

SELF –REVELATION IN THE POETRY OF SYLVIA PLATH

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ABSTRACT

Poetry is the sudden overflow of emotions and from times immemorial poetry has come to the rescue of mankind whenever he/she wants a catharsis of one's emotions. Poetry as a genre of literature is much more complicated to comprehend. The novel or a drama or a story has something straightforward to tell but in case of poetry one has to go beyond the words to come to exact meanings of the poem. This paper attempts to study Sylvia Plath's poems and to make out that up to what extent her poetry was related to her own self.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Poetry, Confessional Poetry

INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath was an ambitious writer and a perfectionist. Her poetry focuses on her own self and matters related to her life. In this paper an attempt has been made to relate her poetry with her own self, her revelations and confessions. Broadly speaking her poetry is termed as confessional poetry as it is replete with a whole bundle of confessions from her personal life. She shot into prominence after she committed suicide in 1963 by putting her head in a gas oven and it was after her death that critics stared gobbling and understanding the depth of her works.

Literature is a form of art but one cannot deny the fact that literature has its roots in the existing life and milieu of any writer/artist. A work of literature cannot come out by itself. It needs a proper framework, situation etc, which are mostly derived from the society and the life of the writer. Coming to Sylvia Plath her poetry is mainly autobiographical where by the poet narrates about her life and her problems in her poems. Her poetry has a lot of confessions to make. To quote Robert Phillip "Confessional art whether poetry or not is a means of killing the beast which are within us, those dreadful dragon of dreams and experiences that must be hunted down concerned and exposed in order to be destroyed"(2). Thus, confessional poetry talks about the deep hidden truths of life of the poet. Who wants to break all shackles and come out with their confessions, how personal and private they may be.

It cannot be said that poetry especially the confessional one emerged only in modern times. Poetry has always contained an element of confession. To quote a few names from the past there were The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Confessions by Rousseau and The Confessions of an English Opium Eater by Thomas De Quincey. Confessionalism represents extreme development in modern poetry.

Sylvia's life was not a joy ride. She lost her father when she was just ten years of age and this separation from her father created a huge void in the life of Plath. Her father died because of a severe case of diabetes that could have been prevented. This thing got into her mind and she felt that her father committed suicide because he could have avoided his death. She was torn between the social and intellectual roles she had to play. In 1953 she consumed sleeping pills but later recovered with psychiatric help. Her marriage with Ted Hughes also made her a little skeptical of being known as just the

wife of Ted Hughes and having no identity of her own. This feelings of being lost as an individual haunted Plath day and night. Ted's affair with Assia Gutmann shattered her from within completely. In order to give vent to her pent up emotions she took refuge with poetry and felt it the best way to purify her conscience. The constant struggle of loneliness and brilliance continued in her mind that resulted in her barbaric suicide in 1963.

Plath's poetry deals with a variety of themes which allow her to open up her personal self to her readers. It is pertinent to mention that Plath's poetry is not just for the sake of disburdening herself from her pent up emotions but it also amalgamates into it the public discomforts as well. Her psychological torments have been compared to the atrocities done on Jews by the Nazis.

In order to bring out the self revelation in her poetry this paper examines various themes that were there in her poetry. "dying is as art, like everyting else" these lives from Plath's poem "lady lazarus" at once strikes the chord that "Dying" is "an art". Her longing for death finds clear reference in the poem.

"I have done it again
One year in every ten
I manage it".

In these lines Plath is talking about her attempted suicides and near death experiences. She also states about an accident which she met at the age of ten. "The first time it happened I was ten./ It was an accident" and then she refers to an attempted suicide when she was twenty. "The second time I meant/ to last it out and not come back at all".

In "Daddy" Plath desires to kill her father, "daddy, I have had to kill you". In another poem titled "Cut" she tells "I am ill/ I have taken a pill to kill". So death and suicide finds a considerable space in her poems. She wants to die and also wants to kill the memories of her dead father from her mind.

The fear of losing her husband Ted finds expression in "The Bee Meeting" when she says that "the bees will not to notice. They will not smell my fear my fear, my fear". She refers to people in general who would not bother to look at her situation and her fear of losing her husband. Poem "Daddy" and "Fever 103" also involve her private feelings. Her fever and resulting boredom has disillusioned her. Her father-fixation finds proofs throughout the poem "Daddy" and her married life also finds illustration in the same poem. "A man in black with meinkempf looks /drank my blood for a year/ seven years if you want to know".

In "Electra on Azelia Plath" Sylvia talks about the death of her father and her visit to her father's grave. The bee poems like "The Bee meeting", "The Arrival of the Bee Box" and "Stings" are the poems based upon her father's and her own experiences as bee keepers. There is also an element of alienation in her poems. She feels lonely and insecure after her father's death. She tries to unite with her father by trying to commit suicide. "I was ten when they buried you/ at twenty i tried to die/ and get back, back, back to you". (Daddy)

The sentiments expressed in her poetry reveals that her poems are truthful depiction of her inner self. In order to let there be a universal appeal in her poems she has used varied myths and realities and incorporated the same in her poetry. To conclude the paper we can make out that no doubt Plath's poems were revelation of her disturbed self and life yet her poems have universal appeals. I would like to end the paper by quoting Ted Hughes who says,

“Death is life in Sylvia Plath’s vision. This earthly life is merely a pre-requisite for death at times a preparatory series of small death” (155).

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