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100
Poems
to Grow
Your
Confidence

Introduction

Having self-confidence can make all the difference to the way we live our lives. It really matters. Confidence can make us feel good about ourselves, encourage us to make a start, spur us on to follow our dreams, enable us to take risks, or help us face up to an uncertain future with courage and fortitude.

Some people can come across as more confident than others, but it is also the case that confidence levels fluctuate over time. Our levels of confidence depend not only on our inner sense of self, but also are influenced by whom we are with, what we are doing and the challenges we are facing.

In these pages, you will find a range of poetic explorations of confidence in all its guises. Our own inner critic can often act as a brake on our self-belief and courage so it is exciting to read poets who feel and describe an easy sense of self-confidence. Poems often feel like they are delivered direct to our emotional bloodstreams, so who wouldn't feel a fillip of confidence on reading Dylan Thomas's seductive assertion, 'honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns' ('Fern Hill'), or on listening to Wordsworth telling us of his sense of joy, 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!' (*The Prelude*)? Poets draw energy and confidence from the beauty and power of the world around them, expressed by Edna St Vincent Millay

in her heady response to nature, 'Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year; / my soul is all but out of me' ('God's World').

In these examples confidence emanates from the joy of being alive and in being able to be yourself. It is a confidence often associated with the young or of the youthful spirit. Fear is not part of the picture. But many of us, poets included, can struggle with self-doubt. There are often significant obstacles, internal or external, to overcome. In these circumstances, confidence is hard-won. Maya Angelou captures that sense of determination in her anthem-poem 'Still I Rise'. She writes, 'You may tread me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I'll rise' and 'Up from a past that's rooted in pain / I rise'. Like a mantra, insistently, repeatedly, Angelou tells us 'I rise / I rise / I rise.'

Many poems tell of struggles that threaten to overwhelm yet show how, with courage and self-belief, they can be overcome. It often feels like it is out of these very challenges that bravery and resilience are forged, famously articulated by W E Henley: 'Out of the night that covers me, / Black as the pit from pole to pole, / I thank whatever gods may be / For my unconquerable soul' ('Invictus'). For others, such grit and determination are expressed in the poets' use of negatives, such as Emily Brontë declaring 'No coward soul is mine' or Archibald Lampman writing 'Not to be conquered

My Own Voice

From *The Prelude*, Book 1

My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind's
Internal echo of the imperfect sound;
To both I listened, drawing from them both
A cheerful confidence in things to come.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

‘I am
the
master
of my
fate’

Invictus
William Ernest Henley



The Voice of Spring

I am coming, I am coming!
Hark! the honey bee is humming;
See, the lark is soaring high
In the blue and sunny sky,
And the gnats are on the wing
Wheeling round in airy ring.

Listen! New-born lambs are bleating,
And the cawing rooks are meeting
In the elms – a noisy crowd.
All the birds are singing loud,
And the first white butterfly
In the sunshine dances by.

Look around you, look around!
Flowers in all the fields abound,
Every running stream is bright,
All the orchard trees are white,
And each small and waving shoot
Promises sweet autumn fruit.

Mary Howitt (1799-1888)

The time that my journey takes

Gitanjali 12

The time that my journey takes is long and the way
of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of
light, and pursued my voyage through the
wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many
a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest
to thyself, and that training is the most intricate
which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to
come to his own, and one has to wander through
all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine
at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them
and said 'Here art thou!'

The question and the cry 'Oh, where?' melt into
tears of a thousand
streams and deluge the world with the flood of the
assurance 'I am!'

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

I dwell in Possibility

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of Eye –
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

‘Boldness
be my
friend!’

Cymbeline
William Shakespeare



Confidence

Oppressed with sin and woe,
A burdened heart I bear,
Opposed by many a mighty foe;
But I will not despair.

With this polluted heart
I dare to come to Thee,
Holy and mighty as Thou art;
For Thou wilt pardon me.

I feel that I am weak,
And prone to every sin:
But Thou who giv'st to those who seek,
Wilt give me strength within.

Far as this earth may be
From yonder starry skies;
Remoter still am I from Thee:
Yet Thou wilt not despise.

I need not fear my foes,
I need not yield to care,
I need not sink beneath my woes:
For Thou wilt answer prayer.

In my Redeemer's name,
I give myself to Thee;
And all unworthy as I am
My God will cherish me.

Anne Brontë (1820-1849)