

Mariani's *Dream Song: The Life of John Berryman* (1990). Coleman and McRae's selection, available now both in print and a search-friendly digital format, accompanied by useful notes, a glossary, chronology, and a short introduction, constitutes thus an indispensable resource for anyone interested in researching Berryman's life-work. Coleman's continuous efforts for the development of Berryman scholarship are nothing short of admirable.

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Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich. *Między Freudem a Bogiem. Życie i twórczość Anne Sexton* [Bewteen Freud and God: The Life and Work of Anne Sexton]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katedra, 2020, 340 pages.

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich's book on Anne Sexton is a well-researched biography, which effectively weaves together in-depth readings of the poet's work and refreshing insights into her turbulent life, marked by emotional upheavals, internal conflicts, and mental illness. Even though the title itself seems to imply a duality of work and life, the book vividly illustrates how in Sexton's case the two were inextricably embedded in each other. The author carefully analyzes how Sexton's life informed her poetic thinking and how the act of writing affected the way she experienced the world, placing special emphasis on the poet's relationship with psychoanalysis and her unorthodox approach to religion and spirituality as intimately tangled with the body.

Composed of eight chapters, the book focuses on those aspects of Sexton's life and work that have received slightly less attention from scholars, critics, and translators alike, as the author explains in the introductory note (11). While in the United States Sexton's work is widely known and discussed, in Poland it remains largely unexplored. Sexton published ten poetry collections (three of them appeared posthumously), including a Pulitzer-winning *Live or Die* (1967), and a play *Mercy Street* staged in New York City in 1969. Even though she was later overshadowed by Sylvia Plath's fame, she received much critical acclaim and was widely recognized on the American literary scene already in her lifetime. In Poland, however, only one collection, *Kochając zabójcę*, was published in 1994. As Aleksandrowicz-Pędich points out, the Polish anthology of American women poets *Dzikie brzoskwinie* (2003), edited by Julia Hartwig, includes only two poems by Sexton (in Hartwig's translation), while fourteen poems by Plath. More recently, two of Sexton's poems were translated by Magdalena Szewczuk and Adam Buszek for the literary magazine

Wizje.¹ Hopefully, in the twenty-first century an interest in Sexton's work will grow, since, as Aleksandrowicz-Pędich demonstrates, her life and work are a "fascinating material that can strongly resonate with the experiences of contemporary readers" (8).

Między Freudem a Bogiem constitutes an important contribution to the studies on Sexton. It introduces Polish readers to her poetry as inseparable from her life, complicating the oft-used category of "confessional poetry" and renewing its meanings for the twenty-first century. The book is both research-based and lucidly written. It draws on academic articles and monographs, but at the same time reads like a good story, which makes it an informative and engaging source both in academia and beyond. When it comes to the factual information, it mostly relies on Diane Middlebrook's *Anne Sexton. A Biography* (1992) and Anne Sexton's *A Self-Portrait in Letters* (2004) edited by her daughter and literary executor Linda Gray Sexton and Lois Ames (2004). Since one of its major focal points is the relationship between Sexton's poetry and psychoanalysis, *Między Freudem a Bogiem* also integrates enlightening insights from Dawn Skorczewski's *An Accident of Hope. The Therapy Tapes of Anne Sexton* (2012): a monograph which sheds light on audio recordings and notes from Sexton's therapy sessions with Dr. Martin Orne, which are archived at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard. However, unless it is not indicated in the bibliography, Aleksandrowicz-Pędich does not draw on the Anne Sexton Papers, which are part of the Harry Ransom Center and consist of a plethora of unique materials. Typically, biographies utilize such materials to offer original insights into the author's life and work and open new research paths. On the other hand, the Papers have not been digitized, which makes them difficult to access.

Aleksandrowicz-Pędich also situates the entanglements of Sexton's life and work in a larger context of American patriarchal culture from the late 1940s through the 1970s. Here, however, the analysis is sometimes slightly less nuanced. For instance, the chapter 2, "W świecie amerykańskiej kobiety" ("In the American woman's world"), opens with an observation that "[in] the past, American women, just like women all over the world, were confined to the emotional and private realms of life, while their work was mostly done at home" (51).² The author continues to observe that "the tendency of middle-class women to develop emotional disorders was not only a medical, but also a social issue" (51-52) and refers to the canonical 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The connection between the conservative late 1940s and 1950s—when Sexton was a young woman—and the late nineteenth century is a significant one, but a more detailed contextual analysis which would establish a link between these two historical moments is missing.

As Adrienne Rich, Sexton's contemporary, noted, the 1950s in the United States was a period when "both poetry and women were being re-domesticated" (193). The prefix "re-" is crucial here. The time when women and poets like Sexton, Plath, or Rich, among others, were relentlessly trying to reconcile creative work with the roles of wife and mother, was marked by a return to conservative values, including a

1 See, Anne Sexton, "Dwa wiersze," translated by Magdalena Szewczuk and Adam Buszek, *Wizje*, no. 2/2019. <https://magazynwizje.pl/anne-sexton-dwa-wiersze/>.

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of excerpts from *Między Freudem a Bogiem*. *Życie i twórczość Anne Sexton* are my own.

traditional family model with a father as a breadwinner and mother as a homemaker. This model, rooted in the suburban American Dream, was weaponized as part of American capitalist ideology during the intensified Cold War tensions. Significantly, the process of re-traditionalizing was coupled with a systemic erasure of the history of revolutionary feminist thinking that emerged in the 1920s in the United States and was manifested both in the streets and in literature. Aleksandrowicz-Pędich refers to the “Roaring Twenties,” but only in passing—in the context of lavish parties that Sexton’s parents enjoyed—and does not mention this revolutionary tradition that post-war women poets were cut off from as a result of the conservative backlash in the 1950s. Such trail blazers as Djuna Barnes, Muriel Rukeyser, Margaret Sanger, Anne Spencer, Mina Loy, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and many others refused to be “confined to the emotional and private realms of life” (51), to return to Aleksandrowicz-Pędich’s description of the climate that Sexton was born into, and engaged in writing and activism, bringing together the affective and the intellectual, the public and the intimate. Experimenting both in life and work, they also negotiated cultural taboos that Sexton and her contemporaries had to re-negotiate: taboos that included women’s body and sexuality. Discussing, even briefly, this process of re-domestication might have enriched the contexts of patriarchal backlash that Sexton was exposed to and which contributed to her positioning as “a secret beatnik hiding in the suburbs in my square house on a dull street” (*A Self-Portrait* 70-71), as she wrote in her 1959 letter to Carolyn Kizer.

Między Freudem a Bogiem also offers a refreshing take on “confessional poetry”: a poetry “school” that Sexton is associated with alongside Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and John Berryman, among others. As opposed to deep-seated definitions which tend to reduce confessional poetry to a direct expression of the poet’s own affective states, Aleksandrowicz-Pędich’s book illustrates how Sexton’s poetry constitutes a meticulous research into “the self” understood as a multi-faceted psychological and philosophical concept. The relationship between Sexton the poet and the speaking subject in her poems was “complicated,” as Aleksandrowicz-Pędich points out, quoting the poet’s own words: “I’ll often confess to things that never happened” (*No Evil Star* 131-132). While Sexton often places emphasis on the lyric “I” and draws on her own life experience, she also refigures the embodied self in a broader and more universalist sense. Moreover, in *Między Freudem a Bogiem*, Sexton also proves a “chronicler of historical evils, who was able to comment on them in a poignant way” (88). Even though she did not explicitly engage with politics, her historical and sociocultural awareness informed many of her works. And, importantly, her research into the self and relations with others was enriched by references to mythology, psychoanalytic theory, and popular culture. For instance, as Aleksandrowicz-Pędich illustrates, the figure of the father in Sexton’s poetry is an intricate assemblage of “autobiographical elements, an influence of psychoanalytic treatment, the workings of patriarchal culture, and, most of all, the author’s creative imagination” (26). Such a rethinking of the confessional mode of poetry builds on a recently observed intensified interest in the concept of “life writing” and tallies with the current trends in the Plath scholarship,³ which also refigures the meanings of lyric confession.

3 See, for instance, *Sylvia Plath in Context*, edited by Tracy Brian, Cambridge UP, 2019.

As the title *Między Freudem a Bogiem* suggests, the biography foregrounds two recurrent themes in Sexton's imaginative life-writing: her engagement with psychoanalysis and her spiritual search. As Aleksandrowicz-Pędich explains, Sexton spent most of her life in therapy, which at the time still relied to some extent on Freudian psychoanalysis. Also, she was encouraged to start writing poetry by her psychiatrist and therapist, Dr. Martin Orne, who became a major figure in her life. Through close readings of Sexton's writing, the author demonstrates how deeply the poet's experience as a patient and her intimate knowledge of psychoanalytic theory were reflected in her poetry. Significantly, Aleksandrowicz-Pędich combines her textual analysis of poems with critical reflections on the ethics of Freudian psychoanalysis, tracing how it was evolving in post-war America's patriarchal society.

The second theme is developed in Chapter 7 titled "W poszukiwaniu Boga" ("In search of God." Here, the author establishes interesting connections between Sexton's reliance on psychoanalysis, her life-long spiritual search, and profound interest in the body through a reference to Julia Kristeva's 2009 monograph *This Incredible Need to Believe*, which claims that "[f]ar from locking themselves into the obsessional palace of pure thought, thinking, for women, cannot be shut off from carnal sensoriality: the metaphysical body/soul dichotomy is, in these women, unbearable" (114). Aleksandrowicz-Pędich situates Sexton's poetic thinking within a larger tradition of destabilizing long-standing dualities: a tradition in which many women philosophers, writers, poets, and activists also partook. The author compellingly argues that Sexton consistently brought together the incorporeal and the material and that her affirmative refiguring of female corporeality and sexuality was intimately tangled with her search for spirituality, which was a yet another manifestation of her feminist thinking. She focuses in particular on these poems where Sexton offers an experimental vision of God as dissociated from any religious dogmas: a vision which presents God as intensely embodied.

Aleksandrowicz-Pędich hailed Sexton as a "prophet for tumultuous twenty-first century: an era marked by depression, searching for emotional rest, and digging deep into internal wounds—whether through Freudian analysis of childhood trauma and life mistakes or by putting hope in God and religion-rooted explanations of the world" (11). While I am reluctant to agree with such a characterization of the twenty-first century: Freudian psychoanalysis is nowadays taken more seriously by literary theorists than practicing psychologists (as pointed out elsewhere in the book) and a lot of people actually turn away from religion, I also consider Sexton's work highly relevant today. It constitutes a meticulous research into the self in crisis, both psychological and sociocultural. It complicates the idea of lyric expression, which is a recurrent topic in contemporary debates on poetics. And, last but not least, it develops integrative, non-dualist thinking that we desperately need in times of intersecting global and personal crises. All those aspects of Sexton's work are analyzed in Aleksandrowicz-Pędich's book, making it quite a compelling read for times like these.

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Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands. La Frontera: The New Mestiza. The Critical Edition*. Edited by Ricardo F. Vivancos-Pérez and Norma Elia Cantu, Aunt lute books, 2021, 550 pages.

Gloria Anzaldúa is a central figure in the modern Border studies theory. When in 1987, she published her groundbreaking book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, she became the most representative and most often quoted researcher of the US-Mexican border, and soon an icon of the entire border studies. As she repeatedly emphasized, the task of her life was to create a new Borderlands discourse, which would include the voices of socially and culturally excluded people—women of color, the queer or the poor from the so-called Third World. Demonstrating visionary sensitivity, Anzaldúa has long drawn attention to the problems and issues that are currently being discussed and written about in various academic disciplines. The Borderlands she depicts is an area where various systems of power, exploitation, and oppression intersect—capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and the white man's supremacy. Her Border symbolizes cultural crossroads and the intersection of multiple identities, where Chicana *transfrontera feminista* (transitional feminist) consciousness was born. Therefore, the New Mestiza created by her, the figure of a strong and self-conscious woman, breaking all barriers and limitations through a feminist consciousness rising method, has become a model for many women worldwide. Also, her *La Frontera* is more than just a revisionist feminine vision of the Borderlands, contrasted with the one known from the canonical male depictions. Hence, it has become a constant inspiration for numerous academics.

Initially meant as a poetry collection, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* became a milestone in various disciplines. It redefined Chicano/a, Border and women's studies in the U.S. and significantly impacted such disciplines as cultural and literary studies, political and ethnic studies, and feminist philosophy and queer theory. Therefore, in 2021 the critical edition edited by Ricardo F. Vivancos-Pérez and Norma Elia Cantú was published to honor Anzaldúa's legacy and make her masterpiece available to a broader audience.

The critical edition has two introductory chapters, one by each of the editors. Norma Elia Cantú, in her Preface "Doing Works that Matters. The Impact of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*," focuses on three aspects. In the first part—the trajectory of *Borderlands*—she describes her history of reading the book and meeting with Gloria Anzaldúa, thus using Anzaldúa's method of *autohistoria* (life-writing). Cantú recollects how the book influenced her life as a woman of color and an academic, offering her "a voice that spoke to my own experience and that