

I. Boruszkowska,
PhD student at Faculty of Polish Studies
Jagiellonian University,
Krakow, Poland

A POSSESSED, A HYSTERIC, A SEER – FEMALE CHARACTERS IN PLAYS OF LESYA UKRAINKA. INSANITY ON THE MARGINS OF DISCOURSE OF DIFFERENCE

I. Борушковська, *магістрант факультету польських досліджень Ягеллонського університету, м. Краків, Польща.*
Одержима, істеричка, пророчиця – жіночі персонажі в драмах Лесі Українки. Божевілля на полях дискурсу іншості. *Польські та українські письменники в кінці XIX і на початку XX століття у своїх роботах проаналізували стереотипи нормальності, різноманітність і інобуття. У своїх п'єсах «Блакитна троянда», «Касандра», «Одержима» Леся Українка створила унікальну концепцію жіночої модерністської суб'єктивності, героїню, погляди якої відрізняються від загальноприйнятих моделей поведінки. Особливо цікавим є маска божевілля в «Блакитній троянді».*

И. Борушковская, *магистрант факультета польских исследований Ягеллонского университета, г. Краков, Польша.*
Одержимая, истеричка, пророчица – женские персонажи в драмах Леси Украинки. Безумие на полях дискурса инанковости. *Польские и украинские писатели в конце XIX и начале XX века в своих работах проанализировали стереотипы нормальности, разнообразие и инобытие. В своих пьесах «Голубая роза», «Касандра», «Одержимая» Леся Украинка создала уникальную концепцию женской модернистской субъективности, героиню, представления которой отличаются от общепринятых моделей поведения. Особенно интересным является маска безумия в «Голубой розе».*

Insanity constitutes one of the key experiences of the modern man. As a phenomenon it eludes the grasp of science and a rational description, at the same time afflicting a sizeable part of the society. It also makes for an important theme in the arts.

Among the causes of interest in mental illness, in literature or journalism, we might name the popularity of the works by S. Freud or C. Lombroso, as well as the regular appearance of the theme in theatrical plays of acclaimed Western European dramatists – H. Ibsen, A. Strindberg, G. B. Shaw. Analyzing mental illness in a cultural context may lead one to conclude that it is a result of maladjustment with regards to prevailing behavioral norms, ideas about life-course development, and value systems. The accelerating civilization and the increased interest in individual existence contributed to the onset of many different forms of psychopathology as well as to magnified preoccupation with the internal human life, including its altered or deranged forms.

Mental affliction as a literary device is characteristic of the literature of modernism. Both Polish and Ukrainian writers from around the break of XIX and XX centuries dissected in their works the stereotypes of normalcy, breaking the hitherto prevalent literary taboo concerning difference and otherness in their larger sense. Derangement functions as one of the most significant forms of exclusion, hence the belief that the suffering person is not only undergoing an illness, but is also a captive, trampled upon by the political powers, deprived of his or her subjectivity and of the right to one's own form of being.

In the Ukrainian XIX/XX-century literature what looms in the foreground is one of the essential images of the modernist period – that of a woman. This development is owed mainly to the two most important writers of early Ukrainian modernism – Lesya Ukrainka and Olga Kobylańska. Oksana Zabużko considers this very moment constitutive for the appreciation of female writing as generally acceptable instead of as merely an exception to the (male) rule [2, p. 149]. Lesya Ukrainka was the first to introduce to Ukrainian literature women characters with internal sophistication and multi-dimensionality, depicting them in a novel, inventive manner.

If we were to describe Lesia the Ukrainian as one of the most famed Ukrainian female authors, as the foremost Ukrainian poet of the XIX/XX-century break (next to Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko she is hailed as one of the national prophets), then we still would not do justice to her role in Ukrainian cultural consciousness and the literary process.

Lesya Ukrainka (Лієся Українка), born Larissa Petrovna Kosach-Kvitka (Лариса Петрівна Косач-Квітка) on February 13th (25th) 1871 in Zwiahel (Ukraine), and died on July 19th (August 1st) in Surami (Georgia). Her family background was the Ukrainian intelligentsia – mother was the writer Olha Kosacz (Ołena Pczółka), uncle - the scholar, linguist and historian Mychajło Drahomanow. She spent her childhood

years in Volhynia, in the town of Łuck among others [1, p. 296]. As a very young child Łesia was struck with bone tuberculosis, which resulted in spending much of her adult life seeking treatment and visiting various sanatoria. Frequent travels allowed her to master foreign languages and her reading habits made it possible to acquire an education without leaving home [1, p. 297].

In her plays Łesia the Ukrainian brought forth a distinct concept of female modernist subjectivity. Her female protagonists are full-blooded characters, women evincing behaviors deviating from conventional norms. Łesia the Ukrainian gave birth to female characters with mental affliction in the following works: *Blue Rose* (Блакитна троянда), *Cassandra* (Касандра), *The Possessed* (Одержима). Particularly interesting is the mask of madness (taken as a broad cultural phenomenon) in Łesia's protagonists: female hysteria in *Blue Rose*, the madness of love in the drama play *The Possessed*, and prophetic insanity in *Cassandra*.

In the middle of XIX-century's ninth decade, Lesya Ukrainka turned to a new literary genre. Her first drama entitled *Blue Rose* was written in the year 1896, yet printed only in 1908. It tells the story of the life of Ukrainian intelligentsia - its protagonists are educated, they discuss literature, art, and science. The author reaches to the European dramaturgy of the era, and touches upon such popular modernist subjects as mental illness, love and death. One could say that it is with this very work that Łesia earned her place in the canon of modernist, or decadent, drama.

The main protagonist is a 25-year old woman Lubow Hoshchynska (Любов Гощинська). The centerpiece of the work is the relationship between Lubow and Orest, who is a writer in love with the woman. The whole story develops between those two, even though other characters have their fair share of stage, such as Orest's mother. He and Lubow constitute a pair who have in common not only mutual love, but also illness, or perhaps rather a proclivity for illness. Their love is also pervaded with fear - as decadents they do not know how to love someone for real. What they constantly seek in the relationship is something unearthly, a poetry of emotions of sorts, something unreachable. The symbol of those longings is the "blue rose" appearing in the title. The color of a rose - flower symbolizing love - is red. Blue meanwhile evokes associations with spirituality, religiousness, art. The title of the drama brings to mind other flowers with their own connotations in literature, such as red roses and white lilies - the emblems of love and death indeed.

The protagonist is an interesting character - she does not believe she could ever attain happiness. She is constantly haunted by the realization that she might have inherited mental disturbance from her mother. It is exactly this awareness that aggravates her illness - one could even say that she is persuading herself of her own insanity. Within the pair Lubow-Orest there occurs a tragedy, and disease eventually conquers love: Lubow overhears Orest's mother calling her "deranged", which devastates her as she retains the image of her own mother, who because of mental affliction ruined her husband's life and to a certain extent - also that of her daughter; a break-up ensues; Orest grows ill after the two parted ways, becomes paralyzed, his mother fears for son's life; the loving couple meet once again - a very emotional scene terminates in the female protagonist's suicide. Lubow, having believed happiness is forever out of reach for her, decides to leave Orest and poison herself.

Blue Rose is a drama in which the author describes love permeated with fear. The main character is cognizant of the fact that she must lay down her own life as a sacrifice. Throughout the whole plot she is accompanied by the feeling of being torn between love and death, between the overwhelming desire for personal fulfillment and the consciousness of the impossibility of finding it in marriage, in love.

Blue Rose, by employing the theme of Eros and Tanathos, falls within the literary context of European modernism. Eros - the god of love, Tanathos - the god of death, often appear in tandem in literary works beginning in the earliest epochs. However, when examining the later oeuvre of Łesia the Ukrainian, it can be surmised that it constituted only a brief episode spurred by the interest in decadence and pessimism prevalent at the break of centuries.

Written in 1896, *Blue Rose* is thought to be the first psychological drama in Ukrainian literature and the first dramatic work rendered in accordance with the modernist literary conventions. Contemporary feminist critique (T. Hundorowa, S. Pawlyczko, W. Ahejewa) invokes this play when drawing attention to the role of sexuality, female insanity and hysteria, and when analyzing modernism as feminism. S. Pawlyczko in particular pointed out that the writer deliberately chose the topic of madness, seeing the phenomenon as a metaphor indispensable for understanding the world [3, p. 243]. It is also worth to single out the autobiographical elements in the play - in this very period the author was undergoing treatment for bone tuberculosis and hysteria, which made her privy to the psychology of a diseased person and to medical methods. We can find traces of investigations into hysteria undertaken personally by Łesia - including

detailed descriptions of the condition and allusions to the ideas of S. Freud and R. von Krafft-Ebing. In her correspondence with another Ukrainian female writer – Olha Kobyłańska, Łesia performs a certain kind of auto-diagnosis, describing symptoms of hysteria ("irrational apprehension", "fear without a cause", "bouts of crying", "headaches", "insomnia"). Thus, the letters of Łesia together with her literary works may be turned into an object of study. Hysteria was deemed a womanly disease since the early ages. What is more, is that quite often, especially in antiquity, a purported connection between this specific condition and lack of sexual activity was suggested. As is emphasized by Showalter, being labeled "insane" grants the woman in question not only a verbal latitude, but also affords her access to new experiences, unavailable to those toeing the line, considered "normal" [6, p. 189].

S. Freud in his *Studies in Hysteria* proposes to look into traumatic childhood events in order to perform a case-study concerning a troubled patient, applying so called "therapy with speech" [5, p. 45]. The psychoanalytical therapeutic method can be transferred into the field of literary analysis – in the case of Łesia the Ukrainian we are able to reconstruct the particular traumatic episode which the protagonist had been a part of and determine the unconscious conflict that precipitated the disease. The psychoanalyst searches through the patient's utterances looking for blunders, slips of the tongue, repetitions, omissions, in order to discover that which is hidden in the subconscious and to work through the trauma. When dealing with an analysis of a drama, one can call upon the stage the "forgotten" / "concealed" characters - the parents of Lubow. The protagonist's father is mentioned only twice – which we could interpret as an adumbration of Electra Complex. The few-year old Lubow is witness to a tender scene where the loving father whom she admires tends to her mentally deranged mother. An unconscious, suppressed desire for the father would explain the distance the protagonist holds vis-à-vis the mother, perceived as a rival. Additionally, Lubow feels threatened by her mother who upon realizing the daughter's feeling towards her husband, wants to inflict a punishment of sorts by transferring the disease to her. The fear of mother's retaliation as a rival accompanies the girl into her adult life. Lubow thinks that her illness is a comeuppance for falling in love with her father, a comeuppance inherited from the mother. The unconscious hostility throws a shade onto the adult life of Lubow, who chooses not to have children of her own, lest she become like her mother. Ambiguous feelings with regards to the mother undergo a transformation – they move from a stage of compassion for her suffering to a sub-conscious hatred. At this point in Lubow's family history there dominates a perception of being left out in the cold by the mother who is "attached" to her own illness, and Lubow sees her as appropriating the whole of husband's attention, which makes Lubow deprived of any of the previously mentioned compassionate feelings. Next to the Electra Complex, we could point out the significance of "rose" found in the title. In the play the protagonist often seeks refuge in the family garden with an abundance of flowers - symbols of the feminine and the motherly element. We come across the motif of flowers being cut which could be read as symbolic of castration – the protagonist propelled by her penis envy (the female aspect of castration complex), seeing her mother as a competitor, tries to symbolically challenge her by cutting down the flowers in mother's garden. Lubow condemns her mother (and indirectly herself as well) due to the weaknesses handed down from generation to generation – in this case a mental disease. Lubow sees her hysteria as springing from the conflicts with her mother. What happens throughout the story is a suppression of the mother figure, and Lubow suffers the trauma of an unwanted child. The awareness of being rejected, pushed away by the mother elicits in the protagonist a feeling of non-existence, a perception that her being is not fully valuable and therefore can be annihilated at any moment.

Apart from the mental illness, the protagonist inherits from her mother artistic talent as well. The play emphasizes the similarity between the mother and the daughter, commonality of their characters, through which the author reveals the genealogy of talents. However, to follow in mother's footsteps and develop her gifts as a musician and a painter is too much of a challenge for Lubow – she renounces it saying "more perseverance is needed here than I can give" and "I know music enough to know that a pianist I will not be".

The model protagonist in Łesia's dramatic work is a young, strong, proud, beautiful woman in possession of an aristocratic soul. When touching upon the female problematic, the author eagerly employs ancient myths, reinterpreting them, and also portraits contemporary women. All of her female protagonists love, oftentimes more than their male partners and all of them suffer because of love, losing their men (like Cassandra with Dolon), not finding partners worthy of them (Dolores - the fiancé of the legendary Don Juan), not having known love they dream and yearn for it, longing fruitlessly for unattainable persons such as Miriam does towards the Messiah in *The Possessed* (1901). A frequent theme is the acceptance of one's solitude or even the deliberate choice of it, which is presented as the highest sacrifice. Lubow Goszczyńska, the protagonist of *Blue Rose*, due to the hereditary mental disease renounces love and happiness in order to

prevent herself from inflicting pain on her hypothetical future family. The protagonists, irrespective of the historical guise, epochs and circumstances in which they came to live, do not afford themselves the luxury of compromise, they rebel and fight, opposing the apology of weakness and humility, and the passive acceptance of fate.

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