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## **Amanda Gorman and Her Way With Poetry**

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### Amanda Gorman and Her Way With Poetry

Merry Byrd in “The Sankofa Spirit of Afro-futurisms in Who Fears Death and Riot Baby” states that Amanda Gorman sets out to create work that will heal a nation by creating a place where the past and the future meet in equilibrium (46). Gorman’s poetry, specifically “The Hill We Climb,” focuses on our lives as a collective and invites us to move forward together as one. Throughout her collection of poetry, she addresses issues, such as climate change, social injustice, racial inequality, etc. to be a voice for our future. For her, poetry is a creative space to speak on our country’s injustices in a way that people are more inclined to read and/or listen to. Amanda Gorman promotes perseverance and togetherness throughout her poems: “Earthrise,” “The Hill We Climb,” and “The Miracle of Morning” to challenge the narrative of our nation’s history and make the world a better place for the generations to come.

Amanda Gorman, the youngest inaugural poet at the age of twenty-two, has always had a love for writing and helping people. Gorman and her siblings, including her twin sister, were raised by a single mother in Los Angeles, California. Gorman grew up with a speech impediment as well as an auditory processing disorder, so she had to look for other means of expressing herself (Zelazko). In an interview with Vogue, Gorman states that she started writing poetry far before she began reading it because at the time, poetry was not taught in the classroom (St. Felix). Furthermore, Gorman says that her mother thinks her poetry is bound to save democracy (St. Felix). In 2013, Gorman was named the Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate and while

attending Harvard in 2017, she became the first to be named National Youth Poet Laureate (Zelazko). Both Gorman and her twin sister are activists because they feel, as with most young adults these days, that now more than ever our country needs change and there is no reason that we have been fighting for the same basic human rights for hundreds of years. Due to all of the difficulties and injustices she faced throughout her lifetime, being a young black poet with a speech impediment and raised by a single mother, Gorman uses her experiences throughout her life to turn them into pieces of literature that helps others and unites people to fight against our country's injustices to better the nation for the future.

After gaining fame and publicity when Gorman performed at President Joe Biden's Inauguration in 2020, scholars have had a lot to say about how her poems promote togetherness and ignites a flame throughout the people as we hear her poems. One scholar states that beyond the politics surrounding her performance of "The Hill We Climb" at the inauguration, the lines alone bring on a sense of enlightenment and thrill to listeners and readers (Errington et al.). Gorman's inaugural performance left many calling her our messenger of the past and our voice for the future from the way she described our nation's history and rallied the listeners watching live as well as millions of people watching from home together to do something to change our future. While another scholar says that her work contains Afrofuturist principles in the way she describes the past and the future to create better conditions for our nation's people, specifically people of color (Byrd 46). Gorman and her twin sister have always wanted to help others in any way they can, so becoming activists was never a surprise, but Gorman voices the discrepancies of our nation with her written work while her sister turns to film production to showcase the issues common people face throughout our nation everyday and at times, they even work in collaboration.

The free verse poem, “The Hill We Climb,” brought Amanda Gorman the fame that she was inevitably going to get due to her talent of igniting togetherness and change throughout our nations and its people through her words. Specifically, “The Hill We Climb” speaks on pieces of our nation’s history that no one should be proud of, but Gorman finds a way to describe how we must come together and learn from them to leave our country better than we found it. Early on in the poem, Gorman states, we are striving “To compose a country committed / To all cultures, colors, characters / And conditions of man” (Lines 22 - 24). Within our country’s history, there has always been an issue with rights, whether this is rights for black men, rights for women, or rights for people of different sexualities. For a country to be known as the land of immigrants, Gorman states that we must have government policies to support this and guarantee immigrants and people of all kinds the rights they deserve. Additionally, the speaker says: “Because being American is more than a pride we inherit – / It’s the past we step into and how we repair it” (Lines 49 - 50). This quote adds a more serious tone to the poem and takes a jab at the South and the pride people hold towards the Confederation. Our nation’s history is not something we can change, but together we can take the steps to learn from our mistakes and to leave the world as a better place when we are gone. These quotes clearly show that Amanda Gorman sets out to challenge the narrative of our country’s prolonged history of inequality and “The Hill We Climb” does just that.

Furthermore, “The Hill We Climb” is more of a political poem than “Earthrise” and “The Miracle of Morning” because it was written for Joe Biden’s inauguration. Even with the poem being widely political, Gorman still found a way to bring the country together and imagine how the world could be if we stood up for what we believe in. Lori Martin in her editorial note states that after Gorman read “The Hill We Climb” at the inauguration, there has been a feeling

lingering that “something new is happening” (297). “The Hill We Climb” contains rather political lines such as “where can we find light / In this never-ending shade,” “We braved the belly of the beast,” and “Our people diverse and dutiful. / We’ll emerge, battered and beautiful,” to help describe our past, create a sense of change, and allude to the new presidency resembling the dawn of a new day (Lines 2 - 3, 5, 102 - 103). For most people, President Donald Trump’s term in office was not something to be proud of. This was a situation in which many lost rights that had just recently been given to them—or at least it felt that way anyway. With the new presidency coming in, Gorman signified that we can now persevere and do something about our past to help those around us who are being hit by inequality and social injustice. Amanda Gorman’s most well known poem, “The Hill We Climb,” speaks on our nation’s past to create a sense of perseverance and togetherness to create a future that we will be proud to share with the generations to come.

Similar to “The Hill We Climb,” Amanda Gorman’s poem “Earthrise” contains lines about inequality, social injustice and changing the narrative of our country’s history, but focuses on climate change rather than politics. For years climate change has been a concern, but to the average citizen, it seems like the issue is far too large for them to help the cause, but Gorman’s poem, “Earthrise,” reassures people that anything can help conserve our planet. The speaker says, while some believe that climate change will just go away, others pray because even when disasters are over “it is the obscure, the oppressed, (and) the poor” who “still suffer more than anyone” (Lines 20 - 27). These lines circle back to the inequality and injustices throughout our country. People pray that disaster never strikes their homes and families, but there are people across the country who feel this type of struggle and defeat every day. Gorman proceeds to say “You don’t need to be a politician / To make it your mission to conserve, to protect / ...To give

next generations the planet they deserve” (Lines 41 - 42, 46). In these lines, Gorman states that we do not need to be anybody special to come together within this cause and help preserve our world for the generations to come. With our growing population and standard of living as well as climate change negatively affecting animal production across the world, if something is not done to combat this within the next few years, the effects of climate change and global warming will be irreversible (Kuraz). Amanda Gorman uses “Earthrise” as a way to voice that the people of this nation need to put their differences aside and come together to fight against climate change and make the world a better place for the future generations to come.

Like many of Amanda Gorman’s poems, “The Miracle of Morning” is very optimistic, but rather than speaking on politics and climate change like the poems discussed previously, this poem focuses on something that has been significantly affecting our lives for the past two years: the Coronavirus pandemic. Gorman states, “The question isn’t if we will weather this unknown, / But how we will weather this unknown together” (Lines 11 - 12). Although people across the world were isolated from their friends and families, we found new ways to come together and fight through the struggles we were facing. Additionally, the speaker states, “We’ll observe how the burdens braved by humankind / Are also the moments that make us humans kind” (Lines 30 - 31). Gorman means that the people of this nation may mourn and struggle, but together, we will come out of the situation as better beings, ready to take on a new world. Throughout “The Miracle of Morning”, Gorman states that even during the spike of the pandemic when everyone was isolated, we still found a way to come together to fight for what we believe in to make the world a better place. Arana-Chicas and other scholars support Amanda Gorman’s message from “The Miracle of Morning” when they discuss how in the spring of 2020, despite the pandemic, millions of people came together to support the Black Lives Matter movement and fight against

the inequality and systematic racism that is spread throughout our nation and its policies (1). Gorman's poem, "The Miracle of Morning," promotes togetherness even in isolation and perseverance when fighting for equality and justice throughout our nation.

Amanda Gorman's works of poetry range from poems written on politics and social injustices, climate change, and the Coronavirus pandemic, but somehow they all support the same message of unity, fight, and perseverance. Her most well known poem, "The Hill we Climb" focuses on politics and social injustices, while "Earthrise" focuses on fighting against climate change and conserving the world we know and love, and finally, "The Miracle of Morning" discusses the effects that the Coronavirus pandemic had on our nation. Teenagers and young adults across the country have been truly influenced by Amanda Gorman and her work. There is a new found idea within the younger generations that they can make a difference in this world and that now is the time for change, which is something that so many prior generations were lacking beforehand. Amanda Gorman uses her poetry to challenge the narrative of our country's history in a creative and approachable way, while her words foster a sense of community throughout the nation to leave the world better than we found it for the generations to come.

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## **The Hill We Climb**

When day comes, we ask ourselves,

where can we find light

In this never-ending shade?

The loss we carry. A sea we must wade.

We braved the belly of the beast.,

We've learned that quiet isn't always peace,

And the norms and notions of what "just is"

Isn't always justice.

And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it.

Somehow we do it.

Somehow we weathered and witnessed

a nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished.

We, the successors of a country and a time

Where a skinny Black girl

descended from slaves and raised by a single mother,

Can dream of becoming president,

Only to find herself reciting for one.

And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine,

But that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is  
perfect.

We are striving to forge our union with purpose.

To compose a country committed

To all cultures, colors, characters

And conditions of man.

And so we lift our gazes not

To what stands between us,

But what stands before us.

We close the divide,

Because we know to put

Our future first, we must first

Put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms

So we can reach out our arms to one another.

We seek harm to none, and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:

That even as we grieved, we grew.

That even as we hurt, we hoped.

That even as we tired, we tried.

That we'll forever be tied together, Victorious,  
Not because we will never again know defeat,  
But because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that:

“Everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree,  
And no one shall make them afraid.”

If we're to live up to our own time, then victory  
won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made.

That is the promised glade,

The hill we climb, if only we dare it:

Because being American is more than a pride we inherit –  
It's the past we step into and how we repair it.

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather  
than share it.

Would destroy our country if it meant delaying  
democracy.

And this effort very nearly succeeded.

But while democracy can be periodically delayed,

It can never be permanently defeated.

In this truth, in this faith we trust,

For while we have our eyes on the future,  
History has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption.

We feared at its inception.

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs

Of such a terrifying hour.

But within it we found the power

To author a new chapter,

To offer hope and laughter to ourselves.

So, while once we asked: How could we possibly prevail  
over catastrophe?

Now we assert: How could catastrophe possibly prevail  
over us?

We will not march back to what was,

But move to what shall be:

A country that is bruised but whole,

Benevolent but bold,

Fierce and free.

We will not be turned around

Or interrupted by intimidation.

Because we know our inaction and inertia

Will be the inheritance of the next generation.

Our blunders become their burdens.

But one thing is certain:

If we merge mercy with might, and might with right,

Then love becomes our legacy,

And change our children's birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we  
were left.

With every breath from our bronze-pounded chests,

We will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.

We will rise from the golden hills of the West!

We will rise from the windswept Northeast, where our  
forefathers first realized revolution!

We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the  
Midwestern states!

We will rise from the sunbaked South!

We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover,

In every known nook of our nation,

In every corner called our country,  
Our people diverse and dutiful.  
We'll emerge, battered and beautiful.

When day comes, we step out of the shade,  
Aflame and unafraid.  
The new dawn balloons as we free it,  
For there is always light,  
If only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it.

### **Earthrise**

On Christmas Eve, 1968, astronaut Bill Anders  
Snapped a photo of the earth  
As Apollo 8 orbited the moon.

Those three guys  
Were surprised  
To see from their eyes  
Our planet looked like an earthrise  
A blue orb hovering over the moon's gray horizon,  
with deep oceans and silver skies.

It was our world's first glance at itself  
Our first chance to see a shared reality,  
A declared stance and a commonality;

A glimpse into our planet's mirror,  
And as threats drew nearer,  
Our own urgency became clearer,  
As we realize that we hold nothing dearer  
than this floating body we all call home.

We've known  
That we're caught in the throes  
Of climactic changes some say  
Will just go away,  
While some simply pray  
To survive another day;  
For it is the obscure, the oppressed, the poor,  
Who when the disaster  
Is declared done,  
Still suffer more than anyone.

Climate change is the single greatest challenge of our time,

Of this, you're certainly aware.

It's saddening, but I cannot spare you

From knowing an inconvenient fact, because

It's getting the facts straight that gets us to act and not to wait.

So I tell you this not to scare you,

But to prepare you, to dare you

To dream a different reality,

Where despite disparities

We all care to protect this world,

This riddled blue marble, this little true marvel

To muster the verve and the nerve

To see how we can serve

Our planet. You don't need to be a politician

To make it your mission to conserve, to protect,

To preserve that one and only home

That is ours,

To use your unique power

To give next generations the planet they deserve.

We are demonstrating, creating, advocating

We heed this inconvenient truth, because we need to be anything but lenient  
With the future of our youth.

And while this is a training,  
in sustaining the future of our planet,  
There is no rehearsal. The time is  
Now  
Now  
Now,  
Because the reversal of harm,  
And protection of a future so universal  
Should be anything but controversial.

So, earth, pale blue dot  
We will fail you not.

Just as we chose to go to the moon  
We know it's never too soon  
To choose hope.  
We choose to do more than cope  
With climate change  
We choose to end it—  
We refuse to lose.

Together we do this and more  
Not because it's very easy or nice  
But because it is necessary,  
Because with every dawn we carry  
the weight of the fate of this celestial body orbiting a star.  
And as heavy as that weight sounded, it doesn't hold us down,  
But it keeps us grounded, steady, ready,  
Because an environmental movement of this size  
Is simply another form of an earthrise.

To see it, close your eyes.  
Visualize that all of us leaders in this room  
and outside of these walls or in the halls, all  
of us changemakers are in a spacecraft,  
Floating like a silver raft  
in space, and we see the face of our planet anew.  
We relish the view;  
We witness its round green and brilliant blue,  
Which inspires us to ask deeply, wholly:  
What can we do?  
Open your eyes.  
Know that the future of  
this wise planet

Lies right in sight:

Right in all of us. Trust

this earth uprising.

All of us bring light to exciting solutions never tried before

For it is our hope that implores us, at our uncompromising core,

To keep rising up for an earth more than worth fighting for.

### **The Miracle of Morning**

I thought I'd awaken to a world in mourning.

Heavy clouds crowding, a society storming.

But there's something different on this golden morning.

Something magical in the sunlight, wide and warming.

I see a dad with a stroller taking a jog.

Across the street, a bright-eyed girl chases her dog.

A grandma on a porch fingers her rosaries.

She grins as her young neighbor brings her groceries.

While we might feel small, separate, and all alone,

Our people have never been more closely tethered.

The question isn't if we will weather this unknown,

But how we will weather this unknown together.

So on this meaningful morn, we mourn and we mend.

Like light, we can't be broken, even when we bend.

As one, we will defeat both despair and disease.

We stand with healthcare heroes and all employees;

With families, libraries, schools, waiters, artists;

Businesses, restaurants, and hospitals hit hardest.

We ignite not in the light, but in lack thereof,

For it is in loss that we truly learn to love.

In this chaos, we will discover clarity.

In suffering, we must find solidarity.

For it's our grief that gives us our gratitude,

Shows us how to find hope, if we ever lose it.

So ensure that this ache wasn't endured in vain:

Do not ignore the pain. Give it purpose. Use it.

Read children's books, dance alone to DJ music.

Know that this distance will make our hearts grow fonder.

From a wave of woes our world will emerge stronger.

We'll observe how the burdens braved by humankind

Are also the moments that make us humans kind;  
Let every dawn find us courageous, brought closer;  
Heeding the light before the fight is over.  
When this ends, we'll smile sweetly, finally seeing  
In testing times, we became the best of beings.