

# Sylvia Plath

DADDY  
~~MYSTIC PRESENT~~  
~~THE FRODO BAGGINS~~  
 and other poems

by  
 Sylvia Plath

The Restored Edition

# Ariel

A Facsimile of Plath's Manuscript, Reinstating  
 Her Original Selection and Arrangement

THE RESTORED EDITION

*A facsimile of Plath's manuscript,  
reinstating her original selection  
and arrangement*

Sylvia Plath  
*Foreword by Frieda Hughes*

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*faber and faber*

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## Foreword

This edition of *Ariel* by my mother, Sylvia Plath, exactly follows the arrangement of her last manuscript as she left it. As her daughter I can only approach it, and its divergence from the first United Kingdom publication of *Ariel* in 1965 and subsequent United States publication in 1966, both edited by my father, Ted Hughes, from the purely personal perspective of its history within my family.

When she committed suicide on February 11, 1963, my mother left a black spring binder on her desk, containing a manuscript of forty poems. She probably last worked on the manuscript's arrangement in mid-November 1962. 'Death & Co.', written on the fourteenth of that month is the last poem to be included in her list of contents. She wrote an additional nineteen poems before her death, six of which she finished before our move to London from Devon on December 12, and a further thirteen in the last eight weeks of her life. These poems were left on her desk with the manuscript.

The first cleanly typed page of the manuscript gives the title of the collection as *Ariel and other poems*. On the two sheets that follow, alternative titles had been tried out, each title scored out in turn and a replacement handwritten above it. On one sheet the title was altered from *The Rival* to *A Birthday Present to Daddy*. On the other, the title changed from *The Rival* to *The Rabbit Catcher* to *A Birthday Present to Daddy*. These new title poems are in chronological order (July 1961, May 1962, September 1962, and October 1962) and give an idea of earlier possible dates of her rearrangement of the working manuscript.

When *Ariel* was first published, edited by my father, it was a somewhat different collection from the manuscript my mother left behind. My father had roughly followed the order of my mother's contents list, taking twelve poems out of the U.S. publication, and

thirteen out of the U.K. publication. He replaced these with ten selected for the U.K. edition, and twelve selected for the U.S. edition. These he chose from the nineteen very late poems written after mid-November 1962, and three earlier poems.

There was no lack of choice. Since the publication of *The Colossus* in 1960, my mother had written many poems that showed an advance on her earlier work. These were transitional poems between the very different styles of *The Colossus* and *Ariel* (a selection of them was published in *Crossing the Water* in 1971). But towards the end of 1961, poems in the *Ariel* voice began to appear here and there among the transitional poems. They had an urgency, freedom, and force that was quite new in her work. In October 1961, there was 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' and 'Little Fugue'; 'An Appearance' followed in April 1962. From this point, all the poems she wrote were in the distinctive *Ariel* voice. They are poems of an otherworldly, menacing landscape:

This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary.  
The trees of the mind are black. The light is blue.  
The grasses unload their griefs on my feet as if I were God,  
....  
I simply cannot see where there is to get to.  
(*'The Moon and the Yew Tree'*)

Then, still in early April 1962, she wrote 'Among the Narcissi' and 'Pheasant', moments of perfect poetic poise, tranquil and melancholy—the calm before the storm:

You said you would kill it this morning.  
Do not kill it. It startles me still,  
The jut of the odd, dark head, pacing

Through the uncut grass on the elm's hill.  
(*'Pheasant'*)

After that, the poems came with increasing frequency, ease, and ferocity, culminating in October 1962 when she wrote twenty-five major poems. Her very last poems were written six days before she died. In all, she left around seventy poems in the unique *Ariel* voice.

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, our thatched black and white cob house in Devon, for a long visit. Tensions increased between my parents, my mother proposing separation, though they travelled to Galway together that September to find a house where my mother could stay for the winter. By early October, with encouragement from Aurelia (whose efforts I witnessed as a small child), my mother ordered my father out of the house.

My father went up to London where he first stayed with friends, and then around Christmas rented a flat in Soho. He told me many years later that, despite her apparent determination, he thought my mother might reconsider. 'We were working towards it when she died,' he said.

Deciding against the house in Galway, my mother moved my brother and me to London in December 1962, to the flat she had rented in what was once Yeats's house in Fitzroy Road. Until her death, my father visited us there almost daily, often babysitting when my mother needed time for herself.

Although my mother was in London for eight weeks before she died, my father had left her with their house in Devon, the joint bank account, the black Morris Traveller (their car), and was giving her money to support us. When my mother died, my father had insufficient funds to cover the funeral, and my grandfather, William Hughes, paid for it.

My father eventually returned to Devon with my brother and me in September 1963, when his sister, Olwyn, came over from Paris to help take care of us. She stayed with us for two years. My father

continued to see 'the other woman' on visits to London, but she remained living primarily with her husband for two and a half years after my mother's death.

Throughout their time together my mother had shown her poems to my father as she wrote them. But after May 1962, when their serious differences began, she kept the poems to herself. My father read 'Event' in the *Observer* that winter and was dismayed to see their private business made the subject of a poem.

My mother had described her *Ariel* manuscript as beginning with the word 'Love' and ending with the word 'Spring', and it was clearly geared to cover the ground from just before the breakup of the marriage to the resolution of a new life, with all the agonies and furies in between. The breakdown of the marriage had defined all my mother's other pain and given it direction. It brought a theme to the poetry. But the *Ariel* voice was there already in the poems of late 1961 and early 1962. It was as though it had been waiting, practising itself, and had found a subject on which it could really get a grip. The manuscript was digging up everything that must be shed in order to move on. 'Berck-Plage', for instance, written in June 1962, is about the funeral that month of a neighbour, Percy Key, but it is also tangled with the grievous loss of her father, Otto, when she was a child. My parents became beekeepers that summer, like Otto, who had been an expert on bees, and his presence stalks the five bee poems in the U.S. version of *Ariel* (four in the U.K. edition).

In December 1962, my mother was asked by BBC radio to read some of her poems for a broadcast, and for this she wrote her own introductions. Her commentaries were dry and brief and she makes no mention of herself as a character in the poems. She might expose herself, but she did not need to point it out. I particularly like two of them: 'In this next poem, the speaker's horse is proceeding at a slow, cold walk down a hill of macadam to the stable at the bottom. It is December. It is foggy. In the fog there are sheep.' ('Sheep in Fog', though one of the poems she included in her broadcast with the *Ariel* poems, was not listed on my mother's contents page in the manuscript—it was only finished in January 1963. My father included it in the first published version of *Ariel*.) For the title poem my mother

simply writes: 'Another horseback riding poem, this one called 'Ariel', after a horse I'm especially fond of.'

These introductions made me smile; they have to be the most understated commentaries imaginable for poems that are pared down to their sharpest points of imagery and delivered with tremendous skill. When I read them I imagine my mother, reluctant to undermine with explanation the concentrated energy she'd poured into her verse, in order to preserve its ability to shock and surprise.

In considering *Ariel* for publication my father had faced a dilemma. He was well aware of the extreme ferocity with which some of my mother's poems dismembered those close to her—her husband, her mother, her father, and my father's uncle Walter, even neighbours and acquaintances. He wished to give the book a broader perspective in order to make it more acceptable to readers, rather than alienate them. He felt that some of the nineteen late poems, written after the manuscript was completed, should be represented. 'I simply wanted to make it the best book I could,' he told me. He was aware that many of my mother's new poems had been turned down by magazines because of their extreme nature, though editors still in possession of her poems published them quickly when she died.

My father left out some of the more lacerating poems. 'Lesbos', for instance, though published in the U.S. version of *Ariel*, was taken out of the British edition, as the couple so wickedly depicted in it lived in Cornwall and would have been much offended by its publication. 'Stopped Dead', referring to my father's uncle Walter, was dropped. Some he might otherwise have taken out had been published in periodicals and were already well known. Other omissions—'Magi' and 'Barren Woman', for instance, both from the transitional poems—he simply considered weaker than their replacements. One of the five bee poems, 'The Swarm', was originally included in my mother's contents list, but with brackets around it, and the poem itself was not included in her manuscript of forty poems. My father reinstated it in the U.S. edition.

The poems of the original manuscript my father left out were: 'The Rabbit Catcher', 'Thalidomide', 'Barren Woman', 'A Secret', 'The