

PROCLAIMING WOMAN'S BODY, SEXUALITY, IDENTITY AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY: THE CONCEPT OF ECRITURE FEMININE IN ANNE SEXTON'S CONFESSIONAL POETRY

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Abstract:

The concept of Helene Cixous' "Ecriture Feminine" or "the women's writing" theorizes a commotion upon the monolithic phallus prevailing in the literary genre. It draws upon the miscellany, variability and numerous prospects that act as the innate rudiments in the realm of female sexual experiences. Discrimination is contagious in nature as it inflates its circumference to the dominion of creativity. Patriarchy has emblazoned its supremacy over the literature, where phallus centered writing is considered as the symbol of authoritative language. Anne Sexton, the bard of confessional poetry replicates the female identity and sexuality by battling against the notion of gender prejudices. This article entitled "Proclaiming Woman's body, Sexuality, Identity and Artistic Creativity: The concept of Ecriture Feminine in Anne Sexton's Confessional Poetry" aims to study her most applauded poems titled "In celebration of my Uterus" and "Menstruation at forty" as body poems revolving the facet of "Ecriture Feminine." It also highlights the confessional poetic drifts, where she diffuses and construes the stark-naked reality by flouting away the cuffs of socio-cultural margins.

Keywords: Ecriture Feminine , Monolithic phallus, Patriarchy, Prejudice.

"Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies." (The laugh of Medusa, Cixous, pg. 6).

Woman's body, sexuality, identity and creativity are nebulous terms which are intertwined to each other; but are being manacled in the mesh of Phallocentrism.

"Ecriture Feminine" is a term devised by French feminist and literary theorist Helene Cixous in her eminent essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), which corroborates the concept of women's writing or feminine writing. Cixous intends for positioning a genre of literary writing that swerves from the conventional phallogentric panaches of language. That exemplifies the one which scrutinizes the rapport amongst the edifying and psychological engraving of the female body and female alteration in language and writing. Cixous and other French theorists including Luce Irigaray, Chantal Chawaf, Catherine Clément, and Julia Kristeva and the psychoanalytic theorist Bracha Ettinger popularized the form of this feminist literary theory in France during the early 1970s.

Language often embodies as the tool of patriarchal or masculine countenance. As Peter Barry writes, "the female writer is seen as suffering the handicap of having to use a medium (prose writing) which is essentially a male instrument fashioned for male purposes." But this theory converses the conception presaged by the patriarchal hegemony.

Cixous encounters the women to impede the restraints of Phallocentrism, overriding in the phase of writing.

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity; about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain minuscule-immense area of their bodies; not about

destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive, about trips, crossings, trudges, abrupt and gradual awakenings, discoveries of a zone at once timorous and soon to be forthright. (Cixous,pg.25)

Anne Sexton, the versifier of Confessional poetry asserted the revolutionary doggedness of depicting womanhood as the dominant leitmotif of her poetry. Confessional poetry is being discerned as the gaudily self-revelatory verse, which divulges the personal façade. It instigates its advent through the works of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, W. D. Snodgrass, where they paves way for the illustration of proscribed and reprehensible taboo topics such as sexuality, trauma, illness, menstruation, death etc.

According to Sexton, “Poetry milks the unconscious.” Sexton bemoaned and commemorated female identity, authority sexuality and creativity by confessing or unveiling the outrageous and scandalous personal niceties about her own life.

Sexton engraves her own identity in the patriarchy infested literary domain through her feminist body poems manifesting the so called nauseating subjects such as Masturbation, Menstruation, Sexual desires, Menopause, Abortion etc. Her gutsy voice dreadfully incites to reassert her own individuality against the phallogocentric literary province.

This concerned article attempts to scrutinize the concept of female identity through a close stance on Sexton’s body poems. These fervently ferocious and sexually redemptive poems about the female body surpasses the matter of Sexton’s personal life and expedition into its profundity. She appeals to exalt femininity by confiscating the attires that confine and fleece the nakedness as though they were the provenance of disgraceful clandestineness; and subsequently, devoid of confessions or embarrassments, she unbosomed both the alluring and awful purposes of these bodies. And thereby she cleaved away the notion of gender prejudices.

Sexton’s firebrand poems titled “In Celebration of my Uterus” and “Menstruation at Forty” are epithets of confessional body poems; to ponder over how female identity is subpoenaed through the doffing of the woman narrator in order to disclose the body beneath, flaunting the biases and preconceptions that women are being imperiled to in their way of life. On one hand, these feminine poems renders the female body as the epitome of glorification or celebration. And on the other hand, it encapsulates agony, discomfort and amalgamation of emotions and desires.

Sexton’s “In Celebration of my Uterus” induces an exemplification of veracious self-articulation, a chaotic elucidation of multifaceted reactions. It probes a disquisition of the personal woman psyche. It scarpes the male centered bigotry in terms of “Ecriture Feminine”; orbiting around the incompatible views on her own womanliness.

The word “phallus or penis” is repeatedly being considered as the terms resembling male supremacy. But the word “vagina” is treated as the utmost abhorrent expletive word by the patriarchal society. Sexton’s “In Celebration of my Uterus” enclasps womanhood by unambiguously mentioning about the taboo female part called “uterus.” The uterus is perceptibly the body part associated with the female reproduction system. It is pertained as the woman’s womb which fosters the foetus during the stage of maternity. Furthermore, this reproductive or sexual organ effectuates substantial personal and societal importance. Sexton reflects the uterus as the basis of humanity; which is being hailed as the roots of the soil.

I sing for you. I dare to live.

Hello, spirit. Hello, cup.

Fasten, cover. Cover that does contain.

Hello to the soil of the fields.

Welcome, roots. (In celebration of my Uterus, Sexton. pg.6)

The male society presumes uterus or woman's body merely as a child bearing machine which satiates their sexual urges or desires.

Many women are singing together of this:

one is in a shoe factory cursing the machine,

one is at the aquarium tending a seal,

one is dull at the wheel of her Ford.(Sexton,6)

The narrative tone of the poem is personal and colloquial in nature; where she avows her control over her own body. Some oratorical questions about the patriarchy can be problematized through this body poem. Does a woman's child bearing capability alone govern her aptitude? Does the only mode for a woman to recognize herself is via her voluptuous, reproductive and sexual bond with men? What about her dreams or goals, her requirements for love, self articulation and self complacency? Does a woman's individuality and essence deployed exclusively on the performance and flaws of her sexual organ? Sexton's tactic of hovering these interrogations is through the invocation of irrational or ridiculous summonses about the uterus.

Sweet weight,

in celebration of the woman I am

and of the soul of the woman I am

and of the central creature and its delight .(Sexton,6)

Sexton upbrings all women together to display their potentiality and harmony. Their body needs to be articulated through poetry and their bodily process ought to be unmasked like that of others. It lures upon the assortments, capriciousness and abundant forecasts that act as the distinctive barebones in the facet of female sexual experiences within reflects the concept of "Ecriture Feminine." Sexton uses this poem to celebrate the womanhood within each woman and to embrace their body the way it is.

Menstruation, a substantial piece of womanhood and a principle of femininity are well depicted in Sexton's body poem titled "Menstruation at Forty." She evidently utters the brashness of society towards the process of menstruation. It lionizes the female body as the bearer of ache. It is a blend of emotion and sufferings. Menstruation is considered as a stereotypical theme for poetry. But poets like Anne Sexton, Lucille Clifton, Sharon Olds distorted this ideology about menstruation. Periods can be appraised as a normal biological phenomenon.

Sexton's "Menstruation at Forty," highlights the incongruity between female desire and communal pacts with the distress of maternity; still being remarked as a distasteful issue to confer acquiescently at the time. The autobiographical rudiments of this poem are palpable.

The poem shudders us with its forthright description of the narrator's anticipations and visions, which often get tousled inside the womb. The origin of narrator's forte is through her optimistic self scrutiny or introspections. The garnering underneath the body smears the consciousness despite being one juncture of life was under culmination, but another journey endures. She restates the worth of a women beyond the tag of a baby-producing machines.

The womb is not a clock

nor a bell tolling,

but in the eleventh month of its life

I feel the November
of the body as well as of the calendar.(Sexton, Menstruation at forty.pg.9)

The speaker lays her productive self being detached, thereby befitting a novelty in all other dimensions of her life. Hence, she adduces the imperative account regarding by what means a woman's distinctiveness is not inherently allied to the unrelenting, clunking clock within her womb.

"Menstruation at forty" labels the facade's biological; also related to societal "death" due to her helplessness to propagate which highpoints as well as elucidates the refutation that she undergoes from her social background.

All bodies are unique; and their mode of expressions are inimitable the way they are.

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display - the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. (Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*; 373)

Through these body poems revolving around the concept of Cixous' "Ecriture Feminine"; it is being proclaimed that women do have body, voice, sexuality, identity and artistic creativity. They have the potential to express, embrace and celebrate their body and identity through the poetic language sphere. So it posits a tumult upon the monolithic phallus predominant in the literature by incriminating confessional poetic inferences.

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