



Analysis of Poem “The Hill We Climb”

by Arwen Huang

2021 is destined to be a year full of changes and hope. Although the shadows from 2020 have not yet waded, the world has been seeing lights of hope in both social and political aspects. For the United States, the biggest event must be the change of president and the transition of political powers in all the states. The inauguration of Joe Biden featured a slew of high-profile performers, but for many audiences, it was the lesser-known Amanda Gorman who truly wowed the crowd and touches their hearts with the poem *The Hill We Climb*. The poet, by depicting both challenges and strength of unity, successfully appeals to her audience, the people from all over the world who either feel positive toward the new president or have doubt about him, and intend to give them a strong sense of identity, hope, and unity. Through using symbolism, antithesis with puns, and allusion, the text links to a global issue about "power and politics", which is how "the transition of power brings hope to the people."

The poem is very special in terms of its function. Unlike the poetry in literature, *The Hill We Climb* is one of the examples of inaugural poems. This type of poem has a very specific function, to document the beginning of a new political era and to make the audience feel positive about the new president. Hence, it usually contains content including memorizing the history, highlighting the strength of the country, and looking forward to the future. By showing all the positive images, the poem intends to make the audience feel confident and hopeful about the new president. Therefore, these poems can be considered as a way of government propaganda. *The Hill We Climb*, as a successful example, is unlike any of the traditional poems. It is free verse, implying the new energy and the breaking of any past stereotype and constraint, such as racial discrimination. Despite the fact that the poet's identity as a young female African American from a single mother family appeals to the audience, the techniques she used throughout the poem create a strong and long-lasting impact on the readers, effectively bringing hope to the audience in the transition of power.

To begin with, the author uses symbolism throughout the poem to illustrate her strong confidence and hope toward the future regardless of the challenges they are facing. Appearing both in the title and the text, "hill" not only refers to the Capitol Hill where the inauguration is located but an imaginary hill that has its meaning extending from the history to the future, which correlates with the three main content of the poem. The image of the hill first symbolized the hardship of how American came into being in its long history. It was their forefathers who, through a tough process just as "climbing a hill", achieved independence, unity, democracy, and equality. The hill also refers to the current situation. The contemporary citizens of America as climbers are climbing a hill full of challenges — current problems like Covid-19, racial discrimination. However, the author intends to tell the audience that through insisting on their road and conquering the challenges, they can reach the "peak of the mountain" — a bright future. Through using the symbolism of hill, the author uses a common and simple object to relate all the achievements in the past and present, and hope in



the future all together to create a feeling of progression, continuation, and unity of a country throughout history. Since all the audiences have the experiences of the toughness of climbing a hill and the pride when standing at the peak, this symbolism transforms a vague idea into a specific visual and sensory image, inciting audiences' sense of pride and hope.

In addition, the pair of symbol "light" and "shade" is another central symbolism in the poem. "where can we find light in this never-ending shade?" The author first begins with this rhetorical question, immediately throw readers to think about two contrasting imagery, shade, and light. By using shade as a symbol, she refers to the problems that appear in this contemporary society, especially the turbulence a few days ago, arousing readers' reflection upon their current situation. Light, on the other hand, indicates the positive power and changes that the new president and the people can create. The image of shade is dark, violent, and thick, which can invoke readers' panic and fear while the lights incite warmth, happiness, and safety. Through presenting this pair of contrasting symbolism, the author describes the two opposing sides of America, those who want to divide and those who want to unify, thus presenting an image of the country is not one that's defeated or succeed, but one that's still on its way to progress and achieve success. She seeks to inspire hope in those listening that a better day is dawning and that better times are ahead.

Moreover, the author cleverly uses antithesis with pun or rhythms to shows hopes in the transition of power. "Lay down our arms / so we can reach out our arms." is one typical example. The first "arm" refers to weapons, while the second means kindness and love among people. Through deliberately using the same word to illustrate the opposite meaning, the author intends to draw in the divide of the two different sides, one violent and cruel and the other warm and helpful, invoking the kindness and warmth among the audiences. Therefore, this line triggers hope inside the readers as they naturally feel inclined to a harmonious society rather than fighting and death. Hence, the author intends to create people's anticipation toward the new presidential era. Another example appears in line 37-39, where the poet uses anaphora to present pair of antithetical words "grieved/grew", "hurt/hoped", and "tired/tried", showing that although the country has serious problems and have experienced grieve, the people will always unite together and strive to become stronger. What makes these words special is that they are assonance, and some of them are even homomorphic. By showing the similarity between the words with completely different meanings, the author implies that positive and negative things coexist, and urge readers to keep on the hard work and confidence even in the darkest moment as it is their national spirit. Hence, the words leave a deep impression in the readers' minds, and motivated them to be confident, and keep dreaming. Therefore, by showing all these contrasting phrases, the author brings hope to the people, telling them to never give up and always be kind and positive.

Last but not least, the author uses allusions, both contemporary and historical. In lines 94-100, he uses anaphora "we will rise from..." For the audiences, it is very obvious that this is an allusion to the speech I Have a Dream written by Martin Luther King. Such a link not only shows that the author is paying homage to this great activist but also successfully catches the



readers' heart as they all strongly believe in his word. Therefore, these lines make readers link the inauguration to the time when Martin Luther King is giving the speech and links the hope and dream that is depicted in the speech to this poem. Hence, the writer persuades the readers that challenges like discrimination can be improved in the future just like what the people believe in Martin Luther King's time. Additionally, the author also alludes to her own life. "Where a skinny Black girl/descended from slaves and raised by a single mother/can dream of becoming president" Here, the writer not only alludes to history — the time of slave, but also implies the contemporary opportunities. The author is reminding the readers of her identity, which is considered to be lower-class in history, and the positive changes she has achieved due to the good social environment. By alluding to her own story, the author increases the reliability of the example, thus motivating other young people who now facing difficulties to strive for a better future. "Slave" and "presidents" creates a strong contrast, showing how the society has been advancing, thus setting an inspiring moving example for the audience. Hence, through using allusions, the author gives audiences hope toward the present and future.

In conclusion, the poem *The Hill We Climb* successfully shows the when facing political changes, the transition of power, people tend to feel more confident and hopeful toward the future. By using symbolism, antithesis, and allusions, the poet paints a picture of hope and leave a strong impression in the readers' mind.