**Sylvia Plath, “Mirror”**

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.

Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike

I am not cruel, only truthful –

The eye of a little god, four-cornered.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.

It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long

I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.

Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me.

Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.

I see her back, and reflect it faithfully

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, and in me an old woman

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

“Whatever I see, I swallow immediately. / Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike / I am not cruel, only truthful”. In Sylvia Plath’s “Mirror”, the inanimate object is personified and comments on the life of a woman, from childhood to old age. Speaking on the nature of self-image, “Mirror” highlights the effects of societal obsession with perfection and the inability to accept the reflection. Through literary devices such as imagery and personification, Plath constructs her poem to provide a somber tone, as the mirror recognizes a level of discontent in those who look into it.

Throughout “Mirror”, Plath aims to explain that the nature of woman and self must be examined in its purest and unfiltered form. The mirror that Plath personifies explains that it is not cruel, it only aims to show the truth to those who look into it. “The eye of a little god, four-cornered” is used by the mirror to describe itself. The use of ‘god’ provides the appropriate amount of weight to Plath’s message. God, being an all knowing entity and making woman in her image, is assigned to the mirror as it understands and can show all; from soul to physical appearance. The raw image displayed by the mirror has no preconceptions, it does not see then alter but rather sees and enhances for the purpose of personal perception.

The poem speaks to the unawareness of one’s soul. While the mirror is a small item hanging on a familiar wall, it is also a grand body of water, home to life, ripples, stillness, and reflection. The image that is echoed back to the viewer is unaltered – whether they are prepared to see the results or not, the reflection hosts all of the answers to the question of what it means to be them. However, Plath raises the point that no matter how many times the image in the mirror is viewed, the answer is never fully satisfactory. Lines 15-17 read, “I am important to her. / She comes and goes. / Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness”. The woman may see the truth every morning and place value on the answers she receives, but as long as she remains dissatisfied, her soul will never accept itself. She will remain aloof to the wholeness of her being because she feels there is more to alter or discard; so, she will continue to look in the mirror, hoping and pleading for the mirror to fail its purpose.

Plath concludes the poem with the effect that the mirror has had on the woman, writing, “In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish” (18-19). Plath includes this line to speak on the distress seen when the mirror has been used day after day, but not for the purpose it wishes to impart. The mirror understands that the truth can be freeing and aid those who desire to become familiar with their own qualities. However, the use of the word ‘drown’ and ‘terrible fish’ indicate that although this woman looks in the mirror frequently, her results are the same. She is trying to suppress her true being with her discontent. She has pushed away the young girl whose questions of identity and self-worth could have been answered and has emerged as an old woman with layers of lies and partial truths covering the mirror, so she cannot see what it aims to show.

The personification of the mirror is the main literary device employed by Path that secures her message. Lines 7-8 read, “It is pink, with speckles. / I have looked at it so long / I think it is a part of my heart,”. The mirror is given distinctly living qualities such as the ability to look and feel. This allows the audience to develop a connection with the mirror, understanding it as though they are understanding themselves. The line continues to read, “But it flickers. Faces and darkness separate us over and over,”. The mirror has seemingly formed a connection with this wall, just as the faces who look into it have formed a connection with the object. The mirror serves the purpose of candor, it will never tell a lie to those who approach it and it will never exaggerate for the purpose of spared feelings. The pink speckled wall offers moments of solitude to the mirror, as its existence is filled with the disappointment of others.

Having made a connection to the mirror, the personification continues in the second stanza with the line, “She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands” (14). There are two contrasting connotations in this line with the words ‘rewards’ and ‘agitation’. The mirror is fulfilling its duty, the woman has asked and she has received, yet she is still dissatisfied with her response. The mirror doesn’t seem to have any quarrels about this, though. It is still important to the woman, and that is an accomplishment to the mirror. While the woman continues to return and cry into the lake, the reflection is offering understanding and patience. The reflection refuses to go anywhere and knows that it will always be visited. All the mirror can do is continue to offer the truth, which Plath demonstrates is the most important gift. Without the truth, the woman’s life will be ruled by “those liars, the candles or the moon,” (12).

The personification and word choice in “Mirror” is used to reach a broad audience, as it is not an uncommon, individual feeling to be lost and unaware of one’s true being. Although the mirror is not actually living, the message that it exudes is best understood when thought about like an entity of its own. Personifying the mirror allows the readers to better understand its intent, which is the discovery and acceptance of the whole self, soul and looks. Looking into a mirror, these questions arise naturally. However, by giving the mirror human qualities and articulations, the reader is able to better understand the struggle of affirmation within oneself and transform their abstract feelings into words. The struggle of the woman who is looking into the mirror and drowning her true self offers commentary on the nature of society to see and ignore, rather than embrace. The mirror will always be there, and as it exists, it will always have visitors; the mirror’s explanation that it works only to tell the truth and not disfigure serves the purpose of telling the audience that discontent can still be present, but acceptance of the truth is the ultimate strength.