CHAPTER SIX

CRAFTED ART
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Art is life worked with; is life wheedled, or whelmed: assessed: clandestine, but evoked....

I could take the Harlem night and wrap around you,
Take the neon lights and make a crown,

Take Harlem's heartbeat,
Make a drumbeat,...

Real great art must be artless. It is in the sense that the craftsmanship, the devices, tools and techniques involved should not obtrude, so much so real great art is concealed art. The form, structure, craftsmanship and the cerebration of the writer are all present; but they do not superimpose themselves. In other words, these artistic considerations are subordinate to the artists' intensified feelings, thoughts and experiences. At the same time, one cannot deny the fact that there is no modern art without much brainwork and cogitation behind it. All great post-modern works are marked by skilled craftsmanship and it is by technical excellence that Tony Morrison's Joe Trace and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man are considered post-modern fiction. E.E.Cummings, John Barth, George Louis Boges, Barthelme, E.L.Doctorov and Vladimir Nabakov are all outstanding post-

modernists because their works contain so much of craftsmanship and American ingenuity. Their œuvres are subjected to revisions resulting in complexities, ambiguities and perfection. The point that is made is that the high level of mentation put in by the American creationists lies concealed. There is something more than mere insight and imagination. There is a careful and meticulous arrangement of every item involved -- be it diction or form or structure. A post-modern writer expects the reader to put in as much heavy thinking in understanding his poetry as he himself had put in. In fine, without adequate reader- participation, the sense and signification of a post-modern work cannot be thoroughly gleaned.

The poets Brooks and Hughes are Black creationists who have produced real great concealed art. They subordinate all artistic possibilities of language to their inner urge and surges of emotion. They firmly believe that "The task of the Negro writer in any sort of society is ... to clarify his interior and to deliver, thoroughly, and only the 'messages' urged by that clarity."  

A good work of art is marked by a definitive form, close structure and perfect organization -- gestalt. It employs the conventional charms of poetry, uses apt diction, is governed by a core message and fuses the form and content ingeniously, ensuring the qualities of clarity, brevity and plausibility. The poetry of Brooks and Hughes measure up to these principles of art.

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790 Brooks, quoted in George E.Kent, A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks, p.182.
Incidentally, one ought to note that Brooks and Hughes also measure up to the comprehensive and perceptive definition of an American Scholar promulgated by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all.\textsuperscript{791}

As stated earlier, Brooks and Hughes place the greatest stress in the suitable form, a tight structure and a well-knit organization -- gestalt -- to create poetry of lasting value. In the first place, they choose the right kind of poetic form to serve as the vehicle to convey their deeply-felt feelings and experiential thoughts. It ought to be stressed that there is a balanced fusion of form and content. In this connection, the two pointed observations of Terence Hawkes and Roland Barthes are studied in conjunction of one with the other. The observation of Terence Hawkes runs thus:

With regard to literature this means, initially, pushing beyond mere content into an area which we can loosely term that of form.\textsuperscript{792}

The observation of Roland Barthes is still more pointed than the foregoing one, and it runs thus:


\footnotesize\textsuperscript{792} Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1977), p.58.
This cannot be a science of content ... but a science of the conditions of content, that is, a science of forms....

Yet again, the emphasis on organization and structure results in creating the sense of internal coherence -- sense of wholeness -- and in transforming various fundamental sentences into the widest variety of new utterances while retaining this within its own particular structure. Finally, it promotes the thought that it makes no appeal beyond itself. Jean Piaget argues to the point:

... structure ... can be observed in an arrangement of entities which embodies the following fundamental ideas:

(a) the idea of wholeness.
(b) the idea of transformation.
(c) the idea of self regulation....

In this context, Brooks pours her artistic vision into various forms of poetry, such as sonnets, ballads, epic and free verse. Brooks is a skilled sonneteer. She writes typical Shakespearean sonnets like "piano after war" and Petrarchan sonnets like "the white troops had their orders but the Negroes looked like men" and also mixes both as in the sonnet-series "the children of the poor." If the octave conforms to the Petrarchan form, the sestet experiments with a variation of the Shakespearean form. Such variations help to underscore the complexity of the parent's multiple emotions about the conflicting situations presented in each sonnet. The mother's ambivalent thoughts are rendered clear by the usage of unusual metaphors like "sweetest lepers" and "little halves" to denote her children

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in the sonnet "What shall I give my children?" In the sonnet, "And shall I prime my children, pray, to pray?" there is a dexterous alteration of formal diction and colloquialism.

In the war sonnet-series, Brooks uses "off rhyme" to give a touch of reality. The language, diction and rhythm of "gay chaps at the bar" give an air of military atmosphere:

WE KNEW how to order. Just the dash Necessary. The length of gaiety in good taste....

Here, the break between "dash" and "Necessary" augments the significance of the dash and emphasizes the compulsion behind "Necessary."

The sonnet "piano after war" depicts the soldier who hopes to survive war jolted out of his reverie. There is a sudden tonal shift in the sestet where "his climbing fever of proud delight" is substituted by icy coldness and stony hardness. This sonnet is a good example for Brooks' clever play of half rhymes and appropriate diction and imagery. On the whole, the form, matter and tone are well controlled and complement one another:

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

79 Brooks, "gay chaps at the bar," in WGB, p.48.
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....

Brooks subjects the sonnet form to a modern approach and yet at the same time ensures that it is traditionally untraditional. As George E. Kent observes:

She [Brooks] attacked the sonnets' rigidity by breaking up traditional sentence syntax into punctuated phrases, by emphasizing the colloquial, and by the pressure of her contemporary realism. In winning a freedom from traditional formal eloquence, however, she won also a freedom to use at will her own style of formal eloquence without being constricted by tradition....

Apart from sonnets, Brooks experiments with the Black folk forms like ballads and blues. She has written quite a number of ballads adopting narrative and dramatic techniques. She uses the usual ballad themes like sex, unrequited love, violence and disaster, employing folk diction and Black vernacular. "Ballad of Pearl May Lee" which is about raping and lynching is a good example. The story element is the main factor and Brooks subordinates all other artistic considerations to it. The language is plain, direct and dramatic. The story is flashed in many scenes as on a stage. There is a lavish use of repetitions and colloquialism. Epithets like "pink and white honey" and "dark meat" which respectively stand for the White girl and the Black girl, enrich the texture of the ballad.

796 Brooks, "piano after war," in WGB, p.52.  
* This bears repetition.  
797 George E. Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture (Chicago: Third World Press, 1972), p.112.
Moreover, the pathetic and mocking tone of Pearl May Lee is maintained throughout the ballad:

And I was laughing, down at my house.
Laughing fit to kill.
You got what you wanted for dinner,
But brother you paid the bill.
   Brother,
   Brother,
Brother you paid the bill.

You paid for your dinner, Sammy boy,
And you didn't pay with money.
You paid with your hide and my heart, Sammy boy,
For your taste of pink and white honey,
   Honey,
   Honey.
For your taste of pink and white honey....

Being in confessional mode,* the ballad has the quality of the blues. Brooks has not specialized in blues form like Hughes but very skilfully adventures in mixing blues and ballad forms. In the "Queen of the Blues," she blends the ballad's narrative technique and the blues' confessional form.

Brooks' "Anniad" is a long poem which achieves epic dimensions. Karl Malkoff regards it as a miniature epic. It traces Annie Allen's struggle to find meaning and fulfilment in her life. Brooks, having consciously worked on this poem says

798 Brooks, "Ballad of Pearl May Lee," in WGB, p.47.

* The American Confessional poets such as Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg and Gwendolyn Brooks differ from the British confessional poets such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley in the sense that the British poets are concerned about their own selves and therefore, pouring out their personal feelings, thoughts and experiences of their own anguish and angst. On the other hand, the American confessional poets project the suffering, the sturm-und-drang of the whole race. It is not an individual voicing his sentiments and thoughts. The American confessional poet becomes the voice of humanity.
that it is "a poem that's interested in the mysteries and magic of technique." With a diction that is at once lofty and musical and to the point, Brooks is able to make the reader empathize with Annie Allen. The poet Nikki Giovanni, after reading "Annie Allen" had the following to say:

... and Annie Allen and I met. And it flowed. And titillated and teased and made me feel. And I didn't like to feel. And I understood Annie Allen to be my mother and I sympathized with her and loved her.  

A plain girl like Annie is elevated to the heroic epic stature. Kent commends the poem's epic-title and "the language which has deep connotations drawn from chivalry, religion, music, nature, general classical tradition, the military and black life."  

Vers libre -- free verse -- is another form which Brooks adopted to break the yoke of tradition. With lines of varying length, free verse is a flexible tool in the hands of Brooks. It helped her to picture on the page a world of unlimited possibilities and encourage budding young poets by saying "Poems do not have to rhyme... Remember that poetry is your Friend!" "In the Mecca" is a long narrative poem in free verse. "Life for my child is simple" is a short poem which

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799 Brooks, quoted in George E.Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture, p.107.

800 Nikki Giovanni, quoted in George E.Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture, p.129.

801 George E.Kent, Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture, p.131.

illustrates Brooks' skill in handling free-flowing free verse. Incidentally, as in Whitman, the line length is related to thought pause. Only in the case of Allen Ginsberg the line length is related to breath pause.

The greatness of a work of art depends on a close and balanced structure, apart from the form. A balanced structure is one in which there is an arrangement and interrelation of all the parts to the whole. A good poem is structured around a textuality around which all the relevant ideas revolve. The parts contribute to the whole or the whole subscribes to the parts. In other words, the contributing ideas act either centripetally or centrifugally. In "In the Mecca," the core concept is the search for the lost child -- Pepita. And Pepita's mother, Mrs. Sally, finding Pepita missing, hurries through the big building with many a turning and corner, aided by her other children. No one has seen Pepita; each has his or her own misery to cope with and hence blind and uncaring to the mother's urgent need of the moment. Finally, Pepita is found murdered under the bed of Jamaican Edward. Structured around the theme of quest, are the lives of individuals who are alienated, and isolated in the midst of people. Alfred serves as a link to unify the structure. He appears every now and then and serves as a chorus and commentator. The whole poem is like a drama with many scenes. The scenes are tightly interlocked. They all converge to point out the unfulfilled and frustrated lives of the occupants of the Mecca.

Brooks uses right words in the right places and achieves clarity, precision and complexity. Mrs. Sally looks at her kitchen after returning from the church service and finds it bad. She wants to decorate it and Brooks
views the kitchen through Mrs. Sallie's eyes:

Now Mrs. Sallie
confers her bird-hat to her kitchen table,
and sees her kitchen. It is bad, is bad,
her eyes say, and My soft antagonist,
her eyes say, and My headlong tax and mote,
her eyes say, and My maniac default,
my least light.
"But all my lights are little!" ...

Mrs. Sallie continues to talk in a paradoxical image which underlines the paradoxical existence of people in the Mecca:

"I want to decorate!" But what is that? A pomade atop a sewage. An offense.
First comes correctness, then embellishment!...

Here, the speaker's thought-process is photographically captured with the help of apt punctuations, which play a definite role in giving an integrated structure to the poem. Again, the capitalized question raised by the mother, "WHERE PEPITA BE?" draws one's attention immediately and intensifies the tone, being embossed against the background.

Furthermore, the poem abounds in imagery, symbolism and figures of speech. The alliterative sounds convey the sense as in the following lines:

Great-great Gram hobbles, fumbles at the knob,
mumbles, "I ain seen no Pepita. But
I remember our cabin....

Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, p.380.
Ibid., p.381.
Ibid., p.387.
One can imagine the hobbling grandmother fumbling, mumbling and remembering her days of slavery. The recurrent bilabial sounds "m" and "b" suggest the act of mumbling and enhance the meaning.

Again, "In the Mecca" achieves unity of structure when the quest ends with the spotting of Pepita's murderer and when the mother decides to "try for roses"; her quest will hereafter be after "roses":

"I touch"--she [Pepita] said once -- "petals of a rose. A silky feeling through me goes!"  
Her mother will try for roses....

A good work of art is governed by perfect organization. In an organic structure, the lines and ideas are positioned coherently. Every subsequent phrase or sentence is born of the earlier one. There are several paradoxes built in a poem, out of which emerges the final one. A perfect example is Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Cleanth Brooks, in his "Keats's Sylvan Historian: History without Footnotes," studies the several paradoxes which lead to the final "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Brooks' "The Lovers of the Poor" is built up and strengthened by several factors such as paradoxes, juxtaposition of positive and negative elements, contrasts, epithets and images. The two White ladies who have come to distribute the "pretty" money collected from "delicate rose-fingers" to the "worthy poor" and the "beautiful poor" in the slum, decide not to give their "loathe-love largesse" when the poor fail to measure up to their expectations. The poetic texture is built with the aid of contrasts between the poor and the wealthy,

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806 Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, p.403.
between the "old" things of the slum and the "homekind oldness" of the ladies' posh dwellings, and paradoxes like "loathe-love largesse," and "mercy and murder hinting" faces of the White ladies. The final lines are charged with grim humour and subtle irony:

... better presently to cater
To no more Possibilities, to get
Away. Perhaps the money can be posted.
Perhaps they two may choose another Slum!
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....

Yet again, one notes the contrast between the "scented bodies" and "the laden air." The hurried exit of the ladies is opposed to their casual arrival in the very beginning:

The Lovers of the Poor

arrive. The Ladies from the Ladies' Betterment League
Arrive in the afternoon, ...

The indented first line, with no initial capital, meant to be read along with the title "The Lovers of the Poor" diminishes the importance of the visitors. On the

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* This bears repetition.

808 Ibid., p.333.
whole, conforming to the rhetorical modes of exposition, narration, description and argumentation, the poem highlights the ladies' insensitivity to the needs of the poor and hypocritical dual nature.

With the form, structure and organization intact, a good piece of crafted art succeeds best only if the "emotion" beneath is best expressed with a felicity of diction, cadence and an appropriate employment of apt symbols, images and figures of speech. Brooks is a stylist specially noted for her forcible and choice diction, sharp, curt and finely-turned phrases, incongruous comparisons, melodious words, rare coinages, juxtapositions, rhetorical devices, black idioms, Biblical idioms, and suggestive language. Zack Gilbert acclaims Brooks thus:

    Queen of your craft, queen
    Of the perfect word and shorthand phrase,...

It is such a word shorthand with a condensed style that one finds in her poems. Her short and epigrammatic style as that of Emily Dickinson is best evidenced in "We Real Cool":

    We real cool. We
    Left school. We
    Lurk late. We
    Strike straight. We
    Sing sin. We
    Thin gin. We
    Jazz June. We
    Die soon....


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

* This bears repetition.
Rarely does one come across such a rhythmic cadence loaded with significance in the field of poetry. The single emotion -- which is about the pathetic plight of the seven pool players -- is filtered and presented in crisp words and telling phrases.

In fact, after her "mind-blowing experience" in 1967 at Fisk University Writers Conference, Brooks deliberately decided to write short poems, -- "rather short because most people in this rushy time are not going to take the time to sit down and read an epic."  

Brooks has a fascination and love for words. Brooks herself acknowledges her interest in word-play:

> Very early in life I became fascinated with the wonders language can achieve. And I began playing with words. That word-play is what I have been known for chiefly....

One can hear the sibilant sounds crowding one after the other in quick succession depicting Mrs. Small, who is in a hurry:

> Leaving her to release her heart  
And dizziness  
And silence her six  
And mix  
Her spices and core  
And slice her apples, and find her four....

812 Brooks, quoted in Black Women Writers at Work, Ed. Claudia Tate, p.47.  
There is alliteration employed in the last stanza of "The Anniad" to capture Annie's reminiscent mood:

Think of almost thoroughly  
Derelict and dim and done.  
Stroking swallows from the sweat.  
Fingering faint violet.  
Hugging old and Sunday sun.  
Kissing in her kitchenette  
The minuets of memory... 814

Some more captivating examples from the abundance of her word-magic are, "that long leaplanguid land,"815 "below the richrough rightime of your hair,"816 "Original. / Ragged-round. / Rich-robust,"817 "I remember my right to roughly run and roar./ My right to raid the sun,"818 "Shot silk is shining,"819 "He never shall sally to Sally / Nor soil any roofs of the town,"820 "Of the holocaust he/Is helmsman, hatchet, headlight"821 and "Her body is like new brown bread ... Receptive, soft and absolute."822 It is to be noted that Brooks is an adept at making the tone and sense of the lines cohere.

818 Brooks, "Riders to the Blood-Red Wrath," in SP, p.117.
820 Brooks, "the ballad of the light-eyed little girl," in WGB, p.106.
Brooks uses vowel sounds adroitly. Similar vowel sounds are juxtaposed to give assonance. Long vowels aid in giving a sweeping movement and in displaying an exhilarated spirit of the girl at the hair dresser's shop, in the following lines:

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GIMME an up sweep, Minnie,
With humpteen baby curls.
'Bout time I got some glamour.
I'll show them girls....
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There is consonance as in the lines that follow where there is the agreement of consonantal sounds:

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The children in ritual chatter
scatter upon
their Own and old geography....
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Again, there is a rich and free play of assonance and consonance which gives the quality of resonance:

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If there are flowers flowers
must come out to the road. Rowdy!--
knowing where wheels and people are,
knowing where whips and screams are,
Knowing where deaths are, where the kind kills are.

As for that other kind of kindness,
if there is milk it must be mindful.
The milk of humankindness must be mindful
as wily wines.
Must be fine fury.
Must be mega, must be main....
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823 Brooks, "at the hair dresser's," in *WGB*, p.37.
825 Brooks, "Young Africans," in *FP*, p.18.
It is interesting to note that inspite of a free play of words, Brooks does not waste a single word. She is highly economical and believes in extracting the maximum possible meaning from a single word. For example, in "The Ballad of Rudolph Reed," the verbs "corroded" and "squeezed" in the lines, "The agent's steep and steady stare / Corroded to a grin,"\textsuperscript{826} and "A neighbor would look, with a yawning eye / That squeezed into a slit"\textsuperscript{827} are aptly deployed to show the change of facial expressions.

Blyden Jackson commends Brooks' concise language and pays a glowing tribute to her craftsmanship:

> Her [Brooks'] craftsmanship is careful. Miss Brooks belongs to the school of writers who do not believe in wasting a single word. Selection and significance -- one can divine in her diction how she has brooded over them, how every word has been chosen with due regard for the several functions it may be called upon to perform in the dispensation of a poem...\textsuperscript{828}*

Paradoxes and oxymorons are amply used by Brooks to give complexity to her poems and also to depict her characters' lives in antithesis to their desires and aspirations. Some of them are "the clear obscure," "the perilously sweet," "A dainty horror," "my beautiful disease," "lovely sadness," "a clear delirium," "wicked grace," "the bolted nomad" and "glad-sad child." Again, Annie is

\textsuperscript{826} Brooks, "The Ballad of Rudolph Reed," in \textit{WGB}, p.361.
\textsuperscript{827} Idem.
\textsuperscript{828} Blyden Jackson, quoted in \textit{Modern Black Writers}, Ed. Michael Popkin, p.102.

* This bears repetition.
"Wanted and unplanned"\textsuperscript{829} simultaneously and Mrs. Sallie finds that to decorate her kitchen in bad state will be "A / pomade atop a sewage."\textsuperscript{830}

Brooks' use of adjective phrases are novel and original: "shy snow," "dull dare," "gentle fright," "bald innocence," "hurt hour," "gray shudder," and "desert death" are some of them. Moreover, she keeps her language ever fresh by drawing freely from the rich wealth of language and coining new words and phrases to serve her purposes. Language serves her and is pliable in her dexterous hands. She either invents new words like "thoroughlize," "livingest," "bigly," "goldly" or compounds new phrases like "knock-down-drag-out fight," "wish-I-weren't Blacks," and "visions of Death-to-the-Hordes-of-the-White-Men!" Compounding helps in creating succinct and terse phrases and words, compressing much thought. This is best evidenced in "Walter Bradford":

\begin{quote}
It's Walter-work, Walter.  
Not overmuch for  
brick-fitter, brick-MAKER, and wave-outwitter;  
whip-stopper.  
Not overmuch for a  
Tree-planting man.\textsuperscript{831}
\end{quote}

Use of repetitions, refrains and parallelisms add charm and give resonance. The poem "throwing out the flowers" which describes what happens after a Thanksgiving dinner, uses alliterative repetitions:

\begin{quote}
The duck fats rot in the roasting pan,  
And it's over and over and all,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{829} Brooks, "the birth in a narrow room," in \textit{WGB}, p.67.
\textsuperscript{830} Brooks, "In the Mecca," in \textit{WGB}, p.380.
The fine fraught smiles, and spites that began
Before it was over and all.

The Thanksgiving praying's away with the silk.
It's over and over and all.
The broccoli, yams and the bead-buttermilk
Are dead with the hail in the hall,
All
Are dead with the hail in the hall....

Brooks is more fond of metaphors than of similes. Metaphors have a direct impact on the reader. Moreover, as Gladys Margaret Williams states, "Metaphor has that quality of immediacy, that absence of contamination that ... does not lead to misunderstanding. Effective metaphor can deal with content that cannot be described." Brooks packs much meaning in her metaphors when she uses "whirlwind" to denote the troubled environment of the Blacks, "lemon" to represent trouble, "oak" to stand for stoic endurance, "steel" to indicate determination, "candles" to mean quest and enlightenment and "whip" to imply slavery and oppression.

Here is a sampling of Brooks' use of "candles" as a striking metaphor: When Big Bessie advises her son to be "A New pioneer of days and ways," she refers to "candles":

Be precise.
With something better than candles in the eyes.
(Candles are not enough.)...

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832 Brooks, "throwing out the flowers," in WGB, p.75.
834 Brooks, "Big Bessie throws her son into the street," in SP, p.127.
The son's "candles" -- the present wisdom and knowledge -- are not enough; he needs more enlightenment in his journey of quest. In fact, Brooks advocates a "physical light that waxes."  

Brooks' metaphors become extended metaphors. They turn into powerful imagery. Brooks draws her images from a variety of sources. They are forcible, evocative and extractive. Sometimes, they are startling too. There are images of halls, doors, streets, flowers, food, plants, birds, animals, blood and so on. Brooks' effective use of imagery can be illustrated with the help of a few examples. In "In the Mecca," the confused and anxious Smiths search for the missing Pepita. With a skilful use of images of halls, doors and flowers, and appropriate diction Brooks draws the isolated and alienated lives of the inhabitants of the Mecca:

In twos!
In threes! Knock-knocking down the martyred halls
at doors behind whose yelling oak or pine
many flowers start, choke, reach up,
want help, get it, do not get it,
rally, bloom, or die on the wasting vine....

In the same poem, the pathetic death of Pepita is given in terms of bird-imagery, which serves to evoke one's sympathy:

She whose little stomach fought the world had
wriggled, like a robin!
Odd were the little wrigglings
and the chopped chirpings oddly rising....

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835 Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, p.393.
836 Ibid., pp.386-387.
* This bears repetition.
837 Ibid., p.403.
Images of slow-burning are recurrently used in Brooks' poems to delineate the slow and on-going martyrdom of the Blacks at a very casual level. In "The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock," the image of burning is used: "While wheat toast burns / A woman waters multiferns." Again, in "In the Mecca," the mother Sallie, during her frantic search for her lost Pepita, says that Pepita is smart, simultaneously remembering and "Knowing the ham hocks are burning at the bottom of the pan."

Befitting her complex nature of writing and the complicated lives of the Blacks, Brooks introduces counter images like those of light and darkness, love and hate, strength and weakness, heat and cold etc. For example, in "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon," the love-hate imagery is forcibly brought out. The husband, "The Fine Prince" and the wife, the "milk-white maid" doubt whether the murder of the "Dark Villain" of fourteen years is really worthwhile. Both feel guilty inwardly. When the husband makes advances of love to his wife in order to appease his guilt, the wife responds with an unspoken hatred, in spite of her efforts to resist it:

He whispered something to her, did the Fine Prince, something About love, something about love and night and intention.

She heard no hoof-beat of the horse and saw no flash of the shining steel.

He pulled her face around to meet, His, and there it was, close close, For the first time in all those days and nights.


839 Brooks, "In the Mecca," in WGB, p.389.
Incidentally, in a Whitmanesque manner, images tend to grow into symbols in the
poetry of Brooks. For example, the "robin" which wriggled and died -- Pepita --
grows into a symbol of innocence. Again, the recurrent images of the alleys,
stairways, streets, tracks, doors and halls symbolize the mazy and labyrinthine
path of the Black man. For instance, Brooks' persona Annie suggests to the
Black and White people who are "lost," to "wizard a track" through the
"screaming weed":

. . . Rise.
Let us combine. There are no magics or elves
Or timely godmothers to guide us. We are lost, must
Wizard a track through our own screaming weed....

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840 Brooks, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a
Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon," in WGB, pp.322-323.

841 Harry B. Shaw, Gwendolyn Brooks, pp.94-130.

842 Brooks, "Men of careful turns, haters of forks in the road," in WGB,
p.124.
Brooks wields many other symbols ingeniously. The frontyard and the backyard symbolically represent the restrictions imposed on women, as in "a song in the frontyard." Even the names of the characters are symbolic and representative. Mrs.Small's name is suggestive of the confined and limited world in which she dwells and executes things and Mrs.Miles typifies the social distance she maintains between herself and her Black maid.

Colours become significant in Brooks' hands. She brings in red, yellow, brown and black in different contexts. She is particularly interested in the colour grey. She associates it with frustrations and monotony. In "kitchenette building," she refers that the occupants are "grayed in and gray." Again, she uses it in Maud Martha. Maud Martha's home -- the kitchenette -- is plagued with roaches and she becomes painfully aware of an oddness about that place:

She was becoming aware of an oddness in color and sound and smell about her.... The color was gray, and the smell and sound had taken on a suggestion of the properties of color, and impressed one as gray, too. The sobbings, the frustrations, the small hates, the large and ugly hates... that came to her from behind those walls ... via speech and scream and sigh -- all these were gray.
There was a whole lot of grayness here...  

Brooks' poems are marked by a gentle and sympathetic irony. There is no bitterness attached. She subtly throws light on the follies and foibles of the Whites as in "The Lovers of the Poor." She does not spare the preacher with his lecherous intentions towards a lady in the first pew, in "obituary for a living lady":

And wonders as his stomach breaks up
into fire and lights
How long it will be
Before he can, with reasonably slight risk of rebuke,
put his hand on her knee....

Again, in "In Montgomery," irony is prominent and effectively employed:

In Montgomery is no Race Problem.
There is the white decision, the white and pleasant vow
that the white foot shall not release
the black neck....

All these schemes and tropes are couched and concealed in Brooks' poetry to make it great art; the greatest art is one in which the form and content are beautifully blended. The artist marries one to the other without sacrificing one for the other. The form itself communicates the message, even before the reader reads and understands. Walt Whitman's Passage to India is a good example of expressive form which communicates the message even before it is understood. Like Hopkins' "Windhover," Brooks' "Malcolm X" by its pattern, frame, rhythm and diction achieves a uniqueness. As Melhem points out, "On the page, the poem takes the wedgelike shape of a bird, birds in flight, or a wing." Again, in "the birth in a narrow room," as Melhem observes, the third line is indented and contracted like a birth contraction.

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847 Ibid., p.57.
Weeps out of western country something new.
Blurred and stupendous. Wanted and unplanned.
Wink. Twines, and weakly winks
Upon the milk-glass fruit bowl, iron pot,
The bashful china child tipping forever
Yellow apron and spilling pretty cherries....

The third line, with its alliterative "w," also signifies the baby-cries of a new born baby.

In "the old marrieds," the first and last line are the same--"But in the crowding darkness not a word did they say" -- to give a cyclic quality; the life of the old marrieds goes on endlessly with no variation or change:

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....

Brooks uses long lines and short lines alternately. She explains it with reference to her poem "To a Winter Squirrel" and says that she is attracted to mix "long lines] with rather short ones that get an idea across with a sudden impact." Yet

848 Brooks, "the birth in a narrow room," in WGB, p.67.
849 Brooks, "the old marrieds," in WGB, p.3.
* This bears repetition.
850 Brooks, quoted in George E.Kent, A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks, p.166.
again, the alternation of short lines with long lines is for musicalness and musicality of ideas.

Brooks compresses words together without leaving space as in the lines "A drumdrumdrum. / Humbly we come."\(^{851}\) This technique gives an economical style. In this particular example it adds musicality and a subdued march-rhythm.

Again, Brooks resorts to this technique of compression in "Boys. Black":

\[
\text{Although you know} \\
\text{so little of that long leaplanguid land,} \\
\text{our tiny union} \\
\text{is the dwarfmagnificent.} \\
\text{Is the busysimple thing....}^{852}\]

The words "leaplanguid," "dwarfmagnificent" and "busysimple" not only accentuate the progress of the Black boys but also emphasize the "tiny union" that is advocated in the lines.

Sometimes Brooks deliberately leaves a space as in the line, "The step / Of iron feet again. And again wild"\(^{853}\) Here, this device helps in giving a short pause. In this particular context, the soldier, listening to the step of iron feet, is ready to jump wildly into action once again. The space "suggests a leap across an abyss,..."\(^{854}\)

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\(^{853}\) Brooks, "the progress," in WGB, p.59.  
* This bears repetition.
Punctuations also help in comprehending the content. Brooks uses full stops almost after every word to urge the Black boys towards action. The urgency can be "seen" and felt simultaneously:

Boys. Black. Black Boys.
Up, boys. Boys black. Black boys....\textsuperscript{855}

Mrs. Small's lack of concentration and dilemma -- whether to attend on the insurance man or to attend to the needs of her home -- is well captured in the following lines, with full stops almost after every word:

Mrs. Small went to the kitchen for her pocketbook
And came back to the living room with
a peculiar look
And the coffee pot.
Pocketbook. Pot.
Pot. Pocketbook....\textsuperscript{856}

Her peculiar look can be "seen" on the page, with the alternating words "pot" and "pocketbook."

Sometimes Brooks drops punctuations deliberately to give a quick motion on the page:

No child has defiled
the Heroes of this Wall this serious Appointment
this still Wing
this Scald this Flute this heavy Light this Hinge....\textsuperscript{857}

\textsuperscript{855} Brooks, "Boys. Black," in Beckonings, p.15.
\textsuperscript{856} Brooks, "Mrs. Small," in WGB, p.325.
Thus, with an excellent fusion of form and content, Brooks' poems achieve artistic unity. She uses techniques consciously in an insinuating manner. She feels that "The Negro poet's most urgent duty, at present is to polish his technique, his way of presenting his truths, and his beauties, that these may be more insinuating, and therefore more overwhelming." It is such suggestiveness which makes her work great. She expects the raw dough of experience to be cooked into art: "You have got to cook that dough, alter it, until it is unrecognizable. Then the mob ... will eat, enjoy and prosper."

As a post-modern writer, Brooks expects the reader to do some work on his part. She advises young poets thus: "Your poem does not need to tell your reader everything. A little mystery is fascinating. Too much is irritating." She further advises the budding poets to allow the reader to do some digging on his part: "Try telling the reader a little less. He'll, She'll love you more, if you allow him to do a little digging. Not too much, but some."

Naturally, Brooks' poems lend themselves to a good analysis and synthesis. The reader has to dig deep to get her intended meaning. Her poems can be analysed, based on the theory of Dramatic Pentad by Kenneth Burke. "The Boy Died in My Alley," which is dramatic in nature, can be studied and analysed in this light. It is

858 Brooks, quoted in George E.Kent, A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks, p.195.
859 Idem.
860 Ibid., p.235.
861 Idem.
dedicated "to Running Boy." The five ideas--the action, the agent of the action, the scene of action, the means employed and the argumentation -- can be traced in the poem, which is given below in full:

The Boy died in my alley
without my Having Known.
Policeman said, next morning,
"Apparently died Alone."

"You heard a shot?" Policeman said.
Shots I hear and Shots I hear.
I never see the Dead.

The Shot that killed him yes I heard
as I heard the Thousand shots before;
careening tinnily down the nights
across my years and arteries.

Policeman pounded on my door.
"Who is it?" "POLICE!" Policeman yelled.
"A Boy was dying in your alley.
A Boy is dead, and in your alley.
And have you known this Boy before?"

I have known this Boy before.
I have known this Boy before, who
ornaments my alley.
I never saw his face at all.
I never saw his futurefall.
but I have known this Boy.

I have always heard him deal with death.
I have always heard the shout, the volley.
I have closed my heart-ears late and early.
And I have killed him ever.

I joined the Wild and Killed him
with knowledgeable unknowing.
I saw where he was going.
I saw him Crossed. And seeing,
I did not take him down.

He cried not only "Father!"
but "Mother!
Sister!
Brother."
The cry climbed up the alley.
It went up to the wind.
It hung upon the heaven
for a long
stretch-strain of Moment.

The red floor of my alley
is a special speech to me....  

By action, one means something more than the mere killing of a running boy. It means the root cause or the emotion behind the event. Brooks will not see anything superficially. Anything that she writes arises from a concern about Blacks. Once, walking down a road in Ghana, Brooks and her husband saw a happy running boy. While her husband viewed him just as a "running boy-happy, happy running boy," Brooks had a penetrating and different view about the boy:

... if you wrote exhaustively about running boy and you noticed that the boy was black, you would have to go further than a celebration of blissful youth. You just might consider that when a black boy runs, may be in Ghana, but perhaps on the Chicago South Side, you'd have to remember a certain friend of my daughter's in high school -- beautiful boy, so smart, one of the honor students, and just an all round fine young fellow. He was running down an alley with a friend of his, just running and a policeman said "Halt!" And before he could slow up his steps, he just shot him. Now that happens all the time in Chicago. There was all that promise in a little crumpled heap. Dead forever. So I would have to think about that in a poem I was writing about a running boy....

The outward action of the killing of the boy sprung from the artist's inward emotional response to a running boy. The capitalized "Boy" represents every Black boy whose life is in jeopardy.

862 Brooks, "The Boy Died in My Alley," in Beckonings, pp.5-6.
The agent of the action is not mentioned but is understood. It must be the White man who has been a threat to the lives of Blacks all along. The scene of action is in the alley, where the speaker dwells. The action and its consequences are highlighted by several means; the dramatic devices like dialogue and aside and other tools like repetitions, metaphor, irony and capitalization are aptly employed to bring out the intended effect. Brooks' skill is displayed in oxymorons like "knowledgeable unknowing." The final argumentation is condensed, pithy and thought provoking: "The red floor of my alley / is a special speech to me." It bespeaks one's responsibility over one's neighbour and fellowman. It also avers a commitment and dedication. It has Biblical overtones in the sense that one should love one's neighbour as himself. In this context, it is reminiscent of the question, "Who is my neighbour?" directed to Jesus Christ and the subsequent narration of the parable of the Good Samaritan by Jesus Christ.  

In the same poem, one detects the perfect pyramid-like structure, which reaches its zenith when the Black boy's cries reach up the alley and to the speaker's heart-ears, and then comes the denouement in the last two lines.

On the whole, Brooks is a great artist and stylist in the post-modernist trend and she has earned a unique reputation of her own.

Langston Hughes, who is unanimously accorded and acclaimed as the "Dean of Black Letters" and the poet laureate of Harlem, is a skilled craftsman like Brooks. With Hughes, poetry is a powerful vehicle to explain and illuminate the Blacks'
condition in America. He bends poetry to serve his purpose with an admirable technical excellence. Thematically, the poems of Brooks and Hughes are the same; technically, they differ a little because both are creative and original to the core. In fact, Hughes is Brooks' mentor and model. While Brooks is more gifted in writing complex and difficult poems which appeal to intellectuals, Hughes is more talented in writing simple and direct poems which can easily charm the commoner. But then the greatest strength of Langston Hughes' poems lies in their Whitmanesque indirection and suggestiveness. Though Brooks expresses her wish to reach out to those who are in the inns and taverns through her poetry, she cannot help being difficult and demanding in most of her works. On the other hand, Hughes cannot help being simple and lighthearted even while presenting profound themes, in most of his works.

Hughes is an able artist who knows his art. His poetry is marked by a good form, close structure, organization, apt language, appropriate figures of speech, the usual charms of poetry and a rare combination of form and content as that of Brooks.

Hughes tries his hand at various forms of poetry like lyrics, ballads, blues and jazz. He excels in whatever form he handles and makes it suit his purposes. Hughes is a fine lyricist, who pours his intense and exuberant emotions into simple, short lyrics. The lyrical form, with its smooth, regular rhythm and exuberance befits in every way the nature of Hughes. Though apparently simple, they are immensely difficult to write, involving much cerebration. They are, in short, deceptively simple. They bear the conventional charms of poetry, which
are introduced very naturally. Some of the outstanding lyrics are "When Sue Wears Red," "The Negro speaks of Rivers," "Dream Variations," "Daybreak in Alabama," "Ardella" and "Danse Africaine." All these poems are enthusiastic celebrations of love and life. One can feel the rhythmic cadence and the whirling movement of the dance in "Danse Africaine":

The low beating of the tom-toms,
The slow beating of the tom-toms,
  Low ... slow
  Slow ... low
  Stirs your blood.
  Dance!
A night veiled girl
  Whirls softly into a
  Circle of light.
  Whirls softly ... slowly,
Like a wisp of smoke around the fire --
  And the tom-toms beat,
  And the tom-toms beat,
And the beating of the tom-toms
  Stirs your blood....

The rhyming "low" and "slow" along with the repetitive "tom-toms" adds musicality and charm to the poem. With the night-veiled girl as the central figure, the light and music encircling her, one can feel the "stir" of blood. The whirling, circular and rhythmic movement of the dance is rendered effective by the use of the relevant words like whirl, stir, circle and smoke and the apt simile, "a wisp of smoke around the fire." In short, the poem measures up to Hughes' definition of poetry given below:

Poetry is rhythm.... The rhythms of poetry give continuity and pattern to words, to thoughts, strengthening them, adding the qualities of permanence and relating the written word to the vast rhythms of life ....

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865 Hughes, "Danse Africaine," in SPLH, p.7.
Hughes' ballads conform to the common ballad features. He has written quite a number of ballads based on the usual ballad themes like love, violence and superstition. A typical example is "Ballad of the Land Lord." The story is that the land lord gives eviction orders when the tenant requests the house to be fixed up before he pays the rent. As opposed to the humble, "Landlord, landlord" of the tenant, the landlord's frenzied, "Police! Police!" helps to contrast the emotional reactions of both. The poem's strict ballad form in the first five stanzas gets upset with the onset of the cry "Police! Police!" The lines thereafter get irregular in length and rhyme. The short, curt phrases denote the quick action taken against the innocent tenant. Thus Hughes is innovative in the sense that he mixes ballad-form and free verse and renders the story real.

Dramatic monologue is another form which Hughes uses in his crafted art, as in "The Negro Mother" and "Mother to Son." The mother is the speaker in both the poems and the son is the silent listener. This form befits the content -- advice of the mother to her son and other children.

Hughes' craftsmanship is particularly revealed in his skilful handling of Black musical forms like the blues, spirituals, gospels, sermons and jazz. The "Glory Hallelujah" section of poems contain many devotional songs, spirituals, gospels and sermons. "Feet o' Jesus," "Fire," "Sunday Morning Prophecy," "Sinner," "Prayer Meeting," "Spirituals" and "Tambourines" are marked by devotion and piety. These forms help in giving an outlet to the pent up sorrows. Hughes gives these poems musicality and folk flavour.
More than any other form, Hughes wields the blues form very effectively. If Brooks has mastered the sonnet form and been innovative with it, Hughes does the same with blues form and experiments with it. The "sad funny songs-- too sad to be funny and too funny to be sad," born out of heartache, helped Hughes to best fulfil his aim: to illuminate the Blacks' condition in America. As Jemie states, "Blues is central to his artistic vision; the blues outlook of stoic endurance, and its style of understatement and ironic humour, suffuses not only his poetry but his prose and drama as well."

Most of Hughes' blues are in the strict and accepted pattern -- a three-lined verse, with the second line repeating the first and the third line rhyming with the first two lines. Sometimes the second line is slightly altered. Hughes breaks each line into two for the sake of convenience, on the printed page. The "Po' Boy Blues" is a perfect example, from which the following lines are quoted:

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North de
Whole wide world's turned cold.

I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong,
But this world is weary
An' de road is hard an' long....

867 Hughes, "Songs called the Blues," in LHR, p.159.
868 Onwuchekwa Jemie, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry, p.54.
869 Hughes, "Po' Boy Blues," in DK,p.44.
Here, the poor boy who has migrated to the North with much expectation is disappointed and as a result, feels blue and weary. And as stated earlier, in the second stanza, the first line is repeated with a slight alteration in the second line. The tone of the poem is melancholic and it can be perceived by the repetitive lines.

Hughes changes the format of the blues to his convenience. Instead of repeating the first line, he repeats the second line with a slight variation as in "Southern Mammy Sings" and thus asserts his originality and ingenuity:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Not meanin' to be sassy} \\
\text{And not meanin' to be smart --} \\
\text{But sometimes I think that white folks} \\
\text{Just ain't got no heart.} \\
\text{No, m'am!} \\
\text{just ain't got no heart...}^{870}
\end{align*}
\]

Blues poems are uniquely noted for a subtle fusion of incongruous humour, irony and sorrow. Hughes defines it as a mixture of ironic laughter and tears. There is a clever understatement covered by a comic outside. There are several examples of this sort in Hughes' poetry. In the "Evenin' Air Blues," the speaker who has come up to the North is disappointed and hungry, yet witty:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{This mornin' for breakfast} \\
\text{I chawed de mornin' air.} \\
\text{This mornin' for breakfast} \\
\text{Chawed de mornin' air.} \\
\text{But this evenin' for supper,} \\
\text{I got evenin' air to spare.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But if you was to ask me} \\
\text{How de blues they come to be,} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[^{870}\text{Hughes, "Southern Mammy Sings," in SPLH, p.162.}\]
Says if you was to ask me
How de blues they come to be --
You wouldn't need to ask me:
Just look at me and see!...871

Hughes achieves such a fine fusion of emotions by an efficient and effective use of Black vernacular. Again, this fusion includes an optimistic note to keep living, that permeates the blues as in the following lines:

Goin' down to de railroad,
Lay my head on de track,
I'm goin' to de railroad,
Lay my head on de track --
But if I see de train a comin'
I'm gonna jerk it back!...872

Not only did Hughes subject the blues to technical treatment and popularize them but also experimented with the poetic use of jazz. Hughes articulates why he writes so many jazz poems in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain":

...jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul -- the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile....873

As Hughes himself states, jazz serves to let out one's rebellious thoughts, frustrations and weariness. While the blues are sober and subdued in tone and mood, the jazz is characterized by energetic, bouncy and broken rhythms,

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872 Hughes, "Songs Called the Blues," in LHR, p.160.
colloquial and spontaneous expressions. Again, unlike the blues, the jazz poems have no rigid form. It is in vers libre. A typical example of jazz is Hughes' Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods For Jazz. The poem is unique in its complexity, structure, music and symbolic imagery among the writings of Hughes. The poem expresses the artist's ideas and thoughts as they come to his mind, without inhibitions. This technique of free association of ideas is yet again unique. Jemie observes that "Ask Your Mama is an avant-garde experiment ... Chiefly as a result of its total immersion in free association, there is a distinct 'disorganization' about Ask Your Mama. Compared to the electric clarity of his other books, Ask Your Mama is Hughes's one and only difficult book. It is his sop to academia, his answer to those readers who demand complex surfaces to puzzle over."^874

The recurring refrain "ASK YOUR MAMA" is given as an answer to the many questions asked, in the course of the poem:

AND THEY ASKED ME RIGHT AT CHRISTMAS
IF MY BLACKNESS, WOULD IT RUB OFF?
I SAID, ASK YOUR MAMA...^875

YET THEY ASKED ME OUT ON MY PATIO
WHERE DID I GET MY MONEY!
I SAID, FROM YOUR MAMA!...^876

The retort "ASK YOUR MAMA" or "FROM YOUR MAMA" is curt, elusive and insolent, snubbing the White questioner.

^874 Onwuchekwa Jemie, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry, p.81.

^875 Hughes, AYM, p.8.

^876 Ibid., p.43.
Hughes handles the Black themes like poverty, frustrations, threats of violence, struggles, and paradoxical and harsh actualities of life deftly in his Ask Your Mama. The language reflects this:

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
ANSWER QUESTIONS ANSWER
AND ANSWERS WITH A QUESTION....

This word play is like that of Brooks and the lines are written to fit the jazz instrumental rhythm as in the following lines:

DE --
DELIGHT --
DELIGHTED! INTRODUCE ME TO EARTHA....

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES
WHERE NEGROES SING SO WELL
NEGROES SING SO WELL
SING SO WELL
SO WELL?
WELL?...

The structure is beautiful and meaningful. "Delight" is increased from line to line. Singing "so well" gets decreased into the final "well" which turns into a question. Commenting on this technique of dropping words one by one, James Emanuel says, "Hughes plays with a phrase as if it were a ball to dribble."

In brief, Hughes excels in whatever form he touches -- be it strict metrical composition or vers libre with loose rhythm. Apart from form, his poems have a

877 Hughes, AYM, p.20.
878 Ibid., p.69.
879 Ibid., p.19.
880 James A. Emanuel, Langston Hughes, p.165.
good and perfect structure. The central textuality gives a poem a purpose-sense. It is around this core idea that the details which contribute to its development are built. In Hughes' "Christ in Alabama," "nigger Christ" is the central concept. "Nigger" does not merely denote a superficial identification of the Black man with Christ, but the Christ whom Hughes visualizes is someone different from the Whites' Christ. He will be a greater protector, healer and lover, exclusively for the Blacks. This is the central thought of the poem.

Again, in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "soul" is the key-word. Crossing the Mississippi by train as a boy, Hughes was charmed by the sunset turning the muddy water into golden and wrote this poem. His conviction about the Black man's profound soul glitters in the poem:

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers....


This bears repetition.
The Black man's soul is as ancient as the Euphrates, which is one of the four rivers in the garden of Eden.\textsuperscript{882} The river which is ever deepening, singing, lulling and transforming (the muddy water into golden) is analogous to the Black man's profound soul. The refrains "I've known rivers" and "My soul has grown deep like the rivers" link and unify the poetic ideas and strengthen the same. The imagery of the muddy bosom turning all golden not only enriches the central idea but also strikes an optimistic note of transformation. Furthermore, it is reminiscent of the line "Trouble / Mellows to a golden note"\textsuperscript{883} in Hughes' "Trumpet Player." Hughes' conviction about the Black man's trouble mellowing into gold is revealed in the imagery. This is yet again reminiscent of the patriarch Job's words of faith: "...when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."\textsuperscript{884} In this context, Hughes is sure that he who survived down through the centuries can survive his present lot in America too. Thus, the poem is woven around the profound word "soul" and it has a tight and well-knit structure.

There is perfect organization and coherence of thought in Hughes' poems. Most of Hughes' poems, with the characteristic lucid flow of thoughts, end in thought-provoking questions. The colored child at a carnival raises a question which has no answer:

\begin{quote}
Down South on the train
There's a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we're put in the back --
But there ain't no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where's the horse
For a kid that's black?...\textsuperscript{885}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{882} The Bible, \textit{Genesis}, 2:14.

\textsuperscript{883} Hughes, "Trumpet Player," in \textit{SPLH}, p.115.

\textsuperscript{884} The Bible, \textit{Job}, 23:10.

\textsuperscript{885} Hughes, "Merry-Go-Round," in \textit{SPLH}, p.194.
Again, in "Reverie on the Harlem River," the speaker, going down to the river all alone in the midnight, overcome by despondency says, "Lawd, I wish I could die -- / But who would miss me if I left."886

The fact that Hughes' poems are built up with a good organic structure can be illustrated with yet another poem, "Harlem":

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?...887 *

The poem begins with a question which is often asked by a Black man. Then follow a volley of questions which are the possible answers for the first question. All the questions except the first one can only be answered with a "yes" or "no." The organic structure is such that the whole poem is built up by several questions with unusual similes and all these are incongruous images. In Hughes' dexterous hands these inconsistent images do find a linking thread. These images of drying, festering, rotting, stinking and sagging have negative connotations of destruction

886  Hughes, "Reverie on the Harlem River," in SPLH, p.42.
887  Hughes, "Harlem," in SPLH, p. 268.
*  This bears repetition.
and decay. They are all passive actions as opposed to the final "explode." The tone of the poem is slowly built up to a crescendo until "stink(ing) like rotten meat," and there is a momentary lull in the "sagging" before it is finally expected to explode. The explosion, when it comes, will not be passive like the other actions but will be violent and devastating. Thus, the poem which begins in a subdued and resigned tone ends in a tone of warning; and the final question is more than a mere question; it becomes a statement of ultimatum.

"Kid in the Park" is yet another poem wherein one detects such an organization. The lonely kid with no home of his own, sees that the people, birds and even inanimate things as the aeroplanes do have a destination. He hopefully waits for his home which is "just around the corner":

Lonely little question mark  
on a bench in the park:

See the people passing by?  
See the airplanes in the sky?  
See the birds  
  flying home  
  before  
  dark?

Home's just around  
  the corner  
  there --  
  but not really  
  anywhere...  

It is the final denouement that enriches and strengthens the organic structure in the foregoing lines. Thus, Hughes is able to pin down a simple situation, draw the reader's attention and render organic beauty and clarity to it.

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With due respect to form, structure and organization, Hughes has written a number of short poems. In fact, he has written more number of short poems than Brooks. One detects Brooks' complexity, variety and epigrammatic style in his poetry, but it is presented in all simplicity. There is a touch of ease and lightheartedness attached to his works so much so he gives an impression that his poems simply flowed through his pen. Nancy Cunard regards Hughes in this light:

One of the main characteristics of Langston Hughes is ease -- both of manner and of mind. The impression of one who skates over the difficulties with grace and with tact. But this charm of manner does not signify that Langston is not very much all there....

Hughes is a great creationist and stylist who knows his art. His poems abide by the definition of poetry which he himself gives: "A poem I think, should be the distilled essence of an emotion -- the shorter the better." This idea is actually echoed later in Brooks' definition of poetry:

Think of life as a rough powder that you pour through a sieve. Well, the finest part of it that comes through will be the poetry. Poetry is a concentration; you can get the essence of a novel into a short poem....

Hughes distils his emotions into short, pointed and compact poems. It can be as simple as a sentence:

I wish the rent
Was heaven sent....

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889 Nancy Cunard, quoted in "Three Negro Poets," CELH, pp.94-95.
890 Hughes, quoted in James A. Emanuel, Langston Hughes, p.127.
892 Hughes, "Little Lyric," in SPLH, p.127.
Or a jotting of a momentary compact emotion:

It's such a
Bore
Being always
Poor....

Or capturing the significance of life in a nutshell:

Folks, I'm telling you,
birthing is hard
and dying is mean --
so get yourself
a little loving
in between....

Or a casual expression on death:

Tell all my mourners
To mourn in red --
Cause there ain't no sense
In my bein' dead....

In these poems, melancholy and dejection are obviously felt. They touch the very depth of the problem. Hughes can strike straight at the reader's heart. A mingling of pathos and a streak of humour elevates the quality and artistry of the poems. The reader captures the surfacing emotion, and is quite unaware of the labour behind. Thus, Hughes' poetry gains the reputation of being concealed art. Like Brooks, Hughes has developed a unique poetic diction of his own. Wallace

893 Hughes, "Ennui," in SPLH, p.131.
Thurman's observation serves to exemplify this:

He [Hughes] has borrowed the lingo and locutions of migratory workers, chamber-maids, porters, boot-blacks, and others, and woven them into rhythmic schemes borrowed from the blues songs, spirituals and jazz and with them created a poetic diction and a poetic form all his own....

Hughes can play with a phrase or a word as Brooks does, but he does not do it as often as Brooks. He displays this talent particularly in his Ask Your Mama. One hears an echo of words as in the following lines:

GRANDPA, DID YOU HEAR THE
HEAR THE OLD FOLKS SAY HOW
HOW TALL HOW TALL THE CANE GREW
SAY HOW WHITE THE COTTON COTTON
SPEAK OF RICE DOWN IN THE MARSHLAND....

If Hughes plays with words, it is because, in the words of Brooks, he "is merry glory." His diction is lively and energetic, throbbing with life and pulsating with sympathetic love. He plays with the word "HEY" in the following lines:

I can HEY on water
Same as I can HEY-HEY on beer.
HEY on water
Same as I can HEY-HEY on beer.
But if you gimme good corn whisky
I can HEY-HEY-HEY -- and cheer!...

---

896 Wallace Thurman, quoted in Modern Black Writers, Ed. Michael Popkin, p.231.
897 Hughes, AYM, p.71.
In "Old Walt" Hughes exhibits his skill in manipulating with words:

Old Walt Whitman  
Went finding and seeking.  
Finding less than sought  
Seeking more than found,  
Every detail minding  
Of the seeking or the finding.

Pleasured equally  
In seeking as in finding,  
Each detail minding,  
Old Walt went seeking  
And finding....

In these lines, the multiple use of the words "seek" and "find" is exquisitely wrought. Hughes alliterates freely and uses assonance and consonance to give a sonorous and musical quality as in the lines taken from Ask Your Mama:

IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES  
WHERE THE DOORS ARE DOORS OF PAPER  
DUST OF DINGY ATOMS  
BLOWS A SCRATCHY SOUND.  
AMORPHOUS JACK-O'-LANTEENS CAPER  
AND THE WIND WON'T WAIT FOR MIDNIGHT  
FOR FUN TO BLOW DOORS DOWN.  
BY THE RIVER AND THE RAILROAD  
WITH FLUID FAR-OFF GOING  
BOUNDARIES BIND UNBINDING  
A WHIRL OF WHISTLES BLOWING  
NO TRAINS OR STEAMBOATS GOING --  
YET LEONTYNE'S UNPACKING....

If Brooks' poetry is marked by scores of alliterative sounds, Hughes' poetry is characterized by scores of repetitions and refrains as in his blues, jazz and other musical forms.

900 Hughes, "Old Walt," in SPLH, p.100.
901 Hughes, AYM, pp.3-4.
Hughes coins words and phrases for the sake of poetic convenience and compression. Some of them are "star-dust," "dream-dust," "nigger joy," "nigger night," "son-of-a-gun" and so on. He compresses and merges the names of the founders of Negritude as in the following line:

ALIOUNE AIME SEDAR SIPS HIS NEGRITUDE....

This blending symbolically stands for Black solidarity and Black strength, born out of Black unity.

Cataloging as a technique has been often employed by Hughes, to present the manifold powers and diverse abilities of the Blacks. He lists a number of names in *Ask Your Mama* and "Final Call." He enumerates Blacks from different walks of life, calling them "My People" as in "Laughers." Again, he catalogues a "spectrum" of rainbow colours of Harlem girls and exclaims "All those sweet colors / Flavor Harlem of mine!"

In addition to these technicalities, Hughes masterfully handles figures of speech, imagery, satire, humour and symbolism like Brooks. In Hughes' artistic hands life is a baggage, as in "One Way Ticket," "Stars are great drops / Of golden dew," the sea is a stretch of sorrow, Justice is a blind goddess with two festering sores as her eyes, the Black's face is like a chocolate bar, or a jack-o'lantern, the gypsy melodies are rockets of joy dimmed too soon, "Day / Became

902 Hughes, *AYM*, p.70.
904 Hughes, "Harlem Night Song," in *SPLH*, 61.
the bright ball of light / For us to play with, / Sunset / A yellow curtain,/ Night / A velvet screen,"^905 and the troubled woman is like a wind-blown autumn flower.

Hughes' imagery is highly imaginative and striking. They are sketchy as well as pithy in detail, and evocative in power. His poems on nature and other nonracial poems abound in images. Hughes finds "Joy" an accomplice of the butcher:

I went to look for Joy,  
Slim, dancing Joy,  
Gay, laughing Joy,  
Bright-eyed Joy --  
And I found her  
Driving the butcher's cart  
In the arms of the butcher boy!  
Such company, such company,  
As keeps this young nymph, Joy!... ^906

"March Moon" is an artistic poem with imagistic precision:

The moon is naked.  
The wind has undressed the moon.  
The wind has blown all the cloud-garments  
Off the body of the moon  
And now she's naked,  
Stark naked.  

But why don't you blush,  
O shameless moon?  
Don't you know  
It isn't nice to be naked?... ^907

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^905 Hughes, "Fulfilment," in SPLH, p.63.  
^906 Hughes, "Joy," in SPLH, p.57.  
^907 Hughes, "March Moon," in SPLH, p.60.
In "Drum," one detects death-imagery, which is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson:

Bear in mind
That death is a drum
Beating forever
Till the last worms come
To answer its call,
Till the last stars fall,
Until the last atom
Is no atom at all,
Until time is lost
And there is no air
And space itself
Is nothing nowhere,
Death is a drum,
A signal drum,
Calling life
To come!
Come!
Come!...

The lines get shorter towards the end and trail off to signify the dying breath. Like Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes employs an image -- drum -- which is close to the heart of the Black. Yet again, like Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes' human ingenuity fails to project the picture of the point of death and thereafter. But then, as in Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes' faith in the life after death is strong and abiding.

Like Brooks' blood-imagery, Hughes' imagery in the following lines is startling and unusual:

God having a hemorrhage,
Blood coughed across the sky,
Staining the dark sea red:
That is sunset in the Caribbean....

---

908 Hughes, "Drum," in SPLH, p.87.
Hughes' poems, like those of Brooks, are shot through with mild irony and satire. In the "Ballad of the Man Who's Gone," Hughes narrates how the wife of the deceased collected money and had the husband's funeral grand. He ends it up saying, "I wonder what makes / A funeral so high / A poor man ain't got / No business to die." Satire is used as a device to hold up to ridicule the clergyman's greed in "Sunday Morning Prophecy." After dramatically giving the details of the Judgment Day, the minister says the following:

Come into the church this morning,
Brothers and Sisters,
And be saved --
' And give freely
In the collection basket
That I who am thy shepherd
Might live.

Amen!...

In "Ruby Brown," Hughes satirizes the Whites who pay Ruby more for her yielding to their desires, than for her honest work in their kitchens. Also, there is a hit at the "good church folk":

Now the streets down by the river
Know more about this pretty Ruby Brown,

The good church folk do not mention
Her name any more.

But the white men,
Habitués of the high shuttered houses,
Pay more money to her now
Than they ever did before,
When she worked in their kitchens....

---

911 Hughes, "Sunday Morning Prophecy," in SPLH, p.22.
912 Hughes, "Ruby Brown," in SPLH, p.166.
Humour is the most powerful weapon in Hughes' hands, to comment on the Black life in America. Humour is inborn in Hughes and he holds that it is part of humanity, naturally given to man. It helps him to see the seamy side of life with sympathy and lightheartedness. Hughes deploys black humour or underground humour, by which a suffering self conceals suffering and gives an appearance of being happy: "Within --/ The beaten pride. / Without -- / The grinning face"[^1] is the image of the suffering Black. He swallows his pain in a smile and laughs outwardly. Hughes uses this capacity of the Black, to help him overcome his problems and rise above them. In "Hope," Hughes captures the pity of the Blacks' lives:

He rose up on his dying bed  
and asked for fish.  
His wife looked it up in her dream book  
and played it....[^2]

In "Midnight Raffle," the man who lost his nickel in the raffle regrets his loss but overcomes it by taking it in a humorous vein:

I lost my nickel.  
I lost my time.  
I got back home  
Without a dime.  

My bread wasn't buttered  
On neither side....[^3]

[^1]: Hughes, "Uncle Tom," in SPLH, p.168.  
The sorrowful widow's remark when her husband is buried is laden with pathetic laughter:

When they put you in the ground and  
They throw dirt in your face,  
I say put you in the ground and  
Throw dirt in your face,  
That's one time, pretty papa,  
You'll sure stay in your place....

The man who is "too blue," even at the point of being desperate unto death, surfaces his speech with mild humour:

What shall I do?  
What shall I say?  
Shall I take a gun  
And put myself away?  
I wonder if  
One bullet would do?  
As hard as my head is,  
It would probably take two.  
But I ain't got  
Neither bullet nor gun --  
And I'm too blue  
To look for one....

Symbolism is aptly introduced and subtly employed in Hughes' works. It elevates his style of writing. According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, "An 'image' may be invoked once as a metaphor, but if it persistently recurs, both as presentation and representation, it becomes a symbol, may even become part of a symbolic (or mythic) system." With Hughes, the recurrent images of sunny

916 Hughes, "Widow Woman," in SPLH, p.139.  
917 Hughes, "Too Blue," in One Way Ticket, p.102.  
Africa and dense African jungles which have always stood for freedom grow into symbolic stature and significance. In "Final Call," Hughes lists a number of people to be sent for, to pipe the rats away from America. Like Brooks' symbolic use of rats and roaches to signify the Black man's life amidst misery, Hughes uses the image of "rats" to represent the unsolved problems of America:

SEND FOR THE PIED PIPER TO PIPE OUR RATS AWAY....

Ask Your Mama is highly symbolic. The several symbols like the snow, frost, cold and the frozen Niagara have more meaning than on the page. The symbols show the Black man's being alienated in a strange land of ice, cold and snow, as opposed to the warmth, sun and heat of the African soil, which Hughes depicts in other poems. "Madam" is a symbol of dignity and courage. Jesse B. Simple, as his name suggests, stands for any simple and ordinary individual.

One discerns a deft mingling of form and content in Hughes' poems as in Brooks'. All the technical varieties are ably hidden in the matter and meshed with the form. Hughes adopts a new technique in Montage of a Dream Deferred. As in a film, one sees a rapid succession of various scenes presented in short poems. The poems are thematically related. The movement of the sequence is not linear. As Jernie observes, "its component poems move off in invisible directions, reappear and touch, creating a complex tapestry or mosaic." Hughes, in his

919 Hughes, "Final Call," in P and L p.21.
920 Onwuchekwa Jemie, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry, p.65.
prefatory note, says how this new form befits a "community in transition":

...this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and distortions of the music of a community in transition....

In "Negro Dancers," the form captures the rhythmic dance steps:

"Me an' ma baby's
Got two mo' ways,
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!
   Da, da,
   Da, da, da!
'Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!" 

That a good poem communicates even before it is understood is best seen in Hughes' poems with musical words and even words which seem to have no meaning -- like Bop, Mop, and Be-Bop:

Whats' written down
for white folks
ain't for us a-tall:
"Liberty And Justice--
Huh -- For All."

Oop-pop-a-da!
Skee! Daddle-de-do!
Be-bop!

Saltpeanuts!
De-dop! ...

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921 Hughes, quoted in Onwuchekwa Jemie, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry, p.63.


923 Hughes, "Children's Rhymes," in SPLH, p.224.
Here a casual browser who is not a Black will comprehend only the musical element on the surface. But for a Black reader, for whom this poem is intended, the form bespeaks the content and conveys a message. It has something to do with his racial experience in America. This is made clear in Simple's conversation with the Straight man in the story "Bop." Simple tries to explain where the word "bop" came from, and how it makes sense:

"You must not know where bop comes from," said Simple, astonished at my ignorance.

"From the police beating Negroes' heads," said Simple, "Everytime a cop hits a Negro with his billy club, that old club says, BOP! BOP!...BE-BOP!...MOP!...BOP!

"That Negro hollers, 'Oooool - Ya-koo! Ou - o - 0!'

"Old cop just keep on, 'MOP! MOP!...

BE-BOP!...MOP!'

"That's where Be-BOP came from, beaten right out of some Negro's head into them horns and saxophones and piano keys that plays it. Do you call that nonsense...."  

Hughes uses the trail-off technique in "Go Slow" as in "Drum." The meaning of the word "slow" is graphically captured on the page:

Go slow, They say --
While the bite
Of the dog is fast.

Am I supposed to forgive
And meekly live
Going slow, slow, slow,
Slow, slow, slow,
Slow, slow,
Slow,
Slow,
Slow?
????
??
?....


In *Ask Your Mama*, to show that the talented Blacks who "made it" the hard way and moved out of the "quarter of the Negroes" to suburban surroundings fare better, Hughes picturesquely introduces dollars and cents on the page. It is a reflection on consumerism which is a key term reigning the minds of men and women in the post-modern world:

TO MOVE OUT TO ST. ALBANS $$$$$
WHERE THE GRASS IS GREENER $$$$$
SCHOOLS ARE BETTER FOR THEIR CHILDREN $ccccc
AND OTHER KIDS LESS MEANER THAN $ccccc
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES $ccccc...

The same technique is adopted in "Elderly Politicians" as he digs at their opportunism:

The old, the cautious, the over-wise --
Wisdom reduced to the personal equation:
Life is a system of half-truths and lies,
Opportunistic, convenient evasion.
Elderly,
Famous
Very well paid
They clutch at the egg
Their master's
Goose laid:
$$ $$$ $$ $$
$$ $$ $$
$$ $$
$$...

The merchant-in-man attitude of the politicians is mirrored in the poem with the picturesque rendition of the dollars. Thus Hughes' poems combine the form and matter spontaneously and effectively.

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926 Hughes, *AYM*, p.42.

927 Hughes, "Elderly Politicians," in *LHR*, p.130.
Hughes' poems, like those of Brooks, have intrinsic artistic value and hence lend themselves for an analytic approach. Kenneth Burke's theory of Dramatic Pentad is applied to Hughes' poems. Hughes' widely anthologized poem "I, Too" can be measured against Kenneth Burke's yardstick:

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America....

The background and the underlying idea behind this short poem is Hughes' firm conviction that he is as good an American as his White counterpart. Hughes has expressed this idea time and again in many of his other poems and speeches. In "Theme for English B" it is clearly expressed: "You are White -- / yet a part of me, as I am a part of you./ That's American." He also feels that Mother

928 Hughes, "I, Too," SPLH, p.275.
America has been giving a step-motherly treatment to her Black son. The agent of this action is the White brother who perpetuates this partial treatment. The scene of action is at present the kitchen where the neglected darker brother endures humiliation and injustice with patience. By a dexterous handling of parallelism, juxtaposition, contrast and the repetition of "I, too" Hughes builds up the action. With a clever and skilful application of terse and lucid diction, the poem moves forward to the final argumentation: "I, too, am America." The first statement "I, too, sing America" evolves into a more meaningful and assertive "I, too, am America." Again, the shame of the White brothers to introduce this dark brother to the company will ultimately transform into a shame for having thought of the Blacks as ugly and odd. "Tomorrow" is a significant word for a Black reader of the poem. James Baldwin's point of view is relevant at this juncture:

Negro speech is vivid largely because it is private. It is a kind of emotional shorthand -- or sleight-of-hand -- by means of which Negroes express, not only their relationship to each other, but their judgement of the White world. And, as the White world takes over this vocabulary -- without the faintest notion what it really means -- the vocabulary is forced to change....

In a nutshell, this poem "I, Too" glitters with the sheer optimism of the Harlem Renaissance and the pride of the Black and Beautiful Movement.

In the same poem, one perceives the pyramid-like structure. The initial statement is slowly built up to a climax when he forewarns that nobody will dare ask him to eat in the kitchen. The final assertive statement serves as the denouement.

Brooks and Hughes, with all their technical skill and crafted art are committed "Black" artists. Their works have definitive purpose-sense, without which any work of art, however ably crafted will become flat. Their aim and concern is to create an awareness among the Black masses and inculcate courage, pride and affirmation of life. As Jemie observes, "The Black artist's mission ... calls for depth of vision, breadth of sympathies, passion and courage" which is true of these two Black artists in every respect. Being racial artists their works are primarily governed by a pervading consciousness of their race, and all the attendant predicaments and plights of the Blacks. But, being great creationists with a superb mastery of their art, they evolve out of the constrictions of racism and become humanists. Their works capture the wretchedness of human lives in general. They crystallize and perpetuate into art emotions and experiences of universal nature, common to all. Frank London Brown in his article "Chicago's Great Lady of Poetry" appreciates Brooks for her humanity and love for each individual regardless of race:

Love is the rainbow she chases -- love in the broadest sense: love of each man and woman, by each man and woman. She wants to show her readers the golden cord of humanity that unites every girl in a tattered dress and every girl in a gown of silk....

Similar is the view of Wallace Thurman about Hughes:

When Langston Hughes writes of specific Negro types he manages to make them more than just ordinary Negro types. They are actually dark-skinned symbols of universal characters....

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931 Onwuchekwa Jemie, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry, p.197.

932 Frank London Brown, quoted in George E.Kent, A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks, p.159.

933 Wallace Thurman, quoted in Modern Black Writers, Ed. Michael Popkin, p.231.
This evolution from one level to the other -- from the particular to the universal-- involves a lot of labour and craftsmanship. Brooks and Hughes have displayed their artistry with a subtle mixture of theme and structure and have produced works of art which stand the test of time. As post-modern poets, they have produced real great concealed art and as universal poets, they have transcended their race and are humanists in the path of great poets like Whitman.

As stated earlier, the greatness of their poetry lies in their craftsmanship, American ingenuity, revisionary skill, writing capacities and language mastery to introduce humanistic concerns and the universals. Moreover, they offer instruction and guidance and education to the Blacks to strike upward mobility and gain recognition.