

_ Ai

Poet Description:

Born Florence Anthony in Albany, Texas, Ai did not learn her real father's identity until she was sixteen. Then she learned she had a Japanese American father; her mother was black, Irish, and Choctaw Indian. She took the name "Ai," which means "love" in Japanese, to signal her heritage. Ai's childhood was spent in a variety of cities, including Tucson, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. She was educated at the University of Arizona and the University of California at Irvine. Although she did short lyrics on both intimate and public historical topics, as "Twenty-Year Marriage" and "The German Army, Russia, 1943," demonstrate, her specialty is the dramatic monologue, sometimes in the voices of invented personas, sometimes in the person of named public figures. Her speakers have included Marilyn Monroe, Leon Trotsky, Emiliano Zapata, John F. Kennedy, Joseph McCarthy, the Atlanta child murderer and an anonymous Kristallnacht survivor. Some are corrupted seekers after power who try to justify themselves fruitlessly; others have been consumed by different appetites. Her language is vivid but rather matter-of-fact and unadorned. Indeed, the voices of her speakers sometimes acquire an almost deadpan, driven passion. She was obsessed, throughout her career, with the intersecting subjects of death, sex, history, and religion. Her poems seek to lay bare the most violent inner motives we have and the meaning of the desire behind them. Like Plath, she sought a way to write without holding anything back. In the process, especially when taking up real people and events, she has shown us one thing we might not have known poetry was uniquely suited to do??speak brutal truths about public life with a clarity no other discourse can muster.

Race/Ethnicity:

African [1]

Japanese [2]

Western European [3]

Native [4]

Picture:



Gender:

Female [5]

Sexuality:

Straight [6]

First Name:

—
Last Name:

Ai

Birth & Death Dates:

Tuesday, October 21, 1947 to Saturday, March 20, 2010

School of Poetry:

Other ^[7]

Birth Place:

Albany , Texas

United States

See map: Google Maps ^[8]

Texas US

Death Place:

Stillwater , Oklahoma

United States

See map: Google Maps ^[9]

Oklahoma US

Group visibility:

Private - accessible only to group members

Source URL: <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/ai>

Links

[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/race-ethnicity/african>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/race-ethnicity/japanese>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/race-ethnicity/western-european>

[4] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/race-ethnicity/native>

[5] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/gender/female>

[6] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/sexuality/straight>

[7] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/school-poetry/other>

[8] <http://maps.google.com?q=46.880607+-87.363281+%28%2C+Albany%2C+TX%2C+%2C+us%29>

[9] <http://maps.google.com?q=42.938410+-73.653173+%28%2C+Stillwater%2C+OK%2C+%2C+us%29>