American Literary Seminar III:

Contemporary American Literature, After World War Two

Course Packet: POETRY

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**Howl**

By [Allen Ginsberg](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/allen-ginsberg)

*For Carl Solomon*

**I**

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,

dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,

angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,

who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,

who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,

who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull,

who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,

who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York,

who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos night after night

with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls,

incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind leaping toward poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time between,

Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light of mind,

who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo,

who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford’s floated out and sat through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi’s, listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox,

who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,

a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon,

yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars,

whole intellects disgorged in total recall for seven days and nights with brilliant eyes, meat for the Synagogue cast on the pavement,

who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall,

suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines of China under junk-withdrawal in Newark’s bleak furnished room,

who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,

who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow toward lonesome farms in grandfather night,

who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas,

who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels who were visionary indian angels,

who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy,

who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Oklahoma on the impulse of winter midnight streetlight smalltown rain,

who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa,

who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving behind nothing but the shadow of dungarees and the lava and ash of poetry scattered in fireplace Chicago,

who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the FBI in beards and shorts with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out incomprehensible leaflets,

who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism,

who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square weeping and undressing while the sirens of Los Alamos wailed them down, and wailed down Wall, and the Staten Island ferry also wailed,

who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before the machinery of other skeletons,

who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication,

who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts,

who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,

who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love,

who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may,

who hiccuped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob behind a partition in a Turkish Bath when the blond & naked angel came to pierce them with a sword,

who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsman’s loom,

who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness,

who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake,

who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver—joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses’ rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too,

who faded out in vast sordid movies, were shifted in dreams, woke on a sudden Manhattan, and picked themselves up out of basements hung-over with heartless Tokay and horrors of Third Avenue iron dreams & stumbled to unemployment offices,

who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the East River to open to a room full of steam-heat and opium,

who created great suicidal dramas on the apartment cliff-banks of the Hudson under the wartime blur floodlight of the moon & their heads shall be crowned with laurel in oblivion,

who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of Bowery,

who wept at the romance of the streets with their pushcarts full of onions and bad music,

who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in their lofts,

who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the tubercular sky surrounded by orange crates of theology,

who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,

who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable kingdom,

who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg,

who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade,

who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were growing old and cried,

who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors, or were run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,

who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alleyways & firetrucks, not even one free beer,

who sang out of their windows in despair, fell out of the subway window, jumped in the filthy Passaic, leaped on negroes, cried all over the street, danced on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed phonograph records of nostalgic European 1930s German jazz finished the whiskey and threw up groaning into the bloody toilet, moans in their ears and the blast of colossal steamwhistles,

who barreled down the highways of the past journeying to each other’s hotrod-Golgotha jail-solitude watch or Birmingham jazz incarnation,

who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity,

who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver & waited in vain, who watched over Denver & brooded & loned in Denver and finally went away to find out the Time, & now Denver is lonesome for her heroes,

who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other’s salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second,

who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for impossible criminals with golden heads and the charm of reality in their hearts who sang sweet blues to Alcatraz,

who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky Mount to tender Buddha or Tangiers to boys or Southern Pacific to the black locomotive or Harvard to Narcissus to Woodlawn to the daisychain or grave,

who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury,

who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,

and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia,

who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia,

returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of the East,

Pilgrim State’s Rockland’s and Greystone’s foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon,

with mother finally \*\*\*\*\*\*, and the last fantastic book flung out of the tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 A.M. and the last telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished room emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow paper rose twisted on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination—

ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you’re really in the total animal soup of time—

and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipsis catalogue a variable measure and the vibrating plane,

who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus

to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head,

the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down here what might be left to say in time come after death,

and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America’s naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio

with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.

**II**

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments!

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose smoke-stacks and antennae crown the cities!

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind!

Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream Angels! Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky!

Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasuries! blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible madhouses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!

They broke their backs lifting Moloch to Heaven! Pavements, trees, radios, tons! lifting the city to Heaven which exists and is everywhere about us!

Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies! gone down the American river!

Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religions! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!

Breakthroughs! over the river! flips and crucifixions! gone down the flood! Highs! Epiphanies! Despairs! Ten years’ animal screams and suicides! Minds! New loves! Mad generation! down on the rocks of Time!

Real holy laughter in the river! They saw it all! the wild eyes! the holy yells! They bade farewell! They jumped off the roof! to solitude! waving! carrying flowers! Down to the river! into the street!

**III**

Carl Solomon! I’m with you in Rockland

   where you’re madder than I am

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you must feel very strange

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you imitate the shade of my mother

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you’ve murdered your twelve secretaries

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you laugh at this invisible humor

I’m with you in Rockland

   where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter

I’m with you in Rockland

   where your condition has become serious and is reported on the radio

I’m with you in Rockland

   where the faculties of the skull no longer admit the worms of the senses

I'm with you in Rockland

   where you drink the tea of the breasts of the spinsters of Utica

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you pun on the bodies of your nurses the harpies of the Bronx

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you scream in a straightjacket that you’re losing the game of the actual pingpong of the abyss

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse

I’m with you in Rockland

   where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha

I’m with you in Rockland

   where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb

I’m with you in Rockland

   where there are twentyfive thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale

I’m with you in Rockland

   where we hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets the United States that coughs all night and won’t let us sleep

I’m with you in Rockland

   where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls’ airplanes roaring over the roof they’ve come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself    imaginary walls collapse    O skinny legions run outside    O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here    O victory forget your underwear we’re free

I’m with you in Rockland

   in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night

*San Francisco, 1955—1956*

# A Supermarket in California

## Allen Ginsberg, 1926 - 1997

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!--and you, García Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in a hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we’ll both be lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

*--Berkeley, 1955*

**Sunflower Sutra**

By [Allen Ginsberg](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/allen-ginsberg)

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and sat down under the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron pole, companion, we thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed, surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery.

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sank on top of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those mounts, just ourselves rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old bums on the riverbank, tired and wily.

Look at the Sunflower, he said, there was a dead gray shadow against the sky, big as a man, sitting dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust—

—I rushed up enchanted—it was my first sunflower, memories of Blake—my visions—Harlem

and Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes Greasy Sandwiches, dead baby carriages, black treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded, the poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel knives, nothing stainless, only the dank muck and the razor-sharp artifacts passing into the past—

and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset, crackly bleak and dusty with the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye—

corolla of bleary spikes pushed down and broken like a battered crown, seeds fallen out of its face, soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air, sunrays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried wire spiderweb,

leaves stuck out like arms out of the stem, gestures from the sawdust root, broke pieces of plaster fallen out of the black twigs, a dead fly in its ear,

Unholy battered old thing you were, my sunflower O my soul, I loved you then!

The grime was no man’s grime but death and human locomotives,

all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad skin, that smog of cheek, that eyelid of black mis’ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuberance of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—modern—all that civilization spotting your crazy golden crown—

and those blear thoughts of death and dusty loveless eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what more could I name, the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs & sphincters of dynamos—all these

entangled in your mummied roots—and you there standing before me in the sunset, all your glory in your form!

A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect excellent lovely sunflower existence! a sweet natural eye to the new hip moon, woke up alive and excited grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden monthly breeze!

How many flies buzzed round you innocent of your grime, while you cursed the heavens of the railroad and your flower soul?

Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you look at your skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive? the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?

You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower!

And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not!

So I grabbed up the skeleton thick sunflower and stuck it at my side like a scepter,

and deliver my sermon to my soul, and Jack’s soul too, and anyone who’ll listen,

—We’re not our skin of grime, we’re not dread bleak dusty imageless locomotives, we’re golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own seed & hairy naked accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our own eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sitdown vision.

*Berkeley, 1955*

# Skunk Hour

## Robert Lowell, 1917 - 1977

*For Elizabeth Bishop*

Nautilus Island’s hermit

heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;

her sheep still graze above the sea.

Her son’s a bishop. Her farmer

is first selectman in our village,

she’s in her dotage.

Thirsting for

the hierarchic privacy

of Queen Victoria’s century,

she buys up all

the eyesores facing her shore,

and lets them fall.

The season’s ill--

we’ve lost our summer millionaire,

who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean

catalogue. His nine-knot yawl

was auctioned off to lobstermen.

A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy

decorator brightens his shop for fall,

his fishnet’s filled with orange cork,

orange, his cobbler’s bench and awl,

there is no money in his work,

he’d rather marry.

One dark night,

my Tudor Ford climbed the hill’s skull,

I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,

they lay together, hull to hull,

where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .

My mind’s not right.

A car radio bleats,

‘Love, O careless Love . . . .' I hear

my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,

as if my hand were at its throat . . . .

I myself am hell,

nobody’s here--

only skunks, that search

in the moonlight for a bite to eat.

They march on their soles up Main Street:

white stripes, moonstruck eyes’ red fire

under the chalk-dry and spar spire

of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top

of our back steps and breathe the rich air--

a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail

She jabs her wedge-head in a cup

of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,

and will not scare.

**Anne Sexton:**

**Ringing the Bells**

And this is the way they ring  
the bells in Bedlam  
and this is the bell-lady  
who comes each Tuesday morning   
to give us a music lesson  
and because the attendants make you go  
and because we mind by instinct,  
like bees caught in the wrong hive,  
we are the circle of crazy ladies  
who sit in the lounge of the mental house  
and smile at the smiling woman  
who passes us each a bell,  
who points at my hand  
that holds my bell, E flat,  
and this is the gray dress next to me  
who grumbles as if it were special  
to be old, to be old,  
and this is the small hunched squirrel girl  
on the other side of me  
who picks at the hairs over her lip,  
who picks at the hairs over her lip all day,  
and this is how the bells really sound,  
as untroubled and clean  
as a workable kitchen,  
and this is always my bell responding  
to my hand that responds to the lady  
who points at me, E flat;  
and although we are not better for it,  
they tell you to go. And you do.

# The Truth the Dead Know

## Anne Sexton, 1928 - 1974

*For my Mother, born March 1902, died March 1959  
and my Father, born February 1900, died June 1959*

Gone, I say and walk from church,

refusing the stiff procession to the grave,

letting the dead ride alone in the hearse.

It is June. I am tired of being brave.

We drive to the Cape. I cultivate

myself where the sun gutters from the sky,

where the sea swings in like an iron gate

and we touch. In another country people die.

My darling, the wind falls in like stones

from the whitehearted water and when we touch

we enter touch entirely. No one’s alone.

Men kill for this, or for as much.

And what of the dead? They lie without shoes

in the stone boats. They are more like stone

than the sea would be if it stopped. They refuse

to be blessed, throat, eye and knucklebone.

**Wanting to Die**

By [Anne Sexton](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/anne-sexton)

Since you ask, most days I cannot remember.

I walk in my clothing, unmarked by that voyage.

Then the almost unnameable lust returns.

Even then I have nothing against life.

I know well the grass blades you mention,

the furniture you have placed under the sun.

But suicides have a special language.

Like carpenters they want to know *which tools.*

They never ask *why build.*

Twice I have so simply declared myself,

have possessed the enemy, eaten the enemy,

have taken on his craft, his magic.

In this way, heavy and thoughtful,

warmer than oil or water,

I have rested, drooling at the mouth-hole.

I did not think of my body at needle point.

Even the cornea and the leftover urine were gone.

Suicides have already betrayed the body.

Still-born, they don’t always die,

but dazzled, they can’t forget a drug so sweet

that even children would look on and smile.

To thrust all that life under your tongue!—

that, all by itself, becomes a passion.

Death’s a sad bone; bruised, you’d say,

and yet she waits for me, year after year,

to so delicately undo an old wound,

to empty my breath from its bad prison.

Balanced there, suicides sometimes meet,

raging at the fruit a pumped-up moon,

leaving the bread they mistook for a kiss,

leaving the page of the book carelessly open,

something unsaid, the phone off the hook

and the love whatever it was, an infection.

**All My Pretty Ones**

By [Anne Sexton](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/anne-sexton)

Father, this year’s jinx rides us apart

where you followed our mother to her cold slumber;

a second shock boiling its stone to your heart,

leaving me here to shuffle and disencumber

you from the residence you could not afford:

a gold key, your half of a woolen mill,

twenty suits from Dunne’s, an English Ford,

the love and legal verbiage of another will,

boxes of pictures of people I do not know.

I touch their cardboard faces. They must go.

But the eyes, as thick as wood in this album,

hold me. I stop here, where a small boy

waits in a ruffled dress for someone to come ...

for this soldier who holds his bugle like a toy

or for this velvet lady who cannot smile.

Is this your father’s father, this commodore

in a mailman suit? My father, time meanwhile

has made it unimportant who you are looking for.

I’ll never know what these faces are all about.

I lock them into their book and throw them out.

This is the yellow scrapbook that you began

the year I was born; as crackling now and wrinkly

as tobacco leaves: clippings where Hoover outran

the Democrats, wiggling his dry finger at me

and Prohibition; news where the *Hindenburg* went

down and recent years where you went flush

on war. This year, solvent but sick, you meant

to marry that pretty widow in a one-month rush.

But before you had that second chance, I cried

on your fat shoulder. Three days later you died.

These are the snapshots of marriage, stopped in places.

Side by side at the rail toward Nassau now;

here, with the winner’s cup at the speedboat races,

here, in tails at the Cotillion, you take a bow,

here, by our kennel of dogs with their pink eyes,

running like show-bred pigs in their chain-link pen;

here, at the horseshow where my sister wins a prize;

and here, standing like a duke among groups of men.

Now I fold you down, my drunkard, my navigator,

my first lost keeper, to love or look at later.

I hold a five-year diary that my mother kept

for three years, telling all she does not say

of your alcoholic tendency. You overslept,

she writes. My God, father, each Christmas Day

with your blood, will I drink down your glass

of wine? The diary of your hurly-burly years

goes to my shelf to wait for my age to pass.

Only in this hoarded span will love persevere.

Whether you are pretty or not, I outlive you,

bend down my strange face to yours and forgive you.

**Sylvia Plath**

**Daddy**

You do not do, you do not do

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time——

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic

Where it pours bean green over blue

In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

I used to pray to recover you.

Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town

Scraped flat by the roller

Of wars, wars, wars.

But the name of the town is common.

My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.

So I never could tell where you

Put your foot, your root,

I never could talk to you.

The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

I could hardly speak.

I thought every German was you.

And the language obscene

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew.

A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna

Are not very pure or true.

With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck

And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack

I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of *you,*

With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.

And your neat mustache

And your Aryan eye, bright blue.

Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——

Not God but a swastika

So black no sky could squeak through.

Every woman adores a Fascist,

The boot in the face, the brute

Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,

In the picture I have of you,

A cleft in your chin instead of your foot

But no less a devil for that, no not

Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.

I was ten when they buried you.

At twenty I tried to die

And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue.

And then I knew what to do.

I made a model of you,

A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.

And I said I do, I do.

So daddy, I’m finally through.

The black telephone’s off at the root,

The voices just can’t worm through.

If I’ve killed one man, I’ve killed two——

The vampire who said he was you

And drank my blood for a year,

Seven years, if you want to know.

Daddy, you can lie back now.

There’s a stake in your fat black heart

And the villagers never liked you.

They are dancing and stamping on you.

They always *knew* it was you.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.

# Lady Lazarus

I have done it again.

One year in every ten

I manage it--

A sort of walking miracle, my skin

Bright as a Nazi lampshade,

My right foot

A paperweight,

My face a featureless, fine

Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin

O my enemy.

Do I terrify?--

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?

The sour breath

Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh

The grave cave ate will be

At home on me

And I a smiling woman.

I am only thirty.

And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.

What a trash

To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.

The peanut-crunching crowd

Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot--

The big strip tease.

Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands

My knees.

I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.

The first time it happened I was ten.

It was an accident.

The second time I meant

To last it out and not come back at all.

I rocked shut

As a seashell.

They had to call and call

And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I’ve a call.

It’s easy enough to do it in a cell.

It’s easy enough to do it and stay put.

It’s the theatrical

Comeback in broad day

To the same place, the same face, the same brute

Amused shout:

‘A miracle!'

That knocks me out.

There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge

For the hearing of my heart--

It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge

For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.

So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,

I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.

Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash--

You poke and stir.

Flesh, bone, there is nothing there--

A cake of soap,

A wedding ring,

A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware.

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air.

23-29 October 1962

**Ariel**

Stasis in darkness.

Then the substanceless blue

Pour of tor and distances.

God’s lioness,

How one we grow,

Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to

The brown arc

Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye

Berries cast dark

Hooks—

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,

Shadows.

Something else

Hauls me through air—

Thighs, hair;

Flakes from my heels.

White

Godiva, I unpeel—

Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now I

Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.

The child’s cry

Melts in the wall.

And I

Am the arrow,

The dew that flies

Suicidal, at one with the drive

Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

**Gwendolyn Brooks**

# The mother

Abortions will not let you forget.

You remember the children you got that you did not get,

The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,

The singers and workers that never handled the air.

You will never neglect or beat

Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.

You will never wind up the sucking-thumb

Or scuttle off ghosts that come.

You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,

Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.

I have contracted. I have eased

My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.

I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized

Your luck

And your lives from your unfinished reach,

If I stole your births and your names,

Your straight baby tears and your games,

Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches, and your deaths,

If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,

Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.

Though why should I whine,

Whine that the crime was other than mine?—

Since anyhow you are dead.

Or rather, or instead,

You were never made.

But that too, I am afraid,

Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?

You were born, you had body, you died.

It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.

Believe me, I loved you all.

Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you

All.

# We Real Cool

THE POOL PLAYERS.

SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We

Left school. We

Lurk late. We

Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We

Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We

Die soon.

**The Crazy Woman**

I shall not sing a May song.   
A May song should be gay.   
I'll wait until November   
And sing a song of gray.   
  
I'll wait until November   
That is the time for me.   
I'll go out in the frosty dark   
And sing most terribly.   
  
And all the little people   
Will stare at me and say,   
"That is the Crazy Woman   
Who would not sing in May."

# ["A Poem Some People Will Have to Understand" - Amiri Baraka](http://missedstations.tumblr.com/post/73081861922/a-poem-some-people-will-have-to-understand)

Dull unwashed windows of eyes  
and buildings of industry. What  
industry do I practice? A slick  
colored boy, 12 miles from his  
home. I practice no industry.  
I am no longer a credit  
to my race. I read a little,  
scratch against silence slow spring  
afternoons.  
I thought, before, some years ago  
that I’d come to the end of my life.  
Watercolor ego. Without the preciseness  
a violent man could propose.  
But the wheel, and the wheels,  
won’t let us alone. All the fantasy  
and justice, and dry charcoal winters  
All the pitifully intelligent citizens  
I’ve forced myself to love.  
  
We have awaited the coming of a natural  
phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable  
workers  
of the land.  
  
But none has come.  
(Repeat)  
           but none has come.  
  
Will the machinegunners please step forward?

Mari Evans:

### I am a Black Woman

I am a black woman   
the music of my song   
some sweet arpeggio of tears   
is written in a minor key   
and I   
can be heard humming in the night   
Can be heard   
humming   
in the night

I saw my mate leap screaming to the sea   
and I/with these hands/cupped the lifebreath   
from my issue in the canebrake   
I lost Nat's swinging body in a rain of tears   
and heard my son scream all the way from Anzio   
for Peace he never knew....I   
learned Da Nang and Pork Chop Hill   
in anguish   
Now my nostrils know the gas   
and these trigger tire/d fingers   
seek the softness in my warrior's beard

I am a black woman   
tall as a cypress   
strong   
beyond all definition still   
defying place   
and time   
and circumstance   
assailed   
impervious   
indestructible   
Look   
on me and be   
renewed

## *"Remember"* by [Joy Harjo](javascript:void(0);)

[Remember](javascript:void(0);) the [sky](javascript:void(0);) that you were [born](javascript:void(0);) under,   
know each of the [star's stories.](javascript:void(0);)   
Remember the [moon](javascript:void(0);), know who she is. I met her   
in a [bar](javascript:void(0);) once in Iowa City.   
Remember the [sun's](javascript:void(0);) birth at dawn, that is the   
strongest point of time. Remember sundown   
and the giving away to night.   
Remember your birth, how your [mother](javascript:void(0);) struggled   
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of   
[her life, and her mother's, and hers.](javascript:void(0);)   
Remember your [father.](javascript:void(0);) He is your life also.   
Remember the [earth](javascript:void(0);) whose skin you are:   
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth   
brown earth, we are earth.   
Remember the [plants, trees, animal life](javascript:void(0);) who all have their   
tribes, their families, their histories, too. [Talk to them,](javascript:void(0);)   
listen to them. [They are alive poems.](javascript:void(0);)   
Remember the [wind](javascript:void(0);). Remember her voice. She knows the  [origin of this universe.](javascript:void(0);) I heard her singing [Kiowa](javascript:void(0);) [war](javascript:void(0);)   
dance songs at the corner [of Fourth and Central](javascript:void(0);) once.   
Remember that you are all people and that [all people](javascript:void(0);) are you.   
Remember that you are this [universe](javascript:void(0);) and that this universe is you.   
Remember that all is in [motion,](javascript:void(0);) is growing, is you.   
Remember that [language](javascript:void(0);) comes from this.   
Remember the [dance that language is,](javascript:void(0);) that life is.   
[Remember.](javascript:void(0);)

Gary Soto *1981*   
**Mexicans Begin Jogging**

At the factory I worked

In the fleck of rubber, under the press

Of an oven yellow with flame,

Until the border patrol opened

Their vans and my boss waved for us to run.                                                                       5

"Over the fence, Soto," he shouted,

And I shouted that I was an American.

"No time for lies," he said, and passes

A dollar in my palm, hurrying me

Through the back door.                                                                                                       10

Since I was on his time, I ran

And became the wag to a short tail of Mexicans--

Ran past the amazed crowds that lined

The street and blurred like photographs, in rain.

I ran from that industrial road to the soft                                                                            15

Houses where people paled at the turn of an autumn sky.

What could I do but yell vivas

To baseball, milkshakes, and those sociologists

Who would clock me

As I jog into the next century

On the power of a great, silly grin.                                                                                     20