

*Portrait of God
as a Creative Writing Student*

Such a long Sunday
In March: north wind
Mouthing my letter-box,
Edging its way
Into the bright room
Where I calmly read,
Having discovered this morning
That God exists
And has made the world
Much as a first-year student
Makes a poem—from himself
And any available language,
With many slides and hitches
And hopes and misconceptions
About what the hell it all is.

I see my duty clear:
To foster his self-esteem
And his humility
In equal proportions.
He must learn how to listen.
He must get used to revising.
So when I climb
The thin blue tree
Of my dying brain, in a chill
Brilliance much like this
March day I will tell him
Some of his ideas were good,
Lots of his images
I liked—for instance, grass.

I'll show him what I crossed out
 —the adverbs and adjectives
 That spoilt so much and the rhymes,
 Their violent mockery.
 God will be grateful.
 I know his next world
 Will be an improvement,
 If not quite Shakespeare.
 I look forward to reading it.

from *Letters Back*

Sylvia Plath responds to her critics and others

1984

(To the Queen of England)

Men slaughter harmless creatures, act the shaman,
 Rap with ghosts, hang out with goddesses,
 And who in your establishment will blame them?
 Then, if they're ripping off babes' bodies
 Instead of helping put their kids to bed,
 Your knights will merely smirk:—that's poets' licence.
 And any way, the wife was off her head.
 You nod: *those vulgar tears, that shocking violence...*
Poor Ted's so wonderful. Sure, but he's crazy.
 Once he thought he was a crow, and shat
 White, squawked black. Your poetry-learning's hazy.
 So go ahead, laurel this diplomat-
 Cum-witchdoctor, and schmooze his dewy charm.
 His stuff about you's bollocks. (S'cuse me, Ma'am.)

PLAYING OURSELVES

(To Adrienne Rich)

Adrienne Cecile Rich, you weren't exciting!
 Back then in sixty-two and sixty-three
 I was the one doing the red-hot writing.
 And then you added DC to AC
 And found a style I can't exactly praise.
 Experimental? Well, your sense of form's
 Kind of unbuttoned, on its holidays.
 You reached the wreck, though, flipped up some storms,
 Found the drowned face. The shore-bound shiverer died
 Painfully, her useless skin ripped off,
 Trim craft in ribbons. No, not suicide
 But huge divorce, long labour. Mazel Tov!
 The truth is yours. Women-poets must dive—
 Not flay themselves. Glad you came up alive.

THE BLOODY END OF THE SKIN

(To Carol Ann Duffy)

Meet Mr Arachne of the Guild
 Minerva founded, weaving the long tale
 In twice-dyed threads: our psychic battlefield.
 A lurid view of treaty and betrayal,
 It fills the museum mind of hoi polloi—
 His cloak-and-dagger version, starring Daddy,
 The daughter and the prince who must destroy
 The Dad—who's dead, but still a real baddie.
 This scene shows the dénouement of the plot:
 The father hides behind the boy whose skinny
 English chest the girl zooms through like shot
 So Dad gets girl and hero feels a ninny.
 This story's not original, nor proven.
 Spiderman's threads are mine, unpicked, re-woven.