

Sylvia Plath, 'Roe
Deer', 'Mirror' and
'Blackberrying'



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In this essay my aim is to compare the three poems 'Blackberrying' and 'Mirror' by Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes' 'Roe Deer'. I will mainly be focusing on the poets' use of language and imagery in the poems. In addition to this I will discuss how they transform the ordinary into quite magical objects and surroundings. The first thing that stands out from all the poems is the fact that none of the three use any rhyme scheme, I think that this is because a rhyme scheme would ruin the effect of the poems. A regular rhyme scheme would alter the pace of the poems, as these are very deep and reflective poems.

In Ted Hughes' 'Roe Deer' the stanzas are much shorter and are irregular. In 'Roe Deer' Hughes leaves one line on its own, separate from the other stanzas; 'The Deer had come for me'- I think Hughes leaves this line separately because it is a turning point in the poem, he is so absorbed into the vision of the deer that he thinks he is about to enter their world, he wants to believe that he is the chosen one and the deer have come to take him away. Yet this dream is destroyed straight afterwards as 'Then they ducked through their hedge, and upright they rode their legs away from him'. Each of the poems has a somewhat magical feel to them.

In 'Mirror', the poem has quite a magical feel to it, as the mirror is personified, and this makes the mirror seem alive. In 'Roe Deer' Hughes produced a magical affect to his poem in many different ways; the first obvious line to select is 'They had happened into my dimension'- I is as if there are two parallel dimensions and the deer are in the natural dimension and he is in the human dimension. In 'Roe Deer' it is as if he can't fully understand and be part of the animal kingdom, though he would like to be.

Another line giving the effect of another world is: 'And there where the trees were no longer trees, nor the road a road'. This line can be interpreted in two different ways. You realise that the snow is so deep that the trees and road can hardly be distinguished at all.

But when you look deeper into the line you can see that perhaps in the few seconds that he looks into their dimension the animals' perception of the world is different to the human one- they see things differently to the way that we see them, and he briefly sees that. Hughes continues: 'Towards tree dark- finally seeming to eddy and glide and fly away up'; here there is an unusual syntax, it seems as if the deer are flying; because they are throwing up lots of snow powder, the man cannot see their legs- giving the impression that they are gliding through the air, even flying through the air. This creates a magical illusion. Another illusion described in the poem is the way in which the deer's footprints are covered up by the falling snow, 'The snow took them and soon their nearby hoof prints as well'. The snow covers up their footprints, making it seem as if they were never there and just a figment of his imagination. In 'Roe Deer' Hughes refers to 'the dawn dirty light'.

The use of similes is quite varied, for instance in 'Roe Deer' the use of similes and metaphors is relatively sparse; 'Seeming to eddy and glide and fly away up'- it is as if the deer get whipped up into the swirling snow. I think the sparse use of similes and metaphors is because Hughes realises that the deer already have such and overpowering magical presence that there is no use in comparing the deer to anything else, but only describing them as they are. In 'Roe Deer' where the figure in the poems desperately wants to be a part of the deer's world, even though he knows he cannot be. In 'Mirror'

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Plath writes 'in me she has drowned a young girl'; it is as if the young woman has already slowly entered the depths of the world of the mirror and is swallowed up by it, leaving the old woman behind- yet in the case of the woman this was something she didn't have any choice over; she has become a slave to the mirror, as she becomes increasingly distraught at the way in which it reflects her gradual aging. In 'Mirror' we come across the metaphor: 'then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon'.

Here we see Plath describe the woman as she turns her reflection from the mirror to 'those liars' the candles or the moon, the candle light and moonlight conceal her age and her flaws because they are flattering. Earlier in the poem the mirror describes itself as being truthful- 'I am not cruel, only truthful'; the woman wants to escape from the harsh reality that she faces daily to the softer candlelight and moonlight. The use of light in 'Mirror' can be compared to the use of light in 'Blackberrying', but ironically the use of light in 'Mirror' is used to create a rather sad yet truthful reality. The imagery in the three poems focuses on nature, not so much in 'Mirror', but the mirror is still metaphorically described as being a lake. The atmosphere in 'Mirror' is quite a strange one, as it revolves around the mirror's perception of the outside world- which consists of the wall in front of it and the woman who stares at her reflection in the mirror.

The mirror is quite an arrogant character; 'I am important to her'- this raises the issue that society judges women on the basis of being youthful and attractive, the mirror's arrogance is quite ironic because although the mirror believes itself to be important to the woman, it is in fact the other way around. It is the woman that is important to the mirror, because without her

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the mirror has no other function or purpose. I think that mirror tells the sad tale of aging, and as the woman sees herself physically deteriorate more and more each day, she becomes emotionally more and more depressed. In 'Roe Deer' the mood of the poem has a more enchanting mood and atmosphere because of the dreamy snow covered landscape. When I read the poem it opened me up to my own experiences of loneliness and isolation, but in 'Mirror' I didn't or couldn't fully relate to it, as it told the story of an aging woman trying to struggle with the reality that she faced, and I am a teenage boy. In 'Roe Deer', the man begins to become enchanted with the natural world of the deer; In 'Mirror' begins to open up to the reality of the passing of time.