

## Plath and Place: Introduction

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Places can sometimes be very powerful and very magical. Often places can imprint themselves so deeply in our memories it feels as though the inside of your head has been stamped or branded by sights, sounds, smells and atmospheres. Memories of places are a little more than a photograph while still lacking the immediacy of actually being there. Yet they can stay with us, taking on a whole new life and meaning in our personal histories and mythologies. Places were no less important in the life and work of Sylvia Plath. Indeed, even the most cursory glance at her poems will reveal the high number of titles that are based on actual locations she visited or lived in: "Green Rock, Winthrop Bay," "Point Shirley," "Parliament Hill Fields." In this journal section of *Plath Profiles* 4, entitled "Plath and Place," the papers, poems and art work that follow will explore this important relationship between Plath and place; how certain locations taken through Plath's "photographic chamber of the eye" (Plath, *Collected Poems* 24) became transformed into something textual and poetic. Each piece included here explores the impact of places and spaces on Plath, where she visited, lived, travelled and sometimes explicitly draws out subsequent poems, stories and letters or sometimes leaves you, the reader, to draw your own conclusions. Also dispersed throughout this section of the Journal, you will find a selection of photographs, with textual quotations, demonstrating how seeing an actual source of inspiration for Plath adds a further layer of delight to her writing – how *accurate* she always was in capturing the essence and feel of a place.

This section begins with a wonderful piece by Ronald Hayman called "Poet on the Edge of the Sea," which places Plath firmly in her childhood locales at Winthrop and on Point Shirley. Hayman explores how the sea entered Plath's early consciousness and never really left, informing much of her later work and taking, as he states in his piece, "a firm grip on her imagination."

Hayman's article is followed by "A Perfectly Beautiful Time: Sylvia Plath at Camp Helen Storrow" by Peter K. Steinberg, which explores an overlooked aspect of Plath's childhood – her summer visits to Camp Helen Storrow. In a fascinating piece of research, Steinberg not only draws upon Plath's early unpublished journals, letters and early poems from this time, but actually contacted the owners of this site and was able to visit and walk



the grounds. As a result, we are able to see the location where Plath spent her summers while Steinberg muses on how these visits infiltrated her memory and sense of nostalgia in some of her later poems.

Following Steinberg's paper is "On the Road with Ted and Sylvia: Plath and Hughes's 1959 Trip Across America," a playful piece by David Trinidad, which retraces the cross-country route Plath and Hughes took from the east to west coast of America. Trinidad follows their path, including in-depth detail from letters and postcards sent back home that meticulously traces the roads that they took and the sites where they camped, as well as an interesting revelation about their visit to Plath's paternal Aunt. One special feature of this paper is Trinidad's inclusion of scanned images of postcards Plath mailed home, courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

Anna Journey's essay "The Best Resurrections: Letter from Yaddo: Saratoga Springs, New York" in which Journey, herself, staying in the writer's retreat in Yaddo, traces Plath around the estate and considers the impact this place had on both Plath's poems from that time and her journal entries.

From Journey's Yaddo, we then move to Ireland, where in "The Wild Beauty I Found There: Plath's Connemara," I reflect upon Plath's reaction to her brief stay in Ireland in September 1962. I explore how she wrote about the place in published and unpublished letters at that time and include photographs of the house Plath planned to rent for the winter of 1962-63.

Finally, Jennifer Yaros in "Private Ground" approaches the topic of "Plath and Place" from a slightly different angle, considering the place a Plath poem can create within the reader – in this case contemplating "Private Ground," "The Moon and the Yew Tree" and stating in her essay that "the reader is able to dwell in a personal space, shared only with the speaker of the poem in that moment."

Following this collection of papers, we have a poetry section featuring poems by Christine Walde, P.H. Davies, Jemma L. King, David Trinidad, Kathleen Aponick and the late Morney Wilson, all of which deal with significant places in Plath's life. Walde's poem acts as a companion piece to the Trinidad paper as she writes about "Mr & Mrs Hughes, Camping." Davies and King switch their attention to Yorkshire and write about Heptonstall and Hebden Bridge respectively. Trinidad writes of three of Plath's bedrooms, followed by a more haunting poem set in Court Green, called "Ted Hughes Sees a Ghost." Morney Wilson's poems are reflections about London locations "Chalcot Square" and "Your Blue



Hour" about Fitzroy Road. Kathleen Aponick's poem draws together many of these places as she contemplates Plath's moves from New England to Cambridge to London.

Rounding out this section of *Plath Profiles 4*, is Kristina Zimbakova's art, entitled "Troublous Wringing of Hands (Ocean)" and "Out of the Shoe and into the Cauldron," both inspired by various photographs of Plath-related places.

Places, however, do not stay the same. Time and activity impact upon them, change or destroy them, so sometimes when we revisit a place we can hardly recognise it at all. That is why Plath's writing about *place* is so important – she captured these locations: her elms trees and apple orchards, a park in London, the frozen pond in a writer's retreat in New England. She captured these locations, and in some cases her nostalgia for these locations, and stamped them in print so we too feel there, if we allow ourselves to fall into the text of her poetry.

