

## *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath: Ten Years On*

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Ten years ago, the study of Sylvia Plath's work was revolutionized by the publication of *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*.<sup>1</sup> Previously, readers of Plath's work had needed to travel to the Smith College archive to consult the approximately two-thirds of her journals (Hughes 177) not included in the earlier edition of *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*.<sup>2</sup> Even at Smith, the full, original manuscripts of Plath's August 1957 – November 1959 journals were sealed until work began on the *Unabridged Journals* in 1998. As many contemporary reviewers pointed out (Rose, Kendall, Moses, Nye), and as Karen Kukil makes clear in her editorial notes (Plath, *Unabridged* ix, 676), *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* does not contain all the journals that Plath wrote. There are eight early diaries and journals, written between 1944 and 1949, at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, which are not included. Also missing are the two last journals Plath kept, which "continued from where the surviving record breaks off in late 1959 and covered the last three years of [Plath's] life" (Hughes 177). In 1982, Ted Hughes wrote that the first of these journals "disappeared more recently (and may, presumably, still turn up)," and that he had destroyed the second, "because he did not want [Plath's] children to have to read it" (177). An unsent draft of a letter to Jacqueline Rose also survives, in which Hughes wrote, "I hid the last journal" (Enniss and Kukil 62). Furthermore, as both Karen Kukil (Plath, *Unabridged* 676) and Tracy Brain (144-5) have pointed out, the Lilly Library holds diaries, calendars, scrapbooks and other papers in which Plath recorded and reflected on the details of her life. As Brain puts it, "We must accept that there will never be a 'complete' edition of Plath's *Journals*" (145). The *Unabridged Journals* gives us a complete record of the twenty-three journal manuscripts and fragments held at Smith College. Its value to readers and scholars of Plath's work cannot be overstated.

Writing in the *New York Times*, Joyce Carol Oates criticized the "adulatory" nature of Kukil's meticulous faithfulness to the details of the text of Plath's journals, but this is misguided.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath, 1950-62*, ed. Karen V. Kukil (New York: Anchor Books, 2000). *The Journals of Sylvia Plath, 1950-62*, ed. Karen V. Kukil (London: Faber and Faber, 2000). The British edition is complete; the American edition has shortened a few names to initials and dashes "to protect the privacy of living individuals," and "in two places, six sentences have been omitted (for a total of twelve omitted sentences)" (x). These omissions occur on pp. 358 and 444-5 (of both editions, whose pagination is the same).

<sup>2</sup> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, ed. Frances McCullough (New York: Dial Press, 1982).



As Kukil herself put it in a contemporary interview, "The more information you know, the better you understand someone's writing" (Kirtz). There is no substitute for seeing the original manuscript of Plath's journals – the printed text cannot convey the degeneration of her handwriting, for example, during her long entry for July 6, 1953. Even Kukil's notes on Plath's alteration of the words "you will see him if he asks again" to "you won't see him if he asks again" (43, 678) cannot quite convey the way in which Plath has physically turned the one word into the other. The *Unabridged Journals* gives us the closest possible reproduction of Plath's texts that can be achieved in print. Plath's spelling, punctuation, phrasing, numbering, markings, annotations and deletions are all reproduced as she wrote them, and Kukil describes the physical properties of each journal, as well as reproducing a facsimile of a page of each one. In a contemporary interview, Kukil speaks of the "new facets of [Plath's] personality" opened up for readers of the *Unabridged Journals* (Hawker). It would be impossible to list all that readers of this text learned for the first time about Plath, and in this essay, I will discuss just a fraction of this material. Indeed, the greatest indication of the value of the *Unabridged Journals*, ten years after its first publication, is how much we still have to learn from it.

One significant aspect of Plath's writing life opened up to readers by the *Unabridged Journals* is the large number of short stories she planned, drafted and wrote. Plath's stories have been neglected for a long time by critics, in part because so many remain unpublished. The publication of Plath's notes, drafts, sketches and opening passages of short fiction in the *Unabridged Journals* makes clear to readers how constantly and with what variety Plath worked on writing and publishing short fiction. The first thing that strikes the reader is the sheer number of plot sketches. By my count, there are outlines of the plots of four stories that Plath completed but which are now either lost or extant only in fragments on the verso of Ted Hughes' papers. These are "The Trouble-Making Mother" (287-8, 290-1), "Operation Valentine" (which Plath refers to as a story about a mother's helper) (288), "Mrs McFague and the Corn Vase Girl" (297, 313, 615), and "The Bird in the House" (409). There are also outlines of plots for eighteen more stories which Plath did not complete, ranging in length from two lines to three paragraphs. These are entitled "The Eye-Beam" (283, 292), "The Great Big Nothing" (614-5, 404), "The Day of the Twenty-Four Cakes" (288, 292-3), "Four Corners of a Windy House" (302, 303), "House of Wind" (303), "The Snow Circus" (320), "The Fringe-Dweller" (320), "The Button Quarrel" (443-4), "The Silver Pie-Server" (443, 498), "The Champion Spinach-Picker" (443), "The System and

I" (487), "The Little Mining Town in Colorado" (487-8), "The Discontented Mayor" (488), "Lord Baden Powell and the Mad Dogs" (488), "Emmett Hummel and the Hoi Polloi" (488-9), and "The Olympians" (498), as well two plot sketches that do not have titles (301). There are also references, as opposed to full plot outlines, to a further eleven stories which Plath completed, but which are now lost or exist only in fragments – "The Two Gods of Alice Denway" (168), "The Matisse Chapel" (205), "The Black Bull" (499), "Remember the Stick Man" (499), "The Prado" (499), "The Laundromat Affair" (276, 292), "A Prospect of Cornucopia" (507, 509, 510-11), "The Pillars" (509, 511), "The Mummy" (512, 513, 514, 524), and "The Beggars" (530). Plath also writes out in full the first five paragraphs of a story about an American woman traveling in Spain (251-3), and the first line of a story about a housewife who commits suicide (498).

It is the plots in particular that give us the most detailed insight into Plath's creative processes. "The Day of the Twenty-Four Cakes," for example, is conceived first as "either Kafka lit-mag serious or SATEVEPOST" (288). Plath tells herself, "Try both styles: do it to your heart's content" (288). Eleven days later, when she sketches the plot a second time, she envisages either "McCalls or SatEvePost naturalism and introspection" (292). The plot outline which follows this reflection suggests that it has become a women's magazine story, with a moral in which home and family are privileged, after a struggle with the difficulties of the roles of housewife and mother, as the greatest values for the heroine. Kate Moses calls this plot a "particularly terrible...idea," but this is not the case. It has all the potential to be an example of Plath's women's magazine fiction at its best, both conforming to the requirements of the women's magazine story and at the same time articulating aesthetic concerns of her own, quite at variance with these requirements. Ellen, the heroine of "The Day of the Twenty-Four Cakes" is unhappy as a wife and mother. When her husband goes on a business trip with the secretary he may be having an affair with, she decides to leave him. "Compelled to leave something for children," Plath notes, she starts baking cakes for them, and, "by compulsion, feels the need to keep on" (293). She calls the store for ingredients, and keeps baking for twenty-four hours, midnight to midnight, one cake per hour. At the end, her husband comes home early from his trip, and she is "at peace with herself." She knows that "he has truly come back to her" and that she will stay with him. This is a story very characteristic of Plath's women's magazine fiction. On the one hand, it is a domestic story which ends up, as the genre requires, affirming the value of home and



family. On the other hand, within this story, Plath portrays an intensity of distress, an expression of powerful emotions in her heroine, which is all her own. Eva Moskowitz has argued that post-war women's magazines "devoted considerable attention" to "the psychological tensions experienced by the housewife and her difficulties conforming to the domestic ideal" (77). As Joanne Meyerowitz points out, this is much less true of their fiction than of their feature articles (250). The *Ladies' Home Journal*, for example, asked contributors for stories that "do not completely exclude from their reflection of life such qualities as love and hope and generosity and mercy and courage and self-sacrifice, such things as laughter and content" (*Writer's* 40). Plath carefully marked and annotated these lines in her copy of *The Writer's 1954 Year Book*. *McCall's*, the magazine to which Plath considered sending the story, points out that "the modern domestic emotional problem story is always a safe bet" (*Writer's* 41), but Ellen's excessively compulsive behavior represents a level of psychic disturbance beyond anything seen in women's magazine stories in the 1950s.

A second significant plot outline published in the *Unabridged Journals* is the longest of all that Plath wrote, for a story called "Emmett Hummel and the Hoi Polloi." This is for a very unusual story in Plath's *oeuvre*, one told from the point of view of a man. In 1950 she wrote a short monologue called "Watch My Line!" which is spoken by a man, and in 1956 she wrote "The Invisible Man," which is told from the point of view of the central male character. Even in these pieces, however, the male characters are related essentially to their wives and families. The husband of "Watch My Line!" speaks entirely about his wife, and the story of the invisible man is primarily about his relationship to his wife and son. "Emmett Hummel and the Hoi Polloi" is the only story Plath planned that is simply about a man. He is a "clerk in a bank, or some such," "immaculate, spartan, chaste" (489), constantly dragged down by ordinary life and people. In an early scene in the story, he is eating his breakfast egg in his boarding house, and discovers that it is empty. He puts salt, pepper and butter in it, but, Plath writes:

He cannot jump up and shout: Fraud, fraud, I have no egg. Simply puts the spoon to his mouth, makes motions of eating. (488)

Plath planned another short story in which a "weak-willed girl" is "always 'put-upon' by high-power salesmanship of others until...she is a product 'not-herself'" (*Unabridged* 301). Her hairstyle, clothing, job, even boyfriends have all been chosen for her by others. Emmett Hummel

is a similar character, in that he too is alone in a world that neither notices nor cares for him. It might be argued that this is the way in which, like the central characters in Plath's other stories about men, he is related to women: as himself, he simply does not belong in the world, and there is no place for him. He attempts outwardly to conform to social standards, but they do not allow him to be himself. Plath plans out this story in May 1959, in the period in which she is writing her very best short fiction. The *Unabridged Journals* shows us that, in this period, she also planned out in detail a story about a man, something she almost never does, and that, like the few other central male characters in her fiction, his experience is comparable to that of women. Despite the length and detail in which she plans out the story, however, and the exhortation, "I guess I better begin on Emmet Hummel" (489), Plath never writes it.

A third piece of information about Plath's work as a fiction writer which the *Unabridged Journals* provides readers for the first time is the reproduction of Plath's pen-and-ink drawing of the "corn vase" which accompanies her notes for the story "Mrs McFague and the Corn Vase Girl." Plath completed this story, but only four pages of it survive, on the verso of Ted Hughes' papers. In the *Journals*, Plath outlines the plot of the story three times (297, 313, 615), and makes lengthy notes on the Spauldings, the Cape Cod couple on whom it is based (286, 410, 612-4). In the longest series of these notes, she makes a drawing of one of their "corn vases," around which her story centers (614). This drawing shows us something we would not know from any other source, published or unpublished, that each vase is fashioned so as to represent a black worker, possibly a slave, in a cornfield. A giant stalk of corn, rising behind the worker, forms the bowl of the vase, with two other stalks bending inwards to form handles. The worker himself stands out on the base of the vase, about half the height of the corn stalk. Plath's notes suggest that the vases are a pair, one representing a man, the other a woman. The "corn vase girl" of Plath's story is the black woman represented on the latter. While the pages of the story in which Plath described the vases are not extant, her outlines of its plot make clear that they are extremely precious objects. Mrs McFague's life is one of poverty, "yet she hides riches" (297). The corn vase girl is a "Sacred Object" to her, the "idol round which she moves" (313). The study of Plath's representations of race is in its infancy, and no critic has discussed this drawing of a vase depicting a black worker nor its role in Plath's story. This role is a complex and conflicted one. The story centers around a representation of a black woman which is the most precious object in a white woman's life, but it is a representation of the black woman's poverty,



her agricultural labor, if not her slavery, which the white woman so values. The central event of the plot, the moment in which an ill-mannered child breaks this vase, is also ambivalent. On the one hand, the corn vase was Mrs McFague's "idol" and only valuable possession. On the other, in one of the outlines at least, its loss in some way sets her free – "now she can bear to sell the other" (615).

A second area of Plath's thinking to be made available to readers for the first time by the *Unabridged Journals* is her many reflections on religious beliefs and sensibilities, a field still largely neglected by critics of her work. There are many paragraphs in which Plath directly states her religious beliefs. "I don't believe in God as a kind father in the sky," she writes; "I don't believe there is life after death in the literal sense" (44). Plath never wavers from her firm rejection of any supernatural faith, yet she has a complex relationship to such faith, able to address sentences to God at the same time as affirming her disbelief that God exists: "Who am I, God-whom-I-don't-believe-in? God-who-is-my-alter-ego?" (91). The *Unabridged Journals* make long passages available from the summer of 1952, in which Plath was working as a mother's helper for the Cantor family in Chatham, Massachusetts, who were Christian Scientists, and dating Bob Cochran, a high school senior from Chatham, who was also a Christian Scientist. Reviewers of the *Unabridged Journals*, such as Erica Wagner and Robert Nye, tended to see early passages like these as the least interesting parts of the text, but in fact they tell us a great deal about Plath's thinking. The Christian Scientist view that made the most lasting impression on Plath was the exegesis of Genesis 2:6, "But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground," in which the mist is said to represent the error of believing in the reality of material existence. Plath records this in her journal at the time, after a conversation with the Cantors: "the figment of matter being like myth, rising like 'mist' (see Genesis) to cloud the truth" (120). Years later, as she reflects on a foggy morning in Boston, she writes whimsically, "The mists of error" (472), and in *The Bell Jar*, the "lady Christian Scientist" who comes to visit Esther in hospital speaks to her about "the mist going up from the earth in the Bible and the mist being error" (201). Plath even uses the metaphor of mist to describe her own take on the Cantors' religious beliefs, which is that, whilst she is a materialist, she agrees that "thinking makes it so" and that "attitude is everything." As she expresses her own view: "No man can ever grasp the whole impersonal neutrality of a universe. That is hidden under the mists of subjectivity" (120-1). As in mature poems like "Mary's Song" or "Nick and the Candlestick," or a

story like "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams," in the *Journals* we see that, from an early stage in Plath's writing life, the language of religion (indeed of several religions) is a language in which she chooses to express herself, despite firmly disbelieving its truth-claims. The *Unabridged Journals* provides a gendered perspective on this position in Plath's reflections on the Christian Science of Bob Cochran. She takes a maternal view of her younger date's beliefs, smiling to herself at the "paradox" by which he can admire her tan skin and white bathing suit, calling her "cream and honey," yet at the same time can read aloud to her from *Science and Health*, which teaches that material existence is an illusion (134). Nevertheless, she decides not to attempt to "undermine" or "take away" his faith, but rather, as if she were his mother, to "cultivate" and "bring out" his faith (134), to "tender and nourish" his idealism (135), and to "give...impetus" to the faith that gives him a strength she finds attractive and valuable (136). She calls herself at one point his "mother and spiritual mistress" (137).

A more complex relationship of attraction to an individual's religious life can be seen in the reading notes Plath makes on the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, made available for the first time in the *Unabridged Journals*. The earlier edition of the journals had shown that St. Thérèse was a negative ethical example for Plath, who firmly believed that each individual was responsible, however burdensome the responsibility, for creating his or her own life. It is much easier, she reflects in her therapy notes, "to give your soul to god like St. Therese and say: the one thing I fear is doing my own will. Do it for me, God" (*Journals* 271). The *Unabridged Journals* gives us a full context for this view with the reading notes Plath made on the saint's life. The first thing that strikes the reader is the sheer length of the notes, which seems to indicate a detailed fascination on Plath's part with a woman whose ethics she nevertheless condemns. Plath is especially interested in the twists and turns of St. Thérèse's psychological experience, noting the details of her delirium, of her childhood wish for her mother to die, so that she could go to heaven sooner, of her sense of the physical presence of the devil, and of the frequent desire she shows for painful experiences and even death. It is this masochistic strain in St. Thérèse's spirituality that fascinates Plath most. She copies out a passage in which St. Thérèse writes of the pleasure she takes in the symptoms of her coming death from tuberculosis – "I felt a hot stream [of blood] rise to my lips, and thinking I was going to die, my heart almost broke with joy" (592). When she wakes the following morning, the saint writes that she remembers she "had some good news to learn," and indeed finds that her "handkerchief was saturated with blood:"



"What hope filled my heart!" Plath copies out all of this passage, as well as another long passage in which St. Thérèse asks the Child Jesus to be His toy, but not a "precious toy," rather "a little ball of no value that could be thrown on the ground, tossed about, pierced, left in a corner, or pressed to His heart, just as it might please Him" (591). Plath notes details like the pleasure St. Thérèse took in having a pin accidentally fastened through her shoulder, and her increasing "preference for whatever was ugly and inconvenient" (591). Kukil notes that Plath had not only copied out a passage in which St. Thérèse spoke of how much pain she had suffered in her religious life from the cold, but also that Plath had bracketed and starred the passage and marked it in capital letters with the word "COLD" (592, 701).

In addition to the texts themselves, *The Unabridged Journals* contains a major resource for scholars of Plath's work in the index to the volume, which is so thorough as to constitute a detailed reference guide to these texts. Kukil points out that "important artistic, cultural, literary and musical influences" are included, as well as "famous people and subjects relevant to the study of American and British popular culture of the 1950s and early 1960s" (707). The index contains a wealth of cultural references, each one a source of potential research into Plath's work. There is a sub-entry for Plath's clothes ("Plath, Sylvia: clothes of"), for example, with 17 separate sub-sub-entries for the different kinds of clothes to which Plath refers – "blouses," "coats," "colors and fabrics, SP's favorite," "dresses," "evening gowns," "footwear," "handbags," "hosiery and underwear," etc. (721). There are 101 separate references for these 17 kinds of clothes. Plath's cooking has another sub-entry ("Plath, Sylvia: cooking of") with 67 references, divided according to the places in which Plath cooked these meals (721). The geography of the places to which Plath refers is carefully annotated. The places in Massachusetts in particular are specified in detail, in numerous entries such as "Nauset Beach (Orleans, Massachusetts)," "Nauset Light Beach (Eastham, Massachusetts)," "Rock Harbor Creek (Eastham, Massachusetts)" (719, 727). Plath's Northampton is fully listed (719), as is Smith College. The sub-entry on "buildings" under "Smith College" gives 21 separate college buildings to which Plath refers a total of 60 times, in some cases, such as "Faculty Club, The (10 Prospect)," providing their address (728). Plath's college transcript lists 27 courses she took for credit during her time at Smith. The index to the *Unabridged Journals* gives references to 21 of these, by name and number in a sub-entry for "courses" under "Smith College." There are also many detailed references to contemporary culture, such as an entry for "Hula-Hoops" (715), which sends us to Plath's observation on "those



new round hoops that serve to twirl in, jump through, roll" (418). Similarly, Plath's comment on "Miss America beauty pageant chaos" in 1958 is listed in the index under "Miss America Pageant, Atlantic City, New Jersey" (419, 718). "Popular music" and "Television" both have full entries, the former listing 12 separate songs along with the various types of music to which Plath refers (726, 730). The editor even gives, in language unavailable to Plath, a sub-entry for her "circadian rhythms" (21).

Plath refers frequently in her journals to works that she has read, or quotes from such works, without of course giving their bibliographical details. These details, the author's name and title, however, are given in full in the index. When recording the results of her therapy sessions with Ruth Beuscher in December 1958, Plath writes that her mother gave her "books by noble women called 'The Case for Chastity'" (432). The index has an entry for this book, both under its title and under its author's name, Margaret Culkin Banning, which Plath does not give. Banning's book *The Case for Chastity*, made easily available for the reader in this way, is the original text which Plath transformed in *The Bell Jar* into the fictional article "In Defense of Chastity," which Esther is given to read by her mother (81). Esther's article is from the *Reader's Digest*, and Banning's book, published in 1937, also appeared in shorter form in the *Reader's Digest* that year. Several things can be learned from this book. First, it is a direct example of the kind of sexual ideology in which Plath grew up. It is a brisk, no-nonsense essay, based on the author's sense of contemporary research in psychology and sociology, on the many dangers of pre-marital sex. In addition to the risks of venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy, the infection and death that can follow an abortion, Banning writes that "petting" (that is, forms of sexual contact excluding sexual intercourse) creates habits of satisfaction that make it impossible to adjust to "normal marriage relations" – for girls who pet, "the chances of satisfaction and compatibility in marriage are very poor" (13). Indeed, "many of such cases are in danger of becoming perverts." Girls who break their own and society's codes with pre-marital sex, furthermore, can become hardened into liars, obsessed with guilt, lonely, socially outcast, and although "many of them would have made fine wives or mothers," they are usually deserted by a man who ultimately "preferred a virgin for a wife" (16). Such women may become promiscuous, feel inferior, and be unable to enjoy sex even if they later marry. Although *The Case for Chastity* advocates chastity for both sexes, Banning's book is aimed primarily at female readers, and she acknowledges a kind of historical inevitability to the double standard: "Any law which approaches a single standard of morality for



men and for women, is almost impossible to enact" (22). Indeed, Banning writes that there is an "ancient instinct" which "makes a man prefer a virgin for a wife" (22).

The second thing we learn from Banning's book is that its content is, in one respect, surprisingly different from that of Esther's article. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther says that the "main point" of the article her mother gives her is that "a man's world is different from a woman's world and a man's emotions are different from a woman's emotions," and that only marriage can unite the two properly (81). This is in no way the main point of Banning's book. In just one paragraph – interestingly, the only paragraph in which she makes a feminist point, that men make the laws about sex, although they don't keep them themselves – Banning speaks about a difference in the reasons men and women have for formulating sexual ethics:

Women think of their own personal protection and that of their individual children in influencing and upholding marriage codes.

Men think of the safety of the race. (22)

This is as close as Banning gets to saying that a man's world is different from a woman's world, or that a man's emotions are different from a woman's emotions, and this is the sum total of her thoughts on the subject. It is clear that Plath has made an aesthetic choice to import these words into the article in *The Bell Jar* in order to represent, in exactly the way she wants as an artist, the kind of sexual ideology and institutions that a girl like Esther was faced with in the early 1950s. Plath records in her journal Perry Norton's mother's view, "Girls look for infinite security; boys look for a mate. Both look for different things" (54), a statement she also takes and uses in her novel. Wherever Plath heard the view that a man's world is different from a woman's as an argument against pre-marital sex, the comparison of the article Esther reads with the book Plath herself read makes clear that Plath is not merely representing her own experiences in *The Bell Jar*. Rather, she is making a conscious and deliberate aesthetic choice to portray the kind of discourse used by women who have bought into patriarchal sexual standards against the interests of women like Esther who want to criticize and change these standards.

A similarly significant source is listed in the index of the *Unabridged Journals* under the entry for Mavis Gallant. Plath refers several times to Gallant's *New Yorker* stories, which she admires and aims to emulate. Whilst staying at Yaddo, in October 1959, she records in her journal her "involvement" with Gallant: "Her novel on a daughter-mother relation, the daughter committing suicide" (518). She adds, "A novel, brazen, arrogant, would be a solution to my

days" (518-9). A sub-entry in the index under Mavis Gallant's name gives the title of this novel, *Green Water, Green Sky*, which Plath herself does not specify. Published in 1959, and based on three stories Gallant published in the *New Yorker* in the same year, this novel has been almost entirely neglected by critics of Plath's work. It is, however, one of the major precursors of *The Bell Jar*. The second part of the novel narrates the descent into breakdown and suicide of the central character Flor, an intelligent young woman whose problem has been, since she was twelve years old, her dysfunctional relationship with her mother. Like Esther's mother in *The Bell Jar*, Flor's mother does not allow her to be who she wants to be, but is constantly anxious to maintain appearances and to raise a socially respectable daughter. Bonnie judges her daughter "queer" (31), although it is Bonnie's own standards that have made her so. Gallant portrays the ways in which these standards leave no place for Flor in a way that provided a significant model for Plath of the relationship between Esther and her mother. For Bonnie, her increasingly erratic daughter "bore the virus of a kind of moral cholera that threatened everyone" (57). As a result, Flor hates the mother she is also required to love:

    Their closeness had been a trap, and each one could now think, If it hadn't been for you, my life would have been different. If only you had gone out of my life at right time! (65)

Gallant describes the symptoms of Flor's breakdown in this situation in detail, many of which Plath would ascribe to Esther in *The Bell Jar*. Flor begins to lose her grip on language, as Esther does in Plath's novel, fixating upon a certain phrase as the only one she can understand, "...upon the beached verge of the salt flood..." These are "words out of the old days, when she could still read and relate every sentence to the sentence it followed" (33). In a similar way, Esther finds herself unable to read with attention, except for the tabloids, whose short paragraphs and pictures do not allow the words to "wiggle about" on the page before her eyes (137). Like Esther, Flor loses the ability to sleep, and ceases to be able to distinguish between day and night, knowing only a constant longing for sleep. Gallant also describes a symptom that Plath would ascribe to Hilda in *The Bell Jar*. Flor is afraid that she may become invisible, and this fear causes her to dress in bright clothes and to "steal glimpses of herself in shopwindows, an existence asserted in coral and red" (32), just as Hilda stares at her reflection "as if to make sure, moment by moment, that she continued to exist" (100). Neither woman is helped in the slightest by her psychiatrist: Flor thinks, "If in six months you have not been able to take your dresses to be cleaned, or yourself to a dentist, how can you help me?" (38), just as Esther thinks, "How could this Doctor



Gordon help me..., with a beautiful wife and beautiful children and a beautiful dog haloing him like...angels?" (129). Like Esther, Flor descends further and further into the sense that she can no longer live as the kind of person she is becoming, and, like Esther, finds the sleeping pills that have been hidden from her. In a passage in which her suicide is not directly described, but in which she takes these pills, she feels a peaceful regression to her childhood, when she had been happy, and journeys back into "her father's arms" (101).

I have discussed just a few of the resources made available for readers and scholars of Plath's work by *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*. Many of these resources are still to be explored. Ten years after its publication, one conclusion stands out above all concerning the *Unabridged Journals*. It is the only really adequately edited text of Plath's that we have. Karen Kukil's edition provides an exemplary model of a text that on the one hand allows Plath's work to speak unmediated to her readers and that on the other provides a full resource for scholars of her work. We now need a Collected Letters, a Collected Fiction, a Collected Prose, a Collected Juvenilia, a Collected Art, and an updated Collected Poems. If any of these editions is published with the meticulous faithfulness to Plath's work that characterizes the *Unabridged Journals*, the benefit both to readers and scholars of Plath's work will be incalculable.

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