



PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY IN THE WORKS OF SYLVIA PLATH AND ANNE SEXTON: *AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE*

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Abstract

Any deep insight into the inter-contextual layers of the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton and the assigned socio-political contexts related to their poetic and prosodic outputs and outlooks has entailed an existential perspective for an adequate understanding and in-depth interpretation of them in order to shed light on the issue of existential crisis, which manifested itself in the broadest sense in the life of these literary figures, and which gave way to personal transformations, cataclysmic life crisis, political motives of contention, self-identification, longing and yearning for death, loss of identity, search for building a new identity and indomitable motives for committing suicide.

This type of poetic output which can best be described as confessional has become popular in the 1950s in artistic imagination in response to consumer-oriented cultures and life styles reflective of luxurious conformity, and which flourished due to conjunctural milieus and peculiar socio-political contexts in the American society of the period.

Keywords: Existential Crisis, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Loss of Identity, Poetry.

SYLVIA PLATH AND ANNE SEXTON'IN YAPITLARINDA KİŞİSEL DÖNÜŞÜM VE VAROLUŞSAL ENDİŞE: VAROLUŞSAL BİR BAKIŞ

Öz

Sylvia Plath ve Anne Sexton'ın şiirlerinin inter-kontekstüel katmanlarına, vezinsel ve düzyazınsal dışavurum ve bakış açılarıyla ilintili sosyo-politik içerik ve bağlamlara yönelik yapılabilecek derinlikli bakış ve incelemeler, bu edebi kişiliklerin yaşantılarının doğru bir biçimde anlaşılmasının bir koşulu olarak varoluşsal bir perspektif benimsemeyi gerektirir; Bu yazarların dünyasında en geniş biçimi ile deneyimlenen, kişisel dönüşümlere, ülkütütücü bunalımlara, siyasi çekişmelere, kimlik arayışına, ölümü arzu etmeye, kimlik kaybına, yeni bir kimlik oluşturmaya ve bitip tükenmek bilmeyen intihar arayışlarına yol açan varoluşsal kriz problematiğinin aydınlatılabilmesi için eserlerinin daha iyi bir biçimde anlaşılması ve derinlemesine yorumlanmasında yarar vardır.

İtirafçı Şiir geleneğinin en iyi biçimde temsil edildiği bu tür şiirsel dışavurumlar, 1950'lerde zevk-düşkuncü yaşam biçimlerinin yansıtıldığı dönemin Amerikan toplumunu karakterize eden konjonktürel ortamlar ve özgün sosyo-politik bağlamlardan ötürü güçlenen tüketimci-menşei kültürler ve yaşam tarzlarına bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkmış ve sanatsal imgelem içinde yer bularak popüler hale gelmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Varoluşsal Kriz, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Kimlik Kaybı, Şiir.

INTRODUCTION

Ontological disintegration, loss of identity, existential anxiety, death and suicide employed as subject matters in various outputs of a staggering number of literary prodigies of the twentieth century English and American verse and prose reflecting the precarious and tragic human condition have long been considered to be excitingly quintessential topics for philosophical inquiry, psychoanalytical interpretation and literary analysis (Seybolt, 1986).

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Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton were two American poets of the twentieth century, whose poetic outlooks, artistic perspectives and philosophical outlooks had similar undertones characterized by thematic and formalistic elements scattered across the whole spectrum of their works. In their poetry, they picked up themes which revolve mainly around the banality of life and which can best be characterized by and associated with the melancholy and bleak feelings as well as a profundity of the meaning of death.

When various novelistic or poetic works woven of imageries related with death are scrutinized and becomes the focus of concern for critical analysis, it would be much more tempting to say that we should take into account literary figures who are, to some extent, psycho-pathologically suffering cases in point within the context of their autobiographical accounts as living their lives entangled and enmeshed with human striving and survivability on earth, tormented souls haunted by and inflicted with desperation, misery, death and annihilation when deconstructed through a binary system of thoughts within the context of their autobiographical accounts and manifestations as was the case in the works of a couple of genius literary figures of the century who could be to some extent categorized within a similar artistic circle and epistemic genealogy; imageries woven in the bulk of their works were related with a deeply-rooted ontic anxiety or *existential angst* about life and death which seem to play a crucial role in the poetic manifestation and philosophical outlook of these two literary figures (Rose, 1993).

The chief focus of concern in the present manuscript has therefore been on the various outputs of these literary figures together with some references made to their contemporaries, within this context, representative and reflective of human desperation and misery as was amplified in the poetry of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, and Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*, which has, for this purpose, been analyzed in an attempt to delineate attitudes of these literary figures towards death and illustrate how these poets interpreted death, within a shared socio-aesthetical context which shows a striking similitude in terms of their descriptions of death, and expound the problematic and the question of why this theme was so much of paramount importance for these poets.

1. DEATH AND SUICIDE AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MANIFESTATION IN POETRY: THE CASES OF SYLVIA PLATH AND ANNE SEXTON

Sexton and Plath wrote about the intolerability of existence, the temporalization of human condition in cosmos and about the fascination of the mystical unknowns materialized and signified with death. In Sexton's and Plath's works, death is a common theme replete with the indescribable and the uncomely connotations and imageries conveyed in their works though sometimes becoming conspicuous and even excruciatingly detailed in the grievously depicted feelings of melancholy and finally in the real life incidences which occurred in the form of a deliberate extermination, which was nothing less than suicide (Madi & Neimneh, 2015); Sexton pointed out her feelings of death quite clearly and steadfastly, whereas in Plath death was employed in a rather esoteric and mysterious undertone. The personal background and the upbringing of the two writers also have amazing similarities in terms of traumatic experiences they passed through during childhood, resulting in and paving the way for sentimental yearnings, individual strivings, psycho-pathological manifestations, adversities and various other difficulties recurring and recounted throughout their adulthoods which proved to be ontologically disintegrational and destructive when deconstructed through a binary system of thoughts; and if we take a much broader look at the biographical accounts of Sexton and Plath, it becomes clear that several cases of death occurring in their own families had left a traumatic



influence on these poets and haunted their minds in the form of trepidations, apprehensions and existential anguish. The topic of death having this kind of undertones expanding into the widest contemplation of *existential angst* was adroitly employed in their poems. A dexterous representation of this problematic in the poetic manifestations is best characterized in Plath's "Daddy", and in Sexton's "The Truth the Dead Knows."

Sylvia Plath's representations and signification of human condition on earth temporalized with death and idiosyncratically presumed to result in suicidal termination or non-being make it clear that death should have been conceptualized in her imagination which would ontologically be an integral part of repleteness of being for a much more adequate and aesthetical rationalization of life; the banality of everyday life as a diminutive factor for our being in the intolerable flux of time looms large in her works, and is conveyed through a chain of imageries representing human desperation and misery in a frightening and illogical universe:

Bit my pretty red heart in two.

I was ten when they buried you.

At twenty I tried to die

And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do. (Plath, 1981)

The theme of death is therefore expressed poignantly in her works. The meaninglessness of life is compared with death, which is multifaceted, multilayered, and the spokeswoman of the poems has a charming sentiment towards death, though, at times, amounting to a delirious infatuation, except when she is thoroughly becoming depressed and trepidated with it, experiencing a mental state symptomatic of bipolar disorder and at times reminiscent of complete confusion and oblivion. The various images of death thus loom large in the works of these writers. Hart Crane, in his poem "the Bridge", exposes the condition of modern man referring to Emily Dickinson, Isadora Duncan and himself: "These two women suffered from loneliness, disregard and pain in a crude society. The poet goes on to depict the cause of their pain in modern vulgarity by describing a country scene in New England where the cows seem to be the only creatures. He feels isolated among the people who cheapen the countryside with their drinking and vulgar interests in antiques, people who are jealous of each other and indifferent to nature" (Durmuş, & Yıldız 2014).

Coming from a family of German descent, Sylvia Plath, from the very beginning of her childhood years upto the self-termination of her life, showed an unusual breadth and dexterity in the brief period of her poetic output since her artistic outlook signified a challenge to the poetic paradigms of the century, writing her first poems at the age of eight. However, as she became infatuated with death she manifested a severe bipolar disorder symptomatic of severe depressive throes that led to the first suicide attempt before seventeen. Under intense psychiatric scrutiny and treatment, she still could graduate with honorary degrees in 1955 from the prestigious Smith College. She received a Fulbright scholarship to be accepted by Cambridge University, where she continued writing poetry and met Ted Hughes, with whom she got married in 1956. Intolerable episodes of suffering and the spiritual exasperations put her into a multitude of deliriums and trepidations, paving the way for a life of tribulations and adversities.

Her deteriorated health, coupled with the divorce from Hughes in 1962, led to suicide; her works were later brought to literary recognition. In her works, suicide as a theme is poignantly recounted and plays an important role, as is the case in her famous poem "Lady Lazarus":



I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it--

A sort of walking miracle, my skin

Bright as a Nazi lampshade,

My right foot

A paperweight,

My face a featureless, fine

Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin

O my enemy.

Do I terrify?--

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?

The sour breath

Will vanish in a day. (1981)

In the novel, *The Bell Jar*, she puts forth a multitude of different sentiments on the suicide attempt of the female protagonist Esther Greenwood and propounds a challenging and revolting attitude towards whatsoever is related with life. Esther is taken from the depths of life; she reacts with fondness towards mystical contexts of existence as to what is just alive and what is just dead far from the outward appearance when she rises above a higher existential mode signifying an authenticity of being. So Esther tells, for example, at length about what impressions she had, as she looked at the bodies. Her recounting peculiar to her narrativity about death and disintegration, fleshes and the carcasses of the bodies characterizing the cataclysmic wars and conflicts conveying the socio-political contexts of the period are also a striking case in point, which were poignantly reflected in almost all of her works, especially in one of her poems named “Two Views of a Cadaver Room”. Suicide as a theme is, therefore, to be tackled as a chief focus of concern, which, all of a sudden, comes to the fore, arrests our attention in the novel *The Bell Jar*, as well as in her other poems. In *The Bell Jar*, the symbolization and representation of the suicide attempt as a theme is based on actual events happened in Plath's life. Her works can therefore be considered to be predicated to a *tour de force* for *existential angst* marked with phantasmagorically woven autobiographical elements. One can assume that Sexton's poems also have been written in *terra necra*, a land of the dead, embroidered with autobiographical elements, when taking into consideration her descriptions of death reminiscent of a sort of necromania (infatuation with death) and the disillusionments she experienced throughout her life. Autobiographical accounts illustrate their literary tune as reflective of and associated with adversities, spiritual exasperations, precarious living conditions, psychopathological experiences and tribulations signified and exemplified in their idiosyncratically personal narrative which instantiated sentimental experiences and instigated self-destructive behaviours and tendencies on a level of striking similitude and which have therefore been the chief focus of our concern and tackled throughout this manuscript (Chesler, 2005).



The theme of death in the works of Sexton and Plath has parallels in terms of transferred imageries, meanings and description of varieties of feelings of death, expanding into the widest contemplation of human situation. A representation and signification of various manifestations of death, as it was made by the two writers, has, therefore been the subject of this manuscript. The question of why death has played a prominent role in the works of poets can be due to their autobiographical accounts if we are to expound the critical points in their artistic narrative and trace the ingenious pathways across their poetic texts and cast a deeper insight into the deeper layers of their ontic and poetic output, in particular, and, therefore, make an appropriate critical and interpretation and analysis of their literary works in general.

2. THE 20TH CENTURY AS CHARACTERIZED BY WOMEN GENIUSES INFLICTED WITH EXISTENTIAL CRISIS, MIRRORING HUMAN CONDITION AND QUESTIONING THE MEANING OF BEING

Death as a theme in literature employed by women has a long established tradition. Another tormented soul representing a somewhat similar genealogy in the literary tradition within the context of existential angst was Virginia Woolf, who also experienced consecutive deaths of her beloved relatives, namely the untimely loss of her mother, as was the case for Plath and Sexton. They were all ransacked by the disease, which finally caused the death of her half-sister Stella Duckworth. Woolf's later life was marked by mental illness, depression, a deep melancholy. And an overwhelming majority of artists in both 20th and 21st centuries, who were haunted and infatuated with existential angst like Virginia Woolf employed death as a recurring theme in their works. Woolf wrote in her first novel *the Trip Out* (1915) about the mysterious death of a young woman who died four weeks after the announcement of her engagement. In another novel, "*Mrs. Dalloway*, which Woolf later called it as a study of madness and suicide, about how these two world views are set side by side" (Bronfen, 1992). Thus, death in Woolf's novels has been a recurrent subject employed on a wide spectrum across her narrative. Even in the entries of her diaries Woolf gradually developed a habit to be closely infatuated with death. She put forth such aphorisms in an entry dated 17 February 1922:

I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual... Suppose, I said to myself the other day this pain over my heart suddenly wrung me out like a dish cloth & left me dead? - I was feeling sleepy, indifferent, & calm; & so thought it didn't much matter, except for L(eonard). Then, some bird or light I daresay, or waking wider, set me off wishing to live on my own - wishing chiefly to walk along the river & look at things. (Qtd. in Rohman, 2014)

Due to the fact that she came to identify herself with the irrationality and illogicality wrought by whatsoever is related with and reminiscent of death and oblivion, her agonies of mind implicitly created a contingent realm in which the meaning of life was constantly questioned and she assiduously strove for a rationalization of human condition in the midst of such existential crisis, The knowledge of the finality or death is contrary to the enjoyment of life (Bassnett, 2004).

In a diary entry written on February 25, 1957, Sylvia Plath expressed her appreciation for Woolf's literary works. She also wrote that she felt connected to her through the suffering and angst which can be considered to be a genealogically common thread and lineage between them:

... And just now I pick the blessed diary of Virginia Woolf to Which I got bought with a battery of her novels Saturday with Ted. And she works off her depression over rejections from Harper's ... by cleaning out the kitchen. And cooks haddock & sausage. Bless her. I feel my life linked to her, somehow. I love her - from reading Mrs Dalloway for Mr. Crockett - and I still hear



Elizabeth Drew's voice sending a shiver down my back in the huge Smith classroom, reading from *To the Lighthouse*. But her suicide, I felt I was in reduplicating in that black summer of 1953. Only I couldn't drown. I suppose I'll always be over vulnerable, slightly paranoid. But I'm so so damn healthy & resilient. And apple-pie happy. Only I've got to write. (1982)

Sylvia Plath felt connected to and infatuated with Virginia Woolf, when she realized that death in her life also played a determining role in shaping her literary ingenuity, knowing that Woolf was highly sensitive towards this issue. Similarly, Woolf's suicide was conceived as to be coincidental with Plath's life.

The historical and ideological context in which Sylvia Plath was born and bred and became creatively active and prolific, is constitutive for her work, facilitating subsequent in-depth interpretations of her posthumously. The various social and political factors and influences contribute directly to an accurate analysis and perception of the protagonist Esther and Sylvia Plath in her diaries. Thematic references to politics and the role of women are also interspersed and employed in her poems. For the loss of identity and the sudden trajectory to death are often taken into consideration in the most serious and analytical way possible in order to have an adequate understanding of her artistic career. Therefore, a brief knowledge about the socio-political, ideological and moral codes and norms both in the public and individual spheres and structures, and in particular, the racial issues and the roles assigned for women are considered to be essential.

Taking a glance at the lives of Woolf, Sexton and Plath, one can easily arrive at the conclusion that they were overshadowed by several incidents of untimely death, revolving around their families and haunting their own family members, just like the type of death reminiscent of the casualties of the World War II, which left a deep impression and influence on the transnational literatures the world over.

The imageries signifying and conveying death and various other cataclysmic disasters depicted in the works of various artists in the continental Europe and the disillusionments brought about on the part of the characters recounted in various poetries after the devastating bombing during the word wars could be reminiscent of a universe both frightening and illogical (Fussell, 1989).

One finds the subject of death also richly conveyed in the poems of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, who was born in 1892, and had committed suicide in 1941. She depicted death in her most poems and as a triumphant end of life:

Someone sweeps on towards
mortal victory.
The trees -
gestulations of triumph:
Judas
in sacrificial dance.
The trees -
a shudder before the
mysteries
Conspiracy
against life, weight, measure,



The trees -

a tattered curtain.

The trees -

gestures of entombment. (1964)

Tsvetaeva came from a wealthy family, her mother died of tuberculosis in an early age. As an adult she lived for some time in Berlin and Prague, but spent her life until her death in Russia. She wrote epic poems and plays. A higher mode of existence representative of higher ideals and great expectations for humanity but unfortunately compromised and disillusioned by cataclysmic destructions of war were decisively put forth and presented. It is surprising that a poet like Tsvetaeva, who embodied herself into the character of a the confident and successful woman outwardly striving and exasperating for a higher mode of existence, committed suicide and took her own life (Karlinsky, 1985).

Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath were therefore not the first writers who dealt with the theme of death in their works. Great predicaments, abysmal conditions and adversities of life experienced by these poets seem to arise from an *existential angst* sporadically popping out in the form of human desperation, misery and helplessness, as was manifested, for example, in the suicidal death of Virginia Woolf. The traditional representation of death theme in the modern and post-modern poetry has been influenced, among other things, by personal traumatic experiences of poets.

The urge to get infatuated with death is one of the themes most strikingly portrayed and recounted in Anne Sexton's poems which are likely to be representative of childish fantasies cherished in their unprocessed early traumas reflecting pains, trepidations and sufferings of love. When reading Sexton's poems, it becomes clear that nothing is easy in life, and that death can be considered to be a blessing and a saviour that might put an end to human suffering.

Sexton struggled with life, and wanted to investigate death. The motifs embroidered in her poetry pervade us like a thread looming across all her volumes of poetry. The urge to commit suicide was manifested in the poems "Wanting to Die" (1964), "Suicide Note" (1965), or in "Sylvia's Death" (1966). Sexton seemed to prefer in her poems the spelling of a dramatic monologue, which was reflective of a termination of personal suffering. Indeed, the spokeswoman in the poems is occupied so much with her own business; feelings of self-pity and the mental trepidation that she forgets that there may be people who might consider her in a different, more positive approach than has been anticipated. Her husband and her children believed in her, and they were from the perspective of the speaker's devoted self to the affirmative side. In *Live or Die*, a collection of poems in which an association of life with death was discussed, the spokeswoman came to the mere realization that she was isolated from the outer world and the worldly things, and was therefore not understood properly. While other people mainly worked in order to live their lives without questioning it, the spokesperson was caught between an existential dilemma by an analysis of death and a proper meaning of life, to lead a life questioned. So is put forth in "Man and Wife" (Live or Die):

We are not lovers.

We do not even know each other.

We look alike



But we have nothing to say... (1981)

Problematic interpersonal relationships, in the case of marriage, can, under various circumstances, bring about unintended and disturbing consequences, the seemingly convivial dialogue between two persons can in reality turn out to be unintelligible and evolve into an illicit dialogue and be perceived as strange, since they represent only a duty, an obligation to tolerate one another, even though they might not in reality stand it. Rejection of the joys of life in as a subject matter employed in Sexton's poems is characteristic of her description of transience of worldly life. Everything is too easy, cannot be questioned, and therefore seems to lose its appeal. When life is contrasted with death, the mysterious end of life, the spokesperson of her poems becomes infatuated and fascinated with death since death is no longer viewed as an annihilation but rather something blessing and attractive not only for ideological reasons, but also because death as a theme allows the poet to live well. One can even go so far as to assert that, for the spokesperson's life, any attempt to question the meaning of life can only be aesthetically established through the ontological underpinnings of death. The spokeswoman in Sexton's poems conveyed the views of a woman on the trivialities of worldly life and the quintessential reality of death. Unlike Sylvia Plath, Sexton was interested in associations. Her poetry is very much related with the autobiographical accounts of herself. Her literary works could also be considered therapeutic to the various psychopathological processes and experiences she went through; it would therefore be much more tempting to remember that Sexton had begun writing poetry with the advice of a psychiatrist as part of therapeutic strategy after she had made her first suicide attempt.

Sylvia Plath's chief focus of concern was not on the biographical incidents occurring throughout her life, such as date of birth, her parents' divorce, etc., to remind a few examples. Plath drew on and was engrossed in her literary work which facilitated a much more adequate understanding of human condition and which led her to a higher level of conscious experience and perception of reality. In this real life included political events, the illogical workings and off-springs of thoughts and emotions. This kind of human condition had been bound to undergo a process of aesthetic dissatisfaction characterized by annihilation and death, the very thought of which is overwhelmingly thrilling and sheds one to tears. While Plath repeatedly returned to and haunted by the subject of death, she felt less devoted to worldly pleasures in the brief span of her life. In fact, Plath's poetry is replete with the recurring symbols conveying death and gloomy landscapes reflecting the imageries of the predicament of man in cosmos as well as emblematic of a search for meaning of life, which symbolizes a turn to childhood and reliving a past experience. As Joyce Carol Oates pointed out:

The experience of reading her (Plath's) poems deeply is a frightening one: it is like walking to discover one's adult self, grown to full height, crouched in some long-forgotten childhood hiding place, one's heart pounding senselessly, all the old rejected transparent beasts and monsters crawling out of the wallpaper ... I cannot emphasize strongly enough how valuable the experience of reading Plath can be, for it is a kind of elegant "dreaming-back", a cathartic experience that not only cleanses us of our personal and cultural desires for regression, but explains, by way of it is deadly accuracy what was wrong with such desires. (1973)

The reading of Plath's works triggers a change in the reader. It can lead him back to his childhood, conjuring up images and experiences of the past and reviving repressed fears and anxieties, this can sometimes be in the form necrophobia (fear of death) which can trigger a higher level of existential vigilance, a repleteness of being, a full awareness and consciousness or a state of awakening just as it is the case with fascination and infatuation about annihilation



and death. Plath's poetry is of enormous marvelousness and great artistic unity in terms of the aforementioned binary system of oppositions within the concept of life and death.

The spokeswoman in Plath's poetry is a passive witness to the turbulences and crises of life. In addition to the self-sufficiency and the self-expression of the spokesperson in her poems we find a bunch phantasmagorical imageries symbolizing death as a theme which becomes emblematic of the bleak landscape characterized by the lake, the black sky, etc. Plath's works on the subject of death are incorporated with connotations illustrating that death and life are ontologically interrelated within the context of a binary system of thoughts; the integrate and complementary aspect of dualities is embedded in socio-esthetical context. People live and die, and that fact has to be accepted because it is part of the reality. Nevertheless, death remains a mystery for speculation and divination about death, and swerves around rolling in her mind. The spokeswoman longs for her ideal, and also assumes often that one experiences after the death a state of an overwhelming rapture, peace and relief. In Plath's poems, a connotative association has also been established between death and sea. Plath spent a considerable part of her childhood near the sea. Here, death plays a key role in conjuring up images, fantasies teemed with water. Generally, one can observe in her descriptions of death certain ambivalence towards everything; there is fear and anxiety of death at times amounting to ontological disintegration, as well as a fascination and infatuation with it (Goodspeed-Chadwick, 2012). As in "Daddy", in which the spokesperson for the dead father feel hatred and at the same time cannot forget, she is always drawn into the maelstrom of death. The very thought of death will not let her go further and realize her ideals grounded in mere mundanity if there is not a transcendently ontological reality (Goodspeed-Chadwick, 2012).

Plath denied the so-called "good" side of life to devote herself to death (Scheerer, 1976). This attitude can be viewed as a challenge to escape from life, and to create a new identity and undergo a process of a personal transformation, which might have brought about the urge to choose the spokeswoman in her poetry. Bored with real life events or disappointed by distressing incidences, she turns away from whatever is related with life, plunges into feelings related with death, and experiences an epistemic transformation. Within the context of her idiosyncrasy, death and life are ultimately not compatible, though, to some extent intermingled with each other; because if you're satisfied with life, death seems unimportant; but both can also complement each other. This might be one of the reasons underlying Plath's urge to question life, and, finally, on a tragic basis, embrace death through self-termination (Kottana 2014).

In tandem with a detachment from society and an alienated attitude towards whatsoever is related with life, Sexton, too, appeared to have no enthusiasm for whatsoever is related with life whether it be institutional opportunities, material flourishing or various exotic trips granted to her throughout a tribulated life span. About the African safari, which she undertook shortly after her second suicide attempt in July 1966 together with her husband, and which was funded by a scholarship that was granted to her. On her 38th birthday, Sexton experienced a traumatic injury, and broke her hip. This experience served as an inspirational basis for the poem "The Break" (Love Poems):

So I fell apart. So I came all undone.

Yes. I was like a box of dog bones.

But now they've wrapped me in like a nun.

Burst like firecrackers! Held like stones! (1981)



Sexton received a multitude of different awards for her poetry. For Live Or Die, she received the Pulitzer Prize, besides she taught at Radcliffe College in Harvard University, and at other American universities. Her professional success was remarkably great during that period; however, Sexton's mental condition gradually worsened, and her daughter noticed that Sexton made several attempts to commit suicide in the years 1967-1970. Maxine Kumin wrote on one occasion that Sexton was always eager to enhance her poems to standards which were best idealized and emulated in the public imagination. So she fought to keep a picture or a word in her poetry although others were involved in the correction of something or embellish their output in favour of a poetic fashion. Sexton's trepidations triggered by lived traumas were reflected in almost all of her literary works. So she developed a distinct kind of constitution of poetry that gave her poems an independent undertone. Furthermore, she was preoccupied with the role of women assigned by various institutions in society.

Ultimately, Sexton was haunted and overtaken by the mental disorders. In 1973 she rejected the advice of her therapists; living a life of solitude reminiscent of a self-imposed exile negatively affected her physical and mental well-being progressively. In the spring of 1974 she committed a third suicide attempt, after which she still turned out to survive. The last year of her life she spent largely in the McLean Hospital. On October 4, 1974 Anne Sexton finally ended her life.

CONCLUSION

Topics such as ontological disintegration, existential crisis, personal transformation or fragmentation, epistemic aberration or alienation, death and suicide, which were employed on an intermittent basis by various literary figures in the 20th century English and American poetry, have become controversially disturbing subject matters, since the chief focus of concern is on the precarious and tragic human condition set in a universe both frightening and illogical, and the finger is pointed exactly to the very wound and anguish giving way to intolerable existential modes and moments of human condition. The difficulty of writing about topics that have always been associated with human desperation and misery, proved to be extremely thrilling and precarious, though a bit more exciting as well.

Selected key texts that have become the chief focus of our concern for critical analysis and interpretation are excerpted from various poetic pieces and novels belonging to the aforementioned geniuses, considered to be categorized within a shared socio-aesthetical context, and who, throughout their artistic careers, produced highly intensive, subjective expressions of longing for death and an arduous search for self-identification and self-realization; any expressionist elements related with these topics were critically analysed and explored, in tandem with their relative significations, fictionalizations and allusions which these authors presented throughout their literary career.

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