

**Opponent's report on B.A. thesis by Sára Benešová:
"The Portrayal of Female Sexuality and Sensuality in Selected Works of Anne Sexton and
Adrienne Rich"**

In her thesis, Sára Benešová examines the poetry of Anne Sexton and Adrienne Rich within the framework of *l'écriture féminine*, arguing that these poets both made foundational contributions to women's writing through their portrayal of female sexuality and sensuality, or *jouissance*, despite significant differences in their writing style and approach to the craft of poetry and the public representation of the poet.

Sexton and Rich were almost exact contemporaries and were both representational figures in women's writing, confessional poetry and the feminist movement as it developed in the Northeast United States. Despite these seeming similarities, their writing styles and public personas were very different. Thus the comparative close readings this thesis performs are important, both for distinguishing the individual elements of each poet; for seeing their overlapping characteristics more clearly; and for distinguishing the elements of form and content that would play key roles in women's writing.

The thesis contains five chapters and a bibliography.

Chapter I, the introduction, lays the groundwork for the study by examining the foundational concepts of *l'écriture féminine*, a feminist literary theory established in France during the 1970s by Hélène Cixous among others, including Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, figures the chapter authoritatively quotes and alludes to.

Chapter II examines the concepts of *jouissance* and female sexuality and pleasure as central elements of women's writing, focusing on the parallel between the female body and the body of the poem.

Chapter III examines the work of Anne Sexton, specifically her poems "Her Kind," "Rapunzel" and "In Celebration of My Uterus" within the framework of *l'écriture féminine* as explicated in the previous chapters.

Chapter IV focuses on two poems by Adrienne Rich: “Diving into the Wreck” and “(Unnumbered, The Floating Poem),” also within the framework of *l’écriture féminine* as explicated in the previous chapters.

Chapter V concludes the thesis by comparing and contrasting the work of Sexton and Rich, showing how they both expressed and helped establish women’s writing while following their own distinct voices and journeys.

This is an interesting and authoritative thesis that comprehensively situates the work of both poets in a crucial international feminist context. The overview of *l’écriture féminine* is brisk and handled well. The examination of Sexton especially provides fruitful ways of reading her work that push beyond the usual concepts of confessional writing. The examination of Rich is also insightful and rewarding.

Chapter II is only two pages long and I wonder if it could have been included in the first chapter. I’m curious about the organizational logic here. The phrase “is going to” is used numerous times, ie., “this chapter is going to outline.” It’s a minor point, but “will” would be more formal and more appropriate to the academic context. There are some small typos, like the use of a hyphen in place of an em dash on page 1, but these do not detract from the overall impression. This is a well-researched, clearly structured and insightful thesis that eloquently places these poets in their rightful context.

In light of the above comments, I have three questions to pose:

- 1) Lyn Hejinian’s essay “The Rejection of Closure” distinguishes between open-ended feminine texts and closed male texts. Do you agree with this distinction and can it be applied to the work of Sexton and Rich?
- 2) Does your reading of Sexton and Rich in the context of *L’écriture féminine* contradict, or supplement the usual academic discourse on their work?
- 3) Can any formal elements of Sexton’s and Rich’s poetry be read as enacting or representing the the concepts of *jouissance* and *l’écriture féminine*?

I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

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20 August, 2021