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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

**THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY AND CULTURAL
BELONGING IN ZADIE SMITH'S
MULTICULTURAL NOVEL: **ON BEAUTY** (2005)**

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ÖZ

ZADIE SMITH'İN ÇOK KÜLTÜRLÜ ROMANINDA KİMLİK VE KÜLTÜREL AİDİYET PROBLEMİ: **ON BEAUTY (GÜZELLİĞE DAİR)** (2005)

MERYEM SENEM BAŞCI

Bu tez Zadie Smith'in çok kültürlü romanı, **On Beauty (Güzelliğe Dair)** (2005)'de çok kültürlü toplumlardaki bireylerin kimlik problemi, öz kimlik ve aidiyet duygusu arayışı üzerine odaklanacaktır. Zadie Smith post yapısalcı ve humanist eleştirilerin arasındaki sorunu, bu eleştirmenlerin hayata problemlili yaklaşımını ve kimlik oluşumu üzerindeki etkilerini irdeler. Seçilen romanda, ırklar, toplumsal cinsiyetler, sınıflar ve kuşaklar arası iletişim kopukluğu hayatı daha karmaşık bir hale getirip gençleri toplumdaki yerlerini bulma hususunda rol modelsiz bırakmıştır. İletişim problemi ve insanların hayatlarındaki kaos gerçek hayat ve ideolojiler arasındaki kopukluktan kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu yüzden, bu çalışma özellikle çok kültürlü toplumlarda kimlik oluşumunu etkileyen faktörler üzerinde duracaktır. Smith sadece kimlik problemini sunmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda karakterlerin sanata ve güzelliğe yaklaşımları üzerinden bu probleme bir çözüm de sunar. Zadie Smith karakterlerin hayatlarındaki kaosa bir çözüm olarak sanatı sunar. Smith'e göre sanatın kendi içinde dönüştürücü bir etkisi olduğunu söylenebilir. Genel bir deyişle, sanat bireye farkındalık kazandırarak kişinin kendini gerçekleştirme sürecine zenginlik katmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik Problemi, Aidiyet, Güzellik, Sanat, Yapısalcılık Sonrası, Humanizm

ABSTRACT

THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY AND CULTURAL BELONGING IN ZADIE SMITH'S MULTICULTURAL NOVEL: *ON BEAUTY* (2005)

MERYEM SENEM BAŐCI

This thesis focuses on the identity problem and cultural belonging of the characters and their search for particular identity and sense of belonging in Zadie Smith's multicultural novel: *On Beauty* (2005). Zadie Smith examines thoroughly the conflict between the poststructuralist and humanist criticism presenting their problematic approaches to life and their effect on identity formation. In this selected novel, miscommunication between races, genders, classes, and generations makes life more complicated and leaves the youth without a role model while searching their place in the society. The communication problem and chaos in people's lives stem from the disconnection between real life and ideologies. Thus, this study will focus on the factors that affect identity formation particularly in multicultural societies. Smith does not only present the problem of the identity, she also provides a solution through the characters' response to art and beauty. Zadie Smith seems to present art as a solution to the chaos in the characters' lives. It would not be an exaggeration to say that art has an internal transformative effect. In a broader sense art enriches and accelerates one's self-realization process endowing one with a broader mode of consciousness.

Keywords: Identity Problem, Belonging, Beauty, Art, Poststructuralism, Humanism

PREFACE

This thesis is made as a completion of the master education in English Language and Literature. This study analyzes how beauty enhances and enriches one's self-realization process bestowing a mode of consciousness. In a world where we lose our sensibilities day by day and get lost in chaos and conflict, I believe that we should cling to something that promises hope and help us overcome our selfishness. In Zadie Smith's novel, **On Beauty** (2005), beauty is the hope to overcome the chaos and selfishness in the world. Giving art a moral aspect, Smith shows that it is possible to develop people's nature through art and beauty. This transcendental approach to art helps people to see the beauty in each other. After reading this novel, Carlene's life motto, "There is such a shelter in each other" is engraved in my mind. When I get desperate of all the chaos in the world, I always remember it to keep myself sane and hopeful. This motto has urged me to study this novel in my thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Assoc. Prof. Canan Şavkay to whom I owe most. I thank her a lot for her suggestions, advices, comments and guidance through the process of this work. Without her great support and guidance, I would not have accomplished this thesis. When I got lost, she was always there to help me with her great guidance. This thesis would not have been possible without the patience and support of my family, friends, particularly my fellow sufferers, Zehra Aydın and Zöhre Baş Korkmaz. They both always believed in me, motivated and endured me during this process. The last but not the least, It is a pleasure to present my hearty thanks to my husband Durmuş Başcı who always believed in me and supported me with his great patience during this process.

Meryem Senem BAŞCI

İstanbul, 2017

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ABBREVIATION LIST

Ed. By.	: Editor
Ibid	: Aynı Eser
Loc. cit.	: Aynı Eser Aynı sayfa
p.	: Sayfa
pp.	: Sayfalar
Trans. by.	: Çeviren
w. d.	: Basım Tarihi yok
w.p.	: Basım Yeri Yok

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the identity problem and cultural belonging of the characters and their search for particular identity and sense of belonging in Zadie Smith's multicultural novel: **On Beauty** (2005). In this novel, Zadie Smith examines thoroughly the conflict between the poststructuralist and humanist criticism presenting their problematic approaches to life and their effect on identity formation. Miscommunication between races, genders, classes, and generations makes the life more complicated and leaves the youth without a role model while searching their place in the society. This study will focus on the factors that affect identity formation particularly in multicultural societies. Smith does not only present the problem of the identity, she also provides a solution through the characters' response to art and beauty. The two father figures, Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps are portrayed representing different problematic approaches to art. As these father figures are art historians working at the humanities department, Smith also criticizes the criticism of aesthetics in the universities and raises the question how the aesthetic critic should approach art. Throughout the novel, Zadie Smith presents how the critics' theoretical rigour makes them blind and prevents them from forming a proper human relationship. On the other hand, she also provides a solution to overcome the conflict in identity formation through the communication of the two oppressed women characters of the novel and their response to art and beauty.

The conservative art historian Monty Kipps stands for the traditional ideology of Eurocentric Humanism, which marginalizes the people who do not fit the universal notion of man. With the rise of the Renaissance in the Fifteenth Century, the classical works of Latin and Greek were revived which opposed the scholastic thought of Medieval Europe. Different from the scholastic thought that centres on God, Renaissance philosophers believed in human dignity and the capability to give meaning to their life without the need for dogmatic belief. The classical works of Roman and Greek thought provided a great source for the philosophy of humanism,

and humanism contributed to the development of social science, art, and philosophy. The word humanist was derived from the Italian word *umanista* meaning the teacher or student of the humanities, which is the study of philosophy, poetry, rhetoric, grammar and art.¹

In order to better understand the problems Smith engages with in the novel, it is significant to provide a broader definition of humanism:

Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.²

Humanism undergoes many changes in time; Renaissance individualism which puts man at the centre of life leads the path towards secular humanism. Humanism's aim for the self discovery of man and the discovery of the world through human reason turn eventually into an exploitation of nature and of some human beings who do not fit into the notion of 'Eurocentric Man'. Political and economic cupidity and hegemony of European nation states used humanistic notions as a justification for the brutality of the century. As Tony Davies points out:

On one side, humanism is saluted as the philosophical champion of human freedom and dignity, standing alone and outnumbered against the battalions of ignorance, tyranny and superstition. [...] On the other, it has been denounced as an ideological smokescreen for the oppressive mystifications of modern society and culture, the marginalisation and oppression of the multitudes of human beings in whose name it pretends to speak, and even, through an inexorable 'dialectic of enlightenment', for

¹ Andrew Copson, "What Is Humanism?", **The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism**, Ed. by Andrew Copson and A. C. Grayling, w. p., John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015, pp.1-2.

² **Ibid.**, p.6.

the nightmare of fascism and the atrocity of total war.³

In Smith's narration, the art historian Monty Kipps represents the notion of humanism described above; he uses the ideals of humanism as a smokescreen for his racism, although he himself is black. As it will be discussed in the first chapter, Monty marginalizes and objectifies women and underprivileged people by opposing the affirmative action policy of the university.

A stance which appears to be at first glance a healthy attitude in opposing everything that Monty stands for, namely the oppression in the name of humanism of all the marginalized social groups, is represented in through Howard, also an art historian. However, Zadie Smith reveals how Howard's stance also falls short in constructing a positive sense of identity. Smith touches upon the problems of poststructuralist theories which cause a void when they deconstruct all values and beliefs, but fail to propose an alternative constructive position instead. Through the characterization of the liberal professor Howard Belsey, Smith tries to point out the problems of poststructuralist theory. At university Belsey opposes the elitist humanistic ideology of Monty Kipps who supports the affirmative policy that backs up underprivileged students by providing them a place at college. Even though Howard has a point in criticizing the evil sides of humanism, he cannot provide any solutions and thus he cannot go further than criticizing and ignoring values.

As the novel puts emphasis on poststructuralist theory and points out its shortcomings, it is necessary to mention the background of post structuralism. Post

³ Tony Davies, **Humanism**, w.p., Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001, p.5.

structuralism emerged in France in the 1960s. Two important figures of this approach to discourse are Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. After the horrible devastation through the atomic bombs in Japan, the holocaust and all the brutalities of World War II, the notion of the human started to be questioned. All these events appeared to end the notion of the centralized universal ideals of humanism. Instead of universal ideals, we see a scepticism towards certainty and knowledge. That is why; post structuralists deconstruct the certainty and superiority of Western civilization exposing how artificial its ideals are. Exposing the fallacy of Western civilization and sciences, Foucault focuses on the relation between power and knowledge, as Western civilization uses science, art and discourse as a power to control society. While in theory these human sciences aim to improve society, they result in repression, which society accepts happily. “The new human sciences have turned out to be straightjackets that, strangely enough we seem to be happy to put on.”⁴ As Howard is aware that all discourse is related to power, he is against the notion of genius or beauty in art because he believes that all these notions are artificial, and the beauty in art is a mask that power wears. Not believing in the idea of the human as independent and reasonable, poststructuralists consider that human beings are constructed as a result of universal ideals of Western civilization. Post structuralism is not only restricted to the sphere of philosophy, but it influences many other disciplines like literature. Under the effect of post structuralism, scepticism begins to dominate over literary theory. This anti- authoritarian stance can be seen in Roland Barthes’ well-known essay, “The Death of the Author”, in which he denounces the power and authority even of the author:

⁴ Hans Bertens, **Literary Theory**, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 124.

In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases- reason, science, law.⁵

Barthes announces the death of the author and the birth of the reader, because he views the text as produced by the reader instead of the author. Apart from Barthes, the philosopher Jacques Derrida has also been of great influence. While Barthes decentres the literary text and liberates it from the limitations of the author, Derrida decentres the intellectual universe. In his essay, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, Derrida criticizes structuralism that holds on a centre, because he thinks that it limits free play:

It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word “structure” itself are as old as the epistémé—that is to say, as old as western science and western philosophy—and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the epistémé plunges to gather them together once more, making them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, up until the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure-or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been involved, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient; balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure. No doubt that by orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the freeplay of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.⁶

Annihilating the notion of man constructed by Western civilization, post

⁵ Roland Barthes, “The Death of The Author”, Art Sites UCSD, (Online) <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/Gustafson/FILM%20162.W10/readings/barthes.death.pdf>, p.147, 11 February 2017.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, California State University, (Online) <http://www.csudh.edu/ccauthen/576f13/DrrdaSSP.pdf>, p.1, 11 February 2017.

structuralism gives voice to all the marginalized groups such as women, homosexuals or non-white people. Post structuralism's dissolving and decentring all values and truths has resulted in giving a voice to these marginalized people. This has given rise to anti-humanist thought, which has emancipated and liberated them from the limitations of universalism. According to the feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti:

Anti-humanism consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting. Different and sharper power relations emerge, once this formerly dominant subject is freed from his delusions of grandeur and is no longer allegedly in charge of historical progress.⁷

From this angle, Howard would be called as a poststructuralist along with his attitudes to his family. Howard's criticism of humanism does not go beyond a discursive stance; he fails to reconcile his theories the ordinary life, which results in his alienation from both his family and his surrounding. Howard's theoretical blindness prevents him from respecting any different idea than his own. Thus, he presents a despotic father figure who despises the beliefs and ideologies even of his children and his wife.

Post-structuralism rejects absolute truths or facts about the world. It also rejects meta-narratives, as Barthes has explored in "The Death of the Author"; the meaning that the author intends to give is secondary to the meaning perceived by the reader, thus there cannot be only one meaning or purpose. Decentring absolute meaning and truth, poststructuralist thought rejects the universalist ideologies of Western Civilization that creates binary oppositions. This has always resulted in the marginalizing of people who are not western, white and male, thus identifying them as others. This decentring corresponds to the anti humanist thought that disregards the notion of man as a measure of all the things. Michel Foucault in his book **The**

⁷ Rosi Braidotti, **Post Human**, w.p., Polity Press, 2013, p.23.

Order of Things announces the end of the notion of universalist man:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area- European culture since the sixteenth century- one can be certain that man is a recent intervention within it... As the archeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.⁸

On the other hand, in **On Beauty**, Zadie Smith questions the notion of anti-humanism and the concept of “Death of Man” and urges the reader to reconsider this notion presenting its problems in humanities departments. The problem of the humanities departments of the universities is that they isolate themselves from the public sphere. In the novel, Zadie Smith’s choosing her narration’s setting as the Humanities Department of Wellington University also points out this problem of the intellectuals. Emily Apter states also humanities’ isolation from society as follows:

Meanwhile Readings, in the early 1990s, affirms nihilistically “culture no longer matters to the powers that be in advanced capitalism.” Readings senses that the humanities has lost its *raison d’être*, its ability to defend its stakes and intellectual objectives. Tolerated as a luxury item within the elite walls of the university, its purchase has atrophied in the public sphere.⁹

Thus, Smith suggests that Humanities should find a way to reconcile themselves to life. For this reason, anti-humanistic approach should be toned down to give voice to humanities again in public sphere because it is not fair to reject all the values of humanism such as self-discovery of people, human dignity and freedom. Neil Badmington suggests that we need to reconsider ‘the death of man’ notion:

⁸ Michel Foucault, **The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences**, w.p., Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, pp.386-7.

⁹ Emily Apter, “The Human in the Humanities”, **October**, Vol.96, Spring 2001, pg.83, (Online). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779118>, JSTOR, 16 December 2016.

Posthumanism, I want to suggest, needs theory, needs theorizing, needs above all to reconsider the untimely celebration of the absolute end of "Man." What Jacques Derrida calls the "apocalyptic tone" should be toned down a little, for, as Nietzsche once pointed out, it is remarkably difficult to cut off the human(ist) head through which we (continue to) "behold all things".¹⁰

Considering that the novel's name is **On Beauty**, the reader might expect Zadie Smith discussing and defining the concept of 'beauty', and what it is or not. However, Smith in her narrative, creates her characters and puts them together with their differing personal responses to the concept of beauty. To reveal how one's attitude to 'beauty' may change and affect one's identity, Smith puts two major and conflicting characters side by side within the same intellectual environment: Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps. While Howard seems to be a post structuralist academician with his liberal thoughts, Kipps could be considered the conservative and narrow-minded intellectual. This sharp contrast between the two men may help to see how ambivalent and subject to change a person's attitude to the concept of 'beauty' can be. Walter Pater talks about the definition of 'beauty' in **The Renaissance**, and he asks the following questions:

What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to ME? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?¹¹

According to Pater, the important thing is not to define 'beauty', but to be aware of the "temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects."¹² Smith, like Pater, tries to answer these questions: how does 'beauty' affect each character? Is it possible to develop people's nature through art and 'beauty'? One can assume that Smith presents a moral aspect of 'beauty' and art, but this morality is not general and constructed by the rules of society. On the contrary, this

¹⁰ Neil Badmington, "Theorizing Posthumanism" **Cultural Critique**, No.53, Winter 2003, p. 10. (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354622>, JSTOR. 16 December 2016.

¹¹ Walter Pater, **The Renaissance/ Studies in Art and Poetry**, w.p., Project Gutenberg, 2000, p.6.

¹² **Ibid.**, p.9.

morality is personal and according to some of the character, may come from a transcendental source.

Zadie Smith seems to present art as a solution to the chaos in the characters' lives. It would not be an exaggeration to say that art has an internal transformative effect. In a broader sense art enriches and accelerates one's self-realization process endowing one with a broader mode of consciousness. According to Elaine Scarry, from whom Zadie Smith borrows the title and who has been a great inspiration for the novel, claims that when we see something beautiful, we undergo "a radical decentering" giving up our selfishness:

When we come upon beautiful things—the tiny mauve-orange-blue moth on the brick, Augustine's cake, a sentence about innocence in Hampshire— they act like small tears in the surface of the world that pull us through to some vaster space; [...] or they lift us (as though by the air currents of someone else's sweeping), letting the ground rotate beneath us several inches, so that when we land, we find we are standing in a different relation to the world than we were a moment before. It is not that we cease to stand at the center of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us.¹³

As the biggest problem in the novel is the selfishness of the father figures who are blind to the world and to the people around them, Smith uses 'beauty' as a vehicle to overcome this selfishness. In **On Beauty**, while the father figures are portrayed as blind characters stuck in their ideologies and theories that prevent them from seeing the beauty in life and also in art, the mother figures are presented as the empathetic characters that see the 'beauty' in art and in other people. Even though these two mother figures are marginalized and alienated by their husbands, they can develop a way to see into the life of things. In this thesis, it will be explored how these women characters are portrayed as the representative of a consciousness that has developed a humane sensibility through art. It will be analysed how the characters' response to art affects their lives and relations. Art is offered as a solution to the conflict in the novel.

¹³ Elaine Scarry, **On Beauty and Being Just**, Aalto University, <https://blogs.aalto.fi/researchinart/files/2012/10/scarryBEAUTY.pdf>, pp.118-9.

Monty's elitist attitude shows up especially in his approach to art, as he believes that his elite status gives him a refined taste and this belief shows his hegemonic and exploitative mind towards art. For this reason, Smith appears to reject him as an alternative way to deal with art and values. Monty's hegemonic and exploitative mind, however, justifies Howard's view that a socially constructed notion of beauty in art merely serves as a mask for the power held in the hands of the dominant classes. Howard's opposition to representational art stems from the Renaissance idea of representing man as the centre of life. He also believes that the seventeenth century painter Rembrandt has served this movement. Howard tries to deconstruct the idea of Rembrandt's as a genius, believing that he is "a merely competent artisan who painted whatever his wealthy patrons requested"¹⁴. While analysing the painting "The Sampling Officials of the Drapers' Guild", known as the "The Staalmeesters", Howard ignores any idea or story that goes beyond the painting:

How can we know what goes on beyond the frame of the painting itself? What audience? Which questioner? What moment of judgment? Nonsense and sentimental tradition! To imagine that this painting depicts any one temporal moment is, Howard argues, an anachronistic, photographic fallacy. It is all so much pseudo-historical storytelling, disturbingly religious in tone. We want to believe these Staalmeesters are sages, wisely judging this imaginary audience, implicitly judging us. But none of this is truly *in* the picture. All we really see there are six rich men sitting for their portrait, expecting – *demanding* – to be collectively portrayed as wealthy, successful and morally sound. Rembrandt – paid well for his services – has merely obliged them. The Staalmeesters are not looking at anyone; there is no one to look at. The painting is an exercise in the depiction of economic power – in Howard's opinion a particularly malign and oppressive depiction.¹⁵

Howard's approach to art, namely that art is in the hands of the wealthy classes who use art as a mask for their power, coincides with the notion of *self-fashioning* by Stephen Greenblatt. The literary historian Stephen Greenblatt introduces the term *self-fashioning* while exploring the construction of identity according to the standards of society during the Renaissance. For example, while 'beauty' is

¹⁴ Zadie Smith, **On Beauty**, London, Penguin Books, 2005, p.154.

¹⁵ Smith, p.384.

attributed to the women in portraits with jewelleries and beautiful dresses, masculinity is attributed to men with weapons or armours. In his book **Renaissance Self-Fashioning** Greenblatt states:

[I]n the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. [In this century,] *fashion* seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of a self.¹⁶

On the other hand, one should keep in mind that Howard has not always looked at Rembrandt's painting in this way. He was fourteen when he first saw the painting "The Staalmeesters" and at that point, he had been amazed by the looks of the men in the painting feeling that they are judging him:

How many times has Howard looked at these men? The first time he was fourteen, being shown a print of the painting in an art class. He had been alarmed and amazed by the way the Staalmeesters seemed to look directly at him, their eyes (as his schoolmaster put it) 'following you around the room', and yet, when Howard tried to stare back at the men, he was unable to meet any of their eyes directly. Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. On that day, forty-three years ago, he was an uncultured, fiercely bright, dirty-kneed, enraged, beautiful, inspired, bloody-minded schoolboy who came from nowhere and nothing and yet was determined not to stay that way – *that* was the Howard Belsey whom the Staalmeesters saw and judged that day. But what was their judgement now? Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard. Howard looked at the men. The men looked at Howard.¹⁷

When he was young and unaware of those ideologies he has been deconstructing in his academic life, he had undergone such an emotional experience that he had not even been able to look back into the eyes of the staalmeesters. Howard's response to this painting at that time shows that he has not been blind to 'beauty' and had had an intimate relation to art, but his engagement with poststructuralism has made him blind to the theories over time resulting in his loss of sensitivity towards art. In his youth, his reaction to this painting had been sincere, emotional, and immediate. His

¹⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, **Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare**, Chicago and London, The University of Chiago Press, 1980, p.2.

¹⁷ Smith, pp.384-385.

son Jerome, for example, thinks that the dramatic change in his father's approach to art stems from his deranged theories:

It's only when I'm away from home and I'm talking to non-family people that I can see how psychotic he is. The only music in the house now is, like, *Japanese electro*. Soon we'll just have to tap on pieces of wood. This is a guy who wooed his wife by singing half of *The Magic Flute* *outside her apartment*. Now he won't even let her have a painting she likes in the house. Because of some deranged theory in his head, everybody else has to suffer.¹⁸

Jerome's analysis of his father's approach to art shows that the poststructuralist theory's rejection of beauty dehumanizes the critics and imprisons them into limited perspectives.

How can the critic find a way out to emancipate oneself from the restrictions of ideologies and theories and see the beauty in art and also in life? The solution for this problem can be found in the notion of Edward Said's humanism, which overlaps with the solutions rendered in the novel. Edward Said reconciles the philosophy of humanism with contemporary theories. He states that,

What concerns me is humanism as a usable praxis for intellectuals and academics who want to know what they are doing, what they are committed to as scholars, and who want also to connect these principles to the world in which they live as citizens.¹⁹

Thus, Said opposes the idea of an intellectual alienated from society, but urges the intellectuals to connect to the world. In this study, Edward Said's humanism and Zadie Smith's approach to the notion of beauty in **On Beauty** will be harmonized and explored through the analysis of characters and their approach to art.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.236.

¹⁹ Edward W. Said, **Humanism and Democratic Criticism** New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p.6.

In **On Beauty**, the alienation of the intellectuals from society causes a conflict in the lives of their families. This novel is about identity formation, and the father's blindness to real life impairs the self-realization process of the children. Despite being a poststructuralist who is against the marginalization of people in theory, Howard cannot put his theories into practice in real life, and marginalizes his children and his wife despising their beliefs and thoughts.

In the second chapter of this study, the identity formation process of the children will be explored in terms of spirituality, gender, and race. Howard's three children Zora, Levi and Jerome search for different values and meaning in their lives in terms of gender, race, and spirituality while trying to form their identity. Because of being stuck in his perspective blindly, Howard cannot tolerate any different ideology or belief in the family. Thus, the children's quest for belonging is impaired. Controlling their thoughts and beliefs, Howard cannot provide a democratic and liberal environment where the children can give meaning to their lives through arguments. Thus, Jerome cannot fulfill his pursuit for spirituality because of Howard's intervention and domination. Also, Levi's quest for racial identity gets wounded because he cannot find a role model to fulfill his search for belonging. In his own family and neighborhood, Levi feels as an outsider and stranger. Levi needs a multicultural environment to fulfill his quest, but he cannot find this environment in his family and in Wellington's isolated neighborhood. It is obvious in the novel that both young male characters struggle in their self-realization process because of their father's bad guidance.

Young female characters also suffer from the despotic attitude of father figures. Observing that their fathers silence and dominate their mothers, Zora and Victoria do not want to be subordinated like their mothers, so they take the father figures as role models and get alienated from their mothers. As the mothers get weaker and dominated, the daughters develop a self-hatred for their own gender. Thus, in the novel, Zora gets close to her father and imitates him in academic and social life. Attaining her father's problematic approach, Zora develops a problematic identity.

Apart from the children, the fathers also marginalize their wives, but Smith emphasizes that these silenced women Kiki and Carlene represent a solution for the conflict of identity. Through the communication of the two oppressed women characters of the novel and their response to art and beauty, Smith provides a solution. Forming a tentative relationship without prejudices, embracing and welcoming each other, seeing the beauty in life and art bring new hope to human connections in the novel, and that connection is achieved by Kiki and Carlene. Thus, beauty and art play a moral role in the novel helping people overcome their selfishness and construct empathetic relations. Smith's approach to art coincides with Edward Said's approach to art and humanism. Thus, in the third chapter, through the characterization analysis of Kiki and Carlene, Edward Said's humanism and Zadie Smith's concept of beauty will be explored and harmonized.

CHAPTER ONE

FATHER FIGURES

Zadie Smith's novel **On Beauty** (2005) emphasizes the lack of connection between characters. In this novel, Smith deals with the problematic relationship between couples, academics, genders, races and classes. This communication problem and the chaos in people's life stem from the disconnection between real life and ideologies. The father figures in the novel, Monty Kipps and Howard Belsey represent the academic institutions' blindness to ordinary life. Consciously or unconsciously, they cause a crisis especially in the identity forming process of their children because of this miscommunication.

Monty and Howard cannot form an empathetic relationship because of their theoretical and ideological obsession. Even though they share different ideologies, they have a common side. Their ideological rigour blinds them and prevents them from forming simple and unprejudiced relationships because they lack empathy towards other people and are consequently unable to connect.

Monty Kipps is an elitist conservative, Trinidadian British art historian and a visiting professor at Wellington University, Black Studies Department. He puts forward neo conservative, anti-affirmative ideas. Monty stands for the conservative humanistic approach, believing that all people can achieve what they want through human reason. However this is a problematic approach because this universalist stand, which puts everyone on an equal level, actually causes injustice between the underprivileged and the privileged people. He ignores all the evil sides of humanism believing that "equality is a myth", "multiculturalism a fatuous dream" and "being

black is not an identity but an accidental matter of pigment.”¹ However, ignoring all these problems that are caused by Humanism does not justify Humanism or does not wipe out these identity problems, but rather causes a blindness resulting in Monty’s self hatred for his own race. Also, as an elitist, he believes in the universal notion of man and as such, Monty discriminates and marginalizes underprivileged students because he thinks that they do not deserve any college education if they are not willing to achieve what it takes.

One of the major conflicts in **On Beauty** revolves around the affirmative action policy of Wellington University. Monty Kipps does not support the affirmative action of the University, which grants a place to some successful disadvantaged students. When Kiki visits him at home to see how he is doing after his wife Carlene’s death, she witnesses a discussion between Monty and Chantelle, one of the disadvantaged students. After Chantelle leaves, Monty explains to Kiki why he opposes this policy:

Here is a young African-American lady, who has no college education and no college experience, who did not graduate from her high school, who yet believes that somehow the academic world of Wellington owes her a place within its hallowed walls- and why? As restitution for her own- or her family’s misfortunes. Actually the problem is larger than that. These children are being used as political pawns- they are being fed lies.²

As Monty has a humanistic approach to life, he believes that every human being should have the responsibility to earn their rights and to shape their lives. On the other hand, as a black person, he forgets that the black people have not had the equal opportunities and have been oppressed. Monty believes that black students should earn the opportunity to study at a college, not take it as a gift. Kiki reminds him that black people’s opportunities have been severely obstructed, so it’s a matter of redressing the balance now. However, Monty thinks that this will continue to

¹ Smith, p. 44.

² **Ibid.**, p.365.

victimize black people, and they will not try and achieve anything themselves. Because of Monty's opposition to affirmative action, Kiki believes that he has "the right-wing black self-hatred for his own race"³.

Even though he is a black person and was marginalized in the past, surprisingly Monty despises marginalized and weak people. Thus, we can say that even though the race problem exists in the novel, the real problem is the will to power. Hence Monty gains the power in academic life and gets the title of sir and then he becomes an elitist and forgets the underprivileged people as Kiki tells him:

When I look at Condolezza, and Colin- God! I want to be sick – I see this rabid need to separate themselves away from the rest of us- it's like 'We got the opportunity and now the quota's is full and thank you very much, adios.' It's that right-wing black self hatred.⁴

Monty's hatred is not only for underprivileged black people, but also for all underprivileged people. It would not be fair to call him a racist, but his 'superior mind' reminds us of the elitist and racist attitude of Arthur Comte de Gobineau:

The great law of the world is to live, to enlarge and develop our most active and sublime qualities, in such a way that from any sphere we can always strive to reach one that is wider, more airy, more elevated. Leave weakness and scruples to the petty minds and the rabble of underlings.⁵

Monty's elitist attitude about education corresponds with his approach to art. According to Monty, "[...] Art was a gift from God, blessing only a handful of masters."⁶ Kathleen Wall suggests:

³ **Ibid.**, p.368.

⁴ Smith, Loc. cit.

⁵ Arthur Gobineau (comte de), **Selected Political Writings**, Ed. by. Michael Denis Biddiss, London, Harper&Row, 1970, pp.199-200.

⁶ Smith, **On Beauty**, p.44.

[I]n a manoeuvre that echoes Kant's project of explaining the judgment of taste to a burgeoning middle class, Kipps believes that art 'naturally' belongs to those who have been awarded the privilege of money and taste: he is proud that he owns 'the largest collection of Haitian art in private hands outside of that unfortunate island.'⁷

He believes that his elite status gives him a refined taste, and this belief shows his hegemonic and exploitative mind towards art. After learning that his wife left the valuable painting 'Erzulie' to Kiki, Monty does not give it to Kiki, but takes the painting to his office. Carlene bought the painting before she married Monty, so it totally belongs to her. Destroying his wife's last wish disrespectfully, he thinks that this last wish is a symptom of Carlene's sickness. However, instinctively he believes that Kiki who is not an elitist and therefore does not have right to keep this valuable painting. We do not know if Monty knows the description of Maitresse Erzulie, who is a Voodoo goddess, but his seizure of the painting and keeping it in his office can be a metaphor for the patriarchal abuse of a matriarchal symbol.

His elitist attitude to art and education shows itself also in human relations. Monty's domination at home and his authority over Carlene is the reason for the passiveness of Carlene. In his articles, Monty writes about the roles of his wife, which are probably set by him. When Kiki visits Carlene, she mentions those articles and tries to learn more about her life thinking that these roles are not the only things Carlene wants in life:

He writes a lot about – I mean, I've read his articles – about what a perfect mother you are, and he . . . you know, often uses you as an example of the ideal – I guess, the ideal 'stay-at-home' Christian Mom – which is amazing of course – but there must also be things you . . . maybe things *you* wanted to do that . . . maybe you wish . . .⁸

Carlene does not clearly say if Monty dominates her or not. The only thing we can know about Carlene's life before Monty is her painting. The Erzulie painting, which

⁷ Kathleen Wall, "Ethics, Knowledge, and the Need for Beauty: Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*", **University of Toronto Quarterly**, Vol. 77, No: 2, Spring 2008, p.113, (Online) <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/254238>, Project Muse, 15 December 2015.

⁸ Smith, p.176.

represents the moon goddess, is one of the examples that can be shown for her resistance to patriarchy. Carlene gets this painting before she gets married to Monty, so we can say that it represents her identity before marriage. This painting may remind of her own unity, her oneness with herself and therefore we can say this is why she loves this painting so much. Erzulie stands for the Black Virgin, the moon goddess who is one in herself. However, when she gets married, Carlene suppresses her own integrity and adapts to the socially structured masculine norm. As a result, she becomes only one sided and loses her unity.

After they get married, Monty idealizes her role as mother, which becomes the only identity of her. This situation mutilates her soul's unity and may be a reason for her illness. Kiki is the only person who understands and cares about her. Her family does not know how serious her illness is. They leave her alone at home when she is ill and go to New York. They even find out the cause of her death after she dies. Her loneliness and isolation can be explained with Luce Irigaray's argument in her essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother":

The social order, our culture, psychoanalysis itself, want it this way: the mother must remain forbidden, excluded. The father forbids the bodily encounter with the mother.⁹

Thus, the real death of Carlene in the novel can also be a metaphor for the murder of the mother in patriarchal society. Moreover, we can understand how isolated she must have felt at home when she leaves the painting to Kiki before she dies. She does not write anything personal to her family, but only mentions Kiki's name in her testament. Her testament is like a last rebellion to her husband and family.

Monty is not aware that he isolates and alienates his wife, because he cannot see her as an individual. This attitude again shows his patriarchal and hence,

⁹ Irigaray, Luce, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother", **The Irigaray reader**, Ed. by. Luce Irigaray and Margaret Whitford, Cambridge, Basil Blackwell, 1991, p.39.

humanistic approach that marginalizes women. Another example for this attitude can be observed between Monty and Chantelle. He sexually abuses his student Chantelle. He thinks that he has the right of abusing and objectifying her and therefore does not deem her worthy of college education. Thinking that Monty can help her get a place at college in exchange for their relationship, Chantelle asks for his help, but this enrages Monty. Indeed, Chantelle's situation is more pathetic, because as an underprivileged woman, she regards the only solution for her situation in offering herself to Monty. Even though this novel takes place in the 21st century, the effect of slavery still goes on and this time a black man serves these sick values.

Because of his obsession with elitism, Monty fails to connect with underprivileged students. Thus, he cannot actually see if those students really deserve a college education or not. The characterization of Monty, trying to exclude underprivileged people from university and marginalizing non-elitist people, illustrates Eurocentric Humanism even though he is a black man and works at the Black Studies department. His attitude can be explained through Braidotti's criticism of Humanism:

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history.¹⁰

Humanism, creating anthropocentric universal values, does not consider everyone as human beings if they do not correspond to the ideal man. This approach excludes some group of people that are marginalized in society. Even though Humanism's ideal human figure loses its exceptionalism after World War II, as Braidotti stresses above, still there are some who are not granted the status of full human beings.

Contrary to Monty's anti affirmative stand, Howard supports the affirmative action policy. These two professors have always disliked each other because of their different ideologies:

¹⁰ Braidotti, *Posthuman*, p.1.

Howard had always disliked Monty, as any sensible liberal would dislike a man who had dedicated his life to the perverse politics of right wing iconoclasm.¹¹

Moreover, their feud does not only stem from their different ideologies, but the greatest reason why Howard hates Monty is actually their both writing a book on Rembrandt. Subconsciously Howard understands that his own deconstructive approach to art lacks the ability to emotionally relate to art and this is underscored in the heated dispute between Monty and Howard during a college meeting. At the Faculty meeting, Howard asks Monty to propose the outline of his lectures, which Monty calls "Taking the Liberal Out of the Liberal Art". Howard believes that Monty's lectures will offend some minority groups inside the institution, because they contain homophobic material. However, Monty rejects giving the outline, defending himself against Howard by giving examples of Howard's post-structural theoretical beliefs. Monty says:

I admit it surprises and delights me that a self professed 'textual anarchist' like Dr. Belsey should be so passionate to know the intention of a piece of writing [...]¹²

In this statement Monty turns around Howard's arguments and shows him his own problem, and to a certain extent he is right. Howard's poststructuralist and antihumanist view does not lead him anywhere. This is why he cannot write the book on Rembrandt. And this is also why he cannot reconcile theory and real life, which leads to his problem with Kiki.

Though Howard identifies himself as a liberal, he cannot respect any other political view and tries to eliminate it. At the faculty meeting, during their heated debate with Monty, another professor shows Howard's insincerity, asking him,

Is the liberal consciousness really so very slight that it cannot survive a series of six

¹¹Smith, p.29.

¹²**Ibid.**, p.327.

lectures that come from a perspective other than its own?¹³

Thus, even though Monty's lectures may be humiliating for homosexual students, the Faculty decides to keep his lectures for the sake of the freedom of speech.

Throughout the novel, Zadie Smith presents how these two academics' theoretical rigour makes them blind and prevents them from forming a proper human relationship. They cannot escape the realm of theory and cannot see the beauty in people and life. Howard's theoretical approach to art and music shows his disconnection from life. When the Belseys go to a Mozart concert, at the end he says, "Everyone been touched by the Christian sublime? Can we go now?"¹⁴ Kiki tries to explain what a genius Mozart is, but he rejects any metaphysical idea of art and tells her, "I just prefer music which is not trying to fake me into some metaphysical idea by the back door."¹⁵ Anna Grmelova states:

Howard Belsey considers himself to be liberal, yet his myopic, uncritical immersion in poststructuralist theory and his extremely negative attitude to representational art lead to his inability to appreciate beauty either in art or in life.¹⁶

Howard's dislike of representational art and beauty actually stems from his disbelief in humanism's ideal. As Heidegger suggests, "[E]very humanism remains metaphysical."¹⁷ That is why he is so scared of getting touched by art and beauty emotionally.

Interrogating Rembrandt as a radical art theorist, Howard, in fact, explores the constructedness of the idea of the human and consequently the humanist concept of art. At their anniversary party, he explains his stance to a curator of Rembrandt

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.330.

¹⁴ **Ibid.**, p.71.

¹⁵ **Ibid.**, p.72.

¹⁶ Anna Grmelová, " 'We Murder to Dissect': Enjoyment of Beauty versus Theoretical Rigour in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*", **Brno Studies in English**, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2012, p.78.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", Trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi, **Global Religious Vision**, Vol. 1, No: 1 p.87, (Online)

<http://globalvisionpub.com/globaljournalmanager/pdf/1393650768.pdf>, 20 March 2017.

Appreciation Organization when he says:

[...] ‘what I *meant* was that Rembrandt is part of the seventeenth-century European movement to . . . well, let’s shorthand it – essentially *invent the idea of the human*,’ . . . And of course the corollary to that is the fallacy that *we* as human beings are central, and that our aesthetic sense in some way *makes* us central – think of the position he paints himself in, right between those two inscribed empty globes on the wall . . .’¹⁸

Howard’s response to art is only theoretical, and he wants to show its anthropocentrism and therefore he avoids responding emotionally and to see the beauty in Rembrandt’s paintings. For Howard, Rembrandt is not a genius, but just “a merely competent artisan who painted whatever his wealthy patrons requested”¹⁹. His poststructuralist theoretical approach causes a void in his life, because he cannot replace a new ideal when he deconstructs the humanist ideal. This problematic approach naturally shows up in his social life and human relations. In spite of being a liberal, he fails to respect his children’s and wife’s opinions or beliefs. He tries to affect and direct the family members in every aspect of life with his own thoughts. When his eldest son, Jerome writes about his relationship with Victoria, the daughter of Monty, his archenemy, and tells him that he wants to marry her, Howard immediately flies to London to prevent this marriage without considering his son’s feelings. His intervention in this event causes Jerome’s introversion and his alienation from his family. However, Howard does not even realize that Jerome is suffering because of him. His disconnection and blindness to his own family makes him represent a despotic attitude at home. Everyone at home thinks that he is insensitive and only thinks of himself. Kiki criticizes his domination over their beliefs or ideas:

[W]e can’t talk about anything seriously, everything’s ironic, nothing’s serious – everyone’s scared to *speak* in case *you* think it’s cliché’d or dull – you’re like the thought police. And you don’t care about anything, you don’t care about *us*.²⁰

¹⁸ Smith, p.117.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**, p.154.

²⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 393.

At first glance Howard does not appear as a dominant person like Monty. He does not, for example, set the roles of his wife as Monty does for Carlene. However, psychologically he dominates his family members' opinions. His theoretical approach to both life and art makes him blind and prevents him from understanding the people around him. Thus, he does not understand his wife's feelings and also he fails to understand his children. As already mentioned, there is an emotional void in his life, and he cannot see their suffering, especially his wife's suffering, which is caused by him. When his sexual affair with the poet Claire is revealed, Howard cannot see Kiki's emotional breakdown. Also, the reason for his sexual affair with Claire may be this emotional void. When Kiki tries to learn the reason for his betrayal, he blames her and draws attention to Kiki's changed appearance in the last years, as a reason for his betrayal. He tells Kiki, "I married a slim black woman"²¹ and the fact is that Kiki has gained quite a lot of weight. Despite being a poststructuralist and deconstructing the clichés, Howard cannot escape society's conception of the ideal female body, and he tells her:

It's true that men – they respond to beauty . . . it doesn't end for them, this . . . this *concern* with beauty as a physical actuality in the world – and that's clearly imprisoning and it infantilizes . . . but it's *true* and . . . I don't know how else to explain what.²²

His response to beauty is only on the level of physical, so he cannot see deep in into his wife's personality.

While Howard criticizes Monty's conservative ideology, he fails to see how similar they are in deed. Like Monty, Howard represents a patriarchal father figure at home, alienating his wife and children from him and controlling their perspectives of life. Thus, he cannot stand Jerome's being a Christian, or he cannot stand his wife's attending Monty's classes to have a different perspective.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Howard is so full of antihumanist ideas that he loses touch with reality and consequently, he cannot understand human feelings. Kiki criticizes him for his intellectual and aloof response to the world around him:

+ Don't undermine me like that. *God* – it's like . . . you can't even . . . I don't feel I even *know* you any more . . . it's like after 9/11 when you sent that ridiculous e-mail round to everybody about Baudry, Bodra –

-Baudrillard. He's a philosopher. His name is Baudrillard.

+About simulated wars or whatever the fuck that was . . . And I was thinking: *What is wrong with this man?* I was *ashamed* of you. I didn't say anything, but I was. Howard,' she said, reaching out to him but not far enough to touch, 'this is *real*. This life. We're really here – this is really happening. Suffering is *real*. When you hurt people, it's *real*. When you fuck one of our best friends, that's a *real* thing and it *hurts* me.'²³

Even in a tragic incident like 9/11, Howard cannot feel the human suffering behind events and instead only focuses on theories, which explain the possibility of these incidents' being simulated. On the other hand, even if these incidents may be simulated, he cannot see that there are suffering people. Thus, Kiki always warns him that he has to reconcile his theories with ordinary life.

Actually, Howard's theoretical approach is not wrong or evil and he certainly has a point in criticizing and opposing Monty's humanist ideology. He thinks that elevating human nature above all other things has caused all the disasters that we have lived through, and that is true of course. For Howard, the beauty in art is only a mask that power wears. As Tzvetan Todorov states:

All the tragedies we have lived through, first with colonialism, then with fascism, finally the concentration camps. All this has taken shape not in opposition to or in contradiction with so-called humanism in the form in which we have been practicing it with several centuries but I would say, almost its natural continuation.²⁴

²³ **Ibid.**, p. 394.

²⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, "Lévi Strauss", **New French Thought: Political Philosophy**, Ed. by. Mark Lilla, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p.44,

Howard's problem is his inability to place an alternative and constructive new position. He actually cannot go further than just ignoring humanism and in order to escape from its ideals, which have caused so much evil in the past. He cannot propose an alternative solution and this causes his problems in his academic life. It is significant, for example, to point out that he cannot finish his book on Rembrandt. Moreover, he becomes the cause of a lot of chaos in his private life.

The solution for Howard's problematic approach towards both art and social reality is actually presented in the novel through the means of art. When Howard suddenly gets exposed to art without being armed against it with his theories, he involuntarily responds emotionally. First, his sudden exposure to Mozart's *Ave Verum* at Carlene's funeral takes hold of him:

Howard, who had long ago given up on this ideal, now found himself – in a manner both sudden and horrible – mortally affected by it. He did not even get the opportunity to check the booklet in his hand; never discovered that this was Mozart's *Ave Verum*, and this choir, Cambridge singers; no time to remind himself that he hated Mozart, nor to laugh at the expensive pretension of bussing down Kingsmen to sing at a Willesden funeral. It was too late for all that. The song had him.²⁵

When they listened to Mozart's Requiem before, Howard had time to prepare himself in order to respond theoretically and not to be affected by its power and transcendence. However, at the funeral, he does not have the chance to build a theoretical wall between himself and art, and he suddenly finds himself crying, thinking of the death of his beloved ones.

Later, the second incident when he is exposed to art without his theoretical prejudices is at his tenure presentation on Rembrandt. He forgets the file that he prepared for the presentation and arrives there in a rush. When he finds himself without words to comment on the portrait, he suddenly is able to really see the painting, "Hendrickje Bathing" (1654), he has the chance to see it without his

²⁵ Smith, pp. 286-7.

prejudices. He sees his wife in the painting, in Hendrickje's face. The point is that when Howard reconciles his private life with the realm of theory, he can respond to art emotionally, first at the funeral and then at his presentation. Instead of rejecting and criticizing all beliefs that cause a void in his life, he can feel empathy for other people. He needs to find a compromise between his academic and private life. He needs to liberate himself from the theoretical boundaries that he has built himself.

In the novel, art is used as a means of connection that brings people together in spite of their differences. After Howard responds to Mozart's *Ave Verum* emotionally, he goes to his father's house without even realizing that he is going there. It is like a metaphysical effect of the music on him even though he rejects the idea of music being metaphysical. His subconscious intention is to find a way to communicate with his father, whom he has not seen for four years:

Howard had knocked on the door eight minutes ago filled with hope, his heart loosened by music, his mind stunned and opened by the appalling proximity of death. He was a big malleable ball of potential change, waiting on the doorstep. Eight minutes ago. But once inside, everything was the same as it had always been. He didn't mean to be so aggressive, or to raise his voice or to pick fights. He meant to be kind and tolerant. Equally, four years ago, Harry surely hadn't meant to tell his only son that you couldn't expect black people to develop mentally like white people do. He had *meant* to say: I love you, I love my grandchildren, please stay another day.²⁶

Though Howard cannot tolerate his conservative and racist father again and leaves the house in a short time, the important thing that has to be taken into consideration is the triggering effect of the art on him. He takes a step to form a humane and affirmative communication thanks to art. Unfortunately, he cannot carry out his intention because his theoretical biases overwhelm and prevent him feeling empathy for his father again.

Contrary to Howard who is affected by art subconsciously, Jerome is aware of the art's role as a means of empathetic and humane communication, and he uses it

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.296.

to bring his family together. When the Belseys learn that Monty is coming to the Wellington University as a visiting professor, Howard and Zora always discuss this issue ignoring Jerome's feelings and sorrows about Monty's family. As mentioned before, Jerome had a relationship with Monty's daughter, Victoria. Because of Howard's intervention, the thing gets more complicated, and Jerome gets ashamed and hates his father. Because of Monty's moving to Wellington, the uneasiness at home and Howard's selfishness towards his son disturb Kiki. The idea of solution to establish peace at home comes from Jerome organizing a night outside for a Mozart concert. Actually Jerome is starving for a family unity that he witnesses at the Kipps family and tries to provide this unity in his family through art. However, because of Howard and Zora's indifference and prejudices to art, Jerome's solution does not work. Jerome is the only one in the family touched by the music. Amused by his crying for the music, Kiki thinks with pride, "*I don't understand, she thought, but he does. A young black man of intelligence and sensibility, and I have raised him.*"²⁷ Kiki's point is important because Jerome's sensibility and intelligence separate him from the rest of the family. Zora and Howard lack the sensibility, and Kiki and Levi lack the theoretical information. On the other hand, Jerome possesses both features that make him understand the art and people even though he has also some identity problems because of his father.

This role of the art in the novel coincides with the attitude of Edward Said towards music. Said thinks that the transcendent power of music bring people together despite their differences:

Beethoven in the first place really transcends the time and place of which he was a part. He was an Austro-Germanic composer who speaks to anyone who likes music no matter whether that person is African or Middle Eastern or American or European. And that extraordinary accomplishment is entirely due to this music of striving and development and of somehow expressing the highest human ideals, ideals of brotherhood, of community, of yearning, also, perhaps in many instances, unfulfilled yearning.... Music making and listening at the same time present a kind of fascinating dialectic between the individual and the collective, and that back and forth is very precious and gets over a lot of ground that is not commonly traversed in everyday life.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁸ Yumna Siddiqi, "Edward Said, Humanism, and Secular Criticism", *Alif: Journal of*

According to Said, making music or listening to it creates a harmony. The example of Beethoven and his music corresponds to Said's understanding of humanism. Criticizing the abuse and misuses of Humanism that has led to racism and imperialism, Said thinks that it is the problematic idea to restrict Humanism to some religious, educational or aristocratic elites. On the other hand, Said believes:

[T]he essence of humanism is to understand human history as a continuous process of self-understanding and self-realization, not for us, as white, male, European and American, but for everyone, is to see nothing at all. There are other learned traditions in the world, there are other cultures, there are other geniuses.²⁹

In conclusion, Humanism's emancipation of the human mind is not restricted to only Eurocentric man notion according to Said's perception of humanism. This problematic idea is illustrated through the characterization of Monty in the novel. Monty's perception of humanism is what Said criticizes as an abuse of humanism. For Said, it is not fair to reject all the notions and values of humanism because of its misuses, but he develops his own notion of humanism that embraces all nations and cultures. Rejecting humanism entirely, without taking its values in consideration, in a way causes chaos in life as we see through the characterization of Howard. The solution to reconcile the theory and the social or daily life is possible through the notion of Said's humanism.

Said's humanism gives an important role to intellectuals that is; like an exile, they should liberate themselves from the boundaries of the settled identities and be open to different perspectives, as he says:

Comparative Poetics, No. 25 (5002), n.d., pp.84-5, (Online)
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4047452> , Jstor, 16 December 2016.

²⁹ Edward W. Said, **Humanism and Democratic Criticism**, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p.26.

Humanism is about the reading, it is about perspective, as in our work as humanists, it is about transitions from one realm, one area of human experience to another.³⁰

However, in the novel, the two intellectuals, Howard and Monty cannot escape their own imprisonment in their ideologies and theories that cause their blindness to other perspectives. In the following chapters, it will be analysed in detail how their blindness affects the identity formation process of the young characters. Also, Said's views on humanism and critical theory will be handled as solution process of connection problem in the novel.

³⁰ Said, **Humanism and Democratic Criticism** p. 80.

CHAPTER TWO

YOUNG CHARACTERS

2.1. Self-Realization and Democratic Criticism

2.1.1. The Quest for Belonging of the Young Male Characters

In *On Beauty*, the intellectuals isolate and alienate themselves from ordinary life, and the Wellington neighbourhood also maintains this isolation as being an elite and upper middle class neighbourhood. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the intellectual father figures, Monty and Howard cause chaos and struggle in the lives of their families because of their intolerance to different perspectives of life. Presenting this problem through their family life, Zadie Smith actually points out the problem of the intellectuals' alienation from real life. Especially, Smith shows the problem of the intellectuals' being stuck in only one thought and perspective. Because of their narrow-mindedness, their children desire for cultural and social diversity. Especially, at the Belseys' house, the children's quest for belonging is impaired because of their father's intolerance to different perspectives of life. Howard clings to his own perspective so hard that he cannot stand any different ideology or belief. Actually, Howard does not have any belief, because his poststructuralist thoughts prevent him from believing in any ideologies or values. Thus, he cannot stand the idea of Jerome's being a Christian. His narrow-minded attitude in his academic life also shows up in his relation with his family, so Kiki always criticizes him as being a "thought police"¹. He criticizes, ignores, and makes fun of his own family's values, but cannot respect them or cannot lead his children while they are struggling in their self-realization and self-understanding process.

¹ Smith, p.393.

Because of Howard's psychological pressure, Jerome has an identity crisis and tries to develop a sense of belonging outside his family and Wellington society. Howard's indifference to Jerome's individual needs causes Jerome's alienation, and, in a way, he gets close to Monty in order to attract his father's attention. In spite of his father, he chooses an internship under Monty's supervision in London. This situation also gives Monty a chance to win over his rival's son, so he invites Jerome to stay at their house. At the Kippses' house, Jerome is able to listen and learn different ideas and it is an opportunity for him to dissent from his father's ideologies. He is in search of diversity and difference because he is fed up with his father's so called liberal but narrow ideals. Unconsciously, Jerome knows that he needs different ideas and perspectives for his self-realization:

It was a kind of blissful un-selfing; a summer of un-Belsey; he had allowed the Kippses' world and their ways to take him over entirely. He had *liked* to listen to the exotic (to a Belsey) chatter of business and money and practical politics; to hear that Equality was a myth, and Multiculturalism a fatuous dream; he thrilled at the suggestion that Art was a gift from God, blessing only a handful of masters, and most Literature merely a veil for poorly reasoned left-wing ideologies.²

The Kipps family is a new and attractive world for Jerome, so he lets all these ideologies seize him without thinking about them. Jerome's response to Monty's ideologies shows that he lacks the ability to approach the Kipps household critically. While falling in love with this new family, he cannot see the evil sides of Monty's ideals. This inability is an outcome of Howard's despotic attitude that inhibits his children from developing arguments.

On the other hand, the opportunity to pray freely at the Kippses house, which is impossible in his own home, as his father immediately starts mocking him whenever he sees him praying, makes Jerome feel a sense of belonging for the Kippses. However, his emotional attachment to the family and his religious belief prevent him from developing a critical approach, so he adopts Monty's intolerant aspects of humanism quickly. While adoring the Kipps family's unity, he is not able

² **Ibid.**, p.44.

to see how Carlene is silenced at home. He mentions the mother figure, Carlene, to his father: “The rest of the family talk about sports and God and politics, and Carlene floats above it all like a kind of angel.”³ Her image as a floating angel recalls the silenced women of the Victorian period. She is given the sacred role of nurturing and praying all the time because her role is only in the kitchen and church, but she does not join the discussions with her family. However, Jerome does not realize her being marginalized at home, because he is charmed by this family, which is so different from his own.

Also his love for this family “found its correct, specific vessel in Victoria – right age, right gender, and as beautiful as the idea of God.”⁴ On the other hand, he fails to see that his perception of the family does not correspond to the character of Victoria. Actually, their short relationship ending in a disappointing way shows that the unity and harmony of the family is not real and has deceived Jerome.

Howard’s intervention in Jerome’s decision to marry Victoria causes a break between father and son. Jerome feels ashamed and becomes introverted, distancing himself from his father and his hatred to his father even grows. Howard’s infidelity, which is very humiliating for Kiki, draws the mother and son closer and creates an emotional bond between them. Both are suffering because of Howard and therefore they feel empathy towards each other. The problematic relationship between Howard, Kiki and Jerome seems like a classical Oedipal Complex, but this problem actually stems from Howard’s indifference to his family’s feelings. Jerome tells his mother about Howard: “He only ever thinks of himself. He doesn’t care who he hurts.”⁵

Preferring Brown University to Wellington University, Jerome wants to stay away from his father’s despotic domination over their life. When he is back home for spring break, he tells Levi and Zora:

³ **Ibid.**, p.4.

⁴ **Ibid.**, p.45.

⁵ **Ibid.**, p.59.

It's only when I'm away from home and I'm talking to non-family people that I can see how psychotic he is. The only music in the house now is, like, *Japanese electro*. Soon we'll just have to tap on pieces of wood. This is a guy who wooed his wife by singing half of *The Magic Flute* *outside her apartment*. Now he won't even let her have a painting she likes in the house. Because of some deranged theory in his head, everybody else has to suffer. It's such a denial of *joy* – I don't even know how you can stand living there.⁶

Being away from home, he can clearly observe his father's problematic personality, but contrary to him, Zora and Levi cannot develop a critical perspective as they are stuck in this family.

However, it is not only Howard that causes harm to Jerome's identity. Like his father's theoretical blindness to life, Jerome has also a religious or ideological blindness to life. Howard cannot reconcile theory to life, and Jerome cannot reconcile religion to life. When he is in London with the Kippes, Carlene sees that Jerome clings to an idea and cannot leave it. Later on in Wellington, Carlene explains Jerome's obsession with Victoria:

He was so focused on my daughter; he almost couldn't let her live. I suppose you call it obsession. When he has an idea, your son, he holds it very tight. My husband is like that – I recognize it. Jerome's a very *absolute* young man.⁷

Even though Jerome always criticizes his father's theoretical obsession, he has the same problem that prevents him forming a critical approach. He has to overcome his obsession, which becomes an obstacle to form healthy relations. Kiki is also aware of this similarity between her children and Howard as she tells Carlene:

All of my children are a little like that, to tell you the truth. They set their mind to something, and my *God*, they don't let go. That's their father's influence. Pig-headed as *hell*.⁸

⁶ **Ibid.**, p.236.

⁷ **Ibid.**, p.171.

⁸ Smith, **Loc. cit.**

Each character in the novel has an obstacle or circumstance that prevents their liberation. This problem stems from the absence of open-minded attitude in their family and this absence is mainly symbolized in the father figures' stance. Howard, for instance, does not let his family to develop a democratic way to express their opinions in their life by always controlling their thoughts and ideologies, which affects the personality of the children. Unconsciously, the children are also obsessed with ideas like their father's obsession, which cause damage in their identity formation. Considering that Howard is a literary critic, the novel's engagement with criticism and his inability to allow others to express ideas divergent from his calls to mind Edward Said's emphasis on the need to reconcile humanism and criticism. W. J. T. Mitchell explains Said's ideas as follows:

The language of democracy, of equality, of power sharing, of justice, of secular self-governance must not be co-opted by ideologues but must be reclaimed and reinfused with practical meaning for human relationships. And a democracy is, if it is anything, a place where power grows out of arguments, knowledge, language, persuasion, and reason—in short, out of the resources made available by humanism and criticism.⁹

Said's notion of Humanism can be shown as a solution for the chaos caused by Monty and Howard. Both of them cannot provide a democratic environment where their children can give meaning to their lives through arguments. That is why; both Monty and Howard fail to enrich Jerome's life because they are self-centered and do not value other people's opinions. From the beginning, Jerome is searching for a united family with values and empathy in the family. Jerome is a sensitive and naive character with spiritual concerns, so he yearns for a family to which he can belong. He cannot feel a sense of belonging to his own family because there is not a connection between family members. Thus, he feels close to the Kipps family,

⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, "Edward Said's Humanism", **Critical Inquiry**, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter 2005), pp. 463-4, (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/430975>, Jstor, 16 December 2016.

hoping that he can find the values he is searching for. However, Monty's poisonous views of humanism as "Equality was a myth, and Multiculturalism a fatuous dream"¹⁰ are not what Jerome is looking for in his life. Though he seems hypnotised by Monty's thoughts, what really bewitches him is the family life of the Kippses. On the other hand, Jerome fails to see that the unity of the family is only a superficial one because Monty dominates his family, especially his wife. Like his father, Monty also cheats Carlene with a student. Monty does not lead Jerome to a good way but imposes his anti-egalitarian humanistic thoughts. Both his father's anti humanistic thoughts that give no place to religion or metaphysics and Monty's discriminatory humanistic thoughts do not lead Jerome in his search for belonging, so Jerome gets disappointed and becomes introverted. Eventually, he cannot develop a way to maintain metaphysics and social justice together.

Actually Jerome's pursuit appears to come close to Said's concept of humanism, which brings together criticism and human relations. Unfortunately, this pursuit cannot be fulfilled because of the father figures' problematic intervention and domination. Thus, the characterization of Jerome stays as a problematic one and his quest for values and morals in his life gets suspended, and he feels empty.

Another young male character who is in search of belonging like Jerome is his brother Levi. While Jerome's quest is metaphysical, Levi is in search of a home in this world. Later on, his quest for home becomes a political one under the effect of Haitian immigrants. Like Jerome, Levi also does not feel a sense of belonging to his own family and Wellington. His style, language and clothes make him feel a stranger and outsider in Wellington. Speaking broken English, he tries to prove that he does not belong to the academic environment of Wellington or his family:

This faux Brooklyn accent belonged to neither Howard nor Kiki, and had only arrived in Levi's mouth three years earlier, as he turned twelve. Jerome and Zora had been born in England, Levi in America. But all their various American accents seemed, to Howard, in some way artificial – not quite the products of this house of his wife. None, though, was as inexplicable as Levi's. Brooklyn? The Belseys were

¹⁰ Smith, p.44.

located two hundred miles north of Brooklyn.¹¹

Levi's isolated and protected life in Wellington does not give him any excitement or attraction, so escaping Wellington once a week and spending time in Roxbury attracts him, and he considers Wellington as an artificial place without any fun. Spending time in Roxbury makes him feel as a street boy, and he thinks that he sees every aspect of life there. Actually Levi's being a street boy is not a serious issue for his family but a childish feeling, and Roxbury is just an amusement place for Levi because he still lives with his family safely in Wellington. That's why; they usually make fun of Levi's tendency to acting as a street boy. When the Belseys go to the Mozart's concert, Levi tells them:

This ain't America. You think this is America? This is *toy-town*. I was *born* in this country – trust me. You go into Roxbury, you go into the Bronx, you *see* America. That's *street*.¹²

Levi's identifying himself with Roxbury is an absurd situation for the family because he does not know how the life is there. In a sarcastic manner, Zora tells him:

Levi, you don't live in Roxbury, You live in Wellington. You go to *Arundel*. You've got your name ironed into your underwear.¹³

As Levi is not an adult, he cannot leave home and live in Roxbury where mostly black people live, so his part time job at a music store gives him an opportunity to escape Wellington's dull life:

¹¹ **Ibid.**, p.11.

¹² **Ibid.**, p.63.

¹³ Smith, **Loc. cit.**

And but the thing was, if he didn't get his measly thirty-five dollars a week, then there was no money to escape Wellington on a Saturday night, no chance to dance with all those kids, all those *girls* who didn't give a fuck who the hell Gram-ski was or why whoever – *Rem-bran* – was no good. Sometimes he felt that those thirty-five dollars were the only thing that kept him half normal, half sane, half *black*.¹⁴

Thus, quitting this job is not only upsetting because of money issues, but also he loses the opportunity to connect to people of Roxbury. While feeling as a stranger in his own neighbourhood, Roxbury is the place where he feels at home. That is why, when he meets the Haitian boys, he disguises his real identity and tells them that he lives in Roxbury. On the surface, Levi seems to tell this lie to be close to them, and he knows that Wellington's elite society excludes and exploits these immigrants paying them lower than the standards. Thus, he does not want to say that he is also from that society. In fact, he lies about where he lives because he does not feel Wellington as a home at all; telling them that he lives in Roxbury makes him feel he is really a street boy.

Levi does not feel to belong to Wellington because of being black and a street boy. In some point, he is right to feel in that way. Because of his outfit like black rappers or street boys, people stare at him in a disturbing way. For Levi Wellington is not home because there is no one like him there, or there is not a role model whom he can associate with. The problematic father and son relationship also occurs between Howard and Levi. As his brother Jerome cannot take his father as a role model for his metaphysical search, Levi also cannot find anything in his father for his search for a racial identity. Howard and Levi do not share anything in common except living in the same house. As worked through in the previous chapter, Howard's theoretical rigour blinds him and alienates him from the people around. Levi is also affected from this problem and cannot connect to his father. On the other hand, while the other children, Jerome and Zora have an intellectual approach like their father in some way, Levi does not concern about academic life at all. Thus, all intellectual people in Wellington are like from another planet for Levi. Feeling as an outsider in this neighbourhood, Levi develops a prejudiced approach to the people of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.193.

Wellington. As mentioned previously, Howard does not provide a democratic environment at home for his children. Unfortunately Levi also cannot escape this blindness that they get from their father and fails to communicate with Carlene without prejudices. When the Kippes move to Wellington from London, Carlene sees Levi on the street and stares at him, which is irritating for Levi. Without introducing herself, she tries to have a conversation with Levi warmly and asks questions about his mother whom she has never met. Levi does not want to talk to her because he believes that every old woman in Wellington neighbourhood thinks he is a murderer because of his race. Although Carlene is black too, Levi thinks, “any black lady who be white enough to live on Redwood thinks ‘zackly the same way as any old white lady”¹⁵. Thus, it is understood that Wellington neighbourhood is an elite place and not multicultural and do not welcome immigrants. This isolated neighbourhood does not fulfil Levi’s need of black identity. To explore and gain a self of sense, Levi needs to be away from this society and his family because they cannot provide this diverse and multicultural environment that Levi is enthusiastic about exploring. That is why, the music store and Roxbury are essential places for him, where he can meet people that he feels like his family. While he is exposed to gazes in Wellington, nobody stares him in Roxbury twice, so he feels like a homecoming there.

Levi’s alienation from Wellington is actually very similar to Kiki’s alienation. His mother also does not feel that she belongs to Wellington because of her race as she tells Howard:

Everywhere we go, I’m alone in this . . . this *sea* of white. I barely *know* any black folk any more, Howie. My whole life is white. I don’t see any black folk unless they be cleaning under my feet in the fucking café in your *fucking* college.¹⁶

Even though there are also black intellectuals at Black Studies Department at Wellington like Erskine and Monty, they are also elitist and do not represent black

¹⁵ **Ibid.**, p.85.

¹⁶ **Ibid.**, p.206.

identity. Thus, Levi also does not find anything in them for his identity search. The best guidance for Levi's identity quest would be his mother Kiki because Levi's quest is outside of intellectual environment. However, Kiki is in search of a meaning for her own life and struggles because of her problems with Howard, so she cannot guide her children. Thus, the subordinated mother figure fails to have a role in development of children's sense of belonging.

Although Levi has some prejudices stemming from Howard's despotic theoretical approach, he also has the good qualities of his mother and Carlene. This confusion in his character shows that he needs a proper guidance. Both Jerome and Levi have good manners and sensitive characters but they both struggle because of their father's bad guidance. In Levi's situation we again observe the Oedipal problem because Howard's subconsciously dominating Kiki wounds Levi's quest for black identity. Even though Howard is not racist, his despotic approach subordinates Kiki and this situation also cause a crisis in Levi's identity because Kiki is the one that he associates with black identity. Thus, Zadie Smith urges us to think that the father figures should change and leave their theoretical blindness to guide their children properly in their quest for sense of belonging.

Though Levi is portrayed as an irresponsible and carefree teenager, in fact, he can be a very open-minded and sensitive person who tries to understand the suffering of other people and can feel empathy to them. Being just fifteen, his character is undeveloped, so he seeks a sense of belonging in race. When he meets the Haitian people selling imitation bags on the streets, he feels closer to them at once and even hides his background to get closer to them. His unprejudiced approach to these people is parallel to the relationship between Carlene and Kiki. Thus, he can feel his mother's pain after Carlene's death. Kiki's sadness upon her death even surprises Kiki because they did not know each other for a long time. However, Levi knows this feeling because he is also able to feel a close relationship and love for the people that he has not known for a long time. Thus, he clearly expresses his mother's feelings through his own experiment and at Carlene's funeral Levi tells his mother:

But sometimes it's like you just meet someone and you just know that you're totally connected, and that this person is, like, your brother – or your sister,' adjusted Levi, for he had been thinking of somebody else entirely. 'Even if they don't, like, recognize it, *you* feel it. And in a lot of ways it don't matter if they do or they don't see that for what it is – all you can do is put the feeling out there. That's *your* duty. Then you just wait and see what comes back to you. That's the deal.¹⁷

Levi's inexperience of the world and his lack of knowledge of theory, history or economics give him an unprejudiced perspective of people and outer world, so thanks to this inexperience, he can develop a sense of empathy easily. While reading a book on the history of Haiti, he cries feeling the pain of those people even though he does not know anything about this country before. He joins the march to protest the unfair payment to immigrants because this wanton injustice overwhelms him:

Levi had been raised soft and open, with a liberal susceptibility to the pain of others. While all the Belseys shared something of this trait, in Levi – who knew nothing of history or economics, of philosophy or anthropology, who had no hard ideological shell to protect him – it was particularly pronounced. He was overwhelmed by the evil that men do to each other. That white men do to black. How does this shit happen! Each time he returned to the Haiti book he felt impassioned; he wanted to stop Haitians on the streets of Wellington and make it better for them somehow.¹⁸

As Levi takes his sensitivity from Kiki, in this quotation Smith also reminds us the liberal worldview of Belseys. Even though Howard does not understand the feelings of his family members and is unable to provide a democratic environment for his children, his worldview is liberal and he is against the discriminating ideas of Monty. His liberal ideas cannot go further from theories, though. Levi's approach to equality is also narrow-minded because he just focuses on the oppression of Haitians and does not care about other oppressions like women's. Trying to gain a black consciousness, he just focuses on this subject but does not focus on injustice as a general concept.

¹⁷ **Ibid.**, p.304.

¹⁸ **Ibid.**, p.355.

Levi does not have a settled identity or ideology that restricts him and prevents him connecting as we see in his father's characterization or in Monty's characterization. On the other hand, he is free from this restriction and he can easily connect with other people. Levi's problem, just as in the case of his brother Jerome, once more reveals parallel features with Edward Said's theory of criticism. In a way, we can say that Levi's empathetical approach stems from his "amateurism" in intellectual life. As Ashcroft explains, Said's theory of "secular criticism" is:

[A] criticism freed from the priestly restrictions and unreflective certainties of intellectual specialization; his concomitant advocacy of 'amateurism' in intellectual life, and his belief in the importance of a text's 'affiliations' with the world rather than its filiations with other texts.¹⁹

Levi's alienation from the intellectual environment of Wellington and his amateur love for rap music, which is called Spoken Word in the novel, gives him the secular perspective enabling him making connection with social life. However, Levi's total ignorance of theory or philosophy poses a problem in his construction of identity, because his naivety and inexperience cause him acting without thinking. He steals the Erzulie painting from Monty's office thinking that it does not belong to Monty because his Haitian friends tell him that Monty has no right to his Haitian painting collection. They also tell him that to have his big Haitian painting collection, Monty exploited the poor artists who needed money paying small sum. However it is not true because the painting was bought by Carlene, not by Monty. Thus, thinking that this is also a kind of stealing, Levi also steals it to give it back to Haitian people. His reckless behaviour leads him nowhere, and Levi does not develop a sense of belonging because of his ignorance.

As a consequence, both Jerome and Levi try to develop their self-realization, but fail because of father characters' intervention or their inexperience. Even though,

¹⁹ Bill Ashcraft, "Edward Said: The Locatedness of Theory", **Futures of Critical Theory**, Ed. By. Michael Peters, Mark Olssen, Colin Lankshear, Oxford, Rowman&Littlefield publishers Inc., p.263, 2003.

both of them try to get free of ideological restriction, they cannot develop a sense of belonging and their quest for identity gets suspended.

2.1.1. The Quest for Belonging of the Young Female Characters

As the father figures' narrow-minded manners affect the identity construction of sons negatively creating chaos in their quest, the daughters Zora and Victoria struggle because of the same reason as well. Their fathers' despotic attitude and their power in academic life silence the mothers and alienate the daughters from their mothers. For both young female characters, the fathers represent power in their lives while the mothers represent the subordinated party. Zora and Victoria do not want to be subordinated like their mothers, so they think that the only solution to escape their mothers' fate is to take the father figures as guidance to construct their identity.

Monty's daughter Victoria realizes her mother's lack of power and does not see her as an ideal figure for herself. She associates power with her father, the patriarchal figure, Monty. Monty's domination and Carlene's passiveness create a gap between mother and daughter. As Monty stands for the patriarchal order, he causes the mother's exclusion from guiding her daughter because he wants to be the one who shapes the lives and identity of their children. Monty's attitude proves the patriarchy's keeping mother silenced and excluded.

In the novel, there is no dialogue between Carlene and Victoria, so we can only make inferences of their relation. First of all, when Jerome writes about the Kippes to his father, he only mentions about Carlene as a nurturing and praying figure but she is not included in the family conversations. Throughout the whole novel, Zadie Smith does not bring Carlene and her family together to show her loneliness and isolation. Later on, the whole family does not take care of Carlene during her illness, which again proves her isolation. Thus, Carlene's death does not

affect the family deeply or make a gap in their life because she was already excluded from their life when she was alive. As mentioned previously in the first chapter, the death of Carlene in the novel can be also a metaphor for the murder of the mother in the patriarchal society. Upon learning that her mother does not mention them in her testament, Victoria does not question her alienation from her mother but only blames her saying that, “I apparently respect my family more than Mum did- she does not even mention us.”²⁰ However, Victoria does not realize that they did not care with their mother as much as Kiki did. They even do not realize her illness’ symptoms, but they get very angry when they find out that she leaves one of the most valuable paintings to a stranger but not someone from her family.

After her mother’s death, Victoria tries to fulfil the lack of affection with a sexual relationship with Howard Belsey. As she is not a conservative person like her father, Monty is not the ideal powerful figure for Victoria. Thus, she chooses Howard as an ideal model for herself and tries to attract him sexually so that she can get closer to him. After making love with Howard, she tells him, “I need a man right now”²¹, which shows her desire to have an ideal model in her life. After her mother’s death, she does not fulfil the maternal absence in her life with a mother figure, but she looks for a man figure, which proves her mother’s ineffectiveness on her. On the other hand, as we do not witness a clear and concrete evidence of Monty’s alienating Carlene from the children, we cannot put the all blame on Monty. Actually, Zadie Smith tries to redress the balance blaming both father and mother. That is to say, Carlene does not strive to guide Victoria but chooses to be silenced and accept Monty’s domination over her without questioning. As dealt with Carlene’s suppression in the previous chapter, Carlene adapts to the socially structured masculine norm, and does not complain about her situation in her marriage. Also, Carlene has an essentialist attitude in her marriage, as she tells Kiki that, “Men move with their minds, and women must move with our bodies, whether we like it or not.

²⁰ Smith, p.279.

²¹ **Ibid.**, p.318.

That's how God intended it."²² In a way, this essentialist attitude shows that Carlene does not take the responsibility of guiding her children intellectually. In addition, again while talking to Kiki, Carlene tells her that she does not have any aim in life stating, "I don't ask myself *what* did I live for [...] That is a man's question. I ask *whom* did I live for."²³ As she herself does not have any ambition in life, it may be hard for her children to take her as a role model for themselves.

The other problematic mother-daughter relationship can be seen between Kiki Belsey and her daughter, Zora. Being a black and non-academic woman in Wellington neighbourhood, Kiki feels alienated and isolated. She seems more powerful than Carlene, but she also lives for Howard and her family and feels confined to that marriage. We can feel Howard's domination even in the decoration of the house. He does not like paintings, so they do not have any painting at home. Moreover, they do not celebrate Christmas only because Howard does not want it. He tries to affect and direct the family members in every aspect of life with his own thoughts.

While there is an intimacy between the sons and Kiki, their daughter Zora gets closer to her father and ignores her mother. Even though her father commits adultery, she does not blame him. As Kiki does not belong to the academic neighbourhood of Wellington, Zora thinks that she does not deserve his father. Thus, she justifies his father's relation with professor Claire:

Howard –he is great. I mean, he just had this affair – yeah, I know, it all came out, it was with this other professor – so everything's pretty fucked up at home right now. My mom is freaking out. But I'm really like, hello, what kind of a sophisticated guy in his fifties does not have an affair? [...] Intellectual men are attracted to intellectual women. Plus my mom doesn't do herself any favours –she is like three hundred pounds [...]²⁴

²² *Ibid.*, p.96.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.176.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.139.

Zora's defence of her father in his affair shows that she is the defender of patriarchy. Like her father, she ignores Kiki because Kiki is not the ideal model figure for her. While ignoring her mother, she idealizes her father and imitates him in every sense. Her approach to beauty also coincides with her father's approach because she has the same theoretical approach to everything like her father. According to Anna Grmelova's approach in her article, "We Murder to Dissect", their neglect to people around them stems from this theoretical rigour:

Like her father, Zora is consistent in her theoretical views and at the same time incapable of proper human involvement and sympathy, as demonstrated in her self-centered attitude to the street poet Carl Thomas who comes from an underprivileged Afro- American background.²⁵

As Zora is attracted by Carl, but cannot admit it to even herself, she uses Carl's being an underprivileged student as an object of desire. She is incapable of making a simple friendship as she lacks sensitivity like her father. She tries to reach him using her academic superiority.

Moreover, Zora's obsession with her physical appearance coincides with Howard's fondness of physical beauty of Claire and Victoria. Howard can show the change in Kiki's appearance as a reason for his betrayal because he tells Kiki "I married a slim black woman."²⁶ Both the father and the daughter only focus on physical appearance. They cannot escape the perception of society for ideal body form of the women even though they deconstruct every thought about beauty. It is one of the reasons why Zora is alienated from her mother and blames her for her father's affair with Claire because she is fat. This situation shows how Zora and Howard look at the events shallowly. That is why Zora fails to understand her mother's emotions. She has a self-hatred for her own gender that makes her get closer to her father instead of taking her mother as a role model. Kiki points out her daughter's self hatred as stating:

²⁵ Grmelová, p.79.

²⁶ Smith, p.207.

[...] this hatred of women and their bodies –it seeped in with every draught in the house; people brought it home on their shoes, they breathed it in off newspapers. There was no way to control it.²⁷

Apart from the obsession with the physical appearance, Zora also shares the same academic approaches with her father. She does not look for beauty in artworks like her mother does, but she approaches art theoretically like her father and uses her father's language. For example, Claire does not want Zora in her poetry classes because she believes that Zora lacks creativity. Looking at everything with a critical eye, she cannot focus on beauty in also poetry. While talking about her poetry class, she tells her mom, "just setting out parameters. Some people read stuff out. It was a pretty mixed bag. Lot of Plath wannabees."²⁸ Zora's problematic attitude can be explained through Lacan's theory of the Symbolic Stage when the child submits to the law and language of the father and assumes a symbolic identity. In this stage, the child also realizes the lack of power in the mother:

The mother, for the child, ceases to be the all-powerful provider of every satisfaction as she herself is a desiring being deprived of satisfaction. This conundrum of maternal desire points elsewhere, toward 'the law introduced by the father'.²⁹

The authority of the father figure takes the place of the mother when the child enters the Symbolic Order. Thus, the mother ceases to be the provider of the child's desires.

In that academic environment, Howard becomes the powerful masculine identity whom Zora associates with authority, and her mother becomes "the other", weak woman who dedicated her life to the masculine authority. Being an alienated

²⁷ **Ibid.**, pp.197-198.

²⁸ **Ibid.**, p.200.

²⁹ Emily Zakin, "Psychoanalytic Feminism", **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, Ed. By Edward N. Zalta, 2001, (Online)
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis/>, 16 April 2016.

woman in the society, Kiki tells Howard, “Everywhere we go, I am alone in this sea of white.”³⁰ However, Claire is much more suitable to her father according to Zora because she is a beautiful, white and slim woman from the Wellington academic environment. Thus, Zora thinks that Claire fits her intellectual father, and she accepts her father’s affair with Claire. While she blames her mother even though she is innocent, she does not blame Claire. Zora tells Claire as a “mature person”, “We are all adults. And I have no intention of not being an adult.”³¹ Also, she admires her and insists on taking her poetry class even though she does not have the creativity and imagination for that class.

Towards the end of the novel, Zadie Smith deconstructs the powerful masculine identity by subverting the ideal father figures, Howard and Monty. Monty’s relationship with one of his students is revealed, and he loses his respectability as a conservative and religious man. Moreover, Zora finds out her father’s relationship with Victoria and loses her respect for Howard. She is disappointed because she finds out that her ideal model is fictional but not real. This time she cannot see her father’s affair as normal because Victoria is just Howard’s student at the same age with her. This is immoral both academically and socially.

Hiding his affair with Victoria, Howard attacks Monty for his relationship with a student; “Well my God. What a tricky bastard. Moral majority my arse.”³² When Zora asks about his affair with Victoria, Howard cannot tell anything. This time is a turning point for Zora because she understands the superficiality of her father’s values and power. She rages against him, “Defended and defended and defended you...Against Mom! I took your side.”³³ She realizes her father’s evil side at that moment and for the first time asks him “When have you ever given a fuck about what anyone wants?”³⁴ Losing her respect for her father, Zora turns to her mother immediately:

³⁰ Smith, p.206.

³¹ **Ibid.**, p.229.

³² **Ibid.**, p.432.

³³ **Ibid.**, p.433.

³⁴ Smith, **Loc. cit.**

Zora now reached the top of the stairs leading down to the basement. Howard begged her for a little more time. There was no more time. Mother and daughter were already calling for each other, one running upstairs and one running down, each with her rich, strange news.³⁵

When the daughter and the mother meet at the stairs, it is the starting point for Zora to accept and welcome her mother from then on. Thus, Zora finds shelter in her mother now, not in her father anymore.

As a conclusion, Zadie Smith shows Kiki as a powerful woman character at the end of the novel. She does not continue living with Howard and confining herself in that marriage but starts to live for herself. She also gains the support of Zora at the end. While Zora takes her father as a role model in the beginning, she loses her faith in him at the end. Zadie Smith shows that weaker and alienated mothers are the reason for girls' turning to "powerful" men figures in their life. However, Smith deconstructs the power of fathers by showing their failures and elevates women power by making Kiki a more powerful woman at the end.

³⁵ Smith, **Loc. cit.**

CHAPTER THREE

NOMADIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF KIKI AND CARLENE

3.1. “There is such a shelter in each other.”

In the previous chapters the problems of disconnection between real life and ideologies and the identity crisis of the young characters have been discussed. The biggest problem in this is the ideological and theoretical obsession of the father figures causing chaos in their families especially in the identity formation process of their children. In this chapter, Zadie Smith’s suggestion and solution for this miscommunication between the blind and authoritative male characters and the suppressed ones because of their fathers’ blindness will be discussed.

Smith does not only represent the problem of the ideological rigor of the academicians or the identity crisis of the young characters, she also provides a solution through the communication of the two oppressed women characters of the novel and their response to art and beauty. These women characters, Kiki and Carlene are the wives of the two professors, Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps who are enemies in academic life. Living in the upper class academic neighbourhood of Wellington, Kiki and Carlene, who do not belong to that academic society, get alienated and isolated. On the other hand, Zadie Smith makes them more powerful in the sense of human relations than any of the other characters in the novel. Kiki and Carlene communicate without prejudices and without losing their human sensibility.

Even before Kiki and Carlene meet, they are deeply interested in each other and have an emotional connection despite their husbands’ feud. When Levi tells his parents about the weird old woman who has asked him many questions about his mother, Kiki is sure that this woman must be Carlene, although Kiki and Carlene

have never heretofore met. Kiki feels immediately that she should invite the Kippses to their anniversary party and so she just runs to their house to meet Carlene and invites them to their party despite the problems between their husbands. However, Monty Kipps does not take Carlene to the party explaining that she does not like social events.

Carlene sends a card to Kiki stating that she wants to pay a visit, but Kiki does not call back because of her problems with Howard. At their anniversary party, she has discovered that Howard has cheated on her with Claire, a professor at Wellington University. After a few weeks, she calls Carlene three times and also sends a note with Levi but cannot reach her. Monty answers the phone each time giving some excuses about Carlene. This situation makes Kiki think that Monty tries to keep Carlene away from others.

These two women have different personalities and different viewpoints of life, but they can listen to each other. Actually, Kiki does not approve of Carlene's ideas about women and family, but she still enjoys her company. For example, at their first meeting, Carlene says, "Men move with their minds, and women must move with our bodies."¹ As a reply, Kiki tells her that she believes "[M]en and women use their minds about equally."² It is easy to listen to someone with whom you share the same opinions, but these two women characters are totally different and still approach each other with tolerance and empathy. Their dialogue shows that they can see the beauty in life and in each other. These two women mostly correspond to Rosi Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject. Braidotti defines this notion as:

Nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity.³

¹ **Ibid.**, p.96.

² Smith, **Loc. cit.**

³ Rosi Braidotti, **Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory**, New York, Columbia University Press, p.33, 1994.

Nomadism invites people to reject the “phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking”⁴.

At their second meeting at the Kippes’ house, Carlene welcomes Kiki at their library, and they have a deep conversation about themselves and their families. This conversation somehow makes Kiki get lost in early memories of Howard, looking at the painting called “Maitresse Erzulie” blankly. Carlene thinks that she is admiring the painting, so she draws Kiki’s attention to the painting, asking her if she likes it. Then she explains the meaning of the painting to Kiki: “This Voodoo goddess, Erzulie symbolizes many things like love, beauty, purity, the ideal female and the moon. She represents contrary things like jealousy, vengeance, discord, love, perpetual help, goodwill, health, beauty, and fortune.”⁵ This symbolizing fascinates Kiki because the personality of Erzulie is something that she wants to have in her own life. Instead of sticking to one identity, Kiki wants to embrace different possibilities and lifestyles in life. This is why she is respectful to other people even if they have different lifestyles or different perspectives of life. Thus, her *nomadic consciousness*, which rejects *phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking* gives her an empathy towards everyone around. Even though she and Carlene have different personalities, she just listens to her and respects her.

Like Erzulie, Kiki has a complex personality and contradictory qualities. Kiki is both a suppressed and strong character. She is a desperate woman in her marriage, feeling suffocated and alienated in Wellington society. She is in pursuit of meaning for her life after she finds out that her husband Howard has been unfaithful and now she repents having devoted her life to him. In spite of all the problems in her life, Kiki is not presented as a weak and vulnerable character. On the contrary, she can express herself openly, approach people with empathy and construct positive relations. With all her positive and negative sides, weaknesses and strengths, Kiki is

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁵ Smith, p.175.

portrayed like a Moon Goddess. The Jungian critic Esther Harding describes the ancient Moon Goddess in the following terms:

The Moon Goddess was dual in her very nature. She lived her life in phases, manifesting the qualities of each phase in turn. In the upper-world phase, corresponding to the bright moon, she is good, kind, and beneficent. In the other phase, corresponding to the time when the moon is dark, she is cruel, destructive and evil.⁶

We cannot say that Kiki has an evil or destructive side, but she definitively wreaks havoc in Howard's life at the end of the novel. She has sacrificed her life for Howard and her family, but in return she has been betrayed and alienated by her husband. The sexual relationship between Howard and Victoria is the last straw that causes their divorce. Instead of kicking Howard out of home, leaving him with the children at home turns their roles upside down; it makes Kiki independent and Howard weaker. The physical condition of the house after she has left actually is a metaphor for her destructive side over Howard. The house after she has left is described in the following manner: "Then the heat came and everything began to rot and swelter and stink."⁷

When Claire contemplates about Kiki, she also describes her in terms of a goddess:

Natural, honest, powerful, unmediated, full of something like genuine desire. A goddess of the everyday. She was not one of Howard's intellectual set, but she was actively political and her beliefs were genuine and well expressed.⁸

She is always self confident and powerful as understood from Claire's description. However, Howard's theoretical rigour has dominated and changed her in a negative way. Dedicating her life to Howard and her marriage, Kiki feels isolated and oppressed in a society where she does not belong.

⁶ Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries*, London, Rider Publishing, p.111, 1982.

⁷ Smith, p.434.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.227.

The painting of Erzulie reminds Kiki unconsciously of her past when she was one in herself like a moon goddess. Esther Harding states:

The psyche itself is both male and female. Each human being contains within himself potentialities in both directions.⁹

However, in a patriarchal marriage, the couples often identify rather with only one part according to social standards. Thus, men develop the male part and women develop the female part. Each party oppresses the other aspect of their psyche and becomes only one sided. They only together become a unity. In this traditional unity, while the man represents power and superiority, the woman represents weakness and dependence.¹⁰ Thus, Kiki's identity, that was complete and one in herself and carrying all potentials, has been split over the years. Even though they may be considered as a modern family, Howard's rules shape their marriage and Kiki. After Howard's infidelity, their unity has fallen apart. That's why Kiki is looking for her psyche's own unity in itself again, and she is thinking about what her life will be for.

Carlene and Kiki's lives are similar in some points. Carlene also remains outside the academic life of Wellington, and she occupies the role of "the other" at home and also in society. Carlene's lack of power and lack of social status can be explained through the term "castration". Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gaber explains the term as:

[...] 'social castration', which amounts to the same thing, for this term signifies women's lack of social power, this lack being represented by means of the word 'castration', as a male possession, though not as in any sense a male attribute.¹¹

Although Carlene internalizes or seems to internalize the role of stay-at-home Christian mom in social life and in her marriage, she has a silent resistance to this

⁹ Harding, p.104.

¹⁰ **Ibid.**, pp.104-105.

¹¹ Peter Barry, **Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory**, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, p.131, 2002.

role in her private sphere. As also mentioned in chapter one, we can infer from the Erzulie painting that Carlene owns it as a resistance to patriarchy. This painting stands for her past before Monty when her soul's unity was not mutilated by her husband's domination over her. Another symbol for Carlene's resistance to her role is the moonstone necklace representing the divine feminine, which attracts Howard's attention when they first meet. Howard thinks, as a conservative Christian, Carlene is expected to wear cross.

As again mentioned in chapter one, Carlene's last will is her last silent reproach to her husband and children. When she is lonely, Kiki is the only one who accompanies her. Two weeks before she dies, when they go shopping together, she tells her, "I would like to give you a gift as a thank you. I've been rather lonely. And you've thought to visit me and spend a little time with me."¹² After her death, her family finds out that she leaves the painting Erzulie, which she bought before she got married, to Kiki, not anyone from her family. She knows that Kiki is the only person who deserves this painting because Kiki's approach to beauty and art is similar to hers. In addition, this painting is important for Carlene because it symbolizes her independence and her past when she was not married to Monty. When she is introducing the painting to Kiki, she explains why she likes that painting:

It's a Hyppolite. It's worth a great deal I believe, but that's not why I love it. I got it in Haiti itself on my very first visit, before I met my husband.¹³

After getting married, she is no longer independent and takes the role of the angel at home given by her husband. Although she seems to accept and internalize her position at home, her illness symbolizes that this situation is not suitable for her. Losing the unity of her soul results in her having cancer and this finally leads to her death. She sees that Kiki will gain her independency again, so she leaves the painting to her.

¹² Smith, p.265.

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.175.

Being the subordinated counterpart of Monty without complaining and also carrying the symbols of a divine feminine, Carlene prevents us from identifying her with a stereotype. She is a woman ridden with contradictions, so it is hard to identify her. Kiki and Carlene both focus on the soul of things, and they see into things, people and life. Carlene's words explain her standpoint in life: "[L]ife must come first over the Book."¹⁴ Instead of sticking to one identity, they both embrace different possibilities. Thus, it would be unfair to regard Kiki and Carlene as vulnerable wives. On the contrary, Zadie Smith shows the reader that both women's empathy is their power that gives them a different dimension.

Both women's approach to art is personal; that they can find something about themselves in art. Their personal response to art also makes them gain an empathetic point of view in their lives and relations. On the other hand, their intellectual husbands cannot approach art emotionally. For these professors, it is like a taboo to involve their emotions in responding to art. This is why they cannot find or they escape to find something personal in art. Through these intellectuals' response to art, Smith points out the problem of critics' ignoring emotions in approaching art.

This problem of critics that Smith points out leads us to Edward Said's concept of criticism that he integrates the text or artwork with the real world instead of restricting the artwork to the theory. For Said, criticism must engage the critic to the world. Bill Ashcroft states:

Said* [...] means that the critic must refuse to be locked into narrow professional specializations which produce their own arcane vocabulary and speak only to other specialists. The cult of professional expertise in criticism is pernicious because it surrenders the actual material and political concerns of society to a discourse dominated by economists and technocrats.¹⁵

Lindsay Waters also states this problem in her article, "In Responses Begins Responsibility: Music and Emotion":

¹⁴ **Ibid.**, p.178.

¹⁵ Ashcraft, p.265.

* Edward Said.

Because idealism and high modernism exiled feeling from arts talk for nearly two centuries, we do not have the words to talk about our experiences of art. In refusing to look down from the heavens of high theory on the sentient creature who undergoes a musical experience, I think Said has done real theoretical work. For two centuries, we have for the most part valued the intellectual over the sensual, moralized the arts, devalued the role of the recipient of art in artistic judgment, and promoted the notion of the work of art as an organic whole whose workings can be understood fully in terms of its internal organization.¹⁶

In the novel, Howard's approach to art shows this problem of the critics. While Howard deconstructs art and escapes from emotions, he cannot replace it with any positive value and as a consequence, his approach and theories get toneless. On the other hand, Edward Said suggests:

For the process of reading begins and ends in the reader, and what enables the reading is an irreducibly personal act of commitment to reading and interpreting, the gesture of reception that includes opening oneself to the text and, just as importantly, being willing to make informed statements about its meaning and what the meaning might attach itself to.¹⁷

Here Said mentions close reading but it may be acceptable in all forms of art like painting and music as well as literature. For Said, deconstructive reading avoids the personal connection, which results in deferring "human emancipation and enlightenment that changes and enhances one's knowledge for purposes other than reductiveness, cynicism, or fruitless standing aside."¹⁸

Kiki and Carlene make a personal connection to art, but we cannot say that they are the ideal critics that Said and Smith suggest. Both women lack any knowledge of theory, which prevents them from producing ideas on art, and they cannot produce any criticism. Both women are also aware of their lack of knowledge. When they talk about the painting *Erzulie*, Kiki tries to analyse the painting, but she can only refer to her husband's theories:

¹⁶ Waters, p.99.

¹⁷ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p.66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.66.

‘That’s interesting . . .’ began Kiki shyly, giving herself a moment to remember a thesis of Howard’s, which she now wished to reproduce as her own for Carlene. ‘Because . . . we’re so binary, of course, in the way we think. We tend to think in opposites, in the Christian world. We’re structured like that – Howard always says that’s the trouble.’¹⁹

Moreover, when they first meet and Carlene quotes from one of her favourite poems, she also mentions her husband’s suggestion to her about art:

When I spoke it to him, he said that that was all very well but I should place it on a scale – a scale of judgement – and on the other side of the scale I should place *L’enfer, c’est les autres*. And then see which had more weight in the world.²⁰

While they both can see the beauty in the artwork, they fail to analyse it with their own ideas. They just reflect their husbands’ theories.

This situation shows that Smith does not disregard or undermine theory or criticism. On the other hand, she tries to make a balance between theory and emotion. Thus, she comes up with a third way of harmonizing theory and feeling through the character, Katie. Katie Armstrong only appears in Howard’s class on Seventeenth Century Art. At first, Katie is really excited about this class because the class is mostly about Rembrandt whom she admires a lot. However, she cannot understand much because of Howard’s complicated language and as a consequence she gets demoralized. After the third class, she spends a lot of time studying the paintings “Jacob Wrestling with an Angel” (1658) and “Seated Nude” (1631) which Howard assigned for the next class. Katie analyses these paintings in great detail; that is she harmonizes her knowledge of art with her personal attachment to the paintings:

¹⁹ Smith, p.175.

²⁰ **Ibid.**, p.175.

The first painting is *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1658. Katie has thought about the vigorous impasto that works counter-intuitively to create that somnolent, dreamy atmosphere. She makes notes on the angel's resemblance to Rembrandt's pretty son, Titus; on the perspective lines that create the illusions of frozen movement; on the personal dynamic between the angel and Jacob. When she looks at this painting she sees a violent struggle that is, at the same time, a loving embrace ... Caravaggio always gave his angels the darkly resplendent wings of eagles; by contrast, Rembrandt's angel is no eagle but he's no dove either. No bird Katie has ever seen really has these imprecise, shabby, dun-coloured wings. The wings seem almost an afterthought, as if to remind us that this painting is meant to be of matters biblical, otherworldly. But in Rembrandt's Protestant heart, so Katie believes, the battle depicted here is really for a man's earthly soul, for his *human* faith in the world. Katie, who lost her faith slowly and painfully two years earlier, finds the relevant passage in the Bible and adds the following to her notes:

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the break of day . . . And he said, Let me go for the day breaketh. And the angel said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.²¹

Her response to the second painting, "Seated Nude" is also emotional, which makes her cry. She again makes a personal connection to the painting, feeling that "these are the marks of living."²² Katie interprets the painting with her feelings and her knowledge of cross-hatching that she knows. However, in class Howard's disregard of beauty in these artworks demoralizes Katie, and she loses her courage to speak about the paintings. As Katie's appearance in the novel is very short, her character does not contribute a great deal to the development of the plot. However, through her approach to art, Smith suggests an aesthetic experience that helps people understand the others as Katie tries to feel the pain or the life experience of the woman in the painting. On the contrary, Howard and Monty lack this experience. As Kathleen Wall states:

Neither acknowledges the intersubjectivity of the aesthetic experience, the sense of a presence beyond themselves. The result, Smith's plot implies, is a concomitant ethical blindness to the particularities of the individuals in their world; they violate their intersubjective relations with others, treating wives, students, and children as adjuncts to their reputations and desires.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.250-251.

²² *Ibid.*, p.252.

²³ Wall, pp.760-761.

On the other hand, their wives Kiki and Carlene are representatives of the construction of empathy, which is lacking in most of the other characters in the novel. Their affirmative relation is based on nomadic subjectivity and consciousness, which is explained by Rosi Braidotti in terms of “yearning”, which she borrows from the poet Bell Hooks:

[...] ‘yearning’ is a common affective and political sensibility, which cuts across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice and that ‘could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy – ties that would promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition.’ In this respect, nomadic consciousness is an epistemological and political imperative for critical thought at the end of this millennium.²⁴

The notion of nomadic consciousness of Braidotti coincides with Edward Said’s concept of Humanism. Said considers the essence of humanism, “[...] as a continuous process of self understanding and self realization, not just for us, as white, male, European and American, but for everyone [...]”.²⁵ All the traditions in the world and all the cultures contribute to the humanity and human mind. Forming a tentative relationship without prejudices, embracing and welcoming each other, seeing the beauty in life and art bring a new hope to human connections in the novel, and that connection is achieved by Kiki and Carlene.

At the end of the novel, Howard also starts to see the beauty in art and in Kiki too. When Kiki leaves him after learning the Victoria incident, Zadie Smith portrays Howard weaker and vulnerable. Kiki, who is dependent on Howard, and objectified and ignored by him, decides to be independent, leaves him and even hides where she lives from him. Being an independent woman, Kiki is more respected by her children now. Even Zora, who has always criticized Kiki, respects her and does not defend Howard any more.

²⁴ Braidotti, **Nomadic Subject**, p.2.

²⁵ Said, **Humanism and Democratic Criticism**, p.26.

Howard's change starts at home. While there was a wall between him and his family, now he pays attention to everything about his children:

He knew, without looking, which of his children was passing through a room – from their intimate noises, their treads.²⁶

He also sees every detail in the house and in the garden that he has not seen until then. Howard does not criticize or dominate every one around him. When Jerome tells that he is going to the church, surprisingly Howard does not mock Jerome's belief, and stays silenced. Kiki's separation causes the changes in Howard and opens his eyes to the world around him.

At the end, during his presentation on Rembrandt for his tenure, he cannot speak. He just presents all the paintings from the power point and at last shows the painting, "Hendrickje Bathing" (1654). As he forgets the file that he prepared for the presentation, he finds himself unguarded against the beauty in the art. Actually, this situation shows that Howard breaks the theoretical boundaries that he has built between himself and art and also life. Until then, Howard has always avoided seeing the beauty in art and criticized Rembrandt by deconstructing his art through theories. However, during his presentation he undergoes a change and overcomes his prejudices. While his audience waits for Howard to comment on the paintings, he is speechless discovering the beauty in art again, and he only focuses on "Henrickje Bathing" and on Kiki, who is among the audience. Howard sees the life experience of Henrickje in the painting that leads him to see the beauty in Kiki. Kiki must have realized how Howard looks at the painting and sees it differently, so she smiles at him. Howard's analysis of Hendrickje is like Katie's analysis of the "Seated Nude", focusing on the details in the painting:

Howard looked back at the woman on the wall, Rembrandt's love, Hendrickje. Though her hands were imprecise blurs, paint heaped on paint and roiled with the brush, the rest of her skin had been expertly rendered in all its variety – chalky whites and lively pinks, the underlying blue of her veins and the ever present human

²⁶ Smith, p.435.

hint of yellow, intimation of what is to come.²⁷

Kiki's smiling at Howard is like a greeting and welcoming. As Howard looks at the painting and Kiki and the painting again, he makes a personal attachment. Art teaches Howard to develop empathy now. As Katleen Wall states:

But rather than seeing 'judgement' in Kiki's look, he finally acknowledges the knowing, but self-delighting greeting of his wife that echoes Hendrickje's self-absorbed exploration of depths only she can see in the dark surface of the water. Here, he and Kiki seem to agree to make Hendrickje's elusive, reflective beauty part of their lives; here the greeting of the work of art mediates the greeting between the ever-humane Kiki and the now human Howard.²⁸

Looking at "Hendrickje Bathing" without the lens of his theories, Howard sees that Rembrandt has deep love of physical detail, and Rembrandt himself goes against the social norms of beauty in his society, in the Seventeenth Century's Dutch Visual Culture. On the other hand, until this point, Howard has always believed that Rembrandt served the ideals of society. However, he sees the difference and deepness now. Jakob Rosenberg analyzes Rembrandt's difference from his time as follows:

If we try to define some of the outstanding characteristics, which distinguish Rembrandt from his contemporaries, we think perhaps first of his remarkable independence and his unusual urge to follow his own impulse in the choice of subject matter as well as in interpretation and treatment. Rembrandt was in this respect truly 'modern' –perhaps the first modern artist of this kind in history. But Rembrandt's forceful individualism never took a completely arbitrary course; it maintained a firm foundation of universal significance. His spiritual tendency embraced all his subjects –portraiture, landscape, and Biblical painting alike –and since it was linked with an extraordinary human intimacy and empathy, Rembrandt's art comes closer to us than that of the international Baroque, with its more ostentatious character.²⁹

²⁷ **Ibid.**, p.443.

²⁸ Wall, p.774.

²⁹ Jacob Rosenberg, "Rembrandt in His Century", **Readings in Art History**, Ed. by Harold Spencer, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969, pg 185.

Rembrandt disturbs people with his paintings as he reflects all the realities instead of idealizing the body. In “Seated Nude”, “Hendrickje Bathing” and in his self-portraits, Rembrandt stresses the life experience with all deficiencies and vulnerabilities. Even though the misshapen bodies may disturb the audience, Rembrandt shows it with all the reality. Instead of focusing on physical beauty, Rembrandt focuses on spirits of people. That’s why, for example Katie feels empathy to the woman in “Seated Nude”. Rembrandt leads people to make a personal attachment reflecting spirituality. Thus, Rembrandt actually becomes a guide for Howard to see, neither through society’s lens nor through theory’s lens. Art reconciles Howard to art and life, and Howard understands this through Kiki’s guidance at the end.

CONCLUSION

In Zadie Smith's **On Beauty**, each character's response to aesthetics coincides with their connection to the world and people. The father figures Monty and Howard refuse to see the beauty in art, and they also have difficulty in seeing the beauty in people and life. Throughout the novel, Zadie Smith presents how these two academics' theoretical rigour makes them blind and prevents them from forming a proper human relationship. They cannot escape the realm of theory and cannot see the beauty in people and life. Their blindness prevents them from forming simple and unprejudiced relationships because they lack empathy towards other people and are consequently unable to connect. Their blindness to the life and beauty, which causes them to be narrow-minded and intolerant to different perspectives of life also affects the self realization process of the children, because it harms their quest for belonging.

Smith does not only represent the problem of the ideological rigor of the academicians or the identity crisis of the young characters, she also provides a solution through the communication of the two oppressed women characters of the novel and their response to art and beauty. Kiki and Carlene, who do not belong to that academic society, get alienated and isolated. On the other hand, Zadie Smith makes them more powerful in the sense of human relations than any of the other characters in the novel. Kiki and Carlene communicate without prejudices and without losing their human sensibility. Kiki and Carlene can see the beauty in life and art. Both women's approach to art is personal; they can find something about themselves in art. Their personal response to art also makes them gain an empathetic point of view in their lives and relations. On the other hand, their intellectual husbands cannot approach art emotionally. For these professors, it is like a taboo, a weakness to involve their emotions in responding to art. This is why they cannot find or they escape to find something personal in art.

Zadie Smith presents art as a solution to the chaos in the characters' lives. It is obvious that art has an internal transformative effect that develops people's self-realization process offering them a broader mode of consciousness. In this thesis, it has been explored how the characters' response to art affects their lives. Throughout the novel, Zadie Smith presents how these two academics' theoretical rigour makes them blind and prevents them from forming a proper human relationship. They cannot escape the realm of theory and cannot see the beauty in people and life. For instance, Howard needs to find a compromise between his academic and private life. He needs to liberate himself from the theoretical boundaries that he has built himself.

In the novel, art is used as a means of connection that brings people together in spite of their differences. Said's humanism gives an important role to intellectuals that is; like an exile, they should liberate themselves from the boundaries of the settled identities and be open to different perspectives, as he says:

Humanism is about the reading, it is about perspective, as in our work as humanists, it is about transitions from one realm, one area of human experience to another.¹

However, in the novel, the two intellectuals, Howard and Monty cannot escape their own imprisonment in their ideologies and theories that cause their blindness to other perspectives. In this study, how their blindness affects the identity formation process of the young characters has been discussed. Also, Said's views on humanism and critical theory have been presented as solution process of connection problem in the novel.

In **On Beauty**, the intellectuals isolate and alienate themselves from ordinary life, and the Wellington neighbourhood also maintains this isolation as being an elite and upper middle class neighbourhood. As aforementioned, the intellectual father figures, Monty and Howard cause chaos and struggle in the lives of their families

¹ Said, **Humanism and Democratic Criticism** p. 80.

because of their intolerance to different perspectives of life. Presenting this problem through their family life, Zadie Smith actually points out the problem of the intellectuals' alienation from real life. Especially, Smith shows the problem of the intellectuals' being stuck in only one thought and perspective. Because of their narrow-mindedness, their children desire for cultural and social diversity. Especially, at the Belseys' house, the children's quest for belonging is impaired because of their father's intolerance to different perspectives of life. Howard clings to his own perspective so hard that he cannot stand any different ideology or belief. Actually, Howard does not have any belief, because his poststructuralist thoughts prevent him from believing in any ideologies or values. Thus, he cannot stand the idea of Jerome's being a Christian. His narrow-minded attitude in his academic life also shows up in his relation with his family, so Kiki always criticizes him as being a "thought police". He criticizes, ignores, and makes fun of his own family's values, but cannot respect them or cannot lead his children while they are struggling in their self-realization and self-understanding process.

As a consequence, both Jerome and Levi try to develop their self-realization, and to accomplish their self-fulfilment but fail because of father characters' intervention or their inexperience. Even though both of them try to get free of ideological restriction, they cannot develop a sense of belonging and their quest for identity gets suspended. As the father figures' narrow-minded manners openly aggravate the identity construction of sons creating chaos in their quest, the daughters Zora and Victoria struggle because of the same reason as well. Their fathers' despotic attitude and their power in academic life silence the mothers and alienate the daughters from their mothers. For both young female characters, the fathers represent the power in their lives while the mothers represent the subordinated party. Zora and Victoria do not want to be subordinated like their mothers, so they think that the only solution to escape their mothers' fate is to take the father figures as guidance to construct their identity, which lead them to a sort of identity crisis.

Towards the end of the novel, Zadie Smith deconstructs the powerful masculine identity by subverting the ideal father figures, Howard and Monty. Monty's relationship with one of his students is revealed, and he loses his respectability as a conservative and religious man. Moreover, Zora finds out her father's relationship with Victoria and loses her respect for Howard. She is disappointed because she finds out that her ideal model is fictional but not real. This time she cannot see her father's affair as normal because Victoria is just Howard's student at the same age with her. This is immoral both academically and socially.

In conclusion, Smith does not only represent the problem of the ideological rigor of the academicians or the identity crisis of the young characters, she also provides a solution through the communication of the two oppressed women characters of the novel and their response to art and beauty. These women characters, Kiki and Carlene are the wives of the two professors, Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps who are enemies in academic life. Living in the upper class academic neighbourhood of Wellington, Kiki and Carlene, who do not belong to that academic society, get alienated and isolated. On the other hand, Zadie Smith makes them more powerful in the sense of human relations than any of the other characters in the novel. Kiki and Carlene communicate without prejudices and without losing their human sensibility. Their human sensibility and empathetic attitude in human relations actually stems from their response to art, which is also emotional. They both find something personal in art that raises their consciousness. Thus, it is obvious that there is an interconnection between one's response to art and social life. Approaching art without restrictions makes Kiki and Carlene also unprejudiced in their human relations. Another character with the same attitude is Howard's student, Katie who approaches art not only with a personal attachment but also with theoretical knowledge of art that is different from Kiki and Carlene. Katie is the best example to show that theoretical knowledge of art does not necessarily prevent someone from personal and emotional attachment to art. At the end, Smith suggests through the characterization of Katie, an attitude towards art and life harmonized with human sensibility and knowledge.

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