

Creative Writing, Creative Memoirs, 2-4, 10 May 2017, Calvert Library, Prince Frederick, bring 6-8 copies of 500+- of your memoir, fiction, non-fiction, or a poem or two. This is the season for reading and writing on politics but even the *NYTimes* realized Enough!

Jill Jepson: Dealing with Doubters, Parts 2&3

The unfortunate thing about doubters is that it only takes one to inflict a lot of grief on your life. Your life might be full of people rooting for you, but if there is a single one who tries to bring you down, they can create a heaping helping of pain. We writers are sensitive. We're insecure. We're in a highly competitive field. We need support, not put-downs.

So, what can we do when we're dealing with people determined to undermine us? There are some clear-cut techniques that can help us stop the put-downs in their tracks and, more importantly, not let them bring us down. Here are three:

Determine who to pay attention to and who not to.

Several times in recent years, editors have returned my work with serious criticism. They've always used kind, compassionate words—but have still let me know my work needs serious work. It wasn't good for my ego, but it was great for my writing.

These people are *not* haters. They are helpers. A penicillin shot may sting, but it still makes you better.

We have to separate out the helpers from the haters. Give your work to skilled editors and trusted friends who can help you improve. When they criticize, listen. Accept their advice with gratitude. Ignore everything else. Especially ignore:

Sarcasm. It is not critique. It's cruelty.

Unsolicited advice. If you didn't ask for someone's opinion, it's probably because you don't want or need it.

"Expert" advice given by non-experts. People who have never written or published anything seldom have anything useful to say about writing or publishing. That doesn't stop some of them from promoting their favorite theories on the topic. Ignore them.

Trivializing. The next time someone tries to make you feel as if your writing is silly, unimportant, or a mere hobby, put them on your "Pay No Attention" list.

Seek out Supporters

If you don't have people in your life who are rooting for you, you need to seek them out. Join a supportive writer's group, or start one of your own. Find fellow writers at literary events. Join a social networking website and look for people to connect with there. Create a community.

Your supporters are people who commiserate when you're feeling down and celebrate when you're joyful. They offer advice only when it's asked for, and don't get annoyed if you don't follow it. They are gold.

Give Back If you don't support your supporters, you will lose them. If you want to lament the fact that no one is publishing your short story, you also have to be willing to listen to others when they are disappointed or frustrated. Do that, and you will find that you've built a strong network that will get you through the worst of times.

Giving back to your supporters does something more: It fills your mind with thoughts of others, drawing you away from the self-focus that doubters love. The more time you spend thinking of what others need, the less time you spend thinking about the friend who suggested you give up or poked fun at your dreams. Supporting others helps you build an immunity to cruelty and indifference.

I hear from a lot of writers who struggle with unsupportive friends and family members. It can get so bad for some writers that they consider giving up their passion.

Use the put-downs as motivation.

Brian from accounting says you'll never make it. Prove him wrong. Your cousin tells you real estate is a great option for when you give up that writing thing you do. Prove her wrong. The guy at the fruit stand suggests you should stop writing poetry and focus on magazine articles. Your roommate reads your story, shrugs, and says in the most patronizing tone imaginable, "It's better than the last one." Well, you don't want to prove *them* wrong, but you want to prove your work deserves more praise than that.

Snide, critical, passive-aggressive, or just plain aggressive

comments can be discouraging—or they can be the best motivators ever. Take that smoldering irritation you can't quell and use it to fire up your writing. You can keep going for months and years on the fuel you generate from the put-downs and intrusive advice. Show them up all...

What a relief it is when you realize you don't have to keep thinking about someone's unkind words. You can choose to focus on something else. I call it *turning the channel*. I'm never going to find a resolution or "get back at" the person who insulted me, so I'm going to turn away from them and their words and focus on something good, healthy, and worthwhile instead.

Meditators learn to turn away from the stray thought. When they realize their minds are busily thinking instead of, well, not thinking, a skilled meditator will simply and gently turn their focus back to the breath, or to whatever focal point they are using. You can use the same technique when a hater's unkind words are making you miserable...

You don't need anyone's approval. You may need the approval of an editor at a publishing house, at least if you're aiming for external reward, but you don't need the approval of the haters.

I still remember the sense of liberation I had when I responded to a friend who repeatedly put down my writing with, "I'm not writing it for your approval." I didn't intend it as a sarcastic come-back: It was just the plain truth. But the matter-of-fact bluntness of it did the trick. My friend never issued another insult, but more importantly I realized that I really didn't care what she thought. I was following my own knowledge and instincts. I had found my own north star.

The writing life requires a large helping of self-reliance. Knowing what you want and working steadily toward it won't necessarily make the haters stop, but it will make them irrelevant.

American Poets, Refusing to Go Gentle, Rage Against the Right

By ALEXANDRA ALTER APRIL 21, 2017



Amanda Palmer at a poetry reading at Lincoln Center in Manhattan on Wednesday, where the stage banter was often political. Credit Krista Schlueter for The New York Times

The poet Jane Hirshfield has never thought of herself as an agitator. A self-described “genuine introvert,” Ms. Hirshfield likes to spend her days gardening, hiking and writing verses about nature, impermanence and interconnectedness. But a couple of months ago, to her own surprise, she emailed the organizers of the March for Science in Washington and urged them to make poetry part of the protest.

At the rally on Saturday, Ms Hirshfield will read her new poem “[On the Fifth Day](#),” which addresses climate change denial and the Trump administration’s dismantling of environmental regulations. “I’ve never done anything like that before,” Ms. Hirshfield said. “I don’t even give dinner parties.”

The march will also feature pop-up poetry writing workshops, and more than 20 banners with science poems by Gary Snyder, W .S. Merwin, Tracy K. Smith and others. (Ms. Hirshfield also wanted to have a donkey

carrying baskets with printed-out poems, but the organizers rejected that idea).

“Poems are visible right now, which is terribly ironic, because you rather wish it weren’t so necessary,” she said. “When poetry is a backwater it means times are O.K. When times are dire, that’s exactly when poetry is needed.”

Like virtually everything else in the Trump era, poetry has gotten sharply political these days. Writers are responding to this turbulent moment in the country’s history with a tsunami of poems that address issues like immigration, global warming, the Syrian refugee crisis, institutionalized racism, equal rights for transgender people, Islamophobia and health care.

The recent resurgence of protest poems reflects a new strain of contemporary American poetry, one that is deeply engaged with public policy and the latest executive orders coming from the White House. At a moment when many artists and writers have joined a diffuse resistance movement on the left, a vocal and mobilized group of poets are using their work to wrestle with some of the most pressing issues in American culture and politics.

“This isn’t just confessional poetry, but poetry that’s meant to stir us into action,” said Jeff Shotts, executive editor of Graywolf Press. There’s a long tradition of liberal political activism in American poetry; early examples include Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Walt Whitman’s antislavery poems. In later decades, American poets used the medium to oppose the Vietnam War and racial oppression. Many wrote raw, mournful poems after the Sept. 11 attacks, and pacifist [poems](#) protesting the war in Iraq.

More recently, a new, politically engaged generation of young African-American, Latino and Asian poets have written verses that address institutionalized bias and the Black Lives Matter movement. Critically acclaimed poets like Claudia Rankine, whose 2014 collection “Citizen” became a best seller with more than 200,000 copies in print, have demonstrated that there’s an enormous appetite for poetry that deals bluntly with racism, civic identity and social justice.

But poets, scholars and publishers say the flood of protest poems after the 2016 election stands apart from earlier eras in both its quantity and intensity and its stylistic and thematic diversity. Some see the emerging body of brash political poetry as a stark departure from the more introspective, personal style that characterized so much of 20th-century American poetry.

“There’s going to be a major shift in our poetry,” said Alice Quinn, the executive director of the Poetry Society of America. “The poems that I have been reading, which are freshly minted, most of them, have a powerful sense of urgency and reckoning and responsibility.”



Claudia Rankine in 2014. That year, her collection “Citizen” became a best seller with more than 200,000 copies in print. Credit Elizabeth Weinberg for The New York Times

Poets are using social media to respond quickly to the news, posting new verses online. Hours after the election results came in on Nov. 8, Danez Smith, a 27-year-old poet in Minneapolis, wrote a poem about losing faith in the country, titled “You’re Dead, America.” It was published on BuzzFeed on Nov. 9, and includes the verses, “on the TV/ is the man from TV/ is gonna be president/ he has no word/ & hair beyond simile/ you’re dead, America.” Smith, who identifies with neither gender and prefers no

courtesy title, has also written poems about health care and police violence, which have been used on signs and read aloud at Black Lives Matter protests.

“There’s something beautiful about the poem that is needed right now,” Smith said. “It might not be as powerful a couple of months from now.”

There seems to be a growing audience for poetry that speaks to the anxieties of our era. In November, a few days after the election, the Academy of American Poets and the online publication [Brain Pickings](#) organized an “emergency” pop-up poetry reading in Washington Square Park in New York, where hundreds of people gathered to hear 20 poets, among them Patricia Smith and Elizabeth Alexander.

Traffic to the academy’s online poetry archive has surged in recent months. Maya Angelou’s poem, “Still I Rise,” has been viewed nearly 470,000 times since Nov. 8, compared to about 280,000 times in that period the previous year, while Langston Hughes’s poem, “Let America Be America Again,” has been viewed some 280,000 times, up from about 88,000 times. Last year, some 20 million people read poems on the academy’s [website](#).

“We turn to poems in moments of crisis for comfort,” said Jennifer Benka, the executive director of the Academy of American Poets. “We’ve seen this spontaneous swell of people coming to read poems that speak to this moment.”

Poetry readings around the country have come to resemble leftist political rallies. In March, the Poetry Coalition, which includes 25 organizations in the United States, held readings around the country focused on the theme of migration, with some programs put together partly in response to the Trump administration’s attempted travel bans. At City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, the Poetry Society of America held a reading and discussion about the plight of Syrian refugees. This month, the Wick Poetry Center at Kent State University organized an event in Akron, Ohio, where Syrian, Lebanese, Congolese and other immigrants read their original [poetry](#).

On Wednesday at Lincoln Center, at a packed poetry reading put on by the Academy of American Poets, stage banter often turned to politics as a group of actors, writers and singers read selected works by Hughes, Whitman, Terrance Hayes and Adrienne Rich. The singer-songwriter Amanda Palmer roused the audience when she said President Trump might make punk rock great again. The actress Uzo Aduba read Robert Hayden’s poem “Frederick Douglass,” calling it “essential and important in this time.”

Publishers are seizing on the recent outpouring of political poetry with new “resistance”-themed collections that speak to the political climate. Last month, Dispatches Editions released “[Resist Much/Obey Little: Inaugural Poems to the Resistance](#),” a 740-page anthology that was quickly assembled in response to the election and features work 350 poets. Boston Review published “Poems for Political Disaster,” which has a foreword by

the United States poet laureate, Juan Felipe Herrera, and includes poems by Stephen Burt, Monica Youn and Jorie Graham.

Major publishing houses are rushing out their own volumes. A forthcoming collection by Spiegel & Grau, “How Lovely the Ruins: Inspirational Poems and Words for Difficult Times,” combines classics by E. E. Cummings, Robert Frost and Whitman with new works by young poets like Ocean Vuong and Danez Smith.

“Poets have always been responding to the times,” said Ms. Alexander, who wrote the introduction to the collection. “What is different now is that more people are listening and understanding that poetry is a place to turn.”

In May, Knopf will publish “Resistance, Rebellion, Life,” a collection of 50 contemporary poems that includes works by Robert Pinsky, Eileen Myles, Kevin Young and Solmaz Sharif. The volume, which was edited by the poet Amit Majmudar, came together quickly this winter after Mr. Majmudar put out a call for new political poetry. He got around 150 submissions. Some poets responded with work in 15 minutes.

Mr. Majmudar said he tried to include a range of perspectives. “I was equally open to an anti-globalization poem as I was to a Trumpocalypse Now poem,” he said in an email. But poets tend to be liberal, and the submissions skewed heavily to the left. The selected works include blunt poems that refer directly to Mr. Trump, in decidedly unflattering terms. Erica Dawson’s poem “They Call Them Blue My Mind” quotes Mr. Trump’s boasts about grabbing women’s genitals. In a seething poem titled “Now,” Frederick Seidel takes aim at the administration, writing, “Now a dictatorship of vicious spineless slimes/ We the people voted in has taken over.”

Others in the collection are less partisan, and deal with anti-Semitism, immigration, the refugee crisis and mass shootings.

Mr. Herrera, who wrote the poem “Interview With a Border Machine” for the collection, said he sees the book as a survival handbook for living in troubling and tumultuous political times. “I guess I would call this collection ‘emergency poems,’” he said.

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Poems of Resistance: A Primer APRIL 21, 2017

Protest poetry has deep roots in the United States. Poets have used their verses to oppose slavery, the Vietnam War, segregation and racial oppression, the Iraq war, and more recently, discrimination and police violence against African-Americans.

So it’s not entirely surprising that there’s been a resurgence of political poetry in the Trump era. “More of it is circulating more widely,” said Stephen Burt, a poet and poetry critic. “It has always been there, but this seems really big.”

In the months following the 2016 election, poets have rushed out “resistance”-themed anthologies, joined marches and rallies to recite their verses, and composed poems that address some of the most divisive issues of our time.

Here are five poems that speak to this moment in American politics and history. If you’re worried about the state of the country, or the world, these poems won’t offer much reassurance. But giving comfort or solace isn’t really the point.

‘The Moon After Election Day’ By Alex Dimitrov

I’m looking at the moon tonight,
the closest it’s been to Earth since 1948
and feel relieved we can do little to ruin it.
That can’t be true, you say, and for a moment
even the moon’s loneliness escapes isolation
and depends on something else. It’s attached.
Like us and what we abandon. Us
and the evil we refuse. The same evil
we share history with, the thin membrane
between you or me and the worst of life.
It’s already past midnight and another election
is over in the United States of America.
The oceans will not continue into infinity.
Nor will our money. Nor will this suffering.
We have voted and proven again
we do not know one another. *I am trying
so hard to understand this country*, I tell you
even as I’m about to fail loving you (I know this)
in the way people need to be loved
which is without deception, which is almost
impossible. *Don’t you love it though*, you say,
and I remember the first time I saw you in a room
without anyone else. *Don’t you love the moon?*
And because it’s easy to say it, I do, I make sure
to tell you *I do*. Despite the news I knew years ago:
no one saves anyone. We’re on the moon.

‘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.

In 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.

‘If They Should Come for Us’ By Fatimah Asghar

these are my people & I find
them on the street & shadow
through any wild all wild
my people my people
a dance of strangers in my blood
the old woman’s sari dissolving to wind
bindi a new moon on her forehead
I claim her my kin & sew
the star of her to my breast
the toddler dangling from stroller
hair a fountain of dandelion seed

at the bakery I claim them too
the sikh uncle at the airport
who apologizes for the pat
down the muslim man who abandons
his car at the traffic light drops
to his knees at the call of the azan
& the muslim man who sips
good whiskey at the start of maghrib
the lone khala at the park
pairing her kurta with crocs
my people my people I can't be lost
when I see you my compass
is brown & gold & blood
my compass a muslim teenager
snapback & high-tops gracing
the subway platform
mashallah I claim them all
my country is made
in my people's image
if they come for you they
come for me too in the dead
of winter a flock of
aunties step out on the sand
their dupattas turn to ocean
a colony of uncles grind their palms
& a thousand jasmines bell the air
my people I follow you like constellations
we hear the glass smashing the street
& the nights opening their dark
our names this country's wood
for the fire my people my people
the long years we've survived the long
years yet to come I see you map
my sky the light your lantern long
ahead & I follow I follow

'Small Shoes' By Maggie Smith

If there are fewer stars now
than when I was a child,

I can't say
which are missing,
who was the last to see them.

**Is it not a crime
unless we call it a crime?**

**It is difficult to document
a disappearance,
a boat full of stars**

**capsized.
Stars lying in the sand**

**face-down,
wearing small shoes.
Add that to the report:**

**some of the stars washed up
in small shoes.**

‘Citizenship’

By Javier Zamora

**it was clear they were hungry
with their carts empty the clothes inside their empty hands**

**they were hungry because their hands
were empty their hands in trashcans**

**the trashcans on the street
the asphalt street on the red dirt the dirt tax payers pay for**

**up to that invisible line visible thick white paint
visible booths visible with the fence starting from the booths**

**booth road booth road booth road office building then the fence
fence fence fence**

**it started from a corner with an iron pole
always an iron pole at the beginning**

**those men those women could walk between booths
say hi to white or brown officers no problem**

**the problem I think were carts belts jackets
we didn’t have any**

**or maybe not *the* problem
our skin sunburned all of us spoke Spanish**

**we didn't know how they had ended up that way
on *that* side**

**we didn't know how we had ended up here
we didn't know but we understood why they walk**

**the opposite direction to buy food on this side
this side we all know is hunger**

"The Moon After Election Day," by Alex Dimitrov, from "Resistance, Rebellion, Life," copyright 2017, published by Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin Random House LLC., New York; "On The Fifth Day," by Jane Hirshfield, copyright 2017, originally appeared in The Washington Post; "If They Should Come for Us" by Fatimah Asghar, copyright 2017, originally appeared in Poetry magazine; "Small Shoes," by Maggie Smith, copyright 2017, originally published in Rise Up Review; "Citizenship," by Javier Zamora, copyright 2017, courtesy of the author.

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Making a Poetry Chapbook [APPLIES IN MOST WAYS TO MOST BOOKS]

Instructors: Anne Becker, poet, & Linda Rollins, book artist

Dates: Wednesdays, May 24, 31; June 7, 14, 21, 28

Time: 12 noon-3pm, May 24-June 21

11am-3pm, June 28

In this 6-week intensive workshop, participants will create a chapbook manuscript of their poetry and then make the physical book. The final draft will have no more than 15 pages of poetry. In the first four meetings we'll explore how groups of poems work together to create a focused, whole experience, reading model chapbooks and considering various strategies of organization, prepare the manuscripts, have them critiqued by the group and in turn critique the chapbooks of the other participants. In the final two meetings we'll learn about the book-making process, consider how decisions such as style, paper and cover choice, affect and enhance the whole that is the book. By the end of the workshop each participant will have made two beautiful copies of their chapbook. First four meetings will be held at the Writer's Center in Bethesda; last two, at Pyramid Atlantic in Hyattsville. Materials fee: \$15.00 to be paid to instructor at PAAC.

Register at www.writer.org. Cost: \$360 (check with Writer's Center for member price)

Instructor Bios: Anne Becker, author of *The Transmutation Notebooks: Poems in the Voices of Charles and Emma Darwin*, *The Good Body* (chapbook), and *Human Animal* (forthcoming '17) has presented programs at Johns Hopkins, University of Connecticut, Folger Library, Smithsonian's Natural History Museum. Poet Laureate Emerita of Takoma Park, she is now poet-in-residence at Pyramid Atlantic.

Linda Rollins' passion for book binding started at John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina in the early 1990s. An apprenticeship near her home in South Florida combined with study in Massachusetts led to the opening of her bindery, Capella Book Arts in Ft. Lauderdale, 1995. Linda joined Pyramid Atlantic Art Center as their Binder in Residence in 2003. She continues to teach bookbinding classes there for groups and individuals.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

SONNET VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.