

თვითასახვა და თეატრალურობა სილვია პლათის 'ლედი ლაზარე'-ში Self-reflection and Theatricality in Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus"

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თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

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აბსტრაქტი

გასული საუკუნის მეორე ნახევარში მოღვაწე ამერიკელი პოეტი ქალის, სილვია პლათის შემოქმედება მკვეთრად აშუქებს ავტორისეულ განცდებსა და მენტალურ მდგომარეობას, რაც დღემდე რელევანტურს ხდის მის შემოქმედებას. პლათის ლექსები კონფესიონალური სახისაა და თეატრალურ ხასიათს ატარებს. ამ კუთხით განსაკუთრებით გამოირჩევა ავტორის სიკვდილის შემდეგ გამოცემულ ლექსთა კრებულ 'Ariel'-ში (1965) შესული 'Lady Lazarus', რომელიც დღემდე ხიბლავს მკითხველსა თუ კრიტიკოსებს თავისი ენიგმატურობით. აღნიშნულ ლექსში ავტორი ოსტატურად იყენებს ალუზიებსა და სხვა მხატვრულ ხერხებს თეატრალურობის ეფექტის შესაქმნელად. თუმცა ტექსტის გაგება რთულია წინარე ავტობიოგრაფიული დეტალების ცოდნისა თუ აღნიშნული ხერხების დეკოდირების გარეშე. აქედან გამომდინარე აღნიშნული კვლევის მიზანია წარმოვადგინოთ, თუ რამდენად ჰპოვებს ავტორის ბიოგრაფია თვით-ასახვას მოცემულ ლექსში და რა ხდის მას ასე თეატრალურს.

სილვია პლათი, დაბადებული ბოსტონში 1932 წელს იღებს უმაღლეს განათებას წამყვან უნივერსიტეტებში და ქორწინდება ინგლისელ პოეტ ტედ ჰიუზზე. თუმცა, ერთი შეხედვით წარმატებული ცხოვრების მიღმა სილვია პლათს ბავშვობის ტრამვად დარჩა მამის გარდაცვალება, მისი ქორწინებაც ხანმოკლე აღმოჩნდა, რასაც ემატებოდა პოეტის მენტალური პრობლემები (კლინიკური დეპრესია) და სუიციდის მცდელობა. ბიოგრაფიული ფონის გათვალისწინებით ერთი შედეგით აშკარა ხდება აღნიშნული ლექსის შინაარსი, თუმცა კრიტიკოსები დაობენ, რომ ეს შეიძლება იყოს განზოგადებული აღწერა ერთი ქალის ცხოვრებისეული გამოცდილებისა. მეორე მხრივ გვხვდება, 'ლედი ლაზარეს' წმინდა ავტობიოგრაფიულ ტექსტად განხილვა, რომელიც ავტორს არ ანსხვავებს მთხრობელისაგან. თუმცა ჩვენი კვლევის

სათუქველზე იქმნება განცდა, რომ ესაა შერწყმა ავტორის პიროვნებისა და განზოგადოებული მთხრობელისა, რაც ბადებს თვით-მითოლოგიურ გმირ ქალს. რაც შეეხება თეატრალურობას, მთხრობელი თითქოს მიჰყვება შექსპირისეულ დოგმას – ‘სამყარო სცენა’, ამიტომ თვითმკვლევლობის უშედეგო მცდელობა და მისი გამეორებადი სახე მის ცხოვრებას თეატრალურ დადგმად აქცევს, რომელსაც გმირის ცხოვრების ‘მაყურებელი’ ხარბად ენაფება. სილვია პლათის პოეზიის თეატრალურობას ხაზს უსვამს მისი მეუღლეც, ტედ ჰიუზი მის ჩანაწერებში, როცა ახსენებს რომ პლათის როგორც ცხოვრება, ასევე შემოქმედებაც არქეტეპური დრამაა და თვით-მითოლოგიზებული ქალის სახესთან პირდაპირ კავშირშია.

კვლევის შედეგად ვასკვნით, რომ მხატვრული ხერხების ოსტატური გათამაშებით ავტორმა შექმნა თვით-მითოლოგიზებული გმირი ქალი და ამ გმირშივე ნაწილობრივი, თუმცა არა სრული ასახვა ჰპოვა ავტორის ცხოვრებისეულმა გამოცდილებებმა თუ პირადმა ემოციებმა, შეიქმნა რა საკუთარი ხელწერა შინაგანი თეატრალურობისა. ამან თავისთავად ლექსი აქცია თეატრალურ წარმოდგენად მკითხველისა და კრიტიკოსთათვის რაც დღემდე ინტერესს იწვევს და განხილვის საგანია.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სილვია პლათი; თეატრალურობა; თვითასახვა; ამერიკული პოეზია; ‘ლედი ლაზარუს’

Keywords: Sylvia Plath; theatricality; self-reflection; American poetry; ‘Lady Lazarus’

Introduction

“Sylvia Plath wrote intensely and died immensely” (Axelrod, 2000, p. 481)_ This can be the shortest summary of Sylvia Plath’s life, who was quite a tragic poet, novelist and short story writer of the 20th century. Her viewpoint captures the essence of women’s lived experiences, as well as retains relevance in contemporary discourse. Despite her short life, Plath left us a lasting legacy with two of her most famous published collections of poetry_ ‘The Colossus and Other Poems’ (published in 1960) and ‘Ariel’ (published in 1965, after her death) (‘Sylvia Plath’, Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia; 2024, April 2). One particular poem, namely “Lady Lazarus”, which is included in ‘Ariel’ still draws readers’ and critics’ attention because of its intensity and confessional nature. At a first glance of the poem’s name, a general idea of its meaning is established from the title because of the apparent allusion of biblical story of Lazarus, a man who was given a life back by Jesus. But after reading the poem, the reflection of the author’s biographical events make it difficult to analyze without knowing about Plath’s own life and her writing style. That is why, her death, which was not accidental but rather

intentional, exposed even darker problems concerning her personal experiences and mostly her inner theatrical perception of life and death, which is clearly shown in the mentioned poem. Therefore, the main aims of this paper are to determine the depth of self-reflection as well as to explore and explain theatricality in Sylvia Plath's poem 'Lady Lazarus'.

Discussion of the findings

For the better understanding of the poem's context and to explain why some critics draw parallels to her personal life, while others generalize the text, we have to get familiar with the biographical details of Plath's life.

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1932. Here she graduated from Smith College and continued her studies in the University of Cambridge, England, where she was a student at the Newnham College. Very interestingly, she was fond of writing prose and stories rather than poetry, but it's her poems that attracted public's interest more. Poet's father died when she was eight and it affected her immensely. Later, while studying in London she met and got married to an English poet Ted Hughes but the couple separated in the fall of 1962_ one year before her suicide. Still the relationship is said to be reflected in her works. When it comes to her mental condition, Plath was clinically depressed for most of her adult life ('Sylvia Plath', Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia; 2024, April 2). She also had a life-threatening swimming pool accident when she was 10 and suicidal attempt at the age of 20, when she took sleeping pills, both of which are mentioned in the poem "Lady Lazarus". At that time her family members were able to rescue Plath. But in 1963, at the age of 30, she took her own life.

Regarding the fact that her life was full of struggles, Sylvia Plath's works embody her personal experiences as well as mental state in the form of desperation for self-destruction and death wish. It's particularly evident in the latest collection of poems_ 'Ariel'. As for the poem "Lady Lazarus", it was praised in a review published by *The New York Times* for its "*relentless honesty*," "*sophistication of the use of rhyme*," and "*bitter force*" ('Sylvia Plath', Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia; 2024, April 2).

The structure of the poem consists of twenty-eight stanzas, and is written in free verse but still having subtle rhyme. According to M. L. Rosenthal, an American poet, critic and editor, Sylvia Plath's works fall under the literary genre of Confessional poetry (Axelrod; 1984), meaning it is a poetry exposing very deep individual experiences and traumas together with many taboo matters such as mental illness, sexuality, and suicide. A "*true example of a confessional poem*" is how he describes "Lady Lazarus", considering the poem as autobiographical (Sanghvi; 2013; p.142). On the other hand, however, Sylvia Plath herself made a recording of the poem for the BBC in December of 1962, giving us not an autobiographical explanation but rather generalized one:

"The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first. She is the phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will. She is also just a good, plain, very resourceful woman" (Ford, 2016).

A critic Britzolakis argues that Plath's "*construction of the speaking subject displaces familiar distinctions between poet and persona*" because the location of the textual 'I' is '*unstable and dublicitous*' (Axelrod, 2000, p. 481).

Accordingly, the author manages to generalize personal cases into deep social problems, while the critics still emphasize the role of self-reflection as the sole foundation of the poem analysis. However, the essay suggests the idea of mixing the both, biographical details and generalized storyline, in order to describe the poem best. Thus to present this more apparently a deeper analyzing of the text is needed.

Firstly, the name of the poem, alliteration itself _ 'Lady Lazarus' suggests biblical allusion of Lazarus of Bethany, as we already mentioned above, meaning that it concerns themes like death and rebirth. Some critics argue, that Plath's inspiration may have been the lines from T. S. Eliot's '*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*', in which the speaker imagines himself as 'Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all', since Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' also tells us 'all' about her journey (Ford; 2016). In addition to this, we believe that speaker's identity as a woman is emphasized by the word "lady", thus suggesting gender related topics in the poem.

This is what we encounter in the first part of the poem _ in the beginning, we read the first lines

*"I have done it again
One year in every ten
I manage it—"* (Plath; 1965)

Which tells us about the repeated suicidal attempt of the speaker_ introducing the topic of suicide (Ford; 2016). And then, the author starts describing the speaker rising out of the grave, who is considered in society as a 'miracle' because of her survival, and is compared to a '*Nazi lampshade*' using simile. That is another allusion of historical events concerning the Nazi regime and the Holocaust:

*"A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot
A paperweight..."*

Considering this, we can clearly see the mentioned mixture of self-reflection, as Plath talks about her own experience, but also the Nazi allusion suggests the generalisation of the 'miracle'.

The next lines, including this historical allusion also suggests alliteration of "*My face a featureless, /fine Jew linen/ Peel off the napkin*" and here is the first introduction of the antagonist and the likely recipient, addressee of the poem in this particular moment: "*O my enemy./ Do I terrify?—*"

The description of the persona continues and we reach the line where she says: "*And I a smiling woman. / I am only thirty. / and like the cat I have nine times to die.*" Expressing the irony of her life as a suicide survivor, she claims to be a smiling woman and have nine lives

just as it's believed for cats to have so and "this is Number Three." Here as well, the mentioned age of the narrator draws our attention but having nine lives presents self-mythologization.

Now the audience of the described 'theatrical play' appears in the poem as "*the peanut-crunching crowd*" which "*shoves in to see*" and from now on she is exposed to them with her hand and knees, just like an actor. A critic Melander reads the metaphor of the '*peanut-crunching crowd*' as an example of Plath's '*exhibitionism that belongs to the suicidal urge*' (Sanghvi; 2013; p. 142). Analyzing this part gives us sense of generalization.

Many believes, that the author, as a feminist writer, emphasizes her identity of a woman while saying "*I am the same, identical woman*" in contrast to male dominated society. And the lines "*Herr doktor ... Herr God, Herr Lucifer*" proves that so-called enemy in the poem is a man, it may not be particularly one person in all cases, but a generalized picture of male dominated society, since the term '*Herr*' denotes 'Mr.' in German ('*Herr*'; Cambridge Online Dictionary; 2024).

The second, more biographical part starts as the speaker tells us more about the previous attempts and the above mentioned details of author's life will help us understand it "*The first time it happened I was ten. / It was an accident.*" mentioning her first nearly death experience. But the second was not an accident "*The second time I meant / to last it out and not come back at all.*" The amount of detailed description of the suicide attempt in this scene includes vivid parallels to her life events. We can clearly say that the poem depictions are too detailed to be called generalized. Based on the above mentioned criticisms and text analysis, the stylistic devices used depicts the narrator as a fictional character, but author's biographical details utilized suggests the self-reflection, which reinforces the idea of generalized reflection of author's self. Additionally, the essay states that as the narrator's rebirth ability is being exhibited for the audience, and as the act of coming back to life repeats, it resembles the act of ritual with its essence and thus acquires a theatrical trait of ritual-making.

Moving on to the theatrical part, as Shakespeare suggests 'All the world's a stage' and Sylvia Plath uses is "exceptionally well" but how exactly is it expressed in "Lady Lazarus"?

Ted Hughes, author's husband and writer, mentions that "*Plath's life and writing form a single, archetypal drama of psychic rebirth, rooted in 'a deep and inclusive inner crisis'*". Also, he writes of a "*deeply secluded mythic and symbolic inner theater (sometimes a hospital theater) accessible to her only in her poetry*" (Britzolakis; 1999; pp. 10-11). Britzolakis suggests that Plath's poems "*enrich a theatrical performance rather than a sincere expression of mourning*" (Axelrod; 2000; p. 481).

As the above mentioned suggests, it is Plath's way of fusing her life and poetry into one theatrical act and it forms "*a singular, unshakeable, and self-evident text*" (Britzolakis; 1999; pp. 11). Which is neither fully biographical, nor completely fictional but self-mythical. The idea is supported by the high point of the poem:

*"Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.*

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

...

It's the theatrical."

We think that real-life struggles become a kind of performance in the eyes of society and the narrator states_ "*I do it exceptionally well*"- trying to do it in an original way. Repetition turns her death-like experience into theatrical act enjoyed by "The peanut-crunching crowd" and 'amused shout'.

However, "*For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge...*" _ suggesting there are consequences for audience's insensitive stare to her mental battles. Here, she once again addresses the 'antagonist' of the poem:

'So, so Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy'

And the next passage points out the value of the speaker, determined by how useful she might be to the antagonist, which is thought to be reference of the author's husband, and not how she truly feels._

"I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby"

Another allusion is presented with the line "*I turn and burn*", just like phoenix, a mythical creature symbolizing immortality through burning and regenerating from its own ashes. It appears in the final lines as well:

"Herr God, Herr Lucifer / Beware / Beware.

Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / and I eat men like air."

As we see, the poem ends with the warning against even the highest powers of universe that she will once again rise from the dead like a phoenix and 'eat' her enemies. The ending once again reinforces the above-mentioned idea of author's representation in the poem as a self-mythologized woman, who stages a theatrical scene of death and rebirth for the 'audience' of her life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we summarized and evaluated the degree of self-reflection and theatricality in Sylvia Plath's 'Lady Lazarus'. The poem's name includes allusion and hints on the two main topics depicted in the poem_ death and rebirth. We also came across different allusions from the bible_ Lazarus; from history, such as the holocaust and mythical_ Phoenix. As for the ideas of the poem, it involves suicide, death wish, feminist ideas and struggle of the speaker while society enjoys her miracle making ability to return from dead. According to some critics, the mentioned poem reflects autobiographical details from her life, while others consider it as more generalized depiction of a female narrator of the poem, presenting general social problems and

struggles of women. However, by analyzing the text itself the essay presents more fused representation of the author as a mythical character, staging a theatrical scene. Throughout the poem, author's irony is apparent and she displays the story in a pure theatrical manner, making it Sylvia Plath's signature way of conveying ideas with the help of inner-theater. That, I believe, is what makes her poems, and specifically 'Lady Lazarus' truly immortal and relevant to this day.

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სამადლობელი:

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