

as he could” suggests life in a coal mining town was arduous and undesirable.

In the second stanza, the line “The furnace it fed stood in the dank / basement, its many arms upraised / like Godzilla or some other monster” gives the experience a chilling effect that links the coal to devastation through its monstrosity. Combined with the poem’s title, readers get a sense that Piercy’s experience with coal was menacing, particularly at night. Her memory of the furnace as being insatiably hungry for coal with fire that “glowed like a red eye” and shadows and sounds that caused mice to scamper intensifies her relationship to coal, which might be read as the poet foreshadowing the damage the country’s overuse of coal has wrought on the bodies of coal miners as well as on a larger environmental scale.

The clinkers, or waste caused by combustion and heating, feature twice in the poem—it is the poet’s responsibility to discard these clinkers. The repetition of the word “clinkers” heightens its importance in the context of the poet’s dread of the coal-fired furnace. While the poem centers on the use of coal in the speaker’s household and community and does not explicitly address more large-scale environmental concerns, global climate change is an issue Marge Piercy cares about fiercely and that often shows up in her poetry and novels.⁸⁰

POETRY: “OUR PURPOSE IN POETRY: OR, EARTHRISE” BY AMANDA GORMAN

Amanda Gorman: Biography

Amanda Gorman (b. 1998) was the youngest inaugural poet in American history when she read her poem “The Hill We Climb” at the 2021 presidential inauguration, espousing messages of unity, hope, justice, and change.⁸¹ Gorman was also the nation’s first National Youth Poet Laureate.⁸² Gorman, who has a speech impediment, began writing and reciting poetry to help her find her voice as a young girl.⁸³ Gorman was inspired by the Pakistani activist and Nobel Prize winner, [Malala Yousafzai](#) to become a youth delegate for the United Nations in 2013.⁸⁴ She later earned a degree in sociology from Harvard; performed poetry honoring nurses, educators, and veterans at the Super Bowl; and authored a children’s book called *Change Sings: A Children’s Anthem* (2021) as well as a collection of poetry titled



Amanda Gorman recites her inaugural poem, “The Hill We Climb,” during the 59th Presidential Inauguration ceremony in Washington, January 20, 2021.

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Call Us What We Carry (2021).

In a 2021 interview for *Time* magazine, Gorman has said she views poetry as:

... the lens we use to interrogate the history we stand on and the future we stand for. It’s no coincidence that at the base of the Statue of Liberty, there is a poem. Our instinct is to turn to poetry when we’re looking to communicate a spirit that is larger than ourselves. Whenever I’m writing, I’m looking at the history of words. The specific history of words in the Inaugural poem was: We have seen the ways in which language has