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Though it is difficult not to agree with Jeannine Dobbs that for Sylvia Plath "domesticity is an ultimate concern" (Dobbs, 11), the domestic spaces and objects in her poems seem to have a certain tendency to becoming de-domesticated, estranged or defamiliarized. Her poems with "domestic settings," Dobbs notes, "are usually her most ominous poems" and they transform the homely warmth to something unhomely and, as the title of Dobbs's essay ("Viciousness in the Kitchen": Sylvia Plath's Domestic Poetry") informs us, "vicious" (Dobbs, 21). Reading Plath from a different critical perspective, Lauren Zane looks at such transformations in the light of the formalist idea of defamiliarization. To Zane, Plath represents various domestic issues "not as simply confessions of her own problems in life, but as a means of defamiliarlizing the reader and the reader's conventional assumptions about the domestic" (Zane, 261). In her view, Plath agreed with Victor Shklovsky's idea of art and, by way of subverting "traditional connotations with familiar things" (261), helped "readers overcome false ideas drawn from the collective social connotations of domestic relationships" (265). This slightly didactic purpose clearly suggests that, for Zane, Plath was strongly critical of the routine of the everyday habitualization and automatization of domestic life. Automatization "impoverishes experience" and "eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and our fear of war," writes Zane quoting from Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" (Zane, 263, Shklovsky, 5), and suggests that what Plath performs in her writings is an attempt at recovering experience and imagination by way of rejecting "the 'poverty' of a life without 'moving, working, [and] making dreams'" (Zane, 262, Plath 1979, 272).

Such a stance seems to be at least debatable in the light of Plath's penchant for domestic equipment which she expressed in her *Journal* (January 20, 1959) when she and Ted Hughes decided to live in England: "We decided to live in England. I really want this. Ted will be his best there. I shall demand an icebox and a good dentist, but love it" (Plath 1987, 464). What she probably meant by "an icebox" was, as we shall see, an American size refrigerator which was difficult to be bought in England in the 1950s and which, alongside the American teeth, may be well treated as a nostalgic trace of longing for ideals of American home and everyday life figuring in various advertisements of domestic equipment. As Marsha Bryant notes in her insightful reading of commodity culture in Plath, the poet "reiterates and revises, coincides and collides with American advertising and its representations of domesticity" (Bryant 1975, 18). Writing to her mother from Cambridge in November 1956, Plath literally refers to American advertising and declares that she would transform her kitchen into "an ad out of *House and Garden* with Ted's help" (Plath 1975, 283), the declaration which Bryant finds to be "hardly the bohemian image we expect from someone seeking to become the female equivalent of W.B. Yeats" (Bryant, 18).

English fridges were, as we shall see, "diminutive" for Plath. She received an American size refrigerator only in 1960, having to live in domestic spaces which did not match the American ideal, and which she transformed into a home exactly through defamiliarization of that ideal and through domestication of something which might be called living in the cold. What I suggest below is a reading of the idea of coldness in her writings as enthused by a certain lack of technological control over temperature in England which, though discomforting, offers a possibility of a closer contact with the reality of living, a possibility of "wintering" which she explores not only in the poem carrying that title ("Wintering" 1962), but also in other texts alluding to feeling cold

both inside of domestic spaces and elsewhere. Though the demand of having an icebox seems to be quite mundane and unpoetic, Plath's poetic renditions of domestic spaces and places which I will discuss below make refrigerators and, more generally, coldness, an intriguing theme in her treatment of the idea of dwelling and of dwelling places – those left behind in America, and those in England to which she has never fully, as we shall see, accommodated herself.

'Being cold', treated as a cultural concept, is surrounded with negative connotations of bodily discomforts and emotional lack, and the invention of the refrigerator was also a culturally significant advancement which made cold easily useable and controllable. In the 1950s, 96 per cent of American homes already had a refrigerator (compared to 13 per cent in England), and the American ones were, now proverbially, big. The coming of the refrigerator made it possible and easy to have outside inside, the cold of winter within the warmth of the domestic hearth. Though the opposition of warmth and coldness is connotationally quite complex, it seems to be an inviting one from the perspective of the possible identification with one's milieu, of being at home – inside, by the fire – rather than outside, among the uncertainties of weather and out in the cold with which, at least in some climates, being outside is associated. The association of home with shelter, with the material form of home which offers a "roof over one's head," goes hand in hand with the perception of home as hearth which "connotes the warmth and cosiness which home provides to the body, causing one to relax in comfort and ensuring a welcoming and 'homely' atmosphere for others" (Somerville, 532). Adding to this the idea of home as origin, of home as roots, we may provisionally assume that what Peter Somerville categorises as "rooflessness" does not apply only to those who are deprived of places to live in, but also to something which may be called an ideology of homeliness defining what and who we are. Homes and roofs also provide us with roots, and associated with the idea of "rooflessness" is that of "rootlesness" (cf. Somerville, 532), of not belonging to a home – a family, a state, perhaps also a world – and thus of being deprived of one's beginnings, be it in paradise or elsewhere. The seemingly simple concept of "home" has even more senses than the ones mentioned above because these senses are themselves ambivalent and symbolically expandable. According to Somerville, *home*

> can be argued to have at least six or seven dimensions of meaning, identified by the 'key signifiers' of shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode and (possibly) paradise. Each of these signifiers can be explicated in terms of its wider symbolic meaning (its 'general connotation'), its evocation of a specific sense of security, and its characteristic mode of relating to oneself and to others. (532)

The dimensions of the meaning of coldness are also quite numerous, and being, or staying, outside is only one of them. Social interactions are frequently described in reference to temperature, and coldness may well be associated with social rejection or indifference, the association which according to Chen-Bo Zhong and Geoffrey J. Leonardelli is rooted in our early experience with caregivers in which "an infant being held closely by the caregiver experiences warmth, whereas distance from the caregiver induces coldness" (Zhong and Leonardelli, 838). Though the term "acclimatization" refers first of all to one's adjustment or adaptation to a new climate, it is easily expandable to adaptation

to places or situations, to social and political climates, sometimes being used as a synonym of acculturation and cultural assimilation. The coldness induced by distance from the "caregiver," perhaps from the mother, might also be an interesting aspect of Freud's having envisioned the beginning of culture in human taking control over fire, of finding some means to substitute for the motherly warmth in the homely hearth.

However, this positioning of home, and thus also of the homely, seems to be a little more complex from the topographical perspective which Georges Van Den Abbeele offers in his reading of the metaphorical transpositions of travel. In his view, what is constitutive of the existence of the idea of "home" is its loss, or at least a temporary deprival, because

> the positing of a point we can call home can only occur retroactively. The concept of home is needed (and in fact can only be thought) only *after* the home has already been left behind. In a strict sense, then, one has always already left home, since home can only exist as such at the price of being lost. (Abbeele, xix)

Writing about home, and thus about closeness and warmness, from a distance, from the position of being away from home is, from such a perspective, a model perspective of writing about home, one from which both the writer and the reader confront some more or less matching dilemmas. In other words, it is in fact rooflessness that enables a perspective on the images of a roof of one's own, also of a hearth of one's own, a perspective which seems to be quite relevant in interpreting Sylvia Plath's poetry.

Though Boston, Sylvia Plath's hometown, has a continental climate with relatively cold winters, feeling cold seems to be an important aspect of her inability to feel at home in Britain where, in 1955, she was to spend a year as a Fulbright scholar at Newnham College, Cambridge. Initially (October 1955) she is only struck by the fact that her room in Cambridge is "cool enough to keep butter and milk in." (Plath 1975, 187). This information is in fact an explanation for the fewness of refrigerators in England: "I can see why there are so few iceboxes here. Imagine, in the morning when I get up to wash in the bathroom, my breath hangs white in the air in frosty clouds!" (Plath 1975, 187). The cold she experiences becomes the subject of various rhetorical transformations in which her new English home figures as a space with which she cannot fully identify herself and from which warmth has evaporated. The English coldness is reflected not only in "the hedonistic delight … of cold pork pie" (cf. Brain, 55), but also in the zombie-like brilliance of Cambridge lecturers whose second-handedness is "tantamount to a kind of living death," as she wrote to her mother a months later, on 22 November 1955 (Plath 1975, 198). In February 1956 she seems to be beginning to accept the cold along with the English food not only "out of simple practicality" but also, as it seems, as something that could enable her a better understanding of English architecture: "I accept the cold, the perpetual shivering, the bad coffee and starchy food with *a stoic amusement* and walk through historic arches with familiarity and a certain regrettable ignorance about their background in time" (Plath 1975, 216, italics mine).

Coldness seems to be responsible for Plath's rendition of England as a strange, alienating space which she sometimes does treat with a stoic kind of amusement, though one which is as it were paired with a more fearful kind

of shivering. In "Leaving Early" (1960), a poem which Tracy Brain reads as a poem dramatizing alienation and debunking "the idea that anyone can naturally belong anywhere" (Brain, 65), England is shown as flooded with an abundance of ugly objects and overabundance of flowers, sometimes displayed in kitchy Toby jugs:

> The roses in the Toby jug
> Gave up the ghost last night. High time.
> Their yellow corsets were ready to split.
> You snored, and I heard the petals unlatch,
> Tapping and ticking like nervous fingers.
> You should have junked them before they died.
> Daybreak discovered the bureau lid
> Littered with Chinese hands. Now I'm stared at
> By chrysanthemums the size
> Of Holofernes' head, dipped in the same
> Magenta as this fubsy sofa. (Plath 1981, 145)

The ugly objects display the coldness of dead flowers which the snoring English do not care about and are comfortably living with the dead. The dead roses are accompanied by chrysanthemums which are, in turn, compared with Holofernes's severed head with which Judith saved the city of Bethulia. The co-presence of deadly flowers with the solid piece of furniture translate the interior into a space which harbingers death, thus rendering the English home as a sepulchre of sorts, a cold place which allusively reflects the coldness which cannot be really treated with a stoic kind of amusement.

The poem also seems to be alluding to D.H. Lawrence's (who for some time fascinated Plath, cf. Bayley 2008) short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums" where the smell of chrysanthemums is literally described as cold. The room in which the dead body of the family father is to be laid has no fireplace:

> The air was cold and dump, but she could not make fire, there was no fireplace. The candle-light glittered on the lustre-glasses, on the two vases that held some of the pink chrysanthemums, and on the dark mahogany. There was a cold, deathly smell of chrysanthemums in the room." (Lawrence, 193)

In "Leaving Early" the image is even heavier and denser. The flowers mix with the coldness of the smell and become a palpable kind of substance, a dense swamp which immobilises the body and makes the narrator breathless and speechless:

> Lady, what am I doing
> With a lung full of dust and a tongue of wood,
> Knee-deep in the cold swamped by flowers? (Plath 1981, 145)

This cold and dense atmosphere of the home is hardly a space which can leave one stoically unaffected, and the inability to speak which it evokes goes hand in hand with the experience of something unspeakable, with something alien to one's language and to the experience of the domestic as safe and secure.

This expression of the "unhomeliness" of the English home which is also, as Tracy Brain notes, a depiction of "the confusion of an American in England" (Brain: 65), brings in the question of the homely nature of language becoming confused. Plath's homely American English, though almost the same as the English English of her new home, becomes a confusing mixture of homely and unhomely, exactly as in Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* through which Tracy Brain reads the stoppage of communication in the poem: "Most pressingly, the speaker's feeling of what Freud describes as *unheimlich* … the opposite of what is familiar, is experienced through language itself, through an inability to communicate in the Lady's speech" (Brain, 65).

Plath's "tongue of wood" cannot communicate with the cold Englishness which surrounds her, the theme which she takes up reflecting on a walk with her daughter in Dartmoor ("New Year on Dartmoor" 1961):

This is newness: every little tawdry
Obstacle glass-wrapped and peculiar,
Glinting and clinking in a saint's falsetto. Only you
Don't know what to make of the sudden slippiness,
The blind, white, awful, inaccessible slant.
There's no getting up it by the words you know.
We have only come to look. You are too new
To want the world in a glass hat. (Plath 1981, 176)

Though coldness is not literally mentioned in the poem, the "glass-wrapped" surrounding resists translation into the words she knows, into a familiarity enabling some kind of identification. The land is slippery and slant, inhospitable and unfamiliar, the effect which is amplified by the choice of Dartmoor as the setting of the poem. Brain sees Dartmoor as "an unexpected piece of England" which is not "typically 'English' to non-English readers," in fact to tourists who would rather go to Bath or Stratford to see what Englishness is. Choosing Dartmoor, Plath "increases the sense of defamiliarisation" (Brain, 67), thus in a way ascribing to the landscape the formalist feature of literariness in which the communicative function of language goes, as it were, to the background. "The blind, white, awful, inaccessible slant" of the landscape is itself a poem which, perhaps as in Emily Dickinson, tells the truth "slant," gradually dazzling the daughter who accompanies her, though leaving that truth inaccessible to the words she knows.

The words one knows also appear in another "roofless" poem which Plath wrote after her visit to France in 1961. The poem's title, "Stars over the Dordogne," is distantly reminiscent of Kant's starry sky (whom Plath read at Smith College), and some allusive hints at a possible relationship between the nightly horizon above one's head and one's moral constitution are readable in it. The poem also brings the reader to a non-English space of rooflessness. Written away from both England and America, the poem offers a look into the night sky, though one marked by the use of words which destabilize the apparent universality of the vision. Though seemingly a description of stars "dropping thick as stones into the twiggy // Picket of trees" which are then "eaten immediately by the pines," the poem brings in a memory of some more domestic stars:

Where I am at home, only the sparsest stars
Arrive at twilight, and then after some effort.

> And they are wan, dulled by much travelling.
> The smaller and more timid never arrive at all
> But stay, sitting far out, in their own dust. (Plath 1981, 165)

On the French sky the stars are strange and unfamiliar with the exception of the English Plough which she recognizes with the American name of the Big Dipper:

> The Big Dipper is my only familiar.
> I miss Orion and Cassiopeia's Chair. Maybe they are
> Hanging shyly under the studded Horizon.
>
> […] Such a luxury of stars would embarrass me.
> The few I am used to are plain and durable;
> I think they would not wish for this dressy backcloth
> Or much company, or the mildness of the south.
>
> They are too puritan and solitary for that –
> When one of them falls it leaves a space,
> A sense of absence in its old shining place. (Plath 1981, 165)

The American stars seem to be fewer compared to "such a luxury of stars," and the few she is used to are simple and stable. They are also "too puritan" for the "dressy backcloth" displayed in front of her eyes. In the poem, as Tracy Brain notes, "the seemingly American speaker recoils against the supposedly American excess, instead identifying with the English sparseness" (68). Though the topography of the poem is somehow convoluted, Brain seems to have been slightly misled in her identification of the excess as American. The excessive richness may well be read as French (perhaps catholic) overdressing, and though America is "too puritan," it is not fully posited outside exactly because of the recognizable simplicity of the American Big Dipper. Brain rightly notices that while "'Stars over the Dordogne' focuses on the situation of the American as alien, it positions any British reader unacquainted with the term Big Dipper as outside, and any American who uses such a vocabulary as inside" (Brain: 68). The question of the position of Plath's home, however, slips from these considerations and Brain, in accordance with most Plath criticism, in fact says that it is undecideable and depends on the fluidity of "us" and "not us." The "us," she claims, may be either Anglo-American alliance which excludes France, or it may "leave England isolated, and pair France with America" following the historical pairing of American Revolution and French republicanism, including France's support during the War of Independence (68). Although the possibility of the "we" to include French-British alliance within its scope goes unnoticed in Brain's interpretation, such a possibility seems to be emerging at the end of the poem where in the French peach orchard the speaker finds some "chill" which reminds her of the second, perhaps English home:

> Unwarmed by the sweet air of this peach orchard.
> There is too much ease here; these stars treat me too well.
> … I shut my eyes
> And drink the small night chill like news of home. (Plath 1981, 165)

The chill, reminiscent of the coldness of the English home, seems to be a trait of a major concern with temperature which is strongly present in Plath's writings. The phrase "why am I cold" (Plath 1981, 176) posed as a question though without the question mark in "The Bee Meeting," may suggest that the "domesticated bee hive" (McFarland, 261) appearing in the poem is her coffin, especially in the context of her other "bee poems" ("The Arrival of the Bee Box", "Wintering" and "Stings") in which, as written in weeks preceding her death, she is also said to be foreshadowing it. "I am cold" of course might mean "I am dead," but such a straightforward association of coldness with death in the poem seems to be too obvious and too simple. (Ff. McFarland, 261–262). "Why am I cold," without the question mark, is preceded by the phrase "what have they accomplished," the "they" referring to the villagers hunting the queen bee, to the society at large, perhaps British, with which Plath does not identify and survives in it rather than lives. The mode of this survival is hinted at in the poem "Wintering" which in a complex way transforms the question "why am I cold" into a statement of fact by way of shifting coldness from the sensory domain of feeling cold, to coldness as the existential quality of being cold. In other words, the narrator does not feel cold, she *is* cold, in fact hibernated:

Tate and Lyle keeps them going,
The refined snow.
It is Tate and Lyle they live on, instead of flowers.
They take it. The cold sets in. (Plath 1981, 218)

Tate & Lyle is a British company which produces sugar-based food ingredients and, among others, animal foods. In this context, the pronoun "them" in "keeps them going" refers both to the society and to the wintering bees. Sugar, the "refined snow," comes in the cold time of winter, simultaneously allowing the bees to live through the winter, huddling around the queen in a semi-hibernated state[1]. It seems to be this state which, rather than death, whose figurations Plath explores in a number of her texts.
The theme of hibernation, interestingly, was also, somewhat unknowingly, taken up by Ted Hughes who compared in his *Birthday Letters* ("The Chipmunk") both America and Sylvia Plath to a chipmunk, perceiving them as "Alien to me as a window-model, // American, airport-hopping super product" (Quoted in Bassnett, 148). Concentrating on the mobility of chipmunks, Hughes seems to have forgotten that chipmunks hibernate in the winter. Some of them, like bees, winter, relying on the stores in their burrows. Perhaps living in England, where chipmunks do not live, Plath found some sort of hibernation to be a way of living and writing, an idea which she more explicitly expressed not from the position of a chipmunk or a bee, but that of a frog. In "Frog Autumn" the frog, who, in the name of the whole species, uses the pronoun "we," depicts the world in which shortness of food is accompanied by scarcity of expression:

Summer grows old, cold-blooded mother.
The insects are scant, skinny.
In these palustral homes we only
Croak and wither.

1 Honey bees do not fully hibernate in winter and busy themselves with keeping the nest warm and safe. "Winter is a time of semi-hibernation for honey bees. The whole colony huddles around the queen, who will generally stay deep in the middle of the hive. They try to stay as warm as possible, so they stay organized" (Bratman).

Mornings dissipate in somnolence.
The sun brightens tardily
Among the pithless reeds. Flies fail us. (Plath 1981, 99)

What may be thought of as a linkage of wintering, hibernation, and somnolence are inactivity and non-participation, a passiveness, or even stupor which also characterize hospital patients whose figures can be found in a number of Plath's poems along with hospital spaces. What she constructs is in a way an "uncanny" (unhomely) space of stuporous inactivity which is as it were metonymically glued to the English cold, and which she uses as an imaginary space of escape both from her English and her American homes. This space could be, very provisionally, called "hibernaculum," the provisionality of the use of the term resulting from the provisional and changing range of that space. Plath uses this term in "Electra on Azalea Path," a poem written on the occasion of a visit to her father's grave:

The day you died I went into the dirt,
Into the lightless hibernaculum
Where bees, striped black and gold, sleep out the
blizzard … (Plath 1981, 116)

In the above lines, the hibernaculum offers a space of escape from the memories of the father which haunted her throughout her life. Her father, as an entomologist, knew that honey bees do not hibernate in winter, and so probably did Sylvia Plath. And yet she posits the hibernaculum as a homely space away from the home of the father, an alternative shelter which strongly connotes a religious kind of adulation. Simultaneously going "into the dirt," Plath endows this space with the negativity of death and buries herself from the father's world of hailing Hitler "in the privacy of his home" (Plath 1987, 430),[2] but in fact withdraws to the coldness and lightlessness of the imaginary hibernaculum which lives its own bee-life in winter. The bees are not inactive or passive in the winter time, but cluster to keep themselves warm and create heat by shivering and moving between the inner and the outer part of the cluster so that the queen and the other bees in the hive do not freeze.[3] In "Wintering" Plath quite explicitly genders the life of bees bringing to mind Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and its vision of a world without fathers:

The bees are all women,
Maids and the long royal lady.
They have got rid of the men,
The blunt, clumsy stumblers, the boors. (Plath 1981, 219)

2 In the poem "Daddy": "I have always been scared of you,/ With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo./ And your neat mustache/ And your Aryan eye, bright blue./ Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You – / Not God but a swastika."

3 The worker bees create heat by shivering and they also move back and forth between the inner part of the cluster and the outer part . In this way no bee will freeze . On nice sunny winter days you can see honey bees flying a short distance out of the hive and then quickly returning. Sometimes if they go too far out or stay out too long they can get chilled and will not be able to fly back into the hive. It is too bad the bees have to leave the hive at all but they kind of have to, the object of these short flights is to eliminate body waste. (http://www.bees-online.com/Winter.htm)

The space of Plath's hibernaculum is evidently some figuration of the, however figurative, coldness of the English home which, through the image of semi-hibernating bees, she projects as a kind of dwelling which is closer to nature than the warmth of an American home which keeps coldness either outside, or within the usually white body of a refrigerator. Plath's already mentioned demand for a refrigerator may be read as an expression of a seemingly paradoxical wish of having home at home, of bringing America to England in the form of domestic equipment which would function as a reminder of the home left behind. This does not mean that she is unequivocally positive about America, and the home left behind may be a reminiscence of the glossy aesthetics of *House and Garden*. Though in one of her letters she despaired that she would be unable "to get the American size" refrigerator" (cf. Brain, 58), later, when she eventually received one, she wrote (2 February 1960): "My pride and joy arrives Thursday: a beautiful refrigerator." This aesthetic excitement, in the next line of the letter, gives way to the cooling function of English homes:

> Most of the fridges here are diminutive … a freezer just big enough for icecubes. Women here need a sales to buy one – most of them just use "cold-cupboards", the closest windowsill, or a closet! (quoted in Brain, 58).

Yet people do not freeze in the English homes, and this modest condition seems to be quite acceptable for Plath, the American refrigerator standing, perhaps quite ironically, for the American greatness. However odd the image of an American refrigerator in the English hibernaculum may seem, this technological improvement also seems to be an offer to somehow aid the English women, perhaps the "bees of England"[4] in their daily routine of wintering, though without transforming them into American Madonnas of the refrigerator. This last phrase is a reference to the title of the second draft of the poem "The Babysitters" (completed in 1961) in which her best friend, Marcia Brown, whom she had left on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, and herself from ten years before appear. The draft's title was "Madonna (of the Refrigerator)," and both Brown and Plath are "placed among 'glittering' white tools of domestic trade, household appliances linked to 'square white Alps'" (Connors, 81), an American refrigerator being one of them. What is thus brought, from a distance (both spatial and temporal), to the American home is Alpine snow, a coldness which she ascribes now to the American domestic equipment, thus estranging, or foreignizing, the space which used to be the space of her own.

4 "Bees of England" is a phrase which Percy Bysshe Shelly used in his revolutionary "A Song: 'Men of England'" to awaken the working class from the slumber and blindness to the exploitation by the "drones" of capitalist production: "Wherefore, Bees of England, forge // Many a weapon, chain, and scourge, // That these stingless drones may spoil // The forced produce of your toil?" (Shelley 1914: 568). Though he does not write about a hibernaculum in the poem, the poem's address to "Men" through the image of female worker "bees" seems to be quite telling.

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