

Editor's Note

During the summer I had the honour of attending a garden party at Whitstead, the postgraduate residence at Newnham College, Cambridge, where Sylvia Plath lived when she joined the college as a Fulbright Scholar in 1955.

Over sun-warmed pork pies and a rather disastrous attempt on my behalf to bake a pink apple pie, my hostess introduced me to the current resident of the room, Karina, who gave me a brief tour. We went up and up the stairs – the pretty polished wooden ones first and then the cramped, carpeted ones – all the white walls and doors clear and anaemic-looking, past a small toilet, until finally, there it was: Sylvia's room.

It's odd to be in the former living space of people who are only ghosts to you: sometimes, when the spaces are intricately reassembled, such as Mendips, John Lennon's house in Liverpool, or lovingly preserved, such as Gustav Moreau's home-turned-museum in Paris, it is not hard to imagine the artists at work, or mop tops coming up the drive as you stand at a kitchen window. Others, such as Lumb Bank, Ted Hughes's home turned into a residential writing centre for the Arvon Foundation, clearly carry on as a seat of creativity and culture.

Sylvia's old room, however, was just a room. The walls were no longer yellow-painted, the carpet isn't green, and the furniture has changed a bit as the window no longer has a comfy seat under it. The only evidence to be found was that of the current scholar... even the furniture had likely been replaced in the 60+ years since Plath studied here. The space was too transitory, no connection could be made.

Until I was taken to the toilet.

Karina pulled out her phone and showed me the sketch reproduced in the upper right corner of the page. "Look out the window," she said.

Knees on the toilet seat, I peered out, and there it was, the same perspective, just as Plath had sketched it, although with considerably more foliage now and no smoke from the chimneys. But that was proof. As ridiculous as the image was, I could see 20-something Sylvia in her argyle-stockinged feet perched on the toilet rim, balancing her sketch pad and a bottle of India ink, expression determined as she painstakingly sketched those wibbly little houses in her detailed hand. Possibly another Newnhamite pounding on the door. I felt as though I'd verified a Monet and established provenance. And I might have fangirled just a little bit. Because come on, how many Plath scholars get to hang out in Sylvia's old toilets?

I took a few cheeky snaps on my visit to Whitstead, and have included them throughout this issue. I specifically did not take a photo of Karina's room because it was *Karina's* room. Another Newnhamite scholar is in that room now, and undoubtedly it has changed to reflect the personality of its resident. Which is as it should be.

I must apologise for the delay in this issue of *Plath Profiles*, but I hope you enjoy it. With volume 9 we have begun a blind peer review process with success. I am indebted to Jill Anderson, Jessica R. McCort, Elizabeth Spies, Sarah Nichols and Nick Smart for their efforts, their incisive reading and fantastic feedback, and to Amanda Golden for keeping the journal's Facebook page lively. I would also like to thank all of our contributors for this issue, who have produced beautiful poems, artwork, and some truly original scholarship that I hope will push the boundaries of Sylvia Plath study. And as always, thank you to the eternally patient Bill Buckley, for everything.

MANAGING EDITOR
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A LOO WITH A VIEW Sylvia Plath sketched this view from the toilet of her home in Cambridge while a student at Newnham College. Full-page image taken in July 2015.

Credit: Cathleen Allyn Conway

