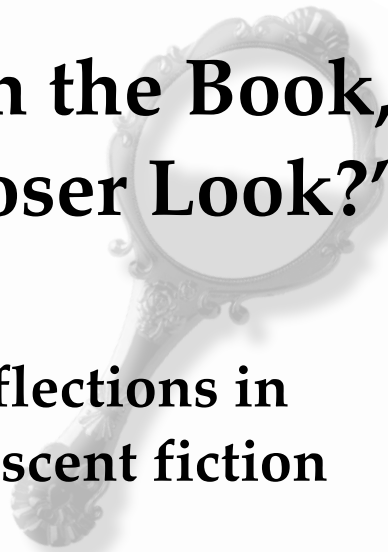


‘Mirror Mirror in the Book, May I Have a Closer Look?’:

**On mirrors and reflections in
contemporary adolescent fiction**



The author hereby declares that she has produced the present work by her own means in terms of conception, research, writing and presentation. All sources have been acknowledged.

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Mamer, 2013.

Abstract

The *travail de candidature* at hand will deal with the use of mirrors and reflections in three contemporary teenage novels. The following works of fiction have been chosen for the purpose: *The Mirror Image Ghost* by Catherine Storr (1994, pre-adolescent), *Black Mirror* by Nancy Werlin (2001, teenage) and *Mirror Mirror* by Gregory Maguire (2003, young adult). Before focussing on the three selected novels just mentioned, the subsequent analysis will see to a brief but necessary history of the mirror and mirror images in literature in general. It will moreover pithily put on display the exploit of looking glasses and reflections in children's books for younger addressees. It will then tackle two main subject areas: the mirror as object in relation to material culture and the impact of its function, reflection, in terms of psychoanalytic criticism. The debate will attend to topics of home, belonging, production processes, the uncanny, physical appearance and Other while always referring to a common undercurrent of character development and identity quest fostered by the looking glass and that which it shows, or not, to the looking.

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‘Mirror Mirror in the Book, May I Have a Closer Look?’:

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The moment the idea for this paper had arisen I embarked on the investigation with passion. However, I had been unaware, at that stage, of the dimensions this research would be willing to take on.

Soon, I seemed to be trapped in one of those mirror labyrinths found at fairs. And I still have not found my way out...

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Lisa Sainsbury, for her academic support and advice on this quest. Thanks to my friends for listening to my complaints without complaining. Last but not least, cheers to my family who knew all along, and in contrast to me, that I would finish, eventually.



INTRODUCTION: Mirror(s,) Moments, and More...

The *travail de candidature* at hand will confront the use of mirrors and reflections in three contemporary teenage novels. The following works of fiction have been chosen for the purpose: Catherine Storr's *The Mirror Image Ghost* (1994), *Black Mirror* (2001) by Nancy Werlin and *Mirror Mirror* (2003) written by Gregory Maguire.

The Mirror Image Ghost addresses a nine to twelve audience whereas *Black Mirror* clearly attends to teenagers. *Mirror Mirror* has been placed into a more recent market category called 'young adult', epitomising a transitional reading stage between teenage and adult fiction. These novels reveal a number of common characteristics, some relevant to the discussion, others just mere coincidence. All three hold a girl as their main protagonist. Moreover, these characters come from dysfunctional or patchwork families and have troubles with one or more members within the provided social structure. Each novel, starting with *The Mirror Image Ghost*, portrays a period in a girl's life in terms of self-discovery, from child to adolescent to adult, culminating in *Mirror Mirror*. They could thus be considered as coming-of-age literature in their different ways. Last but not least, apart from the evident word representation in the titles, they have been picked because they indeed perfectly mirror the mirror.

The novels presented above address dissimilar target audiences in terms of age scope and consequently exhibit a fundamentally diverse approach to the subjects treated. They are therefore valuable as case studies for the research in question as they are wide-ranging in readership as well as in the authors' implementation of mirrors and reflections as literary tools of framework, plot, idea formation and particularly, mental and physical growth of their characters.



The paper will be divided into two main chapters that will be intrinsically linked through structure as well as content, thereby ensuring an inherent continuity. Both parts will contain a brief opening related to the title of the section. The lead-in will again be followed by three separate though interrelated sub-chapters, where each segment will be dedicated to one of the three selected novels. A final conclusion will bring together the different lines of thought introduced in the discussion and will additionally suggest alternative areas of studies for further research where appropriate.

The first chapter ‘The Mirror – An Object ’ will investigate the impact of the mirror as an object on plot and character development. In order to achieve this aim, it will evaluate the variable role of the artefact as part of material culture and its studies within specific contexts and as ultimately contributing to questions (and answers) of identity creation.

Tying in with the previous concerns, the second part of the *travail de candidature*, ‘The Mirrored – A Subject’ will concentrate on issues of the mirror and mirror images as media in the field of psychoanalytic criticism, in particular the domain of the Self, as this is notably associated with the preceding concepts of the relationship between object and subject.

The coherence of this dissertation will thus be predominantly guaranteed through its underlying *leitmotif* of fictional identity and identity formation in the three contemporary works of adolescent fiction. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson indeed declares a human being’s identity formation process as ‘beginning in childhood and continuing its developmental course throughout the life cycle, but coming to the fore as a central task of adolescence’¹. Here, this process is encouraged through mirrors and reflections. The two chapters will explore the two different sides of the coin, as it were, climaxing in the second section as the final stage of the analysis.

¹ Erik Erikson. Quoted in Jane Kroger, *Identity Development : Adolescence Through Adulthood* (California and London : Sage Publication, 2007), p. 10.



There is, admittedly, a pair implication of ‘mirror’ involved in the process of this research and it is a tricky one at that. When using the noun ‘mirror’, people generally refer to what was formerly called a glass or looking glass or, in more basic terms, any shiny surface such as water, aluminium, metal or varnished material reflecting what it is being held up to or else, in physical opposition, confronted with. The etymology goes back to the Old French or Latin term *mirer*, meaning ‘to look at’ or ‘to wonder’², which already implies two fundamentally distinct connotations. Moreover, when looking up the word in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, a second sense, non-literal though similar in essence, can be added to the definition: ‘a thing that reflects or gives a representation of sth’³. The example found in the reference book is even more enlightening as it says that ‘Charles Dickens’s novels are a mirror of his times’. Newspapers like the *Daily Mirror* or *The Mirror* play on the ambiguity described above to reinforce their *status quo*: they project an image of the world for society to see and are, at the same time, representative or mirroring so to speak, the very image they promote. Funnily enough, the English playwright John James Osborne dared recommend to ‘never believe in mirrors or newspapers’⁴.

Consequently, the novels employed in this paper work on a double level; on one hand they employ the object mirror as a literary assistant. On the other hand, they themselves act as the artefact they evolve around: they thus ‘mirror’ certain historical, archaeological, social and psychological perspectives, some of which will be brought to light in the course of the discussion.

Furthermore, a highly interesting inconsistency is provided by the synonyms ‘reflection’ or ‘to reflect’. ‘To reflect’ has, again, two prospective meanings at its disposition: to begin with, as already mentioned, it might

² Online Etymology Dictionary, Internet WWW page at URL :

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=mirror> (accessed 04/09/2012)

³ In *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, Jonathan Crowther, ed, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 748. All quotations are from this edition.

⁴ John James Osborne. *FamousQuotesAbout.com*, Internet WWW page at URL : <http://www.famousquotesabout.com/on/Mirrors> (accessed 04/09/2012)



function as an alternative to 'to mirror' in the first sense but 'to think, to consider, to ponder'⁵, too. This dual, even slightly discrepant, element invests the mirror research with a further layer: in order to exploit the topic to its fullest possible extent, the surface of the merely visible, namely the mirror and that which is mirrored, needs to be scratched. The mirror and the image will subsequently open up whole new worlds, will work as doors to the now still intangible or unthinkable for both readers and characters alike.

Despite the fact that the object mirror and the mirrored subject have become so ingrained in everyday life (bathrooms, elevators, glass buildings, mobile phones) and popular culture (songs, video clips, superstitions), to the extent that we do not think about their implications, consciously, every time we are faced either with the artefact or its function, the traditions and impacts of both go way back in time. It is in literature, fiction and other that we can detect a long-lasting mirror tradition, a tradition that is continued well into the selected novels of the twentieth and twenty-first century. A brief summary of this convention in writings will show that the looking glass has been employed in various ways, depending on the substance (plot, characters, motifs...) and socio-historical background of and in the literature displayed below. This short presentation is aimed at demonstrating that although the mirror and its images are as variable a narrative tool as are the meanings and interpretations connected to them, there is definitely what could be called a genre of looking glass literature. What the works belonging to that genre have in common then is the fact that object, with or without function, and subject, looking or not looking into the mirror, cannot be treated as individual units. They are, as the case studies will prove, natural allies. The looking glass turns into a magnifying glass: it makes find.

In Greek mythology, the mirror or mirror image already enjoyed a certain fascinating status. The legends of Narcissus and Medusa include either the thing or the reflection provided by a gleaming surface as decisive fictitious stimuli. Narcissus falls in love with his own image, a self-reverence which

⁵ *Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, p. 980.



leads, in the end, to his ultimate downfall. Medusa, on the other hand, was created to cause death when being looked at. Perseus, the hero of that tale, manages to overcome the gorgon by using a shiny shield as a mirror so as to cut off her several snakeheads, thereby avoiding the direct gaze at the fatal creature. Without going into further details, as these will be provided at the relevant places in the chapters, oppositional attitudes towards mirrors are made evident: looking glasses and their likes are sources of reproduction, of reality, of self-awareness and therefore self-consciousness. Conversely, they also advance self-delusion, the mysterious, immortality and death at the same time. Some of these issues will be problematised in the present dissertation when talking about contemporary teenage mirror books.

More widespread looking glass literature, as it has now become frequently known by among academics and literary critics, dates back to as early as the eleventh century, where references to mirrors and mirror images can mostly be found in clerical writings. The book of Genesis indeed informs that ‘God created man in his image’⁶. However, even though man should endlessly strive to come close to that image, they should not fully incorporate it. According to expert Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, the Ancient Greek already warned that

The mirror, a tool by which “to know thyself”, invited man to not mistake himself for God, to avoid pride by knowing his limits, and to improve himself. His was thus not a passive mirror of imitation but an active mirror of transformation.⁷

This idea of the mirror as an active object will be echoed in the material culture breakdown in Chapter One. Moreover, ‘transformation’ is what drives the girls in the three chosen novels: theirs is an identity process of change by means of the mirror.

⁶ *The Official King James Bible Online*, Internet WWW page at URL : <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-1-27/> (accessed 12/09/2012)

⁷ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror* (New York & London : Routledge, 2002), p. 106. All quotations are from this edition.



With the rise in popularity of the product two centuries later as belonging to common household stock and the research dedicated to developments in optical science and light, the looking glass can also be traced more repeatedly in secular and spiritual documents and literature of the time such as Dante's works *Divine Comedy* (1308-1321) in which mirrors or the light emanated from them lead the way to God. Nonetheless, it needs to be pointed out at this stage that the looking glass was not always and only considered to be connected to the divine. Quite on the contrary: even if new explorations were shedding light on how mirrors and reflections worked, their uncanny and deceptive nature could not be denied, and has never been. Melchior-Bonnet explains:

With the emergence of the mirror, a fantasy world of fears and desires is born. For the preacher mirrors were the paraphernalia of witches who lock demons inside them, but were also dangerous objects for any Christian because they attracted "crazed stares." When the mirror was not reflecting the spotless divine model, it was the seat of lies and seductions, used by cunning Satan to deceive men. As an instrument of both simulation and lust, the mirror fed illusions of the mind and cupidity of the flesh, and thus was tied to numerous allegorical representations of sin.⁸

While referring to positions taken in the Middle Ages, this quote puts on display yet again to what extent the mirror and its functions have been looked upon from assorted and even conflicting perspectives: a matter of life and death, of reality and illusion, of fear and desire, of God and the Devil, of lust and sin...

In spite of these controversies in correlation to the item and its repercussion, the trend of exploiting both in literature was sustained, and inexorably so. Mirror expert Mark Pendergrast ascertains that, in fact, 'by 1500, more than 350 European books had mirror titles of one sort or another',⁹ a hype which was furthermore fostered by the invention of the printing press

⁸ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 187.

⁹ Mark Pendergrast. *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p. 124. All quotations are from this edition.



fifty years later. Shakespeare himself recognised possibilities a mirror was and is still able to evoke. That is why Richard II says to his mirror ‘O flatt’ring glass,.../ Thou dost beguile me!’¹⁰ upon not seeing the image that he expected to meet in the looking glass, an aspect treated extensively in Chapter Two. By that time, it could be argued in favour of looking glass literature having become a sort of genre in its own right, represented by the object mirror and above all its weighty utility.

This increase in using the mirror and mirror images as narrative tools was not restricted to English literature, palpably, but it cannot be negated that many influential British works seem to have drawn on this device to generate a convincing build-up to highly complex ideas. Take Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) as a further example: though the item at stake is not a mirror in the technical sense but a painting or more accurately, a portrait of the main character, it still takes advantage of mirror effects such as self or body image and the difficulty for some to come to terms with copies of the physical ‘I’. That’s why Dorian famously laments:

‘How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!’¹¹

And in the name of Hedonism, he does. This extract, although relating to a fictional character, demonstrates to what degree humankind had become, at that period, obsessed with matters of appearance and youth, issues which will be addressed in detail in the subsequent debate.

The use of the object and its function as literary stratagems has obviously changed in the course of time as have their connotations in genuine socio-historical contexts. A rather revolutionary perspective on the mirror and

¹⁰ William Shakespeare. *Richard II*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt, ed, (London : Norton, 1998), Act IV, scene 1, lines 269 – 271, p. 999.

¹¹ Oscar Wilde. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London : Penguin Books, 1985), p. 31.



mirror image was introduced by poet and novelist Sylvia Plath in 1961. Readings of her poem are as numerous as understandings attached to mirror allegories in general. In this poem, the matter is the narrator. It is not the looking glass nor the reflection it provides which is seen or looked at; on the contrary, it is the mirror which actively observes. It is thus turned into an in-between thing, not dead but not living either, an eerie form of animism which will be explored in connection to *The Mirror Image Ghost* both in terms of material culture as well as psychoanalytic criticism.

‘Mirror’

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike
I am not cruel, only truthful –
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me.
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.¹²

Again, as in Wilde’s work, the mirror and the images launched are represented as a haunting yet irrefutable existence drawing on the fear of a given body modification, especially when it comes to age and beauty. Moreover, aspects of truth and expectations and the irredeemable relationship between mirror and mirrored are raised in one breath, features which shall be scrutinised by means of the chosen case novels shortly hereafter.

¹² Sylvia Plath. ‘Mirror’. Internet WWW page at URL :
<http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/sylvia-plath/mirror/> (accessed 12/09/2012)



Examples using the mirror and reflections in one way or another are frequent in the literary world. As can be deduced from the few above, the exploit of mirrors in writings has become as manifold as the symbolisms they can be coupled with. While it is difficult to establish canon-like standard criteria, it is nevertheless plain that the works play with and count on this very variety of the tool 'mirror'. Fact is, however, that one collective trait slowly but gradually crystallises: object, function and subject do not exist independently. By looking at one, we are also looking at the other(s). And as a consequence, this relationship results in the hypothesis that the product and its impacts are part of the subject, hence, part of an identity. This phenomenon has not stopped at *The Mirror Image Ghost*, *Black Mirror* and *Mirror Mirror*.

As a matter of fact, if the delight in mirrors and reflections in the realms of adult fiction and poetry can be deemed remarkably long-lasting in its venture, children's and adolescent literature, as a separate category, have proven to have turned into more than keen competitors.

Fairy tales represent the forerunner model of this culturally and historically shaped tradition of looking glass literature. This might not be an accident. Children are exposed to fairy tales at a very early age, at least in the Western European world, indeed before they can read or even hold a book in their hands themselves. These stories find their origins in an oral tradition and have been passed on from generation to generation. Parents start reading tales to their children when they become responsive and receptive, which is, approximately, at the age of six months. This is exactly the time period Jacques Lacan refers to as the mirror stage in a child's development, a theory that has created a stir in the domain of psychoanalytic criticism as shall be seen in Chapter Two. It might be daring to insinuate more than a coincidence here between the psychology of the child and their narrative receptive functions. Reading fairy tales typically happens at a later age so that the audience is able to see and understand the moral usually woven into the story. And yet, this parallel might be interesting enough to consider for further research.



Still, there is a second fairy tale quality that makes them prone to fit in with the idea of a looking glass genre. The status of the tales has been slightly marginalised from other pieces of fiction through their ‘association... with domestic arts and with old wives’ tales’¹³, so Maria Tatar. A lot of the tales speak of adventures, of journeys, of quests, of out-of-home; yet in essence, the stories are confined to children and the house, the world of interiors. Grimm’s fairy tales were actually titled *Nursery and Household Tales* at the beginning. It is not surprising then that quite a large number of fairy tales use household objects as plot drivers: the oven in *Hansel and Grethel*, a wheel and a spindle in *Rumpelstiltskin*, the clock-case in *The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats*. The titles of Hans Christian Anderson’s stories are loaded with stuff imagery: *The Flying Trunk*, *Red Shoes*, *The Match Girl*, *The Tinder Box*, to name just a few. And there are those using the mirror or other reflective surfaces.

Which child does not know the legendary lines of Snow White’s stepmother ‘Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest one of all’? The mirror delivers an answer, even if only restrictedly so. It has been bestowed with a voice and so has come to life, a move which might have given Plath the inspiration for her poem. This story by the Brothers Grimm (1812) can be judged the ultimate mirror story; an enormous amount of different versions of the fairy tale have been published for children, teenagers and adults alike by Roald Dahl, Angela Carter, Spike Milligan and Shel Silverstein, for example. Some of these altered accounts have appeared in form of poems and have tended to make use of the ‘mirror scene’ as a means of subversion, twisting and turning the original model to their own liking and need such as making fun of the stepmother’s quest, for instance. In Shel Silverstein’s poem ‘Mirror Mirror’ (1996), the mirror decides to change its mind after the Queen has nearly thrown a fit; she did not like the mirror’s reply which, customarily, designates Snow White as the most beautiful girl in the world:

¹³ Maria Tatar. ‘Introduction’, in *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Maria Tatar, ed, (New York : Norton, 1999), p. x.



‘Mirror, Mirror’

QUEEN:

Mirror, mirror on the wall.
Who is the fairest of them all?

MIRROR:

Snow White, Snow White, Snow White--
I’ve told you a million times tonight.

QUEEN:

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
What would happen if I let you fall?
You’d shatter to bit with a clang and a crash,
Your glass would be splintered--swept out with the trash,
Your frame would be bent, lying here on the floor--

MIRROR:

Hey ... go ahead, ask me just once more.

QUEEN:

Mirror, mirror on the wall.
Who is the fairest of them all?

MIRROR:

You--you--It’s true
The fairest of all is you--you--you.
(Whew!)¹⁴

Here, the mirror seems fed up with the Queen’s perpetual question, thus answering her in a way that shows both annoyance and a sarcastic line. Yet the main element of the well-known mirror passage is kept alive: the fact that the Queen needs this reassurance of Snow White being inferior to her, hence her defining herself against her stepdaughter. While *Beauty and the Beast* (1740)¹⁵ and Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Ugly Duckling* (1843) follow similar uses of the mirror and its function in terms of identity formation, it is the story of Snow White which remains unequalled in contemporary rewritings. The novel *Mirror Mirror* by Gregory McGuire, based on this highly

¹⁴ Shel Silverstein. ‘Mirror, Mirror’. Internet WWW page at URL : <http://poemsbysheilsilverstein.blogspot.com/2009/01/poem-by-shel-silverstein-pg-88.html> (accessed 12/09/2012)

¹⁵ First published version by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve



interpretative fairy tale, has been picked for this research to certify the idea of validating Self through Other.

In 1872, the children’s mirror novel *per se* made its appearance on the market: Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, the sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice imagines a parallel world behind the mirror, a world which is, in essence, like the one she lives in, except that ‘the things go the other way round’¹⁶. Carroll and his illustrator John Tenniel consciously play with the fact that a mirror image keeps on being outright bewildering: when you raise your left hand your mirror image, which you anticipate to be your exact copy, raises its left. When you try to move your arm away from you for example, you will only find it getting close to the other ‘you’, your reflection. A reflection is then forever mirror-inverted, and so is Alice’s experience through the looking glass: in the ‘real’ world, the painting on the wall next to the fireplace is on her left whereas in the ‘looking glass’ world, it can be found on the right. *Through the Looking Glass, And What Alice Found There* is the original title of the book. Alice does recognise some components of the real world in the world behind the mirror. Some things are familiar, others are not. In that way, *Through the Looking Glass* displays joint individualities with Catherine Storr’s novel *The Mirror Image Ghost* which will take up on the matter of defamiliarisation of place and things.

If the fairy tales and Carroll’s work have laid out the path for children’s looking glass literature historically, it is picture books which offer the young a first hands-on take on the idea of using the object and its function between covers. As a matter of fact, so-called touch-and-feel hardbacks for toddlers introduce the theme, exemplified through the baby einstein *Mirror Me! A Mirror Book* (2002) design which employ small mirrors on the right hand side of a spread for children to imitate animal faces shown on the left. Again, the mirror stage and self-awareness (and therefore awareness of Other) become obvious issues to be attended to.

¹⁶ Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass* (London : Penguin Books, 1994), p. 19.



The looking glass trend has been continued in picture books for slightly older children. Tying in with *Through the Looking Glass* is Anthony Browne's famous *Through the Magic Mirror* (1976), a surrealist piece of work evocative of René Magritte's painting, or Suzy Lee's emotional and ingeniously challenging *Mirror Mirror* (2003), a picture book without text, with sparse colour use and whose illustrations are at times highly reminiscent of the Rorschach ink blots used in psychology. The recently published *Mirror* (2010) by Jeannie Baker does not contain mirrors in the primary sense: it actually includes two stories in two different worlds, as it were, but mirroring each other in nature.

The list of children's fiction dealing with mirror symbolism is, like that for adults, seemingly endless. The idea of confronting a younger audience with such highly suggestive imagery has been furthermore cultivated by extremely popular books such as JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series which takes account of two-way mirrors used as a method of communication as well as the Mirror of Erised (reversed of 'desire'), well-known to die-hard Potter fans. This magical item encloses the inscription 'erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi'¹⁷. When held up in front of a mirror and subsequently put into another order, it says 'I show not your face but your heart's desire'. In this case, the mirror functions as a door to a person's soul, a bearer and discoverer of deepest secrets and alike, topics which will reoccur in the course of the analysis.

This concise but pertinent outline of writings using mirrors and reflections as means of framework or narrative tools has been introduced to illustrate an on-going fashion of employing the object and its function both in adult literature as well as stories for the young, thereby initiating a claim for a looking glass literature sub-genre in the domain of children's or adolescent fiction. The previously provided examples and ensuing case studies moreover show that the trend covers each category of children's literature, from the very young to the nearly adults. The three novels which will be

¹⁷ J.K. Rowling. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London : Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 225.



analysed hereafter perfectly fit in with the tradition of looking glass literature generally in that they do mould the mirrors and reflections to their needs accordingly, while working within and attending to given socio-historical contexts. Not only do they assimilate ideas and notions which have already been explored before, but in addition open up whole new scopes of mirror and reflection symbolisms, due to the subject areas of interest they comprise and the audience they address. Through the looking glass we find will character. The time has come at last to ask 'Mirror mirror in the book, may I have a closer look?'



CHAPTER ONE: The Mirror – An Object

When scrutinising any kind of object, it almost goes without saying that this item needs to be x-rayed through the means of material culture, the study of stuff. However, in the context of that academic field, the object does not exist in a vacuum; on the contrary, the determining factor for choosing material culture in the discussion at stake is provided by the way it finds both its sources and results in the connection between objects and subjects. The subsequent analysis will benefit from exactly that relationship: of Things and Men.

Just as the mirror cannot be pinned down to one exclusive functionality, in social or historical terms, material culture seems to escape one clear-cut definition. Material culture, as the objects it envelops, draws on as well as partly characterises various subjects areas such as linguistics and literature, sociology, anthropology, archaeology and history, arts, economics, production and consumption, to name the most obvious. The pluralist disposition of the mirror, which shall be observed in detail henceforth, thus perfectly fits in with this classification or actually, lack of it. Similar to the forever shifting temperament of the looking glass through history, material culture as a field of study has moreover changed in nature over the years. Having firstly developed into a more tangible notion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, material study as an individual project is fairly new to the world of academia: it enjoyed its pivotal upsurge in interest in the 1970s through The Archaeological Institute of Universal College London together with the archaeology department of the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University, with names such as Buchli, Miller and Tilley used hereafter.¹⁸ As an initial awareness and consequent intellectual endeavour, material culture has ranged, in purpose, from the idea

¹⁸ For a manageable overview on the history of material culture and its development as a field of study refer to Victor Buchli's *The Material Culture Reader* (Oxford : Berg, 2002)



of objects as mere markers of the past to static symbols of social evolution. Whatever the momentary personality of material culture, it has always entailed the idea that people and things, sometimes regarded as opposites, at other times considered as supplementary, should not and cannot be analysed as separate entities, as Christopher Tilley puts forward: ‘persons cannot be understood apart from things. Much of material culture studies is concerned with deepening our insights into how persons make things and things make persons’¹⁹. Material culture then focuses on the relationship or relationships that have existed and will further subsist between human beings and the objects they bring into life and consume or buy and even more notably, the individuals that are fashioned according to or as a consequence of certain object productions. Tilley suggests in fact that ‘Subjects and objects are indelibly linked. Through considering one, we find the other’²⁰. In this context, material culture becomes a lens through which the characters’ attitude and development can be scrutinised and vice versa. Object and subject mirror each other. In this light, an object or in this particular case, the mirror, is henceforth anything but passive: it has come to play an active role in character formation, real or fictional. The present analysis will thus reveal the mirror, solid and touchable, as the central tool in the process of identity creation of the leading individuals of the chosen novels; they move from being children to teenagers or adults respectively by means of the mirror.

¹⁹ Christopher Tilley. ‘Introduction’, in Christopher Tilley, ed, *Handbook of Material Culture* (London : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), p. 2. All quotations are from this edition.

²⁰ Christopher Tilley. ‘Introduction’, p. 4.



It did not tell what it had seen. It held all this within its silvered glass and the wooden frame.

- Catherine Storr, *The Mirror Image Ghost*

The mirror hung in Fanny's room, opposite the windows which looked out on to the small London gardens at the back of the house. Now the mirror reflected light: the morning sun, the English sky, often streaked with clouds, the scanty, pale modern English furniture of Fanny's bedroom.

It was not an English mirror. It had been made in Germany, nearly two hundred years before. It had a heavy frame of dark, carved wood, and it was long enough to show the reflection of a grown person, full length. Now the person it showed most often was Fanny; but in its long history, it had shown a great many people doing many different things. It had shown people being born, growing up and dying. It had shown people laughing and crying, loving and quarrelling, eating, drinking, celebrating, praying. There was nothing that people do, whether kind or hateful, comforting or terrifying, which the mirror had not seen and reflected in its time.

But it was silent about these memories. It did not tell what it had seen. It held all this within its silvered glass and the wooden frame. Perhaps it could have spoken only to another mirror. A mirror like the little hand looking-glass which lay just in front of it, on Fanny's dressing table. It would not be until the two mirrors were placed so that each reflected the other that any of their secrets could be told. And this did not happen until Lisa...

But this is the beginning of Lisa's story and must be told in the right order in a new chapter.²¹

The first page of Catherine Storr's *The Mirror Image Ghost* immediately defines the framework the discussion is going to work and mature in: the mirror is exposed as an object which comes with a history, thus providing the ideal setting for an evaluation within the territory of material culture. Secondly, this passage juxtaposes object and subject, bringing them into contact; people will forever surround items and will forever be surrounded by them, thereby

²¹ Catherine Storr. *The Mirror Image Ghost* (London : Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 3. All quotations are from this edition.



mutually fostering identity processes as embedded in the study of material culture. In this context, the opening lines uncover the inevitable symbiosis between an old mirror and a young character, Lisa. ‘This is Lisa’s story’... meaning the story of Lisa’s search for herself via the looking glass.

The introductory paragraphs reveal everything about the mirror and yet nothing at all. Why is that so? Because the mirror has chosen not to give away secrets, not its own, not those of the people it has already encountered. It is for the reflected, here Lisa, to find out. From the outset, the object ‘mirror’ is hence represented as a powerful force due to its primary capacity to implement its basic purpose, that of reflection, but more so through its secondary talents: it observes, takes in, remembers... and holds its tongue. In that way the mirror has been bestowed with an air of animism, an uncanny side. Slightly alive, though not human, it parades a range of spiritual characteristics. Big Mirror is watching you!

By granting the mirror qualities of the senses that are usually confined to humans or animals, not objects, Storr resourcefully turns her main narrative weapon into something known yet mysterious. This established defamiliarisation of a common object strikes at the foundations of Jean Baudrillard’s beliefs on furniture arrangement and general structures of interior design disclosed in his *The System of Objects*. Like Tilley, he underlines the fact that ‘Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value – what might be called a “presence”’²². Lisa clearly feels this presence through the forces the mirror displays; that is why she is continually drawn to it and ‘she had almost made up her mind never to look in a mirror again’ (p. 63). But only ‘almost’. The mirror fascination is too strong an attraction for Lisa to abandon. Baudrillard continues by stating that actually, ‘What gives the house of our childhood such depth and resonance in memory is clearly this complex structure of interiority, and the objects within it serve for us as boundary

²² Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, (London : VERSO, 2005), p. 14. All quotations are from this edition.



markers of this symbolic configuration known as home²³. In *The Mirror Image Ghost*, the action happens inside the house and more specifically, inside the mirror and its reflection. The mirror, ‘the boundary marker’, fixes the limits to Lisa’s physical and mental possibilities; she is, in the end, a child whose opportunities remain essentially narrowed to indoor space.

The setting of mystery is Fanny’s bedroom at her parents’ house. For Lisa, her grandparents’ home used to mean her home, a place she had been able to escape to from her stepfather and his children. Her first home having already been intruded by a precarious family situation, her secondary home is now also being invaded by the people she does not welcome in her life and does not feel welcomed by:

‘And when you told me about Laurent, you never said anything about his stinking kids. You didn’t tell me then that they were coming to live with us and to muck up my life and make me miserable. It was all going to be wonderful, I was going to have a proper father at last and we were going to be a real family. I didn’t want a stepfather much, and I certainly didn’t want a stepbrother and sister. Especially horrible French kids like they are.’ (p. 31)

It needs to be established here that Lisa is presented as an uprooted character upfront: she is spending her holidays at her grandparents’ with her patchwork family including her mother, her mother’s new partner and his two children, Pierre and Alice. She definitely does not feel completely at home anywhere as she is having a hard time coming to terms with the imposed conditions, especially having to share a room with Alice. Moreover, Lisa cannot accept her new stepfather [‘...I don’t want him around’, ‘He doesn’t make me happy’ (pp. 5-6)] although, as the quotation above shows, Lisa is in want of a father figure. The fact that Pierre and Alice speak French and repeatedly belittle English culture does not help to improve things at all. Lisa’s viewpoints on ‘home’ and ‘family’ do not correspond to her expectations in the slightest. Her mother’s former bedroom evolves into her personal retreat from disappointment and is nevertheless the place where

²³ Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*, p. 14.



strange things are occurring. For Lisa, ‘home’ has turned into a bendable subject; the mirror is the ultimate item to negotiate ‘home’, thus twisting Baudrillard’s theory of home (and objects) as a possible comfort zone. ‘Home’ is typified by the objects it contains which then again partially form the human beings in their immediate proximity. Here, it will be a liminal object against and by which a liminal subject, namely Lisa, will be trying to define herself.

This is the jumping-off point from which Lisa’s adventure begins. And this is the adventure: by holding a hand-mirror up to the old looking glass, Lisa travels back in time through her grandfather’s mirror. Her mother is not terribly alarmed when Lisa tells her about the happenings:

‘I’m not surprised you saw extraordinary things if you were using two mirrors. It’s terribly muddling. If you’d ever tried to cut your own hair in a mirror you’d know that everything works the wrong way round. You think you’re getting nearer with the scissors and in fact you’re going the other way. Two mirrors makes it more than twice as impossible...’ (p. 40)

Yet Lisa knows, at least after her second time slip, that her mother was far too rational about the situation. ‘Extraordinary things’ is not strong enough an expression to describe what Lisa is experiencing with and in the looking glass. Lisa leaves home and does not leave home simultaneously. Slowly but surely, the mirror in *The Mirror Image Ghost* stands for what is ‘home’ but on the other hand, it also embodies everything ‘home’ is not.²⁴ It works with-in and without the given framework of Lisa’s world. For her, the looking glass has come to be one and the same reference point in the parallel time formations, a safety spot so to say, while at the same time being cause of the alienation of and from ‘home’. As Lisa recognises upon her second visit to the looking glass universe, ‘At first it seemed to Lisa quite unfamiliar, but as she looked around it, she realised that though the room was strange to her, the furniture was not’

²⁴ The second mirror, the hand-mirror is irrelevant to this discussion as it is a means to an end only, a simple tool to achieve a certain effect of giving more depth to the transformational power of the big looking glass. Unlike the main mirror, the hand-mirror is not an end in itself.



(p. 83). The eerie nature of the mirror quietly destroys the initial unison between human and object, makes the supposed home a place of what Nicholas Royle calls ‘unhomeliness’, of ‘not-at-home’, or ‘even out-of-home’²⁵. ‘The uncanny is (the) unsettling (of itself)’, so Royle²⁶. And yet, it is this very self-estrangement of and from the mirror and its surroundings, the sense of belonging and unbelonging Lisa faces in both spaces, that is fundamental to Lisa’s character development and therefore, identity formation. On page 66 in *The Mirror Image Ghost*, Fanny exposes the problematic in the here and now when she suggests spending Christmas together at her parents’, a place that Lisa used to worship. ‘You’ve always loved it before’, she says. Lisa’s reply, ‘That was when it was just you and me’ (p. 66), furthermore illuminates the situation. Lisa feels hurt, neglected even, by her mother at the beginning of the novel. In the mirror world, apart from the obvious time slip, her unbelonging is demonstrated for example through the fact that the mirror world characters mistake her for a boy because she is wearing trousers in a time period when this would have been unusual, if not unacceptable, for a girl to do. In that world, she is not only a temporal but also a physical misfit. ‘You are wearing boys’ clothes. This is a trick. You are a bad boy to come here and make me afraid’ (p. 121), Elsbet exclaims.

Not at home and nonetheless not completely out of it either at her grandparents’ house, Lisa finds repeated distraction in the mirror in her mother’s room. The heavy mirror with the wooden frame had belonged to her grandfather’s parents in Austria and it ‘was the only thing left in his father’s apartment. Everything else had been taken away’ (p. 25) when Lisa’s grandfather went back to Austria after the war to see whether his parents might still be alive. What connects Lisa then with this mirror are long-forgotten and even unknown family ties, a family heritage, namely that of World War II, which she is still too young to understand initially. As the story progresses, however, the character progresses, too: when Lisa was called

²⁵ Nicholas Royle. *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 4. All quotations are from this edition.

²⁶ Nicholas Royle. *The Uncanny*, p. 5.



‘sulky and rude’ (p. 18) by her mother or when she voiced her disdain towards Pierre and Alice through phrases such as ‘Not my family they’re not’ (p. 18) at the opening of *The Mirror Image Ghost*, the reader can notice a gradual maturity growing in Lisa. ‘Sulky’ and ‘rude’ are adjectives employed to label a small child. Lisa’s time travels, the mirror, have made her desert these child attributes due to the seriousness of the situation she discovers. In the middle of the book she is ready to admit that ‘she was becoming accustomed to having Pierre and Alice around. Sometimes she caught herself almost liking Pierre...’ (p. 82). This is the mirror’s doing. When brought into play with another, smaller mirror, the war mirror opens up a new or more appropriately, an old world for Lisa to dig up, to grasp, to comprehend and ultimately, to evolve with. What she sees and is seen in are parts of her grandfather’s childhood and that of his sister as Jews in Nazi Austria. It is obviously not irrelevant what she observes but how or rather through what she does so is more crucial at this stage: the mirror. The mirror has, as the opening page of the novel suggests, attended the above situations exhibited through the double reflections. Due to restricted information and/or experience about the Second World War stipulated by the primary text, it would be quite hazardous to talk about the mirror as a bearer and reminder of a collective memory, in this case the Holocaust, or even as James W. Pennebaker calls them, ‘shared presumed memories or histories’²⁷ when referring to later generations of a certain group of people. Still, it cannot be denied that Lisa’s being, hence her identity, is tightly linked to this experience of war: if her grandfather had not survived, if she had not warned his family of the historical magnitude they might probably be subjected to, she would not have been born. Since the children she meets in the parallel mirror world are her own future grandfather and his sister, endangered Jews in the light of the World War II Nazi cause, it has to be said that if she herself had not survived, in that parallel though past world, she would not have been born.

²⁷ James Pennebaker. ‘Introduction’, in James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé, eds, *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives* (New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), p. vii.



Illogical as this may sound, it is the crack in the mirror and therefore the mirror itself which was and still is witness to this truth:

One of the soldiers reappeared at the door. He asked a question. The young officer looked at him, then back at Elsbet, as if the answer concerned her. But at last he shook his head and turned towards the door. As he did so, he saw Lisa.

He spoke to her. She had no idea what he was saying. He motioned the soldier in the doorway, to lay hold of her. He said, ‘*Auch Juden,*’ and Lisa somehow knew that he was saying that here was another Jewish child. Before the soldier could touch her, Lisa had stepped backwards towards the mirror. As she went, she saw a second soldier lift his machine gun, pointed at her. She was being told to do something, to step forwards, to remain still, she didn’t know what. She stepped back again just as the soldier fired. She heard the whine of the bullet as it passed over her head, she caught sight of Elsbet’s face, her mouth open to scream. Then she was back in Fanny’s bedroom, surrounded by light, walls and silence. She was looking at the large mirror, with its surface damaged by that spider’s web hole. She knew now when that had been made and how. (p. 123)

The crack here is the key as it transforms the mirror into an object of war. In the realms of archaeology and social anthropology, most distinctively in the sub-domain of trench art studies, such objects have been unearthed as heavily loaded with representations of materiality and culture, possibly more than any other artefacts in a given context. Expert Nick Saunders defines their highly idiosyncratic nature as following:

The objects of war, like any artefacts, embody a diversity – but perhaps a unique intensity – of individual, social and cultural ideas and experiences. Analysis of them reveals the social origin of artefact variability, and the fact that at the same time they are part of, and constitute the physical world. This world structures perceptions, constraining or unleashing ideas and emotions by the people who live within it in ways which draw together materiality, spirituality, politics and emotion, and simultaneously link the living and the dead in an ever-changing interplay of past and present.²⁸

²⁸ Nicholas J. Saunders. *Trench Art : Materialisms and Memories of War* (Oxford : Berg, 2003), p. 1. All quotations are from this edition.



He goes on by claiming that ‘nowhere other than in war are people’s social lives more insistently determined by their relationship to the objects which represent them, and through which they come to know and define themselves’²⁹. The mirror undoubtedly links the living, Lisa, and the dead, her grandfather and his sister³⁰. Just as the mirror is an in-between object (in-between home and unhomeliness, war and peace, past and present), Lisa is, as has already been mentioned, an in-between character for the same reasons and in the same spaces. She herself wonders ‘... if there was another Lisa somewhere else who had never managed to get born because of this [Hitler’s war]. A sort of ghost child, waiting in limbo for parents who were already dead’ (p. 92). She is thus inevitably connected to the mirror as artefact and comes to define herself through it, as the study of material culture presupposes. The mirror reflects, not as the shiny surface it primarily is but as the literary tool it is being used as, Lisa’s mental and social states. The crack is there and so are Lisa’s problems. Yet the damage is not irreparable.

The object helps her adopt new perspectives towards herself as a subject and her present family situation and hence pulls the necessary strings to trigger a certain maturity in her as a character, a genuine acceptance and even embrace of the circumstances she initially despises, an attitude that a child would not be able to put on display:

‘You’re lucky, you and Alice. I wish I had a sister. Or a brother.’

‘You have us,’ Pierre said.

‘If I was lost, would you look for me?’

He pretended to consider. ‘Perhaps I would. It would depend on how rude you had been to me before you were lost. If you had called me Frog, I would let you stay away.’

‘I’ve never called you Frog!’

‘You wanted to. When we were first here.’

‘That was a long time ago,’ Lisa said. (p.143)

²⁹ Nicholas J. Saunders. *Trench Art*, p. 1.

³⁰ Neither Lisa’s grandfather nor his sister are dead at this point ; ‘dead’ means ‘past’ here.



That was when Lisa was still a child, not a teenager. The first step, out of negative perceptions and out of childhood, has been made. By analysing the mirror as an object in its material and cultural functions we have found Lisa's family history, the importance of family ties and therefore her own past and beyond. It has become evident, once again, that objects and subjects form, especially in the sphere of the home, a whole: an object's purpose depends on a subject whereas a subject's identity is influenced by the stuff they produce and consume. As shall be seen in Chapter Two, the mirror's function, the images it generates, play an equally significant role in terms of Lisa's identity formation. By unearthing the mirror's secrets, Lisa shall find her own.

Where the mirror was. Screaming – once you noticed it - in its own way.

- Nancy Werlin, Black Mirror

Nancy Werlin's *Black Mirror* offers an entirely different plot to *The Mirror Image Ghost*: a teenage detective novel, of some sort, the story contains a main character very distinct to Lisa. Frances is already in her teens, dealing with issues that Lisa is yet to meet. And still, both are predominantly preoccupied with a mirror. The object 'mirror', although in unlike manners, is common ground. For Lisa, the mirror signifies her past and therefore, her present (and future). For Frances, the mirror becomes her persistent companion on her journey to finally being able to say 'I looked into the mirror and I saw Frances



Leventhal³¹. However, this is still a long way to go. Before Frances can actually conjure up the courage to look at her reflection, she spends 245 pages merely looking at the object. Similar to the way it has been done in the previous section, the mirror will be scrutinised in the light of material culture in relation to the topics of home and belonging, and its indisputable bearings to identity formation.

For the most part of the novel *Black Mirror* the mirror is there; on the other hand, it is simply not. As a matter of fact, in spite of being more of an identifiable framework here than a central plot driver, the looking glass is present through its absence: it is not a physical absence in the sense that the object *is* not. It can be seen, it can be touched, it can be felt... Yet it has been stripped of its fundamental function, the reflection:

Saskia's eyes widened and she took a step toward it, her brow furrowing. 'Frances, what's that?'

'It's a Jewish custom,' I said tensely. 'You drape the mirrors in black when you're in mourning. You're not supposed to look at yourself or think about yourself.'

There was a moment of silence in which Saskia regarded me carefully. Then: 'But only for a *week*,' she said. 'Only while you sit shivah. Right?'

My own familiar response snapped into place too. 'I'm still in mourning,' I shot back.

Saskia lifted her chin. 'So am I', she said. 'I'm just a little less theatrical about it.' (p. 116)

The surface explanation Frances provides as a reason for the concealed mirror image refers to a tradition deeply embedded in Jewish culture. Ronald Eisenberg explains further:

In the house of mourning, it is customary to cover mirrors or turn them to the wall. The most popular reason for this practice is that mirrors are a symbol of vanity, and the mourner should not be concerned with personal appearance. Because prayer services are held in the house of

³¹ Nancy Werlin. *Black Mirror* (London : Speak, 2003), p. 246. All quotations are from this edition.



mourning, the reflection might distract the attention of the worshipers. Indeed, it is forbidden to pray in front of a mirror, and synagogues are not decorated with them.³²

Frances's brother has just passed away; it needs to be clarified at this stage that the obscured mirror is the only affinity to Jewish codes of conduct to be discovered in the novel. Why adhere to it here then? The answer is unequivocally simple: it suits Frances. 'You're not supposed to look at yourself or think about yourself'; this idea is much to the young girl's liking. Due to reasons which will be analysed closely in Chapter Two, the main character has trouble coming to terms with her changing female body and thus generally tries to avoid her mirror image. Moreover, on another level, it is not so much the mirror or its effects which bother Frances most. Rather, it is the cloth which is representative of her condition, as she describes:

I suppose I could have chosen Buddhist white, rather than Jewish black, but the black had been available. And it didn't really matter to me which religion I expressed mourning in. The cloth was a *personal symbol*. It was so that I would have a visible reminder of Daniel's death at all times. It was so that I would remember my failure. (p. 28)

It is evident that Judaism is not so much a motivation as a good excuse for keeping the mirror under-cover. Frances is not ready yet to openly confront the loss of her brother nor is she willing to deal with her own social issues. 'My failure' refers to Frances's sense of unbelonging, at school, at home, in short, any kind of social structure or community. 'I didn't fit in anywhere' (p. 28), she maintains. Frances considers her lack of social interaction to be the reason as to why she did not realise her brother was in difficulty. Covering the mirror, an object loaded with negative connotations, in her eyes, comes to mean covering, hiding or blocking out problems.

The mirror, however, is difficult if not impossible to ignore. Its eerie, half presence is repeatedly being pointed out to, thereby turning it into a constant

³² Ronald L. Eisenberg. *JPS Guide Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), p. 97.



and active companion for the narrator: ‘The mirror that said: *You owe your brother*. The mirror that said: *You were so wrong about everything*’ (p. 40) or ‘...where the mirror was. Screaming – once you noticed it – in its own way’ (p. 115). By wrapping the mirror Frances wanted to break away from it as an object with a function, as a highly evocative product. She does, in the end, achieve the exact opposite: she draws it closer, feels its magnetism at all times. Jean Baudrillard has studied precisely this attraction-repulsion phenomenon in modern structures of interior design, especially in relation to serial furniture, furniture that is designed to last in function, quality and style:

Their mobility and multi-functionality allow him to organize them more freely, and this reflects a greater openness in his social relationships. This, however, is only a partial liberation... this ‘functional’ development is merely an emancipation, not (to go back to the old Marxian distinction) a liberation proper, for it implies *liberation from the function of the object only, not from the object itself*.³³

Such serial objects are made not to be fashionably exquisite, a designer piece or one of a kind, but to form a consistent part of the common person’s household. Frances’s mirror seems to be anything but special and can therefore undoubtedly be categorised as the kind of furniture just mentioned. Serial products are the fast food of stuff: easy to buy, easy to move, and easy to use or consume. According to Baudrillard, the facility connected to this sort of furniture creates a certain healthy distance between object and subject: Frances’s mirror does not, in essence, put any limits on her. That is why she can choose to strip it of its function and to place it where she does, an aspect which shall be looked at in due time. However, Baudrillard maintains that this freedom from the object is merely shaped on a superficial level. We might be able to ignore or conceal an object’s purpose, as Frances does with her mirror, yet we cannot ignore or conceal the presence of the object as object. At this stage the mirror image might have become escapable; the mirror, as artefact in itself, as an artefact of Frances’s choice, though, has not.

³³ Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*, p. 16.



This specific mirror has entered Frances's life at an emotionally relevant point, shortly after Daniel passed away. Frances is presented as an outsider, a social and physical outcast, a rather stereotypical teenage girl who feels highly uncomfortable in her shaping body. She appears to become more aware of these traits through her brother's death. Daniel's decease triggers in her two opposite reactions: on one hand, as can be seen by the covered up looking glass, Frances takes refuge in her solitary world, detached from others and even herself. In contrast to this, she also decides upon attempting a 'greater openness in her social relationships', as Baudrillard would call it, and embarks on a social adventure with Daniel's friends. This state finds an echo in the asset of the mirror but hiding its primary utility dialectic. Daniel Miller, a professor of anthropology, is an expert in the matter of 'things'. He considers the acquisition of new products as a way to generate social interactions. As a logical consequence, he has broadened his research to 'the other side of the coin': to 'a study of how we divest ourselves from things and how this assists us in dealing with the loss of relationships'³⁴. Frances appears to combine the two opposite ends of the consumption spectrum. She gets hold of that object to eventually deal with her past and to eventually change her attitude in the future. As Miller suggests, 'memories and aspirations are laid out in photographs and furniture'³⁵.

As has been mentioned before, Frances's aspiration for a possible social evolution is more of an ambition than a reality. She keeps to her room at college more than she has ever done before. She is, indeed, rather peculiar about her small hall space: she frequently calls it 'safe' or 'private'. She also portrays it as a place that usually calms her down and from the outset voices her dilemma in admitting other people into that room; in fact, she confesses that 'except for Daniel, early freshman year, she [Ms. Wiles] was the only person I'd ever invited into my room' (p. 27). This room, as little as it might be, is therefore the more important in function: it is Frances's home.

³⁴ Daniel Miller. *Stuff* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 2010), pp. 145-146. All quotations are from this edition.

³⁵ Daniel Miller. *Stuff*, p. 109.



Anthropologists have conducted numerous studies on the subject of houses and homes, architecture and interior design, colours and furbishing. Miller terms houses ‘the elephants of stuff’, ‘huge lumbering beasts that are excessively hard to control’³⁶. Homes have become the paragon of objectification in the world of social anthropology, the place where objects dominate, a place subjects seek to dominate through objects. Frances’s mirror clearly rules over her room and Frances controls her space via that mirror. Tilley compares or rather contrasts the animal kingdom and mankind in that a main difference between the two can be found in the idea that people ‘actively serve to create, or objectify, the environment of which they are part’³⁷, whereas animals do not. However, we not only create or alter our surroundings, as Frances does with the mirror, we also create ourselves through our domestic dwellings. Frances has moved out of her grandmother’s house, a marker of her dysfunctional and culturally alienated family life which she had not been able to change or influence, into a readily pre-designed and conceptualised room belonging, originally, to the higher authority of the college. The shell of her home, her material world, was not her choice. Since everything else seems to be slipping out of her hands, Frances feels obsessively protective about her space, defensive even. She has to turn that room into *her* room; she needs to permanently mark her territory. In order to abolish that separation between person-room and make it person-home, Frances has added her own special objects, like the mirror. Consider the following mise en abyme: the mirror mirrors home mirrors Frances mirrors outer social world. Miller establishes this relationship between object and subject in relation to identity formation:

Each of these studies [in *Stuff*] illustrates the process of accommodating as an example of objectification. In no case are people merely representing themselves in their homes as a static relationship. In each research project it is the dynamics of the home that is paramount, whether moving house, refurbishing a home, creating mess or merely

³⁶ Daniel Miller. *Stuff*, p. 81.

³⁷ Christopher Tilley. ‘Objectification’, in Christopher Tilley, ed, *Handbook of Material Culture* (London : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), p. 60. All quotations are from this edition.



moving stuff around. In each case the persons are once again creating themselves through the medium of stuff.³⁸

Robert St. George then completes this statement fittingly in relation to Frances and the latter part of the just founded *mise en abyme* by saying that ‘domestic interiors are social spaces that shape human interaction according to the furnishings a given room contains’³⁹. Frances’s room is sparsely decorated and rarely visited, except by herself. The covered mirror in that exclusively private space is a symbol of Frances’s introvert and ill-accepted (by herself) personality and near absence of human interaction. At the same time it indicates a disruption, a challenge to the peace and private, as it also encompasses changes and developments yet to come.

Nevertheless, the mirror was not the first of Frances’s acquisitions nor objects which show her inherent need to produce and make herself a refuge. As a matter of fact, Frances is interested in art and calls herself an artist. For her, the art studio at school ‘smelled like home’ (p. 66). It is in her art that she finds comfort and expression. Three black pictures mark her most impressive work. Maybe the discussion should have started with her paintings; still, they only seem at their most relevant when looking at them where the mirror is now, namely positioned up with the three acrylics. Three black works of art supplying a frame to a black mirror:

In my room, the jarring effect (which I love) is caused by the way the “normal” things – the quilt, the pillows, the rag rugs – clash with the ferocity and darkness of the acrylic paintings on the walls. (p. 113)

The blank squares – dark green, dark blue, black mixed with yellow – that you see when you first look at the paintings are not what you see when you keep looking. They’re only what I painted on top, at the end. It’s a very thin coat, as thin as I could manage, as thin as would cover and conceal, while not concealing. (p. 114)

³⁸ Daniel Miller. *Stuff*, p. 99.

³⁹ Robert St. George. ‘Home Furnishings and Domestic Interiors’, in Christopher Tilley, ed, *Handbook of Material Culture* (London : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), p. 221.



The key concepts unearthed in relation to the mirror reappear in connection to the paintings: the hiding, concealing, and blocking away. The darkness, the black. However, while Frances seeks to gain a certain control over her room and herself, she has designed the paintings to accomplish the exact opposite. She nevertheless has to admit that she has failed in that attempt, that she is not ready yet to go ‘wild’:

Me, I like it when artists just throw things into their paintings. I like a sense of danger and risk; a *lack* of control. It’s hard to explain, especially since achieving that particular effect in a piece of art actually requires a tremendous amount of control. Of your medium. Of your hands. Of yourself. You create, very precisely, something that is – wild.

At least, that’s how it is for me.

Not that I think my paintings fully achieved that wildness. I’m not good enough yet; that’s the simple truth. But there’s definitely something there, on those canvases. Ms. Wiles said it best.

Nightmares. (pp.113-114)

Frances is still unable to attain that ‘lack of control’ in her art because she does not have ‘a tremendous amount of control’ over herself, represented in her avoidance of her mirror image. The paintings reveal what she is afraid the mirror will reveal when uncovered: nightmares. Beneath the black cloth she will have to face what she has tried to hide with black paint:

Beneath that coat of paint are all my secret emotions, expressed fully and frankly. You can’t see them at all in the finished paintings – except you can. You can feel them. You look at my paintings, and you know they’re there. Beneath the dark squares. (p. 144)

The paintings basically mirror the mirror... or is it the other way round? The *mise en abyme* previously illustrated takes on new dimensions. Interestingly enough, the reader is provided with this explanation of Frances’s art work the first time someone other than Ms. Wiles steps into the secret sphere of Frances’s home. It is Saskia, her brother’s girlfriend, whom she has intended to socialise with. Frances feels as protective about the canvases as she does about the mirror. The unity of three black squares denotes her as much as she



denotes them: they are each other, on surface level and underneath. The way Frances knows what is hidden beneath the black coat of paint, she also knows what is to come beneath the black cloth. When time is right.

Frances's need to invent herself through objects or to find objects which create her can be traced back to her general desire to own things. In order to examine her mania with stuff it is useful and indispensable to look at what media theorists call the uses and gratifications theory, meaning the physical, social and psychological benefits people get through artefacts such as Frances's mirror. Arthur Asa Bergen exposes this hypothesis in the sociological context of material culture in his book *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture*. The want for object consumption and possession can thus be related to four different factors: four aspects which can be connected to Frances and her situation, four features which clearly show that she is in a transitory phase of her identity process.

The first characteristic on the list is 'to have beautiful things'. Berger talks of a 'psychological reward', a 'feeling of well being' and success in people when they have nice stuff.⁴⁰ In Frances's case, this yearning is obviously linked to questions of status. Frances comes from a humble milieu; she is a student who is able to attend that school only on the basis of a scholarship. Berger assumes that 'achieved status means that many people who aren't financially successful suffer from alienation and a sense of relative deprivation'⁴¹. Frances's sense of unbelonging has already been brought up before but becomes more apparent here, hence her obsession with objects such as the mirror, her own art or a jumper to break free from her ascribed status described as from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' (p. 53):

The sweater had arrived yesterday in a box from Nordstrom; a mysterious catalog order from my father. I doubted he could afford it and I had almost sent it back. But staring at it, touching it, I had been filled with unexpected longing. (p. 215)

⁴⁰ Arthur Asa Berger. *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture* (California: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2009), p. 59. All quotations are from this edition.

⁴¹ Arthur Asa Berger. *What Objects Mean*, p. 62. Nota Bene: 'achieved status' refers to merits, abilities as opposed to 'ascribed status' (family heritage)



Frances's longing to belong, to occupy a fixed place in society, is expressed by her wish to wear clothes usually reserved for others and to be able to eventually look at herself, in that outfit, in her mirror.

The second quality of objects as bearers of gratification lies in their nature to divert and distract. This point has already been touched upon with the mirror having been acquired at a specific moment in Frances's life.

The next aspect to take into consideration is probably the most dominant in Frances's case. Berger talks about our desire to own and consume certain objects 'due to desire to imitate others'⁴². Frances's mother left them when she was nine. Now as a teenager, Frances directs her attention to Ms. Wiles, her art teacher, who has grown to be her substitute role model. Ms. Wiles is portrayed as a person she respects, at least in the beginning. It soon is evident that the word 'respect' might even be too weak to put across what Frances feels towards Ms. Wiles. It is love, admiration but also, to some degree, pure jealousy:

Sometimes I feel sure that Ms. Wiles could just look at me and understand things I hadn't even fully formulated. Not that she ever said them aloud. She just... looked. As now. I can't explain it. Yvette Wiles was just... special. We could be silent together.

Sometimes I wish I could *be* her. (p. 11)

By looking at Ms. Wiles, Frances sees what she would like to see when looking into a mirror. By being in Ms. Wiles's house, Frances sees where she would like that mirror to be one day.

I had been in Ms. Wiles's cottage three or four times, but I always needed to look around and admire it all over again... she had such great *things*.

...

It was all so civilized, so wonderful. I wanted to grow up and live in a place like this. No; I wanted it to happen immediately. (pp. 82-83)

⁴² Arthur Asa Berger. *What Objects Mean*, p. 60.



Frances's attraction to things, her craving to own them and use them can thus be located in the fact that she has not found herself yet. She cannot accept herself, she cannot face her mirror image and wishes, at this stage at least, to be someone else, to live like someone else, to possess like someone else. She is still in the process of making and being made.

Last but not least, Berger registers 'to affirm aesthetic values' as an element of gratification through artefacts. He retains that 'our choice of objects may be more connected to our lifestyles – the groups with which we identify – than to our personalities and taste'⁴³. Frances, in the course of development, identifies with whom she respects most: Ms. Wiles, the woman, the artist, the teacher, the owner of pretty things.⁴⁴

The mirror in Frances's room fits in with all four categories. It is the object which accompanies the main character through the most difficult period of her young existence, a period of a hidden, unknown identity yet to come out. The novel has 249 pages. On page 246, after Frances has found out the truth about her brother's death, she says:

I was overwhelmingly aware all at once of the mirror in the corner, on the wall, still draped in black. I ought to take it down now, I thought. Its purpose was over. It and its black mourning cover should come down. The Frances who had put them there was gone. Gone forever – even if I didn't quite know who she – who I – had become.

Was becoming.

Still, I didn't take the mirror and the fabric down. (p. 246)

'Its purpose was over'... Frances's identity formation, however, was not. Even though Frances tries hard to not to confront the mirror, she simply has to acknowledge its presence and is therefore unable to disengage herself from the artefact which determines her room, her home. The mirror symbolises both her want for social interaction and, at the same time, her inevitable lack

⁴³ Arthur Asa Berger. *What Objects Mean*, p. 60.

⁴⁴ She detaches herself from that identification though, physically and emotionally, once she finds out who/what Ms. Wiles really is.



of it; it promises change yet also means the opposite. Frances is stuck: there's no way back to the child she once was. On the other hand, she is struggling to go forward, to become the young woman she will eventually see in her reflection. Backed up by Frances's mysterious black paintings, the mirror is at the root and an effect of that struggle; it is highly prominent due to Frances's desire to own things, an emotional appetite prompted by questions of status, imitation and identification.

The mirror's function as an object has thus been defined in terms of material culture and matters of identity formation. On page 247, Frances finally reveals herself in the mirror. She has changed both in mind and body, undoubtedly so, but is not fully formed yet. Chapter Two will illuminate that change in greater detail in relation to her physical appearance, hence her reflection, the mirror's purpose. The reflection in the looking glass will lead Frances to where the mirror as object was not able to take her to: to 'I looked into the mirror and saw Frances Leventhal.'

'I've lived here before mirrors were invented. I'd have known if this thing had a human owner.'

- Gregory Maguire, Mirror Mirror

Whereas the two previous novels clearly demonstrated a number of parallels such as a contemporary setting, Gregory Maguire's *Mirror Mirror* appears, apart from the obvious mirror reference, as a kind of misfit work at first glance. Firstly, in *Mirror Mirror*, the readers are confronted with a drastic and



maybe unexpected change of time and place: they find themselves catapulted back to the sixteenth century. Moreover, the site of action is not an English speaking one: the location of Maguire’s choice is Lombardia in Italy, featuring the historical Borgia figures⁴⁵. Last but not least, the fact that *Mirror Mirror* is indeed an old fairy tale, *Snow White and The Seven Dwarves* in disguise, calls for additional original perspectives. This agenda creates room for innovative discussion points in terms of the mirror as an artefact of material culture, notably in relation to object origins and production, which shall be attended to shortly hereafter.

Both *The Mirror Image Ghost* and *Black Mirror* have dealt with concepts of ‘home’; in *Mirror Mirror*, the main character Bianca de Nevada spends most of her narrative time out of home and therefore does not, *a priori* and independently from the looking glass, belong to the place where she resides principally, which is the dwelling of the dwarves. *Mirror Mirror* will thus not further enlighten the matter of the mirror as part of the ‘home’ notion. Furthermore, although the chief protagonist, as in Storr and Werlin’s work, is a young girl, Bianca is a highly absent and passive character. It is she who develops, who is in need of an identity and therefore lives through an identity process. However, she only does so through the medium of others: without the dwarves, the mirror as an object does not have a purpose of being. Without the stepmother, the reflection does not have a purpose of being. Yet it is the mirror which will define Bianca, as it has defined Lisa and Frances. As a consequence, the looking glass and Bianca, object and subject, cannot be separated from the other characters. On the contrary, they only co-exist due to the dwarves and the stepmother. The following discussion will concentrate on the dwarves and the mirror in Chapter One in connection to material culture and will move to the stepmother, the mirror and reflections in Chapter Two to wrap up with Bianca at the end. As can be seen from the outset, *Mirror Mirror* delivers a whole new set of potential hypotheses which shall broaden the

⁴⁵ The fact that Maguire has chosen to work with characters who did exist around that time will not be included as a special element in the analysis but will be dealt with as a given.



subject on the use of the mirror in contemporary adolescent literature, starting with the historical aspect of the background and object at stake.

If we would like to present a history of the mirror as an object, we would have to present a history of reflection first. The direct consequence of looking into a mirror indeed precedes, in chronological time, the object which makes it possible. Reflection is as old as the human race and older. Shiny reflecting surfaces such as water, or later metal, already provided such images before their social and psychological impact had been born and could be grasped. The previously quoted Mark Pendergrast has written an extensive and highly challenging book on the subject called *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection*. To attempt to put to paper an appropriate summary what others have spent hundreds of pages and the same amount of hours on would be similar to gazing into an endless mise en abyme of looking glasses: utterly dissatisfying. Fact is that whereas a reflection might be arbitrarily, unknowingly produced, the mirror as object is not. It is a ‘thing’, an artefact, designed and crafted by the human mind and hands.

Its history goes back as far as 6000 BC where mirrors were not mirrors as we know them today but rather polished surfaces. The first looking glasses made of plate glass, close to the contemporary model and manufacture, were fabricated in sixteenth century Venice, Italy, the country which managed to hold the method secret from the rest of Europe for about a hundred years.⁴⁶ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet maintains that ‘the real Venetian mirror remained a rare object in the sixteenth century’⁴⁷ and it was the steel or tin mirror which was introduced to society as a common urban household commodity.

Is it a coincidence then that, when first faced with the intricate looking glass discovered in the river near the house, the rural characters in Gregory Maguire’s *Mirror Mirror* react with suspicion, a certain refrain? Since that kind of ornamental and functional shiny replicating object had not yet found its way into the world of interior design and much less so into countryside

⁴⁶ For a detailed history see *The Mirror* by Sabine Melchior-Bonnet

⁴⁷ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 22.



domestics, it is natural to see the humble and simple people of the de Nevada household eye the thing with distrust. As owning such a beauty was enough of a privilege, let alone losing or getting rid of it, the housemaid Primavera immediately ascribes the artefact to a non-human possessor. No worldly person could have nor waste such an exquisite piece. ‘I’ve lived here before mirrors were invented. I’d have known if this thing had a human owner. No, it’s a creation of the water nymphs. I don’t like it one bit. We ought to put it back’⁴⁸, Primavera exclaims. Keeping an object like that, which rightfully does not belong to them, seems to Primavera like a foreboding of danger and a harbinger of bad luck. She does not and cannot know, of course, how right she will turn out to be in her theory.

And is it mere chance that the novel, a revisionist version of *Snow White*, is set in sixteenth century Italy, historical time and place of mirror production, the home of looking glass making? Although, in core, working with a fairy tale in the traditional sense, Maguire has interestingly opted for a change of setting: from the more customary Bavaria woods to the Mediterranean, from the usual ‘once upon a time’ to a specific time frame. This adjustment helps entail a fundamental focus switch: contrary to the original *Snow White*, here the mirror and its source fill a more crucial place in the plot than the young girl and her family issues. This novel draws the spotlight closer to the mirror producers, namely the dwarves. This shift has been achieved before with the Disney movie⁴⁹. However, unlike the Disney account, which depicts the seven dwarves as the centre of attention, *Mirror Mirror* rather creates a balance, a connection between Bianca’s and the dwarves’ two worlds⁵⁰; the manufacturers of the looking glass operate as a mediator coupling Bianca and the mirror, subject and object.

⁴⁸ Gregory Maguire. *Mirror Mirror* (New York: Headline Review, 2009), p. 13. All quotations are from this edition.

⁴⁹ For further insights into the Disney adaptation see Jack Zipes. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002)

⁵⁰ These ‘worlds’ are to be understood as at home and not at home. In relation to Bianca, this refers to the de Nevada household (home) and the dwarves’ dwellings (not her primary home). As for the dwarves, it points to the fact that their home changes with the presence and absence of the mirror and the eighth brother.



The present section will hence put emphasis on the dwarves and the mirror or, more specifically, the dwarves as the makers of the mirror and therefore, rightful holders of their making: they have manufactured the object for their own individual purpose and should thus be recognised as the lawful owners of that object. Although the mirror image in relation to the actually eight creatures occupies a vital position in the mirror-identity dialectic, it will only be addressed when it contributes to the discussion of the looking glass, the artefact, as an advancement or regression enhancing object.⁵¹ The focal point here will be on the object as an end in itself rather than merely a means to an end.

Primavera is not entirely wrong when she refers to the possessor of the object as non-human, nor is she completely right in her assumption either. Dwarves are mythological creatures or even spirits, by tradition portrayed as underprivileged both in height and looks. They are, by definition, not part of mankind yet are associated with it through their human attributes. John Lindow, a specialist in Norse mythology and the origins of such creatures, justly advocates that dwarves ‘create “human likenesses”’⁵². He goes on by upholding that ‘certainly the fashioning of “human likenesses” is consistent with the general picture in the mythology of dwarfs as craftsmen... the dwarfs make objects’⁵³. In *Mirror Mirror* then, the dwarves seem human at times because of the objects they are able to fashion. In the present novel, the dwarves have made the mirror.

Still, not considering themselves human, the narrator dwarf relates their non-human existence to a long-forgotten past: ‘Back then, I say, meaning a past moment I can postulate must have existed, but can’t in truth remember for itself’ (p. 31). This ‘past moment’ the eighth dwarf believes to possibly recollect might refer to two distinct periods in the dwarves’ lives; it can draw

⁵¹ Please note that whereas the traditional fairy tale as well as most newer versions of the story work with seven dwarves, Maguire sets out with eight of them. The temporary loss of the mirror means the temporary loss of a dwarf.

⁵² John Lindow. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 100. All quotations are from this edition.

⁵³ John Lindow. *Norse Mythology*, p. 100.



to a pre-mirror time frame (the mirror has not been created yet)⁵⁴ or a post-mirror though pre-Bianca setting. The dwarves in the novel need to be looked at from two different perspectives: their existence before and after the mirror was taken away from them. As a matter of fact and as shall be demonstrated hereafter, the separation between the dwarves and the mirror, the maker and the making, gives rise to inevitable consequences concerning the creatures' sense of being and living. Tilley puts forward the idea that 'a person's relationship to an object is obviously very different when they have made it themselves... It is easy to see the manner in which the self becomes part of the thing and vice versa'⁵⁵. The intense and intimate relationship between the mirror and its owner becomes, once again, apparent and in this case, all the more so: if the indissoluble connection between subject and object, between the character's identity formation and the looking glass, was judged a matter of inevitability in *The Mirror Image Ghost* and *Black Mirror*, this fact is solidified into an absolute truth in *Mirror Mirror*. The relationship between consumer and object is binding; the relationship between producer and object is beyond the symbiotic. This supposition clearly contradicts Marxist takes on production and producers or consumers. In *Capital*, on commodities, Karl Marx himself defines a product as 'an object outside us'⁵⁶. In this light, there is a predestined division between goods and consumers. This position has been fervently challenged by contemporary archaeologists and anthropologists in that they promote a possible appropriation of any object through a personalisation of that object in its setting, as in Frances's case. The dwarves definitely operate in the newer area of thinking. When their favourite artefact was still with them, the dwarves were hardly distinguishable neither from their surroundings nor from each other. That is how Bianca de Nevada meets and sees them: as some sort of stone, as part of the interior furbishing even, with 'interchangeable attributes' (p. 188): 'It therefore took her some time to

⁵⁴ This era is generally absent from the novel and shall thus not be addressed in the present debate as it would only be based on empty assumptions.

⁵⁵ Christopher Tilley. 'Objectification', p. 68.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx. 'Capital', in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 268.



register the conversation she seemed to be having with other matters of business in the room – bits of furniture, were they, or seven boulders arranged randomly?’ (p. 176). Bianca’s comparison of the dwarves to stuff reinforces the idea that these creatures are inseparable in essence from the objects they manufacture, a supposition which will, however, fall subject to change due to the loss of that one object which marks them out, the mirror. For now though, Nextday, the narrator dwarf, states ‘I am a rock and my brothers are rocks’ (p. 164). At that stage, the dwarves are anything but human; this condition is nevertheless about to be negotiated. Nextday continues:

A pack of dirty thieves is what they called us. They had no better words for it, not knowing whether we were beasts or men. We knew no better than they did what we were, for we had little language of our own – no names, back then, few habits of civilized living. But we didn’t steal. Dirty vagabonds, the lot of us, back then, but not thieves.

...

We might have become more human – sooner than we did, if indeed we ever have – did we move according to the rhythms of human beings. (p. 31)

There are several ideas here which must be attended to and which are closely interlinked. Firstly, there is the mention of the word ‘thief’. The dwarves consider everyone in possession of the object they have created as a robber. The mirror, although found and not purposefully removed from its producer, is in the de Nevada ménage where it does not, according to the dwarves, correctly go. In their book on dwarves, Ditte and Giovanni Bandini claim that ‘taking from the dwarves’ treasures hidden underground without asking them, without their explicit permission, is a sacrilege’⁵⁷. As it turns out, in *Mirror Mirror*, it is indeed.

⁵⁷ Ditte and Giovanni Bandini. *Das Buch der Zwerge* (Düsseldorf: Albatros, 2004), p. 70. My translation (from German): ... Sich ohne zu fragen, ohne ausdrückliche Erlaubnis an ihren unter der Erde verborgenen Schätzen zu vergreifen, ist ein Sakrileg...



The first change in the dwarves' subsistence occurs: the mirror, crafted to help them assimilate to the human world, is missing. The immediate effect is but logical: the dwarves, divorced from their object of 'human likenesses' (in which they consider the human kind to be superior to their own), cease in their adjustment to mankind, regress even further back than their own origins. The dwarves have been amputated of their social product and a brother; they retreat into an asocial, pre-mirror stage of development, 'back into our unexamined selves we slunk' (p.166). They degenerate to a time before the 'back then' referred to above. As has been validated in *Black Mirror*, objects are markers of social relationships, especially, according to Tilley, personalised objects.⁵⁸ The impact that the loss of this highly peculiar artefact entails on the eight dwarves as a social unit is serious.

With the mirror gone, the group has been partially bereaved of one of their kind, of the dwarf who sets out to claim back their artefact. His leaving catches the dwarves off guard; as they say: 'With a departed companion, there was a looseness to our group. There was a way in which we were incomplete...' (p. 165). As Marx already suggested, '[F]rom the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labor assumes a social form'⁵⁹. Making the mirror, together, has engendered a solid shared purpose between the creatures. Nonetheless, the dwarves' tie to the looking glass is so strong, so intimate and vital, that they allow their group to split for the commitment of retrieving it. Their social bond, the unity through which they have defined themselves for years, is broken:

Seven was less than we were used to being. We had once been the number one more than seven, we clots in the earth's arteries. But the noisy one left and maybe for need of him we were stricken with attention. When we were only seven, there was something wrong.

It was a matter of balance. There is a smug assurance among pairs, a possibility of completion that other creatures lack. (p. 165)

⁵⁸ Christopher Tilley. 'Objectification', p. 63.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx. 'Capital', p. 270.



To say we were pairs is to propose, to the human mind, a system of marriages among brothers, as if 3 and 4 were one unit together in all things, as if 3 and 4 gave to each other something denied to 5 or 2. This isn't the case. To say we were pairs isn't to propose an intimacy or a singularity among our pairings. It's merely to say that we functioned, loosely, as teams of two, and it hardly mattered whether it was 1 or 7 on the other side of the table or the other end of the long saw or the other edge of the pillow.

...

But one of us left, and we eventually noticed that he was gone.

There wasn't enough of us to go round. It wasn't 7 who was abandoned, nor any other one of us. It was the all of us, and then we learned to count to seven, and saw that we ought to have been able to count to the next number up, the seven plus one. But we couldn't, for that one was gone. In his absence, we remembered once again our incompleteness. (pp. 166-167)

This situation, however, takes a complete twist with the arrival of Bianca at their door. Bianca has been expelled from her home and becomes an intruder to theirs. The mirror and Nextday have been summoned away from their home and thus intrude the de Nevada household, Bianca's home. Both parties inevitably influence each other. Living with a human gradually makes the dwarves and their environment human, too, starting with the Disney-like naming of the members of their little community. They undergo a (too) sudden move from 'we didn't yet distinguish ourselves from one another' (p. 69) to 'beginning our lumbering life of individuality' (p.171). Bianca fills the void of the pairs without being able to replace the lost member in his substance. As Nextday also symbolises the looking glass, although missing, Bianca develops into a kind substitute mirror, closing the subject-object circle but unsatisfactorily so. The material culture equation dwarf + mirror = 1 has been disrupted. Instead, the missing element is replaced by a human alternative. As far as the dwarves are concerned, the more human they become, the more they think. The more they think, the more they suffer from both the loss of the mirror and their mate. The dwarves have been described as craftsmen; now, in their human-like condition, they may even be termed *homo faber*. Portraying the human being as *homo faber* draws to the idea of man



as creator, a ‘tool-making animal’⁶⁰ as Benjamin Franklin suggested at the eve of the Industrial Revolution. The Scottish essayist and historicist Thomas Carlyle keeps this up by maintaining that man is a ‘tool-using animal’: ‘Without tools he is nothing, with tools he is all’⁶¹. Even though the notion of material culture was still unknown at the time of Franklin or Carlyle, their ideas could be seen as forerunners to the concept. A *homo faber* is a human being who is able to control their environment with their tools. It is in that idea that the dwarves fashioned the looking glass: to have power over the outside world so as to gain power over themselves, a theory already uncovered in *Black Mirror*. This viewpoint again opposes Marxist thoughts on the matter. Webb Keane, on the relationship between subjects and objects, exposes the problem as follows:

Under capitalist relations of production, tools, for instance, may still serve as practical means to human ends, much as they had before, and products may still bear the marks of the labour that produced them, but producers no longer recognize themselves in either tool or product.⁶²

The general setting in *Mirror Mirror* might not correspond to Marxist perceptions of a capitalist society of mass production and consumption but the mirror, in its historical perspective, does. The mirror was to provide a reflection but not just any reflection. It was to offer the image the dwarves desired to see, an image they wanted to adhere to and, eventually, adopt:

So, being adept at all things having to do with the earth – the soil, the mines, the precious stones and metals, the juice of lava – we found it easy to ferret out the secrets of the Venetians. We blew a quantity of glass and shaped it into a shallow bowl, and painted the inner skin with a coat made of tin and quicksilver. We made for ourselves a mirror that could look like an eye into a room, so we could watch how humans look

⁶⁰ Benjamin Franklin. Quoted in Gordon W. Hewes, ‘A History of Speculation on the Relation between Tools and Language’, in Kathleen R. Gibson and Tim Ingold, eds, *Tools, Language and Cognition in Human Evolution* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 24.

⁶¹ Thomas Carlyle. Quoted in Gordon W. Hewes, ‘A History of Speculation on the Relation between Tools and Language’, in Kathleen R. Gibson and Tim Ingold, eds, *Tools, Language and Cognition in Human Evolution* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 24.

⁶² Webb Keane. ‘Subjects and Objects’, in Christopher Tilley, ed, *Handbook of Material Culture* (London : SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), p. 197.



at themselves, and learn by their example how to look at ourselves. (p. 244)

Being trained in working materials and minerals, the dwarves have skilfully managed to manipulate the looking glass, thereby fortifying the notion of rightful possession in their hands. This mirror is different from common mirrors. It is *their* mirror, *their* object, *their* self. And it is dangerous: with it, Lucrezia is losing her self⁶³, without it, so are the dwarves. ‘The thing is the person and the person is the thing’⁶⁴. The characters’ development, in either way, is regulated by the presence or absence respectively of that very mirror.

When they finally get hold again of the product of their design towards the end of the novel, the dwarves, upon looking at their reflection, feel ‘stuck in a process of change that they could no longer vary’ (p. 294), ‘trapped by the laws of their own devising’ (p. 295). The only hope to stop that change or rather, to escape this indefinite limbo of dwarf-human existence is to divide the change-bearing artefact into its individual constituents, single elements. Back to basics is the name of the game, for both the makers and their making:

Feeling the old moments silting away, Nextday took his all-but-human hands and put them upon the bowed glass in the mirror. He was able at least to remove the glass from the poisonous quicksilver behind it. However, he could no longer absorb the constituent parts of glass into his skin. He was left with a long oval of glass that could reflect nothing – a long anonymous shield, barren of deceit. The looking glass, clear enough now, without the looking aspect. (p. 295)

According to Tilley, ‘creating things is... a fabrication of the social self’⁶⁵ as has been shown on numerous occasions. ‘The corollary of this, of course, is that in many societies destroying these same things marks the end of the social self’.⁶⁶ The complete destruction, however, fails in the dwarf society. Too human or not enough dwarf, the creatures have been separated from their essence by

⁶³ ‘It corrupts the mind, and confounds the separate humors. It can make humans suspicious cabals in every crown, of treason at every turn. It causes tremors and drooling. It’s a dangerous substance to humans.’ (pp. 244-245). ‘It’ refers to quicksilver here.

⁶⁴ Christopher Tilley. ‘Objectification’, p. 63.

⁶⁵ Christopher Tilley. ‘Objectification’, p. 63.

⁶⁶ Christopher Tilley. ‘Objectification’, p. 63.



the absence of their creation, their essence meaning the materials they are commonly surrounded by, which define them in their being and function. Its purpose gone, the glass cannot be defeated, their condition is lost. The glass is not to be theirs anymore and so they confer the simple material, now devoid of activity, onto their second carrier of change, Bianca: 'They set the glass from the mirror into the lid of the coffin, so the girl's beautiful form could decompose as they watched, and as it rotted, their own indictment and incarceration would be more fully nailed upon them too' (pp. 295-296).

When the mirror ceases to exist, the dwarves' existence ceases in its development. They made the mirror, they owned the mirror, they were the mirror. Subject and object are/were one, here all the more obvious through the creatures' slightly object-like nature at times. Their quintessence, the looking glass, had been taken away from them and so had been one of their unit: 'we want to be whole and alone, and she [Lucrezia Borgia] has divided us into segments, as if we were lost individuals, the way humans are. We are not humans... we want our looking glass' (p. 186). Their incompleteness was temporarily comforted with the arrival of Bianca de Nevada at their doorstep; she became their mirror to mankind, she became the eighth in their parity. Because of her, the dwarves turned into what they had always wanted to be, the reason as to why they had created the mirror in the first place: more human. However, in that humanness, there was too much lack of their thing and their self. Moreover, the mirror had found its way into the evil hand of Lucrezia Borgia, who abused of its powers, shamelessly, and therefore, dangerously. In order to be whole again, the artefact needed to be destroyed. All attempts to do so fully failed; the unison of object and subject was and is too strong. Both parties continue to be something half: the mirror is now glass without reflective function, the creatures are not human but not unhuman either. Like Lisa and Frances, the dwarves have become in-between organisms, too. The analysis in terms of material culture has shown that their being is one with the object they have produced and is thus entirely dependent on it. Their development as living creatures has both progressed as



well as regressed with the absence of their artefact yet has suffered the same effect with its presence. They were, are and simply will be mirror.

This is, essentially, where the story of the dwarves comes to an end. They are mentioned one more time as guardians of the coffin, as part of the environment [‘our beards are growing into the soil’ (p. 313)], having found perfect language acquisition while not considering themselves human [‘leave it to a human to...’ (p. 315)]. At the same time, this is also where the story of Bianca de Nevada comes to life. Bianca had been driven away from her home at an early age, though spared death by the hand of the huntsman. She wakes up, one day, as a teenager in the dwarves’ dwelling. The process of becoming that teenager has been skipped; she now starts her life as substitute mirror and brother in a place she can hardly call home nor even house and yet: ‘*The space was nothing like a room...* and as the word *room* is spoken, even to deny a likeness, the nonroom-space becomes more like a room, regardless’ (p. 175). Bianca remains confined to that space, turning it and everything around her into something more human, until the day Lucrezia Borgia discovers her and tries to kill her. As has been mentioned before, Bianca is a highly inactive character. The first part of her character development is assumed by the dwarves. Bianca seems disconnected from the mirror yet in fact, her existence is entirely reliant on it as the characters determining her are entirely reliant on it. With the destruction of the mirror and Nextday’s return her role as a temporary replacement finds an end, too. However, to be a person, a subject in herself, the second share of her identity formation has still to be taken into account. This part belongs to Lucrezia Borgia and the function of the mirror in Chapter Two.

The debate above culminates in the results aspired to be attained from the outset: to prove that objects and subjects are undeniably connected. Material culture is produced by humans but humans are also formed by



material culture. Mankind changes stuff changes mankind. The mirror is stuff. Through their use of that stuff, the three novels become linked as their characters develop, in a progressive or backwards way, with the absence or presence of the looking glass. In each case, the characters define the object and the object defines them. The three works of literature chosen for the purpose are fundamentally different in their procedure of depleting the mirror as a tool. This is due to the fact that the chief characters differ from each other in age as well as issues. Each one of the girls is at a special stage of adolescence, either just entering it (Lisa), in the middle of it (Frances) or about to leave it (Bianca). Lisa's complications originate from her family situation whereas Frances generally deals with concerns of a social nature and of the self. Last but not least, there is Bianca, more absent than present, who has been bereaved of a story in the first place, as it were. She only comes into existence, fictionally and individually, once other characters have closed the matter with the mirror. The approaches in terms of material culture, relating mirror and characters, have thus varied according to key concepts of age and the problems which had to be addressed. The device and the results are common though: the mirror and identity creation, although happening at peculiar phases. In order to move to the next aspect, namely that of object function and subject response, it needs to be clarified that this does not necessarily occur at a higher level. It is not a given that the effect of the mirror, or any other object for that matter, is more significant than the product itself. In *The Mirror Image Ghost*, Lisa's identity process is influenced equally strongly by the artefact and its function. Object and reflection work in the same time parallel; the reflection precedes as well as ensues the looking glass. Werlin's *Black Mirror* follows a seemingly more traditional pattern: since the mirror had been muted of its function through a cloth which is only removed towards the end of the novel, it is evident that here, the object comes first in Frances's creation of herself. Technically speaking, of course, it is her mirror image which leads Frances to conceal the looking glass in the first place. The novel, however, does not provide the reader with insights into that period of time and the analysis shall thus focus on that which is fixed. Bianca de Nevada is probably



the most challenging of the three to look at: in terms of material culture and the mirror as object, her identity process can be found in relation to the dwarves. Yet when taking into account the function of the mirror and Bianca's lack and search of self, it is her guardian Lucrezia Borgia who needs to be scrutinised. Mirror and function hence contribute to Bianca's identity formation at the same and not at the same time as they play on different levels with different characters. The artefact mirror has served its purpose in the present analysis: subject and object are irrefutably concomitant to the point of inseparability. Mirror is man and man is mirror.



CHAPTER TWO: The Mirrored – A Subject

In the past few decades those interested in psychoanalytic theory have tended to show oppositional attitudes. The prevailing dilemma with psychoanalysis as a form of literary criticism has frequently been derived from the eventually upheld opinion that psychoanalysis can merely be classified as a ‘science of interpretation’⁶⁷; its definite failure, according to Peter Brooks, can be situated in its ‘underlying conviction that it is inherently explanatory’⁶⁸ and is neither the basis nor a consciously procured effect of a given piece of fiction. At the same time, however, the general concern with this very method of assessment has reached a remarkable growth both socially and above all, academically. Despite irrevocable anxieties, psychoanalytic criticism is now a well-established and extremely enriching form of appreciation and will come out as an, if not *the* compulsory apparatus in the examination below. This is partially due to the fact that psychoanalysis, although always rooted in Freudianism, has moved beyond its origins because of interpreters of the *Ur*-father Freud such as Jacques Lacan and is transparently prepared to take a seat on the couch and be analysed itself. Both Freud and Lacan will play a crucial role in the subsequent debate as Freudian notions of the uncanny and the double and Lacanian ideas of the mirror stage theory are taken up and implemented in relation to the novels and characters in question. Moreover, while the three works of fiction are staging three adolescent girls as main protagonists, it is *Black Mirror* which will primarily address concepts of the female, the body and the ‘I’.

If psychoanalysis as such is defined as a ‘theory of personality’⁶⁹, hence dealing with identity issues, it is evident that using psychoanalytic criticism in

⁶⁷ Elizabeth. Wright. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁶⁸ Peter Brooks. *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1994), p. 22.

⁶⁹ *TheFreeDictionary*, Internet WWW page at URL:

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/psychoanalysis> (accessed 11/04/2012)



the present mirror literature will shed light on the characters’ quest for personality and so development within that framework. And all of this can be discovered in the effect of the mirror or, as in Werlin’s work, the temporary absence of it. Whereas Chapter One tried to chiefly focus on the looking glass as artefact and attempted to purposefully and consciously ignore the function of the object in that discussion, Chapter Two will pick up on that which has stayed veiled until now: the mirror image(s). It is obvious though that the line between the object (as in *thing*) and its function is a very thin one to draw, if it can be drawn at all, and that intersections of the two will be predestined.

Sabine Melchior-Bonnet launched a notable endeavour to trace the history of mankind and their mirror image in her work *The Mirror: A History*. Her research shows that men have always been fascinated by their reflection, since prehistoric times, and have tried ever since to generate that image using variously available instruments. Fact is that humans’ reactions, needs and purposes in relation to creating their sameness in reflective surfaces have varied and have been transformed depending on the definition of ‘self’ as well as shifting social and historical circumstances. Whatever the changing nature of reflection, fact is also that, as Melchior-Bonnet remarks, ‘the mirror... accompanies the human quest for identity’⁷⁰. In order to relate the mirror image to personality and vice versa, the seeker must have the ability to recognise their reflection as being their own or as being different from their own in the first place. The mirror test, developed by Gordon Gallup Junior in the 1970 and based on Darwinist principles, has demonstrated that this competence is foremost ascribed to humans and only a few types of the animal kingdom such as chimpanzees, a species very similar to mankind in numerous biological dispositions and behavioural patterns.⁷¹

However, it is not necessarily in the ‘sameness’ just mentioned that the identity factor is produced. Indeed, that much sought-after likeness might lie in its exact opposite: that which is not or that which is ‘other’. When

⁷⁰ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 4.

⁷¹ *ScienceDaily*, Internet WWW page at URL: http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/m/mirror_test.htm (accessed 13/04/2012)



investigating the history of the mirror and reflection it becomes clear that we cannot think in straightforward terms but rather have to consider contraries. Melchior-Bonnet exposes the in-built reflection dialectic:

Such is the ambiguity and richness of the reflection, at once identical to and different from the original. These two sides of the mirror, ... , are in day-to-day reality fused into a complex alloy – a person is always both the same and otherwise, similar and different, with countless faces.⁷²

Some of these faces will be disclosed in the ensuing study, and some will have to remain hidden...

‘Les miroirs sont les portes par lesquelles la mort va et vient’

- Catherine Storr, *The Mirror Image Ghost*

The first chapter mainly centred on *through* what Lisa looks and sees; here, the focal point will be put on *what* she looks at and sees. It needs to be promptly settled that we cannot talk about a regular reflection in Lisa’s case: the image that the mirrors found, when held up against each other, is not a copy, a one-to-one reproduction of the original if this is ever possible to start with, as has already been mentioned in the introduction. It is not a reflection of herself that Lisa is offered, at least not most of the time, and nonetheless in some ways it is exactly that: what she makes out and experiences there and then and in that manner elucidates who she is, was and is yet to become and therefore epitomises the facsimile she should witness in an ordinary mirror image. A

⁷² Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 6.



coming-of-age novel of some sort, the genre of this work as well as Freudian ideas of the uncanny, the double and ghosts will take on an active part in exploring Lisa's identity expedition through the means of psychoanalysis and the looking glass.

The genre of *The Mirror Image Ghost* reveals itself to be pivotal to plot and character development. In fact, in the realms of contemporary literary theory, especially children's literature, Catherine Storr's novel can be assigned to various categories, each one unique in its own right but all of them exhibiting common features, the most distinguishable one being that of time travel. In general, *The Mirror Image Ghost* is, plainly speaking, a time travel narrative. The history of such stories shows, as M.A.L. Locherbie-Cameron suggests, a significant shift from the spotlight on the characters' external world to their internal world, hence, their psyche: as shall be demonstrated via Lisa, time travel fiction 'is simultaneously a vehicle for adventure and, because it necessarily involves change, a key or a paradigm of self-discovery'⁷³. The mirror and the images it delivers make this journey available to Lisa. The adventure is procured by the time-slips and ghostly encounters; in turn, the content and characters faced with during the escapades will be responsible for the change called-for above, a transformation which will make further time-slips unnecessary because the ultimate aim, Lisa's passage into adolescence, will have been achieved. Last but not least, it can be said that the reflection, within the provided perimeters of the genre and psychoanalytic criticism, will be initial and final contribution to Lisa's path onto her next phase of life.

The three narrative forms presented below thus display characteristics, independently, which are pertinent to Lisa's identity formation. It is relevant to mention that Lisa's time-slips do not take place all too frequently and do occur on a mental basis only; the reader does not feel her to be, or so it

⁷³ M.A.L. Locherbie-Cameron. 'Journeys through the Amulet: Time Travel in Children's Fiction', in *Signal: Approaches to Children's Books* 79 (1996), p. 45.



seems, entirely displaced in any kind of spatial or tangibly physical way.⁷⁴ The times and places co-exist in a palimpsest-like dimension: Lisa is in both places at the same time and at the same time, she is in both places at different times.⁷⁵

In *The Mirror Image Ghost*, Lisa occasionally finds herself catapulted back to the past, to her grandfather's childhood under Nazi occupation. She does not meet herself then and there but rather her maker or more accurately, her mother's maker. Back to the past becomes, inevitably, back to the future, a peculiarity generally representative of time travel fiction. Nikki Gamble and Sally Yates put on view a short although concise summary of the diverse types of time travel narratives which *The Mirror Image Ghost* could be allocated to.⁷⁶

The novel could be described as a historical fantasy work, introducing a supernatural component with the mirror, or as a piece of alternative history, which traditionally deals with altering the course of past events. Finally, *The Mirror Image Ghost* comes closest to the definition of the time-slip novel where a child character from the present is moved back to a genuine historical past. Like historical fantasy, 'the qualities of time-slip are', so Gamble and Yates, 'magical and mysterious'⁷⁷, a quality which is promoted, once again, through a gateway such as the mirror. However, time-slip fiction does take this idea one step further, and so does Storr's novel. Gamble and Yates explain:

Though the fantasy element of time-slip is the product of imagination, emotional and psychological truth must be present if the reader is to suspend their disbelief. The catalyst for time travel is often provided by some emotional difficulty such as bereavement... separation... divorce...,

⁷⁴ Chapter One works with the fact that the room or house visited during Lisa's time travel episodes remains more or less the same in the past, although slightly unfamiliar and consequently, uncanny.

⁷⁵ This, of course, avoids an inexplicable absence of the main character from a given setting but raises the problem of how things which happen to the character during the time travel, especially in relation to physical harm, can have an impact on the girl in the present or future. Storr circumvents this issue by making Lisa escape the bullet which was destined for her.

⁷⁶ Nikki Gamble and Sally Yates. *Exploring Children's Literature*, 2nd Edition (London: Sage, 2009)

⁷⁷ Nikki Gamble and Sally Yates. *Exploring Children's Literature*, 2nd Edition (London: Sage, 2009), p. 149. All quotations are from this edition.



parental illness... or even the state of adolescence. Frequently the hero or heroine might be aided by their experience in the past coming to terms with personal difficulties.⁷⁸

The key words here are ‘psychological truth’, ‘difficulty’, and ‘adolescence’. Due to Storr’s narrative techniques, such as a plain British setting, the novel does indeed come across as absolutely convincing despite its fantasy angle. Moreover, Lisa does encounter several struggles in her present: her familial circumstances have already been put on display. She feels alienated and lonely at times; in addition, her grandfather falls terribly ill at the end of the novel, when Lisa has discovered that her grandfather’s sister, deemed dead for years, is, in fact, quite alive. Furthermore, these issues are exploited in and through Lisa’s transitional phase from childhood into puberty. Taking into account the advantages and effects of time travel narrative, how does Storr then finally manage to reconcile her main character with her present through the past, thereby allowing her to develop as a character? The answer is: by means of what Lisa sees in and beyond the reflection. Or the lack of it, for that matter.

Heinrich Heine might once have claimed, in the light of the Freudian idea of the double, that ‘There is nothing more uncanny than seeing one’s face accidentally in a mirror by moonlight’⁷⁹. Freud himself lays out the evolution of the uncanny in relation to the notion of the double by stating that ‘from having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death’⁸⁰, ‘he’ being the mirror image. If noticing your reflection in a mirror, which can be considered as a form of the double, is regarded both as a proof of being alive and at the same time as horrifying and possibly fatal, imagine your reaction and the potential consequences it entails when looking into a mirror and not seeing it. Or observing something completely different from your usual or expected reflection altogether. This is what happens to Lisa. Her

⁷⁸ Nikki Gamble and Sally Yates. *Exploring Children’s Literature*, p. 149.

⁷⁹ Heinrich Heine. Quoted in Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 187.

⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud. ‘The Uncanny’, in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), p. 163. All quotations are from this edition.



uneasiness lies in the fact that she sees what is not there or that what is there is not what she desires to see. This confusion develops into an intrinsic urge to observe the truth, and nothing but the truth, aka reality, on Lisa's part. She is in want of her psychological genuineness:

How could she see something reflected in a mirror which wasn't there when she looked at the real room in front of her? (p. 27)

Was that the sort of danger Pierre had meant? That you could confuse yourself by looking into two mirrors at once, so that you began to see things that weren't really there? At the memory, a tiny shiver ran down Lisa's spine. She was annoyed at herself. She had far too much common sense to begin to be frightened of a couple of mirrors. Some time she would go back to Fanny's room and reassure herself that there was nothing mysterious in the double reflection, nothing to fear. (p. 34)

There couldn't be anything real about it (p. 38)

Lisa does not see her double, which becomes more discomforting than actually seeing it. Royle maintains that typically, 'one may want one's double dead'⁸¹ as it does come with negative repercussions; yet he continues by declaring that 'the death of the double will always also be the death of oneself'⁸². Lisa does obviously not wish to kill or avoid her reflection. Quite on the contrary: in line with Royle's theory, she expresses the need to see her 'normal' mirror image, her double, in order to become an or *the* original in the first place.

How does she retrieve her double and hence, her very own fundamental self? Storr and Lisa do so through a door. The mirror turns into that very door. It converts, as an object, into an access in the form of a portal and its reflections are remodelled to a tool to linking past to present at the hand of ghostly images. The phenomenon is depicted as such from the outset by Lisa's stepbrother and stepsister:

'Fais attention quand tu te regardes dans un miroir', Pierre said.

⁸¹ Nicholas Royle. *The Uncanny*, p. 190.

⁸² Nicholas Royle. *The Uncanny*, p. 190.



...

... I said, be careful how you look in mirrors. They are dangerous, didn't you know?’

‘That's stupid! How can mirrors be dangerous?’

‘*Les miroirs sont les portes par lesquelles la mort va et vient*’, Pierre said.

...

‘He is saying that mirrors are the doors for Death to enter. And to ... to go away.’

‘It's stupid! How could... Death come through a mirror? Mirrors aren't doors.’

‘Perhaps they are doors for *la mort*. That is, Death.’

‘I'm not frightened of death,’ Lisa said, not quite truthfully.

‘Then you are *stupide*. Very, very *stupide*. Everyone is frightened of death.’ (pp. 20-21)

Pierre's assumptions disclose themselves to be genuine, at least in the beginning and only partially so. The mirror is indeed an entry and an exit at the same time to Lisa's past, present, and future. It takes on this alienating function through its primary one, namely that of reflection: what Lisa sees in the mirror image, experiences as a mirror image, is a figure long thought dead, a reminiscence of what is not anymore:

‘Did you ever see Grandpa's sister? The one who died.’ (p. 58)

...

She picked up another [photo]. A cold finger touched her spine.

‘Grandma! Who's this?’

That? Oh, that's Elsbet. Grandpa's little sister.

...

‘Lisa? What's the matter?’

Lisa managed to say, ‘Nothing.’ (p. 59)

...



She had to try to work out how it was that now she herself had seen a ghost. (p. 60)

The little girl she had seen in that photograph was the child she had seen in the double mirror image. She had seen Elsbet alive. But Elsbet had died years ago. If she'd been alive now, she'd have been nearly as old as Grandpa. Lisa had seen her ghost. (p. 61)

The ghost is the past is the double is the present is Lisa. What is supposedly dead grows to be the essence of what is alive. A first insight into the prevailing paradox is provided by the idea of what is, indeed, a ghost. The *FreeOnlineDictionary* offers the following inspiration:

ghost

n.

1. The spirit of a dead person, especially one believed to appear in bodily likeness to living persons or to haunt former habitats.
2. The center of spiritual life; the soul.
3. A demon or spirit.
4. A returning or haunting memory or image.
5.
 - a. A slight or faint trace: just a ghost of a smile.
 - b. The tiniest bit: not a ghost of a chance.
6. A faint, false image, as:
 - a. A secondary image on a television or radar screen caused by reflected waves.
 - b. A displaced image in a photograph caused by the optical system of the camera.
 - c. A false spectral line caused by imperfections in the diffraction grating.
 - d. A displaced image in a mirror caused by reflection from the front of the glass.⁸³

From the various propositions it becomes clear that 'ghost' or 'ghostly' has to do with image, reflection, life and death. The first terminology additionally raises the thought of haunting, which evokes the idea of an uncannily repetition easily traceable to Lisa's case of several time-slip episodes. Lisa truly seeks the haunting: in a state of attraction-compulsion freak-show

⁸³ *TheFreeDictionary*, Internet WWW page at URL:
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ghost> (accessed 23/04/2012)



conundrum, she consciously provokes the reflections to appear and the ghosts to disturb her present.

Lisa went into her mother’s bedroom and sat down in front of the dressing table. She examined the reflection it gave her back; her own head and shoulders against the background of the shaded room. Outside the window the branches of the trees were black against the rapidly darkening sky. She picked up the hand mirror, When she looked into it, it too reflected back her own face. She thought, I’ve been frightened of nothing, it’s just an ordinary mirror. To prove it, she made herself turn her back on the large mirror and hold up the smaller glass so that she could see the double reflection.

She saw dark hair. The back of her own head. Now if she turned half sideways, she would see her unfamiliar profile. But before she could do this, the head in the mirror had moved and she was looking at a face which was not her own. (p. 67)

The face she then perceives is that of Elsbet, her grandfather’s allegedly dead sister. Expert Avery F. Gordon explains in her work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* how ghosts, haunting and social developments are inextricably woven into each other:

What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. I used the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises spectres, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These spectres or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has real presence and demands its due, your attention. Haunting and the appearance of spectres or ghosts is one way, I tried to suggest, we are notified that what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Avery F. Gordon. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. xvi.



Some of the inklings submitted here, like the notion of defamiliarisation of the familiar, have been explored in the course of the discussions before while others open up impressive new dimensions. Gordon talks about a connection between the emergence of ghosts and concealing and blocking out personal issues; what Lisa has been stifling is her own Self, her identity. Her safe childhood haven has been lost forever. A transition into the real, into pre-adulthood is inevitable and necessary. In order to be able to accomplish that shift, Lisa has to deal with her roots. Her roots are of ghostly nature and ghosts are what make us human, according to Bennett and Royle⁸⁵. As a matter of fact, we cannot look at ghosts and our psyche separately: ‘Ghosts, that is to say, move into one’s head’⁸⁶. Notwithstanding, what Lisa digs up beneath the mirror image is more than she could ever have imagined. The ghost she sees is indeed very much alive, therefore even more present through her absence. Her grandfather’s sister had disappeared, not died. Even though she is retrieved, physically, from the world of absence at the end of the novel, she remains an eerie presence only, a fleeting image, a mere reflection of her own former self:

She was old. She was bent with age. The pale skin of her scalp showed through between the strands of short grey hair. Her face was puckered with a thousand lines round a beak of a nose, underneath pouched, deep set eyes and a thin-lipped, bitter mouth. She was clutching a grey shawl round her shoulders, over a stained, black dress... It can’t be Elsbet! It isn’t Elsbet! That dirty old woman can’t be Grandpa’s sister, Lisa thought. (p. 131)

As Bennett and Royle maintain about ghosts, they are ‘an entity not alive but also not quite, not finally, dead. Ghosts disturb our sense of the separation of the living from the dead – which is why they can be so frightening, so uncanny’⁸⁷. Not only do ghosts intrude the sphere between what is alive and what is not; it is by means of the dead that Lisa will eventually feel completely alive, once and for all.

⁸⁵ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle. *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Harlow : Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 132. All quotations are from this edition.

⁸⁶ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle. *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, p. 133.

⁸⁷ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle. *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, p. 132.



Catherine Storr's novel emerges as all the more uncanny as it subverts, through its characters, the points of reference linked to ghosts just exposed. In truth, while it is self-evident for Lisa that she has been facing a liminal figure from the zone of the dead, it is the same case for the so-called phantom in return: on several occasions, even after her grandfather's sister's existence has been discovered, it is indeed Lisa who is referred to as being a/the ghost, and not Elsbet. As can be seen during the conversations taking place between Lisa, Elsbet and Lisa's mother, Lisa eventually lets her sheltering walls crumble and admits to the possibility of being what she could never have envisaged being before: an in-between individual, the 'ghost child' previously imparted.

'My brother is Hans. He says that only ghosts can pass through mirrors. So you are a ghost.'

'No, I'm not! I'm alive! You're the ghost, because you're dead.'

'You are *dumm...* stupid. I am living here in our apartment. Of course I am not dead.' (p. 68)

'I've come back from another time, long after you, so I know what happened. It's history, I know about it.'

'How can you come back? You are trying to frighten me. You are pretending to be a ghost.'

'I'm not pretending anything. All right, then, I am a ghost.' If Grandma and Grandpa had thought she was a ghost, then perhaps that was what she was in this extraordinary world in which she didn't belong. (p. 121)

'Who's that child?'

'That's Lisa. My daughter. Hans is her grandfather.'

'She cannot be real. She is a ghost. Take her away.'

'I don't understand. What do you mean?'

Elsbet said, 'That child is not alive. It is a dead child you have with you. You should be careful.' (p. 132)



Dead and alive become interchangeable, indivisible, symbiotic. It is vital for Lisa to recognize herself as ‘ghost’, as ‘non-real’ in that other time universe. ‘The ghost is internalized: it becomes a psychological symptom’⁸⁸, so Bennett and Royle; the ghost has thus entered Lisa’s psyche and is not an object/subject outside of Lisa anymore. If Elsbet is what is shown in Lisa’s reflection and Elsbet is a ghost, it can be logically concluded that by acknowledging herself to be an eerie presence, Lisa finally turns into her uncanny double, into her reflection. Elsbet and Lisa mirror each other yet one double needs to die for the other to subsist. And it is Elsbet who dies to let live: she passes away after a brief appearance of being alive. She turns into a ghost of herself, into what others long believed her to be. One final encounter between Elsbet and Lisa is obligatory so that Lisa can resume her life, a new life as an adolescent, in the midst of a patchwork yet functioning family:

‘I came through the door.’ Lisa looked at the door of her mother’s room and the old woman gave a scornful laugh. ‘Not that door. The door you came through. The mirror.’

Lisa remembered Pierre’s saying, ‘Mirrors are doors for Death to enter.’ She said, ‘When I came through the mirror, everyone thought I was a ghost. You said I must be a ghost.’

‘That is right. Only ghosts can go through such doors.’

‘But I’m alive. You’re alive. I saw you in Vienna.’

‘That was yesterday.’

‘It was weeks ago!’

‘You have no idea of time. Today I’m not alive...’ (p. 140)

The death of the double does not develop into the death of the character. Quite the opposite is applicable: the death of the double (Elsbet) is compulsory to produce a new double (Lisa). The title of the novel thus takes on various proportions. Questions as to which/whose image and which/whose ghost is being referred to are left to interpretation. Fact is, however, that the meeting with her family’s past, with her grandfather being

⁸⁸ Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle. *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, p. 133.



extremely weak and Lisa terribly confused about her family situation, are paramount for Lisa to mature in the way which has been shown in Chapter One; she leaves the realms of childhood and enters adolescence. She has previously depicted herself as a limbo child: that is what she is now, although in a different way than the one she had in mind.

The double, Lisa's double, grows to be climactic to Lisa's psychological metamorphosis. Freud and his followers relate ideas of the double to concepts of death and consequently, of life, and that which lies in between: ghosts. Eerie reflections come to mean presence in the first place for Storr's protagonist Lisa. Moreover, the time travel narrative that Storr has opted to employ allows Lisa to experience rather than to observe: out of the past but inset in the framework of the present, she evolves into an active agent in her own development and incorporates the fusion of times within herself and thus her identity formation.

I looked into the mirror and I saw Frances Leventhal.

- Nancy Werlin, Black Mirror

Although embedded in the straightforward outline of a rather lame teenage drug-related detective story, Nancy Werlin's *Black Mirror* can still be peeled into individually valuable layers. This discussion takes up on where Chapter One has withdrawn from: Frances's rather disturbed and disturbing affiliation



with her physical appearance. Unlike Lisa, Frances does not work with what she sees but with that which she is trying not to see: herself or her Self.

Despite the fact that feminist writer Liz Frost warns in the introduction to her work *Young Women and the Body: a Feminist Sociology* to not over-medicalise ‘symptoms’ with teenage girls (some of these signs just blatantly belong to the process of puberty) and thereby easily categorising adolescent girls into ‘sick’ and ‘normal’, she nevertheless upholds that ‘the relationship between young women and their bodies is a negative and frequently damaging one’⁸⁹. Frances does not make an exception to that rule; rather, she establishes it. The opening pages of *Black Mirror* quickly define Frances’s attitude to her body as beyond the clichéd and set matters straight from the outset. It is as if Frances was just going to explain once to the reader why she feels the way she feels by tracing her position back to childhood memories, pre-mature bodily developments and her mixed racial/ethnic origins. Chapter One revealed Frances as a social outfit; Chapter Two exposes her as a physical one, too.

Seven years ago, when I was only nine and we had just moved into her house, Bubbe stood me in front of her. Seated in her chair, she could still look straight into my face, and then her eyes narrowed as she looked me up and down. ‘Frances,’ she announced sternly, ‘you may have her delicate face and bones, but you are not going to be a dainty Japanese woman like your mother. You’re going to be a typical voluptuous Leventhal.’ She put her hands measuringly on my hips and added disapprovingly: ‘And soon.’ (p. 3)

Within weeks I menstruated for the first time, and I also discovered that I was one of those women plagued by vicious monthly cramps. And naturally, it didn’t end there. My waist nipped in; my hips rounded; and my breasts swelled suddenly and painfully...’ (pp. 3-4)

I’d been asked countless times: ‘Where are you *from*?’ I certainly didn’t appear Caucasian – that is, typically ‘American’ – and I didn’t fit a single stereotype of what a Jew ought to look like. All would have been well if I had just looked Japanese, but there was also something about my looks that didn’t fit what people expected from a child of Asian ancestry. Something that seemed a little... off. (p. 4)

⁸⁹ Liz Frost. *Young Women and their Body: a Feminist Sociology* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 10. All quotations are from this edition.



‘What *is* she? Some kind of Asian?’

‘Yes, I guess – although, that hair? A mix? I don’t know. But, oh, look at the breasts. I could cry.’

‘I *know*! She’s so tiny, they make her look like a dwarf.’

‘Poor freaky kid.’ (p. 4)

People do not seem to grasp nor accept Frances’s looks. As a consequence, being extremely alienated, Frances herself cannot accept her body and can therefore not accept the projection of that body onto a surface which would throw it back at her: her reflection in a mirror.

I had planned to take off all my clothes, stand on the step stool, and look at myself, naked, in the mirror above the sink. But I didn’t. Instead I sat on the closed lid of the toilet and cried. In my mind I could hear those two women. And after that I began wearing big, baggy clothes and avoiding mirrors. (p. 5)

In *Body Outlaws*, Ophira Edut claims that in order to set out on the path to bodily acceptance the subject should start at the mirror⁹⁰; as shall be seen hereafter, in Frances’s case, the opposite is the key: it will end, indeed, with the mirror.

As much as an obsession with one’s mirror image might have grown to be fundamental to human psychology in a world which is dominated by the power of physical appearance, so has avoiding mirrors or other shiny reflective surfaces found a place in that same world. As a matter of fact, disorders such as BDD (Body Dysmorphic Disorder)⁹¹ or

⁹⁰ Ophira Edut. ‘Introduction’, in Ophira Edut, ed, *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image* (California: Seal Press, 2003) p. xxv. All quotations are from this edition.

⁹¹ Definition according to the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistic Manuel: 1) preoccupation with some imagined defect in appearance. If a slight physical anomaly is present, the person’s concern is markedly excessive. 2) The preoccupation causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning. 3) The disorder is not better accounted for by another mental disorder (e.g. dissatisfaction with body shape and size in anorexia nervosa).

Behaviours and symptoms:

Frequently checking mirrors/ avoiding mirrors/ comparing self to others and thinking you look worse/ Asking or wanting to ask if you look OK/ Trying to convince people there is something wrong with how you look/ Spending a lot of time grooming, getting ready, etc./



eisoptrophobia/spectrophobia⁹² have become thoroughly ingrained in the realms of mental medicine and some of the symptoms or behavioural patterns associated with BDD could be easily recognised in Frances's conduct.⁹³

Frances would indeed like to retreat as furthest as possible, to the extent that she claims 'If only I could be invisible' (p. 39). Invisible, yes, but to whom? To others and ultimately, to herself. To look and to be looked at: the gaze of others or its absence as it were ['I had become accustomed to being ignored at school' (p. 8)] are as existentially significant as her own contemplation and she initially avoids both. She is not aware, at that stage, that her fake art teacher and role model Ms. Wiles is right in many ways when she states 'Look. That's the key to everything... If you don't *look*, you can't *do*' (p. 67). Or, in lieu, you can't *be*. In this coming-of-age story, reflection is synonymous with self-perception, physical appearance with mental self-consciousness. The main character will need to realise exactly that: I see (me), therefore I am.

What we perceive in the mirror (or are trying to steer clear of respectively) is what we think we project into the world, ergo, becoming a mirror in our own right. Where, then, does this now intensely endowed *body* + *reflection* = *I* or, alternatively, *reflection* = *body* = *I* equation stem from? The relationship between men (as in 'human beings') and their reflection or body

Picking your skin/ Covering parts of your body (for example, with hats) to hide features/
Often change/take a long time to select clothes/ Adopting body positions to hide parts of self

Liz Frost. *Young Women and their Body: a Feminist Sociology*, p.12.

⁹² Definition: An abnormal and persistent fear of mirrors. Sufferers experience undue anxiety even though they realize their fear is irrational. Because their fear often is grounded in superstitions, they may worry that breaking a mirror will bring bad luck or that looking into a mirror will put them in contact with a supernatural world inside the glass. Eisoptrophobia" is derived from the Greek "eis" (into) and "optikos" (vision, image, sight). Other English words derived from "optikos" include "optic" (relating to vision) and "optician," a technician who designs eyeglasses according to a prescription.

MedecineNet.Com: *We bring Doctor's Knowledge to You*, Internet WWW page at URL: <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=12252> (accessed 6/05/2012)

⁹³ Without trying to impose an actual diagnosis on a fictional character here.



image has been and is a tricky one in itself, not only in history but even more so in the present tense.⁹⁴ Frost explains:

...we have moved into a social era which, it has been argued, can be characterised by its unique obsession with the visual display of identity... Appearance obsessed and self-obsessed, the socially produced subject of late consumer capitalism attempts to exercise some control over existence in the context of impossibly large, rapidly moving unknowable forces of, for example, globalisation, by an over-emphasis on control in the personal sphere... Concerns with the self, the well-being of the self, the 'actualisation' of the self, including the body and appearance, have developed in relation to the needs of consumer capitalism to produce individualised consumers with a whole range of personal wants and needs... Self has become a self consciously pursued – 'reflexive' – project. People make and remake themselves in relation to available versions of what it means to be a person. Perfection, or the 'best version' is pursued.⁹⁵

Chapter One has already dealt with Frances's 'control in the personal sphere' by means of the objects, notably the mirror, she surrounds herself with. Moreover, her needs and wants as a consumer have also been explored in detail through the theory of ratification. It is evident here, in connection to the previous section, how inextricably object, reflection and subject are linked to matters of identity. Frances (and all of us so it seems) defines herself over her body which again is defined by and against a social construct. Frost nonetheless also exposes the limits of the theory above: the means to achieve that imposed identity, failure in accomplishing the aim and the possibility of it not being reachable in the first place due to high media influence for example. These perimeters put an enormous strain on Frances, as she is their victim, given her social status. The vested borders become even worse when coupled with her being female. Indeed, it has been indicated that women and their body image have an even trickier relationship to put on display than men do with theirs. Girls or women are not pushed into stereotypical appearances any more than men are; they just seem to react differently to this inevitable socio-economic phenomenon, seem more prone to welcome what

⁹⁴ For a detailed analysis see Mark Pendergrast. *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection*

⁹⁵ Liz Frost. *Young Women and their Body*, pp. 37-38.



they see and are expected to be seen as. Statements such as 'the mirror was and is particularly ambiguous to women'⁹⁶ or 'femininity is a creation of the mirror'⁹⁷ uttered by Melchior-Bonnett vividly support that argument. The body has turned into a playground of female identity formation, as Edut illustrates:

... in cultures around the world, the body is a sign, a text to be read and interpreted. For each body part there is at least one widely accepted script already written, a bit of subtext that fleshes out, so to speak, the extremity in question... While these scripts purport to be objective observations, they are more often propagandistic narratives, self-serving tracts that operate primarily in the construction of community, be it based on ideology, race, vocation or class, on a local, national or international level. As long as there is a standard of beauty, a set of positive attributes assigned arbitrarily to a particular set of body parts, there are two camps locked in xenophobic embrace: those who have the 'good' parts, and those who do not; those who are on the inside of the community, and those, who, tragically, are relegated to its margins.⁹⁸

Socially, Frances does not fit; physically, she does not either. Frances clearly is at the margins, in many different ways. Due to her financial situation, Frances cannot afford to buy herself a reflection and therefore, an identity. Similarly, because of her ethnicity, she is not what she distinguishes as the 'standard of beauty'; for her, Saskia, her brother's girlfriend, is the incorporation of the perfection which should be pursued:

Beautiful Saskia (with the Pre-Raphaelite heaps of hair, and the wide-set eyes, and the creamy skin, and the tall slender body, and, somehow, the exactly-right clothes) was also Saskia of the warm heart and open hands. (p. 21)

...and she'd [Saskia] smiled, shyly, and I'd noticed her hair had gotten longer, and she wasn't wearing her glasses anymore... (p. 40)

It wasn't just her confidence and her beauty; she had all the little things too. Like clothes. Somehow, almost from freshman year on, she's managed to dress well. (p. 97)

⁹⁶ Simone Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. xi.

⁹⁷ Simone Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 214.

⁹⁸ Ophira Edut. 'Introduction', p. xv.



As I looked at her, I thought with the old wonderment and resentment that she was still beautiful. She was still what I wished I were. (pp. 226-227)

Whereas questions of imitation and comparison in connection to the mirror as object have been tied to Ms. Wiles earlier in the debate, so are issues of imitation and comparison in connection to the mirror image put in relation to Saskia at the present stage. Frances wants to be anything but herself. Frances then moves within the exact limits previously exposed in her identity quest and that is why she can, in that agenda, do nothing but fail in that very mission.

However, in the end, she does not do so. How does Frances manage to defy the seemingly inevitable outcome of personal collapse? By changing the structure in which she is trying to unveil her identity. The imposed socially constructed bounds do not and cannot be successful for her, as they do not and cannot be successful for the majority of the population. In order to be able to realise herself, she must thus work against the grain: she must accept herself the way she is, even if she is not Ms. Wiles or Saskia.

'Start at the mirror!' Re-adjusting the reference points above is a first step into adulthood. Frances is a woman, not a girl; we read and see it as audience, but she does not want to recognise the fact yet. Early in the novel she says 'I realized I'd put my hand tentatively on my own round hip' (p. 9), demonstrating that she is well aware of her changing/changed body without being ready to acknowledge these changes as they do not correspond to the image she would like to perceive of herself. Frances struggles to hide this reality mainly with clothes and in this manner puts herself into a binary position to Saskia as her kind of wished-for alter-ego: 'baggy old jeans, my biggest sweatshirt, warm wool socks, thick boots' (p. 29). By wearing outfits that deny her physical female identity, namely her body, and by shunning her mirror image which underlines that body-related identity, Frances distances herself from her body, even totally disconnects from it. Frost repeatedly uses the terms 'alien' or 'enemy' when talking of teenage girls and their



developing appearances. She provides a detailed explanation of why that is the case:

Perhaps the principal defining features of this constructed stage referred to as adolescence can be, for girls, the enforced location of self or identity within the confines of the gendered body. Throughout childhood, of course, there is in reality no disembodiment, but the relative anonymity and at least social androgyny of children's bodies may allow many girl children the space to be unselfconscious in relation to their physical self, and to mainly ignore it. That being 'grown-up' necessitates being massively identified with the body, is the change that girls undertake which has inherent difficulties, such as alienation and objectification of parts of the self. As Martin argues, '...becoming sexually female entails inner fragmentation of the self. A woman must become only a physical body in order to be sexual: ... [and] beyond this the body she becomes is itself and object to her' (Martin, 1987, p.21). This contradictory construction of female as almost synonymous with body on the one hand, but as an object, in the way that it is defined by others as an object: in other words, the lived contradiction of the body as somehow the self and not-self, may be precisely what growing up introduces.⁹⁹

Whereas as children, girls and boys retain a similar stance towards their body and on these grounds, a similar notion of personality, role and status, this inherently changes for girls when starting puberty. The body becomes the 'I'. In this view, reflection is body is Frances; Frances disconnects from her reflection, disconnects from her body, disconnects from her self on her way to becoming a woman, a sexual object/subject. It is this paradigm that Frances will need to subvert in order to be able to face her reflection with pride and dignity.

A significant modification in that socially provided structure occurs with Frances's first productive insights into the mystery of her brother's death. On page 151 she wonders 'But I never did look in mirrors anyway, because I disliked myself. No, wait. I disliked my appearance. I felt so confused.' (p. 151). Frances has finally started on breaking the boundaries: the initial equation has become muddled up, even though it is still an extremely tentative approach on Frances's behalf. She is not sure anymore whether to

⁹⁹ Liz Frost. *Young Women and their Body*, p. 71.



define herself according to or rather against her body and her mirror image but it is evident that she has nevertheless embarked on deconstructing the construct. She has managed to gently undermine the imposed body-reflection-identity balance.

A few pages further into her self-acceptance, Frances allows herself a peek in the mirror. It results into a close examination of herself, her individual physical features and finally, in an attempt to create a connection between her body and the person Frances, although she strongly insists on failing to do so:

My hand reached out. I removed the black silk. I stared into the dim, unfamiliar reflection. Vaguely I could see the line of my brow. The bulk of my hair. My face only, not my body. That was safer. Mirror, mirror, on the wall...

No, I turned away.

Then I turned back. (p. 153)

I poked out my undistinguished chin, raised my imperious nose, drew in my brows, and then I looked. I really looked at the girl in the mirror.

She looked straight back at me.

...

‘I honestly felt no connection with her whatsoever.’ (p. 155)

By referring to the person in the reflection in the third person, Frances still chooses to remain at a distance, a distance that slowly but surely starts to crumble at the end of that chapter as Frances suddenly switches from third to first person: ‘I didn’t look at her – at me – at her while I did it [covering the mirror again]’ (p. 156). And back again to impersonal third. ‘And the second the mirror was decently covered again, I felt better’ (p. 156). Mirror, mirror, on the wall, can Frances ever be completely ready at all?

Yes, she can! She can see or rather, at that stage just before closure, she can *feel* that she is indeed a woman. As has been ascertained from the



beginning, the idea of perceiving herself as a grown-up female individual is crucial to Frances's identity process, correlating body and body image in the reflection the looking glass will generate. While she is not steadfast enough (yet?) to separate body and identity in a world where this equivalence seems indestructible in any case, she can at least agree the arithmetic to include her *own* body:

To him [James] I was too young to think of romantically. Sexually. And to him my recent personal revelation, deep in the dark of another sleepless night, was irrelevant.

Whatever else I might be or might not be, I was not a child. I had had the body of a woman for seven years now. Seven years.

A confirming cramp bit into my abdomen. It was almost like an old friend. (p. 216)

Frost maintains that as a matter of fact, 'Female subjectivity is heavily identified with being sexually desirable'¹⁰⁰, in that way again locating the agent of identity formation outside the individual, outside Frances. In her case, the external stimulus is catered for by her object/subject of sexual attraction, James Diefenbacher. By granting that one day 'You're going to be a very intriguing, very attractive, and very unique woman. Well, you already are' (p. 242) to Frances, James paves Frances's ultimate stride into a new existence. Of course her new profile as 'an artist', 'a grown-up', 'a woman' (p. 249) is far from absolute. And yet, 'start at the mirror' in the novel becomes 'finish at the mirror': 'I looked into the mirror and saw Frances Leventhal' (p. 248). However, Frances's identity process is a tedious one. She continues her statement by saying that '*She* gravely looked back out at me'¹⁰¹. There is more work for her to be done so as to see 'what was really there. Who was really there' (p. 249), in her reflection. 'Not tonight, but soon. Soon' (p. 249).

History shows that female identity formation is a highly engendered identity formation. Gender as well as personality creation, in particular for

¹⁰⁰ Liz Frost. *Young Women and their Body*, p. 198.

¹⁰¹ *My italics*.



women, is a social construct intrinsically related to ideas of the body and therefore body image. As a logical consequence, detachment from the physique results in detachment from identity. Frances follows these lines by means of mirror concealment. Challenging the assumptions might be a Herculean project but it is necessary in order for her to develop as a fictional character. For Frances it becomes crucial to approve of her own body as it is or what it has already turned into, namely the body of a woman, not that of a girl. Ultimately, she will be inclined to trust the reflection of that body and hence, that person. One day she might realise that physical appearance and reflection do belong to her identity but just partially so. Looking into the mirror might mean 'That's me'; however, at the same time it also means 'That's me, but only on the surface', not personally or humanly.

'Mirror mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of us all?'

- Gregory Maguire, *Mirror Mirror*

Since Maguire's story is essentially based on the traditional fairy tale *Snow White*, *Mirror Mirror* is probably the most obvious of the three works of fiction to select when discussing mirror matters. This choice turns out to be all the more palpable when relating it to psychoanalytic criticism. It is evident that the fairy tale lends itself perfectly to Freudian and more particularly Lacanian concepts and has been analysed accordingly on numerous accounts. As *Mirror Mirror* mirrors the original on many levels and in the same amount of ideas, it can be scrutinised on similar grounds and for comparable reasons. Being a



contemporary piece of literature, with the knowledge and measures of possibilities in the domain of psychoanalytic criticism of its predecessor, *Mirror Mirror* takes issues of the Symbolic and Imaginary a step further down the road through the rather unusual character development of its main protagonist Bianca.

‘Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of us all?’ A query so simple and renowned from the outside but highly complex, anatomised and misunderstood in its essence. It is striking, is it not, that the actual addressing a mirror has hardly been challenged. Yet then again, it remains to be discussed as to what or who is truly being spoken to, the mirror or the reflection. And do we not, each one of us, repetitively find ourselves talking to our image, in a looking glass or other? Whether in real life or fiction, we could expect an answer: from the person mirrored, the double, the ‘I’ or, in a fairy tale world, the object itself. Even Lucrezia Borgia, a historical and fictional character at the same time, has become trapped between fantasy and realism as she admits towards the end of the novel that ‘she no longer knew, nor even cared to question, whether the shaped revealed therein [in the mirror] were phantasms of her mind or whether there was magic at work’ (p. 280). Nonetheless, whoever or whatever we ask, we will always ‘demand[ed] the truth of it’ (p. 280), as Lucrezia Borgia does.

Truth, mirror, reflection, identity... and the missing ingredient is clearly the French structuralist psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. The aspects of Lacan’s theory explored will be confined to what is known as the mirror stage, hence the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, the notion of Lacanian desire and their immediate consequences. Taking into account the slightly fantastic nature and the traditionally kept happy-ending formula of the chosen text, one predicament seems to overshadow all others: can there ever be desire-fulfilment and so, a regression to the Imaginary state of being and to what extent does this influence the development of someone else, here, Bianca? The reflection is answer.



Lacan's model is predominantly concerned with the child and the child's experience. The view on the mother or surrogate mother, although playing the most decisive role in the syncrisis at hand, remains excluded. However, in order to get to the identity formation of the child, in this case Bianca, it is the mother who needs to be contemplated. Bianca is, in fact, portrayed as a rather inert figure and, as has already been discovered regarding the dwarves, not actively taking part in her character development. From the outset though, she and therefore her reader, are aware of the precarious affinity between her own self and that of Lucrezia Borgia apropos her identity quest and her path into adulthood:

‘In looking at Lucrezia Borgia, I was aware of myself looking: I was aware of myself... She loved herself, that much was sure. I didn't have a vocabulary for beauty at the time. But she was bewitching: and I knew it right then, that moment too. In knowing that much, I began to grow up' (p. 43-44).

‘Other’, image, and identity are established as inherently linked right off the bat. Generally, such insights from Bianca on her emergent maturity are rare; mostly, she lets others and objects do the job for her.

A brief yet informed outline of the most significant characteristics of Lacan's ideas will be indispensable in order to proceed to further discussion. What is then acute to the debate is the Lacanian notion of the mirror phase, a key element that marks the work of ‘the most controversial psycho-analyst since Freud’¹⁰², so David Macey. According to Lacan, up until the age of six months, the infant child resides in a non-conscious state of being. It lives in an idealised symbiosis with the mother, unable to differentiate between itself and its environment: it has not hitherto acquired a sense of Other and therefore, of Self. After that short period of time, the child, held up by the mother, is able to recognise its own image in the mirror. Yet the image is a delusion. It is a reflection and remains a representation only, ultimate by nature. The image

¹⁰² David Macey, ‘Introduction’, in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin, 1994) p. xiv.



the child experiences is a whole, the reality it is part of is not; the mirror stage, as argued by Lacan,

manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject originally identifies himself with the visual *Gestalt* of his own body: in relation to the still very profound lack of co-ordination of his own motility, it represents an ideal unity, a salutary *imago*...¹⁰³

To attain this ‘ideal unity’ is going to be the everlasting desire of the subject, everlasting because the object of desire is always already lost; the subject is always already split. The wholeness produced, symbolised by the oneness with the mother, is illusory and can never be resumed, if it ever was assumed. The mother, moreover, has become Other. To merge with the *imago*, to reach complete unison, would entail an identification with the (M)other, with something the subject is not. This *Gestalt* the child faces in the mirror then, so Lacan, ‘symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination’¹⁰⁴.

The child has left the Imaginary Order and has finally entered the realm of the Symbolic. In Bianca’s case this happens involuntarily and abruptly so: her mother passed away when she was born. Her father Vincente, however, has imposed himself as a constant presence, functioning as an overprotective mother, as it were, until the arrival of the surrogate Lucrezia:

‘You will be a woman one day,’ said Lucrezia. ‘You need guidance in the womanly arts of conversation, negotiation, deception, prayer, and the management of a private purse. Please, take your place in this chair. I will have a few words with you as a mother might do with a daughter.’ (p. 102)

The separation from her mother, biological and eventually surrogate, as well as from her father turn Bianca into an adolescent but above all, a fertile female able to reproduce. The process into and of puberty has been left out. After

¹⁰³ Jacques Lacan. *Ecrits*, Selected and Translated Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), p. 18. All quotations are from this edition.

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Lacan. *Ecrits*, p. 2.



having been tricked away by Lucrezia, she moves from childhood into adolescence in the dwarves’ home where she wakes up as a new organic entity, emblematised by her menstrual blood:

‘Mamma,’ she said, ‘Mamma. Gesu Cristo. Mamma, Mamma.’ Then her words gave way to mere syllables, lengthening inchoate sounds.

She voided her interior. The blood rolled and splashed, and bits of matter tore embery fingers against her insides... Her legs were slick, her buttocks and heels slick, and she fell, almost fainting, as if she couldn’t endure such loss of blood without a loss of breath or even life. (p. 179)

She is, biologically, ready to take on the role of the mother herself, which she does to some extent when staying with the dwarves. Be that as it may, not fully formed to play according to all the rules, Lucrezia needs to be eliminated first for Bianca to entirely assume that position.

Either way, in Lacanian terms, the child has gained a sense of self by its separation from the mother and thus now accepts the Law of the Father. The ‘I’ is ready to become a socialised ‘I’ through the gradual acquisition of language and will embark on the eternal strive for the forever unachievable desire to develop into a whole human subject. Like in *Black Mirror* although on distinct grounds, desire, wishes and wants are key expressions in *Mirror Mirror* and are repeatedly evoked:

‘I’m here to do your bidding... But I don’t know what you *wish*.’ (Bianca, p. 102)

Bianca sat, and the silence was profound and grew somewhat tense, as if Lucrezia was studying her and finding her *wanting*¹⁰⁵. (p. 102)

‘I should have *liked* a daughter,’ said Lucrezia, ‘but perhaps it’s for the best.’ (p. 103)

‘...you are bitten with the usual human rage of *wanting*’ (p.192)¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Wanting here could mean ‘lacking’, of course and yet the context of the statement suggests a double meaning.

¹⁰⁶ *My italics* in these four quotations



In order to gain admittance into a chosen social context, desires need to be stifled, a phenomenon that inevitably leads to the generation of the unconscious. Toril Moi even argues in favour of an equality of the two: ‘The unconscious emerges as the result of the repression of desire, in one sense the unconscious *is* desire’¹⁰⁷. And sometimes, although destined to be hidden, the unconscious or desire manifests itself, a manifestation that could make appearance in the form of an object which Lacan has named *objet petit a*, here, the mirror. The looking glass has turned into an *objet petit a* for three parties: the dwarves, Lucrezia and, though unintentionally so, Bianca. The *objet petit a* belongs to the Order of the so-called Real, the unconscious, the repressed, that which lies beyond the Symbolic. Yet the *objet petit a* persists as a sign only: as an object of unattainable desire, it remains itself impossible, as accurately stated by Malcolm Bowie: ‘A wish can be fulfilled; desire cannot: it is insatiable, and its objects are perpetually in flight’¹⁰⁸. In Lacanian theory the subject is thus irrevocably divided since, even if it seemingly realises its desire in its smallest measurements, ‘whatever they get they always want more, or something different’¹⁰⁹. The dwarves, in their nearly human shape, have recognised this trend in Bianca: ‘were you to get what you want, poor thing, you wouldn’t want it. Isn’t the wanting richer?’ (p. 193). Lucrezia, likewise, lives by this conundrum:

We make of the hollow world a fuller, messier, prettier place, but all our inventions can’t create the one thing we require: to deserve any fond attention we might accidentally receive, to receive any fond attention we don’t in the course of things deserve. We are never enough to ourselves because we can never be enough to another. Any one of us walks into any room and reminds its occupant that we are not the one they most want to see. We are never the one. We are never enough. (p. 226)

In the Brothers Grimm’s fairy tale *Snow White* as well as in Gregory Maguire’s *Mirror Mirror*, Snow White’s/Bianca’s wicked step- or surrogate mother,

¹⁰⁷ Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 101. All quotations are from this edition.

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm Bowie. *Lacan* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 10. All quotations are from this edition.

¹⁰⁹ Malcolm Bowie. *Lacan*, p. 15.



although physically existing in the Symbolic Order, appears to be continually caught up in aspects of the realm of the Imaginary. She might have passed through the mirror stage as an infant but seeks to regress by abiding to this different, non-developmental function of the mirror. This can be clearly demonstrated in her daily seeking her self-image in replica and her consultation of it. Perpetual self-love is what marks the essence of Lucrezia's existence since she has been denied any other potential love in her young yet lived life: 'I am a woman who killed for love/ I am a woman who killed for lack of love./ The mirror declares that the twin accusations are equal.' (p. 297) Due to these circumstances, Lucrezia has become obsessed with her own body and beauty, is in want to deny all others, especially Bianca, such godly gifts. The myth of Narcissus is reinterpreted in Lacanian terms as a result of the split subject's idealised *mirage*, formulated by Jacqueline Rose as the 'I' that revels in its state of 'reflexion of a narcissistic structure grounded on the return of the infant's image to itself in a moment of pseudo-totalisation'¹¹⁰. In the mirror image, nothing exists outside Lucrezia Borgia or more appropriately, for the substitute mother, nothing exists outside a unified self-perception. And yet everything does. As Lucrezia pleadingly laments, once the mirror has gone, 'It was all I would have wanted, to look at the mirror and see nothing but myself' (p. 301). In fact, it is Bianca, the Other, that is reflected back to her. In contrast to the original fairy tale, at least initially, Lucrezia's desire never appears to be fulfilled; even so, in order to eventually meet this want, Lucrezia is willing to pay the price of being potentially trapped forever in complete narcissism, of subsisting as a case of arrested development. Her aim to exist as such is, of course, challenged by the pubertal Bianca. In his section on *Snow White* in *The Uses of Enchantment*, psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim claims that 'As long as the child is totally dependent, he remains, as it were, *part* of the parent; he does not threaten the parent's narcissism'¹¹¹. Yet Bettelheim is undeniably mistaken given that in the fairy tale novel, it is

¹¹⁰ Jacqueline Rose. Quoted in Raymond Tallis, *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory* (London: MacMillan Press, 1988), p. 135.

¹¹¹ Bruno Bettelheim. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 203.



exactly that part of herself that Lucrezia plans to definitively eliminate. Bianca lives in the Symbolic: among the dwarves, she has turned into a socialised 'I' and therefore is a split, non-unified subject. Lucrezia, in danger of becoming the same, with Bianca possibly representing Lucrezia in the Symbolic, fervently defends her position in the Imaginary, cost what it may:

'Take the child from the house, deep into the woods, far beyond where anyone might find her.'

'There are woods enough to lose a child in.'

'I want her more than lost. I want her life.'

...

Do as I say. Bring me her heart carved from her chest. (pp. 146-147)

The reader, who is familiar with the Brothers Grimm's version, is well aware of the fact that the guardian mother will eat the infant's heart. Here, this particular plot element can only be guessed at since it is not stated publicly. Looking back at Lucrezia's deeds in general, there is no doubt though that she will dutifully take to that task, too. Lacan's Imaginary can be compared to Freud's oral stage, a stage when everything outside the infant is put to the mouth. Lucrezia is ready to devour and, in due course, to return that which she is not or does not wish ever to become.

The wicked surrogate mother does, as it is expected and common in classic fairy tales (and *Mirror Mirror* is one, technically speaking), in the end die, and painfully so. It must not be forgotten at this stage that the novel additionally incorporates biblical images to achieve the required ending: Lucrezia, driven and tormented by her desire, has also requested that Vincente find the three remaining apples of the Tree of Knowledge, the fatal tree which triggered Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise Eden. Finally, on page 321, this dream seems to be within reach, 'she would have what she wanted, at last' (p. 321). Weakened by life and eternal want, Lucrezia does not manage, however, to defeat the gondolier, the monster (is it the deer slain instead of Bianca?) which was to deliver her to the last Apple. The novel does not grant her death any physical space; Lucrezia passes away unloving and unloved. What does this death, posthumously, represent to her? If Toril Moi,



who combines Freudian terminology with Lacanian concepts, is to be believed, then it is in death that Lucrezia has reached her ultimate goal:

If we accept that the end of desire is the logical consequence of satisfaction (if we are satisfied, we are in a position where we desire no more), we can see why Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, posits death as the ultimate object of desire – as Nirvana or the recapturing of the lost unity, the final healing of the split subject.¹¹²

Whether or not ‘the final healing of the split subject’ is ever possible remains to be discovered, since Lacan defines the subject as always already split and desire as forever unapproachable. It is a fact that Bianca, the Other, even if recurrently threatened with extinction, survives. She moreover had to repress everything her guardian embodies in order to be able to enter the realm of the Symbolic. In a way, then, Lucrezia has turned into Bianca’s unconscious. Bianca did not realise the impact of what she was actually referring to when claiming at the beginning of the novel, as a child, that ‘In looking at Lucrezia Borgia, I was aware of myself looking: I was aware of myself’ (pp. 43-44). Could it be argued that, since the replacement mother in the role of the unconscious occasionally disturbs Bianca in her daily routine, Lucrezia belongs in turn to the Real Order, seducing Bianca with a range of *objets petit a* (the stay laces, the comb and the apple)? Lucrezia tries to push her rebellious part, her Symbolic side, into renewed narcissism so as to drive that part of herself back into the Imaginary and to see the longed-for wholeness of the self-image, which she expected to be produced by the mirror. And still, she does not succeed.

And good for Bianca that she does not. The discussion must come to this conclusion in order for Bianca to become a fully individualised ‘I’, in order for her to develop. Shortly after Lucrezia has literally disappeared from the surface, Bianca returns to the place of her childhood, Montefiore, which might now turn into the place of her adulthood:

¹¹² Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 101.



It took Bianca a while longer to remember the name of Lucrezia Borgia. Borgia! With the reclamation of that single word, a tide of memories surged forward, and each small wavelet made her *older and fiercer*, but also more amazed and incredulous. (p. 231)¹¹³

Progression and regression mirror stages of identity formation respectively for two characters at the same time yet in opposite directions. Lucrezia depends on the reflection to be her own, to tell her she is the fairest of them all. Lacan's idea of the unattainable unified subject evolves into Lucrezia's inevitable fate and ultimate doom. Lucrezia straddles the stools between the Imaginary and Symbolic through the both hated and loved mirror image. Bianca, in return, depends on that same mirror image while she herself never consults the looking glass in question. She does so via her guardian, her Other. Through the Other we find the Self. Bianca is never really neither aware of having an Other nor of functioning as such for someone else; it is Lucrezia who defines her as such, who measures up against her as such and consequently reveals her as such and therefore remodels her into Self by means of the mirror image. In the end, released from notions other than 'I', free from Lucrezia Borgia and the dwarves, Bianca might take further matters of her identity into her own hands and trace her own reflection.

Chapter Two thus discloses that reflection has come to mean 'I' in the course of social evolution. As Pendergrast states, 'We have used the reflective surface both to reveal and to hide reality'¹¹⁴, where reality refers to identity or identity formation through body image. That is what the characters in *The Mirror Image Ghost*, *Black Mirror* and *Mirror Mirror* do: they either try to repress who/what they are by stifling or manipulating their reflection or, on the other hand, have launched an intense attempt to retrieve or discover their

¹¹³ *My italics.*

¹¹⁴ Mark Pendergrast. *Mirror Mirror*, p. x.



personality by generating that very reflection. Their concerns are related to social status, family issues, physical appearance and wanting. Fact is, that one's reflection has turned into an inevitable force, the seeking of the double more powerful than the original, thereby distancing the original from itself, which then again calls for an enhanced identity quest. Melchior-Bonnet goes into detail:

In today's world filled with mirrors, what can the image, to which we are so accustomed, tell us? One can no longer escape the multitude of observing eyes. At every turn we are reminded of our social status: there is a continuous monitoring of appearances, and even of sentiments, all conforming to an imposed label (youth, health, wealth, and so forth). The individual is transformed into an image, plumbed into his or her deepest depths... The overinvestment of the mirror image goes hand in hand with a devaluation of the subject and a growing and renewed demand for identity.¹¹⁵

Lisa pursues that mission by looking for her double and disposing of it at the same time. Ghostly matters develop into her psychological tool to foster for her identity creation. Frances, on the contrary, fights hard to admit to her reflection; her journey is highly influenced by questions of body and appearance. It is only at the end of the novel that she is finally ready to face her mirror image and to acknowledge the woman she perceives in it, without fully taking to it yet. In *Mirror Mirror*, ideas of the double take on a completely new dimension: Lucrezia and Bianca function as each other's double, each other's reflections, as it were, each other's Other and thus Self. Lacanian models of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as key elements of the mirror phase are vital to the analysis. In order for Bianca to unearth and live her Self, the (M)other needs to be excluded from the equation.

In all three cases, the chief protagonist finds her path into either adolescence or adulthood through one way or another by means of her mirror image. The object's function hence generates psychological growth in the subject in question, *quod erat demonstrandum*. Since it is obvious that reflections and identity cannot be separated from psychoanalytic studies and mirror

¹¹⁵ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 273.



images and character formation dominate the works of fiction chosen for the purpose, it can be concluded that these enriching insights could only have been realised through the literary theory of psychoanalytic criticism implemented, in sync, with matters of the mirrored.



CONCLUSION

Mirrors: omnipresent and omnipotent, or so it seems. Big Brother of a sort, at its best... and its worst.

Although the three novels use the object and its function in numerous different ways, as a literary vehicle, psychological framework, as a companion or even competitor to the main character, to name but a few, it is evident that they do play a crucial role in *The Mirror Image Ghost*, *Black Mirror* and *Mirror Mirror* respectively. As the three works of fiction exploit the thing to its fullest possible extent by taking advantage of its pluralist nature, it can be said that they belong to the sub-genre of children’s looking glass literature. As a matter of fact, when taking into account the history of the founded genre in question, the chosen texts follow an apparent common undercurrent of opposites connected to the mirror: life and death, reality and illusion, the familiar and the unfamiliar, belonging and unbelonging, body and mind, Self and Other. The mirror and mirror images become the shared grounds on which to explore distinct yet interlinked topics, each of them ultimately piloting towards or being piloted by the *leitmotif* of identity formation.

Pendergrast might have stated that ‘Mirrors are meaningless until someone looks into them’¹¹⁶. His assumption is, however, flawed. Chapter One demonstrates that the object, even when devoid of its function, enjoys a *raison d’être* in its own right when looked at from the perspective of material culture studies. In *The Mirror Image Ghost* the looking glass is representative of home and not-home at the same time. As an object of war, it becomes reminiscent of Lisa’s past and yet, simultaneously, of her future. *Black Mirror* is entirely dissimilar in its approach: here, the mirror works as a symbol of social alienation and fitting, imitation and as a product of consumption. Re-bestowing the object with its primary function will be the first step for Frances

¹¹⁶ Pendergrast. *Mirror Mirror*, p. ix.



to self-acceptance, physically and therefore, mentally, an aspect thoroughly scrutinised in Chapter Two. Whereas Werlin's novel is more dedicated to the object as an end product, it is in *Mirror Mirror* that the looking glass is taken care of at its origins. Producer and product live in a symbiotic bond; the dwarves depend on their creation while the artefact depends on the dwarves for a proper implementation. And Bianca, passive as she is, depends on both for her character development. In general it can be established that mirrors and men are inherently concomitant; by exploring the one we have found the other.

Despite of the fact that the case studies are globally influenced by Lacan's idea of connecting a human being's self-awareness to a tedious identity quest, there are a far larger number of significant issues which have been analysed in the light of psychoanalytic criticism. The double, the uncanny, physical appearance, female adolescence, the mirror stage, Self and (M)Other are the key concepts which have thus been unearthed in Chapter Two. This section has focused on reflection predominantly and that which lies beyond: the mirrored or indeed, the absence of her. Storr's work incorporates mainly Freudian ideas. Lisa had to find her double through eliminating a ghost in order to create an original, *her* original. *Black Mirror* concentrates on questions of body and body image, in particular the female body. In Frances's opinion, her reflection equals her body equals her Self. To accept one means to accept the other, which she is able to do at the end of the novel, even if only partially so. It is in Gregory Maguire's *Mirror Mirror* that Lacan's theories finally come to analytical fruition. Bianca's surrogate (M)other Lucrezia moves between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, trying to regress so as to progress by means of the mirror and the pictures/idea it throws back at her. Yet it should not be in Lucrezia's power to use and abuse the looking glass to her own personal benefits. Actually, its images can always only be dangerous and not, as she expects, liberating. Bianca and Lucrezia act as each other's Other; the two cannot exist at the same time. In the dwarves' home Bianca is born into adolescence and with Lucrezia's final departure, she is ready to



move into adulthood in the place of her childhood. The mirror, as it had to be done, is destroyed by the ones who had fashioned it to their needs, the rightful owners the dwarves, in this way productively smashing the Bianca-Lucrezia dichotomy.

‘The mirror is not a neutral, equitable, passive witness’¹¹⁷, so Melchior-Bonnet. The looking glass has indeed been confirmed as a rather actively effective force in the object-subject dialectic at hand, culminating in the subject’s quest for Self. It could be argued, obviously, that one (reader, author, and character) only sees in the mirror what one brings to it, in terms of image and utility, and that the adopted interpretation of both is thus subject to high variability due to cultural, social, historical and economic movements. Moreover, and then again, so is identity itself; as Jane Kroger suggests, ‘Of course, there are many approaches one might take to understand how adolescents come to construct themselves in a world that is constructing them’¹¹⁸, thereby defining identity as the construct it has been exposed as in *Black Mirror*. These issues lend themselves to be appropriately investigated in further research. The present debate, however, was directed so as to explore the mirror as path into self-discovery, and not on the end result itself. And as such, mirrors and reflections have become self-sufficient means in the realm of adolescent fiction. The question ‘Mirror Mirror in the Book, May I Have a Closer Look?’ has not only given the reader a certain degree of satisfaction; it is the characters who have gained the most from this intense request.

¹¹⁷ Sabine Melchior-Bonnet. *The Mirror*, p. 247.

¹¹⁸ Jane Kroger. *Identity in Adolescence: the Balance between Self and Other* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. xv.



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