CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION: AN AUTHENTIC SELFHOOD

The convergence of literature and psychoanalysis in the postmodern discourse of today has blurred the boundaries between them. The interpretation of literature in terms of psychoanalysis enables us to discover the "conscious intentions" and "unconscious motivations" of the author. The entire spectrum of confessional writing is imbued with the existential angst and extremities of the neurotic perversions of the writers which are led by the unfulfilled psycho images of their life. The subjectivity of their writing helped them to create their own aesthetic paradise which re-shuffles the map of literature by exploring a new Byzantium for individual existence. By looking at the realities of being from a fresh angle, the subjective element is led towards the center which was until now marginalized in poetical domain. Moreover, the interplay of conscious, preconscious and unconscious mental processes provides layers of meanings in a text.

The sense of eternal torture has acutely troubled the man ever since the existence of humanity. It has led him towards the search for the roots of the meanings of emotions like dread, anguish, despair, fidelity, hope and love. From Saint Augustine to Genet, confessional writers have been engaged in defining their identity with respect to the reality of their personal experience. The outer world is a manifestation of the inner, turbulent psyche for these writers. Confessional art becomes a means of realizing the poet because it is a scientific approach which expresses the subdued emotions
like angst, anguish and suffering. Mental illness and mental breakdowns were the common theme, cause and underlying strain of confessional poetry. A heightened sensitivity to the human predicament in general, has led to a sharper sense of the pain of existence under even normal condition. Confessional poetry brings an order into the neurotic life of the poet with its psychological preview. Its self-motivation comes from an ardent desire to express the "inner consciousness."

The confessional poets share common subjects, a common vision, frequently a common tone and a common disclaimer to veracity. They use work-a-day language for the free outlet of emotions. But even in this emotional outpouring, a "holding-back" process goes on in poets' mind which helps them to eliminate or embellish the truth. Robert Lowell, the father of the confessional poetry of 1950s America, strikes a sympathetic cord with the lively objective reality that carries the conviction of a strong identity. He advocates a unified sensibility that can make sense out of the waste of accumulated experience. The search for the essence lies at the back of the Life Studies because the existence merely supplies the setting for such a search. The poems of his For The Union Dead sequence portray his self trapped in guilt complex, horror and lack of resources.

W. D. Snodgrass, a source of inspiration for Anne Sexton, wrote confessional poetry after the forced separation from his daughter. While in the Heart's Needle sequence, he writes about his wife and daughter, "Remains" poems describe about his father, mother and the memory of a sister dead at twenty-five. Theodore Roethke shares the suffering, the search
for an authentic self and guilt complex with which Lowell and Snodgrass suffer. His **Open House** identifies this quest and the green house poems of *The Lost Son* and *Other Poems* explore his personal past. Berryman's *77 Dream Songs* and *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* lay bare the anguish of his soul. Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton share the episodes of anguish and anxiety with these confessional poets. The search of existence, the angst of being and non-being, their psychic disturbances and their obsession created havoc in the lives of these two poets.

*Sylvia Plath* was deeply obsessed with her father and after his death, she became a schizophrenic, schizoid and paranoid personality who suffered with ambivalence and made several suicide attempts. A perceptive reading of her works reveal self-pits, self-hatred and self-criticism that led her to suicide. Being a non-conformist in her thoughts and actions, she hated and loved in extremes. Anne Sexton's courage of speaking truth made her one of the most distinctive voices in this generation's literature, and a figure of permanent importance to the development of American poetry. Like most of the poets who are labelled as confessional, Anne did not like the reductive implications of the term. But her books *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* and *Live or Die* reveal her mental traumas and the morbid sadness with which she suffered. Frustrated with the life, and the fear that she was losing her creativity, she committed suicide by Carbon Monoxide poisoning in 1974. Because Sexton spoke so urgently about her experience, the general public was intensely fascinated with her career. Her nervous breakdowns, her flamboyant risks and simple needs, her virtuosic craft and searing honesty,
all of these combined to make her poetry a vital document of a woman's life and of a poet's art.

The recapitulation of the relation between one's psychological past and present is unavoidable, therefore the agonizing emotions and angst of confessional poets, which decentered them, found vent in their poetry. The poems of Plath and Sexton are pervaded and illuminated by a matrix of psychological reality. The themes of impending doom and death and love-hate for their father are treated with unfailing regularity, but each time the themes are recorded with an increasing depth of feeling and artistic finesse. The confessional work of Plath and Sexton inform a pervasive sense of personal crisis. Their central experience is one in which the reality is depicted as schizoid and the self as being divided which is the state of "deluded existence." A deluding existence is very much similar to a schizophrenic's world where he is permanently alienated from all reality. When a person loses the sense of an authentic selfhood, nothing, even confessions appear to be authentic. The mental climate which helps in the perception of one's existence, expresses the notion of guilt as a weapon for enslaving men and deadening their creative powers for self-transcendence.

Art takes place within the dimensions of transcendence. It is a great privilege to understand, assess and re-search such two poets who have verbalized their malaise, their dilemma, with such factility and fineness even when they whine. At times they get indulgent and nostalgic but at other times, serious and poignant. Whatever the mask they use, the reader delights in this. The counteraction of the destructive forces of life by the creative forces
of art helps these writers to retain a hold over themselves, especially during the periods of depression and emotional and spiritual turmoil.

To communicate the consciousness of suffering to an audience that is already numbed to its own, is a task to demand one's authenticity from those who themselves are "unauthentic beings." Sexton and Plath convey it through the sense of continuously unfolding present moment. They want to convey the arbitrary, dark fate that hangs over \[ m \] The "I" in Sexton and Plath's work is always on the way toward a new state of being; their task is to externalize the self without mediation in the objects and processes of the outer world. The search for existence and individual freedom creates oneness among every general psyche of the world struggling between the essence and existence. The expression of self, the pain of love, the death-obsession, and the failure in love and marriage all lead toward the deterioration of the existence which is the central issue of the existentialistic confessional poetry. The poetry of Plath and Sexton is bound in the existential web of self's evolution, and romanticizes the search for identity involving death. The roots of their poetry are in their continuous efforts to reach a level of perception of oneself using all available material from one's immediate life, one's past as well as one's imaginative plunges into the unconscious.

Plath's "Water Color of Granchester Meadows" from her first collection, *The Colossus* defines existence as a form of contingency where each moment is a crisis. It describes her existential quest for authenticity. "The Ghost's Leavetaking" and "The Manor Garden" also explore different threats to existence. "Suicide Off Egg Rock" treats the connection between
the death and the sea in a complex manner and "Hardcastle Crags" again confirms Plath's search for identity. "Point Shirley," "The Colossus," "All The Dead Dears," "The Disquieting Muses," "The Bee-Keeper's Daughter," and "Full Fathom Five" are a means of escape from annihilation. In them, the death is represented as both the enemy of everything that the self loves and the ultimate escape from this painful life. The feeling of "existential nausea" which runs through Plath's poetry is according to Jean Paul Sartre, an expression of the contingency of existence.

Plath's and Sexton's poems reveal again and again their tremendous violent struggle to gain control of their psyche. Anne Sexton's poetry is a perfectly valid kind of poetry and is surely in keeping with the journey backward as well as with the one that probes the present and the future tense. Sexton's poems like "Her Kind," "For John, Who begs Me Not to Enquire Further," are documents of modern psychiatry. The title poem of Sexton's All My Pretty Ones, expresses her anguish on the loss of the lovingness through the death of her mother. "The Truth the Dead Know," which is an autobiographical account of her mother and her father's death within three months, manages to recover itself in the working out of her authentic idiom. In "The Operation," she writes about her mother, her mental sickness and her sense of the loss of being. "The Abortion" furthers her journey into the angst of her life that she failed to bring a new life into the world. Her poems like "For God While Sleeping," "In The Deep Museum," and "Letter Written on a Ferry While Crossing Long Island Sound" carry on her
journey in and out of the dark which appears like a flash of light on the gloomy landscape of Anne Sexton.

The poems of *Live or Die* are powerful meditations of a sensible person caught in the terrors of the modern world who has faced the nervous excitement and the existentialist trauma of this century. They are the expressions of the acute sense of entrapment and violation. Uneasy with her "femaleness," she views her motherhood as a means of redeeming her childhood, as a means of remaining a daughter. Uncertainty of her identity as a girl is a subject of most of her poems. According to Julia Kristeva norms, she celebrates her body in her writings and offers it rather than claiming it. Later, in "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator," she depicts herself angered, abandoned and betrayed because women seek their identity through sexual relationships and she found herself uneasy with the pressures of being a house-wife. Her alienation is defined by herself as witchery. Through the magic of words, she wants to revive a mode of *Being* which is fatally estranged from her. She intents on turning her wounds into words just to heal them up with the magic and true morality of her verse.

Anne Sexton's voice is that of a woman defiled by her own life. Dramatizing their emotions, Sexton and Plath gave life to the world outside the self, by means of these emotions, and in so doing often draw up into consciousness those aspects of the collective human self that would otherwise not be tapped. In her *The Colossus*, Plath discusses the nothingness of universe from which people have withdrawn leaving the world in the grip of dangerous fading shadows, the presences of "The Disquieting
Throughout the volume, the vulnerability of the poet's personality to hostile forces from within and without is at the core of her poems. "Poem for a Birthday," which is a sequence of seven poems combines the onrushing images of birth and death, fear and expectation, in her mind and relates them to the search for identity.

Plath's hospital poems of *Crossing the Water* such as "Face lift," "Insomniac," "The Surgeon at 2 a.m.," and "In Plaster," reflect her concept of body as a constructed piece. Plath has used the hospital experience as a metaphor to develop the inherent contradictions of human existence. Plath's last volume, *Ariel*, is a record of her confrontation with the various female roles and identities into which she had been split full of wrong leads and frustrated efforts. A. Alvarez considers that Plath is destroyed by her own existential quest, the quest of self-knowledge in which she heroically pursues the sources of her own inner torments. Her Lowell-like systematic exploration of the relation of anger, guilt, rejection, love and destruction, made her take her life.

Plath's poems "The Couriers," "The Applicant," and "The Jailer," dramatize the female victimization and suffering and give a negative representation of marriage. Within the context of her own struggle for survival, Plath's personae embody extravagant versions of her desire for self-creation and self-alteration which she achieves through a new form of existence, by changing herself into a vampire-killer as she indicates in "Daddy." This works as a poetic strategy to establish an authentic existence. The "Bee-Poems" also explain her divided self in between the conflicting
demands of her husband's estrangement and the children's presence. To prove her worth, she has to assert herself against a mounting sense of inadequacy. Her search for Queen-bee is a search for her "authentic self" but the queen-bee, with whom she identifies herself, is an "unauthentic being."

Plath and Sexton's poetry is filled with the exposure of their nostalgia, ambivalency and psychic pains through the various psychological images they employed in their poetry. The psychological framework of once fulfilled ecstasy creates a heightened sense of the existing sensibilities. Images are produced by the buried "complexes," the wishes which were forbidden to enter consciousness by the censor. Substitute images are produced by the unconscious wishes so that they may be accepted. Many morally reprehensible wishes are constantly repressed because they contravene social norms and values that the individual has been forced to accept. Plath and Sexton had repressed their wishes which brought about the production of various psychological images in their poetry. Psychological images are drawn from the deeper portions of the mind which are sources of wisdom. For creating images, the quality of the unconscious varies with the individual, and depends upon the stored experiences of the individual. The reader can secure his own personal gratification through the psychological images that a poet uses. Psychoanalysis interprets them in vast patterns of hermeneutics.

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton were diagnosed as typical Hysterics. The repressed self-love and "father-complex" brought their "dissociation" and came out as psychological images of Narcissism, Electra-complex, Colossus
and Lazarus in their poetry. The use of their life in their poetry is an effort to bring together the divergent aspects of their experiences. Ambivalent attitudes which result in loneliness and disaster are the outcome of the dissatisfaction with life and family and the loss of dearest ones. There is a recurrence of psychoanalytic terminology and symbolism in Plath and Sexton's poetry and their thematic interest is in dealing with the various workings of what Freud termed the "family romance."

In their poetry, history and myth combine in such a way that the mythic and psychoanalytic aspects of it become more immediate than the real history of it. They have personalized the myths in their poetry by imparting them a value of being "psychological images". The myth of Electra's love for her father, the myth of the vastness of the Colossus statue, the myth of the Narcissus' self-love and the re-birth of Lazarus, have been used as images in their poetry. There is a conscious use of "mythic aspects" in the poetry of Plath and Sexton. In Plath's poem, "Electra on Azalea Plath," Plath quotes the classical myth of the Electra's revenge from her mother who is responsible for the death of Electra's father. She presents the mythic constructedness of past. In "Fever 103°," "Lady Lazarus," and "Daddy," she combines history and myth in an uneasy partnership. While Daddy's speaker is positioned in a mythic-psychoanalytic framework, in "Fever 103°," it moves towards some sort of cathartic transformation.

psychological image. The Electra complex with which Plath suffers, becomes evident in "The Colossus," "The Bee-Keeper's Daughter," and the poems like "Daddy," "Full Fathom Five," "The Eye-Mote," "I Want, I Want," "Purdah," and "The Bee-Sequence." This complex coloured her relationship with her mother by the incestuous daughter's vision. Sigmund Freud envisages Electra complex as a biological phenomenon which inhibits normal mental development in a female. Plath reduces it to the level of a metaphor through her conscious self-analysis. In her poem "Daddy" she even creates a psychological image of Patricide. She becomes a vampire-killer and kills her father and husband.

The poem "Little Fugue" too, expresses the Electral image where she calls her father "the dark funnel" through which she looks at her own Electral image and yearning for father. The conflicting attitudes apparent in "Full Fathom Five" have Electral overtones. Her poems may be considered as self-conscious master-pieces which aim to prove them to the father within it, who is in control of all the mythic and literary symbols which he both symbolizes and to which he has access. In the poem, "The Eye-Mote," she expresses her Electral feelings as well as her unsuccessful desire to come out of the Electral entrapment. Moreover, the poem "I Want, I Want" also expresses her phallic fixation. Her unnerving father fixation as well as the twisting of various images in psychological mode continues in her poem "The Arrival of the Bee-Box" which suggests the inner turmoil in her life. Besides Colossus and Electral myths, Lazarus myth is also treated in Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus"
and the Narcissus myth is treated as well with her existential brag of 'I am, I am, I am'.

Anne Sexton also has treated Electra! myth in all her collections. In the poem "The Moss of His Skin" from To Bedlam and Part Way Back, she expresses her love for Daddy in the burial with the dead. The title poem of her second volume All My Pretty Ones, manifests her Electra image again. While Plath mourns and hates her father, Anne Sexton forgives him and keeps his diary preserved to love and look at later. "Young" expresses her loneliness as a child. "In the Beach House" from her third collection, Live or Die, expresses her Electra complex through the psychological image of Royal strapping which has a therapeutic effect. In "Cripples and Other Stories" she writes a love song for her doctor and pleads her father's love. While Love Poems treat her psychic images in domestic details, Transformations echo the voice of her own heart and the psychic images formed in her mind. The poems of The Book of Folly express her childhood memories mixed with sexual fantasies and the psychological images related to it. The poems like "The Death of Fathers," "How We Danced," "The Boat," and "Santa" reflect her Electra impulse.

Besides these psychological images, there is a creation of "Double" or the "Mirror image" in their poetry which is an expression of one's guilt or anxiety and is at least a temporary appearance of relief from the disintegration of the soul. Far more than the Narcissus myth, this image becomes a figure of jouissance. The mirror stage in a child's life is the narcissistic love stage when he jubilates at the recognition of his whole
image by creating the mirror images of himself in the persons he loves as well as hates. This imagistic love, when related to the mother is fraught with danger. In her poem "Housewife" Sexton considers this resemblance of image, this mirror reflection, as a trap. All the seven sections of her poem "The Double Image" are skillfully bound by recurring double images where she searches her own identity and authenticity in the identities of her daughter and her mother, whom she creates as her mirror images. These double images, when focused into a single one, make the connections and resemblances valuable. Her poem "Pain for a Daughter" also confronts the vital connections between women-mothers and daughters when they are alone in themselves. In "The Division of Parts," she wrestles with her mother in an outraged voice for she gave her own identity to Anne Sexton.

Plath and Sexton were the cases of schizophrenic, schizoid and paranoid all rolled in their single self. The self-pits, self-hatred and self-criticism that they revealed in their poetry and which led them towards their suicide is a result of their narcissistic and schizoid personalities. According to Freud, sexual component is decisive in the development of both normal and pathological behaviour. Their obsession-compulsions, paranoia and narcissism are the outcomes of childhood conflict while the actual neuroses such as hypochondria, neurasthenia and anxiety neurosis are due to the problems in the present.

Narcissistic obsession makes a person a paranoid who is never able to get out of himself. When the confessional poets express their own feelings and anxieties, pains and anguishes, they intend to reflect their visions
penetrating into the heart of darkness which is the predicament of modern society. "Mirror Stage" theory of Jacques Lacan is similar to Narcissism. Plath and Sexton had put their perceptions to the very edge of the tolerable. Sylvia Plath was father fixated at the oral stage and his loss made her forget her own sexual identification. Like Thomas De Quincey, she examines humanity through subjective experiences and "Daddy," "Lady Lazarus," "Fever 103°," "Getting There," and "Mary's Song" all suggest that autobiographical element.

Anne Sexton also has an intense fascination with her preoccupations, with her victimized, angst ridden, bullying, and narcissistic self. Her poetry is the poetry of the nerves and heart. She is painfully direct and refuses to keep her meaning at a tolerable distance. She is caught in a uniquely feminine trap of simultaneously celebrating herself, exploiting herself, letting herself be exploited, and apologizing for herself. Her poems, "To Bedlam and Part Way Back," "You, Doctor Martin," "Kind Sir! These Woods," "Music Swims Back to me," "Some Foreign Letters," "Her Kind," and "The Double Image" reflect her narcissistic self-love which led her towards her neurotic perversions.

Indeed, the artists like Plath and Sexton avoid surrender to the unconscious and are unable to adapt themselves with reality. They create their own reality. They are cases of obsession-compulsion and are torn apart between conflicts. They require others to realize their own credentials and when that realization is not made, they lose their self-confidence as Anne Sexton suffered from her 'leaky ego' during a European travelling fellowship. Moreover, Plath's suicide is an outcome of this phobia. Phobia is a regression
to childhood; therefore, all the perversions of Plath and Sexton were to be traced in childhood. The psychic conflict of the artist is a result of dissonance between consciousness and the unconscious; and the roots of creativity are found in the unconscious. Though whole life is a constant interplay of unconscious sexual drives and conscious decisions, childhood sets the stage for what a person becomes. Plath's effort to come up to the standards of everyone, and Sexton's inability to adapt with the social demands, led them towards their psychological crises.

Poetry acts as a valve to the unconscious, reducing its pressure by providing it with a specific form of discharge. Being a result of the unconscious, the composing of poems informs about the deepest desires, darkest obsessions, and the most strongly blocked-out memories. The images in the poems are like Freudian slips which lay bare their other, darker dimensions. Even the "free-associations" of the poet, lead to the unconscious intentions of the poet, if interpreted correctly. Id drives which exist in a person before the development of a conscious personality provide a necessary counterweight to the super-ego drives. They are the forces behind society. The lustful, aggressive and anti-social id-drives cannot be repressed but can be converted into cultural activities like writing novels, plays, poems and paintings. According to Freudian perspective, deep down all of us are monsters and we constantly repress many wishes because they are morally reprehensible; but the unsuccessful attempt at repression gives rise to sexual tensions and hysterical symptoms.
Hysteria is a result of the suppressed wishful impulses which have found a new outlet known as hysterical conversion. Though one constantly repress things, the failure to repress successfully, gives rise to hysteria and the best solution is to abandon the vain attempts at repression and confront the wishful impulses as Plath and Sexton had done by writing their poems on Father-love, menstruation, masturbation and physical relations.

Transference, which according to Freud, is a dream-mechanism and a more pervasive phenomenon for controlling the human behaviour, is a specific element in therapeutic technique. The actions, which are triggered by particular questions or issues or events, are known as "transference-induced actions." Anne Sexton's run for her child after reading W. D. Snodgrass' Heart's Needle; and Sylvia Plath's love for Ted Hughes because of his resemblance to her father are transference-induced actions.

Plath's poems like "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" present a dramatic resolution to explosive inner traumas involving murderous and suicidal fantasies. Because Plath was an obsessive-compulsive, ambivalence ruled her life as a dominant passion. She was always tempted by the "mutually-exclusives." The hiatus that existed between her real ability and others' expectation of her was the cause of the omnipresent ambivalence and conflict in her life. As a matter of fact, the lives of both Plath and Sexton were torn apart in obsessions and compulsions. Suffering a double conflict, with the opposition of Id towards ego and the antagonism of Ego towards Super-ego, they faced the agitation and ambivalence which aggravated and exacerbated their life. They thought that their compulsive art would have a
therapeutic effect on their insanity but their suicides proved it wrong. Because the work of Plath and Sexton is in the nature of psychological catharsis, they were unable to maintain the aesthetic distance between their art and life.

Contrary to Plath, Sexton deals with neurosis as a secular theme without romanticizing it. The poetry of "mental illness" ascribes its largest part to the poetry of Sexton. She created a spacious mythopoesis for the uniquely twentieth century form of spiritual healing and 'psychic epistemology' represented by psychoanalysis. Along with Freud's theories, the theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva are also applicable on her poems. While her early poetry was Freudian, her work after Transformations became distinctly Jungian as it assumes the existence of a 'collective unconscious' offering a poetic synthesis of the differing development phases within psychoanalysis. Sexton herself admits that her first book gives the experience of madness and her second book gives the causes of madness; in her third book she finds that she was deciding whether to live or die and in her fourth book she not only lived but loved that sometime miracle. Her poems have a cathartic effect on the reader because as James Dickey puts it, they have a 'sickeningly frightening appropriateness to our time.'

Sexton's To Bedlam and Part Way Back excavates her unstable past, her asylum life and retreat from it, and the old responsibility and threats. "You, Dr. Martin" and "Ringing the Bells" give a direct feel to restlessness and horrors of asylum life. Sexton tried to heal herself through the auto-analysis of her creative activity. Her "Music Swims Back to Me" takes the
reader again in her nostalgic world of pain and loneliness. Along with these poems, "Said the Poet to the Analyst" express her neurotic anguish. "Some Foreign Letters" and "Elizabeth Gone" express her grief, guilt and obsession with her Nana—her great aunt. They express her own ambivalent response to her inability to save her Nana. In the poem "Her Kind," she expresses her loneliness and disapproval of herself by identifying herself with three kinds of women."Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward" expresses her pain on the loss of her daughter through the guilt complex of an unwedded mother. "The Double Image" is an extension of this complex. "Lullaby" and "Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn" reveal the limits of paranoia and her experiences of her furious tours of the wards.

In "The Lost Ingredient:" her attempt to restore the time reflects the universal phenomenon of getting it back. "For John, Who begs Me Not to Enquire Further" is a continuation of her attempt to extend the past and present into each other. It is addressed to her discouraging teacher John Holmes, as well as to the critic in herself. Like any committed artist, Sexton searches for that "sense of order" in life which gives a form to experience and transform "commonplaces" into art. "The Double Image" and "The Division of Parts" explore her discoveries and unresolved dilemmas and are structured to dramatize the privacies of her life."The Double Image" celebrates the liberation from her mother's image and intermingling forces of life and death.

Her next book, All My Pretty Ones, indicates how her poetry serves the therapeutic requirement. "Old Dwarf Heart," "The Abortion," and "The
"Operation" suggest Sexton's pre-occupation with sentimentality. "The Abortion" is an expression of guilt for aborting the baby. "The House" drifts back over her dream-distorted childhood.

*Live or Die* is the record of four years of mental illness, the turns of fear and despair and suicidal depression. Her poetry is either the poetry of a monstrous self-indulgence hence becoming despicable or it is a documentation of neurosis. Her verse stunningly reveals the poetry of psychic disturbance in all its frightful fluctuations between terror and clarity. Her entire career is submerged in her own past and the depiction of her madness. Her poem "Flee on Your Donkey" describes one of Anne Sexton's sojourns in a mental hospital. The facts that she had explored in *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* have been realized here in their total ugliness which is all involved with her own madness.

Though suffering with neurosis, Sexton's poems are the last testament of a gifted and widely recognized American poet. In "Consorting with Angels," she expresses her frustration for being imposed with 'femaleness.' At the expense of her poetry, she has gained the status of a priestess who celebrates her mysteries. In her poem "For the Year of the Insane," she struggles valiantly to escape what she is, to transcend her condition. Her past is a nightmare of grisly proportions, but she cannot evade its urgent appeals to her consciousness. "Those Times" recounts the humiliations of her childhood marked by early sexual distress. "Walking in Paris" is an attempt to retrace the journey of her great aunt Nana both to solve the riddle of other people and her own origins. She loses her identity and submerges
with Nana's Paris. "Self in 1958" portrays her search for reality but in this quest, her own self is mechanized into a plaster doll.

The anguish projected by *Live or Die* is profoundly disturbing precisely because its sources are effable, because the pressure of fantasy has been permitted to distort or mediate the poet's vision. Sexton considers "Cripples and Other Stories" as an evidence of hate poem, though she could never write a poem like Plath's "Daddy" which is full of extreme hatred. Sexton is confused even about her father. Mystified by tenderness, apparent genuine displays of affection and whispers of love, she becomes a 'child-woman.' However, the insolence of Plath's "Daddy" is somehow caught by Sexton's poem "The Addict." In Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton's poetry, the passion to punish, to point an unswervingly accusatory finger, is everywhere balanced by a conviction of personal failure, by an altogether remarkable complexity in single lines, where one cannot be too hastily disposed to make absolute judgements. In spite of the merciless dissection of Sexton's mother and Plath's father in their poetry, with a simultaneously obsessive and self-conscious objectivity, there is a strange admixture of pervasive sorrow, regret for an intimacy that might have flourished.

Sexton's struggles become more representative and relevant as she struggles against anonymous oppressors. She retains an attitude of sardonic anger, like that in the later poems of Plath, which is not only towards her but also towards a world which will not help her. This Plathian sardonic streak intermittently erupts as a peculiarly laughable and bitter form of self-
mockery as in "The Addict" where she describes herself as 'the queen of this condition,' 'on a diet from death,' 'something of a chemical mixture / That's it!'

Anne Sexton has indeed become a grotesque spectacle, as unbearable to herself as she must be to others. The irony, the mockery creates a distancing which makes tolerable, what is too painful to contemplate. She is intent on finding ways to think and feel about the female body- in heterosexual, homosexual, even onanistic contexts. Especially concerned with sexual, extramarital relations with men, much of her poetry is charged with the energy and tensions that come from those relations. "The Breast" expresses her ambivalency and obsession with the limitations of the body, its failure to be equal to the demands of the soul, especially the failure of the female to be equal to her unbalanced idea of herself, mother, daughter, beloved, 'tiny jail,' the poet who cries out 'my sex will be transfixed!' In "In Celebration of My Uterus," she celebrates herself, her being a woman and the specificity of her womanness.

Anne Sexton has been criticized for the intensities of her preoccupation of the self, the victimized, bullying, narcissistic self, half in love with sickness and madness and her own 'violent heart.' "Eighteen Days Without You," the last poem in Love Poems, defines Sexton within and outside the natural world in the absence of her husband. Though the feeling of loss, resentment, depression, excitement, and the glory of return is expressed, it is not a poem of a fierce nostalgia. Her return to her husband is explained with such images that are part of a restored sense of life, human and natural, passionately, wistfully true. Transformations, her next book, is a series of
fairy tales and discusses lesbian relationships and father-complex. In the poems, "Nana-Hex," "The Frog-Prince," and "Briar-Rose," she has explored what it means to be a woman in terms of another woman. "The White Snake," "Iron Hans," "One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes," "The Wonderful Musician," "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," and "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" are outposts of psychosis creating a narrative on insanity from the inside. Freud discusses them as screen memories which are the survivals of persistent human conflicts and desires. Her next book, The Book of Folly, represents herself as a visionary who rejects world's foolish fools for the unworldly wise fools to whose rank the poet has always made some claim. In this book, she becomes nostalgic and turns to her family. Through the poems, "Oysters," "How We Danced," "The Boat," "Santa," and "Friends," she exposes her Electra feelings. To describe fully the darker conflicts of the self without slipping over into the strident voice of confession or the sobbing note of self-pity requires high control at every conscious and unconscious level. Her work illuminated at a deeper level, the part that is in every one of us.

Anne Sexton writes from the center of feminine experience with the direct and open feeling that women, always vulnerable, have been shy of expressing in recent years. In all the books of Anne Sexton, there are such revelations of pain and loss which are extraordinary. Her books serve as an intensely private record of a life hungering for madness and stalked by great loves, the getting and spending of privileged moments and suffered years. The terrible urgency of the poems invites, contradictorily, such disappointments which are felt only with strong poets. In most of her poems,
she struggles for survival, piece by piece of the body, step by step of poetic experience. Her entire life sprung from the matrix of parental madness.

According to Freud’s theories everyone does not manage to find a balance between inner urges and social demands. Sometimes people fail to repress the things they unconsciously wish to repress, and the strangulated affects make it difficult to identify the roots of a person’s problems, and hence result in suicide. Freud proposes that in physical evolution man advances towards future with a desire to capture the past memory of the infancy for which he invents and creates things so that he may achieve completion and the option is, ‘either to love or to die.’

Albert Camus says that there is one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. A person who dies voluntarily recognizes instinctively the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living. Through a bold acceptance of death, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton have imagined liberation from time. The consciousness of death is the call of anxiety and through the intermediary of consciousness only the existence delivers itself. Their poetry is a personal process which demonstrates the initial metaphorical transformation of the environment into the world of death and reflects a transformation of the self from a state of symbolic death to the rebirth. The private obsession and disorientation of the artists become normalized in their poems which are organized into a structure outside themselves, with layers and layers opening to the world of experience. The instincts of love and death, Eros and Thanatos, find their disguised expression in the poems of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Their
poems represent the split nature of their universe. They talk about
destructive parents, death-haunted generations and innocent children.

Freud considers human life as a theatre of operations where the battle
between Eros and Thanatos keeps battling for supremacy. Plath's and Sexton's
poetry link up love immediately with death because the horror of
bereavement is basic to love. Both Plath and Sexton have given importunate
and macabre, gothic and placental treatment of love and death. They are
obsessed with the limitations of the body and with its failure to be equal to the
demands of the soul. In most of their poems, they have worked for the
survival against death-like torments and death itself. Love is a struggle
against death. It keeps fresh, charged and overwhelmed with the forces of
life. The moment one ceases to create ourselves afresh and ceases to love, and
in a way, one ceases to exist. Due to the frustrations in life, Plath and Sexton
wooed death. In their world, love and death form part of the same reality.

Sylvia Plath's and Anne Sexton's poetry reflects one aspect of the
seismography of love. They utter the modern love in their poems. Love, in
their poems, always poses basic existential questions and ends up in a "to be
or not to be kind of conflict" and a struggle for the authenticity in life. Love as
a threat to death, and death as a threat to love are philosophical questions, to
which poetry answers partially.

Suicide is symbolic of the psychic disorder and death is a manifesto of
change. The suicides of both the poets are, in fact, the outcome of the defeat
of the human beings who found it impossible to "suffer any longer the
separation and isolation of their self." Both Plath and Sexton are obsessed
with the diametrically opposite powers of annihilation and salvation. Eros, the love-instinct and Thanatos, the death-instinct are the parallel strains in Plath’s and Sexton’s works.

Plath expresses antithetical attitude towards existence, alternately speaking for life and against it. At one moment, the poems become expressions of power and vitality; in the next they are suicidal and self-negating embodying negative vitalism. The poems of Anne Sexton are also dedicated towards the sanctity of life and its romance with love. The things between this Eros and Thanatos are deception, abdication and guilt. In love for death, life is betrayed; in love for suicide, body is betrayed; and the beloveds betray by leaving alone. The person rejected in love opts for death. The need for love results in the losing of mental balance and such need is a guilt which results in death.

Anne Sexton’s poems in different volumes express her guilty love and the desired death especially the volume *Live or Die* reflects her obsessions with her body’s limits and her search for reconciliation through love. Sylvia Plath’s *The Colossus* manipulates the thematic opposition between a negative vision of death and a positive pattern of self-transformation. The idea of reticence and self resistance that conflicts with the essentially volatile personal subject matter, dominates this volume. The delicate mysteries of love embedded in the slow rhythm of decay are so patiently realized that they radiate an immediate willingness to touch the reader. "Two Views of a Cadaver Room," "Suicide Off Egg Rock," "Full Fathom Five," "Blue Moles," "Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbour," "Medallion," and "The Burnt Out Spa" are
beautiful descriptions of Plath's visions of death; whether a suicide-wish or a suicide-attempt. "All the Dead Dears" represents family as a loving group whom death destroys and whom she wishes to recover. "Moonrise" expresses Plath's faith in the process of birth after many images of death and pain. It releases personal images of death in a dynamic way as Plath works towards a resolution of the death-fear, allowing her to see her experience as part of a recurrent pattern in nature.

"Medallion" assigns all those negative qualities to the dead snake that Plath normally assigns to the dead; hardness, blankness and inertness. "Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond" is Plath's identification with a nonhuman form of life and affirms a cycle of death and rebirth that moves from winter to spring and back again. "The Stones" provides a fitting end to the thematic drama of the volume, the poet herself becomes stone, the death had trapped the poet's self too; hence a dissolution of her authenticity. It turns the drama of petrification into the self's own struggle.

"The Stones" contains typical Plath imagery in its use of stones and pebbles to indicate the world of death and childbirth and babies to symbolize the presence of life. The last line of "The Stones," "I shall be good as new" which is the final line of the volume _The Colossus_, identifies the root cause of her malady, the inability to find a language of love. It becomes even more discursive as it bears a testimony to two contradictory emotional desires: to be reborn into a totally 'new' self and to retain the 'old' self with its hatred for itself and all others. Finally, the speaker is brought back from the womblike state. The poems after _The Colossus_ envision form as a way of shaping the
conflicting personal forces of the self. While in "The Stones," love offers electric current, in "Morning Song" the love with its positive image is aided by the midwife's slap, that bring forth the bald cry to take its place among the elements.

"Tulips" is a monologue spoken by a woman in a hospital bed in which she reduces herself into an inanimate object and finds the winter world of the hospital desirable with its enveloping whiteness. The perception of correspondence between the tulips and her own hurt indicate her existential fear. Her loss of identity is the result of this existential predicament. Her feeling of guilt and her personal past, render her the sense of authenticity. By identifying her hurt, the poet is able to transform it into a unique experience that will give her a sense of identity and individuality.

In Plath's "Elm," the feminine voice of the spirit of the tree is entangled and confused like the Plath's personal relationship with Ted Hughes. The tremendous strain of the separation, the misery of the imagined abandonment and the rage of jealousy and hatred that is inspired, had the immediate effect of arousing her poetic energies. "Ariel" employs the image of the crying child to indicate the reduction of self to its original, preadult state.

The evolution of Sylvia Plath's muse is a sign of the growth and clarification, of her peculiar awareness of the burden of her life in the whole context of modern existence. This poem reflects how the exhilaration of swift movement on horse back or the mere idea of it suggests to her every other kind of ecstatic movement and life awareness. This poem moves from statis
in darkness, "substanceless" to the "cauldron of morning;" Death in Plath's world, can be either self laceration or salvation, agony or peacefulness. For her, death is a kind of spirit or god who incarnates himself in the objects and forms of the world; a man visiting her in the hospital, with lidded eyes, a scald scar of water, and voracious desires. "Death & Co.," views the two aspects of the death as the businessmen who have come to pay a courtesy call. Failed relationships and the breakdown in communication are the themes that are heavily underscored and Plath's mastery of dynamics enables her to escape the almost inert heaviness of "The Disquieting Muses." "Nick and the Candlestick" dramatizes various images to suggest the world of death. The images suggest a world of death in which all familiar objects have been transformed into hostile ones. "Getting There" is one of her most openly anguished death poems. It participates in the violence of history, the biological holocaust, and reflects her existential yearning.

"A Birthday Present" is a fascinating contrast to "Fever 103°" which is an obsessive focus on the birthday present brought by the speaker's friend. "The Munich Mannequins" and "Totem" represent the two vivid impressions of the world of death and confront the dead void of space. "Getting There," portrays a cosmic voraciousness and clearly renders Plath's agony in the face of a cannibalistic universe. In "Poppies in July" she reflects her fascination with blood. "Contusion," "Edge," and "Words" also connect death with absorption and water. In "Edge" the suicide that is implicit in "Contusion" and "Kindness" becomes rather explicit. The inner violence that occasions the poetry and the poetry that sustains her life become one. Death
is seen as satisfying. The woman at the end of Ariel has accomplished far more than the woman who considers herself at the end of The Colossus, "The vase, reconstructed, houses / The elusive rose." [CO 84]. Whatever method of dying has been used by Plath, she confronts a structural obstacle to any attempt at overcoming the dualism of self and world.

Anne Sexton also reflects the decaying existences, desire and love for death, but there is a difference that ultimately she completes her vision of death in the awful rowing towards God's kingdom. Anne Sexton, distorted into an alienated individualism, strives for purity, integrity, love and energy. There are many times when one has to face death-like existence in life and the person is pushed towards a vacillation between the belief and disbelief and the identities are at stake. Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton were good friends, and their togetherness led them towards the intensity of the suicidal element in their poetry. Anne Sexton's suicide was the result of her intense struggle with her own self that dissolved the precarious aesthetic distance between creativity and self-destruction. "You, Doctor Martin," the first poem of her first volume, To Bedlam and Part Way Back, reflects along with her madness, her indication of herself on the verge of death. There is a menacing flat accent of life-in-death in the poem "Ringing the Bells," where self is reduced to an almost infantile regression. "The Double Image" is the poem about the poet's suicide attempt, the death of her mother by cancer and about her guilt complex regarding her child. It was the dissolution of distance between Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath's identity which added powerfully to her malaise. All My Pretty Ones is a continuation of the themes of death and ruin, guilt and
morality. "The Truth the Dead Know" is an account of the death by cancer of her mother and her father three months later. Dedicated to her parents, the poem is a recuperation of soul in working out of her personal idiom.

"The Operation" written after the death of her mother expresses her anguish after the death of mother and her own desire to die. Its not the death of someone she knows dying which forces her into a vision but her own realization of the death fact, her own madness at it. Making use of her personal grief, Anne Sexton drags the reader into her individual experience to feel one by it. "Old," writes about the beginning of the death-dream inside her. Live or Die [1966], the Pulitzer Prize winner book of Anne Sexton reveals her search for reconciliations, her obsessions with the limits of the body and its failures to be equal to the demands of the spirit. In "Somewhere in Africa" which is an elegy for John Holmes, she writes her own vision of death and God. Her imaginative vitality redeemed her death vision from both terror and perversity. In "Sylvia's Death" she nevertheless depicted her own and her dear friend Sylvia's suicidal longings with sardonic good humour. In "For the Year of the Insane" she feels that the hour of her death is approaching near and "Menstruation at Forty" again reclaims her death wish and that too on her birthday.

In 'Wanting to Die' she expresses her intense belief that suicides are special people like Sylvia Plath and she herself is. Leaving everything as it is, suicides leave the world, leaving a lot to be said, a lot to be understood. Suicidal impulse waits for the poet to commit the act to undo that old hurt which has been hurting her since years. In the manner of suicide, one would
easily get oneself free from the prison of this physical form; and when two suicides meet to discuss their visions of authentic selfhood through death, as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton did, they abdicate all other things in life.

"The Addict" is another poem in which she writes about her desire for death and her addiction for sleeping pills along with the self-promise for death. The poem "Live" is really a poem to make a decision about her own life. Anne Sexton's Love Poems examine love in it many guises: sensual, filial, adulterous self, and portray the impossibility of reciprocal love which shows the loneliness of the individual. "The Touch," "The Kiss," "Suicide Note," "Loving the Killer," "For My Lover, Returning to His Wife" portray the triumph of true and legal love. In "It is a Spring Afternoon," she concludes that, as death is the way of the natural world, so time and nature are restorative. "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator," provides a solitary solution to such intense frustration and loss. "Mr. Mine" asserts that one reason of the impossibility of lasting love is the egotism implicit in every sexual act. "Eighteen Days Without You," explains her wait for death. In The Book of Folly, she explains in the poem "The Silence" that she is haunted by the silence. She compares this silence with the eternal silence of death and is shocked by it.

Anne Sexton's 'narcissistic' preoccupation with death which started its manifestation from To Bedlam and Part Way Back gets fully surfaced in The Death Notebooks. The poem "For Mr. Death Who Stands With His Door Open," displays her obsession with death. Though both Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath wrote of the cruelty of life and the cruelty of the people, particularly the unkind nature of their parents, yet unlike Sylvia Plath,
Sexton seems always to have been asking to be forgiven. In 'The Death Baby', she writes in the "SevenTimes" about her recurring death seven times and the experience of getting rolled over by it. In the poem "Madonna" of "The Death Baby" she writes about her mother's death. In the last books, Anne Sexton has expressed herself more and more obsessed with death in a strangely religious way. This obsession made her lose control of the language at the same time that she lost control of her life. Throughout her poetry, she tried to identify the grapes and the thorns and to decide which one to choose. For her, thorns were tempting, not only for their obvious suicidal attraction, but, as one version of sexual identity.

Most of the poems in her The Death Notebooks are meditations on her own death. They tend to fantasize forward rather than remember back. The concerns of these poems are always the human intricacies of need and belief, and their context is Sexton's need for belief and her inability to believe, as that dilemma interacts with her relationship to herself and others, the dead and dying.

Anne Sexton's biggest enemy was her own mind which led her into dangerous, sometimes thrilling places, away from love of herself, away from life but if she had not led such a dramatic and tragic life, and if Robert Lowell's pioneering 'confessional' writing had not preceded her, her achievement of the authentic idiom to realize herself, would had been impossible.

Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath have been called as the poets of suicide by their critics. But the reality is that their poems embody not only their faith
in the transforming powers of art but also their despair of altering their psychological condition and their relation to others. Death, as well as love is manifested as adventures in their poetry, which bear the risk of extinction. On the whole, love and death, though being contrary human drives have a common denominator. Offering alternative visions of life, both are a comment upon and a creative distortion of reality. Love immortalizes the lovers and the moments in memory and do not always remain at war with death. Death is only an individual reality, something as private and as individual, as love. The end of love is the end of life but only for the individual, not for the collective self. In fact, there is a tragic-comic uncertainty about semantic boundaries in the arbitrariness and absurdity of the authenticity of selfhood. This reality makes the men all the more lonelier, shattering its authentic self and allowing the self-negation to spread from the inner self outward to the other; and ultimately to the entire cosmos engulfing all in the terrains of mysterious love that proves fatal and dissolves the self.