

BETWEEN FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY: THE TWO POLES OF PERSONAL, EVENTUAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN THE “DADDY” OF SYLVIA PLATH

The poetics of Sylvia Plath and especially the poem “Daddy” is usually considered either strictly linguistically [3], with the analysis of metaphors [4] and inclusions of words from other languages [2], or through a cultural-biographical context: through the prism of her real relationships with her husband and father [1]. However, both approaches have disadvantages: the linguistic approach focuses too much on the means of expressiveness and the general meaning of the poem eludes its attention. Biographical and contextual methods provides valuable information for interpreting the poem and inscribing it in the existing tradition, however, they have little to do with the poem itself. In this paper an attempt to combine these two trunk directions will be made.

There are two blocks of experiences (detached, based on the theory of binary oppositions of Trubetskoi): one is connected with femininity, the other — with masculinity. There is no actual figure of the father — it becomes only an iconic sign of oppression. Oppression is associated with a broader cultural background — namely, with the Jews being oppressed by the Germans. Heroine, because of this transfer, starts to consider herself not only pretending, but actually being a Jew (“I began to talk like a Jew. I think I may well be a Jew”). The “female” block is associated with oppression, being a Jew and being small, and the “male” — with strength, fascism and being big. If you are a woman, you are inevitably a Jew and can not get away from the Holocaust.

A linguistic analysis (a description of the use of words from German (“Ich, ich, ich, ich” and etc.) based on articles with a linguistic approach, an analysis of lexical repetitions, compositional repetitions and alliteration and assonance; author neologisms and rhythm and rhyme system) shows, that, firstly, it is the transfer to a cultural background that allows the heroine to talk about the unspeakable, secondly, the she seems to be born again (it is important that she is not born — she is “glued” by someone), only death allows her to end up with the inseparable characteristics, such as gender, with which all other characteristics are related.

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3. Mitchell, R. (2005). Reading (And) the Late Poems of Sylvia Plath. The Modern Language Review. Vol. 100. No. 1 (January). Modern Humanities Research Association. P. 37–50.
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