

The Hill We Climb

Amanda Gorman

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.

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.
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.
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.

"THE GIFT OUTRIGHT" BY ROBERT FROST (INAUGURAL POEM)
Poem recited at John F. Kennedy's Inauguration by Robert Frost

The land was ours before we were the land's
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she will become.

Spring Wedding by Andrew Motion

I took your news outdoors, and strolled a while
In silence on my square of garden-ground
Where I could dim the roar of arguments,
Ignore the scandal-flywheel whirring round,

And hear instead the green fuse in the flower
Ignite, the breeze stretch out a shadow-hand
To ruffle blossom on its sticking points,
The blackbirds sing, and singing take their stand.

I took your news outdoors, and found the Spring
Had honoured all its promises to start
Disclosing how the principles of earth
Can make a common purpose with the heart.

The heart which slips and sidles like a stream
Weighed down by winter-wreckage near its source -
But given time, and come the clearing rain,
Breaks loose to revel in its proper course.

Causa Belli

They read good books, and quote, but never learn
a language other than the scream of rocket-burn
Our straighter talk is drowned but ironclad;
elections, money, empire, oil and Dad.

Mythology by Andrew Motion

Earth's axle creaks; the year jolts on; the trees
begin to slip their brittle leaves, their flakes of rust;
and darkness takes the edge off daylight, not
because it wants to—never that. Because it must.
And you? Your life was not your own to keep
or lose. Beside the river, swerving underground,
the future tracked you, snapping at your heels:
Diana, breathless, hunted by your own quick hounds.

The Names by Billy Collins

Yesterday, I lay awake in the palm of the night. A soft rain stole in, unhelped by any breeze, And when I saw the silver glaze on the windows, I started with A, with Ackerman, as it happened, Then Baxter and Calabro, Davis and Eberling, names falling into place As droplets fell through the dark. Names printed on the ceiling of the night. Names slipping around a watery bend. Twenty-six willows on the banks of a stream. In the morning, I walked out barefoot Among thousands of flowers Heavy with dew like the eyes of tears, And each had a name -- Fiori inscribed on a yellow petal Then Gonzalez and Han, Ishikawa and Jenkins. Names written in the air And stitched into the cloth of the day. A name under a photograph taped to a mailbox. Monogram on a torn shirt, I see you spelled out on storefront windows And on the bright unfurled awnings of this city. I say the syllables as I turn a corner -- Kelly and Lee, Medina, Nardella, and O'Connor. When I peer into the woods, I see a thick tangle where letters are hidden As in a puzzle concocted for children. Parker and Quigley in the twigs of an ash, Rizzo, Schubert, Torres, and Upton, Secrets in the boughs of an ancient maple. Names written in the pale sky. Names rising in the updraft amid buildings. Names silent in stone Or cried out behind a door. Names blown over the earth and out to sea. In the evening -- weakening light, the last swallows. A boy on a lake lifts his oars. A woman by a window puts a match to a candle, And the names are outlined on the rose clouds -- Vanacore and Wallace (let X stand, if it can, for the ones unfound) Then Young and Ziminsky, the final jolt of Z. Names etched on the head of a pin. One name spanning a bridge, another undergoing a tunnel. A blue name needled into the skin. Names of citizens, workers, mothers and fathers, The bright-eyed daughter, the quick son. Alphabet of names in a green field. Names in the small tracks of birds. Names lifted from a hat Or balanced on the tip of the tongue. Names wheeled into the dim warehouse of memory. So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart.

A Letter From the Front

By Sir Henry Newbolt

I was out early to-day, spying about
From the top of a haystack -- such a lovely morning --
And when I mounted again to canter back
I saw across a field in the broad sunlight
A young Gunner Subaltern, stalking along
With a rook-rifle held at the read, and -- would you believe it? --
A domestic cat, soberly marching beside him.

So I laughed, and felt quite well disposed to the youngster,
And shouted out "the top of the morning" to him,
And wished him "Good sport!" -- and then I remembered
My rank, and his, and what I ought to be doing:
And I rode nearer, and added, "I can only suppose
You have not seen the Commander-in-Chief's order
Forbidding English officers to annoy their Allies
By hunting and shooting.

"

But he stood and saluted
And said earnestly, "I beg your pardon, Sir,
I was only going out to shoot a sparrow
To feed my cat with.

"

So there was the whole picture,
The lovely early morning, the occasional shell
Screeching and scattering past us, the empty landscape, --
Empty, except for the young Gunner saluting,
And the cat, anxiously watching his every movement.

I may be wrong, or I may have told it badly,
But it struck me as being extremely ludicrous.

The Day Lady Died

BY FRANK O'HARA

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
three days after Bastille day, yes
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do
think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*
of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

Death of Harry Patch (2012) Andrew Motion

When the next morning eventually breaks,
a young Captain climbs onto the fire step,
knocks ash from his pipe then drops it
still warm into his pocket, checks his watch,
and places the whistle back between his lips.

At 06.00 hours precisely he gives the signal,
but today nothing that happens next happens
according to plan. A very long and gentle note
wanders away from him over the ruined ground
and hundreds of thousands of dead who lie there

immediately rise up, straightening their tunics
before falling in as they used to do, shoulder
to shoulder, eyes front. They have left a space
for the last recruit of all to join them: Harry Patch,
one hundred and eleven years old, but this is him

now, running quick-sharp along the duckboards.
When he has taken his place, and the whole company
are settled at last, their padre appears out of nowhere,
pausing a moment in front of each and every one
to slip a wafer of dry mud onto their tongues.

When I was a girl named Monica

Ta-Nehisi Coates

We will watch each other age
in front of cameras, in newsprint,

a public decay. It's already started.
Look at my new sway;

my body seems more ample
among the miniature shampoos,

the thin rectangles of wrapped soaps.
Look at the pale shifting of my skin

under the red eye of the ticking heat lamp.
And I've noticed your hair's gone white,

your face loosening.
I'm shocked

how can you still appear--
not televised, not some public memory

of the two of us swimming valiantly--
but the intimacy of teeth,

breath and breathing.
And I carry you sometimes

for a day or two,
like a bird hidden in a pocket

and I imagine
that you know how I live.

And while the bird shifts
and rustles and keeps one wet eye

on my life, I am more purposeful,
I stride.

But today you see me here naked
standing in front of this hotel mirror.

You are someone who knew me before
I was the world's collective joke

about cigars, thongs, stained dresses,
when I was a girl named Monica.

I miss her much more than I miss you.