CHAPTER – I

THE IMPACT OF THE TWO BLACK LITERARY MOVEMENTS ON
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Ever since Blacks were brought as slaves to America, they have been busy creating oral works of art, especially in poetry. For poetry, came naturally to them, music being inherent in their culture, in their very blood. The existence of songs, spirituals, blues, folktales on various subjects bear witness to this.

However, these were never considered literary enough by white Americans because they were in their native style and did not correspond to the prevalent European forms, and more because the theme was invariably slavery, a protest for freedom. Another major factor was, the works by slaves was hardly worth notice let alone consideration. Their works had to wait until after the twentieth century to attain the label of art or literary work.

Gwendolyn Brooks began her career as a Negro poet who loved the language and knew how to use it. Race to her was incidental. She wrote about her people, their lives, pains, suffering and misery in racist America. But her voice lacked the covert protest which is the hallmark of her poetry in the second period. This chapter is a journey of Gwendolyn
Brooks from a Negro poet to a prominent Black poet. It looks at Brooks from the backdrop of two literary movements that have been instrumental in raising Afro-American literature to worldwide notice. An understanding of these two literary movements gives a deeper insight into the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks.

This chapter deals with two aspects - firstly the two literary movements and secondly the life of Gwendolyn Brooks. The first part of the chapter throws light on the beginning, growth and decline of the Harlem Renaissance, its significance to the Black literary scene, the various political, social factors and the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960's. The latter section deals mainly with the biographical details of Gwendolyn Brooks and their corresponding contribution to her growth as a poet.

What has to be noted, however, is that although Gwendolyn Brooks was not an integral part of the Harlem Renaissance proper, the impact of the ideologies of the Harlem Renaissance seems to have moulded her literary career. The Harlem Renaissance became a spring board from which Gwendolyn Brooks dived into the field of Black literature and Black consciousness.

In this study which traces the growth of Gwendolyn Brooks's Black consciousness, the Harlem Renaissance becomes the guiding force.
The Harlem Renaissance becomes not only a source of inspiration but also a point of departure in Gwendolyn Brooks's poetic career. She was, indeed, fortunate to be born during the peak, the flowering of the Harlem Renaissance.

The need to be accepted by and into the American literary mainstream has been the foremost desire of every Black writer. Though various works by the Black writers were published for many years, the bulk of the writing was termed under the head 'Black Literature'. More importantly, most Black writers were forced to write such literature that could vocalize the suffering they had to face, and yet follow the necessary literary parameters so as to be accepted into the American mainstream literature. Black literature then was, to quote Amini Baraka's words "slave master-sanctioned house-negro writing".¹

An awakening of Black consciousness among Blacks was very necessary. For centuries the Negro was without identity, and was denied one at every stage. So coloured was his vision that he had developed an attitude in his mind that 'white is right'. He had no pride in himself, his race, or his colour. As Langston Hughes points out in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", that right from birth it was ingrained in a Black child's mind that Blacks are no good. His mother,

for instance, telling him “Don’t be like niggers”, when he was bad and his father reminding him constantly “look how well a white man does things”. The child, therefore, grew up worshiping the word “white”, which unconsciously became a “symbol of all the virtues”. Quite naturally, “I want to be white” runs through his mind. Hence, one could hardly imagine him having high values regarding his race and its beauty.

In this situation, a need to awaken in him a sense of pride for self and race was of utmost importance. There was a need for literature where the Black man could speak of himself and his race with pride. When such a need became strong, it was men like W.E.B. DuBois who gave Black literature a definite direction and helped it blossom. W.E.B. DuBois holds the most prominent place among Black American thinkers. Highly educated and talented DuBois strongly believed that time was not yet ripe for the development of American Negro Literature. For, as Arnold Rampersad opines, “The flower of art will bloom only where there is liberty, or the memory of liberty”. DuBois wrote in 1913 that “The economic stress is too great and the racial persecution too bitter to allow

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the leisure and poise for which literature calls". Nevertheless, he believed that unless the Afro-Americans produced and contributed a great deal to the body of art or literature, they would not be given the passport to enter the "polity of civilized people". He also stressed that a body of literature was of utmost importance to stop or counter the onesided propaganda waged against Blacks with books like Charles Carroll's The Negro a Beast (1900), Shufeldt's The Negro: A Menace to American Civilization (1907), and Thomas Dixon Jr's The Leopard's Spots (1902) and The Clansman (1905), all of which denigrated the Blacks. W.E.B. DuBois felt there was now a need "for action, not subservience or contemplation in the face of American racism". He opposed the slave mentality and racial submission that was advocated by Booker T. Washington, an educationist, who while championing literacy, disapproved of college education and government representation for Negroes and did not want the Blacks to make demands for social equality.

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
DuBois, on the other hand, felt that education was necessary, not that basic education, but intensive education for those Blacks with potentiality, with talent and with promise. With this in mind, he founded the radical Niagara Movement in 1905 which demanded civil rights and other basic freedom for the Negroes. In 1910, he established the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its powerful official monthly magazine The Crisis which later became the forum for New Negro Literature. The Crisis was an important organ of the Harlem Renaissance and the most effective voice against racial injustice.

Besides being a historian, pioneer sociologist and a man letters, DuBois was also social thinker, who stressed the need for integration of Blacks into American Society. The first step in the right direction towards integration would be, he believed, the development of Black literature in America which would prove to be an instrument of social uplift.

It was during this time, the early twentieth century, that one witnessed a sudden activity and a spirit of regeneration among the Afro-Americans. A number of Black organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) 1909; Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association; The Urban
League and The African Blood Brotherhood which came up in the North, helped the Blacks with similar ideas to come together. Magazines like The Crisis and Opportunity provided young aspiring Black writers a fitting platform to express their concerns.

Many young writers of caliber – Langston Hughes, Claude Mackay and others – were strongly influenced and inspired by Du Bois’ The Souls of Black Folk (1903). Gwendolyn Brooks felt that had she read DuBois’ The Souls of Black Folk much earlier, she would have penned entirely different poems.

This Black awakening known by different labels, like the “New Negro Movement”, the “New Negro Renaissance” or the “Harlem Renaissance”, is a unique feature in the history of the Blacks in America. It was the outcome of various factors that were political, social and economic in nature which brought the Blacks to the north.

However, when the Blacks arrived north in large numbers, the alarmed northerners put them into the ghettos. These ghettos restricted their activities and aspirations. Yet they proved a blessing in disguise in that, the Negroes put together in ghettos became conscious of themselves as a community and thereby were able to organize themselves into various movements and associations enabling them to express their
feelings. It brought them closer and cemented them in a bond of common cause.

With the various Black organization and magazines to cater to his need, the Black writer was encouraged to be innovative, rather than go back to white models. He was inspired to draw themes from his own cultural experiences rather than from that of the cultures around him.

Now, the Black man was on the right track. He had begun to realize his self and was conscious of his race. At this juncture Marcus Garvey, a West Indian, arrived on the scene and gave a further fillip to Black consciousness. His movement gave, not only to the educated but to the common Black man as well, greater psychological security and a stronger sense of identity. He spoke about the glorious past of Africa, thereby instilling in them a pride of their native country, racial purity and pride in all things Black.

This movement though short lived influenced to some extent the writings of Hughes, Cullen, McKay and other poets, who in turn influenced Gwendolyn Brooks. The influence of Garveyism went far ahead and consciousness of Black Nationalism and separatist tendencies brought newer themes and attitudes for the Black writers.

The poem of Claude McKay “If We Must Die” drew its inspiration from the race riots of the 1919, expressed the new pride of the Negro

This and the white man’s growing interest in the Blacks and their writing helped open the doors of many a famous publishing houses hitherto shut to the Black writers. One notices that more than any other form of literature, the Black man with his love for music was able to adapt himself to poetry very easily. The Black writer did not believe in following the white tradition, for he did not hold it sacred any more. His poetic tradition is unique in itself.

The Harlem Renaissance, contributed a whole galaxy of talented writers, both poets as well as novelists, who, through their works, tried to show the real spirit of Blacks and at the same time took care to alter the image of Blacks which had been presented to the world earlier.

The most noteworthy writers of this period have been Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Fenton Johnson, Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Gwendolyn Bennett, Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, to name a few.

Though the theme of most of these writers of the New Negro Movement
was similar, they experimented with a variety of forms like the poetry, autobiography, essay, short story, novels. Biography was used by many writers both as an art form and also as a vehicle of protest. The subjects they chose to write about were varied—glorification of their race, the ghetto life, an awareness and consciousness of themselves and their race. These "New Negroes", to use a word coined by Alain Locke, "were a provocative mix they sought to change but they also sought to preserve—to change racist attitudes but to preserve African heritage, to diminish isolation between races but to nurture distinctive racial character".9

In more specific terms as Langston Hughes says, in his "The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain":

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.10

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9 Trudier Harris, Foreword, "Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940", DLB 51: xi.

Such was the confidence and pride that radiated from the artist of the Harlem Renaissance.

One can never undermine the contributions of Harlem Renaissance for the uplift of the Blacks. Though it had a short life span beginning around World War I and extending to the early 1930's, this movement not only brought forth talented writers, but also a body of literature which was unique in itself and different from the white tradition. Though thematically, the Black writers were very different from the whites, they gave a definite direction to the Black literature.

The literary trends which started out as protest literature also created a consciousness among the Blacks themselves and helped them tell the world who and what the real Negro was. They also elevated Black literature to world wide critical notice. These writers were beginning to be credited with the distinction of being serious literary artists. However, this Renaissance, symbolized by a burst of many hued literary activity was very short lived. The Economic Depression of 1929 marked the end of the Harlem Renaissance. The New Negro Movement was not only affected by the Crash but also by its members who slowly abandoned it. However, Harlem Renaissance did its part in awakening
the Black consciousness in the Black man and provided him with international notice.

Apart from Harlem Renaissance, there were other events like the Abolition Movement, the Civil War and Reconstruction which were instrumental in throwing up Black identity. These events not only influenced the Blacks but also provided them areas from which they gleaned not only their themes but also characters and motivation too. Their desire to move towards the American mainstream literature was given impetus through these events.

One such event that created waves not only in the lives of the Blacks but also in their literature, was the Integration Movement which gained momentum through the Desegregation Act passed by the Supreme Court in 1954. With this Act, social changes were witnessed in public schools, armed forces, universities as well as other areas where integration came into effect. As Davis points out, the nation had "committed itself officially and spiritually to the ideal of integration". Though the "commitment was largely token, it changed the racial climate of America".11 It must be noted that the Integration Movement had a great impact on Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry.

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A series of social upheavals too followed. The main cause for Integration Movement was the firm and emphatic “no” of Rosa Parks, who refused to obey the bus driver’s order to give up her seat to a white rider. When she was arrested, the NAACP organized the boycott of the city buses which lasted for more than a year. The boycott was lifted only with Supreme Court ruling that segregation of the buses was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court had already declared school segregation unconstitutional in 1954, but progress towards desegregation was slow. Then followed the great confrontation in 1957 when nine Black children attended an all white school, at the Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Next came the sit-in, where youths had been trained in workshops in non-violence. These youths targeted “for-white-only” lunch counter. They were taught not to lose their temper even when jeered at, roughly jostled, beaten or spat upon.

Year 1961, saw the Freedom Riders who took two buses from Washington to challenge segregation along the way to New Orleans, Louisiana. The year 1963, saw demonstration in the state of Mississippi over the admission of James Meredith to the State University. There was ‘The March’ where Blacks from all over the country came to the nation’s capital. Whites also joined filling the vast spaces between the Washington
Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. These various events which brought lot of pain, suffering, tears and deaths, eventually led to the civil right movement in the 1960's and Civil Rights Act of 1964. All these real life incidents provided raw material for Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry. This Act put an end to discrimination in public accommodations and started the process of desegregation. Of the many Black leaders Martin Luther King Jr. was instrumental in this Act.

This change in the racial climate created a vacuum of ideas for the Black writers of the fifties. For, until then, the predominant Black writing was mainly protest literature. Most of this protest writing was directed against a common enemy. But with the Integration Movement, the enemy was no longer a threat and the long developed theme crumbled. There now seemed nothing left to protest about. Though for a long time Integration was only in theory with hardly any noticeable change in any walk of life. This naturally meant a serious change for the older writers who had gained enough experience and mastery in this protest tradition. Regarding this Davis rightly points out that, this became an almost tragic experience for the writers of the fifties, who were in their middle year, for it meant giving up “tradition in which they had done their apprentice and journey man work” especially now that they were ready to use it as
“master craftsmen”. Works like Margaret Walker’s “For My People” (1942); Langston Hughes’s “Freedom Flow” (1943) and Gwendolyn Brooks’s “A Street in Bronzeville” (1945) all carried the element of protest, as did the novels of the time like Attaway’s Blood on the Forge (1941), Offord’s The White Face (1943). In fact the “first casualty of the new racial climate was protest writing” claims Arthur Davis.

Bereft of the protest theme, the Black writers were forced to turn to new pastures. The Black man turned to look at himself not within the American framework, but at himself within his own race. His gaze now shifted from the overall to the specific. He looked more intently at the problems and conflicts within his own group. He found to his greatest wonder and amazement that he had unearthed a great, big mine within himself.

This shift from the outer to the inner gave him abundant themes to explore and experiment on. This change can be witnessed in the novels of the fifties like Dodson’s Boys at the Window (1951) and Gwendolyn Brooks’s Maud Martha (1953), which focus on racial themes within the group. Many writers, likewise, started concentrating on the group as a whole and less on the traditional protest theme.

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13 Ibid.
This trend was witnessed in poetry too. Many great protest poets simply dropped from the literary scene. This was because protest theme had become an integral part of their works and lives. It was no passing fancy but almost a spiritual experience to them. With the changes in political and social situation, these great writers were left without a set directive and most chose not to write. But poets like Melvin Tolson and Gwendolyn Brooks stood their ground and used their creative forces to adjust to the new clime. The once overt protest was now absent from their works. Though traces of protest could be found, it was handled with great subtlety.

Meanwhile, the 1960’s saw the younger generation Blacks reaffirm their faith in Black Nationalism. Gwendolyn Brooks was also swept by the tide of Black Nationalism. The poetry written during this time is representative of the black mood of militancy. Their fervour was tinged with militancy. The ideals of Black Nationalism and separatism, which in the 1920’s advocated by Marcus Garvey, but had not prospered long, now gripped the minds of the Blacks. This influence brought new themes and newer attitudes to the writings of the Black authors.

This period which was witness to various political activities also saw many a change in Black literary and cultural fields. This literary manifestation came to be known to as the Black Arts Movement. Many
of the young literary artists did not agree with the integrationist older writers. The younger writers sought to establish their own tradition, a Black tradition far removed from the Euro-American literary tradition. That had led the major established older generation Black writers. The new Black writer, also known as “militant”, turned to look at his own culture and tradition. He now deliberately combined politics with art and envisioned liberating Afro-Americans on all walks of life, economic, social, political, spiritual and psychological. The new Black writer consciously worked towards “using Black music and Black speech as a framework”\textsuperscript{14} for his art.

The moulding of Gwendolyn Brooks’s character was sandwiched between these two great Black literary movements. Their ideologies helped shape her literary vision, although she did not follow the beaten track.

The Black Arts Movement was headed by Le Roi Jones. With him and the younger poets the mild tone that was the hallmark of the earlier poets was almost gone. The tone of these poets was angry and defiant. They did not believe in begging or pleading for their rights from the whites. Instead of searching in themselves for faults which engendered the contempt of the white man, they examined the white man in all

aspects, and as Dudley Randell points out, they dubbed him “the Beast”. There was now no longer even a trace of self pity. Pity was replaced with pride. Black man’s colour which for so long had been regarded a handicap, now became a strength. Blackness which at one time brought the Black man pain was now used by the artist to achieve distinction. The earlier aspiration of Blacks — “I want to be white” was replaced by “why should I want to be white? I am a Negro - and beautiful.” The slogan “I am Black and beautiful” was something they not only said but believed. They rejected the word ‘Negro’, a name given by the white men, and called themselves ‘Black’.

This was an emancipation which brought with it pride in Blackness and made these writers indifferent to white audience. They now believed in writing for Blacks, and making them aware of Black unity, Black consciousness and Black pride. They did not mind if their work was “labeled didactic or propagandist. They considered such labels part of white standards” and rejected them. “They were indifferent as to whether their work survives, just so as it is effective today”.  


One could say the Black Arts Movement was an extension of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's which had lain dormant during the intervening years. The rising awareness among the Blacks that they should be afforded the same rights as the white Americans and not given secondary status brought the Blacks together and intensified their sense of unity in struggle.

John A. William describes the first coming together of Blacks as a "cultural" one, while the second resurgence of Black aesthetics of the late 60's referred to as Harlem Renaissance II, essentially "political".18

These, in short, are the various social and political events that have strengthened Black solidarity and enhanced Black consciousness and have influenced the Black literature through the years.

When placed in this larger context it appears that Gwendolyn Brooks has not been an integral part of the Harlem Renaissance, yet she was for some time bound to it for she draws her inspiration from the writers of this era. She has her roots in the Harlem Renaissance tradition and reaches out towards the new generation of Black writing.

Claudia Tate, in her introduction to Black Women Writers at Work, points out that the writers' experiences and interests cannot be divorced from their work and that extra literary concerns, be they social, political

or even intimate aspects of their personal lives, have direct bearing on their creative process. Many critics are quick to point out that the artist’s life and art are inextricably linked to some extent.\(^{19}\) It becomes imperative that a few biographical details of Gwendolyn Brooks’s life should be included in the study.

Gwendolyn Brooks is considered one of America’s major literary figures. Her works span a period of more than five decades. She has the rare distinction of not only attaining mastery over poetic technique, but also of having a strong affinity to her race and their problems which are distinctly portrayed in her poetry. She is also a figure that looms large over Afro-American poetry, for she had the ability to bridge the gap between the poets of her generation, the poets of the 1940’s who were her contemporaries and the younger generation Black militant poets of the 1960’s.

Born in Topeka, Kansas on 7 June 1917, Brooks is the first ever Black writer to have won the Pulitzer Prize and is rightly considered as one of the most distinguished American poets of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Her parents, Keziah Corinne Wims and David Anderson Brooks played a significant role both in her literary and personal life. Discovering the

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budding talent at a tender age of seven, Brooks’s parents nurtured it with all the loving care it needed and helped her blossom into a poet of such stature that there were very few, in fact almost none, to parallel her height and achievement as one of the most distinguished American poets and the most vocal spokesperson for the Afro-Americans.

Gwendolyn Brooks in her Report from Part One says that when her mother saw her writing, she declared, “You are going to be Lady Dunbar”. This statement had a great influence on the young mind and Gwendolyn Brooks grew up believing in what her mother said and strove hard to justify her mother’s faith. Her father did his bit through his habit of singing in the house and reciting poetry from Dunbar and reading literature from the Harvard classics. Gwendolyn Brooks acknowledged later that it was a father’s readings that made her want to write poems like the kind she had heard him read.

Both David and Keziah Brooks had their upbringing in poor, but highly religious and well disciplined families which lay emphasis on order. The same discipline and order was inculcated into their small family. Sixteen months after Gwendolyn, her brother Raymond was born, and that comprised the Brooks’s family. Theirs was a small, yet

strong family with lots of love and warmth. Brooks remembers having led a very orderly life in her childhood, the kind led by many Chicagoans.

When at the age of six, Gwendolyn Brooks entered school, a shock awaited her. The secure environment of her home was gone. She was forced to face another set of values. "The beginning of school ... was the beginning of her awareness of racial and color issue." She was even more shocked when she was spurned by members of her own race for she was not good in sports, nor could she ride a bicycle. She also lacked light skin and "good grade" hair. Her greatest delight until now had been sitting on the steps of her back porch, dreaming of a fairy world. This was shattered in her first encounter with the intraracial prejudice.

The situation was even worse at Forrestville School where the nice dresses she wore brought criticism. Added to this, her shy, withdrawing nature gained her the label "ol' stuck-up heifer." In this situation she missed her home where she felt treasured and loved.

To bridge these two totally contrasting worlds of alienation and belonging, she took to writing poems, which became to her "an act of


inner communing"^{23} and gladdened her heart. At the age of eleven, she began maintaining note books recording her poems. Gwendolyn Brooks read books avidly and her early poems, especially those written in her youth, show a universe of order and beauty. She was greatly influenced by the 19th century English poets like Keats, Wordsworth, Longfellow and William Bryant. Even at a very early age, she picked up the traditional forms of the poetry and her vocabulary was extremely good, and so was her ability to put forth complex ideas. Gwendolyn Brooks’s daily activity centered around three things – reading, writing and daydreaming- all of which she did with complete self-absorption.

In 1930, when she was thirteen, her first poem “Eventide” was published in *American Childhood Magazine*. In 1934, her poems began to be published in the *Chicago Defender’s* weekly variety column *Lights and Shadows*. Poems written even at the age of fourteen shows her ability to handle images and free verse.

Social parties for Gwendolyn Brooks were bitter pills. Here too she experienced rejection for, though she wore the right clothes, had her hair straightened, parted and waved as was the fashion of the day, and having learnt how to dance the ‘Charleston’, she was not chosen by any

boy for the dances. The choice inevitably was the light – skinned girls. She was hardly included in their youthful games of “post-office” of “kiss the Pilla”. Her main drawback was that she was dark. This rejection by the members of her own race, these humiliating experiences made Gwendolyn Brooks retreat further behind the wall she had erected around herself and gave material for many a poems later. Though she was plagued by the feeling of inferiority, in her mind she could never find anything wrong or shameful about her appearance nor did she feel bad about her dark skin.

Gwendolyn Brooks begins her Report from Part One with her thoughts on the colour of her skin. She writes:

When I was a child, it did not occur to me, even once, that the Black in which I was encased (I called it brown in those days) would be considered, one day, beautiful. Considered beautiful and called beautiful by great groups. I had always considered it beautiful. I would stick out my arm, examine it, and smile. Charming! And convenient, for mud on my leg was not as annunciatory as was mud on the leg of light Rose Hurd.

Brooks graduated from Englewood High School in 1934, and started making noticeable progress with traditional poetic forms. She experimented with different possibilities and made use of various poetic techniques.

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Knowing from the beginning that she was destined to be a poet, Gwendolyn Brooks made up her mind to write at least one poem each day, if not more. Having read different poets, she slowly developed a keen love for language and words. She very readily admits that she hardly knew anything of the technical possibilities of poetry until she was twenty four.

A more disturbing experience awaited Gwendolyn Brooks as she moved on to the Hyde Park Branch School, an all white school. Until now, her encounter with the whites had been limited. Here at school, however, she and the other Black students were not allowed to mix with the whites. They were completely ignored to the extent that they didn’t exist for the whites. This was her first hand experience with interracial intolerance. She was not injured, but was left all alone. This experience found its way in many poems. In “To the Hinderer”, published in the Chicago Defender’s, “Light and Shadows” column, she writes:

Oh, who shall force the brave and brilliant down?

There’s not descent for him who treads the stars:

What shall he care for mortal hate or frown?

He shall not care, his bright soul knows no bars.26

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Soon after Gwendolyn Brooks was transferred to the all Black school, the Wendell Phillips High School. She very gladly joined the school, happy to have escaped the bitter interracial experiences she had had there. However, Wendell Phillips high school was no better, because here once again she came face-to-face with the intraracial differences which she found much harder to tolerate and cope with. Many a times, she tried desperately to be popular, but could not bring herself to change her ideas or her ways of thinking. Here at school her poetic skills and writing ability were noticed and three teachers namely Ethel Hum, history teacher; Margaret Harris, journalism and Horace Willston, teacher of American Poetry encouraged her in this endeavour.

The greatest achievement for Gwendolyn Brooks in her sixteenth year was her correspondence with James Weldon Johnson, a prominent Black writer and Civil Rights Leader and Langston Hughes both of whom appreciated her work.

After graduating from school, she joined Wilson’s Junior College. By now, much of her early work was in print, though in minor publications. It gladdened her heart to see her work in print and this made her all the more determined to make a mark for herself.

The poems of this period point out to the growing racial awareness and pride in her people who did well and a rebuke for those who looked
down upon Blacks including Blacks themselves. Writing about the colour prejudices existing among Blacks, she says:

But little men of Afric’s swarthy shore,
There is more prejudice within your race
Than out beyond its shadowed bar; far more
Within your tract than any other space
Why search for foreign dung, why seethe and foam
When so much mucky filth lies loose at home?

(“Thoughts of Prejudice”, May 28, 1935)27

The poems of her youth document her self, the struggle, wonder about the future, sometimes despair, and at times confidence. A keen reading of Black writers, especially Langston Hughes made her realize that it was worthiest to write about ordinary life.

Graduating from Wilson’s Junior in 1936, she went with dreams of working for The Chicago Defender, to which column she had been a regular contributor. She wrote in this regard to the publisher Robert S. Abbot, hoping to get a job. Abbot, a Black himself, was known for his honest reporting, his racial pride and his working for the justice of

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Blacks. In fact it was through his papers that the Black community had a powerful voice.

When Gwendolyn Brooks went to meet him for her interview, she witnessed intraracial prejudice in one so reputed for helping the Blacks, Abbot's expression changed when he saw her. Quite predictably, there was no job open for her. Rejection due to skin colour, and that too from her own hurt her most. In the face of this rejection she published her own mimeograph newspaper, News Review, where she wrote on cultural matter, local events, editorials, short stories, poems and included cartoons by her brother Raymond.

When jobs befitting her educational qualifications were hard to come by, she took up a job as a domestic maid. This was one of the most humiliating jobs in her life. However, it gave her material for many future poems. She wrote of this experience in her novel Maud Martha. If she had found work as a domestic help humiliating, a worse job awaited her when she began to work as an assistant to a spiritual advisor Dr. E.N. French, whose main work site was a huge, many-storyed slum building called the Mecca building. He exploited the poor state of the occupants by selling them Holy Thunderbolts, magic potions, charms, dusts of different kinds and love potions, which were supposed to rid them of all their worries and problems and provide answers to their dreams.
Gwendolyn Brooks's job was to carry these various ingredients to the poor inhabitants to rid them of their 'ills'. The duplicity and fraud of the situation made her more miserable. This experience would never rub off her. The hopelessness of the desperate inhabitants kept haunting her and it was her desire to document these experiences. This she did, much later, in her long poem entitled “In the Mecca” in 1968 which contained “the murder, love, loneliness, hates, jealousies, hope occurred and charity, sainthood, glory, shame despair fear, altruism”.

She kept up this miserable job for four months determined not to go home empty handed, until she was fired. This cheating and fakery left a deep and lasting impression on her mind.

It was during this time, she attended meetings at the NAACP Youth Council. The Youth Council was considered the most militant organization of the times. Young, aspiring Black writers and intellectuals met regularly. For the first time Gwendolyn Brooks felt at home among them and in her elements, for she was immediately accepted by the group and made to feel important, a ‘someone’ who had the capacity to inspire and contribute. In this open, friendly, cordial atmosphere, Gwendolyn Brooks opened up and blossomed. She was still the shy youngster who hardly opened up or spoke out until spoken to. Yet, the Youth Council

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gave her the proper platform. She joined other members in the marches on the streets of Chicago in protest against lynching and other social injustices against Blacks.

The Youth Council opened up another avenue in her life, which until now was inactive. She was now receiving young men at home and going out on dates. It was at one of the meetings at the YWCA that she met her future husband, Henry Lowington Blakely “a fella who wrote”. He had come to the meeting especially to meet “the girl who wrote”. When Gwendolyn Brooks saw him for the first time, what she saw was a “glorious man who stood with obvious dignity”. So impressed was she that she blurted out to her friend in her most uncharacteristic and unaccustomed boldness, ‘there is the man I’m going to marry’.29

Two years after they had met, Gwendolyn Brooks and Henry were married on a Sunday, Sep. 17, 1939. He was, as Gwendolyn Brooks described him “a man of intellect, imagination and dynamic constitution, the old folks’ name for a certain physical indomitableness, an on-going strength that resists, again and again threats to its proud survival.”30 He was good young man who had had his share of hardships and struggles

30 Ibid.
and shared with Gwendolyn Brooks her interest in writing. He himself wrote poetry since he was eleven years of age.

After the wedding, they moved into the Tyson Apartment on Forty-third, and South Park. The kitchenette apartment was small. Gwendolyn Brooks used to wide space and a room of her own, felt cramped. Despite the wedding bliss and happiness, bleakness invariably started creeping in slowly in their marriage.

The poems of this period contain variety of themes – love – painful, satisfying, and disillusioning; poems of racial situations that show her enhanced awareness of Black consciousness. She felt that these experiences helped raise the "artistic tension" within her resulting in poems on ordinary struggling people. The poems written during this period indicate that she was through with the period of apprenticeship and ready to take on the adult world of poetry.

10 October 1940, marked another landmark event in the couples' life, Henry Blakely III was born and this indicated a very productive period for the poet. The economic crisis, lack of proper jobs, pressures from all sides, both economic and housing, forced them to stay apart for some time. In 1941, change in job and house brought the much needed stability to their lives.
Gwendolyn Brooks was now working on various projects to make money. Another crucial event in her life that gave her a definite directive was in 1941, when Inez Stark Boulton, a Gold Coast socialite conducted a poetry workshop for Blacks at the South side Community Art Center called “The Poetry Class”. This class was an eye opener for Gwendolyn Brooks. Gwendolyn Brooks and Henry joined the workshop. Here she was introduced to the most modern techniques used by recent writers. At last, finding the right vein she began writing with a new vigour, polishing up her language. In fact, most poems of Gwendolyn Brooks’s first collection *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) were part of the workshop exercise written during 1941-42. Gwendolyn Brooks won the first prize in the workshop competition. The experiences she garnered at the workshop and Stark’s helpful advice to come to terms with the present life, to see and write poems “uniquely based upon your experience” stood her in good stead. The poems she wrote during this period throw light upon her commitment.

Gwendolyn Brooks’s first tried to get her collection of poems published through Knopf publishers, where Emily Morison was the editor. Morrison’s suggestions did Gwendolyn Brooks good. She wanted Gwendolyn Brooks to concentrate on her own background and write

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poems based on her own experiences. Working along the lines of this suggestion, Gwendolyn Brooks gathered nineteen poems based on her cultural background and on Blacks and sent them this time to Harper and Brothers. The editors at Harper, much excited by these unique, new poems, sent them to Richard Wright, a Black novelist of renown, who had established himself in the literary world and was one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. Wright was all praise for her poems. On 15 August 1945, her poems were published under the title *A Street in Bronzeville*, wherein she dealt with Black life at close quarters. When the ‘author’s copies’ reached her Gwendolyn Brooks’s joy knew bounds. She was thrilled and ecstatic.

*A Street in Bronzeville* was well received. Gwendolyn Brooks and her husband read the review that appeared in the *Sunday Chicago Tribune’s* book review section standing under the street light after their weekly outing to the movies. The headlines read ... “Chicago Can Take Pride in New Young Voice in Poetry” and Gwendolyn Brooks believed that it was “this review that initiated My Reputation.”

This was the year that Gwendolyn Brooks came to the notice of the reading public and her collection struck a new note in Black poetry. It was accepted by both Blacks and whites. With the launch of her career as

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a poet with A Street in Bronzeville, Harper and Brothers was very willing to publish her next work. It was then that she met Elizabeth Lawrence, her first editor who became one of Gwendolyn Brooks's most treasured friends and who gave her helpful advice.

Her next collection of poems to be published in 1949 was Annie Allen which contained poems on social issues. This collection too had immediate responses most of which were favoured and varied. The years between A Street in Bronzeville and her next publication saw Gwendolyn Brooks as a recipient of various awards and prizes. The Mademoiselle Merit Award as one of the ten most outstanding women of the year in 1945; the Guggenheim fellowship in 1946 and 1947; a prize of $1000 from National Institute of the Arts and Letters Awards in 1946; the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Creative writing in 1940; Poetry magazines Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize in 1949 for Annie Allen, were a few among the many.

Meanwhile, Gwendolyn Brooks had to face severe housing problem, where at one time she had to share a home, which cramped her writing style and invaded her sense of independence. With the World War II, job discrimination against Blacks increased as did the housing problems, which were the major causes of racial conflict.

Between 1940 and 1950's, there was a rapid rise in the Black population, yet Chicago and its institutions refused to extend the area to which Blacks were confined. Chicago saw as many as nine race riots between 1945 and 1954.

This housing discrimination found expression in Gwendolyn Brooks's essay They Call It Bronzeville (Holiday, October 1951) and in her poem “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed” which appeared ten years later in The Bean Eaters.

Despite the obvious discrimination, hope floated high among the Blacks, especially owing to freedom talk of World War II when General Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote an article for the Negro Digest titled, The Future of the Negro. The General, praising the Blacks for their patriotism, loyalty, sacrifice, progress, predicted all the rights of American citizenship by the year 2000.33

33 Negro Digest; Feb. 1950.
Many Blacks firmly believed this and so did Gwendolyn Brooks who hoped that things would work out soon. Realisation slowly began to dawn that there was no glimpse of any kind of improvement. Gwendolyn Brooks gained relief by portraying the utter helplessness and bitterness of the situation through her poems. The poems “Downtown Vandeville”, “I love those little booths at Benvenuti’s”, “The Lovers of the Poor” are ironic portrayal of her bitterness. This seemingly new trend in Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry greatly alarmed the white audiences who believed that she was moving from the “universal to social commentary”.34

Gwendolyn Brooks had always believed in the beauty of life and felt good to be alive. Her philosophy that life is to be lived for its own sake stood her in good stead. This helped her immensely as she marched forward unhesitatingly as an outstanding artist, a model citizen and an example for the Blacks.

The great day for Gwendolyn Brooks came in 1950 when she was honoured with the most coveted award for literature – the Pulitzer Prize for *Annie Allen*. She was looked upon “as both an artist and as a citizen of the world”.35 The award was unique in itself because she was the first

Black ever to have received this honour. Winning of the award brought an added responsibility of being not only a spokeswoman, but also a person with social, cultural responsibility not only to her people, but also to her nation.

8 Sept. 1951 marked another important event in Gwendolyn Brooks's life. On that day, her daughter Nora was born. Though it brought in a lot of happiness, it meant many changes too. There was an urgent need for a bigger house. With some financial help from her parents, Gwendolyn Brooks and her husband moved into 7428, South Evans Avenue on Chicago southside in 1953. This became Gwendolyn Brooks's house since then. This home provided and fulfilled her greatest dream and desire to belong and feel rooted and provided her material for more work. Now with a small baby to look after, Gwendolyn Brooks discontinued serious writing and took up smaller writing assignments.

Much earlier along with writing poetry Gwendolyn Brooks had begun a fiction work, American Family Brown. She felt that now was the right time to recreate that work. The end result was Maud Martha, which was published in 1953. Her only novel, Maud Martha seemed to mirror her own experience as a girl, a young wife and a mother. The story is about a Black young woman who suffers many a miseries because of the
Blackness of the skin, and finally emerges from her youthful romantic dreams to find fulfillment as wife and a mother.

From childhood, Gwendolyn Brooks had cherished the dream of owning a house in the countryside, with lots of animals and trees around. She had felt that this would be the most ideal place to write in and draw inspiration from. But the house in Chicago did not prove her right, because with her commitment to her surroundings, she realised the advantage of growing up in the city with its sea of humanity in all shapes, shades and colour and which provided her a very rich mine wherein to gather her material and themes from.

The change in the racial climate brought on by the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision against segregation and the struggle for civil rights, began to work on Gwendolyn Brooks's consciousness, which started the process of change in her. Her works slowly, yet surely started reflecting her awareness of the Black world around her.

By now, Gwendolyn Brooks was enjoying the fruits of being a well established writer with a fulfilling personal and public life. Amidst these busy schedules, Gwendolyn Brooks was worried about her father's health. He was admitted to the Provident Hospital for stomach and heart problems and had to undergo an operation. When on 21 Nov. 1959, he passed away peacefully, she saw a man full of life embrace death with
tranquility. She felt consolation instead of grief. For she vividly recalled the serenity of his death and saw for herself how peaceful death could be and claimed that she now no longer feared death.\footnote{Kent, \textit{A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks}, Op. Cit., p. 135.} She dedicated her next work \textit{The Bean Eaters} to her father "In Honor of David Anderson Brooks, My Father". A dirge was created which went beyond grief, and recalled the goodness and the beauty of his life.

The death of her father brought considerable change in Gwendolyn Brooks. She felt that she could not be free from the feeling of tightness and somberness. The early spontaneity, always a part of her and with which a family was acquainted, was now totally missing.

Over the year, Gwendolyn Brooks began her work on another novel which she had decided to call \textit{The Life of Lincoln West}. This project did not see the light of day. The material was used as a story for the anthology \textit{Soon, One Morning} which was published in 1963 by Herbert Hill, and as a poem in \textit{Family Pictures} as "The Life of Lincoln West".

The publication of \textit{The Bean Eaters} brought in more recognition and appreciation. She was now established as a poet of some worth. In \textit{The Bean Eaters}, Gwendolyn Brooks has many poems where she shows her people facing life in all its varied forms and yet ready to face
whatever challenges that life has in store for them. Many of her poems highlight her awareness of interracial and intraracial conflicts.

One can notice Gwendolyn Brooks’s mastery of poetic forms and her gradual movement away from autobiographical towards social concerns in poems like “The Lovers of the Poor”, “The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock”. Though the social poems in The Bean Eaters left many reviewers uneasy, Harvey Curtis Webster points out very correctly that of the first three books of Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry, her best social poems were to be found here.\textsuperscript{37}

The early 1960’s brought another significant and drastic change in Gwendolyn Brooks’s racial consciousness. The main reason was the racial struggle which seemed to bring a new sense of possibilities for the Blacks. There was hope that things would change for the better. When there seemed no such change, protests began, when protests failed, revolts began.

A change came in Gwendolyn Brooks too and it came about suddenly and almost dramatically. She came under the influence of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960’s. This changed her whole life, her ideology, her personality, her art, her financial situation, and her relations with others. This was to bring a drastic change in her personal life too.

\textsuperscript{37} Harvey Curtis Webster, “Pity the Giants”, Nation. (Sept. 1962) : 96.
There were changes happening all around her like, Freedom Movements, Sit-ins, freedom rides, church bombing, riots and marches. All this were the outcome of the desegregation rule. With so much racial conflict all around her, Gwendolyn Brooks could not very well say as she had in 1961, that many days went by without her thinking of race.

Gwendolyn Brooks's popularity continued to grow and so did her contacts and association with the young. President John S. Kennedy invited her to read at a Library of Congress Poetry Festival in 1962. Here she met Robert Frost whose praise of her work boosted her morale.

Poetry, for Gwendolyn Brooks, was something that was an integral part of society which upheld the prevalent situation. The changes in society were well reflected in her works. This time too she rose up to the occasion with her contributions. She wrote poems on various civil right leaders and on President Kennedy on his assassination, who Gwendolyn Brooks felt held a special affection for the Blacks and was a ray of hope for their betterment.

In Feb. 1962, Gwendolyn Brooks protested strongly when the New York radio station's WNEN vice president and general manager, John V.B. Sullivan refused to broadcast her poem “Of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery”, which had a musical setting by Oscar Brown, all because it contained the word “Black”. The radio station felt that this
particular word would offend the Negroes. Gwendolyn Brooks found this hard to believe for this word “Black” and its use had acquired much pride for the Blacks. The Blacks exulted in being recognized as Blacks. She did not appreciate the fact that she was accused of hindering the progress of the Blacks, for she claimed that she had long been a part of the struggle:

For seventeen years, without ever detouring from my Business – which is being writer. Many of the banners so brightly (and originally, they think) waved by today’s youngsters, I waved years ago, and published sixteen years ago.38

The phrase “plain Black boy” Gwendolyn Brooks wrote was a “clean and sincere, three-word, twenty year old phrase of mine”.39

She now took up a teaching job at Colombia College, 2075, Wabash Avenue. She enjoyed her work as a teacher and very soon gained the reputation of a good teacher. This experience of teaching was invaluable for her, for it helped her get more into the spirit of the young, a preparation for events to come in the late 60’s. It also helped her lose some of her inherent shyness. She now put on the mantle of a spiritual mother for many young people. She was very conscious of the civil right

39 Ibid.
movement activities all around her. Being aware and sensitive to the cause, she wrote with impassioned fervour.

Many awards came her way. The Colombia University conferred on her an honorary doctoral degree for her *Selected Poems* in June 1964. She was selected to be one of the five poets of honour to read at the Poetry Day Benefit. This event was considered to be one of the most glamorous literary events of Chicago. Before the Poetry Day, there was the President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Scholars’ Reception at the White House, which she attended.

With the retirement of Elizabeth Lawrence from Harper and Row as its editor, the almost 20 years long association with Gwendolyn Brooks came to an end. Gwendolyn Brooks and Elizabeth represented two varying worlds, the Black and the white. Gwendolyn Brooks was sad when she heard the news, yet she wondered, to put it in her own words, if the “young-chicken-mother hen relationship had gone on for a long time”.40 Most of the times it was to Elizabeth that Gwendolyn Brooks had turned to for advice, which while was indeed valuable, always tended to be white-audience based.

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The University of California sponsored a conference on the Negro Writer in the United States at the Monterey Peninsula’s Asilomar Conference Center from Aug. 5-9, 1964. Gwendolyn Brooks attended the same with her daughter Nora. It brought together Black writers of renown like Saunders Redding, Arna Bontemps, Le Roi Jones. Besides these writers were teachers, social workers, students, housewives, artists and intellectuals. The debate ranged from intellectual discussions to harsh reactions from young radicals who supported Jones. The conference was an eye opener for Gwendolyn Brooks. She saw the turn young radical thinking was taking.

In April 1967, she attended the second Fisk Writers Conference. This gave Gwendolyn Brooks the additional inspiration she needed. It also provided her an opportunity to interact intensively with the younger Black writers. At the conference, there was a confrontation between literature and civil rights, which took on a nationalistic concern with the role of the Black writer questioned. Every Black writer worth notice was present at the conference and the whole atmosphere seemed charged. Of the conference, Gwendolyn Brooks writes that she was “first aware of a general energy, an electricity, in look, walk, speech, gesture of the young Blackness I saw all about me”.

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her made her feel renewed and reborn. But at the conference, unlike at other big gatherings she had attended, here she was "coldly Respected", not warmly "loved" and welcomed as had been the case in the South Dakota State College. The main theme of the conference was "The Black Writer and the Human Rights". Here at the conference she felt that she had slept and woken up in a strange land and didn’t know where to go or what to do.

The Fisk Conference had been successful in jerking Gwendolyn Brooks awake to the harsh realities around her. She suddenly found that most of the things that she heard the young Blacks speak about was very hard to believe and digest. She was left with the feeling of wonder, when life had passed her by.

When Gwendolyn Brooks returned home to Chicago, she carried with her the excitement of Fisk University. She was now more hard pressed than ever looking for a way to express the new found consciousness. She found this opportunity when producer-singer Oscar Brown Jr. invited her to a preview of his latest work "Opportunity Please Knock". Brown worked with a street gang, Blackstone Rangers, using their potential talent. The preview much impressed Gwendolyn Brooks.

and she gladly offered to conduct a writing workshop for them. This project was extremely fruitful.

The event at 'The Wall' at Chicago was another eye opener, where Black artists fashioned the mural communicating Black dignity on the wall of a Chicago Slum building at 43rd and Langley. This mural included the portrait of Gwendolyn Brooks. It was very strange and new for her to see so many committed Blacks out on the street, together, showing their unity and solidarity.

This gathering happened because Blacks now cared no more about believing in integration, which was just a figment of hopeful imagination, just in writing. In the face of this, the Black artist and writers felt it was their foremost duty to stress Black solidarity and pride in one’s race and in one’s self. This feeling of solidarity, of oneness and the need to do something for the community was picked by Gwendolyn Brooks, not through reading newspaper as was in the past, but by going out with the younger Blacks. Listening to them talk, and read, she felt the rush of blood and the beat of pulse for herself.

Before 1967, it was the whites who chiefly read Gwendolyn Brooks, for Blacks then were not buying books, especially not poetry. The whites read, Gwendolyn Brooks felt to salve their conscience. But now things had taken on a drastic turn. The time had come when Black
writers did not care what white audience thought of their works. They now wrote to please themselves and their people. Gwendolyn Brooks too no longer bothered when white critics pointed out that she had lost the "universality", which marked her earlier work. She felt she had now walked beyond the point of trying to make the whites understand writings by Blacks. She came to the realisation that she could never hope for the white audiences to sympathise with the Blacks for they were hardly equipped to be proper critics and that, the best critic for a Black writer was the Black man himself.

Having reached this point and made a decision, there was no looking back. Gwendolyn Brooks in her own way did her best as she could, to spread the new spirit of awareness. It gladdened her heart to see how strong and proud the Blacks had become. This new found confidence in self was an inspiration to her. The Blacks seemed confident and seemed to know just what was right for them.

In the late 1950's and early 60's, life and writing moved at a smooth, steady pace without upheavals. Her friends included both white and Black writers, who came together and talked on writing, mostly white writing and the different trends therein. The years following 1967 took on a different trend and outlook. Gwendolyn Brooks now became very conscious of the fact that her people were the Black people and it is to
them that she needs to appeal for understanding. Until this time, the whites found her and her writing lovely; she was something of pet to them. They termed her nice. But with a change in alliance, and her association with younger Blacks, her relationship with most white friends came to a stand still. But she did not mind it, because she claimed that she had stopped thinking their way. The break-off was complete and she felt free to write what her heart and mind dictated.

A significant change on her home front was the separation from her husband Henry Blakely. The marriage had been an example for others to emulate. He was also a writer, but a fine person who never envied Gwendolyn Brooks her success. Gwendolyn Brooks said that the breakup came around the time she began to "subscribe enthusiastically" to the new Black Arts Movement; Henry was and remained an integrationist. However, Gwendolyn Brooks was very quick to point out that the reason for breakup was not because of her allegiance to the Black cause. They were not separated for long and came together in 1973. She writes of their coming back together in a poem "Shorthand Possible", wherein she writes:

A long marriage makes shorthand possible,
The everything need not be said.

Much may stay within the head.
Because of old-time double seeing,
Because of old-time double being.
The early answer answers late.
So comfortably out of date!
The faded photographs come clear
To dazzle down the now and here.
I said: "someday we'll get Franciscan China".
You said, "some day the Defender will photograph your house".
You said, "I want to have at least two children".44

For a long time Gwendolyn Brooks was trying to put in words her earlier experience as the secretary to Dr. E.N. French, those terrible youthful memories of having to climb the steep stairs to deliver Holy Thunderbolts, liquid Love Charms, to the poor residents of the Mecca building and these kept haunting her adult life. At first she thought that she could best express her experiences in the form of a novel, with the heroine, a girl name Giovanna. Somehow this work refused to take shape until the late 1960's in an altogether different form.

The form that the experiences of the Mecca building took was in 1968 as a long poem titled *In the Mecca*. In this volume, she included a section called *After Mecca* that contained ten poems which brings out her feelings of the newer consciousness in the Black community and herself. For many critics, *In the Mecca* came as a shock, yet it was acknowledged by most as a powerful work.

8 January 1968 was another feather in her cap, for it was on this day that she was appointed Poet Laureate of Illinois by Governor Otto Kerner, on the death of Carl Sandburg. She put her elevated position to the best possible use by encouraging writing talent among the young.

Gwendolyn Brooks showed her complete alliance and commitment to the Black cause by giving up her publishers Harper and Row and her long years of association with them and turned to Broadside Press, founded in Detroit by Black poet Dudley Randall, and Third World Press founded by poet Haki R. Madhubuti, to encourage Black publishing companies.

Her deep commitment and concern for the Blacks, especially the young writers was recognized by the Black writing community. On 28, Dec. 1969, at the Afro-Art Theater, Chicago’s Southside paid her a public tribute. On this occasion, a book titled *To Gwen, With Love*, which
comprised testimonials by local Black writers and those from over the world was brought out.

In 1972, Gwendolyn Brooks published her autobiographical work *Report from Part One*, containing prefaces by George E. Kent and Don L. Lee. This book contains information on her family history, her marriage and children, her various works, their inspiration, inception, growth and publication. Most specifically, it records her transition and transformation from a common Negro to a Black poet of international renown. The work also contains a detailed account of her visit to Africa, her excitement and disappointment there. It also contains her various interviews and altogether makes enjoyable and informative reading.

Gwendolyn Brooks had plans to write a verse biography tracing the life and poetic talent of Phyllis Wheatley, the first Black slave, woman-poet, under the title *To Disembark*. But this work did not materialise. In the 1980's she selected poems that reflected the struggle and experiences of the Blacks from the first three volumes under the previously unused title *To Disembark*. It also included five unpublished poems under the heading *To the Diaspora*, which charts the spiritual struggle of the Black women and prisoners. It also contains a birth song in the African tradition. D.H. Melhem, in her studies on Brooks points out that Brooks in her later poems donned on the mantle of a prophet to point out the
direction for her people to take in order to avoid disaster and to achieve prosperity. From this point onwards, Brooks was not only a teacher, but also a prophet.

More recognitions and awards came Gwendolyn Brooks's way. She was appointed honorary consultant in American Letters to the Library of Congress in 1973. She read her works with other celebrated poets like Robert Hayden, Stanley Kunitz at the White House on 3 Jan. 1980. She was appointed to the Presidential Commission on the National Agenda for the Eighties. The Gwendolyn Brooks Junior High School was dedicated to her on 24 Nov. 1981 at Harvey, Illinois. She revisited England in 1983 to judge the Sotheby's International Poetry Contest; and in 1985 was made Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress. The honorary doctorates awarded to her exceeded over seventy.

Just as Gwendolyn Brooks had changed her old publishers to support Black Press in the late 1960's, in 1980 she made another important change. She decided to publish her work herself, and named her publishing firm The David Company, in memory of her father David Brooks.

In 1986, Gwendolyn Brooks published *The Near- Johannesburg Boy and other Poems* dedicated to the students of Gwendolyn Brooks Junior High School. These poems were inspired by uprisings in South
Africa. The collection is a representation of her African identity established with her two African trips. The child in the context of apartheid forms the central basis of the poem.

On her seventieth birthday in 1987, she conferred the eighteenth annual Poet Laureate Awards at the University of Chicago, surrounded by family, friends and admirers. Haki Madhubuti (Don L. Lee) had planned his own surprise for her, he had edited an anthology containing tributes to her – *Say That the River Turns: The Impact of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Third World Press, 1987), a collection of poetry, prose and reminiscences by many writers including her husband and daughter. In his introduction to the book Madhubuti called Brooks "a Living National Treasure".

Gwendolyn Brooks’s other works include the omnibus volume *Blacks*, where all her earlier works could be obtained under one volume.

In 1989 she received a lifetime achievement award from the National Endowment for the Arts. She was named the 1994 Jefferson Lecturer by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the highest honour by federal government for work in the humanities.

In 1995 appeared her *Report from Part Two* another autobiography, when she was nearly eighty, showing her still active mind undiminished in its vigor and intensity. Here she records the last days of her mother’s
life, her visit to Ghana and Russia, on various people who touched her life, on women and on colour Black.

Gwendolyn Brooks has surely come a long way, not only as a Black women poet, but also as an American Poet. She had a wide audience and is looked upon in her community as an institution. She has made her place as one of the most distinguished poets of the twentieth century. People belonging to different factions find in her a voice, and she reached not only to the older but younger generation readers too due to the vast range of her poetic resources.

Gwendolyn Brooks died of cancer at the age of eighty-three on 4 December 2000 and has left behind a legacy as an unusual poet who has promoted her culture and race through her poems that are candid yet compassionate and humanistic.

This chapter has mapped the various life experiences of Gwendolyn Brooks and has juxtaposed it with the growth of the two Black literary movements. This chapter becomes a foundation for the exposition of Gwendolyn Brooks’s creative career. The following chapter traces her development from an integrationist poet to a militant one with emphasis on her movement from a Negro poet to a Black one.