



## K A T I E M A N N I N G

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Following Barack Obama's inaugural speech on January 20, 2009, Elizabeth Alexander read a poem that she had been commissioned to write for the occasion: "Praise Song for the Day." Although we don't often see media commentators and bloggers fired up about a poem, for a few days, at least, the mainstream media cared about poetry.

The negative reactions were so immediately and prominently published that even the Wikipedia entry for "Praise Song for the Day" notes this reception in its brief description of the poem: "Delivered directly after Obama's inaugural address, it received a lukewarm response and was criticized as 'too prosaic.'" Within three months of the event, Micah Mattix, lecturer at the University of North Carolina, used the poem's negative publicity in the introduction to his article "Poetry and Subsidies: Is Materialism Ruining Creativity?" Before moving into his main claim—that U.S. poets are mediocre because there's too much money in poetry—Mattix simply drops the names of a few commentators who responded negatively to the poem to justify his own assessment: "it was a flop."

Much of the immediate criticism focused on Alexander's delivery of the poem. On the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* website, their art critic Regina Hackett abused Alexander's reading in a blog entry titled "Giant step up for USA, giant misstep for poetry." "Her delivery was flat," Hackett wrote. "She sounded as if she were ordering a pizza on the phone. [...] Alexander's effort is the product of a limited imagination, an academic approach to rhythm and an anorexic understanding of imagery." Hackett's move from criticizing Alexander's reading style to criticizing her for being too academic was a common occurrence in the negative responses. In online discussion forums from the *St. Petersburg Times* to *Entertainment Weekly*, readers commented on posts about the inaugural poem by decrying her delivery as "awful," "poor," "monotone," and "choppy" (Bancroft and Tucker). Even Miller Williams, the inaugural poet from 1997, told an interviewer that Alexander did well with the task she was given, but then he criticized her delivery: "I wish she had something after the resolution of the poem to let us know clearly that it was over," Williams said. "Had she read it in my living room, I would have said, 'Keep your voice up at the end, and nod to the audience and say, 'Thank you,' when it's over'" (qtd. in Italic). From her tone to her speed to her conclusion, Alexander's delivery was picked apart by poets and non-poets alike.

Other critics claimed that the poem itself was boring and inappropriate for the occasion. Although Moira Weigel wrote positively about Alexander's larger work as a poet, her article in *The Guardian* held that Alexander had "offered bland and distractable universalism on the day that the world was watching." This view of the poem was echoed by an anonymous commenter on the *St. Petersburg Times* website: "Given the occasion and those in attendance maybe [the poem] should have been one with more umph! and not so somber in tone" (Bancroft). One of the harshest and most widely quoted critics, Adam Kirsch with *The New Republic*, called Alexander "a perfect, an all too perfect, choice for inaugural poet," but his claims that her "bureaucratic verse" caused her to "affirm piously, rather than question or challenge," also amounted to calling her poem bland.

Still other critics went so far as to deny that "Praise Song for the Day" was even a poem. Independent blogger Patrick Kurp posted an entry two days after the inauguration that denied the poem its genre and also took a swipe at Alexander's academic status: "'Praise Song for the Day,' in fact, is not poetry but an inferior species of prose. It is what one expects from an earnest junior-high-school student with little gift for language, or from a professor at Yale." In a similar move,

*The American Spectator's* Tom Bethell belittles Alexander by calling her “Barack’s pet poet,” and he denies that “Praise Song for the Day” has any relationship to poetry: “I hesitate to call it a poem because it had so little connection to poetry as that art has been understood for centuries, indeed millennia. It was so dismal that the *New York Times*, in its 30-page special section the next day [...], failed to mention Alexander or print her poem. It had all the fizz of a week-old soda.” An anonymous comment in the *St. Petersburg Times* online forum simply said, “THIS IS NOT POETRY!” (Bancroft).

The fascinating thing about these negative reactions to the poem is that most of the writers consider the poem only as they experienced it aurally. They respond to the delivery and to the features of the poem that they could hear during Alexander’s reading, such as the simple language and familiar images. What Wikipedia and other widely read sources don’t report, however, is that there was also a wave of positive responses to “Praise Song for the Day.” Most of these analyses were published two days or more after the event, and they usually took into consideration the poem’s written and more subtle formal features, such as its lines, poetic technique, and allusions. As Joel Dias-Porter wrote in his blog, “Having actually had the opportunity to peruse the text, my opinion of the piece has grown.” It seems, then, that the most deliberate elements of artistry in the poem demand close reading. “Praise Song for the Day” elicited negative responses immediately after its oral delivery because it functions more fully as a written, visual poem.

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Let’s flash back to December of 2008 and put ourselves in Elizabeth Alexander’s position:

Imagine getting this impossible assignment: write a poem that hundreds of millions of people will hear and read; make sure all of them can understand it; make it hopeful, but acknowledge the hardship America’s undergone in recent years, and in not-so-recent ones; make it reasonably short. You’ve got, like, a month to work on it: go! (Teicher)

Alexander had only a few weeks to create a poem that would work well orally for an international audience on a historic occasion and that could be published as a chapbook and live in print beyond the inaugural moment. Under these circumstances, she did an impressive job of making a poem that could function in both the oral and written realms.

### *Oral Poem*

“Praise Song for the Day” is not an orally composed poem. Alexander said in an interview that she kept notes on scraps of paper and then worked the poem out in writing: “It certainly broke the record for drafts—maybe 350 pages,” she said (qtd. in Teicher). Further, it does not contain the traditional markers of an oral poem, such as patterns of rhyme and meter, which were historically employed in poetry as memory aids as much as for pleasure. Responding to Regina Hackett’s critical blog entry about the poem, journalist and creative writer Nordette Adams wrote, “Hackett understands poems can be poems and not rhyme, but many Americans still believe words are only poetry if they fall within the definition of poetry learned in elementary school—pretty turns of phrase in near-even lines, ending in rhyme.” Alexander’s poem certainly does not live up to this expectation.

The poem does, however, show signs of its intended oral delivery because it incorporates one of the most important

features of spoken language: simplicity. The most complex words in “Praise Song for the Day” include “bramble” (line 5), “darning” (7), “edifices” (29) and “filial” (37), and the overall vocabulary works at a fairly accessible level. Most of the sentences are declarative and relatively short: “A woman and her son wait for the bus. / A farmer considers the changing sky. / A teacher says, *Take out your pencils. Begin*” (13-15). In the second half of the poem, Alexander also worked in some imperative sentences and fragments: “Say it plain: that many have died for this day” (25); “Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day. / Praise song for every hand-lettered sign, / the figuring-it-out at kitchen tables” (31-33). As the previous example also shows, the poem includes a large amount of word and sentence structure repetition, features that are more often necessary for communicating in speech than in writing.

Randy Malamud noted the poem’s link to speech’s simplicity in his article from the February 2009 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Like most of Alexander’s poetry, he said, “‘Praise Song for the Day’ is at first glance conversational, understated—a pastiche of ordinary images.” While these features probably would not cause someone to mistake an oral delivery of this poem for spontaneous conversation, they do link the poem to the more simple diction, syntax, and repetition of oral communication over written communication.

On his blog, editor and poet E. Ethelbert Miller also pointed out the relationship between Alexander’s inaugural poem and Barack Obama’s inaugural address:

Alexander’s poem should be connected to the closing lines of Barack Obama’s speech. Can we get a coda here? Obama quotes George Washington—and it seems like a Valley Forge moment. It’s Winter in America. Alexander’s “Praise Song for the Day” echoes this: “In today’s sharp sparkle, this winter air, anything can be made, any sentence begun.” Miller’s observation again points to the oral nature of Alexander’s poem; it serves to recapitulate and reinforce the message of Obama’s speech that was given directly before it. While poems are composed in many ways and for various reasons, this poem was clearly meant to communicate via oral delivery in that specific setting.

Since “Praise Song for the Day” works, at least to some degree, at the level of spoken communication, it’s interesting to consider its oral delivery from the perspective of communication theory. Models of communication abound, but as Ruth Finnegan explains in her book *Communicating*, the most pervasive and influential is the Shannon and Weaver model: “Communication is initiated by a sender ‘encoding’ [...] a ‘message.’ This is transmitted and, having survived more or less accurately depending on the distortions (‘noise’) on the way, reaches the ‘receiver’ who ‘decodes’ it [...]. The straight-line process is concluded by the successful receipt of the message” (13-14). Although this model has its limitations, it is particularly useful for its acknowledgement of “noise” as central to the communication process.

How might such noise have interfered with Alexander’s communication of “Praise Song for the Day” to her audience? First, let’s consider her live audience. They were on the National Mall to witness a historic occasion: the inauguration of Barack Obama. They were not there for a poetry reading. Many of them had been standing for hours in freezing weather to be present for this event, and they would have to move through crowds for some time afterwards to get transportation away from the inauguration. Obama had just finished his speech, so the audience members were jostling to get out of the crowd and cold when Alexander began to read her poem. These “receivers” were not very receptive.

Then there were the many people watching the event on television. Some may have simply wandered away or turned

off the program when Barack Obama's speech was finished. Some may have deliberately avoided the poetry reading. For those who stayed tuned in, any number of local distractions, language barriers, biases against poetry, disappointed political agendas, and other distortions could have interfered with their reception of "Praise Song for the Day." The television cameras also showed the crowd in D.C. dispersing during Alexander's reading—visual noise that must have had an effect on how viewers perceived the poem's importance and quality.

This noise certainly affected Alexander as the "sender" of the poem as well. Imagine standing at a podium on such an important occasion to read a poem you created while the audience in front of you disperses and the audience you can't see judges you (and will continue to judge you on this for your entire life). In addition to the psychological distortion this situation would cause, the outdoor setting, the large crowd, and the echo from distant speakers would create literal noise to interfere with your oral delivery of the poem. Considering all of this noise, it's a wonder that Alexander was able to communicate anything to any audience, and it might explain some of the immediate negative reactions, especially to her delivery style. Despite Alexander's best efforts with using simple, conversational language and despite the poem's connection to Obama's speech that preceded it, the initial communication of this poem was fraught with distortions that interfered with its oral delivery and made the poem less successful at reaching its audience.

#### *Print Poem*

Even though "Praise Song for the Day" should work well for oral delivery in an ideal communication setting, it functions more fully in writing, where people can take the time to see, study, and contemplate its more complex poetic features that are easy to miss below the surface of the simple language upon a first listen or even a first read. The importance of the title itself, for example, was probably lost on many people when they first heard the poem. It might have caused some to wonder why the poem didn't sound more like a song, and it might even have contributed to the accusations that "Praise Song for the Day" is not a poem.

The day after the inauguration, Carol Rumens' article "Elizabeth Alexander's praise poem was way too prosy" was published on *The Guardian's* website. She began her critique of the inaugural poem by defining the praise song as a form:

The African praise song traditionally celebrates the life of an individual, giving their name, genealogy, totem animal, job, personal attributes, etc in a rhythmical, incantatory, call-and-response style. To use this ancient form was an idea with exciting potential, but, as it turned out, the title of Elizabeth Alexander's inauguration poem was more inspired than the poem itself.

While Rumens did the initial work of defining Alexander's title and form, she did not pursue the connections that might exist between Alexander's poem and the form. Instead, she simply dismissed the poem because it didn't neatly fit her expectation of what a praise song should be, which is, of course, not "prosy."

The following day, another writer, Joel Dias-Porter, published "Parsing the 'Praise Song'" on his personal blog. Although posted online in a less lofty venue than the high-traffic British newspaper's website, Dias-Porter's analysis of "Praise Song for the Day" shows signs of deeper study and consideration of the poem's connection to the form. He notes that the praise song is a common form in Africa, "usually written in praise of people, living or dead." Then he goes on to explain

the significance of Alexander's choice to invoke the form: "Thus a praise song for the occasion mimics the Sankofa bird, a way to look both backwards and forward simultaneously. A way to honor her heritage as 'griot' while also honoring a momentous event." Dias-Porter looks beyond the surface differences between the poem and the traditional form and offers a thoughtful interpretation of how the praise song label places Alexander, an African-American woman, in the *griot* role on the occasion of the first African-American president's inauguration.

While the praise song label connects Alexander's content to an oral tradition, the poem is structured upon an intentionally visual form. The lines have no regular meter or syllable count, but they do have similar visual lengths on the printed page, a common consideration in free verse poetry. More significantly, the poem is organized into fourteen tercets with a final single line. "That the body of the poem is 43 lines is no coincidence," Joel Dias-Porter writes, "since Alexander is smart enough to know that while Obama is the 44th President of these United States, he is the 43rd person to serve as such. This is due to Grover Cleveland serving two non-consecutive terms as the 22nd and 24th Presidents." Once again, Joel Dias-Porter's analysis sheds light on Alexander's intentionality and craft.

This well-crafted visual structure was initially obscured, however, when *The Times* immediately ran a transcribed prose version of the poem based on Alexander's reading alone. Mark Doty, a prominent poet and professor, posted the accurate text of the poem on his blog that evening, and he offered this commentary:

Earlier today, the *Times* and other sources posted transcripts of Elizabeth Alexander's beautiful inaugural poem, but I hadn't till just now seen it with its lines and stanzas as the poet intended them. It's a fine example of the way a well-placed line and a shapely stanza energizes and formalizes plain speech; the formal choices here emphasize the clarity, dignity and grace of Alexander's language.

In her review of "Praise Song for the Day," posted six days after the inauguration, Nordette Adams discussed the problem with this misprinting and addressed the early wave of negative reactions to the poem: "Certainly anyone critiquing this poem without having seen the correct typographical form as released by Graywolf Press does herself and the poet a disservice. Lines and line breaks may convey as much meaning as words." Doty and Adams don't exaggerate here; in written poetry, line breaks are crucial for emphasis and meaning.

Of course, some critics who did see the correct printing of the poem still took issue with its line breaks, particularly the line that ends in "of":

Say it plain: that many have died for this day.  
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,  
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,

picked the cotton and the lettuce, built  
brick by brick the glittering edifices  
they would then keep clean and work inside of. (lines 25-30)

Adams also expressed her frustration with such reviewers who condemned that line as an "awkward construction" and "proof [Alexander] is a sloppy writer." "However, if you're not just a critic," Adams wrote, "if you're someone who actually

writes poetry and crafts poetry, you know a word like ‘of’ jutting off the line in phrasing odd to the poetic ear must be there for a reason.” Adams goes on to discuss how “of” visually and aurally sets up the central question and most important point of the poem that follows six lines later: “What if the mightiest word is love?” (36). In a poem with no set rhyme scheme, this instance of rhyme does stand out as significant and meaningful; ending a sentence and a line with “of” was not a grammatical error.

I would argue that ending that particular line with “of” also works to emphasize the opposition Alexander sets up between “the glittering edifices” and those who cleaned and worked in such buildings. In a poem composed of fairly simple language and short sentences, it is meaningful when we see two multi-syllable words at the end of one line followed by a line ending in “of” to conclude the longest sentence in the entire poem. When Alexander calls us to remember “the dead who brought us here,” we’re subtly reminded of the African slaves who built the White House and worked in it, and we’re recognizing that this inauguration brings an African-American family to live in a position of honor and power within “the glittering edifices.”

In his *Chronicle* article, Malamud points out additional poetic features in “Praise Song for the Day” that subtly refer to U.S. history and require a close reading of the text. He observes how Alexander uses the word “we” in a significant way: “Especially fitting, she frequently repeats the simple word ‘we,’ accentuated through the device of anaphora (a word echoed at the beginning of a series of clauses) to emphasize our commonality as a culture.” Malamud also points out how Alexander’s simple descriptions of people work as loaded metaphors:

“Someone is stitching up a hem, darning a hole in a uniform, patching a tire, repairing the things in need of repair.” In those lines, Alexander delicately conveys how profoundly broken American society has become, what a mess President George W. Bush has left his successor, but she chooses the quiet metaphor over the caustic political accusation, making this poem more unifying (as befits a “praise song”) than partisan.

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. While many early reviewers make no mention of this literary device, Joel Dias-Porter’s thorough analysis of the text once again comes through: “The Malcolm X allusion ‘Say it Plain’ I recognized right away and loved, as well as the allusions to the Bible ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’ and the aphorism taught to medical students ‘First do no harm.’” Dias-Porter goes on to admit that he recognized “Take no more than you need” as an allusion, but he had to look it up to discover its origin: the environmental sustainability movement.

A poem that uses so many literary devices and that might require additional research to be completely understood is certainly more complex than a single hearing can convey. While “Praise Song for the Day” can work on the surface as oral communication, it works most fully when experienced visually as a written text.

### *Reception*

In light of this analysis of the poem's oral and written functions, let's re-examine the initial critical reception of "Praise Song for the Day."

Reviewers like Regina Hackett and many anonymous authors of online comments criticized Alexander's delivery of the poem at the inauguration, labeling it "flat," "monotone," or the less specific "awful," and Miller Williams wanted a clearer sign of conclusion. Certainly Alexander was reading the poem in less than ideal circumstances with an incredible amount of communicative "noise," which must have affected her presentation in some negative ways, but was her oral delivery of the poem objectively poor?

In a *Star Tribune* article published the day after the inauguration, Hillel Italie portrayed Alexander's reading style in positive terms: "Alexander, wearing a bright red coat, delivering her poem in poised and determined style, offered a sketch of everyday work and interaction." Some of the comments in online forums were even more enthusiastic in their praise of the poem and its delivery. Such comments on EW.com included these: "Loved the poem and the delivery"; "Excellent poem, excellent reading, excellently thought provoking"; and "It's too bad that people think the reading is 'flat.' Alexander knows how the poem [...] should sound because she wrote it—she hears it in her head the way she wrote it to be read. I interpreted it as calm and matter-of-fact, a great choice for Obama's inauguration" (Tucker). Although the negative reactions have gotten more attention, even creeping into the Wikipedia entry for the poem, it seems that the initial aural experience of "Praise Song for the Day" actually led to a variety of responses and judgments about the quality of Alexander's delivery. This point of criticism is more about the hearers' aesthetic preferences than about Alexander's specific oral delivery of this poem.

Another major point of criticism from reviewers like Moira Weigel, Adam Kirsch, and more anonymous internet users was that "Praise Song for the Day" was bland and not appropriate for the inaugural occasion. Some of these did take into account that Alexander was only the fourth poet to read at a U.S. inauguration, and Kirsch even noted the unique pressure placed on Alexander in this specific inaugural context:

There was an extraordinary burden of expectation attached to Alexander's poem; I don't recall Maya Angelou or Miller Williams, the poets who read at Bill Clinton's inaugurations, getting the kind of attention that Alexander received in the last few weeks. The reason, I think, is that Obama's inauguration was just the kind of event that might inspire genuine poetry.

The rise of internet communication—blogs, internet news, online forums, and YouTube—also contributed to the added pressure and attention on Alexander's inaugural poem that didn't apply to her predecessors' work in the 1990s, and especially not to Robert Frost's first inaugural poem in 1961. These rapid methods of communication made it possible for people to criticize and dismiss "Praise Song for the Day" before they had access to a reliable written version of the poem.

Again, the poem's appropriateness for the occasion seems to be a point of contention rather than a widely agreed upon aspect of the work. Many reviewers did find that Alexander's poem worked within the small tradition of previous inaugural poems. Hillel Italie pointed to the poem's overall theme as a site of connection to this tradition: "Like Miller Williams' 'Of History and Hope' and Angelou's 'On the Pulse of the Morning,' Alexander narrated history as a hard, but hopeful

progression, a long and difficult question answered best by love.” Some comments in online forums were less specific but still addressed the poem’s aptness for the occasion. One said simply that the poem “was on the mark for today’s time and the current environment in our country” (Tucker). Some prominent critics wanted loftier material, but many hearers and readers of the poem were pleased with its down-to-earth content.

Another important aspect of the poem’s appropriateness for the inauguration was its accessibility. Due to the event’s historic nature and due to the advanced technology available around the world, Alexander’s poem needed to have fairly simple diction and syntax to communicate clearly to an international audience of all ages and varying levels of proficiency with English. “What if the mightiest word is love?” (line 36) the poem asks, and the worldwide audience can understand this simple language even if the concept pushes us to more complex levels of thought and practical application. The features of the poem that some critics dismissed as boring and inappropriate could also be viewed as tactful and fitting for the occasion.

Finally, there were those critics like Patrick Kurp, Tom Bethell, and the emphatic commenter from the *St. Petersburg Times* who claimed that “Praise Song for the Day” is not a poem, suggesting that it is simply prose and sometimes insulting Alexander’s intelligence and academic achievements as well. Italic disrupts such a reading by placing Alexander’s work not only in the tradition of inaugural poetry, but also in the context of her own and other American poetry: “Her poem was a grounded, non-topical summation and joining of minute details and infinite themes, connections that run through American verse from Walt Whitman to William Carlos Williams, and through such Alexander works as ‘Fugue’ and ‘A Poem for Nelson Mandela.’” While it can be tricky to define poem in our contemporary context, where poems don’t have to rhyme or even be broken into lines, the connections between “Praise Song for the Day” and previously established poems do seem to justify its poem label.

E. Ethelbert Miller also responded directly to criticism of the poem’s “prosy” style by explaining how the poem functions: “For a moment Elizabeth Alexander is not a Yale professor she is a woman going about her daily work. [sic] She hears the music created by the people. If her words seem more prose than poetry, it’s because she is saying it plain. This is a praise song in which the words of remembrance do the heavy lifting.” While some critics used the poem’s prose connections to attack Alexander personally, Miller cites that plain language to show how Alexander serves as speaker for the people instead of speaking above them as a Yale professor.

Alexander’s use of poetic technique further suggests that “Praise Song for the Day” belongs to the genre of poetry. Nordette Adams echoed Miller’s assessment of the poem in her blog as well, pointing especially to Alexander’s artistry. “Praise Song for the Day” is poetry,” Adams wrote. “Alexander plays with sound, rhythm, and imagery to convey what she means. The language is deceptive in its simplicity [...]. The poem has a density that is missed in the careless read.” Even Elizabeth Alexander herself pointed to her use of poetic form when she encouraged critics to read the poem again. “Of the critics,” Angela Dodson wrote, “she says merely that they ‘are entitled to their opinions.’ She hopes that they will take a fresh look now that the book is out, in part because versions on the Internet and in print did not convey accurate line breaks and stanzas.” From its content to its visual form, “Praise Song for the Day” falls securely within the boundaries of poetry.

With this final criticism that the poem is not a poem, the critics point us to the real problem: they were not a poetry

audience. Knee-jerk media responses are not appropriate for the packed language of poetry, which often requires multiple readings because of its concentrated language. Those who dismissed the poem without unpacking the implications and allusions within its simple language were not a poetry audience. A poetry audience does the work of thinking and understanding. Those who printed the poem in prose from a transcription of Alexander's reading were not a poetry audience. A poetry audience knows that a poem's visual form and line breaks are important sites of meaning and that there is a difference between the oral delivery and the print realities of a poem. Those who said, like one anonymous writer in an online forum, "I thought poetry was supposed to sound musical," were not a poetry audience. A poetry audience realizes that poetry is a huge category, that poems can be lyrical, narrative, formal, free, prose, sense, nonsense, sound-based, and/or visually based language.

Even David Ulin, book editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, showed himself lacking as a poetry audience when he traced the history of U.S. inaugural poems:

Alexander is just the fourth poet to appear at an inaugural; the others are Robert Frost, who delivered his poem "Dedication" at the inauguration of President Kennedy, and Maya Angelou and Miller Williams, who were part of the first and second President Clinton inaugurations, respectively. That's rarefied company, but unfortunately "Praise Song for the Day" didn't measure up.

What is truly unfortunate is that Ulin gets his facts wrong. Robert Frost wrote "Dedication" for Kennedy's inauguration and planned to read it before "The Gift Outright," but the sun and snow glare interfered with his vision, so he simply recited "The Gift Outright" from memory instead ("Poetry"). A poetry audience would be aware of this history and would actually examine the previous inaugural poems before making the claim that this one "didn't measure up." Ulin and critics like him were writing without doing the work necessary for fully assessing "Praise Song for the Day" and without understanding the nature of poetry.

Many poems are intended for both visual and aural enjoyment, but no poem can do everything to meet the oral and print demands all at once. "Praise Song for the Day" was intended to work when read aloud on inauguration day and when read in print far beyond the occasion itself. Alexander worked in features to meet the needs of both modes of communication.

A poem certainly can't please everyone's aesthetic preferences either, particularly when mainstream U.S. culture places so little value on poetry. "Praise Song for the Day," however, did get a great deal of positive feedback during and after the early wave of negative reactions. Most reviews that included a close reading of the accurate text were favorable towards the poem. Angela Dodson reported that Alexander received "hundreds of letters and e-mails from people from as far away as Croatia, Tunisia and Vietnam about how they connected to the poem or specific lines of it." Nordette Adams also pointed out a few days after the inauguration that "Graywolf Press is being swamped with [requests] for the poem." She concludes, "So, somebody liked it." Perhaps now, as we near the end of Barack Obama's presidency, it's time to change the Wikipedia page and the mainstream perception of Elizabeth Alexander's inaugural poem to reflect the poem's reception more completely and accurately.

*Note: Elizabeth Alexander's inaugural poem and reading can be viewed at [www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/praise-song-day](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/praise-song-day).*

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