

METAPHOR AS A STYLISTIC DEVICE FOR CONSTRUCTING FEMALE IDENTITY IN SYLVIA PLATH'S SELECTED POEMS

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu tezisdagi Silviya Plathning "Ko'zgu", "Talabgor" va "Lolalar" she'rlarida ayol shaxsiyatini shakllantirishda metaforaning uslubiy vazifalari o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot kognitiv stilistika va feministik adabiy tanqidga tayanib, metaforaning shunchaki poetik bezak emas, balki lingvistik mexanizm sifatida ishlashini o'rganadi. Qiyosiy matn tahlili orqali ish shuni ko'rsatadiki, Plath ayol o'ziga xosligini ijtimoiy jihatdan qurilgan, psixologik jihatdan beqaror va doimiy ravishda qayta tiklanadigan tarzda ifodalash uchun konseptual metafora, moddiylashtirish, jonlantirish va lug'aviy qarama-qarshilikdan foydalanadi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, metafora asosiy uslubiy vosita bo'lib xizmat qiladi, uning yordamida Plath ayollik haqidagi an'anaviy tasavvurlarga qarshi chiqadi va patriarxal diskursning ayol subyektivligiga ta'sirini fosh etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Sylvia Plath, metafora, stilistika, ayol shaxsiyati, kognitiv stilistika, feministik adabiy tanqid, poetik til.

Аннотация. В тезисе рассматриваются стилистические функции метафоры в формировании женской идентичности в стихотворениях Сильвии Плат Mirror, The Applicant и Tulips. Используя методы когнитивной стилистики и феминистской литературной критики, автор показывает, что метафора выступает не только художественным приемом, но и языковым механизмом конструирования субъективности. Анализ показывает, что посредством концептуальной метафоры, реификации, олицетворения и лексических противопоставлений Плат раскрывает влияние общественных и гендерных норм на формирование женской идентичности.

Ключевые слова: Сильвия Плат, метафора, стилистика, женская идентичность, когнитивная стилистика, феминистская критика.

Abstract. This thesis examines the stylistic functions of metaphor in constructing female identity in Sylvia Plath's poems Mirror, The Applicant, and Tulips. Drawing upon cognitive stylistics and feminist literary criticism, the study explores how

metaphor functions as a linguistic mechanism rather than merely a poetic ornament. Through comparative textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that Plath employs conceptual metaphor, reification, personification, and lexical contrast to represent feminine identity as socially constructed, psychologically unstable, and continually reconstructed. The findings indicate that metaphor serves as the principal stylistic device through which Plath challenges conventional representations of womanhood and exposes the influence of patriarchal discourse on female subjectivity.

Keywords: *Sylvia Plath, metaphor, stylistics, female identity, cognitive stylistics, feminist criticism, poetic language.*

Introduction. The poetry of Sylvia Plath occupies a distinctive place in twentieth-century American literature because of its rich figurative language and complex representation of female experience. While numerous scholars have examined Plath's works from autobiographical and feminist perspectives, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the stylistic mechanisms through which metaphor constructs female identity. Modern stylistics regards metaphor as a cognitive process that transfers characteristics from a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain, thereby shaping the reader's conceptual understanding rather than merely decorating the text.¹ Consequently, metaphor in Plath's poetry should be understood as an important linguistic device that organizes poetic meaning and represents feminine subjectivity. In Plath's selected poems, metaphor consistently transforms ordinary objects into representations of female identity. Although *Mirror*, *The Applicant*, and *Tulips* employ different images, they rely on the same stylistic principle: abstract psychological and social experiences are expressed through concrete metaphorical structures. As Leech notes, metaphor creates semantic foregrounding by establishing unexpected relationships between literal and figurative meanings, encouraging readers to reinterpret familiar concepts.² This stylistic process enables Plath to expose the relationship between language, gender, and identity.

The poem *Mirror* constructs female identity through the conceptual metaphor of reflection. The opening statement, "*I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions*"³, immediately personifies the mirror, allowing an inanimate object to become the speaking subject. Linguistically, the lexical items *silver*, *exact*, and *truthful* belong to a semantic field associated with precision and objectivity, while the first-person narration foregrounds the authority of the mirror itself. According to Axelrod, Plath's mirror poems attempt to construct the poetic self through "figures of voicing" and

¹ Simpson, Paul. *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. London: Routledge. 2004. – P. 41.

² Leech, Geoffrey N. *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. London: Longman. 1969. – P. 153.

³ Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes. New York: Harper Perennial. 1998. – P. 173.

“metaphoric identification in lack”, suggesting that identity remains unstable rather than complete.⁴ The metaphor reaches its culmination in the image of the “terrible fish”, where ageing is represented as a disturbing transformation rather than a natural process. Thus, the metaphor functions stylistically by externalizing psychological self-perception and presenting female identity as continually reconstructed through reflection.

A different stylistic function of metaphor appears in *The Applicant*, where femininity is represented through the extended metaphor of a commercial product. The image “*A living doll, everywhere you look. It can sew, it can cook*”⁵ combines metaphor with reification, reducing the future wife to a functional object. The repeated pronoun *it* replaces the expected feminine pronoun, creating a grammatical marker of dehumanization, while the parallel structure “*It can sew, it can cook, it can talk*” foregrounds usefulness rather than individuality. Britzolakis describes this representation as the image of the “mechanized woman”, whose identity is reduced to domestic functions rather than personal autonomy.⁶ Similarly, Slater argues that Plath portrays woman as the “physical embodiment of commodity culture”, exposing the linguistic mechanisms through which patriarchal discourse commodifies femininity.⁷ Consequently, metaphor becomes a stylistic instrument for revealing how language itself constructs socially acceptable models of womanhood.

The metaphorical patterns developed in *Mirror* and *The Applicant* continue in *Tulips*, although the poem shifts from objectification to psychological reconstruction. The speaker’s declaration, “*I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses*”⁸, conceptualizes identity as a possession that can be surrendered. The cumulative repetition of *my name*, *my history*, and *my body* creates syntactic parallelism that emphasizes gradual self-effacement. At the same time, the lexical opposition between the white hospital environment and the vivid red tulips establishes two contrasting semantic fields representing emotional withdrawal and renewed vitality. Van Dyne interprets the hospital as a “neutral space” where social roles temporarily disappear, while the tulips interrupt this silence by restoring emotional and physical awareness.⁹ Britzolakis likewise observes that the flowers participate in a “chain of metaphors”

⁴ Axelrod, Steven Gould. *Sylvia Plath the Wound and the Cure of Words*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1990. – P. 190.

⁵ Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes. New York: Harper Perennial. 1998. – P. 221.

⁶ Britzolakis, Christina. *Sylvia Plath and The Theatre of Mourning*. 1999; New York: Oxford University Press. 2001. – P. 119.

⁷ Slater, Eleanor Catherine. ‘Sylvia Plath and the Containment of Women’s Domestic Identity’.

⁸ Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes. New York: Harper Perennial. 1998. – P. 160.

⁹ Van Dyne, Susan. *Revising Life: Sylvia Plath’s Ariel Poems*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1993. – P. 92.

through which the speaker's attempted rejection of social and maternal identities is ultimately challenged.¹⁰ Unlike the mirror or the doll, the tulips do not imprison identity; instead, they reconstruct it through metaphorical confrontation with life itself. Although these poems employ different metaphorical images, they demonstrate a common stylistic strategy. The mirror, the living doll, and the tulips function as different source domains through which Plath conceptualizes female identity. Each metaphor is reinforced by complementary stylistic devices, including personification, lexical repetition, semantic contrast, syntactic parallelism, and foregrounding. Consequently, metaphor functions not only as a figure of speech but also as the principal linguistic mechanism through which the poet represents identity as socially negotiated rather than biologically predetermined.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis demonstrates that metaphor occupies a central position in Sylvia Plath's poetic style. Through conceptual mapping, reification, personification, and lexical opposition, Plath transforms everyday objects into complex representations of feminine subjectivity. The study shows that metaphor performs cognitive, stylistic, and ideological functions simultaneously, allowing the poet to expose the influence of patriarchal discourse while constructing dynamic models of female identity. Therefore, the stylistic analysis of metaphor provides a productive approach to understanding both Plath's poetic language and the linguistic representation of gender in modern American poetry.

References

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