

## Alphabet for the Muse, A-Z

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Underlined words and phrases are from Sylvia Plath's 1949 *Webster's Dictionary*, underlined in her hand and part of the Sylvia Plath Collection at Smith College. Italicized words represent the dictionary word itself, not always underlined when SP underlined definitions and other terminology associated with definitions.

*for Karen V. Kukil*

A is Astarte,  
Phoenician goddess  
of fertility and sexual love  
 who could be cruel  
causing or fitted to cause  
pain or grief.  
 So you learned to conjure:  
summon a devil, spirit,  
legerdemain, to juggle ...  
or call on solemnly,  
by invocation,  
implore or beseech  
 4. Evoke...as if by magic,  
 another order altogether,  
 the asymmetry of  
 lack.

B draws you, the words  
blaze, brocade  
 and blanch the white luster  
 of place, a home;  
 the blight parents you.

C, a caryatid or captive, -- priestess  
in the temple  
of Diana at Caryae... supporting  
an entablature -- a casket  
 kept hidden? Cerberus  
 in his clairvoyance for discerning  
objects not present to the senses,  
 understood your cryptic cosmos,  
Clotho, a cicatrix; the chronicle was cruel.

D was not daft, or Daedalus,  
cunning worker that he was in

more places than the Cretan labyrinth,  
 he had a wilder surprise in store  
 to dazzle you; your downfall  
 was to depend: 1. to hang down.  
 2. to be contingent.  
 ...5. to trust the always dexterous,  
 this would diminish  
 your deism, the belief in a personal God.

E employs the pursuit of knowledge  
 by observation and experiment; that is,  
embryo and emerge make  
 for their own exile --  
 they explicate or exorcise  
 an exact effort  
 ... to wrest what cannot exalt itself.

F's fate, your appointed lot.  
 3. Ultimate lot,  
 underlined, like fathom  
 several times, along  
 with the definition:  
 to penetrate and comprehend  
Clotho, with her gifted threads  
 confused by your dress.  
 It gave her a fever,  
excessive excitement  
 when, unhappy with the hem  
 unthreading, she added length,  
 and you kept ripping it;  
 not to expose flesh, but  
 to be more familiar with the body --  
 to fathom a mystery  
 in the increased heat, the fantasy.

G, strangely gothic in the pink  
 line (the only colored ink) in the midst  
 of continuous  
 black pen marks -- that pink  
 brings more attention to  
romantic as opposed to classical,  
 a combination of sublime and grotesque  
 even if gothic, like God, is left  
 unmarked.

H is Hecate – but what are

the expectations inside  
 a third of the alphabet,  
 the hushed 'h' of horrific,  
 unmarked like the virgin goddess  
 unwilling to give up her independence;  
 the hazard would haunt  
 or hex her kingdom, moon-goddess  
 who loved the luminous in hallucinate,  
 the crackle of heckle, while in Holocaust  
 was the snared hare, hunted.

I is imagination, imbalance,  
 the I of idealized or poetic  
creation, the immaculate I.

J loves the gems of jargon,  
 the jeopardy somehow  
jerboa, those "Old World jumping rodents"  
jettisoned; the real Jonah (3. someone  
who brings ill luck), the jailer.

K could be kind, a kiln for  
 some favorites, banana bread  
 and apple cake, words scrawled  
 on a December calendar date,  
 two months before the hardening,  
burning or drying.

L has lethargic limbs,  
 her forgetful ... Morbid drowsiness;  
 a state of inaction,  
or indifference, lewd too.  
 As for Lethe,  
 an unchaste lethargy,  
 kept the lioness fighting.

M's manna is mania,  
 a Mecca, in the maze  
 of confusing  
and baffling...paths;  
 the labyrinth, dizzy, but  
 no melodrama, no melancholy  
 or melancholic line is crossed  
 here, where the mechanics  
 of metaphysical metamorphosis  
 are underlined: martyr, matador,

metaphor.

N refused to be narrow, a nag,  
 anything not nimble, alert.  
 Even nihilism with its nymphomania  
 in the nether world  
 was treated with nonchalance,  
 a simpleton ninnyhammer  
 compared to the real numen,  
Nemesis.

O, oracular and opulent,  
 becomes ordained ore,  
 the Ouija, opalescent oracle...  
 any material containing  
valuable metallic constituents  
for the sake of which it is minded  
and worked, what orgy this revelry  
 in the medium that brought  
 an alphabet...signs, a planchette,  
mediumistic messages, also,  
opposition.

P, god of flocks and pastures  
patron of shepherds, hunters, Pan,  
 and for you, panic which meant paralysis,  
 a particular pastoral of incongruous  
unrelated scraps, the patchwork and  
paradox of the perilous and perseverance.

Q is a queen; she has no qualm,  
 or misgiving with her quill.  
 The quagmire is a quixotic  
unpractical question --  
 What will quicken and quench  
 this quietism?

Always rapt, R grows  
rapacious as the alphabet,  
rare – transported,  
wholly absorbed – lets you  
 forget the rat in its midst,  
 that contemptible deserter,  
 the excessively grasping  
voracious one.

S is sorcery, power gained  
 from the assistance or control  
 of evil spirits, though not sorrowful;  
 the swarm, 1. A great number  
 of honeybees emigrating  
 from a hive in company with a queen  
 to start a new colony elsewhere  
 is sweet, 3. Dear; beloved.

The tabula rasa of T, has a tinge  
 as with disease; something odious  
 though not taboo, the taint  
 might be a totem  
 to a specific family  
 esp., any animal or plant species..  
 A symbol of representation  
 of the totemic being.

U, unkempt, unruly, unsparing.  
Not merciful or forgiving,  
Untrue; Not faithful; disloyal  
 it cannot unman anything  
turbulent; ungovernable.

V's vein follows veil  
 (syn. See Empty, void)  
 what lies there -- a fissure?  
a crevice, a strain,  
Venus ?..protectress of gardens...  
 a very beautiful woman of venomous virtue  
 the vein of blood back to the heart?

W, as in to lay waste, to devastate,  
 will also emancipate: this warrant  
 tells you to keep watch over,  
ward, as in the warden you fend off.

X  
 The only X,  
x-ray.

Y's yarn was long, "the lyf  
 so short" in your beloved  
 Chaucer's words --  
 and "the craft so long to lerne."

Z, the zodiac's completion,  
is the zealous muse in the zero hour,  
that zeal.