Interest in Sylvia Plath continues to grow, as does the mythic status of her relationship with Ted Hughes, but Plath is a poet of enduring power in her own right. This book explores the many layers of her often unreliable and complex representations and the difficult relationship between the reader and her texts. The volume evaluates the historical, familial and cultural sources that Plath drew upon for material: from family photographs, letters and personal history to contemporary literary and cinematic Holocaust texts. It examines Plath’s creative processes: what she does with materials ranging from Romantic paintings to women’s magazine fiction, how she transforms these in multiple drafts, and the tools she uses to do this, including her use of colour. Finally, the book investigates specific instances when Plath herself becomes the subject matter for other artists, writers, film-makers and biographers.

Sally Bayley is Teaching and Research Fellow at The Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford. She is co-editor of Eye Rhymes: Sylvia Plath and the Art of the Visual (2007) and author of Home on the Horizon: America’s Search for Space, From Emily Dickinson to Bob Dylan (2010).

REPRESENTING SYLVIA PLATH

EDITED BY
SALLY BAYLEY
AND
TRACY BRAIN
Contents

List of illustrations vii
Notes on contributors viii
Acknowledgements xii
Abbreviations xiv

Introduction: ‘Purdah’ and the enigma of representation
Sally Bayley and Tracy Brain 1

Part I: Contexts
1 ‘Mailed into space’: on Sylvia Plath’s letters
Jonathan Ellis 13
2 ‘The photographic chamber of the eye’: Plath, photography and the post-confessional muse
Anita Helle 32
3 ‘O the tangles of that old bed’: fantasies of incest and the ‘Daddy’ narrative in Ariel
Lynda K. Bundizen 54
4 Plath and torture: cultural contexts for Plath’s imagery of the Holocaust
Steven Gould Axelrod 67

Part II: Poetics and Composition
5 ‘The trees of the mind are black, the light is blue’: sublime encounters in Sylvia Plath’s ‘tree poems’
Sally Bayley 91
## Contents

vi  
### Part I: Plath's Language  

6 Coming to terms with colour: Plath’s visual aesthetic  

Laure de Nervaux-Gavoty

7 'Madonna (of the Refrigerator)': mapping Sylvia Plath’s double in ‘The Babysitters’ drafts  

Kathleen Connors

8 'Procrustean identity': Sylvia Plath’s women’s magazine fiction  

Luke Ferretter

### Part II: Repetition

9 Confession, contrition and concealment: evoking Plath in Ted Hughes’s Howls & Whispers  

Lynda K. Bundtzen

10 Fictionalizing Sylvia Plath  

Tracy Brain

11 Primary representations: three artists respond to Sylvia Plath  

Suzie Hanna

Bodily imprints: a choreographic response to Sylvia Plath’s ‘poppy poems’  

Kate Platt (with Sally Bayley)

Stella Vine’s peanut-crunching Plath  

Sally Bayley

### Bibliography

235

### Index

244
Illustrations

1. Otto Plath as Pedagogue, c.193
   Reproduced by kind permission of Susan Plath Winston
   on behalf of the Estate of Aurelia S. Plath. Copyright the
   Estate of Aurelia S. Plath.  page 40

   STILLs BY SUZIE HANNA FROM
   THE GIRL WHO WOULD BE GOD (2007)

   2. ‘Autumn Leaves with House’  204
   3. ‘Typing’  204
   4. ‘Blue Dress’  206
   5. ‘Toy Theatre’  207
   6. ‘Castle Tightrope’  208
   7. ‘Two Blue Birds’  209
   8. ‘Colour Script for The Girl Who Would Be God’  210
   9. ‘Princess’  211

IMAGES BY OLIVER LAMFORD

10–18. Dancer Natalia Thorn in Dance to Poppy Poems  216–222

PAINTINGS BY STELLA VINE

19. ted and sylvia (2004)  225
20. sylvia cooker (2005)  226
Notes on contributors

STEVEN GOULD AXELROD is Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside. He is author of Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Care of Words (1993). His areas of interest include American literature and American poetry. He has written on Robert Lowell and Wallace Stevens, and is co-editor of The New Anthology of American Poetry, vol. 2, Modernisms, 1900–1950 (2002). He is currently researching a book-length study of Cold War poetry.

SALLY BAYLEY is Lecturer in English at Balliol College, Oxford. She was co-director of the Sylvia Plath Symposium, a four-day international conference that took place at Oxford University in October 2007. She is co-editor of two collections of essays: Eye Rhymes: Sylvia Plath and the Art of the Visual (2007) and From Self to Shelf: The Artist Under Construction, a book of interdisciplinary essays on artistic self-representation (2005). Dr Bayley is author of numerous articles on Plath and the Cold War, D. H. Lawrence, Stevie Smith and Tracey Emin. She has recently completed an interdisciplinary study of American space, Home on the Horizon: America’s Search for Space, from Emily Dickinson to Bob Dylan (2010). Dr Bayley is also a memoirist and poet.

Notes on contributors

LYNDA K. BUNDTZEN is Herbert H. Lehman Professor of English at Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Her areas of interest include film, contemporary American women poets and feminist theory. She is the author of several critical volumes, including Plath's Incarnations: Women and the Creative Process (1983) and The Other Ariel (2001). Her essays for academic journals include 'Mourning Eurydice: Ted Hughes as Orpheus in Birthday Letters' (2003).

KATHLEEN CONNORS was director of The Art of Sylvia Plath, the 2002 international symposium at Indiana University to mark what would have been Plath’s seventieth birthday. In 2007, she was co-director of The Sylvia Plath 75th Year Symposium at Oxford University. Connors is co-editor of Eye Rhymes: Sylvia Plath's Art of the Visual (2007). An authority on the Plath archive at the Lilly Library, Connors is the author of 'Living Color: The Interactive Arts of Sylvia Plath'. This major study of the archival sources of Plath’s visual art forms half of the text of Eye Rhymes. Connors is also the author of 'Visual Art in the Life of Sylvia Plath: Mining Riches in the Lilly and Smith Archives', in Anita Helle’s The Unraveling Archive (2007). As Visiting Scholar in Indiana University’s Department of English, Connors curates exhibitions and produces educational programmes with a focus on multidisciplinary arts, youth initiatives and Asian culture.

JONATHAN ELLIS is Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Sheffield. He is author of Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop (2006) and has also written on contemporary cinema. His current project focuses on the art and practice of letter-writing in modern and contemporary culture.

LUKE FERRETTER is Assistant Professor of Twentieth-Century British and American Literature at Baylor University. He has published two books of critical theory and is currently working on a book on Sylvia Plath’s fiction for Edinburgh University Press. He has published several articles on critical theory and on twentieth-century literature, including essays on D. H. Lawrence, on Hanif Kureishi and on Sylvia Plath's relationship to feminist psychiatry. He is on the editorial board of Plath Profiles.

KATE FLATT won a 2007 Rayne Fellowship for Choreographers. She is one of the UK’s best-known choreographers, whose large-scale work includes opera and music theatre for the West End (Les Misérables, Fiddler on the Roof, Carmen and Dr Faustus). She studied at the Royal
Notes on contributors

Ballet School, London Contemporary Dance and on a Churchill Scholarship in Germany and Eastern Europe. She was assistant to Léonide Massine for productions in New York, London and Australia. She has choreographed four productions at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, including Turandot, and productions for the English National Opera, Glyndebourne, Opera North, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and Garsington. Flatt has also worked at the Châtelet and the Bastille in Paris, and in Orange. Film choreography includes The Avengers, Restoration and Chaplin. Her most recent work is Soul Play, a powerful piece of dance theatre for one actor and one dancer that explores the archetypal idea of ‘soul’ in a secular world. Soul Play is supported by Arts Council England, East and The Junction. Flatt is currently working on a piece about the embodiment of metaphor; here, she considers strategies for using script and metaphor in dance.

Suzie Hanna is Subject Leader in Animation and Course Leader for the Master of Arts in Animation and Sound Design at the Norwich School of Art and Design. Her work includes collaborations with composers, poets and dancers. Hanna is a regular contributor to literature festivals and conferences, and is a consultant for animation projects and productions. She also performs puppetry and is working on a book about animation and anthropomorphism.

Anita Helle is Chair of the Department of English at Oregon State University. Professor Helle has published on mid-century modernism, archival criticism, and material culture in journals such as American Literature, American Literary Scholarship annual and Feminist Review. Her essay ‘Lessons from the Archive: Sylvia Plath and the Politics of Memory’ was included in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader (2007). Professor Helle is editor of The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath (2007) and a member of the Editorial Board of Plath Profiles. She is currently working on a book-length collection of essays on photography and twentieth- and twenty-first-century authorship.

Laure de Nervaux-Gavoty is a former Fulbright Scholar. She is lecturer in English at the Université Paris-Est Créteil Val de Marne. Entitled ‘Writing Beyond Images: A Study of Sylvia Plath’ (‘Sylvia Plath: la traversée de l’image’), her PhD dissertation explored the representation of visual processes and the dialogue with the visual arts in Plath’s work. Dr de Nervaux-Gavoty has published several articles
Notes on contributors

on Plath in collections of essays in French as well as in English in the electronic journal E-rea (Revue électronique d’études sur le monde anglophone).

Stella Vine first came to prominence in 2004, when Charles Saatchi bought one of her images of Princess Diana and another of a dead heroin addict, ‘Rachel’, and displayed them in the Saatchi Gallery for his New Blood Show. Since then, Vine’s controversial paintings of iconic figures from our celebrity- and victim-loving culture have received constant attention in the press, with reviews and interviews in the Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Times, Independent and by the BBC. Vine is admired by Germaine Greer, who wrote the Preface for the catalogue that accompanied Vine’s first solo exhibition, Stella Vine: Paintings, at Modern Art, Oxford, in late 2007. Vine’s work appears in multiple forms and places, from high to low culture: from her major Oxford exhibition to a collection of tee-shirts for Top Shop that were print-screened with images from some of her paintings. Vine was curator of an exhibition of youth art at Tate Liverpool in 2006, and has given a talk at the Tate Modern on a 1943 painting by Balthus, ‘Sleeping Girl’. Vine’s paintings sell for thousands of pounds, but she also donates work, alongside other contemporary artists.
Acknowledgements

Dr Ray Ryan of Cambridge University Press gave this project his editorial support and belief very early on. We have been extremely fortunate in having his expert guidance and sound advice. We are very grateful to Bath Spa University’s Contemporary Writing Centre, and especially to Professor Tim Middleton, for funding the costs of the visual images that are integral to some of the pieces in Representing Sylvia Plath. Sally Bayley would like to thank the staff of Oxford University’s Rothermere American Institute – in particular, Nigel Bowles and Laura Harvey – for their kind and generous support in offering a quiet place in which to work. Tom MacFaul’s work on standardizing all of the references and on compiling the bibliography was of immeasurable help. His astute judgements and careful eyes were of immense benefit to the final version of the manuscript; he read this through in its entirety, delivering several important improvements. Richard Kerridge commented on our introduction, ‘Purdah and the Enigma of Representation’ as well as Tracy Brain’s piece, ‘Fictionalizing Sylvia Plath’. His careful responses are greatly appreciated. Tracy Brain is thankful to Imogen, Violet and Lily for so many reasons. Colin Edwards offered friendship and encouragement. Sally Bayley is grateful to Andrew Blades for the time he gave to discussing the musical implications of Beethoven’s ‘Grosse Fuge’ over tea at Browns. Kathleen Connors’ energy and vision were important to the earliest ideas of what this book might be. Like countless other Plath scholars, we thank Karen Kukil of Smith College’s Mortimer Rare Book Room for her superb archival knowledge and help. Stella Vine generously offered her paintings for reproduction at no cost, as did Suzie Hanna, who contributed stills from her animated film The Girl Who Would Be God. We are grateful to Oliver Lamford for his photographic contribution to Kate Flatt’s ‘Poppy Poems’ piece, and for his sensitivity and fidelity to the spirit of her work. We are grateful to Susan Plath Winston for giving permission on behalf of the Estate of Aurelia S. Plath to reproduce the photograph of Otto
Acknowledgements

Plath as Pedagogue, c.1930. Sally Bayley would like to thank Edward Kanterian and Tom MacFaul for their assistance in readying the images for production.

We would like to thank all of our contributors for their faith in this project. They gave Representing Sylvia Plath their valuable time and hard work before there was any guarantee of publication. Their adherence to tight deadlines and efficient handling of edits and citations have smoothed production at every stage. Without their commitment, this book would not exist. We are grateful to the two anonymous readers to whom Cambridge University Press sent our manuscript. Their detailed suggestions and knowledge made this a better book than it would otherwise have been.
Abbreviations


OED *Oxford English Dictionary*

PM Plath MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

SPC Sylvia Plath Collection (Poetry), Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College, Massachusetts