

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

AMANDA

GORMAN

POEMS

CALL US

WHAT WE

CARRY

AMANDA
GORMAN

P O E M S

CALL US
WHAT WE
CARRY



VIKING

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



First published in the United States of America by Viking,
an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2021

Copyright © 2021 by Amanda Gorman

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

Viking & colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Visit us online at penguinrandomhouse.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

Ebook ISBN 9780593465073

Design by Amanda Gorman and Jim Hoover, adapted for ebook by Michelle Quintero

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

pid_prh_5.8.0_138721560_c0_r0

*For all of us
both hurting & healing
who choose to
carry on*

Contents

[Requiem](#)

[What a Piece of Wreck Is Man](#)

[Earth Eyes](#)

[Memoria](#)

[Atonement](#)

[Fury & Faith](#)

[Resolution](#)

[Notes](#)

History and elegy are akin. The word “history” comes from an ancient Greek verb ἵστωρειν meaning “to ask.” One who asks about things—about their dimensions, weight, location, moods, names, holiness, smell—is an historian. But the asking is not idle. It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself.

—ANNE CARSON

SHIP'S MANIFEST

Allegedly the worst is behind us.
Still, we crouch before the lip of tomorrow,
Halting like a headless hant in our own house,
Waiting to remember exactly
What it is we're supposed to be doing.

& what exactly are we supposed to be doing?
Penning a letter to the world as a daughter of it.
We are writing with vanishing meaning,
Our words water dragging down a windshield.
The poet's diagnosis is that what we have lived
Has already warped itself into a fever dream,
The contours of its shape stripped from the murky mind.

To be accountable we must render an account:
Not what was said, but what was meant.
Not the fact, but what was felt.
What was known, even while unnamed.
Our greatest test will be
Our testimony.
This book is a message in a bottle.
This book is a letter.
This book does not let up.
This book is awake.
This book is a wake.
For what is a record but a reckoning?
The capsule captured?
A repository,
An ark articulated?
& the poet, the preserver

Of ghosts & gains,
Our demons & dreams,
Our haunts & hopes.
Here's to the preservation
Of a light so terrible.

REQUIEM

Now let us issue from the darkness of solitude.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

PLEASE

ensure you maintain [] yourself & others & []
face

[] all [] [] people [] in []
time.

ARBORESCENT I

We are
 Arborescent—
What goes
 Unseen
Is at the very
 Root of ourselves.
Distance can
 Distort our deepest
Sense
 Of who
We are,
 Leave us
Warped
 & wasted
As winter's
 Wind. We will
Not walk
 From what
We've borne.
 We would
Keep it
 For a while,
Sit silent &
 Swinging on its branches
Like a child
 Refusing to come
Home. We would
 Keep,
We would
 Weep,

Knowing how

We would

Again

Give up

Our world

For this one.

AT FIRST

There were no words for what we witnessed.
When we talked to each other,
Our sentences were stilted
& stalled as a telegram.
*Hope we are doing well/
As we can be/
In all these times/
Unprecedented & unpresidential.*

When asking how others were faring,
We did not expect an honest or full response.
What words can answer how we're remaining alive?
We became paid professionals of pain,
Specialists in suffering,
Aces of the ache,
Masters of the moan.
March shuddered into a year,
Sloshing with millions of lonely,
An overcrowded solitude.
We pray there will never be such a
Precise & peopled hurt as this.

We began to lose words
As trees forget their leaves in fall.
The language we spoke
Had no place for *excited*,
Eager, *laughter*, *joy*,
Friend, *get together*.
The phrases that remained
Were their own violence:
That was sicckk!

Ha! we're dead.
We are deceased.



To try is to take a stab,
To take a shot.
We want to find who made us
A slaughterhouse,
A rhetoric that works in red.
We teach children:
Leave a mark on the world.
What leads a man to shoot up
Souls but the desire to mark
Up the globe?
To scar it & thus make it his.
His intention to be remembered,
Even if for a ragged wreckage.
Kids, unmark this place.
Leave it nothing
Like the one we left behind.

Sorry for the long text;
There are no small words in the mouth.
We find the rhetoric of reunion
By letting love reclaim our tongues,
The tip of the teeth.
Our hearts have always
Been in our throats.

FUGUE

Don't get us wrong.
We do pound for what has passed,
But more so all that we passed by—
Unthanking, unknowing,
When what we had was ours.

There was another gap that choked us:
The simple gift of farewell.
Goodbye, by which we say to another—
Thanks for offering your life into mine.
By *Goodbye*, we truly mean:
Let us be able to say hello again.

This is edgeless doubt:
Every cough seemed catastrophe,
Every proximate person a potential peril.
We mapped each sneeze & snuffle,
Certain the virus we had run away from
Was now running through us.
We slept the days down.
We wept the year away,
Frayed & afraid.

Perhaps that is what it means
To breathe & die in this flesh.
Forgive us,
For we have walked
This before.

History flickered in
& out of our vision,

A movie our eyelids
Staggered through.

We added a thousand false steps
To our walk tracker today
Because every step we've taken
Has required more than we had to give.

In such eternal nature,
We spent days as the walking dead,
Dreading disease & disaster.
We cowered, bone-shriveled
As a laurel in drought, our throats
Made of frantic workings,
Feet falling over themselves
Like famished fawns.
We awaited horrors,
Building up leviathans before they arose.
We could not pull our heads
From the raucous deep.
Anxiety is a living body,
Poised beside us like a shadow.
It is the last creature standing,
The only beast who loves us
Enough to stay.

We were already thousands
Of deaths into the year.
Every time we fell heart-first into the news,
 Head-first, dread-first,
Our bodies tight & tensed with *what now?*
Yet who has the courage to inquire *what if?*
What hope shall we shelter
Within us like a secret,
 Second smile,
 Private & pure.

Sorry if we're way less friendly—*
We had COVID tryna end things.
Even now handshakes & hugs are like gifts,
Something we are shocked to grant, be granted.
& so, we forage for anything
That feels like this:
The click in our lung that ties us to strangers,
How when among those we care for most
We shift with instinct,
Like the flash of a school of fish.
Our regard for one another
 Not tumored,
 Just transformed.

By *Hello*, we mean:
Let us not say goodbye again.
There is someone we would die for.
Feel that fierce, unshifting truth,
That braced & ready sacrifice.
That's what love does:
It makes a fact faced beyond fear.
We have lost too much to lose.
We lean against each other again,
The way water bleeds into itself.
This glassed hour, paused,
Bursts like a loaded star,
Belonging always to us.
What more must we believe in.

* In fact, levels of social trust have been in a steep decline in the United States. See David Brooks. Strikingly, a 2021 study suggests that the descendants of the survivors of the 1918 influenza epidemic experienced lowered social trust. See Arnstein Aassve et al.

SCHOOL'S OUT

The announcement
Swung blunt as an axe-blow:
All students were to leave
Campus as soon as possible.

We think we cried,
Our brains bleached blank.
We were already trying to forget
What we would live.
What we would give.

* * *

Beware the ides of March.
We recognized that something ran
Rampant as a rumor
Among our ranks.
Cases bleeding closer,
Like spillage in a napkin.

There is nothing more worrisome
Than a titan who believes itself
Separate from the world.

* * *

Graduation day.
We don't need a gown.
We don't need a stage.
We are walking beside our ancestors,
Their drums roar for us,
Their feet stomp at our life.
There is power in being robbed

& still choosing to dance.