

UPON REFLECTION by Keith Fisher

I gaze into the mirror and behold the familiar face graced by the patina of age. The full beard has done little to hide the gradual regression. I step back a pace and the image retreats from me, as I equally withdraw from it.

I recall this discovery as a boy; how the looking-glass presents a different perspective of the world which retreats from one as one withdraws from the world. If I move far enough away, I will disappear into infinity to reappear immediately, and in proportion to the speed with which I run back to view my reflection. The sheet of silvered glass is a mirror of me as am I of it.

Because I, in turn, am the mirror of the image that appears in it. Harm me and you harm my image. Harm my image and you harm me.

But it is not the perfect image that gazes at me from the mirror. It's quite clear that the parting in my sparse hair is on the wrong side of my head; the wart on my cheek has jumped across my face. I may be as you see me, but not as I am myself. What I know to be my left, you see as my right.

So it is that what we see of a person is not as the person perceives himself. The image presented to the world is not the same as the self-image. What you perceive is unlikely to be my reality.

I once read the biography of a writer and marvelled at what he had achieved, visited and recorded in his many works. What literary style he displayed in words that painted portraits. I later read his autobiography in which he revealed an alien, inner world of self-doubt, fear, hatred and corruption – a picture akin to that of Dorian Grey.

I gaze at my likeness in the glass, my external projection, and ponder upon the nature of the internal self-portrait of the man before you.

Yes, these thoughts and a thousand others pass through my mind as I sit before a canvas. I reflect upon the more than thirty self-portraits I completed or half-finished during those fateful three years. I can see the anguish reflected in them as keenly as I am aware of the distressed soul that painted them. But what

do you see? The brown and green and yellow daubs that you perceive to be me.
But what do you know?

Do you know of the rejection, the misery, the loneliness, the callous
desertion by Kee who I thought loved me as I did her?

Do you know of the poverty, the hunger, the frustration of living with a
mind that has betrayed me; of my crumbling body it sought to control, to
impose an alien will upon me?

The one person who loved me and whom I loved, my dearest Theo,
understood me but could not be with me. His wife had borne him his only son.
How could I call him away from them?

How are your self-portraits progressing, he asked me in the letter in which
he announced the birth of his son, named after me – poor child. I replied that
the third picture of myself that week was almost colourless, in ashen tones
against a background of pale veronese green. At least, Theo never said I had
lost my mind.

Six months later, my dear brother visited me. He had heard from my
doctor that I was not well.

I lay in my bed and looked in the mirror and saw the night sky reflected.
In the darkness of my mind I experienced, once again, the need to paint the
darkness of the night which is far more richly coloured than the brightest day
with its intense hues of violets, blues and greens. If you look carefully you will
also see that certain stars are lemon-yellow, others pink or a green, blue and
forget-me-not brilliance. Putting little white dots on the blue-black base is not
enough to paint the glory of the night.

“Theo, Theo; are you there?”

“I am beside you. I’m holding your hand, Vincent.”

He died beneath his starry sky of pink and green.

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