

THE SEA IN THE WORKS OF SYLVIA PLATH AND PETYA DUBAROVA: A COMPARISON¹

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Abstract: This article compares the portrayals of the sea in Sylvia Plath's and Petya Dubarova's works. Both authors wrote their major poetry and prose during the Cold War, the former in the 1950s, early 1960s, the latter in the 1970s, on both sides of the Atlantic, respectively. They also belonged to opposing political and military camps – the USA and NATO on one side, and the Comecon on the other of which Bulgaria was a member state. The sea as a heterotopic place and space bordering on the human ones in their case will be shown to be a frequently personified natural element that is benevolent to the narrator and that allows a getaway into a phantasmatic world composed of dreamscapes marked by fictional transformations of the body typically contained in the areas around Boston, USA and Burgas, Bulgaria. Strongly present in their childhood, the sea also served as a vital force of the imagination which helped sustain both poets in their adolescence years and whose waning power in terms of its receding literary presence eventually signaled their approaching untimely demise.

Keywords: sea, journals, letters, Comecon, Cold War, modernism, comparative literature

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1. Based on the author's monograph *Feminine Selves in Sylvia Plath's Prose and Poetry: The Perspective of Compared Lived Experience in Fiction*. – a. n.

As a place of mass tourism during the season, the beach has been called by Michel Foucault (1984) “a site of temporary relaxation” (“Of Other Spaces”, p.3). Insofar as it can be seen as a border area between the land and the sea, its cultural qualities are related to human activities of various nature – from beachcombing to sunbathing and fishing, to name the ones that come readily to mind. The heterotopic dimensions of the beach and its appertaining elemental areas – land and water – are hence enriched by a space of transgression with the American Sylvia Plath and the Bulgarian Petya Dubarova who explore its protean properties and populate them with fictional humans who, once found in this environment, instantly adapt by becoming partially or completely amphibian. Another important element in this article is the exploration of what Foucault calls “propinquity” (ibid., p.2), that is proximity and namely how the sea affects places and spaces in its vicinity. We shall see that with both writers this often results in examples of daydreaming – the sea becomes a personality, or it simply exercises a benign influence irradiating nearby areas, affecting the narrator directly. While these transformations of space are typically linked to a fictional rendition of experienced childhood, its iterations on the pages of the authors under scrutiny contain the immediacy of what has just been experienced or may contain the coloration of the fond memory. Since the two poets in all certainty did not know about each other and no direct influence can be established, the comparison is in line with 21st century perceptions and concepts as neatly synthesized by Ben Hutchinson (2018) who in *Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction* provides the possible lines of comparative studies not based on influence, in this case *differing vs conferring responses to a recurring question* (p. 19) – the Cold War and *comparing occurrences of a particular topic in different literary periods* (ibid., p. 20) – the sea as a motif. The article also includes a combination of *historical vs geographical approach – looking across time vs looking across cultures* (ibid., p. 20). Likewise, the study also explores the possibility of *inherently acceptable comparisons of cultures in a minor language – Bulgarian² through a major language – English³* (ibid., p. 24). It is the aim of this study to also contribute to this critic’s affirmation that “in the continuous need to justify itself, that marks comparative literature as uniquely beholden to changing intellectual fashions, and thus to changing disciplinary metaphors [...] it must be understood comparatively, which is to say as historically contingent and context-specific” (Hutchinson, 2018, p. 12).

Sylvia Plath in her *Letters* (2017), *Journals* (2007) and *Johnny Panic* (2001) prose has a lot to say about the sea – the Atlantic Ocean at Boston. In her *Letters* it is an immediate reflection of the time spent near it and is always related to an incident which involves herself as a child. The letters featuring it as a setting

2. All translations from Bulgarian into English in this article are mine. – a. n.

3. Emphasis mine. – a. n.

are typically addressed to her grandparents and the young Plath comes out as the girl who is not afraid to brave the big waves when others watch at a distance. Her *Journals* and prose collection provide glimpses into the more distant past, especially prominent in some of her later essays when she was already living in England, was married to the English poet Ted Hughes and he was about to leave her or had already left her, which undoubtedly brings a yet stronger intensity to the evoked experience. The Bulgarian poet Petya Dubarova (2015) who wrote mostly poetry, but also prose including a journal which has been published recently also in its incompleteness, lived in Burgas, Bulgaria, on the coast of the Black Sea. Just like with Plath, the sea is a strong connection to Dubarova's childhood, and is well reflected in her *Poems* and essays, with both playing a vital role of a benign force related to a carefree existence, self-exploration, and an escape from oppressive realities. For Dubarova the warm southern sea of Burgas was a magical world, which could also be observed in certain short stories by Plath in reference to Boston and the Atlantic, but the Bulgarian poet had a very personal touch with the sea, expressed in her signature seal of a chromatism "синьо вълишебство" which resists a literal translation in English and should probably be rendered with the adjective *azure* rather than with *blue*. Her codified *azure/ blue* poetical world abounds in chromatisms dominated by this color which present the sea as a mythological creature often with humanoid aspects.

What formally brings Dubarova close to Plath was the fact that she also lived in the Cold War period but on the other side of the Berlin Wall, in Bulgaria, and so had the Comecon experience. Strikingly original for Bulgaria, with her natural rhymes, highly melodious idiom, cosmic tones, sense of magic and belonging, as well as with the intense portrayals of city- and seascapes, Burgas, and the Black Sea, she is the definitive Bulgarian poet of childhood and the sea. Writing about herself as a subject, Dubarova was part of an extant movement of excellent poets who also wrote confessionally such as Konstantin Pavlov, Hristo Fotev, Aleksandar Gerov, Ekaterina Yosifova and Boris Hristov and by writing in this mode they emphasized on the personal experience as opposed to ideologically important topics very much as the American Confessional poets of the 1950s and 1960s did. The Americans among whom there are names such as Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, John Berryman, W. D. Snodgrass, and Sylvia Plath thus inscribed themselves under the label *the Silent Generation*, relegating their internalized protest to poetry. Dubarova was fond of listening to Pink Floyd, Smoky and the Beatles and that alone shows a clear dissenting attitude towards the communist regime which did not tolerate Western rock music. She translated some of their songs which in her translation sound so much like the rest of her poetry that they are rather free adaptations than true translations. Elitsa Dubarova, her sister, from the "Forward" to the 2015 two-volume edition of her prose and poetry, reports that Dubarova was published in a European anthology called *Passages*

(2001) alongside Goethe, Petrarch, and Shakespeare. Also, her poetry has been translated into English in a book called *Here I Am, in Perfect Leaf Today* (1992) and launched in the USA (E. Dubarova, 2015, 1, p. 9).

There are many points of similarity between Plath and Dubarova bringing the two poets very close: the important theme of the sea in the Bulgarian poet's childhood, the fact that she wrote in a manner which was based on personal experiences, the introvert character of both her prose and poetry, the reflection of the epoch in her works and her tragic end only at the age of 17 through suicide in 1979. Dubarova may have suffered from depression herself although she mentions in her journal that she was naturally happy and did not need special occasions for that; her early poetry is also sparkling with exuberance. However, her death caused by taking sleeping pills also brings her close to Plath in one of the American poet's unsuccessful attempts to curb her life. Just like Plath, her journal is unfinished since only excerpts from it have been published, possibly potentially hiding family secrets or a particularly unpleasant exposure of the communist regime which is supposed to have been gone since 1989. As a reason for her suicide⁴ has been cited an unfortunate incident where she was unjustly accused of damaging some factory equipment during a school brigade – for producing Burgas beer⁵. Dubarova's journal entries and poems about school are numerous and gradually the communist school emerges as a sinister inhuman institution which aims to crush students' creativity and emotions. Dubarova, like Plath, loved sunbathing and bronzing up until from her beloved white in the summer she often turned almost black. With Plath, the sea is a place of play with her friends or her father, a place of endless daydreaming once the loss of the father figure has become too oppressive to bear – Otto Plath, her father, died when she was 9 years of age which the precocious and vulnerable Sylvia felt as a betrayal. The *coup de grâce* was delivered by Hughes leaving her in 1962 after 7 years of marriage, the double loss being reflected in Plath's angry poem "Daddy".

The sea in the two poets' works thus becomes a locus of heterotopic experiences, an element that underscores Heidegger's idea of the resident's being in a *place* and dwelling in its appertaining *spaces*⁶ (Heidegger, 1985, p. 65; Malpas, 2006,

4. In *The Bell Jar* (1966) Plath suggests that only psychiatrists should be held responsible for the patients' suicides: "And then Doctor Nolan told me how the best of psychiatrists have suicides among their patients, and how they, if anybody, should be held responsible, but how they, on the contrary, do not hold themselves responsible" (p. 253). Still, Dubarova may not have been suicidal at all. Much less than Plath's texts hers offer little evidence to that effect. – a. n.

5. See Pencho Kovachev's article about Petya Dubarova's note before her death on bg-voice.com as of 19 March 2014. – https://bg-voice.com/zagaduchnoto_predsmurnto_pismo_na_petya_dubarova/ – a. n.

6. Also discussed in *Modern(ist) Portrayals of the City in Dickens and Dos Passos: Similarities, Differences, Continuities* (p. 30) and *The Different Dobruja in the Literature be-*

p. 230). Jeff Malpas also develops the idea of the relationship between *place* and *event* – the place always seen in the process of transpiring, “taking place” (ibid., p. 221), never ceasing to change. The *event* itself can be seen as a “disclosive happening of belonging”⁷ (ibid., p. 223), that is, the events in the discussed works by Plath and Dubarova will be viewed as being revelatory of the girls’ belonging to Massachusetts (Boston) and Burgas, respectively.

The information concerning Plath’s childhood and obtained from the journal entries was rendered there from the distance and further warping of the memory. It was through the same prism that her short stories about that period were written, too. Their capacity of evoking a memorable scene that illuminates an important moment through the liberating effect of autofiction is very important. The *Journal* entries may have served as a foundation on which to build the story, motioning the spotlight over the respective event, that is, the *Journals* that are now lost. As for Plath’s *Letters*, they provide invaluable information about her very early writing, as well as her evolving writing techniques.

Using a brainstorming exercise, Plath thinks of an incident from her childhood which exposes the process of creating such stories from memory, based on free associations that were tangent on the actual event. Among others, Andersen’s Ice Queen from his *Fairy Tales* (1981) and Lewis Carroll’s Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* (2009) inevitably appear. The tedium of dating reflected in the *Journals* is broken by child-like activities whenever Plath finds herself near the ocean in Boston:

July 19 – This morning I awoke into dampness, the windows white and vague with fog. This afternoon, while all the family was out the first big storm came. I had just washed my hair, and the rain began, big, wet drops from the great spread of sky [...] I could look through the screen to the wildly heaving trees, the gray ocean, angry with white foam, the crackling blasts of sheet lightning and the immediate whip cracks and rattling, banging, earsplitting bursts of thunder. Water ran in rivers down the pavement, and suddenly I remembered to shut the windows. But even as I ran from room to room, trying to close the fourteen or fifteen windows on the side where the rain was coming in, it was too late, and the sills were wet with puddles, and the water was collecting in streams along the floor (Plath, 2007, p. 77).

The description above allows us to see the young Plath identifying with the child when near the ocean. Even though she is occupied with counting windows, we are being presented with a highly poetical but controlled portrayal of the rainstorm and the ocean, that is, the hectic involvement of the speaker in preventing the water from flooding the many rooms of the house (judging by the number of

tween the Wars (p. 92). – a. n.

7. Ibid., pp. 226, 92. – a. n.

windows). Despite the heavy metaphorical usage throughout the description, it does not appear overburdened. In the *Journals* we have descriptions of the sea that experiment with colors – obviously, a good exercise for descriptive writing by Plath. Most of them are very good, with a few of them appearing overdone in the composite color effect, and cluttered, for example: “the ocean is cerulean towards the horizon, vivid azure nearer shore, blue and sheened as peacock feathers” (ibid., p. 238); “Clouds scudded across the pale thin brightening white moon, which laid a paving of platinum light on the ocean” (ibid., p. 250), etc.

In her letters from the 1940s, Plath’s perceptions of the ocean are, naturally, much more within what we would expect of a child – immediate perceptions – from the memory of an event that has just happened, for example in a letter to her grandparents whom she calls “Grammy and Grampy”, from July 13, 1945, she just calls it “salty ocean” (Plath, 2017, p. 54). She also seems to be the only girl that dares to brave the big waves: “I was the only one who dared to go in first for the waves were strong and cold until you ducked” (ibid., p. 54). In a letter to her mother from July 25, 1946, aged 14, more adjectives are applied and the description is excellent for a girl at her age, containing not only the changing faces of the ocean, but also the activities practiced there, with lots of physical details: “When we arrived we sat down on the familiar white sand and had our nosebag lunches, and then made our barefoot way tediously over the barnacled rocks, until we at last reached the sandy golden strip where the low tide was. How I love the ocean! We then hunted for sea creatures in the shallow, warm pools between the rocks!” (ibid., p. 103). Plath’s letters to her mother are considerably longer than those to her grandparents and usually relate a story, thus being excellent examples of narrative/ descriptive essays, for example: [describing a bike ride, July 1, 1947] “We passed little country farms and gardens on the way, luxuriant with placid spotted cows and bright yellow daisies. The warm, sweet moist smell of the wayside grass was wafted to our nostrils as we rounded a bend and came smack against the blue curve of the ocean” (ibid., p. 119). In another letter to her mother from 5 July 1947, Plath pays more attention to detail, and we can notice a shift of the usual for her adjectives applied to the *waters*, adding brusque concreteness as well as the sensation of plentitude and pervasiveness: “The waters were a light, salty blue and a sandy, smooth bar stretched out into the ocean. The water was free from crabs and seaweed, and I went swimming with Sally Haven, an adorable girl who lives in Newton” (ibid., p. 125).

Sometimes the correspondent would be different which brings about some stylistic modifications. In a letter to Hans-Joachim Neupert, a pen-pal of hers dated 24 September 1948, she writes in a manner which can be seen as deliberately literary: “Somehow I have a special place in my heart for the ocean. I like the way the water changes from one mood to another – from high waves on dark, stormy days, to tranquil ripples on sunny days. I still remember a

night that I spent on a lonely beach” (ibid., p. 163). What follows is yet another incident told near the ocean.

Childhood is much more present in the *Letters* (2017), in the *Journals* (2007) being occasionally evoked in the memory. Just like Dubarova, Plath grew up near the sea and it is very much present in all her writings concerning her childhood and adolescence. Before we get to the masterful portrayals of New York and the Atlantic from *The Bell Jar* (1966), Plath’s seascapes remain vivid, intelligent and a bit overambitious, which reflects her very young age for a writer. The texts have also demonstrated the acute awareness Plath had of the person she was talking to.

The sea is mainly present in Dubarova’s poetry which contains about 200 pieces and almost every single one of them could be used for the purposes of this analysis. Since the poems will be discussed in translation, there will be things from the original that will be missing, as any translation, even the best one, cannot prevent it. They were written in Bulgarian to show the sheer joy of using the language in celebration of life and were not meant to be translated.

In “Somewhere there”⁸ (*Там някъде*) written in 1977 from her acclaimed posthumous *The Sea and I (Аз и морето)* (2015) we find ourselves in the recognizable Burgas of the 1970s, also captured in the film reels of the epoch and today in the collective memory of those who were lucky enough to see it with their own eyes. It is rendered by the 15-year-old Petya in poetic colors with elements of nature representative of the city: “Somewhere there, in clouds, in maddening vines,/ From the eyelashes captured the taste of the brines/ From the sea-home of the salty crab/ From some enchanted old blue slab”| *Там някъде в облаци, в луди лози,/ от мигли запазили дъх на сълзи,/ от морския дом на соления рак,/ от някакъв стар, омагьосан син бряг* (Dubarova, 2015, 1, p. 13). It is obvious that the vines with their immediate access are more animated than the still life that follows, but every detail is important, and we have the presence of the sea everywhere – from the people’s *eyelashes* to the *salty crab* and *blue slab*. The *maddening vines* could also be a poetic reproduction of the haze which occurs close to the sea, as well as their irresistible pull to the sea people of Burgas whose eyelashes all have retained the sea in them. The vines are the ones that send a wave-like effect of movement to all other elements in the picture. Immediately after that appears the lyrical ‘I’, having set the scene. The appearance of the sun, some two stanzas down, over the sea city changes all the surroundings and affects the speaker: “A sun with the magic of a golden

8. This translation of a poem by Petya Dubarova from Bulgarian into English, as well as the other translations of her works, in part or in entirety, is done with non-commercial purposes and pursues no financial gain, the only scope being rendering the content of the work in the most representative manner for its spirit and essence so that it can be analyzed in this study. – a. n.

fountain/ Erupts from the soft vault almost undone/ And some sort of a strange matte dawn/ Makes me happy, tender and fond”] *Слънце с магия на златен фонтан/ изригва от мекия свод разлюлян./ А някаква матова странна зора/ ме прави щастлива и нежно добра* (ibid., p. 13). The *sun* causes a complete change of the environment, obviously for the eyes that register the change of colors and transformation of nature. While some transformations are insignificant, others are violent – the *vault almost undone*. This awakening to life of the city makes the speaker smile and she is suddenly *fond* of the changed environment, the lines suggesting an overall feeling of goodness. This ever-present craving for the warm sun of Burgas, Southern Bulgaria, and the warm colors of the sea at summer make Dubarova a poet of the southern Bulgarian sea.

In this ecstatic perception of nature Dubarova can be compared to Emily Dickinson (2012) in most of her poems. The lyrical ‘I’ in this poem of Dubarova’s is overly generous and wants to give the gift of the good mood to everyone, having captured the magic of summer Burgas. Likewise, Dickinson usually presents a solitary observer who remains in blissful solitude inebriated with godly nature – “I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed” (Dickinson, 2012, p. 28). By contrast, Plath is not so romantic as Dubarova, and not bubblingly ecstatic about changing nature, either, possibly due to the different effect of the Atlantic by comparison to that of the warm southern sea. She likes to observe and describe but is usually not very involved in the description. Instead, she likes to transgress spaces in nature on her own, when no one is expecting it, breaking on through to the other side. In this gem of a poem, Dubarova, aged 15, has the child’s desire of unconditional sharing absent in Plath at 16.

In “Murder” (*Убийство*) dated in 1975, aged only 13, Dubarova constructs one of her most memorable poems with a strong ecological theme – the pollution of her beloved sea which, just like in all her poems, is personified into some sort of a good-natured superhuman being, a leviathan that stoically bears the brunt of human abuse but who is finally defeated in his magnanimous super-humanness, deprived of the capacity to create, and give joy. The man-made element – the harbor is also personified into an evil cynic through the act of spitting crude oil. As with other poems by Dubarova, here we can also see three stages of an event – the spilling of the oil, the immediate reaction of the wounded sea and the disappointed people who fail to understand, and finally, a grim prediction of the death of the sea brought on by continuous misunderstanding and criminal neglect on part of the people: “A harbor spat crude oil/ Insolently creased his eyes and sneered/ A cold shiver ran through the sea,/ He coughed, strung gray veins, reared”] *Едно пристанище изплю мазут./ Нахално сви очи и се захили./ Премина през морето тръпка студ, закашля то, изопна сиви жили* (Dubarova, 2015, 1, p. 72). In this chronological cause-and-effect narrative

sequence, Dubarova is undoubtedly influenced by the Bulgarian tradition, her reliving the event is very emotional, the sea, an element of nature and the harbor – a man-made structure personified into good and evil humanoids, respectively.

The second stanza typically shows a member (offspring) that has become a casualty of the act: “A wave – beautiful and good,/ Poisoned lay beside the quay/ And sad seagulls with seagull plumes/ Adorned her grave, see”| *Една вълна – красива и добра,/ отровена полегна върху кея/ и тъжни чайки с чайкови пера/ закичиха и гроба ѝ/ и нея* (ibid., p. 72). The sea reacts as a human would over the death of his/ her child: “The sea did not sleep until dawn/ His child sadly to bemoan.../ In his heart he closed the sorrow/ And wistful waited for the morrow”| *Морето не заспа до сутринта./ За мъртвата си рожба дълго плака.../ Затвори във сърцето си скръбта/ и утрото замислено дочака* (ibid., p. 72). Dubarova keeps narrating the consequences of the oil spill eventually presenting the people who refuse to understand: “But he was silent in a light so gray/ His wound smarting bitter/ The beautiful, perished wave/ Kept spilling her poisoned litter...”| *Но то мълчеше в сива светлина/ и пареше му раната горчива –/ красивата загинала вълна./ Отровата не спря да се разлива...* (ibid., p. 72). The direct victims of the ecological disaster – dying fish, dolphins and seaweed also come into view with some naturalism arising from the vivid economical depiction the graphical concreteness of which is as much as hinted at, but as with so many of Dubarova’s works, it can easily be finalized through the readers’ imagination (ibid., p. 72). The poem finishes upon a postapocalyptic vision prophetically evoking a nuclear disaster (Chernobyl) or a nuclear arms exchange, which was always in the air during the Cold War, with an equally devastating effect on the sea: “And someday a freezing scowling cold/ Will envelop the harbor, oh so gray/ Under black foam as if under a mold/ At his feet the sea will die away”| *И някой ден навъсен, студ суров/ пристанището сиво ще облъхне, под черна пяна като под покров/ в нозете му морето ще издъхне* (ibid., p. 72). Plath’s highly evocative metaphor of the *bell jar* finds its place in Dubarova’s poem through portraying similar masks of uncaring people and indifferent institutions; the latter in Dubarova are completely absent for understandable reasons, crystalizing, like in Plath’s novel, into the *mold*, enveloping, covering all, effectively stifling life.

At this tender age Dubarova easily compares to the early Plath in the themes of her poems and the depth with which she treats them, creating an environment eerily free of adults. While they are visibly and palpably there in Plath’s early poem “Bitter Strawberries” (Plath, 1981, p. 299), in Dubarova their presence is usually reduced to the classroom where they stand in hierarchical opposition to the children.

Dubarova’s poetry goes through a transformation from 1977 onwards, becoming increasingly transcendental. The sea gradually recedes, the topics of secrets, lies,

guilt, ingratitude become central, the school is omnipresent as an insupportable oppressive institution, the school uniform – hateful because of its insistence on monochrome colors in a contrast with the poet’s “multicolor girl’s heart”. The bodily perceptions, the ecstasy and hedonistic delight of contemplating the changing cityscape with the beloved sea nearby no longer work and are ousted by an impostor – the preoccupation with the spiritual at the expense of the carnal. Religion also slowly creeps in but rather as a question to which Dubarova’s answer is that after death we live on in our children, thus taking a position very close to that of Plath – the nonexistence of God as we know Him from the Bible.

The analyzed works by the two female poets have shown the importance of their growing up by the sea. Plath was closer in age to Dubarova when she created her poems from *Juvenilia*, but they are not precisely dated. At any rate, she must have been at least 17 or 18 years of age, judging by Hughes’s note, and still may have written from memory. The sea from her childhood is more present in her letters and *Johnny Panic* (2001) prose. The poems by Dubarova are the freshest take on living and growing up by the sea as they evolved from the sunny summer girl, smiling, and laughing. Unfortunately, she became the serious school student who from her photographs does impart the look of a prisoner in a school uniform who would share that her hell is the high school – the English Language School of Burgas, with its relentless intransigence and rigid discipline. Dubarova’s poems are then unique because they not only recreate childhood in the 1970s Comecon Bulgaria, but they are children’s literature written by a child which can also be enjoyed by adults. Further transformations of space related to the sea are to be observed in both writers’ prose.

In her essay “Ocean 1212-W” (Plath, 2001, p.24) written in 1962 from the prose collection *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, Plath returns yet again to her childhood, this time around from the perspective of the twenty-nine-year-old adult, the age when Anne Sexton created her first major childhood-based poems. The essay shows the confidence of a writer who has proved her craft and who reaches back to times gone by, evoking yet again the mighty American Atlantic from her current life in England: “My childhood landscape was not land but the end of land – the cold, salt, running hills of the Atlantic. I sometimes think my vision of the sea is the clearest thing I own. I pick it up, exile that I am, like the purple ‘lucky stones’” (ibid., p. 24). Plath’s stance is clearly detached, reflective, yet the intensity of the memory gives concreteness and clarity to every detail, we can feel the significance of the experience through the senses of the child that Plath was. To be able to plunge into the distant past, and with that, quickly acclimatize the reader, similarly to the described technique from her *Journals*, she indulges in a *Mrs. Dalloway* stream of consciousness sequence based on a game of free associations, so she gets to the inscrutable sea: “The motherly pulse of the sea made a mock of such counterfeits. Like a deep woman, it hid a

good deal; it had many faces, many delicate, terrible veils” (ibid., p. 24). While in Dubarova’s representations of the sea it rather resembles an old giant with manlike qualities, for Plath it bears the similitude of a woman, in Bulgarian the word belonging to the neuter gender, in English to the nonanimate “it” category of nouns, which technically puts it in the same place.

Once before the wave is about to engulf her, with her mother catching her heels, the narrator is stopped for the first time from breaking through: “I often wonder what would have happened if I had managed to pierce that looking-glass. Would my infant gills⁹ have taken over, the salt in my blood?” (ibid., p. 24). Plath’s essay contains essential information about the first conscious transformation into an *other* zoomorphic entity, an amphibian that could have belonged to another world. Plath’s suggested transformation asks the question if it is possible, in this world, to live in an alternate reality, if we could transgress spaces and change even physically in the process, like Jack Sally from *Avatar* (2009) or Leto II Atreides from Frank Herbert’s *Children of Dune* (1987). Since the zoomorphic transformation remains checked in mid-action, Plath allows it to continue in the warped reality reproduced by the memory – in an inversed transformation of the skates “the shape of old pillowslips with the full, coy lips of women” (ibid., p. 25). While this anthropomorphic change looks grotesque and unsettling, the little girl turning into a fish is a whole new promising world that did not happen. Like Anne Sexton who had a grandfather living close to the breaking waves of the Atlantic, so did Plath – a grandmother who had a house there. Her phone number OCEAN 1212-W sounds like an incantation when repeated to the operator – an instant teleportation to a marine Terabithia where the sounds of the sea were combined with the fascinating discoveries of beachcombing over “mountains of rattling and cranking purple stones” (ibid., p. 25). Such a location has all the oneiric potential for endless daydreaming. Fantasizing remains in the realm of the would-be amphibian girl’s imagination who in “the same sea-bitten house” (ibid., p. 26) dreams of the sea washing up “a drowned sailor” (ibid., p. 26), thus wishing to connect romantically with other men of the sea who, however, realistically can exist only in death. This

9. In *The Bell Jar* (1966) the actual presence of gills in a human is a scientific fact but also related to death: “I thought drowning must be the kindest way to die, and burning the worst. Some of those babies in the jars that Buddy Willard showed me had gills, he said. They went through a stage where they were just like fish” (p. 166). The return to this early phase of human prenatal existence is linked to losing the faculty of abstract thinking, reading, and writing, with speaking severely reduced to short sentences. To act upon it, Plath demonstrates how her protagonist tries swimming as far out as possible (p. 167), a death realized in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as Edna Pontellier’s road to freedom, also tried by Jack London himself, without success, so his Martin Eden from the eponymous novel kills himself by swimming towards the bottom of the sea. Plath’s novel is, above all, about a terrible loss of communication as well, leading to a complete communication breakdown, the road to getting “mad”. – a. n.

realization, undoubtedly, brings necrophiliac connotations to Plath's account. At the moment of writing the essay Hughes may have already left Plath and she would fantasize about relating to dead men rather than to alive ones – in life Hughes could be substituted by no one.

In the essay, having felt her gills almost sprouting, she keeps identifying with oceanic creatures, each one reflecting her attitudes to different events in her life: “a sad sea urchin” (ibid., p. 27) upon the birth of her brother, etc. The narrator in the essay repeats the exercise unobserved – entering the water half hoping to be sucked in by the sea, but instead, remaining alive and out of the water she feels “a reject” (ibid., p. 27).

Feeling rejected by the ocean that does not quite accept her as a worthy creature of the sea, the speaker keeps supplying food for her marine fantasies by describing how she would nurse injured starfish watching them regrow their lost arms (ibid., p. 27). The bits and pieces of conjured up childhood are finally all blown up into fragments of a sea storm: “Nothing could be seen. The only sound was a howl, jazzed up by the bangs, slams, groans and splinterings of objects tossed like crockery in a giants' quarrel” (ibid., p. 30). The childhood spent near the ocean for Plath is mythological and transformative on a physical and mental level – she turns *amphibian*, occasionally borrowing other kindred marine animal forms, the sea elements turn into *quarreling giants*, a beach stroll potentially yields *a drowned sailor*.

In her short story “Sunday at the Mintons” (1952), Plath offers an early take on transgressing the water element, narrating about a retired brother and his helping sister, Henry and Elizabeth, the former a rather poorly concealed representation of her idealistic beau and the latter being herself. Plath employs a few of these female avatars – Sally from “That Widow Mangada” and even Alice from “Stone Boy with Dolphin” and “Among the Bumblebees”, identifying with Lewis Carroll's Alice, thus speaking about her own fictionalized experiences as an omniscient confessional narrator. Eerily prophesying about a certain part of her family routines with Hughes, Plath describes the boring daily existence of Elizabeth “circumscribed once more by domestic duties” (ibid., p. 301). Being a confirmed daydreamer, Elizabeth goes with her brother to the pier where her amethyst brooch falls under a rock. The brother retrieves it but as she watches suddenly speechless, she sees him carried away by an enormous wave. In her imagination he goes through yet another transformation occasioned by the ocean: “She envisioned a green, aquatic Henry dropping through layers of clouded water like a porpoise. There would be seaweed in his hair and water in his pockets. Weighted by the round gold watch, by the white-faced compass, he would sink down to the ocean floor” (ibid., p. 308). In the story the youthful imagination of Plath aged 20 pictures him “taking his afternoon stroll alone on Sundays, walking briskly in the dilute green light, prodding curiously at

the sea anemones with his cane” (ibid., p. 308). As Henry spends more time on the bottom of the ocean, he somehow becomes part of its stately silent world: “Even as she meditated, the features of Neptune’s kingly visage blurred, puffed, rounded, and there, turned to look at her, was the startled face of a much-altered Henry [...]. Poor Henry. Her heart went out to him in pity. For who would look after him down there among all those slippery, indolent sea creatures?” (ibid., p. 308).

Through Henry’s transformation Plath explores man’s vanity and narrowmindedness since Henry changes but not for the better. Miraculously surviving among the marine animals in the ocean, possibly breathing with his gills, the ones little Sylvia was on the way of growing in “Ocean 1212-W” (before she started dreaming of mermaids and mermen), he is ill adapted to life there, looks startled and unable to fit in. He was used to lecturing about maps, atmospheric pressure, the moon controlling the tides, but there he is completely deprived of the possibility to use his marine knowledge, being in the ocean. Playfully ironic, Plath allows Elizabeth to join him in a sort of a *Splash* (1984) reversed sacrifice – Elizabeth tries to follow him in the water, but a sharp gust of wind lifts the skirts of her lavender dress, and she is taken up in the air, herself and Henry being separated by all the water of the ocean. Still weighted down by his watch and all the trinkets he cares about, he is in the ocean while she floats over the waves in the air: “Her high-pitched, triumphant, feminine giggle mingled with the deep, gurgling chuckle of Henry, borne along beneath her on the outgoing tide” (ibid., p. 309).

The story is prophetic in more than one way of the relationship she was going to have with the man of her life – Ted Hughes – the rather formal manner of Henry reminiscent of the typical Englishman although Plath knew about England from the books she had studied at school. The ocean was to stand symbolically between them, but again in an inversed order – herself rather pulled down to earth, being reduced to domestic duties, constantly trying to adapt, and himself, lighthearted and carefree, master of his destiny, a modern womanizer who could not commit to loving and being with one woman, riding the uplifting air currents.

The short story, the most revelatory of her relationship with her father and symbolic of her identification with Carroll’s heroine is “Among the Bumblebees” set in Boston near the ocean. Plath’s father was a passionate apiarist and the bees he kept were an eternal object of fascination for Plath – in 1962 she was to write the so-called “Bee Poems”, a sequence of five poems reconnecting yet again with him. In “Among the Bumblebees”, we are presented with Plath’s image of her father as a well-intentioned giant who could always comfort and reassure her with his very intimate presence: “For Alice Denway’s father had been a giant of a man. In the blue blaze of his eyes was concentrated the color

of the whole overhead dome of sky, and when he laughed, it sounded as if all the waves of the ocean were breaking and roaring up the beach together” (ibid., p. 310).

Again, as is the case with other appearances of Plath’s father in fiction “The Colossus” and “Daddy”, the latter containing a blended yet differentiated portrayal of both her father and Ted Hughes, her father is a mythological figure identifying with the mighty ocean. On the beach he swims powerfully in the ocean while she watches him from the shore where the waves break. She seems to be the only one who can command this god as when she calls him, he returns to take her for a swim out on his back (ibid., p. 313), thus allowing her to tame the deep waters of the ocean: “the water, black and deep beneath her, would seem calm and friendly” (ibid., p. 313). The story goes on to add details of father-daughter intimacies in which she grows ever stronger with the sensation that powerful as he is, he is but a “tame lion” (ibid., p. 314) in her hands. It is through this vital for the little girl communication that she also connects to the raging elements outside the house, establishing harmony with them as well, like Jack Sally braving the aerial challenges from *Avatar* with the help of his *ikran*:

Sitting on her father’s lap in the den, watching the waves at the end of the street whipped to a ragged froth of foam and blown spray against the seawall, Alice learned to laugh at the destructive grandeur of the elements. The swollen purple and black clouds broke open with blinding flashes of light, and the thunderclaps made the house shudder to the root of its foundations. But with her father’s strong arms around her and the steady reassuring beat of his heart in her ears, Alice believed that he was somehow connected with the miracle of fury beyond the windows, and that through him, she could face the doomsday of the world in perfect safety (ibid., p. 314).

Although Alice feels godly in the presence of her father, she is not a true mistress of the elements the way that he is their master, which requires his daily presence next to her. His power of control is so comprehensive that he is able to catch a bee in flight and release it before he gets stung since the bees will not even sting him, awed by his powers (ibid., p. 315), a textual reference to “Bitter Strawberries” where the bees turn into war airplanes. With this potential transformation of theirs, Alice’s father proves to be the undisputed master of all living things under the sky.

Having become half-amphibian or having a male character complete the ichthyological transformation that she was probably afraid to go through with makes Plath’s characters less part of the otherworldly half-human, half-animal beings than the half-serpent, half-human Alice makes the girl a true serpent in Carroll’s book. The reason for that is that the sea creatures in Plath’s texts remain more realistically mute than Carroll’s nonsense talking bizarre creations. Still, the desire to transgress the human form and be an indescribable and unknowable

other is part of a magical childhood in which the child could play God. From the marine zoomorphic transformations to identifying with the gods of the sea, Plath's mythological childhood spent near the ocean is woven in lore that proves prophetic as regards her future marriage and relationships with men. Plath tried to be the grown-up goddess, but the world was not so pliable in her hands and having forever lost her faithful *ikran* she had to go through yet other transformations of her feminine selves before she could become *Lady Lazarus*.

Just like Plath's, Dubarova's prose (short stories, journal entries and letters) is key to understanding better the poems, revealing some processes and circumstances behind the scenes, but the prose is important in its own right, especially the short stories and the *Journal*. Both modes show Dubarova completely capable of telling an interesting story with an enviable immediacy, lively dialogue, and sharp concern for meaningful detail. It is amazing that Dubarova managed to fill over 400 pages of quality literary material at the brittle age of between 11 and 17. Of course, just like the very young Plath, not everything she wrote is top-notch, but what makes her feat even more impressive is that she did not have the highly professional literary dignitaries such as Alfred Kazin that Plath had but had her schoolteachers from whom she could not have learned much. As for poetry advisors, the best known was the late poet Hristo Fotev whose poetry is arguably less impressive than Dubarova's by comparison. So whence the universal appeal and high literary quality of her writings? It is evident that if Bulgaria ever had a self-made naturally born poet, Dubarova was the one.

The first transformation I will discuss in her is a short story – a masterfully crafted modern fairy tale called “A Sea Tale” (*Морска приказка*). In it she uses Alice's conceit of falling asleep and dreaming about turning into a fish, a similar technique to Plath's in “Sunday at the Mintons”. At the time of writing, she was only 13. Below I offer my translation of the tale in question.

The waves are still bashing their cold watery foreheads against my chest. My eyes, aching with fatigue, seem to still see the black mussels turn their pointed ends at my feet. In my stomach – swallowed sea water. It is welling up, surging towards my mouth. Perhaps unhappy for my having locked it where it is dark and cramped. My arms, like death-tired gills¹⁰, are feebly dangling. The eyelids, heavy with the salt and water, will not close.

Сякаш още блъскат вълните студени мокри чела в гърдите ми. Преуморените ми до болка очи като че още виждат черните миди, обърнали остриета към нозете ми. В стомаха ми тежи погълнатата морска вода. Тя се бунтува, повдига се към устата ми. Недоволна е може би, че съм я затворила на тъмно и тясно. Като уморени до смърт хриле на риба лежат отпуснати ръцете. Клепките тежат от солта и водата, но не се затварят.

10. Perhaps also a subconscious desire to become one with the sea in drowning. The imagery is strongly present in Plath and is both mythological and moribund. – a. n.

How did I insult the sea? Why did he suck my last drop of strength so cruelly? Why did he make my lips blue, blue, like the color of his depths?...

The tired eyelids lap warmly the pupils of my eyes. I fall asleep...

I ride the waves with my eyes closed. Let them take me somewhere. In between my fingers, like annoying little snakes, are writhing blue and black seaweed. The sun is touching my back with the fiery palm of his hand. But suddenly I turn my eye towards the shore: "Oh, Sea, wait, take me back!"

My arms turn cold and refuse to move. Involuntarily, I bite into the flesh of a big wave and run out of air. I sink. The salty waters wash my eyes wide open. My body hits something. I fall through. But I breathe, I breathe! The air is wheezing between my nostrils and hits my lungs.

But where did I end up? I am afraid! How fast it all happened. I look at my feet. Uncannily, a stream of sunlight flows and creeps along the walls of my den. Now I notice that I find myself in a big cool vessel. I touch timidly the cold bottom. But this is an amphora! My initial astonishment is replaced by horror yet again: "Oh, you, stupid cruel amphora! Why did you swallow me? To see how slowly and painfully I will die of hunger and thirst? Why did you hide me and not let the sea drown me!?" I clench my fists and pound the high thick walls. I try to climb up, to get to the opening, which, strangely, is closed. But in vain I scratch and pound, to no avail I scream and cry. There is no one to hear. I fall to the bottom tired to death, and I sink into the depths of unconsciousness... I am awake and horrified again. Oh, how my body hurts. But strange again – it seems to be changing its shape. I close my eyes. I feel I am becoming smaller and smaller.

С какво ли обидих морето? Защо то така жестоко изпи и последната ми капка сили? Защо направи устните ми сини, сини, като цвета на дълбината си?...

Уморените клепки близват с топлина зениците. Заспивам...

Аз лежа върху вълните със затворени очи. Нека ме носят нанякъде. Между пръстите ми като досадни тънки змийчета се заплитат сини и черни водорасли. Слънцето сякаш е допряло до гърба ми горецата си длан. Но изведнъж обръщам очи към брега: „Море, чакай, върни ме!“

Ръцете ми изстиват и отказват да се движат. Без да искам, захапвам плътта на една висока вълна и въздухът ми свършва. Потъвам. Солените води мият широко отворените ми очи. Тялото ми се удря силно о нещо. Пропадам някъде. Но аз дишам, дишам! Въздухът остро свиста между ноздрите и дробовете ми.

Но къде попаднах? Страх ме! Колко бързо стана всичко. Поглеждам към нозете си. Незнайно от къде потича струя светлина и ползва край стените на леговицето ми. Сега забелязвам, че се намирам в огромен хладен съд. Докосвам плахо студено дъно. О, това е амфора! Но първото ми учудване е заместено отново от ужас: „О, ти, глупава, жестока амфора! Защо ме погълна? За да видиш как бавно и мъчително ще умра от глад и жажда? Защо ме скри, а не остави морето да ме удави!“ Аз стискам в юмрук дланите си и удрям високите дебели стени. Помъчвам се да се покатеря нагоре, за да стигна отвора, който, кой знае защо, е затворен. Но напразно драскам и удрям, напразно креция и плача. Няма кой да ме чуе. Падам на дъното уморена до смърт и потъвам в дълбините на безсъзнанието... Отново съм будна и ужасена. О, колко силно ме боли тялото. Но странно — то сякаш изменя формата си. Затварям очи. Чувствувам, че се смалявам, смалявам.

Am I running out of air again? No, I want water. The amphora suddenly tilts. Its neck crashes open and as if a callous palm of someone's hand thrusts me into the water. Oh, how strange I swim! My head hurts from the strong blow. I raise my hand to touch it. The horror of it! Instead of hands I see two wretched fish gills. Yes, my whole body is the body of a fish. Why did the sea mock at my helpless state so? Why did he turn me from man into a stupid fish?

The same callous palm of a hand is shoving me somewhere. Below me are moving marine deserts covered with dead sands. Ugly clams peer at me, looking like black bulging eyes. A strange animal with slimy slippery legs stares at me and shakes its whole body, bristling up, as if to challenge me to a fight. I close my eyes. I do not want to look at anything anymore. But unexpectedly, my fish body touches the bottom. I look around. I find myself in a wonderful sea hall. From all sides – a forest of blue seaweed. Some reach up flexible arms and tremble ever so slightly. Others spread enormous petals looking like fans, sewn up from tender blue silk. In their shade the sand looks violet. A few rosy jellyfish depart from this shade and soar transparent and light as bladders of air. A trusting seahorse alights without sound before me and looks at me with its black beady eyes.

Beside me swim schools of motley fish. But suddenly, in the fish world panic strikes. Something wiry and tight grabs me with thousands of others. It pierces my body, suffocating me. Now I realize. A fish trawler has cast its fishing net. Now I will die in it like so many millions of other fish. How cruel man is! How mercilessly he pillages the depths of the sea. Now I understand why the sea is insulted. For centuries he has been forced to bear – being locked in the shackles of thousands of ports, cut by the bottoms of so many ships, with its waters pillaged.

Но въздухът ми ли свършва? Не, искам вода. Амфората неочаквано залитва. Отворът ѝ с трясък се отваря и сякаш нечия груба длан ме изхвърля във водата. О, колко е странно плуването ми! Главата ме боли от силен удар. Вдигам ръка да я пипна. Ужасно! Вместо ръцете си виждам две жалки рибешки хриле. Да, цялото ми тяло е рибешко. Защо морето така се подиграва с беззащитността ми? Защо от човек ме превърна в глупава риба?

Същата груба длан ме тласка нанякъде. Под мен минават морски пустини с мъртви пясъци. Грозни миди ме поглеждат, приличащи на черни облеещни очи. Някакво странно животно с гадни плъзгави крака се заглежда в мен и цялото се разтърсва, сякаш ме предизвиква да се бием. Затварям очи. Не искам да гледам повече нищо. Но неочаквано рибешкото ми тяло се докосва до дъното. Поглеждам. Намирам се в някаква чудна морска зала. От всички страни — гора от сини водорасли. Едни протягат нагоре гъвкави ръце и потреперват леко. Други разперват огромни листа, приличащи на ветрила, съшити от нежносиня коприна. В сянката им пясъкът изглежда теменужен. Няколко розови медузи се отделят от тази сянка и изплуват нагоре, прозрачни и леки като мехури въздух. Едно доверчиво морско конче каца безшумно пред мен и ме поглежда с черните си стъклени очи.

Край мен преплуват пъстри ята риби. Но изведнъж сред рибешкия свят настъпва паника. Нещо жиливо и здраво грабва мен и хиляди други. То се впира в тялото ми, задушава ме. Сега разбирам. Рибарски кораб е спуснал мрежата си. Сега и аз ще умра в нея както милиони риби. Колко е жесток човекът! Как безмилостно ограбва морските дълбини. Сега разбирам защо морето е обидено. Векове наред то е принудено да търпи — да бъде заключвано в оковите на хиляди пристанища, да бъде разрязвано от дъното на много кораби, да бъдат ограбвани водите му.

I see nothing else anymore. I lie – a breathless fish. And the fishermen have no idea that they have killed me – the man with the fish body. Perhaps someday the sea will treat them like he treated me. Then they will be killed by other people who will be equally unaware that by killing the sea, they will be killing themselves. I wake up. My head dizzy with my dream. Before me meek and quiet lies the sea.

Повече нищо не виждам. Аз лежа — бездиханна риба. А рибарите съвсем не знаят, че са убили мене — човека с рибешкото тяло. Може някога и с тях морето да постъпи както с мен. Тогава те ще бъдат убити от други хора, които също не ще знаят, че са убийци не на морето, а на самите себе си.

Събуждам се. В главата ми тежи сънят. Пред мен смирено и утихнало лежи морето (Dubarova, 2015, 2 pp. 8-10).

In this early piece of prose, Dubarova remarkably builds a story of zoomorphic transformation full of vivid details – from the *black and blue seaweed* to *jellyfish* and *seahorses*. The man-fish takes a closer look at the marine animals. It should be noted that Dubarova recreates a convincing animated depiction of sea life and that its representatives – plants and animals are endemic to the Black Sea, in the same way that we have the plants and animals typical of the US Atlantic coast in Plath – anemones, sea urchins and starfish. The textural properties of the coastline are also present in both – with Plath, the pebbly beach, while with Dubarova, the beach is sandy, reflecting its geophysical qualities in Boston and Burgas, respectively. Just like with Plath, the portrayal of the underwater world is not entirely pleasant for the puzzled human being turned into a fish – there are animals that look frightening for the man-fish: *A strange animal with slimy slippery legs stares at me and shakes its whole body*. And again, like Plath, there are the cognitive perceptions of the amphibian who, in Dubarova’s text, finishes his transformation and the only thing that has remained of the former human being is the consciousness. Unlike Plath, who keeps the story going from the imagination of the person not in the sea, Dubarova chooses to present the sea incident from the perspective of this human consciousness in the fish body. As a result, the sensation is sometimes painful with a naturalistic touch: *the air is wheezing between my nostrils and hits my lungs*. In “A Sea Tale”, Dubarova connects to the world of fairy tales and her ecological presentation of the story is reminiscent of the underwater world we see in Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid”, elements of which are also present in Plath – the *King of the Sea* with his *trident*. In all three stories, Andersen’s, Plath’s and Dubarova’s, there is the sensation of overwhelming silence, with the *gurgling* sounds of Henry in “Sunday at the Mintons”, which gives rather an additional mocking touch to people’s insistence on communication at all cost, also mocked at in *Splash* where the mermaid, upon the insistence of Allen (Tom Hanks), speaks in her own sea language and all TV sets in the room burst to pieces.

The transformation in Dubarova’s text has a very clear purpose – to show the world from the perspective of a fish that has fallen victim to humans, but a fish with human consciousness, thus presupposing that fish and humans can

be completely identical in their perceptions and mentality once put in the same body and the same environment, with the difference that fish do not speak. This presumption is, of course, naïve and is entirely within the concerns of the little girl aged 13 that Dubarova was. Plath, being much more mature, in at least 2 texts stops at the transformation to an amphibian body, both evoking the soviet writer's representation of an amphibian man's experiences, Alexander Belyaev in his *The Amphibian Man* (*Человек-амфибия*) from 1928. As mentioned, Dubarova, unlike Plath, did not have the best teachers in literature and writing. Still, her achievement is exceptional since she got to her writing heights not because of the circumstances but in spite of them.

Aged 14, in her short story – essay “Happiness” (*Щастие*) Dubarova undertakes yet another physical transformation based on self-negation. A girl of the joyful summer and warm southern sea, in this text Dubarova yearns for the winter in her desire to stifle and annihilate everything that connects her to the summer, and which unlocks her summerly behavior:

The summer should not have come. It simply should not. I am waiting for winter. I want her to come with eyes – nests of cold, with arms – make-believes, with hairs – thickened with mud and sorrow. I will go to her myself, will sink into her lap. I alone will hold out my hand. She will lock my heart in her cold orbit. I will not shiver, will only feel how my heart shrinks like a tortured warm clover and will not speak. I will go white, all of me. My eyes, like sunny bunnies, will turn livid black. The fierce frost will bite at my hair. I am waiting for winter. I want to see my summer dead – withered in a gray chimney or right under the trees. And grim, like a predatory fish, I will trample upon his hair and will go from here. It is then that my motley blood will darken, and my veins will interweave frightened into a forest.

Не трябваше да идва лятото. Не трябваше. Аз чакам зимата. Аз искам тя да дойде с очи – гнезда на студ, с ръце – измислици, с коси – набъбнали от кал и мъка. Аз сама ще ида при нея, ще потъна в лоното ѝ. Сама ще дам ръката си. Тя ще заключи сърцето ми в своята студена орбита. Аз няма да треперя, ще чувствам само как сърцето ми се свива като измъчена топла детелина и ще мълча. Ще побелея цялата. Очите ми, приличащи на слънчеви зайчета, ще станат сивочерни. Свирепата скреж ще загризе косите ми. Аз чакам зимата. Искам да видя мъртво моето лято – изсъхнало в някой сив комин или направо под дърветата. И мрачна като хищна риба, ще стъпча косите му и ще си отида. Едва тогава мойта пъстра кръв ще потъмнее и вените ми ще се сплетат уплашено в гора (ibid., p. 25).

In this striking text Dubarova manages to take herself apart and show how each single part of herself dies a wintery death. The winter is personified into a huge elderly woman with the irradiating power of turning everything white. This desire to kill all her youthful summerly emotions is a denial of the summer that prompts her to “go crazy” with all the enjoyment that it brings, and all the time spent by her beloved sea. The opening is remarkably profound and masterfully constructed, judging by the tender age of its author, and renders itself to many metaphorical interpretations, some of which can be the nuclear winter that could occur at any moment from a Cold War missile interchange – it was on TV all

the time on both sides of the Berlin Wall, or it could be the study process as its peacetime in-house equivalent. Identifying with the winter effectively kills off emotions and renders one close to death or dying. It could also simply mean a desire to not feel so much because feeling brings her pain as so amply attested to in Dubarova's numerous references to school, lessons, and examinations. Still, it could mean seeing herself in an *alter ego* which is her complete opposite, but this *significant other* is invited to nullify everything that she is, perhaps an early longing for death which will allow her to fit in society more and which eventually became a reality through silencing herself by her own hand.

The second paragraph removes most of the above suppositions and relegates the negation of the summer self to school experience where winter should prevail and from which we learn that it was the desk alone and its color that made the speaker happy, but everything else was counteractive and produced the desire of freezing her feelings and emotions:

Then my beautiful wooden desk will not dare sing green songs for me in class. I will not laugh at the red corrections in my class work. They will never resemble sunny bunnies to me. The glass in the window in class will be afraid to release golden paths of light towards my eyes. The port, sumptuous as a blue anemone, will dim its contour. And the ships will not trumpet touchingly when I am in class, being examined. They, light as dragonflies, will leave my cold town off to new happiness. And I will sink into gray bays of numbers, words, theses, and theorems. It is the only way to make my ravenous schoolbook¹¹ sate. He will look at me through his invisible glasses pleased. And I will, perhaps, become the queen of all knowledge.

Товага вече моята хубав дървен чин не ще посмее да ми пее в час зелени песни. Не ще се смее на червените поправки в контролното. Те никога не ще ми заприличат на слънчеви зайчета. Стъклото на прозореца в клас ще се страхува да спуска златни пътечки от светлина към очите ми. Пристанището, пищо като синя актиния, ще притули очертания. И корабите няма да тръбят трогателно, когато съм в клас и съм изпитвана. Те, леки като водни кончета, ще оставят моя студен град и ще тръгнат да търсят ново щастие. И аз ще потъна в сиви заливи на цифри, думи, теми, теореми. Единствено така ще задоволя глада на алчния си бележник. Той ще ме погледне през невидимите си очила доволен. И аз ще стана може би царица на всички знания (ibid., p. 25).

This paragraph reveals a 1984 surveillance and supervision model – the schoolbook which bore the marks that students were given. It was especially incriminating for the school students back in the 1970s through to the 2010s. Even though it continued to be used until 2019, its psychological power was from then on greatly diminished simply because students stopped paying so

11. The word in Bulgarian is “ученически бележник”, a small booklet where marks were regularly entered so that they could be seen by the parents. Before the electronic register became a reality for most schools in 2019 and parents started receiving notifications for each examination of their children, the schoolbook was the only way parents could see their children's school progress. The schoolbook bore the school seal and the principal's signature on its first page and was an official document. Often it was an interminable source of domestic drama. – a. n.

much attention to it, and so did the teachers. The text testifies to the fact that the schoolbook was a formidable weapon for disciplining the children into obedience since they could receive a low mark even when they were not being examined, simply because they might misbehave – laugh in class, etc. The green wooden desk where Dubarova sat suggests the potential for sensuous delight, but the teacher in the classroom usually brought an atmosphere of dead seriousness similar to what we see in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, hence Dubarova's appreciation of the British rock group. As the text suggests, Dubarova was easily distracted by the summer sounds outside – the *trumpeting ships* which turn into *dragonflies* and fly away where they stand a higher chance of making people happy. The *bronze Burgas* basking in summer sunshine from "Somewhere There" here becomes *my cold town*. The city perceived through the classroom, especially in summer, becomes modernistically unreal: *The port, sumptuous as a blue anemone, will dim its contour*. The prevalence of sea and water images related to parts of the city makes the school a frontier of harshness, gestapo-like discipline, and insensitiveness in the daily acquisition of new knowledge. To be apt to the task, the speaker will have to deny everything that she is – the sunny girl – and blend in the school winter reigning supreme.

The short essay reveals a poem-like structure, poetry in prose as everything that Dubarova wrote in her early writings was certainly poetical just like all that Plath wrote throughout her works was poetical, poetry or prose. The speaker's realization is that she would like *winter* to come for her although she is all *summer*. Her reference to being poor as a reason for not having the *winter* strongly suggests that one needs to have a certain predisposition to be able to associate with *winter* in actual summer. And then the question is if the speaker is so *poor* in these qualities that *winter* simply can have no hold over her. Dubarova's weaponry for resisting *winter* – her *green desk, window, sunlit port, herself, all her ships, smiles, sunny bunnies* are all strong insular reflections of *summer* which persist even when astronomical winter has come. All the transformed urban elements to the smallest item – the *green desk* work as a protective shield forever stopping *winter* from taking over and this is expressed in the sudden change of the subject – 'I' becomes 'we'. The essay ends with the hope which, as we know, turned out to be an illusion: "And perhaps my schoolbook, manuals, they will forgive every little deviation of mine because, after all, I am the summer's daughter... I am happy to have the summer!" | *И може би бележникът, учебниците ще ми прощават всяко малко отклонение, защото все пак аз съм дъщеря на лятото... Щастлива съм, че имам лятото!* (ibid., p. 26).

This essay is one that connects Dubarova to Plath yet again – in the accumulative image of *the summer's daughter* almost identical with the more sumptuous *summer queen* in Plath. It also expresses Dubarova's desire to become *the queen of knowledge* corresponding to the overachieving Plath who in her *Journals* expresses the desire to command a vast knowledge of the world. The sad reality for Dubarova is that she was at school, not college, and she was subjected to an inhuman system of factological and ideological material present in almost all

subjects without access to the examples of great literature. The rest of the short stories, especially from 1979, together with the journal entries, show a certain departure from the highly poetical expression of the early prose work, suggesting that perhaps Dubarova was advised to make this differentiation and so we get well-written short stories more in line with what was being written at the time in Bulgaria where the sea is hardly present. Having lost the connection with it, its healing effects of daydreaming no longer work and so Dubarova succumbs to the forces she has so aptly fended off by portraying it time and again in her works. Likewise, with Plath, it also loses its power of creating life-saving seascapes. The ocean in Boston from 1953 evoked by the self-exiled Plath in London 10 years later becomes nothing but another vector to a possible suicide as demonstrated in *The Bell Jar* (1966), thus the darker overtones of Plath's seascapes, never completely absent in her works, finally catch up with her.

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