

An analysis of "mirror" by sylvia plath



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Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" explores the impact of time on individuals, specifically within the realities of aging and losing beauty; here, Plath speaks from an implied autobiographical perspective. As readers, we know that much of Plath's oeuvre of poetry focuses on her lost youth and her gradual lack of beauty as she ages. Plath uses personification of the inanimate mirror to highlight how it is not the mirror that is problematic; it is her own reflection. The mirror is simply "not cruel, only truthful," thus simply serving as an honest perception of her beauty. The use of the verb "cruel" displays how time can play tricks on people and make them feel undermined by their own reflections. Similarly, Plath's poem "Facelift" also delves into the idea of her hating her inner and younger self.

Plath uses the theme of time within "Mirror" to investigate how everyone wastes time, in some form. She explores the idea of regret throughout time, pondering how she once spent her youth worrying about her aesthetic beauty and how she looked to others for validation. She looks in the mirror to search its "reaches for what she really is"; the use of this metaphor distinctively displays how Plath is confused about who she has become and how she has somehow managed to lose so much time. The use of the adverb "really" shows that Plath isn't sure as to the person she ever was, physically or emotionally; she feels deceived by the way she once lived her life. Similarly, in "The Manor Garden," Plath regrets ever becoming pregnant; this revelation brings to light that Plath has rarely ever been proud or liberated by the way she has lived her life, and instead is constantly ashamed of herself and regrets the way in which she led her existence.

Moreover, Plath explores how people can feel and become powerless, another major topic of her compositions. This theme of powerlessness is exhibited throughout "Mirror" to show how external forces can truly make people feel as though they have lost all control within their lives. The mirror is explained as "the eye of a little god," as personification is used to display the vast power it holds over people. Plath uses the noun "god" to show not only how powerful the mirror is, but how frightening it can be; she personifies the mirror to exhibit how she feels that she is losing the power of controlling time, almost as though she is losing a battle against a thinking, living adversary. Similarly, in "A Sonnet To Time," the watch is personified in order to display how inanimate objects have a strong force over people. Plath seems to be consumed with worry and anxiety about her loss of beauty; however, the theme of time is also used to represent the loss of herself and of the person she once knew. Within "Mirror," the woman is observing not only her appearance, but also something much deeper; the woman is observing her mind and her soul. After being exposed to her true self, she rewards the lake "with tears and an agitation of hands." Thus, she displays how aware she is of the distinction between both her exterior and interior lives. The use of the noun "agitation" highlights only how exhausted she is from meditating over her essentially false outer self of appearance, as opposed to her true inner self.

Another way in which time is represented throughout "Mirror" is through the idea of dependency on observing her attrition of beauty and life. When the woman is not around and the mirror has nothing but the wall to look at, the world is truthful, objective, factual, and simultaneously "silver and exact."

This facet of the poem displays how, without the woman, there is no corruption; however, when the woman is reflected in the mirror, the world becomes unsettled, complicated, and emotionally vivid. The use of the adjective “ exact” indicates that, although the reflection is becoming a weapon of harm to the woman, the reflection is the unavoidable truth that cannot be eluded. Indeed, the mirror is no longer a boundary to the woman, but is actually a liminal and penetrable space. Similarly, in “ Face Lift,” the autobiographical undertone suggests that Plath has always disliked her appearance and makes the world around her seem disordered, purely due to her lack of self-confidence.

Lastly, Plath uses the idea of nostalgia and reminiscence to explore the theme of time. Evidently, Plath feels nostalgic over the beauty she once held; she highlights how although she now feels the least beautiful she’s ever felt, she has always felt that way, at every stage of her life. As Plath “ turns to those liars, the candles or the moon,” she hopes to seek validity in her once-beautiful appearance. The use of emotive language highlights this desire and exhibits how the nostalgia she feels is forcing her to lie to herself. The use of the noun “ liars” suggests that Plath is aware that she no longer looks as she once did; however, it calms and reassures her to occasionally delude herself into believing in the presence of this vanished image.