

AMANDA GORMAN

'The Hill We Climb'
(1/4)

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 gaze, 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.

AMANDA GORMAN

'The Hill We Climb'
(2/4)

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 promise to glade, the hill we climb, if only we dare.

It's 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.*

AMANDA GORMAN

'The Hill We Climb'
(3/4)

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, become the
future.*

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.

*Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, 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.*

AMANDA GORMAN

'The Hill We Climb'
(4/4)

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

We will rise from the sun-baked South.

We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover.

And every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful, will emerge battered and beautiful.

When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid.

The new dawn blooms 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.

WALT WHITMAN

'Song of Myself'
(112)

Stanza 1

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

*I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.*

*My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.*

*Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.*

WALT WHITMAN

'Song of Myself'
(2/2)

Stanza 51

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?
Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,
(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.
Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his supper?
Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

AUDRE LORD

'Power'

1/3

*The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.*

*I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
is the only liquid for miles
and my stomach
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.*

AUDRE LORD

'Power'

2/3

*A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
and a voice said "Die you little motherfucker" and
there are tapes to prove it. At his trial
this policeman said in his own defense
"I didn't notice the size nor nothing else
only the color". And
there are tapes to prove that, too.*

*Today that 37 year old white man
with 13 years of police forcing
was set free
by eleven white men who said they were satisfied
justice had been done
and one Black Woman who said
"They convinced me" meaning
they had dragged her 4'10" black Woman's frame
over the hot coals
of four centuries of white male approval
until she let go
the first real power she ever had
and lined her own womb with cement
to make a graveyard for our children.*

AUDRE LORD

'Power'

3/3

*I have not been able to touch the destruction
within me.*

*But unless I learn to use
the difference between poetry and rhetoric
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
and one day I will take my teenaged plug
and connect it to the nearest socket
raping an 85 year old white woman
who is somebody's mother
and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
a greek chorus will be singing in 3/4 time
"Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are."*

CAROL RUMENS

'The Emigrée'

1/2

*There once was a country... I left it as a child
but my memory of it is sunlight-clear
for it seems I never saw it in that November
which, I am told, comes to the mildest city.*

*The worst news I receive of it cannot break
my original view, the bright, filled paperweight.*

*It may be at war, it may be sick with tyrants,
but I am branded by an impression of sunlight.*

*The white streets of that city, the graceful slopes
glow even clearer as time rolls its tanks
and the frontiers rise between us, close like waves.*

*That child's vocabulary I carried here
like a hollow doll, opens and spills a grammar.
Soon I shall have every coloured molecule of it.*

*It may by now be a lie, banned by the state
but I can't get it off my tongue. It tastes of sunlight.*

CAROL RUMENS

'The Emigrée'
2/2

*I have no passport, there's no way back at all
but my city comes to me in its own white plane.*

It lies down in front of me, docile as paper;

I comb its hair and love its shining eyes.

*My city takes me dancing through the city
of walls. They accuse me of absence, they circle me.*

They accuse me of being dark in their free city.

*My city hides behind me. They mutter death,
and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight.*