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TO BE A WOMAN IN MEN'S WORLD: ANNE SEXTON'S MANIFESTO OF ICONOCLASM

ABSTRACT: World history is the history of rebellions and revolts experienced since the devil's rebellion against God, described in holy books. Among the most striking examples of this turbulent and dynamic process are man's revolt against the church with Renaissance, people's against the king with French Revolution, and women's against patriarchal order and men with Modernism. The rights not given to the rebels by their rulers are indeed behind all these rebellions. In fact, the last one is referred to as a women's rights struggle that started in the 19th century and spread to the 20th century in western culture. Anne Sexton, with her poem titled "Her Kind" and analysed in our study, presents her works as one of the cornerstones of American women's poetry in the last century. In this poem in which she challenges the roles of obedient housewife, chaste mother and faithful wife imposed on women for thousands of years due to Eve archetype, Sexton also opposes the social exclusion, accusation and stigmatization of women who get rid of these roles shaped by traditional male perspective. She writes the manifesto of the free and independent woman by stating firmly on the last line of each stanza "I am her kind". In our study, the manifesto that Sexton produces in this poem is examined with a focus on its precursors, and it is concluded that this rebellion actually stemmed from long years of obedience. Writing with the belief that God imposes this obedience on women with His holy books, the state with its laws, society with its traditions and men with their physical and economic power, Sexton rejects all these traditional and stereotyped female identities, secondary to men. Thus she proves to be one of the iconoclast female figures of the 20th century, thereby writing her name in the history of women's struggle.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Woman, Rebellion, Witch, Anne Sexton.

ERKEKLERİN DÜNYASINDA KADIN OLMAK: ANNE SEXTON'IN İKON KIRICILIĞA DAİR MANİFESTOSU

ÖZ: Dünya tarihi kutsal kitaplarda anlatılan, şeytanın Tanrı'ya başkaldırısından itibaren yaşanmış isyan ve başkaldırıların tarihidir. Bu çalkantılı ve devingen sürecin en dikkat çeken örnekleri arasında; Rönesans'la insanın kiliseye, Fransız Devrimi'yle halkın krala ve Modernizmle kadının ataerkil düzene ve erkeğe başkaldırısı yer alır. Aslında bu başkaldırıların hepsinin arkasında, başkaldıran kitleye, onu yöneten kitle tarafından o güne dek verilmemiş haklar bulunmaktadır. Nitekim bunların sonucusu Batı kültürü içinde etkin olarak 19. yüzyılda başlayan ve 20. yüzyıla yayılan bir kadın hakları mücadelesi şeklinde geçer. Çalışmamızda incelenen "Onlardan Biri" başlıklı şiiriyle Anne Sexton, son yüzyılda Amerikan kadın şiirinin mihenk taşlarından biri olarak eserlerini ortaya koyar. Binlerce yıldır Havva arketipi nedeniyle kadına dayatılan itaatkâr ev kadını, namuslu anne ve sadık eş rollerine meydan okuduğu bu şiirinde Sexton, geleneksel erkek bakış açısıyla şekillendirilen bu rollerden sıyrılan kadının toplum tarafından dışlanmasına, suçlanmasına ve damgalanmasına da karşı çıkar. Her kıtanın sonunda "Ben de onlardan biriyim." diyerek özgür ve bağımsız kadının manifestosunu yazar. Çalışmamızda Sexton'ın bu şiirinde ortaya koyduğu manifesto, onu ortaya çıkaran koşullar odağında incelenmiş ve bu başkaldırının aslında çok uzun yıllar süren bir baş eğişten kaynaklandığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu baş eğişi Tanrı'nın kutsal kitapla, devletin kanunlarla, toplumun geleneklerle ve erkeklerin de fiziksel ve ekonomik güçle kadına kabul ettirdiği inancıyla yazan Sexton, erkeğe göre ikincil planda yer alan tüm bu gelenekselleşmiş ve kalıplaşmış kadın kimliklerini reddeder ve 20. yüzyılın ikon kırıcı kadın figürlerinden biri olarak kadın mücadelesi tarihine adını yazdırır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ataerkillik, Kadın, Başkaldırı, Cadı, Anne Sexton.

Introduction

The story of a woman is accepted to have started with the creation of Adam and Eve by Lord God as a helper to the man created before her. This is first noted in the "Genesis" in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles:

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ... But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man (Genesis/2: 18-23).

It is not only the role of man's helper assigned to the woman by God but also the temptation of the woman in the biblical parables that has stigmatized her as secondary to man in the world. More important than the former is, however, the latter case for Eve as an archetypal figure for the women succeeding her on the earth. That part of the story starts with the attempt of the Serpent, which is controlled and guided by Satan, to tempt Eve, who resists eating the forbidden fruit at first. *God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,* (Genesis/3: 4) says the Serpent to tempt and trick Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. Hearing that the fruit of the tree is "good for food, pleasing to the eye, and necessary for gaining wisdom" (Genesis/3: 6), Eve takes one and eats it, inviting Adam to eat it as she has just done. Upon eating the fruit, Eve and Adam see each other naked, which points to the fact that their eyes are opened to see that they are converted from spirit to body. This is the beginning of the whole story of woman suppressed, oppressed and repressed by man in the world due to the fact that she is seen as the reason why human is banished from the paradise onto the earth as mortal sinners.

Throughout the historical process, negative gender-oriented approaches towards women in social life are largely attributed to the Serpent's temptation of Eve and her role as a tempter of Adam and they have led to the emergence of ideas that reduce women to almost nothing in daily life. From the past to the present, women have always faced a situation of neglect and oppression, being kept in the background and always under the domination of man lest she should tempt man or be tempted by those around her. In ancient civilizations such as India, Greece, and Egypt, the main task of the woman was, in parallel to the narratives in the holy book of Christians, limited to the domestic space, making children, taking care of them, cleaning the house, marrying and serving her husband, thereby staying obediently under her husband's domination or as a sexual object for him. In fact, says Chris Weedon, *it was very difficult for women to achieve economic independence, and so marriage was one of the few ways in which women could secure their future* (1987: 4). This was tantamount to the woman's unquestionable and unconditional dependence on her husband to survive or lead her life. In Ancient Greek society, the woman was denied all civil rights and freedom, and she could claim no rights. Moreover, the ancient Greeks had no respect for women. No different from an object and property to buy and sell, a woman could be inherited or donated to or sacrificed for someone else for any purpose.

The whole history of mankind has witnessed such minimizing and degrading attitudes of men towards women in almost all societies, in which she has always been excluded from the outside world, or public sphere accepted to be the battlefield of men, and pushed between the four walls where she belongs, which is labelled as domestic sphere available for her due to her alleged vulnerability to the hard and harsh life outside. This social system is named as patriarchy, literally meaning "the rule of the father". Gerda Lerner, a feminist who probes into the foundation of patriarchy as a social system, dates it back to the Middle East of the 2000s B.C. (1986: 2). Below is her description of her work entitled *The Creation of Patriarchy* in an interview with Jeffrey Mishlove on "Thinking Aloud":

Other groups that were subordinated in history -- peasants, slaves, colonials, any kind of group, ethnic minorities -- all of those groups knew very quickly that they were subordinated, and they developed theories about their liberation, about their rights as human beings, about what kind of struggle to conduct in order to emancipate themselves. But women did not, and so that was the question that I really wanted to explore. And in order to understand it I had to understand really whether patriarchy was, as most of us have been taught, a natural, almost God-given condition, or whether it was a human invention coming out of a specific historic period. Well, in "Creation of Patriarchy" I think I show that it was indeed a human invention; it was created by human beings, it was created by men and women, at a certain given point in the historical development of the human race. It was probably appropriate as a solution for the problems of that time, which was the Bronze Age, but it's no longer appropriate, all right? And the reason we find it so hard, and we have found it so hard, to understand it and to combat it, is that it was institutionalized before Western civilization really, as we know it, was, so to speak, invented, and the process of creating patriarchy was really well completed by the time that the idea systems of Western civilization were formed (Napikoski, <https://www.thoughtco.com/patriarchal-society-feminism-definition-3528978>).

Another popular definition of patriarchy comes from Weedon in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*:

The term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference (1987: 2).

Within this system, says Yavuz Çelik, men have often resorted to written works, traditional practices and narratives in the Bible, as well as the laws they themselves have enacted, in order to persuade or force women into adopting this identity and social role:

Just as God seeks, after expelling Adam and Eve from the heaven, to shape them mentally, spiritually and bodily through the holy books like Towrat, Bible and Qur'an in which He informs them about what to and not to do there, so men have been in a ceaseless attempt to give shape to women and their behaviours on the earth by means of bans, restrictions and instructions (2019: 124).

On the other hand, a British feminist, Sylvia Walby comes up with six key structures that serve to support the existence of patriarchal order: These are *the family household, paid work, politics, culture, violence, and attitudes toward sexuality* (1990: 20-21). Despite so many supporting devices of patriarchy for long, the first blows against the dictatorial and authoritarian attitude of the patriarchal system to women can be said to have been shaken or shattered in the real sense of the word during the Industrial Revolution of Europe, when women first found a place for themselves in the public sphere having been kept exclusive to men by then on the whole. For the first time, women took an active role as part of the social production process in factories for so-called womanly professions such as weaving, ironing and cooking. Coupled with the epoch-making French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution is deservedly credited with having changed the social structure of the society in many fields ranging from family to politics. A move of migration from villages to urban areas enabled the transition from the traditional family structure to the nuclear family, thus leading to radical changes in the former. However, it cannot be said that the whole process of developing has become useful for women, as they had to work quite long hours to earn money and keep their lives going. Not only these hard conditions for women but also inequality between their working hours and wages and those of men threatened the female body, health and psychology as well as their social identity. This could be accepted as the spark of the process whereby feminist groups began to emerge and not to accept all this unfair system. Their main goal was initially to ensure that men and women should work, earn and live under equal conditions. With the advent of early feminist groups,

women gained some political, social and legal rights in the public sphere, though gradually, but even so they were still not equal to men. Women were still an object of men's exploitation and oppression in various fields. Bell Hook, an influential feminist writer, is careful to remark that feminism is not equal to being against men or male world, but rather it is "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (2000: viii).

It is within this context that a number of female writers and poets came up with their works questioning the place of women in their society from the 1920s on in particular, which could as well be accepted as part of the modernist movement. There has been a strong increase in the amount of feminist literature that embraces women's equality and ideals in a stronger and more conscious way since then. Nevertheless, feminism as the title of women's struggle for a better world for them, not as secondary to men but equal to them in the society shared by both groups, is still a controversial topic today because women still continue to be oppressed in different parts of the world largely because patriarchy has a much longer history than feminism. Despite this debatable status of feminism and feminist writing, today women writers write tremendously to enrich the essence of English literature and express their sensibilities through their writings. Feminism has increased women's self-confidence and provided the identity of individuality in patriarchal society. In addition, as the feminist movement developed over the centuries, the style of writing changed, and the writers felt the need to address themes such as sexuality, homosexuality and freedom. Especially in the twentieth century, when women finally gained the right to vote and respect in society, and came to be more equal to men, writers approached new topics more openly and freely, which is one of the important innovations in the development of literature. Anne Sexton is one of such female poets who thought and wrote aloud on women and the problems faced by them in the middle of the 20th century in America. Her choice to be boisterous in her thinking and talking on such issues was also what made her receive the label of 'confessional' in poetic circles.

Anne Sexton as a Confessional Poet

Anne Sexton (1928-1974) is one of the most important feminist American poets of the twentieth century. Having a troubled and barren childhood in the absence of parental love and interest, which she herself repeatedly confesses in her interviews and writings, Sexton starts to be rebellious and self-willed from her early adolescence on. In Çelik's words, she finds herself in incessant pursuit of support from her girlfriends and love from her boyfriends, which is grounded in the fact that she grows up in loose and loveless contact with her parents (2018: 175). This attitude of hers is largely attributable to the lack of father love in her childhood. Linda Nielsen, in her study on the lack of father love in a daughter's growing period, utters a general remark in support of this common assumption about her:

Daughters who grow up in the absence of a father, either physically or emotionally, often seek for sex very quickly with other men, partner with many different men, make wrong decisions about whom to date, and even engage in relationships with men who are much older than them to fulfil the father role, thus seeking for support and attention (2012: 90).

Largely due to an unhappy childhood aloof from her father in particular, Sexton adopts a somewhat polyamorous¹ way of life, which means the practice of or desire for romantic relationships with more than one partner at the same time, and often with the informed consent of all partners involved. This is also clear in her own words: *Ever since (my father), ever since my mother died, I want to have the feelings someone's in love with me* (Mitchell, 2000: 116). As can be expected, this is rather eccentric of young girls and women in an age and society still largely ruled by patriarchal rules and laws. She flirts with a number of school friends in her school life, but secretly marries Alfred Muller at the age of nineteen though Muller is betrothed

¹ A term invented in the 1980s and popularized by Deborah Anapol to refer to *the whole range of love styles that arise from an understanding that love cannot be forced to flow or be prevented from flowing in any particular direction* (Anapol, 2010: 1).

to someone else at that time. However, she, aware of her physical beauty and attractiveness to men, does not have much difficulty in finding other partners for herself and she betrays on her husband several times when he is in the army. In doing so, she rebels the dictations and impositions of the society on a woman, especially a married woman. It is through her bold portrayal and narrative of what she herself does in her real life that she gains her title as a confessional poet. Just as she defies the social taboos and norms that confine and restrict woman to the domestic sphere in real life, so she challenges the taboos of poem writing by writing about womanly issues and her own unwomanly – from the perspective of male-dominated society around her – experiences. It is therefore natural that she writes poems especially about women. With her poems, she tries to shed light on the second-class life and position of women living in the shadow of man in the patriarchal order. Adrienne Rich, another important American woman poet, writes of Sexton as follows:

She was not in any narrow or politically "correct" sense a feminist, but she did some things far ahead of the rebirth of the feminist movement. She wrote poems alluding to abortion, masturbation, menopause, and the painful love of a powerless mother for her daughters, long before such themes became validated by a collective consciousness of women, and while writing and publishing under the scrutiny of the male literary establishment (2012: 7).

However, her aim with her poems is not to start some kind of revolt against men, but she just wants to show how women have long been treated as second-class citizens compared to men and how they have been excluded by the society all over the world throughout history. This centuries-old humiliating attitude of man to woman is reflected in what is today called Cinderella complex, as Özata refers to it: "Women who are raised under the pressure of male domination are individuals who cannot develop an idea for liberation, cannot be fully independent, feel the need to lean on a man under any circumstances, and have developed a Cinderella complex in their inner world" (2021: 52). This sort of need, traditionally imposed and dictated on woman, is what Sexton and other feminists attempt to eliminate from the mind and memory of the society. While Cinderella means a voluntary acceptance of male-dictated rules, Sexton's struggle is for a willing and conscious objection to and rejection of these rules. Therefore, she becomes the voice of women in society through her poems during her life. As in her quotation from Goethe's letter to Schopenhauer as an epigraph to *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* that it is the courage to make a clean breast of it in the face of every question that makes a philosopher (Sexton, 1960: 2), she proves courageous enough to reveal herself outspokenly. To really get at the truth of something is the poem, not the poet, she says in an interview (Marx, 1966: 562) to express her determination to tell the reader all about herself in as clear a language as possible. Her poems thus help to change the general perspective on women and give them a powerful voice over men. Contrary to the general opinion of the society, it gives women more authority and the opportunity to stand strong as an individual and reveals the reality of women. While Sexton herself is not directly associated with the feminist movement, she can be considered to be a large part of the feminist movement and a leading figure in the confessional poetry movement of the mid-twentieth century. Though she often rejects the label of 'confessional' for herself, she has been described as the 'High Priestess' and the 'Mother' of confessional poetry, and as 'the most persistent and daring of the confessionalists', says Gill (2004: 425).

Confessional poetry is, briefly speaking, the poetry of the personal. It focuses on the private areas, experiences and inner worlds of individuals. It is quite different from traditional poetry in that it allows poets to express their inner feelings and unspoken words and thoughts through their writings; that is, it serves as a means of confession and therefore differs from traditional poetry. Largely due to this aspect of it, it provides the poet with an atmosphere of a psychologist's or psychiatrist's room where s/he can pour all her/his inner troubled and troubling waters. It may be taken as a sort of discharge or disburdening mechanism for her/him due to the fact that its poet pours all her/his suppressed realities, fears, anxieties, traumas,

taboos, secrets, etc. into her/his lines in a therapeutic manner. In doing so, the poet is disburdened of the external conflicts, traumas, depressive mood, pressure, etc. on her/him, caused by traditional, moral, religious values and laws or regulations surrounding her/him. M. L. Rosenthal, who claims to be the first critic to use the term 'confessional' for the poetry of Robert Lowell, defines this sort of poetry as "therapeutic" in its intent and effect, "autobiographical" in the speaker's identity in poems and "truthful" in terms of its uncompromising honesty (1959: 154). With such a self-expressive quality, confessional poetry gains fame with both male and female poets from the 1960s on. P. Lal attributes the origin of this sort of poetry to the strong urge of many young poets *to turn away from the transcendental-mystical stream of poetry, to deal with the concrete experiences of men living in the world of their own time* (1969: xi). Also, Kurup describes confessional poetry as *revealing the tension resulting from their acute self-awareness and the restraint upon them by the hostile environment and becomes a private quest for values and an effort to peer into the dark abysmal contents of the poet's own mind* (1991: 6). However, the theme of female poets was initially different from that of male poets in writing and style. This is because confessional poetry served the women poets as an environment where they could set their souls, suppressed and enslaved for centuries, free. It is for this reason that Sexton may be said to have chosen to write poems with confessional, or in her own words 'personal', qualities. In an interview with her, she assumes herself to be explicit in her choice to do so: *My poetry is very personal. I don't think I write public poems. I write very personal poems* (Moore, 1985: 50). Caroline Hall also argues on Sexton's poetry that it is representative of her attempts to express her personality rather than an escape from it: *In its use of apparently biographical personae and speakers and in its themes of sexual love, oedipal hate, personal anguish, unbearable suffering, and emotional breakdown, this poetry represents not an escape from personality but an expression of it* (1989: 34).

Sexton, like most women of her time, lived in an age when women had to claim their femininity in the face of a lot of problems plaguing them. Moreover, she was a woman of an era when it was necessary to understand that women were not only women but also human beings. The fact that women feel and think like men because they are essentially humans was slow to penetrate into the minds of men who had been accustomed to the superiority of men to women for centuries. This slow quality of man's acceptance and even refusal of women's cries for equality and recognition of their identity in a male-dominated society was the trigger for many women writers to create rebellious women characters, and Sexton was just one of them. And she wrote one of her most significant poems entitled "Her Kind" in an attempt to cry out against the enslaving and dominating norms of her still patriarchal society.

"Her Kind"; A Manifesto of Female Rebellion

Sexton starts writing poetry upon the recommendation of her psychiatrist, Dr. Orne, that she should write her feelings and thoughts in a cathartic or cleansing manner. She obeys her doctor's suggestion and publishes her earliest poems under the title *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* in 1960. This book contains some of Sexton's most anthologized poems. "Her Kind", the subject of this study, is one of the famous poems in this book. At first reading, the poem is about a woman who is in search of her life, fighting for recognition in a male-dominated world and opposing her own domestication and intimidation. The woman, the speaker indeed, opposes the expectation of the society from women that they should be stereotypically beautiful, domestic, loyal, serving, obedient, etc. In a sense, she rejects societal expectations of what she should be like. She is a woman who chooses independence over addiction and dependence, self-confidence over family ties and sheer loyalty, extraordinary versus ordinary and usual, and death versus surrender and renunciation. Thus, this study is intended to examine this poem as Sexton's manifesto of self-liberation and/or rebellion against men's rule.

Sexton divides this poem into three separate but seemingly similar stanzas, and each stanza has an equal number of seven lines, each showing a particular side of the female character's personality in the poem. *Content dominates, but style is the master. I think that's what makes a poet. The form is always important*, she says in an interview with her (Marx, 1966:

567), which is visible in this poem as well. The repetitive ending of three stanzas with the same rhyming pattern for each (ababcbcb) creates a sound harmony while the identical length of the lines produces a visual harmony. Besides her stylistic unity, she expresses herself in the content of her poem. In the first stanza, the speaker presents herself as a lonely suburban witch. She is a lonely housewife or mother in the second one. And in the last one, she portrays herself as a daring adulterer who is courageous enough to face execution for this. With a different portrayal of womanhood in each stanza, "Her Kind" is more like a self-declaration, an affirmation of an identity, rather than a simple narrative of the character's life. It is a woman's rebellion against the dictates of a society that tries to restrict her identity by telling and imposing who, what and how she should be. It is a portrait of a woman who does not fit into society. Three different women of the poem are each independent and strong, a point which violates the societal expectations of women on one hand and the social order based on family including a woman in it on the other. These women's violation of the social identity and gender roles attributed to women usually suffices for them to be labelled as outcast. Viewed from this perspective, the poem "Her Kind" reveals the expectations that society imposes on women and how their denial of these expectations leads to their alienation and exclusion from society.

Throughout history, women who did not meet the standards and expectations of the society were ostracized and even burnt at the stake, both literally and figuratively. In fact, it is a sad fact that women who are seen as extraordinary are declared as witches by the society and burnt at the stake. This response of the male-dominated society to such women's extraordinary behaviours and actions could be taken as a witch hunt and as a reaction of the male-dominated society to the women's revolt in Maria Mie's words (Nathan–Xiaogang, 1998: 59). This social condemnation often stems from people's obsession or prejudice with the perfect woman that has been the puppet or slave of men's houses for centuries which they have come to define and describe as 'home' with a woman in its centre. According to this prejudice or obsession of men, a perfect woman is required to be domestic, motherly, obedient and wary of going to extremes.

The first stanza of the poem portrays one aspect of society's expectations from women, which the speaker clearly, loudly and boldly defies:

*I have gone out, a possessed witch,
haunting the black air, braver at night;
dreaming evil, I have done my hitch
over the plain houses, light by light:
lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind* (Sexton, 2007: 15).

The speaker speaks with the first-person pronoun 'I' in the poem and defines herself as 'a possessed witch' which has a dual meaning. The first one is denotative, implying that she has an owner, possibly referring to the identity as its owner that society gives her. This identity considers the ownership and management of her by her husband if she is married, and by her father if she is single. The second meaning is, however, connotative and related to the adjective 'possessed', which means being totally controlled by an evil spirit. The speaker seems to have chosen this word especially because in this way she manages to create the perception that she is considered 'a witch' by the society, also implied by the words 'haunting the black air', 'braver at night', 'my hitch over the plain houses' and 'twelve-fingered'. The speaker's implication of the gothic and supernatural, even the grotesque, can be taken as tantamount to a witch that alludes to the medieval age practices of burning the women who were against the social impositions and restrictions on them. This is best seen in her reference to the nights when she feels brave as she is barely seen then. For she finds herself surrounded by traditions, rules, laws and moral values in her society and by her husband and children in her family. All these practices confine her to the so-called domestic or private sphere of her home day and night. A woman's going out at night is, therefore, a behaviour beyond and against the male-

dominated society's usual expectation of "woman sitting at home". This situation is contrary to the stereotypical 'angel at home' image used to describe women in the traditional sense in the Victorian era, for example. Traditionally, society expects women to lead a sheltered life in the absence of or beyond the reach of men other than their husband. Women should be obedient, quiet and reserved, as they are the "exclusive property" of men in patriarchal system. Nevertheless, here we are confronted with the image of a woman who, instead of being shy and avoiding the outside world, is bold, strong and independent and who identifies herself with witches excluded from society and burnt. She challenges the society's isolation of her, for which she is categorized and considered to be crazy or 'out of mind' by society. This is the strategy of the powerful in a society, which is that the rulers or those who have power or authority laden the ruled and the weak with negative labels and names if they rebel, violate or ignore the dictations and impositions on them. Thus, in the first stanza dominated by darkness and strangeness, the speaker portrays herself as an extraordinary woman who is not accepted in society. While the sixth line "A woman like that is not a woman, quite." refers to the tendency of the society not to accept such women as women but as someone unnatural or weird, the speaker challenges the society's pejorative categorization of such unruly women and rebels it, saying "I have been her kind." (Sexton, 2007: 15). Even the choice of the present perfect tense for this line seems to be deliberate as she intends to convey her message to the reader that she has been such a woman for a long time.

It could be said that society is afraid of the idea of a strong woman as a strong female figure is a threat in a male-dominated society. It follows that men are apt to lose their control over women. For this reason, the male-dominated society tries to isolate the women. A woman who is kept aloof from the society and left alone within the boundaries of house tends to feel powerless and vulnerable, which is in the nature of punishing the woman who goes beyond the traditional norms and rules. This is why women have not been able to fully prove their identity for centuries. During the crazy witch trials of the European Inquisition in the late 16th century, for example, heretics, namely the women who opposed accepted beliefs and doctrines, were tortured and killed. These women, called witches, were no more than women who differed from society's expectations. It is therefore perfectly appropriate to stereotype the modern woman as a kind of witch. In her work on witchcraft and women, Madej-Stang declares that the witch can overthrow the patriarchal system by questioning and challenging the existing social and political system, with her omens and spells, and therefore writes that she is a symbol of the feminist movement (Madej-Stang, 2015: vii). This is the visible fear of patriarchy as men have enjoyed the luxury, comfort and ease of ruling over the women by then. In this poem, however, Sexton says through the speaker that she is even content to be crazy in a society where men have influence and authority (Gill, 2004: 436).

The second stanza focuses on the role of a lonely housewife who takes care of her home and children. The feeling of confinement felt by the woman living within the boundaries deemed appropriate for her and how lonely and unhappy she feels in this narrow life are emphasized. Considering the primitive life in the forests and the struggle of animals, far from the civilized city life, the speaker "associates the society in which men have a say with primitiveness" (Çelik, 2018: 193). The 'warm caves' she finds in the forest can be interpreted as her marriage and home. The household items used in the next two lines are the items that a woman often uses in the house. These items, which resemble a young girl's dowry, also represent the transition from a young girl to a housewife, because the way she decorates and fills the hot caves with these items is the behaviour that society indirectly dictates to her. Upon marrying, a young girl is expected to be the woman or servant of her house, taking care of her children and serving her husband. It is also possible to see the sense of keeping order as it transforms a place far from civilization in the forest into a traditional house recognizable with modern furnishings. "A woman like that is misunderstood," says the speaker in the sixth line of the second stanza to express the distress and discomfort suffered by the woman while whining in the process of arranging the irregular at home, which is the role expected of her as a mother and wife. What makes her misunderstood is not the way she regulates the mess at home but the fact that she

whines while doing so, because the woman should always be pleased with serving her husband and children at home established, afforded and guarded by the man.

For the poet Sexton, who secretly ran away against the will of her parents with the man she loved at the age of nineteen, it is perfectly natural that such a house should be a warm cave in a male-dominated society. However, her use of the plural noun 'caves' instead of 'cave' here may also indicate the places where she took refuge outside of marriage and where she went with the voice of her heart and impulses, or rather the extramarital affairs she lived in. Based on the confessional identity of Sexton and her life story, it can be said that this interpretation is not wrong or exaggerated. From this point of view, the caves mentioned in the poem also symbolize her rejection of the society, listening to the voice of her own soul, and in a sense, her revolt against the female identity, monogamous marriage or the female character that is created and imposed on women by the male-dominated society. In other words, the speaker addresses her reader as a woman who, despite her mind and reason, common sense and traditional role, namely her superego, has followed her unbridled passions, or id, by surrendering to her heart and feelings. She reveals her choice in an interview with her as follows: *The great theme we all share is that of becoming ourselves, of overcoming our father and mother, of assuming identities somehow* (Sexton, 1977: 28). For this reason, it could be said that Sexton is trying to change the social perception limits foreseen for women here. In addition, the housewife image that we encounter in this stanza represents a woman who tries to please her home, children and husband in accordance with the expectations of the society. For example, in a detailed study on 571 housewives living in the city and slums of the Chicago area in the 1960s, when the poet Sexton lived, H. Z. Loftapa determined that the typical American housewife has three priorities; being a mother, wife and housewife (Ogden, 1986: 181). In addition, her study revealed that the issue that determines their status is the profession of their husbands. However, the facts that they complain about the life they lead and that they do not get the value they deserve in the society, along with their desire to improve their position in the family, cause such women to be misunderstood and even condemned in the society. The speaker of the poem again challenges this prejudiced attitude of the society to such women, saying again that she has been her kind. It is not a matter of shame or regret for her to be misunderstood by the society for her attempt to reform herself, but a source of pride and power. She seems determined to shatter the walls and barriers built by the society on the way to her self-efficacy and self-identity by portraying the women figures denounced and ostracised for their rebellion against the standardized or traditionalized passive and obedient roles identified with them.

In the last stanza of the poem, we see a woman who is not ashamed or even afraid of dying. On the contrary, she breaks the age-old silence about her life and body and rebels against all oppression by opposing this shame. The sexually suggestive expressions we encounter present a different image of woman. The person the speaker calls 'driver' is obviously a man. The fact that she is in his car expresses her being dragged by a man as a victim of the male-dominated society, and this car and the scene depicted with 'nude arms' may be telling about her going to a mental hospital, her nudity or her revealing herself clearly. However, the most important expression in this continent is the expression 'survivor'. Despite everything men do, her being or staying alive as a woman shows her strength and determination. It is more than a miracle that she can survive as she really wants to be not as she is wanted to be in the world of men.

Perhaps for Sexton, life itself is the driver to get him where he wants to go, but the speaker completely disdains this road and wants to set her own path. In this way, she isolates herself from the society that progresses like a flock of sheep and cannot go beyond stereotyped boundaries and ideas. So it could be said that this is a woman who spoils and disturbs the social landscape. Women artists of all kinds have been critically judged by men for centuries. Their emotions were called hysteria, and their creativity was considered to be less important than men's achievements. However, unlike others, Sexton cares about her own feelings and promotes her identity as a woman, regardless of the feelings and thoughts of others. The

speaker here challenges the driver who represents the men, the society and traditions that punish him for his actions. She is determined to follow her true feelings and passions, whatever it may cost. She is one of the excluded women, and as such she runs along her own bed like a river. She is freed from the shackles that have been put on herself, her identity, and her womanhood. The feminist poetess Rich speaks of her strong will: *I see Anne Sexton as a sister whose work tells us what we must fight in ourselves and in the images that patriarchal society shows us* (Rich, 2012: 7). In addition, as is known from the confessions in her own life, it can be said that Sexton, who has cheated on her husband many times, is describing the free and independent woman in her body in the last stanza.

Perhaps because Sexton developed her art not with sacrifice but under the psychological influence of a mother identified with writing, she was the first to touch upon the constraints women felt in conforming to the prevailing feminine stereotypes in society. The last poem Sexton wrote for the *Bedlam* manuscripts, "Her Kind" shows that she was trying to do just that (Middlebrook, 2000: 5). In her book *All My Pretty Ones*, Sexton quotes from Franz Kafka in an attempt to say that her purpose in writing poetry is to create a shock to the reader's senses:

The books we need are the kind that act upon us like a misfortune, that make us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves. A book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us (Sexton, 1962: 2).

Conclusion

It goes without saying that Sexton uses her poetry as a defence, spokesperson, and advocate for the common social problems of women. That is, Sexton not only infiltrates into the society with her feelings and thoughts, desires and passions, but also uses poetry rather than prose as a tool of rebellion and a mirror of social problems. She glorifies the female identity with and in her poems. On the other hand, by opposing men's hegemony over women, their oppression, control, restriction, rules and traditions, and by living her own life as she herself wants, not as men want, she revolts to the patriarchal system and society in which she lives. The first stanza, in this sense, presents her as rebelling against the society in that she proves voluntary and eager to be a witch unwanted and ostracized by it. Following her destruction of the iconized figure of 'passive and silent woman at home' in the first stanza, she attacks the traditional icon of married woman in the second; here her rebel is against the society again and the man as her husband. Not only does she challenge the traditional rules and roles of the society but she also ignores the restrictions and sanctions of her husband. And finally, she rebels against God by ignoring His strong ban on adultery and suicide. All in all, she defies and shatters all the sources of hegemonies on women in this poem; God, society and man. These three figures seem to collaborate in shaping, guiding and controlling the woman with reference to the first archetypal myth of Eve, implying to them that the woman should be kept under control at all times. To prove that she is also a member of that society and a subject of God who should be free to do what man can do, she portrays an iconoclast in this poem and manifests the reasons for the need and the ways to do so. With no field left for her to breathe and live in the outside world, she finds herself right in asking for a larger space and a bigger freedom.

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