

## The Gaze and the Look as Female: Placing *Fleabag* Within the Field of Vision

Malavika K Pradeep, English and Foreign Languages University, India

The Southeast Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2026  
Official Conference Proceedings

### Abstract

The term “female gaze” has acquired widespread currency in recent times; the paper analyses the show *Fleabag*, popularly lauded as a series exemplifying the female gaze to expand the scope of the female gaze beyond the narrow definition of a female counterpart for the “male gaze,” through a psychoanalytic analysis of the text, drawing on Kaja Silverman's framework of identification and gaze. As a postmodern text, the research scrutinizes the subjectivity of the character “fleabag,” examining how she is constituted in the field of vision in relation to the concepts of the look, the gaze, and the screen. Lacan describes the camera as a metaphor for the gaze in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, and existing within a particular socio-political and historical context, specific values are concomitantly attached to the camera/gaze (Lacan, as cited in Silverman, 1996, p. 132). Against this background, the paper attempts to explore how far the female gaze and the female look/eye (of the spectator and the protagonist) redefine and restructure “heteropathic identification” (identifying outside the self) of the spectator with the characters as well as the identification between the lovers in the show, promoting “active gift of love” (Silverman, 1996, p. 23, p. 78).

*Keywords:* female gaze, heteropathic identification, active gift of love, the field of vision

iafor

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

*Fleabag*, widely acclaimed for its depiction of the female gaze, follows the protagonist's misadventures as she grapples with grief, loneliness, regret, loss, and love through wit and humor. The show's title denotes the unnamed protagonist and points to one of its main strains: chaotic, messy, antiheroic actions often leading to difficult or even tragic outcomes. Congruent with the theme, the first season reaches its height of dramatic tension when Fleabag's mistake, which led to the demise of her closest and only friend, Boo, is revealed by her sister. Similar morally grey actions mark the entirety of the show, with fleabag constantly being enamoured by the forbidden. This conquest of the taboo leads her to pursue a romance with a priest in the second season, the implications of which will be discussed later in this paper.

When discussing fleabag's desire, it is worth noting that it is entirely haphazard. She engages in meaningless sexual encounters with random men, some of whom she loathes. Her desire leads her to commit the mistake aforementioned, the betrayal of her best friend, which is revealed to us in the final episodes of season one. This casual sex becomes less about sexual autonomy and more about self-destruction following the accidental suicide of her best friend. It is only in the sexual encounter with the priest that she is truly present, turning the camera away. I read the love between the priest and fleabag through the lens of Kaja Silverman's "heteropathic identification" (used interchangeably with "excorporative identification"), meaning identifying outside the body, to foster the "active gift of love" between them (Silverman, 1996, p. 41). Jacques Lacan argues that when the subject encounters the other, it searches for itself in the other. In other words, Lacan quotes that it is "one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level" (Lacan as cited in Silverman, 1996, p. 42). By contrast, the active gift of love is when the subject celebrates the "particularity" of the other, viewing the other beyond as an extension of the subject (Silverman, 1996, p. 73). Although Lacan mentions the possibility of this kind of love in *Seminar I*, it is undertheorized, and Silverman develops it in *Threshold of the Visible World*, which I would be utilizing in this paper.

I also apply the concept of heteropathic identification to the relationship between the spectator and the characters in this paper. The primary target audience of the show is women, and, as mentioned, it has received widespread praise for exemplifying the female gaze; women's intimate experiences are foregrounded, ranging from the emotional to the biological. Fleabag freely discusses the body in the show, whether it be menstruation or masturbation. This underlining of the embodied experience prompts the question of the embodied look and the self-versus-other distinction that accompanies it. When a subject looks at an object, Jacques Lacan posits the possibility of the object looking back at the subject, disturbing the subject's field of vision and "photographing" it (Lacan, 1998, p. 89, p. 106). The "point of light" from which the subject is apprehended constitutes the gaze (Lacan, 1998, p. 95); between these two lies the screen (Bellou, 2024, February 26). Thus, the components of the field of vision consist of the subject's look, the gaze, and the screen. Aligned with this notion, the research paper interrogates the idea of the female gaze within the psychoanalytic framework of Kaja Silverman, who, as stated earlier, follows a Lacanian strain in her work. In this manner, it attempts to transcend the limited understanding of the female gaze as a counterpart to Laura Mulvey's male gaze. Furthermore, this research will examine the extent to which, if at all, the female gaze exists. It seeks to offer possibilities rather than definitive answers in which the female gaze can occur, while cross-examining the validity of the term.

## Literature Review

The mass popularity of the show has led to considerable scholarly research, highlighting various aspects of it, ranging from the “absent mother” to the contextualization of fleabag as a “heteropessimistic” post-feminist subject (Holzberg & Lehtonen, 2021, p. 1902; Wilson-Scott, 2020, p. 273). While Joanna Wilson-Scott (2020) asserts the “omnipresence” of the dead mother in the narrative, even though she is absent, the latter highlights how Fleabag presents the bonding between women, especially to her best friend Boo, as an alternative to “heteropessimist feelings of guilt, shame, and disappointment” (p. 274; p. 1912). It is worth mentioning that Boo’s love tries to fill the gap left behind by the mother’s loss, evidenced in the scene when fleabag says, “I don’t know what to do with it...all the love I have for her,” Boo replies, “I’ll take it...you have to give it to me” (Waller-Bridge, 2019b, 14:39–14:51). As argued by Holzberg and Lehtonen, although the potential of queer bonds as non-normative modes of intimacy in which “heteropessimistic” women can gain “something else” (Boo) is explored, the show reattaches itself to the “promises of heterosexuality” in the end, in other words, “she cannot not want the same” (the Priest) (2021, p. 1914). While I acknowledge the relevance of such a reading and the necessity to transcend the bounds of heterosexuality and the institutional violence it perpetuates, I search for ways to cope with certain aspects of heterosexuality that beget the above-quoted “heteropessimism,” namely, the invisibilization of identities, especially female identities, within heterosexual relationships to promote ethical interactions between the two members.

Turning to the next aspect that I examine in this paper, that of spectatorship, Inge Van De Ven emphasizes fleabag’s use of the audience to “distract herself” from her emotions and “cope with loneliness” and how this relationship is “reciprocal” (Van De Ven, 2021, p. 464). The author argues that fleabag, as a neoliberal subject dealing with isolation, searches for connection beyond the diegetic world and, being fully aware of our look, “performs” authenticity through cringeworthy actions to create a sense of relatability with the audience (Van De Ven, 2021, p. 460). When her real emotions resurface, she does not perform her cheeky address at the camera. As Faye Woods observes, “her pain flickers through the performance of control deployed through her direct address” (2019, p. 208). She loses control towards the end, and in moments of utter despair, she does not confide in us. Aviva Dove-Viebahn (2023) interprets fleabag’s loss of “narrative control” towards the end of the season as a critique of the limitations of modes of “subjectivity” offered by feminism. Repeatedly calling herself a “bad feminist,” she lies at the intersection of refusing to adhere to conventional femininity norms and failing to assert herself as a feminist subject. Dove-Viebahn quotes: “fleabag’s refusal to conform even to viewers’ expectations of her performance instead embodies a resistant femme subjectivity.”

Dove-Viebahn repudiates the categorization of Fleabag as a miserable protagonist whom the viewer can identify with. It is asserted that by rejecting our gaze and asking us not to follow her towards the end of the final season, she wrests control back of her narrative at the same time she renounces it. Through the Lacanian model, her gaze back at the audience decenters us as subjects and asserts her individuality. While I agree with Dove-Viebahn that fleabag is a privileged subject in many aspects, she is white, middle-class, and conventionally attractive. She is not truly an abject subject in many respects; nevertheless, as Fleabag is widely lauded as a nuanced expression of the female gaze, this paper examines the possibility of the female gaze through heteropathic identification. Fleabag stops performing for us towards the end of the show. Dove-Viebahn (2023) places her as a “resistant femme subject by virtue of this rejection.” Acknowledging the validity of such a reading, I examine her paradoxical

subjectivity through psychoanalysis when she occupies the diegetic space and how spectatorship operates in this context.

### **Research Methodology**

Jacques Lacan defines gaze as the “pulsating, dazzling, spread out of function of light” (Lacan as cited in Silverman, 1996, p. 168). In simple terms, the gaze is the object looking back at the subject, inducing awareness of its lack in the subject, thereby removing the illusion of supremacy it strives to maintain. It “constitutes the subject as a spectacle” and “divests his look of its illusory mastery” (Silverman, 1996, p. 168). It instills in the subject that he/ she is also caught in the loop of desire, the subject’s vulnerability to the Other’s desire. The gaze resists symbolization; it cannot be directly apprehended by the subject and is an *Objet Petit a*, a remainder of the real as the subject attempts to symbolize it (No Subject, 2026, n 22). In short, the lack of the subject and his/her look is that he/she can never successfully capture the object; the subject is under surveillance by the Other/object, which renders it as a spectacle, thereby decentering the subject. Lacan quotes in *Seminar XI*, “You never look at me from the place at which I see you” (1977, p. 103). Hence, the gaze is a disturbance in the field of vision that exposes the splitting of the subject, establishing it as the site of the Other’s desire.

What separates the look and the gaze is the screen, “at which social and historical difference enters the field of vision” (Silverman, 1996, p. 134). Lacan identifies the screen as opaque, and Silverman defines the screen as the “culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which the subjects are not constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age, and nationality” (1996, p. 134). It consists of both “normative” and resistant representations (Silverman, 1996, p. 178). Encompassing divergent images of female experience on screen, this article analyses how *Fleabag* is positioned within our field of vision and how the show strives to bring female subjectivity to the forefront by circulating renewed articulations of it.

The look creates subjectivity, and Kaja Silverman defines it as an “embodied, psychic and visual category...marked by lack” (1996, p. 134). The subject, characterized by lack, projects abjection onto others to compensate for its lack. This is the narcissistic identification, and in response to this type of self-centered identification, Silverman advocates heteropathic/excorporative identification (outside the body). As noted earlier, this concept is applied to love relationships to facilitate ethical love.

### ***Fleabag* and the Female Gaze**

To examine *Fleabag* through the lens of the female gaze, first, the term must be defined; Lisa French delineates it as the “expression of female subjectivity, a gaze where female agency is privileged and which is shaped by a female “look,” voice and perspective—in effect, the subjective experience or perspective of someone who lives in a female body” (French, 2021, p. 54). As this definition makes evident, the lived body is a central focus of the female gaze. There are two sides to it; it visibilizes the female body, at the same time, invites critique for reiterating the gender binary and for rejecting experiences outside the paradigm of white feminism. Additionally, excessive focus on the female body risks marginalization of queer identities, such as those of trans and intersex individuals. Acknowledging these limitations, I will examine later in this paper whether the category of the female gaze is valid. For now, I stick to Jill Soloway’s framework as detailed by Lisa French for the female gaze. The female

gaze highlights the “feeling body” and returns the gaze back to the spectator (French, 2021, p. 60).

Through the context of this definition, *Fleabag* references the female gaze. The body is constantly referenced in *Fleabag*, from periods, breasts, buttocks, sex, and even passing gas; it dominates the show. The body here is not sexualized, but viewed as how someone views it from within. One of the instances is when the eponymous main character is talking to the camera about how much she loves sex, while using the toilet. She quips, “I’m not obsessed with sex. I just can’t stop thinking about it. The performance of it. The awkwardness of it. The drama of it. The moment you realise someone wants your body. Not so much the feeling of it” (Waller-Bridge, 2016b, 05:12–05:32). The effect this scene creates is comical while talking about her sex addiction, which ultimately led to a significant loss for her. It also clearly opens the door to why she is addicted to it, to affirm her desirability and possibly to cope with the emptiness she experiences post her loved one's death.

When we position *Fleabag* within our field of vision, the most jarring element is the gaze that emerges through her direct address to the audience. Here, the object looks back at us, the spectator, demanding our attention; initially, she treats us as her confidante as she “performs” cringe for our entertainment. The show begins with a sex scene, and she talks through it to us, which further confirms that she is addicted to the validation it brings rather than the feeling of it. Here, even as we are voyeurs observing the scene, the direct address provides comic relief and invites a sense of relatability. This excess decenters us as subjects; it reminds us that we are not the masters of the situation; she, as a self-aware subject, is the one who performs for us. The “I” dissipates into “we” as we encounter the object’s look, inspiring a horizontal relationship instead of a vertical one. This is the logic of the second criterion that Jill Soloway underscores regarding the female gaze: it returns the gaze to the viewer, demanding to be seen as a subject rather than an object.

### **The Gaze as *Objet Petit a***

The Lacanian model holds that the other's gaze reminds us of our own lack as subjects; here, the object's gaze evokes our inability to exercise complete control over the screen. Usually, the gaze is not easily apparent; it exists as a point of light lying beyond the screen/image in the Lacanian model of vision. The gaze is treated as an *Objet Petit a*, a remnant of the Real leaking through the screen (Banerjee, 2021, p. 2). One reading of the gaze as *Objet Petit a* describes it as a “lost object,” a radical lack in vision, from which the subject separates itself to gain subjectivity (Scott, 2015). It is what remains after the process of symbolization, a fundamental lack that cannot be compensated. Here, the real inches closer to the visible as the character faces the camera. Even though the gaze becomes more visible, and the subject can apprehend the object’s look, it does not speak about the mastery of the eye. There is still something beyond the screen that gazes back at us, even when the character is not directly looking at the audience. It is the “point of light” (Lacan, 1998, p. 95) beyond the screen, something that “precedes the act of looking” (Silverman, 1996, p. 168). It exists before and after our look, evident in the other two readings of the gaze as *Objet Petit a*: it is not the original lost object but rather an object that attempts to fill the lack, and it is what controls and captures our look (Scott, 2015, August 5). *Fleabag*’s direct address to the camera is one manifestation of the gaze as *Objet Petit a*. It temporarily fills in the lack experienced by the look, as we apprehend the object’s gaze.

However, it is vital to emphasize that this is a mere representation of *Objet Petit a*. As argued before, even though the gaze is more visible, the eye's mastery fails. Obviously, the gaze back at the audience destabilizes the exertion of control over the object. The consequence of this is deliberate: to challenge the classical identificatory paradigms offered by the male gaze. As stated above, gaze reminds us that we ourselves are objects in the field of vision, as we are subject to the symbolic Other's look. Laura Mulvey's male gaze presupposes a male way of seeing, and the female gaze is the contrary of this. How *fleabag* exemplifies the female gaze has been elucidated earlier in this paper. The gaze is the point from which light is emitted from beyond the screen, constituting the subject; the screen acts as a buffer between the gaze and the subject's look. For Silverman, the screen is not just the literal cinema screen but a "culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age, and nationality" (Silverman, 1996, p. 135). She details that it is the site where "historical or social variability is introduced in the field of vision...The screen encompasses the particular representational logic and range of material practices through which a given society at a particular moment in time apprehends something which is itself unchanging" (Silverman, 1996, p. 174).

### ***Fleabag* and Spectator Identification**

*Fleabag* foregrounds the abject, even if instances like her sexual debasement seem to be agential in the beginning, as the show progresses, it demonstrates a lack of control and appears as a response to grief and loss (Bentley, 2025, p. 24). Initially, her direct address proves commanding of the diegetic space, but she eventually loses her grasp on it. Although the direct address encompasses all the notions outlined in the paragraphs above, it raises the question of what happens when she does not address the audience. As noted earlier, the gaze exists even when she is not directly addressing the camera. *Fleabag* exists within the larger gaze of the symbolic systems of patriarchy and white-centric, neoliberal feminism. One of the ways through which patriarchy is exemplified is the presence of God's gaze in the second season. For example, when *fleabag* remarks about her atheism, a painting hung upon the wall immediately falls down, to which the hot priest responds- "I love when he does that" (Waller-Bridge, 2019a, 05:03). The patriarchal gaze, symbolized by the priest's devotion, is set in opposition to the female gaze and desire in the second season. Bounded by these structures and the gaze of the symbolic Other, the female gaze perpetuated by the show penetrates the cultural screen to reflect the historical and social context in which it was produced. The show evidently mocks neo-liberal feminism's failings and, by circulating alternate images of womanhood, as decoded by Dove-Viebahn (2023), of "resistant femme subjectivity," it attempts to redesign the tenets of female gaze.

This resistive pressure is exerted on the cultural screen to motivate a restructuring of female spectatorship and subjectivity, prompting us to form a lateral relationship with the character on-screen. The lateral relationship is achieved through techniques such as direct address, which decenters our ego and foregrounds the interiority of characters, and through the employment of the "productive look" (Silverman, 1996, p. 180). The "productive look" is achieved through memory in Silverman. She borrows from Freud to illustrate that when a stimulus is encountered, it passes through the memory reserves for apprehension. The stimulus acquires meaning through associations with other memories. However, these associations in the unconscious are not always logical, as the unconscious itself is "indifferent" to what is culturally valorized (Silverman, 1996, p. 180). This potential can be leveraged to circulate libido on the abject by disseminating alternate visual images. By the promulgation of the other images, the "remembering look" can be altered; the memory archive of repetitive meanings

can be transformed (Silverman, 1996, p. 181). Thus, through the repeated expression of the female gaze in visual media such as *Fleabag*, a reorganization of the cultural values that are deemed desirable occurs.

It elicits identification and apprehension of the character's weaknesses, reminding us of our own. Most of the feminists, especially heterosexual spectators of the show, are caught in a similar conundrum: having to perform in accordance with cultural norms and resisting them. The identification with the titular character is carefully crafted so that her mistakes are not celebrated in a manner that undermines accountability. Instead, as repeatedly emphasized, the identificatory potential is utilized to subjectivize female experiences that refuse to conform to conventional femininity. This horizontal identification of the spectator with the imperfect object on-screen is a form of heteropathic or excorporative identification. It is an identification beyond the self, as opposed to the egoistic, "narcissistic" introjection of the other or the object into the self (Silverman, 1996, p. 20). The Lacanian model of narcissistic identification constructs the other as an extension of the self, leading to aggression and the subject attempting to ingest the other into itself, and thereby trying to eliminate the distance between them. The implication of this mode of identification is that it enables an equal exchange between the self and the other, thereby helping to maintain the simultaneous subjectivity of the two (Silverman, 1996, pp. 20–25).

Silverman treats identification hand in hand with idealization; here, the spectator should not idealize the protagonist, but rather the character's flaws are rendered hypervisible in the show. *Fleabag* self-reflexively comments on her own faults as a "bad feminist." For example, in one of the feminist lectures on being asked if they would trade years from their life for the so-called perfect body, *fleabag* and her sister affirm yes. Another instance is when *fleabag* confesses that she worries that she would not be such a feminist if she had bigger breasts. This predicament of being a "bad feminist" that haunts *fleabag* is highlighted in the show to question the viewing subjects and their own position as the audience.

Silverman equates identification and idealization to establish an empathetic relationship with abject bodies or identities. Here, I would argue that idealization is neither necessary nor desirable for the spectator to engage in dialogue with the character. The intended or "imagined" audience or spectator is one who does not identify with a perfect, heroic protagonist; *fleabag*'s relatability lies in her weaknesses. Here, identification operates through lack; it is an alignment with the characters' vulnerabilities in contrast to narcissistic identification, where undesirable attributes or a lack in oneself are projected onto others. Initially trying to conceal her grief and regret by performing the fun and quirky part, the mask slips when her sister confronts her with "what you did to Boo" (Waller-Bridge, 2016c, 15: 16). After which, it is revealed that Boo's death was an accidental suicide because her boyfriend cheated on her with an unknown woman, incidentally with the character, *fleabag*. Thus, *fleabag* resorts to the masquerade of the excessive, eccentric subject to wrestle with her sorrow.

Nevertheless, a necessary distance is maintained so that the spectator's identity does not collapse into the protagonist's identity, and the character is not glorified; another outcome of the protagonist's gaze at the camera is the creation of affective distance that foregrounds the show's fictional nature and precludes blind idealization. Hence, excorporative identification is undertaken with full awareness of one's role in the identification. Here is a flawed object that meets our look; nowhere in the narrative are her foibles validated. Concurrently, an emotional connection forms, underscoring subjective experience and serving as another marker of the female gaze. The performative mask slips in between the narrative, like how she drunkenly

monologues to her father that she has “a horrible feeling I'm a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist” (Waller-Bridge, 2016a, 20:35–20:47). While she rejects traditional femininity, she simultaneously seeks validation, particularly from men, throughout the show, reflecting how women are audited by the gaze of the Other in the patriarchal systems in which they are placed.

### **Hetero-Pathic/ Sexual Identification**

The show attempts to foreground alterity; at the same time, she remains part of the structures that determine and shape female identities, discussing the various negotiations that postmodern feminist subjects conduct in their lives. Another context in which such operations are enacted is romantic relationships, which feature in the show's second season. The protagonist falls in love with a priest; in addition to fleabag's tendency to revel in the forbidden, this relationship is profoundly healing for her. I would argue that their relationship proves the conditions necessary for a heteropathic relationship. They idealize each other with full awareness of conferring ideality on the other, culminating in the exchange of an “active gift of love” (Silverman, 1996, p. 78). The priest is fully aware of her limitations, the only one who truly “sees” her and is able to discern the “mental place” she goes to while addressing the audience. During their first meeting at the family dinner, she is ignored by everyone, while he is the only one who shows interest in her and is concerned about her after the confusion that ensues when she punches Martin. This also works the other way around: all the others see his identity as limited to that of a priest, except fleabag. Although the character is unnamed and described as the “hot priest,” she discovers his quirks and clumsiness over time.

The stark reality of his priesthood and his adamant commitment to his faith is the central tension of the second season. Rather than idealizing the other as an extension of the self and collapsing the distance between them, both identities remain separate, as a discovery of the self in the other, to quote Silverman (1992), finding “the self at the site of the other” (p. 203). I argue that the female gaze lying at the centre of the show provides the necessary framework for such an identification. The female gaze's focus on affective ties between individuals rather than extravagant spectacles allows space for the diminishing of one's ego, finding it in the other. Even though this may seem the complete dissolution of one's identity and the fusion into each other, active idealizing of the other prevents the same. Through the other, the self vicariously finds itself, as happens at the end of the show, when fleabag no longer needs our identification to validate her existence. The priest also discovers truths about himself and love, albeit with a devastating ending.

### **Is Female Gaze Valid?**

Claims of essentialism have been levelled against the female gaze, with its emphasis on the lived body as a primary locus around which the definition is centered. I would like to pose the question of whether the category of female gaze should be limited to defining the female body. Even though it has been argued that the universalizing claim of the female gaze smoothens the contours of identity, I find that the female gaze is only a way of seeing, seeing beyond the spectacle of cinema. The solution to the apparent erasure of other identities within the ambit of the female gaze is to adopt an intersectional approach. Undoubtedly, multiple layers of oppression exist within gender and sexuality, like race, class, and caste. I accept the fact that *Fleabag* explores only one dimension of gender performativity and resistance, of a white, middle-class, cis-gender woman. *Fleabag* exemplifies one among the varied forms the female gaze can assume and offers a critique of the performance of gender while being a feminist

subject, exposing the faults within feminism itself. In this manner, it becomes a satire on itself, critiquing feminism as a feminist show, reflecting that imperfect feminism does not dismiss the validity of feminism in a postmodern society.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed the female gaze by juxtaposing it with heteropathic identification and the formation of lateral bonds with the spectator. It has delved into the legitimacy of the term and assumes the position that the female gaze exists without resorting to essentializing the category. Theories and praxis of the female gaze and feminism are ever-expanding and must be approached with careful consideration of their limitations to enable more nuanced readings. There are no definitive answers to certain questions posed when one practices feminism, and I maintain that patriarchy is not the only evil in society that must be addressed. Regardless, as emphasized before, both historically and in the future, imperfect feminism is better than no feminism; we are placed within the system, and continued evolution of these understandings is necessary.

Faye Woods classifies *Fleabag* as a “precarious girl comedy” (Woods, 2019, p. 194), and her precariousness is relatable to each one of us, at least at some point in our lives. The structure of the show is designed to create, borrowing Woods’ (2019) term, an “affective pull” in the audience; the randomness with which events are sewn together mirrors how life events unfold, effectuating a more immersive experience. This immersion, punctuated by direct address that disturbs the field of vision, intentionally foregrounds gaze, forcing the audience to engage in dialogue with the character. The simultaneous immersion and distancing create a narrative capable of exposing the paradoxes of the female gaze and feminism. In moments of deep distress, the character does not find solace in us, but in other characters of the show. However, her refusal to address the camera during moments of genuine emotion does not engender a narcissistic identification of the spectator with the character because *fleabag* has already disrupted the screen by presenting alternative images of gender normativity and feminism.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

I have used Grammarly, Inc. to proofread my research paper.

## References

- Banerjee, U. (2021). The Voice and the Gaze as ‘Objet Petit a.’ *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 13(4).  
<https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v13n4.67>
- Bellou, M. (2024, February 26). *NLS-Congress 2024—Lacan’s Mask-Screen*. NLS-Congress 2024. <https://www.nlscongress2024.amp-nls.org/blogposts/bellou-lacansmaskscreen>
- Bentley, L. (2025). “I Don’t Know What to Do with It”: Gender, Religion, and Affective Excess in *Fleabag*. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 37(1), 21–31.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/jrpc.2025.aa103>
- Dove-Viebahn, A. (2023). Controlling the narrative, examining the self: The unruly femme subjectivity of *Fleabag*. *Sexualities*, 27(8), 1401–1414.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607231157072>
- French, L. (2021). The ‘Female Gaze.’ In L. French (Ed.), *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film: An International Perspective* (pp. 53–70). Springer International Publishing.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68094-7\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68094-7_3)
- Holzberg, B., & Lehtonen, A. (2021). The affective life of heterosexuality: heteropessimism and postfeminism in *Fleabag*. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(8), 1902–1917.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1922485>
- Lacan, J. (1977). *The Seminar. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (A. Sheridan Trans.). Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, p. 103 (Original work published 1973).
- Lacan, J. (1998). *The Seminar Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (A. Sheridan Trans. & J. A. Miller Ed.). W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973).
- No Subject. (2026, January 22). *Gaze (psychoanalysis)*. <https://nosubject.com/Gaze>
- Scott, M. (2015, August 5). *Deciphering the gaze in Lacan’s ‘Of the Gaze as objet petit | The DS Project*. The DS Project | <https://thedsproject.com/portfolio/deciphering-the-gaze-in-lacans-of-the-gaze-as-objet-petit-a/>
- Silverman, K. (1992). *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. Routledge.
- Silverman, K. (1996). *The Threshold of the Visible World*. Routledge.
- Van De Ven, I. (2021). Intimate distractions: *Fleabag*’s manipulations of audience attention. *Continuum*, 35(3), 455–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2021.1889465>
- Waller-Bridge, P. (Writer), & Kirby, T. (Director). (2016a). Episode 1 (Season 1, Episode 1) [TV series episode]. In P. Waller-Bridge, H. Bradbeer, L. Hampson, H. Williams, J. Williams, & J. Lewis (Executive Producers), *Fleabag*. Two Brothers Pictures; Amazon Prime Video.

- Waller-Bridge, P. (Writer), & Bradbeer, H. (Director). (2016b). Episode 2 (Season 1, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In P. Waller-Bridge, H. Bradbeer, L. Hampson, H. Williams, J. Williams, & J. Lewis (Executive Producers), *Fleabag*. Two Brothers Pictures; Amazon Prime Video.
- Waller-Bridge, P. (Writer), & Bradbeer, H. (Director). (2016c). Episode 2 (Season 1, Episode 6) [TV series episode]. In P. Waller-Bridge, H. Bradbeer, L. Hampson, H. Williams, J. Williams, & J. Lewis (Executive Producers), *Fleabag*. Two Brothers Pictures; Amazon Prime Video.
- Waller-Bridge, P. (Writer), & Bradbeer, H. (Director). (2019a). Episode 2 (Season 2, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In P. Waller-Bridge, H. Bradbeer, L. Hampson, H. Williams, J. Williams & J. Lewis (Executive Producers), *Fleabag*. Two Brothers Pictures; Amazon Prime Video.
- Waller-Bridge, P. (Writer), & Bradbeer, H. (Director). (2019b). Episode 4 (Season 2, Episode 4) [TV series episode]. In P. Waller-Bridge, H. Bradbeer, L. Hampson, H. Williams, J. Williams, & J. Lewis (Executive Producers), *Fleabag*. Two Brothers Pictures; Amazon Prime Video.
- Wilson-Scott, J. (2020). Both absent and omnipresent: The dead mother in *Fleabag*. *Feminist Media Studies*, 20(2), 273–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1546207>
- Woods, F. (2019). Too Close for Comfort: Direct Address and the Affective Pull of the Confessional Comic Woman in *Chewing Gum* and *Fleabag*. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 12(2), 194–212. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz01>

**Contact email:** malavikakpradeep26@gmail.com