

"Beauty is Destiny" Beauty made Mad by the Mad World: An Analysis of Juhn Jai-hong's film *Beautiful*

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ABSTRACT

As against the platonic aspect of beauty as a non-accidental element that prompts desire and the human beauty as the signpost to realm beyond desire, the film depicts the life of a beautiful young woman, Eun-young Kim for whom her beauty becomes a curse that the world deprives her of her right to live. The proposed article is a reading of the film which undertakes the notion of beauty as objective as against the Kantian notion of subjectivity in the judgement of the beautiful. Moreover it is an attempt to read the film as a speck of hard reality as against to human appreciation of artistic beauty and the film maker's endeavour to depict the real human world.

Beauty is an important part of our lives. Ugliness also is not away. It is no surprise then that philosophers since olden days have been interested in our experience of and judgments about beauty and ugliness. They have tried to understand the nature of these experience and judgments, and they have also wanted to know whether these experience and judgments were legitimate. Kant makes various points about pleasure in the beautiful, which fall short of what we might call his "deep" account of the nature of pleasure in beauty, according to which it is the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding. According to Kant's "surface" account of pleasure in beauty; it is not mere sensuous gratification, as in the pleasure of sensation, or of eating and drinking. Unlike such pleasures, pleasure in beauty is occasioned by the perceptual representation of a thing. These days, we might feel more comfortable putting this by saying that pleasure in beauty has an intentional content. Moreover, unlike other sorts of intentional pleasures, pleasure in beauty is "disinterested". This means, very roughly, that it is a pleasure that does not involve desire — pleasure in beauty is desire-free. That is, the pleasure is neither based on desire nor does it produce one by itself. In this respect, pleasure in beauty is unlike pleasure in the agreeable, unlike pleasure in what is good for me, and unlike pleasure in what is morally good. According to Kant, all such pleasures are "interested" — they are bound up with desire. It may be that we have desires concerning beautiful things, but so long as those desires are not intrinsic to the pleasure in beauty, the doctrine that all pleasure is disinterested is undisturbed.

Juhn Jai-hong's film *Beautiful* depicts a horrible experience of a woman of a particular grace and charm undone by disgrace. It is a screen unleashing of the ugliness of the world mostly of the male gaze on the female body. The beautiful female body is viewed just an object that arises sexual desires in the male. It is accused of molesting the male of his 'virginity'. It is never the Eros between a man and a woman that makes one lovesick in the film but away from the classical definition of passionate love it is burning lust that desires the beautiful love object. Eun-Young is a young woman who finds her beauty to be a curse, drawing unwanted attention from all kinds of men

and making other women jealous. Nevertheless, she leads a relatively content life until she is raped by one of her stalkers, Seong-min, who then blames Eun-yeong for the incident, saying, "I did it because you're so beautiful" (Juhn Jai-hong). Traumatized by the rape, Eun-yeong tries to destroy her beauty, first by attempting to become obese, and when that fails by making herself unattractively thin. When her beauty does start to fade, she becomes alarmed and tries to regain it by wearing gaudy make up and revealing clothes, her behaviour increasingly destructive and unstable. A policeman, Eun-cheol, watches her downfall with pity and sympathy, but eventually he too submits to his lustful desires.

The film focuses on the darkest parts of humans that are ugly. So ugly that it makes the beautiful also ugly. It pictures the claustrophobic modern world removed far away from the classical and medieval notion of beauty and thus creates a world that is an enemy of beauty in the realm of sexual desire. Kim's world negates the platonic idea that 'beauty is not just an invitation to desire, but also a call to renounce it'.

As against the platonic aspect of beauty as a non-accidental element that prompts desire and the human beauty as the signpost to realm beyond desire, the film depicts the life of a beautiful young woman, Eun-young Kim for whom her beauty becomes a curse that the world deprives her of her right to live. The film undertakes the notion of beauty as objective as against the Kantian notion of subjectivity in the judgement of the beautiful. The film is a speck of hard reality as against to human appreciation of artistic beauty and the film maker's endeavour to depict the real human world. Miss Kim caught up in a world where all men charmed by her beauty want to make love with her. She is caught up in a claustrophobic world where she finds no place to live a life of her choice. Every moment she is found being followed. Hidden camera's capture her moments. Her female friends grow jealous of her when they find their men follow her. Miss Kim is presented as a woman of innate goodness and with a sense of dignity that she wants to live her life. The moment she is out, she falls victim to unwanted gaze and had to resist forced sexual advances from unknown men in different places.

The life of Miss Kim changes, in other words, her beauty starts disappearing when an unknown man enters her home and rapes her. This traumatizes her life thereafter. The situation is even more poignant when the matter is taken up by the police. Even the police blame her for being so beautiful and tempting men. The assaulter Seong-min also blames her for being terribly beautiful and thus drawing him towards her to lose his virginity. He blames her "You have ruined my life. I am not a rapist. You are. It is your beauty that has raped me" (Juhn Jai-hong). The suffering of the rape victim is so terrible that she finds everything lost and shamed all the more with questioning of the police officer. The junior seems to show initially sympathy for her. Later he also succumbs to his lust. However it is in this character that the director leaves some hope for humanity that he wishes to marry her and waits for her consent.

This trauma makes her mad that she remembers a fat lady's words that "beauty is destiny" and decides to turn ugly by putting on weight (Juhn Jai-hong). When the attempt to become fat fails she tries to become skinny. Towards the end when she feels that she is no more beautiful turns mad. She dresses up and puts on makeup to look erotic but nobody even looks at her. But the rapist remains a fear factor for her that she mistakes every man that she sees is her torturer. Thus kills everyman that comes on her way finally when gone hysterical was shot by the cops. The closing of the film is even more frightening that beauty is found tempting even as a dead body that is awaiting autopsy.

According to Laura Mulvey, "The cinema offers a number of pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at" (8). But here the cinema does not make the viewers scopophilic. Here the world within the cinema is scopophilic that is threatening and claustrophobic. When the conventional cinema satisfies, in the words of Mulvey, a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, *Beautiful* pictures the voyeuristic world that makes the viewer feel ashamed of and sorry for the victim. The men here are exemplary of the symbolic order and the law, the dominant male possessing money and power. The power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned on woman as the object of both. The film appears to question the male dominant order through the image of woman as a passive material for the gaze and lust of man.

Beauty is often considered divine and attributed as truth too. Like the saintly dictum 'Sathyam , Shivam, Sundaram'. Plato also considers human beauty "as the signpost to the realm beyond desire" (Scruton 48). This idea of beauty coincides with the religious thought of beauty and virginity. The Renaissance paintings of Virgin Mary very well corroborate the divinity of beauty, youthfulness, sexual maturity; suggesting beauty as integral to mature sexual sentiment. In the words of Scruton ,

There are no greater tributes to human beauty than the medieval and renaissance images of the Holy Virgin: a woman whose sexual maturity is expressed in motherhood and who yet remains untouchable, barely distinguishable, as an object

of veneration, from the child in her arms. Mary has never been subdued by her body as others are, and stands as a symbol of an idealized love between embodied people, a love which is both human and divine. The Virgin's beauty is a symbol of purity, and for this very reason is held apart from the realm of sexual appetite, in a world of its own" (45).

This thought demonstrates Plato's idea of beauty as also a call to renounce desire away from it as an invitation to desire. Scruton, in his book *Beauty*, also finds beauty as a non-accidental feature that prompts desire; inherently bound by prohibitions. "Indeed, by pressing up against these prohibitions, the experience of human beauty opens to our vision another realm- divine but no less human- in which beauty lies above and beyond desire, a symbol of redemption" (Scruton 46). This idea is well illustrated in the paintings of illustrious artists like Fra Lippo Lippi and Fra Angelico. But when beauty considered only as an object of desire it makes its divinity which seeks reverence, dishonoured. The body that holds beauty be it of a small child or a woman when contacted with lust, which hardly reserves any respect for the entity of beauty, turns demoralized. This is transgression and results in violation of basic human rights. The film *Beautiful* tours us through a world which transgresses the limits, men's desires for beauty snatches away a young beautiful woman's right to live. The malevolent gaze not only mutilates her body but also breaks her very spirit to live. Thus turning her into a 'mad, hysterical, murderer'. This occurrence further seeks to emphasize that desire should be inherently bound by prohibitions.

Beautiful presents a small world that is claustrophobic, where the woman is nowhere allowed to be on her own. Lustful gaze of men around pierce her body, mind and soul. Nevertheless she finds herself alone and helpless that every woman she meets is jealous of her and cursing her. The beautiful woman, Miss Kim is constantly dehumanized and reduced to objects to be groped, annoyed, taunted and evaluated. In the film unlike most films, advertisements and some other works, the woman is not portrayed as an object but with a sharp sense of censure depicts the world that finds the beautiful as an eye-catching object that makes them libidinous. It's not admiration that is found in the men there but mere objectification of the female body. The film also shows a victim-blaming mentality that makes the victim as sinning against being sinned. Here it is not again the clothing or life style of the woman that arouses the men's libido but the very thought of the woman being extremely beautiful.

In her semi-autobiographical essay "The Female Body", Margaret Atwood metaphorically writes of her body that ironically refers to process objectification of the female body. She says,

The Female Body is made of transparent plastic and lights up when you plug it in. You press a button to illuminate the different systems. The Circulatory System is red, for the heart and arteries, purple for the veins; the Digestive System is blue; the Lymphatic System is yellow; the Digestive system is green, with liver and kidneys in aqua. The nerves are done in

orange and the brain is pink. The skeleton, as you might expect, is white. (491)

This description of the female is predominant with sexual metaphor. All the major parts of the body are colour coded except the reproductive system, which is "optional". This refers to the sexual objectification of the female body in a society of men where they consider a woman's reproductive system "optional". It is man's preference and thus considers the woman's reproductive powers as a potential nuisance. In the movie *Beautiful*, the assaulter blames the assaulted woman as that she has ruined his life. And he is not a rapist but she. It is her beauty that has raped him. By putting the blame on her he steals away. This shows the fear of the man of the embryo in her body that might become his responsibility. As Atwood suggests, the inherent beauty and the unspoken sexuality of the female body is rather considered offensive. Eventually, even the women in the film are found hating Miss Kim, for the charm of her body.

After her rape, Kim is severely found hating her body and trying mutilating it. This gesture coincides with Atwood's concept of "parental judgement" of the girl's body. Atwood presents the parental judgement in the form of a conversation between a father and a mother.

Parental judgement can thereby be exercised. We do not wish to frighten or offend. He said, I won't have one of those things in the house. It gives a young girl a false notion of beauty, not to beauty, not to mention anatomy. If a real woman was built like that she'd fall on her face. She said, If we don't let her have one like all other girls she'll feel singled out. It'll become an issue. She'll long for one and she'll long to turn into one. Repression breeds sublimation. (491)

It's the Barbie doll that the parents are referring to. At the end of the conversation the young girl as irritated at the filial, which is rather social compulsion, mutilates and defiles the doll.

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This shows Atwood's rejection of society's assumed ideal female body and her disgust of the idea of making one to think of one's body as a stigma. In the movie, *Beautiful*, Miss. Kim tries to mutilate and defile her body at the compulsion of the brutal society.

Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure Narrative Cinema" writes of the male gaze and of the female body in Hollywood cinema where women's bodies are portrayed as sexualized objects and as problems to surmount and finally as people not to interact with. She refers to the act of showing women's body parts instead of the whole body in order to project them as sensual objects meant for male gaze. Unlike this Juhn Jai-hong's film *Beautiful* shows the world with in that creates the object for gaze. The film director does not present the female protagonist as a sexualized object. The young woman is just presented as a beautiful human being that has virtues and values of her own. It's the world around her that fixes her as a beautiful object meant for men's sexual gratification. Even her lifeless body is not spared from being 'mutilated' by the greed of the male libido. In the film, the world around mutilates both her soul and body. The film comes to a closure in the autopsy room where Kim's body is kept ready for the medical autopsy but it ends with the doctors' necrophilia and leaves the audience arrested in panic. Unlike the mainstream narrative cinema that Mulvey criticizes in her essay about classical Hollywood narrative, Juhn Jai-hong's *Beautiful* breaks the "... conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world that unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience... conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world (835-36)." As Jae-heung has termed it, *Beautiful* is a 'dark fairytale for grownups deeply rooted in reality'.