

## ABSTRACT

May Swenson was not a major poet, therefore, not many dissertations or criticisms have been written on her poetry. As a result, there is still an aura of mystery surrounding her poetry as many aspects of her works have yet to be explored. Although not much research has gone into establishing Swenson as a feminist poet, Kirstin Ritter Hotelling Zona's latest publication entitled Marianne Moore, May Swenson, and Elizabeth Bishop: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint (2002) which is based on her dissertation, does help to shed light on the issue. In her dissertation, she argues that although these three female poets "all wrote poetry that is marked by a certain self reserve — precisely the motive against which most feminist poets and critics of the last thirty years have established themselves" (Hotelling, After Autonomy v), these poets "underwrite, rather than reject, a deep feminist commitment" (v). In her dissertation and book, Zona examines Swenson's poems in the context of feminist criticism and illustrates that her poems can be read as works which deal with the discovery of the female identity.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine a particular aspect of Swenson's poems in order to show that Swenson is indeed a poet concerned with issues pertaining to feminism, and particularly issues of the female identity. The aspect which will be examined in the course of this dissertation is the silences in Swenson's poetry. Silences are an apt mode of expression to reveal the female self because they bring with them the possibility of a "voice" for those who are oppressed. Silences are apparent in two ways in Swenson's poems. Firstly: through the physical gaps and spaces which we can see on the page and recognise as the physical manifestations of silences. Secondly: they exist through what is unsaid in the poems. The main contention of this dissertation is to examine these two forms of silences and show how they enhance Swenson's interest

and concern for the female identity. Besides acting as a means of expression for the female, they also open gates for women to pave their way to liberation.

Through the process of exploring the silences in Swenson's poems, it is hoped that her role as an important figure in feminist poetry will surface. This study of silences aims to uncover her feminist concerns with the female identity in her poems, and in the process, to reveal facets of Swenson's works. This exploration also hopes in the end, to bring the readers into the different perspectives and readings which her poems can offer.

## ABSTRAK

May Swenson bukan seorang penyajak utama, oleh itu, tidak banyak buku atau disertasi telah ditulis mengenai sajak-sajaknya. Disebabkan itu, sajak-sajaknya penuh dengan misteri. Dia telah menulis banyak buku sajak, tetapi kajian ke atas sajak-sajaknya dan orangnya sebagai penyajak wanita adalah tidak mencukupi. Tujuan disertasi ini adalah untuk memberi perhatian yang lebih kepada sajak-sajaknya dengan mengenakan pembacaan yang berbeza terhadap sajak-sajaknya. Ia bermakna untuk menonjol yang sajak-sajaknya boleh dibaca sebagai kerja yang berkenaan dengan penemuan identiti wanita. Untuk mencapai matlamat ini, sesuatu aspek yang penting di dalam sajak-sajak Swenson akan dikaji oleh disertasi ini iaitu, kebisuan.

Kebisuan adalah sesuatu yang amat penting dan sesuai kerana ia boleh bertindak sebagai “suara” bagi wanita untuk menyuara dirinya. Ia menonjol dalam dua aspek di antara sajak - sajak Swenson. Pertama adalah kebisuan yang dilihat pada mukasurat sajak sendiri. Kedua adalah kebisuan yang direka oleh apa yang tidak disebut atau tidak dapat disebut di dalam sajak - sajaknya. Ia adalah melalui kedua-dua aspek kebisuan ini yang kita dapat merasai and memahami penglibatan Swenson dengan identiti wanita. Kebisuan boleh bertindak sebagai “suara” and juga membolehkan wanita mencari jalan keluar daripada penderitaan mereka.

Dengan manjalani kajian ini, ia diharapkan yang Swenson boleh menonjol sebagai penyajak wanita. Kebisuan dalam sajak - sajaknya juga dapat melepaskan berbagai tanggapan terhadap sajak - sajaknya. Akhirnya, diharapkan bahawa kajian ini dapat membawa pembaca ke dalam dunia Swenson and berbagai perspektif and pembacaan yang datang dengannya.