

"يا مرأتي، من أكون؟" دراسة لاكتشاف الذات في «الفتاة الزجاجية تنظر إلى الوراء» لـ ستيفاني كامبيسي و«البصريات» لـ رين واتسون مدى محمد صالح^{1*}

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الملخص:

يعدّ اكتشاف الذات، أي الإبحار في الذات والتحقيق في أعماقها وأبعادها، مصدر قلق كبير وعلامة مميزة من علامات الأدب. تبحث هذه المقالة في مثالين على اكتشاف الذات في قصتين قصيرتين، وهما "الفتاة الزجاجية تنظر إلى الوراء" لـ ستيفاني كامبيسي و"البصريات" لـ رين واتسون، وذلك في ضوء نظرية التحليل النفسي لجاك لاكان، مرحلة المرأة. تتعمق كامبيسي وواتسون في النفس البشرية وتستكشفان الطريق إلى اكتشاف الذات من خلال امرأتين ومراياهما العاكسة. يتم تحقيق تكوين هوية الشخصيات الرئيسية من خلال النمو التدريجي وتطور الإنسان، بدءاً من الولادة حتى يصبح إنساناً بالغاً بهوية يفترض أنها كاملة التكوين. تبحث هذه الورقة في عكس خط تكوين الهوية؛ أي أنه كلما تقدم الإنسان في النمو والتطور والنضج، وافترض أنه اقتراب من تحقيق التكوين الكامل للهوية، ازدادت ضبابية هذه الهوية وتشبثتها، إلى أن تحدث "الذروة" حين تتحطم اللحظة التي توصل إلى معرفة الذات وتكوين الهوية، وذلك بالتشظي، وليس بالاكتمال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اكتشاف الذات، التحليل النفسي، الهوية، لاكان.

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‘Mirror Mirror On the Wall’, Who Am I of them all? A Study of Self-Discovery in Stephanie Campisi’s ‘The Glass Girl Looks Back’ and Ren Watson’s ‘Optics’

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Abstract:

Sailing into the self and investigating its depths and dimensions have been a grand concern as well as a mark of literature. This paper investigates two examples of self-exploration in two short stories, namely, ‘The Glass Girl Looks Back’ (2010) by Stephanie Campisi and ‘Optics’ (2019) by Ren Watson, in the light of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, the mirror stage. Campisi and Watson delve into the reservoir of the psyche, exploring the road to self-discovery through two women and their mirrors. The main characters’ identity formation is achieved with the gradual growth and development of the human being, starting from birth until s/he is an adult human being with a supposedly fully formed identity. This paper investigates reversing the line of identity formation. In other words, the argument highlights that the more a human being grows, develops, and assumes that s/he achieves the full formation of identity, the more this identity blurs and disperses. The ‘climax’ takes place when the moment the identity is thought to be fully formed, it shatters. It is not by completion, but through fragmentation and shattering, that identity formation is achieved.

Keywords: Self, Discovery, Psychoanalytic Theory, Identity, Lacan.

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*I look into the mirror,
not to see myself,
but to ascertain that what I see, is verily me.¹*

- Adonis*

Sailing into the self and investigating its depths and dimensions have been a grand concern as well as a mark of literature. This paper investigates two examples of self-exploration all through until reaching the moment of self-realisation, in two short stories, namely, 'The Glass Girl Looks Back' (2010) by Stephanie Campisi and 'Optics' (2019) by Ren Watson, in the light of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the mirror stage. Campisi and Watson delve into the reservoir of the psyche, exploring the road to self-discovery through two women and their mirrors.

Identity formation is achieved with the gradual growth and development of the human being, starting from birth until s/he is an adult human being with a supposedly fully formed identity. In this research, however, the argument is about reversing the line of identity formation. In other words, I am arguing that the more a human being grows, develops, and assumes that s/he achieves the full formation of identity, the more this identity blurs and disperses. The 'climax' of this argument takes place when the moment the identity is thought to be fully formed, it shatters. This argument is going to build up on Lacan's mirror-stage theory; however, in reverse. It is also going to focus on the characters under study from the whole -vs- fragment perspective.

The *Imago*, or the Ideal-I, is suggested by Lacan as a form of identification that the human being is to reach after steps of identity formation, mainly, the mirror stage. This totality of form, Gestalt, is 'replete with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation.' (Lacan, 2006, 76-77) Thus, in the Lacanian perspective, the 'I' becomes existent according to the individual once it is separated from the 'You', or 'Us', or any 'Other'. The child will recognize the totality of his/her 'I' and his/her 'world' once s/he is visible as a whole, that is, in the mirror. It is as if the child says, 'I see myself, therefore I exist', and 'my world exists, because it is visible.' The image of the identity is now seen as a whole, not as a fragment, 'utterly sufficient that the same effect may be obtained merely by placing a mirror's reflective field near the individual.' (Lacan, 77) In short, the formation of the full coherence of the body image is established post-mirror sightedness and communication; however, the two central characters in the stories under examination will reverse this image after their realisation.

The '*Imago*'-ed Fragmentation:

The glass girl, in 'The Glass Girl Looks Back', is picked by a handsome young man, who inadvertently walks into her in the street, causing a fascinating damage to her glass body, because the broken piece reflects light beguilingly. When he looks into her, the handsome man falls in love, immediately, with what he sees.² Upon this accident, the handsome man offers the glass girl a job at his place, multiplying the price for her to accept, which she does. She is then taken and put in the finest place in his house. She is attended to and fully pampered by the maids of the house. Everyone admires her, topped by the handsome young man who comes to see her often, expressing admiration and wonder.

One day, the handsome young man grows old, and he, unlike his manner of walking with his head raised high, which was the main cause of unseeing her when he burst into her, now walks next to her with a bent head, also, without noticing her. At this point, she 'blink[s] away tears, trying not to show her hurt.' (Campisi, 2010, 38) What adds to her shock and pain is when the man returns to her and says, 'You are no longer beautiful,'

* Adonis is a Syrian thinker and poet; he is considered 'a leader of the modernist movement in contemporary Arabic poetry', according to Britannica.

¹ My translation from the original Arabic.

² The myth of Narcissus can be brought into consideration.

and leaves. (Campisi, 38) This moment marks the crucial transformation in the glass girl's mental and psychological being. Apparently, his love for his beautiful reflection in the mirror fades with age, and this causes double damage to the glass girl.³ In other words, not only is she shocked by his transformed behaviour and attitude towards her, as she thinks, but also, she discovers that she has been deceived by the fact that the admiration that was poured on her, was only a narcissistic gaze by the handsome young man, through her, a looking glass; a mirror.

Whether she realises the man's motives or not, she enters an epiphanic episode by 'climb[ing] down from her place on the wall and quit[ting] the house,' (Campisi, 38) she then runs on the abrasive road which causes her to grate as she runs. With every piece she loses, the gleaming rays of light that is coming out of her grow more beautiful and more astounding to everyone around her; '[b]ehind her, she saw, she had left a narrow trail of glass slivers that danced a hundred colours in the light of the sun, and people stood at both sides of the roads marveling at this thing she had created through her pain.' (Campisi, 39) This pain is what makes her realise that 'she was indeed beautiful.' (Campisi, 39) The more she approaches her self-realization, viz., her identity formation, and identification, the more she scatters and splinters. By this, she is reversing the mirror-stage unified image; the more she looks into herself, being a mirror herself, literally and metaphorically, the more she develops her identity, however, by shattering the supposed Imago. A post-mirror and post-epiphanic self-realisation, in other words, identification, is established when the whole image is entirely fragmented:

her body lay behind her like a string of crystal, catching the light and creating a fleeting beauty that everyone stopped to watch before running back to their lives. And, in the tiny instant before the glass girl was no longer the glass girl, she was happy because she had found her place. (Campisi, 39).

The glass girl is 'happy' to find 'her place'; she reaches self-realisation as a separate entity from the 'other'. She is no longer the reflection of the other, she is now a beauty of her own. Her 'Ideal-I' is reached and realised, and her fragmentation is her *Imago*.

A Whole of Holes:

In another case of a dispersed whole whose fragments form an Imago, or self-identification, 'Optics' sets forth what seems to be a fully-developed adult character, a daughter, wife, and mother, who goes through an unintended journey of self-discovery. The story begins with a similar scene to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the main character, Beth, and her husband are sitting in a dark room, because the power is cut, and they look at the source of light that comes through their little daughter's, Rose, finger. It is at this point where the reader starts to question the scene, that is, the probability of the girl's pierced finger; the mother's physical and mental wellness; and the state of juxtaposing the real and the imagined. These questions are accentuated the moment her husband withdraws himself physically away from her, but remains in his place, stating: 'That doesn't sound possible.' (Watson, 2019, 150).

There is a reference to her loneliness that might be one of the triggers of her current feelings and later transformation: 'He nudges her head from his shoulder [...] She falls asleep there on the floor and when she wakes again at four, she is alone.' (Watson, 150) Her loneliness is further suggested when she 'climbs the stairs and gets into bed next to him but the sheets are cold and she cannot sleep.' (Watson, 150) Not only does he leave her sleeping on the floor after 'nudging' her away, but also his coldness towards her seems to be reflected in the cold marital sheets.

Beth goes back in memory to her childhood, recalling her mother, and, gradually, her relationship with her. From the moment she mentions her mother's gift to her upon giving birth to Rose, the reader's attention might be drawn to the fact that Beth has some issues with her mother. The thought can be asserted when the narrator states: 'She remembers her mother showing her how to make paper dolls, but they always ended up separate

³ See note (2).

instead of joined together.' (Watson, 151) This may well indicate that there is a psychological distance between Beth and her mother.

It is true that Beth's having 'a vivid imagination' (Watson, 151) as her mother states, cannot be ignored; however, it is unlikely that 'a vivid imagination' affects the physical wellbeing of a child. Beth does not seem unaware of her physical fatigue that might be affecting her judgement or her observation. She says that she might be having imaginations, 'because [she] is so tired.' (Watson, 151) This gives her credits that she is mentally healthy. Despite that '[t]here was a time when Beth would believe in anything;' that was when she was a child and her father would unleash her imagination, she 'always understood physics better than biology [...] They were predictable, logical.' (Watson, 152) Beth, based on this statement, seems to be a rational person who applies reason and logic, rather than just being unreasonably dreamy with rich imagination. She feels more secure with the predictable and calculated; she is uncomfortable with mutability or surprises. It is possible to argue that to Beth, the Father figure represents culture, language, and thus, power; whereas the Mother epitomises nature, biology, and feelings, hence, mutability and anxiety, which can be portrayed in the detachment from the mother. Beth seems to be stuck somewhere between the separation anxiety and the antisocial perspective she has as a result of her unfinished detachment from her mother. Like Lacan's 'child', Beth is going through changes over which she has no control. She feels that she is experiencing some changes that are making her uncomfortable, that is, worried, upset, and disturbed. By noticing holes in the body of her little child, Beth might be projecting her perforated self – particularly that was caused in her childhood – on her little girl, who to her, is her mirror image. Becoming highly anxious about her condition, she visits a doctor, who suggests that Beth goes to the swimming pool to do some physical exercise, and when Beth arrives early, she finds that the cover of the pool is still on, and she feels comfortable that it is 'solid', because it is not scary to her as water is. Water may represent the uncertainty, or rather, the anxiety of the biological detachment from the mother – if the moment the child leaves the amniotic sac at birth is to be taken into consideration. This is the point of separation and the journey of detachment; it is, moreover, the first step towards the mirror stage, and hence, towards forming an identity. She knows that children 'start their [swimming lessons] by putting their faces in the water and breathing out. Everything is different now, even breathing.' (Watson, 153) This can relate to the process of transitioning from childhood to adulthood, that is to say, becoming closer to the post-mirror stage when identification, according to Lacan, is on the threshold of fulfilment.

The first encounter between Beth and the mirror takes place in the dark bathroom, where 'she doesn't look like herself anymore.' (Watson, 153) When she puts her child in front of the mirror and asks her to say what she sees, the child tells her mother that she sees 'Rose' as a whole. The child is able to recognise herself fully as well as partly, as she says 'arm' when the mother sees a hole above the child's elbow and points at it for Rose to tell. The child can easily see in the mirror the wholeness of her own body, that is, her identity, more than her 'adult' mother can:

- What can you see?

- Rose, she says.

- Yes, but what about this? She points at the new place just above her left elbow, where she [Beth] can see all the way through.

- Arm, Rose says. (Watson, 154)

Upon this, Beth visits the optician, in indication that she is aware of what is happening to her, and he assures her that nothing is wrong with her eyes, neither with her glasses.

One morning, half of the child disappears in the eyes of Beth, who panics and rubs Rose with the cream the paediatrician prescribes, and later, the child reappears to Beth:

Rose is sitting at the end of her bed, but only half there. The left side is clear, but somewhere in the middle she fades and the right side isn't there at all. Beth carries her downstairs. She can feel the missing arm holding her hips, but her heart feels as though it wants to break out of her, and it is beating so fast.

She stands Rose in the kitchen and breathes slowly. She rubs the cream all over. Gradually, over the day, Rose comes back. (Watson, 155).

Beth comes to a conclusion that the problem is in her, it is with her eyes, despite what the doctors say, because, '[t]hey can't know everything. They can't understand everything.' (Watson, 155) She now starts to recognise her inner world; she deviates her concern from the external world and surroundings to her inner self. Instead of focusing on the holes and missing parts in her daughter, she, now,

can see little stars, pinpricks of light, all over her own right hand. And then, a place on her wrist where there is nothing. She goes to the bathroom and turns on the light over the mirror. It buzzes and flares. She cannot see herself anymore. Only her right eye is visible, the edge of her brow, the top of her cheek. The rim of her glasses disappears to nothing at the bridge of her nose. She blinks hard, but nothing changes. (Watson, 155).

The moment she realises that it is the very her that she needs to turn to, that is, the moment of some form of identification, she turns into disappearing fragments.

Beth facing the mirror, and looking into it, can be read as Lacan's mirror stage yet in reverse. What Beth goes through before facing the mirror herself, can signify what Lacan describes as the pre-mirror stage, where the child is supposed to be unable yet to identify itself as a whole, but is still going through the separation phase. Beth goes through this separation phase, with all its turbulences, because she is anxious, worried, panicked, and she recalls memories from her childhood and from her relationship with her mother. The fragmentation and separation here seem to be passing on from one generation to the next. Beth sees this separation between her mother and herself in the relationship between her and her daughter, portrayed in the paper dolls that are never joined together:

She imagines her mother ankle deep in clippings, fragments of paper falling all around her like snow. She remembers her mother showing her how to make paper dolls, but they always ended up separate instead of joined together.' (Watson, 151).

Hence, it can be argued that separation anxiety takes its toll on Beth although she was a 'whole' and 'unified' 'adult'. However, upon reaching the mirror stage, and realising herself as a separate entity, she fragments and disappears.

Identification in reverse: Symbolic to Real, Fragment to Whole, Culture to Nature:

Lorenzo Chiesa, in *Subjectivity and Otherness: A philosophical reading of Lacan* (2007), states that the mirror stage effect is in constant occurrence throughout one's life 'due to the imaginary relationships that are established with other human beings.' (Chiesa, 2007, 25) Thus, the glass girl and Beth can be viewed as having a mirror-stage experience as adults, but upon traumas which are obvious in the case of the glass girl, while it is more latent in the experience of Beth. It is not clearly given whether the glass girl is in good terms with her parents, but it is definitely obvious that the epiphanic trauma that she faces, is momentarily caused by the handsome young man; whereas in the case of Beth, it is her accumulative detachment from her mother, and probably from her not-so-attentive husband, throughout a long period of time: 'a severe parent is intimidating by his or her very presence, and the image of the Punisher scarcely needs to be brandished for the child to form it. Its effects are more far-reaching than any act of brutality.' (Lacan, 1948, 104) In both experiences of the glass girl and Beth, there comes a time when they are to undergo a journey of self-discovery, though unintentionally, and, eventually, reach self-realisation.

Many people feel strongly confined in their physical body, that is restrictedly 'embodied'; while others feel more in reconciliation with their bodies and can easily enjoy their freedom as living entities, outside the confinement of their physical bodies, feeling 'detached' or 'unembodied'. (Laing, 1960, 66) According to R. D. Laing, in *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, (1960), '[e]veryone, even the most unembodied person, experiences himself as inextricably bound up with or in his body. In ordinary

circumstances, to the extent that one feels one's body to be alive, real, and substantial, one feels oneself alive, real, and substantial.' (Laing, 66) What Laing explains can be directly related to Beth and the glass girl, both who felt, not early enough, however, that their souls are larger than their bodies, and that their whole and unified identity is only realised after they overcome their physical boundaries, represented by their bodies. It is only after experiencing the vanishing body for one character, and the scattered body for the other character, that their self-realisation, self-awareness, and thus their soundly fulfilled sense of identity, begin.

Despite the fact that the physical body is desired and considered the natural attribute of being human, and that it is the means of living a human life, it can be argued that to some, 'the individual should try to disentangle himself from his body and thereby achieve a desired state of discarnate spirituality.' (Laing, 66) Contrary to forming and acknowledging the Imago after recognising the complete image of the body, this analysis attempts to show that the more one disincarnates, figuratively, mentally, and spiritually, from one's body, and spreads beyond the concept of 'wholeness' per se, one reaches the true and unified self/identity. In other words, as Laing puts it forward:

[The functions of the self] come to be observation, control, and criticism vis-à-vis what the body is experiencing and doing, and those operations which are usually spoken of as purely 'mental'. The unembodied self becomes hyper-conscious. It attempts to posit its own imagos.⁴ It develops a relationship with itself and with the body which can become very complex. (Laing, 69).

This 'complex relationship' can be related to the conflicted perception of the self and body, viz., the physical and mental presence, in line with the whole-vs-fragmented identity. Lacan's mirror stage is formative in offering a position for the self, that is to say, the mirror stage 'has a narcissistic self-indulgence. It is also the beginning of an "I", a thinking subject capable of enunciation.' (Pun, 2018, 49) The emphasis on the physical wholeness in terms of forming the 'I' contradicts with some thoughts that consider the body as a possible source of threat, being prone to illnesses, incapacity, and annihilation after death, or rather, the physical death. The human 'I', in this sense, can be considered as entrapped by, and at the mercy of, the physical body. Thus, with Beth and the glass girl, '[i]nstead of being the core of [one's] true self, the body is felt as the core of a false self, which a detached, disembodied, 'inner', 'true' self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be.' (Laing, 68) Hence, both, Beth and the glass girl reach the beginning of the 'formation' of their 'true' selves after being liberated from the body, in the physical sense.

This liberation, nevertheless, cannot be achieved without passing an earlier milestone of self-awareness, which is the detachment from the 'other'. To elaborate on this point, I would like to start with what Nasrullah Mambrol suggests, in 'Lacan's Concept of Mirror Stage'. (Mambrol, 2016)⁵ Mambrol states that '[t]o exist one has to be recognized by an-other. But this means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other, then, becomes the guarantor of ourselves. We are at once dependent on the other as the guarantor of our own existence and a bitter rival to that same other.' (Mambrol, 2016) Given what has been said, locating Beth and the glass girl in this respect is essential.

In addition to being prisoners of their bodies, both characters start as prisoners of the 'gaze' of their 'other' in their surroundings. The glass girl thinks that what makes her beautiful is the young man's opinion and the way through which he sees her. At first, she 'was a girl made of glass. She walked with fragile, jagged steps [...] When she smiled it was reserved, as she feared her lips could so easily shatter [...] She could not visit the library, as her fingers would slash through the pages of the books; nor could she comb and braid hair, as it would fall to the ground beneath her in hazy curls.' (Campisi, 2010, 36) She is not in good terms with her body and she feels controlled and impeded by her body. Then the young man comes, offering her a job at his place,

⁴ The emphasis is mine.

⁵ To read the full article, see, Nasrullah Mambrol, 'Lacan's Concept of Mirror Stage', 22 April 2016.

<https://literariness.org/2016/04/22/lacans-concept-of-mirror-stage/> [Accessed: Tuesday, 8 August 2023, at 18:40 Damascus time.]

where she is placed in the finest area in the house. The young man makes her happy every time he comes to see her and express his admiration. One day, however, he looks at her and says, 'You are no longer beautiful.' (Campisi, 38) Although the young man here is addressing himself upon aging and not accepting his aged reflection in the mirror, the glass girl thinks that he is addressing her, and upon this reception from the 'other', she '[begins] to sob so deeply she feared she might break.' (Campisi, 38) She plucks herself from the place in which she is situated inside the house, and starts walking in the streets of the city, cracking and scattering parts of her body, breaking into pieces, and abrading her ground-frictioned legs. After feeling exhausted from running, she stops and looks behind her, and sees that 'she had left a narrow trail of glass slivers that danced a hundred colours in the light of the sun, and people stood at both sides of the roads marveling at this thing she had created through her pain.' (Campisi, 38) Then, rain starts to pour on the broken pieces, and together with sunlight they form a reflection on the shattered glass, and charming beauty emerges from the light and colours of the glass, that is, the glass girl herself, after being crushed, physically, into pieces. There, 'she stood for a moment more, thinking that she was indeed beautiful.' (Campisi, 38) After approaching her self-realisation, still unknowingly, she runs until she can no more, and 'her legs had begun to grind down to nothingness'. (Campisi, 38) At this moment, the glass girl recalls the details that have left her with deep rifts:

She thought of her parents, and she thought of everyone who had ever been cruel to her, and she realised that every part of her burnt with a harsh, fundamental pain. And she kept running until she could run no more, and her body lay behind her like a string of crystal, catching the light and creating a fleeting beauty that everyone stopped to watch before turning back to their lives. And in the tiny instant before the glass girl was no longer the glass girl, she was happy because she had found her place. (Campisi, 38-39).

She finally finds the place where she feels she belongs; she was 'no longer' the glass girl, and she is 'happy'. This satisfaction, self-reconciliation, and happiness only take place after the complete shattering of her glass body and her liberation from it. Now she reaches her self-realisation after her long tormenting journey. Similarly, in 'Optics', Beth starts to realise that all that is going on is actually happening within her:

Beth thinks it must be her eyes. It doesn't matter what the doctor and the optician say. They can't know everything. They can't understand everything. Now, she can see the little stars, pinpricks of light, all over her own right hand. And then a place on her wrist where there is nothing. She goes to the bathroom and turns on the light over the mirror. It buzzes and flares. She cannot see herself anymore. Only her right eye is visible, the edge of her brow, the top of her cheek. The rim of her glasses disappears to nothing at the bridge of her nose. She blinks hard, but nothing changes. (Watson, 155).

Beth resists the idea of her internal identity conflict until a belated stage. Until the very last minute, she thinks that the problem is physical and that it is with her eyes, disregarding the physicians' opinions that there is nothing wrong with her, physically. She does not even trust them. Even when she starts to see the sparkles and the little wholes on her body, before facing the mirror, she still relates it to her vision and her 'physical eye'. However, it is only when she decides to look in the mirror, turning on the 'lights' immediately 'over the mirror', that she starts to transfigure and accept the fact that this transfiguration is not merely optical, and that there is a much more profound issue that lies beyond many psychological and social layers.

Mary Klages, in a lecture on Jacques Lacan, given at the University of Colorado, Boulder, sheds light on Lacan's Mirror Stage, and explains its processes. She says that 'the infant must separate from its mother, form a separate identity, in order to enter into civilization. That separation entails some kind of LOSS; when the child knows the difference between itself and its mother, and starts to become an individuated being, it loses that primal sense of unity (and safety/security) that it originally had.' (Klages, 2014)⁶ Both the glass girl and Beth go through this stage of separation.

⁶ For the full article, see, Mary Klages, 'Jacques Lacan',

The glass girl is separated from her family, although they do not play the catalyst in the story; she, moreover, becomes fully detached and liberated from the young/old man who has the major impact on her personality and transformation. Before her decision to leave her glass-pampering place, she experiences the pain of separation anxiety with the young/old man when she knows that he is no longer interested in looking at, and into, her, and that her emotional 'unity' with him is to break. Beth, too, is separated, on the one hand, from her mother, who has some sort of control over her, and, on the other hand, she becomes separated from her daughter, who seems to be in a role reversal state as her mother. Beth seems to be the one who is going through separation anxiety from her daughter, not vice versa. Whenever she looks at her daughter, Rose, she becomes over anxious and starts to see the holes in the child's body. She holds her, feels her, touches her 'whole' parts, yet she cannot see her own child as a 'whole'. She enters a cycle of anxiety and speculation out of which she cannot escape, despite the guidance of all the impartial people around her, until she takes the step, individually, and physically, detaching from her daughter. According to Lacan, in the mirror stage, as Klages puts it,

The child, still unable to be whole, and hence separate from others (though it has this notion of separation), in the mirror stage begins to anticipate being whole. It moves from a 'fragmented body' to an 'orthopedic vision of its totality',⁷ to a vision of itself as whole and integrated, which is 'orthopedic' because it serves as a crutch, a corrective instrument, an aid to help the child achieve the status of wholeness [...] What the child anticipates is a sense of self as a unified separate whole; the child sees that it looks like what 'others' look like. Eventually, this entity the child sees in the mirror, this whole being, will be a 'self,' the entity designated by the word 'I.' (Klages, 2014).

The emphasis in Klages's words is on the physical 'orthopedic' image of the body as a 'whole', which eventually leads to the recognition of the 'self', that is, the 'I'. However, the glass girl and Beth, despite reaching the point of self-realisation, and the sense of a unified identity, move in the exact opposite direction in doing so. In other words, instead of moving from the 'fragmented body' to the 'orthopedic vision of totality', they move from the complete body image, or the physical Imago, to the fragmented, shattered, and vanishing physicality, achieving by that the freedom to the confined, lost, or not yet developed 'I', self, or identity, contradicting the totality of the image and the wholeness of identity suggested by Lacan.

To put it together, Lacan's stages of the self begin with the Real, which is the space of feeling safe and secure due to the primal unity with the mother, that is nature, where every need is fulfilled, and there is no lack or fear of loss. The mother satisfies all the needs of her child, fulfilling the child with the sense of security and completeness, and this is why, there is no need for language to communicate, draw attention to the lacks, and express the demands to fulfill those lacks. Then comes the Imaginary stage, where, according to the child, the 'I' is distinguished from the 'Other', and a sense of a more complete identity is formed. The last stage is the Symbolic order, which represents the father figure, viz., the patriarchal authority, or culture, where a child has to separate from the mother/nature and depend fully on him/herself, submitting by that to the 'law of the father', that, according to Lacan, acts as a separation means between the child and the mother. In the Symbolic stage, language is needed. The child feels the need to express his/her demands, and to position him/herself in comparison to the 'centre of language', that is, the centre of the Symbolic.

What happens with the glass girl and Beth is that instead of moving from the Real to the Symbolic, they move from the Symbolic to the Real. In other words, both women start as complete, refined, and whole beings, polished with culture and language, and seem to be separated from their 'Real' stage and are fulfilled Imagoes in their 'Symbolic order'. Each one of them conveys the impression that they have a stable and clear-oriented life, in which they use 'language' and 'follow the patriarchal order of culture, the ultimate idea of culture, the position which rules everything in the world.' (Klages, 2014) However, both women turn out to be lacking,

<https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~sflores/klageslacan.html#:~:text=To%20Lacan%2C%20ego%2C%20or%20self,se%20of%20separate%20whole%20identity>. [Accessed: Tuesday, 30 January 2014, at 14:58 Damascus time.]

⁷ Emphasis is mine.

with needs that are thirsty for fulfillment; they long for the Real, and they need it to develop their identity and reach self-realisation.

The glass girl is satisfied with her vanishing body into nothingness, and it is clearly stated that she feels happy because she finds her 'place'; that is, her 'self' and wholeness of identity, but this only happens in the complete disappearance of her physical, or 'orthopedic' totality. Beth, moreover, finally accepts that there is nothing wrong with her child, neither with her eyes; rather, the chasmic holes are deep within her psyche. The moment she faces herself in the mirror, with the lit light, she recognises this truth, and starts to lose sight of her image in the mirror, despite still being a whole in her physical existence. What emphasises the idea of not holding her eyes responsible for the optically impaired vision of the holes is the disappearance of the reflection of her glasses in this mirror, and the disappearance of her entire body, except her right eye, that represents the conscious, wakeful, and fully aware observer of the transformation of identity and self-realisation. Here, Beth stops using language. She moves from the unified and cultured Symbolic self, to the fragmented; vanished, yet fulfilled Real self. Both women, post mirror stage, return to the Real, and unite with the free, unconfined, unruly, and fulfilled nature. At the end, language loses its significance, and the liberated self is only realised through the return to the Real and unification with nature.

What this study sheds light on is the journey of self-discovery and identity formation through delving into the self and investigating its depths and scopes. This paper examined two examples of self-exploration in two short stories, namely, 'The Glass Girl Looks Back' (2010) by Stephanie Campisi and 'Optics' (2019) by Ren Watson, taking into account Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the mirror stage. Campisi and Watson sift the reservoir of the psyche, exploring the road to self-discovery through two women and their mirrors. The identity formation of the main characters is attained with the gradual growth and development of the human being, starting from birth until s/he is an adult human being with a supposedly fully formed identity. This paper investigated reversing the line of identity formation. In other words, the argument highlighted that the more a human being grows, develops, and assumes that s/he achieves the full formation of identity, the more this identity blurs and disperses.

The stages of the self in Lacan's theory begin with the Real, which is the space of feeling safe and secure due to the intrinsic unity with the mother. This stage is known as nature, where every need is satisfied by the mother, eliminating any lack or fear of loss, and this is why, there is no need for language to communicate, draw attention to the lacks, and express the demands to fulfill those lacks. The second stage is the Imaginary stage, where the child is able to distinguish the 'I' from the 'Other', and a sense of a more complete identity is formed. The third and last stage is the Symbolic order, which represents the father figure, the patriarchal authority, or culture, where a child has to separate from the mother/nature and fully depend on him/herself, succumbing by that to the 'law of the father', which, according to Lacan, is a means of separation between the child and the mother. In the Symbolic stage, language is needed. The child feels the need to express his/her demands, and to place him/herself in comparison with the 'centre of language', that is, the centre of the Symbolic. This paper, however, investigated reversing the order of the stages of the self in Lacan's theory, through applying the reversed order on Campisi's the glass girl and Watson's Beth.

What happens with the glass girl and Beth is that instead of following the original order of the stages of the self, that is, transferring from the Real to the Symbolic, they move from the Symbolic to the Real. The glass girl and Beth start as adults, 'wholes', and refined with culture and language. Both women seem to be fulfilled Imagos in their 'Symbolic order', separated from their 'Real' stage, and giving the impression that they have a gratified life, in which they are fully capable of using 'language'. In other words, they have fully and successfully moved from nature to culture. However, they both reverse the situation because it becomes apparent that they are lacking; their needs are not fulfilled in the 'nature' stage, that is, the Real, and it is not possible for them to evolve their identity and reach self-realisation.

The climactic and epiphanic moment transpires when the identity is thought to be fully formed; however, at that very moment, this ‘*Imago*-ed’ identity shatters. It is not by completion, but through fragmentation and shattering, that identity formation is achieved.

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