

Literary history, interpretation, and analysis



Othering is used to establish a binary opposition between the Self and the Other, so as to establish and maintain the power of the Self by stigmatizing and isolating the Other. Othering stems from all forms of differences, such as racial, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and geographical differences.

Otherness is a significant concept in postcolonial studies as the imperial authority labels the colonized as the Others in order to exercise power over them. Othering is also common in the society where people label people based on stereotypes and see their own practice as the best way.

In Anne Sexton's "Her Kind," the narrator identifies herself as an Other but at the same time celebrates her Otherness in the last stanza. The poem represents Otherness through vivid imagery of women who are associated with the evil forces in fairy tales and myth. For example, the narrator refers to herself as "a possessed witch" (line 1) and a woman who "fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves" (line 11). Sexton uses words and phrases like "black," "lonely thing," and "disaligned" to represent how the Other is isolated from the mainstream because the narrator of the poem "is not like a woman" (6) and "is misunderstood" (13).

Sexton displays an undaunted and unashamed attitude towards Otherness in the poem. In the first two stanzas are filled with actions as the narrator describes what she as the Other does. Instead of lamenting the fact that she is an outcast, the narrator presents her acts in a plain but highly descriptive language that engage the reader. Both stanzas have a fairy tale like quality as Sexton mentions "witch," "worms," and "elves." It conjures up a sense of mystery without arousing much sympathy for the Other. The last stanza is written in a different style than the previous two; it is closer to the reality and for once the narrator mentions a person other than herself. In this

stanza, the narrator appears to be a “normal” and cheerful woman who is in touch with other people in the society as she “waved her nude arms at villages going by” (line 16). However, starting from line 18, the bright imagery turns into a painful bodily experience. Here the narrator is celebrating her courage to live this lifestyle and Sexton uses a very strong phrase “A woman like that is not ashamed to die” to demonstrate such quality.

The Others in this work may be women who defy social expectations, for example, women who do not or are not willing to fulfill household duties, as suggested by the second stanza. In the first stanza, the woman seems to isolate herself voluntarily by looming in darkness. This suggests that people, particularly females, who choose to live an alternate lifestyle is usually stigmatized as the Others. People who make them the Other include the majority who are from the same community as them but have a different social or cultural practice that can outnumber and thus marginalize them.