



A Note About the Cover

Peter K. Steinberg

On the cover of *Plath Profiles 3* is an image of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes's bedroom wallpaper from their 3 Chalcot Square apartment in London. In an unpublished letter to her mother written January 24, 1960, Plath writes of a recent visit to a paper store. She and Hughes settled on three patterns that they liked best. This letter, held in the Lilly Library's Plath Mss. II, also includes her detailed drawing of the layout of their Chalcot Square flat and on which Plath has indicated, in red, that all four bedroom walls, two walls in the kitchen, and the bathroom would be papered.

Plath sent the swatch that provides the cover for this issue to her mother in a letter dated February 2, 1960. The inspiration for placing the image on the cover comes from Guest Editor Amanda Golden's call for papers on "Sylvia Plath and Material Culture." The wallpaper is a material that takes on a cultural significance in Plath's poetry and prose.

What is particularly fascinating about this wallpaper is the way it surfaces in Plath's writings. It appears to have had the opposite effect of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Yellow Wallpaper": rather than presenting an agent or metaphor of entrapment, it liberates Plath, her speakers, and her personae.

Perhaps the most famous example is in the lines, "All night your moth-breath / Flickers among the flat pink roses" from Plath's "Morning Song" (1961) (*Ariel* 11). In her verse poem "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices" (1962), the first voice explains, "I have papered his room with big roses" (*Winter Trees* 51). The pink wallpaper also appears in Plath's fiction, too. In her story "Day of Success" (1961), for instance, a telephone ring arrests Ellen on the threshold of her bedroom. She takes in "the delicate rose-patterned wallpaper" (*Johnny Panic* 191). In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood cannot hide from Dodo Conway's gaze as it pierces "through the white clapboard and the pink wallpaper roses" (131).

The image appears here with the courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University at Bloomington. The full sample, the only one of the three Plath and Hughes selected known to survive, is available to see in Plath Mss. II, Box 6.





Works Cited

Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1965.

---. *The Bell Jar*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

---. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977.

---. *Winter Trees*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971.