Research Paper English Literature

Plath's Mirror is an All-seeing Eye

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ABSTRACT

Sylvia Plath's Mirror stands as an icon of seeing all objects true to its existence. Something whether it is in the form of its any state. In this regard Plath's Mirror takes the role of an omniscient. So my aim of this paper is to decipher the ideas that how it has been able to see all sort of objects with reference to the mirror. Mirror, somehow is an embellished form of personal projection expressing her personal agony. The Mirror has revealed the complete truthfulness of its power of perception which is clearer than the water.

KEYWORDS Mirror. Omniscient. All-seeing eye. Truthfulness .Icon

INTRODUCTION

Like other poem of Plath like Soliloquy of Solipsist, Mirror also starts with the first person "I" which has been twice repeated in the first opening line:

"I am silver and exact.

I have no preconceptions."(Plath, 173)

Here we do find that the mirror defends itself as an object without any thoughts thought by it in advance. It only swallows whatever it sees.

"Whatever I see I swallow immediately."

Only this time, it is not a person. It is silver and an exact object, a Mirror that is in the subject position. Omniscient and omnivorous, the mirror, trapped in its own 'four –cornered' specifically and placement, can merely "swallow", when the light is good, one image before another takes over and then another, ad infinitum. In itself, it is silver and exact. It has no preconception. It registers person and things exactly. It is without any human or anthropocentric preconceptions. Thus it has no identity, self of its own. It merely reflects whatever happens to its line of vision. It may be that, in itself. It can't reflect darkness and images that flicker and change with human faces looking into it.

In the curious, reversal–centered logic of this poem, the Mirror has now appropriated, even arrogated to itself, "human" qualities. It can now "meditate" on the opposite wall. It can "look" so that the opposite wall looked at for so long; can become "a part of my heart". It has now become a faithful servant who sees the impractical, changing woman's "back and reflect it faithfully" but who ironically "rewarded", in turn, by the lady only "with tears and agitation of hands". In its "four-cornered", now "lake-like", silver reaches or depths, the mysterious lady has drowned a young girl, and "in me an old woman /rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish".

In the Mirror we too have the cultural identity with images like reaches, heart and depths. In fact now it has become creative in its own way. Buried in its depths lies an, "old woman" who now "rises forward" always "looking", the mysterious lady "who bends over me" (the Mirror). "Day after day like a terrible fish". Like Tiresias, the blind prophet, the is also capable of seeing everything. The Mirror finds everything not merely reflecting and ever changing seeds of the future. The Mirror perhaps vengefully become the "looking "lady's Nemesis, proleptically , "rising towards her day by day , like a terrible fish", Pisces , forewarning her about old age, aging , probably illness and death, "darkness".

Ironically, the Mirror, which had in the beginning, claimed neutrality saying,

"I am silver and exact.

I have no preconceptions."

It had swallowed immediately, "whatever I see" "just as it is unmisted by a lover or dislike", has by the end, perhaps, misted over, become while yet non –human, a vengeful Nemesis in whose "heart" lies buried the mysterious lady's unflattering and compulsorily painful future, a vengefulness that "rises" day after day, like a terrible fish to meet the unsuspecting lady, who "bends over me". This is the Mirror's unflattering "reward" or "gift" to the lady. William Freedman in his essay entitled "The Monster in Plath's Mirror" evaluates Sylvia Plath's frequent use of the mirror as a symbol of female passivity and subjugation, reflecting Plath's own conflicted self-identity in its difficulty to reconcile the competing obligations of her artistic life in contrast to her domestic life (Freedman, 1993).

The apparently Passive and amenable , but also non-living , Mirror too contains deep within its "four-cornered" , "little-god" position , inhumanity, cruelty as well as truthfulness . This situation gives an ironic twist to its claim, in the beginning, that "I am not cruel, only truthful". By the end, truthfulness not merely to the present but also to the future, still incipient and yet almost imperceptibly present, leads to cruelty, even a menacing violence. The Mirror seems to be suggesting that to be truthful, a realist; in it itself contains possibilities of being both cruel and violent, just as the Mirror here is to be the pathetic lady in this poem. Still, it is better than those "liars" –as the candles or the moon, flickering figures popular with romantic dreamers.

If we go on searching Plath's truthfulness in her Letters Home. We can find that Sylvia presenting her married and poetic life to the latter in the most glowing and flattering terms, disguised the actual fact of the poet's own acute suffering in her last years due to her marriage foundering on the rocks. Her repeated hospitalization and her resorting to drugs to minimize or control pain. If, as Nietzsche has suggested "Everything that is deep loves masks" (Nietsche, 11) somewhat like the Mirror here, Plath has put on a false self, a mask, of bluff heartiness and cheerful hopefulness.

The precise success of Plath in the Mirror exhibits through the positionality ---its specificity, position and situation which is also its trappedness, so that it's putative claim to being "ex-

act" and "only truthful" can be brought, in the evolving context of the poem. To question by the end where it too appears to conceal within it s hidden depths of emotion, and anger. It gives the lie to its assertion in the beginning that it only "swallow(s) immediately" whatever it sees, "Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike". The minatory word "swallow" in the beginning does perhaps foreshadow, give a hint, of what would follow at the end of the poem, the abrupt foregrounding of cruelty and violence there.

But in the concluding part, we do find some common impressions about the Mirror which is supposed to imagine as a mobile, a walking reflector. In the language of Tracy Brain we may call it as the discarded "wonderful lines" (Brain, p, 24).

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, we do find that Sylvia Plath's poetry surfaces of reflecting images from within such as the mirror, the sea, the lake, the window, the eye, the moon, the bell jar, the crystal ball and the polished stones. Indeed, these stand for her desperate search of her own identity and the reality of her inner psyche which are full of past memories of the dead father, appearing like a Colossus or a Nazi or a bee or a black boot from time to time, while the feelings of love-hate between herself and her mother appear like Medusa or the cold Moon. Mirror" is a melancholy. It exemplifies the tensions between inner and outer selves, which perhaps is the most feminine introspection of attaining the age of losing her beauty.

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