

The Looking Glass

- by Kamala Das

"The Looking Glass" by Kamala Das is a powerful and provocative poem that delves into themes of love, desire, and the challenges of living without it. Here's a detailed analysis:

1. "Getting a man to love you is easy"

- The poem begins with a bold statement, suggesting that winning a man's affection is straightforward.

2. "Only be honest about your wants as Woman."

- The poet advises women to be truthful about their desires and needs, particularly in the context of their gender.

3. "Stand nude before the glass with him"

- This line metaphorically instructs women to reveal their physical and emotional selves to their partner.

4. "So that he sees himself the stronger one / And believes it so, and you so much more / Softer, younger, lovelier."

- The poet emphasizes the dynamic of power and vulnerability in a relationship, suggesting that by allowing the man to feel stronger, the woman becomes softer and more attractive in his eyes.

5. "Admit your Admiration. Notice the perfection / Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under / The shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor, / Dropping towels, and the jerky way he / Urinates."

- These lines focus on admiring the man, paying attention to his physical details and everyday actions, which are presented in an intimate and candid manner.

6. "All the fond details that make Him male and your only man."

- The poet underscores the uniqueness of the man, emphasizing the specific characteristics and behaviors that define his masculinity in the eyes of the woman.

7. "Gift him all, Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of / Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts, / The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your / Endless female hungers."

- This stanza highlights the idea of offering one's true self as a gift to the man, including aspects that are quintessentially feminine, such as the scent of hair, the musk of sweat, and the natural experiences of menstruation.

8. "Oh yes, getting A man to love is easy, but living / Without him afterward may have to be / Faced."

- The poem takes a turn, acknowledging that while attracting a man's love may be uncomplicated, dealing with the aftermath of a relationship may pose significant challenges.

9. "A living without life when you move Around, meeting strangers, with your eyes that / Gave up their search, with ears that hear only / His last voice calling out your name and your / Body which once under his touch had gleamed / Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute."

These lines vividly depict the emptiness and desolation the woman experiences after parting ways with her lover. The world seems colourless, her senses have lost their vitality, and her body no longer radiates the same vibrant energy it once did.

In "The Looking Glass," Kamala Das explores the complexities of love, the sacrifices women may make, and the aftermath of a romantic relationship. The poem challenges conventional notions of femininity and intimacy, offering a raw and honest portrayal of a woman's experience in love.

Themes in the Poem

"The Looking Glass" by Kamala Das explores several interconnected themes, including love, gender dynamics, authenticity, and the emotional aftermath of relationships.

1. Love and Desire: Love is a central theme in the poem. It delves into the desire to be loved and the lengths people may go to attract someone's affection. The poem's message is that love is attainable by being authentic, by openly expressing one's desires, and by admiring and celebrating the object of affection.

2. Gender and Power Dynamics: The poem addresses the gender dynamics in relationships. It portrays a traditional notion of femininity, where the woman is encouraged to make the man feel stronger and superior. This theme highlights the historically unequal power dynamics in heterosexual relationships.

3. Authenticity and Vulnerability: Kamala Das emphasizes the importance of authenticity and vulnerability in relationships. The woman is encouraged to reveal her true self and to embrace her natural, feminine qualities. This theme underscores the idea that authenticity and openness lead to deeper, more meaningful connections.

4. Identity and Self-acceptance: The poem celebrates the uniqueness of each individual's identity, especially in terms of gender and femininity. It encourages women to accept and embrace their own virtues and qualities, rather than trying to fit into predefined roles. This theme highlights the need for self-acceptance and self-love.

5. Emotional Aftermath of Relationships: The latter part of the poem deals with the emotional challenges of living without a loved one. It portrays the emptiness, longing, and sense of loss that can follow the end of a romantic relationship. This theme reflects the universal experience of heartbreak and the struggle to move on.

6. Physicality and Sensuality: Throughout the poem, there is a strong emphasis on physicality and sensuality. The woman's admiration of the man's body, the scent of long hair, and the musk of sweat are all sensual elements that evoke a vivid and passionate connection. This theme underscores the role of physical attraction and sensuality in romantic relationships.

7. Self-image and Insecurity: The poem touches on self-image and insecurity, particularly in the context of how one is perceived by a partner. It explores how individuals may feel more attractive and confident when they are admired and loved by someone they desire.

8. Honesty and Truth: Honesty is a recurring theme in the poem. It emphasizes that being truthful about one's desires and feelings is essential in attracting love. This theme promotes open and honest communication in relationships.

In summary, "The Looking Glass" by Kamala Das addresses a complex web of themes that revolve around love, gender dynamics, authenticity, identity, and the emotional consequences of relationships. It challenges traditional notions of love and femininity while encouraging individuals to embrace their true selves and be open and honest in their pursuit of love. The poem's themes continue to be relevant and thought-provoking in contemporary society.