

## At a loss for words: Probing subjectivity in Anne Sexton's "The Book of Folly".

### Description

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Abstract: After receiving the transcript of one of her interviews, Anne Sexton archly commented to D. M. Thomas: "It's fascinating to read though in places highly inaccurate. I am known to lie, and I never let myself down" (M 279). The overlapping spaces between biography and confessional poetry are immediately vexed, particularly when Sexton's confessions relate directly to a problematic self, a multifaceted

personality. The genre of confessional poetry, by definition, demands an intense use of personal experience, and Anne Sexton's *The Book of Folly* does indeed spill out the secrets of personal failure, emotional pain, sexual abuse, and mental illness; but the self that is created through art, the self that is expelled onto a page, vacillates between a number of ostensible truths and threatens to undermine the very core of confessional American poetry. What become finally the tenuous "truths" of the body emerge through questions of maternity which are ultimately important to Sexton. She variously interrogates the relationships with her own mother and her two daughters and articulates the mother/daughter theme into visions which redound significantly on the division between the Imaginary and Symbolic stages of psychoanalytic development. Sexton plays out this distinction in images of language, hunger, and excrement, all of which hold a central focus in *The Book of Folly*. Accessing these realms through the theory of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, and peripherally through Mary Douglas' anthropological investigations, allows one to interrogate the fictional coherence of these notions more closely and to perceive the inevitability of Sexton's final act of self-sacrifice.

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