

Defining the Female Gaze: Céline Sciamma's Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019) July 20, 2021

Sofia Voss

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to conduct an intersectional analysis of the film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) with an emphasis on director Celine Sciamma's decision to foreground a lesbian love story that forces a break from traditional cinematic spectatorship wherein the audience assumes a masculine perspective. This 'break' refers to the theoretical concept of the female gaze, a subversion of the male gaze theory coined by Laura Mulvey. The female gaze is inherently feminist as it not only refers to viewing a film from a woman's point-of-view but also includes several other traits such as reducing the eroticization of female characters and allowing women to assume an active role as both watcher and character. The following essay will look at the female gaze in the context of Mulvey's own theory, queer theory, and Sciamma's interpretation in *Portrait*, all of which prove important in understanding the landscape of contemporary films and filmmaking and the visual language of feminist and queer representation.