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Literary Analysis Paper

In Toni Morrison’s novel, *A Mercy*, she creates characters with very strong and complex relationships with one another, showing throughout the novel how these relationships can be strained, tested, and even changed. Even though the characters do not change physically many of them undergo internal changes due to a reflection on events that occur that cause them to interact with others differently. These instances of reflection that Morrison incorporates into her novel are both in the literal sense with Sorrow seeing her exact image in her imaginary friend Twin, and a more hidden way with Scully’s chapter at the end of the novel where his character has undergone subtle changes notable in his reflection of life on the farm. Through the reoccurring motif of reflection in Toni Morrison’s novel, *A Mercy*, a shift in self-identity is symbolized, which demonstrates how shifts in identity can drastically impact relationships.

Sorrow’s instance of reflection is one of the most obvious in Morrison’s novel as she mentions that Twin is, “her identical self,” who follows her everywhere she goes from the time that she wakes after the shipwreck up until a little while after Florens leaves to fetch the Blacksmith to possibly save Rebekka from the small pox (137). Due to the shipwreck and waking up all alone Sorrow craved human interaction and thus crafted an imaginary girl identical to herself as she was the only one she could find alive in the wreckage staring back at her in the reflection of the water. After the trauma of the shipwreck and realizing she was alone without a companion to give her company, Sorrow crafted Twin as a much more outgoing and controlling version of herself, someone she could rely on to lead her when she herself was very lost and wary of her surroundings, not knowing how to interact and what she should do in different situations.

After Florens leaves the farm to fetch the Blacksmith, Sorrow is left with the baby growing within her and Twin for company as the others on the farm were quite distant with her. When Sorrow went into labor the first time resulting in a stillborn child she had Lina to guide her and rely on during the process; however, when she goes into labor the second time she is alone and since Twin is essentially herself, “Twin was absent, strangely silent or hostile when Sorrow tried to discuss what to do, where to go” (156). In this moment of giving birth she realizes that instead of relying on Twin the more outgoing and controlling side of herself she has to be capable herself, which causes her to be determined to give birth on her on without the help of others. As she holds her newborn, “she was convinced that this time she had done something, something important by herself,” realizing there is a life dependent on her and her guidance in order to prosper in the world, allowing herself to become complete, which is what she ends up renaming herself (157). Becoming this confident and nurturing mother causes strain on her relations with others as Sorrow, now Complete, desires to be independent and take care of her child on her own, not to mention Lina is disgusted with Sorrow once she returns with a child.

Floren’s instance of reflection comes after she meets with the Blacksmith and sends him back to the farm to tend to Rebekka in the form of a dream where she is unable to see her reflection in the waters with, “not even a shadow there” (162). The moment where she is unable to see her reflection shows how lost she feels after finding out she made this harrowing and long journey to find the Blacksmith hoping to rekindle feelings of love and belonging only to find that there is a young boy who is the object of the Blacksmith’s affections rather than herself. As she cannot fathom her feelings of love not being reciprocated due to the young boy, she begins to unhinge and become very frantic and angry at the slightest move the child makes to the point where she shoves the boy and even injures him right as the Blacksmith returns, which causes him to lose any lingering feelings he had with Florens. Florens’s unraveling only continues as she remembers her mother and questions the bond she had with her, and whether or not her mother truly loved her as she sent Florens away with Jacob Vaarks.

Florens losing sight of who she is, losing sight of her reflection, causes a major transformation in her character and her relationships with those she had grown rather fond of on the farm. As Florens loses sight of herself she also loses sense of her identity and becomes very unsure of who she is after losing the affections of someone she deeply cares for once again, once after separating from her mother and again with the Blacksmith’s rejection, which causes her to revert into a very wary and void of caring girl. She is lost as to what she should do after undergoing such pain and loss, causing her to withdraw inside of herself, “thinking always as my life and my security from harm, from any who look closely at me only to throw me away” (184). Florens’s withdrawal causes those she was close with to distance themselves from her and she makes no effort to maintain those relationships she had prior to leaving the farm as she can only focus on leaving words for the Blacksmith that he will never read and trying to learn what to do with the sadness she holds.

Another example of reflection that is much more subtle than the other references made by Morrison in her novel is found during Scully’s chapter when he discusses the state of the farm and those living on it. At first glance the chapter reads simply as Scully’s thoughts about life, events on the farm, and all that remains unknown, but on further analysis Scully’s reflection of his time at the farm and the relations he now has with everyone reveals a subtle shift in his identity. Scully heavily reflects on the death of Jacob Vaark’s and how it was the turning point in the family relationship he had with the others living on the farm, but he did not recognize this shift until after the return of Florens as he recognized that he and the others clung to the thought, “they were a kind of family together. . .carved. . .out of isolation” (183).

After recognizing the turning point of his relations with the others on the farm, except for Willard, his lover, a distinct change is noticeable within Scully’s character as he becomes more selfish, putting himself and Willard first before the others. At the beginning of the novel it is very apparent that Scully and Willard are eager to serve Jacob on the farm and help him with any type of work, but after the death of Jacob and Scully’s reflection he realizes there is nothing left to keep him here and instead begins to focus on getting enough money from Rebekka as swiftly as possible for, “Scully and Mr. Bond. . .to imagine a future” (183). After Jacob dies, Scully is willing to help care for the farm as he feels he owes it to Jacobs’s widow, but once Florens returns and Rebekka becomes distant he realizes that he and Willard no longer have a place on the farm, especially if Rebekka gets a new husband who would take over management of the farm and perhaps force Scully and Willard to continue working even though Scully has no desire to do so. Instead of trying to reconnect with the girls on the farm Scully recognizes during his reflection that, “their futures were separate and anyone’s guesses. . .nothing yet on the horizon to unite them,” showing his shift from seeing them as an extended family to nothing more than an artificial family that he needs to move on from to continue on with his life.

Reflection is a reoccurring motif used by Morrison in her novel, *A Mercy*, to symbolize a change in a character’s identity and how this change affects the character’s relationship with others. Not all these instances of reflection are as obvious as others, like Sorrow with Twin being mentioned as identical to one another compared to Scully’s much more subtle changes in his chapter dealing with his thoughts on the present and recollections of the past. Her use of reflection shows how characters perceive themselves and others in the world around them after moments of intense events, like Florens discovering that the Blacksmith’s affections were centered around the little boy he was taking care of in his home rather than herself. The use of reflection by Morrison shows how a person can be deeply changed in a very swift or gradual manner depending on, “Whatever each one loved, sought, or escaped” (183).

Word Count: 1513