

Analysis of anne sexton's poem "her kind"

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Analysis of Anne Sexton's Poem " Her Kind" Anne Sexton was a poet and a woman, but most importantly, she was an outcast.

Subjected to nervous breakdowns and admitted to a neuropsychiatry hospital, Sexton must have been all too familiar with the staring eyes and the judging minds of the public. Just being a woman in today's world often can be enough to degrade a person in the public's eye, let alone being labeled as a crazy woman. But Anne Sexton did not let society remain unchallenged in its views. She voiced a different opinion of women through poetry. In Anne Sexton's " Her Kind" the speaker of the poem embraces society's negative stereotype of modern, liberated women and transforms it into a positive image.

Two voices, the voice of society and the voice of the speaker, duel about the issue of the stereotype of modern women. Like Anne Sexton, the speaker in this poem is an outcast woman. Basically, the speaker of " Her Kind" is outcast because she is powerful. Traditionally, society expects women to lead sheltered lives. Women are to be obedient, quiet, and timid.

They are viewed as gentle and kind, not " dreaming evil" (Line 3). The modern, liberated woman completely shatters this tradition by courageously speaking her mind and living an independent life. She is empowered as she seeks education and a stable career instead of a domestic life. Since the modern woman does not fit the traditional label, " A woman like that is not a woman quite" (Line 6). Society would view this line of the poem as a negative slam on the modern woman and paraphrase it by saying, " She's

not quite right in the head; therefore, she does not belong here in civilization.

" Society appears to recoil from the idea of a powerful woman. Male dominance becomes threatened, and men are faced with a loss of control. As a result, the male dominant society casts out the modern woman and tries to squash the change in power. This task may be accomplished by physically removing the liberated woman from the population or by mentally blocking her from acceptance so that she feels isolated. In fact, society has actually done both.

During the crazy witch trials of the European Inquisition in the late 16th century, heretics [one who dissents from an accepted belief or doctrine] and witches were tortured and killed. Those women who were called witches may have been no more than women who were different from society's expectations. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that the modern woman is stereotyped as a type of witch. Anne Sexton's " Her Kind" employs the persona of a witch to show that modern women are outcast in society. In the first stanza, the speaker establishes herself as a witch by saying, " I have gone out a possessed witch" (Line 1). By describing herself as ' twelve-fingered" (Line 5), the speaker emphasizes her disfigurement and label as a witch because twelve fingers are symbols of sorceresses.

Yet, the reader can understand that she is not actually a witch; rather, the witch is merely the persona used to exemplify the role of women in society. The three verses in " Her Kind" do not describe three different types of women; instead, they elaborate on the persona of the witch. Two different

voices deal with this persona throughout the poem's three stanzas. One voice, the voice of society, expresses the opinion that witches, or modern women, are evil. But since there is only one speaker in this poem, society's voice is present through the speaker's mimicking of public opinion as though agreeing with it.

She says, " I have gone out a possessed witch," (Line 1) but she is only sarcastically repeating how society must have said, " She has gone out a possessed witch. " She is the modern woman who is not the timid, obedient female; instead, she is " not a woman, quite" (Line 6), and she is " dreaming evil" (Line 3) and " out of mind" (Line 5). Plus, she is a " lonely thing" (Line 5) because she has been outcast. This idea of society casting out the modern " witch" woman is further developed in the second and third stanzas. When the speaker lives in " warm caves in the woods" (Line 8), she lives separated from society as though she is an outsider.

This distancing shows how she is different from society; perhaps society pushes her away because she is different, or perhaps society sees her as different because she has segregated herself from the typical lifestyle of civilization. Either way, the voice of society chants, " A woman like that is misunderstood" (Line 13). Society must get rid of her because it cannot see her point of view. Moreover, Anne Sexton uses stunning imagery to illustrate the pain society inflicts on an outcast. The speaker compares herself to a witch who has been carted off to an insane asylum and claims " I have ridden in your cart, driver, I waved my nude arms at villages going by, I learning the last bright routes" (Lines 15-17). She vividly describes pain through torture methods practiced on witches during the Inquisition.

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For example, she feels she has been burned at the stake because society's "flames still bite my thigh" (Line 18). The speaker's "ribs crack where your wheels wind" (Line 19) on another torture device, the wheel. The words "still" in the phrase "still bite" (Line 18) stresses that tortures have not gone out of style but have merely changed shape, and society still employs them to resist the change in power towards women. Although the physical tortures are no longer obvious in America, women's success is still lagging because of the attitude of society. The public supposes that she is "not ashamed to die" (Line 20) because everyone already thinks that she is crazy, and she cannot harm her reputation anymore anyway. She is an evil witch and ought to die out.

Overall, the three stanzas can represent the negative stereotype society has placed on the modern woman. However, the poem does not end with the speaker completely agreeing with the voice of society. Since the speaker presents the poem from the first person point of view, the reader may see inside of the speaker's head to realize the impact of the poem's true meaning. For instance, the speaker's own personal voice associates her with a witch by saying, "I have been her kind" (Lines 7, 14 ; 21). If the poem were given in third person, society's voice could still be presented, but the complex dimensions of the witch persona would be lost without the second voice of the personal speaker.

Since the speaker uses first person, she can examine the voice of society and then give her own views. She does this in all three verses. The second voice, the personal voice of the speaker, is revealed in the last two lines of each stanza. The phrase "A woman like that is not a woman, quite. I have

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been her kind" (Lines 6-7) can be seen as a sigh of relief that the modern woman is refreshingly new and can finally be herself. The speaker identifies herself as a modern woman with "I" usage and admits to being a witch in society.

At the same time, she tells society to accept her as a witch. When she says, "A woman like that is misunderstood" (Line 13), she cries out that society does not see how important she is and that she should not be viewed negatively. She is "misunderstood" because independence is actually a positive step for women. Finally, the speaker's personal view becomes astonishingly clear in the last stanza. She claims to be a "survivor / where your flames still bite my thigh" (Lines 17-18). In other words, she will not give up; rather, she will survive being an outcast in the public's mind and will struggle to exist in the community.

"A woman like that is not ashamed to die" (Line 20), and a heretic often becomes a willing victim for her beliefs. Since the speaker has "been her kind" (Line 21), she is not afraid to die for her cause. The modern woman will not go away quietly. Her crusade, or "hitch" (Line 3), will continue "over the plain houses, light by light" (Line 4). She will not become tamed and will try to change the stereotype of modern women into a positive goal.

Whereas society sees the witch as a negative image, the speaker views the witch as a positive achievement. On one hand, the speaker mimics the public's views of the modern woman by comparing her to a witch, "haunting the black air" (Line 2). She sounds afraid that she is outcast and unaccepted. The public will persecute her and hinder her representation in society. But,

on the other hand, her determination as a “ survivor,” and the double meanings of each stanza’s end show that the speaker’s real view of the witch contrasts sharply with society’s view.

Basically, the speaker says, yes, modern women are different from what society expects. But to be different is not necessarily evil. Instead, a “ witch” is a positive idea because women will finally step out into the world and make changes occur. The speaker promotes the acceptance of “ witches” in society and encourages women to step out and be different. Throughout Anne Sexton’s poem, the public’s voice duels with the speaker’s personal voice until the speaker’s opinion emerges successful and determined to survive in the end.

Instead of supporting that witches are evil, Anne Sexton’s poem reveals that witches are wonderful. The poem’s speaker welcomes the stereotype of the witch and uses dueling voices to show that the stereotype is actually a positive, strong image for the modern woman and that it does not serve the deteriorating, degrading purpose society meant for it to have. Society must accept change and stop casting out women if it is to live in peace. The public fights a losing battle; in the end, the modern woman will triumph. Only then will outcasts such as Anne Sexton be accepted for who they truly are, and the modern woman, or “ witch”, will be rewarded for her determination at last.

Like Anne Sexton, the speaker in this poem is an outcast woman.