



AMERICAN INAUGURAL POETRY: POETICS AND STYLE



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Summary

The paper represents critical reflection on a fifty-five-year history of American inaugural poetry. The research opens with the overview of theoretical aspects of occasional poetry, focusing on poetics and style of the poems commissioned for presidential inaugurations. Further on the article outlines the history of inaugural poetry in the U.S. Special attention is given to the comparative analysis of the poems *The Gift Outright* by Robert Frost, *On the Pulse of Morning* by Maya Angelou, *Of History and Hope* by Miller Williams, *Praise Song for the Day* by Elizabeth Alexander and *One Today* by Richard Blanco. The comparative research focuses on the representation of the major themes, ideas and imagery in the above-mentioned inaugural poems.

Key words: occasional poetry, inaugural poems, Robert Frost, Maya Angelou, Miller Williams, Elizabeth Alexander, Richard Blanco.

Inaugural poetry is one of the varieties of occasional poems among the other types of ceremonial poetic compositions, such as wedding, funeral, victory poems, etc., which comments on a particular event and is written for a public reading. Ulrich Schmitzer specifies that occasional poetry is a form of poetry created for a specific occasion, not as a result of the poet's autonomous desire. Thus, the scholar emphasizes that “from a perspective that privileges original thinking, occasional poetry is often regarded as inferior but this is unjustified since large parts of ancient poetry from the earliest periods on are occasional poetry in a broader sense” (Schmitzer, 2006). Robert Pinsky defines occasional poetry as poems, responding to specific circumstances (like coronations, birthdays, weddings,

executions, family anniversaries, etc.) though they have ranged from majestic pieces to good-humored verses (Pinsky, 2000: 77). Occasional poetry encompasses poems commissioned for a specific event, created to order, and generally, it is poetry on demand. Consequently, the main purpose of such poetic works is to praise, commemorate or immortalize the event or the hero, patron, political leader.

Poems written for special occasions tend to have more exposure than poems written and kept more private, they are read to the audience directly, and they are created as works of art, which are performed or recited in front of an audience. These features dictate the choice of poetic images, lexicon and figures of speech. Inaugural poetry has two formats: descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptive refers to past and current events, while prescriptive focuses on future events, shapes the way that future events unfold by telling how they should unfold. Jonathan Z. Kamholz remarks that “occasional poetry traditionally divides its focus between descriptive and prescriptive themes – between what is and what should be. Descriptively, the occasional poem honors the completion of a particular action by a particular person [...]. It narrates the sequence of events, placing the deeds at a particular point of a hero’s life so that his life seems to lead to the praiseworthy deeds, rather than haphazardly including them. The occasional poem also traditionally, anchors the deeds it depicts in time” (Kamholz, 1983: 79).

Analyzing the poetics of occasional poetry, J. Z. Kamholz points out that it fixes the point of time and designates a place; being delivered in the presence of the figure it commemorates, the occasional poem both limits and expands the ego of its recipient (Kamholz, 1983: 79). The scholar concludes that “occasional poetry implies the agreement between speaker, subject, and audience about how to identify virtues and heroes. The audience may share the rejoicing, and the sense of limitation experienced by the hero. An occasional poem, then, typically brings together a man, an event, a place, an audience, and a speaker; its implied subject is a single example of the embodiment of shared ideals” (Kamholz, 1983: 79).

Although widely debated in the press (Charis-Carlson, 2009; Garner, 2008; Kirsch, 2009; Tobar, 2013; Ulin, 2009; Waldman, 2013), American inaugural poetry has rarely become the object of scientific scrutiny. There are only a few scholarly publications, which focus on the literary analysis of the poetry of such kind (Crouch, 2013; Mosson, 2010; Pinsky, 2000).

Ian Crouch, analyzing poetry for presidents, asserts: “The official inaugural poems feel a bit laden with their duties as civics lessons. They must appeal to a

wide audience, honor a moment of agreed-upon significance, and downplay friction and ambiguity. Yet, for all their collective shortcomings, the way inaugural poems gesture to the past is what gives them strength” (Crouch, 2013). Katy Waldman states that “occasional poems are among the few types of verse that get enough reach to possibly spark change. They seem precision-fitted to express outrage and grief, as well as hope or celebration” (Waldman, 2013). Gregg Mosson points out that American inaugural poems are rooted in the ideals of *The Declaration of Independence* – equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all, as well as they reintroduce Whitman’s ideas of the unity of all things with the world-embracing current of *Song of Myself*. According to Mosson, it is essential that the inauguration poems are characterized by the ambivalent nature, which the scholar calls ‘a Janus-faced American optimism’, thus focusing on the past and predicting the future: “America’s inaugural poetry offers a Janus-faced American optimism, looking with deep rue at the complex and violent human past to imagine an always better, equal, and more peaceful future” (Mosson, 2010).

Ian Crouch investigates the leitmotifs and imagery of R. Frost, M. Angelou, M. Williams and E. Alexander’s poems, underlining that “Frost surveys the country’s colonial origins, the world’s entombed explorers, and the nation’s long-dead founders. Angelou reaches further back, summoning first the dinosaurs and their ‘hastening doom’ and then the great names of the Native American tribes, diminished and depleted. Williams invokes ‘the great and all the anonymous dead’. Alexander, marking a moment not just of political ascendancy but also deeper social meaning, is more insistent [...]. If these poems move a bit too self-consciously toward hope, they nonetheless still leave room for meditations on a country with a complicated past and a tangled present, which requires much of the person elected to lead it” (Crouch, 2013).

In the in-depth analysis of inaugural poetry Michael R. Burch emphasizes that “whereas Frost seemed to praise colonialism (if in a somewhat ambivalent manner), Angelou spoke strongly against the greed of invaders who were ‘desperate for gain, hungry for gold’. She challenged Americans to no longer lie ‘face down in ignorance ... armed for slaughter’ but to ‘study war no more’ and to ‘come, clad in peace” (Burch, 2013). Analyzing critical response to Maya Angelou’s inaugural poem, Zofia Burr comes to the conclusion that “while the political, theatrical, and poetic may be theoretically extricable, in this instance [in Angelou’s presentation] they are intertwined” (Burr, 2011: 124).

For the literary analysis we have chosen the five specimens of inaugural poetry: *The Gift Outright* by Robert Frost, *On the Pulse of Morning* by Maya Angelou, *Of History and Hope* by Miller Williams, *Praise Song for the Day* by Elizabeth Alexander and *One Today* by Richard Blanco. As inaugural pieces the poems emphasize the ideas of reconciliation and brotherhood, peace and unity as well as freedom and democracy.

Reading poems for presidents at inaugurations started in 1961 when Robert Frost recited from memory his *Gift Outright* at John F. Kennedy's swearing in ceremony. In three decades from the event Maya Angelou became the second inaugural poet with *On the Pulse of Morning* at William J. Clinton's presidential inauguration in 1993. The tradition continued with Miller Williams reading *Of History and Hope* in 1997, Elizabeth Alexander presenting *Praise Song for the Day* at Obama's inauguration in 2009, and Richard Blanco reciting *One Today* in 2013. All the poets, except for Robert Frost, read original compositions created for the occasion. Ian Crouch remarks: "Frost also wrote a new poem for the occasion, but he was eighty-six at the time, and, famously, the frigid, blustery weather and glaring sun in Washington that day made reading difficult. So he abandoned the new poem and recited one that Kennedy had requested, *The Gift Outright*, from memory" (Crouch, 2013).

The choice of the poet for the inaugural ceremonies and the key imagery in the poem presented at inaugurations reflect the times during which they were created. The first inaugural poet Robert Frost spoke to Kennedy's background of New England pride and prominence. Maya Angelou's *On the Pulse of Morning* reflected diversity and the power of democracy that marked Bill Clinton's presidency, while Richard Blanco in his inaugural poem focused on equality, unity, and gay rights – key ideas which distinguished Barack Obama's era. Quoting an inaugural committee's spokeswoman, Addie Whisenant, Michael R. Burch explained what dictated the choice of Blanco as an inaugural poet: "The poet's deeply personal poems are rooted in the idea of what it means to be an American" (Qtd. in Burch, 2013). But no matter what ideologemes dictated the choice of the poet, all the inaugural poems have become political documents bearing the inspirational appeal as well as speaking to America's past, present and future.

The society and critics' response to the phenomenon of ceremonial poetry readings has been dubious. Mass media, literati and academia regard creating and commissioning of inaugural poetry as an honorable duty. Ceremonial poems are

praised as beautiful works of art and poetic documents addressing the specific moments in history of the U.S. As Miller Williams who commissioned his poem *Of History and Hope* for William J. Clinton's presidential ceremony asserts, "an inaugural poet belongs to the American people" (Qtd. in Clines, 1997). But according to the derogative critique of Francis X. Clines, inaugural poetry reading is "one of the most awkward gestures of American life, it's a popular versifying" (Clines, 1997). Adam Kirsch joins in to the critique and asserts: "The contemporary poet who sets out to write an official occasional poem gives up the privacy in which modern poetry is born, without gaining the authority and currency that used to be the advantages of the poet laureate in Rome or England. The verse is not public but bureaucratic – that is to say, spoken by no one and addressed to no one" (Kirsch, 2009).

Zofia Burr defines the function of the poet performing at the inaugural ceremony and the public role of poetry as follows: "The function of the poet as a check on power is both analogous to that of the press as the Fourth Estate (understood as having a responsibility to scrutinize the actions of the government from the perspective of the people) and also absolutely unlike the press, insofar as the press remains part of the public sphere and its imperatives – the very things that poetry is designed to check and counter in the name of integrity defined in terms of the private, the personal, the individual. Thus, if poetry has a public role to perform it is only by virtue of and on the basis of its ability to remain an idiom apart from all the public discourses of society. By this account, the maker of the poem cannot anticipate a public role for his or her work and have it remain poetry" (Burr, 2011:123).

The poets chosen to commission their poems to commemorate the inaugural events are the ones who have achieved a widespread public recognition and are considered highly praised contemporary poets. Despite the fame each inaugural poet faced severe criticism. Frost's *The Gift Outright* was considered as the poem voicing the subject position of the white conqueror thus overlooking the presence of non-Anglo communities in American culture (Frost, 1964: 467). Maya Angelou's *On the Pulse of the Morning* was labelled by the poet David Lehman as "not very memorable" (Qtd. in Burr, 2011: 124), but despite the critique, it became a million seller after it was recited in 1993 at Bill Clinton's inaugural (Charis-Carlson, 2009). Andrew E. Mathis mentions that "her detractors notwithstanding, Angelou moves readers who might not be schooled in Frost. *On the Pulse of the Morning* has been set to music and was recently performed by the

Winston-Salem Symphony – a clear sign of popular, if not academic, recognition” (Mathis, 2005:12).

Given the criticism which Angelou’s poem was subjected to, Zofia Burr focuses on the intertextual dialogue between *On the Pulse of Morning* and *The Gift Outright*, and argues that: “What all of the responses to Angelou’s poem neglect, however, is the multiplicity of ways in which Angelou’s inaugural poem speaks back to Frost’s inaugural poems” (Burr, 2011: 126) In the comparative analysis of the two poems Burr focuses on the crucial difference between *On the Pulse of Morning* and *The Gift Outright*: “Angelou’s poem returns to the scene of the European colonization of America treated by *The Gift Outright*. But instead of speaking from the (expected) ‘human’, ‘American’ perspective, Angelou’s poem offers as its main speakers ‘I, the Rock, I, the River, I, the Tree’. Through these voices, ‘the land’ of Frost’s poem speaks back to colonizer and colonized. Playing as they do on their meanings in black American spirituals, Angelou’s animation of the rock of ‘No hiding place’ the river of ‘Down by the riverside’ and the tree of ‘I shall not be moved’ articulates a ‘land’ imbued with a specific history of oppression. While Frost’s poem constructs its inaugural moment as the founding of an American identity by instituting a break with the English past, Angelou repeats but transforms this gesture by alluding to the devastation of Native American and African cultures on which the founding of American culture depends and by highlighting the presence of non-Anglo communities in American culture” (Burr, 2011: 127).

Mosson undertakes the comparative analysis of Frost and Angelou’s poems, specifying that “Maya Angelou’s inaugural poem *On the Pulse of the Morning* echoes Frost’s first line from *The Gift Outright* by imagining this ‘land’ in America’s landscape in its pre-human, Paleolithic days. Angelou turns the clock even farther. The land was neither ‘ours’ nor we of the land” (Mosson, 2010).

Elizabeth Alexander, as a fourth inaugural poet, similarly came upon a lot of critique. The critics concluded that *Praise Song for the Day* didn’t measure up because its ‘prosaic language’ and rhetoric ‘simply didn’t sing (Ulin, 2009) and that “Alexander, a professor at Yale, was simply the wrong choice for an inaugural poet” (Charis-Carlson, 2009). Adam Kirsch regards *Praise Song* as a ‘bureaucratic verse’, inauthentic and rhetorical, lost in clichés and driven by an agenda: “The poem’s argument was as hard to remember as its language; it dissolved at once into the circumambient solemnity” (Kirsch, 2009). Katie Manning in the analysis of the reception of Elizabeth Alexander’s inaugural poem

focuses on the merits and flaws of it: “Even though the poem acknowledges the nation’s divided history, Alexander wrote it with a plural voice and with collective images that serve to draw all people – ‘beyond marital, filial, national’ borders – together into one community. In addition to her subtle references to U.S. history, Alexander also made some explicit allusions to people, texts, and organizations within the poem, but these allusions were easy to miss during her oral delivery because their language is so simple” (Manning, 2016: 38).

Nerys Williams focuses on Maya Angelou and Elizabeth Alexander’s poetic achievements, stating that their inaugural poems “illustrate how poets attempt to avoid the rhetorical flourishes associated with public address while retaining a direct appeal to their audiences’ expectations. Their poems create a dialogue with previous inaugural poems” (Williams, 2011: 64). The scholar underlines that Alexander’s *Praise Song for the Day* represents the direct conversation with Angelou’s *On the Pulse of Morning*. Williams asserts that Alexander’s poem echoes the momentum of work songs with the focus upon acts of mending broken communities (Williams, 2011: 64). Further on exploring the loci of *Praise Song for the Day*, the scholar emphasizes that “in Alexander’s estimation the political poem refuses becoming reportage. Images of mending, regrouping, artistic creation and daily schedules become the loci of the poem. We are presented with a ‘someone’ who is darning as well as people making music, teaching, waiting for a bus and watching the weather. Far from being a praise song of America, the poem focuses on the elements within American society which fail to function – what Alexander refers to as the ‘things in need of repair’” (Williams, 2011: 66).

Carolyn Wedin asserts that Elizabeth Alexander’s poem *Praise Song for the Day* is modeled after the African ‘praise song’ for the most ordinary daily things and activities (Wedin, 2011: 179). The scholar adds that “this poem has some echoes of and builds on the Angelou poem, particularly in the sense of making Angelou’s lists active. Here we have not just a list of occupations but people in action in those occupations, not groups of newcomers to these shores but what those groups did, picking cotton, building railroads, stitching garments” (Wedin, 2011: 179).

But Elizabeth Alexander’s poem departs from a traditional African form of oral literature that offers praise, focusing instead on negative aspects and problematic issues of America’s present (Alexander, 2009). As Nerys Williams formulates it, “Alexander’s opening poses a caustic critique upon the failure of the Bush administration, the breakdown of an American polity and its dependence upon a

language of mistrust, a failure to act in the spirit of a central ‘good’” (Williams, 2011: 65).

In his comparative analysis of *On the Pulse of Morning* and *Praise Song for the Day* Nerys Williams underlines the striking similarity between the two: “For Alexander and Angelou, America remains in a state of possibility and the role of the inaugural poem is not to glorify political achievements. Instead their poems display a need to find connections between citizens and act as a reminder of the failures, as well as the possibilities, inherent in political rhetoric” (Williams, 2011: 67). Further explorations of the mentioned poems prove that “whereas Angelou’s poem stresses the importance of inclusion and multiplicity, Alexander’s poem stresses the importance of encountering others through travel, and the curiosity to know what is beyond one’s own community” (Williams, 2011: 66).

Gregg Mosson concludes: “One strength of Alexander’s writing is its unique phrasing. This torqued phrasing highlights objects in their human significance. It does this by highlighting the activity involved in an object, rather than the object as a stillness apart. For instance, the poem notes: ‘edifices / they would keep clean and work inside of’. That ‘work inside of’ has an awkward beauty. This awkward beauty visually depicts and sonically captures the cleaning people’s tough, repetitive, necessary and honest work. This fact-as-process, this object-as-actively-experienced echoes the theme of America-as-process theme that runs through Robert Frost’s *The Gift Outright*, through Maya Angelou’s ‘dream’ at the end of her inaugural poem, back to Whitman’s vision as life as process, and the whole process of politics and ideals that *The Declaration of Independence* articulated and helped tip into motion. Process, rather than object, is a significant American theme” (Mosson, 2010).

What unites the analyzed inaugural poems is the Whitmanesque representation of America and its people, which is process-oriented and is focused on the dynamics of life, its changes and developments. Moreover, the themes of unity, togetherness and brotherhood, which are represented in Elizabeth Alexander and Richard Blanco’s poems, revise Whitman’s ideas of unanimous brotherhood and the ethical code of hard work. Michael R. Burch analyzes literary influences on Blanco’s *One Today* and states the literary influence of Walt Whitman, quoting the lines which are Whitmanesque (Burch, 2013). Reminiscent of Whitman’s poetry are Blanco’s melodies and sounds that accompany routine and daily activities of America’s people.

Whereas Richard Blanco addresses the reality and demonstrates the close link with the phenomena and objects of everyday life ('pencil-yellow school buses', 'fruit stands', 'rooftops', 'pipes and cables', 'screeching subways'), Maya Angelou concentrates on metaphorical ideas of 'distant destiny', of 'history that cannot be un-lived', 'new steps of change', skillfully creating symbolic images of the Rock, the River, the Tree, and thus transcending the everyday object level.

As Hector Tobar mentions, *One Today* was an intimate and sweeping celebration of American shared, single identity as a people: "Blanco built his poem on a foundation of the concrete and the everyday. He began with people going to work and school in 'silver trucks heavy with oil or paper – bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us, on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives'. And then he placed these ordinary people in a recognizably American landscape of one ground" (Tobar, 2013).

Both poets Angelou and Blanco focus on diversity of America's people. In *One Today* the idea of diversity is represented via polyphony of greetings in different languages (Blanco, 2013b). Angelou employs enumeration creating the catalog of heterogeneous notions: America's people are represented according to their ethnicities (the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew etc.), religious beliefs (the Catholic, the Muslim), occupations (the Priest, the Teacher), sexual orientation (the Gay, the Straight), and various material backgrounds (the homeless, the privileged) (Angelou, 1994: 271).

Both poets address the concept of a dream. In Blanco's poetry the reminiscence of Martin Luther King's 'dream' is represented in the terms of unity and togetherness ("the 'I have a dream' we keep dreaming"). Although the critics focus on the fact that Angelou's *On the Pulse of Morning* follows the oral tradition of African American speakers, such as Frederick Douglas, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X. (Lupton, 1998: 212), Angelou explores the category of a dream on the metaphysical level, like 'praying for a dream', 'give birth again to the dream' (Angelou, 1994: 272).

Hope is another leitmotif which is foregrounded in Angelou, Miller and Blanco's poems. In the inaugural piece *On the Pulse of Morning* the ideas of brother/sisterhood and unity are represented in close connection with the idea of hope: "Here on the pulse of this new day / You may have the grace to look up and out / And into your sister's eyes, into / Your brother's face, your country / And say simply / Very simply / With hope / Good morning" (Angelou, 1994: 273).

Miller Williams in *Of History and Hope* emphasizes the idea of hope in the context of American history (Williams, 1997). The poet said in a 2013 interview that he wanted the poem to be a “consideration of how a look at a nation’s past might help determine where it could be led in the future” (DeMillo, 2015).

In Blanco’s poem the idea of hope is foregrounded along with the motif of unity: “Hope – a new constellation / waiting for us to map it, / waiting for us to name it – together” (Blanco, 2013b).

What distinguishes Maya Angelou’s inaugural poem among other specimens is the category of the Divine. Blanco primarily and mainly focuses on the idea of unity as the key metaphor of *One Today*: one sun, one light, one ground, one sky. But the imagery of Maya Angelou’s poem brings back the ideas of American transcendentalists and their concepts of the Divine Nature. Thus Emerson’s view of Nature as the embodiment of Spirit is reflected in Angelou’s poem. *On the Pulse of Morning* is characterized by the transcendental vision of organic interrelationship between Man and Nature. According to Emerson, “only through communion with the Divine could a man identify himself with other men, since they too possess divinity within them” (Qtd. in Hochfield, 1975: 176). In Angelou’s poem the Rock, the River and the Tree function as the incarnations of the Divine. The natural phenomena are personified and capitalized: “the Rock cries out to us”, “a River sings a beautiful song”, “the first and last of every Tree speak to humankind today” (Angelou, 1994: 270). Mosson remarks that Angelou’s poem in spirit echoes the British Romantic concern that humanity’s alienation from nature has disfigured us. Nonetheless, “Angelou assumes a Janus-faced optimism. The poem uses this perspective of peace versus war to look back at American history, and imagine a better future” (Mosson, 2010).

In *One Today* by Richard Blanco the personal story of the poet is intertwined with the history of the country which is the land of a million of possibilities and hope for a new life for his Cuban-born exile/immigrant family, the poet himself and other immigrants. Richard Blanco mentions in the biographical note: “The most powerful quality of our country is that each day is full of a million possibilities. We are a country of fierce individualism, which invites me to shape my life as I see fit. As I reflect on this, I see how the American story is in many ways my story – a country still trying to negotiate its own identity, caught between the paradise of its founding ideals and the realities of its history, trying to figure it out, trying to ‘become’ even today – the word ‘hope’ as fresh on our tongues as it ever was” (Blanco, 2013a).

Richard Blanco's *One Today* has the explicit level of subjectivity which springs from the author's personal experience. Moreover, the poet, commenting on *One Today*, accentuates some spiritual ties with Barack Obama, primarily their multicultural experience. Obama's father is from Kenya, Barack Obama grew up in Indonesia and Hawaii which gave him the opportunity to be culturally united with Africa, Asia and North America. Similarly, Richard Blanco had close ties with various cultures: Cuban, Spanish and American. Blanco voices his multicultural as well as his personal experience in the stanzas 6 and 8 of the poem (Blanco, 2013b). In inaugural poetry preceding Blanco's *One Today* the events of the private life of the poet were excluded from the poetic text: Frost, Angelou, Williams and Alexander eliminated the signs of the author's subject position and did not refer to their personal experiences explicitly.

Literary critics also include into the thematic group of inaugural poetry the works which immortalized the presidential ceremony but were not delivered in public. Bob Holman and Margery Snyder mention two 19th-century poems – [*An Ode in Honor of the Inauguration of Buchanan & Breckinridge, President and Vice President of the United States*](#) by Col W. Emmons, printed on broadside in 1857 (Emmons, 1857), and [*An Inaugural Poem, Dedicated to Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, and Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee*](#), published in *The Chronicle Junior* in 1865 (Holman et al., 2017).

One of such cases is Robert Lowell's *Inauguration Day: January 1953*, which responded to the event when Eisenhower was given the oath of office. Ian Crouch considers it to be the greatest inauguration poem that was never delivered at the Capitol: "It is concise, yet concerns itself with the wide and fraught swathe of American history. And, like the four official inaugural poems that have so far been delivered, it marks a moment of supposed renewal with darker tones of the past, and with death" (Crouch, 2013).

The case with Robert Frost's *Dedication*, the poem which was composed for the occasion but was not read in public, can be also regarded among the poems which did not become the part of the swearing in presidential ceremonies. Gregg Mosson interprets the poem in terms of American exceptionalism, and states that "here, Frost compares America to Rome. By doing so, *Dedication* celebrates America's cultural refinement and imperial power. It envisions America embracing a leading role on the world-historical stage, as well as an ideal future with more freedom for all. However, this ideal is cognizant the messier parts of human history and experience when Frost writes about 'revolution and outlawry'" (Mosson, 2010).

The group of inaugural poets might be complemented by James Dickey, who composed a poem *The Strength of Fields* that he read at Jimmy Carter's inaugural gala but not at the inauguration itself (Dickey, 1979).

At the 2017 President-elect Trump's inauguration no poetry was read. Although Donald Trump dropped the option of inaugural poetry reading, nonetheless a group of American poets responded to the event by the 2017 Anthology *If You Can Hear This: Poems in Protest of an American Inauguration*. Published by Sibling Rivalry Press the collection includes over 70 poets from around the world writing in response to the 2016 presidential election and subsequent inauguration (Borland, 2017). With Trump's election as president and lots of controversy which his figure brought about, it's evident that mass protests against Trump's rhetoric in the U.S. led to the outburst of anti-Trump poetry and poetic readings and performances in protest of Trump's inauguration. Thus the specific type of anti-inaugural poetry requires further research and critical reading through the lens of protest poetry poetics.

In conclusion, it should be noted that in the analyzed inaugural poems the political, theatrical and poetic are theoretically intertwined. The most prominent feature of the genre is reference to the past, to the outstanding historical events together with the focus on the future. The inaugural specimens under analysis proved to balance the demands of intimacy and universality, praising what is good and unique about the United States without seeming naïve, or propagandistic. Lyrical and inspirational, inaugural poems reflect on the America's past and speak to the future, American people's 'distant destiny', functioning as hymns of peace and hope, and emphasizing the theme of America-as-process. Rooted in the ideals of *The Declaration of Independence* – equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all, American inaugural poems reintroduce Whitman's ideas of the unity of all things. Robert Frost's *The Gift Outright* reflects on the country's colonial origins and the nation's founders. *Of History and Hope* by Miller Williams celebrates the milestones of the U.S. history and has some echoes of *The Gift Outright*. Maya Angelou, Elizabeth Alexander and Richard Blanco's inaugural poems are composed as Whitman-like catalogues, foregrounding American multiculturalism and enhancing the idea of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity.

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