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Confessional Rebellions: Body, Domesticity, and Subjectivity in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das

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Abstract— *Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das are routinely grouped as "confessional" poets, yet comparisons of the two have largely assumed the label, read Plath through her suicide and treated Das as an Indian echo of an American school. This article historicizes the comparison. It reads Plath within the Cold War ideology of domestic containment, and Das within a post-independence India in which the Hindu Code (1955–58) rewrote marriage, the official status of English was contested (1963–67), and the Nair matrilineal household of her birth was being legally dismantled. Drawing on Gilbert and Gubar's angel/monster paradigm, Cixous on writing the body, Kristeva on abjection and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of Western feminist universalism, it reads selected poems, The Bell Jar and My Story, along three axes: the body, domesticity and madness, and language. Both poets, it argues, turn confession from private catharsis into a staged performance of female agency, but their rebellions differ in kind. Plath's speakers seek release from the body through spectacle, ritual death and flight, and her claims to authority borrow the vocabulary of historical atrocity. Das's speakers claim the body, the English language and the Radha myth as possessions of a regional, multilingual self. Confession, the article concludes, is a rhetoric shaped by particular regimes of the family, and it cannot travel from Boston to Malabar unrevised.*

Keywords— ***confessional poetry; Sylvia Plath; Kamala Das; female body; domesticity; postcolonial feminism; abjection; Nair matriliny***

I. INTRODUCTION

M. L. Rosenthal's review of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* in *The Nation* on 19 September 1959, titled "Poetry as Confession," named a mode of writing that was soon attached, often against their wishes, to Lowell, John Berryman, W. D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. For Rosenthal, the novelty lay in the poet's abandonment of persona, summed up in his remark that "Lowell removes the mask" (*Our Life in Poetry* 109), and in the disclosure of what decorum would ordinarily withhold. The term soon settled on Plath's posthumous *Ariel* (1965), and above all on the poems of October 1962, written after her separation from Ted Hughes.

In the same decade, Kamala Das published Summer in Calcutta (1965) and The Descendants (1967), English verse books that treated marital unhappiness, adultery, and female desire with unusual candour. Her autobiography, published in English as *My Story* (1976), caused a scandal in Kerala. Das, who also wrote in Malayalam as Madhavikutty, is routinely placed beside Sexton and Plath. The placement carries a hidden argument: it makes a category coined in Boston the measure of a poet whose formation owed little to that milieu. This article compares the two poets while treating "confessional" as an object of analysis rather than a premise.

1.1 Socio-historical Contexts

Plath's mature work belongs to what Elaine Tyler May calls domestic containment: the Cold War ideology that cast the home as the sphere where dangerous social forces could be held in check (May). *The Bell Jar* appeared in January 1963, the year of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan), and Deborah Nelson links the rise of confessional poetry to the contemporaneous redefinition of privacy in American law and culture (Nelson). In 1959 Plath and Sexton audited Lowell's poetry seminar at Boston University ("Lowell, Plath, and Sexton"), and Plath later told Peter Orr that *Life Studies*, especially its hospital poems, had opened poetry to private and partly taboo experience (Orr). For Plath, confession arrived already bound to the asylum and the nursery.

Kamala Das began publishing in a republic that was rewriting the legal form of the family. The four statutes of the Hindu Code (1955–58) introduced monogamy and divorce for Hindus and set a statutory minimum age for marriage. Das had married K. Madhava Das in 1949, at about fifteen ("Kamala Das"), so her marriage belongs to the older customary order and her poetry to the codified one. Her language was contested too. Article 343 of the Constitution allowed English to continue only until 1965; the Official Languages Act of 1963 said merely that English *may* continue; the anti-Hindi agitations of 1965 left about seventy dead by official count; and indefinite bilingualism was secured only in 1967. "An Introduction," with its defence of Das's English, appeared in 1965, while that status was an open constitutional question.

The context most consistently absent from comparative criticism is Nair matriliny. Under *marumakkathayam*, descent and property passed through the female line within the *taravad*, the joint matrilineal household, and the customary union of *sambandham* could be dissolved, with children remaining in the mother's house. Colonial and post-colonial law progressively redefined this order. The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 allowed *sambandham* unions to be registered as marriages, the Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1932 codified matrilineal inheritance, and the Kerala Joint Family System (Abolition) Act of 1975 ended the joint family (Kodoth; Arunima; Gough; Jeffrey). Das was born in 1934 into the Nalapat family, a name that came to her through her mother, the poet Balamani Amma, and after marriage she moved into a patrilocal life in Calcutta and Bombay ("Kamala Das"). The structural contrast is exact. Plath writes from inside a male-headed nuclear household that Cold War ideology sought to fortify, while Das writes as the daughter of a female-centred order that law was dismantling.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Although they wrote from very different positions (Plath within post-war American suburban domesticity and Das within a post-colonial Indian patriarchal lineage), both poets turn the confessional mode from a vehicle of private catharsis into a site of feminist subversion. Through bodily imagery, resistance to marital containment and claims to linguistic autonomy, each recasts the female confessional voice as political agency rather than passive hysteria. Their rebellions, however, differ in kind. Plath stages rebellion as escape: her speakers exhibit, empty, burn and finally outrun the female body, and her boldest claims to authority borrow the vocabulary of historical atrocity. Das stages rebellion as appropriation: her speakers claim the body, the colonial language and the devotional myth of Radha as possessions of a self that is regional, multilingual and openly performed. The relation between the poets is therefore not that of original and copy but of two rhetorics of confession, each legible only within its own history of the family.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Plath Scholarship

Plath criticism began as a quarrel about legitimacy. George Steiner called "Daddy" "the Guernica of modern poetry" (Steiner, "Dying Is an Art") but later asked whether a writer who was not a victim had the right to appropriate the Holocaust (Steiner, "In Extremis"), and Irving Howe judged the analogy between a daughter's grievance and the camps disproportionate (Howe). Judith Kroll moved the debate from biography to myth, reading the late poems as a personal mythology of rebirth drawn from Graves and Frazer (Kroll). Feminist criticism then recast the field. Sandra M. Gilbert identified a recurrent plot in which a true self escapes a false shell (Gilbert), and Alicia Ostriker placed Plath at the centre of American women poets' seizure of male-coded language and myth (Ostriker). Steven Gould Axelrod read Plath's writing as both wound and cure (Axelrod), and Jacqueline Rose defended the Holocaust imagery as a self-aware exploration of fantasy and identification (Rose).

A third phase has emphasised performance and history. Christina Britzolakis shows how irony and self-parody undercut any reading of the poems as sincere confession (Britzolakis); Marjorie Perloff demonstrates that Hughes's reordering of *Ariel* replaced Plath's planned arc toward rebirth with one ending in death (Perloff); Tracy Brain, Nelson and Jo Gill historicise the work (Brain; Nelson; Gill, *Cambridge Introduction*); and Heather Clark presents Plath as a deliberate, ambitious artist rather than a victim

(Clark). The field has moved from biography toward performance, but it has rarely tested Plath's rebellion against a different historical order.

2.2 Kamala Das' Scholarship

Das criticism has its own founding quarrel, over sensationalism and authenticity. Devindra Kohli defended her departures from standard English as authentic Indianisation and rejected readings that reduced her treatment of desire to self-dramatisation (Kohli). A. N. Dwivedi judged her claim to universality forced (Dwivedi), and Anisur Rahman began a formal inquiry that later critics have seldom pursued (Rahman). A second strand concerns myth. Fritz Blackwell concluded that Das's interest in Krishna is "literary and existential, not religious" (13), and R. Parthasarathy linked her candour to the Sahaja tradition (Parthasarathy 56). A third strand is feminist and autobiographical. Iqbal Kaur read *My Story* as a document of feminist revolution (Kaur), Vrinda Nabar read the poetry through female desire and its frustrations (Nabar), and Eunice de Souza credited Das with having "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women" (de Souza). P. P. Raveendran notes that Das never identified with organised feminism (Raveendran), and Merrily Weisbord's memoir portrays her husband differently from *My Story* (Weisbord).

This research paper has debated Das's sincerity in the very terms Plath studies has dismantled, treated her English as style rather than political choice, and left matriliny largely outside its readings.

2.3 Existing Comparative Scholarship

The comparison itself is not new. Indian doctoral theses have paired Das with Plath and Sexton, generally under the confessional label (Gupta; Mohapatra; Awasthi), and Anju C contrasts Das's sustaining life instinct with Plath's overwhelming death drive (Anju C). Seema Chaudhary compares the poets' themes and technique and explains their differences through biography (Chaudhary); Nidhi Mehta's essay appears to be the only comparison published in a Plath-studies venue (Mehta); and Ritushree Sengupta reads both poets on the body and patriarchal control (Sengupta). The most methodologically distinct study, Seema Ghangale and colleagues' "Language as Revolt" (2025), uses critical discourse analysis to read enjambment, dense metaphor and shifting pronouns as linguistic revolt against patriarchy (Ghangale et al.).

III. RESEARCH GAP

The gap is one of method and context rather than an absence of comparison. Existing work treats "confessional" as a description rather than a historically produced category, and so ignores the revisions of Gill, Nelson and Britzolakis. It reads Plath through her suicide. It implicitly positions Das as derivative, although *Summer in Calcutta* appeared in the same year as the British *Ariel*. It does not use postcolonial feminism, and Mohanty in particular, to ask whether frameworks built on Plath can be applied to Das without distortion. It omits the contexts that make the domestic poems legible: Cold War containment on one side, and the Hindu Code, the language crisis and Nair matriliny on the other. And it rarely ties form and language to the political conditions of writing.

The present study differs from Ghangale and colleagues, the closest precedent, in three respects. It reads Das's choice of English as a position taken during the constitutional crisis of 1963–67, not as a set of stylistic markers. It places the domestic poems within two specific legal orders of the family rather than a general patriarchy. And it uses Mohanty to test, rather than assume, the reach of Western feminist theory, including against Plath's own universalism.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do Plath and Das adapt and redefine the twentieth-century confessional mode within Cold War America and post-independence India respectively, and can the label describe Das without distortion?
- In what ways do both poets use body politics, physical decay and sexual autonomy to resist patriarchal surveillance and domestic confinement, and when does the body figure as a site of entrapment rather than an instrument of revolt?
- How do their distinct stylistic strategies, Plath's mythologised and highly crafted metaphor and Das's conversational, multilingual post-colonial English, subvert male-dominated literary canons, and where do their claims to authority reach their limits?

Research Objectives

- To historicise the confessional label from Rosenthal's 1959 coinage through its later revisions.
- To read selected poems by both poets, with *The Bell Jar* and *My Story*, along the axes of body, domesticity and madness, and language.
- To situate Plath within Cold War domestic containment, and Das within the Hindu Code, the language crisis and Nair matriliny.

- To test Gilbert and Gubar, Cixous and Kristeva against Mohanty's critique of Western feminist universalism.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Confessional Poetics and Its Revisions

Rosenthal defined the confessional mode by two features: the removal of the mask, so that the speaker is to be taken as the poet, and the disclosure of material that convention would keep private (Rosenthal, "Poetry as Confession"). The definition's simplicity made it both influential and vulnerable, and Berryman, among others, rejected the word. Later criticism has inverted it. Jo Gill, drawing on Foucault's account of confession as a practice that produces truth rather than revealing it, treats confessional writing as a self-conscious, often ironic performance of selfhood (Gill, *Modern Confessional Writing*). Nelson reads the mode as a response to a political crisis of privacy (Nelson), and Christopher Grobe traces confession as a way of staging the self (Grobe). Plath's remarks to Orr point the same way: she rejected poetry closed in on itself and held that private experience should bear on events such as Hiroshima and Dachau (Orr). No verified statement by Das on Plath or on the label has been located, and none is attributed to her here. In this article, "confessional" names a rhetoric of disclosure, a set of choices that produce the effect of an unmasked self, whose fidelity to biography is a separate question.

5.2 The Angel, the Monster and the Madwoman

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that patriarchal culture confined women to the extremes of angel and monster, producing in women writers an anxiety of authorship, and that their rebellion is often voiced by a mad or monstrous figure who is the author's double, "an image of her own anxiety and rage" (Gilbert and Gubar 78). The angel has a precise genealogy, in Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854–62) and in Virginia Woolf's insistence that the woman writer must kill her (Woolf 236–38). The madwoman requires two qualifications. Elaine Showalter shows how psychiatry constructed madness as a female malady that could also be read as protest (Showalter), while Shoshana Felman warns that to romanticise madness as rebellion is to mistake powerlessness for strategy (Felman). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of *Jane Eyre*, which recovers the colonial status of the madwoman Bertha Mason, shows that the paradigm has a colonial blind spot (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts").

5.3 Writing the Body and the Abject

Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" demands that women write themselves into a history from which they have been driven: "Write your self. Your body must be heard" (880). Two of its figures serve this study: the Medusa reread as laughing and beautiful rather than monstrous (885), and the pun on *voler*, to fly and to steal, as women's double relation to language (887). The English text in *Signs* does not itself use the phrase *écriture féminine*, which belongs to the wider French tradition, so this article speaks of "writing the body." Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* defines the abject as what the self must expel to constitute itself, whatever "disturbs identity, system, order" (4): bodily fluids, food loathing, the corpse and the first separation from the maternal body (2–4, 13). Both poets write at these borders, in images of blood, wounds, sweat, menstruation and the corpse. Tina Varga Oswald and Nina Gagulić argue that Plath's speakers perform the abject rather than expel it (Varga Oswald and Gagulić); this study asks whether Das's speakers instead offer it.

5.4 Mohanty's Corrective Critique

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" criticises the Western feminist construction of "the 'third world woman' as a singular monolithic subject" (51), produced by assuming that women form a coherent group before analysis and that power operates in a single binary (55–56). Against this, she calls for politically grounded analysis of particular places (65). Here Mohanty functions as a methodological constraint rather than one lens among others. Her critique forbids two moves common in the existing comparisons: treating Das as a Third World version of Plath and treating Indian domesticity as a variant of the American suburb. It also turns back on Plath: if Western feminism's universal woman is historically specific, then so is Plath's rhetoric of universal female suffering.

5.5 Combining the Lenses

The lenses are applied in sequence, with Mohanty last, because the others tend to universalise. Toril Moi faulted Gilbert and Gubar for assuming a unified authorial self and Cixous for grounding writing in anatomy (Moi), and Imogen Tyler argues that abjection theory can re-abject the maternal body it describes (Tyler). Accordingly, angel and monster are treated as roles the poems stage, Cixous's call as a programme against which they are measured, and abjection as a structural account of how bodily borders are drawn.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Approach

The study is qualitative and comparative, proceeding by close reading of diction, imagery, lineation, address and tone within a feminist and postcolonial hermeneutic. The comparison is parallel rather than genetic: no source establishes that Das read or was influenced by Plath, and none is claimed. Susan Bassnett's case for a comparative literature freed from Eurocentric models of source and influence (Bassnett) and Spivak's call for comparison attentive to the languages and histories of the global South (Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*) justify organising the study around shared problems rather than lines of descent.

6.2 Corpus and Selection

For Plath, the corpus comprises *The Collected Poems*, edited by Ted Hughes (1981), the source of line numbers; *Ariel* (1965; 1966) and *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (2004), consulted for contents and order; and *The Bell Jar* (1963), cited by chapter. The poems read are "Tulips" (1961) and five poems of October 1962: "The Applicant," "Lady Lazarus," "Lesbos," "Daddy" and "Ariel." For Das, it comprises *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), source of "An Introduction," "The Freaks," "The Sunshine Cat" and "My Grandmother's House"; *The Descendants* (1967), source of "The Looking Glass" and "The Maggots"; *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973); *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996), source of "Radha"; and *My Story* (1976). Texts were selected for their direct bearing on at least one axis, their centrality to critical debate, and, with two exceptions ("Radha" and *My Story*), their composition between 1961 and 1973, a window that includes the crisis over English.

6.3 Procedure, Persona and Limitations

Section 7 reads each poet in turn along each axis and closes with a synthesis; theory follows the reading so that the poems can complicate the lenses rather than illustrate them. Quotations from the primary works are cited by line number or, where no line numbers are given, by title. Every speaker is treated as a persona. Plath introduced "Daddy" on BBC radio as spoken by a girl with an Electra complex whose father was a Nazi (Plath, *Collected Poems* 293–94), a frame that fictionalises her biography; the speaker of Das's "An Introduction" marries at sixteen, a year later than Das herself; and Das later acknowledged that *My Story* contains substantial fiction (Kelkar). The study reads Das only in English and does not engage her Malayalam writing; its corpus is small by design; and it is conducted from within the Anglophone academy that Mohanty critiques.

VII. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

7.1 Mapping the Female Body: Desire, Disease and Autonomy

7.1.1 Plath: commodity, spectacle, emptiness

In "The Applicant," the wife is first offered as a serviceable hand:

"To fill it and willing

To bring teacups and roll away headaches

And do whatever you tell it.

Will you marry it?

It is guaranteed." (11-15)

The irony is plain: the wife is sold as an instrument that serves the house without questioning its

logic, and the guarantee makes that service permanent. The pitch then turns her into a talking

domestic automaton and closes with the proposal:

"But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,

In fifty gold

A living doll, everywhere you look.

It can sew, it can cook,

It can talk, talk, talk.

It works; there is nothing wrong with it.

You have a hole, it's a poultice.

You have an eye, it's an image.

My boy, it's your last resort.

Will you marry it, marry it, marry it." (31-40)

The language lays bare how the marriage market thinks of a woman. The poem adopts the idiom of

a job interview and a sales pitch, inventories the body as replaceable parts, and refers to the wife

with a neuter pronoun. The poem is spoken entirely by the salesman; the wife never speaks. Its

rebellion is ventriloquism, reproducing the language of the marriage market until it sounds absurd,

and its bomb-proof suit ties marriage to the Cold War household-as-shelter that May describes. The

angel in the house has become a consumer durable.

In "Lady Lazarus," the crowd presses in to watch the body unwrapped, and the ironic undertone

returns as the speaker advertises herself as a commodity:

"This is Number Three.
What a trash
To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.
The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot——
The big strip tease.
Gentlemen, ladies." (22-30)

She then claims possession of herself, as a woman awakened to her own existence, by charging for every look and touch:

"There is a charge
For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart——

It really goes.
And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood
Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
So, so, Herr Doktor.
So, Herr Enemy." (57-66)

"Lady Lazarus" gives the commodity a voice. Resurrection becomes a fairground striptease, and the crowd's appetite is as much the subject as the speaker's survival. The decisive reversal is that the commodity now sets its own price. The passage also reads as a sardonic account of the confessional transaction itself, in which an audience pays to see a poet's scars, so that Plath anticipates her reception and invoices it. In Kristeva's terms, the speaker is a corpse that speaks, abjection made articulate, and she occupies the abject rather than expelling it (Varga Oswald and Gagulić). The poem ends with a phoenix-like rising and a threat to devour men:

"Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air." (82-84)

The closing image has been read as myth of rebirth and as demonic transformation (Britzolakis 155). Either way, the body that rises has first been burned away, and Gilbert and Gubar's monster returns closer to fire than to flesh. In "Tulips," the speaker surrenders her name and body to the hospital:

"The tulips are too excitable; it is winter here.

Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in.

I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly

As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands.

I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.

I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses

And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons." (1-7)

The language then warms and rises in feeling as the flowers' vivid colour and her returning heartbeat press in:

"The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.

The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;

They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,

And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes

Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.

The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,

And comes from a country far away as health." (57-63)

"Tulips" inverts the spectacle. The speaker hands her body to the institution and welcomes the

stripping of identity, since white blankness promises the peace of the dead. The red flowers, like

the family photograph that snags on her, insist on obligation and life. What disturbs her desired

order, in Kristeva's sense, is life itself, and the purity she longs for is coded white, a point Renée

Curry's study of whiteness in Plath makes consequential (Curry).

7.1.2 Das: the body claimed and given

In "An Introduction," puberty, marriage and the first night are presented with a bare, unsparing realism:

"Not the deaf, blind speech

Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds

Or of rain or the Incoherent mutterings of the blazing

Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they

Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs

Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair." (23-32)

Das compresses maturation and its seizure in marriage into a few lines. The speaker distinguishes between a violence the husband did not commit and an injury her body still registers, so that the body records a harm for which existing categories had no name. Her answer is a change of costume: gender becomes something worn, and she takes off the assigned femininity.

In "The Looking Glass," the speaker offers women ironic advice, inventories the man's body, describes the woman's

gift of her odours and fluids and records her depletion when the lover leaves:

"Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman…….His last voice calling out your name and your
Body which once under his touch had gleamed
Like burnished brass, now drab and destitute." (1-24)

"The Looking Glass" reverses the gaze that "The Applicant" turns on the woman. The man is inventoried with tender, slightly comic precision at his least dignified, not priced as a commodity. The woman's gift consists of what patriarchal culture classifies as abject, bodily secretions, odours and menstruation, and Das neither stages it as spectacle nor prices it, as "Lady Lazarus" does, but offers it. This is the closest either poet comes to Cixous's call for the body to be heard. Yet the gift creates dependence: when the lover leaves, the body given away is emptied, and the self drains with it.

In "The Freaks," the speaker gives an unflattering close-up of the lover, sets appetite against emotional emptiness and defends herself by displaying desire, all with unusual openness:

"He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love;……

I am a freak. It's only
To save my face, I flaunt, at
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust." (1-20)

In "The Freaks," desire is flaunted to cover emotional vacancy, and the speaker knowingly assumes the role of monster. Like Lady Lazarus, she makes a show of the body to control what is seen, but her audience is social rather than commercial: she guards a reputation, whereas Plath's speaker exacts payment. Kohli's warning against reading such poems as sensational self-dramatisation is borne out by a poem that names its own display as defence (Kohli).

7.1.3 Synthesis

In both poets, the body entraps where others define its use (the market, the hospital, the marriage bed) and becomes an instrument where the speaker sets the terms, by naming a price or by giving a gift. Both instruments cut two ways. Plath's speakers perform abjection to pass through it, toward a body burned away or bleached white; Das's offer the abject as intimacy and are depleted by the exchange. Cixous's programme fits Das better than Plath, but neither confirms Cixous's universal woman: Das's speaker names her nationality, colour and birthplace before her sex, and Plath's longed-for whiteness is not neutral. In Mohanty's terms, neither writes "the female body"; each writes a body placed in a history.

In "Lesbos," the kitchen is a harshly lit stage set, and the speaker leaves while denying any bond between the women:

"Viciousness in the kitchen!
The potatoes hiss.

x x x x

Sweetheart, that kleptomaniac.
I am still raw.
I say I may be back.
You know what lies are for.

Even in your Zen heaven we shan't meet." ("Lesbos")

"Lesbos" is Plath's most direct poem of domestic rage. The kitchen is a false set, and the title invokes Sappho's island of female community only to invert it, as two wives regard each other with contempt. The angel's kitchen produces monsters but not solidarity. The poem was omitted from the British *Ariel* of 1965 and included in the American edition of 1966, so that its most explicit indictment of domestic life was itself contained in Britain (Perloff; Rose).

7.2.2 Das: My Story, "The Sunshine Cat," "The Old Playhouse"

The daughter of a matrilineal family is given in marriage by her father on patrilocal terms, a transfer of authority that can be read alongside the transformation of matriliny that Arunima traces (Arunima). Her breakdown, as *My Story* describes it, is treated by relocation, a remedy prescribed to the husband rather than administered by an institution. No ward or electrode appears, so Showalter's institutional model has little purchase; madness stays inside the marriage. Because Das acknowledged that the book contains fiction (Kelkar), and Weisbord portrays the husband differently (Weisbord), these episodes are read as literary construction, and Kaur's account of the book as feminist revolution holds best when that revolution is understood as performed (Kaur).

"The Sunshine Cat" turns on the men and the husband who failed her, the book-lined room he locks her in and a strip of sunlight that keeps shrinking:

"They did this to her, the men who know her, the man
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band
Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where

New hair sprouted like great-winged moths, burrowing her
Face into their smells …For sleep had lost its use.

I shall build walls with tears,
She said, walls to shut me in." (14-22)

"The Sunshine Cat" turns Woolf's room of one's own into a cell. The room is lined with books, so literacy furnishes confinement, and the husband is its jailer. The poem judges him in the language of use, for failing both to love her and to use her properly, and by the end she is worthless to men. This breakdown is a deadening rather than hysteria, closer to Felman's powerlessness than to the protest Showalter describes.

In "The Old Playhouse," the husband sets out to tame a migratory bird, and the speaker is diminished in a sealed room:

"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky……

For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom; it must will the mirrors
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water." ("The Old Playhouse")

"The Old Playhouse" makes domestication literal: the wife is a migratory bird, and marriage is the project of taming her. Set beside "The Applicant," it continues the story past the sale. Plath's procured wife never speaks, while Das's speaks back from inside the completed transaction. Against these rooms Das sets, in "My Grandmother's House," a remembered house of the maternal line now fallen silent, an elegy that the history of the *taravad* makes legible. Plath has no equivalent; the lost origin in her poetry is paternal.

7.2.3 Synthesis: the politics of hysteria

In Plath, madness is institutional and psychiatric, tied to a punitive state, and the cure is individual and paid for by the death of a double, a structure Gilbert and Gubar's paradigm describes precisely. In Das, madness is domestic and handled through the husband, the double is a social mask, and the imagined alternative is a remembered matrilineal house rather than a liberal future. Here Mohanty's corrective is decisive. A Western feminist script would cast Das as a woman oppressed by Indian tradition and freed by modern frankness, but the poems suggest something closer to the reverse. Das, an upper-caste, English-educated woman married to a bank officer, complains of a modern, patrilocal, bureaucratic marriage that displaced the female-centred order of her childhood. Read through the Anglo-American madwoman alone, her domestic poems lose the history that gives them their grievance.

7.3 Diction, Aesthetics and Linguistic Subversion

Both poets claim authority by taking language from those who own it, the strategy named in Ostriker's title and in Cixous's *voler* (Ostriker; Cixous 887). They rob different owners, at different costs.

7.3.1 Plath: "Daddy" and "Ariel"

In "Daddy," the speaker's inability to speak her father's German and her identification with deported Jews are rendered with driving emotion:

"You do not do, you do not do

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo……..

There's a stake in your fat black heart

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always *knew* it was you.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through." ("Daddy")

"Daddy" is built on nursery rhythm and a single insistent vowel rhyme that sounds like baby talk and like the pronoun of address. Its crisis is linguistic: the father's language silences the speaker, and she escapes it by taking the position of those that language persecuted. Rose defends the move as a self-conscious exploration of fantasy (Rose), and Plath's remark to Orr shows that binding private experience to Dachau was a declared principle (Orr). Yet the problem remains. The Jewish victim serves as the most extreme available sign of suffering, borrowed by a white American daughter to figure her relation to patriarchy, which is precisely the conversion of a specific history into a general figure for women that Mohanty criticises.

The marriage vows show the father's model reproduced in the husband, and the Nazi allegory yields to vampire imagery as husband replaces father. The last line is a speech act that also recalls a telephone being hung up. The poem attempts to kill by saying.

"Ariel" traces the pre-dawn fusion of rider and horse, the Godiva self-stripping, the fading cry of a child and the flight into the sunrise. It opens:

"Stasis in darkness.

Then the substanceless blue

Pour of tor and distances.

God's lioness,

How one we grow,

Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to

The brown arc

Of the neck I cannot catch." ("Ariel")

"Ariel" moves in short, heavily enjambed lines whose syntax carries the self forward as motion.

Cixous's *voler* becomes literal flight, and Gilbert's myth of a true self escaping its shell finds its

exemplary text (Gilbert). The poem also answers Mrs. Willard: the woman is no longer the

launching point but the projectile. Liberation, however, coincides with self-annihilation, and what

that means depends on which *Ariel* the reader holds, since Plath's own order ends with the bee

poems and survival while Hughes's ends in death (Perloff). A further limit must be stated plainly.

Line 10 uses a racial slur, not reproduced here, to describe the berries along the path. The liberated

self is coded white, through the Godiva allusion, against a darkness named by racial insult. Like the

Holocaust borrowings of "Daddy," this turns the difference of others into material for the speaker's

transformation, and a reading that celebrated "Ariel" as a universal flight of the female spirit would

repeat the flattening Mohanty describes.

7.3.2 Das: "An Introduction" and the Radha poems

"An Introduction" sets aside the male domain of politics and grounds identity in nation, colour and region before gender, the local placement Mohanty demands. Published in the year of the anti-Hindi agitations, it takes neither side of the Hindi–English opposition and refuses linguistic purity instead, claiming English with its peculiarities intact as truthful and as much her own as her body. The objections come from relatives as well as critics, so the policing of language at home mirrors the policing of the body. This is voler as theft: the colonial language seized while its national status was undecided.

The ending moves from Malabar to all women. Dwivedi called this universality "self-imposed and not natural" (Dwivedi), but the poem earns it in a way his objection misses. The speaker claims the first-person pronoun, which the lover had treated as his own, as the shared property of every speaker. Plath reaches universality by borrowing the suffering of others; Das reaches it through grammar.

The Radha poems require a textual correction. The poem often discussed as Das's "Radha," in which Radha's last night with Krishna is followed by her deadness beside her husband, is "The Maggots" in *The Descendants*; a separate poem titled "Radha" appears in *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing*.

"Loved her for the last time and left...
That night in her husband's arms, Radha felt
So dead that he asked, What is wrong,
Do you mind my kisses, love? And she said,
No, not at all, but thought, What is
It to the corpse if the maggots nip?" ("The Maggots")

The devotional theme of separation is repurposed to describe adultery and marital deadness. The marriage bed becomes a grave, and Kristeva's corpse returns: where Lady Lazarus's corpse rises and speaks, Radha's lies still. With Blackwell's existential Krishna (Blackwell 13) and Parthasarathy's Sahaja lineage (Parthasarathy 56), the poem shows that the myth gives Das an authorised idiom for female desire that exceeds marriage.

Radha's dissolution invites comparison with the wish for emptiness in "Tulips," but the two differ. Plath's emptiness is an escape from obligation; Radha's is a chosen union with a beloved who is not the husband, sanctioned by a living devotional tradition. Kroll shows Plath building a private mythology from Graves and comparative anthropology (Kroll). Das draws on a myth her culture already uses to sanctify female longing and turns it against the marriage that culture enforces.

7.3.3 Synthesis: voice as authority

Plath takes language from the father, from the iconography of fascism and from historical atrocity; hers is an authority of extremity, bought at the price of appropriation and a racial coding of liberation that her universalism cannot see. Das takes the colonial language during its constitutional contest and Krishna from the devotional tradition; hers is an authority of location and grammar, and its price is a universality voiced from an elite, English-educated position unavailable to most women in Malabar. The revolts target different authorities, and Plath's claim to speak for women is as historically located as Das's, though it has seldom been read that way.

VIII. CONCLUSION

On the first research question, the confessional mode does not travel unchanged. Plath stays close to Rosenthal's breach of reticence but converts disclosure into theatre and myth, binding the private self to public history. Das performs the same breach within a Malabar household order, a contested English and a devotional tradition, so the label fits her only once it is historicised; read as an Indian echo of an American school, she is misread. In both, confession is a means of agency rather than a symptom.

On the second, both poets locate entrapment wherever others define the body's use and agency wherever the speaker sets the terms. Plath's speakers take control by pricing their exhibition or willing their own emptiness, so agency tends toward escape from the flesh; Das's take control by giving, and remain exposed to depletion within love. In domestic life, Plath's madwoman is a psychiatric figure produced by institutions, and her recovery is individual and purchased by a double's death; Das's breakdown stays inside the marriage, and her alternative to the patrilocal home is a remembered matrilineal one, which reverses the script through which Western feminism has often read Indian women.

On the third, Plath's authority derives from extremity and the borrowed suffering of others; Das's from location, from English claimed during the crisis over its status, and from a devotional idiom that sanctions desire beyond marriage. Each universalism has its limit: Plath's woman is white and American, and Das speaks from an elite, English-educated position.

The article's contribution is a method rather than a verdict: it treats confession as a rhetoric shaped by particular regimes of the family, and brings Nair matriliny, the Hindu Code, the language crisis and the editorial history of both poets into a comparison that has so far done without them. Further research should extend the comparison to Das's Malayalam writing as Madhavikutty and test the argument against Sexton.

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