

These Ghostly Archives 5: Reanimating the Past

Gail Crowther & Peter K. Steinberg

"Archival histories consist of tales we tell about the archive, and of tales the archive tells." (Helle 5)

The universe of the Sylvia Plath archive is expanding. In addition to discussing long-established and worked-through archives such as the Plath papers held by Smith College and Indiana University, this series of papers has explored lesser known collections of materials such as the BBC Written Archives Centre, the Heinemann archives, and *The New Yorker* records. We ended our previous paper stating that "Since Plath's documents and possessions are scattered disparately in archives across the world, there are always new treasures to find" and with a quote from rare book dealer Rick Gekoski stating that "the treasure hunt must go on" (49). This is a challenge as much as it is a credo, and in this paper we continue our conversation about newly uncovered Sylvia Plath photographs, letters, and collections of archival materials.

Our tales of the archive, and in particular the Plath archives, are as Anita Helle states above, a simultaneous telling. There are our experiences as researchers, and the stories we tell about our searches and finds, working alongside the stories the archives tell to us. This multi-dimensional story weaves a tale that not only informs us about Plath, but also includes history, culture, memory and time-hopping across years. As in "These Ghostly Archives 4,"¹ our research for this paper took place both within the walls of traditional archives – in libraries and special collections– as well as remotely through Google queries and out of doors: both in nature and in houses where Plath resided. In this latter category of "archive" it is the traces of Plath which proved most meaningful and instructive in understanding just how ghostly and limitless her archive is. So whereas a traditional view of an archive may be a wood-paneled reading room with manuscripts and letters, we argue that the archive exists as history on the ground. A place, a house, a room can contain an archive because it houses time, events, memories and past histories. If archives can tell us a tale, then what is more evocative than standing in a house Plath once lived in, or visiting a place she once visited? Places tell stories too. These experiences, we argue, are as relevant to the archive as the more traditional handling of papers and artifacts. Each

¹ "These Ghostly Archives 4: Looking for New England." *Plath Profiles* 5 (Summer 2012): http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/vol5/Crowther_Steinberg.pdf

of these experiences brings their own wonder, their own stories. And each of these experiences shows us that through its very nature, the archive is everywhere, all around us, and thus haunts both our imagination and our culture. Equally, if we see the archive as this living, breathing and moving "thing," then it grows and changes and *always* has a tale to tell us. Here are our latest stories.

PKS: Between 1950 and 1953, Sylvia Plath frequently published her poems and stories in two nationally distributed periodicals: *Seventeen* and *Mademoiselle*. It was not until April 1953, however, that she considered an acceptance to be her "first real professional" one when *Harper's Magazine* purchased three poems "Go Get the Goodly Squab," "To Eva Descending the Stair," and "Doomsday" (*Letters Home* 109).²

The records for *Harper's Magazine* are held in Washington, D. C., in the Madison Building (pictured below) of the Library of Congress (<http://lccn.loc.gov/mm78024968>). In all,



Plath published eight poems with *Harper's* between May 1954 and December 1962. In the collection, there are three original letters from Plath to *Harper's Magazine* dated: April 23, 1953; February 7, 1954; and April 1, 1962. In addition to these letters, *Harper's* retained carbon copies of many of their outgoing letters to Plath. From that April 1953 poem acceptance, it took

thirteen months for Plath's work to finally appear in *Harper's*. The interval between April 1953 and May 1954 almost made "Doomsday," the first to appear, a posthumous poem. Plath's disappearance and suicide attempt in August 1953 received prominent placement in newspapers across the United States, and I found out that *Harper's* evidently was paying attention. *Harper's* also retained many of Plath's original poetry typescripts.

² The poems appeared separately in three 1954 issues of *Harper's*: "Doomsday" in May, "To Eva Descending the Stair" in September, and "Go Get the Goodly Squab" in November.

GC: While Peter was dealing with Plath's (near) posthumous publication with *Harper's*, I was dealing with a very different type of posthumous publication. Recently released to The British Library were a collection of notebooks by Ted Hughes outlining his plans and early drafts of some poems which appeared as what we now know as *Birthday Letters*. Given the media flurry in October 2010 over the discovery of "Last Letter," a draft poem discussing the final weekend of Plath's life (and Hughes' claim that there was a "dry run" for her ensuing suicide), I was keen to further explore these embryonic *Birthday Letter* poems. In particular, to see if anything else could be uncovered regarding Plath's work and life during her short time in London during 1962-1963. Coupled with exploring Hughes' own writing, I also requested the notebooks of the Hughes scholar Ann Skea who recounts several meetings with Hughes, one of which took place as he was engaged in collating and producing these poems. I felt the two read together would make interesting companion pieces. And I was not disappointed.

PKS: Disappointment can happen in the archival hunt. When I find Plath's name associated with an archival collection, I try not to get too excited because it could be that the materials are not relevant, or that Plath is named purely because of an association with the person whose papers were deposited with a library. Like Gail at the British Library, I too was not disappointed with the *Harper's* records.

The first materials I came across in the archive were the poetry typescripts Plath sent for their consideration. These are annotated heavily with printer's instructions. The poems they have are (listed in the order in which they appeared in the magazine): "Mushrooms"³ (July 1960), "You're" (June 1961), "Sleep in the Mojave Desert" (February 1962), "Private Ground" (August 1962), and "Leaving Early" (December 1962). All of the typescripts in the collection, except



³ This typescript had Plath's Wellesley address in the top right corner, but affixed with a paper clip is a cutting from a different Plath letter with her Chalcot Square address on it.

"Leaving Early," are in concordance with their final appearance in Plath's *Collected Poems*. In "Leaving Early" there are two changes. Line five of the first stanza of the typescript reads "Velvet pillows the color of blood pudding," and in the *Collected Poems* "color" is spelled in the British way, "colour" (145). Also, in the first line of the second stanza, the typescript has a capital T for "Toby jug," whereas the *Collected Poems* uses lower case: "toby jug" (146). In addition, though I was not actively looking for it, they have a typescript of Ted Hughes' poem "Fourth of July," which appeared in both the July 1960 issue of *Harper's* and in his second poetry collection *Lupercal* (Faber; Harper & Row, 1960).

GC: As Peter was discovering with *Harper's*, there can be textual variations on a poem, even a poem that is regarded as completed. As I opened the beige, cardboard folder in The British Library containing Hughes' notebooks in which he began drafting *Birthday Letters*, I realised that not only can there be textual variations in poems, but in a whole book of poems. The early ideas for *Birthday Letters* are contained in old school exercise books. They have the pupil's name on the front, the school, the subject and are a variety of colours. Where Hughes obtained these books, is as far as we know, unknown. Some other poem drafts were written on loose sheets of paper and then later versions appeared in a large, plush, creamy-paged book, beautifully inscribed with black ink and Hughes' characteristic writing. I was not entirely sure what to expect when I opened the pages. In previous archival visits, I have struggled to read Hughes' handwriting and knew this was a real possibility – that faced with these draft poems, I would not be able to read a word. Thankfully, this was not the case, although much was illegible, either due to sections crossed out or written in such tiny script that it was impossible to read.

The first page of the first book I opened contained a list of numbered poems with a variety of titles such as "You, me and other women," "Boyfriends," "Gossip," "Guests A & D," and "February 10th."⁴ Some of these titles were crossed out, others had written next to them in capital letters LOST. This suggests, as Hughes himself claimed, that some of these poems had been written years before. Although these notebooks are undated, what we do know is that *Birthday Letters* was published in 1998 – and that when Ann Skea met Hughes in August 1995, he was already working on putting the book together. Her notebook recounts a visit to Court

⁴ This notebook can be found in MS 88918/1/6.

Green in which Hughes told her he was working on poems he should have written thirty years ago about issues he should have resolved back in the 1960s. Despite publishing some of these poems in his *New Selected Poems* edition from 1995, he informed Skea that some people found the poems unacceptable. Although Hughes does not explicitly state who, Skea notes he does not seem to be referring to readers, but rather to people who were present at the time that the events were unfolding.⁵

What I was interested to find, was whether these early drafts could reveal anything about Plath's final eight weeks in London. Her voice is so weirdly silenced from this time. There are a few poems, a couple of short stories, limited letters and a radio appearance reviewing Donald Hall's *New Contemporary Poetry* in January 1963. But beyond this, those weeks in London seem shrouded in silence and snow, the big freeze. However, the next school book that I opened had scrawled on the front in Hughes' hand, "That Sunday Night" – and I was surprised and shocked when I saw the contents.

PKS: Archival research is a combination of faith, luck, and persistence. The contents of each new box and new folder, especially on a first-time visit, comes with an air of mystery. Sometimes it is difficult to remain calm; sometimes it is shocking or unsettling to see what is revealed as each page is turned.

Harper's records – rather the finding aid to the collection – were not easy to navigate or understand. This made the research visit slightly risky. Though Plath was a named subject, it really was not clear exactly what materials they held. For the London years of 1960-1962, I found three carbon-copied letters from *Harper's* to Plath; and one letter from Plath to *Harper's*. The letters from *Harper's* all originated from R. B. Silvers, then the editor of the magazine. On January 8, 1960, he bought "Mushrooms." On September 12, 1960, Silvers accepted both "Sleep in the Mojave Desert" and "You're." On March 27, 1962, the magazine took "Leaving Early" and "Private Ground;" and it was to this letter that Plath responded on April 1 (the day before she wrote "Little Fugue").

According to Plath's submissions lists, held at Smith College, she sent these two poems,

⁵ What is interesting in Skea's notebook, is that she describes this meeting, sitting in the large room at the back of the house – the room that Plath referred to as the large kitchen. Skea includes a sketch of the layout. It is odd to see a drawing of the interior of Court Green and furthermore to wonder how much it must differ from the years when Plath lived there.

as well as six others on December 28, 1961.⁶ In accepting the poems, Silvers apologized for the delay in responding and wanted assurance that they were not scheduled for book publication within eight months. It is possible he knew that the American edition of *The Colossus* was scheduled to be published shortly by Knopf.

Plath's response affirms that while she is having a book of poems out that spring, the poems he is interested in were too recent to have been included in the collection. She states that the poems likely will not be published between the boards of a book for years to come. There was something arresting about this letter, however: Plath's signature. The style and format of the letter is consistent with Plath's business correspondence. The address and postmark are North Tawton. But Plath's signature is very different to what I am used to seeing. Picking one word to describe it, I would say it was stiff.

GC: The Plath that we are used to seeing and reading about appears in a very different form in later poem drafts enclosed within those school exercise books of Hughes'. The only existing writing from Plath at this time are the later poems (not intended for *Ariel* but nevertheless included in the original volume) and prose such as "Ocean 1212W," "Snow Blitz," "America, America," and letters to friends and family.⁷ The Plath that emerges from this published material is the familiar Plath – in control of her situation, wryly humorous and



working hard to move on from the difficulties of the late summer and autumn in Devon. In the school book titled "That Sunday Night," Hughes, in an untitled poem, recounts an incident which he appears to place in London in December 1962. During this undated evening, he and Plath are guests at a restaurant in Dean Street, Soho called *L'Epicure*.⁸ He recalls that they were there at the

request of "Eric," very likely Eric White (who appears in some detail later in this paper).

⁶ The poems rejected were: "The Babysitters," "Wuthering Heights," "Magi," "A Life," "Candles," and "Small Hours." They appear here in the order that Plath listed them on her submissions list.

⁷ Further evidence that these later poems were not intended for *Ariel* can be found in an unpublished letter Plath wrote to Olive Higgins Prouty dated December 15, 1962 in which she states that she has begun a third collection of poetry. This letter can be found in the Lilly Library at Indiana University.

⁸ Although Hughes states *L'Epicure* was on Dean Street, it was in fact located on the corner of Frith and Romilly Streets, close by to Dean Street. We show, above, a photograph of where the restaurant was.



Evidently, all parties got drunk throughout the evening and upon departing the restaurant, Hughes asks Plath where was she staying? Where were the children? He questions, how many times did they walk around and around Soho Square (pictured above) saying the same things? Eventually, Plath asks if she can return to Dido Merwin's flat with Hughes where he is staying and again they walk around and around the Square.⁹ Hughes finally agrees to let her return with him, where the tirade continues. He hopes she will sleep but it goes on and on until the neighbours downstairs bang on the ceiling amidst the maelstrom of emotions taking place. The next morning, reports Hughes, things are much calmer between them and they depart as cold-mouthed as flood victims who are travelling towards the same morgue. Cross checking these possible dates against what we know of Plath's movements that December in 1962, it seems most likely that this poem refers to a visit Plath made to London at the start of the month. Certainly it was before her permanent move there on December 10, otherwise Hughes would not have needed to ask where she was staying. Plath's calendar for that year shows a visit to London on Monday December 3, followed by a meeting in a restaurant in Leicester Square the following day to discuss a possible reading to be given in Stevenage. What is difficult to determine is how long Plath stayed in London and where she stayed. On Wednesday November 28, Plath's calendar shows a note to herself to ring the Macedos (London friends). This could have been to organize a place to stay the following week. If Plath did travel to London on Monday December 3rd, she was certainly home by Thursday the 6th as an unpublished letter from Aurelia Plath (dated December 8) states how much she enjoyed their phone conversation the previous

⁹ Dido Merwin was the wife of the poet W.S. Merwin, friends of Plath and Hughes. Her flat was located at 17 Montagu Square, London W1.

Thursday evening.¹⁰ This means the night Hughes writes about could have taken place either Monday 3rd, Tuesday 4th or Wednesday 5th December. Rather cryptically, Plath's calendar shows a crossing out for Tuesday December 4th. She initially wrote something which was then scribbled over in ink. Although the odd letter is legible, the entire entry is not and it would be interesting to know if this referred to any event that took place in London. And if so, was this entry erased by Plath or the hands of someone else? The calendar is not untampered with. Two pages are missing. The first missing page is from the week when Plath and Hughes went to Ireland and Plath returned alone. The second missing page is from the week when Hughes returned to Court Green in October to finally package and remove his things for a permanent move to London. When handling the original calendar in Smith College archives, it was obvious to see from the imprint on pages beneath that these two weeks had heavy annotations and deep crossings out. It seems unlikely we can ever really know, but perhaps the interesting point about this untitled Hughes poem is not only that Plath and Hughes were in touch during her visits to London but that Plath, allegedly, made overtures to stay with him and that this liaison ended badly. Of course, we do have to consider the nature of the draft poem. Is it significant that this poem was not taken to completion and included in *Birthday Letters*? Certainly there is something openly confessional about this piece and until the final lines, very little poetic language. Equally, it is not a poem draft that Hughes picked up and reworked again and again. These school notebooks in which Hughes wrote repeatedly, read like books of loss and death. It is Hughes writing out over and over again his mourning and melancholia. The anguish is surprisingly visceral. While reading I had to keep taking short breaks as the experience of being immersed in his writing was both overwhelming and unnerving. Foucault would ask, do these notebooks amount to a body of work? What does it take for something to become a work and for someone to become an author? Papers, anecdotes, collected remarks, memories? And even when someone is accepted as an author, is everything left behind part of the body of work? Foucault enquires: "How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death?" (104). These poem drafts may be scraps, may not even amount to a body of work and yet Hughes appeared more clearly to me in the archive than ever before. Julian Wolfreys recounts that often as readers we can use a text as if it were "merely a conduit, a spirit medium, if you like, by which the author

¹⁰ This letter dated December 8, 1962, is located in the Plath Collection in the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College.

communicates" so that the return of the author appears a little ghostly and returns in an uncanny revivification (xii). This sort of textual interpretation is not unproblematic but perhaps hardly surprising given the immediacy of archival contents; the physicality, the shiny ink, the smeared ink, the dust, creases, coffee stains. Is it any wonder that Plath and Hughes regularly appear in the archive, configuring their absence, as Eng & Kazanijian would say, as a potential presence? (ix).

PKS: We would not be writing this, we would not be here had Plath succeeded in killing herself in August 1953. The author tried to void her presence and silence her voice before it was fully audible: before she had the chance to shout at Ted Hughes in Soho Square and in Dido Merwin's flat. And likely elsewhere, for that matter.

Above, I discussed Plath's last letter to *Harper's* from April 1962. The first Plath letter in the *Harper's* records was written on April 24, 1953 (four months to the day of her suicide attempt) and is addressed to editor Russell Lynes. She expressed confusion as she thought she sent four poems and their letter of acceptance only referenced three. She included a revised version of "Doomsday" which she, claiming bias, felt was superior to the version she submitted.

Harper's published a "Personal & Other" ("P & O") section in their magazine which included biographical information about their contributors. Her details in this part of the letter take up three lengthy paragraphs. To sum, Plath writes that she is a junior English major at Smith; working odd jobs and on scholarship; that she performs these jobs and transforms them into subject for her writing, doubling in effect, her pay rate; she lists her previous summer jobs covering 1950-1952; her role as press correspondent; and a list of previous magazines and newspapers in which her work appeared. She concludes the letter listing some of her future ambitions which include traveling around the world (confessing she had never been out of New England); to attend graduate school; working varied jobs for experience; and like Miniver Cheevy with literary aspirations: to keep on writing.

Russell Lynes reply three days later candidly states, "You sound like a very busy person, and I wonder how you find time to do any writing at all" (April 27, 1953). Plath had asked if Lynes could indicate when the poems might appear but he was unable to be helpful as the nature of the business is tentative.

Plath had plans for herself but they were all thrown into question when she sought the

oblivion of death on August 24th. With her correspondence in the *Harper's* file, I was surprised to see a photocopy of an article on her suicide attempt. Likely the original article survived until the records were transferred to the Library of Congress. As newspapers are heavily acidic and printed on paper barely worth its cost of manufacture, archives routinely photocopy clippings on acid free paper and toss the original. Seeing the article—"Smith College Editor, 20, Hiding, Ill, Under House"¹¹—gave me pause as it meant that *Harper's* was aware of Plath's ordeal. Did other publications, namely *Seventeen* and *Mademoiselle*, who published Plath regularly in the early 1950s, do the same?¹² We can presume so, especially *Mademoiselle* who gave the *Boston Evening American* rights to reprint her poem "Mad Girl's Love Song."

On January 29, 1954, Ellen Bond of *Harper's* "P & O" department wrote to Plath who was by then back at Smith College. Admitting embarrassment at holding her poems for so long, Bond wrote that the magazine would print at least one of her poems that spring. Another purpose of the letter was to request that Plath bring them up to date on what she wanted to appear in the "P & O" column. Plath responded on February 7th, restating much of what she did in her letter from the previous spring, but adding that in the summer of 1953 she worked as guest managing editor at *Mademoiselle*, that in the fall she was named a junior Phi Beta, and that she did work for the editorial board of the *Smith Review*. Was *Harper's* being cheeky asking Plath this question? What did they make of her response? The text that was finally used in the May 1954 issue was: "Sylvia Plath ('Doomsday,' p. 29) is a Smith College junior and has had poems and stories published in *Mademoiselle* and other magazines" (19). This publication, the one she considered her first professional acceptance, announced Sylvia Plath to the literary world.

GC: It is interesting that Plath regarded her first professional acceptance as being a poem entitled "Doomsday," a rather prescient subject for the material in her final poems. One of Hughes' embryonic pieces held in The British Library called "Delivering Frieda" deals with a poem Plath wrote on February 5, 1963, the final day of her poetic output. "Edge" is a notorious Plath poem, often read in light of her subsequent suicide – the theatrical stage of the poem revealing the body of a dead woman and her two dead children she has taken with her. "Delivering Frieda" sees

¹¹ From the *New York Herald Tribune*, August 27, 1953: 32.

¹² In *Pain, Parties, Work: Sylvia Plath in New York, Summer 1953* (HarperCollins, 2013), author Elizabeth Winder includes details that confirm that *Mademoiselle* magazine kept track of Plath's disappearance and discovery. See pages 227-228 in the chapter titled "Aftermath."

Hughes shift tone from a longing and anguish of mourning to an angry, accusatory father. He accuses Plath of using the poem "Edge" to model her death and furthermore writes that she planned to take Frieda with her.¹³ These words are crossed out by Hughes and instead he quotes Plath's own words "She is taking them with her." He then rails that poetic justice outweighed poetic frenzy and that Plath went on alone, but not before she had scribbled out that one line – scribbled it out into unbeing. Since this line does not appear in the published version of "Edge," I consulted the draft of "Edge" held by the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College, and indeed this line by Plath does appear in the first draft. Furthermore it has been repeatedly scribbled out by Plath in black ink. Hughes ends his draft imploring Plath to let her last sea-cold kiss evaporate from the "salt affliction."

The accusatory tone of this piece is not unique in the pages of these school books. Other poem drafts by Hughes accuse Suzette Macedo and The Beckers of giving Plath bad advice.¹⁴ They should, he claims, have told Plath to make peace, to ask him to come back, to say that she loved him. Further frustration is leveled at Plath's former lover Richard Sassoon. He asks why was Plath's love for Sassoon so simple? What, as a husband, had Hughes done so wrong? But his greatest anger is saved for the readers of Plath. In an untitled draft, he describes sitting in Court Green watching readers – which he refers to as monkeys with cameras – crawling all over the adjoining church and around the yew tree. He claims that they would crawl over the moon if it would perform. The house is described as Plath's mausoleum and everyone in it is conscripted by her death, her curse. Hughes describes how Plath's readers take film over her ghostly shoulder and Hughes asks, how can he redirect Plath's curse so that it falls on them, into their ears and eyes? He ends the draft by referring to Plath's readers as maggots, profiting and picking at her death. It is a powerful moment, when a draft from the archive, the traditional archive of reading rooms and paper, merges with the dynamic archive, Plath's house in North Tawton, Devonshire. Places house their own ghosts too, suspended in time.

PKS: In *A Closer Look at Ariel: A Memory of Sylvia Plath*, Nancy Hunter Steiner writes: "If Sylvia could not exactly haunt the room during her absence, she clearly made her presence felt" (15). We have felt Plath's presence in the archive: in many archives to be exact. In our previous

¹³ We find the title and subject of this poem interesting. No mention is made of Nicholas Hughes, Plath's son.

¹⁴ Helda and Suzette Macedo and Jillian and Gerry Becker were London friends of Plath. Plath stayed with the Beckers for the final weekend of her life.

paper cited above, Gail discussed visiting Plath's dorm room in Lawrence House, where Plath spent five semesters as a student at Smith. How does Steiner's statement hold up against a house where Plath spent many years? Would it ring true even given that I never knew Plath?

26 Elmwood Road. THE address. It calls to mind the famous, suburban, white clapboard, corner lot adolescent home of Sylvia Plath. A place she also called home intermittently between 1957 and 1959 as a young married woman. Of all the places where Plath lived in America, 26 Elmwood Road is arguably the number one destination for any of her readers. The house can be viewed casually and without too much concern of intrusion. Visiting it in person means something different to everyone, but it remains as such a site of secular pilgrimage. I made my first visit to this Wellesley, Massachusetts house in May 1998. It has a magnetic power to it. Very few months pass without the necessity of my doing a simple drive-by: just to see it. To make sure it was still there. To see inside of it always seemed out of the question. However, in October 2012, I was invited to do just that.

But, before we enter, I cannot claim total ignorance of the layout of the house. In the Helle Collection of Plath Family Photographs, 1910-1963, held by the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College, on the back of a photograph of the house from the early 1940s is an ink-drawn plan in Aurelia Plath's hand.¹⁵ Her schematic provides a decent overview of the shapes of the rooms. Fortunately, I was soon to learn that very little has changed.

Like Esther Greenwood at the end of *The Bell Jar*, I paused on the threshold of the front door, being guided "as by a magical thread" into the house (258).

GC: While Peter was visiting places associated with the start of Plath's life, I was conversely, visiting places associated with the last years of her life. The living archive can offer a blueprint for the production of a text. Thus when the living archive is re-visited, there is a chance that some of that original blueprint will still be in place. Of course, with a living archive, there is also the risk that it will have been altered beyond recognition, or even destroyed, but this is the elusivity (and perhaps we might say, fascination) of a dynamic space. What might be left? What tales might it have to tell us? On Thursday, November 9, 1961, Plath wrote to her mother "Tell Warren *The New Yorker* just bought a poem of mine I wrote here called "Blackberrying," about the day we all went blackberrying together down the land that sloped to the sea" (436). Indeed

¹⁵ This drawing is reproduced in Andrew Wilson's *Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life Before Ted* (Simon & Schuster, 2013). See photograph 8.

the poem itself offers an equally evocative scene of a fruit laden coastal road: "A blackberry alley, going down in hooks, and a sea / Somewhere at the end of it, heaving" (*Collected Poems* 168). There are "high, green meadows" (168), there is a gorge "between two hills" (169), a sheep path and the face of the hill which is "orange rock / That looks out on nothing, nothing but a great space" (169). I had long wondered about the location of this poem, and felt sure it had to be somewhere along the Devonshire coast given the hints in letters, both published and unpublished. Even after the publication of *Birthday Letters* in 1998, I managed for many years, to overlook a glaring and vital piece of information contained in the poem "The Beach":

You'd seen the cliffs – a slashed and tilted gorge
Near Hartland, where we'd picked blackberries
That first somnambulistic week of your ecstasy
With your brother. (154)

I now had a location for the poem – the North Devonshire coast somewhere near Hartland.

PKS: Massachusetts was the heartland for Plath. For the longest time, I considered the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College to be "the" house of Plath: the place where the poet has lived posthumously since her papers and other effects arrived in the 1980s. Familiar with its layout and the protocol on how to behave, I feel comfortable within its doors and walls. However, crossing the property line from the public road in Wellesley to the private residence felt like a violation. 26 Elmwood Road is a place of force.

Aside from relatively minor improvements, the house is very little changed from Plath's own time. This is comforting when one considers the additions most houses have put on in the neighborhood. The ground floor contains the living and dining room, kitchen, sun room, lavatory, and formerly Warren Plath's bedroom. The upper floor has two large bedrooms and a full bathroom, as well as a storage room/attic. My initial reaction to being in the house was to think of Plath's journals, meticulously edited by Karen V. Kukil and published in 2000. Those first words: "July 1950 – I may never be happy, but tonight I am content" were written here (8). The shape of the house enveloped the ghost of that writer and sealed it shut. I feel I have moved from being a latent observer reading over Plath's shoulder to an occupier of the same physical space with no regard for the passage of time. Suddenly Plath's adolescence has a new context. In Plath's March 29, 1951 journal entry, she notes her grandmother sewing, the clicking and whirring ice box, the sound of her brother brushing his teeth in the downstairs bathroom, and

other features of that house and her life that could be an advert "of the middle-middle class home" (53). This passage now resonates as I can visualize now the geography of the house.

No matter the room I was in, there was another space in the house calling and calling my name.

GC: The passage of time on space can be an eerie experience. Time can sweep through a space and leave it untouched, or it can brush and create a few changes, yet leave the essence untouched. As Peter found himself sealed up on Elmwood Road with the teenage Plath's presence, I was following the lines of a poem to a much older Plath, to a wider, more open space; to the Devonshire coast where fields and sheep trods lead to the sea and the cliffs drop away into the ocean. From Plath's own words, I knew the place where she went blackberrying was north facing ("the hills' northern face") and from Hughes' words I knew it was near Hartland (169). There was a gorge, orange rock and lanes of blackberries. Studying a map of the Devonshire coast, it seemed the most obvious (and only north-facing) place was near and around Hartland Point and it was here I felt most likely to encounter the living archive, the lines of a poem. There is some criticism leveled at reading a poem in this manner – is it too literal? Is it too autobiographical? Does it miss the point totally regarding a creative piece of writing? Peter and I respond to this criticism in the same way. Any reading of a poem has multi-dimensional aspects. It can be read and sifted for autobiographical elements that have been manipulated and transformed. It can be read symbolically for myth, allusions and associations. It can be read psychoanalytically, from a feminist, Marxist or any other "ist" perspective. It can be compared to another poet's work for influence¹⁶ – but the key point is that none of these readings exclude the other. They can work together to create a playful and fuller reading. Surely, after all, that is what poetry is for? Therefore we do not miss the association suggested by a "blood sisterhood" or the "Ebon in the hedges" but at the same time, we are fascinated by the space that provoked this poem (168). The privilege of somehow experiencing a place via the written word and then "seeing" the actual physical space through someone else's eyes can be a little overwhelming; but furthermore, can induce an even greater respect for the poet's ability to capture such images in certain words and phrases. Driving the blackberry laden lanes around Hartland involved directly

¹⁶ Interestingly, Plath's poem "Blackberrying" is the subject of an article exploring whether this piece was influenced by another poem called "The Blackberry" by Faber poet Norman Nicholson, who resided for his whole life in my hometown of Millom, Cumbria. See *Notes and Queries* 52.4 (2005): 507.

experiencing this flash of recognition in Plath's words. Just as I approached the end of a lane near the sea, black tatters flew up into the wind – they were choughs: "Overhead go the choughs in black, cacophonous flocks-/Bits of burnt paper wheeling in a blown sky" (168). Even the here and now seemed a little ghostly, a little less real.

PKS: Open to the elementals of coastal England, Gail is an active participant in the narrative of Plath's "Blackberrying." She is on the precipice of a cliff whose face is orange rock and I pause in the kitchen at the top of the stairs leading down to the basement. A deep, serious intake of breath is necessary for my bearings before I descend. Carefully, one step at a time.

The basement opens around me. At the bottom of the stairwell I am facing the front of the house. Above left is the living room; above right the dining room. I turn to the right and see in



the back corner of the basement the laundry area. Stretching across the length of the house's foundation, smack in the middle of that wall, is a gaping hole. I always thought the research that went into my paper "'They Had to Call and Call': The Search for Sylvia Plath"¹⁷ prepared me for this moment. I was wrong.

The general description of the crawlspace that has persisted since Plath's disappearance – and even in her novel *The Bell Jar* – describes it as being beneath the porch – which is now the sun room. But this is not the case at all. The crawlspace is actually beneath the kitchen and extends along the back of the house underneath the first floor

lavatory and stops approximately at what is the foundation beneath what was then Warren Plath's bedroom. Other descriptions of the space, however, are more or less accurate to what I remember reading, making it feel as though I had previously seen the location. The minds' eye – be it

¹⁷ <http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/vol3/Steinberg.pdf>

through textual familiarity or some sixth sense – is a powerful interpretative tool. When it concerns Sylvia Plath, who had her own uncanny ability of foresight, it sometimes feels as though my imagination is haunted. The article "Find Girl in Cellar," which ran in the August 26, 1953 issue of the *Boston Traveler*, describes the space as: "20 feet by 10, has cement walls—part of the foundation—and a dirt floor. It can be reached only through a 2½ foot by 2½ foot opening shoulder high above the cellar floor" (17).

As the newspaper report says, the hole is shoulder high against my body, and it is between the clothes dryer and water-heater. The basement is dark, sparingly lit by naked light bulbs. A maze of pipes weaves above my head, enters the hole, and exits out the back of the house. I have no choice but to heave myself up and, unlike Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* who "crouched at the mouth of the darkness," I launch myself into the crawlspace (179).

GC: The draft manuscripts for "Blackberrying" held at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, reveal a poem with very few changes made from initial conception to completion. One or two lines that Plath excised offer further descriptions of the location: a small wood in one of the meadows and the sea seeming a far way off. At Hartland Point, the cliff is edged with meadows that stretch back, criss-crossed with narrow, earthy sheep-paths. In the first manuscript of "Blackberrying," Plath refers to these as "goat-paths" but by the second, she has realized her mistake and altered it to "sheep-paths," the term which appears in the final poem. Likewise, in the first two handwritten drafts, the birds which suddenly fly up are described as "crows" and this appears in the first typed manuscript, but is altered by hand to "choughs." It is interesting to speculate that perhaps she showed this draft to Hughes and that he corrected the type of bird. Indeed, that area of Hartland is quite notorious for its chough population.

Below are some photographs taken at Hartland. There were blackberry lanes leading down to the sea, there were sheep-paths and meadows, choughs and orange rock. And at the end of it all, the sea "Beating and beating at an intractable metal" (169).



"Nobody in the lane, and nothing, nothing but blackberries" (168)



"A blackberry alley, going down in hooks, and a sea / Somewhere at the end of it" (168)



"The last hook brings me / To the hills' northern face, and their faces are orange rock." (169)

PKS: "It was completely dark" (*The Bell Jar* 180).

The daylight of Hartland Point could not be more different to the darkness wrapping around me in the crawlspace. I have no idea where the walls are, or the ceiling above and think of how easily Plath must have injured her face during the suicide attempt. "The dark felt thick as velvet" (179). The only source of light is from the flash of my camera which I point, blindly, in front of me and depress the shutter release button. The instant gratification of the digital camera! Now the space opens as I view the image on the screen.

The room has shape now and I feel myself exhale, seemingly, for the first time after some minutes. The space is much larger than you can imagine: easily "20 feet by 10" as the newspaper story reported. Plath would have crawled all the



way back to the wall I just photographed and been wrapped in a blanket, lying on bare earth (where now there is a tarp).

Did the "earth seem friendly" to me (179)? Not necessarily, but it was cold and dank: a mirror to the rainy and cool October day. Like Esther, I too wondered "how long it had been since this particular square of soil had seen the sun" (179). I was under the bell jar, myself. Occupying a space in which Plath at one time sought "eternal oblivion" (*Letters Home* 131). This is not a comfortable feeling, but necessary somehow to understand one of the most important events in Plath's life, and one of the more affecting scenes in *The Bell Jar*. Plath wrote precious little else about this, rarely referring to it in her journals, for example. But she did write a candid (almost flippant) letter to Eddie Cohen from McLean Hospital on December 28, 1953.¹⁸

Leaving the crawlspace, I notice old hinges which hint that at one point a screen or covering had been fitted over the entrance, and I consider this must have been done after Plath's suicide attempt. But, this is possibly a fantasy deduction. Leaving the house is bittersweet. The time inside was so short, but so memorable. Having seen the inside of 26 Elmwood Road, aspects of Plath's life are more contextualized now.

"These Ghostly Archives" allows for time-jumping as a way to manipulate the unnecessary restrictions imposed by a literal chronology. From Elmwood Road and Hartland Point we therefore head back into the traditional archive to reveal previously unknown and little discussed Plath letters.

GC: Browsing the finding aid to the Lilly Library at Indiana University, I was surprised to see a fairly substantial collection of letters sent to Aurelia Plath from Winifred Davies (Plath's mid-wife and friend in North Tawton, Devon) – nineteen in all. But what was more interesting was the date of these letters, for they spanned a fourteen year period beginning on September 22, 1962 until May 1976. This indicated that at the same time that Plath was writing letters to her mother about the situation in North Tawton (which can be read in edited format in *Letters Home*), one of Plath's closest confidantes at that time was also writing letters to Aurelia Plath. Peter and I immediately thought that a comparison between the two would be fascinating. Lilly Library informed me that they held three letters from Winifred Davies to Aurelia Plath from 1962 dated from the months September, October and November. The only other letter written

¹⁸ We are told by Aurelia Plath that her daughter never sent the letter. See *Letters Home*, pages 128-132.

during Plath's lifetime was in early January 1963, followed by a further fifteen letters exchanged over the years. From the tone of the letters, the two women were close and held great respect for each other. Furthermore, Winifred Davies' letters are a fascinating insight into exactly how Plath and her situation was regarded by a significant resident of North Tawton. I requested copies of all letters from Lilly and these were provided as high quality photocopies. Being based in the UK, there was an exciting wait for Lilly to make and mail the copies to me. One morning about two weeks later, the post arrived with a large, cardboard envelope bearing the Indiana University insignia. Inside were thirty-nine pages of words from Winifred Davies. Given the lack of contact biographers have made with many significant people in North Tawton at this time (Winifred Davies, Nancy Axworthy,¹⁹ Susan O'Neill-Roe²⁰) this really felt like hearing a voice across the years, written at the time and preserved on paper.²¹ There was a slight distancing from the usual archive experience. I was not, after all, handling the original documents, but rather copies, so the full sensory immediacy was not there. But the words were powerful enough to drag me back into the past. The letters contain gems of information and observations, not the least beginning with an account in September 1962 of when Plath and Hughes returned from their unsuccessful holiday in Ireland.

PKS: Unpublished archival letters provide a wealth of contextual information by which we can arrive at new understandings of certain situations. Finding letters which captured memories never before cited either in criticism on or in biographies of Plath (and occasionally Hughes, though admittedly we read less about him than we do about Plath) feels like winning the lottery.

Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes first "met" the British musicologist, composer, translator, editor, poet, writer, and arts administrator Eric Walter White in 1957, when Hughes and White corresponded regarding *The Hawk in the Rain*'s being named as one of the Poetry Society Bulletin's Autumn choices.²² Some of their correspondence is now held by The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collection, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Ted Hughes' first letter is dated July 12, 1957, stretches to two

¹⁹ The local woman who helped Plath to clean Court Green.

²⁰ Plath's nanny for a short time towards the end of 1962 who also helped her move to London in December 1962.

²¹ It is worth noting that Winifred Davies and Nancy Axworthy are now both dead, but even when they were alive they were either not contacted or refused to go on record.

²² See "The Hawk in the Rain (London: Faber & Faber, 1957)" by Heather Clark online at <http://www.thetedhughessociety.org/thehawkintherain.htm>. Accessed 3 May 2013.

typewritten pages. The letter bares a minor insertion of three words in Plath's hand.²³

White reappears in 1961 as a recipient of a letter from Sylvia Plath written on August 22nd. In this letter, Plath sent to White at his request the worksheets for her poem "Insomniac," which was chosen the winner of the Cheltenham Poetry Festival. The letter is very funny as Plath expresses delight that sleeplessness can be rewarding.²⁴ On this date – August 22, 1961 – Plath was busy in her Chalcot Square flat, preparing to move to Court Green. The letter to White is just a small piece of that day. In addition to writing to White, Plath sent a letter enclosing the worksheets of "Tulips" to her friend Jack Sweeney of Harvard's Woodberry Poetry Room.²⁵ On this day Plath also annotated her 1957-1959 journal, leading me to create all kinds of wild theories about why she did this. On December 12, 1958, in a long journal entry written after a session with her "psychiatrist" Dr. Ruth Beuscher, Plath asks herself, "Why don't I write a novel?" (438). Plath annotated the typescript journal "I have! August 22, 1961: THE BELL JAR" (696).²⁶ Did Plath receive a letter or a phone call that morning from her publisher Heinemann accepting the novel? Is this the day she renamed the novel from "Diary of a Suicide" to *The Bell Jar*? Does a copy of this letter exist, if it ever did? How separate each of these documents are now given that they were all created or handled on the same day.

GC: Often with incomplete correspondence we have to fill in the gaps and this creates a certain amount of speculation or imagination on the part of the researcher. Given that Aurelia Plath stayed with Winifred Davies in the final days of her summer 1962 visit, it is fair to assume that the two women became close and discussed the unfolding events at Court Green as the Plath/Hughes marriage disintegrated. Whether Aurelia asked Winifred Davies to keep her informed, we will never know, but certainly the first letter to Aurelia appears to be responding to certain concerns. Given that Aurelia only left England at the beginning of August 1962, by

²³ The Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University holds six letters between Plath, Hughes and White. Ted Hughes to White, July 12, 1957; White to Hughes, July 17, 1957 and September 18, 1957; Plath and Hughes to White, circa September 3, 1962; White to Hughes September 5, 1962; and Hughes to White, June 14, 1966. There is one letter from White to Plath, discussed below. They also hold "Autobiographical Particulars" of Ted Hughes from 1957. Held in Eric Walter White (second accrual) 1947-1969, <http://library.mcmaster.ca/archives/findaids/findaids/w/white.2.htm>. Accessed 3 May 2013.

²⁴ The letter and worksheets for "Insomniac" are held by The British Library, in Add 52617, "Cheltenham Festival prize poems" collection.

²⁵ The letter and worksheets for "Tulips" are held by the Houghton Library, Harvard University. The persistent link to the finding aid is: nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:Hough:h00887.

²⁶ This journal is held in the Sylvia Plath Collection in the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College.

September 22 Winifred Davies had already received two letters from her and begins a reply with an apology for the delay in writing, stating that when Aurelia's second letter arrived her conscience was pricked into responding. She then immediately launches into lamenting that the news from Court Green is not good. Although Davies appeared at some stage to harbor hopes that the marriage would be reconciled, it seemed by the end of September that it was over and that Plath had decided upon a separation. In a letter to her mother, dated September 24, Plath writes "I went up to Winifred's for three hours the night I realized Ted wasn't coming back, and she was a great help....Since I made the decision, miraculously, my own life, my wholeness, has been seeping back." (462). However, in her September 22 letter, Winifred Davies had already informed Aurelia of this visit and stated that Plath was in great distress and there was nothing Winifred could do other than listen. She felt through the act of talking, Plath was able to clear her mind and feel better once the decision to separate had been made. Davies criticizes Hughes while taking care to state that she is aware that she only has one side of the story. However, Davies attempts to comfort Aurelia by saying that Plath did seem calmer before she left and that she had made her eat some supper. There had been some good laughs during the evening, as well as tears. Perceptively, Davies also states that finding a nanny will be essential, for if Plath is able to write she will feel better for being able to lose herself for a few hours a day in her work.

However, October 1962 was a difficult month for Plath as she succumbed to flu and fevers and Hughes returned for the final time to pack his belongings and move to London. She wrote some desperate letters to her mother on October 9 and twice on October 16. All letters show Plath was struggling with her health and ability to cope. She even asks if it would be possible for someone (preferably Warren's new wife, who she had not met) to come over and help her. Aurelia, clearly panicking by the tone of these letters, cabled Winifred Davies to ask her to secure help for Plath and the children. But of course by the time Aurelia had received these worrying letters, the situation at Court Green had changed and Plath was ecstatically happy employing a new nanny, Susan O'Neill Roe, and planning her winter in Ireland. On October 25 Winifred Davies writes that she hopes Aurelia has received a more cheerful letter from Plath. Having seen her just the day before, Davies states that Plath is full of hope and enjoying the companionship of Susan O'Neill Roe as well as the freedom to write. Davies points out, that the problem with letters is, by the time they have been posted and received, the situation they describe is old news and things have moved on. Plath is now making plans, going to London and

planning a stay in Ireland. Davies thinks Plath should be moving nearer to London for easier access to the BBC and that her plans to retain Court Green as a summer house will not work. However, as philosophical as ever, Davies states, that the matter of Court Green is something that will resolve itself.

PKS: From August to October 1962, while their marriage was under considerable stress, Plath and Hughes continued to, out of necessity, make plans, see friends, and travel to and from London. Some of these trips were made together, one such jaunt to London to meet up with Olive Higgins Prouty and see Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* circa August 15th.

In a letter to Eric Walter White dated simply "Monday," Hughes cancels plans to see him, his wife Dodo, and Jack and Máire Sweeney, as Plath has been sick with flu and 103 degree fevers.²⁷ The letter can be roughly dated to September 3rd, as Hughes mentions that he is hopeful to travel to London between the 7th and 10th (of September) to meet the person with whom he would be serving as compeer for the Poetry Society, and expressing hope that Plath will be healthy enough to travel to Cleggan on the 10th. Hughes ends the letter stating how enchanted Plath was with prints she had seen by the artist Sydney [sic.] Nolan.²⁸ Plath then adds a postscript to the letter saying that she hopes within a fortnight to be able to be recovering from her flu on Richard Murphy's boat. Commenting as well on the Nolan prints, Plath opines that Nolan's work is visionary cartography. Plath and Hughes regularly shared space on correspondence, but this is the first known example of this that we know of after Hughes' affair was discovered.²⁹

White responded on September 5th (making the date of the "Monday" letter September 3rd highly probable) stating that at the last minute, also, Máire Sweeney was unable to meet the night before. White helped coordinate with Plath and Hughes seeing the Sweeney's the following week in Dublin, informing them that the Sweeney's were staying at the Russell Hotel. Plath and Hughes did dine with the Sweeney's in Dublin on their way to Cleggan. But of course, they did not return together and two weeks after of her arrival back at Court Green, Plath began writing the poems that would make her name.

²⁷ This letter, like the previous letters from Ted Hughes to Eric Walter White, is held by McMaster University, Canada.

²⁸ The artist Sidney Nolan was an Australian painter and printmaker. For more information see <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/417246/Sir-Sidney-Nolan>. Accessed 22 Feb. 2013.

²⁹ And of course it was not feasible to call White as Plath had ripped the telephone cord off the wall.

GC: By November 1962, the letter Winifred Davies wrote to Aurelia Plath held a very different tone. Plath, she reported, was full of the joys of spring. Apart from a cut finger which apparently sent Plath into a panic everything appeared to be going well.³⁰ Davies was pleased to report that Plath had abandoned her plans to winter in Ireland, having decided instead to move to London, which according to the midwife was a much more sensible decision. Now, she just hoped Plath would sell Court Green and find somewhere smaller as she felt it would be an unmanageable property, especially if it was unlivable. According to Davies, Plath would not hear of this idea and again Davies repeated her earlier claim that it was up to Plath to make her own plans and come to her own decisions. Interestingly, around this time, Plath writes a letter to her mother about her excitement at finding a place in London, her new haircut and her writing plans. She states: "I am so happy and full of fun and ideas and love. I shall be a marvelous mother and regret nothing" (478). She does not, however, mention her cut thumb, but it seems Aurelia asked about it for in a later letter dated November 19, Plath states: "I didn't tell you of my thumb – it's now healed – because Dr Webb made a botch of it" (481). One wonders how Plath felt knowing the accounts of her life in Devon were being reported to her mother and whether this impacted on what she felt she could tell Winifred Davies.

On December 5, 1962, Winifred Davies wrote her final letter of the year to Aurelia Plath stating that all still seemed to be going well with Plath who was happy and finally feeling free. The midwife and her son Garnett had been to Court Green for supper and found Plath cheerful and full of plans for moving to London. Davies had suggested a haulage company Plath might want to use to move her things and this was duly arranged. Susan O'Neill Roe would be helping her to move and settle and Davies stated that if Garnett was free he would also drop by Fitzroy Road and assist. Aurelia Plath appears to have sent Davies a Christmas card and a calendar of New England, for Davies states that when Plath saw it she became quite homesick, despite being certain that she did not want to return to America for some time. This letter from Davies is really the only account we have of Plath's final days in Devon since there is a letter-writing gap from Plath herself during this period, and her journals from 1962-63 are of course, either lost or destroyed. The last letter to Aurelia Plath from Devon appears to have been written on November 29 and Plath does not write again until December 15 from London (although there is evidence

³⁰ It seems likely this cut finger was actually Plath's thumb, the event recorded in the poem "Cut."

that they spoke on the phone in the meantime).³¹ The only other letter from Winifred Davies written during Plath's lifetime was sent to Aurelia on January 3, 1963. In this she states that Plath appears to be happy, if somewhat disorganized. Garnett had been to lunch with her the previous Sunday (December 30) and was going to go again and help her paint. She notes that they seem to get on well together. The letters Plath wrote home during January document the work she was carrying out on the flat, her health problems (chest x-ray, flu, weakness and tiredness) and her planned appearances on the BBC. Although she does not sound disorganized, there is clearly less energy in her writing than letters written in the previous months: "I just haven't felt to have any identity under the steamroller of decisions and responsibilities of this last half year, with the babies a constant demand" (495). Furthermore, Plath appears to show some vulnerability: "I guess I just need somebody to cheer me up by saying I've done all right so far" (496). Ironically even before Plath left North Tawton, Winifred Davies wrote to Aurelia Plath stating that she was sure the move to London would be a great success. However, the next letter from Davies written on February 13, 1963, was full of both shock and poignancy.

PKS: The poetry Plath wrote throughout October 1962 would go on to solidify her arrival as the 20th century's most powerful female voice. As Plath continued to write these poems, she received contracts to record "Berck-Plage" with the BBC, as well as record her new poems and be interviewed by Peter Orr of the British Council in conjunction with the Woodberry Poetry Room at Harvard. On October 23, Plath wrote to Eric White asking if she could stay with him and his wife Dodo on Monday the 29th. She mentioned that she was doing the BBC recording but made no explicit reference to the appointment with Orr; however, she did say that she might have to stay until Wednesday on business. Starved for culture, Plath mentioned only needing a place to rest her head as she would likely go to see a film or a play. In this letter she also expresses interest in taking part in the American poetry evening at the Royal Court to be held in July 1963.³² This letter, and two others dated October 26, 1962 and November 14, 1962, are held in the Eric Walter White papers at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.³³

By October 26th, the Whites confirmed that she could stay with them when she is in London the following week. Plath writes back a very appreciative letter, providing more detail

³¹ See *Letters Home*, page 486, which states Plath called her Aunt Dot and mother Aurelia on December 11, 1962.

³² Plath said she was writing to the British poet Patric Dickinson by the same post. This letter has not been located.

³³ The finding to the collection is online at <http://research.hrc.utexas.edu:8080/hrcxtf/view?docId=ead/00603.xml>.

about her forthcoming trip London. Per Plath's address book, the White's at this time lived at 21 Alwyne Road, N1 (pictured below), in the Canonbury/Islington area of north London. Plath's visit to London is now quite well-known: "Berck-Plage" and the British Council recording being the crowning achievements of Plath's recording opportunities. As well, it is the stuff of lore that she read her new poems to Alvarez, and attended that Monday evening the PEN Poetry party.

Plath also met with Patric Dickinson on Tuesday, October 30, at 11 am. In Plath's address book,



held by Smith College, she has a Rye, Sussex address for Dickinson but it is unlikely they met there. Beneath this address is another: the Savile Club, 69 Brook Street, Mayfair. There is no other contextual information but it might be that they met to discuss the event there. The club, established for those active in the arts and sciences, is approximately one mile from where she met Peter Orr. The most interesting part of this October 26, 1962 letter is the way in which Plath refers to her time in North Tawton, which she calls an "enforced purdah." Plath as we know wrote a poem called "Purdah" two days after this letter was written on October 28, 1962.³⁴ So strong she found the poem that she included it among those she

read two days later.

Eric White sent a letter to Plath on November 6, 1962, forwarding to her a letter from the Poetry Book Society.³⁵ Plath's final letter to Eric White (that we know of) was dated November 14, 1962. In it, she thanks White and his wife for putting her up, for a hot bath, and for forwarding the letter from the Poetry Book Society. She tells them she is hopeful of getting a place in London, that she is looking forward to seeing them, and as well, to planning the American Poetry night in July 1963. Though likely, it is not clear whether or not Plath stayed with the White's on that Tuesday night, October 30th. As we try to reconstruct Plath's movements and understand the effort and triumph that characterized her life and her poetry at this time, it is these open-ended references to letters, appointments and other events that lead to

³⁴ In her *Collected Poems*, "Purdah" is dated October 29, 1962. All the drafts which are held by Smith College, save one, are dated October 28.

³⁵ This letter is held in Eric Walter White, Second Accrual, at McMaster University.

scholars' sleepless nights, to wonder, and frustration.^f

GC: On February 13, 1963 Winifred Davies writes to Aurelia Plath. Her letter opens with "My Dear" and she asks "what can I say?" Davies feels under the circumstances words are inadequate. She is clearly writing in immediate response to a phone call she has just received from Susan O'Neill Roe's mother, Nan Jenkins, informing her of Plath's death in London. She states that she does not have many details. What is interesting about this letter is that Davies knew at this stage, unlike Plath's American family, that this was a case of suicide. Ted Hughes sent a telegram on February 12 to Aurelia's sister simply stating: "Sylvia died yesterday".³⁶ It was not until Warren Plath arrived in the UK and met with Plath's solicitor that he discovered his sister had taken her own life.³⁷ In fact, up to that point, there seems to have been a belief that Plath died of "virus pneumonia" (certainly this was listed as the cause of death in the local Wellesley newspaper) ("Recent Deaths" 4).³⁸ However, for Winifred Davies, there was no doubt about the cause of death. She writes that she had only just received a letter from Plath full of plans and of all of the appointments she had been given. But, speculates Davies, things must have simply got too much for her and she could not take it anymore. The letter is short, but poignant. Davies' shock is evident and she sends her prayers and sympathies to Aurelia, as well as stating that her son Garnett will be so distressed for he was very fond of Plath. Then there is a three month gap before Davies resumes her correspondence with Aurelia, asserting with some concern that she has no information about Plath's children, and as far as she knows they are still in London. It is not until the end of the year in November 1963 that Davies can report on the children's welfare. They are back at Court Green and, under the watchful eye of Elizabeth Compton,³⁹ appear to be doing very well. By January 1964, Davies writes that she has seen the children and they are fine. Although inexperienced, Olwyn Hughes is in charge of their care and claims that she would be delighted for Aurelia to see them if she visits that summer. Davies warns Aurelia that if she does come to North Tawton, there will be much that she will not be happy about, but states clearly and firmly that nothing can be done about that.

³⁶ See *Letters Home*, page 500.

³⁷ This information can be found in an unpublished letter Warren Plath wrote to his mother on February 17, 1963, and stored in the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

³⁸ It is interesting to contrast this report with an article from the *St. Pancras Chronicle*, published on February 22, 1963, titled "Tragic Death of Young Authoress," which clearly states the cause of death as suicide and included details from Plath's inquest.

³⁹ Elizabeth Compton [now Sigmund] was Plath's friend in Devon throughout 1962.

Over subsequent years, the letters from Winfred Davies contain updates on Plath's children, arrangements for Aurelia to stay with Davies at her home, Longmeadow (pictured below right) over summer and little anecdotes reflecting back on Plath. For example, one thing I have always wondered was, given the prominence in Plath's writing about her bees, what happened to her hive after her death? The poem which Plath intended to close her version of *Ariel* was "Wintering" and the narrator asks:



Will the hive survive, will the gladiolas
Succeed in banking their fires
To enter another year?
What will they taste of the Christmas roses?
The bees are flying. They taste the spring. (219)

In a letter dated May 26, 1963, Winifred Davies informs Aurelia that due to the nice weather she has been able to spring clean her bees. In addition to her own bees, Davies also notes that she is in possession of Plath's bees. It appears they were given to her by Plath just before she left for London. Despite the tough winter in North Tawton and the roof blowing off the hive, Davies notes that Plath had packed and wrapped the bees so well and so preciously that they survived the winter to enjoy the spring.

PKS: As dozens of different archives hold documents Plath created – including as we have seen documents created on the same day – we are able sometimes to piece together some of her daily actions. This is especially useful for certain periods where the record is incomplete, such as from the summer of 1962 through early 1963. On October 23, 1962, the same day Plath wrote to Eric White asking if she could stay over at his house, Plath wrote the first of five letters to Father Michael Carey, then an Assumptionist Priest studying at Oxford.⁴⁰

These letters from Plath to Carey were first printed in Toni Saldívar's 1992 book *Sylvia Plath: Confessing the Fictive Self*. Saldívar reports that Carey wrote to Plath "asking for a critique of his poetry" (201). What followed was Plath expressing her current attitudes towards the composition of poetry. Her advice was: "If you enjoy it, do it, and fine!" (201). In Carey's

⁴⁰ There is one known extant letter from Father Michael Carey to Plath. Dated January 28, 1963, the letter is held in the Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College.

poems, Plath saw two poets vying for dominance. The first was "lyrical-traditional" and the second "produces meticulously-observed phrases" (202). She suggests that he read (as in "study") Thomas Wyatt, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Emily Dickinson, for their "assonances and consonances" (203). In her letters there is a certain transfusion of words and images that Plath would soon incorporate in the authorial comments about her poems that she prepared for the BBC, as well as in her poems, such as the image of the sun as a geranium, in "Mystic."⁴¹

Though Saldívar's book has been in print for more than two decades, the location of the original letters has never been known. Therefore, we did not know that the transcriptions of Carey's letters in her book do not completely reflect the actual letters. For example, it is not stated that with her second letter dated November 21, 1962, Plath enclosed a typescript copy of her poem "Mary's Song." There are slight differences between this poem and its final form in her *Collected Poems*. The third letter, dated November 29, 1962, has two postscripts; but there is only one in the book. In the postscript that is missing, Plath asks Carey what "A.A." stands for, which followed his name's title. "A.A." are the initials that follow an Assumptionist Priest.⁴²

Father Michael Carey gave his letters from Plath to Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, in August 2007, and passed away in November of that same year. Along with the letters he donated, Carey gave a valuable book as well: a 1960 Heinemann first edition of *The Colossus*. Carey acquired the book in June 1963, months after Plath's death, from a bookshop in Oxford. Assumption College has only recently made the letters available to the public.

Carey annotated one letter that he received from Plath. The annotation was not printed in the text in *Sylvia Plath: Confessing the Fictive Self*. In the bottom left hand corner of the last letter she sent him, dated February 4, 1963, Carey wrote in pencil:

She died Feb. 11, 1963

R.I.P.

Given that this is the year of the 50th anniversary of Plath's death, this seems an appropriate place to conclude our paper. Plath's voice has called to us from archives across the world and we have

⁴¹ See the Appendix in *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (HarperCollins, 2003). Additionally, Gail Crowther found additional authorial comments in the British Library. See "These Ghostly Archives 3" in *Plath Profiles* 4 (Summer 2011): http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/vol4/Crowther_Steinberg.pdf.

⁴² Saldívar masked both Carey's real name and affiliated religion by calling him a Roman Catholic Priest; it is likely the "A.A." was removed from the letter in order to further cover his identity and religious affiliation.

listened to what she has to say. Jodey Castricano observes: "If the dead shape the lives we are able to live, then they not only compel what we are able to read and to write but they also make it possible" (133). The ghostly experience in the Plath archives allows us to read those works left behind, and as Gaston Bachelard states: "The joy of reading appears to be the reflection of the joy of writing, as though the reader were the writer's ghost" (xxvi).

To end this paper, we would like to share a special find, and a discovery that reanimates Plath in the most visual sense: two previously unseen photographs. These pictures were discovered by chance after noticing a photograph online which I had not seen before. Having traced the origin of the photograph, it belonged to a company called "Peter Lofts Photography" based in Peterborough, UK.⁴³ A little more research yielded the information that Peter Lofts had purchased the full archive of a photography company called Ramsey and Muspratt, based in Cambridge. I engaged in a fascinating correspondence with Peter Lofts, who explained many of these Cambridge images were all still stored on their original glass plates by Ramsey and Muspratt. Peter and I asked him if he would investigate how many images he had of Plath. We were staggered to learn it amounted to thirteen. Further research suggested to us that these images of Plath and Hughes were most likely taken towards the end of 1956 and this was confirmed by Peter Lofts, who stated the files list the images under the title "Mr & Mrs Hughes" from an address at Eltisley Avenue, Cambridge in 1956.⁴⁴ Plath does write to her mother on November 21, 1956 that they plan to have some "good pictures" taken (288). Here we are about to present two of the pictures to you for the first time. Never are the dead more poignant and more preserved than in a photograph. According to Roland Barthes:

When we define the photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move, it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are as anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. (57)

The photograph, claims Barthes, does not call up the past, but attests to what once existed.

"Photography," he states, "has something to do with resurrection" (82).

Here is Plath, a celebration this is.

⁴³ One of these images can be viewed on Peter Loft's website <http://www.loftyimages.co.uk>. Accessed 6 Nov. 2012. It is possible to buy personal copies of these images from Peter Lofts.

⁴⁴ Email to Gail Crowther from Peter Lofts November 8, 2012.



©Peter Lofts Photography



©Peter Lofts Photography

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for assistance received: Renu Barrett, Archivist, William Ready Division at McMaster University; Carol Bere; Richard Larschan, University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth; Liz Maisey, Head of Technical Services, Emmanuel D'Alzon Library, Assumption College, Jordan P. Mitchell, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; The British Library; and Peter Lofts Photography.

Photographs of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes © Peter Lofts Photography. Used with permission of Peter Lofts Photography. Not to be reproduced without permission.

Photographs of Hartland Point © Gail Crowther. Used with permission of Gail Crowther. Not to be reproduced without permission.

Photographs of the Library of Congress, 26 Elmwood Road, Soho Square, Frith and Romilly Streets, Longmeadow (North Tawton), and 21 Alwyne Road © Peter K. Steinberg. Used with permission of Peter K. Steinberg. Not to be reproduced without permission.

Works Cited

- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press: Boston, 1994. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Vintage: London, 1993. Print.
- Castricano, Jodey. *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Print.
- Crowther, Gail and Peter K. Steinberg. "These Ghostly Archives 3." *Plath Profiles* 4 (2011): 119-138. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.
- . "These Ghostly Archives 4: Looking for New England." *Plath Profiles* 5 (2012): 11-56. Web. 17 Dec. 2012.
- Eng, David and David Kazanjian, eds. *Loss*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003. Print.
- "Find Girl in Cellar." *Boston Traveler*. Blue Streak Edition 26 August 1953: 1, 17. Print.
- Fletcher, Christopher. "Norman Nicholson's 'The Blackberry' – A Fruitful Source For Sylvia Plath?" *Notes and Queries* 52.4 (2005): 507. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Robinson. New York: Pantheon Books. 1984. Print.
- Helle, Anita, ed. *The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007. Print.
- Hughes, Ted. *Birthday Letters*. London: Faber, 1998. Print.
- Lucas, Victoria. *The Bell Jar*. London: Heinemann, 1963. Print.
- Lynes, Russell. Letter to Sylvia Plath. 27 April 1953. *Harper's Magazine* records. Library of Congress. Print.
- "Personal & Otherwise." *Harper's Magazine*. May 1954: 19. Print.
- Plath, Sylvia. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Ted Hughes. London: Faber, 1981. Print.
- Plath, Sylvia. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Karen V. Kukil. London: Faber, 2000. Print.
- Plath, Sylvia. *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1953*. Ed. Aurelia Schober Plath. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. Print.
- Plath, Sylvia. Letter to Father Michael Carey. 4 February 1963. Assumption College. Print.
- "Recent Deaths: Sylvia Plath Hughes." *The Townsman* 21 February 1963: 4. Print.
- Saldívar, Toni. *Sylvia Plath: Confessing the Fictive Self*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992. Print.
- Steiner, Nancy Hunter. *A Closer Look at Ariel: A Memory of Sylvia Plath*. London: Faber &

Faber, 1974. Print.

"Tragic Death of Young Authoress." *St. Pancras Chronicle* 22 February 1963: 5. Print.

Wilson, Andrew. *Mad Girl's Love Song: Sylvia Plath and Life Before Ted*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2013. Print.

Winder, Elizabeth. *Pain, Parties, Work: Sylvia Plath in New York, Summer 1953*. New York: HarperCollins, 2013. Print.

Wolfreys, Julian. *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 2002. Print.

Archival Collections Consulted

Cheltenham Festival prize poems. British Library, London, England.

Eric Walter White papers. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

Eric Walter White, Second Accrual. Mills Memorial Library, McMastery University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Letters to Michael Carey. Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Photographs of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. Peter Lofts Photography, Cambridge, England.

Plath Mss II. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Bloomington, Indiana.

"Sickroom Tulips" by Sylvia Plath. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Sylvia Plath Collection. Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Harper's Magazine records. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Edward James Hughes papers. British Library, London, England.

Ann Skea Notebooks. British Library, London, England.