

Recollections of Mrs. Hughes's Student

Ellen Bartlett Nodelman, Smith College Class of 1961

& Amanda Golden, Georgia Institute of Technology

*At the top of the detailed introduction to Dylan Thomas's poetry that Sylvia Plath prepared for her freshman English class at Smith College in the spring of 1958, she added a note to return her student Ellen Bartlett's essay.¹ When I met Ellen on September 4, 2006 in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, I learned in the course of our conversation that Plath had selected Ellen's exam response analyzing James Joyce's novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1917)* to read to the class as an example. In preparation for our interview, Ellen had composed the following memoir of her year as a student in Sylvia Plath's class. – AG*

I'm sure I was not the typical Smith freshman, so my responses and memories may not be at all typical. I was the quintessential outsider, having been educated, since the age of 10, overseas, in schools in India and the Philippines. I had had a fairly decent, if somewhat rigid, education in the boarding school in India that I attended, but I left that after the equivalent of 9th grade and then had two years plus (including a truncated 10th grade year—all of three months in total of that) in the American School in Manila.

Our teachers were not professionals, for the most part. They tended to be well-meaning wives of expat businessmen/diplomats/navy officers stationed in Manila. For the two plus years I was there, I essentially educated myself, working my way around the school library and reading up on anything that interested me. Unfortunately for any hopes of a well-rounded education, I ignored anything that DIDN'T; math and science were significantly absent from my list of worthwhile topics to bone up on.

I was a good English student – as far as my school was concerned. But I never wrote a critical paper in the time that I was there. I vaguely remember writing something about *Hamlet*

¹ See Golden, "Sylvia Plath's Teaching Syllabus" and Plath, "Teaching Notes" Lilly Library. A Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Poetics from Emory University's Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry and an Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship from the Lilly Library at Indiana University enabled my research. I am also grateful to the Smith College Archives for permission to publish the clippings from *The Sophian*.

when we read it in class, and answering lots of questions, short answer questions that appeared after each reading selection in our text book. But not a genuine critical paper, so probably never a genuine critical thought.

Then I arrived at Smith. Most of my classmates were from good private schools, either boarding (the Miss _'s School that proliferated all over the country at that time) or top day schools. Others came with a public school education but, in general, one from a select number of elite public schools in the tonier suburbs. They all clearly came better prepared than I – something of which I was keenly aware.

They were obviously far more socially adept than I, full of information on such crucial issues as the better eating clubs at Princeton and the distinction between various fraternities at Dartmouth and Williams. They were a superior bunch, academically. In my senior year, I was told by someone in authority that ours had been, statistically, the most outstanding class of all the Seven Sisters freshman classes. But academic superiority does not necessarily translate into intellectual curiosity. The major preoccupations in my class were What men's college were you visiting next weekend and Who, among the upperclassmen in your house, was getting pinned to whom. Bridge games were the main social occupation in the "house" during the week and everyone lived for the weekend, when one could either get away to the desirable men's college or have someone, from that desirable men's college, visit in Northampton.

Don't get me wrong. The girls were all smart and hard working. All the freshmen in my house, many of whom later confessed that they felt equally out of place, were terrified that they wouldn't measure up, that they came in unprepared, so I was hardly alone in that. All the girls in my classes paid attention, did their work carefully and thoroughly and, by and large, mastered the material. This while usually knitting in class (socks or college scarves for the longed-for boyfriend) and taking copious notes simultaneously. They just didn't share that knowledge with anyone else when they got back to the dorm. You never came in from a class continuing an argument or debate that had started in class. You never brought up something you had just learned over the dinner table or before dinner in the house living room. That was something you kept to yourself.

My class was sort of caught between generations. The typical 50's student, conventional, conformist, planning for the MRS Degree was on one side of us and, of course, looming in the

future were the rebels of the 60's. We had a foot in each decade, even though we had no idea that this was true.

Smithies of that time were largely conventional and conformist. Most of my fellow freshmen in Chapin House, where I lived, came from business backgrounds and were Republican in politics. Everyone wore Bermuda shorts (even in the winter: wool Bermuda shorts and knee socks), blouses/shirts with "Peter Pan" collars and the inevitable circle pin. Scarab bracelets were all the rage. The Coat was the double breasted camel's hair coat. The lucky girls who were going with the Yale Man or the Princeton Man or the ___ Man wore the requisite six foot striped scarf sporting that college's colors.

If you were shy, as I was, you tended to hide in your room or in the library, and social life was pretty much non-existent. There were a few mixers, mostly with Amherst boys, but they were ordeals for the socially awkward. So I just tried to busy myself with things that DID interest me and look as inconspicuous as possible.

What does all this have to do with Sylvia Plath? Well, in the first place, we had no idea that she was going to turn into Sylvia Plath. She was Mrs. Hughes and no one knew much about her. One of the upperclassmen in my house came from Wellesley, Mass., and knew more about her than anyone else. When she heard that Mrs. Hughes was my English teacher, she told me that Mrs. Hughes had been a Smithie herself, that she was considered brilliant and up and coming back home in Wellesley. Other than that, she didn't seem to know much.

Only one other girl in my house had Mrs. Hughes for English 11. I envied the other kids in my house because they had "in" teachers like the sexy and provocative Mr. Schindler (who later married one of his students) and, sigh, Mr. Hecht who was a Known Poet and also very cute. Most of us wanted male teachers, on whom we could develop crushes; if we had a woman teacher, she had to be either young, friendly and cutting edge, hence a role model, or older and maternal, someone on whom we could depend.

Mrs. Hughes was none of the above. Not even, as far as anyone knew, a Known Poet. She was strict, severe, brisk and to the point. Everyone in the class was scared stiff of her. She sat us in assigned seating our first day (I ended up in the front row, perhaps because my last name began with B), sitting in the far right hand side, next chair to the end. She rarely cracked a smile. There was little room for discussion. She did the talking. I remember her having many books on

the lectern on her desk and, yes, notes, but I don't really remember the extent to which she consulted those notes. She did, however, direct the class in an absolute no-nonsense fashion.

Everyone in the class hated her. She was mean. She wasn't friendly. She didn't joke with us. She didn't encourage us. She just walked into the classroom, put her things down on her desk, fixed a steely gaze on us, laid down the law for an hour, gathered up her things and stalked out.

I remember clusters of girls, after class, complaining about her. Always the complete outsider, I didn't join them in their complaints, but I didn't disagree either. I wondered then if, as a Smith graduate herself, only a few years out of college and not all that much older than any of us, she had decided to be super strict to assert her authority. Not only was she strict – stiff might be a better word for her demeanor – but tension is truly the operative term. The tension emanating from her when she walked into the room, when she stood, stiff and straight in front of you, even as she stalked out of the classroom at the end was palpable. I remember having the impression that if she relaxed, she would fall, or, more accurately, explode into a thousand little pieces, right in front of our eyes.

Two incidents in the fall stand out in my mind, one only in retrospect, the other right at the time. The first was walking into class one morning and noticing, as class got underway, that the girl who usually sat next to me was missing. Back then, cutting class was rarely done. As a freshman, you were allowed three cuts per class . . . I'm hazy on what would happen if you exceeded that number, but I DO remember that three was the magic number – and that was for all year. So a missing classmate, especially the one who sat next to you in assigned seating, was a noticeable phenomenon. But class got started as usual, and we worked hard on the reading for the day (we were doing William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*) and didn't think more about it. She never came back. We found out later that day that her body had been found down by Paradise Pond, that she had hanged herself. It was the sensation of the moment, especially coming as it did fairly early in the year when many of us were still feeling out of our element and dealing with all the transitional problems typical for all freshmen. But, looking back at it, I don't recall Mrs. Hughes ever saying a word about her. She just forged on ahead. At the time, I thought little about that. Mrs. Hughes never showed any personal feelings or even seemed to recognize that we were, in fact, persons. So her seeming obliviousness to this missing person seemed quite in character. I now wonder how much she knew about her and what the suicide of one of her very first students may have meant to her.

The second incident followed hard upon her returning our first papers to us. She had assigned us a critical paper on the first book we had read, William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and I remember going over my notes from class and from the assigned reading as meticulously as I could and working like a dog on the paper, the first paper of this sort that I had ever written. I turned it in, considering it a fairly good try and hoping for the best. I was devastated when Mrs. Hughes handed the papers back. I had gotten a C+. Me, Ellen Bartlett, who had never had a grade in English lower than an A. Mrs. Hughes had posted her office hours for students to consult with her, so I marched over to her office in the library at the very first opportunity.

It was the first time I met with her alone. She was quite nice to me, greeting me with a rather regal and somewhat distant, "Well, hello, Ellen." But she did remember my name. "What can I do for you?" I stammered out that I wanted to talk about my paper and what I could do to make up for it, to improve on it. I'll never forget her saying, "But Ellen, you know, C+ is a very good grade at Smith." I remember resolving right then and there that I was going to get an A in her course or die trying.

She did sit down with me and go over the paper, thoroughly, pointing out the gaffes and glitches which I'm sure were numerous. I wasn't placated, but I was determined. I was going to prove her wrong.

After that, I began to relax a little in her class. She began to make eye contact with me. I don't recall her ever saying anything at that early stage of the class that was particularly encouraging but I felt encouraged. She seemed to take an interest in me and in one or two other students, and I remember getting into the habit of staying a moment or two after class and exchanging a few words about whatever we had been discussing in class with her . . . just like you did with a "real" teacher. I remember having more opportunities to participate in class and doing so quite happily. I also remember, grade grubber that I was, that my grades DID improve and that I did live up to that resolution that I had made after the awful first paper.

I can't say that most of the members of my class ever shared my change of feelings. To the bitter end, most of them disliked her. I can't speak for her other English 11 sections . . . they may have had better memories of her. But I ended up really liking her and feeling that she liked and respected me. She was always willing to take time to meet with me and talk. She encouraged me to major in English, something at the time I was reluctant to do, and to take upper level

English classes the following year instead of standard sophomore English classes. We'd meet occasionally outside of class and just talk about other things. I think, like most self-centered teenagers, I was anxious to burble on to her about a lot of my worries and preoccupations and she was quite patient about that. I do NOT recall her ever sharing anything truly personal about herself with me or with anyone else.

Of course, everyone knew that her husband, Ted Hughes, was a poet. I don't think it ever crossed our mind that she was also a poet. Certainly she never discussed her writing with us. I recall going to a poetry reading that Ted Hughes gave . . . not that she even mentioned the reading in class. Events like this at Smith were well publicized in bulletins that covered each week's doings, so we were all aware of it. I went alone – don't think anyone else in my class went – and Mrs. Hughes greeted me kindly and introduced me to her husband. I was, naturally, very impressed; he was, equally naturally, completely indifferent. I remember it being a stimulating session and I think it was there during the give-and-take after his reading that I had any intimation that my English teacher might also be a poet. But that was the first and last time the possibility of her creativity came up.

What she was, and even the kids in my class who disliked her thoroughly admitted to this, was a very good teacher. I came into her class without the faintest idea of what critical reading might be and with even less of a notion as to how to write a coherent critical essay. She taught us all precisely how to do both. She was rigorous, demanding and thorough in her approach both to her students and to the literature we were reading. And while she never seemed to show great passion and love for that literature, I think it sort of snuck through despite all her efforts to rein herself in. Oddly enough, one of the casualties of my learning how to approach literature in this fashion was my own writing. As I mentioned before, I had loved to read and write, albeit in a thoroughly undisciplined way, when I was in high school, and had toyed with the idea of becoming a writer. I wrote stories and some poetry, and continued doing so my freshman year at Smith. But somehow, learning to take apart the writing of great authors and poets in such a ruthless, clinical way, made me see everything I might try to do as futile and unworthy. I now wish I had discussed this with her – as our relationship developed throughout the year, she was accessible to conversations of this sort, and she might have been able to steer me in another direction. Instead I lapsed into a self-deprecating writers block.

As for the works we read with her, they were chosen, I believe, not by her but by the department. I'm sure she had leeway to select some and reject others, since each of the English 11 sections had slightly different syllabi, but the major works were all the same. We began with the William James, an odd choice but one that helped us begin to look at style and structure along with meaning; and I believe we enjoyed struggling with the ideas. Then we did a series of short stories. I recall having *The Portable D. H. Lawrence* and *The Portable James Joyce*. We spent most of the first semester on those two writers. I remember a number of stories and also remember having ambivalent feelings about Lawrence, enjoying the writing but feeling distinct unease with some of his notions, particularly his handling of women. Yet I don't remember Plath ever directing the discussion in this direction. She stayed strictly away from judgments of that sort, focusing always on what an author was saying and how he was saying it. The Joyce I remember a bit more clearly, snippets of *Dubliners* (certainly "The Dead") and then, memorably, *Portrait of the Artist*. That really came across to me – and I remember the pleasure I felt when we returned from one vacation, having taken our mid year exam before we left, and Mrs. Hughes read my answer to the question she had posed to us on that book to the entire class (straight from my blue book).

The second semester was devoted to drama and poetry, but I believe we finished up with *Crime and Punishment*. Why it was arranged that way, I don't know. The drama was eclectic – we read *Duchess of Malfi* and something else Jacobean (I really don't recall what), then leapt to Strindberg and Ibsen. It was the modernist tinge that was emphasized in almost everything we did.

The poetry began with a thorough introduction to Hopkins, whom I loved – as I think she must have as well. That despite the fact that I could never get my mind around the concept of sprung rhythm! We then went on to Eliot, Yeats and Auden, but I believe that was pretty much it . . . no one else. Again, she taught us how to really read, and therefore appreciate, poetry . . . small wonder . . . and I loved every minute of it. But if there was a passion within her for poetry, it didn't seem obvious to the casual onlooker. And it was all done in the same measured, methodical way that she went about teaching everything from start to finish. The fact that I fell in love with so much of what we read may well have been a result of her conveying her own feelings for it DESPITE her best efforts to the contrary.

We never read any Virginia Woolf, but I do remember Plath mentioning her, when we were discussing Joyce and his use of point of view and language. I recall trying to read *To the Lighthouse* on my own later that year and abandoning it without really making inroads at the time. Easily discouraged, I guess. Shows you how Plath must have encouraged us through the reading we did without our sensing that encouragement.

As I said above, she was very careful (cold, many of my classmates would have described her as being) not to display too much feeling about any of the works we were reading, but those feelings still managed to come through even though we were not all that aware of the fact. It seems odd that someone whose poetry is so open and passionate and personal should have hid behind the persona of the correct, analytical, precise and objective pedagogue. Still, those emotions did feel their way to us, however disguised.

Clearly, she did not joke around in class or ever be casual, unlike so many of our other younger instructors. She worked hard at the Professional Demeanor and, while relaxing a little as the year went on, kept it to the bitter end. She used notes but mostly books in her hand, reading from them, commenting on what she had read, extrapolating from all that and, increasingly as the year progressed, getting us to participate and respond to her suggestions. There were those who never did and those of us who enjoyed participating in class and did so frequently once we overcame our initial fear of her. She never brought anyone else into the class; it was her bailiwick and she ruled it absolutely! Her husband was absolutely irrelevant to us . . . just a figure of curiosity and, of course, considered madly sexy but still irrelevant. He really didn't appear around campus . . . I think the first time I saw him was at that poetry reading which was well into the school year.

Plath was a handsome woman but her classroom persona was helped by the way she dressed – her hair severely tied back and up on her head (again, as if she was trying to convey the school marm impression); her clothes formal and tailored. The pictures you see of her and Ted, her hair streaming loose, her open body language – that was nowhere to be seen.

I do recall her talking about the Tarot Cards when we did *The Waste Land*, but I really don't remember if she brought them into class or not. She may have, but if she did, she would have used them minimally; it would not have been her style to allow us, or herself, to become distracted. But I do know that I understood the allusions to them, and to much else in the poem, thanks to her thoroughness and probing.

Again, in retrospect, she may have developed a fondness for me for two reasons, I was a reasonably decent student after she got hold of me AND I was also a bit of a lost soul, lonely (my parents were halfway around the world and I was alone there in the States), out of my element, used to serious adult company and not to the social whirl of my peers. She may have taken pity on me for that and for other reasons. I think she was also proud that she had been able to turn me into a real English student after that initial debacle.

The oddest part of all this is that I almost missed this entire experience. As I said, I had gone to school overseas and my education had been spotty, to say the least. I did very well on the SATs, had good grades from my indifferent school and, I guess, was a bit off the beaten track, which made me attractive to Smith at the time. My sister, 13 years my senior, and into whose hands I had been deposited by my parents when they went back to the Philippines, had attended Smith while I was still in PreK and had lived in a house with a faculty resident, Miss Ehlers, who coincidentally was my Class Dean. After spring vacation that freshman year, my sister drove me back to Smith after contacting Miss Ehlers and arranging for us all to go out to dinner at Wiggins Tavern. In the course of the dinner conversation, Miss Ehlers asked me what English class I was taking. I told her that I had English 11 with Mrs. Hughes. She stared at me and said, "But that's impossible. You were exempted from English 11." "I was?" I responded. "No one ever told me that." Then Miss Ehlers said, "Oh, yes, I remember now. Your verbal scores on the SAT and the Achievement Test (as they were referred to then) were so high that you were automatically exempted from freshman English. But then we saw that you were from the Philippines and we weren't sure how good your English would be. So we decided you'd better go into English 11 after all."

Obviously, my English was just fine (born in New York City, attending private schools until my parents took me off to India at the age of ten). BUT the decision still had been the right one. And not just because otherwise I would have missed having Sylvia Plath as an English teacher. But because, as Sylvia Plath discovered, and soon taught me, I had come to Smith without any idea of what college writing is all about. I needed that class, whoever taught it, and I'm forever grateful that I had the encounter with Sylvia Plath and that, unlike so many of my other classmates, the encounter proved, in the end, to be both profitable and pleasurable.

Afterword by Amanda Golden.

On Tuesday, November fifth, 1957, Alfred Young Fisher notified his former poetry student Sylvia Plath that he would be observing her class on Friday. As Plath recorded in a fragment now published in her *Unabridged Journals*, Fisher was to "sit in on" her first day teaching D. H. Lawrence (*UJ* 622). In preparation for his visit, Plath crafted an exercise that would enable her students to better understand the protagonist's mode of perception in Lawrence's short story "The Blind Man" (1922).² In addition to Ellen Bartlett Nodelman's memoir, Plath's teaching notes and the contexts informing them shed light on the creativity and effort that she brought to her teaching.

Plath taught three sections of English 11 that met at nine and eleven in the morning and three in the afternoon (*UJ* 388-9). Her afternoon classes met on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and her morning classes met on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Following her first class meeting with the Wednesday afternoon section, the three class sections progressed at slightly different paces (*LH* 326).³ When Plath referred to her first day devoted to Lawrence in her journal, she meant in her afternoon class, which was a day ahead of the other sections.⁴ Nodelman would have encountered the text on the following class day, as she was in Plath's early morning class (Interview). Given that Plath spent Mondays and Tuesdays composing her teaching notes, it would have been an added source of stress that Fisher called on Tuesday night, as she was beginning her first class of the week the following afternoon.

After Plath spoke with Fisher on Tuesday night, one of the students in her morning class was found hanging in the vicinity of Smith's Paradise Pond on Wednesday morning.⁵ On Thursday, the front page of Smith's student newspaper *The Sophian* included the brief article, "Smith Freshman Takes Own Life" (Figure 1). While Plath may have also been privately informed that her student had died, she would have encountered the newspaper's announcement as she searched the same issue for Bonnie Josephs's article about Plath's time as a Fulbright

² Plath, "Teaching Notes." Abbreviated *TN* in parenthetical citations.

³ See Golden, "Sylvia Plath's Teaching Syllabus." Unpublished portion of Plath's September 23, 1957 letter to her mother housed at the Lilly Library (*LH* 326). Email of 7.10.09 from David K. Frasier of the Lilly Library.

⁴ The first day of the term was a Wednesday and so Plath started this class a day ahead of the others (*LH*).

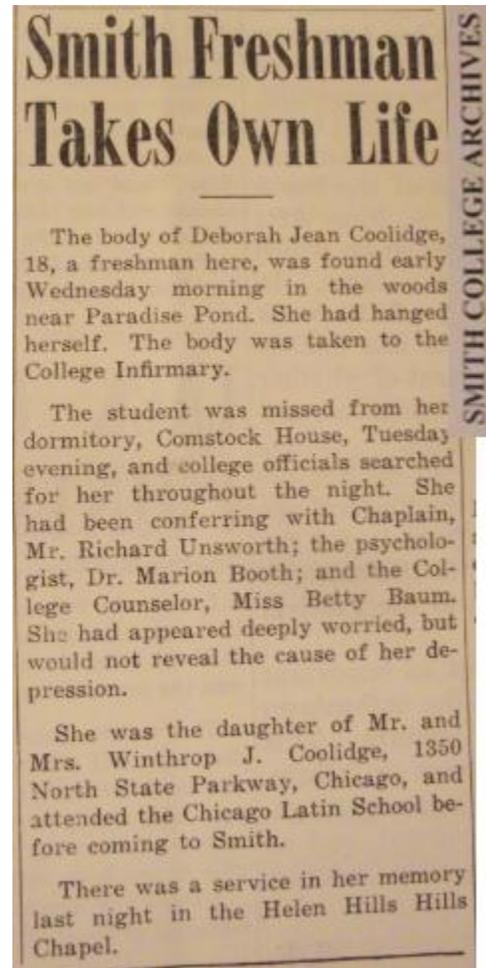
⁵ See also Linda Wagner-Martin, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*. Wagner-Martin cites this student's death as an antecedent for Plath's depiction of the character of Joan's suicide in *The Bell Jar*: "The woman had hanged herself, supposedly because of either a pregnancy or an abortion. Later that fall, according to the Smith newspaper, *The Sophian*, there were other attempted suicides" (148).

Scholar at Newnham College, Cambridge and her return to Smith, "Hughes Depicts the Cambridge Scene."

Figure 1. *The Sophian*. Volume VI.
No. 29, Thursday, November 7, 1957.
Page 1. Smith College Archives.

In Plath's notes for her overview lecture on Lawrence, she clarified his understanding of "blood consciousness" and the significance of the body. She quoted from a letter he sent in 1913: "My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true" (TN). Despite the cold impersonality of the modern world, she qualified that Lawrence did not literally suggest that wives escape with gamekeepers and quoted his late assessment in "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" (1929): "Life is only bearable when the mind and the body are in harmony, and there is a natural balance between them, and each has a natural respect for the other" (TN). Two characters in Lawrence's story "The Blind Man," Plath argued in her teaching notes, each demonstrate one of these extreme perspectives.

In her teaching notes for "The Blind Man," Plath drafted an activity asking her students to close their eyes and envision how they would make their way out of the classroom and down the Seelye Hall staircase if they could not see. The shape of Plath's notes suggests that she was working quickly and captures her excitement. She used short words and phrases and asked "How?" three times. Plath also inquired as to whether, with their eyes closed, her students were aware of their classmates' presence. She concluded the exercise by suggesting that without sight, the students' remaining senses would have been critical. She then cited the blind Indian writer Ved Mehta's recent book *Face to Face* (1957) and his term, "facial vision."⁶ Mehta had been at



⁶ <<http://www.vedmehta.com/reviews/remember-spectator.htm>> Last accessed 3 October, 2012.

Balliol College, Oxford while Plath and Hughes were living in Cambridge.⁷ As Norman Cousins captured in his 1957 article in the *Saturday Review*, Mehta uses "three highly developed senses—skin sensitivity, hearing, and memory" (2). Plath's stairway exercise and questions regarding her students' awareness of their classmates recalls Cousins's account that for Mehta, "[t]he air felt one way when he came to the foot of the stairs, another way at the head of the stairs. If I walked behind him he would wait for me to catch up" (2).⁸ Plath's approach updated the teaching of Lawrence in the hallways where she had studied literature. If she did use this exercise when Fisher visited, he might have been impressed with not only the students' engagement, which seems rare compared to the contents of Plath's teaching notes for other texts, but also the empathy that her choice of text and exercise enabled.

In her memoir, Nodelman also responded to one of my queries regarding another pedagogical experiment that Plath drafted in her teaching notes. In her teaching materials for T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Plath reminded herself to show her students the "Hanged Man" card in her Tarot deck. In doing so, she planned to share with her class an artifact that held new significance for her since she was a student that also reflected the poetic interest that she shared with Hughes in the occult and mysticism.⁹ In the process, she also recorded Eliot's association in the popular imagination with the Tarot cards at midcentury. In Plath's copy of Basil Ivan Rakoczi's *The Painted Caravan: A Penetration into the Secrets of the Tarot Cards* (1954), which she purchased in London in 1956, Rakoczi observed opposite the table of contents, "[a]t the end of the book you find on the left the Hanged man of Gypsy Initiation Rites and on the right, the Drowned Phoenician Sailor, a card under the sign of wands, described by T.S. Eliot in 'The Wasteland [sic].'"¹⁰

When Plath learned in the spring of 1957 that she would be returning to "Smith in the lovely Pioneer Valley, among the people I admire most in the world," she exclaimed to her mother, "[w]hat an introduction for Ted!" Anticipating the publication of Hughes's first book of poetry, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957), she added, "I imagine it will come out next fall, and then

⁷ <<http://www.vedmehta.com/about/resume.html>> Last accessed 5 October, 2012.

⁸ Norman Cousins, "A Most Remarkable Man." *Saturday Review*. August 17, 1957.

<<http://www.vedmehta.com/about/articles/satreview-1957-0817-2.htm>> Last accessed 3 October, 2012.

⁹ For further examination of Plath's teaching of Eliot, see Golden, *Annotating Modernism*. Regarding Plath, Hughes, and mysticism, see Wagner-Martin *Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life*.

¹⁰ Rakoczi opposite the Table of Contents. Plath's copy of *The Painted Caravan: A Penetration into the Secrets of the Tarot Cards* is housed in the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith. Plath noted purchasing the book in her 1956 calendar in the Lilly Library. See Golden, "Sylvia Plath on Charing Cross Road."

what fine publicity it will have in the center of these poetry-conscious university communities" (LH 301). Northampton's Hampshire Bookshop, where Plath had purchased books as an undergraduate, celebrated her return to Smith and the publication of *The Hawk in the Rain*. In another letter to her mother, Plath reported that "the head of the Hampshire Bookshop, an ex-Smith woman, very nice, sent Ted two little bottles of American champagne on his publication day" (326-7). The bookstore also placed an announcement in *The Sophian* advertising signed copies of Hughes's book (Figure 2). Even though the newspaper description mentions that Hughes was married to Sylvia Plath of the English department, as Nodelman and her classmates knew Plath as Mrs. Hughes, they may not have made the connection.

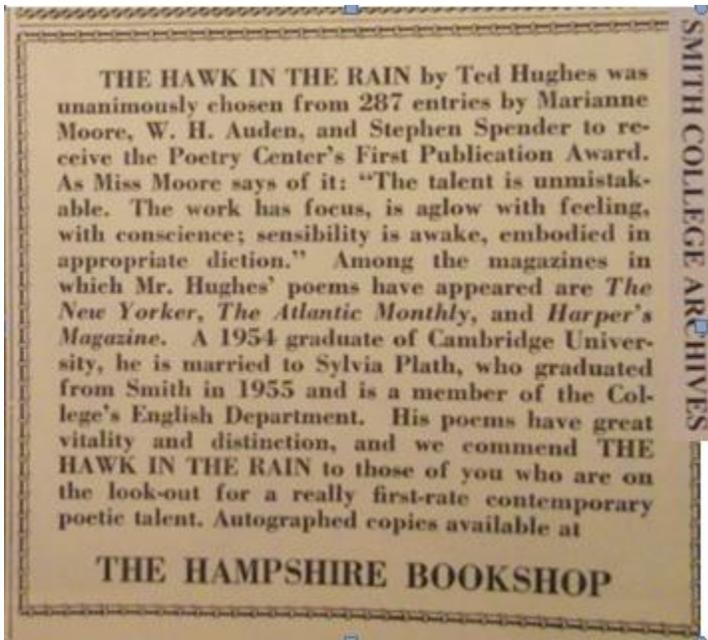


Figure 2. *The Sophian*. Tuesday, October 15, 1957. Smith College Archives.

Over a year after Plath left teaching, her anxiety over giving Nodelman an average grade resurfaced in one of Plath's "old teaching nightmares" while she was in residence at the Yaddo Artists' Colony in the fall of 1959. A visit from Plath's former teacher and colleague Newton

Arvin, triggered her dream of "a lounging, bored class, about to be dismissed, me noticing a student resembling Ellen Bartlett, to whom I had given a C, had a story in the New Yorker [sic] . . . and me promising to reconsider her mark on these grounds. Probably a meld of my sense of this vibrant new Ellen Currie, Jean Stafford's New Yorker stories, which I'd just been reading, and Newton's recall to the old treadmill" (UJ 508). Without Nodelman's memoir, we would not know that this early grade provided a springboard for her success. As a result, we are also better able to imagine Plath's presence in the classroom, her approach to teaching, and the influence she had on her students as she fought to keep up on "the old treadmill."

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