appearance" (Shafak 98-99). B-C becomes a woman when he wears different clothes. She also changes her clothing, takes a corset, and resembles a man more than a woman. She puts hair on her face, legs, and hands together with a moustache. Their ultimate aim is to watch somebody within different costumes and identities. However, B-C loses his control due to alcohol. He causes a fight between the fat woman and a man in the pub. At the end of the fight, everybody looks at them. Therefore, the situation becomes very disturbing for her although they had the chance to go out together and watch the others. When they return home, B-C vomits and she is covered in blood due to the fight. Despite

everything, she is pleased with this bad situation because she observes B-C again. Although he is vomiting in a very bad position, she likes watching him even in such a situation. She says,

When he came out of the toilet he looked terrible. He'd returned to his former height, he'd smeared cherry-colored lipstick all over himself, all of his make-up had run and mixed together. It was clear he was going to be very ashamed of himself, if he had the strength to be ashamed. To tell the truth, it was quite pleasant to see him in this wretched and disgraceful state (Shafak 107).

As all these examples suggest, despite her discomfort in being watched by others, the fat woman herself also takes pleasure in looking and objectifying. The fat woman also makes a spectacle of B-C and she loves watching him in every position. Even if he seems "wretched", she wants to watch him and takes pleasure from this activity. The fat woman makes her dwarf lover as well as the other people around her the object of her look.

The gaze is a significant part of the fat woman's life in other ways, too. Although she does not feel comfortable with the gaze of the others, she is accustomed to and feels relaxed under the gaze of B-C. As they do not want to go out together due to their strange appearance, they can spend their time only at home. For this reason, when the fat woman comes to Hayalifener Apartments, B-C asks her about what she has done throughout the day and she tells the events of the day. As she is obsessed with the gaze, she tells the events that are related with the gaze around her. In the supermarket, she notices the security cameras. She says, "I related it as if he knew what he'd seen; wide mirrors, security guards, and hidden cameras. In this land of freedom and variety, the signs reading 'Dear customers, our shop is protected by hidden cameras!', wandering among the eye-pleasing counters, I told

him” (Shafak 88). She tells everything to B-C and wants him to listen carefully by watching her.

Actually, she likes B-C’s gaze on her as he is the one who does not disturb her through the gaze. She likes his gaze and wonders about what he sees when he looks at her. In order to comprehend her identity, she needs B-C’s gaze. Therefore, from time to time she tries to learn about herself. As she points out,

Whenever he fell asleep, and I took off the glasses that were sliding off the end of his nose, I would always try them on before I put them aside. What did his little eyes see through this glass? He knew so many amazing things, so much about people’s stories, how did he see it all? Whatever I looked through them, the lenses of these glasses didn’t solve the mystery. Whenever I put on B-C’s glasses, I went to the mirror to look at myself (Shafak 158).

She even puts on B-C’s glasses and looks at herself in the mirror. Although she cannot see anything different, she is very curious about B-C’s gaze. When she looks, she sees the fat body, the same face, and the same woman but B-C’s gaze is different and she needs it in order to have a sense of self. He has a complimentary task for her and she likes it as she says, “Until now, the only person whose glances didn’t make me uneasy was B-C, and he was the only person I couldn’t take my eyes off. He was the only person I wanted to be seen by, who I wanted to see even more of me” (Shafak 230).

However, as time passes they start to lose their communication due to the Dictionary of Gazes. Whenever she wants to communicate with B-C, he is dealing with the dictionary. When she dyes her hair, B-C does not care about it. He just notices but does not look at her carefully. She says, “When I came back I found B-C in an irritable mood. He noticed what I’d done to my hair right away. He said a few

nice things, but it was clear his mind was elsewhere. I'd never seen him this troubled before" (Shafak 97).

When B-C's gaze is gone due to his involvement with the Dictionary, she is depressed and feels lacking. She is fond of B-C's gaze which is an important part of not only their relationship but also her life. Similar to Fevvers in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, the female protagonist here needs his boyfriend's gaze in order to have a sense of identity, no matter how illusory. Without the gaze, she feels empty. For this reason, she goes even so far as to commit suicide when B-C starts to ignore her.

Moreover, the gaze is also represented as having a discipline effect in *Mahrem (The Gaze)*. When the fat woman and B-C change their costumes, they go out in disguise and observe the other people around them. Although the fat woman does not want to go out in disguise at the beginning, she accepts it. In order to watch the other people, they go to a restaurant and B-C drinks alcohol. Despite the fat woman's warning, B-C gets drunk and at the end of the night, the fat woman is involved in a fight due to B-C's behavior. By changing their costumes, they think that they also get rid of their identities so they act more selfishly. Therefore, in the absence of the gaze, even the fat woman, who is herself disturbed by the gaze, starts to act in a harmful and dangerous way. Feeling that no one is looking or watching, she does not care about social dictates. This again points to how much she herself has become a part of the system. It seems that the gaze of patriarchal society orders and organizes her actions, and when she is temporarily free of it, she starts to act in a totally different and also dangerous way.

Furthermore, in *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, the fat woman's life is in fact shaped by an incident happening in the absence of a controlling gaze. Towards the end of the novel, the reason for her extraordinary fatness is revealed with a shocking flashback. The reader learns that her obsession with eating is intimately linked with an instance of sexual harassment she has experienced in her childhood. The reader learns that in the past, she lived with her grandmother in a town away from her parents. When she was playing hide and seek with her friends, she hid herself in a coalshed, where there was a man hiding in the darkness. The man is described by saying, "He was a stranger. He was just standing there, under the broken window. Half of his face was in the light, and half was in the dark. He looked very worried" (Shafak 214). Apart from the strange man and the child (the fat woman), there is nobody in the coal shed. When she notices that there is a man in the darkness, she just looks at him without saying anything and sits near the door because if she says something or goes out, she will lose the game hide and seek. For this reason, she has to be silent and careful. The man says he wants to play a game with her asking her, to close her eyes. When she opens them, the strange man puts his penis into her mouth and harasses her in the darkness of the coalshed. Shocked and disgusted, she starts to vomit after he leaves: "When she realized that she was vomiting nothing but bitter liquid, she lifted her head and made an effort not to cry. She looked directly into the nothingness" (Shafak 218). She sees nothing apart from the darkness for a moment. This incident happens when there is no one to see and stop it.

Following the harassment, the child loses her control, too, like the strange man in the darkness. As she is shocked, she does not know what to do. Her nausea goes on but there is nothing further to vomit in her stomach. She notices that she has

not cried. For this reason, she is ashamed. “As she twisted about, she felt once again that she was being watched. But this time she was determined to find who was watching her. And she did. Standing right in front of her: Elsa!” (Shafak 219). When she looks around, she sees their landlady’s cat Elsa, which, she realizes, has watched everything. She feels guilt as a child and is seriously disturbed because there is a witness. The child perceives the cat’s stare as a person’s, and this creates a serious sense of guilt and shame in her. Nobody should have seen her but there is another’s gaze on her. “She looked angrily at the retreating Elsa. The cat had been watching from the very beginning with her eyes that saw everything and missed nothing” (Shafak 220). When she looks at the cat’s eyes, she remembers what has happened again because the cat has recorded everything in its eyes:

Elsa had seen everything; everything she shouldn’t have seen. When people commit sins, they can’t stand to be in the same place with someone who has witnessed this. Witnesses and sinners can’t face each other. Even if they look into each other’s eyes. The best thing was to leave as soon as possible; just like the cherries that left the branches (Shafak 220).

Therefore, she feels she has to do something in order to erase the moment of the sexual harassment and to make sure no one has seen. Again, there is nobody and no gaze around her. She kills the cat brutally in order to erase everything. She ties her muslin cloth to its eyes and hangs it on a tree in the garden. In a sense, she blinds the cat as it has seen everything. She tries to relieve herself from her deep shame and sense of guilt, which was partly caused by another’s gaze, by killing the cat relentlessly in the absence of any controlling look.

Actually, the harassment she experiences and the sense of guilt that comes from the gaze leads to her psychological problems and obsession with eating. She is

examined by a child psychologist but she does not tell the events, keeps them as a secret so her eating obsession starts. She wants to eat more and more. “She was so hungry that, after being raked by the unbearable people, she began to chew at the bunches of grapes on the oilskin table-cloth. She was so hungry that, her hunger started eating at the deathly weight that was pressing down her. She urgently had to eat something else” (Shafak 224). In order to feel her mouth clean, she eats more and more. She wants to overcome the taste of the harassment so eating something will erase this taste. As a result, she gets fatter day by day. When she reaches an extraordinary weight, her body is regarded as strange by the society. This time, the gaze of patriarchy does not accept her physical strangeness. The child’s sexual harassment in the absence of any controlling look leads to her psychological problems and obsession with eating. This obsession leads to fatness and then she is disturbed by this fatness due to the unapproving gaze of patriarchal society. Therefore, she is imprisoned in a big vicious circle. The gaze now puts relentless pressure on her as a fat woman unacceptable in the eyes of society. This is, therefore, a serious dilemma for the fat woman.

In the light of this discussion, it can be argued that the effect of the gaze is the central theme in Elif Şafak’s *Mahrem (The Gaze)*. The female protagonist, the nameless fat woman who is about one hundred and thirty kilos, is the object of the look due to her extraordinary body. She is seriously disturbed by this situation and wants to overcome it. However, she, like Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, is also in a serious dilemma because she herself is a part of the system, liking to objectify others and needing the gaze for a sense of identity. Like *Nights at the Circus*, then, *Mahrem*

(The Gaze) also aptly demonstrates the serious dilemma involved in issues concerning the gaze.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the dilemma of the gaze in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)*. It has argued that in both *Nights at the Circus* and *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, the female protagonists find themselves in a dilemma in relation to the gaze. On the one hand, the protagonists are spectacles under the patriarchal gaze and they are seriously disturbed by this. On the other hand, they themselves are an integral part of the patriarchal system, sometimes enjoying the gaze and sometimes needing its presence for a sense of identity. This analysis has been made by making use of a variety of theoretical works.

In order to focus on woman's objectification under the patriarchal gaze, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), which is about visual representations in Western art and Laura Mulvey's famous article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which is about how women are represented in classical Hollywood cinema, have been used. Berger explains that the male gaze has controlled and subjected women, so it is active and dynamic. Man looks at woman and woman is looked at by man. For this reason, woman becomes the object of the look. Similarly, Mulvey criticizes the passive and sexy image of woman used especially in films, foregrounding the erotic pleasure in the male gaze. In order to analyze the dilemma of the gaze, on the other hand, psychological and cultural theories of the gaze have been made use of. Specifically, Sigmund Freud's concept of scopophilia, Jacques Lacan's evaluation of the significance of the gaze in psychosexual development and identity formation, and

Michél Foucault's argument about the role of the gaze in dictating order and discipline through Jeremy Bentham's panopticon model have provided the theoretical framework for this section.

Following a discussion of the theoretical background, Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* has been analyzed in terms of the female protagonist's dilemma concerning the gaze. The female protagonist is a winged woman, Sophie Fevvers, who works at a circus. She represents a visual material due to her physical qualities. As a winged aerialist, she becomes the object of the look. She works in a brothel serving as a statue and following this, she works in a museum of female monsters. In the novel, the men who admire her want to objectify and exploit her. However, she does not want to permit it. Also, from the beginning to the end, she is watched by the journalist Jack Walser, who initially meets her for an interview but then, she falls in love with him. This, together with a number of other events, cause her to reconsider her status within patriarchal society and approach the issue with higher awareness. She begins to realize, together with the reader, that she is the object of the male gaze but this gaze has also become essential for her sense of self. Therefore, she finds herself in a dilemma. She herself takes pleasure in being watched. Without the gaze, she feels empty and does not care about her appearance at all. Especially when she loses Walser, she understands this. In addition to this, after the train crash in Siberia, she has to live in an isolated place away from civilization and feels bad in the absence of the gaze. Fevvers, therefore, demonstrates how the issue of the gaze is highly complicated and involves a big dilemma.

The following chapter has analyzed Elif Şafak's *Mahrem (The Gaze)* from the same perspective, comparing it with Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* at the same

time. The novel has been analyzed in terms of the female protagonist's dilemma of the gaze. The analysis has focused mostly on the first narrative in *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, in which the nameless female protagonist is an obese woman, who is about one hundred and thirty two kilos. The main reason for her fatness comes from a sexual harassment she has experienced in her childhood. The reader understands that actually patriarchy has led to her fatness, and it is again patriarchy that causes her to feel very bad about her physical situation. Due to her extraordinary body, she has been the object of the gaze throughout her life. She feels ugly as an obese woman. Therefore, she is disturbed by the gaze of others, and she likes loneliness. Her boyfriend is a dwarf who similarly makes use of the fat woman in his Dictionary of Gazes. However, just like Fevvers, the fat woman is also in a dilemma in relation to this issue. She herself also enjoys watching others and being watched by her boyfriend B-C. Also, they go out by changing their clothes in order to watch the people around them. Without the gaze, she feels herself empty just like Fevvers and even wants to commit suicide when she loses especially B-C's gaze on her. The novel also suggests that the gaze is also a tool to control others and to dictate order and discipline. At the end of the novel, the reader learns with a shocking flashback that the absence of a controlling look, which has resulted in the child's sexual harassment, is also the major source of the fat woman's physical and psychological problems. In her adult life, the gaze this time puts pressure on her as a fat woman undesired in the eyes of patriarchal society. She is, therefore, caught in a serious dilemma.

In both of the novels, this study has analyzed the way the female protagonists are exposed to the male gaze. Both Fevvers and the fat woman are objectified by the

male gaze like a visual material. Not only the people around them but also their lovers, Jack Walser and B-C objectify them. However, they also take pleasure in the gaze and need it for a sense of identity. Without the gaze, both Fevvers and the fat woman's identity seem to collapse, and they find themselves in situations of disorder, which at times becomes highly dangerous. The gaze, therefore, is a complicated issue and a serious dilemma for both of the female protagonists in *Nights at the Circus* and *Mahrem (The Gaze)*.

However, there are also some differences in the way these two novels approach this issue and create their protagonists. Actually, the fat woman seems more disadvantaged than Fevvers because *Nights at the Circus* has a more optimistic end as Walser falls in love with Fevvers and changes. He stops objectifying Fevvers and learns to approach her in a more egalitarian way. In *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, on the other hand, B-C does not change at all, leading to the fat woman's suicide in the end. Also, at the end of *Nights at the Circus*, a new century starts with Fevvers' laughter, and there are implications that this new century will be a century of a new order for gender relations. The novel seems to make a statement in this way about woman's liberation. The fat woman in *Mahrem (The Gaze)*, on the other hand, kills herself hopelessly as she is more and more disappointed as the novel approaches its end. In this sense, the way *Mahrem (The Gaze)* approaches the problem of the gaze seems less hopeful and even more pessimistic compared to *Nights at the Circus*.

The issue of the gaze is not as simple as it sometimes looks. In feminist studies, the gaze is a disturbing concept as it makes woman a passive spectacle, but there are other dimensions of this problem, too. The gaze also has a powerful place in human psychology and culture. In feminist studies, the gaze is often treated as a tool of

objectification. The male audience sees the woman as the object of the look so the woman is passivized. Women are used like ornamental objects and they are just watched by men. However, the gaze is so powerful and both men and women have internalized it to such a great degree that it is very difficult to discard. Both of the novels analyzed in this thesis seem to suggest that feminist thinking should also consider this dimension of the gaze. Removing the gaze completely seems impossible and does not seem to provide a full solution. What kind of new system and what kind of gaze politics have to be created in order to solve this dilemma is a significant problem feminist thinkers still have to deal with. Further research can look into this issue in more detail, trying to see how this dilemma is represented in other literary, artistic and cultural artifacts. All this may eventually help to create a better understanding of the problem and to formulate more effective solutions for it. An alternative reading and writing can be necessary for engendering the issue of the gaze both in literary studies and other areas of research. Such an understanding can provide self-knowledge for women's identity and refusal of male-domination in patriarchal society. The act of looking back with a feminist awareness can make it possible to see with fresh eyes and create an alternative for the controlling patriarchal power mechanism. With such an alternative, women can eventually rid themselves of the influence of the patriarchal gaze.

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