

Addressing Sylvia

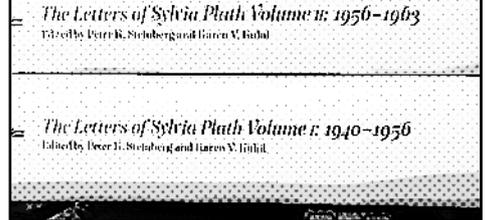
A comic by Ernesto Priego

Early January 2019. It was Winter here.

They have propped my head between the pillow and the sheet-cuff
 Like an eye between two white lids that will not shut.
 Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in.
 The nurses pass and pass, they are no trouble,
 They pass the way gulls pass inland in their white caps.
 Doing things with their hands, one just the same as another.
 So it is impossible to tell how many there are.
 My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water
 Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.
 They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring
 me sleep.

And it is so close on, finally; I imagine
 It is what the dead close on, like a Communion table.
 Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion table.
 The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.
 Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe
 Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.
 Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.
 They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me
 down,
 Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour,
 A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.
 Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.
 The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me
 Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins
 And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow
 Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,
 I wanted to efface myself.

I had by then completed the set of the complete Letters of Sylvia Plath, two mighty volumes.



I did know she had lived at 3 Chalcot Square, Primrose Hill, London NW1 8YB, from January 1960 to August 1961... there is an English Heritage Blue Plaque there.

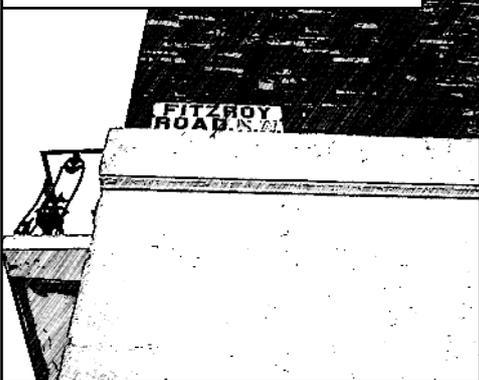


I had always been intrigued, however, by the last days of her life. Reading the second volume of her letters I took note of her last address, 23 Fitzroy Road, London NW1. It was from there she sent her last letter.

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| October | Writes twenty-five poems; records 'Beetle' and fifteen poems for British Council Room. |
| November | Rents flat at 23 Fitzroy Road, London, residence of W. B. Yeats. |
| 10 December | Moves with Frieda and Nicholas into Fitzroy Road. |
| 1963 | |
| January | Dubbed the 'Big Freeze of 1963', London's coldest winter of the century. |
| 10 January | Records review of Donald Hall's <i>Complete American Poetry</i> for BBC. |
| 14 January | Heinemann publishes <i>The Bell Jar</i> under the name of Sylvia Plath. |

(name), Smith College
 23 Fitzroy Road
 London N.W.1
 February 4, 1963
 & can au pair and can
 get an unfurnished
 10 Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse Bouscher
 Mon: 4 February 1963
 T15 (aerog)
 Dear Dr. Bouscher,
 I write from London where I have found a flat for about 6 months for about a year. I thought

So I decided to take a walk and take a look at her last address. Pay my respects.



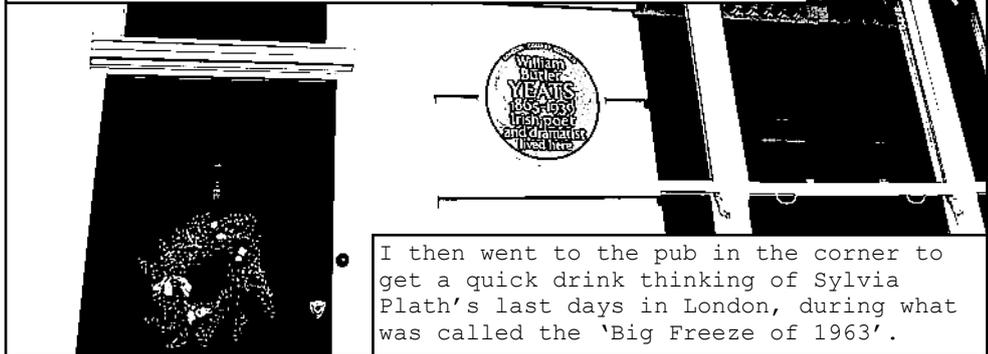
Fitzroy Road, London NW1. It was a cold day. The sky was concrete grey, almost white. It did feel ghostly. What's in an address? What is there where it is no more?



It is always weird to go and look at a stranger's house. It is even weirder, truly uncanny, to go searching for an absence. What do we hope to see? What do we hope to feel?



Sylvia had liked Yeats had lived there once. Do the folk who live there now know Sylvia Plath died there? I looked up. That day Fitzroy Road was very quiet. The day was still. I stood there and listened briefly.



I then went to the pub in the corner to get a quick drink thinking of Sylvia Plath's last days in London, during what was called the 'Big Freeze of 1963'.

