

Mirror

Matthew Williams • English Literature • March 18, 2026

Mirror

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Analysis: The mirror begins with blunt self-definition, presenting itself as objective and impartial. "Silver and exact" establishes precision, while "no preconceptions" suggests complete freedom from bias or emotion.

Whatever I see I swallow immediately

Analysis: The metaphor "swallow immediately" suggests total absorption without distortion or delay. The mirror presents itself as something that takes in reality exactly as it is.

Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

Analysis: The mirror claims emotional neutrality. It rejects human bias, insisting that affection or hatred does not alter what it reflects.

I am not cruel, only truthful,

Analysis: This line separates honesty from malice. The mirror defends itself, suggesting that painful truth may feel cruel, but that pain comes from reality itself, not from the mirror.

The eye of a little god, four-cornered.

Analysis: The metaphor "The eye of a little god" gives the mirror divine authority, suggesting a cold, almost absolute power to judge and reveal truth.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.

Analysis: The personification "meditate" gives the mirror a contemplative quality, making its routine seem thoughtful and self-aware.

It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long

I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.

Analysis: The metaphor "part of my heart" suggests attachment formed through repetition and familiarity. However, "it flickers" reminds us that this stability is constantly interrupted.

Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Analysis: The line suggests the passage of time through cycles of day, night, and human presence. Repetition is built into the mirror's existence, reinforcing monotony and routine.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,

Analysis: The metaphor "I am a lake" expands the mirror into something deeper and more symbolic. A lake suggests depth, memory, and emotional searching rather than simple surface reflection.

Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Analysis: The woman is not merely checking appearance. She is searching for identity, truth, and perhaps reassurance, showing how deeply self-image is tied to reflection.

Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.

Analysis: The metaphor "those liars" refers to softer, more flattering light sources. Unlike the mirror, they distort reality and offer illusion rather than truth.

I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.

Analysis: The word "faithfully" reinforces the mirror's role as an unbiased witness. It cannot soften or comfort; it only returns what is present.

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

Analysis: There is irony in "rewards me with tears", since truth is met not with gratitude but distress. Her emotional reaction shows the pain of confronting aging and loss.

I am important to her. She comes and goes.

Analysis: The mirror recognizes its significance in the woman's life. It has become part of her daily ritual and self-understanding.

Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

Analysis: This emphasizes repetition and inevitability. The daily return to the mirror suggests obsession, dependence, and the passage of time.

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

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Analysis: The metaphor "drowned a young girl" suggests the disappearance of youth over time. The simile "like a terrible fish" presents old age as something grotesque and rising from the depths, making aging feel monstrous and unavoidable.

About the poem

Author: Sylvia Plath (1932–1963)

Context: Mid-20th century poetry; reflects concerns with identity, femininity, aging, and psychological tension

Core idea: The poem explores the painful relationship between truth and self-image, showing how aging forces the woman to confront a version of herself she does not want to accept.

• Main themes

- Identity and self-perception
- Aging and loss of youth
- Appearance vs reality
- Time and inevitability
- Female anxiety and self-image

- Truth versus illusion
- **Mood:** Pensive and unsettling, with increasing sadness and emotional tension
- **Tone:** Matter-of-fact, coldly truthful, and quietly disturbing

Remember

- The mirror is both a literal object and a voice of harsh truth
- “Now I am a lake” deepens the poem from reflection to psychological searching
- Candles and moon are called liars because they flatter, unlike the mirror
- The young girl is not literally dead. Youth has been lost over time
- “Like a terrible fish” is the key ending image. Aging rises as something feared and unavoidable

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