

Soaring rhetoric: NASA mission will carry Poet Laureate Ada Limón's words to Jupiter

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U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón is seen at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif. on Thursday, Jan. 19, 2023. Limón wrote a new poem for an upcoming NASA mission to Jupiter's moon Europa. "In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa" will be engraved on the Europa Clipper spacecraft. NASA expects to launch the mission in October 2024. Credit: Gregory M. Waigand/NASA via AP

A new work by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón, written for an upcoming NASA mission to Jupiter's moon Europa, is a glance at outer space that returns back to Earth.

Limón's "In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa," which she read Thursday night during a ceremony at the Library of Congress, is part of NASA's " [Message In a Bottle Campaign](#) " as the aeronautics and space administration prepares for a years-long journey. The Europa Clipper is expected to launch in October 2024, with "In Praise of Mystery" engraved on the spacecraft.

"Writing this [poem](#) was one of the greatest honors of my life, but also one of the most difficult tasks I've ever been assigned," Limón said in a statement released through the Library of Congress. "Eventually, what made the poem come together was realizing that in pointing toward other planets, stars and moons, we are also recognizing the enormous gift that is our planet Earth. To point outward is also to point inward."

During a recent interview with The Associated Press, Limón said she struggled at first with the poem, explaining that because of its official nature she couldn't rely on her usual instincts. After working on more than a dozen drafts, she received invaluable advice from her husband, Lucas Marquardt, who urged her to write the poem as if it were personal, a "poem that you would write anyway."

"I think of all the times as a child that I would look down and find a whole universe in the grass, or in a small, watery wedge from the creek across the street from my house," she said. "But then I also think that that was in tandem with looking up at the [moon](#)."



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The 7-stanza poem begins as a tribute to "the [night sky](#) inky/with black expansiveness," a sky we read as an "unerring book of the universe." But, Limón adds, treasures can be found below the sky.

"O second moon, we, too, are made
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.

We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark."

Limón, 47, has been poet laureate since 2022 and was recently appointed by Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden to a second term, lasting two years. Her books include "Bright Dead Things" and "The Carrying."

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