

## Two Poems

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### Postscript to Sylvia

We were crossing the Alps,  
going south from Germany's  
wheat-colored fields into Italy's softer light,  
its low hills lined with scrub pines  
recalling the Cape you introduced to Ted,  
Eastham's burning sands, its wild surf.

Someone else was driving.  
It must have been '66  
for I was reading *Time's* review of *Ariel*,  
your cries from the brink—  
stark songs that in time  
lifted our own buried images.

You didn't know us, Sylvia.  
We entered Poetry's portal after you,  
sharing coffee and drafts of poems  
at kitchen tables, drafty classrooms.  
Books, too, some by those you knew.  
Lowell and Sexton were two.

Formalism instructed you.  
(Our teachers were its students  
before we fled its strictures.)  
The Academy's metrics: you borrowed them  
from the masters: Shakespeare, for one,  
*full fathom five thy father lies.*

Others, too, left their mark on you:  
Thomas and Roethke, surely Ted.  
You caught their sounds and rhythms.  
Soon life had you shouting to the gods  
in *your* style, *your* lyrics,  
intense and true.

Stars flame, recede: The Muse can be cruel.  
You grew out of fashion:  
Some mimicked you.  
Others scorned and mocked

though never equaled the best  
of your clear-as-a-bell lines.

If you could have lingered in time—  
fled with the children, found haven,  
stood your ground, for you were  
sicker than they knew, the mind's circuits,  
untended, flying off course,  
no one there to set them right,  
no one there but you.

## One Sunday in Haverhill

At the library podium, Mrs. Plath,  
thin in winter grays, lifts her eyes to us,  
her hands on *Letters Home*.

She'll read five or six, present  
her daughter's brighter side,  
dispel the negatives.

And as she reads, we hear Sylvia  
in a rush with life, its every note.  
*Dear Mother and Warren....*

But what we want—my friends and I—  
are clues to the poet's end—  
Could Mrs. Plath shed light?

She can not. There is only her need  
to soften images Sylvia carved  
in words that cut like knives.

In closing, the speaker takes questions.  
"But what of Sylvia's intent, in *Ariel*?"  
I think the last to question her asks.

"Weren't those final poems her truth?  
Art of desperation, abandonment?"  
Though pained, the speaker smiles,

descends the stairs to us, to be closer,  
to have our ear: "Yes," she argues,  
"but you must understand,

Sylvia was a wildly imaginative girl.  
As her verse: charged, drama-filled.  
Yet, as the letters show, loving, caring."

Dutiful, we could have added,  
for Sylvia knew the debt she owed  
would always be due, never forgiven.

"We want to thank you, Mrs. Plath,"  
the Presenter was saying—too soon it seemed—  
"for your insightful talk, here in Haverhill."

And then, yes, a friend beside me calls out  
(Did others hear it, I wonder?):  
"And for your presence, Mrs. Plath!"

Which, for us in that time—my friends and I—  
though we didn't know them personally—  
meant Sylvia's: her life and art.

Note: The poem was inspired by the memory of Aurelia Plath's appearance at the Haverhill Public Library in Haverhill, Massachusetts, on February 29, 1976, after the 1975 publication of *Letters Home*, a selection of Sylvia Plath's letters chosen and edited by Mrs. Plath.