Sylvia Plath

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Perhaps when we find ourselves wanting everything, it is because we are dangerously close to wanting nothing.

Sylvia Plath, one of the most well-known female poets of the 20th century, was born in Boston in 1932. Her father, a German immigrant and college professor, died while she was still quite young, in 1940, but his authoritarian manner left its mark and their troubled relationship found expression in her poetry.

Plath moved to England after college to study at Cambridge, where she met and married English poet Ted Hughes in 1956. The couple had two children before Hughes left Plath in 1962.

Her first collection of poems, Colossus, was published first in England in 1960, and later in the U.S. She was known as one the confessional poets, much of her work—notably dark and often violent—was autobiographical and considered by some critics to be self-indulgent. A semi-autobiographical novel, The Bell Jar, was published in 1963 and reflects on her experience in her late teens when in a severe depression she attempted suicide and was hospitalized.

Many of the poems in her best known collection, Ariel, were written in the months after Hughes left. Of the poems, Thomas McClanahan wrote that "the everyday incidents of living are transformed into the horrifying psychological experience of the poet." Joyce Carol Oates wrote that the poems "read as if they've been chiseled, with a find surgical instrument, out of arctic ice."

Ariel, as well as two other collections, was published after Plath's death by suicide in 1963. In 1982, she became the first poet to receive the Pulitzer prize posthumously for The Collected Poems.

Want to take your favorite poet to work for Take Your Poet to Work Day?
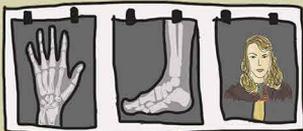
1. Color your poet
2. Cut out your poet along dotted lines
3. Attach a popsicle stick to the back of your poet with tape or glue
4. Take your poet to work as shown

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