

Analyzing The First Mexican-American Laureate Poet Ada Limón's Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" through Literary Lens

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: November 06, 2025 Revised: December 12, 2025 Accepted: December 30, 2025 Available Online: January 11, 2026	<i>The masterpiece research work is stunning success in the realm of English literature, because earlier no research is done on the Mexican-American Laureate Poetess Ada Limón's poetry. The study aims to analyze the literary devices and usage of these devices in Limon's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl". This poem is Limón's opening poem in her acclaimed collection Bright Dead Things, published in 2015 by Milkweed Editions. This poem is selected to collect literary devices used in this poem. The content analysis approach was used for data collection and collected data was presented in the tables. The results revealed that Limon used metaphors, similes, personifications, imageries, apostrophes and dictions. These results are presented in the tables, in the end the researchers presented some recommendations and direction for upcoming researchers and scholars which makes study valuable.</i>
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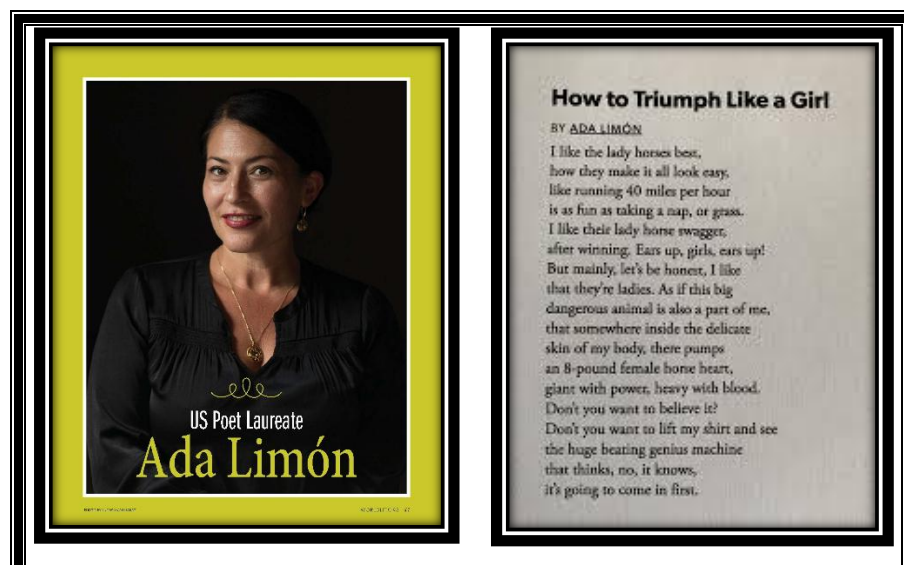


Introduction

Limón is the first woman of Mexican ancestry to be named poet laureate of the U.S. few women have filled the role, and fewer women of color still. Ada Limon is famous poetess from the Mexican-American descent; first Latina to become poetess Laureate in the United States by congress librarian in the current era (Riccio, 2019). Limon's poems are generally are written in free verse style which is commonly prevail at present, however it is not split and decomposed. Thematically, there is diversity in her poems but these are often about the self-discovery. Limon's poetic voice is extensively loved because her poetry is a manifestation of her life (Parker, 2019). Limon is the writer of seven collections; the first collection *Lucky Wreck* was written in the year

(2006); and the second collection *The Big Fake World* was also written in the same year in (2006); but after three years the third collection *Sharks in the Rivers* was written in (2010). Then after five years break in (2015) Limon wrote fourth collection *Bright Dead Things*; while fifth collection *The Carrying* was written in year (2018). The last two collections *The Hurting Kind* and *Shelter: A Love Letter to Trees* were written respectively in (2022). Direct language is used in Limon's poetry is the main characteristic of her poetry make her prominent figure in the realm of poetry. Limon's poetry is easily accessible, the poetess integrated her personal experience with the natural world. In the thematic point of view, Limon's poetry circles around the themes such as themes of, nature and body, grief and loss, fertility and infertility, love and connection, gratitude and wonder, witnessing and presence. Ada Limon explored these themes by using clear and direct language which create various feelings and relevant logical ideologies.

Ada Limon's Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"



Context of the poem

As we focus on the context of the Ada Limon's poem "*How to Triumph Like a Girl*" we find that Limón wrote the poem inspired by the Kentucky Oaks, a race for three-year-old fillies held the day before the Kentucky Derby. It serves as a defiant counterpart to more somber poems in the same collection, offering a direct and celebratory vision of 21st century feminism. The poem earned Limón a Pushcart Prize, one of the highest honors for a single poem.

Literary Context

Published in the collection *Bright Dead Things* (2015), the poem reflects Limón's personal experience living in Kentucky's horse country. It is often analyzed as a foundational piece of 21st century feminist poetry, translating grit and confidence into anatomical imagery.

Structural Shift

The poem follows a narrative arc that moves from the literal to the metaphorical:

- **The External (Lines 1–6):** The poem opens with broad, lighthearted observations of "lady horses" at a race, focusing on their "swagger" and physical speed.
- **The Pivot (Line 7):** The phrase "But mainly, let's be honest" marks a structural "Volta" or turning point. The tone shifts from offhand observation to more personal, candid confession.

- **The Internal (Lines 8–12):** The structure narrows to the speaker's own body. She moves from watching the horses to imagining their "8-pound female horse heart" pumping inside her own "delicate skin".

Poem's Structure

Ada Limón's *"How to Triumph Like a Girl"* uses a compact, free-verse structure, mimicking a sonnet's brevity, to build confidence, linking speaker's self-belief to powerful lady horses (fillies) who embody grace, strength, and innate winning instinct, shifting from broad observation to a direct challenge for the reader to embrace their own powerful, female core, a "giant with power, heavy with blood".

Rhythm's Form

- a. **Modern Sonnet Influence:** While it is 18 lines long (exceeding the traditional 14 lines), it is often described as a "compact poem" that mimics the brevity and punch of a sonnet.
- b. **Line Length:** Most lines are between 8 and 10 syllables, creating a tight, controlled visual image on the page and a conversational yet rhythmic pace.
- c. **Enjambment:** Limón uses frequent enjambment (carrying a sentence over a line break), which mirrors the continuous, forward motion of a horse at a gallop.

Themes in the Poem

- i. **Reclaiming Female Strength:** The poem reframes "lady hood" by identifying with powerful "lady horses". It rejects traditional notions of female delicacy, instead emphasizing the grit and "swagger" of these animals after a victory.
- ii. **The Biological Essence of Power:** Limón uses vivid anatomical imagery specifically an "8-pound female horse heart" to suggest that strength is an innate, biological reality rather than just a social performance.
- iii. **Instinctual Success:** A central theme is the "certainty" of winning. The speaker envisions a heart that doesn't just hope to win but "knows it's going to come in first," suggesting that confidence is an inherent "genius machine".
- iv. **Kinship with the Natural World:** The speaker finds an "avatar" for her own life force in the animal kingdom, bridging the gap between her "delicate skin" and the raw, wild power of a racing filly.

Problem Statement

Statement of the problem is a brief summary of the research problem, normally contained within one paragraph, its purpose is to identify the concerned problem. Limon's concentration on the problem is the gap between a woman's true, powerful, often instinctual innersole ("the genius machine") and public opinions and hopes of victory ("triumph") which frequently miss the raw, resilient, and is deeply linked with nature of female's power, instead of supporting traditional values, possibly favors the aggressive method of triumph. This poem pursues to regain and redefine triumph as an intrinsic state, embedded in human body, natural and genuine creativity, rather than external validation.

Research Significance

The present research classifies Ada Limon as a specimen of ecofeminist poetess due to her efforts to words the exploration of the spiritual and biological linkage between women and nature. The traditional views of femininity are challenged in Ada Limon's poem by reclaiming "lady" for describing a "big dangerous animal" having extreme power. As a winner of Push chart prize, this poem is often cited in instructional settings because of its "striking assertion of unbound female power". It is generally used in instruction to teach "girl power" and the progression of innovative

poetical descriptions. Limón's poem mirrors a crucial factual transference as the poetess moved to Kentucky and began mixing the culture of horse race towards home and identity.

Objectives and Questions

The present research aims;

- To analyze the literary devices in Ada Limon's Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl".
- To analyze the use of literary devices in her poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl".

The following are the research questions;

1. Analyze the literary devices in Ada Limon's Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"?
2. How does Ada Limón's use of literary devices in her poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"?

Literature Review

Literature review is critical analysis and synthesis of existing scholarly research on specific topic. Its function is to provide overview of current knowledge, identify gaps in research, and contextualize new studies within the existing academic landscape. Ada Limón is the first woman of Mexican ancestry to be named U.S. poet laureate. Through her understanding of social media and the power of connection, she strives to make poetry accessible to everyone. Her poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" begins "I like the lady horses best" a funny and engaging first line that draws the reader in with surprising diction and a conversational tone. Her work is exultant and deeply felt, in touch with the emotions and experiences that make us human.

Poet Laureate

The office of the U.S. poet laureate is a relatively recent one. Philanthropist Archer M. Huntington endowed the position in 1937 as the "Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress." The official title of "Consultant in Poetry" remains, but "Poet Laureate," the name most Americans associate with the role, was added by an Act of Congress in 1985. Over time, the position has changed from one primarily advising the Library of Congress about their poetry collections to a more public-facing role. The most influential U.S. poets laureate have usually had a special interest or project: Maxine Kumin championed the work of women poets. Billy Collins' "Poetry 180" project brought a poem a day to classrooms throughout the school year. And Robert Pinsky helped build an archive of Americans reading their favorite poems. The terms of the laureateship are short, just one year, though some often stay for two terms (Limon, 2015; Limon & Nior, 2022). The most recent U.S. poet laureate and the first Native American to fill the role Joy Harjo, served for three, from 2019 until passing the baton to Limón in July 2022.

Conceptual Framework

Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" utilizes a variety of literary devices to explore themes of female power, kinship with nature, and self-confidence. The conceptual framework outlines the key devices as metaphors, conceits, similes, personifications, imageries, apostrophes and rhetorical devices and their functions within the poem.

Table 1: Elements in Conceptual Framework

Element	Description
Speaker's Persona	Candid, confident, and conspiratorial; addresses the reader as a friend or confidant.
Thematic Lens	Feminism & Empowerment: Reclaiming "girlhood" as a source of strength rather than weakness.

Structure	A compact, 18-line poem that mimics the brevity of a sonnet to emphasize confidence.
Juxtaposition	Contrasts the "delicate" human form with "dangerous" animal energy to suggest that power is often overlooked or internalized.
Symbolism	Horses: Represent freedom, grace, and an untamed female force that knows it will "come in first".

This framework demonstrates how Limón uses vivid imagery and metaphorical language to urge readers to recognize their own capacity for "triumph".

Theoretical Framework

The structure that can support a theory is called theoretical framework; it not only encompasses the theory, but narrative explanation about how the researcher engages in using the theory and its underlying assumptions to investigate the research problem (Ahmad et al., 2025; Soomro et al., 2025). The poem is best analyzed through a feminist and ecofeminist lens, focusing on the intersection of womanhood and the natural world.

- **Feminist Literary Criticism:** The poem challenges patriarchal norms by redefining "girlhood" as a state of immense power rather than frailty. It explores the "otherness" of women and animals as parallel sites of strength.
- **Embodied Feminism:** It centers on the female body, specifically internalizing the "eight-pound female horse heart" as a source of innate, biological triumph.
- **Deconstruction:** It deconstructs the binary between "delicate" human skin and "dangerous" animal force, merging them into a single identity.

Research Methodology

"Methodical study of process is known as the research method" (Ahmad et al., 2021, p 194). Its function is to provide organized structure of the research study, and in this part the researcher give account of the methods used in research (Murtaza, et al., 2025; Shaheen et al., 2025). The poem *"How to Triumph Like a Girl"* by Ada Limón is the opening poem in her acclaimed collection *Bright Dead Things*, published in 2015 by Milkweed Editions. This poem is selected to collect literary devices used in this poem. The content analysis approach was used for data collection and collected data was presented in the tables.

Data Analysis

Ada Limón's in her poem *"How to Triumph Like a Girl"* uses various literary devices to explore themes of female power, confidence, and kinship with nature.

Table 2: Metaphors in the Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"

SR. No	Metaphors	SR. No	Metaphors
1	"How to triumph like a girl"	4	"Thick Blood"
2	"lady horses swagger"	5	"Flying" & "Swish"
3	"8-Pound Female Horse Heart"		

The poems title "How to triumph like a girl" is central metaphor of the speaker's desired inner strength, confidence and power while, "lady horses swagger" in metaphorical sense refers to the feminine strength and confidence, this metaphor also representing the speaker's idealized self as she admires their effortless grace and power, contrasting it with human struggle whereas the "8-

pound female horse heart," a "giant with power," representing immense capacity, and the horses' "flying and swish" as a model for triumphant, unburdened movement.

Here are the key metaphorical elements:

1. **Lady Horses as Role Models:** The "lady horses" are not just animals; they embody a powerful, respected femininity that the speaker aspires to, showing strength in both athletic power and serene confidence (like taking naps).
2. **The "8-Pound Female Horse Heart":** This is a metaphor for immense, powerful, and often overlooked inner capacity, suggesting a core strength that defies typical delicate feminine descriptions.
3. **"Thick Blood":** The heavy, strong blood flowing through the horse's powerful heart symbolizes a potent, almost masculine, life force that the speaker identifies with.
4. **"Swagger":** The horse's confident walk after winning is a metaphor for self-assurance and pride in one's power, a quality the speaker admires.
5. **"Flying" & "Swish":** These actions describe the effortless grace and decisive movement of the horses, symbolizing effortless triumph and freedom.
6. **Juxtaposition of Horse & Human:** The poem directly compares the horse's physical attributes (muscle, heart) with the speaker's human body, highlighting the contrast between outward appearance and inner might.

Through these metaphors, Limón explores feminism, self-acceptance, and the idea that true strength isn't always loud but can be inherent and profoundly powerful.

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" metaphors are used to explore themes of female power, self-confidence, and the intersection of physical delicacy and internal strength.

Central Metaphors

1. **The "Lady Horse" as Female Power:** Limón uses thoroughbred racing horses—specifically "lady horses" as an extended metaphor for women. These animals represent a blend of grace and ferocity, making extreme effort (running 40 miles per hour) appear effortless.
2. **The Eight-Pound Horse Heart:** The most prominent metaphor is the speaker's claim that she has a "giant" eight-pound female horse heart pumping inside her "delicate skin". This contrasts external human fragility with an internal engine of massive, raw power.
3. **The Horse "Swagger":** The physical "swagger" of a horse after winning a race serves as a metaphor for feminine confidence and the unapologetic celebration of victory.

Function of These Metaphors

1. **Internal vs. External Strength:** By placing a massive horse heart inside a human body, Limón suggests that a woman's true power is often concealed beneath a surface that others may perceive as delicate.
2. **Biological Certainty:** The heart is described as something that "thinks, no, it knows / it's going to come in first". This metaphors self-assurance not as a choice, but as an inherent, biological drive for success.
3. **Feminist Reclamation:** Using the phrase "like a girl" in a triumphant context subverts the traditionally derogatory use of the phrase, framing "girlhood" as synonymous with immense, unyielding strength.

Table 3: Similes in the Poem “How to Triumph Like a Girl”

Sr. No	Similes	Sr. No	Similes
01	In the poem’s title "Like a Girl"	03	"As if this big dangerous animal is also a part of me"
02	"like running 40 miles per hour is as fun as taking a nap, or grass"		

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl," similes draw comparisons using "like" or "as," notably equating the speaker's strength and spirit to powerful female horses, such as their effortless speed described "like running 40 miles per hour is as fun as taking a nap, or grass," and the powerful internal image of a giant, beating "8-pound female horse heart, giant with power" within her delicate body, emphasizing a fierce, capable female energy.

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" similes and comparative language are used to bridge the gap between the speaker’s human experience and the powerful physicality of female horses.

Here are the key similes:

1. **"How they make it all look easy, like running 40 miles per hour is as fun as taking a nap, or grass":** This compares the seemingly effortless strength and speed of the mares to simple, enjoyable activities, highlighting their natural power.
2. **"As if this big dangerous animal is also a part of me":** This simile links the wild, powerful horse to the speaker's own self, suggesting an inner wildness.
3. **"That somewhere inside the delicate skin of my body, there pumps an 8-pound female horse heart, giant with power, heavy with blood":** This powerful simile internalizes the horse's strength, comparing the speaker's own heart to a massive, powerful animal's heart, showing hidden strength.

Key examples of similes and comparisons in the poem include:

1. **Running speed and ease:** The speaker describes how female horses make "running 40 miles per hour" seem "as fun as taking a nap, or grass". This comparison emphasizes the natural ease and joy with which these animals exert incredible power.
2. **Identification with the horse:** The speaker uses the phrasing "as if this big dangerous animal is also a part of me" to establish a direct connection between her own body and the raw strength of the horse.
3. **Internal anatomy:** While functioning more as a central metaphor, the speaker compares the internal power of a woman to having "an 8-pound female horse heart" pumping inside her "delicate skin". This imagery creates a vivid picture of hidden, massive strength within a seemingly fragile frame.

Table 4: Personification in the Poem “How to Triumph Like a Girl”

Sr. No	Personification	Sr. No	Personification
01	"Lady horse swagger"	03	"as fun as taking a nap,"
02	"Ears up, girls, ears up!"	04	"horse heart"

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" personification is used to bridge the gap between animal instinct and human emotion, primarily by attributing human social behaviors and confidence to female horses.

In Ada Limón's "How to Triumph Like a Girl," personification appears as the speaker attributes human-like confidence and superior qualities to female horses, giving them "lady horse swagger,"

ears "up, girls," and an internal "genius machine" heart that knows it will win, thereby protecting human desires for strength and grace onto the animals, blending equine power with feminine triumph and challenging traditional gender roles.

Here's how personification works in the poem:

1. **"Lady Horse Swagger"**: The speaker admires the confident, almost human-like swagger of winning female horses, attributing a social attitude to them.
2. **"Ears up, girls, ears up!"**: This phrase directly addresses the horses as "girls," treating them as fellow females and implying shared feminine attributes like awareness and pride.
3. **"The 8-pound female horse heart, / giant with power, heavy with blood. / Don't you want to believe it? / That thinks, no, it knows, / its going to come in first."**: The heart is given human-like cognitive abilities, a "genius machine" that "thinks" and "knows," taking on the power and certainty usually associated with human ambition.
4. **Relating Horse to Human**: The speaker imagines having this powerful horse heart, metaphorically linking her own body and female identity to the horse's physical and triumphant capabilities, showing how female strength transcends species.

By personifying these horses as powerful, knowing females, Limón connects animal strength with female identity, using the horses as a symbol for female power, grace, and inherent ability, making abstract concepts of triumph relatable and vivid.

Key examples of personification in the poem include:

1. **Lady Horse Swagger**: The speaker describes the horses as having a "lady horse swagger" after winning a race. "Swagger" is a human posture associated with confidence and pride, attributing a conscious social attitude to the animal.
2. **The Thinking Heart**: The speaker personifies her own internal "horse heart" as a "genius machine that thinks, no, it knows, it's going to come in first". This grants the physical organ the human capacity for complex thought and absolute certainty.
3. **Social Roles as "Ladies"**: By repeatedly referring to the animals as "lady horses" and "girls," Limón projects human gender roles and social hierarchies onto them, suggesting they are "civilized" and aware of their triumphant status.
4. **Effortless Pleasure**: The poem suggests that for these horses, running at high speeds is "as fun as taking a nap," personifying their physical exertion with the human capacity for recreational enjoyment.

This device serves to make the horses' strength more relatable and aspirational for the speaker, reinforcing the theme of innate female power.

Table 5: Imagery in the Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"

Sr. No	Imagery	Sr. No	Imagery
01	"8-pound female horse heart"	04	"giant"
02	"Delicate skin"	05	"heavy blood"
03	"ears up"	06	"huge beating genius machine"

Ada Limón's "How to Triumph Like a Girl" uses vivid imagery of powerful, graceful lady horses to represent inner strength, contrasting their effortless speed with simple pleasures like napping or grazing, and featuring the striking image of a giant, beating, 8-pound female horse heart inside the speaker's body, a "genius machine" knowing it will win, connecting the speaker's feminine self with primal power.

Key Imagery Examples:

1. **Lady Horses:** They embody effortless strength, grace, and confidence, making high-speed running seem as easy as resting.
2. **"Ears up, girls, ears up!":** A command that's both a celebration of victory and an encouragement for women to be bold and present.
3. **"Delicate skin" vs. "8-pound female horse heart":** A powerful contrast showing the hidden, immense power beneath a seemingly fragile exterior.
4. **"Huge beating genius machine":** A metaphor for the intuitive, powerful heart that knows its own capability for success.
5. **"Swagger":** Describes the confident, victorious post-race demeanor of the female horses, reflecting inner certainty.

This imagery creates a strong, relatable metaphor for female power, suggesting that deep within, women possess the same inherent, powerful confidence as these magnificent animals.

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl" the imagery focuses on the contrast between delicate human vulnerability and the raw, immense power of nature, specifically female racehorses.

Key Imagery and Symbols

1. **The "Lady Horse" Swagger:** The poem begins with the visual of female horses running at high speeds (40 mph) and their post-race "swagger" with "ears up". This imagery portrays strength as something that can be both graceful and effortless, like "taking a nap" or eating "grass".
2. **The 8-Pound Heart:** A central visceral image is the "8-pound female horse heart" pumping "heavy with blood" inside the speaker's own "delicate skin". This literal weight and size emphasize a hidden, massive internal strength.
3. **The "Huge Beating Genius Machine":** The heart is described as a machine that doesn't just feel, but "thinks" and "knows" it will come in first. This industrial, mechanical imagery suggests that female triumph is a programmed, inevitable force rather than a fluke.
4. **The Physical Revelation:** The speaker dares the reader to "lift my shirt" to see this internal power, turning the chest—often sexualized or associated with nurturance—into a site of competitive, animalistic "genius".

Themes Supported by Imagery

1. **Female Power:** By identifying with "big, dangerous animals," Limón uses imagery to reclaim the word "lady" from passive connotations and redefine it through speed, power, and victory.
2. **Embodiment:** The imagery bridges the gap between the speaker's human body and the horse's anatomy, suggesting that the "life-force" that drives an athlete is the same one that exists in every woman.

Apostrophe as a Literary Device

The literary device of apostrophe involves the speaker directly addressing an absent person, an abstract idea, or an inanimate object as if it were present and alive.

Table 6: Apostrophe in the Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"

Sr. No	Apostrophe	Sr. No	Apostrophe
01	"Ears up, girls, ears up!"	02	"Don't you want to believe it?"

1. **"Ears up, girls, ears up!":** This is a direct address to the "lady horses" (line 6). By addressing the horses as "girls," the speaker personifies them, giving them human-like qualities and a sense of shared identity with the speaker and, by extension, all women. This heightens the emotional connection the speaker feels with the horses and their strength.
2. **Don't you want to believe it? Don't you want to lift my shirt and see / the huge beating genius machine.":** The speaker directly addresses the reader ("you") with these questions (lines 13-15). This device forces the reader to engage with the speaker's personal emotion and her "secret" desire for powerful self-confidence, creating an immediate and intimate connection between the poem's speaker and the audience.

Poetic Contractions

Poetic contractions are contractions of words found in poetry but not commonly used in everyday modern English. Also known as elision or syncope, these contractions are usually used to lower the number of syllables in a particular word in order to adhere to the meter of a composition.

Table 7: Poetic Contractions in the Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"

Sr. No	Contractions	Sr. No	Contractions
1	"let's "	3	"Don't you want to believe it?"
2	"they're"	4	"Don't"

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl," contractions are used to create a direct, conversational tone that mimics a person confiding in a friend. The specific contractions used in the poem include:

1. **Let's:** Found in the line "But mainly, **let's** be honest, I like / that they're ladies".
2. **They're:** Used to describe the horses ("I like / that **they're** ladies").
3. **Don't:** Used twice in rhetorical questions to the reader: "**Don't** you want to believe it?"

Function of Contractions in the Poem

1. **Informal Tone:** By using modern, everyday contractions rather than formal language, Limón establishes a candid and personal voice.
2. **Immediacy:** The use of "it's going to come in first" at the end of the poem creates a sense of inevitability and confidence in the speaker's success.
3. **Reader Engagement:** The contraction "Don't" helps the speaker address the reader directly, fostering a conspiratorial and intimate connection.

Table 8: Motifs in the Poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl"

Sr. No	Motifs	Sr. No	Motifs
01	"lady horses"	04	"lift my shirt"
02	The Heart as a "Genius Machine"	05	"secret,"
03	Physicality and Anatomy		

In Ada Limón's poem "How to Triumph Like a Girl," several motifs emphasize the themes of female power, self-confidence, and the connection between the human and animal worlds.

1. **"lady horses"** (specifically three-year-old fillies) serve as the primary motif for untamed female strength.
2. **The Heart as a "Genius Machine":** The speaker envisions an "8-pound female horse heart" within her own body. This mechanical yet organic imagery portrays the female body as a powerful and instinctively successful "genius machine".

3. **Physicality and Anatomy:** The poem frequently references physical features such as "ears up," "delicate skin," and the "heavy with blood" heart to bridge the gap between the speaker's human form and the horse's animal power.
4. The act of the speaker inviting the reader to "**lift my shirt**" to see her heart is a motif of defiant openness.
5. **Candidness and Connection:** The conversational tone, shifting from casual observation to sharing a "**secret**," acts as a motif of female solidarity, inviting the reader to believe in their own hidden strength.

Table 9: Form of the Poem “How to Triumph Like a Girl”

Sr. No	Form	Sr. No	Form
1	Free verse	4	Section breaks
2	Brevity and compactness	5	Direct confident tone
3	Sonnet like qualities		

Form: In the contemporary poetry freedom and conversational feeling is common as modern poetess Limon firstly, used free verse style as rhyme scheme is not used strictly and irregular meter. Secondly, brief and solid style is used in the poem as in eighteen lines there are eight to ten syllables creating it feel concise and powerful, as if the speaker doesn't need lengthy explanation. Thirdly, the poem has sonnet like qualities as in its length it is close to the sonnet size. Fourthly, its section break features dividing it in three sections. Lastly, the poem is in direct and confident tone is its short line and declarative statements for instance "I like the lady horses best" indication of confidential statement. In nutshell the form of the poem supports the theme and the confined structure of the poem reflects strength of the female horses and poetess's individual internal power.

Table 10: Diction of the Poem “How to Triumph Like a Girl”

Sr. No	Diction	Sr. No	Diction
1	Informal and conversational	4	Empowering adjectives
2	Sensory and physical	5	Juxtaposition
3	Nature focused		

Diction: Language and **diction** used in Lemon's poem “How to Triumph like a Girl” is categorized by its tone which is conversational, direct, and intimate style; that is combining everyday language with powerful natural imagery, particularly of horses to explore the strength and confidence of female.

Literary Lens

Ada Limón's poem "**How to Triumph Like a Girl**" serves as the opening piece of her 2015 collection, *Bright Dead Things*. Through various literary lenses, the poem explores themes of gendered power, bodily autonomy, and the rejection of traditional vulnerability.

Feminist Lens: Reclaiming Power

- **The "Lady Horse" Archetype:** Limón uses the image of female racehorses—powerful, "big dangerous" animals to subvert stereotypes of feminine fragility. The horses represent a form of "swagger" and raw athletic dominance that is explicitly tied to their female identity.
- **Defiance of Social Norms:** The invitation to "lift [her] shirt" (Line 15) is a transgressive act. In a literary context, this challenges the societal taboo surrounding women's bodies and

reclaims the female form as a "huge beating genius machine" rather than a passive object of the gaze.

- **Collective Identity:** The use of "we" and "girls" establishes a shared female strength, suggesting that triumph is an inherent capability rather than an exceptional one.

Biological & Materialist Lens: The Body as Machine

- **Anatomical Imagery:** Limón moves from external observation to internal biology, imagining an "8-pound female horse heart" pumping inside her "delicate skin". This literalizes the internal strength, suggesting that female power is not just a metaphor but a physical, heavy reality.
- **The "Genius Machine":** By describing the heart as a machine that "knows it's going to come in first," the poem portrays intuition and determination as reliable, mechanical certainties.

Structural Lens: Tone and Form

- **Tone of Bravado:** Critics note the poem's "joy, bravado, and sheer push," which sets a defiant tone for the rest of the collection.
- **Conversational Pace:** The style is described as having "prose sense" with "reassuring accessibility," allowing the complex themes of soul-grilling and strength to feel intimate and direct.

Psychological Lens: Confidence as Choice

- **The Will to Believe:** The rhetorical question "Don't you want to believe it?" frames self-confidence as an act of free will. It challenges the reader and the speaker herself—to choose a narrative of victory over one of doubt.
- **Internal Landscape:** The poem maps the speaker's internal terrain, navigating the "bigness" of personal ambition against the backdrop of a literal race.

Discussion

Limón uses these devices to convey that true female triumph isn't about loud aggression but a quiet, inherent, powerful grace, much like a lady horse that looks effortless while being incredibly strong and fast, a strength the speaker wishes to embody. Ada Limón's "How to Triumph Like a Girl" uses vivid imagery and a conversational, confessional tone to explore female strength, vulnerability, and self-belief, personifying powerful "lady horses" to represent an innate, powerful female spirit within, culminating in the audacious belief in an internal "giant" heart destined to win, blending natural observation with deep feminist themes of confidence and embodiment, all within a compact, free-verse structure. The poem celebrates the effortless power and "swagger" of female horses, linking their physical prowess to a desirable, confident femininity that the speaker wants to embody. A central image is the speaker's internal "8-pound female horse heart," a powerful, instinctual "genius machine" connecting her own body to the horses' powerful nature, moving from observation to deep personal identification. The direct address ("Don't you want to believe it?") creates intimacy, inviting the reader into the speaker's secret belief in her own capacity for triumph, while acknowledging the delicate skin housing this power. The poem subtly critiques traditional notions of "lady," redefining it through the horses' strength, suggesting that true femininity encompasses power, danger, and inherent success. Limón uses the natural world (horses, grass, and running) to explore profound human emotions and aspirations, a hallmark of her work.

Conclusion

Concluded that the "**How to Triumph Like a Girl**" by Ada Limón is an 18-line free verse poem that celebrates female power, confidence, and the innate strength shared between women and nature. In essence, "How to Triumph Like a Girl" is an anthem for embracing innate female power, finding confidence in one's own body, and recognizing the inherent, majestic strength within womanhood, symbolized by the powerful, graceful lady horse. In her poem "**How to Triumph Like a Girl**," United States Poet Laureate Ada Limón utilizes several literary devices in the concluding lines to shift from external observation to a visceral, internal declaration of female power.

The conclusion of the poem features the following literary devices:

1. **Metaphor:** The speaker compares her own heart to an "**8-pound female horse heart**" and a "**huge beating genius machine**". This metaphor bridges the gap between the literal strength of a racehorse and the metaphorical internal power of a woman.
2. **Juxtaposition:** Limón contrasts the "**delicate skin**" of the human body with the "**giant**" power and "**heavy**" blood of the horse heart. This highlights the hidden, immense strength contained within a form that might externally appear fragile.
3. **Direct Address (Apostrophe):** The speaker directly challenges the reader with the rhetorical questions: "**Don't you want to believe it? / don't you want to lift my shirt and see**" this creates an intimate, conspiratorial tone that forces the reader to confront the speaker's claim of power.
4. **Diction and Tone:** The word choice shifts from "fun" and "swagger" in the beginning to more intense, biological terms like "**pumps**," "**blood**," and "**machine**". The final lines establish a tone of **inevitability and certainty**, ending with the absolute conviction that she is "**going to come in first**".
5. **Imagery:** The visceral description of the "**huge beating genius machine**" provides a strong visual and kinetic image, emphasizing the raw, mechanical-like efficiency and "genius" of female intuition and strength.
6. **Enjambment:** The poem uses line breaks to create a driving rhythm, particularly as it builds toward the final declaration, mimicking the fast-paced, rhythmic beating of a racing heart.

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