Fear in Beauty: Sylvia Plath's Reflections in *Mirror*

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the role of fear and its outcome in the quest for beauty in Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror". Beauty has been defined as the source of power as well as the cause of the annihilation of the entire civilization. Internal beauty has a superior role to external beauty. The persona of the poem has been found engaged in the quest for external beauty even in her old age which is unnatural and worthless. Extreme fear has acted negatively and devastatingly to ruin the life of the persona of the poem. It has led the speaker of the poem hopelessness of life and depersonalized condition which compelled her to commit suicide. The role of fear must be focused on the balance form of fear to maintain and achieve the goal in life. Otherwise, fear's role and its effect tend to be detrimental and destructive to reaching the destination of keeping beauty, peace, and harmony in life. It has been analyzed how fear has acted and affected the life of Sylvia Plath due to extreme fear in beauty's quest in old age.The original lines of the poem have been adopted as the primary data and analyzed with the support of secondary articles and journals produced on the poem. The speaker's fear in the poem "Mirror" has been explored in various forms and such fears have been found to be acting actively in the psyche of the speaker in losing her charming facial appearance of her own youth**.**

Keywords: depersonalized, fear, detrimental, quest, suicide

Introduction

Fear is a primal psychological instinct that exists naturally, distinguishing itself from the fear observed in animals like birds, which express it through instinctual bodily reactions such as flight. While animals exhibit sensory-based fear responses, human fear is more complex and rooted in psychology. As Subba asserts, human life is often shaped and influenced by psychological fear, with the assertion that "life is directed, conducted, and controlled by fear" (Subba, cover page).In human experience, fear is

intricately tied to consciousness and knowledge. Subba posits that fear is a product of awareness and understanding in everyday life, emphasizing that "fear is the outcome of knowledge and consciousness" (Subba, 47). This perspective underscores how fear in humans is shaped by cognitive processes and awareness, unlike the more instinctual fear observed in animals. In summary, Subba's insights highlight the nuanced nature of fear as experienced by humans, linking it closely with cognitive awareness and psychological processes that define human existence.

Fear plays diverse roles in everyday life, influencing various aspects of human experience. According to Russell (1373), fear is primarily responsible for causing errors, while overcoming fear is seen as a pathway to acquiring wisdom. There exists a spectrum of fears encompassing fears of gods, ghosts, sin, superstition, making mistakes, losing health, and losing beauty—an attribute particularly valued by individuals. Sylvia Plath, for instance, grapples with doubts about her personal beauty, seeking validation through different means.

Beauty is regarded as a form of power, manifesting in two dimensions: internal and external. Internal beauty, comprising character, excellence, skills, and knowledge, is crucial for survival and achieving success in life. It enriches the quality of life internally, representing a potent force that enhances one's inner being. Achieving both internal and external beauty is considered rare and signifies a balance between inner and outer qualities (Sontag, 300).In essence, the exploration of fear and beauty in human existence underscores their multifaceted roles and impacts, revealing their complexities as perceived and experienced by individuals in society (Russell, 1373; Sontag, 300).Beauty does not always have positive consequences. Historical figures like Helen of Troy and Padmini illustrate this vividly.

According to Devkota (332-338), Helen's beauty famously sparked the Trojan War, a conflict that lasted a decade and brought catastrophe upon many. Similarly, Padmini, renowned for her beauty among the Rajputs, chose self-immolation rather than face capture by a Muslim king, an act that led to further conflict and fear.The power of beauty, as exemplified by Helen and Padmini, can attract risk, death, danger, and misfortune. Medusa, from ancient mythology, provides another stark example. Bogam (380-381) details how Medusa, once praised as the most beautiful of the three Gorgon sisters, incurred the wrath of Minerva for her arrogance and was transformed into a monstrous creature whose gaze turned others to stone. Even after her death, her terrifying visage continued to wield its deadly power.

The poem "Medusa" poignantly portrays Medusa's transformation from a beautiful maiden to a feared and reviled creature, highlighting how the pursuit and possession of beauty can lead to calamity, destruction, and profound fear (Bogam, 380-381).In

essence, these stories underscore the dual nature of beauty, which can bring admiration and desire but also provoke jealousy, conflict, and tragic consequences. They serve as cautionary tales, urging careful consideration of beauty's allure and its potential pitfalls.

Regarding Halen, "In the Homeric poems, she is the surprisingly beautiful wife of Menelaus, and her abduction by Paris led to the Trojan war(Lohani, 338)". It displayed the disaster of Helen's beauty to draw the Trojan war for 10 years.

Padmini was a beautiful Rajput queen, A Mewar, wife of Ratna Singha. Enchanted by the talks of her beauty, Alladin Ahilji attacked Mewar in order to achieve her. The Rajputs were defeated and Padmini burned herself to death, before falling into the hands of the Muslim king(Lohami, 338). Padmini's beauty became a kind of curse in her life. Her beauty ruined her and she turned out to be the victim of her own charming personality.

The poem "Mirror" by Sylvia Plath has been analyzed through a psychoanalytical lens, revealing it as a metaphorical representation of the speaker's emotional state. In this interpretation, the speaker becomes akin to a mirror, reflecting unfiltered truths about identity and self-perception. In Plath's collection "Ariel," this metaphor extends to suggest that a woman's self-awareness evolves into a complex network of mirrors, initially constructed during infancy. Over time, these mirrors distort idealized memories of the past, presenting a stark portrayal of a woman who is awakened to reality, akin to a modern-day Sleeping Beauty either painfully aware or still dreaming.In Sylvia Plath's earlier story "The Wishing Box," the motif of Sleeping Beauty's transformative slumber is reinterpreted as an eternal awakening, symbolizing irreversibility. According to McCort (148), Plath employed this children's book theme not only as a narrative structure but also as a multifaceted reflection of her own experiences. This approach became integral to her poetic exploration of revisiting childhood memories and understanding their enduring impact on her present life. Plath often framed her personal narrative through the lens of children's literature, using it as a tool to reinterpret her own childhood and to analyze how societal norms and values were ingrained from the stories she cherished (McCort, 156). Her poems reflect a deep introspection into her childhood experiences, framed within the context of these literary influences.

According to McCort (156), Sylvia Plath demonstrates the strong interconnection between the past and present within the female experience. She explores how deeply women's perceptions of themselves are shaped by the stories they were told in childhood. Plath illustrates that the self is viewed as an evolving narrative that can be constantly reexamined and rewritten. Through her identification with children's fiction and poetry, she not only reveals her own identity but also delves into how these literary influences inform and reshape her understanding of herself over time.According to

Freedman (160), Sylvia Plath's personal struggle is encapsulated in the image of the truly terrifying fish, representing a submerged woman who has come to accept her own dehumanization and passivity, seeking solace in the numbness it offers. This imagery implies that the mirror not only reflects the fish but also conceals a monstrous presence beneath its surface. At the same time, Schwartz (72) suggests that this same depiction may also suggest that a superficial image of angelic beauty can itself be monstrous. In essence, the monster lurking in the depths symbolizes the same monstrosity found on the surface, or perhaps more precisely, the superficiality and lack of depth inherent in mere appearances.According to Freedman (165), embracing the role of the mirror indirectly entails accepting the societal image of womanhood and motherhood as dictated by males. In Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" and other poems exploring themes of motherhood and confinement, aggression often prevails over tenderness. Schwartz (72) further argues that a woman who assumes the reflective role can become harsh, particularly towards herself. The image of the poetess reflected as a fish seeking her beauty in the lake metaphorically underscores Plath's profound depression, attributing it to the oppressive influence of patriarchal and societal norms. This analysis aims to highlight how these stereotypes contribute to Plath's mental struggles and emotional turmoil.According to Ghlib (2593), Sylvia Plath's symptoms of hysteria, such as depersonalization, severely restricted her life and ultimately led to her suicide. The poetess's depression, reflected in her poetry, vividly illustrates her struggle and the desperation that culminated in her decision to take her own life.

Kroll (1978) argues that Plath's poem "The Mirror" reveals the profound insight that a life dominated by false realities is not truly living but rather a form of unbearable existence akin to a living death, which can only be escaped through actual death. The poem portrays how the persona within it is inwardly victimized, searching desperately for her own identity amidst overwhelming trauma. The mirror serves as a metaphor for the hidden traumas, much like those experienced by Sylvia Plath herself, concealed beneath a veneer of outward composure that projects an idealized image.

This analysis underscores how Plath's poetry reflects her personal anguish and psychological turmoil, shedding light on the complex intersections of identity, mental health, and societal expectations.According to Schwartz (20), Sylvia Plath dedicated her life to resolving the discord between her inner feelings and outward appearances. She grappled with a profound dilemma involving internal and external conflicts throughout her lifetime. Researchers have explored how her mental illness, personal struggles with identity, and metaphorical reflections on transitioning from youth to motherhood shaped her attempts to transcend earthly existence. However, the specific exploration of fear

and her pursuit of beauty in defining her existence remains an unaddressed gap in existing research, which this research aims to fill.

Research Questions

Beauty has been regarded as the source of power andglamour in mortal life. The research is guided with:

A. What is the effect of beauty in the personal life of Sylvia Plath reflected in the poem 'mirror'?

B: How has fear acted in the poem "Mirror"?

The Objectives of the Research

The general objective is to discuss the role of beauty in life but the specific objective is:

A: To explore the effect of beauty in the personal life of the poetess Sylvia Plath as revealed in the poem "Mirror".

B: To investigate the fear's role as it has acted in the poem "Mirror".

Significance of the Research

The significance of the study dwells to create awareness and consciousness in dealing with fear and beauty. It has shown the connection between fear and beauty in which the role of fear has opened how beauty has to be dealt with. Beauty has not turned out to be always positive since it hides risks and fear. The invisible aspects of fear lead to the entire annihilation of life if the beauty is mishandled.

Materials and Methods

The research has been carried out in the detailed critical analysis of the poem "Mirror"bySylvia Plath. The poem's original lines and stanzas have been taken as the primary data of the research. The various journals, research articles, and related materials written on the concept of beauty and about the poem itself have been taken as the secondary data for the research. Fearism, which has got both positive and negative role in leading the life or destroying it,has beenadopted as the lens to analyze the poem, "Mirror." The various thematic categories have been made and analyzed the poem as the qualitative research.

Delimitation of the Research

This research has been confined to the textual analysis of the poem 'Mirror' by Sylvia Plath. It has only been observed from the perspective of fear and its role seen in the poem. It has not linked with the ideas of the external similar texts.

Result and Discussion

Mirror's Impartial Role

The poem "Mirror" consists of two stanzas: the first stanza depicts the mirror's position as an observer in the room, while the second stanza metaphorically portrays the mirror

as a lake. In this stanza, the lake reflects the aging beauty of a woman who distrusts the mirror's portrayal and seeks her genuine facial appearance in the lake's reflection.

The woman in the poem laments the gradual loss of her beauty as she ages. She fears the inevitable decline and strives to preserve her attractiveness. She values her charismatic persona and keeps a mirror in her bedroom to monitor her appearance. The narrator of the poem is personified as the mirror itself. Sylvia Plath's poem begins with the line, "I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions," indicating that the mirror is made of silver and impartially reflects the true state of its owner without bias or prejudice. The mirror further states, "Whatever I see I swallow immediately Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike," emphasizing its role as an objective observer that faithfully reflects everything it sees without distortion from emotions like affection or aversion (Plath).

This interpretation underscores the mirror's role as a symbol of truth and impartiality in the poem, highlighting its ability to reveal the stark reality of aging and the woman's fear of losing her allure.

In the poem "Mirror," the extracted lines span two lines where the mirror describes its immediate acceptance of whatever it reflects, without bias or preference based on love or dislike. The mirror serves as an impartial observer of truth, yet the owner of the mirror, Sylvia herself, doubts whether it accurately reflects her beauty. She harbors a fear of losing her attractiveness and dreads the possibility of becoming unattractive. Plath's depiction in "Mirror" intertwines her own identity with that of her mother, expressing apprehensions about eventually resembling her. According to Conway (p, 42), the poem reflects Plath's dual perspective as both daughter and herself, revealing her poignant anxieties about aging and maintaining her allure. As a young girl, the mirror held no significance, but as she matures, the woman in the poem wrestles with deep-seated desires to preserve her beauty and captivating persona.

The poem "Mirror," the narrator, the mirror itself, asserts its role as a compassionate and truthful observer to anyone who seeks their reflection. The mirror states, "I am not cruel, only truthful," likening its gaze to that of a small, impartial deity with four corners that faithfully reflects all who come before it (Plath). It remains unchanged in its duty, reflecting visitors without altering their appearances. Over time, the mirror observes its owner aging and becoming fearful of losing her beauty. The mirror reflects on its own existence, noting how it constantly gazes at the opposite wall, which has become like its counterpart. The faces of visitors and the darkness of night are the only interruptions to this contemplation (Plath).

This interpretation highlights the mirror's perspective as a passive yet deeply observant entity, reflecting the evolving fears and anxieties of its owner about aging and losing

attractiveness. The mirror's metaphorical relationship with the opposite wall symbolizes its constant and introspective observation of the world around it.

The mirror imagines itself as a lake in the second stanza of the poem. The mirror utters:
"Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
 Searching my reaches for what she really is (Plath)".

A woman approaches a lake, leaning over its surface to glimpse her own reflection. She seeks clarity about her true position and appearance, indicating a dissatisfaction with the mirror on her wall. Despite what the mirror reflects, she feels she has aged and lost her former beauty, causing her distress. She harbors skepticism about her external appearance as shown in the mirror and turns to the lake for a more genuine reflection of herself.

In poem "Mirror," the reflection not only mirrors the challenges faced by Plath herself but also reflects the broader struggles of women who feel compelled to maintain youth and beauty to remain relevant. According to Conway (p, 44), the mirror in the poem judges the woman as a failure, suggesting that true success does not hinge on external appearance, particularly for accomplished women. The mirror becomes a source of distress as the woman fears her aging and perceived unattractiveness, prompting her to seek validation by looking into the lake.

The shift in the poem's second section where the mirror declares, "Now I am a lake," signifies a deeper metaphorical exploration. Like a lake, the mirror gains depth and complexity, reflecting a woman searching for her true self, reminiscent of the myth of Narcissus. Plath and women in general are depicted as struggling to reconcile their self-perception with societal expectations, sometimes resorting to deceptive means symbolized by candles and moonlight, which cast both shadows and illumination, masking reality.

The mirror maintains its steadfast role, faithfully reflecting whatever stands before it, even when this reflection disturbs the woman who is drawn to the lake for solace. Plath employs glass imagery to symbolize the concealment and revelation of one's authentic identity, emphasizing the woman's fear of losing or distorting her true beauty. Schwartz (70) discusses how Plath portrays the internalized fears and dialogues of a woman confronting her aging process, viewing signs of time as a form of mutilation. The poem's speaker, though the mirror, reveals the woman's profound anxiety about aging and her reluctance to trust the mirror's reflection, instead seeking affirmation from the lake.

In essence, "Mirror" delves into themes of self-perception, aging, and societal pressures through its portrayal of a woman's ongoing struggle to reconcile her inner and outer selves, using the mirror and lake as symbolic reflections of her journey.

"She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

I am important to her. She comes and goes (Plath)".

These two lines of the poem depict how much sad she is by the loss of her beauty. she is terrified and scared so much that she cannot see her own face reflected in the lake and she weeps and cries over the lake. She is with the river of tears dropping into the lake and she is even agitating with her hands. Lake has become essential for her to know her true beauty and she regularly visits there. Her fear is beyond her control and she has turned out to be conscious of her beauty as it is said consciousness and knowledge are the main causes of fear (Subba 47). If she did not have knowledge about the loss of her beauty with age, she would not go to the lake as a routine. Hence, she is fear-stricken and feels restless. "Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness (Plath)". She reaches the lake each morning and bends over it to know how much ugly she is seen as reflected in the image of the lake. Her face replaces the darkness in the lake by eliminating the sunlight and the light of the morning.

"In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish (Plath)".

Mirrors serve as steadfast companions to those who are preoccupied with maintaining beauty and a desirable image, much like the speaker in Sylvia Plath's poem. From a young age to her elderly years, the woman has been captivated by her reflection in the mirror, and even now, she visits the lake regularly. However, the mirror metaphorically transforms her into a frightening fish, symbolizing her intense fear and anxiety over losing her beauty as she ages. This fear has deeply troubled her, affecting her physical and mental well-being. Plath's own experiences illustrate how excessive fear can lead to depression and tragic outcomes, such as suicide. Schwartz (71) explores what draws the woman back to the mirror day after day, despite the distress it causes her. The mirror reflects an image that frightens her, possibly representing the inevitable effects of aging that transform her into something she fears becoming. Metaphorically, the fish in the depths of the mirror symbolizes both the depths of her fear and a deeper, unacknowledged aspect of herself that she may be drawn to but struggles to accept.

In essence, Plath's poem delves into themes of self-perception, fear of aging, and the psychological turmoil that can result from an obsession with external beauty. The mirror becomes a symbol of both fascination and terror for the woman, reflecting her internal struggles and fears in a poignant exploration of identity and mortality. In Sylvia Plath's poem, the mirror symbolizes a woman's reflection of herself and others. Plath presents a dual image of herself, portrayed as both a brightly reflective surface and a devilish form within the mirror and its representation. According to Schwartz (71), the mirror embodies the persona that Plath projected to society—a disciplined performer

who flawlessly adhered to societal and parental expectations of elegance, charm, and success. This persona was frozen in a socially constructed ideal of femininity, akin to a Cover Girl smile.

However, the relentless pursuit of beauty became self-destructive for the speaker in the poem. Plath explores the theme that beauty is fleeting and the obsession with maintaining it, especially in old age, led to her own demise. The fear and anxiety over losing beauty eventually drove her to take her own life. In summary, Plath's poem scrutinizes the complexities of self-perception and societal expectations through the metaphor of the mirror, illustrating how the relentless pursuit of beauty can become detrimental and ultimately tragic.The opening line of the poem suggests that when a woman spends all her time in front of a mirror, she wastes her youth, immersing herself deeply in her own reflection much like Narcissus. The poem's central message is that indulging in narcissism is ultimately futile and drains one's time and energy. Mirrors, depicted as non-judgmental, merely "swallow" reflections, implying that once something is reflected, it is lost forever and irretrievable. The mirror, originally intended to reflect truth, now reflects a blank wall, symbolizing the woman's lack of identity and self-definition over time. She becomes insignificant, blending into the various faces and the surrounding darkness.

This research has aimed to highlight Sylvia Plath's profound depression and suggests that societal and patriarchal stereotypes contributed to her mental disorder. According to Ghlib (2593), symptoms of hysteria such as depersonalization severely constrained her life and ultimately led to her tragic decision to end her own life. Plath's poetry reflects her struggle with depression and the pressures imposed by societal norms, illustrating how extreme fear and societal expectations can have detrimental effects on mental health and well-being.

In essence, the poem "Mirror" delves into themes of identity, self-perception, and the destructive consequences of internalizing societal ideals, offering a poignant reflection of Plath's own psychological struggles and the broader societal issues she grappled with. Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror" portrays multiple types of fears from the viewpoint of the mirror, which also embodies the persona of the poetess. The poem explores various fears through the mirror's perspective, reflecting Plath's own anxieties and concerns.

The mirror in Plath's poem, "Mirror", reflects several fears from the poetess's point of view. The poem explores different kinds of fears as it has been analyzed in the following forms.

Fear of Aging

In Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror," the speaker expresses a profound fear of aging and the loss of youthfulness. She obsesses over her physical appearance and becomes

disillusioned and cynical towards the mirror, which faithfully reflects the reality of her aging face. She accuses the mirror on the wall of deceiving her by not reflecting the youthful beauty she desires, viewing it as an adversary.Her intense fear of losing her youthful beauty overwhelms her, causing internal turmoil and restlessness (Plath).

This fear drives her to seek various means of recapturing her lost beauty of youth. Despite her distrust of the mirror, she turns to the lake in hopes of finding a reflection that aligns with her memories of past beauty. However, she finds no solace there either, as the lake mirrors the same reality as the mirror on her wall, intensifying her fear of losing the joys associated with her youthful appearance.

In essence, Plath's poem delves into the psychological complexities of aging and the fear of losing external beauty, portraying how these fears can consume and disturb an individual's sense of self and reality.

Fear of Truth

The mirror in Sylvia Plath's poem starkly reflects an unvarnished truth about appearance and mortality, which proves unsettling for the speaker. While she may have felt physically attractive, charming, and magnificently beautiful in her youth, the mirror forces her to confront the harsh reality of aging and the inevitable changes in her appearance. Plath's speaker is reluctant to face this truth, preferring the comforting realm of imagination and fantasy over the bitter facts of reality. However, the relentless truth presented by the mirror becomes increasingly difficult for her to accept and integrate into her life (Plath). Ultimately, the poem underscores the inevitability of confronting and coming to terms with truth, even when it challenges one's self-perception and cherished illusions.

Fear of Self-Identity

The mirror in Sylvia Plath's poem represents the fear of confronting one's authentic self and the evolving perceptions of identity as time passes. Plath, as the poetess, grapples with the fear of clinging to her past beauty and the illusion of maintaining a static self-identity indefinitely, despite knowing it's beyond human control (Plath). This fear becomes detrimental to her well-being, as she wrestles with the realization of her mortality and the limitations inherent in being human.

In essence, Plath's poem explores the existential anxiety of facing one's true self and the inevitability of change, highlighting the struggle to reconcile past perceptions with present realities. The speaker's fear has turned out as hard to hide as it has been discussed by Adhikari (www.ijtell.com).

Fear of Time's Passing

The mirror in Sylvia Plath's poem encapsulates the fear of time slipping away and the inevitability of aging and mortality. Plath herself grapples with the relentless passage of

time and the overwhelming desire to retain her youth indefinitely. She dreads the process of aging and the changes it brings, experiencing profound anguish and melancholy as a result (Plath). The speaker confronts a fear that is beyond human - influence, a futile apprehension that causes immense suffering.

In essence, Plath's poem explores the existential angst of confronting the passage of time and the uncontrollable nature of aging, portraying the speaker's poignant struggle with mortality and the relentless march of time. It has been portrayed as much fearful condition of the speaker as Adhikari (DOI: http//doi.org/10. 25058/179400x.1709) has pointed out the fear of adjusting the life while converting in a new religion from the old religion in which the person has been identified in the society.

Fear of Vanity

The mirror in Sylvia Plath's poem reflects a fear of excessive focus on outward appearances at the expense of inner beauty or worth. Plath herself grapples with a sense of vanity, her pride in always presenting herself as charming and physically beautiful causing her considerable distress. This vanity becomes a source of deep-seated fear in her inner thoughts, leading to significant suffering (Plath). These intertwined fears form a complex depiction of how perception, aging, and self-awareness intersect in Plath's examination of identity and mortality in "Mirror."

In essence, Plath's poem delves into the existential struggle between external beauty and inner worth, illustrating the profound consequences of placing too much emphasis on physical appearance while neglecting deeper aspects of self-perception and identity.

Overall Findings

In Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror," beauty is depicted as a significant and often burdensome aspect of personal identity and self-perception. The mirror in the poem serves as a metaphor for both objective reflection and the subjective scrutiny of one's appearance over time. Plath herself struggled with issues of identity, self-worth, and the pressures of societal expectations, all of which are reflected in the poem. Beauty, as portrayed in "Mirror," exerts a profound influence on the speaker's and by extension, Plath's own personal life in several ways:

Fear of Aging and Loss of Beauty:

The mirror reflects the fear of aging and the gradual loss of youthful beauty. Plath's speaker laments the inevitable changes wrought by time, expressing dismay at the aging process which diminishes external attractiveness. This fear of losing beauty can be seen as reflective of Plath's own anxieties about aging and societal ideals of beauty.

Struggle with Self-Image: The poem suggests a constant struggle with self-image and the discrepancy between inner identity and outer appearance. The mirror presents an unflinching truth that contrasts with the speaker's internal perception of herself.

Plath's own battles with self-perception and identity are mirrored in this conflict between reality and self-illusion.

Psychological Impact: The pursuit and perception of beauty in the poem highlight its psychological impact on the speaker. Beauty becomes a measure of self-worth and validation, leading to introspection and self-criticism. This introspective journey mirrors Plath's own exploration of identity and the psychological pressures she faced throughout her life. It has reflected the psychological impact as Adhikari (2024) has revealed the psychological fear in the minds of people in the process of leading life ahead.

Cultural and Societal Expectations: The societal and cultural expectations placed on women regarding beauty are also implicitly critiqued in the poem. Plath, through the speaker's narrative, challenges these norms and exposes their restrictive nature, suggesting a broader commentary on gender roles and societal pressures.Overall, in "Mirror," Sylvia Plath examines the complex interplay between beauty, identity, and self-perception. The poem serves as a poignant reflection of Plath's own struggles with these themes, offering a glimpse into the profound impact of beauty on personal identity and the human psyche.

In the poem "Mirror," fear plays a significant role in shaping both the thematic depth and the emotional landscape of the speaker's reflections. Here's how fear manifests and acts within the poem:

Fear of Aging and Mortality: One of the central fears depicted in the poem is the fear of aging and mortality. The mirror, personified as a truthful observer, reflects the inevitable changes that time brings to the speaker's appearance. Lines such as "I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions" illustrate the mirror's impartiality in showing the progression of age and the physical deterioration that accompanies it. This fear of losing youth and beauty is palpable throughout the poem, as the speaker grapples with the harsh reality of aging. This type of fear is just like the fear of conserving the ecology and environment as it has been pointed out ecofeminism by Adhikari (www.ijoes.in).

Fear of Self-Perception and Identity: The mirror also reflects the fear of self-perception and the challenges of maintaining a consistent identity over time. The speaker's internal dialogue reveals a struggle with accepting the mirror's reflection, often seeking affirmation or denial of her own perceived beauty. This fear of not recognizing oneself or feeling disconnected from one's reflection speaks to deeper existential anxieties about self-image and identity. Such kind of fear has become similar with the fear portrayed by Adhikari et al (2022) regarding the fear of global eco-condition in which it has become visible but helpless to solve unless it has been activated through policies.

Fear of Inauthenticity and Deception: Another layer of fear in the poem revolves around the concept of authenticity and deception. The mirror, despite its objectivity, is accused by the speaker of being deceitful or cruel in its truthful reflection. This fear of not knowing the true self or being deceived by appearances underscores a broader theme of existential uncertainty and the quest for self-understanding. It has turned out as of self-awareness as Adhikari et al (2022) have advised the global citizens to be aware of conserving the ecology and the environment of the world for the entire humanity.

Psychological Impact and Emotional Distress: The poem conveys the psychological impact of these fears, depicting emotional distress and inner turmoil experienced by the speaker. Lines such as "In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish" evoke a sense of suffocation and despair caused by the relentless confrontation with aging and the passage of time. This kind of fear as depressing as Adhikari et al (2020) have figured out the fear of eco-turbulence in the world.

Cultural and Societal Expectations: Beyond personal fears, "Mirror" also critiques societal expectations and cultural norms regarding beauty and aging. The pressure to conform to idealized standards of beauty, perpetuated by external forces, intensifies the speaker's internal struggle and fear of not measuring up. In short, fear in Sylvia Plath's "Mirror" operates on multiple levels—fear of aging, fear of identity crisis, fear of deception, fear of societal judgment—all of which contribute to a profound exploration of existential angst and the complexities of human perception and self-image. Such fear has been taken as the fear of social image as Adhikari (2020) has revealed the global fear of coronavirus and the deteriorating condition of the ecology and the environment of the entire globe.

Conclusion

The effect of fear in beauty has been found devastating, detrimental, and life-taking. The speaker of the poem "Mirror" has explored the poetess, Sylvia Plath herself though the mirror has been presented as the narrator in the poem. The mirror is the poetess's own persona and she has reflected the pain and fear in the process of seeking her beauty both in the mirror of her bedroom wall and in the lake in the first and the second stanzas respectively. As the poetess has found her beauty getting vanished with her old age, she has developed a kind of doubt with the mirror concealing her factual identity and she has attempted to trace out her real appearance in the lake. However, she has found no difference in her facial appearance and beauty even in the lake and she has been found in the depth of her mental agonies and her melancholic situation led her to depression. As a result, she has found no alternative solution of replacing her beauty except committing suicide. Her fear turned extreme and it has been found beyond her control

and she has been victimized by her own extreme fear. The persona of the poem has found that her conflict between the inner self and outer self, guided by fear led her to mutilate herself. Fear horrified, traumatized, scared and led her depersonalized condition to the persona of the poem and she became restless in maintaining her beauty in society even in her old age. It was beyond her capacity as a mortal being and it must have been realized as the natural process of life.Fear has acted rather dreadfully and negatively in the life of the persona of the poem "Mirror" and it has compelled her to take her own life in vain. Hence, it has given the message that fear must be within a balanced form rather than the extreme one for a meaningful, worthwhile, and successful life. Otherwise, extreme fear acts to ruin the entire goal and life itself as it has acted in the life of the poetess, Sylvia Plath. She has been found seeking external beauty rather than internal one and it has been found unnatural in old age. Internal beauty is gained with learning skills, enhancing knowledge and wisdom but external beauty is natural and innate but it fades away with the passing of time. To fear such perishing external beauty ruins life. So, it has to be accepted what nature has bestowed on mortal beings.

Further topic for research:

Psychological aspect of fear in the poem "Mirror" of Slyvia Plath

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