

Mirror
Sylvia Plath

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—
5 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 part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

10 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.
15 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.

Identify the speaker in the poem. How would you describe the tone of the poem—the speaker’s attitude toward itself and toward the other subjects of the poem? Discuss the way Plath uses language in the poem to convey this complex tone.

In what sense does the speaker “swallow” whatever it sees? What is the meaning of the word “unmisted” as used in line 3?

Discuss the instances of consonance in lines 1-3 and again in line 9—what effect do they have?

Why does the speaker say, “I am not cruel” (line 4)? In what sense is the speaker “the eye of a little god” (line 5)?

What do you think the woman is searching for (line 11)? In what sense are candles and the moon “liars” (line 12)? How would you characterize the use of the word “rewards” in line 14?

Discuss the meaning of the last two lines. In what sense has the woman “drowned a young girl,” and in what sense does an old woman “rise toward her”? What is the meaning of the word “terrible” as it is used in line 18?