

فَنَ البلاغة: نماذج أرسطو في الإقناع ومفهوم السموّ عند لونجينوس في قصيدتي «السيدة
لازاروس» لسيلفيا بلاث و«الحقيقة التي يعرفها الموتى» لآن سيكستون

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The Art of Rhetoric: Aristotelian Models of Persuasion and Longinian Sublime in Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" and Anne Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know"

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المخلص

تُجَادَل هذه الدراسة بأن قصيدتي سيلفيا بلاث "اليدي لعازر" وأن سيكستون "الحقيقة التي يعرفها الموتى" تشكلان تقاطعاً جذرياً بين الإقناع البلاغي الأرسطي والسمو اللونجيني، حيث يصبح أسلوب الاعتراف مجالاً للإقناع المتعالي. فبينما يُنظَّم كتاب أرسطو "البلاغة" الإقناع من خلال الأخلاق والعاطفة والمنطق، يُنظَر كتاب لونجينوس "في السمو" لقدرة اللغة على نقل الجمهور ورفع وإبهاره من خلال عظمة الفكر وكثافة المشاعر. وتؤكد هذه الورقة البحثية أن بلاث وسيكستون تُجسّدان اندماجاً يتكامل فيه الإقناع البلاغي والسمو المتعالي، مُنتجين شعريّة تُحوّل المعاناة الشخصية إلى تأمل عالمي في الموت والصدمة والبقاء. من خلال تحليل نصي دقيق، تتناول هذه الدراسة كيف تُشيد بلاث أخلاقيات أسطورية عن الحصانة، وكيف تُوظّف

العاطفة من خلال صور الهولوكوست والمشاهد المسرحية، وكيف تستخدم منطقاً خادعاً قائماً على الدقة العددية والبنية الدورية، كل ذلك مع بلوغها عظمة لونغينية تُعلي من شأن المعاناة الشخصية إلى مصافّ التسامي. في المقابل، تُؤسّس سيكستون أخلاقياتها على الضعف والأصالة، وتوظّف العاطفة من خلال التناقض الصارخ بين الصور المنزلية والرهبية الوجودية، وتُبنى منطقها على أنه مواجهة فلسفية مع لامبالاة الموت، مُحققةً بذلك جلالاً لا يكمن في التسامي البطولي، بل في وضوح الحزن المُخيف. وتلخص الورقة البحثية إلى أن التوليف البلاغي-الجلالي في هذه القصائد يُقدّم إطاراً جديداً لفهم الشعر الاعترافي كفنٍّ مُقنع لا يُعبر عن العاطفة فحسب، بل يُحوّلها إلى قوة جارفة.

Abstract

This study argues that Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" and Anne Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know" constitute a radical intersection of Aristotelian rhetorical persuasion and Longinian sublimity, wherein the confessional mode becomes a site of transcendent persuasion. While Aristotle's Rhetoric systematizes persuasion through ethos, pathos, and logos, Longinus's On the Sublime theorizes language's capacity to transport, elevate, and overwhelm the audience through grandeur of thought and emotional intensity. This paper contends that Plath and Sexton enact a fusion in which rhetorical persuasion and sublime transcendence are mutually constitutive, producing a poetics that transforms private anguish into a universal meditation on mortality, trauma, and survival. Through close textual analysis, the study examines how Plath constructs a mythic ethos of invincibility, weaponizes pathos through Holocaust imagery and theatrical spectacle, and employs a deceptive logos of numerical precision and cyclical structure, all while achieving a Longinian grandeur that elevates personal suffering to the realm of the sublime. Sexton, by contrast, grounds her ethos in vulnerability and authenticity, deploys pathos through the stark juxtaposition of domestic imagery and existential dread, and structures her logos as a philosophical confrontation with death's indifference, achieving a sublime that resides not in heroic transcendence but in the terrifying clarity of grief. The paper concludes that the rhetorical-sublime synthesis in these poems offers a new framework for understanding confessional poetry as a persuasive art that does not merely express emotion but transforms it into an overwhelming force.



1.Introduction

The relationship between rhetoric and poetry has been vexed since the time when Plato banished the poets from his coveted republic. However, virtually from the very beginning of the Western tradition, rhetoric and the sublime have functioned as adjacent, often overlapping, technologies of persuasion and transport. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the first significant text of persuasive theory, alongside Longinus's *On the Sublime*, the arguably obscure essay on literary heightening, together give us a framework to understand how language can move, shape and overwhelm us. This article employs a dual framework on two of the most rhetorically potent twentieth-century poems: Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" and Anne Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Knows."

Aristotle's rhetorical system, as detailed in the *Rhetoric*, rests on three main modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. Credibility and moral character of speaker will influence ethos; As Aristotle puts it, "we believe good men more fully and more readily than others" and that this principle holds "absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided" (Aristotle, 2004, p. 8). In matters of persuasion, pathos refers to the appeal made to the audience's emotions. "to understand the emotions, that is to say, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited, is an important element in influencing judgment" (Aristotle, 2004, p. 58). The logical appeal or logos uses the enthymeme as "the body of persuasion" (Aristotle, 2004, p. 9), that gives it the intellectual strength and the evidence. Collectively, these three modes are termed as the rhetorical triangle and are still largely utilized in the teaching and critique of rhetoric (Kennedy, 1999; Meyer, 2012).

Longinus theorizes a kind of persuasion that bypasses argument altogether. According to Longinus, an experience of 'transport' both the literary and the audience is caused by grandeur of thought, and elevated emotion, especially as the material is made artistic (Longinus, 1995, p. 1). Longinus' characterization of sublimity as the "mark of a great soul" (Section 9) shows that language has power because of the strength of mind that produces it. One of the most powerful motivators of behavior is emotion; when expressed properly, genuine passion "lights a fire in the listener's emotion and fills [the listener] with that same fire" (8). According to Porter (2016), Longinus "builds on Aristotle's insight into the emotional and intellectual dimensions of persuasion, but extends it to the transformational power of beauty and greatness" (p. 60).

These two frameworks are not just a theoretical mixture. Hall (2020) argues that "Longinus's sublime builds on Aristotle's rhetorical triad by

emphasizing not just persuasion but transformation, inspiring awe and wonder" (p. 43). The fusion of Aristotle's rhetorical principles with Longinus's sublime provides a framework for understanding how great speeches and literary works captivate audiences by balancing reason, emotion, and transcendence. This study takes up that framework and applies it to two poems whose raw emotional intensity and rhetorical sophistication demand precisely such a dual analysis.

The argument is divided into three parts. To begin, the study will outline the theoretical framework involving Aristotelian rhetoric and Longinian sublimity, which are closely working related via their emphasis on thought, emotion and expression. Plath's "Lady Lazarus," the study will show, generates a mythic ethos; establishes a pathos of spectacle and horror; and uses a logos of numbers and cycles, all the while generating a sublimity that turns personal trauma into a public myth. Examining the poem "The Truth the Dead Know" by Sexton further, the study will show that its ethos is grounded in genuine vulnerability, its pathos arises out of the tension between the intimacy of a domestic space and that of existential isolation, and its logos is structured as a philosophical confrontation with the indifference of death, a logos that ultimately capitulates to a sublime of terrifying clarity, rather than a heroic transcendence.

The paper argues that the rhetorical and sublime elements in the two works in question are inseparable: ethos and grandeur of thought enrich each other; pathos and emotional elevation cannot be disentangled; logos and structural architecture of sublime work together. By studying Plath and Sexton through the dual lens of Aristotle and Longinus we get a more fuller understanding of confessional poetry as a replicative art which does not merely express emotion but amplifies it into an extraordinary and world-changing force.

2. Theoretical Framework

The connection between rhetoric and poetry has been in contention since the time of Plato, who expelled the poets from the ideal republic. Rhetoric and the sublime, a notion too and one familiar within the Western critical tradition often overlap, being adjacent persuasive and transporting technologies. Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the first text on persuasion theory, and Longinus' *On the Sublime*, the elusive piece on the literary power of sublimity, together provide a double-framework for appreciating how language moves, shapes, and overwhelms one's audience. Before applying this dual framework to Plath and Sexton, it is necessary to



establish the theoretical terrain in detail, attending to the specific mechanisms by which each theorist accounts for the power of language. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is the first systematic attempt to theorize persuasion as an art (*technē*), not a mere knack. Aristotle describes rhetoric as the faculty of observing 'in any given case the available means of persuasion' (p. 6). He distinguishes rhetoric from dialectic. Whereas dialectic takes place in question-and-answer dialogue form and involves philosophical specialists, rhetoric involves general audiences on practical matters. Dialectic discussion is for academic and skilled audiences on matters of philosophy. As Molina and Spicer (2004), rhetoric is an exchange for a general audience on issues of practical politics (p.285). According to Triadafilopoulos (1999), dialectic is used to discover "general truths from our common opinions," while rhetoric "permits us to communicate those truth claims to others" (745). Rhetoric, for Aristotle, is not what decorative art but necessary civic skill. This is how what is claimed to be true but cannot be proven can be made persuasive to those who do not know the insight of the philosopher.

The three artistic means of persuasion, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*; are the speakers most important means of achieving persuasion. Aristotle's discussion of these modes is known as the rhetorical triangle, which is still used today in rhetorical criticism and composition teaching (Kennedy, 1999; Meyer, 2012). According to Chachanidze (2026), *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* are "powerful frameworks for analyzing persuasive communication" (p. 3). He states that *ethos* has to do with the speaker projecting good sense, moral character, and goodwill. Similarly, *logos* refers to supporting arguments through evidence, while *pathos* refers to engaging the audience's emotions with a viewpoint. According to Aristotle, rhetoric must blend and a successful speaker is compelled to blend these modes: "For since rhetoric is concerned with the affecting of the giving of decisions, it follows that "the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind" (Aristotle, 2004, p. 20).

According to Aristotle, *ethos* refers to the appeal from character and is the most authoritative. As "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character," and, "when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible" (Aristotle, 2004, p. 8). Significantly, this credibility is not a question of previous reputation, but is constructed within the speech itself; which means that the speaker must show *phronesis*, *arete* and *eunoia* through the rhetorical performance (Kennedy, 1999, p. 78). According to Aristotle, we trust good men more completely and quickly

than others; and this is true generally and whatever the matter in question, and he swears it is absolutely true where precise certainty is impossible and there is division of opinion (Aristotle 2004, 8). Ethos creates trust, by presenting the speaker as knowledgeable and ethical. Ethos is the basic step of persuasion which gives the readers belief, which requires a speaker to create the character and make the audience think he has a virtue, benevolence-goodwill and practical wisdom. The construction of ethos is particularly useful in confessional poetry, where the authenticity of the speaker, the sense that the poem's "I" is genuinely revealing personal truth, becomes a key resource for persuasion.

Pathos or emotional appeal expects the speaker to understand the psychology of audiences and control them. Aristotle, while laying down all of the emotions, deals with anger, pity, fear, envy, emulation, the provisions under which each gets aroused and dissipated (Aristotle, 2004, pp. 58–89). According to Aristotle (2004), "To understand the emotions—that is to say, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited—is an important element in influencing judgment" (p. 58). The emotional appeal makes an argument resonate with the audience on a personal level. Pathos is the way to use emotion for persuasion that derives an emotional change from the audience and affects their judgement and choice. According to Aristotle, the emotional appeal is not irrational but rather an essential element of judgment. He asserts that "the emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments" (p. 58). Pathos in poetry serves through the use of imagery, rhythm, and shared emotion.

Logos, the appeal from reason, refers to the logical articulation of the speech which includes the use of examples (paradeigma) and enthymemes. The enthymeme, a type of rhetorical syllogism in which one premise is left unstated, supplied by the audience, is for Aristotle the body of persuasion. The logos is the intellectual organize and sustaining power of the emotional and ethical appeals. Logos is the logical proof of persuasion where is focused on the contents of speaking itself. The speaker proves the argument by examples and enthymeme and results agreement from it. When it comes to poetry, is a revelation of the structure, the patterns of the images, and the logical development of the argument of the speaker, as oblique or paradoxical as it may be.

Aristotle's rhetorical framework is prescriptive, not merely descriptive. It provides a means of persuasion that can be taught, learned and applied. Meyer (2012) notes that rhetoric is not just reasoning, but style: a "elegance or eloquence" (p. 249). According to Burke (1994), in the Renaissance period "prominent [rhetorical] handbooks, like Aristotle's,



were essential in the making of the orator, who then went on to represent the state in lifelong public service" (p. 296). According to Green and Zinke (1994), Aristotle believed that rhetoric education was "on political consensus and cooperation through persuasion" (p. 318). The discipline of rhetoric "stressed broad and integrative learning, steeping students in the values and traditions prized by their respective societies, and prepared them for life as honorable and accountable civic leaders" (Green & Zinke, 1994, p. 318). The civic aspect of rhetoric is important in grappling with how it can be applied to poetry. For the poet, like the orator, speaks to the public. Thus, the rhetorical devices available to the orator are also available to the poet.

Longinus's *On the Sublime*, written around the first century CE, looks at the power of language from another angle. In the case of Aristotle who analyzes persuasion, Longinus uncovers elevation: the ability of language to get the audience out of themselves, to be overwhelmed by grandeur, and to produce what he terms *ekstasis*, a transport or displacement of the self. The sublime in literature is not merely a style, but an experience of an overriding of language. Longinus in the opening paragraph of the treatise comments that "The effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport". While rhetoric aims at persuasion (*peithō*), the sublime aims at ecstasy (*ekstasis*). This distinction is essential. As highlighted in the Portuguese academic tradition, the subject of the treatise "does not aim at persuasion, but induces ecstasy in its hearers" (By the Limits, 2020, p. 3). "A rapture in the sublime tears everything up like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator's whole power at one blow" (Longinus, 1995, Section 1).

Longinus states that there are five sources of the sublime (1) grandeur of thought, (2) vehement and inspired passion, (3) the use of figures (4) noble diction, (5) dignified and elevated composition (Longinus, 1995, Section 8). Among these, the two most important are the first two since they are "largely innate" and cannot be picked up. According to Longinus, "The first and most powerful is the power of grand conceptions... and the second is the inspiration of vehement emotion. These two constituents of the sublime are for the most part congenital. But the other three come partly from art" (Longinus, 1995, Section 8). Doran (2015) provides an in-depth taxonomy of these sources. The first is "grandeur of conception (*noēsis*)," and the second is "vehement/inspired emotion (*pathos*)" (27–29). The first, grandeur of thought, from Longinus, corresponds to what Aristotle would call *ethos*, and yet it lacks an important quality: for Aristotle, *ethos* is a means of persuasion; by contrast, Longinian grandeur of thought, requires the author to possess

an ethos, not as a means to an end but rather the very end. The grandeur of thought is a manifestation of spiritual and intellectual magnitude, which by mere contact impacts its audience positively and elevates them through coming to terms with something greater than their often undistinguished self. Longinus states that "Sublimity is the echo of a great soul" (Section 9). Such Grandeur, akin to Aristotle's ethos, emerges from the speaker's intellectual and moral integrity, which inspires respect and admiration.

The second source, which is vehement and inspired passion, is analogous to Aristotelian pathos, but, for Longinus, only passion that is genuine and not pretended can create the sublime. "It is the nature of the sublime to kindle and inflame the soul" (Longinus, 1995, Section 7). He points out that true passion, when smoothly delivered, "awakes a corresponding feeling" in the audience (section 8). In conjunction with pathos, as experienced by Aristotle, is the emotional bond that connects. Nevertheless, Longinus goes further than Aristotle in asserting that emotion must be genuine, not merely feigned. The feelings, Longinus points out, are going to be dealt with in another essay, now lost, but already it is clear in the existing text that the first and second sources, conceptions and passions, refer to the state of the poet's soul" (Atkins, 1952, p. 99).

The relationship between rhetoric and the sublime is dialectical rather than oppositional. According to Porter (2016), Longinus is quite entrenched in the rhetorical tradition, even if he subordinates rhetoric to the requirements of sublimity: "The art and rhetoric of the Longinian sublime" (p. 85). The sublime can be achieved through rhetorical means, figures, diction, composition, but only when those means are animated by a grandeur of thought and passion. Undoubtedly, Gossens' claim regarding what Longinus must added also adds to the maker of the text: "Longinus (8.1) states that the first condition for the production of sublime moments is an undertaking to master language, which we know to be achieved through study in Grammar and Rhetoric. The author is a part of an old rhetorical tradition and thus incorporates a great many of its instruments of analysis, most especially the traditional terminology established in treatises on rhetoric since Aristotle" (By the Limits, 2020, pp. 20–22). Nevertheless, the author "occasionally uses these same instruments and terminology with a different meaning and purpose" (p. 24). The contrasting features of sublimity and excellence can be summed up by the fact that those qualities of discourse are "only discernible in the whole text, while sublimity is a thing of a single moment" (p. 41). Without sublimity, rhetoric is but competent utterance; without rhetoric,



sublimity is mere inability to express oneself. Both of these accomplishments classical works attain.

3. The Rhetoric of the Sublime in Confessional Poetry

In confessional poetry, the confessional mode developed by Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and others in the mid-20th century is based on the premise that a poet's private life including its most excruciating and shameful aspects can be turned into poetry (Rosenthal, 1959; Phillips, 1973). This change is definitely rhetorical: the poet has to convince the reader that the personal is meaningful, that a private pain has public significance. However, it is also highly sublime: the poet is obliged to achieve such grandeur of thought and feeling that the confession does not become merely self-revelatory but an elevation of final art. In their greatest poems, Plath and Sexton achieve this.

Plath's mythic, invincible Lady Lazarus in contrast to Sexton's vulnerable, grieving mourner. They cleverly employ pathos, with visual manifestations that are shocking, stirring, and overpowering. The poems are structured by a logos that organizes the emotional material into rational argument about death, trauma, and survival. This transcendence takes place when individuals express their personal pain through the means of art. In a similar vein, the speaker of Plath's "Lady Lazarus" states "Dying / Is an art, like everything else. / I do it exceptionally well" (Plath, 2004, lines 43-45). The declaration embodies the poem's underlying argument along with the logos, ethos and sublime statement. The suggestion is made that death ultimately marks the end of all human endeavours and as such is something that can be mastered, aestheticized, and used as an instrument of self-expression. By claiming this, Plath ultimately achieves the highest effect of the sublime according to Longinus, which is one of transport, not persuasion.

The rest of the analysis investigates the operation of this interaction in two poems. This means analyzing each poem one by one paying attention to construction of ethos, deployment of pathos, structure of logos and achievement of sublimity. Analyzing the poems of Plath and Sexton with reference to Aristotle and Longinus will result in a deeper appreciation of confessional poetry as a persuasive art that does not just express but rather transforms emotion into an overwhelming force that changes the world.

4. Analysis

4.1 Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus"

Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus" begins with a statement that is a confession and a declaration:

I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it— (Plath, 2004, lines 1-3)

The ethos of the poem is immediately discernible in this mixture of weakness and strength. The speaker of this poem describes herself as a professional survivor who has taken birth- dying as her profession and her survival as a kind of expertise. This expertise demands respect and attention, establishing what Aristotle would call the speaker's phronesis, the practical wisdom of someone who has been through the fire and now knows what others do not.

The speaker in poem transcends subjective identifications and transforms her personal pain into a mythical level of defiance. She identifies herself with Lazarus, the one allegedly brought back from the dead, but alters him from a male miracle recipient into a female agent of her own resurrection. Lady Lazarus is fierce, deathless, and insatiable. She preys only on one thing. 'Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air'". By appropriating the biblical narrative, Plath takes a masculine sacred story and makes it a female speaker, blasphemous and sublime. Thus, this transformation of the biblical narrative is a rhetorical act.

The victims of the Holocaust further reinforce the speaker's ethos by aligning with her. Her skin is 'bright as a Nazi lampshade' (line 5); her face is 'a featureless, fine / Jew linen' (lines 8-9). The photographs do more than incite horror; they assert a place in the speaker among the extreme sufferers of the twentieth century. As Gubar (2004) argues, Plath's use of imagery native to the Holocaust "seeks to claim an authority of suffering that belongs to no one and cannot be appropriated without violence" (p. 234). The speaker's ethos thus rests on a double move: she claims the authority of the survivor, while the very audacity with which she makes this claim acknowledges the problematic nature of such appropriation.

Longinus's grandeur of thought is evident in the presentation of the speaker as someone from another world. 'Dying is an art, like everything else, I do it so exceptionally well' (43-45). This statement elevates the speaker's personal pathology into an aesthetic principle. She is not only a survivor of suicide attempts; she is also an artist who uses death as her medium. This claim's brilliance and shock, which rejects the conventional pieties of suicide, is itself precisely the "echo of a great soul" from which Longinus says sublimity springs. The speaker's soul is great because it defies the boundaries that society constructs around the suffering of women as victimhood and calls it mastery.





The motivator of "Lady Lazarus" is pathos, with ethos as its base. Through a series of images that can be grotesque, horrific, or even darkly comic, the poem works on the reader. The body of the poet ultimately becomes a stage, a theatre of suffering, "Peel off the napkin / O my enemy. / Do I terrify?" (lines 25). The reader is drawn into this performance as one of the 'peanut-crunching crowd' who 'shoves in to see / Them unwrap me hand and foot' (26-28). This performance of suffering produces horror in us at the images of suffering, guilt at being a part of the audience, and awe in us at the speaker's defiance.

Employing Holocaust imagery significantly heightens the pathos of the poem through the connection of personal suffering to a collective one from history. The speaker's essence as "Lady Lazarus" cannot be separated from her identification with the Jewish victims: "A sort of walking miracle, my skin / Bright as a Nazi lampshade" (4-5). These visuals elicit what Dominick LaCapra (1994) refers to as the "sublime of trauma," the feeling of extreme suffering which surpasses representation and calls for a response that is simultaneously aesthetic and ethical (p. 205). The reader cannot merely empathise and sympathise; he is made to face the veracity of the speaker's suffering as a historical occurrence that cannot be aestheticized away.

Here, Longinus's idea of emotional elevation according to Longinus is important. Lady Lazarus' pathos is not sentimental pathos; it is the pathos of overwhelming force and potency. When the speaker says, Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air, (lines 82-84), the emotional effect is not one of pity but of terror and awe. The speaker is something more than human, a phoenix, a Fury, a figure of vicious apocalyptic vengeance. The Longinian concept of ekstasis typically refers to a state in which audiences are removed from ordinary emotional responses into a state of sublime shock. The victim to avenger transference generates this effect. The emotion of the speaker overtakes the reader, rather than inviting them to feel for him, as the poem builds in intensity.

Logos in "Lady Lazarus" operates subtly yet powerfully through the structural patterns and numerical accuracy that the poem carries. The speaker's assertion that she dies "one year in every ten" (line 2) produces a cycle in a pattern that controls the entire poem. She proclaims "Number Three" (line 22) and "Like the cat I have nine times to die" in line 21. The speaker uses numerical markers to forge reason amidst the chaos of the experience. The speaker's journey through death and resurrection is so logically sequenced that a reader can say: first death, second death, third death, and then more to come.

The repetitive use of the phrase "Do I terrify" and the anaphora "Do not think I underestimate your great concern" in the poem infuses a rhetorical rhythm that supports the argument's *logos*. As Muhammad and Ranjha (2024) observe in their treatment of Sexton, "repetition and anaphora" allow the text to "persuade the reader" through making one thing happen and then something almost similar (p. 10). The use of these devices in "Lady Lazarus" changes an individual's history into a ritualized performance, which is a liturgy of death and rebirth with logic of its own. The *logos* of the poem comes to fruition in the final stanzas as the speaker's argument reaches its conclusion:

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air. (lines 82-84)

Plath's speaker accomplishes it with the intensity of her claim. The poem's key question "And what of the dead?" (line 13) is not a rhetorical flourish but a genuine existential question that the speaker cannot answer and the poem doesn't pretend to answer. This refusal of easy consolation, this intellectual honesty is itself a kind of grandeur. According to Longinus, what is truly great is that which is always and everywhere admired. In a courageous refusal to be comforted, Sexton commands admiration that moves the reader beyond sympathy into a place of awe.

This conclusion is not merely emotional; it is the logical outcome of the poem's premises. If the speaker can survive death, if she has indeed "done it again" and again, then she has achieved a form of immortality that places her beyond the reach of ordinary mortality, and beyond the reach of the men who have tried to control her. The *logos* of "Lady Lazarus" is the logic of the survivor who has nothing left to fear. It is a logic that Aristotle would recognize as *enthymematic*: the reader supplies the unstated premise that death is the ultimate limit, and the speaker's transcendence of that limit renders her invincible.

4.2 The Sublimity of Grief: Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know"

Anne Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know" opens with an act of refusal:

Gone, I say and walk from church,

refusing the stiff procession to the grave,

letting the dead ride alone in the hearse. (Sexton, 1962, lines 1-3)

By this refusal, the speaker establishes *ethos*: a refusal that is equally an assertion of autonomy and an acknowledgment of grief. The speaker's departure from the funeral acknowledges that the definition of a funeral procession does not apply to her situation. This assertion marks her as a telltale, who won't participate the comforting lies of faith or social nicety. Sexton refuses typical mourning rituals, signalling her struggle with



death; through this defiance, she asserts her right to question and redefine what it means to mourn.

The sexual display of vulnerability is essential for Sexton to display. Unlike Plath's mythic self-construction, Sexton's speaker does not assume a superhuman or transcendent status. She is merely a mourner, who is exhausted, bewildered, and heartbroken. It is June. I am tired of being brave" (line 4). The speaker's admission of fatigue is itself a rhetorical act: it portrays the speaker as honest and encourages the reader to share her exhaustion. The speaker at the heart of "The Truth the Dead Know" has lived through the worst, and has no more energy to put on a show.

Sexton's poem exhibits grandeur of thought in a way that Plath's does not. Sexton's speaker accomplishes sublimity with the intensity of her sorrow, whereas Plath's speaker accomplishes it with the intensity of her claim. The poem's key question "And what of the dead?" (line 13) is not a rhetorical flourish but a genuine existential question that the speaker cannot answer and the poem doesn't pretend to answer. This refusal of easy consolation, this intellectual honesty is itself a kind of grandeur. According to Longinus, "the truly great is that which is always and everywhere admired" (Longinus, 1995, Section 7). In a courageous refusal to be comforted, Sexton commands admiration that moves the reader beyond sympathy into a place of awe.

The poem demonstrates pathos through domestic intimacy and existential isolation. The speaker's reference to her "darling" (line 10) creates a thoughtful space of tenderness, which is immediately undercut by the poem's reflection on death. In the aforementioned extract, the speaker states "My darling, the wind falls in like stones / from the whitehearted water and when we touch / we enter touch entirely. No one's alone" (lines 10-12). The speaker's tactile imagery that wind as stones conveys a fully enfolding into touch and the intensity but also fragility of connecting with another. The poem states 'No one's alone', and yet seems aware that everyone is alone, prior to death.

The poem is embellished with a natural imagery that has a beautiful and ominous pat... "Whitehearted water" implies purity as well as coldness. The wind has a dual aspect: it softly caresses and fiercely assaults; it drops in like stones. These images evoke the ambivalence of grief. The way that we come together even in our moments of intimacy haunted by loss. The way that the beauty of the world becomes unbearable after death. As declared in the last stanza of the poem:

And what of the dead? They lie without shoes
in their stone boats. They are more like stone
than the sea would be if it stopped. (lines 13-15)

The burial practices of ancient cultures can be seen at the "stone boats" of the dead since they are inanimate and permanent like death. The comparison of stone and sea insinuates an absolute cessation the cessation of motion, of life, of the meaning itself as it ceased to be prominent-violent and pseudo-natural Schroder. The frozen horror of death confronted without illusion and not the tears of normal elegy is pathos at its most devastating.

Longinus's emotional elevation is brought about not by how intensely the utterer feels but how much the poem evokes the same feelings in us. The speaker in "The Truth the Dead Know" does not astonish the reader with displays of heroic defiance. He acknowledges one's mortality. It is already viewed as a sublime, the sublime of the universal, by virtue of which the suffering of the one becomes indicative of the universal. According to Sexton, in another country, people are dying. When such an expression of the loveliness of the women of a tribe, comes from an artist, it is the stately thought which we get, owing to the intentional speech of the artist.

Logos in the poem is implemented through the philosophical structure of the poem. The speaker first refuses the rituals and then seeks comfort in a human connection. Finally, she confronts the dead and finds them beyond consolation. This structure is not just emotional; rather, through the imagery and syntax of the poem, it becomes an argument about the nature of death and its effect on the living.

The logic of the poem reveals itself particularly in the use of paradox and contradiction. The speaker claims that "no one's alone" (line 12) while the poem insists that death creates a deadly isolation." "They refuse / to be blessed, throat, eye and knucklebone" (lines 18-19). This refusal is both factual and a challenge to reader's assumptions about the power of ritual centered on blessing and cursing. The deceased have ceased to receive blessings, community, or meaning. The logos of the poem is the logic of death itself, a logic that cannot be outrun, only admitted.

Sexton employs ABAB rhyme and its inherent closure to establish a pattern of expectation and fulfillment in order to present her argument. As Muhammad and Ranjha (2024) indicate, "the ABAB rhyming increases the readability of the poem" and "the use of the past and present tense connects the present with the past" (p. 12). The patterning of the rhyme scheme presents a formal counterpoint to the emotional chaos of the poems as they suggest that even with death, there would be a logos. However, the last stanza of the poem breaks the rhyme by ending on the



word stopped. The poem does not lead to a resolution but to silence which is itself the most eloquent expression of grief.

5. Conclusion

Plath effectively combines myth, horror, and number in "Lady Lazarus" by developing a mythic ethos, deploying a pathos of spectacle and horror, and employing a logos of numbers and cycles. The allure of this speaker's thinking is created by the way in which death is articulated and turned and rendered in the sublime as heroic and defiant. Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know" achieves it through the construction of an ethos of vulnerable authenticity, the deployment of a pathos of ordinary grief, and the employment of a logos of philosophical confrontation. The speaker's lofty thinking, her rejection of consolation, her honest engagement with death, produces a quiet but devastating sublimity.

Through both poems, it can be seen that the rhetoric of the sublime is not contradictory. In fact, sublimity would be impossible if there were no art of persuasion that can convey it. Without the ethos that establishes the speaker's credibility, the sublime is simply pompous. Without pathos to stir the readers emotions it would only be cold. If not for the logos that structures the argument, it would be a mess. When read together, Aristotle and Longinus give a complete account of how language moves us not only to think differently but also to feel differently and to be differently.

The analysis of Plath's "Lady Lazarus" and Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Know" through the dual lenses of Aristotle's Rhetoric and Longinus's On the Sublime reveals a fundamental truth about confessional poetry: expression is secondary to persuasion; the most powerful forms of confessional poetry are when the emotions expressed become elevated and transformative. Both Plath and Sexton do more than confess: they produce rhetorical argumentation regarding suffering, death, and survival. They do so in a language of such sublimity, as Longinus describes, which transports, overwhelms and transforms.

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