

Plath Profiles

Poetry



Sylvia Plath is on the Night Train from Paris

by Amy Newman

with a lover asleep and the Olivetti
on the floor of the compartment.
The dark unfolding outside the window
is an infinite religious space.
Her mind branches, trying out crashing,
inadequate metaphors.

Just days ago, she had changed one word
in a problem line, leaving noun for adjective,
describing the end, not the means.
Then such a silvery-white there was!
The language transformed, ductile, like metal.
That was arrival, novitiate, your darling cell.

The train leans into lightening sky.
To her left are lemon trees, yolk-yellow
relenting fruit, and pastel houses
on exquisite, fertile land. Close-up,
the bright flowers purge their seeds,
tiny, crisp coats flung finally out.

On the right, the Mediterranean
forces itself repeatedly in blue,
carrying on under an adamant sun.
There had been a moon in the night, hadn't there,
a romantic spot on the eye somewhere?
But who remembers such dopiness,

given this vertebral infinite, this agitation?
On the other side of this sea is Egypt,
where the girl saint evaporated to a pureness,
while the anchorite suffered his body,
combustible in devotion, and giving up.
Now the train unloads every inch of the past,

absolving in a lustrous violence.
She would like to be taken by force
into the terrible sea
for the malice that powers the heart for real,
and shaken until she sees stars, snarling white,
abrasive and well-meaning.

Sylvia Plath is in Paris with a Balloon on a Long String

by Amy Newman

Sylvia Plath is in Paris with a balloon on a long string,
its tricolor streamers floating and trailing.
It takes up the air like a determined child.
Plath was riding her horses of need,
and then breaking them, one by one.
The horse of loneliness, the horse of panic.
The horse of the Sacre Coeur's calcite-and-rainwater white
piped on Montmartre like a wedding cake.
The horse of the wallpaper powdered with rosebuds.
The horse of weeping in the charming vestibule.
The horse of the park's green geometry,
of the mushroom's black underpleats.
The horse of the lily-of-the-valley's chaste bell.
The horse of the prickly thin storm about to be,
of the cool cottons of the hotel bed
and his beautiful body, golden, lean,
and the horse of having been so close,
and then changing his mind.
The horse of her will like a planet, irrefutable,
distantly tethered to the bestial earth, and Paris
splayed and blazing around them, as if illustrated.

While Sylvia Plath Studies *The Joy of Cooking* On Her Honeymoon In Benidorm, Spain, Delmore Schwartz Reclines In The Front Seat Of His Buick Roadmaster

by Amy Newman

While Sylvia Plath studies *The Joy of Cooking* on her honeymoon in Benidorm, Spain,

Delmore Schwartz reclines in the front seat of his Buick Roadmaster listening to a Giants game on the car radio.

The car's parked on his farmland in Baptistown, New Jersey, where obstinate plants attempt survival at great odds, their vital spikes insulting and defending.

The thistle fans its prickly leaves, the burdock hustles, miserly. Its dry-as death-seed will outlast you, traveler, its dry-as-hope seedling will use you, tenacious as the leftover god, the eye-of-the-needle-god, the straggly one, the Shylock, who lent you your life, who chose this desert wilderness for exile.

He manifests the empty field for you to wander. He removeth your brilliance and set you in a basket alone among the rushes. He maketh the coral of Seconal and suffers you to recline in the evergreen Dexamyl shade, while Ernie Harwell calls the last out (Willie Jones popping up to Al Dark) in the car's radium glow. Do you see it, American poetry? The happy arc of the ball above Shibe Park—a moment of promise falling off, coming to nothing. Disappearing to atoms. Giants win, 4-2.

In Benidorm, Plath skins the market rabbit, hind to head. She'll flour and sear the taut pink flesh and scrape the carrots naked. Spain is a million things, it's lantanas and hibiscus, it's roses that aren't ashamed to split their skirts for love, rude flowers pushing out of their skins, and all-new vines hugging the old walls, new ascendancy, shooting up into skies like something about to matter. The peppercorns that season the stew grow in clusters like glands, ripening, and within each pod is the seed,

the hard, dry, concentrated bitterness for which it is prized.