

# 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.  
Strapid 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  
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine  
Shouting their mouths on it, like a Communion rite.  
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.

*The Letters of Sylvia Plath Volume II: 1956-1963*  
Edited by Peter R. Stebbins and Karen V. Kukil

*The Letters of Sylvia Plath Volume I: 1940-1956*  
Edited by Peter R. Stebbins and Karen V. Kukil

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.



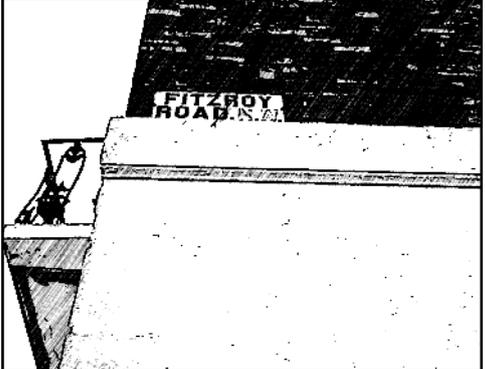
October	Writes twenty-five poems; records 'Beach' and fifteen poems for British Council Room.
November	Rents flat at 23 Fitzroy Road, London, residence of W. B. Yeats.
10 December	Moves with Frieda and Nicholas into Fitzroy Road.
1963	
January	Dubbed the 'Big Freeze of 1963', London's coldest winter 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 pseudonym 'Sylvia Plath'.

(name), Smith College  
23 Fitzroy Road  
London N.W.1  
February 4, 1963  
I got an au pair and can't get an unfurnished

10 Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse Bouscher  
Mon: 4 February 1963  
T.L.S. (repro)  
Dear Dr. Bouscher,  
I write from London where I have found a flat for about 6 months for about a year. I thought

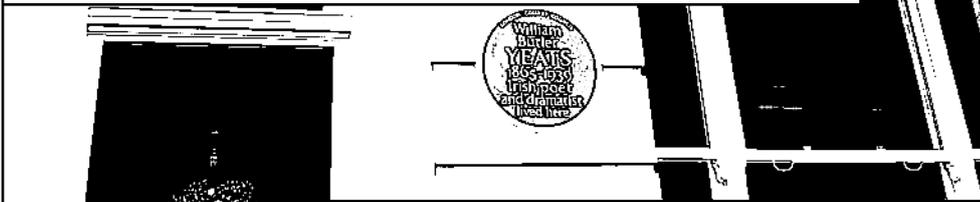
So I decided to take a walk and take a look at her last address. Pay my respects.

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?



23 Fitzroy Road. 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 known W.B. Yeats had lived there. A passerby learns this from the blue plaque by the door. There is no mention, no trace of Sylvia. 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'.

