



10-86
8-90

LADY LAZARUS

=====

diary of a lesson)

by Alfred Carol

DO NOT SMOKE

DO NOT EAT IN THE CLASSROOM

That on the wall; all around, the students progressively arriving, puzzled as I am.

"Bright as Nazi lampshade.."

"Dying is an art...."

"The pure gold baby...."

That under my eyes (our eyes) on the desk. It shines, but, what could we figure out about it?

- a man enters the scene -

- Well bodies, Diana is not coming today: Sorry, but I don't like poetry (... was he really sorry?) and Plath is certainly not going to change my mind - The foot on the chair, looking straight. Choked up! how could a normal cultivated individual not to like Sylvia Plath (just Plath he said, how odd it sounds)? This can not enter our minds. Shall the class go on?

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

*A paperweight,
My face featureless, fine
Jew linen"*

- Here is an example of her loose stanzas; you can not connect them explicitly to the rest of the poem. - We are taken aback, left with no answer. But I later think: Should this explicit connection exist? is not a powerful image vaguely connected to the poem by a "million filaments" a legitimate poetical resource? - OK bud, but notice that in this case the connection can not be found unless you know the life of the author, and that is not GOOD POETRY...

A thunder in the classroom, almost a riot:

Good Poetry! Good Poetry!

This expression makes the rounds like a buzzing hornet. But the next question is still worse:

- What are the essences of quality in Poetry? - From then on, everybody gets mad because, putting poetry aside: what is quality? and,... what are the essences of something? To come out with an answer we should have to dive into a full course of Aristotelian philosophy, while, instead, we are there longing for an immediate explanation.

In the elevator - on the stairs - in the streets - FRUSTRATION is the word on every tongue.

.....

At home, still worried:

- (1) *"Vaig aprendre a fer l'amor
a l'ombra dels pins de Pedralbes
quan roncaven els camions
portant barques a passar l'Ebre
les barques de la Costa Brava"*

says G. Ferrater, and to fully understand it you need to know some facts about the Spanish civil war, and about Ferrater himself. For example, he spent a lot of time in Cadaqués (Costa Brava), and he was born in Reus, not far from the Ebre river. And he also committed suicide!

I look again at Lady Lazarus intently:

*"I rocked shut
a seashell
They had to call and call
And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls"*

What a way of describing it!

It sounds as though "*suicide can be fine*", like in the song (do you remember "Hair"?). Therefore a beautiful suicide can exist. SUICIDE, that shameful tabu firmly established by Christian morals and even other civil morals, could now be a beautiful artistic performance!

*"These are my hands
my knees
I may be skin an bone,*

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman"

Your body also, doesn't belong to some transcendent ruler any longer, but to yourself, and you do what you want with it.

I lean against the armchair, listening to far echoes of that music back in the past:

(2) *"Por qué Dios piadoso,
por qué chaman crime
ir en busca da morte que tarda,
cuando a un esta vida
lle cansa e lle afixe?"*

claimed Rosalía de Castro, another woman. So, some wonder: is suicide an artistic issue of weak, half-hysterical women?

(3) *"VERRA la morte e avrà i tui occhi -
questa morte che ci accompagna
dal mattino a la sera, insonne,
sorda, como un vecchio rimorso..."*

(4) *"Si l'on savait ce bonheur que j'ai...
on n'hésiterait pas si longtemps!
Oh mort, Ange de délivrance, que
ta paix est douce"*

whispers from Cesare Pavese, passion in Alfred de Vigny, both men. Italy, France, Galice, New England, Romanticism, World War II, Spanish Civil War... a network of references that makes up a new idea of suicide as a deliverance; an ultimate way of preserving freedom.

.....

clap, clap, clap...

- How was last class with Dan? -

Again in class, expectation: Lady Lazarus sounds musical and airy this time:

*"So, so Herr Doktor
So Herr enemy
Herr God, Herr Lucifer"*

Her father, of course! A bad souvenir, mythical, charged with all kind of evilness: a Panzer man, a Fascist, a Brute, a devil, with a meinkampf look; and grotesque like a Frisco Seal. Paradigm of men and of the nasty relationship she had with them, specially with her husband, the father of her fatherless son. Father, mother, son

mother
· ·
· ·
· ·
father son

a critical triangle. Should one of the vertices fail, a big trouble begins:

*"You will be aware of an absence, presently,
Growing beside you, like a tree,
A death tree, colour gone, an Australian gum tree -
Balding, gelded by lightning - an illusion,
And a sky like a pig's backside, an utter lack of attention."*

regrets Sylvia Plath, and I, looking up Ferrater, read:

(5) *"...El plor d'un nen
esquinça violent.
- Es potser el nen
que no hem fet i que se'ns queixa. -
Fill,
criatura dels altres, calla. Troba't
els dos que tu delates,....."*

Arbitrary affinities you say.... maybe, but let me be the needle of the thread that leads to the difficult objective of women's liberation, women in their triple condition of daughter, wife and mother.

The complexity of the situation is perfectly stated by Ferrater when he says (isn't he quoting a woman here?):

*"... but, you know, every woman
is a mother and thinks
every father is her child"*

While the harshness of the oppression underlying the set up is pitilessly described by Pavese:

(6) *"le cercava nel fieno le membra contratte,
le fiaccava, schiacciandole come fosse il suo padre
I profumo erano fiori pestati sui sassi."*

No wonder then that these women go crazy when trying to liberate themselves, and that they plunge into images as terrifying as the ones of THALIDOMIDE:

*"O half moon -
Half brain, luminosity -
Negro masked like a white
Your dark amputations crawl and appall -
Spidery, unsafe...."*

Wonderful, Gothic terror! nightmarish,
Whirlpool attracting our sensibility.

>> Critics say she exposed herself too much. There is no esthetic distance in her work <<

These words, sprouting like the burst of a machine gun, make me fall back from my divagations to the lists of contest. I am angry - What the devil have critics to do with the matter? Do we need their permission in order to appreciate - to love - an artist? We respect artists very much because they are the true Gods, but critics! what are they? aren't they like those medieval Physicians trying with turgid tongues to explain the diseases of their patients and always failing?

- I want to talk directly to you, sister Plath, and keep seeing those awful/beautiful images that you draw out from behind the reality:

*"Viciousness in the kitchen
the potatoes hiss..."*

Supreme words!

I want to celebrate you in turn, with those verses of Gerard de Nerval that fit so well to your soul:

*"Je suis le ténébreux, - le veuf, - l'inconsolé
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie:
Ma seule étoile est morte, - et mon luth constellé
Porte le soleil noir de la mélancolie"*

dong, dong... dong 10 o'clock, class is over. It is time to say good bye to you:

"- Hypocrite lecteur - mon semblable, mon frère"

Alfred Carol

ANNEX

Approximate translations

(1)

"I learned to make love
Under the pines of Pedralbes
When the trucks roared
Carrying boats to cross the Ebre
The boats from the Costa Brava."

(2)

"Why merciful God
Why to call it a crime
To look for a belated death
When this life
Tires and grieves you"

(3)

"Death will come and she will have your eyes -
This death that goes along with you
From the morning to the night, always awake,
Deaf, like an old remorse

