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The Modern American Poetry Scene Is Somber, Reflective, Yet Urgent

Our Friends · Thursday, December 23rd, 2021

Poetry thrives in times of uncertainty and struggle, and so it's little surprise that the past few years have produced some of the most excellent poetry, contemporary or otherwise. The Atlantic recently [produced a profile of Amanda Gorman](#), who shot to stardom when she read her work at President Biden's inauguration. In that profile it was highlighted just why Gorman is so widely read and met critical reception; her poetry grapples with the very issues that touch the lives of Americans every day, whether that be the realities of the new normal or deepening inequality. These are messages that need to be said, and need to be conveyed constructively, and much of the [work being produced today meets that standard](#).

Sadness in poetry

The past two years have been a somber time for many. While it's arguable that some poetry should lift moods, there's also a strong argument to be made for the value of catharsis, and using poetry as a medium through which to process feelings. Reflective and [sad poetry books](#) can provide an honest look at the problems going on in the USA in the current era as well as provide a way to deal with complex emotions. Poetry has always acted as a bellwether for the mood of the nation, too, as CNN outlines; the latest generation of poets are [capturing those emotions in beautiful ways](#).

A fierce mirror

As well as offering catharsis, poetry often provides a reflection of society that is seldom captured as clearly elsewhere. This is the view of Joy Harjo, poet laureate, who in a USA Today feature described poetry as a 'fierce mirror'. At a time when self-reflection is in high demand from all corners of society, poetry provides a foil from which the nation can critically assess itself and look at where it's going. It's an urgent media format for a nation that is in urgent need of self-critique.

A unifying factor?

The US is quite fractured along political and social lines in particular. Even the pandemic hasn't created a total sense of unity, with factions on either side of the

divide arguing for or against COVID inhibition measures. What the pandemic has shown, however, is a sense of equality among Americans and people all over the world – the same vulnerabilities are exposed in everyone. According to the New Yorker, the latest wave of poetry has reflected this slight edge of unification. The problems that most people face are the same; even when there's a sense of disunity from events within the country and the wider world, people aren't quite as different as they might think they are.

Throughout history poetry has served as a register of that sentiment. That's true whether it's the poetry of well-heeled scholars, or the working class poetry that typified the 20th century. Now, more than ever, poetry serves as a mirror to the country, and the latest generation of poets are serving that purpose with vigor.

Photo by [Suzy Hazelwood](#) from [Pexels](#)

This entry was posted on Thursday, December 23rd, 2021 at 8:14 am and is filed under [Check This Out](#)

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