Chapter III

Self and World

In most societies woman defines herself through interpersonal relationships. Woman’s dependence is a marked tendency in the Indian context. The dominant psycho-social realities which determine a woman’s identity find expression in literature as role-models. A woman transforms her cultural devaluation into feelings of unworthiness and inferiority. Interpersonal relationships are structured to maintain hierarchical relationships between the sexes. In India the structures are so rigidly set that accomplished women find it difficult to create complimentary roles for themselves.

A woman’s life is a dehumanizing and humiliating experience in a patriarchal society. The struggle to become a human being is the necessary fate that awaits a woman. This struggle is manifested in women’s literature in manifold forms. In women’s poetry the persona assumes different forms corresponding to the various roles a woman is forced to assume. The different guises the persona assumes lead to multiple voices. Besides the multiple roles of daughter, wife and mother, a woman poet plays out the roles of unhappy woman, unstated mistress, selfless lover, reluctant nymphomaniac, innocuous doll, vicious seductress and ferocious witch. In


autobiographical writings, the narrator’s voice is the poet’s Double or the Other. Writing constitutes a continuous process of self-discovery through the medium of creative art. The verbal symbols enable the writer to attain self-knowledge. The most alarming problem which the modern woman writer, especially of autobiographical writings, encounters is the crisis of identity. All her creative endeavours are directed to establish a firm, distinct identity.

Anne Sexton and Kamala Das emphasize the point that there is nothing which can be called isolated individual experience. Their insights into woman’s sexuality enable them to sympathetically portray the sufferings and actions of all kinds of women in their poetry. Their experiences incorporate personal as well as mythical memories. The adventures of each of their personae constitute a commentary on the woman’s plight the world over. The poems of Anne Sexton and Kamala Das repeatedly emphasize the futility of investment in personal relationships, the growing attention to inner self, the women’s potential for self-awareness and their alienation from society. There is a deceptive calmness with which their personae narrate the disintegration and chaos of the self in repulsive epithets. Kamala Das and Anne Sexton adopt this technique, which may be condemned as a structural discrepancy, to shock and enlighten their
readers. They weave highly personal poems out of their sexual, emotional and even spiritual experiences with integrity and mastery. Both thematically and stylistically their poetry should be read in the context of their unique experiences of gender.

Kamala Das relies on her life and experiences for the themes of her poems. The recurring themes in her poetry are childhood memories of ancestral home, love, marriage, man woman relationship, the Radha-Krishna legends and maternal instincts. She transmutes the psycho-pathological elements of her life into something universal in her poetry. Kamala Das remarks in the course of Richard Remedies’s “An Interview with Kamala Das”:

A writer derives inspiration from his life, what else? A writer is like a mirror that has learnt to retain the image reflected in it. Indelible reflection. Those who do not write, retain nothing of life, ultimately. Life runs through their fingers like fine sand. (57)

Kamala Das creates a personal mythology in some of her poems and peoples them with her relations, husband, lovers, children and friends. She believes that her personality is the raw material for her poetry. She writes in My Story: Poets . . . are different from other people... A poet’s raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality (157). This statement, which may be
applied to every creative writer, reflects the essential component of her poetry and indicates a direction to the understanding of her poetry. Kamala Das observes in The Current Weekly, an article: “Although I write with a lot of detachment, I do figure in my writings…” (22). Devindra Kohli, Kamala Das, describes her poetry as a sort of: “compulsion-neurosis” which offers a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions (20). She views poetry as a continuous torment. Her poems carry the violent energy associated with “unpremeditated and unreflected emotions” (Kohli 20). Writing is a means of self-discovery for her. She says: “When I write I get closer and closer to my true self. . . . It is an activity that cannot be shared, so akin to dying” (Remedies 59). She looks upon writing as a full-time vocation and complains that she, a “part-time housewife,” finds it difficult to set aside a the-table for writing (Remedies 59). Kamala Das comments, quoted by Vrinda Nabar in her The Endless Female Hungers: A Study of Kamala Das:

If had not excellent servants to do the work around the house, I would not have become a poet. A poet cannot write when there are momentary worries filling his head. Poetry is a full-time job. (13)
She finds poetry a demanding art. She uses, according to Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English, a “personal voice,” and “self-revelation” in an effort to evolve her personality in a self-assertive mood (152). Anisur Rahman in his Expressive Form in the Poetry of Kamala Das observes that her personae are her own “mutilated self,” tormented by temporal consciousness (20). There is an abiding sense of crisis which pervades her poetry as she relentlessly tries to build an identity in a patriarchal society. The existential framework of her poems underlines the dynamics of self-evolution. Her poetry is marked by a feminist consciousness as well as a feminist sense of resistance to male oppression. She evolves a female identity as a person in her poems. Devindra Kohli, Kamala Das, observes that “Kamala Das has more to say about the pathos of a woman emerging from a passive role to the point of discovering and asserting her individual freedom and identity” (29). Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, also expresses the same idea: “Kamala Das’ is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in largely insensitive man-made world” (680). The central burden of her poetry springs from the conflict between a woman’s loss of freedom and identity in a patriarchal society and her ruthless fight to attain the same values. Kamala Das’ vision, as Suresh Kohli,
“The Poetic Craft of Kamala Das,” points out, is “vitally particularized by woman’s point of view” (17). She startles the conformist society by her attempts to redefine herself in personal relationships even by breaking the traditional concept of womanhood.

Kamala Das’ personae are contemporary women beset be an identity crisis which works at two levels. In the first, she tries to mend an identity for herself by her nostalgic yearning for her ancestral past represented by her grandmother and ancestral home, a place of childhood innocence where she feels at home with her self. The ancestral memories are the vital “symbols of undefiled purity which she left once and lost forever” (Rahman 31). In the second level the crisis assumes the form of a psychic conflict in which the alluring past is at war with the bleak present. The poet’s self frequents the past and present in a commendable effort to redefine her identity. Her rebellious posture against the patriarchal world extricates her self from the crisis of identity. Kamala Das’ poetry is a contemporary Indian woman’s relentless quest to evolve a personal identity distinct from her identity as a sexual object that traditional society has constructed for her.

Kamala Das uses her vision of personal relationships to evolve an identity for herself. This is an existential problem which involves a personal demand for self-
definition against a personal impulse to have none. Her poetic utterances betray an aggressive personality. Like a “forest fire” she wants to grab and swallow everyone and everything that comes her way. Her appetite for life is a consuming passion. The force with which Das takes possession of the different human beings is concretized in “Forest Fire” (OP 39). Unlike the all-destructive forest fire, the poetic frenzy consumes human beings to prevent destruction. Hunger of the forest fire, as Vrinda Nabar, The Endless Female Hungers: A Study of Kamala Das, also points out, is the essential part of Kamala Das’ life (21). The yearning for satisfying human relationships is at the bottom of her heart. The poem “Substitute” indicates the direction in which Kamala Das pursues the relationships: “for always in my arms / Was a substitute for a substitute” (5&6). For the poet the relationships form an endless series of substitutes. The frustrated female psyche continues to deal with the substitutes in a tireless attempt to build a new identity. The distinction of the identity unmistakably conveys the idea of the woman she wants herself to be. Her difference from the forest fire is not without significance. Kamala Das hints that she wants to be different from the traditional woman who has no substitute to rely on.
Kamala Das undergoes an identity crisis due to her inability to establish meaningful and abiding relationships with the world. She attempts to resolve this crisis either through love or by poetry, wherein the urge to return to the past becomes, in essence, an occasion for the celebration of the body. In “My Grandmother’s House” the past is the phase of the narrator’s life when true love existed. After her grandmother’s death, “the house withdrew into silence” (3). She recalls her childhood days when “snakes moved / among books I was then too young / to read, and my blood turned cold like the moon” (3-5). She compares her past with the present and cries out in wild despair:

. . . I who have lost
my way and beg now at strangers’ doors
to receive love, at least in small change?

(14-16)

Love in the past was a spontaneous emotion. The speaker desires to

. . . pick an armful of
darkness to bring it here to lie
behind my bedroom door like a brooding
dog. . . . (9-12)

Darkness is a symbol of nostalgic passion which convinces her that the past is preferable to the present. The speaker’s present condition of emotional insecurity
forces her to find comfort by an imaginative sojourn to her grandmother’s house which binds her to an enviable past. Kamala Das is conscious that an amiable past exists only in memories. The poem stresses the sad awareness that the shared emotional comfort and togetherness are over. The poem begins with this awareness, leads us through childhood experiences and takes us back to the same awareness in a realistic portrayal of the grandmother’s house. The speaker’s fascination for the house provides her with a feeling of vicarious comfort and a sense of belonging.

The poem “A Hot Noon in Malabar” contrasts the irresistible past with the miserable present. The natural and spontaneous life of Malabar is a contrast to the speaker’s suppressed lonely life in the city. Malabar comes to symbolize her childhood days and she recaptures it to regain her lost self. In “The Suicide,” the narrator recollects how she used to swim in the pale green pond when her grandmother warned her: “you must stop this bathing now. / You are much too big to play / Naked in the pond” (79-81). Poems like “No Noon at My Village Home” and “Evening at the Old Malabar House” present the picture of the ancestral home in surreal images.

In her biography of Anne Sexton, Anne Sexton: A Biography, Diane Wood Middlebrook has transcribed
Anne Sexton’s conversation with Martin Orne from the audio-tape of a therapy session:

I suspect that I have no self. So I produce a different one for different people. I don’t believe me, and I seem forced to constantly establish long fake and various personalities. (62-63)

This confession indicates the nature of Anne Sexton’s relationships. All the interpersonal relationships which she is involved in give insights into the socio-psychological complexity of living as a woman in a patriarchal society. She develops a separate self to cultivate each relationship and abandons or represses it later when the relationship is made or done. A sense of guilt pervades all her relationships, with the exception, perhaps, of her relationship with Martin Orne.

Middlebrook observes that Anne Sexton has a tendency to sexualize her significant relationships, a habit which builds up a clinical picture of the poet as a woman undergoing sexual trauma. Anne Sexton mystifies facts and memories and even parades fictional relationships in her poems. This is a reflection on her pathologically unbalanced mind with untapped creative potential.

The poems “February 3rd” and “Her Kind” define Anne Sexton’s various personal relationships. In “February 3rd” Anne Sexton says that a woman’s “ideas” (1) turn out
to be “curse” (1). Her ideas “spring from a radical
discontent / with the awful order of things” (2&3) Anne
Sexton’s discontent is caused by the patriarchal order of
society. The speaker plays a great number of roles from
clown to witch as part of her propaganda for a change in
the social order. Though man assumes the role of a king,
he denies woman the queenly role. The speaker realizes
her predicament: “I’m like my frying pan— / useful,
graceful, sturdy and with no caper, no plan” (29&30). She
understands that unless she shakes herself free of her
mind, her life will become drab. She looks forward to the
roles she plays to give an impetus to her life. The
conventional as well as the unconventional roles she
plays are directed to change the awful social order.

The poem “Her Kind” presents the picture of the
speaker’s life which is as mysterious and as complex as a
witch’s life. Unfazed by a strange and diabolic
environment, she moves about influencing the conventional
women, the domestic housewives with the magic of her
talents: “a possessed witch, / haunt the black air,
braver at night; /’ dreaming evil, I have done any hitch”
(1-3). The speaker is conscious of her distinction from
ordinary women. She is both odd and evil: “A woman like
that is not a woman, quite. / I have been her kind”
(6&7). Anne Sexton’s speaker knows that she is different
from the women of the neighbourhood: she is not a woman
by patriarchal standards. Her dreadful external appearance empowers her to restructure or realign “the disaligned” (10) relationships of the sexes. The protagonist fears that a woman like her is likely to be misunderstood in her endeavours to redefine gender relations: “A woman like that is misunderstood. / I have been her kind” (5&6). She is prepared to run any risk including the possibility of being misunderstood. The protagonist is left in the entangling familial bondage. The title of the poem designates all Sexton-women. The witch is one of the unconventional roles the poet assumes in her relationships with men. The pressures of feminine expectation on a housewife torment her psyche and she counters these pressures by her creativity.

Anne Sexton’s relationship with her great-aunt Anna Ladd Dingley, whom she called Nana, is the fundamental relationship which gives direction to her other relationships. Nana is a very important emotional referent for Anne Sexton in all her mature relationships. The Nana of the poems appears to be her mother’s twin or Double. However, there develops an unusual physical intimacy between Nana and Sexton which proves to be a costly hurdle to her later relationships. Anne Sexton has the guilty feeling that it was her hetero-sexual relations that led to Nana’s emotional breakdown and consequent treatment in a mental hospital. Her loyalty to
Nana gradually transformed to a mental crisis and later into neurosis. As in the case of Kamala Das, Anne Sexton seeks motherly affection not from her real mother but from a person like Nana. After Nana’s breakdown Anne Sexton is seen psychologically seeking Nana in the people she comes across in her day-to-day life.

In “Some Foreign Letters,” Anne Sexton blends the materials of the past and the present to advance the themes of loss and guilt associated with her love for Nana. The speaker uses Nana’s life as revealed in her letters to dramatically express her own distressful present. Disjointed memories are connected by time in the images of the youthful Nana, the old Nana and the young speaker. The speaker recalls the Nana of her childhood: “always old, / soft white lady of my heart” (1&2). Nana’s youth is trapped in an unalterable and irrecoverable past. The youthful, letter-writing Nana is a contrast to the old Nana who was intimate with the poet. The old Nana known to the poet is dead; death seals all further knowledge of Nana. The speaker already loves the old Nana: by reading her letters she learns to love the young woman Nana was: “Tonight I will learn to love you twice:” (64). The speaker shares the guilty love of Nana. The speaker as a girl felt, and as a woman still feels, the blame for Nana’s madness and sensitivity. She realizes that memory exorcises loss and guilt as well as
perpetuates them. Nana’s death leaves a void in the speaker’s life. She desperately breathes life into the sack of death through images of life. She creates living moments and shares the unknown life with Nana. The futility of her attempt to breathe life into the past and avoid the inescapable end to youth finds poignant expression in the poem. The speaker makes desperate efforts to relive the love and intimacy of Nana who was part of her existence.

The poem “Anna Who Was Mad” is built on the central conflict between the speaker’s guilty feeling in Nana’s madness and her desperate need to free herself from the same. The speaker’s predicament has a parallel in Anne Sexton’s life. In one of her letters to Snodgrass Anne Sexton blames herself for Nana’s dementia and attributes it to her physical development into womanhood. The refrain of the poem illustrates the speaker’s conflict: “Did I make you go insane?” (5). “The Hex” is another poem that provides a powerful account of the speaker’s traumatic feeling when Nana is taken to a mental hospital. Her response to the event is graphically described in the poem:

Blood in my mouth,
a fish flopping in my chest
and doom stamping its little feet. (36-38)
The event contains the entire significance of experience and distorts all subsequent experiences. Whenever the speaker has a relaxed moment of happiness, this event, the “Nana-hex,” (2) exerts its power to disorder her psyche.

Birds turn into plumber’s tools,
a sonnet turns into a dirty joke,
a wind turns into a tracheotomy,
a boat turns into a corpse,
a ribbon turns into a noose,
all for the Nana-song, (3-8)

The part of the experience is conveyed by a synecdoche, but Anne Sexton denies the relationship between the fragment and the whole. The poetic attention is so sharp-focussed that the whole is ignored and the fragment is magnified. The “Nana-hex” overtakes the speaker and makes her feel that her own sexuality introduces evil into the world. Anne Sexton explores the impact of a relationship that has deteriorated from intimacy into trauma in the poem.

Ambivalence is the hallmark of Anne Sexton’s Nana poems. Anne Sexton’s protagonist at once craves for Nana’s love and intimacy and struggles to free herself from the guilt and pain associated with the relationship. It is this ambivalence that initiates the central conflict of the Nana songs. Nana is a fundamental source
of neurotic disturbance for the Anne Sexton personae. The conflict arises out of the Double and the Other associated with the poetic self. While the Double takes on the guilt, the Other finds life marvelous. The culpable, guilty self of the Nana poems is radically different from the persona of Anne Sexton’s suicide poems. What distinguishes the two is the conspicuous element of ambivalence in the Nana poems. For the Anne Sexton speaker her pain and pleasure come from same or identical sources. Though Nana is a source of pain and trauma, she provides a constructive help and delightful comfort in the development of Anne Sexton as a person and as a poet. The situation of Anne Sexton speakers is the general predicament of abandoned women in a patriarchal society. Nana is emblematic of feminist sisterhood which is at once a matter of help to the woman’s person and a burden to her apron strings.

Kamala Das’ poetry is dominated by an impulse of rejection. The need for intimacy in life which her speakers express is counterbalanced by a strong sense of self in her poetry. The sexual and emotional demands of her personae are rejected on account of her loss of power, freedom and selfhood in a patriarchal culture. As a force of assimilation, grandmother was a source of relief and comfort for her. Strangely enough, Kamala Das’ affection for her mother is hardly transmuted into
poetry. The narrator of My Story describes her home as “a house of cards” with one parent in Malabar and the other in Calcutta (81). She recalls that her mother was not intimate to the children. “My mother, vague and indifferent, spent her time lying on her belly . . . composing poems in Malayalam” (2). The children are, therefore, forced to seek the company of servants. She portrays her parents as an ill-assorted couple who put on a facade of happiness in the family. The narrator disapproves of her mother’s “timidity” which creates “an illusion of domestic harmony” (5). However, Kamala Das has not written many poems about her mother. “My Mother at Sixty Six,” one of the few of her mother poems, conveys the speaker’s anxiety over her mother’s getting old like “a late winter’s moon” (11). The poem also reveals the speaker’s anxiety about ageing. In the poem “Home to Mother,” the housewife-speaker visualizes herself as a girl running to her mother “with two pigtails and a satchel” (90) says Nandy in his Indian Poetry in English Today. The stress, again, is on the childhood of the speaker irretrievably lost rather than on her love for the mother. At best, as the narrator of My Story reveals, her mother is a source of inspiration for her poems on Krishna legends. As a representative of the Indian woman who seeks independence within domestic security, Kamala Das finds her mother’s subservient role
in the family a hazardous model to follow. The poetic: 
reticence which Kamala Das consistently keeps about her 
relationship with her mother is a fit case for 
psychological probing.

Unlike in the case of Kamala Das, Anne Sexton’s 
relationship with her mother is poetically very 
productive. Anne Sexton’s mother, Mary Gray Harvey, as 
she appears in poetry, is her Double, and a contrast to 
Nana. Anne Sexton’s childhood memories evoke the 
recklessness of an uncaring mother. Her poem “The Double 
Image” is a moving piece that expresses the risks and 
troubles involved in mother-daughter relationships and 
the conflict between affections and aspirations of woman. 
The poem is addressed to her younger daughter Joyce and 
incorporates many factual details of her life. As Diane 
Wood Middlebrook, Anne Sexton: A Biography, reports, the 
poem describes the events associated with Anne Sexton’s 
hospitalization, her suicide-attempts, her recuperation 
at parents’ home and her mother’s illness for which she 
was blamed. The poet condenses and interprets the 
emotional dynamics between herself and her mother in the 
metaphorically expressed title of the poem. The poem 
begins with the speaker’s recollection of her daughter’s 
absence for three years and ends with the confession of 
her guilt in desiring to see herself in the double image 
of her mother and daughter, which is a manifestation of 
the mystery of feminine fulfillment. The speaker admits:
I, who was never quite sure
about being a girl, needed another
life, another image to remind me. (205-207)

Anne Sexton echoes the same ideas in her interview to
Patricia Marx: “Sometimes I feel like another creature,
hardly a woman although I certainly am in my life” (561).
She believes that as “yellow leaves go queer, /flapping
in the winter rain, / falling flat and washed,” (3-5) a
mother’s duty is to find satisfaction in fostering
children. The speaker recalls:

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. (79-82)

She finds it difficult to establish herself in the light
of the two images of mother and daughter. She achieves
only partial success as the two rely on her for their
identity as much as she depends on them. In the
succession of similarities, the speaker resembles her
mother, and her daughter takes after her. She develops
the meaning metaphor:

Today, my small child, Joyce,
love your self’s self where it lives.
There is no special God to refer to: or is
[there is,
why did I let you grow
in another place. (32-36)
As today is linked to yesterday and tomorrow, and has its own validity, a woman who is a daughter and a mother has her basic and intrinsic reality which is her own individuality. The double image that she can visualize is that of herself and of her self’s self, the latter being her real personality different from that of her mother and daughter. The speaker’s mother, who finds herself in her daughter, is unable to withstand the latter’s frantic and frenetic attempts to end her life:

I cannot forgive your suicide, my mother said.

And she never could. She had my portrait done instead. (54-56)

When the speaker suffers from fits of insanity, she takes her to Boston and nourishes her. The suicide attempts of the speaker work hideously on her mother with tell-tale changes in her health:

She turned from me, as if death were catching, as if death transferred, as if my dying had eaten inside of her. (87-89)

During moods of depression and dejection, she takes refuge in “shoveled walks” (41) with her daughter holding her glove. Maternal consideration, which burrows into her mother’s life like cancer, doesn’t spare the speaker as it results in her emotional break-down and attempted suicide. She feels like a “childless bride” (114) in the absence of her daughter:
I missed your babyhood,
tried a second suicide,
tried the sealed hotel a second year. (117-119)
The inherent personality of the speaker, simmering all
through, comes up in the form of witches to warn her
about the maternal mystique, the complete and total
affection and attachment of a mother to her child at the
cost of her real self:

... 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. (15-20)
When the poet goes to live with her mother the witches
say that it is too late for her to do so. She plays into
the hands of the witches, the agents of the real self, in
order to cleanse herself of the dirt of domestic burden
and maternal bondage. They point out the difference
between the speaker and her mother, their “foreknown
separate ways” (172). It is the speaker’s individuality
that makes their relationship broken, partial and
awkward: “I lived like an angry guest / like a partly
mended thing, an outgrown child” (57 & 58). Viewed from
this perspective, the speaker’s daughter who draws all
her attention and exploits her love, seems an unwanted being from the very outset:

You came like an awkward guest
that first time, all wrapped and moist
and strange at my heavy breast. (198-200)

Her daughter, in spite of her affection, remains a “splendid / stranger” (139&140) and never her self’s self. The poem is powerfully passionate and highly personal. Anne Sexton not only shed silent tears but could also move sympathetic tears from the audience during her dramatic readings of the poem.

Middlebrook observes that a second network of meaning broadens the autobiographical references and makes the poem an important contribution to the literature of feminine psychology. Anne Sexton told a radio-audience: “The mother-daughter relationship is more poignant than Romeo and Juliet. Just as Oedipus is more interesting” (87). Mother and daughter replace Romeo and Juliet in a poignant love affair which has been inevitably lost. Illness infantilizes the speaker and permits her to return to her mother. The suicide-attempt is a shrewd though unconsciously devised attempt to thwart the tragedy of being grown up. She tried to be a daughter rather than a mother in the poem. Anne Sexton metaphorically develops the never-forgiving mother who seeks an ideal female image in her daughter, but the
mother’s need constricts the daughter’s growth as a separate self. The speaker’s actions of renouncing motherhood and later of accepting the guilt are part of a struggle to end the reproduction of the false self the mother cultivates. The mother is eager to have a daughter who is an image and not a person. Strangely, the speaker finds her mother’s needs and hungers reflected in herself. The compelling psychological resemblance between herself and her mother causes her neurosis as well as her art. Poetry was prescribed as a therapy to Anne Sexton. Sexton experiences the healing powers of art. Creation of images serves not only as a defense but also as a kind of cure.

One of the ironies of the poem “The Double Image’ is that as the daughter gets well, the mother gets ill. After the child is born, the speaker gets mad and later as the speaker gets well, her mother begins to die. In this poem Anne Sexton deals with the guilt she feels for abandoning her child, and about her mother abandoning her. The advice the speaker gives her daughter to love her real self is virtually the advice she wants to give herself. Her cuts through the petrifying guilt and courageously faces herself in order to face her mother and her daughter. Her refuses to be contained by the reflection of her mother. The poem is an artful therapy. By explaining her absence to the child, the speaker explains it to herself. Finally the child identifies her
mother, and the daughter-speaker accepts and reclaims her child in the face of the death of her mother and affirms her own life. Her literary act also includes the naming of the girl. The baby-girl herself is a creation used to define the self. The speaker’s disorderly relationship with her mother is expressed in a language of uncertainty. But the rhetoric of doubt hardly passes in to her relationship with the infant daughter. The poem distinguishes between the insecure relationship with the mother and the simple relationship with the daughter. In the former the poet is swayed by the direction of language whereas in the latter she controls and selects the language. The poem also differentiates the sharp and well defined present from the vaguely realized past.

The estranged speaker of the poem wails over her inability to mother her child. She tells a lie to delude herself but she unveils the truth latter:

... And you came each weekend. But I lie.

You seldom came. I just pretended (134-136)

This complicated truth creates many self serving lies. The speaker unwillingly passes the guilt which is her legacy to her daughter. She tells her daughter: “I made you to find” (209). This statement helps the child to escape the affective and vicious identification handed down by generations. The speaker’s mother, as a
representative of the old generation, does not admit this truth. The speaker’s confession to the same relieves the child from its implications. The speaker of the poem is a female Oedipus. The epigraph to her first book To Bedlam and Part Way Back and the prologue to its second part “For John Who Begs Me Not to Enquire Further” assert that one should enquire further in order to find the fatal truth. Sophocles’ Oedipus does not want to harm his mother. But Oedipus / Anne wants to kill her mother and marry her father. The poem “The Division of Parts” is a cold elegy on Anne Sexton’s mother. It is about the life of the speaker that has been made miserable by the loss of her mother and by the guilt for having survived. The speaker’s present is juxtaposed with the vaguely remembered past. She looks back and forth and reflects upon her previous confrontation with death. She seeks peace and self-knowledge through memory. The speaker reaches a plane where she can satisfy her hungers:

    . . . I imitate
    a memory of belief
    that I do not own. I trip
    on your death and Jesus, (43-46)

In this poem autobiography becomes poetic catharsis:

    . . . In Boston, the devout,
    work their cold knees
    toward that sweet martyrdom
    that Christ planned. (29-32)
The poet admits that she cannot escape the memory of her dead mother. The image of mother is the image of fragmentation and wholeness. The speaker identifies herself with her mother’s body and explores its various implications in the poem. She rehearses the religious guilt and other complexities of her experience in the poem. The sacrifice of the speaker’s mother is a living experience waiting to be enacted lively. The poem is especially concerned with the disengagement from the world of madness and a weary return to sanity. The speaker wrestles to strike reconciliation with her mother who is reduced to an outraged voice and a memory:

you come, a brave ghost, to fix
in my mind without praise
or paradise
to make me your inheritor. (145-148)

This is her dilemma and her destiny. Though she wants to shake off her heritage, memory and influence, she cannot but endure them:

Divided, you climbed into my head.
There in my jabbering dream
I heard my own angry cries
and I cursed you, Dame
keep out of my slumber.

My good Dame, you are dead. (116-121)
The poem “The Truth the Dead Know” is about nothingness and annihilation. The poem, written in memory of her parents, distinguishes between the livings who touch and love, and the dead who only exist in another world. It ends with a plaintive statement of the dead’s physical reality and their strong rejection of the living. It is as if the livings are ghosts and the dead are the inhibitors of a real world:

And what of the dead? They lie without shoes in their stone boats. They are more like stone than the sea would be if it stopped.

They refuse to be blessed, throat, eye and [knucklebone. (13-16)

The poem stresses the funeral rituals which serve not to unite and ease the living, but to affirm their rejection by the dead. Anne Sexton seems to eschew the common rituals of mourning: “Gone, I say and walk from church, / refusing the stiff procession to the grave” (1&2). The speaker is pained at the thought that she cannot communicate with the dead and that they may even refuse to forgive her. As Anne Sexton confessed to Steven Axelrod a few months before her death, the poem is of great psychological relevance to the poet.

In “Mother and Jack and the Rain,” Anne Sexton deals with the Oedipus myth. The speaker identifies herself with the mother, feels the father’s kiss and inhabits the
mother’s heart. Here woman is reduced to the medium for man’s journey. The sailor’s booty takes the form of mother’s body concealed from the daughter by the wall through which the father kisses the girl. Jack is a stand-in for the father. When the girl attains womanhood, probably at the initiation of the father, her mother is dead. Jack is desexualized to a father-priest who retains his chastity. The tensions in the poem revolve round the haunting and cursing of the rain outside and the affirming and endorsing of the poet’s womanhood inside. The tensions are resolved by writing poetry which for her is her “daily bread” (47). The thematic and formal significances of rituals of mastery are combined in the poem:

With this pen I take in hand my selves
and with these dead disciples I will grapple.
Though rain curses the window
let the poem be made. (9-12)

The rites of mastery carry forward the battle with authority figures. But the initiation and cleansing dramatize the speaker’s role as mother. There is also a conflict between the speaker’s feeling of shame for her body and the affirmation of the same when the mother is dead either in thought or in feeling.

Anne Sexton’s “The Legend of the One-Eyed Man” is an unusual poem in which the male narrator, who is a
combination of Oedipus and Judas Iscariot, confesses to the "other" (20) act forbidden by the Church. The poet has transformed her own personal story and the mythical story of Oedipus into a religious parable. The speaker narrates his crimes which "dropped upon" (8) him "as from a high building" (9) through the story of Judas:

The story of his life
is the story of mine.
I have one glass eye.
My nerves push against its painted surface
but the other one
waiting for judgment
continues to see . . . (16-22)

The narrator deflects the focus from Judas’s real crimes. Judas’s contribution to the crucifixion of Christ is a mistake, for he was only greedy and dishonest. He confesses to other "forbidden crimes" (70):

Judas had a mother.
His mother had a dream.
Because of this dream
he was altogether managed by fate
and thus he raped her.
As a crime we hear little of this.
Also he sold his God. (81-87)

This is the most heretical statement in poetry. The betrayal of Christ is only incidental to the context of
the rape of the mother. His crimes were “expressly foretold” (71). The narrator gives no explanation for his strange accusation of Judas:

Judas had a mother
just as I had a mother.
Oh! Honor and relish the facts!
Do not think of the intense sensation
I have as I tell you this (75-79)

The narrator, the one-eyed man, refuses to dilate on his own life story except to say that “The story of his life / is the story of mine” (16&17). The betrayal of the father in the form of a woman - mother’s dream remains repressed. This repression of the feminine in Christianity leads the God of “The Author of the Jesus Papers Speaks” to declare: “We must all eat beautiful women” (23). This is the female version of Christ’s sacrifice in his male body. This poem further enlarges the theme of Christianity’s violation of the feminine. The New Testament institutionalizes sacrifice, unaware of the fact that the archetypal god-act is founded on the sacrifice of women.

The man’s one eye in “The Legend of the One-Eyed Man” is blinded by the Oedipal crime of patricide. His other eye waits judgement for his sexual outrage of his mother. The one-eyed man continues to embody the
generosity of mind and heart at the cultural rather than at the personal level.

In “Cripples and Other Stories,” Anne Sexton confronts her belief that her parents who never loved her. One of her poems reportedly influenced by Sylvia Plath’s Ariel, it is widely acclaimed as a poem of anger and hate. In this poem Anne Sexton damns the authority of her doctor-father. She also reveals her feelings towards ugliness and her repulsion from tier life and her inability to disguise those feelings:

My cheeks blossomed with maggots
I picked at them like pearls.
I covered them with pancake.
I would my hair in curls. (65-68)

The perception of decay indicates the person’s entrapment between life and death. Anne Sexton’s feeling that her mother was unloving, uncaring and unforgiving is very marked in many poems.

It is Kamala Das’ relationship with her father, and not her feeling for her mother, that finds artistic expression in her poetry. The concluding statement of “Glass” is quite significant in this respect:

... I have misplaced a father
somewhere.

And look for him now everywhere. (27-29)
This can be interpreted as the Freudian search for a lost father figure. Devindra Kohli, Kamala Das, correctly observes that the speaker “moves from man to man in search of her true home” and her father (112). She has given a mythical dimension to the same attempt in her “Krishna poems,” where the father figure merges with Krishna, the eternal lover. The speaker-lover of Kamala Das flits from one man to another in an act of inexplicable revenge against the male order.

The narrator of My Story pictures her as an autocrat who insisted that his wife should not “wear anything but khaddar” (4). He forced her to wear no ornaments except the “mangalasuthra.” His treatment of children was nightmarish and humiliating. He took the children for granted, and never thought that children too have independently developing personalities. Kamala Das was never in sympathy with the ways of her father. No wonder the speaker the poem “Of Calcutta” complains:

I was sent away, to protect a family’s Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some Abstractions, . . . (22-24)

This does not mean that Kamala Das had no regard for her father. She was fond of him and has deep respect for his moral strength, as is indicated by many poems. The poem “A Requiem for my Father” is a monument of filial affection. The poet conceives of her father as a hero, a
strong man with an undying zest for life. He resisted
death and withstood medical torture for nine days: "For
nine days and nights you were on the rack / While your
secret foes came to watch you die" (4&6). Her father’s
popularity was so great, his personality was so
irresistible, that even his “foes came to watch” (9) him
die. The image of “rack” gives a halo to the dying father
and invokes the image of Christ on the cross. The sense
of desolation of the bereaved family, the awareness of
the futility of human achievement and the sensate prayer
of the living for the dead are poignantly expressed in
the poem. The poem closes with the statement: “I loved
you father, I loved you all my life” (22). This is a very
sincere and honest statement in simple and unambiguous
terms.

In another poem entitled “My Father’s Death” the
speaker expresses her repentance and anguish at being “a
bad daughter, bad wife and bad mother” (25). A sense of
guilt pervades the poem. Her father evokes a sense of awe
and reverence. Kamala Das brought him ill-reputation with
her publication of My Story and a few unconventional
prose pieces.

... Some say that I brought him shame. He
[brought with each visit
banana chips and words of reproach. I feared
[my father.
Only in that last coma did he seem close to me,

[and]

I whispered into his ears that I loved him,

[although bad . . . (12-15)]

The speaker longs for a hug, a kind word from her father. Though she is “bad,” she claims she is the most loving. Her love, she states, is priceless: “but my price was too high for you, / your wallet could not hold abstract currency” (15&16). This poem is also a vivid expression of love of a repentant and guilt-conscious daughter for her father. In another poem, “I Shall Not Forget” the speaker recalls the way she watched her father die. This incident gives her courage to defy death. “I have seen death / And I shall not forget” (13&14). Kamala Das’ attitude to her father alternates between love and hate. She expresses her anger and hatred for her autocratic father in her prose writings. But her unqualified love for him finds poignant expression in her poems. As poetic expression her love for her father carries the weight of emotion. Her unstated desire for his company had an abrupt end when she was prematurely married off. Ever since her marriage she has been seeking the “misplace father” in all her relationships with men. In a patriarchal culture every girl has to leave the security and love of her family for an uprooted life in a stranger’s home, where she hopes to receive love at least
in small change. This uprooting and re-rooting of life is certainly emotionally disturbing for a woman.

The father-daughter relationship is the most poignant motif in Anne Sexton’s poetry as well. Anne Sexton looks upon the nuclear family as a microcosmic analogue of the social and psychic structure of patriarchal culture. Her early poetry represents the psycho-social pattern of father-daughter relationship.

Daughters turn away from mothers’ intimacy as they are phobic of lesbian tendencies, jealous of daughters’ youth, averse to harsh training into femininity and resentful of the dislike of other women and female body. In a patriarchal society incest is psychologically performed by most men. Patriarchal marriage and romantic love are “psychologically predicated on sexual union between Daughter and Father figures” (20) Phyllis Chesler says in Women and Madness. Anne Sexton’s father who dies in 1959 resurrects in a series of male images like husband, analyst, lover, priest and even God. In Anne Sexton’s poetry the burial and resurrection of father figures is a recurrent theme. Anne Sexton’s father is a male principle who is not sufficiently accommodative to the female world. He is the patriarchal father-God whose shortcomings are definitive failures of humanity. It would be premature to think that Anne Sexton wrote her poems on the experience of a direct sexual overture from
her father. Her revelations to Martin Orne are only explanatory fictions in the absence of concrete proof. She seems to be haunted by the aggressive attention her father paid to her developing sexuality when he was drunk. She links his transgression with the sin and guilt associated with Nana’s cuddling and her mother’s evasion. Anne Sexton’s body was repeatedly trespassed by the three adult members of her family, emotionally disturbing her from childhood. Anne Sexton revealed to Orne during a therapy review session: “My father was a king. The king can have sex with anyone” (Middlebrook, 114). In this respect her father is different from Nana.

Anne Sexton’s poem “The Bells” expresses a myth through personal memory. The speaker remembers a circus she enjoyed as a child in the company of her father. She recalls “how the bells / trembled for the flying man” (9&10). The child was afraid, but her father held her hand and “love love / love grew rings around” (20&21). She is safe in the ring of love in habited by herself and her father. Now that the daughter is grown up, she can in habit the ring of love through the memory of the bells:

I remember the color of music
and how forever
all the trembling bells of you
were mine. (27-30)
The poem “All My Pretty Ones” is Anne Sexton’s elegy for her father. The ambiguity of inheritance is the strongest issue of the poem. Anne Sexton believes that family is the foundation of all tragedy and of all joy. In the poem, the daughter gives a rebirth to her father by mothering him. In the process, she discovers his flaws as a man and as a father. The speaker looks at the picture of her father in the family album:

... My father, time meanwhile
has made it unimportant who you are looking
[for.
I’ll never know what these faces are all about.
I lock them into their book and throw them out.

(17-20)

She picks through the remains of lost lives captured in photographs. The speaker is held by inheritance to her own photograph. She feels compelled to live out the family myth which represents inheritance:

... 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.

(44-47)

The speaker’s father is her demigod. The longing for god is the longing for the lost father. To celebrate Christmas is, for Anne Sexton, to celebrate the blood
ties of the family. The child outlives the parent and the father is re-born through her. As the child matures, she realizes the flaws of her father. She, thus, comes to know of his alcoholism:

I hold a five-year diary that my mother kept for three years, telling all she does not say of your alcoholic tendency. (41-43)

The speaker also dissuades him from trying a second marriage immediately after the death of her mother:

... This year, solvent but sick, you meant to marry that pretty widow in a one-month rush. (27&28)

She forgives her father in spite of the flaws of betrayal. The daughter-speaker who survives her father forgives him to allow him to continue living in the manner of Christ whose birth she celebrates: “I outlive you, / bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you” (49&50). The imperfections of the old generation are forgiven by the new generation. The dying father leaves only useless objects to his daughter:

a gold key, your half of a woolen mill,

twenty suits from Dunne’s, an English Ford,

the love and legal verbiage of another will,

boxes of pictures of people I do not know. (6-9)

This signifies the hollowness of her inheritance. There is a mingling of grief at the father’s death and anger at
the repudiation of the facets of his life unknown to the speaker. The sharing of the same places in the photograph by the dead and the living guarantees the continued presence of the dead father. This poem makes Anne Sexton’s personal myth of her family distinctively clear. The complex emotions of guilt, anger, grief and isolation are well brought out in the poem. What is pivotal to the poem’s meaning is the speaker’s relationship with her father in the context of present attempt to understand both him and their relationship. The context of ambivalent emotions running parallel in the poem indicates the difficulty both the mother and daughter endured while living with him. The final stanza of the poem offers complex images. The father is both her father and her god. She celebrates Christmas over a cask of his blood and at the same time dreads his alcoholic legacy. The speaker-daughter’s strange face conveys her partial understanding of her father. Anne Sexton confronts a painful and emotionally complex experience in the poem which she transmutes into excellent poetry by a masterly exploitation of poetic materials.

“Briar Rose” directly and sardonically portrays the bliss enjoyed by a passive princess with a parental tag in the company of a disguised male protector. In a prologue Anne Sexton introduces the princess thus:
Little doll child,
come here to Papa.
Sit on my knee.
I have kisses for the back of your neck.
A penny for your thoughts, Princess.
I will hunt them like an emerald.
Come be my snooky
and I will give you a root. (15-22)
The king is said to have overprotected his daughter whom he loved dearly and whom the fairy cursed. Anne Sexton warns that the smothering and overprotective love on the part of the fathers is perilous to the pure and safe life of the daughters. The princess gets into trouble in spite of her father’s obsessive restrictions on her activities.

45 Mercy Street contains Anne Sexton’s final “father poems” which explore the father-husband motif. Anne Sexton’s divorce from her husband can perhaps be read as natural culmination of a situation where the woman is married to her father. The poems also exemplify another divorce – the speaker’s divorce from childhood, her divorce from the Oedipal struggle. In “The Wedding Ring Dance,” the speaker pulls off her wedding ring:

letting my history rip itself off me
and stepping into
something unknown
and transparent. (40-43)
In “Divorce, Thy Name is Woman” the speaker acknowledges her lifetime marriage to her father and in a desperate attempt to redeem herself from the forbidden sin, divorces the father every day.

I am divorcing daddy-- Dybbuk! Dybbuk!
I have been doing it daily all my life
since his sperm left him
drilling upwards and stuck to an egg. (1-4)

The dybbuk of the Jewish legend is the spirit of a dead person speaking through a living person. Here the spirit of the father possesses the living to dispossess her of herself. We as individuals and as a community turn to the memory of the dead for identity and meaning. Sexton, as Diana Hume George in Oedipus Anne: The Poetry of Anne Sexton remarks, believes that we “piece together a sense of the self out of the inheritance of family” and culture (46). A woman spends her life divorcing and marrying her father who is reincarnated in the husband:

Later,
when blood and eggs and breasts
dropped onto me,
Daddy and his whiskey breath
made a long midnight visit
in a dream that is not a dream
and then called his lawyer quickly.
Daddy divorcing me. (13-20)
The seduction and divorce are events that happen in the unconscious. The poem is a ritual enacted in the tortured psyche of the speaker. In marrying the father, the daughter becomes an inverted parody of herself and her mother, of wife and mother. We are possessed by dybbuks of our personal and cultural past. The daddy of 45 Mercy Street is the father Ace, who seduces his daughter before the peering eyes of Aunt Amy of Anne Sexton’s play of the same title.

With characteristic frankness Kamala Das describes the discords of her married life in many of her poems. She frequently complains of her husband’s callousness and her boring domestic routine. She hoped that her husband would be a man of compassion and considerateness. The narrator of My Story recalls: “I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life” (84). Her search for the father figure in her husband failed miserably. His love was only skin-deep. She became a domesticated woman and a sex object. She soon finds herself degenerated to the position of a trained circus dog which jumps its routine hoops each day. She felt soulless: her desires became mute on her tongue. Her husband had history of indiscretion. He was alleged to have homosexual relationship with other men. Any fair-skinned maid could take him away from her for
hours, as she mentions in “A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulder.”

The poem “Heron” states that it is the duty of the wife to satisfy the lust of her husband. The speaker’s husband thinks that she is more lovable when put on sedatives. He believes that her “ragdoll limbs adjust better / to his versatile lust” (5&6) when she is semiconscious. In another poem “The Swamp,” Kamala Das emphasizes the point that unsatisfied sexual banter brings anguish and weariness. Sex without love becomes a tragic sport and becomes an addiction. The poem “Sunshine Cat” reveals the extreme version of domestic cruelty. The husband, here, is “a coward” (3) who “neither loved nor / Used her, but was a ruthless watcher” (3&4). The husband watches his wife as if she were a prisoner convicted for some grave crime. He shuts her up “with a streak of sunshine” (15) and keeps her as a pet. His cruel ways drive her to the point of insanity. The poem “Of Calcutta” narrates the manner in which the speaker’s husband makes sour the routine sexual act by his tales “of greater / Pleasures,” the “richer harvests of / Lust, gleaned from other fields” (5-7) which causes “the embers died” (8) in her. The poem “Cat in the Gutter” also presents the image of a woman disgusted with sex without love.
Kamala Das’ *My Story* contains many passages which narrate the emotional tension in her relationship with her husband. Lack of love in marital relationship can assume the form of male cruelty. The male partner in *My Story* is a savage gloating over his versatile and robust lust. Several passages of the book convey the tedium and monotony of routine sex. The husband recklessly exploits the wife’s body and lacerates her psyche. He is not the father-figure Kamala Das is in pursuit of. The husband who replaces the father is not only domineering but also inconsiderate. Her search for the misplaced father fails.

Anne Sexton has an ambivalent relationship with her husband Kayo. He seems to be a conventional male with conventional views on love, marriage and family. Diane wood Middlebrook meticulously chronicles Anne Sexton’s relationship with her husband. Kayo is like Nana, yet different from her. He willing plays the roles of Nana, Daddy and Mommy to her. Yet she both loves and hates him. She entertains a feeling that Kayo hates her while she is sick. Anne Sexton also believed that Kayo resented her writing career. Anne Sexton’s daughter Linda reported that in spite of his resentment Kayo tried to give Anne time to write poetry. The ideal wife in Kayo’s view would be the one like this mother. Kayo and Anne used to have violent fights. Kayo resented Anne’s involvement with poets. This often led to quarrel fights.
The poems that deal with Anne Sexton’s relationship with Kayo are of a general nature than her “father poems” or “mother poems”. In the poem “Farmer’s Wife,” the poet describes a suburban wife’s indomitable urge to free herself from the “country lust” (2) of her farmer-husband to establish herself as an independent woman. Love and sex are as brief as a “pantomime” (16) show or as blind as a “braille touch” (14). She is confined to the “local” (3) “broom factory” (5). The woman fails to convince her husband that “there / must be more to living / than this brief bright bridge / of the raucous bed” (10-13). After the routine sex she lives” her own self in her own words” (21) and lies in her “separate dream” (24). As her life is depressing, she finds strength in her loneliness. She wants to separate from him to strengthen herself. She wishes to liberate herself from the “sweat of the house” (22). She reimagines her husband to be weak, maimed and romantic and “wishes him cripple, or poet, / or even lonely, or sometimes, better, my lover, dead” (30-32). Had he been crippling, poet, lonely or even dead, she could have found an outlet for her creative power. The rural house wife’s situation is pathetic but inescapable. The farm-couple’s life is a poor parody of the domestic life of the narrator.

Anne Sexton’s vision of the real nature of man is best reflected in her poem “The Wife-Beater.” The cruelty
of man reduces his female dependents to bundle of bones and flesh. The narrator’s husband disturbs her with his diabolic features. He drinks “bullets from a cup” (5) and chews “little red pieces” (8) of her heart. He is a like the townsmen who kill their wives in Anne Sexton’s “Ballet of the Buffoon.” Home is not a secure place for women and children. The security and protection he offers his helpless wife is a fleeting shadow. The woman nourishes anger against irresponsible male forces which degrade her life. His violence even drives animals to shivers. The helpless narrator and her child “knit, into each other / until they are killed” (28&29). Anne Sexton portrays the wife-woman as subservient and dehumanized. The protagonist’s husband, who is both a wife-beater and a child-beater, is “metamorphosed from lover misogynist” (126) says Hall in Anne Sexton. The dramatic atmosphere of the poem reminds us of Middlebrook’s description of the fights between Anne Sexton and Kayo in their Boston home.

In “Hornet” Anne Sexton presents the picture of man’s rudeness through the sustained metaphor of a hornet. Man inflicts unmitigated pain on his dependent woman with his “red-hot needle” (1) and “hammer/ with a nail” (10&11). His rage becomes a “buzzing” (6) when he speaks about his dignity and when hurls abuses at woman under his protection. Man, whose strength is his gender
and sexuality, pervades woman’s life and makes her existence miserable. He remains “in the curtain” (7) and “under the shelf,” (8) speaks to her with “a nest of knives” (14) and creates a nuisance of himself as he climbs “out of the toilet” (16) when she sits on it. He reminds us of the Nazi in “After Auschwitz” who kills and cooks “a baby / . . . for breakfast / in his frying pan” (6-8). The speaker makes an indirect plea to women to awake and fight against such atrocities of men. In the poem “Horse” man is a horse, whose mere presence makes a woman suffer from fear and depression. These are poems that seem to have a bearing on Anne Sexton’s family life. They seem to point to her difficulty in asserting herself as a woman and as a poet in the presence of Kayo.

In the poem “Loving the Killer,” Anne Sexton compares the speaker to a Jew and her husband to a Nazi:

  . . . Oh my Nazi,
  with your S.S. sky-blue eye-

  I am no different from Emily Goering. (52-54)

The literal reference in the poem is to a lover, perhaps to the poet’s husband, who is spoken of as a killer of animals. Love becomes murderous: “love came after the gun, / after the kill” (13&14). The images of destruction and anger reveal the ruinous nature of their love. The speaker loves her husband, though he is a killer of animals, and by extension of her. The occasion of the
poem seems to be Anne Sexton’s trip to Africa which she undertook along with her husband. For Anne Sexton’s husband it was the realization of a dream. But it was a horrifying experience for Anne Sexton:

   Tonight we will argue and shout!
   “My loss is greater than yours!
   MY pain is more valuable!” (34-36)

The poem reveals the exclusive attitudes of the narrator and her husband towards each other. She thinks of him as a killer who is crueler than a slaughterer because he kills his victim only slowly.

“The Divorce Papers” is a sequence of poems relating to the theme of Anne Sexton’s divorce from her husband. Almost all poems of the sequence betray the speaker’s perception of a failed marriage. In the poem “The Wedlock” the husband kisses the speaker “like a mosquito,” (16) and forces her “downwards like a stone” (23). In “Landscape Winter,” the all-pervasive snow spoils the landscape of love. All the poems in the sequence present the husband in poor light. He is always the tyrant who unleashes violence on the hapless and helpless speaker.

Anne Sexton assimilates incidents of domestic violence from her own life into poetry. She wants to convey that even talented and economically independent
women find it difficult to assert themselves and cultivate an identity for themselves in a patriarchy.

The poem “Substitute” illustrates the insatiable appetite which Kamala Das speakers express for affairs:

. . . love became a swivel door,

When one went out, another came in.

Then lost count, for always in my arms has a substitute for a substitute. (7-10)

The article “I Studied All Men” prompts Devindra Kohli, to conclude that the author plunges into a series of love affairs as a satisfactory substitute for her discord and married life (Kamala Das, 95). Love is compared to “a swivel-door” with a simultaneous “in” and “out” (4). This comparison finds its echo in that: “Each night, after stripping myself, I put aside my soul and entered the arena with a body as efficient as a clock work toy” (14) reviewed by Kushwant Singh in Love and Friendship. The refrain “It will be alight” (2) of “Substitute” suggests that she is ready to play the roles assigned to her. Her unconventional state is an aberration which invites attention to her individuality:

Our bodies after love-making

Turned away, rejecting.

Our words began to sound

Like clatter of swords in fight. (11-14)
This statement suggests the lack of harmony between the partners self-discovery in the poem. The ironic repetition of the refrain, as Ramachandran Nair in The Poetry of Kamala Das observes, means the opposite of what it says (30). The love described in the poem is a physical thing. The lovers kissed and loved all in a fury. The rapid and mechanical nature of love suggests lack of emotional involvement.

The poem “A Relationship” identifies love with physical desire: “It was my desire that made him male / And beautiful,” (5&6). The relationship is archetypal, older than “myriad / Saddened centuries” (1&2). It is an irony of fate that the speaker finds rest and peace in her lover who has betrayed her. In “The Testing of the Sirens,” Kamala Das speaks of a dual adultery, of the speaker’s intimacy with two lovers. One of them, as Vrinda Nabar in The Endless Female Hungers: A Study of Kamala Das phrases it, “is merely a poor substitute for the other” (27). The speaker awakens from a night of love and lust to a day of physical loneliness, goes for a drive with the young man with “a pock-marked face” (7) and “a friendly smile” (8). While he photographs her against the rusty guns standing like mute phalluses, a sensation of love arises in her which is doomed to remain unfulfilled. She juxtaposes her intimacy with the young man with the “one-sided love” (28) of the “filthy snob” (27).
She responds to the first lover with her “limbs” (39) and to the second with a “smile” (40). The relationships expose the futility of words which hardly convey anything despite the tenderness and abundance of language. The melancholy wailing of the sirens symbolizing the agony of the speaker resonates with the mirthless laughter of the new lover. The speaker’s loyalty to both the lovers, as Ramachandran Nair in The Poetry of Kamala Das observes, is a passing fancy which is part of her endless search for a perfect lover. The hideousness of such images as the “pregnant/ girl” (30&31) baring her “dusky / breasts” (31&32) and the “crows” (33) bickering over “a piece of lizard meat” (34) suggest the futility of real love and the cruelty of lust posing as love. Real love remains elusive and unfulfilled while lust reigns.

The dialectical opposition between the ascetic and the sensual is the theme of “An Apology to Goutama.” Goutama is a substitute lover who satisfies the speaker’s need for a man’s arms and a man’s voice. The poem expresses her anguish at the failure of her frenetic attempt to keep away the thought of another man. The dichotomy between physical comfort and mental anguish runs through the poem. It is ironic that while Goutama the gentle lover brings calmness and physical comfort to the speaker the other man who hurts her with his love holds her spiritually. The poem reduces “Goutama to the
level of a possible lover for the poet” and then
dismisses him “as an inferior lover” (Kohli 68). Her
amorous approach to Goutama reduces her relationship to a
mere physical one while the torment she undergoes in
loving the other man transcends to a spiritual plane.

The poem “The Descendants” pictures lovers indulging
in insubstantial love which is a sin beyond redemption:

we have lain in every weather nailed, no, not
to crosses but to soft beds and against
softer forms . . . (6-8)

The identification of the cross with the bed indicates
the agony and torture of the kind of love the lovers
practice. The lovers’ savage pleasure is a sin which ends
in damnation and punishment. The speaker is one of the
descendants who await damnation by the public for the
unconventional love to which she yields easily. A similar
idea is expressed in “Convicts.” Here physical love is
described in terms of physical labour. The convicts are
the lovers engaged in lust who are like “the toys dead
children leave behind” (3). In the heat and heaviness of
their fatal lust they have lost their gender: “When he
and / I was one we were neither / male nor female” (5-7).
This is a recurring theme in Kamala Das. A tragic absence
of feeling is emblematic of the kind of love that Kamala
Das’ speakers are after.
The poem “The Doubt” which is built on an irrefutable logic about death, pictures love as a shameful act, and sex as a form of murder where the murderer, the male, destroys the evidence of the crime:

. . . I can see him

After a murder, conscientiously

Tidy up the scene, waste

The bloodstains under

Faucet, bury the knife . . . (5-9)

The poet begins with a simple doubt as to why the corpse is referred to in the neuter and wonders whether it is the soul that imparts gender to a body. The sexual act is portrayed as a murder and the lover’s thrusts as jabs of a murderer’s knife. The poem ends with an exposure of the speaker’s sexual identity. She doubts whether the sexual experience she had as a female was something else. This uncertainty is enhanced by the torturing stabs of her lover. In “Ferns,” as expresses the theme of physical love and its painful end. The fern is a symbol of disenchantment which she desperate wants to hide in the darkness. The images of darkness, lonely streets, craggy shores and mountains evoke a sense of horror. The grotesque nature of the imagery suggests the artificiality and stagnancy of love. The idea of lack of spontaneity in love is conveyed through the conception of
the sexual hunger of the lovers which is self-consuming and horrible.

The poem "In Love" is an ironic portrayal of carnal physical desire, the never-ending lust, which links the speaker to her lover in a short-lived bond. The peace attained through lust fades on encounter with death. The impossibility of the speaker’s escape from her partner’s lust is conveyed through the image of “his limbs like pale and / carnivorous plants reaching / out” (4-6) for her. This poem, as well as “The Looking Glass” deals with essentially the physicality of sexual ecstasy. The latter poem is about love and lust. The speaker flatters the male ego in ironic expressions. The woman yields to the man’s strange demands and gives in to his supremacy. The irony of the situation lies in the woman’s difficulty to keep the man in spite of her sacrifice which leads to a painful contradiction in their relationship:

.... getting

A man to love is easy, but living

Without him afterward may have to be

Faced. (16-19)

The phrases in the poem suggest the offensiveness of the male behaviour. The poem emphasizes the needs of the body. The basic needs of woman are universal rather than personal. The poem underlines the essential oneness and universality of sex as a ritual which each male-female
unit performs uniquely. The poet reveals what the male wants to believe - his strength compared to her softness - before the looking glass. The frankness of the poem is disarming. The lovers share everything in an intimate personal bond.

The poem “Glass” speaks about the fragility of love and of the female body. The speaker wants to assert herself in spite of the pathos of the opening lines: “I went to him for half an hour as pure woman, / pure misery, fragile glass, breaking, crumbling” (l&2). The speaker attempts a ritual manipulation of her lover in a Cleopatra-like indifference. But in the hasty arms of her lover she is reduced to “an armful of splinters,” (4) a “broken glass” (5). With abominable unconcern she enters and ruins the lives of others without involvement and satiety. She makes “every trap of lust a temporary home” (11). The underlying feeling of the poem is the sad awareness that nothing endures in man-woman relationship. The fact that love experience does not reconcile with genuine pleasure is expressed through the juxtaposition of trap with home. The fragile woman hurts deliberately and declares that it has become her habit.

In “Ode to a Lynx,” Kamala Das gives lyrical expression to the falsehood and stink of lust. The poem expresses a strikingly original idea. The poet addresses a lover with leonine grace but refuses to succumb to his
charms. Lynx, here, is a symbol of lust and cunning. The man pretended for three years that he loved not her but her poetry. She forsakes the lover with contempt:

... every busy man seeks a womb,
A womb to hibernate in.
You thought you deserved a singing one.
With each pelvic thrust you hoped to hear,
In skillful verse, the range of my response.

(6-10)

The poet stresses the lack of conscience on the part of man in relationships. Man uses every means, however base, to subjugate and ensnare woman. Woman’s search for true love remains an elusive dream.

Kamala Das makes a myth out of her pursuit for the ideal lover. In a rare poetic conception she transcends the affairs of her speakers by giving her poems the mythic framework of Radha-Krishna love. This deviation in the treatment of physical love is not spontaneous. It is an ingenious but unwilling poetic device necessitated by the compulsions of circumstances. This mythopoeic motif helps her to evade direct public attacks of her love poems. The mystical guise is misleading. It is a poetic strategy rather than a poetic reality. To attribute a mystical dimension to her poetry is a misrepresentation of facts. Mysticism in Kamala Das’ poetry is a deceptive
framework which Anne Sexton has successfully exploited in *Awful Rowing Toward God*.

In “Radha,” Kamala Das speaks about Radha’s long waiting for Krishna. In “his first true embrace” (4) she became a “girl / And virgin” (4&5) and felt that she was melting to the core. Radha’s physical experience is similar to the narrator’s sensation in *My Story*: “At the first touch of his body, all my past infatuations were obliterated. It was as if his dark body was the only body left alive” (184). The “true embrace” (4) of Krishna is to be read in the context of the treacherous kiss of the Indian lover in “Gino.” In the poem “Krishna,” the poet says that Krishna’s body is her prison and that her world ends there. She cannot see beyond his dark body which blinds her. His whispers of love keep her away from the wisdom of the world. The narrator of *My Story* passionately speaks of her last lover in almost the same words.

In “The Blind Walk,” Kamala Das synthesizes love, fear of separation and longing for re-union in a masterly way. Her lover has gone away. He “was / the only landmark” (11&12) she “could recognize” (12) in the city. His name, “the only name” (12) she remembers, “lies cradled” (13) in her breath. She wants to “hold him,” (19) to sow her “soul in the fertile soil of his body” (20). The fertility image of the last lines suggests a possible
reunion of the lovers and the physical fulfillment of their love. The poem “Ghanashyam” is addressed to Krishna who like a koel has built his nest “in the arbour of” (3) her heart. Her life, which was a jungle, is now “astir with music” (5). Whenever she approaches him he vanishes “like a spectral flame” (9) and she is left in the cold. When she is confronted by death she remembers the “husk-game” (25):

His body needing mine,
His ageing body in its pride meeting the need
[for mine
And each time his lust was quietened
And he turned his back on me
in panic. I asked don’t you want me any longer
Don’t you want me. (26-31)

The physicality of the love experience is also stated in My Story where the narrator describes her encounter with her last lover. The speaker in “Ghanashyam” may be recalling the end of an affair. Her lover casts his “net in the narrows” (76) other mind and her thoughts race towards him “like enchanted fish” (79). Though the affair is over the speaker has been living in fertile memory of the experience even while making love or washing plates. The poem’s stress on ageing is only marginal and its main thrust in on her desire to be possessed by love. In “Lines Addressed to a Devadasi” the poet says that
“Ultimately there comes a time / when all faces look alike /All voices sound similar” (1-3). None of her poems categorically emphasizes the exclusively spiritual nature of love. The mystical framework of the poems is a pretext. Whether Kamala Das seeks the “misplaced father” or the “beauteous Krishna,” it has no sufficient cause. Her love poems are only poor imitations of Meera’s hymns.

Deterioration of her marriage led Anne Sexton to seek sexual intimacy will with others. In her letter to Philip Legler she confessed:

My husband . . . hates poetry, hates my abundance, hates my sickness, almost always for years doesn’t desire me as a woman . . . he has continually informed me that I don’t attract him any longer . . . So your fullness, your acceptance came like a shock.

(Middlebrook 253-54)

The letter is a pointer to Anne Sexton’s frustration as a wife. Kayo was emotionally and psychologically incompatible with Anne. Being a businessman he could not adjust himself to be the husband of a rising poet. He rather wanted Anne Sexton to take up her poetry as a hobby. Anne Sexton, therefore, sought emotional fulfilment in the company of kindred souls of both sexes. Some of her intimacies developed into brief love affairs. These indiscretions must be judged in the light of the
patriarchal structure of society. Patriarchal civilization emphasized woman’s chastity and recognized male sexual freedom. The society restricts woman’s sexual love to the confines of marriage on the strength of its sacramental nature.

Anne Sexton’s sexually intimate friendships give her the warmth and security involved in Nana’s cuddles. Each of her lovers, including Ann Wilder, is a stand-in for Nana. But the brief affairs prove to be traumatic with the pain of inevitable separation. As in Thomas Hardy’s novels or in the fiction of Joyce Carol Oates, Anne Sexton’s love affairs end in violent separation due to the patriarchal constraints of family and marriage. But she is always the victim, the sufferer. Anne Sexton’s poem “The Break” is a tell-tale example of the violence involved in romantic love (CPS 190-93). Love, in Anne Sexton’s poetry, is accompanied by torment, frustration, anger and even death. The title of the poem signifies a double break: it is a physical as well as an emotional break, a broken hip and a broken heart. The speaker is at once conscious of the “violent heart that broke” and “the hip that was merely made of crystal.” The broken hip is an outcome of the broken heart: her fall is the result of her anger towards a deserted lover. The unspoken anger grows into destructive violence and explodes “like a pistol.” Anne Sexton artistically sublimes her anger to
create a poem. The poet repeatedly underlines the twin nature of the break which destroys the heart and the body of the speaker: “The fracture was twice. The fracture was double.” The emotional burden of the break of love is extremely painful for the woman; the speaker’s body will heal, but her “fractured heart” will not. In a patriarchal society it is the woman who bears the consequences of all disasters that accompany sexual or romantic love.

The poem “Again and Again and Again” reflects the conflict between the feminine traditional voice and the feminist, unconventional voice within the poet. The speaker makes a “vocation” (11) gender and falls a victim to man’s lust. She questions the traditional concept of her roles. Society perpetuates a false impression about femininity and feminine fulfillment. The patriarchal social order sits on her lips and purifies its evils. Though man cherishes woman’s love and patronizes her, he spurns her genuine anger: “It is old. It is also a pauper” (5). The speaker, however, emerges as a revolutionary and asserts woman’s equality and respect. Love takes a potentially destructive turn like the paradoxical love in Donne. Man exploits woman’s love for the sake of physical enjoyment and later repudiates the woman. Anne Sexton warns women that female submission to
romantic love has perilous consequences for the female order.

In the poem “For My Lover, Returning to His Wife,” the poet contrasts the roles of the wife and the Other-woman. The poem defines the wife and the speaker, the Other-woman, in relation to the husband-lover. The speaker chooses a smaller space and a lesser position for herself:

She is all there.
She was melted carefully down for you
and cast up from your childhood,
cast up from your one hundred favorite aggies.

(1-4)

Both the wife and the speaker are female objects for the use of the husband-lover. But the wife occupies a relatively solid position. The wife has “always been there” (5). She is “as real as a cast-iron pot” (8). She is “all harmony” (15). But the speaker is “momentary” (9). She is a transient “luxury,” (10) “a bright red sloop in the harbor” (11). She is only “an experiment” (15). The speaker expresses her loss and insignificance in a drained tone: “She is solid. / As for me, I am a watercolor. / I wash off” (46-48). This poem like “The Break” is motivated by the desertion of her therapist-lover.
Anne Sexton’s *Love Poems* exposes the dilemma of a woman poet who tries her hand at the conventional genre of love poetry. She sets sexual love at the social context in order to explain the dilemma. Anne Sexton believes that the marriage contract stabilizes the social order. She recognizes the internal conflict between love and hate, and between attraction and repulsion in the love poems. Love helps her to realize wholeness. But in many poems she emphasizes the predatory character of love affairs; in “Eighteen Days Without You *December 10th*” the lovers chase each other for fulfillment: they are “a pair of scissors / who come together to cut” (15-16). These poems consistently stress that love affairs as well as poetry writing are basically positive and creative experiences. They renounce social taboos in a positive sense of assimilation, though Robert Phillips in *The Confessional Poets* claims that *Love Poems* speaks “more of alienation than of conciliation” (82). The centre of gravity of the poems is a mother, a true rival who stands at the origin of the joy that a man gives a woman.

The Indian wife turns to her children for companionship and emotional fulfillment. She achieves freedom and power only among her children. She, therefore, considers the role of the mother as more significant than that of the wife. The worship of mother has been an integral part of Hindu civilization. The son
is a medium of self-expression for the Indian mother. A woman evokes respect as a mother which she fails to evoke as a wife. The self-worth and self-respect of a woman are protected through her son. Motherhood is a compensatory mechanism. Society can control and manipulate a woman by forcing her to take the motherly identity. Patriarchy exploits the symbolic paradigm of motherhood. Indian society inculcates in man an ambivalent attitude toward woman.

Every Indian woman celebrates the birth of a son. The Sanskrit equivalent of son is putra which means deliverer from hell. Though the meaning has a bearing on the deliverance of the soul, this is a significant pointer to the Indian reality. Kamala Das expresses maternal instincts and the joy of fulfillment in the birth of a son in her poem “Jaisurya.” The feelings that precede and follow childbirth assume a generic dimension in the poem which glorifies childbirth as a fulfillment of love. The persona involved in the loving act of creation finds meaning and fulfillment in her new role. Childbirth is also a psychological event with a cathartic effect. What matters to the mother is “the soft stir in womb, / the foetus growing” (4&5). The creative process of motherhood finds a parallel in the creative process of nature, and both again find an analogy in the creation of a poem. In the poem “Afterwards” Kamala Das stresses the
sense of belonging that she obtains from her son: “A man who let me take his name / To make me feel I belonged” (87&88).

Anne Sexton’s relationship with her daughters is very complex and they deserve analysis at various levels. She was, as already stated, a victim of the feminine mystique. Diane Wood Middlebrook gives a sociological interpretation to Anne Sexton’s misery as a wife and a mother. Anne Sexton’s “boy-crazy” adolescence ended in early marriage and birth of two daughters. But, the glorification of the feminine role did not give her any insight into the rearing of children. She could hardly find any satisfaction in homemaking. Though not good at mothering her daughters, Anne Sexton was anxious about their safety. The children were supposed to provide her with a sense of fulfillment as a woman. Instead, they made heavy demands on her emotions. They did not fulfill her eagerness for acceptance. The children required her to respond to their separateness. This conflict led her to bodily sufferings. She confessed to her doctor that she felt guilty about her desire to be a child and didn’t want to be a mother. Her feelings for her children didn’t surpass her desire to free herself from their demands on her emotions. Anne Sexton’s mental illness inevitably kept her away from her children for long intervals. Her poem “Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward” is framed on
her first hospitalization when Joyce was still a baby. She expressed the guilt of a mother’s separation from her daughter in the poem. A sense of poor motherhood as represented in the guise of an unwed mother forsaking her newborn babe is portrayed in the poem. Stressing the difference between motherly tie and motherly duty, Anne Sexton merges the experience of the “Unknown Girl” with her own emotional realities. Built on the conflict between love and pain, the poem reflects how the girl’s life is ruined by the callousness of the male lover and then made more miserable by the attitude of the males at the hospital.

The birthday poem for Linda, “Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Women” talks about a mother’s role in the daughter’s development into womanhood (CPS 145-48). The poet warns the daughter against men who, like wolves, exploit the changes of her body at her “second birth.” The poet’s anxiety at the sexual awakening of the daughter and the motherly apprehension at the possible consequences of such an awakening find vivid expression in the poem. She cautions the girl that male exploitation will lead to the destruction of her. In this poem and in the companion piece “A Little Uncomplicated Hymn” the poet celebrates the growing away of the children, and likens the relationship between the mother and the daughter to that between the poet and her poem. However,
in “Suicide Note” Anne Sexton highlights the tragedy of being a woman. She states that it is “far better / not to be born twice” (l2&l3). It is better not to be born a woman. In “The Double Image” the speaker splits herself between the doubles of her mother and her daughter. Having found it difficult to establish an identity for her, the speaker judges herself with the double images of mother and daughter. The speaker feels guilty about her attempt to piece her life together through double images. She believes that she got well because of her children. They made her feel herself. The poem “The Fortress” reveals the bitter sweet memory and dangerous hidden connections between mother and daughter. The poem explores the theme of community. The concept of family is powerfully presented in the poem. The title suggests a joint defense against the external threat. The poet creates images as a defense mechanism, as a kind of cure. The sleeping child’s wishes elude the mother. They are both cut off from an assured future:

Darling, life is not in my hands:
life with its terrible changes
will take you, bombs or glands,
your own child at
your breast, your own house on your own land.
Outside the bittersweet turns orange.
Before she died, my mother and I picked those
[fat
branches, finding orange nipples
on the gray wire strands.
We weeded the forest, curing trees like
cripples. (31-40)
Anne Sexton believes that the love between the mother and the daughter has greater redemptive power than any religious faith. The poet has a sense of her own value as a mother: "What ark / can I fill for you when the world goes wild?" (45&46) Though she “cannot promise” (50) that her daughter’s wish will be fulfilled, the poem emphasizes their domestic alliance, their togetherness, which forms a fortress against “the bombs” (33) of experience. The shared experience of the past is an abiding memory:

I give you the images I know. (52)

.............

we laugh and we touch.

I promise you love. Time will not take away that. ((59-60)
The poem, as Richard Morton in Anne Sexton’s Poetry of Redemption: The Chronology of a Pilgrimage remarks, “focuses on shared physical experiences” and hence the “imagery is particularly painstaking and vivid” (37). Mother-daughter relationships in Anne Sexton’s poetry incorporate feminine heritage and pain. Anne Sexton
thinks that her generation of mothers and daughters tend to be caught in a snare of guilt and mutual recrimination. Her poetic effort is directed to reverse the process for her own daughters, and by an extension, for all the daughters and all the mothers. Mother in Anne Sexton’s poetry is primarily an image of feminine body. Those mother-daughter poems in which the poet assumes the role of mother have a kind of dignified and holistic vision of female body.

The poetic sequence “The Jesus Papers” is a conceptually radical piece of art. It centres on the motif of the female to demystify the cultural ideology embodied in the myths. The male power, which is intrinsically violent, dominates the concentric worlds of personal life and society. Anne Sexton uses gender-saturated metaphors to attack the phallocentric culture. She not only derives a literary catharsis but also purifies her anger in the creation of the poetic sequence. The sequence begins with the most familiar images of Madonna and Child. The first poem “Jesus Suckle” celebrates the connection between the mother and the infant through the consciousness of the infant. Sensuous bliss generates abundant imagination:

I’m a jelly-baby and you’re my wife.
You’re a rock and I the fringy algae.
You’re a lily and I’m the bee that gets inside.

(6-8)
I’m a kid in a rowboat and you’re the sea,  
the salt, you’re every fish of importance.  

(11&12)

The infant-narrator corrects the myth twice. The last brief correction is thematically more important:

NO. No.  
All lies.  
I am a truck. I run everything.  
I own you. (20-23)

These lines are reminiscent of Anne Sexton’s apology in “Those Times.” But Anne Sexton’s “Jesus” is unapologetic; he is egoistically aggressive towards the feminine order represented by Madonna, Mary Magdaline and the speaker. The God-child denies freedom to the female world. He seizes power, rejects nature and transcends love. The poem differentiates Jesus from Mary and by extension from the speaker. Anne Sexton’s Jesus speaks with the extreme possessiveness of a male in a patriarchal society. His attitude changes his position from child–God to a mature man and that of Mary from Madonna to a subservient woman. It is as if the relationship plummets to the level of man–woman alliance. The concluding poem of the sequence “The Author of the Jesus Papers Speaks” confirms the failure of sensuous femaleness as a result of the manipulative skill of the male world. Masculine control
reduces every female species to the level of sacrificial victims:

   When the cow gives blood  
   And the Christ is born  
   We must all eat sacrifices  
   We must all eat beautiful women. (20-23) 

The poem is reiterates the patriarchal demand for submission couched in the guise of affection. Anne Sexton’s psychological necessities are painful. There is a sense of fated necessity that runs through the poem. The irony lies in the fact that although the speaker puts up a brave face, she is after all another beautiful woman who can be sacrificed. Anne Sexton seems to have a visionary insight by which she re-writes the history of the female. She tells the story of a woman poet in a manner that changes her life as well as those of others.