

Mirror
by Sylvia Plath
P.G. Semester 3
CC – 10
Unit IV

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Introduction to "Mirror"

Sylvia Plath's "Mirror," written in 1961 and published posthumously in her collection **Crossing the Water** in 1971, is a haunting exploration of self-perception, aging, and the relentless passage of time. In the poem, a personified mirror—or rather, an inanimate one—speaks of telling the truth through reflection without self-involvement or emotion. This unusual speaker offers a unique lens for the author, Sylvia Plath, to explore how it feels when one sees her own self-changing face, defining her identity and what was expected of her by society. Often read as confessional poetry, it captures the quiet despair of losing youth, with the mirror serving as both a literal and metaphorical tool for self-scrutiny.

Text of the Poem

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see, I swallow immediately

As it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

I am not cruel, only truthful—

The eye of the little god is four-cornered.

Most of the time, I meditate on the opposite wall.

It's pink, with speckles. I've looked at it so long

I think that it is part of my heart, but it flickers.

Faces and darkness separate us over and over again.

Now I am a lake. She has always been poor.

I see her back, and reflect it truly.

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

I am important to her. She comes and goes.

Each morning, it is her face that replaces the darkness.

In me she has drowned a young girl, in me the old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Summary

It is a two-stanza poem, with each stanza demonstrating a different form of the mirror. The mirror in the first stanza is a truthful, emotionless reflector that passes its days gazing into a pink-speckled wall it has grown very accustomed to. The faces and night momentarily break this monotony, but the mirror remains unmoved.

The second stanza changes the scene: The mirror is now "a lake," over which a woman—presumably the mirror's long-time owner—bends each morning to peer at her reflection. A "poor" woman, either spiritually or materially, reacts to what she sees: her youthful self drowning and the emergence of an aging figure, rising monstrously like "a terrible fish." The poem ends with this visceral image that underscores the ritualistic confrontation with time's erosion that the woman concerned has been going through.

Form and Structure

"Mirror" is a free-verse poem divided into two symmetrical stanzas of nine lines each, reflecting the reflective theme—actually splitting the poem like a reflective surface. There is no fixed rhythm or meter to this poem; the stark, conversational quality of the poem matches the unflinching honesty of the mirror. The enjambment creates a fluid, almost watery flow,

particularly evident in the second stanza, reminiscent of the lake's profundity. Plath demonstrates her use of short, declarative sentences in the first stanza, mostly to establish a clinical detachment, while the longer lines in the second introduce emotional turbulence.

The structure also symbolizes duality: the wall-to-face shift in stanza one parallels the mirror-to-lake transformation in stanza two, reflecting the progression from passive observation to active confrontation with the self.

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