

Images in the Mirror: Reflecting/Refracting the Beauty Myth in Snow White

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Abstract

The story of the mirror predates recorded history. From the earliest times the mirror has functioned as an important though ambiguous source of insight into the human culture and besides its practical use in our everyday life as well as its scientific applications, the mirror has evolved as a complex concept invoking and subverting certain fundamental discourses on knowledge and perception, cultural inscriptions, human subjectivity, representation and aesthetics. Not only has the mutable socio-cultural milieu transformed the concrete form of the mirror but the inherently elusive character of the mirror has resulted in its metamorphosis into a polysemic metaphor for human identity and self-knowledge. In its metaphorical capacity, the mirror simultaneously reflects, reveals, represents and refracts the obvious and the hidden; it embodies the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious codes of meaning surrounding the 'self' and 'identity' in the realms of literature, history, art, philosophy, magic, theology and politics, among others. The mirror has been viewed in literature and philosophy in myriad ways. Besides serving as a mode of re-presentation, imagination as well as a doorway to access time past, future and parallel; the mirror in literature has, interestingly, functioned to reflect/represent and unravel /subvert the myth of beauty as constituted and perpetuated in our socio-cultural matrix. One such intriguing 'literary' mirror is the talking mirror in the popular fairy tale *Snow White*. This paper attempts to examine how the mirror in *Snow White* paradoxically reflects and refracts the compulsive pursuit, particularly by women, of mythical parameters of beauty formulated and imposed to perpetuate and preserve patriarchal power politics.

Key words: mirror, representation, Snow White, beauty, self, identity, patriarchal, power politics.