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## **An Exploration of the Self: A Lacanian Study of Douglas Stuart's Novel *Shuggie Bain***

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### **Abstract**

*This research delves into the complexities of self-formation and identity in Douglas Stuart's novel, Shuggie Bain, through the lens of Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage theory. Lacan's theory posits that the self is constituted through the mirror stage, where an individual misrecognizes his reflection as a unified whole, leading to a lifelong quest for cohesion and a fragmented sense of self. Stuart's character, Shuggie, an effeminate boy, embodies this quest as he navigates the intricate web of gender, sexuality, and societal expectations. He strives to become a normal boy but ends up falling into his trap. He mimics the image of his mother, an alcoholic, divorced and an unhappy woman, and develops an unstable self. His experiences illustrate the Imaginary realm, where the self is shaped by external reflections and misrecognitions, highlighting the tensions between the fragmented self and the illusory unity of the mirror stage. This research offers a nuanced exploration of Lacan's theory, demonstrating how Stuart's work enacts the struggles of self-formation and the search for identity. By examining the ways in which Shuggie negotiates his sense of self, this study reveals the ways in which literature can illuminate the complexities of human experience and its representation in contemporary literature. Through a critical analysis of Stuart's novel, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersections between psychoanalytic theory, literary representation, and the human experience, offering insights into the ways in which we shape our perceptions of self and identity. Ultimately, this study highlights the significance of Lacan's Mirror Stage theory in understanding the complexities of self-formation and identity in contemporary literature.*

**Keywords: The mirror stage, The symbolic stage, Fragmentation, Alienation, Mother-son Relationship.**

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## 1. Introduction:

Douglas Stuart is a struggling contemporary novelist, short story writer and fashion designer. His birthplace is Sighthill, a domain in Glasgow, Scotland where poor people used to live. He moved to New York to pursue a degree in fashion design. He himself suffered from identity issues due to his feminine demeanor, as did with Shuggie in the novel. *Shuggie Bain* 2020 is his debut novel which follows the lives of two main characters, Shuggie and Agnes. He is also the author of two short stories 'Found Wanting' and 'The Englishman'. He has also written an essay 'Poverty, Anxiety, and Gender in Scottish Working-Class Literature'. He recently published his second novel *Young Mungo* 2022 which focuses on homosexuality. Stuart in his novel *Shuggie Bain*, reveals the reality of the perception of the self. He focuses on the inherent subjectivity of self and raises questions of whether an individual can be known at all, whether by society or by himself through the character of Shuggie.

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of the self has been widely discussed in philosophy and psychology. Many empirical philosophers and psychoanalysts have refined and expanded the diverse descriptions of this concept. The philosophical underpinning of the self can be traced out in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), one of the most notable and earliest skeptical works which dealing with human cognitive thoughts and psychic states. The self, Hume asserted, cannot be perceived directly since it is a notion that can be perceived only through our impressions and perceptions in life. He claims, "Self is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference." (1739, p: 251). Hume recognizes the self as an illusion that lies in our impressions and ideas that are directly connected to our mind. However, he develops the idea of the self, arguing that an individual sense the self through a succession of perceptions and that the self is a progression of perceptions. He utterly believes that people continue to experience many things through their senses and these experiences shape the self; when they cease to perceive, they cease to exist and so the self is lost. Furthermore, he asserts that our minds are like theaters in which different perceptions appear, pass, exist, and these perceptions contribute significantly to the formation of the self. "The mind is a kind of theatre", he claims, "where several perceptions make their appearance" (1739, p:

253). Hume's dictum is that the self is merely an illusion, or simply an idea, and in reality, it does not exist. It is the direct recognition of successive perceptions. Hume's understanding of self is counter to other philosophers.

Friedrich Hegel, another trailblazer of the conception of self, takes the phenomenology of consciousness as the focal point to unmask the notion of the self in his philosophical work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). He used the term 'self-consciousness' to define his philosophical doctrine of the self. In his "Master-Slave dialectic", Hegel provides an impressive and disarming assertion that self-consciousness is an experience that requires confrontation with other subjects. According to Hegel, the self can only be recognized in relation to other people in society, so that people can determine a sense of dignity and form their identity. In other words, self-consciousness is an experience, in its entirety attached with otherness in which an individual recognizes himself in another and gazes himself through the eyes of other person. Donald Winnicott, an English psychoanalyst, took up the Hegelian concept and introduced it into the realm of psychoanalysis. Moreover, Hegelian conception of the self has a direct descendant in Lacan's mirror stage theory. These philosophers Hume and Hegel consciously pursued all perceivable phenomena revolving around the idea of the unified, autonomous, and conscious self, until Sigmund Freud, an Austrian founding father of psychoanalysis, projected his theories about the self.

In the psychoanalytical dimension, the questioning of self has been in existence since the beginning of psychoanalysis and can be traced out in the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan. Through his multilayered theory of unconscious, preconscious, and conscious, Freud made an unprecedented attempt to describe the question of self. He concentrated on the unconscious self, a break from previous attempts in traditional philosophy to explain the true nature of the self. He challenged the philosophical doctrines and representations of self that it can only be perceived through our rational reflections. His view of the self is based on his discovery of the unconscious. He dives into the question of the self when he discovered the notion of the unconscious. "It is a very remarkable thing that the Ucs. of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the Cs." (Freud 196). The conscious and the unconscious differ radically both in their rules and in their logic. With his structural theory of the unconscious

and conscious, Freud consciously conceptualizes the self for first time in psychoanalysis. The unconscious is composed of fundamental instincts and drives such as sexuality, aggression, trauma, and self-destruction. It is what enables us to discriminate between right and wrong by placing constraints on our unconscious instincts. These basic instinctive urges seek immediate gratification according to Freud. The unconscious is governed by the “pleasure principle”. The conscious self, on the other hand, consists of everything in our consciousness. It is determined by the “reality principle”. It is what we can distinguish between right and wrong as it puts restrictions over the unconscious instincts. Freud further explores the self through his theory of the Oedipus complex, the dynamic notion of self as the ego and id drive, primary narcissism, and the concepts of Thanatos and Eros.

Carl Jung, another prominent psychoanalyst of Freudian descent, views the self as an archetype that signifies the unified unconsciousness and consciousness in an individual. He used the term self to refer to his understanding of the notion of individuation, the process by which an individual acquires self-awareness and discovers meaning and purpose in life. According to Jung, the process of self-formation is relational as he says, “The self is relatedness...The self appears your deeds and deeds always means relationship.” (Jung 73). Individuation is independent of one’s relationship with others in society. Our emotional relationships, as Jung understands them, bind us together since our desires are interdependent. Indeed, Jung believes that the self can be attained by eliminating the projections associated with emotional ties with others.

Jacques Lacan, on the other hand, explored multiple dimensions of the subject, questioning the rationality and subjectivity of the self from the earliest stages of an infant’s life. Lacan’s representation of self is quite complex and different from other psychoanalysts. For him, the unconscious is structured like language. He claims that Freudian conception of the unconscious is entirely unique and that the unconscious is not distinct from consciousness. Lacan's theory is post-structural in nature and focuses on the unconscious mind's processes. The self, he asserts, can be developed in three distinct stages: the mirror stage, the symbolic stage, and the real stage. They all collectively contribute to the construction of the self. Lacan’s theory illustrates the impossibility of people searching for the true self. The psychological journey of the protagonist,

Shuggie Bain towards self-formation can be best described through the psychoanalytical discourse of Lacan. The paper argues that Shuggie in the novel exemplifies Lacan's mirroring concept, through which one might recognize his self. It also attempts to answer the questioning of self, what kind of self does Shuggie develop and reveal throughout the entire narrative? and how does the novel depict events constituting Shuggie's mirror stage? Furthermore, the novel represents the self as constructed in relation to the surrounding people, most notably the mother, external environment, and it can be constructed within the social structures of society.

## **2. Lacanian Mirror Stage as Theoretical Framework:**

The novel will be dissected through Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory as it is used to analyze the psychic development of infants as well as characters of literary texts. Lacan projected three stages of psychic development within which he asserts that every human being forms a sense of self by experiencing these three distinct stages of self-formation, the mirror stage, the symbolic stage, and the real stage. They altogether play a crucial role in the creation of an infant's self. In his psychoanalytic experience, 'The Mirror Stage as Formation of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychanalytical Experience' Lacan distances himself from Henry Wallon's conception of the mirror stage, depicting the entire process in terms of the unconscious rather than of consciousness and based his theory on Freudian perception of primary narcissism. Most of the critic believe that Lacan grounded his mirror stage theory on post-structural approach and explored the dynamics of the unconscious mind, reviving the Freudian notion of the unconscious, a realm where human actions can radiate and inner desires can be explored. Dylan Evan, a British author, claimed that the Lacanian mirror stage theory is so invested in Freudian psychoanalytic standards. He claims, "The whole of Lacan's work can only be understood within the context of the intellectual and theoretical legacy Sigmund Freud." (Evans, 1996, p. 67).

The mirror stage, according to Lacan, is the initial stage of self-formation in a child's life. He depicts the mirror stage that occurs at some points between six and eighteenth months of a child's life, is thus the phase when the child gets a sense of self through identification with the apparent images of others, most commonly the images of the people around it, particularly the image of its mother. Lacan refers the mirror stage as a phase of identification, "We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term:

namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Lacan 503). Thus, with the advent of the mirror stage, the child enters the process of self-identification in relation to others and acquires its first cognizance of its autonomous body.

Lacan postulates his argument on the Freudian concept of primary narcissism, in consonance with, a child develops a sense of self by falling in love with its image, which precedes the love of others. In contrast to Freud's thesis, Lacan's dictum is that the child is fascinated by its reflected image in the mirror and believes itself to be a complete being when surrounded by the mirrored images of other people. This curiosity enables the child to perceive itself through its reflected image and also helps the child to mimic the surrounding world. In fact, the child becomes fascinated by the image, endeavors to manipulate it, and takes joy in its movement.

As the mirror stage progresses, it exposes a preverbal stage, as the child lacks the ability to convey its feelings through language. Indeed, Lacan refers to the mirror stage as the imaginary stage, referring to the realm of images. It is termed as a world of perception rather than the world of imagination. The child enters the imaginary stage through reflected images and recognizes itself through the apparent images of others, particularly the image of the mother who serves as a bridge between the child and the external world. The child treats the image of mother as mirror, identifies itself with her, and makes a unification with her. Indeed, Lacan argues that the imaginary stage is not real but rather conflictual, and illusory. He says that the child must not believe that the other self that it saw in the form of the mother is its true self. The child, at this stage, experiences a unified and coherent self not fragmented. With the child's coherent sense of self comes the illusion of mastery over the external world. The child establishes a union with the mirror image, the mother figure and gets mutual satisfaction. “my mother is all I need and I am all my mother need.” (Tyson 27). The child sees the surrounding world through its mother's reflections and also sees its completeness in its union with mother rather than itself. Lacan refers to this experience of child as the desire of the mother, intends to imply that the mother embodies reflections. However, the most deceiving aspect of this stage is that the child misidentifies with its image and stays unaware to the fact that the image it has recognized is not its true self. Thus, the child's imagined control over itself and the external world is likewise an illusion that leads to alienation and fragmentation. The construction or discovery of self through the reflection of

others is the ultimate product of alienation and fragmentation, which can be exposed later in the symbolic stage.

Lacan holds a dogma that the process of discovering one's real self is inherently paradoxical, it seems quite similar to Hume's and Hegel's philosophical interpretations of this concept. He makes a very regrettable assertion that true self can never be recognized as it is merely an illusion. For him, from Descartes's deterministic nature of 'I think therefore I am' to the Hegelian philosophy of the 'absolute spirit', the self is nothing more than self-awareness. For him, the symbolic stage begins with the child's acquisition of language, and it is then that the ego is born; this ego is discovered through misrecognition. When the child enters the symbolic stage, it discovers its autonomous self. Through language, the symbolic stage helps the child to communicate, express its feelings and inner wants. Lacan emphasises the child's imagined and idealistic identification in the imaginary stage, whereas in the symbolic stage, he emphasises the child's language acquisition. The symbolic stage exposes that Lacan is very much influenced by leading voices of structuralism such as Saussure and Jakobson. In *'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious'* he asserts that "what psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language." (Lacan 187). According to him, the unconscious is structured like a language.

The symbolic stage occurs between the ages of eighteen months and four years. The child transforms into a social being, begins to distinguish objects, acquires social meaning and logic, and expresses internal desires. The child's desire is the crucial aspect in this stage, since the child wishes to return to the imaginary stage in order to reestablish its unity with its mother. In his book *Fifty Key Literary Theorists*, Richard Lane defines the symbolic stage as the point at which "the desire of the mother is replaced by the law of the father." (Lane 195) Furthermore, the child seems unable to maintain its idealistic unification with the mother, simultaneously, excluded from her, which drives the child into alienation and the painful realization of the fragmented self. The symbolic stage also introduces the child to society, the father's law, language, and the reality that the mother is a separate self that becomes a different subject, and the child experiences a world of lack or loss that can never be fulfilled.

### **3. Analysis of *Shuggie Bain*:**

#### **3.1. Story**

The novel opens with the portrayal of a youngest child, Shuggie Bain, growing up with an alcoholic mother, Agnes Bain, in the post-industrial working-class of 1980s Glasgow, Scotland. The novel is divided into four parts: Each part unmasks Shuggie's psychological development between the ages of five and sixteen through extreme circumstances and a suffocating environment. The entire narrative's issue over these years is Agnes' struggle with alcoholism and its negative impact on her children: Leek, Catherine, and most notably on the developing personality of Shuggie. Agnes, a representation of 1980s woman, a fascinating, self-destructive woman embroiled in second marriage to a philandering cab driver, Big Shug. She left her pious husband to fulfill materialistic desires and remarried to Shug, who used her for his sexual comforts and divorced her. Humiliated in front of her parents, she seeks solace in alcoholism and smoking, which directly affected Shuggie's developing personality, who always clung to her. Her harsh behavior pushed Leek and Catherine to plot their escape to settle their lives. Shuggie assumes the role of caring for her and makes a bond with her. His psychological growth in an unpleasant environment molds him into an odd, gay boy and he becomes the subject of oppression at school. Meanwhile, he feels alienated and fragmented as a result of feminine demeanor, a result of his mother's influence on him. He also becomes the target of sexual violence due to his homosexuality. At the end, both mother-son makes vain promises to change their lifestyles, but despite Shuggie's best efforts, Agnes committed suicide.

#### **3.2. The mirror stage in *Shuggie Bain* as a Metaphor for Self-creation**

It is a natural tendency for children to think about themselves to find their true existence. The same case is seen with Shuggie in the novel.

Shuggie's transformative journey from childhood to adulthood during which he develops a sense of self is at the centre of the discussion.

The article's principal focus is on Shuggie's journey from childhood to adulthood during which he undergoes through multiple transformations and forms a sense of self. From the beginning of the novel, Shuggie is portrayed as a child of few months, as this is the domain where personality and cognitive thoughts emerge according to psychoanalytic theories. Lacan assumes the child as



a central realm for exploring the human self and cognitive thoughts. Stuart (2020) demonstrates, “Agnes had run Shuggie a deep bath.” (p.52). Stuart artistically represents the past experiences of Shuggie through the prism of the present. Shuggie’s personality heavily influenced by his background, as it represents the queer experiences of his childhood, during which he experiences the Lacanian mirror stage and constructs the glimpse of his body, so-called self. Indeed, the past plays a crucial role in elucidating Shuggie’s mirror stage, while the present is associated with his symbolic stage. He does not experience the mirror stage directly by looking into an actual mirror in the narrative; instead he gazes the reflections of others. He senses the self through mirroring or mimicking the apparent images of his family members around him, most notably the image of his alcoholic mother, Agnes because of his complete dependence on her as a child. He seems to be intrigued by the image of his mother and assumes it as his true self. Stuart (2020) depicts, “She kissed his nose. He kissed her nose.” (p.56). It can be seen that Shuggie is seeing his reflection mirrored back to him through the mother’s image. The scene demonstrates mother-son bond free from sexual tensions and also illustrates Shuggie’s fascination towards the reflections of his mother.

The fictional meaning of child is inseparable from the fictional meaning of mother, as Lacan claims that mother figure embodies reflections and serves as a mirror for the child. His mirror stage theory also works through reflections; it is a tool for self-discovery, and the child can only recognize itself when the reflection is explored. Stuart skillfully puts reflection in the mother-son connection, which is not typical one. Shuggie perceives his mother as a mirror and identifies himself with her. He learns the behavior and social structures of society and also perceives the surrounding world through mimicking the external actions of his mother, which later affects his personality and casts him into identity problems. Stuart (2020) writes, “Shuggie has been watching his mother quietly. He was always watching. She had raised three of them in the same mould, every single one of her children was as observant and wary as a prison warden.” (p. 53). This scene illustrates Shuggie's mirror stage wherein he does not merely observe his mother’s actions but he is developing his self through her reflections. It can be argued that Shuggie is seeing a whole new self. He always tries to notice her actions and monitor what she is doing and how other people interact with her. He has mastered the image of his mother and lives in illusions that his self belongs to her. He fantasizes about being able to control things on his own,

which gives him a sense of autonomous self. He also derives pleasure from his unification with the mother and therefore remains away from real perception of the true self.

### **3.3. Shuggie and The Surrounding World**

The surrounding environment, on the other hand, has played a worst role in Shuggie's self-formation. He grew up with his mother Agnes, who embodies an unpleasant environment as she battles alcohol and smoking. Stuart through Agnes paints a vivid image of the Glasgow community in the 1980s, when the disease of alcoholism spreads and Agnes became its victim. "Agnes reached across the mattress for her cigarette, she lit one and sucking loudly, she coaxed the end into a blazing copper tip ... Shuggie watched as the ash started to smolder and then gave off a grey smoke". (p.201). Smoking provides Agnes with an internal sense of tranquility and allows her to forget her regrets. She has a split personality, completely self-absorbed and selfish woman who never paid heed to and loved Shuggie. Her split personality has a detrimental effect on Shuggie's developing self as he always clings to her and perceives her actions. Shuggie "saw her reflection in the mirror, her sleeping back heaving up and down." Shuggie uncapped a mascara bottle and massaged the black ink into the grey fissures on the soles of his school sneakers. Then he took the wand and drew it under his eye lashes. The fine lashes stood out beautifully from his face." (Stuart 201). The scene depicts that Shuggie lacks the ability to discriminate between right and wrong. It also illustrates Shuggie's inability to stay away from the influence of mirror image. His obsession with his mother's image compels him to imitate her actions, regardless of the negative impacts on his personality. This scene also demonstrates Shuggie's effeminate demeanor, which is the direct outcome of the dysfunctional upbringing with an alcoholic mother and in an unpleasant environment. However, as a result of his union with selfish mother, he transforms into a gay boy, loses masculinity and suffers a lot due to his gay identity.

### **3.4. Shuggie's Misidentification of the mirror image**

As the novel progresses, Shuggie grows old and begins his school days. He encounters physical abuses and taunts from his class fellows due to his gay personality. It makes him reflect on his personality, eventually realizing that he is totally misfit in 1980s Glasgow society and its social structures. Stuart depicts, "Something about the boy was no right, and this was at least they could

pity.” (p.10). Shuggie’s queer experiences as a child have a lot to do with people telling him that he is “no right”. It implies that the society has no place for gay boys like Shuggie. In terms of the Lacanian mirror stage, at certain moments the child begins to recognize his fragmented self and suffers the pain of misrecognition. He claims that misrecognition shapes the awareness of true self and also teaches the child that the mirror image is merely an illusion rather than source of pleasure and completeness. Lacan describes misrecognition in these words, “a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency.” (p.79). The insufficiency implies that the child separates itself from its past and accepts the truth that is distinct from the mirror image or mother, also encounters its misperception. The discovery of true self also casts the child into alienation and fragmentation. In the middle of the novel, Shuggie encounters the reality of the perception that he misrecognized the self through an illusory image of his mother as she is not his self, instead she left the scars of abnormality in his personality. He also recognized his fragmentary self and suffered greatly from homosexuality. Although he tries to behave like a normal boy, failed miserably. Without the slightest hint of sentimentality or the tension of victimhood, Stuart reveals how difficult it is for Shuggie to grow up gay in an illiberal and brutal society.

### 3.5. Alienation

The most decisive part of the mirror stage is the child’s sense of alienation as the self-identification journey leads to such an illusion, which casts the child into the world of alienation. According to Lacan, alienation can take two forms. The first is the child's alienation as a result of the discovery of reality that it has misrecognized the mirror image. The second sort of alienation occurs as a result of the child's language deficiency. This is termed as ‘imaginary alienation’. Bruce Fink, a practicing Lacanian psychoanalyst, claims in his book *The Lacanian Subject* that “Alienation engenders, in a sense, a place in which it is clear that there is, as of yet, no subject: a place where something conspicuously lacking.” (Fink 52). It is clear that the child continues in the imaginative stage in which it develops a sense of wholeness through the mirror image or the mother, so sacrificing its own subjectivity. As Anthony Elliot puts it, “the imagined is already a form of subjectivity alienation.” (Elliot 104). Lacan maintains that the child's union with the mirror image or mother results in alienation in both the imaginary and symbolic stages. Lacan

alienates the child, but only by emphasizing the presence of the second term, the symbolic stage at which the child conquers complete subjectivity. Furthermore, when language intervenes and manipulates the child to the symbolic stage, the child feels alienated. The symbolic stage permits the child to comprehend the truth that alienation is the result of an erroneous self-identification.

The entire narrative depicts Shuggie as an alienated and isolated child. His self-identification journey drives him into alienation when he discovers that his self does not confine to his mother in the symbolic stage. His gay personality directly symbolizes his mother's influence on him, which ultimately becomes the cause of his alienation and makes him an object of oppression. The opening lines of the first chapter of the novel offer a deep insight into the world of alienation Shuggie is exposed to, "The day was flat. That morning his mind had abandoned him and left his body wandering down below. The empty body went listlessly through its routine, pale and vacant-eyed under the fluorescent strip lights, as his soul floated above the aisles and thought only of tomorrow. Tomorrow was something to look forward to." (Stuart 01). The scene demonstrates Shuggie's alienation and his state of anxiety. He seemed to be torn between liberty and life. He is shown by Stuart as a psychologically affected, unhappy, and alienated child. Furthermore, he encounters alienation on many occasions during the story. He alienates himself from class fellows his age at school because of gay demeanor. He is disinterested in girls and has no schoolmates. He is also a friendless boy and depressed at his mother's alcoholism. He faced difficulties socializing with boys his age at school as a result of this persistent state of anxiety and despair. At school, he keeps his distance from his classmates, falls victim to their oppression, and becomes alienated himself from them, as Stuart reveals, "The boys who arrived early to play football in the concrete playground were the same ones who made rings around him and shoved him when they got bored. Shuggie found her blue biro and went through his homework jotters like a bookkeeper, adding her name in a flourish, Mrs. Bain." (Stuart 200). It is apparent the way Shuggie becomes the victim of oppression and experiences alienation in the school. Moreover, his classmates dislike him and regularly abuse him since he is a gay boy.

Another moment of alienation is when he alienated himself from other workers at Kilfeathers, where he worked to help his mother financially. Shuggie "fixed his gaze to the middle distance and sat in the corner, not with, but near enough to, the girls from the till." (Stuart 11).

Shuggie's alienation is direct result of his dysfunctional upbringing with a mother who is an alcoholic. According to Lacan, the child experiences alienation at specific points in its development as it comes to terms with the truth that the self it has formed is an illusory self. Shuggie embodies an alienated self in this sense, as he transforms into a gay boy by assuming the image of his mother, Agnes. Shuggie's fate is threatened by his mother; her uncaring behavior instils a sense of alienation in Shuggie, and his fortune is contingent on his mother's self-destructive impulses. Shuggie endures splitting and alienation and lacks a stable self within the domain of mirror stage. Lacan asserts that while the child's alienation experiences are not restricted to the imaginary stage, the child's sense of alienation remains throughout life. Shuggie experiences alienation throughout his childhood and adulthood, and even at the novel's end, when his mother abandons him.

### **3.6. Fragmentation**

The sensations of fragmentation can be explored within the symbolic realm where the child completely transforms into a social being and confronts his fragmented self which is the ultimate legacy of the mirror stage. Shuggie's self-formation journey ended up in fragmentation and inauthenticity within the domain of the symbolic stage. His homosexual demeanor mirrors fragmentation and inauthenticity throughout the narrative. The first chapter of the novel can be considered of Shuggie's experiences of fragmentation, "In the mirror his wet hair was black as coal...He stared and tried to find something masculine to admire in himself: the black curls, the milky skin, the high bones in his cheeks. He caught the reflection of his own eyes in the mirror. it wasn't right. It wasn't how real boys built to be." (Stuart 10). These lines depict Shuggie's fragmented self and also illustrate a lack of authenticity. He confronts the mirror and seeks escape from his fragmented identity which inflicts damage on his physical appearance, he is much weaker than the other boys of his age and looks like an abnormal boy. Through the influence of the personality of Agnes on him in the mirror stage, he lost his masculinity. There is a distinct dichotomy between femininity and masculinity. Shuggie does not adhere to stereotypical notions of masculinity, but rather he intrigued with the feminine manners Agnes and completely transformed into a gay boy. Agnes's parents warned her about Shuggie's feminine manners but she ignored their concerns, and let him play with jewelry and a doll. After years of hearing about Shuggie's queerness from family and friends, Agnes begins to equate her

alcoholism with Shuggie's homosexuality, as both are flaws which can be changed if they make an effort to start anew.

At the core of Shuggie's life, he seems to be struggling desperately to construct his own identity, to sort out who he is? Another example of Shuggie's fragmented identity is apparent in the novel when he was looking for a room on lease he faced questions about his identity, "None of the other landlords had wanted to rent to a fifteen-year-old boy who was pretending to be one day past his sixteenth birthday. The others didn't say it outright, but they had too many questions. They had looked up and down at his best school shirt and polished shoes suspiciously. It's no right, their eyes had said. In the corners of their mouths he could see they thought it was a disgrace for a boy of his age to have no mammy, no people of his own." (Stuart 14). Shuggie experienced fragmentation time and again in the novel as he encountered countless questions regarding his identity. These lines depict that human identity can be constructed within the social structures of society and it plays a crucial role in the formation of an individual's identity. The narrative exposes the unsympathetic treatment of society towards Shuggie, its restrictions and violent face. The people make it clear to him that that he has no right to live among them. Lacan claims that the child experiences fragmentation when exposed to its unstable self. It is called 'split' of personality. In terms of Lacan, Shuggie gets expose to his fragmented self when he defies the social structures of society.

Shuggie's identity is questioned explicitly in the course of the novel. He faced questions about his identity even at school as well as encounters homophobic bullying at the hands of fellows and teachers. His class fellow Francis abuses him. "*For fuck's sake. Stop being such a poofy wee bastard.*" (Stuart 214). The word 'poofy' refers to homosexuality here. Francis further taunts Shuggie, "Do you want to be a girl?" Francis grinned, his arms wide for the crowd. Shuggie shook his head; he only wanted to put his hand to the welt on his face. "Would you rather put on a wee skirt?" (Stuart 214). Shuggie suffered a lot due to his homosexual identity as he becomes the subject of bullying at the hands of his class fellows. The text reveals the split personality of Shuggie as it is revealed by his emotions, actions, and behavior. He does not have a coherent self at all. Furthermore, Shuggie encounters homophobic bullying at the hands of his school teachers. "the teacher gave up yelling encouragement and tired insults instead." (p.12). Stuart unveiled the

inequality of the 1980s Scottish educational institutions. Shuggie becomes the victim of bullying even at the hands of his own teachers, an aged teacher insulted him despite his best efforts when he was playing football. These queer experiences further propelled him into mental distortion and self-destruction when his mother committed suicide at the end of the novel. Shuggie's identity is challenged again and again in the novel which makes it clear that his self remains unstable from the beginning to the end of the novel.

### **Conclusion:**

This research has delved into the complexities of self and identity in Douglas Stuart's works, particularly in his novels *Shuggie Bain*. Through a critical analysis of Stuart's characters and their experiences, this study has uncovered the author's nuanced exploration of identity, gender, sexuality, and the human condition. The findings of this research highlight the significance of literary representations of identity in shaping our understanding of ourselves and others. Stuart's works challenge traditional notions of self-knowledge and external perception, emphasizing the inherent subjectivity of human experience. His characters' struggles with identity, acceptance, and belonging resonate deeply, offering a powerful reflection of the human condition.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships between identity, perception, and subjectivity, offering insights into the ways in which literature can inform and shape our understanding of these complex issues. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of continued exploration and dialogue in this field, highlighting the need for ongoing critical analysis of literary representations of identity and their impact on our understanding of the human experience.

Ultimately, this research underscores the power of literature to illuminate the complexities of human identity and experience, and the importance of engaging with these representations to foster empathy, understanding, and acceptance. Through his works, Douglas Stuart offers a profound exploration of the self, inviting readers to reflect on their own identities and experiences. As this research has shown, Stuart's novels offer a valuable contribution to the literary landscape, one that has the potential to resonate with readers and scholars alike.

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