



POETRY FOUNDATION

I Don't Like Poetry

BY JOSHUA SEIGAL

I don't like similes.

Every time I try to think of one
my brain feels like a vast, empty desert;
my eyes feel like raisins floating in an ocean;
my fingers feel like sweaty sausages.

I don't like metaphors.

Whenever I attempt them
a hammer starts beating in my chest;
lava starts bubbling in my veins;
zombies have a fight in my stomach.

I don't like alliteration.

We learnt about it in school
but it's seriously, stupendously silly;
definitely drastically difficult;
terribly, troublingly tricky.

I don't like onomatopoeia.

I wish I could blow it up
with a ZAP! and a BANG! and a CRASH!;
a BOOM! and a CLANG! and a POW!;
a CLASH! and a BAM! and a THUD!

And I don't like repetition

I don't like repetition

I don't like repetition...



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On the Fifth Day

BY [JANE HIRSHFIELD](#)

On the fifth day
the scientists who studied the rivers
were forbidden to speak
or to study the rivers.

The scientists who studied the air
were told not to speak of the air,
and the ones who worked for the farmers
were silenced,
and the ones who worked for the bees.
Someone, from deep in the Badlands,
began posting facts.
The facts were told not to speak
and were taken away.
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.
Now it was only the rivers
that spoke of the rivers,
and only the wind that spoke of its bees,
while the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees
continued to move toward their fruit.
The silence spoke loudly of silence,
and the rivers kept speaking
of rivers, of boulders and air.
Bound to gravity, earless and tongueless,
the untested rivers kept speaking.
Bus drivers, shelf stockers,
code writers, machinists, accountants,
lab techs, cellists kept speaking.
They spoke, the fifth day,
of silence.



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September, 1918

BY AMY LOWELL

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;
The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;
The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves,
And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open windows.
Under a tree in the park,
Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,
Were carefully gathering red berries
To put in a pasteboard box.
Some day there will be no war,
Then I shall take out this afternoon
And turn it in my fingers,
And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,
And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.
To-day I can only gather it
And put it into my lunch-box,
For I have time for nothing
But the endeavour to balance myself
Upon a broken world.

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Source: Selected Poems of Amy Lowell (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002)

The Shallows

By Amanda Gorman, 2021

Touch-deficient &
Light-starved we were,
Like an inverted flame,
Eating any warmth down to its studs.
The deepest despair is ravenous,
It takes & takes & takes,
A stomach never satisfied.
This is not hyperbole.
All that is gorgeous & good & decent
Is no luxury, not when its void
Brings us to the wide wharf of war.

Even as we stand stone-still,
It's with the entirety of what we've lost
Sweeping through us like a ghost.

What we have lived
Remains indecipherable.

& yet we remain.
& still, we write.
& so, we write.
Watch us move above the fog
Like a promontory at dusk.
Shall this leave us bitter?
Or better?

Grieve.

Then choose.

Invictus

BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
 I am the captain of my soul.

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Source: *Poems* (Macmillan and Co, 1920)



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Confession

BY COUNTEE CULLEN

If for a day joy masters me,
Think not my wounds are healed;
Far deeper than the scars you see,
I keep the roots concealed.

They shall bear blossoms with the fall;
I have their word for this,
Who tend my roots with rains of gall,
And suns of prejudice.

Copyright Credit: This poem is in the public domain.

Source: *Copper Sun* (1927)

CUT

There is no simple way to hurt.

The real damage is dammed, disrupted.

: Inaudible:

We must change

This ending in every way.

* * *

Disease is physiological death,

Loneliness is a social one,

Where the old We collapses like a lung.

* * *

Some days, we just need a place

Where we can bleed in peace.

Our only word for this is

Poem.

* * *

There is no right way to say

How we have missed one another.

Some traumas flood past the body,

An ache unbordered by bone.

When we shift toward a kindred soul,

It is with the cut of all our lives.

Perhaps pain is like a name,

Made to sing just for you.

* * *

We issue an apology

From our warbling palms:

We are still hurt,

But for now, we no longer hurt

One another.

There is no meek way to mend.

You must ruin us carefully.

Amanda Gorman, 2021
Call Us What We Carry.

GOOD GRIEF

The origin of the word *trauma*

Is not just "wound," but "piercing" or "turning,"

As blades do when finding home.

Grief commands its own grammar,

Structured by intimacy & imagination.

We often say:

We are beside ourselves with grief!

We can't even imagine.

This means anguish can call us to envision

More than what we believed was carryable

Or even survivable.

This is to say, there does exist

A good grief:

The hurt is how we know

We are alive & awake;

It clears us for all the exquisite,

Excruciating enormities to come.

We are pierced new by the turning
Forward.

All that is grave need

Not be a burden, an anguish.

Call it, instead, an anchor,

Grief grounding us in its sea.

Despair exits us the same way it enters—

Turning through the mouth.

Even now conviction works

Strange magic on our tongues.

We are built up again

By what we

Build/find/sec/say/remember/know.

What we carry means we survive,

It is what survives us.

We have survived us.

Where once we were alone,

Now we are beside ourselves.

Where once we were barbed & brutal as blades,

Now we can only imagine.

Amanda Gorman, 2021.
Call Us What We Carry



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The Language of Joy

BY JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE

Black woman joy is like this:

Mama said one day long before I was born
she was walking down the street,
foxes around her neck, their little heads
smiling up at her and out at the world
and she was wearing this suit she had saved up
a month's paycheck for after it called to her so seductively
from the window of this boutique. And that suit
was wearing her, keeping all its promises
in all the right places. Indigo. Matching gloves.
Suede shoes dippity-do-dahed in blue.
With tassels! Honey gold. And, Lord, a hat
with plume de peacock, a conductor's baton that bounced
to hip rhythm. She looked so fine she thought
Louis Armstrong might pop up out of those movies
she saw as a child, wipe his forehead and sing
ba da be bop oh do de doe de doe doe.
And he did. Mama did not sing but she was skiddly-doing that day,
and the foxes grinned, and she grinned
and she was the star of her own Hollywood musical
here with Satchmo who had called Ella over and now they were all
singing and dancing like a free people up Dexter Avenue,
and don't think they didn't know they were walking in the footsteps
of slaves and over auction sites and past where old Wallace
had held onto segregation like a life raft, but this

was not that day. This day was for foxes and hip rhythm
and musical perfection and folks on the street joining in the celebration
of breath and holiness. And they did too. In color-coordinated ensembles,
they kicked and turned and grinned and shouted like church
or football game, whatever their religious preference. The air
vibrated with music, arms, legs, and years of unrequited
sunshine. Somebody did a flip up Dexter Avenue.

It must have been a Nicholas Brother in a featured performance,
and Mama was Miss-Lena-Horne-Dorothy-Dandridge
high-stepping up the real estate, ready for her close-up.
That's when Mama felt this little tickle. She thought
it might be pent-up joy, until a mouse squirmed out
from underneath that fine collar, over that fabulous fur,
jumped off her shoulder and ran down the street.

Left my mama standing there on Dexter Avenue in her blue
suit and dead foxes. And what did Mama do?

Everybody looking at her, robbed by embarrassment?

She said, "It be like that sometimes," then she and Satchmo,
Ella, and the whole crew jammed their way home.

Source: *Poetry* (July/August 2021)