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Sylvia Plath's Personal Afflictions in "Mirror"

Sylvia Plath's personal life and experiences profoundly impacted her views as a poet. Her constant and unrelenting battles with depression greatly shaped her outlook on the world. Unlike most poets who tend to separate their personal emotions from their poetry when there is an alternative speaker, most of Plath's work was deeply ingrained with her harsh yet ingenious perspectives. In "Mirror," she intended for her voice to resonate from the mirror, as the mirror itself is the speaker in the poem. Her use of personification to bring life to the mirror creates a unique frame of mind in which you look through the mirror's eye unto the subject of mirror's reflection. The symbolism in "Mirror" highlights her intimate relations with self-image. Her somber past is revealed within the poem using dark imagery that sheds an ominous veil over the tone of her poem. Plath's feelings and emotions encompass her personal viewpoints in her inner self-hate poem, in which she pulls back the glamour to reveal the truth within her reflection.

The poem begins in what seems to be an almost omniscient voice as the speaker of the poem, the mirror, says "I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions." This shows that the mirror is set apart from human emotion and doesn't let these emotions color its unbiased viewpoints. The mirror doesn't have a personality in which to favor or disregard the person eventually standing in the frame of the mirror. It does

have, however, a distinct and singular reflection that it imparts on the viewer within the frame. These lines are also supported with the line "I am not cruel, only truthful." The pain the mirror causes to Plath, the person in the mirror, isn't intentional, as the mirror is impartial to its subject, and the person within the mirror only feels the trouble they themselves cause as a result of looking into the mirror. Plath wants to reject

Before a person enters the frame, though, the mirror only sees the plain background of the "pink speckled" wall. The mirror is used to the nothingness in its reflection. Because the reflection is never disturbed by movement, this means Plath never enters the picture. The mirror doesn't see her because she doesn't want to see it. This shows that Plath almost seems to be afraid of her reflection. This also works with the idea that Plath has certain thoughts and she does not want to face the reality of them. Despite this, in her mind, she has already come to a conclusion. She fears her inner demons; the ones she lies about. In the end, nevertheless, she still commits suicide, her inner demons winning. The disturbances that happen in the mirror indicate that once in a while, Plath braves the reflection to catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Alternatively, this represents her acknowledgment of her heinous thoughts and self-reprimands. The last line of the first stanza states "Faces and darkness separate us over and over". The changes portray Plath returning again and again to the mirror to seek some form of accreditation.

Plath's symbolism within the poem can all resort back to the overall theme of self-deprecation and the unrelenting honesty that the mirror shows to its reflected subject. Her use of words like "swallow" in the first stanza lead readers to perceive a sense of being overwhelmed. The mirror swallows the image of everything it sees,

making the person looking at the mirror, Plath, to feel enveloped and consumed in her own reflection. Likewise, it can be seen that Plath greatly respects the truth, but at the same time feels as though it is betraying her. She recognizes its power even when used against her. Along with the impersonal viewpoint expressed earlier with this line, it also shows Plath values honesty; "I am not cruel, only truthful". Even when later on she tries hiding behind the false lighting that alters the image within the mirror, she endorses the fundamentals of candor. It can be found in the third line of the second stanza that "Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon. The artificial lighting cast a blurred luminescence that obscures the imperfections of the original image.

Hints at Plath's past are woven into her poem in subliminal references. For example, Plath uses key words such as her phrase, "tears and an agitation of hands". This has dreary undertones that convey her dismal childhood and young adult life. Seeing herself in her reflection can be an indication as to Plath questioning her self-worth. If it is taken in the literal sense, it shows that she is so upset that her reflection shows she is crying and wringing her hands in despair. An in depth look at this line reveals that it's actually a glimpse at the inner-turmoil happening in her head. Plath also compares the woman in the poem with a fish. This displays how unwanted things show up unexpectedly at the most inconvenient of times.

Plath uses a lake as another form of symbolism to reference another reflection. The mirror transforms into a lake, maintaining the subject's image. The woman in the poem "bends over and searches" the lake. The lake relays Plath's reflection as she delves deeper and deeper into her reflection, hopelessly trying to find herself within its murky expanse. The lake is "rewarded with a tear", meaning that the reflection has the

power to evoke such strong emotion from Plath, while only dutifully displaying the image of herself. The imagery of the scene at the lake is eerily reminiscent of the Greek myth regarding the human Narcissus who was so captivated by his reflection that he wastes away. Plath's obsession for approval is exhibited through her compulsory habit to return to the mirror. This is much like the story of Narcissus and it could also be used as an example of foreshadowing in Plath's life, as she wrote this poem only two years prior to her suicide. The eighth line of the second stanza promotes this claim by stating, "In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman." While this could be taken literally, the thought behind it is that the woman wasted away her youth by concerning herself with her looks and exterior appeal.

As well as her use of symbolism within the poem, Plath uses a more blatant use of figurative language: personification. As the speaker of the poem, the mirror gives a meticulous impersonal standpoint on what Plath's emotional state would look like to outsiders instead of the twisted illusion created in Plath's mind. Although the mirror is the speaker of the poem, it's as if Plath is trying to blemish the honest view of the mirror. By doing this, Plath makes the women in the poem look desperate and in a state of distressed frenzy. This is much like Plath, who is trying to push her own disturbing views onto the mirror.

Using a compelling usage of figurative language such as the imagery, symbolism, and personification, Sylvia Plath creates a vivid and ethically controversial poem. *Mirror* brings into question the depravity of Plath's mental state. At the same time it focuses on the overall view society has about self-image. The difference being that Plath was a 20th century writer, who in this sense was way ahead of her time period.

Mirror is very prevalent piece of literature in this day and age. Even though Plath's life was notable for her depression and staggering suicide attempts, her literature is a perfect example of a mostly sane state of mind while writing. While her poetry is contingent on her mind set, you can see that closer to her death, the poems themselves grew darker in tone. While Plath might have never overcome her obsession with the truth of self-image, she did attempt to circumvent the ideology of it, even if it was a losing battle.