

Feminist Concerns in Anne Sexton's "Her Kind"  
Maryam Abdulwahhab Chalabee

Assistant Professor Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

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Maryam Abdulwahhab Chalabee  
Department of English/College of Arts  
University of Mosul  
Email:

[maryam.21arp36@student.uomosul.edu.iq](mailto:maryam.21arp36@student.uomosul.edu.iq)

Assistant Professor Shaymaa Zuhair Al-  
Wattar

Department of English/ College of Arts  
University of Mosul

Email: [Shaymaa\\_zuhair@uomsouledu.iq](mailto:Shaymaa_zuhair@uomsouledu.iq)

#### Abstract

For centuries, Western culture, along with religious heritage, contributed together to assigning the gender role of women in society, which is subordinate, passive, inferior, and second in importance. This role did not only marginalise women but also made them victims of oppression and exploitation in patriarchal societies.

The patriarchal culture, social conventions and men's authority all used to subdue and silence women over the years until women started to question their real role in society and demand equality to prove their existence and identity. From the 15th to 20th centuries, women gradually tried to break their silence and the stereotypical image created by patriarchy as helpless, pathetic and inferior creatures.

These women tried to break supremacy through their writings.

This research paper sheds light on feminist concerns in the poetry of the well-known American poet Anne Sexton. Her poetry, which is empowering and feminist poetry, helps the modern world to understand women's issues and represent their silenced voices.

**Keywords: Feminism, Oppression, Gender-role, patriarchal norms, Anne Sexton.**

Feminism is considered a part of a culture that claims a fundamental difference between genders and hence offers principles of two genders. Western culture, along with religious heritage, contributed together to assigning gender roles. Ages ago, it is stated in the story of the creation of Adam and Eve. The story tells that Eve is created from Adam's rib to be his companion and always to be beside him. This gives the first glimpse of the role which will be assigned to women in society. Yet, it is the story of the fall mentioned in the third chapter of Genesis that elaborates on the role that will be imposed on women.

The patriarchal society embraced sharp discrimination between men and women, setting defined roles for each to play. Through centuries, women have been assigned to fixed roles, which are the mother, wife and daughter. All of them are supposed to be weak, passive, obedient, dependent on men, and willing to sacrifice unconditionally for the sake of their men. In brief, women were expected to be angels and seriously warned that if they did not behave like angels, they would be considered evil, witches or even monsters (Monster, mad women), a term coined by the authors Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. (*Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; p53*) Women find themselves obliged to consent to these roles assigned to them even if that means they are going to be marginalised, silenced and even oppressed. They were truly the victims of oppression and exploitation in patriarchal societies.

However, this changed gradually as women began from the 15th to 20th centuries to reject their male-made prescribed role and refuse to adhere to the gendered tradition and the under-representation of women in all aspects of life. They resolutely challenged social conventions and the patriarchal tradition, and hence, Feminism emerged.

Feminism is a complicated concept to discuss as it is a part of culture and society. Feminism tried to re-adjust society's conventions, language and discourse to express equality rather than the authority of males and their domination. As a movement, Feminism originated in Europe and America and gradually spread to other countries worldwide. It is an umbrella term for the rejection and resistance of the social, political and cultural oppression of women by patriarchal societies. It is a social and political movement identified as feminism and encourages gender equality, especially in terms of women's rights and principles. It seeks gender equality in all aspects of society, as well as the challenge and abolition of oppressive and discriminatory systems that have historically harmed women and girls.

The feminist movement demands equality, women's rights and self-determination, including access to freedom of choice, education, and employment, and equal pay for equal work. It also seeks to eliminate gender-based oppression and discrimination, eliminate gender roles and other oppressive mechanisms, promote gender diversity and inclusivity, and recognise the contributions of women to society, history, and culture. Overall, feminism seeks to create a world in which all individuals, regardless of gender or any other characteristic, have the opportunity to live fulfilling and equitable lives.

Feminism has been an ongoing and evolving movement for many decades, and there are numerous theories, perspectives, and practices within the movement. Some of the major waves of feminism include the first wave of feminism in the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, which concerned with women's suffrage and legal rights; the second wave of feminism depicted in the 1960s to 1970s, which emphasised issues such as reproductive rights and workplace discrimination; and the third wave of feminism in the 1990s and 2000s, which focused on issues such as intersectionality and gender diversity.

Feminism is defined, According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, as "*the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim*" (Turnbull, 2010, p. 565), according to Abrams' glossary literary terms, "*feminist criticism, was not inaugurated until late in the 1960s. Behind it, however, lie two centuries of struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements and women's social and political rights*".(Abrams,2012,p.121) the feminist movement is based on the sufferings of women writers who expressed their voices as they faced the odds and were accused of challenging society's traditions and norms. The history of feminism is long and complex, spanning centuries and ages. Feminist aims to demolish the frame of women who should be wife, mother, and daughter in the house doing domestic chores. Feminism is quite about gender equality, women and men having equal pay and opportunities rights. According to literary and critical scholars like Hans Bertens and Charles Bressler, the feminist movement is a social and historical cultural movement that is the result of the suffering of literary women writers as they expressed their voices as they faced the odds and were accused of challenging society's traditions.

The history of feminism is long and various; here is an overview of the waves in the history of feminism:

- I. First Wave Feminism: This phase of feminism emerged in the late 19th century and focused on achieving legal and political equality for women. But its history traces back to the 16th and 19th centuries when women were marginalised and oppressed. At that time, women were trying to raise awareness and challenge the oppressive patriarchal society through their writings. The movement's main goals were securing women's right to vote, access to education and employment, and property rights. Feminism's emphasis from the 17th to the 19th centuries was on empowering women as readers, writers, and thinkers to combat oppression and the silence of the stereotypical image of women in texts written by men.

Males dominated social, cultural and political fields, as they discriminated, articulated women as the "angel of the house" frame, represented socially and literary as helpless, weak, always under the wing of a man or seducer and evil representation. As a result, women rejected this representation of women, and they started to challenge society's norms by introducing literary writings that expressed women's voice and to reform and educate society about women's difficulties as silenced, oppressed and marginalised. Through the ages, many creative writers and authors, like Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, and George Eliot, were notable authors of this era who frequently wrote about gender, authority, and patriarchy. Austen wrote about the limited choices given to women and how her female characters struggled to find happiness and freedom in a patriarchal society. Behn challenged traditional gender roles and oppression to express women's suffering. Her writings paved the way for the following writers, like Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1700s, to the most powerful female voice that challenged oppression: **A Vindication of the Rights of Women**. This first published work signifies the awareness of women's sufferings for equal rights. The movement continued in this way until the 1900s when it turned into an activity with its major concerns about women as inferior, oppressed, and marginalised second-class citizens to men.

- II. Second Wave Feminism: The second wave of feminism was established in the 1960s and 1970s and focused on issues of cultural and social inequality. This phase of feminism challenged traditional gender roles and emphasised the importance of women's reproductive rights, equal pay, and access to healthcare. It also highlighted issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination in the workplace. The activism of feminists during this period included protests, political lobbying, and awareness-raising organisations. They tried to address a wide variety of issues related to women's rights and gender equality. Key figures associated with the second wave of feminism include Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, and Kate Millet. Their work helped to raise awareness of the ways in which gender inequality was deeply ingrained in society, to empower women's voices and bodies,

supports a wider discussion of freedom, choice, and liberation against all oppression, and calls for justice socially, culturally, and even politically, it paved the way for later generations of feminists to continue the fight for women's rights.

This wave of the movement began after World War II in 1949 with the publication of **The Second Sex** by the French philosopher and activist Simone de Beauvoir, who assures in her book that Western culture and society are purely patriarchal societies controlled by men who define how to be a human and what a female is as she being "The Other", and women are passive, helpless, oppressed their existence connected and controlled by men. Also, they are subordinated, without voice or social, cultural or political representation. Beauvoir asserts that women must react and defy male standards to refuse the gendered identity imposed by society; she continues that "*Humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him*" (Bressler, 2011, p.149)

Later in the 1960s, all women in all communities grew angrier against domestic violence and oppression, being marginalised and denied payment and work opportunities as they protested, calling for and demanding gender equality, social and cultural justice, and liberation. Thus, another part of feminism established in the 1960s, called **Liberal Feminism**, is a form of feminism that emphasises the equality of men and women in society. It seeks to promote gender equality through legal and political reform and often focuses on issues such as reproductive rights, equal pay, and access to education and employment opportunities.

Liberal feminists believe women should be free to pursue their own goals and ambitions without being limited by their gender, and society should ensure equal opportunities and protection for all individuals, regardless of gender. It is a "*feminist theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to civil rights and the allocation of social resources such as education and employment*" (Quoted in Mohajan, 2022, P.14). The most influential pioneers of liberal feminism are Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor Mill, who are known for their act for women's rights and liberation of choice. Wollstonecraft is known for "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" in 1792, where she asserts that women are inferior. In addition to that a woman must become independent and as morally strong as a man. She demands equal access to education for women and men, as both genders should get the same education to enlighten their rational minds for society.

*My own sex, I hope, will excuse me if I treat them like rational creatures instead of flattering their fascinating graces and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone." "What is this?" "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men, but over themselves.*  
(Quoted in Widad, Zenati, 2021, p.29)

However, the 19th century disapproved of what the English philosopher and political economist expressed in "*The Subjection of Women*," as he thought that if women had equal civic and educational opportunities, they would choose domestic life over equality. Mill disapproved of this concept, asserting that women would participate more in public opportunities, become partners with men, and have smaller families. Liberal feminists emphasise difficulties like equal pay, equality in academic achievement and labour, reproductive liberty, and women's suffrage. They often work within the prevailing political and legal frameworks to advance gender equality. They may encourage measures like affirmative action in employment and restrictions on gender that address permanent, institutionalised discrimination on the basis of gender.

The previous activity established another activity called **Radical Feminism**, which originated in 1965-1970 by the civilised, educated females who participated in the Civil rights movement in America, then it broke out throughout Europe. Its main concerns are discrimination and rejection of oppression against women all over the world, as well as race, religion and gender discrimination since it is based on psychological and cultural basis due to patriarchal society. Radical feminism is an advancement of liberal feminism that expresses oppression, race, female suffering, and inequalities in employment as a result of a male-dominated society, assault, child assault, and rape and blames all men for treating women as second-class citizens who are marginalised socially, academically, and by gender.

The most influential activist as a radical feminist is the American writer, educator, and artist Kate Millet's **Sexual Politics** in 1970 as the first to challenge society's oppression and norms, genderism, as she assures that the "*... image of the woman as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs.*" (Quoted in Sherrow, 2001, p.121) Females, according to Millett, must destroy the core of culture in order to maintain gender roles because women are capable of generating social norms and participating equally in society. Radical feminism aims to reform, educate society, and participate in more equal, positive, and powerful roles that reject patriarchal norms and absolute power related to gender, helping to establish a social, political, and cultural basis for women.

- III. Third-Wave Feminism: The expression "third-wave feminism" refers to the present phase of the feminist movement, which started in the early 1990s and continues to this day. This wave arose in reaction to second-wave feminism's stated imperfections, which concentrated primarily on the experiences of middle-income white women and did not properly address racial issues, class, sexuality, and gender identity. The previous waves influenced feminists, but as educated young women, they sought to staple feminist concepts such as identity and solidarity. Rebecca Walker (daughter of Alice Walker, an African-American poet and the Pulitzer Prize winner novelist.) was the first to represent the wave in the 1990s with an engagement of political and racial terms derived from the writing of black women. Many other activists are representing this movement, but these women claim that the third wave was concerned only with women's equality.

So, a feminist ought to (break away from the old frame of her mother) to generate a new agenda and expand civil and social rights to achieve equality for women as well as sexual liberation. The use of technology and social media to raise awareness and motivate followers is one of the defining characteristics of the third wave of feminism. Feminist blogs, social media campaigns, and online communities are critical in highlighting marginalised perspectives and drawing attention to problems that mainstream media have previously ignored. Overall, the third wave of feminism represents a more accessible, diverse, and intersectional approach to the feminist movement, and it has had a significant influence on shaping public debate on gender and social justice issues.

- IV. Fourth Wave Feminism: The fourth wave of feminism, established in the late 2000s, was distinguished by the use of social media and digital technology to organise and encourage feminist causes. This era of feminism is highly concerned with problems such as online harassment, equal rights for women, and gender-based violence. Modern Social media platforms firmly contributed and played a role in the development of fourth-wave feminism, with sites such as these being employed to organise and highlight feminist perspectives. Fourth-wave feminism is still in its initial phases. Still, some of its main objectives include ending gender-based violence and domestic violence, achieving gender and racial equity, and deconstructing patriarchal norms.



Feminism is a multifaceted and developing movement where one is expressing the privileges that women don't have as being inferior and oppressed, and the other is challenging patriarchal norms and oppression. In the 18th–and 20th centuries, key historical events revealed the first wave to be traced, as it was the enlightenment for women to teach women about their rights. The fourth wave has played an important role in advocating for women's rights and gender equality all over the world. One common principle is to fight for women's rights by challenging gender stereotypes and roles, promoting gender equality, and fighting against gender violence and oppression.

One of the most notable and accomplished feminist poets who successfully tackled her poetry issues related to women, their oppression and suffering is Anne Sexton. The outstanding Pulitzer prize-winning confessional American poet presents the traditions of a patriarchal society through unique and bold poetic skills. Her pioneering poetry and her tackling of women's issues so openly and frankly pave the way for younger generations of women poets to write and express themselves freely. Maxine Kumin, a friend and fellow poet, argues that women poets, in particular, "*owe a debt to Anne Sexton*" as she "*broke new ground, shattered taboos, and endured a barrage of attacks along the way because of the flamboyance of her subject matter, which, twenty years later, seems far less daring.*" (Kumin, 1981, p. xxxiv).

Anne Grey Harvey Sexton is an American poet who was born in Newton, Massachusetts, on November 9, 1928, to Mary Grey Staples and Ralph Churchill. Painful experiences marked Sexton's childhood. She began writing poetry in college; later, she married Alfred Muller Sexton II, and they had two daughters. She had an abortion in 1960. In the previous year, her mother had died due to cancer, and her father-in-law had died in a car accident; those devastating experiences left her depressed. Sexton had psychiatric treatment and therapy for depression. Sexton, throughout her adult life, suffered from depression, especially after giving birth to her older daughter, Linda Sexton.

Sexton struggled mentally as she attempted to commit suicide a few times. Sexton's therapist told her to start writing poetry as a therapy to overcome depression. In 1957, she joined a Boston-area writers' group where she met contemporary poets like Robert Lowell and her friend Sylvia Plath; she published her first poetic volume, **Bedlam and Part Way Back**, in 1960. (Live or Die) in 1966 and (The Awful Rowing Towards God) in 1975. Later, Sexton joined Robert Lowell's group with Sylvia Plath as they were his students in the Confessional poetry circle, which is a poetic trend that originated in 397 C.E. and is traced in the publication of Saint Augustine's Confessions, where he draws confessions about life and death, joy and sorrow, as his point in writing confessions is to relieve himself of the heavy and painful past:

*Relies heavily on some artificial memory that helps him recall the past agonies and anguishes of life. In Confessions, he asserts the notion of creating his confessional work depending on some fictional memory* (Gad, 2016, pp.14-15)

In the 18th century, the publications of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), in the 1950s in America, established a new poetic mode that expresses a poetic style in the form of confessions that hold the characteristics of being too personal, private, and painful experiences. The critic Michael L. Rosenthal, in 1959, coined the term "confessional" for Robert Lowell's poetry since he used poetry confessions with therapeutic aims through colloquial style. Unlike Augustine (Saint Augustine of Hippo, a Catholic bishop and prolific author mostly known for his works such as Confessions and The City of God), the

confessional poets of 1950 emphasised the impersonal and painful experiences of life from childhood to adulthood. For Sexton, her poetry asserts personal, painful experiences and women's suppression. She boldly and openly tackles taboo subjects related to women. In her poetry, she expresses the female body and the oppression of women as wives, mothers, daughters, and the angels of the house. She says:

*I have been monstrously busy cooking, washing . . . cleaning, giving parties that don't happen, etc. Doing all my little wifely duties [ . . . ] my heart's desire is an electric "Mix-master" (with the orange juice squeezer on top) (Pollard, 2006, p.8)*

Sexton herself could not stand housewifery chores and lifestyles, which is why she expressed this through her poetic talent, which sheds light on women's issues like being oppressed and marginalised and on female concepts that gave support to the women's movement at that time. Her poetry contributed to raising awareness of women's talented writings and their creativity, which led to language differences that expressed gender inequality. Anne Sexton is considered a significant confessional poet with a bold, image-dense, uncommon, and unique talent for reflecting her pains and the female body in a way that puts her on a scale different from others. As T.S. Eliot mentioned in his essay "*Tradition and Individual Talent*" (Eliot, 1982, p. 1), the artist has his originality in going back to the ancient writers and quoting their style and matching it with his to express his ideas and views. Sexton has her uniqueness, talent and individuality of themes and subject matter, the techniques employed in her poetry that explore taboo and personal traumas, depression, in which she pulls the reader into an intimate world of her and exposes her feelings and oppression from the roles imposed on her as wife, mother, and writer, as Sexton tries to reflect the conventional, oppressive norms of the society through tackling more adult themes and retellings of old stories where women are framed as perfect roles attached to the house.

Sexton started writing and composing poetry as a form of relief and therapy to give her soul some peace away from depression and suicidal ideas. She started expressing herself earlier, but she found her true self in 'Confessional' poetry, which is considered bold, unique, and too private. She presents her views on death, revealing that she is not afraid; she rather welcomes death and is even fascinated by it. Her poetry shows that the role society wants her to play as the perfect mother and wife at that time, in 1950-1960, is a heavy burden on her shoulders. Sexton's greatest achievement of all time was her direct expression of the female body, social norms, domestic lifestyles, and sexual subject matter. A fascination with death characterises her poetry, struggles with life, confessions of depression, female bodies, the loss of identity or the split of identity as caused by being a woman and a poet, and other women's related topics, which were all considered unwelcome by critics. Still, her readers liked her style of composition, which made her a successful and significant poet. Maxine Kumin (an American author and poet) states in the forenote of **The Complete Poems that Anne Sexton.**

*For a book or two, she grew more powerful. Then writing Was it 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. (Kumin, Quoted in Sexton, 2001, p.xx)*

Sexton's poetry gained its place within feminist meetings, who found in her poetry the representation of the female body, oppressive roles imposed by social norms, and experiences of all ages, as her poetry is bold and unique challenges against patriarchal norms, which mostly discuss the idea of being a woman and oppose only to her house and children, criticising the social and historical norms that oppress female, enable voice and talent against society and culture. However, Sexton



suffered from the domestic routines of the American lifestyle in the 1950s as a dedicated wife and mother. Sexton wrote her poetry about the housewife's nightmare and her life as a playing game. She lives according to rules she must follow, which she eventually rebels against. The socially prescribed role for a woman to be the perfect wife and mother is associated with the middle class, which, for

Sexton, embodies the nightmare she wants to escape.

*"Her Kind"* is one of the most famous and much-anthologized poems. The poem is a portrayal of women and their struggles. Sexton discusses female struggles and oppression, which are part of the propaganda of social norms. In *"Her Kind"*, she invites the reader into the private world of suffering and challenges faced by women from ancient times to the present to share with the reader what it feels like to be a woman. Sexton writes this poem to express her struggles of being a woman poet and, at the same time, the supposed angel of the house with daily routine and domestic chores which were imposed on her by her patriarchal society. She imagined a world in which she could escape the harsh reality of being a housewife in the 1950s and 1960s. Sexton, in her writings, focuses more on textuality that offers an interpretation than being a typical biographical poet; she expresses self-representation that makes a truthful representation of inner thoughts that pulls the reader's attention and takes them into the lived experiences of the author.

*Her Kind* is a powerful and poignant poem that explores the struggles and societal expectations faced by women in three stanzas. The poem was written by Anne Sexton, the confessional, unique, and daring poet, and published in her 1960 collection, **To Bedlam and Part Way Back**. What is interesting is that regardless of what poetry Sexton intended to present on an evening's agenda, she would constantly begin her reading with *Her Kind* to define her public identity as a poet, telling the audience that this poem would show them what kind of woman, and what kind of poet she is.

In her poem, Sexton depicts three roles of the woman: the "possessed witch," the "housewife", and the "adulteress". She opens the poem with the following lines:

*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.  
A woman like that is not a woman, quite.  
I have been her kind. (Sexton, 2001, pp. 15-16.)*

The poem introduces interesting personas, especially the witches, who live challenging social patriarchal norms. The poem suggests solidarity for all women in the same place and living according to the same roles imposed by the patriarchy.

The poem talks about being a witch under the grip of a wicked spirit who stepped out into the world to take an adventure. A lonely creature with twelve fingers that is not in her mind, she is more daring at night and exists in the shadows. Such a woman is, in some ways, unfeminine. The poet used to be that kind of woman. Found the charming caves in the woods and decorated them with pots, sculptures, cabinets, closets, luxurious fabrics, and a never-ending supply of goods. Also, she prepared meals for the little dragons and fairies while complaining, dissatisfying, and whining.

Such a woman gets understood incorrectly. She used to be that kind of woman. Driver, riding in unattractive and waving my arms at the villages passed, trying to remember the last sunlight traces she had ever seen. The poet is a survivor and still feels the burns from the fire on her leg and the splits in her ribcage caused by the wheels of society's punishment. Such a woman is fearless and ready to die without guilt. The kind of lady the poet is.

In the first stanza, the speaker describes herself as a tormented witch who wanders at night and dreams of wickedness. She admits that because she is different from other ladies, she is a lonely and misunderstood person. She knows for sure that "A woman like that is not a woman, quite". She does not feel that she is a woman who meets the specific standards set for women by the male-dominated society. Moreover, all other women who do not meet these standards nor accept the gendered prescribed roles set for them are not considered "real" women. As a woman poet, she claims that she is '*haunting the black air, braver at night; dreaming evil, I have done my hitch*'; she haunts down the night to write her poetry in peace away from social and patriarchal norms and the stereotypical domestic life. The act of writing, of composing a poem, is an empowering act. She is gaining the power of authority, of having a voice to speak about her inner feelings, the kind of life a woman has to live, about the suppression of women by the patriarchal society which denies women all their rights, including the right to express themselves. To be able to write, to be a woman and a creative poet, she has to defy patriarchal society, even if that means that she will be seen as an ugly "witch" or "twelve-fingered thing" and not a woman. Sure, the witch figure gives her power, but at the same time, she becomes isolated, misunderstood and an outcast. She skilfully presents her suffering and struggle, reflecting at the same time the same suffering and struggle of all the women living in a male-dominated society. For her, she knows that if she wants to write, to have power and voice, she will be outcast and rejected.

Sexton clarifies in the first stanza how women are viewed, their sufferings, and being treated as witches for standing against social conventions. Also, she reflects on the suffering of creative women and how they were oppressed, silenced and marginalised at that time for being women poets.

"*Her Kind*" presents three iconic images of women. The first is the image of "*a possessed witch*" presented in the first stanza, which symbolises the empowerment of women by possessing supernatural power, which stands for creative women's skills, in opposition to the stereotypical image of women imposed by society. The line "*I have been her kind*" expresses how she is marginalised and oppressed like these women, but that she finds her way to live and rejects such roles by living freely due to poetry. In each stanza, Sexton repeats "*I have,*" which gives a sense of declaration throughout the poem. She keeps redefining her speaker's identity to build an intimate metaphor on the part of every woman sharing the same struggles and oppression to reflect her confidence about who she is.

The second stanza offers another iconic image of the *housewife*, which is an excellent image used to elaborate further on the core of feminist matters at that time, the 1950s-60s, housewifery and domestic chores assigned to women. Sexton rejected the idea of being attached to house cleaning and house chores. She even denies the sensuality of marriage as she admits that the roles imposed on women create a robot-like person and separate the women from their true selves, causing a loss of communication with reality. Since women find themselves obliged to play the housewives' roles which are imposed on them, this leaves them with little desire to explore other aspects of who they are and what are their skills, power and creativity. Sexton portrays a conventional image of a housewife's role imposed by an oppressive society as the speaker only cares about her family and children, creating her world (the world of a witch) that causes her to be outcasted and alienated from the rest of the world. The second stanza reads as follows:

*"I have found the warm caves in the woods,  
filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,  
closets, silks, innumerable goods;  
fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:  
Whining, rearranging the disaligned.  
A woman like that is misunderstood.  
I have been her kind."* (Sexton, 2001, pp. 15-16.)

The "*Warm caves*" represent a warm and peaceful place to escape and hide. Sexton presents many things that reflect the image of a warm house, like "*skillets*," "*carvings*," "*shelves*," "*closets*," "*silks*," and "*goods*." The image of house and housewife as the Angel of the House is an image of a wife and mother in a warm house with strange things to do, like "*fixing the suppers for the worms and the elves*," which implies her being a mother taking care of her children, a housewife role. Also, she wants the reader to feel the oddness of the speaker's companion. The reader is supposed to feel the strangeness of a mother rejected by society and accused of being an unfaithful mother and wife simply because she must dedicate herself entirely to her family. Therefore, she is "*misunderstood*" by society for refusing the imposed role of a "*housewife*" as a "*whining*" woman. Society harshly judges and misunderstands "*a woman like that*" for challenging social norms and conventions and rejecting the imposed "*robot-like*" role as mother and wife, so the speaker created her world to escape reality.

The lines reflect Anne Sexton's real at that time, as she used her persona to express herself as a female poet who is not devoted to her home and children and refuses to participate in the public lifestyle of the 1950s and 1960s. Through poetry, she created peace by expressing herself freely. The second stanza expresses feminine aspects as women are forced into roles attached to their house and children, showing the struggles of women being housewives and outcasts due to their views about society and rebelliousness.

Sexton, through her poetic talents and techniques, created a self-portrait in a patriarchal and misogynist society that oppresses women and is attached to old conventions. As Sexton admits that poetry connects or organises things, it is clear that "*Her Kind*" is a self-reclamation of women's roles within a society imposed by patriarchal norms. Sexton tries to reflect diverse images of women housewives and the rebellious people whom society sees as strange, outcasts or even mad.

In the third stanza, Sexton's views and rebellious poetic heightened against social and cultural oppression and when she confirms she is a prostitute:

"I have ridden in your cart, driver,  
Waved my nude arms at villages going by,  
Learning the last bright routes, survivor  
Where your flames still bite my thighs  
And my ribs crack where your wheels wind.  
A woman like that is not ashamed to die.  
I have been her kind." (Sexton, 2001, pp. 15-16.)

This stanza echoes the personal freedom of a woman, "*survivor*," "*thigh*," and "*ribs*", showing the image of a woman as a prostitute. She is addressing a male-dominated society. The "*driver*", "*survivor*", and "*your flames still bite my thigh*" express a sexual image and woman's freedom in a patriarchal society, revealing male authority over females and how oppression exhausted and cracked her freedom and voice. A flame that bites thighs shows society's opinion of a woman who rejects social norms and patriarchal authority. The line "*A woman like that is not ashamed to die*" presents a proud and free woman, as the speaker shows that a woman who rejects and challenges the authority of society is not afraid to die because death is the liberation from such an oppressive and aggressive society. Sexton tries to declare that she is "her kind" because she sees a freak and a rebellious woman who is defying the norms and conventions of society at that time. She sees herself as a survivor and is not ashamed to die as she welcomes and fascinates death.

The poem is full of references to draw the reader's attention to the speaker's struggles by using historical allusions, the most important of which is "*Joan of Arc*," who is burned at the stake for being secular and committing heresy and refusing to submit to the church's authority. As Sexton draws to the

reader's attention the struggles of women and their oppression in such a society, a woman is accused of being a "*witch*", and an "*outcast* ", but such a woman is a "*survivor*" due to the sacrifice of another woman of her kind. She is proud and liberated from social and cultural norms imposed by patriarchy; even such a woman would welcome death, as the poet Sexton finds her freedom in death.

To sum up, the submissive, passive, inferior, and second-class position of women in society is the result of Western culture and religion. Women are typically assigned to certain defined roles, that are of the wife, mother and daughter, and they are all weak, passive, and always indeed for men. In patriarchal societies, such gendered prescribed roles not only marginalised but also made them victims of oppression and violence.

Feminism started as an activity that activists demanded in the first place, and women played a major role in this movement to challenge social conventions. Eventually, in the 20th century, many writers and poets were able to change the stereotypical roles and images of women and empower them, granting them their voices to write and tell their own stories and experiences. Women are not "Angels in the house", but now they are writers, poets, readers, and so on. Also, feminism raises awareness to demolish the archetype of patriarchal society.

Anne Sexton, one of the most influential women poets, made great contributions through her writing, as she created her distinctive voice and told freely and bravely about her feelings, suffering, and experiences as a woman and a poet in a male-dominated society. In her poetry, she presents diverse subjects and self-portraits as she tries to give women power, freedom, authority and voice. She endeavours to make a change and demolish the prescribed gender roles for women, which, through ages, hindered women's creativity and suppressed them.

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