

# 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 it, like a Communion table.  
Shouting 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 thin  
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. Stead and Karen V. Kukil

*The Letters of Sylvia Plath Volume I: 1940-1956*  
Edited by Peter R. Stead 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 'Beetle' and fifteen poems for British Council Room.
November	Rents flat at 23 Fitzroy Road, London, for residence of W. B. Yeats.
10 December	Moves with Frieda and Nicholas into Fitzroy Road.
1963	
January	Dubbed the 'Big Freeze of 1963', London experiences its 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

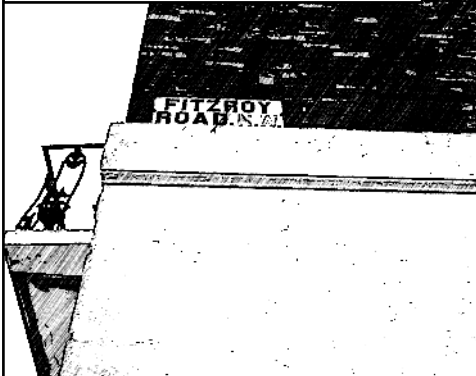
23 Fitzroy Road  
London N.W.1  
February 4, 1963

& an au pair and can  
not get an unfurnished

10 Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse Bouscher  
Monday 4 February 1963<sup>1</sup> TJS (aerogram)

Dear Dr. Bouscher,  
I write from London where I have found a flat  
for about £100 a month for a year. I thought

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



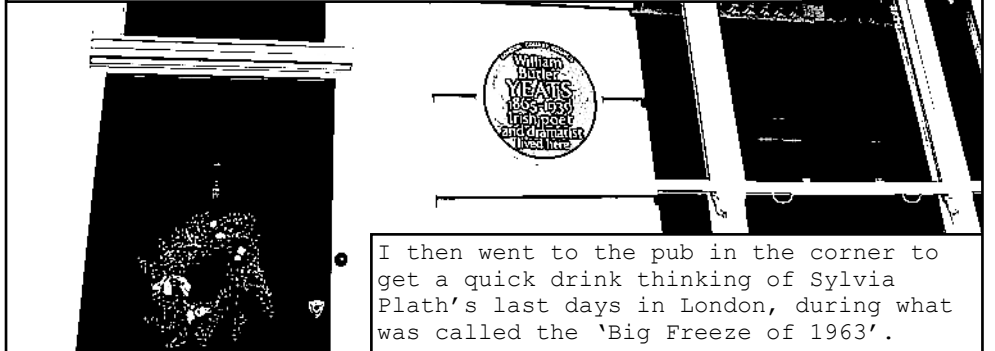
Fitzroy Road, London NW1. It was a cold day.  
The sky was concrete grey, almost white.  
It did feel ghostly. What's in an address?  
What is there where it is no more?



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'.