

These Ghostly Archives 4: Looking for New England

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We never know what we will truly find in an archive, no matter how many visits. And, perhaps it is with fresh eyes, that new materials will be found. This paper concludes with the hope that such a thing will come true, as Peter plans a return trip to Smith College and to other newly learned-of archives and Gail prepares to sail to America for her very first visit...

(Crowther & Steinberg, "These Ghostly Archives 3," 137)

An archive, we are told, is a collection of historical records, or the physical place in which they are located. Certainly, the nature of archives is that they house original documents, often unpublished, unique and singular in their existence. Over the last three papers published in *Plath Profiles*, we have attempted to show the experience of working in an archive and the type of intellectual and emotional engagement that takes place during research. We have shared with you some of our more startling finds, and conversely, kept some of the more personal finds out of publication. In "These Ghostly Archives 3," we discussed the discovery of several never before seen photographs of Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and their home at Court Green. We also published, for the first time, a picture of the elms in Devon that inspired much of Plath's later poetry. In this paper, we aim to shift the focus State-side to Plath's country of birth, and in particular, to the Smith College Sylvia Plath Collection housed in the Rare Book Room in the Neilson Library. However, we will also be uncovering some business correspondence between Plath and *The New Yorker* which has never been mentioned in a publication before now and looking in more detail at what we might deem the more "personal" items that can be stored in an archive. In this case, for example, Sylvia Plath's prom dress. This study is a definite contrast in our conversations as we highlight ways in which the archive can be both personal and professional. While this may sound a little disjointed, we feel that it is artificial to assume these two aspects can be kept entirely separate anyway; a point we raised in our first paper "These Ghostly Archives."¹ Note, for example, in this paper, the fascinating and multi-faceted picture we can draw of Plath by presenting you with her submission list and business correspondence

¹ This paper can be found in *Plath Profiles* 2 http://www.iun.edu/~nwadmin/plath/vol2/Crowther_Steinberg.pdf.

with *The New Yorker* in 1962 alongside annotations from her personal library and her leisure reading that she was carrying out simultaneously. This illustrates how important – or necessary – it is to visit each of the Plath archives: only then can a fuller image of her be woven together.² Often throughout this paper, it is you as reader who is invited to make these links, to draw the dates together and to think about how the personal may wield on the professional, how Plath operated and organized her day-to-day life.

We would also like to introduce to you the notion that the boundaries which contain the contents of an archive can at times become a little blurry. In fact, sometimes, especially when dealing with Plath and Smith College, it can feel like the archive is everywhere – not just simply papers and the place that contains them, but literally a living archive reflecting history on the ground. In this case, we could even say that the archive is "a dynamic space," both preserving itself and working with contemporary changes taking place around it. As we will discuss later in this paper, discovering Plath's old dormitory room in Lawrence House, Smith College was a curious mix of the old and the new. Of course there have been historical changes since the 1950s, but what was startling was the way in which traces of the past, and things and places that Plath would have seen, were still there. Furthermore, these places and objects which we might regard as somehow existing outside of our usual understanding of the archive (such as a room or a prom dress) worked intertextually with documents housed in the actual physical archive. So, when Plath wrote letters describing the room, the dress, it was this experience, of standing in an unchanged room while simultaneously reading Plath's description of the room, that led to the disintegration of the archive boundaries for us. Suddenly, the archive seemed everywhere, and as a consequence, more ghostly than ever.

GC: There are actually very few accounts of archival work in print; the sensations of working with old documents and the experience of anticipation. Carolyn Steedman in *Dust*, is one of the few writers who presents to us the complete archival experience as it were, the journey there, staying in hotels, how researchers gather in a morning outside the archive. The journey to carry out my latest archival research at Smith College was spectacular by anyone's standards. I sailed across the Atlantic. There is now only one

² See "Sylvia Plath Archival Materials" (<http://www.sylviaplath.inf/collections.html>) on Peter's website for a list of libraries and archives holding Plath manuscripts.

transatlantic ocean liner in service, the *Queen Mary 2* owned by Cunard which sails from Southampton in England to New York. The crossing takes seven days and is truly wonderful. Although this choice of transport came about mostly due to a pathological fear of flying, the Plathian elements were not lost on me. For of course, on the occasions that Plath did travel between England and America, this is exactly *how* she travelled. In the 1950s, the liners would have been smaller and the crossing would have taken nearer to ten days. Accessing the archive documents for these crossings reveals that in September 1955 Plath crossed from New York to Southampton on the *Queen Elizabeth*. When she returned to America two years later in June 1957, she also travelled on the same ship. Finally, when Plath and Hughes returned to England for the last time, it was aboard the *SS United States* in December 1959. We even know from existing documentation which lists the passenger manifest for these crossings that they travelled in what was deemed "Tourist Class."³ Sailing across an expanse of ocean like the Atlantic can be rather hypnotic; the swell and the sway. The infinite blueness of it all inspires daydreaming and as I travelled, I read Plath and, of course, wondered how she filled those ocean days. Knowing that the archives at Smith College were ahead of me, allowed plenty of time for me to browse the finding aid and attempt to plan exactly what it was I wanted to see. So in the early hours of a July morning, I sailed into New York City which was shrouded in a cool mist with the Statue of Liberty rising out of the dawn gloom, greenly.

PKS: Arriving in New York hours after Gail, I wait in the hotel for her to arrive as, oddly, disembarking the ship lasts longer than a train ride from Boston. In the hour before her timid knock on my hotel room door, I recalled my previous visit to New York four months earlier in March 2011 and the visit I made to the New York Public Library to browse "*The New Yorker* Records, c. 1924-1984." In all my previous reading, I could not recall any mention of Plath's letters to *The New Yorker* as a source for information. The collection was a gift from *The New Yorker* in 1991, and its comprehensive finding aid was compiled and written between 1994 and 1996.⁴ When searched, the finding aid yields fourteen instances in which Plath was named. In previous papers, Gail and I

³ Ancestry.com holds, among other documents, passenger manifests for Transatlantic crossings.

⁴ <http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/archivalcollections/pdf/nyorker.pdf>

highlighted the mastery of Plath's correspondence with the BBC and how her business correspondence is an undervalued source of information. As I sat in the reading room and anticipated the arrival of the archival boxes, I wondered nervously if this correspondence would live up to those of her BBC letters.

Generally, I feel that Plath may have begun submitting poems, stories, and drawings to *The New Yorker* before she was ready for them. Plath sent her villanelle "Doomsday" and another poem to *The New Yorker* in February 1953 (*Letters Home* 103). It was rejected by March 9 with a note written in pencil that read, "Although we were impressed by many things in 'Doomsday,' I'm sorry to say the final vote went against it, as well as the other poem" (106). Plath called the rejection "tantalizingly sad" and said that coming "so blasted close" is "almost worse than missing out altogether" (106). Rather than being down about it, she immediately packaged off "a third villanelle," her attitude being: "The worst they can do is reject it" (106).⁵ This is a practice Plath maintained for the next decade. In Cambridge, England, on January 28, 1956, Plath wrote in her *Journals*, "And I depend too desperately on getting my poems ... accepted by the New Yorker" (199). She did, just over two years later. On June 25, 1958, Plath she starred twice this day in a journal entry (397). And this is where *The New Yorker* archive begins: Howard Moss' acceptance letter dated June 24, 1958 and Plath's response on June 26, 1958.

GC: As Peter was exploring Plath correspondence with *The New Yorker*, we were both also experiencing New York itself in a uniquely Plathian manner. In the summer of 1953, Plath hit New York City to spend a month working as a "Guest Editor" for *Mademoiselle*. Although we have to take care not to read *The Bell Jar* as being transparently autobiographical, we can also clearly see inspired places and events if we examine scenes from the novel against journal fragments and letters that exist from this time. One journal fragment that was typed by Plath, very likely in the *Mademoiselle* offices at 575 Madison Avenue, survives at Smith College.⁶ It is on the verso of white "Street & Smith Inter Office Memorandum," the publishing company stationary for the

⁵ They did.

⁶ It seems likely to have been written directly from the offices on June 19, 1953, as Plath writes of busy phones ringing and *Mademoiselle* staffers planning to leave for the country over the long weekend which took place on that date.



magazine and an odd precursor to the pink Smith College memorandum paper Plath so notoriously used for her later writing. The journal fragment has been copied almost word for word in *The Bell Jar* as Esther narrates her horror of the impending execution of the Rosenbergs and the indifference displayed by those around her. As Peter and I walked down Madison Avenue, it was difficult not to think of an increasingly disturbed Plath sitting in the sixth floor office amid the chaos of a busy, noisy city (see left).

Of course, *Mademoiselle* is no longer in publication (its last issue being November 2001) and as the above photograph shows, the building is used for a number of different purposes now. It seemed impossible to escape from the realisation that in so much as the living archive can seemingly be everywhere, it has a much more elusive nature than the permanent, fixed building that houses documents. In this case, New York City felt much changed from the 1950s, not just in size and pace, but in the many traces that have been obliterated. The Barbizon Hotel where Plath stayed for the duration of June is now an exclusive apartment block. One building in which Plath attended a fashion show has been knocked down and replaced with an open space and water feature. In an unpublished letter to Myron Lotz written on June 13, 1953, Plath recounts a Guest Editors Dinner Dance and party on the rooftop at the St Regis Hotel (right). She speaks of the sunset and rosy glow across the city and two bands; one that sank into the floor as another rose upwards, each playing the same song so no break in the music was discernable. It was here on the rooftop terrace that



she had her photograph taken, cocktail glass in hand.⁷ The St Regis still stands, a beautiful stone building (see above). The foyer is unchanged from the 1950s. The Regis Roof is still an exclusive party space and restaurant, but the rooftop terrace, alas, is now closed, due to fear of suicides.

PKS: Plath's experiences in New York in June 1953 contributed to the exhaustion of a very busy junior year at Smith College that, by the end of the summer, culminated in her first suicide attempt. Needless to say, I think Plath was more a fan of *The New Yorker* than of New York. *The New Yorker* records contain nineteen letters from Sylvia Plath to various editors and staff on the magazine. Howard Moss received the majority at thirteen letters; but Plath also writes one letter to William Maxwell, four letters to Rachel MacKenzie, and one letter to Robert Hemenway.⁸ In addition to this, in the Plath files there are letters regarding Sylvia Plath by W. S. Merwin, Peter Davison, Olwyn Hughes, and Aurelia Plath, to name a few.

The nature of "business" correspondence often means that there is less "personality" than one might find in more general epistolary communications with family and friends. However, Plath's business correspondence – especially in these *New Yorker* letters – shows her unique and unconquerable drive to create and publish. From her first acceptance in the famous magazine, Plath was compliant to the editor's wishes, but also quite firm and resilient if a suggestion violated her vision for her poetry's structure, meaning, or message. Responding to Howard Moss' first acceptance letter for "Mussel-Hunter at Rock Harbor" on June 26, Plath lectures Moss on her idiomatic intentions of the poems last lines, "...this relic saved / face, to face the bald-faced sun" as well as defends her crab imagery (*Collected Poems* 97). Plath also suggests that Moss publish the poem that summer in order to have the acknowledgement ready for a manuscript she intends to submit to a publisher in the fall.⁹ While Plath may have

⁷ This photograph can be viewed on page 54 of the August 1953 issue of *Mademoiselle*. The caption to the photograph reads: "On the St. Regis Roof, Anne [Shawber], Sylvia and dates hold before-dinner confab." This image is also referred to in *The Bell Jar* (1963) as a photograph that is pointed out to Esther by Joan and DeeDee, although Esther denies it is her in the image (Chapter 17, page 219).

⁸ See Appendix 1, pages 49-53 of this paper, for a complete list of letters to, from, and regarding Plath held in *The New Yorker* records.

⁹ The poem appeared in the August 9, 1958 issue of *The New Yorker* on page 22. August was a month of firsts for Plath, as her first published poem appeared in the *Boston Herald* on August 10, 1941; and her first published artwork "Funny Faces" appeared in the same newspaper on August 2, 1942.

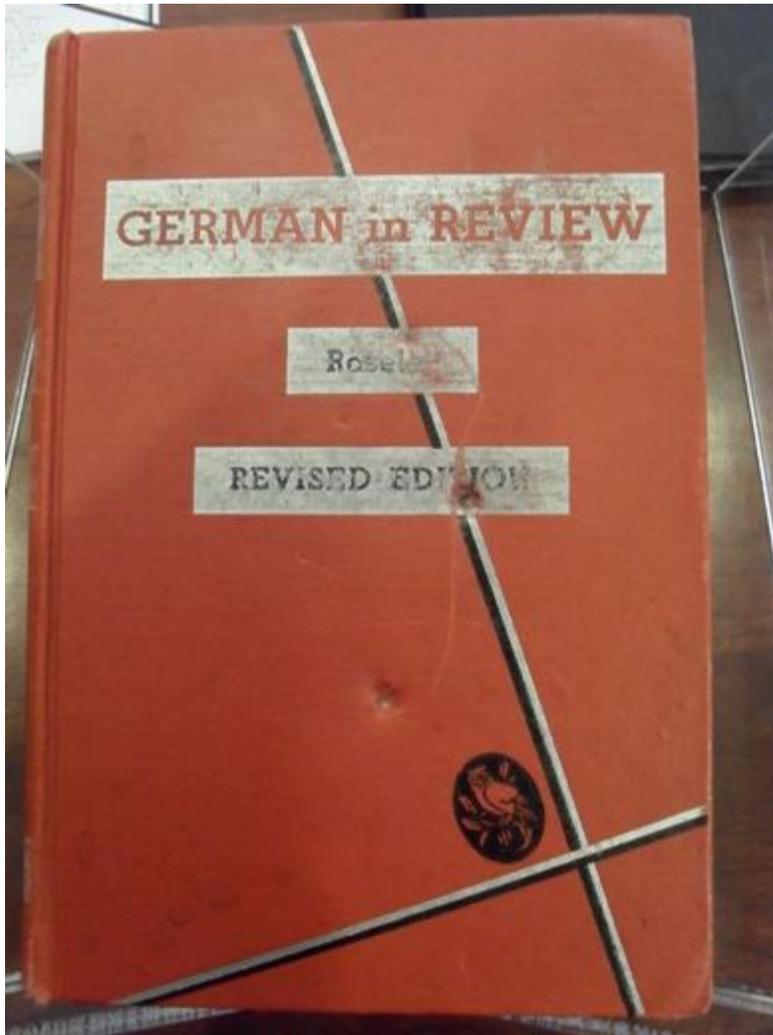
submitted a book, no poetry collection was either accepted or published and I get the sense from the wording of her letter that she may have just been eager to see her name and poem in *The New Yorker*. Moss suggested a titled change from Plath's "Nocturne" to "A Walk in the Night;" but Plath counters with "Night Walk," finding its brevity more appealing. It is through this process of examining her business correspondence that we witness the corpus of Plath's poetry reaching its final state.

Many of *The New Yorker* letters deal with professional matters, such as discussing editorial suggestions, correcting proofs, payments, and occasional practical information sharing such as changes of address. The range of subjects available to researchers in Plath's correspondence enables one to form specific impressions; a mirror microcosm of the archive itself, which is vast, challenging, and illuminating. A visit to just one archive can either bias the impression built about an author, or not yield enough perspective. The Plath-related letters and other items held in the New York Public Library contribute to our growing understanding of Sylvia Plath.

GC: The Smith College Archive is, to use Peter's words above, "vast, challenging and illuminating." The finding aid gives an accurate view of exactly what is held in the Neilson Library, and with only a week to work there, I knew it would be impossible to see everything. One special feature of the Smith College archive is the mix of personal and professional, the young and the adult Plath, the writing and drawings and personal artifacts. The insight into her life, the scope of her creativity can really only be grasped when faced with this collection. I felt I began to re-evaluate her life and legacy after reading some of these documents. Letters which Aurelia Plath had annotated after Plath's death revealed a poignant glimpse into a mother's grief. Copies of memoirs from friends showed how memories of Plath had been sculpted and shaped into creative pieces. Correspondence dealing with scholars and the Plath Estate was particularly enlightening. Letters pertaining to the American publication of *Bitter Fame* between the author Anne Stevenson, Peter Davison, and Olwyn Hughes have to be read to be believed.

The *Ariel* manuscripts are, of course, overwhelming in their vibrancy and spiky-ness. The final poetry manuscripts are heartbreaking in their starkness.

There is Plath's desk, a large selection of books from her personal library (with annotations – Plath was an active reader), her wall calendar from 1962, her final address book, her final check book with stubs meticulously filled in. There are handmade gift tags that Plath made for Hughes, complete with riddles, newspaper cuttings, photographs, hand-painted furniture used in Court Green, clothing items for both Plath and her father Otto (his graduation gown). There is her typewriter, the petal of a rose preserved in a book, a map of Paris and Nice



which she used on her travels in the 1950s (one of which has her hotel room number scrawled on the back). There are hand-made cards, drawings, collages, large canvases (illuminating just what a talented artist Plath was).

There is a copy of her *German in Review* book (left) which has been attacked and pierced twice with a sharp object and stabbed with such force that the holes reach

through over forty pages into the book.

There is her copy of *The Painted Caravan*¹⁰ detailing tarot cards and how to use them, including an image and details on "The Hanged Man" which highlights much of the mythology Plath drew on for her poem based on this

¹⁰ Authored by Basil Ivan Rikoczi

image.¹¹ Although I am trying to give an oversight here into the scope and scale of this archive collection, it is impossible to appreciate the sheer volume until faced with it. Having already spent some archival time in England examining correspondence (both personal and business) and being lucky enough to see poem manuscripts, I was fascinated by how it would feel to engage with the more personal items of Plath's. Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, when discussing the material culture of the dead, reveal how relics not only help us to negotiate with the dead, but offer us the promise of knowledge and perhaps even more pertinently, offer us the promise of reanimation of the dead:

Material culture mediates our relationship with death and the dead; objects, images and practices, as well as places and spaces, call to mind or are made to remind us of the deaths of others. Material objects invoke the dead. (2)

Certainly, Smith College is a space that, in itself, calls Plath to mind, but how does it feel to handle some of her more personal belongings? How would it feel, for example, to come into contact with clothing, something solid and tangible that she once wore? What would happen to feelings of time and space in the archive if I were to encounter, to use Plath's own words, her "exquisite, swish," and "strapless" prom dress?¹²

PKS: The tangibility of Plath's personal belongings in the archive such as her calendar, check book stubs, books from her personal library, and clothes adds a dimensionality that far exceeds the typical exposure to Plath: printed words on mass produced pages. Likewise, when a cache of documents is used for the first time, such as those in *The New Yorker* records, it can redefine facets of Plath's literary personality.

In 1959, *The New Yorker* accepted "Watercolor of Grantchester Meadows," "Man in Black," "The Net Menders," and "A Winter's Tale," the latter being the only poem to appear in that year.¹³ Plath began submitting stories too, such as "Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men" and "The Shadow" in May, though she did not successfully place a story in

¹¹ Her poem was entitled "The Hanging Man" and can be found in *Collected Poems* (141).

¹² A full description, complete with hand drawing of this dress can be found in an unpublished letter Plath wrote to her mother dated February 28, 1953, held in the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

¹³ *The New Yorker* rejected more poems than they accepted. The poems Plath sent but that were rejected are: "The Other Two," "The Thin People," "Landowners," "The Bull of Bendylaw," "The Sleepers," "Dark Wood, Dark Water," "Memoirs of a Spinach Picker," "Polly's Tree," "In Midas' Country," "Goatsucker," "The Eye-Mote," "Alicante Lullaby," "Magnolia Shoals: October" "Yaddo: The Grand Manor," "A Winter Ship," "Two Views of Withens," "Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond," "The Burnt-Out Spa," and "Mushrooms."

the magazine. The correspondence shows Plath standing both firm and relenting in equal measures. For "Watercolor of Grantchester Meadows" and "The Net-Menders" she agreed to the addition of a geographical subtitle for context. In a letter to Plath on June 9, 1959, Howard Moss suggests that Plath re-write the third line of the third stanza of "A Winter's Tale;" thus, a reference to Marilyn Monroe's blonde hair was turned into "Haloes lustrous as Sirius" (*Collected Poems* 87). In the same letter, Moss recommends resubmitting the poem if it has not been placed by October; on September 20 Plath resubmitted "A Winter's Tale" and it was published in the December 12 issue.

Plath was rather firm regarding other edits to "Watercolor of Grantchester Meadows" and "The Net Menders." In a letter to Moss dated April 23, Plath responds to Moss' edits. He wants to change the last line of the first stanza by adding "is" so that the line would read: "Flits nimble-winged in thickets, and *is* of good color," but Plath is dubious, rejoicing that it would change the meaning and the way the line flows. Plath won out. "The Net-Menders" was accepted by Rachel Mackenzie on November 23, 1959. In a letter from Plath dated December 18, 1959 and addressed from The Beacon, Heptonstall, Plath accepts certain edits, adding commas and hyphens but fights back on revisions to the words "bride-lace" and "madonna" from the third and fourth stanzas (121).

In 1960, there is much less communication from Plath to the magazine and back, as can be reflected in the far fewer poems produced and printed in her *Collected Poems*. In all, *The New Yorker* accepted only "On Deck" and "Two Campers in Cloud Country" while they rejected "Candles," "Home Thoughts from London,"¹⁴ "Magi," and "Words for a Nursery." As with past acceptances, Plath and her editors dialogued over the structure of lines and their component words, generally with a compromise reached quickly and easily.

Throughout 1960, Plath was setting up her flat in Chalcot Square, London, becoming a mother, and going through the process of seeing her first book, *The Colossus and Other Poems*, published by Heinemann. Perhaps the confidence of these feats, as well as exploring the women's fiction market for her short stories such as

¹⁴ The Lilly Library holds the only known typescript of "Home Thoughts from London." It is on the verso of a typescript of "Wuthering Heights" in Plath Mss., which Plath sold in November 1961. The poem is uncollected to this day, and is not listed in her *Collected Poems*.

"Shadow Girl" and "The Lucky Stone,"¹⁵ allowed a deeper gestation of thought into novel writing? Imagery in "On Deck" and "Two Campers in Cloud Country" certainly suggest themselves in *The Bell Jar*. Words like "mannequins," "dress shop," "August," "diamond," "Moony," "wrists" from "On Deck" feature memorably in Plath's novel (*Collected Poems* 142-143). Similarly, there are keywords in "Two Campers in Cloud Country," such as "elms," "Boston," "Pilgrims," "pines," and "blank-brained" (144-145). In her novel, Plath re-visits her college years, particularly her junior year, recalling the events that led up to and included her first suicide attempt; remembering the people, the places, the food and the fashion that she tried to forget "in one sweeping tide" as the pills she engulfed "rushed me to sleep" (*The Bell Jar* 179).

GC: One of the joys of reading Plath and working in the archives is the opportunity to approach manuscripts and items from an intertextual angle. With the exception of Plath's final years, we have strong textual-based information for most of her life via letters, journals, interviews, poems and drawings. Sometimes an event can be approached and understood from a number of different sources. For example, when Plath visited Top Withens (the inspiration for *Wuthering Heights*) just outside of Haworth, we have her journal entry, letters describing the walk, poems, an unpublished story, a photograph, a drawing and an article in *The Christian Science Monitor*.¹⁶ Events that feature in *The Bell Jar* are also depicted in letters, journals, journal fragments and stories, along with photographs and other people's memoirs. What I find particularly fascinating is reading and understanding items contained in the archive in this intertextual fashion. When I learned that Smith College held Sylvia Plath's prom dress, I was excited at the prospect of seeing something she had worn. In the absence of a body, there is something evocative about a relic that once housed that missing body. Being able to appreciate her physicality, her dimensions, I felt that they would somehow make Plath seem less cerebral and more *real*. I am, however, aware that there is a certain dislike of such open "emotion" in academic study. Is the desire to, for example,

¹⁵ Published as "The Perfect Place" in *My Weekly*, October 28, 1961, pages 3-7, 31.

¹⁶ This article was called "A Walk to Withens" and was published on June 6, 1959, page 12. There is also an account of this visit by Ted Hughes that can be read alongside Plath's own work in Hughes' poem "Wuthering Heights" in *Birthday Letters*, p.59.

touch Sylvia Plath's hair stored in an Indiana archive "abnormal"?¹⁷ Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* asks whether it can be healthy – morally, socially, ideologically and aesthetically – to give yourself over to someone else's texts and things. Jenkins cites Pierre Bourdieu's "bourgeois aesthetics values" attitude which encourages detachment and an approach of distrust to strong feelings of emotion (15). Such emotional behaviour transgresses dominant cultural boundaries of "good taste" (15). Scholars and fans who engage in over-emotional activity are, he claims, seen as "abnormal."

Joli Jenson (1992) echoes this view when she states that these culturally loaded categories encourage the enlightenment-like view that rationality should be imposed and employed as a "superior" reaction (21). In her discussion of how, for example, emotional fans are perceived, she argues, the enculturation of categories and hierarchies of "good" and "bad" taste, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, result in the belief that emotions and emotional responses to things blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy (21).

Inadvertently this misjudged hierarchy of taste does highlight an important point for this paper. It may well be this blurring of reality and fantasy that allows the scholar to not only receive Plath's things in a particular way, but to manipulate and create their social meaning also. The role of fantasy is surely absolutely crucial, not only in relation to the actual object itself, but, also how the scholar (and/or a reader or fan) uses that object to construct a reality, a discourse or a story. I would be highly suspicious of any claims of emotional objectivity or detachment when faced with Plath's manuscripts and possessions. This emotional engagement seems to me to be perfectly "normal" and, as such, should be openly acknowledged in a reflexive way by the researcher. Therefore, Jenkins' and Jenson's work can be used not only to challenge stereotypes of the obsessional, hysterical scholar or fan but also to offer a way for this research to consider the validity of "emotional" reactions to objects as being just as valid as the more measured evaluation of what Jenson refers to as "aficionados" (9).

With this disclaimer in mind, I would like to recount the intertextual experience of

¹⁷ In a paper I gave at a conference in 2008 called "The Ghostly Archives and the Reanimation of the Dead," I showed a PowerPoint image of Plath's hair held in the archive at Lilly Library, Indiana University. It is a thick ponytail of dark hair and the audience visibly shrank away from the image and expressed disgust. In the question and answer session afterwards all of the questions were about her hair.

encountering Sylvia Plath's prom dress.

In *The Bell Jar*, while recovering from ECT in Belsize, Esther Greenwood is presented with a photograph contained in a glossy fashion magazine by two inmates Joan and DeeDee (219). Joan insists that the photograph depicts Esther in a glamorous location. Although Esther denies it is her, the implication in the novel is that the image is of an earlier event described in the book:

[M]y picture came out in the magazine the twelve of us were working on – drinking martinis in a skimpy, imitation silver-lamè bodice stuck on to a big, fat cloud of white tulle, on some Starlight Roof in the company of several anonymous young men (2)

When Joan and DeeDee present the picture some two hundred pages later, we are told:

The magazine photograph showed a girl in a strapless evening dress of fuzzy white stuff, grinning fit to split, with a whole load of boys bending in around her. The girl was holding a glass full of a transparent drink (219)

As discussed earlier, reading *The Bell Jar* as a transparent autobiography would, I feel, be an inaccurate way to approach the novel. But if we read it as creative autobiography, that is, inspired by events from Plath's own life which are transformed and manipulated for the purpose of the novel, then we can see that this event is most likely based on something Plath actually did experience. She *did* attend a party on a rooftop terrace in New York. She *did* have her photograph taken wearing a strapless gown drinking martinis and surrounded by boys (this photograph appears in the August 1953 edition of *Mademoiselle*). But we also have an account of a dress that Plath had described in some detail in a letter to her mother written in February 1953. Sadly, this letter remains unpublished to date and therefore we are unable to quote directly from it, but the story of the dress is as follows. It was bought on a Saturday morning, February 28, 1953, while Plath was at Smith. We can therefore assume that it was purchased in Northampton, for Plath is writing the letter to her mother from her room in college shortly after making the purchase. She is elated at what she refers to as the most exquisite formal which was on sale, marked down from \$50 to \$30. She writes that it is full length (and underlines these words) with a full skirt and a strapless, silver lamè top. At the end of the letter, Plath includes a hand drawing of the dress with further descriptions; the top

is winged softly and silvery, the skirt has a swoosh of white net with a tiny high waist. The descriptions are almost word perfect to the dress described by Esther in *The Bell Jar*.

Smith College now owns this dress, although it is not stored in the Mortimer Rare Book Room, but across the road in the theatre department which houses all clothing items. Karen Kukil kindly arranged for me to view this dress and took me through a labyrinth of corridors and stairs to a large room filled with theatre props, materials, mannequins; and there, lying on the table, Plath's dress.

PKS: Plath's archives, scattered as they are, are a labyrinth of corridors. Just as seeing something worn by Plath gives her a physical body. Researching the archive, we argue, reshapes our understanding of Plath. There is correspondence in *The New Yorker* records that does just this with regard to Plath's first reading contract with the magazine, first awarded in 1961 and renewed for 1962 and 1963.¹⁸ Plath received a first reading contract while in hospital preparing "for the slaughter" of her appendectomy (*Journals* 602). To her mother, Plath wrote: "Ted was able to bring me an exciting air letter from *The New Yorker*, offering me one of their coveted 'first reading' contracts for the next year!" (*Letters Home* 411).

The first reading contract was a mixed blessing as Plath's acceptances with *The New Yorker* ironically slowed down. Her first batch of poems sent on March 29, 1961, were rejected. Her second batch, submitted on May 29, saw only "Tulips" accepted. On June 17, Plath writes to Moss asking if it is alright to include a mimeographed copy of "Tulips" in a programme, as Plath stated that she was giving a reading of it in July. This was for the Poetry at the Mermaid festival.¹⁹ On June 20, Moss replied, reluctantly granting permission.

The 1961 correspondence gets more interesting. Plath submitted "Stars Over the Dordogne," "Face Lift," and "The Rival" on August 31. Her practice was to place an "X" on her submissions list by the poems that were rejected. In a letter from Moss to Plath,

¹⁸ Due to the policies of *The New Yorker* records, it is not possible to discuss more about the letter as the letter writer is currently still living.

¹⁹ This reading was recorded by the British Library and was included in their 2010 *The Spoken Word: Sylvia Plath* CD.

apparently not retained by her,²⁰ Moss considers "The Rival" an exercise in enmity and goes on to write that the poetry staff could not recognize the relationship between the title of the poem to the poem itself. However, on September 11, Plath writes to Moss explaining "The Rival" to him. This kind of authorial comment gives a back story to the poem and helps us read the poem in potentially new ways. Plath states that the poem contrasts two women: a wife/mother and her opposite. In some ways it resembles the relationship between Esther Greenwood and Joan Gilling in *The Bell Jar*. Readers of "The Rival" may not remember that the poem was originally designed to be in three sections (sections two and three are printed in the "Notes" of *The Collected Poems*). In the end, Plath suggested either removing the second section or changing the title. The poem was rejected outright in a letter from Moss to Plath on September 26, the general feeling being that the poem did not work without Plath's explanation.

Though they rejected "Wuthering Heights," "Finisterre," and "The Surgeon at 2 A.M.," *The New Yorker* accepted "Blackberrying," on October 27, 1961. There was some discussion in Plath's letter to Moss on November 8 about the line "To the hills' northern face, and the face is orange rock / That looks out on nothing..." from the last stanza of "Blackberrying" (*Collected Poems* 169). Plath also made a minor adjustment to the seventh line of the poem, too. When Plath submitted "The Moon and the Yew Tree," "Mirror Talk," "The Babysitters," and "Last Words" in November, *The New Yorker* accepted the first two poems, but suggested renaming "Mirror Talk" to just "Mirror" as the song "Happy Talk" by Rodgers and Hammerstein had turned them off the word "Talk" in titles. Plath's response on December 18 finds her at her most candid, accepting the change to "Mirror" and admitting that she considers herself pretty bad at titles and expresses appreciation for suggestions. The magazine extended Plath's first reading contract into 1962; this came with a cost of living increase check as well as more money per acceptance.

²⁰ The Sylvia Plath Collection at the Mortimer Rare Book Room holds eight letters from *New Yorker* staff members to Plath. This letter to which I refer was not retained by her, but was found in her file in *The New Yorker* records.

GC:



PKS: 1962 is a banner year in terms of Plath's poetic production. After the birth of her second child in January, Plath submitted nothing to *The New Yorker* until April 5, when she sent "Little Fugue," "An Appearance," "Crossing the Water," and "Among the

Narcissi" to them. On April 18, Moss wrote to accept "Among the Narcissi." In this letter he let Plath know that the feedback regarding "Tulips," which appeared in the April 7 issue, was universally praised by everyone with whom he spoke. Plath replied on May 21, writing that she was very happy about the response to "Tulips." In this same letter, she submitted "Three Women," "Elm," "The Rabbit Catcher," and "Event." Regarding "Three Women," Plath suggests that Moss consider any of the verses, particularly those toward the end, for consideration.

On June 27, Moss let Plath know that he liked "Elm" a great deal. There was concern in the poetry department that "Elm," dedicated to Ruth Fainlight, would fail to connect with readers because of the dedication; that it was a private story between the poet and dedicatee. Ultimately Moss rejected this recent batch, but encouraged Plath to consider re-submitting "Elm" after the summer, as the poetry department was closing for a time. Ever eager to publish, Plath resubmitted "Elm" *sans* dedication on August 31, 1962, along with "Berck-Plage," "The Other," "Words heard, by accident, over the phone," "Poppies in July," and "Burning the Letters." Responding to Moss' concerns, Plath's comments on "Elm" are enlightening.

Plath agrees to remove the dedication, writing that when it is published in a collection she can re-instate it, but that for a periodical it need not be present. About the dedication itself, Plath let Moss know privately that Fainlight had nothing to do with the poem, just that Fainlight had liked it when Plath let her read it. Plath explains that the "she" in the poem is the elm, and that because it is the elm speaking, the poem could – in theory – be placed within quotation marks. The elm is speaking to a woman with whom it shares a temperament: something akin to anguish. Moss accepted the poem on September 26, suggesting the title "The Elm Speaks." In this September 26 letter, *The New Yorker* rejects the other poems Plath submitted on August 31, saying that the decision was difficult because, though each of them were fine, none were as accomplished as "Elm."

On October 10, 1962, the same day that she wrote "A Secret," Plath responded in a letter that the acceptance of "Elm" meant more to her than any other poem previously taken by the magazine. In this letter, Plath submits several new poems, including "A Birthday Present," "The Detective," "The Courage of Quietness," "A

Secret," "For a Fatherless Son," "Bees," "The Applicant," and "Daddy." Plath submitted, over the next seven weeks, a barrage of new poems;²¹ however, despite expressing admiration for "Wintering" in unequivocal terms, Moss rejected all the poems except for the second section of "Amnesiac" and asked her to resubmit it as a separate poem. Plath did submit the second part of "Amnesiac" on November 15, agreeing with his opinion that the two parts of the poem (which originally also included "Lyonnesse") are independent of one another. One can only wonder what the magazine itself thought of the poetic blitzkrieg! Notwithstanding only one acceptance, Plath's first-reading contract was renewed into 1963 which promised periodic cost of living increases as well as a higher rate of pay per acceptance.

GC: As Plath's submissions gained momentum with *The New Yorker* throughout 1962, and as she developed in her correspondence a confident, authorial voice to defend and modify her work for publication, she was of course, simultaneously getting on with her own life. As a large proportion of her personal library is held at Smith College, it is possible to see which books she purchased (or had been given as presents) and which books she received to review for various publications. What I had not expected when encountering Plath's books, was the level of active readership she carried out. There are very few that do not carry her annotations (more often than not in her usual bold, black ink) – and these annotations in themselves are probably worthy of a paper. They are insightful, questioning, intelligent and often witty. For example, in *The Ethics of Aristotle*, as he is sharing his views on beauty, he makes the claim that personal beauty requires that one should be "tall." Plath, notoriously tall (as often lamented in her *Journals*), has written next to this claim: "Aha! D'accord!" Aristotle continues with his "wisdom" regarding the affection between a husband and wife and claims that the husband is superior in merit. Next to this, in brown ink, Plath has scrawled "My God!"

Throughout 1962, while involved in the above correspondence with *The New Yorker*, Plath was reading a variety of texts. Sometimes, she underlined and dated a

²¹ These poems were: "Fever 103," "The Jailor," "Medusa," "Eavesdropper," "Lesbos," "By Candlelight," "Nick and the Candlestick," "Cut," "The Tour," "Lady Lazarus," "Stopped Dead," "Amnesiac," "Ariel," "Purdah," "Gulliver," "The Night Dances," "The Couriers," "Getting There," "Letter in November," "The Fearful," "Death & Co.," "Thalidomide," "Years," "Mary's Song," "Winter Trees," "Brasilia," "Childless Woman," and "Fog Sheep."

page of particular significance. Sometimes she drew inky black stars. So, for example, on October 22, 1962, Plath was reading her *Collected Poems* of D.H. Lawrence (1957) and not only dated the page but underlined and drew a star next to the poem "Retort to Jesus" which reads: "And whoever forces himself to love anybody/begets a murderer in his own body" (88). Two pages later, she has underlined the expression "fake love has rotted our marrow" (90). She has also in this reading underlined poems dealing with truth, justice, lies and poison.

In the same month (and presumably for her birthday), Plath has inscribed her name and Devonshire address with an October 27 date into *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* by John Berryman.²² A few weeks later we can see in her *Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, hopes that the Fitzroy Road flat in London, once home of Yeats, will come to her. In a much publicized story, after submitting her application, she opened Yeats' book at random and came across words in *Unicorn of the Stars* that gave her hope. A character, Martin, ends the play with a speech and the words underlined and starred by Plath are "Go, then, get food and drink, whatever is wanted to give you strength and courage.... We have a great thing to do, I have to begin... Bring them in, bring them in, I will make the house ready." (347) Next to this Plath has dated "Nov 13, 1962" and written "The prophecy – true?"

Other books Plath was reading at this time in late 1962 into 1963 held at Smith College are *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller,²³ and *Creatures of Darkness* by Esther Baskin (which Plath has inscribed with her Fitzroy Road address).

PKS: Plath's new poetry written from 1962-1963, though admired by *The New Yorker*, was met with a cool reception; as though she was alone in recognizing the genius of the work she produced. In her submissions lists, she rarely had occasion to underline a poem that was accepted. On January 30 and February 4, 1963, Plath submits batches of five poems and six poems, respectively.²⁴ Her last letters to *The New Yorker*,

²² Interestingly, underneath her inscription is a telephone number for the BBC: LAN 4468. This does not appear to be in Plath's handwriting.

²³ This book is inscribed "For Sylvia/August 17th 1962" in Ted Hughes' handwriting. Plath has added her Devonshire address in the top right corner.

²⁴ The February 4 submission presents us with a challenge as two of the poems included, "Edge" and "Balloons," were not written until the following day, February 5. Plath's tendency was to list the poems in the order in which

accompanying these submissions, do not appear to have been saved; and Howard Moss replied to the first group on February 7 rejecting all five poems ("Totem," "The Bald Madonnas" ["The Munich Mannequins"], "Child," "Gigolo," and "Paralytic") from her January 30, 1963 offering. Plath likely never saw the letter.

Following Plath's death, *The New Yorker* accepted "Mystic," and printed it along with six backlogged poems in their August 3, 1963 issue.²⁵ In *The New Yorker's* files concerning Plath is a letter from Peter Davison to Moss dated February 20, 1963, providing the magazine with Aurelia Plath's address. Davison admits his disbelief at learning of Plath's death, commenting that he found her new poems unique and unsettling. The following day, Moss wrote to Ted Hughes accepting "Mystic," telling the widower that his late wife's poems were quite well-regarded by the magazine staff. Moss' closing to the letter is a heartfelt, expression of regret that he had to write this kind of letter in the first place.

Moss sent flowers to Aurelia Plath, and she thanked him on March 23, 1963: "When I received the beautiful arrangement of exquisite flowers in memory of my daughter, Sylvia Plath, from you, I recalled her phoning me a few years ago – her voice vibrant with joy – 'I've arrived, Mother! A New Yorker acceptance, at last!'"

GC: As Peter continued his exploration of *The New Yorker* correspondence, I continued my work at Smith College. Having seen Plath's prom dress, her scout uniform, her painted furniture and art work, her poem manuscripts and library books, I was eager to trace Plath beyond the walls of the static archive and to see what traces may be left in the places around campus. Given that Plath was both a student and a professor at Smith College, I was interested to see where her dorm rooms were, where her office was when she taught, and places that she referred to in her journals and letters. Even though aspects of Northampton and Smith College have changed since the 1950s, it was eerie and a little uncanny to discover just how much has stayed the same. Moreover, when changes had occurred, it was surprising to see just how difficult it was

they were dated/created. Therefore, "Edge" appearing before "Balloons" is an argument for the latter to be Plath's final poem. On the list, "Contusion" – which was clearly dated February 4 – was inserted by Plath in her own hand.
²⁵ The issue printed: "Two Campers in Cloud Country," "The Elm Speaks" ["Elm"], "Mystic," "Amnesiac," "Mirror," "Among the Narcissi," and "The Moon and the Yew Tree."

to completely remove traces of the past.

For her first two years at Smith (1950-52), Plath roomed in Haven House. She writes in letters and her journal of being in the only house with a balcony that can be used for sunbathing. She writes, creatively, of a swing on the porch where girls take their boyfriends to "neck" (*The Bell Jar* 82). Visiting Haven House is a little like walking into a Plath letter, to see these places she so vividly describes.



These traces of the past support David Lowenthal's claim that, "the past is virtually indistinguishable from the present" (xix). Indeed, he argues that the past is "increasingly suffused by the present" (xix). Likewise, Monica Degan and Kevin Hetherington state that "any space does not just exist in the present. Its ghosts problematise the issue of time as well as space" (1). In other words, the present can be haunted and troubled by traces from the past. If the static archive is ghostly with its relics and belongings of the dead, then the living archive is equally so as the traces refuse to disappear. According to Gaston Bachelard, these types of traces are particularly strong when concerned with houses, mainly because the house is a "privileged study of intimate space" (1). Haven House was Plath's home for two years and to see the space in which she carried out her daily routines, wrote papers and letters, studied, formed friendships, ate meals and sunbathed, was a glance into the highly personal. However, this type of access to the past, to haunted places, increased significantly upon gaining access to the inside of Plath's old dorm room in Lawrence House where she lived for her final two senior years.

PKS: Plath was publishing her work nationally as a resident of Haven and Lawrence House, dreaming of being in *The New Yorker*. Her submissions to the magazine continued after her death as a result of the marketing of her work by her Estate; however, there is no correspondence from the initial posthumous letters until 1969. Olwyn Hughes submitted a number of poems on December 11, 1969.²⁶ Howard Moss accepted the lot on January 8, 1970. Hot on the heels of this big acceptance, on April 8, 1970, Olwyn Hughes wrote to Howard Moss to let him know that two books of Plath's poems were in the works, as well as submitting three unpublished Plath poems, "Last Words," "Lyonnesse," and "Gigolo." Hughes impressed upon Moss to make a quick decision; only "Gigolo" was accepted, and it appeared in the November 21, 1970 issue.

On September 24, 1970, Olwyn Hughes submitted the story "Mothers," letting Moss know that it was the last story Plath wrote (around Christmas 1961), and that it was strongly autobiographical. The story was rejected, along with all other subsequent prose submissions, including "Snow Blitz" (October 26, 1971), "All the Dead Dears" (October 19, 1973), and "Above the Oxbow" (September 18, 1977). To this day, Plath has not published a work of short fiction in the periodical she most coveted.

GC: While Peter was exploring stories Plath wrote (and their subsequent rejection by *The New Yorker*), I was uncovering a different type of story – or rather stories about Plath that have grown and taken on a life of their own over the years. In searching for Plath's old dorm room, it was fascinating to see that a mythology had developed about her in the rooms of Smith College. We, however, cannot take credit in this paper for tracking down Plath's former room in Lawrence House or uncovering these stories, as the work had already been done by a Smith student, Emily Frontiere. When deciding to try and locate Plath's old dorm rooms in both Haven and Lawrence House, it was Karen Kukil's keen memory that came to the rescue with a short article detailing Frontiere's search.²⁷ As a resident of Lawrence House, she recounts how stories of Plath abound – stories about which room was her room, myths about an attempted suicide in a third

²⁶ The poems were: "The Babysitters," "Apprehensions," "Pheasant," "For a Fatherless Son," "The Courage of Shutting Up," and "By Candlelight." It is perhaps ironic that each poem was rejected by *The New Yorker* when Plath first submitted to them. The poems appeared in a two-page spread on March 6, 1971.

²⁷ Alas, despite our best efforts, we were unable to locate the precise numbers of Plath's Haven House dorm rooms.

floor maintenance closet. Plath's story is, the article claims, part of Lawrence House's identity. Frontiere then began her work in the archive using old records and floor plans to try and discover in which room Plath spent her senior year. Eventually using an old house roster, she found Plath's name and room number in her own hand:

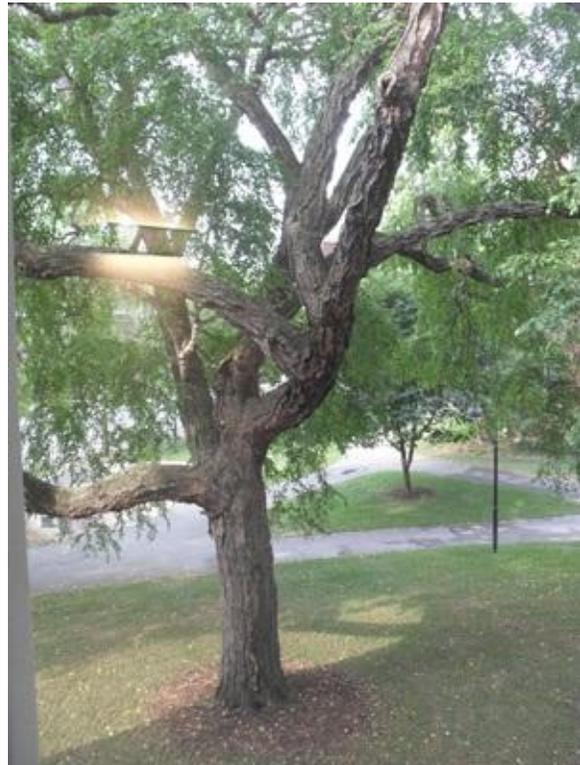
Her bold block print stood out starkly from the other cursive entries, impossible to miss. Right there next to her name, was the room number 4. A quick glance at the floor plans for the house showed that room 4 corresponds to the current room 217. (13)

Room 217 is not on the third floor, but on the second floor, not so far from the staircase. In a stroke of luck, during my visit to Smith, Lawrence House had been taken over by a residential group working with teenage girls who were equally as excited about finding Plath's old room. It is hard to say what I was expecting to find as I walked up the staircase, turning right in the corridor on the second floor, but it felt very eerie. Lawrence House has beautiful heavy wood stair railings and door frames, most likely unchanged from Plath's time there. Room 217 has a heavy wood paneled door which opens into a small vestibule. Plath's roommate Nancy Hunter Steiner describes the room as thus:

It was on the second floor and obviously an upperclassman's room – half of a suite of two identical bedrooms that could be reached from the hall outside only through a common vestibule. The vestibule contained two enormous closets and acted as a buffer against the noise and confusion of the hallway (38-39).



Room 217 itself is a quite small room, containing a single bed, a desk beneath the window, a chair, a fan and a book case (below). It is impossible to know how Plath arranged her room, but the window looked out onto a green space with a tree growing in the center (below).



It was curious to stand in the room and think about the young Plath occupying this space. It was to this dorm, after rooming in a single room down the hallway from January 1954, that Plath moved at the start of the 1954-55 academic year (her final year at Smith College). It was here, according to Nancy Hunter Steiner, that her and Plath spent many hours in each other's rooms discussing Plath's breakdown and suicide attempt, and in some cases, the death of her father. The past was weirdly present, and as we have written before about our experiences in the archives, time dissolved a little. The notion of a fixed, chronological time seemed too prescriptive when faced with these ghosts from the past, for they are still there, and they will always be there while they live in other people's memories, thoughts and fantasies. Never was this felt so strongly as when I looked closely at the entrance door to the room. Wondering if the old door handles were still the same ones from the 1950s, the same one Plath

would have opened and closed numerous times, my eyes were drawn to the new room number, 217, stuck on the door frame. There lurking just beneath the number 217, was Plath's old room number 4, still visible (below). The past in the present. The past still leaving its traces.



PKS: The archive – and particularly Plath's archive as we have seen – leaves traces of Sylvia Plath in places she likely never visited. Her well-composed letters to Eddie Cohen were delivered from either Wellesley or Northampton to Chicago; and from there to the Plath collection at the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington. This expands Plath's haunting reach. Plath may have visited the New York Public Library, too, but we do not know this for certain. It is here that in addition to *The New Yorker* records, which are accessed through its Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New

York Public Library holds additional rare materials in Room 328, the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature.

When I learned of these materials, there were thirteen items listed in an online "Uncataloged Manuscript Holdings" finding aid.²⁸ The list of items were interesting, but cryptic, and without a lot of detail: "Brasilia," with two other poems; "Insomniac," also by Ted Hughes; photograph By Rollie McKenna;²⁹ "Brasilia," with two *Bell Jar* poems; cartoon of a koala bear; alphabet and birthday quatrain; postcard to her grandmother; "Trixie and the balloon;" camping list; pencil drawing of campsite; "Winter and magic;" nine pencil tracings and drawings; and a notebook of copied poetry, with an "Activities and Awards" sheet.

The Juvenilia materials date largely to the 1940s. The "Cartoon of a koala bear" is from 1940, and contains a poem in Aurelia Plath's handwriting on the verso. The "Alphabet and birthday quatrain" is undated and includes an eight line poem on a birthday. Though Plath's "Pencil drawing of campsite" is itself undated, using a transcription I have from her early postcards and letters held at the Lilly Library, it can be dated accurately to July 1943, her first year at Camp Weetamoe in Center Ossipee, New Hampshire. Plath details in her first letter to her mother from camp, July 5, 1943, that her unit is called Oehda, and that she is in tent 3. The drawing includes structures labeled "infirmary," "lodge," "councilors tent," and "my tent." At the bottom of "Pencil drawing of campsite," Plath drew a legend (key) to define what the charming icons she used in the map are, such as water (lake), johns, beds, porch, door, steps, shower. Plath identifies her own tent: tent 3; and in her drawing there are six beds to a tent. The "Camping List" contains items Plath likely took with her, and the verso has comments or notes in Mrs. Plath's hand. The "9 pencil tracings and drawings" consists of a cat (1) and a dog (2) traced from the book *Manners Can Be Fun*, which was likely checked out from Plath's local library. Drawings 3 and 4 are of her brother Warren Plath in bed and her mother bringing him medicine. Drawings 5 through 9 are of five moods of the human face. In addition to these materials, the Berg holds creative writing, as well.

²⁸ <http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/archivalcollections/pdf/bergbacklog200903.pdf>. Since my visit in March 2011, several of the items have been cataloged.

²⁹ The McKenna photograph is one of Plath and Hughes, with Plath looking towards her husband, smiling.

GC: As Peter demonstrates with the Berg Collection, Plath's creative work, her poems, journals, letters and drawings, even as child, give us insight into how she saw the world around her and transformed it into an imaginative place. Equally, this type of work can extend Plath's archives out for us into our living world. For anyone who has ever visited a place associated with Plath, I am sure the same process of asking yourself, "what has changed, what has stayed the same?" springs to mind. As we explored the archive of Smith College beyond the manuscripts and documents, extending into rooms, corridors, houses, it also seemed possible that the archive could extend beyond the boundaries of Smith College.

On September 6, 1957, Plath records in her journal that last night she went walking in an "odd primeval greening park – dark twisted rocks" (301). For the following year 1957-58, Child's Memorial Park, Northampton, features heavily in Plath's journal. It is here that she walked on an evening, watching squirrels and crunching acorns underfoot. Here she chased Hughes after an argument, wagging tree branches to gain his attention. Here she engaged in a bitter argument with a group of young girls stealing flowers for a dance. And here she discovered a baby bird which she attempted to nurse back to life, but failed. In 1958, Plath wrote a poem called "Child's Park Stones," describing the "lobed, warped stones" that littered the park in the undergrowth, "Black



as the charred knuckle-bones/Of a giant or extinct/Animal" (100-1). These stones that Plath describes are still there (left), scattered throughout the park, still blackening, still looming as Plath writes in "the leaf-filtered gloom" (*Collected Poems*, 100).

In a slightly later poem from that year, "Fable of the Rhododendron Stealers," Plath recounts the above mentioned argument with three girls in the Park and describes the "unwalked garden of rose-beds" and how "the stone lion-head set in the wall/Let drop its spittle of sluggish green/Into the stone

basin" (*Collected Poems*, 103). In her journal from August 28, 1958, she furthers this description, writing, "the stone lionhead set in the wall, a ferocious grimace set in stone" (416). This lion-head, too, is still there (below) in the park, greening amongst the formal rose garden, showing us what Plath saw and what she manipulated into a creative exercise.



As Peter and I walked this Park and identified these places, the blurring of the archive boundary was not lost on us. A few days earlier we had held, in the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Plath's journals from 1957-58 describing the very place we were now standing. It seemed like history on the ground, a persistence of memory, the stubbornness of time and space.

PKS: Back in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, I continue my

research in the archival time warp of the 1940s and 1950s. In the "Notebook of copied poetry (With 'Activities and Awards' sheet)," there is an undated document that shows Plath's early poetic preferences. Plath copied the following poems: "One, Two, Three" by Henry Cuyler Bunner (pages 1-4); "October's Bright Blue" by Helen Hunt Jackson (pages 5-7); "We Thank Thee" by Ralph Waldo Emerson (pages 8-9); "What the Toy's Said" by Frank L. Stanton (pages 10-12); "While Shepherd's Watched Their Flock" by Nahum Tate (pages 13-14); "The Duel" by Eugene Field (pages 15-18); "The Elf and the Doormouse" by Oliver Herford (pages 19-20); "The Little Toy Land of the Dutch" by unknown (pages 21-22); and "The Sandpiper" by Celia Thaxter (pages 23-24).

The "Activities & Awards" sheet dates from 1955 and lists those awards which Plath won while a student at Smith College. As a freshman, Plath listed studio club, as a sophomore, Alpha Phi Kappa Psi, Press Board (*Springfield Daily News*), *Mademoiselle* 1952 College Fiction Winner, Entertainment Chairman: Soph Prom, and Sophomore Push. In her Junior year, Plath included Alpha Phi Kappa Psi, Press Board: *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Junior Phi Beta, Junior Representative on the Electoral Board, *Mademoiselle* Guest Editor, Secretary of Honor Board, two Smith Poetry prizes, Editorial Board: *Smith Review*, three poems in Harper's, and Junior Usher. As a senior, Plath listed President: Alpha Phi Kappa Psi, Editorial Board: *Smith Review*, and Press Board: *New York Tribune*.

The "Transcriptions of poems and songs by others, signed and undated" has a cover title of "Sylvia Plath VI poems,"³⁰ and dates to circa 1944-1945. Works transcribed include "October" by Henry van Dyke; "Cargoes" by John Masefield; "Sea Fever" by John Masefield; "O Little Town of Bethlehem" by Phillips Brooks; "Pledge of the Athenian Youth;" "Young America's Creed;" "I Saw Three Ships;" "Washington" and "Lincoln" by Nancy Byrd Turner; "Old Ironside" by Oliver Wendell Holmes; "Concord Hymn" by Ralph Waldo Emerson (with sticker of a silhouette of a Minute Man pasted into top right corner); "America the Beautiful" by Katherine Lee Bates; and "In Flanders Fields" by Lt.-Col. John McCrae. Towards the back of this book is a list of 80 words, Birthdays in March (list of names), Birthdays in February (list of names), and 100

³⁰ This material appears to be the same that was once for sale. See "Sylvia Plath Collections: Sylvia Plath VI poems" <http://sylviaplathinfo.blogspot.com/2007/10/sylvia-plath-collections-sylvia-plath.html> for more information.

Spelling Demons; and a list of Holidays.

There are two "Juvenilia" creative stories held in the Berg Collection, as well. The first is "Winter and Magic," and dates to circa 1940-1941, when Plath was eight years old. At only twenty-two lines long, the story takes place on a snowy Christmas Eve. The entire town was enjoying a big meal save for one run-down, dilapidated house, where four children and their mother share a small piece of bread, while next door, a family and their guests celebrate in luxury. On Christmas morning, the poor family rose to discover a loaf of bread on their table. With each bite they took, the crust reappeared and the loaf became whole again. As a result they were never hungry again. The story ends with the narrator surmising that the rich family is probably not a friendly one.

The other story is "Trixie and the Balloon," and is dated 1942 in what appears to be her mother's hand. The story is two pages long and contains ten paragraphs. In the story, Trixie—who is a character called Warren's yellow teddy bear—decides to take a walk on a spring night. On a path leading to woods, Trixie finds two red balloons tied to a basket that was being held to the ground by vines. Trixie undoes the vines, gets in the basket, and goes for a ride. But once up, the air in the balloons goes out, and she starts to descend back to the ground towards a puddle. Not realizing she was actually near Warren's house, Trixie panics. A friendly fairy arrives on the scene on a birds-nest boat to save her, and Trixie vows never to go on another balloon ride again.

The Berg holds later Plath manuscripts, too. Very few *Ariel* period poems can be found outside of the Mortimer Rare Book Room; and the Berg holds the original draft of Plath's "Brasilia," written on December 1, 1962.³¹ The Mortimer Rare Book Room has photocopies of "Brasilia;" however, they are incomplete. Pages of "Brasilia" were written either on fresh, white paper, or on the verso's of earlier poems such as "Blackberrying" and "Winter Trees." Apart from being the original, what makes the Berg's "Brasilia" interesting is that a revised typescript page (numbered 5 in Plath's hand) was typed on the verso of a draft page – Chapter 12, page 9 – of *The Bell Jar*. In this scene, Esther Greenwood sits on a park bench listening to the litany of voices in her head. Quoting

³¹ "Brasilia" is one of the final poems Plath wrote at Court Green before moving to London. Plath also wrote on this day "Childless Woman." On December 2, Plath wrote the first draft of what would become by late January 1963, "Sheep in Fog." An extra carbon of "Brasilia" was sold, along with an unconnected original drawing of a Cambridge Scene, in November 2011 by Frieda Hughes via the Mayor Gallery in London as part of a sale/exhibit called "Sylvia Plath: Her Drawings."

from the published version of the novel, the typescript page begins: "I looked down at the two flesh-coloured band-aids forming a cross on the calf of my right leg" (*The Bell Jar* 155). The typescript page ends on the words – again, quoting from the published text: "Then I felt a small, deep thrill, and a bright seam of red welled up at the lip of the slash. The blood gathered" (156). There are some slight typographical differences between the draft and the final text.

Another poem draft held at the Berg is a typescript page of Plath's "Insomniac" with many handwritten annotations. The bulk of this poem's drafts are held in the British Library (Cheltenham Festival Prize poems collection, Add Ms 52617). On the verso of this page is a typescript draft of the last stanza of Plath's "Maenad."³² The side of the leaf with "Maenad" also contains draft verses from Ted Hughes' poem "My Uncle's Wound" which mentions Normandy, the North Sea, and March Wind.³³ The published poem ends, "Under the March washing wind / New wheat tugged and glistened" (Hughes 100). The references to March wind, "wheat," "glistening," and "tugged" cannot help but call to mind lines from Plath's "Among the Narcissi," "Berck-Plage," "Ariel," and "Stings": "Spry, wry, and gray as these March sticks ... the terrible wind tries his breathing," "A glitter of wheat and crude earth," "And now I / Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas," and "The sweat of his efforts a rain / Tugging the world to fruit" (*Collected Poems* 190, 200, 239, 215).

GC: As Peter further explored the full extent of the Berg Collection, we equally continued our living archive search beyond the boundaries of Smith, beyond even Northampton itself which led us to the Joseph Allen Skinner National Park. Here, atop Mount Holyoke, is an evocative setting for a number of Plath poems and stories. This park is four hundred acres of forest, tracks, picnic sites and a steep road leading to Summit House at the top of the mountain which was once a hotel. Surrounded by balconies on all four sides, the view looks down to the Oxbow, where the river turns back on itself, and across the valley to Northampton. On clearer days, it is possible to see as far as New Hampshire and Vermont. This former hotel was built originally in

³² Numbered 77 by Plath, likely a page from her *Colossus* manuscript.

³³ In Hughes' *Collected Poems*, "My Uncle's Wound" appears in a section labeled "Uncollected Poems 1960-1967."

1861 but modified and added to over the years. In 1938 it was half blown down in the big hurricane.³⁴ It even had its own tramway built in 1854 to carry supplies and guests up to the hotel. This tramway was improved and used until 1941 when the electric motor burned out and a heavy snowfall collapsed the tramway's roof.

This mountain and hotel feature in Plath's poem "Above the Oxbow" (87-89) in which she describes the scene as:

....The paint-peeled
Hundred-year-old hotel sustains its ramshackle
Four-way veranda, view-keeping above
The fallen timbers of its once remarkable
Funicular railway, witness to gone
Time, and to graces gone with the time. (88)

Interestingly, the hotel itself still stands (just) along with its four-way veranda awaiting restoration (right). All signs of the funicular railway are now gone. By 1965, state workers burned what was left of the wooden track. The ruin which Plath gazed upon from the white railings of the veranda in the 1950s, is no longer there.



³⁴ This is the same hurricane that Plath mentions in her story "Ocean 1212W" and her poems "The Disquieting Muses" and "Point Shirley."

In her story "Above the Oxbow," Plath recounts the narrative of Luke, the steward of the mountain top hotel and his encounter with two young visitors to the site. He describes a hot August day, when tourists were few and "the rickety remains of the old mountain-top hotel, half of it blown away in the '38 hurricane, seemed oddly quiet..." (323). The story discusses some of the history of the hotel and the view down to the river, to the Oxbow. Today, the view to the Oxbow is stunning and Northampton lies nestled across green fields beyond the river (Plath describes it in her poem "Above the Oxbow" as a "valley of discreet academies" (87)). The four way veranda still peels paint, white and blue sagging wood.



PKS: Below the Oxbow, in 1951, during one of her first semesters at Smith, Plath's then-boyfriend Richard "Dick" Norton gave her a copy of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943, first edition, later printing).³⁵ Now held in the Berg Collection,³⁶ the book has an abundance of annotations throughout, showing how the college-age Plath interacted with her book – what Gail earlier marveled at as Plath's "active readership." Nearly every page is covered in Plath's commentary of Eliot. Norton inscribed the book to Plath, hoping the book would contribute to her developing

³⁵ There is an irony to this title as the first poem in the book is "Burnt Norton." Plath "burnt" Norton in her caricature of him as Buddy Willard in *The Bell Jar*.

³⁶ <http://catalog.nypl.org/record=b12499362~S38>

poetics and mind. Ted Hughes, too, after Plath's death, inscribed the book, stating its authenticity. An article titled "T.S. Eliot on Life and Its Paradoxes" from *New York Times Magazine* was tucked into the book with Plath's own underlining.³⁷

There are additional books owned by Plath –or otherwise associated with her– in the Berg. One is Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American & Modern British Poetry* (Harcourt Brace, 1955). A third book formerly owned by Plath is *John Donne: A Selection of His Poetry* (Penguin Poets D13, 1952, reprint). Plath's name is on the first page, top right.

Three books by Plath are held also by the Berg. They hold Nathaniel Tarn's first Heinemann *The Colossus* (1960); a first Faber *Ariel* (1965) with Court Green thatch drippings and a note of authenticity by Ted Hughes; and Aurelia S. Plath's annotated copy of *Winter Trees* (Harper & Row, 1972). Poems that Aurelia Plath actively read include: "Brasilia" (reference to Plath's son Nicholas Hughes), "Amnesiac" (references to Olwyn Hughes and Assia Wevill), "Lyonnesse" (a check by the title), "For a Fatherless Son" (a check by the last line, "Till then your smiles are found money") (*Winter Trees* 33), and "Three Women" (penciled notations on pages 54, 61, and 62).

The archive is a place for documents no longer in active use to live; where researchers encounter them, they breathe new life into them. Plath's archive(s) comprise different types of documents. Documents are not just papers, but can also be a product – or by-product – of a person's efforts at living.

GC: It is this notion of a person's efforts at living that in many ways is one of the key features of exploring the living archive, beyond the boundaries of its static building. However, as this paper draws to a close, I want to return back to the archive at Smith College to introduce some final personal items of Plath's that I encountered. During my time in America, while I felt very strongly both the static and dynamic nature of the archive, there is something about "things", solid, durable things that can be handled and felt. Peter's exploration of business correspondence and manuscripts seemed to work in conjunction not only with similar materials in Smith, but with the personal memorabilia. We may ask, what constitutes the body of somebody's work? Should it just be creative

³⁷ Published on February 21, 1954, page SM16.

writings? Letters? Journals? Paintings and drawings? In the Plath archive, one feels the extent of her creativity when encountering day to day items, which offer a glimpse into the woman above and beyond the work. Yet, at the same time, there is always that energy and drive behind even the most mundane or trivial daily recordings. One only has to look at her 1962 Letts Calendar to appreciate her energetic determination. Likewise, a playful creativity can clearly be seen in items of furniture stored in the archive. The first is a small crib that Ted Hughes made for their daughter, Frieda, as a gift and which Plath painted white and decorated with birds, hearts and flowers.



In "Totem" from *Birthday Letters*, Hughes writes about Plath's tendency to paint symbols on everything – furniture, door frames, mirrors; "You painted little hearts on everything" (163) he said, "And on the cradle I made for a doll you painted,/Hearts" (163). Plath herself in her letters mentions painting furniture with such designs several times. For example, on April 8, 1962 she writes to her mother "I have been painting odd bits of grubby wood furniture – a table, a chair – white with designs, very primitive of hearts and flowers, which cheers me up and should look gay in the playroom..." (451). But

perhaps the most impressive attention to detail is Plath painting and decorating a wastebin, interestingly combining the heart motif with an apple theme, inspired perhaps by the seventy-two apples trees she counted in Court Green's orchard.



Such items, we feel, belong in an archive because they are able to bring Plath alive in a

unique, multi-dimensional manner. In many ways they do not feel "of the past," but rather very much of the present. So again, it is the paradox of absence and presence that can assail any researcher as they work in the archive.

PKS: Remembering her college mentor, on June 7, 1962, Plath signed and inscribed a copy of the American edition of *The Colossus* to her influential college professor Alfred Young Fisher. Plath's inscription reminds Fisher that he is not forgotten, even though it had been seven years since she was his student. Four days later, on the 11th, Plath typed a letter to Fisher to accompany the book, both of which are held in the Patton Collection of the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In the letter, Plath recalls their afternoon sessions in the spring of her senior year, and thanks him for encouraging her. She briefly brings him up to speed as to her life in England, her children, her newer poetry which she says is freer than those in *The Colossus*, and letting him know of her novel's acceptance, as well.

At the letter's close, Plath asks Fisher to get for her a dozen or so of the pink Smith College Memorandum pads – including, for his reference, a torn sheet of the pink paper itself – admitting that the inspiration the paper and its color provides her is a creative muse.

It is at this point that we draw our paper to a close. Rather fittingly, it is poignant to think of a pad of pink Smith College memorandum paper perhaps being sent across the Atlantic to Plath in England where she used it to write some of her most memorable poems. In turn, this paper was then sent back across the Atlantic after her death to be stored in the very place of its origin. A full circle. And in many ways it is indicative of the archive itself; the life that can team and happen to a document or a relic before it comes to rest and be restored to a whole new life as a resource for scholars. In this paper, we have tried to demonstrate that the archive can be much more than those documents contained within the walls of a building. It can be places and objects that exist though time. It can be a crumbling hotel on a mountain, or a greening fountain in a rose garden. But it can also be solid, tangible pieces of paper or pages of books. We never tire of the archive and we never tire of making new discoveries in these archives. As we understand Plath's documents and gain a rounder picture of her as a woman and a writer, we gain a better

understanding of ourselves as researchers and scholars. Since Plath's documents and possessions are scattered disparately in archives across the world, there are always new treasures to find. As Rick Gekoski so succinctly states:

[T]he treasure hunt must go on: there are buried, unlocated, misunderstood, misrepresented objects of every kind which are of value both commercial and cultural, and are essential to our understanding of ourselves. It is our job to find, to understand and to preserve them. (guardian.co.uk)

Appendix 1: Correspondence between/concerning Sylvia Plath and *The New Yorker***Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1958).**

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 24 June 1958*³⁸

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 26 June 1958

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 30 June 1958

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 2 July 1958

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 8 July 1958

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 22 July 1958

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 1 August 1958

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 6 October 1958

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1959).

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 21 April 1959

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 23 April 1959

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 4 May 1959

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 8 May 1959

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 12 May 1959

Sylvia Plath to William Maxwell, 22 May 1959

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 9 June 1959

William Maxwell to Sylvia Plath, 17 June 1959*

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 6 August 1959

Sylvia Plath to Rachel MacKenzie, 20 September 1959

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 28 September 1959

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 6 October 1959

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 21 October 1959 (first letter)

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 21 October 1959 (second letter)

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 24 November 1959

³⁸ The presence of an * indicates that a copy of this letter is held by the Sylvia Plath Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College.

Sylvia Plath to Rachel MacKenzie, 28 November 1959 (first letter)

Sylvia Plath to Rachel MacKenzie, 28 November 1959 (second letter)

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 8 December 1959

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 9 December 1959

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 18 December 1959

Sylvia Plath to Rachel MacKenzie, 18 December 1959

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1960).

Robert Hemenway to Sylvia Plath, 29 July 1960*

Sylvia Plath to Robert Hemenway, 7 August 1960

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 17 August 1960

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 23 August 1960

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 1 November 1960

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1961).

W. S. Merwin to Howard Moss, 19 February 1961

Howard Moss to W. S. Merwin, 23 February 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 24 February 1961*

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 7 March 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 11 April 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 14 June 1961

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 17 June 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 20 June 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 29 June 1961

Rachel MacKenzie to Sylvia Plath, 12 July 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 29 August 1961

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 11 September 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 26 September 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 10 October 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 27 October 1961

Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 8 November 1961

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 15 November 1961
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 16 November 1961
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 8 December 1961
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 12 December 1961
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 18 December 1961
Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 18 December 1961
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 26 December 1971

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1962).

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 24 January 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 18 April 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 9 May 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 11 May 1962
Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 21 May 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 27 June 1962*
Tom Gorman to Sylvia Plath, 6 July 1962
Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 31 August 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 26 September 1962*
Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 10 October 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 11 October 1962
Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 12 October 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 23 October 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 5 November 1962*
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 7 November 1962*
Sylvia Plath to Howard Moss, 15 November 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 16 November 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 27 November 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 28 November 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 30 November 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 7 December 1962
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 14 December 1962

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1963).

Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 2 January 1963
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 24 January 1963
Howard Moss to Sylvia Plath, 7 February 1963
Peter Davison to Howard Moss, 20 February 1963
Howard Moss to Ted Hughes, 21 February 1963
Howard Moss to Ted Hughes, 6 March 1963
Aurelia Plath to Howard Moss, 23 March 1963
Howard Moss to Ted Hughes, 1 April 1963
Howard Moss to Ted Hughes, 19 April 1963
Howard Moss to Aurelia Plath, 11 September 1963

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1970).

Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 11 December 1969
Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 8 January 1970
Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 12 January 1970
Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 16 January 1970
Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 27 January 1970
Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 8 April 1970
Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 24 April 1970
Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 6 May 1970
Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 21 May 1970
Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 28 May 1970
Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 24 September 1970
Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 6 October 1970

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1971).

Susan Schmidt to The New Yorker, 9 March 1971 (fan letter)
Fred Keefe to Susan Schmidt, 15 March 1971

Olwyn Hughes to Howard Moss, 26 October 1971

Howard Moss to Olwyn Hughes, 23 November 1971

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1973).

Olwyn Hughes to "The Story Editor," 19 October 1973

Robert Henderson to Olwyn Hughes, 5 November 1973

Plath, Sylvia: Editorial Correspondence - Fiction (1977).

Olwyn Hughes to "The Story Editor," 18 September 1977

Frances Kiernan to Olwyn Hughes, 24 October 1977

Plath, Sylvia - Contractual Agreements, 1960-1963

Carbons of contracts sent to SP.

Verse Manuscripts, Run & Killed: 1951-1973.

Plath, Sylvia - "On Deck." Run 7/22/61

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Illustrations

Our thanks to Karen V. Kukil, Kiki Smith, and Smith College for allowing us to photograph items from the Sylvia Plath Collection, the Smith College Historical Clothing Collection, and inside Lawrence House. Photographs copyright Gail Crowther and Peter K. Steinberg. Not to be reproduced without permission.

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