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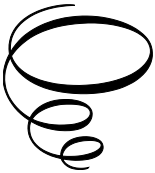

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TO MY DAUGHTERS
NADA & SARA

This book contains graphic discussions of subjects of a sensitive matter; such subjects include sexual abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse of children, and surrounding issues. While CSP works to ensure that any and all subjects of this nature are discussed in a matter than is appropriate, relevant and sensitive, we wish to give our readers due notice that the discussions may be distressing for those affected by these issues.

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

Complete Poems	*CP*
To Bedlam and Part Way Back	*TBPWB*
All My Pretty Ones	*AMPO*
Live or Die	*LD*
The Book of Folly	*TBF*
The Death Notebook	*TDN*
The Awful Rowing Toward God	*TARTG*
45 Mercy Street	*45 MS*
Words for Dr.Y.	*WDY.*
Last Poems	*Last P.*
Life Studies	*LS*
Feminine Mystique	*FM*

PREFACE

Hurrying Truth? Can poetry be a cry for truth? Do readers seek it when delving into art? Why is there a "hunt" for truth in the case of confessional poetry? The word "hunt" has been used by Anne Sexton herself in an interview about the significance of sincerity and falsehood in a style, widely known for the confessional trajectory: "Yes, I think so. That's what I'm hunting for when I'm working away there in the poem. I'm hunting for the truth"[1]. The use of "hunting for" and "truth" twice accentuates her hunger for transmitting credible information to the reader of her "poem[s]". She is akin to a professional hunter, managing boldly the art of pursuing and catching the prey. As a renowned poet, she searches for a target to achieve, deeply tied to mirroring her private life without complexities.

The book's title "*Hurrying Truth"* is significant, for along her career Sexton had been longing for it. In "Just Once"[2], she declares that crying had become her refuge. Whether "eastbound" or "westbound", her "heart" was thumping in search of "[her] truth across a small humped bridge / and hurried [her] truth, the charm of it". I capture the term "hurried my truth" from this poem in order to underline the poet's fierce appetite for evincing the "charm" of making it public. The quest for losing no time is at the "heart" of the poet's struggle on the way to ascend the "bridge" of truth-seeking.

My book deals with the quest for truth in the poetry of Anne Sexton as made manifest in her volumes foregrounding the indelible construction of honesty. What I intend to show is the legacy of the biographical touch. Unlike some critics who evade the personal at the expense of the professional and artistic, this study illuminates the substantiality of referring to Anne Sexton's *CP* as a full compilation, aiming to tell the true story of a poet who was an eminent producer of a confessional mode of writing. Looking inside the biographical treasury, though critics tend to discredit this, is at the heart of this work, for the whole confessional pyramid has been built around personal, solipsistic, subjective, narcissistic, self-obsessed and subjective writing. The poems from *Complete Poems* (*CP*) are a testimony, showing that her poetry mirrors her life with all its ups and downs and the

[1] Lehrich, p. 187
[2] Sexton, *CP* pp.194-195

big question is raised: Does poetry function as art, or as a mode of recounting the poet's life?

The extreme thirst, on Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman and W.D. Snodgrass's part, for the force of truth-seeking has been energized by the American poetess Anne Sexton, too. Born in 1928 in Massachusetts, her poetry is about telling personal stories about her marital life, her agitated relationship with her two daughters, husband, Nana, mother, father, her mental disorders, sexual abuse, and her suicide in 1974.

PART I

TRUTH OR MISINFORMATION

I have reinvested the key terms "truth" and "misinformation" in order to spot the light on the book's project on Anne Sexton's *CP*. I want to show that what characterizes her poems is the heightened level of transparency. Poem after poem, she establishes a close relationship with the reader through recording a detailed account of her private stories. In this sense, the aim of this study hinges on demonstrating the inscription of Sexton's poems in truth and the detachment from providing false information.

From Saint Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Walt Whitman to post-modern poetry, the tradition of incorporating "truth" seems controversial. If T. S. Eliot and James Joyce evince the substantiality of effacing the self in poetry, critic Donald Davie questions the validity of furnishing confessional poetry, in particular, with too personal details[1].

Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, demonstrates that the West has created confession for the sake of generating truth. Foucault's discourse on "power" unveils the kind of relationship between the one who confesses and the one who is confessed to. There lies the nature of the exercising of hegemony. There is no doubt that the person, leaning to telling the truth dominates, to a certain extent, the act of communication. S/He seeks to control every single detail, poured out, in an attempt to monopolize the interactive realm. The French thinker believes that "Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth"[2]. In this sense, the basis for the vocation of transparency, honesty and sincerity resides in the act of avowal. The West's obsession with "truth" creeps into other domains and institutions such as law, medicine, religion, education in a way that it hovers over people's lives. There has been an orientation towards

[1] Rodriguez, pp. 8-9
[2] Foucault, p. 56

penetrating the self for the sake of exteriorizing "a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage"[3].

T. S. Eliot and James Joyce stress the importance of camouflaging the role of the writer in any given text. S/he has to disappear to leave room for the words on the pages to speak for themselves. Nietzsche also denounces the presence of any transparency in what authors present in their works. He argues that "[t]he poets? The poets lie too much". Donald Davie seems discontent with the confessional poets' excessive reliance on transferring their experiences with death, marriage, divorce, alcoholism, sex to avid readers of poetry.

According to T. S. Eliot, a writer is compelled to erase his presence within the literary sphere so as to achieve artistic maturity. The poet is also motivated to boost a pertinent stance towards self- effacement when composing verses. The need for an ongoing eradication of personality is quintessential in the process of illuminating a detached poetic style. In the same stream of thought, James Joyce is in favor of the absence of any intrusion on the part of the writer in any given literary work, for his voice must not only be limited, but also demolished to leave room for an objective speaking voice: "[T]he personality of the artist … finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak"[4].

David Dalton Yezzi postulates that confessional poets tend to reflect a distorted image of "truth". If Sexton considers it a "poetic truth … because behind everything that happens to you, every act, there is another truth, a secret life"[5]. The common thread between Yezzi and the confessional poetess resides in the allegation that there is another fact lurking behind confessional art. For the critic, Snodgrass, Plath, Sexton, Lowell pretend to be honest enough, even though what they introduce is a fabricated and "artful simulation of sincerity", for they "lie like truth"[6]. Similarly, Philip McGowan insists on extracting the autobiographical dimension in this mode of writing. Through his thorough investigation of Sexton's texts, he comes up with the idea that the female poet is aloof from being a truth-teller. She actually "admits nothing" as what she has been used to doing is to be "lying throughout her poetry"[7].

The most common question in relation to the truth/misinformation dialect is whether poetry is about the life story of the poet or not. Sexton's *CP* can be the relevant compilation, reflecting this contentious issue of

[3] Foucault, p. 59
[4] Trilling, p. 7
[5] Lehrich, p. 187
[6] Asotić, p. 58
[7] Byrne, n.p.

seeking or hiding truth through verses. Hayden Carruth argues that her art better stresses the continuous problem of truth/falsehood as it "raise[s] the neversolved problem of what literature really is, where you draw the line between art and documentary"[8].

Huck Gutman, in *Rousseau's Confessions: A Technology of the Self* (1988), relegates the presence of a highly subjective piece of writing to the poet's inclination to telling it true. The best example finds its inspiration in Rousseau's works, deeply involved in a self-reflexive arena where the "I" is well heard, seen and inspected. His *Confessions* is regarded as a confessional book, telling the true story of a protagonist who establishes a tight link with the reader by pouring out his happenings. In the same vein, *Confessions* by Saint Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, is thought to be the first autobiographical work in the history of literature. Adopting an epistolary genre, the writer addresses God in search of repentance. Guilt-ridden, he confesses to Lord that his sins have been ample in size.

In "Sincerity and Poetry" (1966), Critic Donald Davie investigates the role of sincerity in poetry. He thinks that confession can be a hindrance to the poet's growth. Telling too many "true" things to the receiver is probably the most downgrading factor since the poet here exposes everything, leaving no room for the critics to dig deep into something still unveiled. Davie expresses his immense disapproval of a confessional tone in poetry. He proceeds by putting the blame on the "confessional" poet whose style is too revelatory that forces the reviewer to be with folded-hands in front of a myriad of personal details.

Disturbed by the flow of emotions, he curses "the poet whose life, when the gossip-columnist-reviewer goes to work on it, does not reveal fornications and adulteries, drug addictions, alcoholism, and spells in mental homes"[9]. Instead, a poet must be concerned with furnishing his texts with imagery, embellishing his verses with sophisticated matters more than informing the reader about his life. The same image here recalls today's recourse to the "story" application through the social media whereby everyone is playing the game of exposing his or her private life to the public. Making it too overt is at the core of Davie's worries, for the register of negativity in his statement accentuates the extent to which poets of the confessional mode have surpassed the requisite content of "alcoholism", "adulteries" or "mental", alluding to a bleak tableau.

The confessional school appears to tackle themes such as sex, menstruation, drug, alcoholism, divorce, abuse, mental anguish that the

[8] *CP*, p. xxi
[9] Rodriguez, p. 9

American reader has not been accustomed to beforehand. The poet's voice is also of a galvanizing importance within this new mode of writing, for presenting intimate moments have paved the way for a self-referential verse form.

If Sexton claims that she is lying through her poetry when she confesses: "I am a lie. The crystal truth is in my poetry … Cold and queer, I sting with life. I lied. / Yes, I lied. Or else in some damned cowardice"[10], the bulk of this book is to show the construction of "truth" poem after poem. The detailed description of a turbulent marital situation, relationship to her parents, and her daughters: Linda and Joy, Dr. Martin and John Holmes are evident in transmitting a truth-seeking motivation.

Based on these standpoints, since the 1950s, confessional poets have evaded the habit of not recording their actual happenings in their past and present incidents. The following definition of the term confession reinforces the exclusion of lying in poetry by representing every single moment of her life on the pages. To confess is to parallel detailed, honest and true events. In this regard, honesty can be measured as the "true" avenue for poets of the mid-twentieth century.

The discrepancy between authentic and fictional is manifested in literature. In prose, drama or verse forms, there has been a countless discussion on the nature of "truth". In an article, entitled "Poetic Truth or Historical Truth; Dramatists or Historian: Shakespeare's *King Henry V* History Plays", Nayef A. Al-Joulan and Mohammad Salem Al-Mustafa distinguish between the role of both the playwright and the historian. Unlike the former who writes about history, paying heed to the power of creativity, the latter records authentic happenings with less intervention or modification. The documents the historian collects about a specific historical event have to be transferred to the reader in a transparent manner[11].

As far as poetry is concerned, Aristotle in *De Poetica* classifies "truth" into two categories: the "poetic" vs. the "historical". He argues that the poet's role does not consist in grounding his work in actual events. He believes that "it is not the poet's function to describe what has actually happened, but the kinds of thing that might happen". The dissimilarity between what the poet tells and what the historian narrates emanates from the primacy of what "might" take place since the former is more concerned with what "could" occur in life, while the latter points at the

[10] McGowan, *Anne* pp. 3-7-8
[11] Al-Joulan and Al-Mustafa, p. 164

"treat of particular facts" as Aristotle argues. In other words, poetry becomes the hive for a "philosophical" depth because it is dealing with "universal truths"[12].

In "Muthos as Logos: The Concept of Truth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes"[13], Jeanne Stigen Drangsholt refers to Heidegger, Socrates and Plato in explaining the interplay between word and myth in the human being's ongoing search for truth. In "What Calls for Thinking", Heidegger regards Socrates as the most important thinker in Western culture, for he is plunged in "the draft of Being". By "Being", he means the relation to God which is a key factor in the process of creating logical thinking. The act of attaining "logic" is manifested through the person's driven force to await God's withdrawal, for this seems the sole manner in which man can seize truth. The pursuit of truth, then, hinges on the individual's penchant for observing God's resignation, be it overt or covert in certain moments[14].

The bulk of the project on Anne Sexton's "hurrying truth" is not only restricted to the presentation of true events in her life, but also an attempt to display what is hidden, for God's "withdrawal may [also] remain as veiled as ever"[15]. The specificity of confessional poetry lies in the hide-and-seek poetic game, plunging the reader in a spiral of puzzlement. Not knowing whether the poet is telling the truth or dispelling it, the reader's mission, on the process of seeking credibility, rests on "watching" Sexton's "words" as she declares that she "admit[s] nothing".

Maxine Kumin, in the introductory part of *CP*, states that Anne Sexton seems to be the sole poetess whose life stories have been revealed in a way that pushed Robert Lowell to admit his uneasiness with these "embarrassing poems". During that era, many female readers were fascinated by the innumerable private details, offered on a silver platter and with such transparency through the abundant use of the "I". But, to what extent does the first person pronoun reflect the poet's draw for truth? This is enigmatic, for despite the fact that Sexton's intimate events have been exposed to the public with approval and rejection of critics, John Berryman confesses that in *The Dream Songs*, Henry is a fake persona, created to dispel doubts about the implication of the poet himself in the story. Berryman insists on removing the presence of the writer in the succession of "true" events, even though critics point at the tight link between the poet and the "I" in this book of poetry in particular, for most details do refer to John. Whether Berryman inclines to truth-telling

[12] Al-Joulan and Al-Mustafa, p. 166
[13] pp. 368-372
[14] Sexton, *CP*, "Said the Poet to the Analyst" p. 12
[15] Drangsholt, p. 368.

technique or resorts to denial tactic by reiterating that the speaking voice is fictive ("not the poet, not me"), the vogue of the quest for truth within the confessional mode continues to spur controversies[16].

The truth-seeking dynamic has been cultivated within this style of writing, opening the door for a firm debate on the presence of autobiographical elements in the poetry of Anne Sexton. What characterizes the former genre and the latter mode stems from furnishing the literary work with the poet's inner grief, trauma and suicide-driven attitude. In other words, confessional poetry is autobiographical, for the poet writes about his or her personal experience by bringing to the fore memories of the past. S/He also aligns present moments of sadness or happiness with the future.

Autobiography is the subjective, retrospective work written about minute details of the self, by the self, aiming to join the past life to the current one. The concept of confession revolves around the cultivation of the private stories of the poet. Christina Britzolakis claims that such poetry reflects the life of the poet par excellence. There is a connection between what the poet confesses in his or her poems, and the authentic happenings in his or her life. In this respect, Sexton's work "can never be entirely disentangled from the narrative of her life and death"[17].

As far as the first-person voice is concerned, Robert Phillips underlines the dominance of the "I" in confessional poetry. "Confessionalism" is manifested by the frequent use of "the 'I' [which] is, ultimately, the starting point for all the important elements that lead to the confessional mode"[18]. It mirrors what the poet wants to reveal to the reader, incorporating the despicable involvement of the poet. In other words, the reader could not have known much of the minute details about the poet without probing his poems. That is why confessional poetry projects the poet's past, present and even future incidents. The poet acknowledges the role of the target reader, who is there to meet his artistic needs. The notion of "subjectivity" is clear either in confessional poetry or in autobiography. Stan Samuel Rubin emphasizes this idea when arguing that confessional poetry is a "great terrain of subjectivity and autobiography whose opening was signaled by Robert Lowell's *LS*"[19].

Confessional poetry seems autobiographical since the role of the artist is to transmit works infused in self-reflexivity. Within the same vein, Deidre Dowling Price, in a dissertation titled *Confessional Poetry and*

[16] *CP* pp. xx-xxi.
[17] Khalifeh, *Transforming* p. 4
[18] Pipoş and Cristescu, p. 93
[19] qtd. in Crosbie, p. 10

Blog Culture in the Age of Autobiography, highlights a tight link between confessional poetry and "confessional blogs": "[T]he evolution from the sixties to today shows an ever-expanding culture of confession and autobiography"[20]. The mid-twentieth century was marked by the advent of the era of autobiographical writing, either through the confessional poetry of the 1960s or the spread of the "confessional blog culture". Both underline the artist's penchant for pouring out instances of the inner struggle by turning the public into private. Price demonstrates that the 1960s witnessed a drastic move towards the confessional wave and the autobiographical writing. He admits that the first mode influenced the second par excellence, and both constituted what he calls an "age of autobiography", underscoring much in common.

However, in his paper, "Autobiographical Poetry in the Twentieth Century", Dr. Anwar Abd El Kareem Elsayed witnesses similarities and differences between the confessional mode and autobiography. The difference rests on the amount of credibility and authenticity. The poet, in confessional poetry, tends to be more "sincere" by telling what has happened to him in a "frank" way. According to him:

> The speaker in autobiographical poetry is not a persona but the poet himself. Very occasionally, an autobiographical poem is rather long, covering long periods in the poet's real life; however, it sometimes presents some fictional details. Distinct from 'confessional' poetry, which gives frank and minute details related to the poet's private life, grief, pain and tension.[21]

According to Elsayed, the similarity between autobiography and confessional poetry stems from the poet's inclination towards presenting a full-fledged account of his or her life. Nevertheless, he contends that autobiographical poetry tends to eliminate certain unpleasant details, and turns to change truth at the expense of aesthetic drives. Confessional poets, then, tackle themes of mental breakdowns, suicidal tendencies, death and abusive events. Their self-reflexive poetry translates their intimate moments of joy and sorrow.

The question of regarding poetry as a simple reflection of the poet's life stories is at stake for the literary dilemma implements the pursuit of art for the sake of art. Within this interval, the book seeks to foreground the inscription of truth as part of Sexton's strategy under the paradigm of

[20] Price, p. 8.
[21] Elsayed, n.p.

confessional tone. With reference to the question raised at the start of this part, it is plausible to emphasize that the prevalence of an intruding poetess or the use of a number of speaking personae foregrounds Sexton's hunger for evoking the happenings of her marital life, her separation from her daughters, her parents' death and postpartum depression.

Despite the suspicion over the truth-probing ideal, Sexton does control her poems as a predominant speaking voice as well as generates a myriad of female speakers in a few volumes to cater for gratifying women's search for reshuffling their linguistic, sexual and maternal identities. Concealing the fact that these personal stories about marital unrest, mental disorders, sexual abuses and deep anguish are hers is meant to trace an objective point of view endorsed by other personae that the poet creates in order to cater for the universalistic aspect of the female quest. In other words, this paper, through this section, stresses the fact that the marriage between subjectivity and objectivity, with recourse to a few critics' standpoints, helps evoke the inclusion of other marginalized women in their incessant search for linguistic, sexual and maternal identities.

The confessional school instills the trend of immersing the voice of the poet within the corpus of poems. This "self-reflexive" mode paves the ground for the birth of a feminine writing, proper to a female poet who furnishes her collection with the force of the personal. Sincerity in Sexton's poetry can be aligned with the notion of truthfulness to show the extent to which the confessional genre is concerned with recording real incidents in the poet's private life. "In the Deep Museum"[22] further illustrates an ambivalent nature: On the one hand, she claims her voyage for chasing honesty, whereas on the other side the lie turns to be her perpetual interest in the game of lies: "Cold and queer, I sting with life. I lied. / Yes, I lied. Or else in some damned cowardice".

As discussed earlier, critics base their comments on the controversy over the issue of truth-telling to the female confessional poet's own avowal. By admitting that she is seeking verity in her body of volumes, another version of her life is lurking behind. She truly addresses the reader by pouring out her turbulent relationship to her parents, her daughter Linda, Dr. Martin and John Holmes, the ones who motivated her to transcend the painful experience in the asylum and reach poetic self-worth.

In terms of fake poetic truth, exposing the unreliable manifesto for relating the agony of being sexually abused by her father, is proof enough that Sexton is caught in the pitfalls of confusing reality with fiction. No one can prove that her father really abused her and no one can tell whether

[22] Sexton, *CP* pp. 64-65

her great aunt, Nana (Anna Dingley) witnessed that horrible scene or not. In her quest for gathering the tormented self, she has unquestionably fallen into the abyss of misinforming the reader, for she engages the self in a blurred vision whereby she ceases to distinguish between deploying art for aesthetic beauty or punctuating it with too personal and never proven information.

The feature of lying through telling stands out in Sexton's reply to Patricia Marx, who inquires about the nature of confession in her poems. The American poetess demonstrates that "[t]o really get the truth of something is the poem, not the poet"[23] for it "counts for more than" his or her "life". Adding to that, in the next citation, she unmasks herself as a liar, emerging like "an actress" who has just finished her performance: "I am nothing, if not an actress off the stage. In fact, it comes down to the terrible truth that there is no true part of me ... It is as if I will permit my therapy and think it all very interesting as long as it doesn't touch me - I am acting the part of a nice case history"[24]

Critic David Dalton Yezzi explains, in the below-mentioned quotation, that though the confessional school has been classified under the rubric of highlighting "emotional authenticity", it also seeks to "lie". Yezzi contends that this mode spreads an "artful simulation of sincerity", for the poet becomes keen on projecting uncertain facts:

> What makes a poem confessional is not only its subject matter – e.g., family, sex, alcoholism, madness – or the emphasis on self, but also the directness with which such things are handled. Unflinching and generally extreme in their diction and address (certainly compared to what preceded them), the poems of Snodgrass, Lowell, Sexton, and Plath comprise a wide tonal range from sad whisper to hectoring squawk. What they have in common, what sets them apart from other poems that incorporate details from life, is their sense of worn-on-the-sleeve self-revelation and their artful simulation of sincerity. By relying on facts, on "real" situations and relationships, for a poem's emotional authenticity, the poet makes an artifice of honesty. Confessional poems, in other words, lie like truth[25]

Along with sincerity, truth and misinformation, the autobiographical elements in the mid-twentieth century confessional poetry carries the project of framing the subjective "I". The assumption that Sexton seeks to spark the absence of the existence of a totally autobiographical art is at the core of McGowan's theoretical framework.

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[23] Marx, pp. 563-564
[24] Lehrich, p. 188
[25] Asotić, p. 58

William Wordsworth's question of "what is a poet?" has inculcated the endeavor of poets to write for men, not only for themselves: "a man, speaking to man". Their commitment resides in speaking of the self without dwelling on ivory towers. In terms of poetic truth, the English writer disapproves of those "who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will ... [speak] about a taste for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontiniac or Sherry"[26].

Wordsworth's perception of truth is inextricably intertwined with Aristotelian definition of what poetry is:

> Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who comprehends the dignity of his art[27]

Wordsworth confirms that the target of art resides in seeking universal truth. Endowed with great passion, the poet has to overcome "obstacles", less problematic in comparison to those faced by the Biographer and Historian. The choice of these two persons paves the way to the heavy burden of scrutinizing loads of documents, or chronicling the life of others. Here, the "dignity" of the poet is attached to the "utility" of seeking general credibility without recourse to "external testimony".

Truth "of the highest order", for Wordsworth, is to imitate real happenings, and offer a "faithful image". It is incumbent on the poet to "impress and affect the more" through hurrying honesty, "hallowed by love"[28]. Inspired by Horace, he confirms the substantiality of the poet's penchant towards being "ethically" honest when beautifying texts with affecting words.

The other trope this book takes up is the life story of Anne Sexton. It seems titillating to contextualize the female confessionalpoet to better understand her family, childhood, marriage through eloping with husband Kayo, the sense of disregard that she had internalized for decades before

[26] Clancey, p. 111
[27] qtd. in Clancey, p. 112
[28] Clancey, p. 122

she committed suicide. Throwing the self in the hands of God for the sake of reaching harmony, serenity and truth coincides with her upgraded feeling of self-esteem through writing poetry**.**

Anne Gray Harvey Sexton was born in Newton, Massachusets, in the United States of America on November 9, 1928, to Mary Gray Staples and Ralph Churchill Harvey. She had two sisters: Blanche Dingley and Jane Elizabeth Harvey. Most of her childhood was spent in Boston and on Squirrel Island, where she experienced a sense of security, and became engulfed in writing her proper dramatic texts. She used to toss herself in the position of a distinguished character, entering all the home's rooms for the sake of being recognized within her family nest. In 1948, she registered at Rogers Hall boarding school.

The "Old Bag of Bones", as her male classmates called her, also became a model for Boston's Hart Agency for one year. In the same year, she met Alfred Muller Sexton II, nicknamed Kayo, at the Longwood Cricket Club and the couple married. Through the custom of writing letters[29], Sexton confessed to her parents that she had "eloped" with Kayo, informing them that they were not doing anything wrong. At the age of twenty-seven, she felt a heavy burden to accomplish the role of housewife and mother to two daughters: Linda Dingley (born 1953) and Joyce Ladd (born 1955). The sentiment of being overloaded with household duties had immersed her in a chain of despair. Her psychological state was deteriorating as she returned to the asylum for hospitalization. Repeated depression and mental disorders had culminated in the immediate detachment from her daughters, for she could no longer care for both them[30].

Hearing strange voices which urged her to commit suicide, "the Mother" of confessional poetry was fighting to promulgate an eminent place in the literary realm. Over eighteen years of her career, Sexton had been struggling to impose herself as a skilled female poet, capable to undo oppression. The ambitious apprentice never succumbed to her turbulent life, embroidered by personal crises; she rather began writing poetry through the confessional style. Free verse, cinquains, terza rima and sonnets were among the diverse forms of poetry Sexton used in *CP* to foster her appetite for showing her true artistic reputation.

An analogous study of Sexton and Lowell underlines the common thread of mental depression both undergo before managing to foster their poetic thrust. Robert Lowell, Berryman, Snodgrass, and Plath had many things in common: inner turmoil, family trouble and a suicidal tendency.

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[29] Sexton and Ames p. 14

[30] Sexton and Ames, pp. 6-9-14

The identity crisis is manifested in respect to the "self" and the "other". The conviction that members of her family, intimate friends, and relatives were enemies had afflicted Sexton. She felt that they were foes, conniving to destroy her mentally and physically. The sense of disintegration is apparent in her relationship with her parents. Her identity crisis dated back to her fragmented childhood in which a haunting feeling of being an unwelcome child tormented her. She always felt alone even though her family members were close to her. She did not figure out their being there, for she felt alone, trying to defeat unbeatable powers.

Having a "lonely childhood, infused with the feeling that she had been 'locked in the wrong house'" had resulted in a sense of loss in which the female confessional poet got bogged down. The choice of the negatively-loaded term "locked" carries the notion of self-confinement as the poet seemed confined in a vicious circle. Nichols corroborates with Lehrich in projecting the abhorrent condition that Sexton had encountered. Feeling unwanted by her parents aggravated the state of misplacement that had characterized the relationship between Anne, Mary and Ralph. To be an 'unwanted' child bespeaks the impression that parents were responsible for their daughter's mental trouble, though the latter did her best to catch "the attention of her mother and the approval of her father, but felt she continually failed to achieve either". What intensified Sexton's bitterness and self-denial can be attested in the below said citation. Adopting a confessional tone, she claims that parents, sisters, teachers and husband planned to deepen her identity crisis. Lehrich reports what Sexton had already voiced out by postulating that:

> Her parents, she was convinced, had not wanted her to be born. Her sisters, she alleged, competed against and won out over her. Her teachers, unable to rouse the slumbering intelligence from its hiding place, treated her with impatience and anger. Anne's counterphobic response to rejection And admonishment was always to defy, dare, press, contravene[31].

Sexton's identity formation had been on an ongoing scale, for she managed to boost her writing skills thanks to the enriching and fruitful encouragements of her therapist Dr. Martin Orne. The psychiatrist motivated the excited novice to take refuge in writing in order to combat her intermittent psychological turmoil. She was urged to escape the horrors of the accumulated personal crises, which led her to dwell in the asylum, through metrical composition. Assimilating poetry writing to

[31] Lehrich, pp. 170-171

remedy has enabled the afflicted poet to forge an artistic personality by enrolling in a number of poetry workshops.

In Boston, she took part of John Holmes's workshop in 1957. A year later, she frequented Robert Lowell's poetry seminar. Having benefited from attending Holmes and Lowell's seminars, she fulfilled her cherished dream when she made contact with eminent confessional poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath and W. D. Snodgrass, who would turn out to be of substantial inspiration for her. Along with poetry writing, Sexton cooperated with musicians when she founded a jazz-rock group called "her kind". In terms of teaching poetry, she achieved her goal by offering a platform for instilling the love for words in her students at Boston and Colgate universities.

Provocative themes constitute the rise of a distinct mode of writing that appears to diverge from what modernists have tackled. The poetic innovation of the confessional movement depends on the evocation of newly-approached issues such as suicide, death, menstruation, masturbation, and sexuality. The mother-daughter bond, pregnancy and mental breakdowns do reflect Sexton's poetic maturity as she is able to merge a mosaic of topics, in no more than eight published volumes: *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (*TBPWB*) (1960), *All My Pretty Ones* (*AMPO*) (1962), *Live or Die* (*LD*) (1966), *LP* (1969), *Transformations* (1971), *The Book of Folly* (*TBF*) (1972), *The Death Notebook* (*TDN*) (1974) and *The Awful Rowing Towards God* (*TARTG*) (1975). *CP* also overlaps two posthumously published works: *45 Mercy Street* (*45 MS*) (1976), *Words for Dr. Y.* (*WDY*) (1978) and six poems that Kumin put in order under the heading *Last Poems* (*Last P*).

Sexton produced a two-act play entitled *Mercy Street* (1969) performed by Marion Seldes at the Place Theatre in New York City, charting the story of a mad woman in search of identity to tread on the repulsion of mental disorders. It maps out a woman who fights to get back home from the constraints of the mental hospital. The only fiction publication lies in the fact that Sexton co-wrote four children's stories with Maxine Kumin: *Eggs of Things* (1963), *More Eggs of Things* (1964), *Joey and the Birthday Present* (1974) and *The Wizard's Tears* (1975).

Although Kumin argues that critics Louis Simpson and James Dickey disapproved of most of Sexton's poems from *AMPO*, for they "dwell[ed] more insistently on the … disgusting aspects of bodily experience", the female poet managed to offer a framework for talking about the self[32]. Robert Lowell, the pioneer of confessional poetry also critiqued her first

[32] Kumin, pp. xix-xx

volume *TBPWB* for being highly punctuated by personal experience of grief and mental disorder in the asylum:

> For a book or two, she grew more powerful. Then writing was too easy or too hard for her. She became meager and exaggerated. Many of her most embarrassing poems would have been fascinating if someone had put them in quotes, as the presentation of some character, not the author[33].

However, though Sexton insisted on demonstrating her poetic talent within a male-dominated literary scene, the Pulitzer Prize winner decided to put an end to a life full of ups and downs. Six months before her death, taking an overdose of sleeping pills was the sole alternative for the frustrated woman to drown her miseries. Acute mental breakdowns, intermittent therapy, a chaotic marriage which culminated in divorce, and turbulent relationships with parents, sisters and daughters had a negative impact on her psyche. On October 4, 1974, Sexton discussed with Maxine Kumin the publication of *TARTG* which was due in March 1975, went back home, wore her mother's coat, and confined herself in the garage. Eventually, the gifted female confessional poet committed suicide by asphyxiating herself by carbon monoxide.

Reviewers have split perception of Sexton's works: Some accept the mirroring of personal details, while others dethrone the dome of achieving artistic growth through the trajectory of making it true. Through the confessional style of writing, this work ventures to offer an account of Anne Sexton's move towards furnishing *CP* with personal truth. Her poetry is highly about her proper "history"; I mean by history her own life, centered on the self, family, the ups and downs, and her experience in the bedlam. It is akin to social media today, since she exposes her life to the public in an overt way. There is an affinity between what is going on in blog, Facebook groups, Instagram, and the emphasis on a mode of writing, highly punctuated by confession. The allegation of the move to a verse form bespeaks the internal depth of the writer's life stories since the birth of confessional poetry in the late 1950s is at the heart of the book project.

As Sexton affirms the honest zeal of incorporating truth in her poetry, she corroborates with Nietzsche that the poets lie in their texts. As she delineates the tapestry for unreliable account of vocation, her verse composition is the manifestation of truth. "I am a lie" and truth can be traced in my volumes constitute the pillar of the project.

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[33] Kumin, p.xx

To manifest the truth-seeking process with samples from her poems, a clear spotlight of the poetess's background can be tentatively demonstrated through "The Double Image"[34] (1959). It is a journey of Sexton in the jungles of mother-daughter bond, mental disorder, independence and identity formation. The first part of this book considers a single poem that transfers an overt expression of Anne Sexton's world. Right from the outset, Sexton, the speaking voice, addresses the reader, giving information about her "I tell you what you'll never really know" while the stanza is written for the sake of pouring out things that her daughter is requested to remember.

In November 1958, Sexton wrote to W. D. Snodgrass, telling him that "The Double Image" "has a voice … but [a] real voice, I think … whether or not it is my best voice, I am not sure"[35]. Steven Colburn confirms that in this poem Sexton "had truly found her voice as a writer"[36]. The frequent affirmation of the presence of her own speaking voice in this poem can only reassure the reader of the amount of truth that seems to have permeated every stanza. It is noteworthy that the first version was not accepted, either by the Hudson Review or the New Yorker. That's why Sexton redrafted and sent it again to Frederick Morgan, the editor of the Hudson Review on December 11, 1958. Three weeks later, it was accepted for publication.

Obsessed with the outcrying of a female "voice", Sexton alludes to the substantiality of letting her entombed voice be heard as much of the poem's details are as well-arranged as her "complete book of rhymes, / [her] typewriter and [her] suitcases". She attributes a unique voice to the poem, and is quick to point at the complimentarity with hers. Composed of seven parts and twenty-five stanzas, "The Double Image" underscores the poet's quest for "mow[ing] the lawn" by "holding [her] smile in place, till it grew formal".

In the first stanza, Sexton's voice is crystal clear. She initiates it with an unmistakable "I" that has just reached "thirty this November"; while her little daughter is "in [her] fourth year" as she declares. Reverting to a non fake news posture, the confessional poet adopts a verisimilitude in the opening section to empower her text with a truth-seeking attitude. Composed in 1959 at a time when Anne was thirty-one, and her daughter was four[37], Sexton equips her offspring with a huge amount of information "as true as these" details of what she could "remember" of the "medical

[34] Sexton, *CP* p. 35
[35] Sexton and Ames, p. 39
[36] p. 20
[37] Joyce was born in 1955.

hypothesis". She has been honest enough when filling her daughter's "brain" with these past memories, "letting go" of falsehood.

The poem demonstrates the kind of bond between Sexton and her mother, Mary Gray, and between Sexton and her daughter Joyce. The mother-daughter bond occupies an integral part of this poem. The "double" refers to the relationship between Anne and her mother, Mary Gray as well as Anne and her daughter Joyce. The whole passage is replete with an illustration of this special bond that Sexton perfectly elaborated on to record the true life story of the maternal image.

"The Double Image" captures a twofold mother-daughter relationship. As the title suggests, duality is a hallmark in this poem. On the one side, the idea of the double body, during pregnancy, goes hand in hand with Julia Kristeva's[38] standpoint. She argues that the redoubling up of the body underlines the identification between the daughter and her mother. On the other side, Sexton is torn between two losses: her separation from her daughter, and the death of her mother to cancer.

Studying the form of this poem, it is worth noting that the violation of the form is indicative of Sexton's poetic maturity. The conventional form is subverted to redeem the expansion of the female artistic creativity. In her incessant quest to forge her identity, Sexton not only turns to a philosophical quest for more inquiry, but also writes the longest poem in her first volume. Seven parts and more than twenty stanzas do constitute "the Double Image" which unravels the female resistance to the traditional poetic forms.

Following the same stream of thought, Kathleen Crown in "Poetry, Feminism and the Public Sphere" refers to Lynn Keller, who explores the prolific aspect of works by the female poets under the rubric of writing long poems which propel the female consistent creativity. According to Keller, writing longer verse texts is a way of showing the "richness and diversity of women's contemporary writing in extended poetic forms"[39]. A female poet excels in extending the number of lines, in which she shows how capable she is to write in an untrammeled way. This long form goes hand in hand with the "flowering" of the "long forms which accentuate [the] female ingenuity"[40]. It reinforces the break with the limited position women have held in literature and society.

Sexton's separation from her daughter, during her treatment in the mental institution, urges her to write a poem in which she avows a sense of guilt. She panics as she hears them say: "[She]'ll never get [her] back

[38] (1941-) A Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic and psychoanalyst.
[39] p. 646
[40] Crown p. 655

again". The "three autumns", her daughter is away from her, are akin to a heavy burden on her shoulder. She confesses what if her child "[will] never really know". Also, she assures her daughter that she will be mentally stable and "all the medical hypothesis" will be of no importance as they will prove a big fallacy. Her "brain will never" be disordered. She punctuates her poem with negative words such as "did not" and "never" to show the negativity she has been enthralled in. Her life was devoid of meaning the day her family decided to take Joyce away from her. Her sense of motherhood was obscured by her separation from her offspring:

> Sexton's parents, sister, and mother-in-law took her breakdown seriously. Recognizing that [she] could not responsibly care for two young children and that Kayo Sexton, working as a salesman for Sexton's father, was frequently away from home, they arranged for Linda to be sent to Sexton's sister and for Joy to live with Sexton's mother-in-law. Three year old Linda returned home after five months, while Joy, who was still an infant, remained with her grandmother for the next three years. Although Sexton was despondent about the loss of her youngest child, she recognized her inability to care for Joy[41]

Then, Sexton moves to her relationship with her mother, Mary Gray Staples Harvey, who never forgot that her daughter had attempted suicide so many times. She "cannot forgive [her] suicide, [her] mother said. / And she never could". Hence, Anne "lived like an angry guest" with a divided and split self and "like a partly mended thing, an outgrown child". The choice of the verb to mend stands for the implication of the division, which precedes the fixation of the girl's identity. In other terms, the daughter's identity crisis is pieced and redefined because of the mother's eventual love. It is believed that Sexton had a turbulent relationship with an "abject" mother: She "holds to her psychic shields and decides to stay inside as she fears facing an abject mother. This is done after a difficult separation … from her first mother… (with whom she had an ambivalent love / hatred relationship)"[42]. Hence, despite her unstable bond with her mother, she acknowledges the important role Mary Gray played in caring for her daughter. The mother "did her best", and objected vehemently to her daughter's suicide. However, the maternal love prevails as she "restyled" her daughter's hair and "had [her] portrait done instead".

Her mother made efforts to uplift little Anne and help her survive. Sexton uses the sentence "had my portrait done instead" five times with a number of pronouns such as "she", "I" and "they" to moderate the level of

[41] Lehrich, p. 172
[42] Khalifeh, "Who" p. 4

the disapproval of her attempt to kill herself by "swallowing an overdose of barbiturates"[43]. Hardly could her mother assimilate that her daughter dared commit suicide, let alone everyone in the neighborhood.

An unstable relationship like that seems constructive; it is indicative of the female mutual consciousness. Though the mother sounds harsh towards Anne, the latter benefits from her first love to an almost "bad mother". She gains power since the mother endows her with inspiration embroidered by maternal aggression. Besides, this maternal bond allows for redefinition of the self. Sexton does reformulate her own sense of self-worth through this turbulent relationship with her mother.

The way Sexton tries to "connect with her youngest daughter" is equated to, "her mother [who] was also fighting for her life and, instead of forgiving Anne for what she had done, she decided to have her portrait done so that all her pain and suffering remained forever engraved"[44]. Sexton recalls what "the artist said" to her, when regarding her as beautiful as her mother: "[Her] smile is like [her] mother's". The omnipresence of the smile hovers over the whole poem:

> In north light, my smile is held in place,
> The shadow marks my bone
> What could I have been dreaming as I sat there,
> All of me waiting in the eyes, the zone
> Of the smile, the young face,
> The foxes' snare.

Her smile is inevitable to embellish her morose life after her separation from Joyce. However, what adds fuel to the fire is that the mother "looked at [Anne] / and said [she] gave her cancer". The sense of guilt cripples the daughter from generating desirable reaction. The inner ocean of remorse urges her to transmit messages of positivity to her "small child, Joyce" by saying "love your self's self where it lives / There is no special God to refer to; or if there is".

On the way to making family affairs public, the father figure is almost effaced as Anne "had [her] portrait / done instead" when she "came to [her] mother's house in Gloucester, / Massachusetts. And this is how [she] came". The only evidence finds its vocation in the last stanza of part two since Sexton aims to foreground the mother as her "double" copy, while leaving the father to the end. Mary is then glorified at the expense of the

[43] Lehrich, p. 171
[44] Burdescu, p. 14

paternal image, concealing intentionally the fact that Ralph Churchill possessed a highly reputed Boston woolen firm. As she "lived with [her] mother … like an angry guest" though it was [t]oo late, / too late, to live with your mother, the witches said", the father just "passed the plate". Yet, it was "[t]oo late to be forgiven now, the witches said", too.

Bedlam experience is fueled by a grim appetite for demise. The "[p]art way back from" the mental institution has let her "guilty soul" seek sanity. The "surgery incomplete" of the "medical hypothesis", in that place, has made her act "like a pantomime". Silenced for years, she confesses to Joyce about those people who kept saying she would "never get [her] back again" and "could never get [her] back" because she had not "pumped the poison out".

Suicidal tendency has been repeated to remind the reader of another true incident. She admits that she attempted to commit suicide twice though her mom rebuked her for thinking about that: "I, who chose two times / to kill myself", her mother was actually objecting to her decision to kill herself, Anne confirmed that when she told us that "I lost her. / I cannot forgive your suicide, my mother said / And she never could." Then, she turned to pour out facts about her second attempt to put an end to her life when she told Joyce that once she "missed [her] babyhood, / tried a second suicide, / tried the sealed hotel a second year".

Sexton is dogged in the quest for transparency, making frantic efforts to get at the truth inside her to be transferred to the reader. This poem is a strong manifestation of her naked self which is striving to reach the harbor of self-autonomy. The sixth stanza recapitulates the very essence of the female pursuit of identity through the confessional tone:

> And this was the cave of the mirror,
> That double woman who stares
> At herself, as if she were petrified
> In time – two ladies sitting in umber chairs.

Though uncovering her condition as a mistreated, unwanted child, the whole truth is not yet revealed as this autobiographical account hides her being pampered by affluent parents, along with horrible incidents: she was sacked from a number of grammar schools, and rejected by friends and sisters for being a disturbing figure. In this sense, the double version of truth coincides with the "cave of the mirror" that never provides the "star[ing]" woman with a unified profile of her real existence. The duality lays bare the transformation of that "petrified" lady into "two ladies sitting in umber chairs" without a clear vision.

However, the duality of telling/hiding personal details is functional as even though Sexton does not manage to reflect certain events, the reader finds it easy to recall some of them. Most of the details are known by the reader who already has an insightful background information on her condition. The quest for identity is correlated with her digging into her childhood memories with Mary, her mother, her separation from Joyce, suicide attempts, life in Boston and the unstable relation with her father.

To solidify this true incident, critics delve into Sexton's inability to come to terms with her fragmented selves. They confirm that she could not break free of these tormented identities leading her to think about committing suicide. Many "imitators" followed in the footsteps of Sexton through adopting a poetic voice, filled with suffering, and showing eagerness to the development of these painful experiences. They were inspired by her audacity to record suicidal tendencies, and narrate madness as Kathleen Spivack puts it, "the poet as mad, the poet as suicide"[45].

While searching for a united entity among an assemblage of personality problems, Sexton turns to be the reliable source of autobiographical depth about her deranged soul as a fragile woman writer, mother and daughter. Published in *The Hudson Review*, "The Double Image" is believed to be a "confession of maternal narcissism"[46].

The image, Sexton is painting with words, metaphors and symbols, is quite impressive. She is moving through the four seasons to translate the changing climate inside, from a depressed into a liberated being. She is gaining incentive for the quest, she is embarking upon, through switching coldness into warmth, and witchlike into angelic atmosphere. As "yellow leaves go queer, / flapping in the winter rain,", then "ugly angels spoke to" her, "tattl[ing] / like green witches in [her] head, letting doom / leak like a broken faucet".

As a manifestation of "maternal narcissism", "The Double Image" underlines a truth-telling parameter where Anne addresses her daughter Joyce, nicknamed Joy. The reader is involved in discovering the pieces of advice she delivers to little Joy to love herself better. Back to life in the mental institution, she documents how she was "sent" many "letters with news" / of [her] and [she] made moccasins that [she] would never use". In winter time, the "graduate of the mental cases, / with [her] analyst's okay", Joy "fooled" her "[o]n April Fool" and "laughed and this was good" enough to safeguard Joy from going astray.

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[45] Spivack, p. 53
[46] Hedley, pp. 87-114