

Sylvia Plath: of Post-Colonial Time, Space and ‘other’

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The poetry of Sylvia Plath has often been labeled as ‘confessional’. Slapped with this label, the critics have not deigned to look beyond the obvious. A series of quotations and explanations at the beginning of the paper will justify the statement. Despite having confessional elements, yet her poems stand out as brilliant manifestations of the troubled and creative personality of Plath. This paper aims at establishing one perspective of interpretation-from the postcolonial view of ‘space’, ‘time’, and ‘other’ and tries to delve into the poems where this strand infuses a spirit of multiculturalism. Taking examples from a variety of poems the paper tries to prove that her poems are an intermingling of multifarious strains, where she transgresses stereotypes followed by an appropriation of the space thus created.

“I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate fantasy”

P.B.Shelley, “Mont Blanc” (35)

Sylvia Plath’s image of the “tortured woman poet in America” (Ratner 306)has been mythified fascinatingly, so much so, that critics and readers have deigned not to look beyond the ‘obvious’. The details of her life are necessary to understand her works-the themes and patterns which predominate her poetry. She was born in Massachusetts on October 27, 1932 to Otto Emil Plath, a German father and Aurelia Schober Plath, an Austrian mother. She lost her father in 1940, a few days before her eighth birthday. Her widowed mother was not wealthy but she managed to attend Smith, a prestigious women’s college on a full scholarship from 1950 to 1955. However this college life was punctuated by a suicide attempt in 1953 wherein she was forced to miss a semester and it also led to hospitalization and shock treatment.

She lived through a period of literary high in college winning several prizes for her poems and stories. In 1956 and 1957 she attended Newnham College of Cambridge University, England on a Fullbright Scholarship. She married the British poet Ted Hughes in 1956 and they had two children: a daughter, Frieda, in 1960, and a son Nicholas, in January of 1962. A separation between husband and wife followed in October of that year and she committed suicide on February 11, 1963 at the age of 30.

Thus the ‘obvious’ certainly includes the details of her much publicized suicide attempts, her craving to be acknowledged, her marital upheavals and the brilliant but brutally honest portrayals of her life through verse. Countless biographies and critical studies have appeared in the years following her death but it has merely given rise to a strictly one sided image of the versatile poetess. Straitjacketed as ‘confessional’ her lyrical attempts were clubbed with the intimate and immediately personal works of Robert Lowell (b. 1917), Allen Ginsberg (b. 1926), Theodore Roethke, John Berryman (b. 1914) and Anne Sexton (b. 1928). Much of this ‘mistaken label’ as

Rochelle Ratner calls it has been the result of Robert Lowell's Introduction to the American edition of *Ariel*, where he says-

"Everything in these poems is personal, confessional, felt, but the manner of feeling is controlled hallucination the autobiography of a fever.....This poetry and life are not a career ; they tell that life, even when disciplined , is simply not worth it."

Ratner goes even a step further by commenting that-

"Plath has been slapped with the catch-all label of a 'confessional' writer". (Ratner 308).While the poems of *Ariel* contain personal elements, for Ratner they are anything but confessional. She questions-"How can one 'confess' to suicide, death and resurrection? They are, rather, deep visions, mystical experiences, and prayers."(Ratner 309)

The critics themselves were torn asunder, baffled and somewhat out of depths when they tried to design a 'label' for Plath. Contradicting ideas sprung up in their voiced opinions. The British critic A.Alvarez comments that *Ariel*"has an originality that keeps it apart from any poetic fads. It is too concentrated and detached and ironic for confessional verse, with all that implies of self-indulgent cashing-in on misfortunes."(Alvarez 58).Contrary to this expounded idea, he himself in his other writings on Plath, especially *The Savage God* contributes to her being labeled as a confessional writer.

M.L. Rosenthal's view of 'confessional' poetry suggests a continuing of "Romantic and modern tendency to place the literal self more and more at the centre of the poem."(Rosenthal 27).The arena of confessional poems included "private humiliations, sufferings and psychological problem.....usually developed in the first person and intended without question to point to the author himself."(Rosenthal 26).Judith Kroll's idea about Sylvia Plath in her book *Chapters in a Mythology* precisely deviates from Rosenthal's idea of 'confessional'. She says-

"If she were writing 'confessional' poetry, there would presumably be a premium on including precisely those juicy, convincingly specific, 'real life' details which, when they find their way into her poems, she almost invariably and routinely eliminated if they do not also serve a more mythic and general purpose-which, because of her extraordinary sensibility to correspondences with myth, they often do."(Kroll 72)

However, stereotyping Plath as 'confessional' seems to provide the critics and scholars, the perfect excuse to undermine her genius as "unpredictable explosions" (Donoghue 301) conditioned and generated by discrete events in her unconventional lifestyle. The other perspective which has remained somewhat concealed is that poems triggered off by personal events also attempt the construction of a poetics from within the woman's position. It vindicates the belief that women lacked the cognitive powers required for the production of serious art. Unconsciously, Plath also brings to the fore one of the fundamental definitions of poetry as put forth by William Wordsworth.

The events of Sylvia Plath's life have been dissected with cold clarity and detachment again and again. Critics resorted to a peculiar path to put a 'label' on Plath. The anatomy of 'confessional' poetry was thoroughly surveyed to find a chink in its armour which would link up with the unnatural events of Plath's life. The 'label' was pre-ordained and Plath was made to 'fit in'. Surprisingly, this was what she had desired all her life-to 'fit in' everywhere.

Gaining approval, even at an early age made her perform perfectly whatever she was asked to do and also behaving exactly as she intuited would please her elders charted out most of her behavioural patterns. She did 'fit in' but too late-in death amongst the hierarchy of 'confessional' poets.

Confession has a double meaning, however. It is an “act of expiation for sins, one that restores the shriven person to membership in a community of the like-minded.”(Middlebrook 647).The contemporary view that pervades is that for poets confessional poems were “acts of self-accusation performed in public.....as a way of accounting for their non conformism to American ideals.”(Middlebrook 647)

.....Confession can however have a totally different aspect altogether. It can mean the public avowal of a point of view, the confession of faith. Diane Wood Middlebrook creates an interesting point-

“Confessional poems sought to expose the poverty of the ideology of the family that dominated post-war culture and to draw poetic truth from the actual pain given and taken in the context of family life, especially as experienced by children.”(Middlebrook 648)

So ‘confessional’ poems have a boundary and Plath does ‘fit in’ with her experiences of childhood-the loss of her father Otto Emil Plath at the age of eight being the greatest betrayal. The two most important works in Sylvia Plath’s oeuvre which has often been streamlined as ‘confessional’ are *Lady Lazarus* (1962) and *Daddy* (1962). According to critics *Lady Lazarus* is an apparent forecast of Plath’s suicide-

“Dying
Is an art, like everything else
I do it exceptionally well.
I do it so it feels like hell
I do it so it feels real
I guess you could say I’ve a call” (Plath 244)

The poet’s image of herself in this poem-

“The pure gold baby
That melts to a shriek.....”

harks back to an earlier image in *Morning Song*(19 February 1961) written for her daughter-the movement of a post-partum woman through barriers of the psyche towards her infant drawn by an invisible bond-

“Love set you going like a fat gold watch
The midwife slapped your foot soles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements”. (Plath 156)

Daddy on the other hand correlates the anguish she felt when she lost her father in her childhood and when the “perfect marriage” (Stevenson 229) she had wanted to live with her husband broke down and she was bereft and inconsolable. She was “abandoned” (Stevenson 230) by both men in her life.

“I was ten when they buried you
At twenty, I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you
I thought even the bones would do.
But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue
And then I knew what to do
I made a model of you
A man in black with a Meinkampf look.”(Plath 222)

But do the above explanations suffice? Is it the only way that these poems can be interpreted? And besides what are a handful of poems from amongst the two hundred or more poems that she

has written? Are they enough to confine her to the linearity of 'confessional' poetry? The questions remain unanswered.

Critics themselves classify 'confessional' poets as those who wrote about the "instability of the institution of the family from the inside, and in analytical language partially supplied by psychoanalysis.....The structure of the confessional poem, whether technically formal or free, juxtaposes moments drawn from common life in a manner that invites the psychoanalyst's approach to dreams." (Middlebrook 648). Thus the chief themes used by the confessional poets include divorce, sexual infidelity, childhood neglect and mental disorders that follow from deep emotional wounds received in early life. A confessional poem also contains a first-person speaker, "I", and always seem to refer to a real person in whose actual life real episodes have occurred that cause actual pain, all represented in the poem.

But a new idea does shed off its abstract form at this stage. The tangible reality can be absolutely different. The hackneyed term of 'confessional' has outlived itself. Plath can also be viewed from the perspective that she was merely a sensitive child who mused upon a "separate fantasy". (Shelley 35). She was a gifted daughter who was not doomed to womanly unfulfillment. Her suicide was the culmination of this 'separate fantasy' which exhausted itself at a faster pace than she had anticipated. Plath was accompanied in suicide by other gifted poets, Randall Jarrell in 1965, John Berryman in 1972, and Anne Sexton in 1974. "Suicide was the sign of authenticity. Sanity was supposed to feel ashamed of it." (Donoghue 301). This was the context in which Plath's poems were first widely read and the later suicides particularly by Anne Sexton who possessed lots of similarity with Plath, confirmed the prevalent idea. One wonders at this stage why not much importance was adhered to the postulation by Judith Kroll when she says that Plath's dying heroines "have little in common with stereotypes of suicidal women (in whose action a sense of the meaning of death does not even figure) and have a great deal in common with tragic heroines who die calmly and nobly." (Kroll 74). Denis Donoghue describes Plath as "a girl who lived mostly and terribly on her nerves" (Donoghue 301) - but is that reason enough to classify her poems as strictly "confessional"?

Dr. Horder, her physician, after her death, opined that she was a model patient who seemed to understand her own struggle against suicidal depression. An unlikely parallel appears in the form of Dr. John Nash-the Nobel Laureate mathematical genius whose biography *A Beautiful Mind* by Sylvia Nasar has been made into an award-winning film. His is a story about the mystery of the human mind, in three acts: genius, madness, reawakening. For Sylvia Plath, the 'reawakening' never occurred. The genius with the realization of the first inklings of madness took release in death. Afflicted with a different psychological disease unlike Nash, she tried to efface the memory of the "catastrophic abandonment" (Stevenson 229) by her husband. Her mind refused to accept her predicament but that upswing of emotions and its consequent effect does not deprive her of the right to have a varied interpretation of her works.

The poetry of Sylvia Plath, her unique language and imagery, effervescence of emotions refute all traditional concepts and rebuilds them in her own inimitable style. Plath's poems are not merely the outpourings of a unique mind, nor are they simply the concrete avowals of the mystery and intricacies of the human mind. It is a testimony to the fact that genius do not conform to 'labels' or restrict themselves to genres. It reawakens and triumphs, incorporating sometimes unconsciously several strands left open to interpretations.

"Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture". (du Gay, Hall 11). This is the anthropological perspective of the 'other' as

propounded by du Gay, Hall et al. Mary Douglas, in the steps of the classic work on symbolic systems by the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim and the later studies of mythology by the French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, puts forward the view that “social groups impose meaning on their world by ordering and organising things into classificatory systems” (Douglas 116).

However, she argues further that what really disturbs cultural order is when things “turn up in the wrong category or fail to fit any category” (Douglas 99). These things “float ambiguously in some unstable, dangerous, hybrid zone of indeterminacy in-between”. (Stallybrass and White 85). Things staying in their appointed places create stable culture. Symbolic boundaries thus keep the categories ‘pure’, giving cultures their unique meaning and identity. What unsettles culture is “matter out of place” (Douglas 110), the breaking down of unwritten rules and codes of symbolic boundaries being transgressed, of taboos broken.

This is what Sylvia Plath precisely achieves in her poems. She possesses the ‘immigrant psyche’ so to speak, transgressing symbolic boundaries central to all culture. She is not a part of the process of many cultures that “close” (Kristeva 218) themselves against ‘others’ to maintain their purified state. Plath’s poems boast of a multiculturalism which is strangely attractive more so because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order.

Throughout her short life span she visited innumerable places-Spain, Heptonstall, England- the Hughes’ family home, Cambridge, Wellesley and Cape Cod, Yaddo, France, Court Green-Devon, Ireland and many other places. The range of addresses include-337 Elm Street, Northampton (Smith), 9 Willow Street, Beacon Hill, Boston, 18, Rugby Street, 3, Chalcot Square and 23, Fitzroy Road, -where she ultimately gassed herself to death. She imbibed cultural trends often reflected in her poems infusing multiculturalism in her poems. A reinterpretation of time, space and technique is also noticeable in her works which can be attributed to the hybridity generated by the boundaries. There is no horizon in her view point. She has appropriated it and made it her own thus unsettling the stability of a culture. So the ‘immigrant psyche’ involves a reinterpretation of time, space and technique.

For Plath the Augustinian concept of time as demarcated into the past, present and future is antiquated. Time for her is past and future embedded in her present. She lives for ‘now’ snatching every moment from the hands of Time and living it to the full. Space is no more the area she inhabits. She transacts a ‘lived in’ space-it is more the traits of imbibed culture that she carries with herself contributing to the formation of ‘I’ and her poems. The techniques she has received as an inheritor to the literary world is worked upon and developed in her own style so that a Plathian style is created-bold, sharp-edged, zestful and lively, drenched in unique imageries.

A parallel can be drawn with the Romantic poets-she died young like Shelley, Byron, and Keats. But though her development is more Keatsian in its intensity, yet Blake seems to have had a subtle influence on her choice of themes and their execution. The poem *Who* (Plath 131) shows a slight shade of Keats-

“The month of flowering’s finished. The fruit’s in.
Eaten or rotten. I am all mouth.
October’s the month of storage”

It is reminiscent of Keats’ *Ode to Autumn*.

“For Summer has o’erbrimm’d their clammy cells”

Disagreeing with the Romantic poets, Love is not a “theory” but “the mother of milk” and nurses in her poems are usually ambiguous bearers of love.

“And Love the mother of milk, no theory.

They mistake their star, these papery godfolk” (*Magi*) (*Plath 148*)

Thus she does away with stereotyped images of love and romanticism, yet her emotions bear the same force as her predecessors. In many cases she herself could have guessed that many of her ‘exercises’ were ‘pastiche’: *I Want, I Want* (*Plath 106*) recreates the style of Theodore Roethke. Roethke’s innovativeness lay in his variety of styles and themes and the way the comic and serious sides of his temperament were reflected in his poems.

“Open-mouthed, the baby god
Immense, bald, though baby-headed,
Cried out for the mother’s dug.
The dry volcanoes cracked and spit.

Sand abraded the milkless lip
Cried then for the father’s blood
Who set wasp, wolf and shark to work
Engineered the gannet’s beak.

Dry-eyed, the inveterate patriarch
Raised his men of skin and bone
Barbs on the crown of gilded wire,
Thorns on the bloody rose-stem”.

Plath imitates Roethke by being bold, brash and open in dealing with her themes with the help of unique imagery.

Poems, Potatoes (*Plath 106*) imitates Wallace Stevens. The double life he led is reflected in poetry too where he led a double life. The first style is ruminative, soliloquizing, issuing from one theme and many variations, so Stevens is commonly viewed as a philosophic poet. In the second style his creations are lively, lighter on their feet than the persona. It somehow makes one susceptible to finery. Plath however imitates the first style in this poem-

“The word, defining, muzzles; the drawn line
Ousts mistier peers and thrives, murderous,
In establishments which imagined lines
Can only haunt. Sturdy as potatoes,
Stones, without conscience, word and line endure,
Given an inch. Not that they’re gross (although

Afterthought often would have them alter
To delicacy, to poise) but that they
Shortchange me continuously: whether
More or other, they still dissatisfy.
Unpoemed, unpictured, the potato
Bunches its knobby browns on a vastly
Superior page, the blunt stone also”

And *The Times are Tidy* (*Plath 107*) W.H.Auden. The early Auden poems are impatient and virtually nothing elicits his approval or stirs him to warmth. The poet writes short, brisk poems, no harm is meant though a lot of grousing is inherent which he thinks is for the world’s good.

Human folly is inescapable, but Auden does whatever poetry can to turn the impotence of rage into irony, keeping his temper as sweet as possible.

“Unlucky the hero born
In this province of the stuck record
Where the most watchful cooks go jobless
And the mayor’s rotisserie turns
Round of its own accord.

There’s no career in the venture
Of riding against the lizard,
Himself withered these latter-days.
To leaf-size from lack of action:
History’s beaten the hazard.

The last crone got burnt up
More than eight decades back
With the love-not herb, the talking cat,
But the children are better for it,
The cow milks cream an inch thick,”

However poems like *Dark House*, (Plath 132), *Maenad*, (Plath 133), *The Beast* (Plath 134) are written from her own experience. The use of ‘I’ makes us feel that she is recounting her own experience

“This is a dark house, very big
I made it myself,
Cell by cell from a quiet corner,
Chewing at the grey paper,
Oozing the glue drops,
Whistling, wiggling my ears.
Thinking of something else” (*Dark House*)

These poems recognise Roethke as a fellow poet but her work is more than imitative. It is as if she writes from a shared root, in a parallel quest. Both Roethke and Plath sought lost parents. For Roethke the father was fierce and terrifying in the greenhouse of his myth:

“Fear was my father, Father Fear,
His look drained the stones....”

Similarly, Plath-

“Sat by my father’s bean tree
Eating the fingers of wisdom” (*Maenad*)

In *The Beast* the poet housekeeps in a swamp where the now disintegrated soul shape-shifts among lowly, primitive forms of beings-“Mumblepaws.FidoLittlesoul,Hogwalow’s”

“Time’s gut-end
Among emmets and mollusks,
Duchess of Nothing,
Hairtusk’s bride”.

In all the above poems discussed, the spirit is that of Roethke but the form is uniquely Plath’s.

The space transcends borders and Plath's poems record particular events or incidents which had created an impact on her consciousness. So fascinated by a cruel scene witnessed in Spain, she pens down *The Goring* (Plath 47)

“Arena dust rusted by four Bull's blood to a dull redness,
The afternoon at a bad end under the crowd's truculence,
The ritual death each time botched among dropped capes, ill-judged stabs,
The stongest will seem a will toward ceremony obese, dark.
Faced in his rich yellows, tassels, pompoms, braid, the picador
Rode out against the fifth bull to brace his pike and slowly bear
Down deep into the bent bull-neck...”

She uses words like “arena”, “rusted”, “bull's blood”, “redness”, “stabs”, to emphasise the ruthlessness of the scene.

From Eastham, Cape Cod her experiences find voice in *Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor* (Plath 95)

“The crab-face, etched and set there,
Grimaced as skulls grimace: it
Had an Oriental look,
A samurai death mask done....”

Her interest in supernatural and astrology spawned *Ouija*.(Plath 77).The Artists' Colony in Saratoga Springs at Yaddo yielded *A Winter's Tale*,(Plath 86), *Magnolia Shoals*,(Plath 121),*Yaddo:The Grand Manor*(Plath 123) and other poems-

“On Boston Common a red star
Gleams,wired to a tall ulmus
Americana.Magi near
The doomed State House.

Old Joseph holds an alpenstock
Two waxen oxen flank the Child
A black sheep leads the shepherds' flock
Mary looks mild.....” (*A Winter's Tale*)

Stars over the Dordogne (Plath 165) with its hint of pervading unease was composed at France. The 'sense of absence' shows that Plath is uncomfortable with her surroundings.

“And what if the sky here is no different,
And it is my eyes that have been sharpening themselves?
Such a luxury of stars would embarrass me.

A sense of absence in its old shining place
And where I lie now, back to my own dark star,
I see those constellations in my head,
Unwarmed by the sweet air of this peach orchard.”

Thus a majority of Plath's poems resulted from her 'immigrant psyche'. Intermingling of cultures in her works and reflection of the places she visited are blatant in most of her works. It appears as if the surrounding ambience influenced her works to the extreme. She carried with her the essence of the culture she came into contact with, assimilated it and later reciprocated it in her poems. The definition attributed to 'culture' at the beginning of this paper thus appears

thwarted and her poems testify to the fact that there is an element of hybridity, of ambiguousness prevailing in them.

“Hybridity”, Bhabha argues, “subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures.....It is a counter narrative, a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives”.(Bhabha 48).The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed and forecloses the diverse forms of purity encompassed within essentialist theories. Plath’s poems are therefore not mimics; for Bhabha says that “mimicry repeats rather than represents....., and in that very act of repetition, originality is lost, and centrality de-centred”. (Bhabha 88).However we have seen in the above discussion that Plath transgresses and not merely repeats. She re-creates and her style is unique, not merely a pastiche. Everyone creates stereotypes. It is difficult to function in the world without them. “The creation of stereotypes is a concomitant of the process by which all human beings become individuals.”(Gilman 17). The seeds of its beginnings are sown in the early stages of our development. Stereotypes are mental representations of the world. Perpetuating a needed sense of difference between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, “stereotypes make initial bipolar representations” (Gilman 27) .In reality there is no line between self and the other. The imaginary line drawn is dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self and this prevents the troubling of the illusion of an absolute difference between ‘self’ and the ‘other’. Thus “antithetical stereotypes share a shifting relationship and results in a shifting of paradigm in our mental representations” (Gilman 32).

With the shifting of image, stereotypes also shift. The ‘other’ thus is only a reflection of an internal process which draws upon repressed mental representations for its structure and can be called the ‘double’ or ‘doppelganger”. It can also be referred to as the ‘alter ego’ in whom Plath confides and seeks solace and release from the turbulence of her emotions.

Plath’s poems give evidence that her divided loyalties, good girl versus bad girl ran deep enough to muddle her purpose. The line between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ responds to stresses occurring within the psyche. It presents a dichotomy of mutually exclusive type of women, yet Sylvia Plath can be identified with both. The ‘good’ self projects oneself as one in complete control of the world and free from anxiety while the ‘bad’ self which is unable to control the environment is thus exposed to anxieties. With the spilt of both the self and the world into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects, the ‘bad’ self is distanced and identified with the mental representation of the ‘bad’ object. This “act of projection however saves the self from any confrontation with the contradictions present in the necessary integration of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ aspects of the self”. Thus the rosy fertility queen and the gray scholar of *Two Sisters of Persephone* (Plath 31) are twin aspects of herself.

“Two girls there are: within the house
One sits; the other, without.
Daylong a duet of shade and light
Plays between these.”

Spinster (Plath 49) also registers a shift in paradigm. These poems reflect Sylvia’s strange perception of the world and are therefore part of her way of dealing with the instabilities of her perception of the world. She sets up opposite mirror images of ‘self’ and ‘other self’. Preoccupied with doppelgangers she resented their assertion of inevitable autonomy, becoming hated rivals in the process. The frail construct of her ego is thus threatened causing her mental anguish. In *Witch Burning* (Plath 135) the newborn soul is at once a witch-spirit and the wax-image persecuted by witches-a doubled woman, one of whom has to be annihilated to secure the release of the other. The perennial motif of the double is identified as a red leaf in this poem.

“In the market place they are piling the dry sticks.
A thicket of shadows is a poor coat. I inhabit.
The wax image of myself, a doll’s body.
Sickness begins here: I am a dartboard for witches.
Only the devil can eat the devil out.

In the month of red leaves I climb to a bed of fire.” (*Witch Burning*)

In Plaster (Plath 158) too echoes a fierce resentment the inner Sylvia—the real one, the poet felt in the presence of her artificial exterior. The poem *Letter in November* (Plath 253) too presents a beautiful example of conflict between doubles—the strumpet and spinster conflict of the early poems. The split affects this inner conflict. And the split selves of spinster and strumpet are represented not as separate people but as separate voices. In the poem the speaker cries out and the conflict involves the love and hate, strumpet and celibate for one another, for their acts or for their chosen type of lovers.

“Love, the world
Suddenly turns, turns colour. The street light
Splits through the rat’s tail
Pods of the laburnum at nine in the morning.
It is the Arctic,.....

This is my property
Two times a day.
I pace it, sniffing
The barbarous holly with its viridian
Scallops, pure iron ...

O love, O celibate
Nobody but me
Walks the waist-high wet
The irreplaceable
Golds bleed and deepen, the mouths of Thermopylae”

Interpreted as a rhizomic mode Plath’s ‘self’ helps interpretations to crop up from almost any point of her colossal body of poems. Not necessarily interpreted as ‘other’, ‘self’ gives rise to ‘doubles’, ‘objects’, ‘alter ego’, ‘stereotypes’—to name a few. Thus our perception of the world as ‘good’ and ‘bad’, as ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is triggered by a recurrence of the type of insecurity that induced our initial division of the world into opposite poles. Stereotypes can and often do “exist parallel to the ability to create sophisticated rational categories that transcend the crude line of difference present in the stereotype”. (Gilman 45). We retain our ability to distinguish the ‘individual’ from the stereotyped class into which the object might automatically be placed. Thus stereotypes are inherently protean rather than rigid and allow movement of interpretations. Sylvia Plath’s poems had this individualistic streak which separated her works from those of all other contemporary and later poets.

Invalidating traditional concepts, the post-colonial perspective sheds light on the deep structure of stereotypes and their multifarious interpretations.

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