

A Critical Introspection into the Poetic Style of Sonia Sanchez

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Poetry was the creative genre that saw the most accomplished experimental and distinguished work by the black artist of the sixties. Because poetry normally requires far less time to compose than prose genres such as the novel or the short story, it was ideally suited to the felt immediacy of struggle characteristics of Black arts and Black Power advocates and adherents. The black revolutionary poets not only pride the value and distinctness of their blackness but also affirm a black aesthetic in literature. Hoyt W. Fuller, in a critical essay, defines this black aesthetic in *Black Expression* as “a system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black people which reflect the special character and Imperatives of black experience”. (268)

The term ‘Black Aesthetic’ can be linked to the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Black Arts Movements believed that occasional performative, musical authentic, and affective sounds of a black voice committed to struggle could serve as persuasive and effective weapons in the mission to free a black nation. Hence black practitioners sought to combine the African American vernacular resonances of sermons, popular music, and black mass speech into a rousing new form of poetry. Their verse was free, conventional, jazzy, and bluesy and this effort can be found in the verse of Sonia Sanchez. No one was more capable in this amalgamation of the experimental and vernacular than Sonia Sanchez.

Sonia Sanchez is the product of a very turbulent period in the history of African American literature. Sonia Sanchez a poet, educator, and champion of and for black culture is regarded worldwide as a living legend, an esteemed female writer of the African American community. Sonia Sanchez born on September 9, 1934 in Birmingham, Alabama, and she was brought up in the American South. Her mother died in childbirth when she was only a year old. Sonia’s grandmother raised her but she also passed away when the poet was only six years old. At this time she and her siblings got back to Harlem to live with their father, who was a school teacher. It was at this time that Sanchez started writing. Her grandmother's misfortune and the emergence of a stutter spurred her to find speech through writing.

In Harlem, Sanchez learned the dialect of the street that would characterize so much of her writing later. In New York, She learned that racism was not limited to the South, although its northern manifestation was different. She has received numerous awards for both her poetry and social activism, including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the Lucretia Mott Award, the Outstanding Arts Award from the Pennsylvania Coalition of 100 Black Women, an American Book Award (for Homegirls and Handgrenades), a Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Humanities, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, as well as the Peace and Freedom Award from

Women International League for Peace and Freedom and a Community Service Award from the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. She has authored sixteen books and has been contributing editor to *Black Scholar* and the editor of two anthologies.

Like all other poets of her age, Sonia Sanchez's revolutionary aim is to create a black aesthetic with its own distinctive nature. The poetic style of Sanchez is the result of her longing to produce revolutionary poetry for the people of her race. This paper sheds light on the poetic style of Sonia Sanchez's Poetry.

Sanchez's poetic language is black enough to generate confidence in her identity. With an oral poetry that draws both young and old people, she hits her black audience. central goal Sonia Sanchez has consciously selected the vocabulary and style best suited to her central goal of substantive revolutionary rhetoric. Don L. Lee in his book *DynamiteVoices* describes Sonia Sanchez as:

a good solid revolutionary blk/writer (solid: having had to sit on garbage cans instead of park benches; understanding early that you are not white; being loved properly, even if it's only once, watching people you love die/too often). Her ABC's were learned in alleys and corner bars; she knows what motivates her blk/sisters and understands the hurt of Blackmen. (48)

In the twentieth century Sonia Sanchez pioneered the use of music in poetry and laid foundation for many other authors to do likewise. She was interested in tossing out conventional poetry rules to produce another variety of work that fused Blues rhythms, sounds, and themes with political significance, cultural relevance, and social commentary all targeted at an African-American public.

Sanchez is known for her creative fusion of music like the blues and conventional literary forms such as haiku and tanka. She also uses spelling to honor the distinctive sound of Black English, for which she gives credits to Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown.

Homecoming (1969), her first book of poems, is renowned for its blues influences in both form and content. The volume explicates both the struggle in the United States to establish black identity as well as the key motives Sanchez sees in black culture for celebration. *We a BaddDDD People* (1970), her second book strengthen her creative contribution to the Black Arts Movement by focusing on the everyday lives of black men and women. These poems use urban black vernacular, inventive punctuation, spelling and spacing, and the standard of jazz performative.

She continuously explores the sonku, tanka and haiku, and forms, as well as blues-influenced rhythms. The musical elements of her poetry bring to her poems a greater degree of sensitivity. Apart from these, her poetry also exhibits features of Black Speech. Ungrammatical sentence structure is typical of black speech activity and this aspect is seen in many of Sanchez's

poems. The lack of agreement between subjects and verbs can be seen in lines from “To blk/reccrd/buyers”:

don't play me no
righteous bros.
white people
ain't rt bout nothing
no mo.
don't tell me bout
foreign dudes
cuz no blk/
people are grooving on a
sunday afternoon. (*Home Coming* 26)

Another aspect of black speech that she uses to accomplish credibility and communicate with her black audience is unmatched subjects and verbs. Her audience response will be greater when she uses a language form with which they are familiar. An example of unmatched subjects and verbs is found in a poem entitled "to all sisters" from *Home Coming*:

what a white woman got
cept her white pussy
always sucking after blk/ness
what a white woman got
cept her straight hair
covering her fucked up mind
what a white woman got
cept her faggoty white man
who goes to sleep In her
without
coming
what a white woman- got
cept money trying to buy up
a blk/man?
yeah.
what a white woman got? (27)

Sanchez represents the lazily or non-articulated vowel and consonant sounds of black speech in her poetry. Lines from a poem entitled "there are blk/puritans" demonstrates this:

there are blk/puritans
among us
straight off the
mayflower
who wud have u
believe
that the word
fuck/u/mutha/fucka
is evil. (*We People* 17)

Sonia Sanchez does not seek approval or acceptance of her ideas by white America. Sanchez is a revolutionary poet who seeks rejection of her ideas and message from the masses of white people. Her poetry is the voice of the brothers and sisters of her race. The poet through her poetry places herself in the position as a leader of her race. Sanchez explicitly demands her black audience to identify and relate to her as their leader. Therefore, Sanchez has to know the nature and experiences of her black audience. Madhubuti in *Black Women Writers* writes:

Sonia Sanchez respects the power of Black language. More than any other poet, she has been responsible for legitimizing the use of urban Black English in written form. Her use of language is spontaneous and thoughtful..... Her language is culturally legitimate and genuinely reflects the hard bottom and complicated spectrum of the entire Black community. She has taken Black speech and put it in the context of world literature. This aspect of her work has often been overlooked. (420)

Sanchez's implied audience is frequently categorized by their socio-economic and age level. Sanchez uses a language that is acquainted to herself and her black audience. Her aim is to bring about a social, political, and moral revolution amongst black people. Thus, both her revolutionary aim and perception of audience determine her poetic message and style.

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