CHAPTER FOUR

LIVING REACTIONS TO FATE
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..."Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong
Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
Anticipate a message, let it begin?...

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?*
Or fester like a sore --
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over --
like a syrupy sweet?

May be it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?...

Fate is considered the ally with God. And the divine decree determines all events in one's life. The same notion is present in the classical mythology, where

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Lorraine Hansberry uses "A Raisin in the Sun" as the title of her magnum opus.

Hughes, "Harlem," in SPLH, p.268.
Fate is personified in the figures of the three goddesses known as the Moirai. Clotho spun the thread of life; Lachesis measured it and Atropos cut it off. They were the engines or vehicles through which Greek gods acted.

Fatalism underscores that there is a divinity that shapes one's end. Shakespeare makes Hamlet mouth this idea:

There's a divinity which shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.  

The Indian philosopher, Gosala states how a man is controlled completely by fate in the Indian context of casteism:

They are bent this way and that by their fate, by the necessary conditions of the class to which they belong, by their individual nature; and it is according to their position in one or other of the six classes that they experience ease or pain.

Thus, man believes that all occurrences and events are predetermined by divine power. The human beings are powerless to alter them. The idea that is related to this conception of fate as the ally with God is that man needs the maturity to bear

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his lot in this world. Shakespeare voices this point in *King Lear* where Edgar addresses Gloucester:

> What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
> their going hence, even as their coming hither;
> Ripeness is all. Come on, [My Emphasis]...

Brooks and Hughes argue for maturation. They maintain that life for the Blacks is not only governed by fate but also by man-made designs to keep them in a state of ignorance and poverty. By keeping them ignorant, poverty-stricken and dependent, the privileged class could keep the Blacks under tight control and exploit them. Therefore Brooks and Hughes advocate that the Blacks should not turn into defeatists meekly accepting their subservient state as that which is destined by fate for them. The Blacks have to confront their fated situations in life and the roles assigned to them by the privileged class, the society and the Establishment and endeavour to rewrite their fate and redefine their life. Their aim should be of hopes and expectations and not turn out to be dreams deferred.

Incidentally, Jung speaks of the personality being manifested by "definiteness, wholeness, and ripeness." Moreover, he calls the journey towards wholeness as the process of individuation. According to him, personality is an achievement and not something given.

One finds it easy and satisfying to accept one's destiny as God- given. It is true and right in one sense, because he is at peace with himself and is able to accept that everything is in the hands of God. Yet again, it conforms to the theory of

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Karma which Walt Whitman admirably distils thus:

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content....

On the other hand, it is not always right to resign oneself to this thought. The individual should not think that he cannot do anything to change his pattern of life. He need not abandon himself to the view of Lawrence Hope:

For this is Wisdom; to love
To take what Fate, or the Gods may give....

He ought to confront his fate with a view to rewriting it. As per the suggestion of William McFee, in his work Casuals of the Sea, "If fate means you to lose, give him a good fight anyhow." Man can become the master of his fate if he is confident and fearless. It is interesting to record a few lines from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
Men at sometime are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings....

A man's self-esteem determines his fate and helps him overrule the same. The observation of Henry David Thoreau is a pointer to this fact:

> Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines or rather indicates, his fate....

Psychologists, like Freud, expolde the myth that man is a puppet in the hands of fate and assert that he is his own determiner. The Black American poets Brooks and Hughes strongly reflect this idea in their poems. They do not yield to the notion that it is the Blackman's fate to be subservient and inferior. He can be a ruler of his destiny by diligently cultivating self-confidence and faith in God and by channelizing his reactions in right directions.

One must understand the existential life situations in which a man is caught before one attempts to find out the ways and means to help the Black man out of them. Being Black human beings themselves, Brooks and Hughes are doubly aware of the existential perils in human life. Brooks states her wish to present a variety of real life-situations in "In the Mecca" as follows, in her autobiography, Report from Part One:

> I wish to present a large variety of personalities against a mosaic of daily affairs, recognizing that the grimmest of these is likely to have a streak or two streaks of sun.... In the Mecca were murders, love, loneliness, hates, jealousies. Hope occurred, and charity, sainthood, glory, shame, despair, fear, altruism....

463 Henry David Thoreau, quoted in Familiar Quotations, p.589.
464 Brooks, RPO, pp.189-190.
Hughes also "remained the objective observer and appraiser of human actions, particularly those which grew out of the racial situation in America" as Arthur P. Davis puts it. Hughes wrote "out of the stuff of human experience as he saw it... A keen and tolerant observer, he possessed deep insights and a profound knowledge of human nature."

Existentialism is a philosophical tendency which was brought to a pointed focus by the Danish Christian thinker Soren Aabye Kierkegaard and by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. The theist and atheist existentialists differ in certain aspects of their beliefs. While atheist existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus, Simon de Beauvoir and Franz Kafka hold that man lives in a godless universe which renders his existence meaningless, the theists like Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich and Gabriel Marcel believe that though man is alone, his true help, succour and sustenance are found in God. For atheists, "essence" lies in the human existence itself whereas for theists, essence precedes existence. Paul Roubiczek delineates the distinction between essence and existence in concrete terms:

Essence refers to the true nature of things, the humanness of man, the horseness of a horse. It can be considered in an abstract way. Existence is not the humanity of man, but this man John whom I know, or this particular horse which I possess and love....

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466 Ibid., p.20.

The theists identify God with essence. Both theists and atheists believe that man has to confront many irresolvable problems, doubts, unanswerables, mysteries, anguish, despair, struggles, sufferings, loneliness, angst and death in his life. Dread of death, nausea, freedom that is incompatible with comfort, and life turning into one of endless struggle are the other existential situations. In the case of the Blacks, angst, sturm und drang and struggles of life are acute and sharp. Both theists and atheists are puzzled and baffled at the situations which seem to "mock" at man. The relevant observation of Sigmund Freud runs thus:

There are elements, which seem to mock at all human control: the earth, which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its works: water, which deluges and drowns everything in a turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them; there are diseases which we have only recently recognised as attacks by other organisms; and finally there is the painful riddle of death, against which no medicine has yet been found, nor probably will be. With these forces, nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilization ....

With all these odds against man, the theists encounter life with courage, determination and faith in God. In fine, it is through Leap of Faith and intersubjectivity that one can confront the existential perils and redefine one's life. This is precisely the recommendation of Brooks and Hughes.

Human life is a puzzle, with many an unanswerable question -- how God looks, what happens after death, why beauty should be evanescent, why death, decay and

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mutability occur, why the good suffer and the bad prosper etc. These "why" questions can never be answered easily. In trying to find out the answer, man has met with a dead wall only. Even great patriarchs like Job and kings like Solomon were not spared these questions:

One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet.

His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow.

And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure.

They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them. 

...the misery of man is great upon him.

For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?

There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war;...

Though Brooks' man of the middle class has risen socially, and has everything that he wants, he is still plagued with questions. The answers that he receives are not satisfactory:


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470 The Bible, Ecclesiastes, 8:6-8.
I've answers such as have
The executives I copied long ago,
The ones who, forfeiting Vicks salve,
Prayer book and Mother, shot themselves last Sunday... \(^{471}\)

In his own characteristic and simple language, Hughes voices the "whys" of his life in "Tell Me":

Why should it be my loneliness,
Why should it be my song,
Why should it be my dream deferred
overlong?... \(^{472}\)

Man becomes an enigma to himself and rationalism does not help. The rationalist reasons that there is nothing before birth and after death and that life begins in void and ends in void. In trying to solve the mysteries and uncertainties of life, man is left in a state of nausea. Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* defines nausea as the "taste" of the facticity and contingency of existence. He attempts to explain it further:

A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness. Sometimes we look for the pleasant or for physical pain to free ourselves from this nausea; but as soon as the pain and the pleasure are existed by consciousness, they in turn manifest its facticity and its contingency; and it is on the ground of this nausea that they are revealed. We must not take the term nausea as a metaphor derived from our physiological disgust. On the contrary, we must realize that it is on the foundation of this nausea that all concrete and empirical nauseas (nausea caused by spoiled meat, fresh blood, excrement etc.) are produced and make us vomit [My emphasis]... \(^{473}\)

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472 Hughes, "Tell Me," in *SPLH*, p.231.

Brooks' *Maud Martha* depicts Maud being conscious of her husband's weariness, as she reads his thoughts:

The baby was getting darker all the time! She knew that he was tired of his wife, tired of his living quarters, tired of working at Sam's, tired of his two suits.

He is ever so tired, she thought....⁴⁷⁴

This passage strikes a parallel to Fenton Johnson's "Tired" which is a cry of despair before the Negro Renaissance:

I am tired of work; I am tired of building up somebody else's civilization.
Let us take a rest, M'lissy Jane.
I will go down to the Last Chance Saloon, drink a gallon or two of gin, shoot a game or two of dice and sleep the rest of the night on one of Mike's barrels.

Throw the children into the river; Civilization has given us too many. It is better to die than it is to grow up and find out that you are colored.
Pluck the stars out of the heavens. The stars mark our destiny. The stars marked my destiny.
I am tired of civilization....⁴⁷⁵

A similar tone is captured in Hughes' "Po' Boy Blues":

Weary, weary
Weary early in de morn.
Weary, weary,


Early, early in de morn.
I's so weary
I wish I'd never been born....

The wish expressed in the above mentioned poem is reminiscent of Job's bitter lament:

My soul is weary of my life;...
Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me!...

While fatalism asserts the unalterable fixed occurrences in man's life, existentialism avers that man is not a predestined entity. Neither are his actions predetermined ones. He is endowed with a free will and has the freedom of choice. The atheists acknowledge that man has to choose but the theists maintain that he has to make the right kind of choices "which give substance to freedom and increase it." Further, "it should introduce us... to the whole sphere of responsibility, of morality and fundamental values and standards, of trust and love," as Paul Roubiczek explains it. Brooks and Hughes subject this existential philosophy to poetic treatment.

The explorer in Brooks' "The Explorer" wants to find "a still spot" and a "satin peace." He faces many a choice. Brooks dramatically pictures his hunting

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476 Hughes, "Po' Boy Blues," in DK, p.44.
477 The Bible, Job, 10:1, 18.
478 Paul Roubiczek, Existentialism For and Against, p.122.
479 Idem.
through the din with vague hands. Though he is able to find only high voices, nervous affairs and griefs he keeps hunting through the noise:

Somehow to find a still spot in the noise
Was the frayed inner want, the winding, the frayed hope
Whose tatters he kept hunting through the din.
A satin peace somewhere.
A room of wily hush somewhere within.

So tipping down the scrambled halls he set
Vague hands on throbbing knobs. There were behind
Only spiraling, high human voices,
The scream of nervous affairs,
Wee griefs,
Grand griefs. And choices.

He feared most of all the choices, that cried to be taken.

There were no bourns.
There were no quiet rooms....

One understands the significance of choosing the right, which is very difficult.

The man in Brooks' "A Man of the Middle Class" is confident of his choosing with care, though he feels later that he has no answers:

My tongue is brainy, choosing from among
Care, rage, surprise, despair, and choosing care,
I'm semi-splendid within what I've defended....

Satin-Legs Smith "designs his reign" and is able to make a choice of shedding his shabby past, fear and resentments:

He wakes, unwinds, elaborately: a cat
Tawny, reluctant, royal. He is fat

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And fine this morning. Definite. Reimbursed.

He sheds, with his pajamas, shabby days.
And his desertedness, his intricate fear, the
Postponed resentments and the prim precautions....

The persona in Hughes' "West Texas" and his woman choose to pack up their things and go away since "West Texas where the sun / Shines like the evil one / Ain't no place / For a colored / Man to stay!" 483 Similarly, the character in "The South" decides to go to the North, who according to him is "a kinder mistress" compared to the beast-strong, idiot-brained, child-minded and cruel South:

And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North --
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South....

It is to be noted that the person who chooses to go to the North is far sighted. The benefit of his choice stretches forth to his children and his future generation.

Endowed with a gift of free will, man finds himself to be in a responsible position. He encounters the situations of suffering, struggle and death which are

483 Hughes, "West Texas," in SPLH, p.164.
484 Hughes, "The South," in SPLH, p.173.
common denominators to all. Being depictors of reality, Brooks and Hughes present the existential hazards and recommend guidelines to confront them.

Suffering is an inescapable predicament in human life. In the case of the Blacks, affliction for centuries has resulted in angst, anguish and despair at all levels -- physical, mental and social. Chronic suffering results in a wearisome humdrum of affairs. In Brooks' "kitchenette building" the speaker tells drily, "WE ARE things of dry hours and the involuntary plan, / Grayed in, and gray." 485 Annie's parents settle for a life without "swans and swallows." 486 Matthew Cole never smiles "...in / The door-locked dirtiness of his room" 487 but laughs occasionally when he remembers his past. Only a bleak and drab future is in store for little Annie who is now prancing and playing:

Now, weeks and years will go before she thinks  
"How pinchy is my room! how can I breathe!  
I am not anything and I have got  
Not anything, or anything to do!"... 488

Hughes sketches the tedious life of the Blacks working in the steel mills, in an untitled poem written when he was fourteen years old:

The mills  
That grind and grind,  
That grind out steel  
And grind away the lives  
Of men --

486 Brooks, "the parents: people like our marriage Maxie and Andrew," in WGB, p.70.
In the sunset their stacks
Are great black silhouettes
Against the sky.
In the dawn
They belch red fire.
The mills --
Grinding new steel
Old men....

It is brought to a clear focus that the steel ground is new everyday but the men are the same old men day after day with no variation in their lives. The poem's beginning and ending with "grinding" stresses the on-going and non-stop monotony of the lives of the men.

Life is an unending struggle for the Black man in particular. Like the bean eaters who are "putting things away," the share croppers of Hughes are "Plowing life away" to make the cotton yield. A man's struggle is with evil doers and the Establishment. The Black man's contention is particularly against his White brother, and his own physique with its dark hue. He craves for recognition from the former and strives to put up with the latter.

Both Brooks and Hughes present the struggles of the Black symbolically. The image common to both of them is life being compared to a stairway or path with winding steps and many a turning and landing. Brooks advises the Black boys

\[489\] Hughes, untitled poem quoted in *The Big Sea*, p.29.


\[491\] Hughes, "Share-Croppers," in *SPLH*, p.165.
and talks of the "churning" situations in their lives:

Boys, in all your Turnings and your Churnings,
remember Afrika ....\(^{492}\)

In "In the Mecca," Mrs. Sallie returns home and ascends the stair:

S.Smith is Mrs.Sallie. Mrs.Sallie
hies home to Mecca, hies to marvelous rest;
ascends the sick and influential stair...\(^{493}\)

The "sick and influential stair" emphasizes the difficulties of one's life in that four
storied building. Again, symbolically, it leads to "marvelous rest."

Driving through the White neighbourhood, the speakers in "Beverly Hills,
Chicago" find everything fine and beautiful. Even the leaves fall down in lovelier
patterns there. Yet, they continue their journey without losing hope:

We do not want them to have less.
But it is only natural that we should think we
have not enough.
We drive on, we drive on.
When we speak to each other our voices are a
little gruff....\(^{494}\)

The repetition of "We drive on" signifies perseverance and resolution to keep
going.

Both the mothers in Hughes' poems on mothers -- "The Negro Mother" and
"Mother to Son" -- compare life to one's difficult climb up the stairs. Life is not


\(^{493}\) Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, p.377.

a crystal stair but is with many splinters and boards, and turnings and corners. In
fact, climbing requires more strain and effort than mere trudging along:

But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.\footnote{n}

Apart from suffering and struggle, another existential plight named
"lonesomeness" threatens the Blacks.\footnote{This bears repetition.} The tragic loneness and rejection results in
\textit{sturm und drang}. Amidst a busy and noisy life, in the crowding darkness, the old
married couple in Brooks' "the old-marrieds" do not dare to open their mouths. It
is a pleasant time to express their love to each other but they are unable to do so:

But in the crowding darkness not a word did
they say.
Though the pretty-coated birds had piped so
lightly all the day.
And he had seen the lovers in the little
side-streets.
And she had heard the morning stories
clogged with sweets.
It was quite a time for loving. It was midnight.
It was May.
But in the crowding darkness not a word did
they say \footnote{Brooks, "the old-marrieds," in \textit{WGB} p.3.}

In "A Sunset of the City," the middle aged woman feels rejected and lonely in her

\footnote{Hughes, "Mother to Son," in \textit{SPLH}, p.187.}

\footnote{n}
own house. She yearns for love and acceptance:

Already I am no longer looked at with lechery
or love.
My daughters and sons have put me away with
marbles and dolls,
Are gone from the house.

There is no warm house
That is fitted with my need.

I am cold in this cold house this house
Whose washed echoes are tremulous down lost halls.
I am a woman, and dusty, standing among new
affairs....

A similar lament of an alienated woman is found in a poem by Elinor Wylie:

I was, being human, born alone;
I am , being woman, hard beset;
I live by squeezing from a stone
The little nourishment I get....

Life is as hard as a stone for a woman doubly affected -- being human and a
woman.

Like Brooks, Hughes subjects "lonesomeness" to poetic treatment. He ends the
poem "Daybreak" with a question which haunts many a Black individual:

I wonder if white folks ever feel bad,
Getting up in the morning lonesome and sad?....

498 Elinor Wylie, Psyche: The Feminine Poetic Consciousness: An Anthology
of Modern American Women Poets, Eds. Barbara Segnitz and Carol
Again, in "Bed Time" the speaker expresses his loneliness touchingly:

    House is so quiet! ... Listen at them mice.
    Do I see a couple? Or did I count twice?
    Dog-gone little mouses! I wish I was you!
    A human gets lonesome if there ain't two....

Another fine example for such a feeling of alienation is to be found in the picturesque presentation made by Hughes in "Black Seed":

    World-wide dusk
    Of dear dark faces
    Driven before an alien wind,
    Scattered like seed
    From far-off places
    Growing in soil
    That's strange and thin,
    Hybrid plants,
    In another's garden,
    Flowers
    In a land
    That's not your own,
    Cut by the shears
    Of the white-faced gardeners--
    Tell them to leave you alone!...

Incidentally, it ought to be stressed that there are overlappings and continuities of alienation and existentialism.

Death is yet another dreaded and inevitable existential reality. The dread of death constantly haunts the mind of man. The poem "Sky" by Robert Penn Warren

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distils the dreadful approach of death:

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we,
We all, all have much endured, buckling
Belts, hearts. Have borne the outrages
And uncomprehended inclemencies --
Borne even against God's will, or fate's.
Some have survived. We fear, yes.
What mdst we fear advances on
Tiptoe, breath aromatic. It smiles
Its true name is what we never know....
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Paul Roubiczek summarizes Kierkegaard's views on this "dread":

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....he [Kierkegaard] believes that if a man is destroyed by
despair, he has not experienced it deeply enough; if he had,
he would have discovered, in the innermost depth of his
being, a reality which could have saved him....
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Though Kierkegaard too believes in "existence towards death," he views death as a challenge. As Paul Roubiczek observes, "For Kierkegaard, death is a challenge because the knowledge of its inevitability confronts us constantly with eternity and infinity, so that we are constantly forced to focus our attention upon the transcendental."

The fear of death affects the Blacks more than it affects the Whites. Harry B. Shaw lists a number of reasons for the same:

Deaths and the fear of death due to malnutrition, child-
disease, infant mortality, lead poisoning, rat bites, lynching,
capital punishment, military service, inadequate medical

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503 Paul Roubiczek, Existentialism For and Against, pp.61-62.

504 Ibid., p.114.
attention, suicide, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, murder, and other causes play a much more important role in the everyday lives of blacks than in those of whites and, therefore, affect their psyches differently....

Even during the most pleasant and enjoyable moments of one's life, the thoughts of death intrude and affect his casual business which is featured in the two sonnets, "piano after war" and "mentors":

On a snug evening I shall watch her fingers,
Cleverly ringed, declining to clever pink,
Beg glory from the willing keys. Old hungers
Will break their coffins, rise to eat and thank.
And music, warily, like the golden rose
That sometimes after sunset warms the west,
Will warm that room, persuasively suffuse
That room and me, rejuvenate a past.
But suddenly, across my climbing fever
Of proud delight -- a multiplying cry.
A cry of bitter dead men who will never
Attend a gentle maker of musical joy.
Then my thawed eye will go again to ice.
And stone will shove the softness from my face....

For I am rightful fellow of their band.
My best allegiances are to the dead.
I swear to keep the dead upon my mind,
Disdain for all time to be overglad.
Among spring flowers, under summer trees,
By chilling autumn waters, in the frosts
Of supercilious winter -- all my days
I'll have as mentors those reproving ghosts.
And at that cry, at that remotest whisper,
I'll stop my casual business. Leave the banquet.
Or leave the ball -- reluctant to unclasp her
Who may be fragrant as the flower she wears,
Make gallant bows and dim excuses, then quit
Light for the midnight that is mine and theirs....

505 Harry B. Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, p.49.

506 Brooks, "piano after war," in WGB, p.52.

507 Brooks, "mentors," in WGB, p.53.
The mention of all the four seasons stresses how he is being influenced by death all his life. Since death comes between himself and his "proud delight," he squarely faces it and decides to "quit light for the midnight."

Maud Martha thinks philosophically about the irony of human existence as she watches her husband Paul, who plans to go to war:

She watched the little dreams of smoke as they spiraled about his hand, and she thought about happenings. She was afraid to suggest to him that, to most people, nothing at all "happens." That most people merely live from day to day until they die. That, after he had been dead a year, doubtless fewer than five people would think of him oftener than once a year. That there might even come a year when no one on earth would think of him at all....

Annie who has lost her lover in a war laments that her lover had to court the flirting lady "death":

... but, oh, I knew
When he went walking grandly out that door
That my sweet love would have to be untrue.
Would have to be untrue. Would have to court
Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange
Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort)
Can make a hard man hesitate -- and change.
And he will be the one to stammer, "Yes."
Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?...

The "possessive arms" do indicate death's right royal claim on one's life. Though unwilling, man has to submit to it.

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509 Brooks, "the sonnet-ballad," in WGB, p.96.
Thoughts of what would happen after her death worry the girl, who imagines that her lover will find another girl soon after carrying out her funeral rites:

Then off he'll take his mournin' black,
And wipe his tears away.
And the girls, they will be waitin'.
There's nothin' more to say....  

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Hughes delineates the existential reality of birth and death meaningfully and beautifully in "Border Line":

I used to wonder
About living and dying --
I think the difference lies
Between tears and crying.

I used to wonder
About here and there --
I think the distance
Is nowhere....  

"Fantasy in Purple" portrays one's preoccupation with death:

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
Beat the drums of tragedy and death.
And let the choir sing a stormy song
To drown the rattle of my dying breath.

Beat the drums of tragedy for me,
And let the white violins whir thin and slow,
But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun
To go with me
to the darkness
where I go.... 

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510 Brooks, "when I die," in WGB, p.38.
511 Hughes, "Border Line," in SPLH, p.81.
512 Hughes, "Fantasy in Purple," in SPLH, p.103.
Here, while the white violins are played in a slow and thin note, the African drums and trumpets are blaring and loud. The "trumpet note of sun" symbolizes the "hope" with which he wants to encounter death.

Again, death as an inevitable and inescapable reality is shown by Hughes in "Widow Woman":

Oh, that last long ride is a
Ride everybody must take.
Yes, that last long ride's a
Ride everybody must take.
And that final stop is a
Stop everybody must make ....

The term "ride" brings to mind the ride in Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for death, he kindly stopped for me." The poem lays stress on Emily Dickinson's obsession with death. And one detects the height of imagination in her conception of death as a welcome handsome bridegroom who takes one on the journey to eternity past innocence and experience and human thought.

In "Death in Harlem," Arabella, the lover of the Texas Kid, kills her rival Bessie. She is arrested and taken to jail. Like the lover of the girl in Brooks' "when I die," the Texas Kid is able to go to another woman immediately. The goings-on of life never halt despite losses and death and hence the continuum of life and death:

And the sun came up and
It was day --

Hughes, "Widow Woman," in SPLH, p.139.
But the Texas Kid,
With lovin in his head,
Picked up another woman and
Went to bed...  

The poor Black man finds the graveyard to be the cheapest boarding house in "Boarding House":

The graveyard is the 
Cheapest boarding house:
Some of these days
We'll all board there.
Rich and poor
Alike will share.
The graveyard is the 
Cheapest boarding house.
But me -- if I can
Hang on here,
I ain't gonna
Go out there.
Let the graveyard be the 
Cheapest boarding house!...  

Here, despite his poverty, the speaker does not want to go out "there" but wants, as much as he can, to continue life "here" which only means his perseverance and resolution.

"Life is Fine" is yet another poem where the man tries various means to take his life but finally resolves to live because he is born to live:

So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love --
But for livin' I was born.

514 Hughes, "Death in Harlem," in S in H, p.64.
515 Hughes, "Boarding House," in One Way Ticket, p.119.
Though you may hear me holler,  
And you may see me cry --  
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,  
If you gonna see me die.  

Life is fine!  
Fine as wine!  
Life is fine!...  ^516

Hughes drives home the point that life is to live and enjoy amidst trials and hardships.

Thus, one finds human life to be a series of sufferings, struggles, loneness and death. With all these negations and negativities, the atheists also believe that life begins in void and ends in void. Life as a series of absurdities and existence is just a package of nonsense. For Sartre, who believes in nihilism, "All existing beings are born for no reason, continue through weakness and die by accident.... Man is a useless passion. It is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die." ^517 Simone de Beauvoir speculates, "I look at myself in vain in a mirror, tell myself my own story, I can never grasp myself as an entire object, I experience in myself the emptiness that is myself, I feel that I am not." ^518 The more a man tries to solve the mysteries of life, the more he becomes conscious of nothingness. Heidegger reflects, "At the very core of existence, nothingness is dissolving being into nothingness." ^519 Having no belief in God, the atheist

^516 Hughes, "Life is Fine," in SPLH, pp.121-122.
^517 Jean Paul Sartre, quoted in Paul Roubiczek, Existentialism For and Against, p.125.
^518 Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Paul Roubiczek, Existentialism For and Against, p.125.
^519 Martin Heidegger, quoted in Paul Roubiczek, Existentialism For and Against, p.125.
existentialists find all values in life meaningless; for them, man is just a machine with a series of experiences.

On the other hand, theists do not view life as one of nullity. They believe in God. They accept life with all its irresolvables and unanswerables. In fact, they consider angst as a basic quality in human existence and only by experiencing it man is better able to appreciate the nature of his existence. They also perceive the meaning of the sufferings of man and his confrontation with evil. Further, they identify man's affliction with the Passion of Christ. A true believer of God has his share of pain and care in this world and he has to surmount them with a deep and abiding faith in God.

It is Kierkegaard who gives a distinct, clearcut and solid answer to the incertitudes and queries in man's life. He strongly recommends the Leap of Faith. The Biblical incident of Peter's walking on the sea of Galilee exemplifies the importance of implicit faith in the Absolute which makes life meaningful and which argues for intersubjectivity and the practice of the Christian concept of love. In fact, where there is faith nothing is impossible.

For Kierkegaard, faith means the total surrender to the Superior Being who is strong and definitive in character. Again, "to make the movements of faith, [I must] shut my eyes and plunge confidently into the absurd." Such a Leap of Faith is the only alternative suggested by other theists too -- like Thomas Aquinas, Paul Tillich and St. Augustine. Despite the bitterness that engulfed

520 Soren Aabye Kierkegaard, quoted in Paul Roubiczek, Existentialism For and Against, p.58.
him, Job pronounced his faith and made an open declaration of the same:

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another;...  

According to St. Paul, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."  

The Black American poets Brooks and Hughes are optimists with a firm faith in God. They envision a better tomorrow and encourage the Blacks. Having faith in God naturally results in viewing life and the universe in a new and hopeful angle. Behind every cloud of sorrow, they are able to trace a silver lining of hope. Directly or indirectly, they express their conviction in all their poems.

Brooks passes on her faith to the new Black generation by asking them to "Make of my [her] Faith / a Black Star." The soldier in the poem "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell" hopes that his difficult days would come to an end and he is sure to resume life "On such legs as are left me, in such heart/ As I can manage." Till then he preserves his dreams of faith in the cabinets of his will:

I HOLD my honey and store my bread
In little jars and cabinets of my will.

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521 The Bible, Job, 19:25-27.
522 The Bible, Hebrews, 11:1.
524 Brooks, "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell," in WGB, p.50.
I label clearly, and each latch and lid
I bid, Be firm till I return from hell.
I am very hungry. I am incomplete.
And none can tell when I may dine again.
No man can give me any word but Wait,
The puny light. I keep eyes pointed in;...\(^525\)

These few lines speak volumes of one's clarified and definitive life. Charged with unwavering hope, he has a pointed and keen vision. His cabinets of will are little, his lights are puny, and he himself is hungry and incomplete; nevertheless, he decides to be firm and keeps on holding and storing. The use of capitals in "HOLD" emphasizes his indefatigable continuance and steadfastness.

The mother in Brooks' sonnet, "And shall I prime my children, pray, to pray?" advises her children to have faith in God:

Children, confine your lights in jellied rules;
Resemble graves; be metaphysical mules;
Learn Lord will not distort nor leave the fray.
Behind the scurryings of your neat motif
I shall wait, if you wish: revise the psalm
If that should frighten you: sew up belief
If that should tear: turn, singularly calm
At forehead and at fingers rather wise,
Holding the bandage ready for your eyes....\(^526\)

The children are instructed to be stubborn in belief as the phrase "metaphysical mules" indicates. Belief ought to be kept intact. The mother of

\(^{525}\) Brooks, "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell," in WGB, p.50.
\(^{526}\) Brooks, "And shall I prime my children pray, to pray?" in WGB, p.101.
this sequence of poems, "the children of the poor" is ready to stand by her children if their faith falters. Again, her most significant advocacy lies in the last few lines, where she expects them to be prepared to encounter future with a calm forehead and wise fingers, which only insists their sure faith and wise actions and efforts.

The last poem in the sequence "the children to the poor" ends with the mother reflecting "May not they in the crisp encounter see / Something to recognize and read as rightness?" She is confident that they are "adroit" and ingenious and skilful. They have learnt to accept the "university of death":

I say they may, so granitely discreet,
Adroit, the shapely prefaces complete,
Accept the university of death....

Commenting on these lines, D.H. Melhem observes thus: "The sequence thus comes to terms with faith, mortality and personal responsibility."

The soldier in "the progress" faces fear, now that he has lost his "initial ardor" which has been lately substituted by only "a deepening hollow through the cold."
The relevant lines read thus:

But inward grows a soberness, an awe,
A fear, a deepening hollow through the cold....

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527 Brooks, "When my dears die," in WGB, p.103.
528 Idem.
The soldier raises a question and immediately jumps into action:

For even if we come out standing up  
How shall we smile, congratulate; and how  
Settle in chairs? Listen, listen. The step  
Of iron feet again. And again wild  
[My emphasis]... 

Here, Brooks expresses the soldier's "Leap of Faith" thematically and technically. There is "a final interpolated white space that sets apart the last fearful word the soldiers utter." Melhem's interpretation of these lines is worth recording:

...this is a call to resistance. Brooks has projected strength, not elegy, throughout the sequence. The space between "again" and "wild" -- missing in Selected Poems -- suggests a leap across an abyss, a giant step conjuring for this reader a soldier's marching stride...

The word "wild" implies the intensity of his leap across the abyss.

Like Brooks, Hughes recommends "faith" as the only solution to man's problems. He is staunch in faith himself and creates characters who ultimately envision a future filled with hope and change for the better. The old narrator in "Little Green Tree" contemplates his bitter past and looks ahead to find a little green tree, which is a symbol of new life, security and love:

It looks like to me  
My good-time days done past.

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Nothin' in this world
Is due to last.

I used to play
And I played so dog-gone hard.
Now old age has
Dealt my bad-luck card.

I look down the road
And I see a little tree.
A little piece down the road.
I see a little tree.

Them cool green leaves
Is waitin' to shelter me.

O. little tree!...\textsuperscript{534}

In "Still Here" Hughes conveys his unshaken faith crisply:

I've been scarred and battered.
My hopes the wind done scattered.
Snow has friz me, sun has baked me.

Looks like between 'em
They done tried to make me
Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin' --
But I don't care!
I'm still here!...\textsuperscript{535}

Here, the scarred, battered, wind-scattered, snow-frozen, sun-baked persona never gets suppressed by people and circumstances. He has hopes still. He emphatically pronounces "I'm still here," which is in the present tense. "Here" expresses the speaker's wish to live the here and the now by accepting life. "Still" reflects his preparedness to continue living and encounter the hereafter.

\textsuperscript{534} Hughes, "Little Green Tree," in SPLH, p.137.
\textsuperscript{535} Hughes, "Still Here," in SPLH, p.123.
In "Mid Winter Blues," when her "good man" had left her when her "coal was low," the woman says:

I'm gonna buy me a rose bud
An' plant it at my back door,
Buy me a rose bud,
Plant it at my back door,
So when I'm dead they won't need
No flowers from the store....

Here, the woman never resorts to mere lamenting but evinces strength of will and preparedness for the future. She never depends on anyone even for her funeral flowers.

"In Time of Silver Rain" expresses an anticipation of a new life:

In time of silver rain
The earth
Puts forth new life again,
Green grasses grow
And flowers lift their heads,
And over all the plain
The wonder spreads
   Of life,
   Of life,
   Of life!

In time of silver rain
The butterflies
Lift silken wings
To catch a rainbow cry,
And trees put forth
New leaves to sing
In joy beneath the sky
As down the roadway
Passing boys and girls
Go singing, too,
In time of silver rain
   When spring
   And life
   Are new [My emphasis]....

536 Hughes, "Midwinter Blues," in SPLH, p.151.
537 Hughes, "In Time of Silver Rain," in SPLH, p.56.
The oncoming of spring denotes new life, silver rain, growth, joy and singing. The spring season brings to mind the cycle of seasons. There is no stoppage to the goings-on of life and one is reminded of Shelley's note of hope in his "Ode to the West Wind": "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"\(^{538}\) Sorrows and stresses never stay; they give in to new joys and fresh wonders and ecstatic moods "of life!" The wonder of life spreads from the grasses, leaves and flowers to the butterflies and finally to the boys and girls. By writing such happy poems on nature, Hughes displays his optimism. Life is not a nullity for him. It is full of vigour and verve.

Like Brooks, Hughes passes on this faith to the younger generation through the mothers. Hughes' Black mother prays that her dreams and prayers "Impel you forever up the great stairs.\(^ {539}\) She advises the dark ones to "stand like free men supporting my trust. / Believe in the right."\(^{540}\) * Hughes uses the sun, stars and seeds and dreams as symbols of faith. On hearing her daughter's graduation, the weary mother, just returned from the Whites' kitchen, evinces hope which is reflected in her eyes:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{The DIPLOMA bursts its frame} \\
\text{To scatter star-dust in their eyes...}\end{array}^{541}\]


\(^{539}\) Hughes, "The Negro Mother," in SPLH, p.289.

\(^{540}\) Idem.

* This bears repetition.

\(^{541}\) Hughes, "Graduation," in SPLH, p.182.
The "star-dust" bears close parallel to Brooks' reference to the "Shrewd sun" in the eyes of the Black women when she addresses them. Furthermore, the mother utters a statement of faith which embraces the future of the whole Black race, not merely her own daughter's:

Mama says, Praise Jesus!  
The colored race will rise!...

It is such a selfless vision which will help the upliftment of the race.

The "Irish Wake" is one of the many poems which view the sun as a representative of a promising new day:

But when the sun rose making  
All the dooryard bright and clear  
The mourners got up smiling,  
Happy they were here....

One finds the spirit of gratitude for the gift of a new day overwhelming the survivors. A verse from Psalms is similar to these lines: "...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." 

The distant stars and the sun help one to look up and march forward, whereas the hidden "seed of the coming Free" and the steel-like dream nourished in one's

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542 Brooks, "To Black Women," in To Disembark, p.44.  
543 Hughes, "Graduation," in SPLH, p.182.  
544 Hughes, "Irish Wake," in DK, p.25.  
545 The Bible, Psalms, 30:5.  
soul enable him to look inward, take courage and walk with the sun and dawn. The Black man's pilgrimage of faith is either a walk, or a tedious climb, or a prolonged trudge, or a steady march or a hasty drive. Whatever it is, the progress will be sure, steady and certain.

Having faith and assurance alone is not enough. Human effort is equally important. Mere faith can never result in fruition of anything. Coupled with conscious effort and action, it yields the expected results. St. Paul refers to the importance of both faith and individual endeavours.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also....

Brooks and Hughes, through the medium of poetry reach the Black masses and show how to react to life-situations by being assertive and dignified simultaneously; they must polish and hone their responses and keep themselves composed under all circumstances. The main mission of these two poets is to portray the Blacks' responses at various levels along with their solid recommendations.

The Black world consists of different categories of people, whose reactions vary according to their age and status in the society. Their behaviour ranges from meek submission to violent militancy. Added to the usual existential perils, the

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547 The Bible, James, 2:26.
Blacks' struggles are rendered more poignant by their unusually difficult and
trying circumstances. They have to bear the double burden of being human
beings and Blacks.

The elderly Blacks have long been trained by the Whites to accept their place.
They resign to their lot. They wait patiently for the Whites to reconsider. They
even recommend the same conduct to the younger generation. In this context, it
is interesting to record that the grandmotherly "Mamas" represent meek
submission. And, the next generation of married women opt for a state between
confrontationism and assimilation. The younger generation of Black women are
for emergence to a new state of assertiveness, growth and transcendence from old
ways of submission and surrender.

The mothers in Brooks and Hughes are elderly matrons who believe in the
softening of the Whites' hearts in the long run. The old married couple and the
bean eaters of Brooks are examples to such a response. They never mind being
isolated. They keep on doing the same routine things. They are only sustained by
their memories. Emmett Till's mother is upheld by memories of her son as she
keeps on drinking black coffee, after the cruel murder and burial of her son:

Emmett's mother is a pretty-faced thing;
    the tint of pulled taffy.
She sits in a red room,
    drinking black coffee.
She  kisses her killed boy,
    And she is sorry.
Chaos in windy grays
    through a red prairie....  

The phrase, "kisses her killed boy" means that she is recollecting the past and particularly the ruthless murder of her son by a White man.

The mothers do not stop with mere advice. They are ready to stand by their children throughout to sustain their faltering faith, if necessary. Brooks' mother does not hesitate to advise them to fight their way, if necessary.

Hughes presents the reactions of the elderly people in much the same way as Brooks. Old Aunt Sue tells real stories of her past which a Black child listens with rapt attention:

Summer nights on the front porch
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown faced child to her bosom
And tells him stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,
Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.
He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories
Out of any book at all,
But that they came
Right out of her own life.

The dark-faced child is quiet
Of a summer night
Listening to Aunt Sue's stories....

Here again, one finds that Aunt Sue is sustained by memories which she never fails to pass on to the next generation.

Like Brooks' old-marrieds, who never dare to speak, the troubled woman of Hughes never dares to lift her head, bowed down by the severity of life:

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She stands
In the quiet darkness,
This troubled woman
Bowed by
Weariness and pain
Like an
Autumn flower
In the frozen rain,
Like a
Wind-blown autumn flower
That never lifts its head
Again....

Again, like Emmett Till's mother drinking the black coffee and musing over the past, the puzzled Harlemites keep on looking out on the world with wonder, remembering their bitter past:

Here on the edge of hell
Stands Harlem --
Remembering the old lies,
The old kicks in the back,
The old, Be patient,
They told us before.

Sure, we remember.
Now, when the man at the corner store
Says sugar's gone up another two cents,
And bread one,
And there's a new tax on cigarettes --
We remember the job we never had,
Never could get,
And can't have now
Because we're colored.

So we stand here
On the edge of hell
In Harlem
And look out on the world
And wonder
What we're gonna do
In the face of
What we remember....

Hughes' "Mother to Son" depicts the mother enlisting her various hardships in life:

It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor --
Bare....

Hughes' mothers slightly differ from Brooks' in the sense that they stop with advising their children to go on climbing and never go to the extent of provoking them to rise against their oppressors if there arises the need.

The youth of the race, unlike the elders, react violently and vehemently. When their normal and due desires are not taken care of, they burst out furiously and explode fiercely. They become indignant about the partial treatment meted out to them based on their colour and features, or when denied opportunities, exploited and humiliated. Even if they merit a fair deal they are purposefully ignored and this infuriates them. Naturally, they are, as Brooks observes:

Each to his grief, each to
his loneliness and fidgety revenge....

Again, as in "The Blackstone Rangers,"

There they are.
Thirty at the corner.
Black, raw, ready....

552 Hughes, "Mother to Son," in SPLH, p.187.
The Black hero who "had to kick their [the Whites's] law into their teeth" in order to save the Whites reveals who his real and true enemy is as in the recent battle:

(They are not concerned that it was hardly The Enemy my fight was against But them)....

The dark villain in "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon," who pursues the milk-white maid, is just a teenage lad too young to be labelled a villain:

.... the Dark Villain was a blackish child Of fourteen, with eyes still too young to be dirty, And a mouth too young to have lost every reminder Of its infant softness....

The poems of Hughes are equally illustrative of the wild and untempered reactions of the Blacks. Pressed from all sides, they are driven to be on the defensive and act militantly. "Angola Question Mark" presents the contemplation of the speaker on why he reacts violently against his own fellowmen and creates woe:

Don't know why I, Black, Must still stand With my back To the last frontier Of fear In my own land.


Don't know why!
Must turn into
A Mau Mau
And lift my hand
Against my fellow man
To live on my own land.

But it is so --
And being so
I know
For you and me
There's
Woe....

It is interesting to note that the speaker knows his drawbacks and the consequent woe. It is also obvious that as long as the Black is denied his rights in America, his White brother can never enjoy peace and real happiness.

Prolonged feelings of loneliness and sorrow result in a sudden explosion, giving vent to their bitter thoughts. In "Twilight Reverie" one finds the speaker giving full expression to his "bitter old thought":

Here I set with a bitter old thought,
Something in my mind better I forgot.
Setting here thinking feeling sad.
Keep feeling like this I'm gonna start acting bad.
Gonna go get my pistol, I said forty-four --
Make you walk like a ghost if you bother me anymore.
Gonna go get my pistol, I mean thirty-two,
And shoot all kinds o' shells into you.
Yal, here I set thinking -- a bitter old thought
About two kinds o' pistols that I ain't got.
If I just had a Owl Head, old Owl Head would do,
Cause I'd take that Owl head and fire on you.
But I ain't got no Owl Head and you done left town
And here I set thinking with a bitter old frown.
It's dark on this stoop, Lawd! The sun's gone down!...

Hughes, "Angola Question Mark," in P and L, p.64.
Hughes, "Twilight Reverie," in S in H, p.3.
Such a rumination of violent thoughts, no doubt, results in action and reactions beyond one's control.

The youth of the Black race are particularly victims of a singular problem -- the mutual attraction between the young Black males and the young White females. The Black youth prefers White girls, and the fair-skinned White girls are also equally drawn towards the Black man's strength and virility. This condition pushes the Black girl to an insecure and unwanted state. Both Brooks and Hughes particularly concentrate on this problem. Brooks being a female artist, and having undergone the Black girl's predicament herself, has written more poems touching on this issue.

Throughout Maud Martha Brooks presents Maud as one who is rejected on the basis of her black skin. Her brother Harry and even her father favour her light complexioned sister Helen. Obsessed with inferior thoughts about her colour, features and hair texture, she is highly self-conscious and feels that her husband Paul does not want to go with her in public.

Pearl May Lee tells how Sammy wanted White arms to enfold him and how he had always disregarded the Black girls:

At school, your girls were the bright little girls.  
You couldn't abide dark meat.  
Yellow was for to look at,  
Black for the famished to eat.  
Yellow was for to look at,  
Black for the famished to eat....

Brooks, "Ballad of Pearl May Lee," in WGB, p.45.
Again, Willie Boone prefers a light-skinned girl to chocolate Mabbie and comes out of the grammar school wearing the former like a jewel. In "The Anniad," Annie Allen's husband, fascinated by the "maple banshee" thinks of his own wife:

Not that woman! (Not that room!
Not that dusted demi-gloom!)
Nothing limpid, nothing meek.
But a gorgeous and gold shriek....

It is interesting to record that Toni Morrison, the post-modern creationist, in her fiction The Bluest Eye presents the female protagonist Pecola as being conscious of her black skin. She is educated on the White standards of beauty. According to the White artists, the tall female with a slim figure, well-rounded breasts, sharp and keen nose, luscious red lips and bluest eyes and flowing hair is considered beautiful. Pecola pulls her nose to make it sharp and keen. All the Black intellectuals including Brooks and Hughes argue that Black is Beautiful.

The Blacks have their own distinct and unique features which no other race is endowed with, and therefore, they should take pride in being born Black.

A few of Hughes' poems lightly touch upon the Black man's advances towards the White women, which result in his being lynched or hanged. "Silhouette" is an example for the same:

Southern gentle lady,
Do not swoon.
They've just hung a black man
In the dark of the moon.


* This bears repetition.
They've hung a black man
To a roadside tree
In the dark of the moon
For the world to see
How Dixie protects
Its white womanhood....\textsuperscript{561}

The sight of Black men gives rise to terrible thoughts in a White woman in the poem "Death in Harlem":

\begin{verbatim}
While a tall white woman
In an ermine cape
Looked at the blacks and
Thought of rape,
Looked at the blacks and
Thought of a rope,
Looked at the blacks and
Thought of flame,
And thought of something
Without a name....\textsuperscript{562}
\end{verbatim}

Here, Hughes hints at the Black youth's getting drawn instinctively towards the White females.

In "Mellow" Hughes portrays the White girls getting fascinated towards the Blacks:

\begin{verbatim}
Into the laps
of black celebrities
white girls fall
like pale plums from a tree
beyond a high tension wall
wired for killing
which makes it
more thrilling....\textsuperscript{563}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{561} Hughes, "Silhouette," in SPLH, p.171.
\textsuperscript{562} Hughes, "Death in Harlem," in S in H, p.60.
\textsuperscript{563} Hughes, "Mellow," in SPLH, p.242.
It is interesting to record, therefore, that in America the major themes are sex, love and violence. One theory maintained by Norman Mailer in his magnum opus, *Naked and the Dead* is that where there is satisfactory sex, there is love. The absence of satisfactory sex results in violence. The other theory related to racism and White supremacist policies is that racism is the offshoot of sexism or precisely the Black male's sexual superiority.

The predicament of the mulatto youth who can identify himself with neither the Blacks nor the Whites is highly pathetic. While Brooks never gives any specific place for the mulatto, Hughes offers a special niche for the mulatto in his poetry and other works. "Cross" and "Mulatto" are examples for the same. The problems of children of mixed parentage are well brought out in "Cross":

My old man's a white old man  
And my old mother's black.  
If ever I cursed my white old man  
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother  
And wished she were in hell,  
I'm sorry for that evil wish  
And now I wish her well.

*My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.*  
I wonder where I'm gonna die,  
Being neither white nor black? [My emphasis]....

In "Mulatto," the son claims that he is the son of his White father but the father

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564 Hughes, "Cross," in SPLH, p.158.

* This bears repetition.
and his other White sons disown him:

I am your son, white man!

Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods.
One of the pillars of the temple fell.

You are my son!
Like hell!

A nigger night,
A nigger joy,
A little yellow
Bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.
Niggers ain't my brother.
Not ever.
Niggers ain't my brother.

Git on back there in the night,
You ain't white....

Hughes' "Father and Son" is a typical example of miscegenation. It is a short story which vividly portrays the White father's hostile rejection of his own son born of his Black mistress and brutal beating for calling him papa in front of Whites. The story ends tragically with the son killing his father and himself being lynched for that offence. William Faulkner adequately deals with the problem of miscegenation. He argues that the Southern Whites' sufferings are traceable to their sins of miscegenation. In fact, Isaac McCaslin expiates the family sin of miscegenation by refusing to marry and by being of service to the Blacks and the natives in William Faulkner's Go Down, Moses. Both Brooks and Hughes do not fail to picture the reactions of the children with tender minds yet uncorrupted and innocent. Brooks has written a series of sonnets about the children of the

poor people who lost their lives in battles. They are "adjudged the leastwise of the land." Hughes attempts to focus the problems of children. His "Children's Rhymes" is one of the many poems depicting the enigma which confronts every Black child:

By what sends
the white kids
I ain't sent:
I know I can't
be President.

What don't bug
them white kids
sure bugs me:
We knows everybody
ain't free!...567

The children express wide-eyed surprise and pitiful disappointment when brutally handled or tactfully rejected or partially treated or wilfully overlooked. The authors Brooks and Hughes themselves have undergone such humiliating experiences in their own childhood. Both narrate the most heart-rending instance in the life of a child when rejected and ignored by Santa Claus. On both the occasions, the mother has to watch the agony of the child in painful silence, suppressing her own feelings and talking cheerfully. In Maud Martha, Maud and her daughter Paulette meet the White Santa Claus, who is unwilling to even look at the little girl and smile, when she gives a list of all that she wants for

566 Brooks, "What shall I give my children?" in WGB, p.100.
567 Hughes, "Children's Rhymes," in SPLH, pp.223-224.
Christmas. Later, Maud has a real tough time in convincing Paulette about Santa's love for her:

"Why didn't Santa Claus like me?"
"Baby, of course he liked you."
"He didn't like me. Why didn't he like me?"
"It maybe seemed that way to you. He has a lot on his mind, of course."
"He liked the other children. He smiled at them and shook their hands."
"He maybe got tired of smiling. Sometimes even I get--"
"He didn't look at me, he didn't shake my hand."
"Listen, child ... Now you know Santa Claus liked you ... don't you remember, when you told Santa Claus you wanted the ball and bear and tricycle and doll he said 'Um - hm?' That meant he's going to bring you all those. You watch and see. Christmas'll be here in a few days. You'll wake up Christmas morning and find them and then you'll know Santa Claus loved you too"...  

Controlling her tears, the poor mother secretly hopes that her child would have believed her:

Was Paulette believing her? Surely she was not going to begin to think tonight, to try to find out answers tonight. She hoped the little creature wasn't ready....

A similar situation occurs in Hughes' story "One Christmas Eve." Arcie, the coloured maid and her little son, Joe go shopping. Little Joe is attracted towards a Santa Claus distributing gifts in a theatre-lobby. All the children are White. Santa frightens Joe and mocks at him by shaking a rattle in his face. The mother has to comfort him hiding her own inner turmoil:

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569 Ibid., p.302.
"Huh! That wasn't no Santa Claus," Arcie explained. "If it was, he wouldn't a-treated you like that. That's a theatre for white folks -- I told you once -- and he's just a old white man."

"Oh," said little Joe....

Apart from the various responses to life according to their age, one comes across the different attitudes of the Blacks according to their status in the society. The low class, poor, illiterate, ghetto-born and slum-dwelling Blacks differ from the middle class, well-to-do Blacks in their views and attitudes towards the Whites. While the former are satisfied to be at the mercy of the Whites and do not want their present deplorable conditions to improve, the latter go to the extent of hating themselves and imitating the Whites in everything they do. Their aim is to pass for a White. This is the negative aspect of assimilation which all Black intellectuals denounce. Neither reaction is approved by the poets Brooks and Hughes. Instead, they advocate self-dependence, self-esteem and retention of one's own individuality. Jean Wagner talks of two types of reactions which are commonly traced in Blacks which vary from individual to individual in their degrees:

In the first place, the Negro gradually develops a poor opinion of himself. Ashamed of his appearance, self-despising and projecting his contempt on all who resemble him, he sometimes ends up by hating everyone of his own race.... One step further and the white man and his values are idealized, and the goal pursued is the closest possible resemblance to him in every respect. This tendency has brought wealth to cosmetics manufacturers, who sell Negro women products that straighten their hair and lighten their

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570 Hughes, "One Christmas Eve," quoted in James A. Emanuel, Langston Hughes, p.73.
skin tone... on the other hand, since he is constantly brought up short by the impossibility of becoming a white man and since he knows how unfairly he is treated by white people, the Negro develops feelings of great hostility toward them. Rarely is an occasion found for venting this hostility in its raw state... because the Negro cannot at every instant launch an overt attack on those responsible... Ultimately this hostility is siphoned off in varied ways, depending on the individual and the precise situation. It may lead to abject submissiveness or it may find an outlet in some intense physical activity, such as sports or dancing. It may also be sublimated and emerge as hedonism or, if no other safety valve is found, react adversely on the individual's health. Thus the poets Countee Cullen and Claude McKay died of high blood pressure....

Within the racial group, the light-skinned Blacks are prejudiced against individuals of extreme pigmentation. This is not an exaggeration since Brooks herself proves this in her poems like "Jessie Mitchell's Mother" and "The Life of Lincoln West." Lincoln's own father hated the sight of his son, who has "the sure fibre" and "the deep grain" of a typical Black:

His father could not bear the sight of him.
His mother high-piled her pretty dyed hair and put him among her hairpins and sweethearts, dance slippers, torn paper roses.
He was not less than these, he was not more.
As the little Lincoln grew, uglily upward and out, he began to understand that something was wrong. His little ways of trying to please his father, the bringing of matches, the jumping aside at warning sound of oh-so-large and rushing stride, the smile that gave and gave and gave -- Unsuccessful!...

Likewise, Hughes' "Seashore Through Dark Glasses" illustrates how the Blacks hate people of their own race:

Beige sailors with large noses
Binocular the Atlantic

At Club Harlem it's eleven
And seven cats go frantic.
Two parties from Philadelphia
Dignify the place
And murmur:

Such Negroes
disgrace the race!

On Artic Avenue
Sea food joints
Scent salty-colored
Compass points....

The responses of the Blacks can be traced at two levels -- the synchronic and the diachronic. At the synchronic level, the various reactions spring from the common problems encountered by the Blacks. The same dampening circumstances result in a meek submission in one, laziness and envy in another, a tendency to commit suicide in another, or addiction to drinks and immoral life in still another, or a mere dancing away of life in yet another person and so on.

In Brooks' "We Real Cool" one finds that the seven pool players waste away their lives:

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Finding no meaning in their lives, the boys resort to merry-making, idling, drinking and violence. Sometimes, when all such outlets do not help, the Black man is forced to think of committing suicide. The man in Brooks' "A Man of the Middle Class," though "semi-splendid" and had everything that he wanted, is led to the contemplation of committing suicide:

I've answers such as Giants used to know. 
There's a Giant who'll jump next Monday; 
all forsaking 
Wives, safes and solitaire 
And the elegant statue standing at the foot of the stair....

The middle aged woman in "A Sunset of the City" who is no longer cared for by her husband and children is in a dilemma -- "Whether to dry / In humming pallor or to leap and die." The same temptation comes to Timothy, though ultimately he overcomes it. He asks what the fact of his life is and tries various means of ending his life and finally traces "some little thing" to cling on to, still.

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574 Brooks, "We Real Cool," in WGB, p.315.


Diffidence is another passive reaction. The speaker in "Strong Men, Riding Horses" acknowledges his lack of courage and pitiful state and declares: "I am not brave at all."\textsuperscript{577}

Envy is yet another response of the Blacks. Jessie Mitchell's mother feels envious of her own daughter and is satisfied to think that her daughter's life will be "jerkier" than hers due to her dark pigmentation:

\begin{verbatim}
The stretched yellow rag that was Jessie Mitchell's mother
Reviewed her. Young, and so thin, and so straight.
So straight! as if nothing could ever bend her.
But poor men would bend her, and doing things with poor men,
Being much in bed, and babies would bend her over,
And the rest of things in life that were for poor women,
Coming to them grinning and pretty with intent to bend
and to kill….\textsuperscript{578}
\end{verbatim}

One notices that the mother's inferiority complex transforms to superiority complex as well.

Feelings of loneliness and rejection have a negative effect on young girls. The poem "a song in the front yard" portrays a young girl who wants to be a bad woman too:

\begin{verbatim}
I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
I want a peek at the back
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
A girl gets sick of a rose.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{577} Brooks, "Strong Men, Riding Horses," in WGB, p.313.

\textsuperscript{578} Brooks, "Jessie Mitchell's Mother," in WGB, p.328.
I want to go in the back yard now
    And maybe down the alley,
To where the charity children play.
    I want a good time today

    But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
    And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace.
And strut down the streets with paint on my face....

Here, one notices that the girl prefers weeds to roses. It shows that she prefers things which are usually regarded as bad, to those which are generally accepted as good.

Hughes presents a wide variety of Black personae and their reactions at the synchronic level like Brooks. Like the pool players of Brooks, the cabaret girl had lived a gay life. She resents dying quietly, and wants to die as noisily as she had lived:

    I hate to die this way with the quiet
      Over everything like a shroud.
    I'd rather die where the band's a-playin'
      Noisy and loud.

    Rather die the way I lived --
      Drunk and rowdy and gay!
God! Why did you ever curse me
    Makin' me die this way?....

Continued joblessness and poverty push the Black to a state of idling and whiling away his time aimlessly. He spends most of his time dreaming and exists in an

unreal world. In "Fired," one observes the reaction of a man when he is chucked out of job for his laziness:

Awake all night with loving
The bright day caught me
Unawares -- asleep.
"Late to work again,"
The boss man said.
"You're fired!"

So I went on back to bed --
And dreamed the sweetest dream
With Caledonia's arm
Beneath my head....

In the same vein, the speaker in the poem "If-ing" states how he manages to exist just by indulging in a series of "ifs":

If I had some small change
I'd buy me a mule,
Get on that mule and
Ride like a fool.

If I had some greenbacks
I'd buy me a Packard,
Fill it up with gas and
Drive that baby backward.

If I had a million
I'd get me a plane
And everybody in America'd
Think I was insane.

But I ain't got a million,
Fact is, ain't got a dime --
So just by if-ing
I have a good time!...

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581 Hughes, "Fired," in SPLH, p.128.
582 Hughes, "If-ing," in S in H, p.32.
In "Necessity," the speaker is forced to work just because he has to pay his rent:

Work?
I don't have to work.
I don't have to do nothing
but eat, drink, stay black, and die.
This little old furnished room's
so small I can't whip a cat
without getting fur in my mouth
and my landlady's so old
her features is all run together
and God knows she sure can overcharge --
Which is why I reckon I does
have to work after all....

The line "eat, drink, stay black, and die" is reminiscent of Brooks' pool players' pattern of their short span of life. This indicates how a Black man feels about his "mere existence."

Music and jazz provide an outlet for the Black man for his various feelings. In fact, as Jean Wagner points out that jazz is "the privileged channel for expressing the rebellion of modern man, especially the Negro, against the straitjacket of an inhuman industrial and commercial civilization that cut him off from the realization of his highest aspirations." 584

Instead of proving his strength and keeping up his dignity, the Black man, becomes an addict to drinks and drugs quite often. He himself knows that he is heading towards destruction because of his drinking habit:

I did not act like
My mother's child.

584 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.402.
She begged me, please,
Stay on the right track.
But I was drinking licker,
Jitterbugging back,

Going down that road,
All dressed to kill --
The road that leads
Right straight to hell.

Pray for me, Mama!...⁵⁸⁵

The poor Black man has formed a mean image of his own and is unable to respect
himself as in the following lines:

I'm a bad, bad man
'Cause everybody tells me so
I'm a bad, bad man.
Everybody tells me so
I takes ma meanness and ma licker
Everywhere I go....⁵⁸⁶

Hughes narrates in detail how and why a young boy who is jobless becomes an
addict to drugs in the poem "Junior Addict." The poem ends in an earnest appeal
for "sun rise" to come out of Africa:

The little boy
who sticks a needle in his arm
and seeks an out in other worldly dreams,
who seeks an out in eyes that droop
and ears that close to Harlem screams,
cannot know, of course,
(and has no way to understand)
a sunrise that he cannot see
beginning in some other land --

⁵⁸⁶ Hughes, quoted in CELH, p.49.
but destined sure to flood -- and soon --
the very room in which he leaves
his needle and his spoon,
the very room in which today the air
is heavy with the drug
of his despair.

(Yet little can
tomorrow's sunshine give
to one who will not live.)

"It's easier to get dope
than it is to get a job."

Quick, sunrise, come!
Sunrise out of Africa,
Quick, come!
Sunrise, please come!
Come! Come!...

In this poem, one understands that the real drug which victimizes the addict is "despair" which fills his life. Inspite of the word "Yet," the speaker looks forward to a redemption from Africa. Again, it is pathetic to note the rarity of obtaining a job and the precariousness of his life, in which he may not live to see the much anticipated "sun rise."

Like Brooks, Hughes has also written a number of poems wherein young girls turn to immoral life out of necessity. Ruby Brown who works in the Whites' kitchen asks herself two questions: "What can a colored girl do / On the money from a white woman's kitchen? / And ain't there any joy in this town?"

Deciding to resort to prostitution, she earns more money now.

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588 Hughes, "Ruby Brown," in SPLH, p.166.
In "Strange Hurt," the girl chooses to go out and wander in the cold night:

In times of stormy weather  
She felt queer pain  
That said  
"You'll find rain better  
Than shelter from the rain."

Days filled with fiery sunshine  
Strange hurt she knew  
That made  
Her seek the burning sunlight  
Rather than the shade.

In months of snowy winter  
When cozy houses hold,  
She'd break down doors  
To wander naked  
In the cold…  

Little Julie is a delinquent who never cares for what "folks say":

Little Julie  
Has grown quite tall.  
Folks say she don't like  
To stay home at all.

Little Julie  
Has grown quite stout.  
Folks say it's not just  
Stomach sticking out.

Little Julie  
Has grown quite wise --  
A tiger, a lion, and an owl  
In her eyes.

Little Julie  
Says she don't care!  
What she means is:  
Nobody cares  
Anywhere…  

589 Hughes, "Strange Hurt," in SPLH, p.84.
590 Hughes, "Delinquent," in SPLH, p.133.
Thus one finds so many similar and passive reactions on the part of the Blacks at the synchronic level. At the diachronic level also, one can observe the reactions of the Blacks. The rebellious and revolting tendency in an individual keeps mounting in degrees from a mild, quite unobtrusive gesture, or non-cooperation, or a sarcastic smile or a clever and tactful avoidance and shunning, through a seething and boiling level, to a hot, volcano-like outburst of temper. Their various forms of protest are brought forth in a few lines by Brooks:

People protest in sprawling lightless ways
Against their deceivers, they are never meek --
Conceive their furies and abort them early:
Are hurt, and shout, weep without form, are surly;
Or laugh, but save their censures and their damns....

The least and minimum form of protest as in the foregoing lines is laughter which hides the censures of disapproval. In other words, it is the derisive and ironic laughter at the White-ways and reactions. Brooks' poem, "The Lovers of the Poor" is full of ironic humour about the ladies from the Ladies' Betterment League who have come to distribute funds to the "worthy poor" and the "beautiful poor." Looking at the poor, old, dirty and dim surroundings of the slum, the ladies are horrified and leave the place justifying themselves:

...The Ladies from the Ladies'
Betterment League agree it will he better
To achieve the outer air that rights and steadies,
To hie to a house that does not holler, to ring
Bells elsetime, better presently to cater
To no more Possibilities, to get
Away. Perhaps the money can be posted. 
Perhaps they two may choose another Slum!

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Some serious sooty half-unhappy home! --
Where loathe-love likelier may be invested.
   Keeping their scented bodies in the center
Of the hall as they walk down the hysterical hall,
They allow their lovely skirts to graze no wall,
Are off at what they manage of a canter,
   And, resuming all the clues of what they were,
Try to avoid inhaling the laden air....

Hughes himself has remarked how gentle and mild humour serves as a weapon to fight against one's foes and show disapproval:

Humor is a weapon, too, of no mean value against one's foes....Think what colored people in the United States could do with a magazine devoted to satire and fun at the expense of the Dixiecrats. Since we have not been able to moralize them out of existence with indignant editorials, maybe we could laugh them to death with well-aimed ridicule ....I would like to see some writers of both races write about our problems with black tongue in white cheek or vice versa. Sometimes I try. Simple helps me.....

Jesse B. Simple is the character through whom Hughes laughs at the injustices and inequalities in the White society. Through him Hughes raises many a witty, ironical and thought-provoking question. The following is one among the many examples, taken from "That powerful Drop" from Simple Takes a Wife:

One drop -- you are a Negro! Now, why is that? Why is Negro blood so much more powerful than any other kind of blood in the world? If a man has Irish blood in him, people will say, 'He's part Irish.' If he has a little Jewish blood, they'll say, 'He's half Jewish.' But if he has just a small bit of colored blood in him, BAM! -- 'He's a Negro!' Not, 'He's part Negro'.... Now, that is what I do not understand -- why our one drop is so powerful....

One notes that Hughes' argument is quite reasonable and well-grounded.

594 Hughes, "That Powerful Drop," in LHR, p.201.
The next intensified mode of battling is in punishing the other person by building up his hopes and finally shattering them and thus avenging. This gives a kind of satisfaction to the Black. In Brooks' "I love those little booths at Benvenuti's," the White folks eagerly come to observe, detect and dissect the "dusky folk, so clamorous! / So colorfully incorrect, / So amorous, / So flatly brave!" They sit, sup and settle with eager expectation. Their patience is tested as in the ensuing lines:

They stare. They tire. They feel refused,  
Feel overwhelmed by subtle treasons!  
Nobody here will take the part of jester....

Contrary to their expectations, no coloured person fawns or fumbles or clowns. The coloured people arrive, sit, eat, laugh, rise and go out -- all in a firm and noiseless manner.

Again, in Brooks' Maud Martha, Maud visits a millinery shop. She asks the price of a hat and the manager, a White lady, tries various ways and means to persuade Maud into buying the hat. First she stops her, smiles at Maud, looks at her "as if God looked," compliments Maud that she "looked like a lady of taste" and finally pretends to rush in to consult with the owner. Maud allows her to go through the difficulty of finally agreeing on the price which she has asked and says in a calm and triumphant tone: "I've decided against the hat." The rest of the details show Maud's triumph in punishing and frustrating the White manager:

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595 Brooks, "I love those little booths at Benvenuti's," in WGB, p.110.  
596 Ibid., p.111.  
"What? Why, you told -- But, you said --"

Maud Martha went out, tenderly closed the door.

"Black-- oh, black --" said the hat woman to her hats --

which, on the slender stands, shone pink and blue and white

and lavender, showed off their tassels, their sleek satin

ribbons, their veils, their flower coquettes..."598

The victory of Maud is small but she feels satisfied for having asserted her rights.

Again, while working at the Burns-Coopers, Maud can withstand Mrs. Burns-

Cooper's series of instructions regarding the works that Maud has to carry out,

can listen in silence to Mrs.Burns-Cooper's "confidences," but cannot stand their

looks when the elder Burns-Cooper complains that the potato parings are too

thick. She cannot also tolerate their treating her like a child. Maud decides never

to return. She finds satisfaction to think of Mrs.Burns-Cooper getting puzzled the

next day. Thus she asserts her individuality and rights:

...She knew Mrs. Burns-Cooper would be puzzled. The

wages were very good. Indeed, what could be said in

explanation? Perhaps that the hours were long. I couldn't

explain my explanation, she thought.

One walked out from that almost perfect wall, spitting at

the firing squad. What difference did it make whether the

firing squad understood or did not understand the manner of

one's retaliation or why one had to retaliate?

Why, one was a human being. One wore clean

nightgowns. One loved one's baby. One drank cocoa by the

fire -- or the gas range -- come the evening, in the

wintertime....599

Such aggressive, unyielding and irreconcilable attitude and behaviour is to be

found in Hughes' Madam. And Madam can never be cheated or convinced.


599 Ibid., p.289.
When confronted by the rent-man or the clergy man, she is firm and decided in her answers. Unlike Maud who plunges into a cold war of restraint, Madam leashes forth her tongue and argues with the other. After having led the conversation a while, she ends up abruptly with a striking remark, leaving the listener wide eyed and awe struck. When Reverend Butler visits her and enquires about her soul, Madam's answers are curt, elusive and snubbing:

Reverend Butler came by
My house last week.
He said, Have you got
A little time to speak?

He said, I am interested
In your soul.
Has it been saved,
Or is your heart stone-cold?

I said, Reverend,
I'll have you know
I was baptized
Long ago.

He said, What have you
Done since then?
I said, None of your
Business, friend.

He said, Sister
Have you back-slid?
I said, It felt good—
If I did!...600

Like Madam, Jesse B. Simple does not give a direct answer when questioned by a White man about his place of birth. Rather he delights in giving a circuitous reply:

600 Hughes, "Madam and the Minister," in SPLH, p.213.
"The other day a white man asked where is my home," said Simple. "I said, 'What do you mean, where is my home -- as big and round as the world is? Do you mean where I live now? Or where I did live? Or where I was born?'

"'I mean, where you did live,' the white man said.

"'I did live every-which-a-where,' I told him.

"'I mean, where was you born -- North or South?'" the white man said.

"'I knowed that's what you mean,' I said, 'so why didn't you say so? I were born where you was born.'

"'No, you weren't,' he declared, 'because I was born in Germany.'

"'Some Negroes was born as far away as Africa,' I said.

"'You weren't, were you?' he asked.

"'Do I look like a Mau Mau?' I said.

"'You look African, but you speak our language,' that white man told me.

"'Your language,' I hollered, 'and you was born in Germany! You are speaking my language.'

"'Then you are an American?'

"'I are,' I said.

"'From what parts?' he kept on.

"'All parts,' I said.

"'North or South?' he asked me.

"'I knowed you'd get down to that again,' I said. 'Why?'

"'Curiosity,' he says.

"'If I told you I was born in the South,' I said, 'you would believe me. But if I told you I was born in the North, you wouldn't. So I ain't going to say where I was born. I was just borned, that's all, and my middle name is Harlem.' That is what I told that white man. And that is all he found out about where I was borned," said Simple.... 601

Obviously, Simple emerges as a triumphant victor out of the long and meandering dialogue, having carefully avoided telling the place of his birth. It is thus the Black man seizes an opportunity to avenge the White man, whenever possible.

Both Brooks and Hughes have drawn yet another situation of protest in a submerged and subtle manner where the Black woman boldly resists her White

601 Hughes, "Big Round World," in LHR, p.216.
mistress when she tries to keep her working overtime. Brooks sketches Hattie Scott's impatience to finish her chores and when her mistress piles up work, she rebels inwardly and refuses to oblige, thereby establishing her dignity:

IF SHE don't hurry up and let me out of here.
Keeps pilin' up stuff for me to do.
I ain't goin' to finish that ironin'.
She got another think comin'. Hey, you.
Whatcha mean talkin' about cleanin' silver?
It's eight o'clock now, you fool.
I'm leavin'. Got somethin' interestin' on my mind.
Don't mean night school...  

This soliloquy, no doubt, presents her silent, yet assertive retaliation.

Similarly, Hughes' Madam in "Madam and Her Madam" refuses to become a packhorse when her mistress tries to prove her love for her and is ready with a sharp, and witty answer:

I said, Madam,
Can it be 
You trying to make a
Pack-horse out of me?

She opened her mouth.
She cried, Oh, no!
You know, Alberta,
I love you so!

I said, Madam,
That may be true --
But I'll be dogged
If I love you!...

Unlike Hattie Scott's, Madam's retaliation is open and face-to-face, but like Hattie Scott, she establishes her dignity and gets even with her mistress.

602 Brooks, "the date," in WGB, p.36.
These reactions which are quite often mild and unobtrusive with a tinge of irony and a touch of humour, reach a seething and boiling level. In "The Wall," which celebrates the mural depicting Black heroes and Black pride, Brooks describes the Black men as black furnaces, fondling the fever and being ready for the "Hour":

On Forty-third and Langley
black furnaces resent ancient legislatures
of ploy and scruple and practical gelatin.
They keep the fever in,
fondle the fever....

The Black hero, who is actually fighting against the White man himself says that his blood is boiling and he itches to get at the gun:

It was a tall time. And of course my blood was Boiling about in my head and straining and howling and singing me on.
Of course I was rolled on wheels of my boy itch to get at the gun.
Of course all the delicate rehearsal shots of my childhood massed in mirage before me....

In "To Keorapetse Kgositsile," Brooks pictures Kgositsile as a young hero who is "no kitten Traveler" as a flaring hero with "might of mind":

He teaches strategy and the straight aim;
black volume;

might of mind, black flare --
vocanoing merit, black
herohood.

Black total....

In "In the Mecca," Way-out-Morgan hardly eats, and postpones his own pleasures to consider "Ruin" and "Death-to-the-Hordes-of-the-White-Men!" He remembers the past persecutions, and goes on collecting guns:

Way-out Morgan is collecting guns
in a tiny fourth-floor room.
He is not hungry, ever, though sinfully lean.
He flourishes, ever, on porridge of pat of bean pudding or wiener soup -- fills fearsofally
on visions of Death-to-the-Hordes-of-the-White-Men! Death!

Remembering three local-and-legal beatings, he rubs his hands in glee,
does Way-out Morgan. Remembering his Sister mob-raped in Mississippi, Way-out Morgan smacks sweet his lips and adds another gun

Way-out Morgan predicts the Day of Debt-pay shall begin,
the Day of Demon-diamond,
of blood in mouths and body-mouths,
of flesh-rip in the Forum of Justice at last!
Remembering mates in the Mississippi River,
mates with black bodies once majestic, Way-out postpones a yellow woman in his bed, postpones wetnesses and little cries and stomachings -- to consider Ruin....

This stage of rebellion before it reaches its zenith is also pointed out by Hughes in his poems. The Black man, according to Hughes, is waking up. No longer will he be blind to the racial discrimination and its evil:

I live on a park bench
You, Park Avenue.

608 Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, pp.400-401.
Hell of a distance  
Between us two.

I beg a dime for dinner --  
You got a butler and maid.  
But I'm wakin' up!  
Say, ain't you afraid

That I might, just maybe,  
In a year or two,  
Move on over  
To Park Avenue? .... 609

The phrase, "In a year or two " is changed into an urgent "Today" in "Democracy":

I tire so of hearing people say,  
Let things take their course.  
Tomorrow is another day.  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.... 610

The Blackman's impatience is heightened when he feels that it is high time he talked back or retaliated:

Hell, no! It's time to talk back now!  
History says it's time,  
And the radio, too foggy with propaganda  
that says a mouthful  
and don't mean half it says --  
but is true anyhow:  
LIBERTY!  
FREEDOM!  
DEMOCRACY!  
True anyhow no matter how many  
Liars use those words.... 611

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609 Hughes, "Park Bench," in A New Song, p.12.
611 Hughes, "In Explanation of Our Times," in SPLH, p.282.
Hughes' indignation at the liars, nevertheless, is accompanied by an unshaken faith in the ultimate realization of these goals -- liberty, freedom and democracy.

The state of tension in which a Black man exists is clearly depicted in Hughes' "Roland Hayes Beaten." Anytime, their pent up emotions and passions may be triggered:

Negroes,
Sweet and docile,
Meek, humble, and kind:
Beware the day
They change their minds!

Wind
In the cotton fields,
Gentle breeze:
Beware the hour
It uproots trees!...

Hughes is more complacent and patient compared to Brooks. His most vehement expressions are found when he is ready for action with his fists clenched, and when he enthuses the black masses to revolt and arise. In "Militant," one understands Hughes being driven to the verge of patience:

Let all who will
Eat quietly the bread of shame.
I cannot,
Without complaining loud and long,
Tasting its bitterness in my throat,
And feeling to my very soul
It's wrong.
For honest work
You proffer me poor pay,
For honest dreams

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Your spit is in my face,  
And so my fist is clenched 
Today --  
To strike your face....  

"A New Song" written when he was under the influence of communist ideas, speaks of Hughes' awakening to action:

I speak in the name of the black millions  
Awakening to action.  
Revolt! Arise!  
The past is done!  
A new dream flames 
Against the  
Sun!...  

Arnold Rampersad records the revised version of "A New Song" in his I, Too, Sing America:

The bees work.  
Their work is taken from them  
We are like the bees --  
But it won't last  
Forever....  

Brooks goes a step further and suggests a drastic cure for American Democracy. She does not spare America. She wants it to be purged by blood. This is exactly

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614 Hughes, "A New Song," in A New Song, pp.24-25.  
what she concludes and conveys through Amos, in "In the Mecca":

"Bathe her in her beautiful blood.
A long blood bath will wash her pure.
Her skin needs special care.
Let this good rage continue out beyond
her power to believe or to surmise.
Slap the false sweetness from that face.
Great-nailed boots
must kick her prostrate, heel-grind that soft breast,
outrage her saucy pride,
remove her fair fine mask.
Let her lie there, panting and wild, her pain
red, running roughly through the illustrious ruin --
with nothing to do but think, think
of how she was so long grand,
flogging her dark one with her own hand,
watching in meek amusement while he bled.
Then shall she rise, recover.
Never to forget."…616*

In these lines, Brooks has resorted to a terrible treatment, by which she hopes, America will begin to "think."

Thus, one finds the Blacks' reactions varying from a mild and imperceptible dissension to a vehement and perceivable protest and remonstration.

Tracing the poetic career of Brooks and Hughes, one learns that both had had a hope that integration was the only possible solution for the problems of the Blacks. Brooks felt that the Whites would relent in due course and give them equal treatment:

Not that I now ask alms, in shame gone hollow,
Nor cringe outside the loud and sumptuous gate.
Admit me to our mutual estate....617

616  Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, pp.394-395.

* This bears repetition.
Later, when she came into a "new consciousness" in 1967, Brooks committed herself to write poems that are non compromising -- not "conditioned by the White-world" anymore. She set her goals clear and declared her faith in clear-cut terms:

A capricious bunch of entries and responses has brought me to my present understanding of fertile facts. Know-nows: I know now that I am essentially an essential African,... I know now that Black fellow-feeling must be the Black man's encyclopedic Primer. I know that the Black-and-white integration concept, which in the mind of some beaming early saint was a dainty spinning dream has wound down to farce, ... I know that the Black emphasis must be not against white but FOR Black. I know that a substantial manner of communication and transaction with whites will be, eventually, arrived at, arranged -- if Blacks remain in this country; but the old order shall not prevail; the day of head pats for nice little niggers, bummy kicks for bad bad Biggers, and apparent Black acceptance of both, is done. In the Conference-That-Counts, whose date may be 1980 or 2080... there will be no looking up nor looking down...  

Herein, she clearly tells how, hereafter her poems will not be against Whites but for the development of Blacks.

Hughes' path of poetic career is more even but for a short phase during the 1930s when he was influenced by Marxist views. Poems like "A New Song" and "The Scottsboro limited" were written during that period. Later, he himself declared them to be "unrepresentative of his ideals." His reactions are, as usual, mild, patient and charged with human love. While Addison Gayle calls Brooks the "poet of the Whirlwind," Arthur P.Davis names Hughes the "Cool-Poet." In his


He (Hughes) did not see evil as inherent in the character of nature and man, hence he felt that the evil (small e) about which he wrote so frequently in his poems (lynchings, segregation, discrimination of all kinds) would be eradicated with the passage of time. Of course the Hughes of The Panther and the Lash (1967) is not as easily optimistic as the poet was twenty or twenty-five years before. ... though he does not speak so readily about the fulfillment of the American ideal for black people, and though something of the spirit of having waited too long prevails, still the optimism remains....

With this background knowledge of the poets' poetic career and intentions, one proceeds further to understand what these poets recommend to the youth of the race who are often the victims of violence or inflictors of violence, and what these authors have to say about militance.

Militance, according to Brooks and Hughes, is not in inflicting harm on their White brethren. By all means, they oppose the existing idea of violence. For them, militance is not the solution for the ceasing of discrimination in America. But a Black individual must be able to assert his individuality by bold confrontation. Indeed, "power comes, not from the barrel of a gun, but from one's awareness of his or her own cultural strength and the unlimited capacity to

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empathize with, feel for, care and love one’s brother and sister"\textsuperscript{620} as Addison Gayle, Jr. remarks. Gayle further delineates the function of poetry with reference to Brooks' works:

\begin{quote}
... the function of poetry is not so much to save us from oppression... but to give us the strength to face them, to help us stare down the lynch mob, walk boldly in front of the firing squad. It is just such awareness that the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks has given us, ... the choice is clear: one may accept the fate of the victim or the creative birth of the rioter.\textsuperscript{621}
\end{quote}

By the term riot, Brooks means, "energy, vibrancy, challenge, daring, spontaneity, love: the propensity to engage in conflict and confrontation."\textsuperscript{622}

When a conflict arises, it is in the Black man's hands to confront it boldly. In an ordinary situation, Mrs. Small exhibits her courage and continues her part of the world's business. She scorns apologizing for each and everything, when she happens to soil the insurance man's clothes while "graciously" offering him a steaming cup of coffee:

\begin{quote}
"I don't know where my mind is this morning,"
Said Mrs. Small, scorning
Apologies! For there was so much
For which to apologize! Oh such
Mountains of things, she'd never get anything done
If she begged forgiveness for each one.

No.
The insurance man would have to glare
Idiotically into her own sterile stare
A moment -- then depart,
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{621} Ibid., p.86-87.

\textsuperscript{622} Ibid., p.84.
Leaving her to release her heart
Continuing her part
Of the world's business....

Here, one notes that Mrs. Small neither cringes nor apologizes unduly but keeps her dignity with a firm decision -- not to apologize, while she herself has so much to do.

Hughes has created daring characters who encounter a situation with fortitude of mind. Minnie in Hughes' *Simple's Uncle Sam* retorts when the Black leaders advise the Blacks to go slow in attaining their freedom:

No body said slow down in cotton-picking days. So what is this here now? When Negroes are trying to get something for themselves, I must wait, don't demonstrate?...

She decides to stand on her own legs and be her own leader and guide:

Telling me to be cool. Huh! I'm too hot to be cool -- So I guess I will just have to lead my own self -- which I will do. I will lead myself....

Brooks and Hughes give positive advice to the Blacks in order to assert their position in America. First, they must develop a sense of belongingness to America, their motherland. They need to understand that the Black man is an

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625 Ibid., p.145.
* This bears repetition.
integral part of America; it is a land of freedom, built by black and white hands alike; it is the fate of the Black man in America which determines the destiny of America. R. Orlova analyses this view:

... the life of the black man in America anticipates and metaphorically personifies the global fate of America, the birth place of the American Dream and the atom bomb, the melting pot of races, tribes and nations and the hotbed of Jim Crowism, a land of democratic freedoms and buoyant individualism which is justly proud of its Declaration of Independence affirming individual rights, down to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," ...  

Next, the Blacks need to redefine their life-situations through hard work and determination. Brooks' "The Sermon on the Warpland" is a good example in which Brooks hastens the Black men and women to prepare for the coming hell and health together and build their Church:

"My people, black and black, revile the River. Say that the River turns, and turn the River.

Say that our Something in doublepod contains seeds for the coming hell and health together. Prepare to meet (sisters, brothers) the brash and terrible weather; the pains; the bruising; the collapse of bestials, idols. But then oh then! -- the stuffing of the hulls! the seasoning of the perilously sweet! the health! the heralding of the clear obscure!

Build now your Church, my brothers, sisters....  

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Inspite of the difficulties like hell and terrible weather, something good is obtained -- which is indicated by the exclamatory phrase "But then oh then!" The paradoxes like "clear obscure" and "perilously sweet" show that toil and success go together.

Hughes' poems also serve as pointers to the fact that life is not a crystal stair. With strenuous effort one has to ascend the same. The Black race will come up by devoting themselves to study and intellectual pursuits. In "Graduation," Mary Lulu Jackson's graduation promises a bright future for the whole coloured race. The dark boy in "Dark Youth of the U.S.A." resolves to study and lift up his race to its rightful place in America:

Sturdy I stand, books in my hand:
Today's dark child, tomorrow's strong man:
The hope of my race
To mould a place
In America's magic land....

Brooks and Hughes specially and specifically appeal to the youth of the race to react positively and wisely to their unique life-situations. Brooks, who has written many poems dedicated to young heroes visualizes Don at Salaam as a "tied storm" keeping his stromy emotions under control and ready for life:

Beautiful. Impudent.
Ready for life.
A tied storm....

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628 Hughes, "Dark Youth of the U.S.A.," in The Negro Mother And Other Dramatic Recitations, p.19.
629 Brooks, "To Don at Salaam," in FP, p.16.
Brooks warns the boys against easy griefs which fool and fuel nothing:

It is too easy to cry "ATTICA"
and shock thy street,
and purse thy mouth,
and go home to thy "Gunsmoke." Boys,
black boys,
beware the easy griefs
that fool and fuel nothing....

Again, in "Walter Bradford," Brooks teaches the Black the dynamics of practical life:

Just As You Think You're "Better Now"
Something Comes To The Door.
It's a Wilderness, Walter.
It's a Whirlpool or Whipper.

THEN you have to revise the messages;
settle the sick ears to hear and to heed and to hold;
the sick ears a-plenty....

In "A Catch of Shy Fish," Brooks talks of transferring the memorized rules to the game, i.e., following the ideals of life in practical life. Again, in "To Keorapetse Kgotsitsile," Brooks states how he "moves life into his hands," by observing, understanding and keeping life under proper control:

He is very busy with his looking.
To look, he knows, is to involve
subject and suppliant
He looks at life --
moves life into his hands....

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Hughes' poems do not fail to advise the youth to keep going without losing hope. "Blues on a Box" is a simple poem driving home this truth:

Play your guitar, boy,  
Till Yesterday's  
Black cat  
Runs out tomorrow's  
Backdoor  
And evil old  
Hard luck  
Ain't no more!... 633

Hughes has not written as many poems as Brooks specifically addressed to the youth. But his poems equally carry the message to people of any age. In "Question and Answer," he beautifully conveys the purpose of life with all its struggle and trouble:

Durban, Birmingham,  
Cape Town, Atlanta,  
Johannesburg, Watts,  
The earth around  
Struggling, fighting,  
Dying -- for what?  
A world to gain.

Groping, hoping,  
Waiting -- for what?  
A world to gain.

Dreams kicked asunder,  
Why not go under?  
There's a world to gain.

But suppose I don't want it,  
Why take it?  
To remake it.... 634

The purpose of life, as Hughes puts it, is to remake and reconstruct the world.

633 Hughes, "Blues on a Box," in One way Ticket, p.112.
634 Hughes, "Question and Answer," in P and L, p.68.
In "Down Where I am," Hughes recommends a reversal of situation:

Too many years
Beatin' at the door --
I done beat my
Both fists sore.

Too many years
Tryin' to get up there --
Done broke my ankles down,
Got nowhere.

Too many years
Climbin' that hill,
'Bout out of breath.
I got my fill.

I'm gonna plant my feet
On solid ground.
If you want to see me,
Come down....

To sum up, such redefining of situations must simultaneously be accompanied by faith which overcomes the present, determines the future and transcends one's fate. Referring to her own "enlightened" faith as the "sun," Brooks passes the same to the African Americans:

Here is some sun. Some.
Now off into the places rough to reach.
Though dry, though drowsy, all unwillingly a-wobble,
into the dissonant and dangerous crescendo.
Your work, that was done, to be done to be done to be done [My emphasis]....

The Black boy in Hughes' "Dark Youth of the U.S.A.," who has the vision of faith, determines to right all wrong by being wise, strong and hard working. Like

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635 Hughes, "Down Where I am," in P and L, p.50.
636 Brooks, "To the Diaspora," in To Disembark, p.41.
Brooks' "dangerous crescendo" with a great mission ahead, the dark youth climbs towards tomorrow to fulfil his ambition:

To be wise and strong, then, studying long,
Seeking the knowledge that rights all wrong --
That is my mission.

Lifting my race to its rightful place
Till beauty and pride fills each dark face
Is my ambition.

So I climb toward tomorrow, out of past sorrow,
Treading the modern way
With the White and the Black whom nothing holds back --
The American Youth of today [My emphasis]....

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637 Hughes, "Dark Youth of the U.S.A.,” in The Negro Mother And Other Dramatic Recitations, pp.19-20.