



SORROW AND REMORSE IN ANNE SEXTON'S POETRY

Faten Hammoudⁱ

Assistant Professor,
Department of English Language and Literature,
Lebanese University – Branch 3,
Lebanon

Abstract:

Readers and critics alike responded to Anne Sexton's confessional poetry in conflict during the 1950s and 60s. Because of the authentic way in which her poems delve into emotions, some critics had a positive opinion of her poetry. However, some critics contended that Sexton's writing was tainted by her emotions rather than being poetry in the traditional sense. The nature of emotion in poetry and its importance are assessed by the critics in each scenario. Emotions, in fact, secure the sense and meaning of the poetry in a sense-making manner. This essay argues that Sexton's use of emotion to convey her feelings about particular events is evident in her poetry. Through an analysis of her poetry, one can discern the ways in which her individual emotions shaped the overall structure of the poem as well as the shaping spirit and cognitive dimension of emotion. This essay examines the feelings of regret and grief found in Anne Sexton's poetry and shows how these feelings explain the things that happened in her life and give her poems meaning and logic. It makes the case that the emotion found in Sexton's poetry is based on assessments and judgments the woman has made about things that have happened in her life. Sexton considered these events and her feelings about them with awareness and intelligence.

Keywords: Anne Sexton; confessional poetry; emotions; regret; grief

1. Introduction

Norman Kent Denzin (2009, p.66) describes emotion as *"a lived, believed-in, situated, temporally embodied experience that radiates through a person's stream of consciousness, is felt in and runs through his body, and, in the process of being lived, plunges the person and his associates into a wholly new and transformed reality – the reality of a world that is being constituted by the emotional experience"*. According to Kemper (1987, p.267), the definition provided by Seymour Epstein describes a primary emotion as *"a complex, organized response disposition to engage in certain classes of biologically adaptive behaviors ... characterized by a distinctive*

ⁱ Correspondence: email doctorfaten@gmail.com

pattern of expressive reactions, a distinctive state of receptivity, a distinctive feeling, or affective state, and a distinctive state of physiological arousal."

Emotions are short-lived, positive or negative evaluative states with physiological, neurological, and cognitive components, according to Lawler (1999). As for Brody (1999), emotions are motivational systems that consist of physiological, behavioral, experiential, and cognitive elements. They can have a positive or negative valence, meaning they can make a person feel good or bad. The intensity of these emotions can vary, and they are typically triggered by interpersonal situations or events that are significant enough to warrant attention because they impact our well-being.

The seeming simplicity of human emotions belies their many intricacies, issues, and contradictions. Never should a subject's emotions be viewed as merely physiological or mechanical reactions to changes in their surroundings. A subject's emotional experience is dependent on a variety of factors, as various theories have emphasized: the subject's expectations in the situation; the subject's active social identity at all times; the subject's identification with other individuals or groups; and how an act is evaluated consciously and/or unconsciously. Appraisal theories of emotion (Brody, 1999) argue that human beings are more than just attentive biological robots because, prior to experiencing or expressing emotions, we cognitively assess the objects in our environment. Since emotions serve as the self's messengers, they serve a signaling role and are therefore adaptive and helpful in both the short-term interactive context and the long-term evolutionary context (Stryker, 2004).

Nevertheless, emotional experiences not only serve a signal function but also leave an impression, sometimes a lasting one that shapes the subject's future behavior. The emotion felt depends on the subject's causal attribution as well as the event itself, according to attribution theories (Lawler et al., 2008). Anger is felt when a person thinks that another person is to blame for an unwanted event; guilt or regret is felt when the subject thinks that they are to blame; and sadness or despair is felt when the event is thought to be the result of fate (Brody, 1999). Turner and Stets (2006) posit that an individual's evaluation of an item, event, or person is contingent upon their preexisting expectations, which in turn may impact the emotional experience that ensues. One of the most important aspects of social interaction is whether or not people live up to the expectations that others have of them because of their status or position of power. Emotions are also related to the expectations that actors have in each social interaction, according to identity theories (Stryker, 2004). To the extent that an interaction validates or does not validate their identity, they will feel positive or negative emotions (Burke and Stets, 2009).

Identity theories acknowledge and address the fact that both role identities as well as social and group identities operate in culturally defined positions within the social structure. Certain theories, like the intergroup emotions theory, demonstrate that the emotions that individuals feel stem from both their personal experiences and the experiences of the social groups they identify with or belong to (Devos et al., 2002; Mackie et al., 2000; Yzerbyt et al., 2003). Thus, group emotions, socially shared emotions, and processes of emotional contagion exist, as suggested by Durkheim in *The Elementary*

Forms of the Religious Life (Hatfield et al., 1994). The dialectic that exists between emotional experience and expression, emotions' ability to change and form new emotional structures, and the various compositions that define the characteristics of any affective state all contribute to the complexity of human emotions. Emotional expression, or the outward display of emotions, and internal emotional experience, or subjective feelings, are two fundamentally different concepts in the realm of emotions. Words, gestures, vocal tones, facial expressions, and bodily changes can all be used to convey our emotions. However, the way internal experience and outward expression are currently connected is unclear and problematic (Brody, 1999).

First, since emotional expression is focused on communicating with another person and arises in the context of social interaction, it cannot be reduced to the basic and mere manifestation of an internal state (Marinetti et al., 2011).

Second, it has not been proven that emotions experienced internally result in physical or physiological changes. According to Damasio (1994), the physiological changes are what set off the emotions: we tremble because we are afraid, not the other way around.

In summary, external manifestations serve a dual purpose in social communication and emotion expression (Marinetti et al., 2011). Because emotions are a dynamic process that can take on numerous, mysterious transformations that can be either conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, the study of emotions is never easy. Anger can emerge from shame, joy can turn to tears, and suffering can result in pleasure. Among the defense mechanisms that can change our emotions are attribution, projection, sublimation, displacement, repression, and denial (Turner, 2008). Furthermore, it is evident that emotions are neither isolated experiences that we have one at a time nor static states of being. Our emotional lives are dynamic processes made up of various emotional structures and sequences.

This paper explores sorrow and remorse in Anne Sexton's poetry. It will also show how these feelings interpret events in the poet's life and serve as a cognitive shaping force that gives the poems their profundity and significance. Fisher (2002) examines remorse and sorrow in *The Vehement Passions*, focusing on feelings of culpability, and contends that these are healthy responses to the loss or death of a loved one. As stated by Fisher:

"A feeling of responsibility for the death or at least a guilt at not having prevented It, hovers over every loss almost as a misunderstanding of death itself, or as a refusal of the passivity built into losses that happen to us, a refusal so urgent that it would prefer to imagine the self-responsible if that would make it seem less passive." (p.209)

Due to her challenging relationships with loved ones and the deaths of family members, Anne Sexton felt both sorrow and remorse. She took responsibility for her lack of ability to feel or communicate grief over her parents' deaths, which allowed her to express her grief and guilt in a special and unusual way.

2. Anne Sexton's Feelings of Sorrow and Remorse

A great deal of Anne Sexton's poetry bears witness to her life filled with guilt and her worries about not being able to grieve for the things that gave rise to her guilt. For Sexton, the only way she could ever truly feel some sort of sadness was by expressing her culpability via her poetry. Robert Phillips (1973) observes that through her poetry, Sexton "describes her grief for her mother and her great-aunt, her guilt towards her daughter, and her feelings of her own lost self," thereby communicating to her reader her troubled emotional mind (p.76).

Sexton acknowledges that even though she spent months watching her mother die, this did not "equip" her for grief. But her mother's passing did instill guilt in her. The expansion of the images of the doom filling her belly and "*the debt I must assume*" into a coherent, systematized structure that suggests the emotions of grief and guilt is evident in "The Double Image." The subject matter of the poem is Mary Gray, Sexton's mother, and her grief over being her mother's killer, as well as the guilt she felt as a result:

"... Ugly angels spoke to me. The blame, I heard them say, was mine. They tattled like green witches in my head, letting doom leak like a broken faucet; as if doom had flooded my belly and filled your bassinet, an old debt I must assume."

The above lines' imagery is organized around a guilt-and-doom theme. As a result of the "ugly angels" gossip, Sexton was held responsible. The witches initially claim that the speaker is solely guilty, but over time—Sexton compares it to a leaking faucet—the guilt starts to seep through, leading her to start feeling responsible for her daughter. "As if doom had flooded my belly and filled your bassinet, / an old debt I must assume"—Sexton must now shoulder the extra responsibility. Sexton believes that her child's welfare is currently being impacted by the guilt she placed on herself for her mother's passing. The baby's bassinet is now full of the amniotic fluid that surrounded it while it was still inside the mother. All of this, in Sexton's opinion, is the result of her incapacity to love her mother.

In Sexton's poetry, the idea of blame frequently appears in the feelings of regret and guilt. Her mother's death was her own fault, she believed. Undoubtedly, Sexton's belief that her mother blamed her for causing her cancer had an impact on this blame. She took ownership of the guilt and the accompanying grief:

"I cannot forgive your suicide, my mother said. And she never could. She had my portrait done instead."

And:

*"Only my mother grew ill.
She turned from me, as if death were catching,
as if death transferred, as if my dying had eaten inside of her.
That August you were two, but I timed my days with doubt. On the first of*

*September she looked at me
and said I gave her cancer. They carved her
sweet hills out and still I couldn't answer."*

Although it could be read that Mary Gray turned away from her daughter in order to avoid spreading the illness, these lines actually refer to the poet's metaphorical death, and the mother did not want Sexton's "death" to contaminate her own. In August, Joyce, the poem's persona tells us, turned two, but mother and daughter were still apart, and Sexton was still unsure of whether she was ready to assume the role of mother. In September, the mother asserts that Sexton was the one who genuinely caused her cancer. This stanza outlines the difficulties Sexton faces. First of all, the mother believes that Sexton is contagious and has the potential to infect her. Second, she is unsure of when she will be able to take on the role of mother once more because her daughter Joyce is still not with her. Thirdly, Sexton's mother truly holds her daughter responsible for the cancer that has taken hold of her. It is not shocking that Sexton was unable to respond. There was an abundance of blame. The poet blamed herself unconditionally and let the full weight of the guilt burden her because she was still having trouble experiencing grief, which was the reason the answer did not come.

The arrangement of the sequence of metaphors, similes, and images in "The Double Image" highlights the blame that Sexton takes on. The images used in "The Double Image" clearly relate to one another. The metaphors and pictures are connected and made coherent by the blame and the debt. Even the angels, who are typically thought of as being lovely and good, were ugly and malicious, and it was they who held Sexton responsible for her mother's demise. It seems to us that Sexton's sense of guilt and blame came on gradually. But eventually, the blame and guilt became overwhelming, "*as if doom had flooded my belly and filled your bassinet.*" It is also possible that Sexton's guilt has moved from self-blame for her mother's passing to guilt and blame for how she treated Joyce as a baby in her bassinet and as an unborn child in the uterus covered in amniotic fluid.

It appears that Sexton cannot move past the notion that her daughter Joyce's inadequate relationship—or lack thereof—was solely her fault. She holds herself responsible for the time she does not spend with her daughter and the fact that Joyce had to ask her mother's name during their first meeting. Sexton had forwarded a photo of a rabbit to her daughter. Every time she saw her mother, the child carried the image of the rabbit with her, as though it were a calling card. It is especially clear in this instance that Sexton's feelings of guilt stemmed from a sense of self-blame. The odd relationship that develops between a mother and her daughter when they are near one another is described by the poet. "*They pushed against one another akin to puppets on strings.*" This entirely expresses how someone will quickly detach themselves from a stranger they meet by chance on a crowded bus or train, but it hardly captures the dynamics of a mother and daughter making physical contact:

*"Once I mailed you a picture of a rabbit and a postcard of
Motif number one,
as if it were normal to be a mother and be
gone."*

*"I could not get you back except for weekends. You came
each time, clutching the picture of a rabbit that I had
sent you."*

*"The first visit you asked my name. Now you will stay for good. I will
forget how we bumped away from each other like marionettes
on strings. It wasn't the same as love, letting
weekends contain us."*

Sexton clearly feels uneasy in this situation. Nonetheless, Sexton maintains an accurate perspective of the circumstances throughout, enabling the reader to understand the organization of this sequence of metaphors and images. The comparison of the marionettes suggests an artificial intimacy that caused severe discomfort due to their infrequent mother-daughter interactions. The mother also sends a postcard with "a motif number one" and an image of a rabbit, which is not consistent with a typical mother-daughter exchange and further evidence of the unnatural contact. Sexton uses these pictures to arrange them and give them a defining quality in order to convey her sorrow and regret for not being able to provide for her daughter in the traditional way. Then, it becomes evident that Sexton knew that, in this long-distance relationship, her love for her daughter was not being expressed as it should. "Letting weekends contain us wasn't the same as love," the speaker said.

"Now you will stay for good" is the final line of "The Double Image," which alludes to the daughter's return to her mother and home. However, even this brings back memories, which in turn causes Sexton to feel guilty and blamed for her mother's passing. It seems as though as soon as one area of guilt is cleared, Sexton is forced to assign herself another one:

*"You can call me mother and I remember my mother again, somewhere in greater
Boston, dying."*

The poet appears to be inspired by the recollection to defend her decision to have a daughter in some way:

*"I, who was never quite sure about being a girl,
needed another life, another image to remind
me."*

"And this was my worst guilt; you could not cure or soothe it. I made you to find me."

This is where the idea of guilt as blame is most apparent. Sexton seems to be saying that she only had her daughter born in order to feel better about her sexual orientation. But even with the child present, Sexton knows painfully that this is "*my worst guilt*," and it does not make her feel any better.

Sexton's family never experienced a death or separation without Sexton placing a great deal of the blame on herself. With her great-aunt, Nana Dingley, Anne Sexton remained close throughout her childhood and even into adulthood. She wrote several poems that bear witness to her intense love for Nana Dingley and her subsequent sorrow and guilt over her passing. Sexton mistakenly thought that she was to blame for her great-aunt's dementia and passing. At thirteen, Nana had witnessed Anne kissing a boy. Despite the fact that Nana passed away approximately thirteen years later, Sexton continued to take the blame, which led to sadness and guilt. Sexton wrote about many emotional events in her poems, and many of them were not devoid of intellectual insight. Instead, they were based on her life experiences, which is consistent with Nussbaum's (1996) assertion that emotions have a cognitive value and aid in our understanding of ourselves and our relationships.

In "The Legend of the One-Eyed Man," the image cluster alludes to the protagonist's transgressions and raises the possibility that she may not bear full responsibility for them. Even though the crimes are "*crimes dropped on me*," "*Like Judas I have done wrong*," Sexton struggles with determining how much of the things she feels guilty about are her fault. She also experiences guilt. Sexton identifies with Judas Iscariot in this poem, and it is clear that she believes her guilt to be equal to his:

*"Look into my face and you will know that crimes dropped
upon me as from a high building."*

Maybe Sexton thinks that if she was just judged, found guilty, and then pardoned, then she would be forgiven, and the healing process would start. She is still in suspense, waiting for her punishment, while Judas and Oedipus have already received theirs. Sexton is certain that her transgressions are obvious and that they are not hidden. She has an obvious mark on her face from them, just as if she had been struck by something heavy from a height; however, she is not being held accountable for her transgressions or given the appropriate punishment. Sexton suggests that she may not be entirely to blame, even though she is willing to own up to her mistakes and take full responsibility for them: if the crimes are dropped from a very high altitude, there is actually only a slight possibility that they were her fault.

Sexton has designated Judas Iscariot as the one who built the cross on which Jesus was crucified, not satisfied with just being labeled as the Apostle who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. She is precisely doing this to herself by blaming herself for perceived and actual wrongs that she has done and then taking responsibility for them:

*"Like Oedipus I am losing my sight.
Like Judas I have done my wrong. The story of*

*his life is the story of mine.
I have one glass
eye.
My nerves push against the painted surface but the other
one waiting for judgment continues to see."*

Sexton is not entirely conscious of her wrongdoings in certain ways. She claims that she is losing her sight, despite being blind to her sins. "*I only have one clear eye.*" However, Sexton acknowledges full responsibility and guilt for the wrongdoings and says, "*But the other one waiting for judgment continues to see.*"

In "Pain for a Daughter", the patterning of imagery clearly gives meaning to the emotions of anguish and guilt. Examples of imagery implying pain are "*she bites on a towel*" and "*circled against the pain.*"

"Pain for a Daughter" (1962) keeps up the imagery of vision and blindness. Linda fears that she really is "*blind with fear.*" She cannot see physically, but Sexton makes the conscious decision to remain unaware of her daughter's suffering by keeping her eyes fixed on the ceiling. The poet writes about an incident involving her first daughter, Linda, in this poem. A horse stepped on the daughter, causing an injury to her foot. Again, the idea of feeling guilty as self-blame is evident—not for the accident per se, but rather for Sexton's absence from her daughter's side:

*"Blind with fear she sits on the toilet, her foot
balanced over the washbasin, her father, hydrogen
peroxide in hand, performing the
rites of the cleaning. She bites on a towel, sucked in breath,
sucked in and arched against the pain, her eyes
glancing off me where I stand at the door, eyes
locked*

*on the ceiling, eyes of a stranger,
and then she cries ...
Oh my God, help me!
Where a child would have cried Mama!
Where a child would have believed Mama! She bit the towel
and called on God."*

The fact that Sexton was in no way "there" for her daughter—rather than her mother tending to her injured foot—was more of a cause for blame. Sexton is standing by the door, prepared to retreat, rather than offering the child consolation or a handshake. Furthermore, her gaze is fixed firmly on the ceiling, preventing her from having to look at the child or witness the pain. Through these repeated pictures, the terrible realization that she has been emotionally and physically neglecting her daughter becomes clear and blame and guilt start to surface as well.

In addition to taking full responsibility for her failure to fulfill her assigned role as a mother, Sexton also took much of the blame for her marriage's dissolution. "Divorce" demonstrates how the broken marriage imagery — "*I have killed our lives together*" and "*axed off each head*" — unfolds in a way that presents a coherent framework. She does not place any blame on her husband Kayo in "Divorce" (1976). Instead, she holds herself accountable for her part in the marriage:

*"I have killed our lives together,
axed off each head, with their poor blue eyes stuck in a beach
ball
rolling separately down the drive I have killed all
the good things"*

The first and last lines of "Divorce" start with "I have killed," giving the impression that the statement is a confession. Sexton employs visual imagery once more. In the poem, Sexton and Kayo's lives parted ways, causing them to lose their sight as well as their eyes. Even though much of Sexton's life demonstrates her significant and ongoing self-blame for many of the tragedies that befell her family, there are times when she does assign blame to someone else. Oftentimes, that someone is God. Sexton mentions that God is ignoring their predicament when she and her second daughter Joyce are reunited after a three-year separation. She is now charging God with purposeful blindness.

In "The Double Image" (1960), Sexton responds in a way that Suzanne Juhasz (1989) found to be a little cryptic to her daughter's question about where tree leaves go:

*"Today, my small child, Joyce, love your self's self
where it lives.
There is no special God to refer to; or if there is,
Why did I let you grow in another place."*

The poet is telling her child in these lines to love herself because, in the end, she thinks that is all we can rely on. If God exists, why does He not give Sexton the abilities she needs to care for her daughter? Additionally, Sexton argues that her periods of insanity, which kept her from spending time with her daughter, were no more abnormal than yellow leaves that dropped to the ground. Does Sexton mean that this was insufficient justification for her child to be raised by her mother-in-law?

*"We stand watching the yellow leaves go queer,
flapping in the winter rain, falling flat and washed. And I
remember mostly the three autumns you did not live here.
They said I'd never get you back again. I tell you what
you'll never really know:
all the medical hypothesis that explained my brain will never be as true as
these struck leaves letting go."*

According to Sexton, everything in nature eventually gives in to gravity. Sexton finds it more understandable to compare the natural occurrence of leaves falling to the ground to her brain's decline than all the Medicines that are being used to try to explain it. And who exactly said Sexton would never be able to get her daughter back? All we can do is assume that they are Sexton's family members. Therefore, Sexton is partially transferring the blame to these individuals, which somewhat allays her own guilt and blame. Martha Nussbaum (1996) believes that it would be appropriate for Sexton to communicate her feelings regarding the brief loss of her daughter: "*a person who will not defend himself but allow himself to be trampled underfoot and to overlook it is slavish*" (p. 23). According to Carol Tavris (1992), "*Emotions of violated entitlement are involved anytime one believes that a possession has been unjustly taken away or if there is a threat that it will be taken away*" (p. 34), this is also consistent with her thoughts.

A good deal of Sexton's writing implies that, in some ways, she was a victim who frequently took the fallout for things in her life that went wrong. According to Paul Lacey (1989), Sexton's poetry documents her attempts to atone for her transgressions and win forgiveness. With the subtitle "a prayer," the 1967 poem "For the Year of the Insane" is addressed to Mary, the mother of God. This poem has structure and meaning thanks to Sexton's creative use of imagery like "*I am locked in the wrong house*" and "*beads as waves.*" The way this imagery is developed in "For the Year of the Insane" suggests the feelings of guilt and grief in a logical manner. The poem's central theme revolves around an atheist who is heroically attempting to recite the rosary. She knows, painfully, both her former life and her unholy state. The poet is so desperate for approval that she is willing to submit to the ground in an effort to convey total submission and a deep yearning for forgiveness. The poet expresses her belief at the end of the second stanza that her prayers are not being answered. She is just reaching up to the window above with her voice:

*"I count beads as waves, hammering upon me.
I am ill at their numbers, sick, sick in the summer
heat and the window above me is my only listener
my awkward being."*

Sexton's lack of faith is demonstrated by the sequence of images she employs, such as beads being compared to waves. Her prayers are like waves hitting her, rather than each bead symbolizing a prayer (the "Hail Mary") and drawing her nearer to the Mother of God. Although prayers are meant to be uplifting, Sexton feels as though they are pounding her down like waves in the ocean. She mentions that there are fifty "Hail Marys," five "Our Fathers," and five "Glory Bes" in just one mystery of the rosary, and that is only in one mystery. All of this suggests that the rosary seems like a pointless and drawn-out exercise, especially when no one is listening to her. The way the similes are constructed makes it evident that Sexton is disillusioned with the efficacy of prayer, and the reader can see the structure and consciousness in her line of reasoning and, consequently, the perception at work.

Sexton continues to pray, fervently seeking the forgiveness she so desperately needs. She partakes in the sacrament of Communion and drinks the wine, but she believes she has unmeritedly drunk the blood of Christ and has thus increased her own guilt and damnation. She is sufficiently versed in the New Testament and the teachings of St. Paul (Corinthians 11:29), according to which anyone who consumes the body and blood of Christ will be damned for it.

As the last stanza closes, Sexton is still of the opinion that she is unfit to live and that, despite her best efforts, need is not belief:

*"O little mother,
I am in my own mind.
I am locked in the wrong house"*

Sexton is unable to receive the absolution she so desperately wants because she is unable to recognize the mother of God as her mother as well. Sexton blames her mental obstinacy for her inability to believe and, as a result, be accepted into the correct house, which is the house of God, when she speaks of being "*locked in the wrong house*" and "*in her own mind.*" Sexton most likely uses the term "O little mother" to refer to the mother of God as an expression of affection rather than one that denotes diminutive stature.

"All My Pretty Ones" exemplifies how the themes of wine, blood, and forgiveness are emphasized to create a coherent framework that alludes to the feelings of regret and sorrow. Sexton is still seeking pardon and absolution in this poem. She acknowledges that she cannot expect forgiveness for herself unless she forgives others for the wrongs, they have done to her. Likewise, "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,*" is expressed in "The Lord's Prayer."

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ addresses His followers and says,

*"If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.
And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you,
saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4)*

Sexton is acutely aware that she must forgive others in her life in order for God to pardon her. According to what Christ said, a man must make amends with his brother before approaching God's altar. We must first pardon those who have transgressed against us in order to receive forgiveness. Apparently, Sexton was acting in the following ways when she pardoned her father:

*"My God, father, each Christmas Day with your blood, will I drink
down your glass of wine? The diary of your hurly-burly years goes
to my shelf to wait for my age to pass. Only in this hoarded span
will love persevere. Whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you,
bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you."*

The word "pretty" might be used here to set Sexton's father apart from the other attractive people in "All My Pretty Ones." Despite the fact that he was obviously not one of her children, she was willing to love and forgive him.

Another way to look at guilt is as the idea of emotion as debt. Sexton saw the things she inherited from her parents as debts because she felt guilty about their deaths. In "The Division of Parts," the mother's invasion of Sexton's dreams is depicted in lines like "*Keep out of my slumber / My good dame, you are dead*" which give the poem structure and order while also alluding to feelings of guilt and loss. Sexton receives "*gifts I did not choose*" in the poem. After her mother passed away, she inherited letters, jewelry, furs, and family silver, all of which she feels unworthy to receive.

The poet in "The Division of Parts" imagines herself in her mother's nightgown. The "split" mother enters her daughter's bed, but she is not welcomed there:

*"... Dame
keep out of my slumber
My good Dame, you are dead. "*

Only the guilt remains, rather than the grief that Sexton has long longed to convey. She is not sure she wants to remember her mother. She wishes to erase the memories of her mother from her dreams, but on the one hand, she wears her mother's "Bonwit Teller" nightgown to bed to remember her. "The Division of Parts" confirms Sexton's perplexity regarding her feelings once more.

Anne Sexton's incapacity to adequately articulate her grief and guilt for the events in her life was a major source of the grief and guilt that she expressed in her poetry. She felt more guilty for these occurrences because she was unable to communicate her grief. Sexton also felt more guilty than ever about not being able to provide for her kids. Both "The Double Image" and "Pain for a Daughter" show her anguish and guilt. Sexton tried to understand her divorce as well. She is willing to take full responsibility and guilt for her failed marriage once more. Sexton freely placed the blame on herself. By frequently alluding to Christ's suffering and death on the Cross as a means of atoning for humankind's sins, Sexton reveals her willingness to bear the consequences of her actions and once again places the blame on herself.

3. Conclusion

This paper has looked at a few of the ways that Anne Sexton's poetry examines and expresses sorrow and remorse. It has demonstrated how these feelings are shaped in her poetry and how this shaping process is primarily evaluative and cognitive in nature. In other words, sorrow and remorse are not just feelings; they are ways of understanding the world. This essay has demonstrated how evidently distressed and remorseful Sexton is.

Through her poetry, Anne Sexton's incapacity to express grief becomes more and more obvious. She cannot articulate her sorrow, but she accepted guilt about her

relationship with her family members with ease. Nonetheless, Sexton's handling of guilt exhibits a consciousness that shows how the feeling is developed in her poems, expressing the cognitive and frequently estimative nature of her work. Sexton considered the whole sorrow and remorse thing very rationally, realizing that she needed to be able to forgive herself and others for their mistakes before she could begin to heal from these feelings. In "All My Pretty Ones" Sexton states: "*whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you, / bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you.*"

Sexton's poetry demonstrated how remorse and sorrow affected her. Sexton wanted to be connected to her parents even though she was unable to express her torment over her conflicting feelings for them.

Conflict of Interest Statement

I, Faten Hammoud, certify that I have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this research paper.

About the Author(s)

Faten Hammoud, Assistant Professor, PhD in English Language and Literature.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7373-2128>

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