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March's Poetry**

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The Feminine Cultural Construction of Maternity in Susana March's Poetry

ABSTRACT

The paper is aimed at studying Susana March's poem "My son has grown this summer", from 1953, that shows the position of herself with regret and anguish in relation to the growth of her son. The feminine discourse is a discourse characterized by its subalternity with respect to the masculine discourse. The different waves of feminism have made a fundamental contribution to the liberation of women's discourse, taking women from a position of the "other" to an assumption of themselves as subjects. The cultural construction of women has been carried out mostly by men, in such a way that for women their own knowledge and intellection is crossed by a historical alienation from themselves. The woman comes to an awareness of herself and her meaning when it is named by others, but not by true autognosis. This work focus on understanding the problems faced by women in their social and epochal construction. The position of the woman object is shared by the very transmitter of the poem, unconsciously. Motherhood in the poem ends when the child grows up, therefore her condition and feminine essence is truncated. It concludes in the crisis of the traditional female model linked only to motherhood.

Keywords: *autognosis, cultural construction, motherhood, subject, women writing.*

Introduction

The cultural construction of women has been carried out mostly by men, in such a way that for women their own knowledge and intellection is crossed by a historical alienation from themselves. The woman comes to an awareness of herself and her meaning when it is named by others, but not by true introspection.

The feminine discourse is a discourse characterized by its subalternity with respect to the masculine discourse. The different waves of feminism have made a fundamental contribution to the liberation of women's discourse, taking women from a position of the "other" to an assumption of themselves as subjects.

The position of the woman object is shared by the very transmitter of the poem, unconsciously. There is a lack of understanding of herself as a woman beyond her reproductive condition. Motherhood in the poem ends when the child grows up, therefore her condition and feminine essence is truncated. It concludes in the crisis of the traditional female model linked only to motherhood.

Definition of the Topic

The paper is aimed at studying Susana March's poem "My son has grown this summer", from 1953, which shows the position of herself as an object, in crisis with the traditional feminine model. The selected topic is linked to the research I have carried out for several years on women's writing.

This essay addresses the analysis of a female discourse related to motherhood. The interest is in the importance of the female biological being and the writing process of the female voice in a historical perspective of these issues. The subject will be investigated within the lyrical genre written by the Spanish Susana March (1915-1990) born in Barcelona, Spain, was a teacher and writer¹.

Methodology/Materials and Methods

Identification of the topic to investigate: I will prove that there is an ancient motherhood conception in Susana March's poem "My son has grown this summer". This poem indicates an absence of autognosis of herself that is united to the traditional point of view of motherhood and women, related to the women as an object and not as a subject. The definition of autognosis,

¹Susana March "with obvious modernist echoes, in 1938 she published her first collection of poems entitled *Routes*. His second collection of poems, a volume made up of evocative poems from past experiences, is entitled *Poemas de la Plaza Real*, although it was published in 1987 and won the Anjaro Poetry Prize. In the 1940s, under the pseudonym Amanda Roma, she published a huge number of romance novels for the Colombian magazine *Cromos*. (<https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/12929/susana-march-alcala> Real Academia de la History).

following Merriam Webster Dictionary is: “an understanding of one’s own psychodynamics”

Prestigious scholars of the female gender will be taken for analysis.

Considering the position of Helène Cixous in *The Laughter of the Jellyfish*, she maintains about women’s writing:

“It is currently impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, it is an impossibility that will last, since this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, codified, which does not mean that it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governed by the phallogocentric system; It has and will have a place in fields outside the territories subordinated to the philosophical-theoretical domain. It will only allow itself to be thought by the subjects that break automatisms, the peripheral runners never submitted to any authority. But we can start talking. To designate some effects, some drive components, some relationships of the feminine imaginary with the real, with writing.” (Cixous, 1979, 54)

Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* considers being feminine in relation to “the category of the Other”. Seyla Benhabib in *Situating the Self* determines the essence of woman in relation to Hegelian philosophy, being with its determinations, but without self-awareness as opposed to “being-in-itself”. Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, refers to the meaning of impositions on the part of the feminine cultural construction.

The theoretical contribution of Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Women*, will also be considered. Irigaray proposes the exchange for a speculum that would symbolically be the instrument used to illuminate the interior of the human body. She says that the man fears that diverse look of the woman, which implies another reality that is not his own, and that starts from a point of view totally alien to the one he thought. For this reason, her theory opposes that of Simone de Beauvoir, because she maintains that she starts from a masculine way of looking at women. She maintains that it is necessary to assimilate a nature of two, looking for the values of the two subjects, feminine and masculine, bearers of different values, but of equal importance.

Theme Development

There has been a historical evolution of the complex concepts that mean the definition of feminine identity, the female subject and what it means to be a woman. The essence of the feminine being has ancestral roots related above all to motherhood and the division of tasks between the genders. In this sense, women have historically been in a situation of inferiority with respect to men.

The poem “My son has grown this summer” by Susana March belongs to the poetry collection *The sadness*, originally written in Spanish, Ed. Adonais, Madrid, 1953, and openly proclaims a dissatisfaction for being a woman, related to the growth of her son.

Susana March poem
My son has grown this summer

“My son has grown this summer.
He puts his hands on my shoulders and says:
“Look! I’m almost as tall as you.”
He still gets a steep climb.

But soon he will be as tall as me. And higher!
Soon I will be the one who will have to stoop to kiss him on the cheek.

Soon I will no longer be able to say those childish things that mothers say to their children:

call it “my sun”, pretend to be surprised
for any act of yours
tuck him in at night
when he’s already asleep.

Soon I won’t be able to tell you
those stories that you like so much,
the heroic deeds

that I made when I was young,
because he will answer me:

“- If you are a woman. And the women
they do not commit heroic exploits.”

And I will feel before your eyes
all the sad blush of my sex.

I will never be bold, nor big, nor friend
of migratory birds and taciturn sailors.

I will go back to being who I always was:

a woman dissatisfied with being a woman and with everything.

Because the only one in this world who saw me big
he will have outgrown me!”

(Translation from the original version in Spanish, by Claudia Panisello)

Developing

I divide the work for its better analysis into different levels, following Lotman’s parameters in Structure of the artistic text: paratextual level: the title; structure and rhyme; lexical level and intratextual semantic level.

Paratextual level: the title, the structure and the rhyme:

The title is repeated in the first verse of the first stanza and denotes (indicates) the external fact of her child’s growing.

The poem is structured in three stanzas of different size each, using the free verse, that is to say without respect to the metric or conventional measure of the verses. The absence of rhyme predominates in the original version in

Spanish language, with assonant rhyme in some of the verses.

The poem has a lexical level close to the colloquial, since there are no words foreign to the everyday and understandable. There are not many metaphors either, but simple language that is easy to understand for any reader predominates.

At the intratextual semantic level, various subthemes can be identified in relation to the central theme of the child's growth, announced in the title. In the first place, the topic of "tempus fugit" is linked to her maternity and the feeling of loss due to the growth of her son. On the other hand, it seems that this maternity only covered the child's childhood and did not continue for the rest of his life, since a feeling of loneliness and sadness is perceived and at the same time she expresses her anguish directly with the statement "dissatisfied with being a woman".

The first moment, first stanza, refers to objective confirmations within the real world: the natural growth of the son has surprised both the mother and the son. The use of the present perfect of the Indicative Mode "My son has grown this summer", which confirms an event of reality, perfectly measurable by the senses, an objective reality.

The simplicity of the conversation is close to any mother and child, demonstrating the obvious emotion by the use of exclamation marks and the verb in the imperative that denotes the mother's need to witness the increase the son's height: "- Look! !" And then the confirmation of his height by means of the quantitative comparison of equality, diminished by the adverb almost: "I am almost as tall as you."

In the second moment (second stanza made up of only two long verses, close to the prosaic) through the use of the adversative conjunction "but", what was previously said in the first stanza is expanded, and predicts with the verb in the future of the indicative. "Will be" the inevitable: the transformation of the child into an adult. The intimate atmosphere of a common and daily experience, shared by the majority of mothers and their children when perceiving the natural growth, surrounds this pair of stanzas with a human sense understandable to any reader.

The third moment is found in the third, last and extensive stanza and is the one with the greatest semantic content, since it elaborates the intimate impression of what is described in the previous stanzas. The adverb of time "soon" indicates the speed of the child's changes that cause an alteration in his behavior: "Soon I will no longer be able to say those puerile things that mothers say to their children: / call him "my sun", do It's like I'm surprised/by any act of his" . The apparent lack of sincerity that arises in the face of the astonishment of childhood conquests is significant. Likewise, the daily actions of protecting the little one, such as "tucking him in at night/when he is already asleep" seem to be prohibited in the near future: "I will no longer be able to tell him" the verb in the future indicates as something inexorable, when preceded by the adverb of time followed by the adverb of negation, which reinforce what will not happen in the future.

Maternal power seems to fade with age, since she will no longer be able to

speak honestly with him. Another lost power, which reinforces the distance between the two, is indicated later by: “Soon I will no longer be able to tell you”. There is a synthetic parallelism, since they have an identical syntactic structure and they are listed and add powers that you will not be able to do in the future.

This is a sense of otherness, which Simone De Beauvoir defines as follows: “In the eyes of men —and for the legion of women who see through their eyes— it is not enough to have a woman’s body, nor to assume as lover, as a mother, the role of female to be a “woman woman”; through sexuality and motherhood, the subject can claim their autonomy; the “woman woman” is the one that is accepted as Alterity.” (From Beauvoir, pdf, 263)

Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* considers the feminine being in relation to “the category of the Other”. Following my Master’s thesis (174 pages) on the cultural construction of women, Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* in 1968 has studied the feminine being in relation to “the category of the Other”, which “is as original as consciousness itself”.

“Simone de Beauvoir is one of the greatest references in what has been her contribution to the subject of analysis of the cultural construction of women. The fundamental contribution of this author is not only to try to define what it is to be a woman, from the angles of biology, psychoanalysis and historical materialism, but also to have made a fairly extensive historical compilation of the different instances that the representatives have had to go through. of the feminine gender, and the myths around the feminine, referring from the ancient villages and tribes to the times when the book *The Second Sex* was published in 1968. In the second volume, he studies the different processes that women go through, as well as different types of women and their relationships with their family and social environment.” Panisello, Claudia, <https://www.colibri.udelar.edu.uy/jspui/bitstream/20.500.12008/9270/1/Panisello%2c%20Claudia.pdf>

“In *The second sex*, he emphasizes the idea of the Other “The category of the Other is as original as consciousness itself...” She points out that from the most primitive societies and ancient mythology, the duality between the concept of the same and of the other; Later, this quality is transferred to women, considering that women “are not born, but are made” through the cultural guidelines that give them adherence to a gender. She points out the importance of alterity in the different collectivities: “No collectivity is ever defined as One if it does not immediately place the Other in front of itself.” (Vol I, 13).

She reflects on the submission of women, and establishes: “The woman determines and differentiates herself in relation to the man and not he in relation to her; This is the inessential versus the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other. (Vol I, 12). The fact of constituting “the other” for women has a double disadvantage, since it is not only what is singled out by the negative opposition, that is, the subject and what is not him, but also, she constitutes an object in front of what would be the masculine subject. That is to say, the woman, according to this perspective, does not define her being

by herself but in a relationship of inferiority with respect to the main one that would be the man. Following Hegel: “the subject does not arise if it is not in the form of opposition, since it tries to affirm himself as the essential and constitute the other as inessential, as an object.” (Vol I,14). <https://www.colibri.udelar.edu.uy/jspui/bitstream/20.500.12008/9270/1/Panisello%2c%20Claudia.pdf>

Following Simone De Beauvoir on motherhood, which would cause the negative:

“Maternal love is often lost in reprimands and anger dictated by concern for maintaining a well-placed home. It is not surprising that the woman who is torn between these contradictions very often spends her days full of nervousness and acrimony; she always loses somehow and her gains are precarious, they do not sign up for any sure success. It is never through your work that you can be saved; It is occupied, of course, but it is not her justification: it rests on strange liberties. The woman locked in the home cannot found her existence by herself; it lacks the necessary means to assert herself in her singularity, and this singularity, consequently, is not recognized.” (De Beauvoir, 1968, p. 232).

Considering the poem of Susana March, there is a strong sense of anguish, linked to the growth of her son, linked to his evolution in time that passes quickly and inexorably: “those stories that he likes so much / the heroic exploits / that I committed when I was young, / because he will tell me: “- If you are a woman. And women/do not commit heroic deeds.” Before the son talks to her about it, she does not conceive of herself as a doer of feats. She perceives herself as a stranger. Her son will become a man, and he will consider her as a woman, incapable of feats, practically forgetting in her imaginary speech that she is her mother. Her motherhood and joy for the little one seem to end at the end of childhood, as if motherhood expired at some point in the child's evolution, implying a regression for her.

It is significant that she is not considering her poetic discourse as a literary task, which, beyond maternity, also dignifies her as a woman. In this sense, the cultural construction learned about women seems to weigh more than their intellectual activity. The asymmetry between the genres is unconsciously maintained as power within her discourse, where she sees herself annihilated by the assumption of a learned construction. There is no deconstruction of the posture and external vision of herself as a reproductive object in the poem. On the contrary, she affirms this point of view and experiences it as an inexorable reality.

Following Butler in *Undoing Gender*: “The norms that govern intelligible identity, that is, that enable and limit the intelligible affirmation of a ‘self’, are partially articulated on matrices of gender hierarchy...they operate through the repetition... when it is affirmed that the subject is constituted, this only means that the subject is the result of some discourses governed by norms that make up the intelligible mention of identity. The subject is not formed by the rules by which it is created, because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated procedure of repetition that at the same time hides itself and dictates

its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects.” (Butler, 2007, p. 282).

The adult that his own son will become, will become part of the group of men, separated by the difference in gender, and that lyrical self expresses his sadness in this regard: “And I will feel before his eyes / all the sad blush of my sex./

I will no longer be daring, nor great, nor friend / of emigrant birds and taciturn sailors.” It seems to be the absolute end of all imagination shared between her and her son, as if motherhood were temporary and limited to only a short period of time: childhood time.

The projection of herself in times after the enunciation indicating a future state of reiteration of herself prior to motherhood: “I will go back to being what I always was:/a woman dissatisfied with being a woman and with everything.” The nonconformity of the metaphysical void is indicated by the hyperbole “of everything” constitutes the scriptural seal of the consolidation of a negative intelligibility about her body, her cultural construction as a woman and her position within society. The condition of happiness that the child caused her, is transformed in a parallel way to that of her son’s transformation into an adult and returns her to her negative conception of her “being a woman”.

She transmits the most absolute desolation because that exaggeration implies the annulment of all possible satisfaction. Added to the desolation is the final exclamation that closes the poem with an explanation: “Because the only one in this world who saw me big/will have grown more than me!” It means the loss of complicity with your child and, at the same time, the loss of meaning within your world due to the passage of time. Her role as mother seems to have ended with the growth of her son. This look at herself is a look from a masculine point of view, which considers her only an object of reproduction. It is an external look that seems to forget the complicity with her son and is so convinced of the validity of her being a reproductive woman that she is not capable of autognosis. This alienation from herself prevents her from altering that point of view.

The position of subject woman is in the discursive sense, but the intellection of herself is of object woman, signifying an adherence to the androcentric position, since it is assumed only in a reproductive function. This point of view is surprising for women born in the later decades of the second half of the 20th century, because that way of considering the motherhood was no longer in force.

The intellection of herself is crossed by an assumption of cultural construction that saddens her and plunges her into an existential void. In this poem, sex becomes a reification and not a freedom: “And I will feel before your eyes/all the sad blush of my sex”. There is a look of the son traversed by his age. The little son seemed to her as something of her own and encompassable, but growing up transforms him into a stranger, who will judge her and classify her as if she were not her mother, since the fact of being a woman alienates her from her own son.

Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, refers to what the impositions by the

feminine cultural construction mean: there is a “subversive repetition” of the meaning of women for herself: “The main task of feminism is not to create a point of external view to the constructed identities; this would be equivalent to the construction of an epistemological model that stops accepting its own cultural position... The main task rather lies in locating the strategies of subversive repetition that make these constructions possible, confirming the local intervention options through participation in these practices of repetition that form the identity and, therefore, present the inherent possibility of refuting them.” (Butler, 2007, p. 286).

According to Carol Christ in *Why Women Need the Goddess*, although the person is an atheist, in Western civilization, the cultural construction of the masculine being as creator predominates, which is why he develops the position of the need for the Goddess instead of the God, since it would imply a break from dependence on masculine authority. She points out that the meaning of the symbol of the Goddess would be an affirmation of the legitimacy of feminine power. This poem hides the implicit cultural construction in which motherhood is limited to the child's age of her son. The station herself seems to be unaware of her maternal power, and even unaware of the power of her feminine discourse that replicates and emphasizes the norms in force in that time.

Seyla Benhabib in *Situating the Self* determines the essence of women in relation to Hegelian philosophy, being with its determinations, but without self-awareness as opposed to “being-in-oneself”. In this poem, being-in-herself is not built autonomously, but rather in relation to the current cultural construction of its time, but this discrepancy points to the deep questioning of the traditional feminine model and the need to break with it.

Following Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Women*, in this poem is needed another side of the facts. A side that represents and respects the woman herself as a subject, a point of view of her autognosis and self recognition as a woman and her relation with motherhood.

Discussion

The act of literary communication means the presence of a sender and a receiver, recipient of the message. In this case, this poem especially reached my deepest motivation, to incite in me the desire for a response and communication with it, because I am a mother and I feel myself very different feelings about motherhood.

I will answer her with my own poems, that contains substantial different feelings from the one studied above.

Responses to Susana March
By Claudia Panisello (Three poems)

1) *Gold Crown* By Claudia Panisello

If you could read this poem,
I would tell you I read yours, the crying
for your grown son that summer.
From motherhood your point of view
I do not share, friend, these days.

The waves of feminism
like those of the swirling sea
of the sea tidal wave
tidal wave of the abyss,
of the diminished woman
of antiquity built
they have changed in a jolt.

of yesterday's tears
only memories remain today
of women's maternity
It's not just true fate.

Today, the woman can study,
she can be a mother, she can work,
can have a profession
and if you want, sing a song.

Prince Charming went blind
it is no longer the palatial dream,
but in itself the pink queen,
victor of bloody deeds
is victorious of battles won.

And motherhood is a golden crown
of childish joys and achievements,
between mother and son games
in the maternal palace built.

And motherhood is a golden crown
that lives on in the fickle hour,
of the child changes, the height cheats,
but not the feeling, which always lasts.

2) *My children as seeds* By Claudia Panisello

My children in these years have grown,
like seeds from my womb born,
turned into sculptural trees.
Celestial babies are no longer of the rattle,

those in my arms I snuggled,
in my lap they looked with big eyes,
of lactation my maternal caresses.

Taller than me, without doubt,
distant were the times of cradle,
but, I can always call them “my suns”,
“mama’s babies”, “my hearts”,
because of time, motherhood does not depend,
and they will be my beloved children forever.
I will be constantly surprised by his conquests,
and they will dazzle me continuously,
because I know they recognize my infinite struggles,
innumerable efforts and many feats
as a winged woman and mother they value me,
I recognize my beloved children adore me.

Of life the mountains of avatars
we will fly over like migratory birds
and we will continue together through the celestial sky
Of changing seasons, my companions.

3) *Birthday poem for my son Ignacio Rafael* By Claudia Panisello

It’s your birthday today
and what to say about the years
of the hours without ceasing
they pass mercilessly from the cell phone.

My watch has fallen asleep
in the warm memory
of my belly in your heartbeat
completed in nine months.

Warm baby of happy rattle
of free colors and new trees,
of the language learned the word,
of walking in traveling steps.

From the Arghol the warm breeze
Saint Lucia was light blue
dad and mom your smile,
of Pedro and Gloria the company.

From the passing of the clock
the blue ribbon and the school

in white tunic the run
life hastily come and go.

And today, already an adult man,
I transmit my feelings
in threads of the celestial meaning
of yesterday in converted present.

And today, of your life, wish you
of the blue like a giant wave
the rainbow your days be
of excellent iridescent crest.

My poems transmit a completely different feelings about motherhood and the growth of the child, because the relations between mothers and sons (or daughters) are metaphysical relations, that means that the relations are not only for a certain time or period of life, but the whole time of the existence and beyond.

My poem *Gold Crown* shows the fact that motherhood is a gold crown metaphorically speaking, that pervive throughout life. That gold crown connotates the power of women of being able to concibe a life inside them and being able to give birth and educate the babies and accompany them as a witness for all life long. The women are no longer only important for their capacity of being able to be fertilized, but for their whole existences. The tradicional point of view has changed with the different waves of feminism. Today is not only one destiny for the women. She could do whatever she wants and also enjoy motherhood.

My poem *My children as seeds* emphazise that no matter the height of the children have, the feelings of the mother is still the same and she could be surprised with them and their conquests. And also the children could have veneration for the conquests of their mothers. The way the children look at the mother do not have to depend on the age, but on the admiration of whom was their progenitors.

My third poem *Ignacio's Birthday* shows my sense of the time in this special day, that reminds me all the past of my child, but considering with happiness, and possitive feelings the relation between my son and I, and also the future times.

My autognosis may me consider another point of view from the old and traditional that is hold in Susana March's poem *My son has grown this summer*. The autognosis is the deep recognition of the feelings of oneself, that is the very pure ideas that generates the fact of being mother, and the relation between that feelings and the growth of the sons.

Conclusions

Motherhood is a power, being able to be fertilized, being able to conceive a new being within oneself, being able to be the baby first vital space for growth, being able to give birth, being able to breastfeed the baby, being able to care for him, being able to pamper him, being able to educate him, being able to raise him, to be able to see him grow, to be able to give affection, to be able to share, to be able to play, to be able to enjoy his growth, to be able to enjoy his achievements, etc. This succession of powers should be considered historically as something positive, because it is obvious that it is so. The desire to control and diminish women is what has changed the positive into the negative, the lofty and sacred into something unpleasant. The responsibility before these powers is undeniable and it is a feminine feat to be able to have everything under control.

In this poem, although a position as a subject is being structured, because she is recognizing the feelings within herself, but those feelings are crossed by a position of herself as an object, that is, as a perspective of the other and not of her being. itself as an autognosis of her situation around motherhood. Her position endorses and confirms what “the other” sees and does not build an identity of the female subject outside of that position.

The disagreement with the traditional feminine model is exposed, since the lyrical subject dares to expose his feelings in a poem with regret and anguish; and deep down, although they endorse the position expressed above, they are nevertheless denouncing it, as a need for change. The deconstruction of the “subversive repetition” defined above is necessary, since the woman is not only a reproducer, but motherhood is a situation that goes through the physical but has metaphysical scope, which transcends age and lasts throughout timelife.

Thus, the need for a break with that ancient female model that assumed a maternal role limited to certain very limited parameters, both in capacities and in its duration, is manifested. There is an old motherhood conception in Susana March’s poem “My son has grown this summer”, that indicates an absence of autognosis of herself that is united to the traditional point of view of motherhood and women, related to the women as an object and not as a subject.

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