**AMERICAN POETRY**

**Dr. Christina Dokou**

**WEEKLY POEMS**

**WEEK 2**

**Anne Bradstreet (ca. 1612-1672)**

Biography at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/anne-bradstreet>

**To my Dear and Loving Husband**

****

If ever two were one, then surely we.

If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee.

If ever wife was happy in a man,

Compare with me, ye women, if you can.

I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold

Or all the riches that the East doth hold.

My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,

Nor ought but love from thee give recompence.

Thy love is such I can no way repay.

The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.

Then while we live, in love let's so persever

That when we live no more, we may live ever.

**Notes** (by line)

**1**] we: Anne's husband was Simon Bradstreet (1603-97). They were married in England in 1628.

**11**] persever: poetically accented on the second syllable.

**Original text**: Anne Bradstreet, *Several Poems*, 2nd edn. (Boston: John Foster, 1678). Cf. *The Complete Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Allan P. Robb (Boston: Twayne, 1981): 180.

**In Memory Of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who Deceased August, 1665, Being A Year And Half Old**

Farewell dear babe, my heart's too much content,

Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of mine eye,

Farewell fair flower that for a space was lent,

Then ta'en away unto eternity.

Blest babe, why should I once bewail thy fate,

Or sigh thy days so soon were terminate,

Sith thou art settled in an everlasting state.

By nature trees do rot when they are grown,

And plums and apples thoroughly ripe do fall,

And corn and grass are in their season mown,

And time brings down what is both strong and tall.

But plants new set to be eradicate,

And buds new blown to have so short a date,

Is by His hand alone that guides nature and fate.

1678

**Phillis Wheatley (1753?-1784)**

Biography at: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/phillis-wheatley>



**On Being Brought from Africa to America**

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,

Taught my benighted soul to understand

That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:

Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,

"Their colour is a diabolic die."

Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,

May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

**Note on lines 6-7:** Wheatley is punning on indigo die and sugarcane.

Original text: Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London: by A. Bell, for Cox and Berry, Boston, 1773): 18. Facsimile edition in *The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley*, ed. John C. Shields (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

**WEEK 3**

**Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)**

Biography at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Poe>

# The Conqueror Worm

Lo! ’t is a gala night

   Within the lonesome latter years!

An angel throng, bewinged, bedight

   In veils, and drowned in tears,

Sit in a theatre, to see

   A play of hopes and fears,

While the orchestra breathes fitfully

   The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,

   Mutter and mumble low,

And hither and thither fly—

   Mere puppets they, who come and go

At bidding of vast formless things

   That shift the scenery to and fro,

Flapping from out their Condor wings

   Invisible Wo!

That motley drama—oh, be sure

   It shall not be forgot!

With its Phantom chased for evermore

   By a crowd that seize it not,

Through a circle that ever returneth in

   To the self-same spot,

And much of Madness, and more of Sin,

   And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout,

   A crawling shape intrude!

A blood-red thing that writhes from out

   The scenic solitude!

It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs

The mimes become its food,

And seraphs sob at vermin fangs

   In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!

   And, over each quivering form,

The curtain, a funeral pall,

   Comes down with the rush of a storm,

While the angels, all pallid and wan,

   Uprising, unveiling, affirm

That the play is the tragedy, “Man,”

   And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

**The Raven**

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

    While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,

As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

“’Tis some visiter,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—

            Only this and nothing more.”

    Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;

And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.

    Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow

    From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

            Nameless here for evermore.

    And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain

Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;

    So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating

    “’Tis some visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door—

Some late visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door;—

            This it is and nothing more.”

    Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,

“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;

    But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,

    And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,

That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I opened wide the door;—

            Darkness there and nothing more.

    Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;

    But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,

    And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore?”

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, “Lenore!”—

            Merely this and nothing more.

    Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,

Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.

    “Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;

      Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—

Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—

            ’Tis the wind and nothing more!”

    Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,

In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;

    Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;

    But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—

            Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,

By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,

“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,

Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”

            Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

    Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,

Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;

    For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being

    Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,

            With such name as “Nevermore.”

    But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only

That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.

    Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—

    Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown before—

On the morrow he will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before.”

            Then the bird said “Nevermore.”

    Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,

“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store

    Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster

    Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—

Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore

            Of ‘Never—nevermore’.”

    But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,

Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;

    Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking

    Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—

What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore

            Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

    This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing

To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;

    This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining

    On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o’er,

But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,

            She shall press, ah, nevermore!

    Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer

Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.

    “Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee

    Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”

            Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

    “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,

    Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—

    On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—

Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!”

            Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

    “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!

By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—

    Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,

    It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”

            Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

    “Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked, upstarting—

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!

    Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

    Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”

            Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

    And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

    And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,

    And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor

            Shall be lifted—nevermore!

**WEEK 4**

**Walt Whitman (1819–1892)**

**Poet biography at:** [**http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walt\_Whitman**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walt_Whitman) **and** [**http://www.poemhunter.com/walt-whitman/biography/**](http://www.poemhunter.com/walt-whitman/biography/)**; also a short version at** [**https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/walt-whitman**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/walt-whitman)

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**“Song of Myself”**

<http://www.everypoet.com/archive/poetry/Walt_Whitman/walt_whitman_leaves_of_grass_book_03.htm>

**Read only parts 1-13**

**WEEK 5**

**Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)**

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Biography at: <http://www.online-literature.com/dickinson/> and

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emily_Dickinson>

**Poem 49**

I never lost as much but twice,  
And that was in the sod.  
Twice have I stood a beggar  
Before the door of God!  
  
Angels—twice descending  
Reimbursed my store—  
Burglar! Banker—Father!  
I am poor once more!

**Poem** 185

"Faith" is a fine invention  
When Gentlemen can see—  
But Microscopes are prudent  
In an Emergency.

**Poem** 249

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!  
Were I with thee  
Wild Nights should be  
Our luxury!

Futile – the Winds –  
To a Heart in port –  
Done with the Compass –  
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden –  
Ah, the Sea!  
Might I but moor – Tonight –  
In Thee!

**Poem** 280

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,

And Mourners to and fro

Kept treading – treading – till it seemed

That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,

A Service, like a Drum –

Kept beating – beating – till I thought

My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box

And creak across my Soul

With those same Boots of Lead, again,

Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,

And Being, but an Ear,

And I, and Silence, some strange Race

Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,

And I dropped down, and down –

And hit a World, at every plunge,

And Finished knowing – then –

**Poem** 324

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –

I keep it, staying at Home –

With a Bobolink for a Chorister –

And an Orchard, for a Dome –

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice –

I, just wear my Wings –

And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,

Our little Sexton – sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman –

And the sermon is never long,

So instead of getting to Heaven, at last –

I’m going, all along.

**Poem** 712

Because I could not stop for Death--  
He kindly stopped for me--   
The Carriage held but just Ourselves--   
And Immortality.  
  
We slowly drove--He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For His Civility--  
  
We passed the School, where Children strove  
At Recess--in the Ring--   
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain--   
We passed the Setting Sun--  
  
Or rather--He passed us--  
The Dews drew quivering and chill--  
For only Gossamer, my Gown--  
My Tippet--only Tulle--  
  
We paused before a House that seemed  
A Swelling of the Ground--  
The Roof was scarcely visible--  
The Cornice--in the Ground--  
  
Since then--'tis Centuries--and yet  
Feels shorter than the Day  
I first surmised the Horses' Heads   
Were toward Eternity—

**WEEK 6**

[**Robert Frost**](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/robert-frost) **(1874-1963)**

**After Apple-Picking**

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree

Toward heaven still,

And there's a barrel that I didn't fill

Beside it, and there may be two or three

Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.

But I am done with apple-picking now.

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,

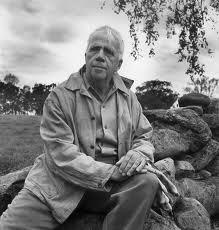
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.

I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight

I got from looking through a pane of glass

I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough

And held against the world of hoary grass.

It melted, and I let it fall and break.

But I was well

Upon my way to sleep before it fell,

And I could tell

What form my dreaming was about to take.

Magnified apples appear and disappear,

Stem end and blossom end,

And every fleck of russet showing clear.

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,

It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.

I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.

And I keep hearing from the cellar bin

The rumbling sound

Of load on load of apples coming in.

For I have had too much

Of apple-picking: I am overtired

Of the great harvest I myself desired.

There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,

Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.

For all

That struck the earth,

No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,

Went surely to the cider-apple heap

As of no worth.

One can see what will trouble

This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.

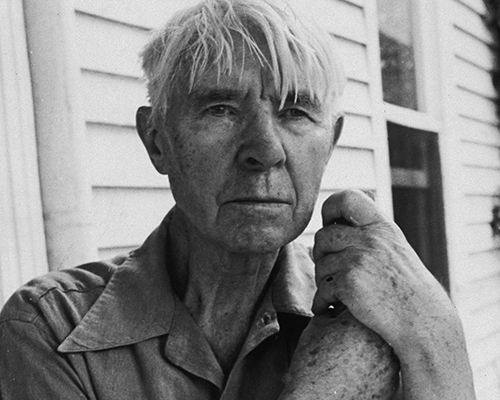
Were he not gone,

The woodchuck could say whether it's like his

Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,

Or just some human sleep.

Source: *Collected Poems, Prose, & Plays* (Library of America, 1995)



[**Carl Sandburg**](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/carl-sandburg) **(1878-1967)**

**Chicago**

Hog Butcher for the World,

   Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,

   Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;

   Stormy, husky, brawling,

   City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women

under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

   Bareheaded,

   Shoveling,

   Wrecking,

   Planning,

   Building, breaking, rebuilding,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,

                   Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

Source: *Poetry* (March 1914).

**WEEK 7**

A person in a suit and tie

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Wallace Stevens, 1879 – 1955**

Biography at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallace_Stevens>

**The Emperor of Ice-Cream**

Call the roller of big cigars,

The muscular one, and bid him whip

In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.

Let the wenches dawdle in such dress

As they are used to wear, and let the boys

Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.

Let be be finale of seem.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,

Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet

On which she embroidered fantails once

And spread it so as to cover her face.

If her horny feet protrude, they come

To show how cold she is, and dumb.

Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Source: The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (1982)

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[**William Carlos Williams**](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/william-carlos-williams)

**The Red Wheelbarrow**

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so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens

This Is Just To Say

I have eaten

the plums

that were in

the icebox

and which

you were probably

saving

for breakfast

Forgive me

they were delicious

so sweet

and so cold

From *The Collected Poems: Volume I, 1909-1939*, copyright ©1938 New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1991

**WEEK 8**

**Ezra Pound (1885–1972)**

Biography at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ezra_Pound>

**In a Station of the Metro**

THE apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

Source: *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction*. Ed. Louis Untermeyer, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1919.

**A Pact**

I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman -   
I have detested you long enough.  
I come to you as a grown child  
Who has had a pig-headed father;  
I am old enough now to make friends.  
It was you that broke the new wood,  
Now is a time for carving.  
We have one sap and one root -   
Let there be commerce between us.



**H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) (1886-1961)**

Biography at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilda_Doolittle> and [H. D.](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/h-d)

**Helen**

All Greece hates

the still eyes in the white face,

the lustre as of olives

where she stands,

and the white hands.

All Greece reviles

the wan face when she smiles,

hating it deeper still

when it grows wan and white,

remembering past enchantments

and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,

God’s daughter, born of love,

the beauty of cool feet

and slenderest knees,

could love indeed the maid,

only if she were laid,

white ash amid funereal cypresses.

Source: Collected Poems 1912-1944 (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1982)

**WEEK 9**

**T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)**

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**Biography at** [T. S. Eliot - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._S._Eliot) and [T. S. Eliot | Poetry Foundation](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/t-s-eliot)

# The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S’io credesse che mia risposta fosse  
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.  
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo  
Non torno vivo alcun, s’i’odo il vero,  
Senza tema d’infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table;

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent

To lead you to an overwhelming question ...

Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”

Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,

Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,

Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

And seeing that it was a soft October night,

Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time

For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,

Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

There will be time to murder and create,

And time for all the works and days of hands

That lift and drop a question on your plate;

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

And for a hundred visions and revisions,

Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”

Time to turn back and descend the stair,

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —

(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —

(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)

Do I dare

Disturb the universe?

In a minute there is time

For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;

I know the voices dying with a dying fall

Beneath the music from a farther room.

               So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,

Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

               And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—

Arms that are braceleted and white and bare

(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)

Is it perfume from a dress

That makes me so digress?

Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.

               And should I then presume?

               And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets

And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes

Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!

Smoothed by long fingers,

Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,

Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet — and here’s no great matter;

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,

After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,

Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,

Would it have been worth while,

To have bitten off the matter with a smile,

To have squeezed the universe into a ball

To roll it towards some overwhelming question,

To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”—

If one, settling a pillow by her head

               Should say: “That is not what I meant at all;

               That is not it, at all.”

And would it have been worth it, after all,

Would it have been worth while,

After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,

After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—

And this, and so much more?—

It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

Would it have been worth while

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,

And turning toward the window, should say:

               “That is not it at all,

               That is not what I meant, at all.”

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two,

Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—

Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind?   Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

Combing the white hair of the waves blown back

When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Source: Collected Poems 1909-1962 (1963)

**The Hippopotamus**

The broad-backed hippopotamus

Rests on his belly in the mud;

Although he seems so firm to us

He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh-and-blood is weak and frail,

Susceptible to nervous shock;

While the True Church can never fail

For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err

In compassing material ends,

While the True Church need never stir

To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach

The mango on the mango-tree;

But fruits of pomegranate and peach

Refresh the Church from over sea.

At mating time the hippo's voice

Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd,

But every week we hear rejoice

The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day

Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;

God works in a mysterious way--

The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing

Ascending from the damp savannas,

And quiring angels round him sing

The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean

And him shall heavenly arms enfold,

Among the saints he shall be seen

Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow,

By all the martyr'd virgins kist,

While the True Church remains below

Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

From *Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920.

**WEEK 10**

**Langston Hughes (1901-67)**

Biography at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston_Hughes>

**“The Negro Speaks of Rivers”**

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the

flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln

went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy

 bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

**Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000)**

Biography at: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/gwendolyn-brooks>

**“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.

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**WEEK 11**

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**Sylvia Plath (1932-63)**

Biography at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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.

Source: *Collected Poems* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1992)



**Allen Ginsberg (1926-97)**

Biography at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allen_Ginsberg>

**“Howl”**

(complete text at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl>)

*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

Source: Selected Poems 1947-1995 (HarperPerennial, 2001)

**WEEK 12**

**Adrienne Rich (1929-2012)**

Biography at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrienne_Rich>

**Diving into the Wreck**

****

First having read the book of myths,  
and loaded the camera,  
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,  
I put on  
the body-armor of black rubber  
the absurd flippers  
the grave and awkward mask.  
I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone.

There is a ladder.  
The ladder is always there  
hanging innocently  
close to the side of the schooner.  
We know what it is for,  
we who have used it.  
Otherwise  
it is a piece of maritime floss  
some sundry equipment.

I go down.  
Rung after rung and still  
the oxygen immerses me  
the blue light  
the clear atoms  
of our human air.  
I go down.  
My flippers cripple me,  
I crawl like an insect down the ladder  
and there is no one  
to tell me when the ocean  
will begin.

First the air is blue and then  
it is bluer and then green and then  
black I am blacking out and yet  
my mask is powerful  
it pumps my blood with power  
the sea is another story  
the sea is not a question of power  
I have to learn alone  
to turn my body without force  
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget  
what I came for  
among so many who have always  
lived here  
swaying their crenellated fans  
between the reefs  
and besides  
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.  
I stroke the beam of my lamp  
slowly along the flank  
of something more permanent  
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth  
the drowned face always staring  
toward the sun  
the evidence of damage  
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty  
the ribs of the disaster  
curving their assertion  
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.  
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair  
streams black, the merman in his armored body.  
We circle silently  
about the wreck  
we dive into the hold.  
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes  
whose breasts still bear the stress  
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies  
obscurely inside barrels  
half-wedged and left to rot  
we are the half-destroyed instruments  
that once held to a course  
the water-eaten log  
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.

From *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* by Adrienne Rich. Copyright © 1973 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright 1973 by Adrienne Rich.

**Joy Harjo (1951- )**

Biography at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy_Harjo>

****

**“Call It Fear”**

There is this edge where shadows

and bones of some of us walk

backward

Talk backward. There is this edge

Call it an ocean of fear of the dark. Or

name it with other songs. Under our ribs

our hearts are bloody stars. Shine on

shine on, and horses in their galloping flight

strike the curve of ribs.

Heartbeat

and breathe back sharply. Breathe

backwards.

There is this edge within me

I saw it once

an August Sunday morning when the heat hadn’t

left the earth. And Goodluck

sat sleeping next to me in the truck.

We had never broken through the edge of the

singing at four a.m.

We had only wanted to talk, to hear

Any other voice to stay alive with.

And there was this edge—

not the drop of sandy rock cliff

bones of volcanic earth into

Albuquerque

Not that,

But a string of shadow horses kicking

and pulling me out of my belly,

not into the Rio Grande but into the music

barely coming through

Sunday church singing

from the radio. Battery worn-down but the voices

Talking backward.

**WEEK 13**

**Anders Carlson-Wee**

Biography at: <https://www.anderscarlsonwee.com/about>



**“How To”**

If you got hiv, say aids. If you a girl,   
say you’re pregnant––nobody gonna lower  
themselves to listen for the kick. People  
passing fast. Splay your legs, cock a knee  
funny. It’s the littlest shames they’re likely  
to comprehend. Don’t say homeless, they know  
you is. What they don’t know is what opens  
a wallet, what stops em from counting  
what they drop. If you’re young say younger.  
Old say older. If you’re crippled don’t  
flaunt it. Let em think they’re good enough  
Christians to notice. Don’t say you pray,  
say you sin. It’s about who they believe  
they is. You hardly even there.

<https://www.jehsmith.com/1/2018/07/how-to-by-anders-carlson-wee.html>

**Danez Smith**

**A picture containing person

Description automatically generatedBiography at** [Danez Smith | Poetry Foundation](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/danez-smith)

**“the bullet was a girl”**

the bullet is his whole life.  
his mother named him & the bullet

was on its way. in another life  
the bullet was a girl & his skin

was a boy with a sad laugh.  
they say he asked for it—

must I define they? They are not  
monsters, or hooded or hands black

with cross smoke.  
they teachers, they pay tithes

they like rap, they police—good folks  
gather around a boy’s body

to take a picture, share a prayer.  
oh da horror, oh what a shame

why’d he do that to himself?  
they really should stop  
getting themselves killed

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