Chapter 10

An architecture of twenty words

Intimate details of a London blue plaque house

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On a warm spring afternoon, I retraced Sylvia Plath's route from the zoo in London's Regent's Park to her home in the North London suburb of Primrose Hill. Passing playing children, mothers with prams, nannies with their charges, young women hurrying home with bags of groceries, I felt like an intruder stumbling into the perfect domestic theatre of Primrose Hill's Chalcot Square. The square is surrounded by late nineteenth-century terrace houses, cheerfully painted in pastel colours. Number 3's façade is an all-too-sweet lilac that discreetly holds a circular ceramic blue plaque announcing (Figure 10.1):

Sylvia Plath
1932–1963
Poet
lived here 1960–1961

On the second floor, in a tiny one-bedroom flat, celebrated American poet Sylvia Plath and her English husband Ted Hughes made their first London home. Here, shortly after the birth of her first child, Plath began to write a

10.1
3 Chalcot Square, Primrose Hill, London

semi-fictional, feminist autobiography, *The Bell Jar*, under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, laying bare the despair, loneliness, and vulnerability of a 1950s' woman. Here also, she strove to become the perfect wife and muse to a husband who would with her, "romp through words together."[1]

Minutes away, around the corner of this green square at 23 Fitzroy Road, there is another house with another blue plaque commemorating Irish poet and dramatist W.B. Yeats. In Yeats' house, Plath overdosed on sleeping pills, lay her head on a towel in a gas oven and took her own life after a cold winter in February 1963. Plath's name on the façade of number 3 serves as a primal signifier for her poetic genius. It also points, albeit obliquely, to what is now the mythic scene of the crime – the mute, unmarked *other* house at

number 23 where Plath met her end. The public's interest in Plath extends beyond the literary into her biographical details. Her houses and their blue plaques have become part of Plath's fascinating biographical paraphernalia.

The London blue plaque scheme was started by the Society of Arts in 1867 to mark the residences of celebrated figures and to raise public consciousness "about the architecture that was prevalent in a person's time and the background against which that person lived."[2] There are, to date, over 750 blue plaque houses in the capital, with approximately 10 percent of these once occupied by notable women.[3] The inscription is usually limited to 20 words. It weaves an intimate web between occupant and house – a relationship that escapes normative historical methods of exploring modern architectural domesticity. If the house is seen as structural, as an object legitimately called architecture, then the plaque is an excessive supplement that refuses to free this object(ive) architecture from the subjective life of its occupant.

The blue plaque constructs architectural meaning performatively by announcing the primacy of the occupant's life in the history of the house – for example, Plath or Yeats – over architectural form, style, typology, or scale. Further, by performatively overwriting the temporal classification of a Victorian house with the duration of Plath's twentieth-century occupancy, the temporal narrative associated with an architectural history of style is also challenged by the plaque. In Plath's blue plaque house, the power to create architectural meaning is shifted not just from the architect to Plath as occupant, but is dissipated to each visitor who encounters the house through the plaque's inscription.

I propose that an intimate method of reading Plath and her domestic environment might help to construct a fuller architectural knowledge of these houses. Intimacy gives a different kind of criticality to architectural methodology. It destabilizes the authority of knowledge premised solely on architectural intentions. By this I mean that the analysis of the blue plaque house based on architectural drawings, the architectural history of the house, the background/intentions of the designer, and the analysis of the building alone are no longer adequate to communicate the experience provoked by the blue plaque. The architectural nature of the blue plaque house, hence, resists conventional architectural analysis and conventional architectural archives. Instead, the biographical details, working methods, and spatial practices of the named occupant become central. These elements come together to generate a new method of reading and a new genre of the architectural detail.

This chapter expands my interpretation of the London blue plaque as a metonymical device of intimacy. We enter the interior of the house not through the masterly reading of a plan, but through the peripheral reading of Plath's biographical documents and poetry. Through the blue plaque, the

excessive motifs of surface, supplement, and femininity manifest themselves in a biographical architecture of the private house. This intimate method of reading, I propose, exceeds the hermeneutic possibilities of a conventional architectural document. To overread Plath's houses is to transform these biographical documents into spatial ones.

Getting under the skin: notes on an intimate method

We might overread Plath's text to explore how her writing could operate as a critique of her domestic spatial order and its historical milieu. "As much as she assimilated and invested in certain conventional scripts as the paradigms of her won success, her interpretation of her experience was often a resourceful negotiation of the incompatible possibilities that were embedded in the 1950s ideology of gender."[4] This interpretation refuses to see Plath as becoming "the horror of which she speaks"[5] or to consume her work as the product of a hysterical woman, since these moves conveniently simplify the anxieties of gender boundaries Plath herself faced as a woman/wife/mother/poet of the 1950s. In return, an architectural analysis of her houses might offer alternative ways of analyzing Plath's poems, as they were intricately connected to her domestic spaces and experiences.

Plath's ambivalent commitment to domesticity gave impetus to some of her strongest poetic works. It is through these works that her houses now resonate with meaning. Seeing her work as a revolutionary language act where the semiotic (unconscious desires) ruptures the symbolic (familial, societal) order[6] of late 1950s' domestic arrangement gives us the possibility of recovering Plath's struggle to transgress the limitations imposed on her as a woman/wife/mother/poet. Her rebellious voice is also akin to an *écriture feminine* since it occupies "*a place* . . . That is not obliged to reproduce the system. . . . If there is somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, *where* it writes itself, *where* it dreams, *where* it invents new worlds."[7] Her writing and spatial practice become central architectural resources *and* theoretical tools to access her domestic space. So, how do we read Plath's writing architecturally?

Overreading: the embodied detail as architectural tactic

Overreading is a symptom of restlessness with knowledge: it is to read texts, not paradigms.[8] To overread Plath is to refuse reducing her work into a static model of despair. In "Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic," Nancy K. Miller retells the parable of Arachne's transformation into a spider, "her head shrinks, her legs become 'slender fingers' and virtually all body . . ."[9] Miller *overreads* the story to recuperate the dissolved body of the spider – the subject lost in the work of the web. Overreading is also an embodied activity, a "poetics attached to gendered bodies."[10] Miller concludes that

overreading is to read for the signature of the subject, "to put one's finger – figuratively – on the place of production that marks the spinner's attachment to her web. . . . to refuse and refigure the very opposition of the spider and her web."[11] To overread Plath allows for the inclusion of her (silenced) voice in the architectural interpretation of her domestic space. Adapting this literary concept to architectural analysis, I propose that overreading architecturally is to overread for the *embodied detail* marked by the occupant.

The architectural detail holds a paradoxical position. The detail is intimate, excessive, the surplus of the building. It is "the joint, that is the fertile detail, is the place where both the construction and the construing of architecture take place."[12] It calls to mind the presence of a "feminine particular," or a "feminine form of idealism."[13] The blue plaque is an excessive detail that is significantly embodied – it encompasses the body of the occupant. Plath herself overread Yeats' blue plaque at 23 Fitzroy Road and saw it as a good omen to reinvent her self, ". . . in the house of a famous poet . . . my work should be blessed."[14] This tactic of overreading practiced by Plath and by all who indulge in the blue plaque, puts the house – the primary object of architecture – at risk by placing it on par with poetry, gossip, suicide, secrets, and lies. On the façade of 3 Chalcot Square, Plath's plaque signals the unwieldy presence of her female body. This feminized house-body overflows the limits of conventional architectural discourse by implicating the occupant's biographical details.

How is the embodied detail written in Plath's texts? Her descriptions of her houses straddle in-between the literary and the architectural. They challenge the form and language of detailing in architecture. While they address issues of scale, texture, material, color, fixing methods, and dimensions, these descriptions do not resemble the constructed joint familiar to architecture. Her details are embodied and lived: the size of her bedroom too small to fit their 0.5 square meter bed on which her daughter was born, the shiny American-sized refrigerator and reconditioned stove that looked out of place in her shabby kitchen, the patterning of her wallpaper, the red interiors of 3 Chalcot Square, and the blue rooms of 23 Fitzroy Road, the cramped vestibule that held Hughes' hulking frame and a rickety card table loaned from friends, the narrowness of the one-bedroom flat that did not take well to her excessive pregnant body and the emptiness of her last flat chilled by one of England's most bitter winters.

These embodied details are dispersed in various archives, often peripheral to architectural knowledge. To place Plath's embodied details in relation to her houses is to make an intimate spatial connection akin to the spatialization of feminine writing, a connection that is "not obliged to reproduce the system." This placement considers Plath's embodied position central to our understanding of her houses.

Paper houses: an intimate strategy for overreading Plath's London houses

Plath had an obsessive relationship with the surface of paper.[15] Her writing practice constituted a kind of overreading – she overread the surface of her writing not as a blank page but as one already invested with symbolic significance. At the Smith College Rare Book Room where the Sylvia Plath Collection is kept, her "textual body is also hopelessly entangled"[16] with Hughes since the bulk of her final poems were written on the back of Hughes' and her own recycled manuscripts and typescripts. On one side of the paper, her words have bled into Hughes' while engaged in a "back talking" with his work.[17] She used paper as an analytical image to speak of her complex place – the position of a 1950s' woman – at the seams of domesticity. In her poetry, the perceived thinness, uniformity, blandness, and sterility of paper represented the environment of such a woman who could either be an infertile career woman or a mindless housewife, but rarely both at once – "Perfection is terrible/ it cannot have children."[18]

Our experience of Plath's blue plaque house is also restricted to its surface. The plaques (50 mm thick, 459 mm in diameter) are set flushed into the fabric of the houses' public façade and positioned so that they can be read from the public thoroughfare. Yet the house remains part of the street, part of the neighborhood, part of its ordinariness. The house is also inhabited by its present occupant whose semi-public space we, as curious viewers of the plaque, constantly intersect. The blue plaque forces a surface reading of architecture that is palimpsestic – the house as a relational entity – connected to its past and present occupancies, and linked to its site. Coinciding with the palimpsestic practice of Plath's writing, this relational reading of the house develops an alternative to the more masculine set of values defining modern subjectivity: "the idea of 'a self that is not closed off, separated from social relations that shape it . . . [that] does not have to imagine itself 'leaving home' to become a self' which might be of more relevance to women."[19] Even if women's expectations in the 1950s were restricted predominantly to the "housewife–mother" mode,[20] Plath ambiguously defined herself as a "triple-threat woman"[21] from within the space of her home. It is thus, from the surfaces of Plath's art and her "viciousness in the kitchen,"[22] that we, as observers, might relate to the surfaces of her two North London blue plaque houses.

A paper foundation: the English Heritage blue plaque archives

When the file I requested on Sylvia Plath's blue plaque house reaches me at the English Heritage Blue Plaque archives, I am beguiled by its contents.[23] It had evidently been mended on its three edges to carry the weight of bulging paper inserts. Inside this nondescript brown manila card folder I had expected

architectural drawings, a history of the house, information on its architect, and views of its interiors.

Apart from a general description of the house as a Grade 2 listed building from mid to late nineteenth century with some details of its façade features, the folder had very little in the manner of conventional architectural documentation. Instead, there were numerous letters nominating Plath for the scheme.[24] There were newspaper articles on Plath, on Hughes, photocopies from various Plath biographies featuring excerpts describing either 3 Chalcot Square or 23 Fitzroy Road, magazine articles on Plath's life and speculations about her suicide, pages copied from Plath's letters to her mother about her house(s) and a photocopy of Plath's entry in the *The Dictionary of National Biography*.[25] There was a full-sized drawing of the plaque setting out its exact inscription. There were formal correspondences between English Heritage and various parties to facilitate the blue plaque installation. This included the owners of the house, the plaque makers, the installation contractors, the architectural photographers, and the building-control department. There was the steady flow of more newspaper and magazine articles, generated by the presence of Plath's newly installed blue plaque on July 28, 2000.

In these documents, the house becomes a necessary setting, perhaps the only stable space to locate a Sylvia Plath who continually recedes into the background. Yet it is through Plath and through the labyrinth of text written by and about her that the house has been made significant. In other words, the house is brought into view – it exists as architectural matter – because of the speculative material in the brown manila card folder. Reviewing the file, one asks what constitutes the architecture of Plath's blue plaque house? What counts for architectural evidence? Does pulp, paper, pulp fiction count? Our identification with Plath's house by such a tenuous sensibility, through the mass of biographical papers in the English Heritage archives, interestingly stirs up the wobbly foundation of the architectural – what constitutes it, how it forms, when it takes place and who creates it.

A newly-cut sheet: 3 Chalcot Square

Number 3 Chalcot Square is one of thirty-odd mid nineteenth-century houses in the square listed by English Heritage for their "group value" of being relatively well preserved. With their neatness and familiarity, they resemble dolls' houses and suggest a wholesome interior containing "all those other mothers headless at their cooking."[26] Number 3 is a three-storey town house with basement and dormers, fronted by three large architraved sash windows on the first and second floors. Smartly painted, it boasts a continuous first-floor cornice with centrally bracketed pediment and a Doric prostyle portico. On the rusticated stucco ground-floor bay, next to a three-light window, there is Plath's blue plaque.

Escaping the fixity of the American super ego with its "bell jar" environment, Plath and Hughes moved to London and took a three-year lease for six guineas a week. The flat came unfurnished with a small bedroom, a kitchen, a living room, and a bathroom. Its cramped interior was compensated by its ready access to a nourishing environment for both writers, being physically close to publishing circles, Soho, and the BBC. Still, Primrose Hill defied this urbanity with its village setting which, for Plath, was an ideal place to start a family – nearby were Regent's Park, her doctors, the laundromat, shops, and, overlooking Chalcot Square, a quiet green with fence and benches where mothers and children spent idyllic days. But even while she wrote that she never wanted to move from the square's gentle familiarity, Plath claimed, "I must say that I am not very genteel and I feel that gentility has a stranglehold: the neatness, the wonderful tidiness, which is so evident everywhere in England is perhaps more dangerous than it would appear on the surface."[27]

Despite being fully pregnant, Plath conformed to the need to housekeep; scrubbing and painting her new flat as meticulously as she committed herself to writing. She immersed herself in "schemes for papering, painting and furnishing her London flat in preparation for the birth of her first baby."[28] To her mother, Plath sent sketches she made of her new flat's floorplan, together with ink-labeled samples of wallpaper for her bedroom (white paper with red and pink roses, and buds and mossy green leaves), and kitchen (cheerfully printed with "old-fashioned bicycles, carriages, carts, passenger balloons, early automobiles, lamp-posts and table lamps").[29] While she dreaded being a drudge, "refrigerators and wallpaper were of great importance. Domestic arrangements took up a great deal of space in her writing, as they did in her life."[30] She took seriously to cooking *apfelkuchen* and chicken stew in her tiny shining kitchen and aspired to be the perfect hostess. As much as she was critical of them, Plath indulged in the recommended domestic practices of her day, diligently detailed by women's magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal*.[31]

At the same time, she challenged the fixed domestic spaces and routines dictated by the architectural layout of their tiny flat. She and Hughes rearranged the flat to create separate areas in which both of them could write. Hughes worked, at first, in a small vestibule in their hallway on a borrowed card table while Plath used the sitting room. Later, they took turns to work in a borrowed study at St George's Terrace in writer W.S. Merwin's house, down the road from their Chalcot Square flat (Plath using the study in the morning and Hughes in the afternoon) and also in the sitting room of their own flat. They devised a timetable when, once a week, each of them would have the luxury of a sleep-in, giving them space to write unencumbered by household chores. Despite the shortage of space and money, Plath invested in the comforts of an American-style refrigerator and a reconditioned stove to counteract what she

perceived as the unacceptable drabness of old-fashioned English kitchens. They also indulged in a bed that was too large for their modest bedroom. The amicable village setting of Primrose Hill had encouraged a steady influx of visitors, but after a period of entertaining, Plath wrote to her mother that she was really going to "put my foot down to visitors now. I get tired easily and like the house to myself so I can cook, read, write or rest as I please . . ."[32]

Her journals, letters and biographies reveal Plath's ambiguous response to the wallpaper-perfection of her flat at Chalcot Square. She delighted in housekeeping and decorating, but simultaneously challenged the constraints this domestic space imposed on her ambitions as an aspiring writer. In changing the spatial and temporal order of her cramped flat by inventive use of its spaces and subversion of household routines, Plath was in fact, questioning where the housewife–mother–writer might be positioned. Her insistence on managing wallpaper and writing paper on equal terms, contested boundaries of inside-outside, housework and professional work. Therefore, the blue plaque at Chalcot Square simultaneously celebrates Plath's occupancy, and points to her ambiguous and composite position in this house.

Back talking: 23 Fitzroy Road

Five minutes away from 3 Chalcot Square is Plath's second and final London home. Number 23 Fitzroy Road is another late nineteenth-century, flat-fronted, three-storey terrace house with basement (Figure 10.2). The house is unlisted. Its rusticated stucco ground floor is topped by two stories of brown brick-faced façade, each floor with two architraved sash windows. Plath occupied a three-bedroom maisonette flat on the top two floors from December 1962 to February 1963, surviving what she called a "snow blitz,"[33] one of the coldest winters in England's history. Unlike Chalcot Square, this house does not have a forecourt and opens directly to the street. The front door is reached by climbing several steps up from the pavement. Apart from another blue plaque placed prominently between a three-light ground-floor window and the front door, the house does not look extraordinary. But Plath found it special when she was looking for a flat to begin afresh in London in late 1962. "By absolute fluke I walked by the street and the house . . . where I've always wanted to live . . . And guess what, it is *W.B. Yeats' house* – with a blue plaque over the door, saying he lived there!"[34]

William Butler Yeats 1865–1939
Irish Poet and Dramatist
Lived here

Plath considered her find of Yeats' Fitzroy Road house a good omen. "Back in Devon, jubilant, full of plans, she consulted Yeats' *Collected*

Plays, hoping for a message from the great poet. Sure enough, when she opened the book at random her finger fell on the passage, 'Get wine and food to give you strength and courage, and I will get the house ready' in *The Unicorn from the Stars*."[35] The architectural significance of this house was performatively constructed by the single announcement that Yeats had lived there.[36] As Plath attested, "I covet it (the flat) beyond belief, with that blue plaque!"[37] After moving in, she wrote her mother saying she felt "Yeats' spirit blessing me."[38] It was habitual for Plath to engage in spiritual beliefs and her use of the Ouija board was not uncommon. Despite the respectable propriety of this terrace house in a middle-class neighborhood, Plath had perhaps linked the announcement of Yeats' occupancy with his legendary delvings into the

10.2
23 Fitzroy Road, Primrose Hill, London

occult – Yeats was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in another London flat around 1890. Primrose Hill had also gained an uncanny reputation as a gathering site for summer solstice celebrations. This ambiguity must have intrigued Plath who longed for some form of normalcy in domestic order – she continued to plan detailed menus for daily meals that she herself rarely had appetite for when she moved into Yeats' house – but simultaneously sought to subvert this order.

In "In Yeats' House: The Death and Resurrection of Sylvia Plath," Sandra M. Gilbert observes that this house held symbolic value for Plath.[39] The plaque marked her entry into the premises of a male poet who, "among the male modernists, had the most reverence for female power."[40] "By dwelling on Yeats' writing, then, literally dwelling in his house,"[41] this passage symbolically marked Plath's entry into a male-dominated poetic tradition. It also opened the possibility of putting the domestic on equal footing with the professional. Yeats' blue plaque performatively changed the status of an ordinary flat-fronted terrace house into a poetic institution for Plath who had overread the history of the house as a palimpsest of Yeats' past and her own future. If the unmarked 3 Chalcot Square offered a new beginning, 23 Fitzroy Road's performative markings acted, physically and psychically, as a symbolic matrix for "back talking," provoking Plath's imaginative dialog with the house's past occupant.

Plath continued to desire and subvert domestic orders. As a single mother, she worked against the stranglehold of domestic chores, squeezing her writing into hours before the day began, ". . . these new poems of mine have one thing in common. They were written at about four in the morning – that still, blue, almost eternal hour before cock crow, before the baby's cry, before the glassy music of the milkman, settling his bottles."[42] Both literary critic Al Alvarez and Plath's friend Clarissa Roche described her new flat as sparsely furnished but meticulously organized. Her fascination with the "village"[43] life of Primrose Hill and wanting to blend in with the picture-perfect houses rivaled with her ambition to establish herself as a poetess. "Shall I write a poem, shall I paint a floor, shall I hug a baby? Everything is such fun, such an adventure, and if I feel this way now, with everything bare and to be painted and curtains to be made, etc., what will I feel when I get the flat as I dream it to be."[44] She sewed her own curtains at the same time as she struggled to mind her children and produce new work for publishers. The symbolic significance of Yeats' blue plaque perhaps made "the world inside the apartment" protective, not unlike "a world inside a balloon" giving Plath an "estrangement from the world . . . seen as positive . . ."[45] since in its formal sense, 23 Fitzroy Road was no more than another terrace house along the street, susceptible to the same anxieties of gentility experienced by many families living in the same neighborhood.

The 1960s' reputation as the "Golden Age of the Family" was, as writer Amanda Craig describes, paradoxical since it was a depressive time for women living in Primrose Hill.[46] Many had to give up their own pursuits to devote themselves full-time to the demanding role of housewife–mother. The pretty houses in Chalcot Crescent belied the way "some families were being eaten away by irresistible underground forces," and "what was fatal was the possibility of perfection that Primrose Hill seems to offer. . . . the very thing that made us feel so safe was what was killing them."[47] But Plath had found an escape outlet when she moved into the sanctuary of Yeats' house. Yeats' blue plaque transformed 23 Fitzroy Road into a potentially liberating space for Plath to reinvent herself. After her death, the façade of Yeats' house took on another layer of significance. The façades of both her houses have become indices to episodes of Plath's life and work. Like the way Plath read the surface of Yeats' house in relation to his life and work, we are compelled to do the same with the surfaces of her houses through her blue plaque.

The blank sheet: voices of the silent occupant

"The scholars want the anatomy of the birth of poetry," Hughes remarked, "and the vast potential audience want her blood, hair, touch, smell, and a front seat in the kitchen where she died."[48] It is possibly this sentiment that sparked the dispute over the appropriate site of Plath's blue plaque. Many felt it should have been installed at the building where she died, in Yeats' house.[49] Plath's daughter, Frieda, wrote that her mother's marker should be at 3 Chalcot Square "to show she was worth more than the sum of her death."[50] "Just as silence contains all potential sound and white contains all colour,"[51] perhaps it is at this silent architectural site that Plath might actually be heard. Standing outside the calm green space facing 3 Chalcot Square, I get a sense that the contentious site of Plath's blue plaque gives us a fuller picture of her relationship to domesticity. Its present position does not foreclose our understanding of her life or her domestic experiences by pointing exclusively to her tragic end. The plaque at Chalcot Square mimics "the centre of Sylvia Plath's art . . . a tension between words and wordlessness, stasis and movement, entrapment and potentiality,"[52] thereby remaining ambiguous and plural in its implications.

Contrary to the plaque's 20-word limitation, there is an excessive quality about an architecture constructed through its presence. It does not merely celebrate what is there, but points to what has escaped, is absent, unmarked, or unsaid. As a metonymical device, it indicates things and spaces outside of itself. Plath's Chalcot Square plaque gestures to her unmarked flat at Fitzroy Road, to the places around Primrose Hill that inspired her poetry, to her position as a "triple-threat" woman in the 1950s, and to the anxieties associated with domesticity and gentility in her time. It forces a palimpsestic

10.3
"Sylvia Plath lived here"

reading of architecture that goes beyond the house's physical form, but simultaneously relies on the physicality of the house for telling its stories. The plaque's performative construction of place – "Sylvia Plath lived here" – subverts the temporal ordering of architecture by weaving a late nineteenth-century terrace house with a mid twentieth-century domestic life (Figure 10.3). Through the plaque, each passer-by is given a glimpse of Plath's domestic interior through the psychical interior of her life and art. This alternative passage is embodied, labyrinthine, excessive, and critical. It is also an intimate passage where the architectural object of the house is hopelessly entangled with the biographical subject of the occupant.

Notes

The author thanks Jane Rendell and Barbara Penner for their incisive suggestions in developing this paper, and Emily Cole for her hospitality at the Blue Plaque archives.

1 A. Plath (ed.) *Letters Home, by Sylvia Plath: Correspondence 1950–1963*, London and Boston, MA: Faber & Faber, 1989, p. 235. Letter to Aurelia Plath, April 21, 1956.

2 E. Cole, *Blue Plaques: A Guide to the Scheme*, London: English Heritage Publications, 2002, p.2. This publication presents the most comprehensive material on the scheme and its history. It includes a section on the design, manufacture and placement of the plaques. A formal selection criteria was established in 1954. To be eligible for a plaque, the nominee must have been dead for 20 years or have passed the centenary of their birth. They must "have made an important positive contribution to human welfare or happiness." Cole, *Blue Plaques*, p. 9.

3 Numbers inferred from English Heritage *Blue Plaques in London 2002* published as a supplement to Cole, *Blue Plaques*. It lists plaques installed between 1867 and 2002 in London.

4 S.R. Van Dyne, *Revising Life: Sylvia Plath's Ariel Poems*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 2.

5 J. Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, London: Virago, 1991, p. 17.

6 J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 43. Kristeva posits that all language acts – e.g. writing, making, drawing – are controlled by two terms, "the symbolic" and "the semiotic." The symbolic is structured by conscious familial and societal norms while the semiotic comprises of unconscious drives, impulses, and desires. In stating "the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic," Kristeva gives the possibility of meaningfully accounting for ways of understanding, speaking and representing that lie outside the remit of existing communicative frameworks. Pertinently, in pursuing an intimate architectural method, feminine writing does not force a split between the self and the site.

7 H. Cixous and C. Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, p. 72 (emphasis mine).

8 A. Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations of the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," in *Feminist Studies*, Spring 1980, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 12. Paraphrased by N.K. Miller, "Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic," in N.K. Miller (ed.), *The Poetics of Gender*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 274.

9 Miller, "Arachnologies," p. 273.

10 Ibid., p. 288.

11 Ibid.

12 M. Frascari, "The Tell-The-Tale Detail" in *VIA*, 1984, no. 7, p. 36. Cited by C. Cardinal-Pett, "Detailing," in D. McCorquodale, K. Ruedi, and S. Wigglesworth (eds), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary*, London: Black Dog Publishing 1996, p. 90.

13 N. Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, London and New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 7.

14 Plath, *Letters Home*, p. 477. Letter to Aurelia Plath, November 7, 1962.

15 For Plath's fascination with paper, see P.J. Annas, *A Disturbance in Mirrors: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1988, pp. 111–113, L.K. Bundtzen, *The Other Ariel*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001, pp. 6–36, Van Dyne, *Revising Life*, pp. 7–10, S. Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in E. Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Differences*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 86–87.

16 T. Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001, p. 7.

17 Ibid., p. 8.

18 S. Plath, "The Munich Mannequins," in T. Hughes (ed.), *Collected Poems*, London: Faber & Faber, 1989, p. 262.

19 Lesley Johnson, "As Housewives We Are Worms," *Cultural Studies*, 1996, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 451–453. Cited by D. Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 62.

20 See B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1965.

21 L. Ames, "Notes Towards a Biography," in Charles Newman (ed.), *The Art of Sylvia Plath*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970, p. 166.

22 This is the title of Jeannine Dobb's 1977 article. Dobson concludes her piece provocatively, asking if Plath "chose paths that would lead her deeper and deeper into a domestic labyrinth because she needed those subjects and those experiences and the emotions they stimulated in order to create her best work." J. Dobbs, "'Viciousness in the Kitchen': Sylvia Plath's Domestic Poetry," in *Modern Language Studies*, 1977, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 11–25.

23 All information on the blue plaque files courtesy of English Heritage, Savile Row, London.

24 Plath's name was suggested for a plaque as early as 1984, but her case was put into abeyance pending consideration in 1988 "to allow time for an assessment of her lasting importance as a poet." In 1989, academic Ruth Richardson wrote passionately to the *Times*

Literary Supplement (May 12, 1989), calling for the public to support Plath's commemorative plaque. In Plath's blue plaque file, a total of 25 senior academics were recorded to have responded to Richardson's plea.

25 C.S Nicholls (ed.), *The Dictionary of National Biography: Missing Persons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 527.

26 K. Moses, *Wintering*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003, p. 107.

27 P. Orr (ed.), *The Poet Speaks: Interviews with Contemporary Poets*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, p.168. Interview with Sylvia Plath conducted on October 30, 1962.

28 Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*, p. 58. Brain refers to the letters between Plath and her mother archived in the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. 59.

31 "I shall have fulfilled a very long-time ambition if a story of mine ever makes the LHJ." Plath, *Letters Home*, p. 433. Letter to Aurelia Plath, October 22, 1961. For Plath's relationship with the *Ladies' Home Journal*, see L. Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures*, London: Prentice Hall, 1997, pp. 106–107, and Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, pp. 175–179.

32 Plath, *Letters Home*, p. 368. Letter to Aurelia Plath, March 3, 1960.

33 S. Plath, "Snow Blitz" (1963), in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, London: Faber & Faber, *c.* 1979, pp. 125–133.

34 Plath, *Letters Home*, pp. 477–478. Letter to Aurelia Plath, 7 November 1962 (emphasis in original).

35 A. Stevenson, *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath*, London: Penguin Books, 1998, p. 275.

36 In actuality, Yeats had only stayed in that house for a few years as a young boy between the ages of two and eight years.

37 Stevenson, *Bitter Fame*, p. 275. Plath apparently wrote this to Ruth Fainlight on November 20, 1962.

38 Plath, *Letters Home*, p. 490. Letter to Aurelia Plath, December 14, 1962.

39 S.M. Gilbert, "In Yeats' House: The Death and Resurrection of Sylvia Plath," in L.W. Wagner (ed.), *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath*, Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1984, pp. 204–222.

40 Ibid., p. 219.

41 Ibid.

42 Notes typed by Plath on "New Poems." Cited by Bundtzen, *The Other Ariel*, p. 10.

43 Plath referred to Primrose Hill as her favorite neighborhood and that it was "like a village" in a letter to her friend Dotty on December 14, 1962, shortly after she had moved into Yeats' house. Another letter written to her mother on the same day again speaks of the warm atmosphere of her neighborhood and the pleasure of so many faces remembering her that she felt as though she was "coming home to a small, loving village." Plath, *Letters Home*, pp. 486, 488.

44 Ibid, p. 488. Letter to Aurelia Plath, December 14, 1962.

45 Annas, *A Disturbance in Mirrors*, p. 117.

46 A. Craig, "Sylvia Plath wasn't the only suicide in Primrose Hill," in The *Sunday Times*, July 30, 2000, p. 6.

47 Ibid.

48 Ted Hughes, *The Observer*, November 21, 1971.

49 A. O'Connell, "Plath's blue plaque angers her friends," in *The Times*, July 29, 2000, p. 8.

50 F. Hughes, "A Matter of Life and Death," in *The Times Magazine*, September 30, 2000, p. 21.

51 Gubar, "The Blank Page," p. 89.

52 Annas, *A Disturbance in Mirrors*, p. 73.