

Sylvia Plath. *Ariel: The Restored Edition*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004. Pp. 240. \$27.95 cloth.

“Is my life so intriguing? / Is it for this you widen your eye-rings?”
 (“The Other”)

The 2004 edition of *Ariel* aspires to restore Sylvia Plath’s (in)famous and popularized posthumous work to its original arrangement. *Ariel: The Restored Edition* intends to address the ways in which Plath’s collection has been manipulated and reworked in earlier editions. The restored version of *Ariel* importantly offers readers access to typewritten facsimiles of the manuscript and the opportunity to participate in Plath’s creative process as they examine handwritten drafts of the title poem. The edition also includes a meticulous notes section by David Semanki that delineates the importance of Plath’s original word choice and punctuation as they differ from the *Collected Poems*, edited by her husband, Ted Hughes. Though the restoration of these poems is an important, even essential, endeavor that works to resituate Plath at the centre of her own text, the choice of Frieda Hughes—daughter of Plath and Ted Hughes—to author the foreword to this edition merely adds to an unfortunate publishing history that has placed an emphasis on *Ariel*’s biographical elements at the expense of the poetry itself. Frieda Hughes uses the foreword as the venue for an emotional defense of her ‘daddy,’ assuming an inappropriate authority over a text dedicated to her when she was a toddler. She fabricates Plath in the same manner as the commentators that she vehemently condemns. By inappropriately framing these poems in her forward, she denies Plath’s work the agency it so richly deserves. It is unfortunate that Plath’s work is once again framed by the words of a Hughes who manages to further manipulate and distort this collection.

Ted Hughes’s controversial arrangement of Plath’s posthumously published *Ariel* poems resulted in two different editions: the 1965 United Kingdom edition and the subsequent 1966 American edition. Hughes’s tampering with the text, many have argued, denied Plath’s collection the hopeful, transcendent progression from the initial word “love” in “Morning Song” to the concluding “taste of spring” in “Wintering,” the collection’s final poem (5, 90). His omission of poems such as “The Rabbit Catcher,” “The Jailor,” and “The Other” from *Ariel* is commonly judged to be an attempt to remove himself from negative scrutiny; this form of censorship continues to outrage many critics and readers. In the introduction to Plath’s 1981 *Collected Poems*, Hughes defends this manipulation of the earlier text:

The Ariel eventually published in 1965 was a somewhat different volume from the one Plath had planned. It incorporated most of the dozen or so poems she had gone on to write in 1963, though she herself, recognizing the different inspiration of these new pieces, regarded them as the beginnings of a third book. It omitted some of the more personally aggressive poems. . . . (15)

Hughes's admission of his distaste for what he calls the "personally aggressive" in Plath's work exposes his motive for tampering with the 1965 and 1966 editions of *Ariel* and suggests a possible impetus for his 1998 book *Birthday Letters* published shortly before his death.

In the case of the 2004 edition of Plath's *Ariel*, tampering comes in a more subtle, yet no less damaging, framework. Frieda Hughes ironically dispels her authority as a critic in the first paragraph of her foreword: "As [Plath's] daughter I can only approach [the restored edition of *Ariel*] and its divergence from the first [publications . . .] edited by my father, Ted Hughes, from the purely personal perspective of its history within my family" (xi). This "purely personal" perspective taints a reading of the newly reordered poems. Hughes uses the forward as a vehicle to defend her father and the Hughes family from the vilification they endure. Hughes's decision to address her father's affair with Assia Wevill (she is tellingly referring to as "the other woman") in the forward not only distracts from Plath's poetry but allows her to construct her mother as the aggressor in a domestic drama:

On work-connected visits to London in June 1962, my father began an affair with a woman who had incurred my mother's jealousy a month earlier. My mother, somehow learning of the affair, was enraged. In July her mother, Aurelia, came to stay at Court Green . . . Tensions increased between my parents . . . By early October, with encouragement from Aurelia (whose efforts I witnessed as a small child), my mother ordered my father out of the house. (xiii)

In this version of history, Plath, under the control of her mother—notably never referenced as Frieda's grandmother—alienates and victimizes Ted Hughes who, according to Frieda, was busily attempting a reconciliation with Plath while tending to the children. Frieda adjectives are telling, her father is "temperate" and "optimistic," a stark contrast to Plath who has a "ferocious temper" and a "jealous streak" (xiii).

In what can no longer be termed without irony as an introduction to her mother's masterwork, Hughes goes on to defend her father's original re-arrangement of the *Ariel* poems and his choice to protect those who were

“dismembered” by Plath’s words. She praises his desire to offer a “broader perspective in order to make it more acceptable to readers, rather than alienate them” (xvi). She describes her dismay at the “many cruel things” written about her father and at how critics, scholars and “strangers” have possessed her mother and have vilified her father:

It was as if the clay from her poetic energy was taken up and versions of my mother made out of it, invented to reflect only the inventors, as if they could possess my real, actual mother, now a woman who had ceased to resemble herself in those other minds. (xvii)

Hughes, however, participates in this fabrication of a woman she barely knew. Her foreword attempts to reshape the “clay” of Plath’s “poetic energy” in order that readers of this new edition might approach these poems from her own, biased point of view—a view she admits is passed on through the guidance of her father. Poems like “The Rabbit Catcher” and “The Jailor” may be included in this new edition, but they are now framed and distorted with Frieda Hughes’s infusion of herself in their presentation.

Frieda Hughes’s foreword ultimately deconstructs itself near its conclusion:

Since she died my mother has been dissected, analyzed, reinterpreted, reinvented, fictionalized, and in some cases completely fabricated. It comes down to this: Her own words describe her best, her ever changing moods defining the way she viewed her world and the manner in which she pinned down her subjects with a merciless eye. (xx)

Ironically, Hughes’s own failure to allow Plath’s *Ariel* poems to speak for themselves, to allow Plath’s words the freedom to signify as she intended, limits this edition and creates just another fictionalized version of Sylvia Plath. In a book whose jacket cover promises that Plath’s “legacy and vision can be reevaluated in light of her original draft,” Frieda Hughes ensures that this edition of *Ariel* is just another interpretation where Plath is reinvented anew. Admirers of Plath will be thankful for the reordered material, for the drafts and facsimiles, and will look forward to the moment when someone other than her husband or daughter pens an introduction that does not actively attempt to distract from her work.

Ariel: The Restored Edition, despite its privileging of Plath’s original order, and its attempts to restore the sanctity of Plath’s creative process, is framed by a manipulative voice that ultimately pleads with the reader to revise their opinions of the role Ted Hughes has played in censoring Plath’s work. His

control of Plath's voice, a voice increasingly controlled by her daughter, is illustrated nicely in Frieda's description of how thankful she was that her father allowed her to hear recordings of Plath when she reached the appropriate age. Though Plath's oeuvre is remarkable, her poetry possessing a unique force, her language conveying a violent momentum of revolutionary transgressions, it is often as if Plath, her work and any approach to it, is somehow stagnated. Any attempt to review this important reissue of *Ariel* seems, too, suspended; Frieda Hughes's foreword continues to place the reader yet another step outside any true appreciation of Plath's poetic genius.

Works Cited

Plath, Sylvia. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Ted Hughes. London: Faber, 1981.

Kara Kilfoil

Gabrielle Helms. *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003. Pp. x, 214. \$65 cloth.

One might claim for the study of national literatures today what Theodor Adorno claimed for philosophy in the mid-twentieth century: that while it "once seemed obsolete, [it] lives on because the moment to realize it was missed" (3). If, as the story now goes, the construction of national literatures from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries partook in teleological narratives of a reconciliation of the citizenry with each other and with the land itself, such that each would reflect and express the other in a mirroring dialectic, and relatedly, partook in narratives of a rise to self-consciousness of a essential underlying *national character*, then the realization of such unifying and essentializing nationalistic narratives has for a long time now been challenged and critiqued as variously impossible and undesirable. Yet somewhat paradoxically, far from consigning the study of national literatures to the dustbin of history, the fragmentation of these narratives has, over the last two decades or so, produced more of such study than ever.

Gabrielle Helms's *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels* is a recent contribution to the ongoing critique of what Helms takes to be the still hegemonic ideology of the Canadian nation. Canada has been widely regarded, in a phrase once quoted approvingly by Northrop Frye, as the "peaceable kingdom," a land of equality, moderation and sensible negotiation. Such a view, however, masks a history of violence,