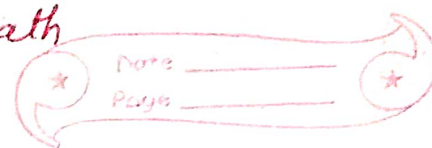


M.A. (Eng)
3rd Sem
Paper - C.C-10

Mirror : Critical
& Analysis
Sylvia Plath



The poem entitled "Mirror" is an unforgettable poem written by Sylvia Plath in 1961. It is an emotional poem, successfully personified and narrated through a mirror's point of view. Sylvia Plath was an American literature figure that wrote poems, novels and several short stories. During her life time, it was always noted that she was chronically gerontophobic, which is the fear of growing old. As a teenager, she wrote in her journal :

"Somehow I have to keep and hold the rapture of being seventeen. Everyday is so precious. I feel infinitely sad at the thought of all this time melting farther and farther away from me as I grow older."

This poem is all about appearances and the search for the self. The fact that the mirror is the voice and has the starring role is a little odd, but Plath wanted to show just how powerful an object the mirror is in people's lives. In particular, she wanted to highlight the issue that some females have with their images, and the inner turmoil that can be caused as the aging process picks up its pace. The poet's own struggle for a stable identity only adds to the idea that the face in the mirror must stay young, pretty and perfect.

'Mirror' is written in two stanzas of nine lines each. The theme of the poem

is that of truth and its effects. In the very first stanza, the mirror is represented as a truthful object. It is such an object which does not pre-decide any notion for any one but reflects the truth which comes before it. So, it claims itself as insensitive or unmoved by love or dislike. The mirror continues to speak of the monotony of its existence as it sits facing the opposite wall "pink with spectacles". The mirror says that it is silver in colour and is exact. It is precise and reflects everything as it is. It compares itself to God's eye which sees equally in all the four directions and treats all things alike. Further, the mirror says that it has been looking at the opposite wall over such a period of time that it seems to the mirror that the wall is a part of it.

Further in the second stanza, the mirror compares itself to a lake. As a woman looks at herself in a lake to ascertain her physical appearance and beauty, in the similar way, the mirror shows her exact appearance - any spots, marks or signs of ageing. Plath says that the moon and the candle, which praise a woman's beauty, are liars because they overlook these minute flaws. The mirror is true and shows her the reality which is bitter for her. In return for its truthfulness, the mirror gets tears and hatred in return from the woman. In the concluding lines, Plath hints towards the transitory nature of beauty. With the passing day, a woman

is getting older and the signs of aging are becoming prominent on her face. Her future appearance of an old, ugly woman gets closer to her and it seems to be there in the mirror because one day when she will look at herself in the mirror, she will see her transformed old face rather than a beautiful young face.

Thus, Sylvia Plath has beautifully presented the transitory nature of beauty through the truthful nature of mirror. In the poem, the speaker is not a person but mirror is personified. Candles and the moon are also personified to give them human qualities like ability to lie. Plath has freely used metaphors to express her view in this poem. The words, 'swallow', 'see' and 'look' are used as metaphors for reflecting and personifies the mirror. Another use of personification and metaphor is in the sentence 'now I am a lake'. The mirror compares itself to a lake. So far as the sentences are concerned, it is small, but of grave meaning. The words are chosen very appropriately. The words like 'terrible fish', 'unmistaken by love or dislike' increase the beauty of the poem.