CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

"All the work you do, is done for your own salvation, is done for your own benefit." - Swami Vivekananda

Our Indian Freedom Struggle inspired every citizen - for it was mainly a non-violent struggle devised successfully by Mahatma Gandhiji, father of our Nation. This favourite freedom struggle concept motivated me to select this topic related to Afro-American literature and specifically preferred Claude McKay and Gwendolyn Brooks, great modern creationists, who voiced strongly for the liberation of the Blacks to other national poets. They identify themselves with the suffering Blacks and assert the dignity of the Blacks proving the fact that the Blacks are not at all inferior to the Whites. They need not play the servile and submissive role any longer. McKay and Brooks react not only to the sufferings of the Blacks but also to that of human beings in general.

The method adopted here is thematic analysis and the approaches are psychological and sociological. There is a studied attempt to analyse, synthesize, interpret and evaluate poems on their thematic relevances and on their form, structure and organization --the Gestalt.
Claude McKay and Gwendolyn Brooks are brought together and studied precisely because of their shared aims of reaching to the problems, plights and predicaments of the Blacks. By the way, the sturm und drang, angst and the suffering of the African American is not that acute as that of the Black in the emerging African nations. It is precisely because the economic standard of the African American is better than that of the Blacks elsewhere. Indeed the dissimilarities between McKay and Brooks are analyzed in this thesis. Then there is a sharp focus on their relative merits as Black creationists of proven worth.

Comparative literature is a study of literature independent of ethnic, linguistic and geographical boundaries has been a liberating and humanising force on literature itself by breaking the boundaries and focusing on the unity of human creativeness underlying the diversity of the literary events.

Comparative literature is one of the modern means which tend to promote such a cultural synthesis, leading ultimately to a realization of the oneness of humanity. As Fritz Strich puts it in Goethe and world literature, that comparative literature is a literary bridge over dividing rivers, a spiritual highway over dividing mountains.

A comparative study of a similar area helps us understand in a better light, by equipping us with a more clear insight into
underlying unity behind the world’s historical process and concomitant issues such as the natural process of social and literary development in general. Such a comparative study of literatures gives an opportunity to pose in a wider perspective a number of important questions of the history and theory of literature. The following observation of S.V. Subramanian in his book *Across Seven Seas* is worth quoting in this context:

... Comparative literature, with its conceptual framework clearly drawn and its scopes, priorities and perspectives carefully defined, can play a role more constructive and creative than that of sages and seers, statesmen and social reformers, religion and science, in shaping the collective human destiny. (104)

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the former President of India, in his work *Indian Philosophy* has said:

Politicians may differ, our economic interests may clash, but when we stand before the masterpieces of art and literature, we do not ask to what country an artist belongs or what nationality he comes from... on the plane of spirit there are no racial or national barriers.
The great people belong to the whole world. They are the contemporaries of all ages and of all countries. (8)

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren say in their celebrated work, *Theory of Literature*, that comparative literature asks for a widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve. They recognize the unity of human and the universality of literature as they assert, ?literature is one, as art and humanity are one?. (152)

The history of Afro-American literature is as old and varied as the United States itself, but there are several recurrent themes: combating racism, searching for a Black identity, and maintaining a unique quality of life. They were familiar with literature and art for many years before their contact with the Western world.

Negroes played an important part in American life, history and culture long before 1619. Africans first came to the New World as explorers. In the United States, the art and literature of the Negro people has had an economic origin. Much that is original in Black American folklore, or singular in ?Negro spirituals? and blues, can be traced to the economic institution of slavery and its influence upon the Negro?s soul.
In 1760, Jupiter Hammon, a slave Negro published *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries*. In all probability this was the first poem published by an American Negro. His most remarkable work, *An Address to the Negroes of New York*, was published in 1787, and Jupiter Hammon died in 1800.

Some scholars have argued that, because of the violent nature of African migration, Blacks lost African cultural knowledge along their journey. Most Black scholars argue that African American culture consists of both the African and the American character of how Black people sustained mental sanity, spiritual health, social life and political struggle in the mids of a slaveholding White civilization.

Eighteenth-century *Slave Narratives*, journals of personal experiences by slaves were a source of insight and inspiration. Afro-American literature of the 1800s was dominated by autobiographical works, culminating in Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery* at the turn of the century.

The early twentieth century saw the rise of Black civil rights organizations such as the NAACP (1909) and the National Urban League (1911). These groups fought with increasing success against lynching, the mistreatment of Black soldiers, Jim Crow Laws, and racism, and at the same time they attempted liberation through their works. There is a cultural awakening during the 1920s and
1930s known as the Harlem Renaissance. Black artists and writers struggled with the notion of African heritage. Countee Cullen saw Africa no longer as a dark continent but as a place of strong black men.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, Black civil rights organizations continued to advocate for equal opportunity and treatment. In 1935, educator Mary McLeod Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women to fight both racial and gender discriminations. Meanwhile, the Congress of Racial Equality (1942) and the NAACP increasingly used court challenges to fight segregation.

The African-American Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) refers to the movements in the United States aimed at outlawing racial discrimination against African Americans and restoring voting rights in Southern states. By 1960, the emergence of the Black Arts Movement, which lasted roughly from 1960 to 70, radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American Civil Rights Movement) Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power Movement (1966-1975), which enlarged the aims of the Civil Rights Movement to include racial dignity, economic and political self-sufficiency, and freedom from oppressions by white Americans. It envisions an art that speak
directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. (www.nathanieltturner.com)

Black Americans had been violently torn from Africa, and they remained an outsider group in America, continually struggling to uncover and define their relationship to Africa. Social, political, racial and religious discriminations, inequality based on caste, colour and creed of the Blacks are the subjects handled by the African American poets. The early twentieth century produced many influential African American writers, among them Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Ralph Ellison. Contemporary poets such as James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Toni Morison and Maya Angelou continue to expand the canon of African-American literature.

Researches pertaining to any aspect of the African American society have to be made necessarily with reference to their history, for their life had been uniquely conditioned by the peculiar situation in which they lived. Literature being the verbal experience of a community's thoughts, sentiments and imagination, the factors that shape and inflect the imaginative faculties and thinking patterns of that community are of crucial importance in the understanding and evaluation of their literature. Black American literature, as Houston A. Baker J r. has remarked, ‘the Black American himself, is to a large extent a social product’ (xvi). Studies
in Afro-American literature, therefore, tend to take socio-historic
dimensions and directions. A comprehensive understanding of the
black people’s history is an inevitable pre-requisite for the study of
any trend, movement or aspect of their literature.

Literature initiated and prospered from an interest in God
and matters of religion. In course of time, there was swing to
man-centredness. Now, in the Twentieth century, all life-situations
are examined in relation to man. He demands a study in his inner
self. The slave past? and the segregation policy motivate the Blacks
to explore about their selves?. These features form in them a quest
for self-identity. In the Emersonian sense, all knowledge springs
from self. It is very significant that a person gains self-knowledge
and discovers for himself his limitations, strengths and so on. A
Concise Psychological Dictionary defines self thus:

[It is] the result of man’s awareness of himself
as a separate object in the environment,
enabling him to regard himself the subject of
his physical and mental states, actions and
processes, and emotionally experience his
own integrity and identity with himself in
relation to his past, present and
future?(275).
As Black artists, both are committed to the purpose and mission of generating Black Consciousness among the oppressed Blacks. The Black literature carries the protest element. Jean-Paul Sartre explains that the Black Consciousness was an awakening movement. They sang about themselves, their state of being and they poured out their hearts. The Blacks realize the urgent need for singing their own praises and creating a Black Consciousness. Sartre views this in his *Black Orpheus* in *The Black American Writer* thus:

These black men are addressing themselves to Black men about black men. Their poetry is Neither satiric nor imprecatory; it is an awakening to consciousness? (7)

To correct the wrong image of the Blacks as portrayed the Whites becomes the ultimate motive of the African writers. The African American writers aim at decreating the stereotypes presented by the White writers about Africa and Africa. The average European imagines Africa as monotonous and bleak. To the White readers, Africa remains, by and large, a dark continent with no meaning, shape or coherence.

The White writers present Africa as one of deserts, hills and mountains, rivers, impenetrable forests, alligators, crocodiles, throbbing drums, frenzied dancers and primitive custom. And this
picture that the white writer presents is only partially true and not completely representative because the white man has never visited the innermost parts of Africa. He conducted slave trade only on the shores of Africa. He was afraid of the anopheles mosquitoes, wild animals and poisonous snakes. So much so, his knowledge of Africa was ephemeral and superficial. With such minimal knowledge, the image that the White writer presents of Africa is far from being genuine.

That is why W.E.B. Du Bois wants to affirm the fact that Africa is the spiritual and cultural home of all Blacks. He writes thus in praise of Africa:

This is not a country; it is a world, a universe of itself and for itself, a thing different, Immense? it is a great black bosom where the spirit longs to die. It is life, so burning so fire encircled that bursts with terrible soul inflaming life? (Broderick 128)

It is this myth which was sought to be exploded by the African writers on the dawn of the century. They impress on the fellow African that they are just as good as others in all respects. Tchicaya U Tam?si?s Foreword, in The Literature and the Thought of Modern Africa, very pertinently argues: ?Africa also has men who
are by no means short of intelligence, who are not all fierce, crazy or randy chiefs of no importance.?(7)

Consequently, the African writers emerge to explode the stereotypes and vitalize African literature. In their hands, African literature has played a vital role in this complex movement towards independence and self-knowledge. They use English language as a powerful medium to express the African tradition, sentiments, aspirations and hopes. They seem to follow Sartre’s recommendation: ?Since the oppressor is present even in the very language that Africans speak, they will speak this language in order to destroy it?? (Orpheus 16).

It is interesting to cross-link Sartre’s recommendation and the practice of protest writers amongst Black artists and the cry of Caliban to Miranda in The Tempest where the Imperial Colonialist meets his due in the English language taught to the native: ?You taught me language; and my profit on’t is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you for learning me your language!? (Hearne 11).

Enjoying a firsthand knowledge of their ancestral homeland and cultural heritage, the African writers represent the sole authoritative voices to present African life. They alone can project the disappointments, frustrations and inexplicable suffering of the Blacks. Only the Black creationists who understand the problems and sufferings of the Blacks could give a right expression to their
feelings, thoughts and experiences. Claude McKay echo this idea in his sonnet ?The Negro?s Tragedy?:

Only a thorn-crowned Negro and no white
Can penetrate into the Negro?s ken,
Or feel the thickness of the shroud of night
Which hides and buries him from other men. (5-8)

Understandably, the Black creationists cry the lot of race and try to create an awareness or consciousness of their race in the minds of the suffering Blacks. The awakening leads them to a bitter sense of rootlessness. All the Blacks are confronted with the feeling of emptiness, an inner void. They feel uprooted from their motherland Africa. Their search for identity is a very painful experience. The displaced Africans have to undergo the mental conflict arising out of the Cultural Divide.

The Blacks are torn between their love for their homeland with all its traditions, conventions, marriage ceremonies and funeral rites and the spell cast over them by the presiding Western languages, methods of living and traditions. Fluctuating between these two hostile elements of civilizations, they lose their balance. To choose their own past traditions of their ancestors or not is their present predicament.
There is an inescapable dilemma, Charles I. Glicksberg writes in *The Alienation of Negro Literature*:

if the Negro writer retreats into himself and develops his racial potentialities he is departing from the norms of American culture; if he imitates that culture, he may cease to be himself and destroy both his uniqueness and his creative vitality? (51)

The cultural dualism is present in the African writers As Sartre says in *Black Orpheus*: ?He has become split and he no longer coincides with himself.? (12) But his ?truncated life? must be unified and the ?walls of this culture prison must be broken down.? (13)

Claudius McKay Festus (15 Sept. 1890 - 22 May 1948), poet, novelist, and journalist, was born in Sunny Ville, Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, the son of Thomas Francis McKay and Hannah Ann Elizabeth Edwards, well-to-do peasant farmers who had enough property to qualify to vote. Thomas McKay's father was of Ashanti descent, and Claude recounted that his father would share stories of Ashanti customs with him. Claude's mother was of Malagasy ancestry. He was the youngest of eleven children. At four years old, McKay started basic school at the church he attended. At the age of seven, he was sent to live with his oldest
brother, a school teacher, to be given the best education available. While living with his eldest brother, Uriah Theophilus McKay became an avid reader of classical and British literature, as well as philosophy, science and theology. He started writing poetry at the age of 10.

In 1906 he decided to enter a trade school, but when the school was destroyed by an earthquake he became apprenticed to a carriage and cabinetmaker; a brief period in the constabulary followed. In 1907 McKay came to the attention of Walter Jekyll, an English gentleman residing in Jamaica who became his mentor, encouraging him to write dialect verse. Jekyll later set some of McKay's verse to music. By the time he immigrated to the United States in 1912, McKay had established himself as a poet, publishing two volumes of dialect verse, *Songs of Jamaica* (1912) and *Constab Ballads* (1912).

McKay left for the United States in 1912 to attend Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, but did not become an American citizen until 1940. McKay was shocked by the intense racism he encountered when he arrived in Charleston, South Carolina which inspired him to write more poetry, where many public facilities were segregated. At Tuskegee, he disliked the semi-military, machinelike existence there and quickly left to study at Kansas State University. At Kansas State, he read W. E. B. Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk*,

14
which had a major impact on him and stirred his political involvement. But despite superior academic performance, in 1914 McKay decided he did not want to be an agronomist and moved to New York, where he married his childhood sweetheart Eulalie Lewars. McKay published two poems in 1917 in Seven Arts under the Alias Eli Edwards while working as a waiter on the railways. In 1919, he met Crystal and Max Eastman, who produced The Liberator (where McKay would serve as Co-Executive Editor until 1922). It was here that he published one of his most famous poems, "If We Must Die", and "Red Summer", a period of intense racial violence against black people in Anglo-American societies. This was among a page of his poetry which signaled the commence of his life as a professional writer.

McKay was a substantial figure who emerged as one of the first and most militant voices of the Harlem Renaissance. He was regarded as one of the first major poets of the movement. Bernard W. Bell terms McKay a giant of the New Negro Movement. McKay set the tone of the Renaissance. He appears to be a pole star guiding the young writers of the 1920s? (Bell 490). He has risen from the sentimental to the splendid in his poetry. McKay was identified by other writers of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, as an inspirational leader. McKay's Harlem Renaissance literature focused on contemporary race issues. He chose to focus on the working-class community
rather than the middle-class population. McKay wrote three novels: *Home to Harlem* (1928), which was critically acclaimed but engendered controversy for its frank portrayal of the underside of Harlem life, a best-seller which won the Harmon Gold Award for Literature. The novel, which depicted street life in Harlem, would have a major impact on black intellectuals in the Caribbean, West Africa, and Europe (BNET.com/ *Home to Harlem - Critical Essay*). His next novel, *Banjo* (1929), a story without a plot, followed the exploits of an expatriate African-American musician. The third novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933) is often identified as McKay’s finest novel. The book is said to follow a principal theme of a black individual in search of establishing a cultural identity in a white society. The book discusses underlying racial and cultural tensions.

James Weldon Johnson perhaps best captured the significance of McKay’s achievement in *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*:

Mr. McKay is a real poet and a great poet. . . . No Negro has sung more beautifully of his race than McKay and no poet has ever equalled the power with which he expresses the bitterness that so often rises in the heart of the race. . . . The race ought to be proud of a poet capable of voicing it so fully. Such a voice is not found every day. . . . What he has
achieved in this little volume sheds honor upon the whole race. (164)


McKay tried his hands at various jobs. His role as a railroad waiter has had a perceptible influence on him in shaping his literary spirit. As with his gifted contemporary Langston Hughes, the wondering spirit of Claude McKay developed in him a keen sense of perception of the plight of the Blacks and their miserable living conditions. Arna Bontemps says that McKay has travelled extensively and role of ?artistic nomad? (142) moulded in him a universal human understanding. He traces the Renaissance to the year 1917, when Claude McKay published the poem, ?Harlem Dance,? in an obscure magazine. This poem heralded the Renaissance, and gave impetus to the poets to come out with their outbursts of cry and anger against the lynchers.

Works of the Harlem Renaissance reflected the sense of alienation, anger, and rage of the black people. They also characterized by heightened social awareness, as many black
authors and artists prejudices as well as to perpetuate their African cultural heritage. Historical factors such as growing up consciousness, urbanization, the rise of Harlem to the position of a Black-American Metropolis with a lively intensive subculture, and finally the awareness of the ?African heritage,? created a framework within which black artists could develop.

To McKay literature and art transcend class and culture, and their intrinsic value is independent of any restrictive and social factor. He says so in A Long Way from Home:

? I preferred to think that there were bad and mediocre, and good and great, literature and art, and that the class labels are incidental? I believe that whenever literature and art are good and great they leap over narrow group barriers and period to make a universal appeal. (139)

The intrinsic value of literature, McKay contends is primarily aesthetic, and its characteristics as a reflection of society are ultimately of secondary importance. Thus, he establishes a sharp dichotomy between formal beauty and content:

In any work of art, my natural reaction was for its intrinsic beauty for its social
significance. My social sentiments were strong, definite, and radical, but I kept them separate from my esthetic emotions for the two were different and should not be mixed up. (103)

Once again, McKay implicitly takes exception to the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude ideal of the committed artist for whom literary creation is also an extension of his social and political activism, and whose work is intended to further a given social, political and cultural ideology. These different views concerning the function of literature entail another divergence regarding both the writer’s source of inspiration and intended audience. While for the Renaissance and for Negritude the collectivity is at once the source and the target of literature for McKay the writer’s work which appeals primarily to the individual’s sense of beauty, is equally inspired by his subjective experience. This is precisely the view McKay expresses as he emphasizes that his poetry expresses his feelings to answer criticism that his work is not sufficiently proletarian.

Addison Gayle aptly records thus in *Black Expression*:

For poetical inspiration and vision, Phillis Wheatley had gone to the classical writers;
Paul Laurence Dunbar to the prevailing
mythologists of the period; Claude McKay, however, went to the people? (17)

Walter White calls McKay, "Without doubt the most talented and versatile of the new school of imaginative, emotional Negro poets?" (Cooper 163). He concludes his review by boldly asserting that "Mr. McKay is not a Negro poet, he is a great poet? (164). The above criticisms of White express a "contradictory opinion?, because he says first McKay is an emotional Negro poet, but concludes contrarily that he is not a Negro poet, but a great poet. In the view point of the researcher, she feels that a critic should criticise perfectly or strongly without any second thought. But White?s opinions on McKay are different. It may puzzle the rea...r.

As a socialist, McKay eventually became an editor at The Liberator, in addition to writing various articles for a number of left-wing publications. During the period of racial violence against Blacks known as the Red Summer of 1919, McKay wrote one of his best-known poems, the sonnet, "If We Must Die," an anthem of resistance later quoted by Winston Churchill during World War II. "Baptism," "The White House," and "The Lynching," all sonnets, also exemplify some of McKay's finest protest poetry. The generation of poets who formed the core of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes and Countée Cullen, identified McKay as a leading inspirational force. His innovation lay in the directness with
which he spoke of racial issues and his choice of the working class, rather than the middle class, as his focus.

McKay felt it is his noble mission to fight for their rights; he never hesitated to voice his protest. As Max Eastman points out in *Biographical Note* thus:

He [Claude McKay] learned in childhood how a family of his ancestors, brought over in chains from Madagascar, had kept together by declaring a death strike on the auction block. Each would kill himself, they vowed solemnly, if they were sold to separate owners. With the blood of such rebels in his veins?Claude McKay grew up proud of his race and with no disposition to apologize for his color? (7)

McKay was attracted to communism in his early life, but he was never a member of the Communist Party. Some of his most famous poems during that period were the militant *If We Must Die?* (1919) and his self portrait *Outcast?,* which was collected in *Harlem Shadows* (1922).

McKay also wrote lyrics reminiscent of his Jamaican homeland and works about love and exile, such as the Tropics in
New York and Harlem Dancer. The tones for many of his works have been described as race-conscious and revolutionary. He was an advocate for full civil liberties and racial solidarity. McKay’s pride in his culture and racial awareness helped to stimulate expression in African American literacy.

McKay never returned to the homeland he left in 1912. He became a U.S. citizen in 1940. High blood pressure and heart disease led to a steady physical decline, and in a move that surprised his friends, McKay abandoned his lifelong agnosticism and embraced Catholicism. He believed in the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, to which he was converted in 1944. In 1944 he left New York for Chicago, where he worked for the Catholic Youth Organization. He eventually succumbed to congestive heart failure in Chicago. His second autobiography, My Green Hills of Jamaica, was published posthumously in 1979. He died from a heart attack in Chicago at the age of 59.

Assessments of McKay's lasting influence vary. McKay's contemporaries, such as James Weldon Johnson, in Banjo remarked that ?Claude McKay's poetry was one of the great forces in bringing about what is often called the Negro Literary Renaissance? (McKay (i)). While his novels and autobiographies have found an increasing audience in recent years, modern critics appear to concur with Arthur P. Davis that McKay's greatest literary
contributions are found among his early sonnets and lyrics. McKay ended *A Long Way from Home* with this assessment of himself:

I have nothing to give but my singing. All my life I have been a troubadour wanderer, nourishing myself mainly on the poetry of existence. And all I offer here is the distilled poetry of my experience. (270)

Gwendolyn Brooks born on June 7, 1917, was the first of two children, born to David Anderson Brooks and Keziah Corinne (Wims) Brooks. Born at her grandmother’s house in Topeka, Kansas; approximately one month after her birth she was taken back to her parents’ home in Chicago where she lived for the rest of her life. She was a highly regarded, much-honored poet. Born and brought up in the urban ghettos of Bronzeville, she won the first major award in 1943 at the Midwestern Writers Conference, and has today come to be recognized as the grand dame of twentieth century African-American poetry.

Gwendolyn’s passion for writing and interest in poetry began at an early age. With her parents’ encouragement, she took refuge in books and in the poems she began writing at seven years old. And by the age of thirteen she published her first poem in the magazine *American Childhood*. Family and home were always central for Brooks. Her deep enjoyment of the family’s holiday
rituals was offset by unhappiness caused by her parents? depression-era financial quarrels. Her mother's demanding standards motivated Brooks, however, who recalls her mother's conviction that Brooks would be "the lady Paul Laurence Dunbar" (RPO 56) as an early source of her commitment to poetry. Her mother pushed the teenaged Brooks to share her work with writers James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes, both of them offered significant advice and encouraged her to read modern poetry and emulate poets like T.S. Eliot and E.E. Cummings. Having some of Brooks' poems, the Harlem Renaissance poet James Weldon Johnson complimented her talent, advising her to break with old traditions:

Dear Miss Brooks, you have an unquestioned talent and feeling for poetry. Continue to write at the same time, study carefully the work of the best modern poets to help cultivate the highest possible standard of criticism.

(RPO 202)

These inspirations prepared her, and by the age of six she had published over seventy poems. Hughes, in particular, remained a generous mentor into Brook's adulthood. Brooks began to teach herself prosody by reading the Romantic poets assigned in classes, including Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron. Brooks
concentrated on traditional forms like ballads, sonnets, and quatrains, while experimenting with enjambment and syntax. By the time of her graduation from Englewood High School (1935), she was contributing poetry regularly to the *Chicago Defender*, the city's Black newspaper.

Her next two years were spent at Wilson Junior College from where she was graduated in 1937. The racial and economic climate of that time compelled Brooks to accept employment as a domestic in the homes of wealthy whites and as assistant to the fraudulent "spiritual adviser" of the poor residents of the tenement called the Mecca Building-experiences she drew upon in later writing. Though Brooks found her employment conditions demeaning, she derived intellectual and social sustenance during this period from participation in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council, where she interacted with ambitious achievers like Margaret Taylor, Goss Burroughs and John H. Johnson, publisher of *Ebony* magazine. In Youth Council, Brooks also met Henry L. Blakely II, whom she married in 1939. Their son, also named Henry, was born in the fall of 1940.

For years, the Blakelys moved from one cramped kitchenette apartment to another, unable to obtain the kind of stable home in which Brooks had grown up, as the growing number of Blacks in Chicago intensified problems of residential gregation
and employment discrimination. Nonetheless, despite the disruptions and challenges of near-poverty, she continued to practice her craft, snatching time away from household chores and child care for writing. In her poem *The Ballad of Rudolph Reed*, Brooks clearly states poverty and the problem of residential segregations thus:

I am not hungry for berries.
I am not hungry for bread.
But hungry hungry for a house
Where at night a man in bed (5-8)

This poem also echoed Brooks' own life experiences, her longings and inconveniences that she had undergone. The Blacks do not avail even the basic amenities. They do not dream for any luxurious way of living or rich food; but a shelter, a house on their own to live and take rest. This status of the Blacks proves their plight.

Significantly, in 1941 Inez Cunningham Stark began a poetry workshop for Blacks on the South Side. Stark, a wealthy, white Chicagoan and member of the Board of Poetry magazine, brought to the workshop a strictly modernist poetics and a ruthless, yet constructive critical sensibility. Stark furthered Brooks' knowledge of contemporary poets and introduced Brooks to the bubbling poetic scene in Chicago. The workshop discussions were open and
honest and at times a bit brutal. During this time Stark and others critiqued Brooks’ work thoroughly. Brooks grew from this experience and in 1943 she won a poetry award from the Midwestern Writer’s Conference. Two years later her first collection of poetry A Street in Bronzeville (1945) was published through Harper & Row, which published all her books through the mid 1960s.

This first collection mirrored her own experiences in the suburb of Chicago called Bronzeville. The collection is broken into two distinct sections with the first detailing the average, day-to-day occurrences of people Brooks knew in Bronzeville. The second part of the collection A Street in Bronzeville details the unfair treatment of African Americans in the military during the World War II. The collection was met with praise and shortly after it was published, she was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. The book was acclaimed as an accomplished debut from a talented poet though often in terms that suggested such merits were unexpected in a Negro woman. Reviewers stressed the poems’ universality, apparently to assure white readers-Brooks’ primary audience, that their focus on Blacks would not be alienating. These poems feature the alliteration, rhyme, tightly controlled lines, and intricate syntax that typify Brooks’ poetics. They also establish themes to which Brooks written throughout her literary career: the impact of White beauty standards on African Americans, especially dark-skinned
Black women; the challenge of creating a rewarding life in impoverished and racist conditions.

*The Ballad of Pearl Mae Lee,* which explores the rage of a dark-skinned woman who was rejected in favour of a white woman. The book’s critical success did not change Brooks’ material circumstances significantly. Tellingly, she often recounted that she was sitting in the dark when she received the word in 1950 that she had become the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize; she and her husband had been unable to pay the electric bill. Notwithstanding its prize-winning status, *Annie Allen* (1949), her second poetry collection, received somewhat mixed reviews. Praise for its technical virtuosity and emotional intensity was matched by criticism of its ornate diction and stylistic excess. *Annie Allen* turns a critical eye upon the limitations of patriarchal gender norms and racist beauty standards impose upon Black women. Langston Hughes, in a review of Annie Allen for *Voices,* remarked that the people and poems in Gwendolyn Brooks’ book are alive, reaching, and very much of today (jpicforum.info/biographies/brooks).

In 1951, following the birth of her daughter Nora, Brooks began working on her only published novel: the heavily autobiographical *Maud Martha* (1953). Brooks turned to fiction in hopes of earning enough money finally to purchase a home—a goal
that, with her parents? help, realized in the small South Side house where she lived until her death.

Soon thereafter, she produced a collection of children?s poetry, *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (1956), and then devoted herself simultaneously to a second novel *In the Mecca* (1968) and a new collection of poems. The collection of poems written during this period, *The Bean Eaters* (1960), was dedicated to Brook?s father, who died in 1959. It reflected Brooks? awareness of the changing racial climate in the United States, perhaps to stress the old people?s adherence to traditional values as well as their lack of saintliness. The isolated routine of the couple?s life draws the attention of Brooks. She expresses these views in *The Bean Eaters*:

Two who are Mostly Good.
Two who have lived their day,
But keep on putting on their clothes
And putting things away. (5-8)

A pessimistic reading of this poem seems justified. The critic Harry B. Shaw quoted as perhaps despairing: ?they are putting things away as if winding down an operation and readying for withdrawal from activity? (Blooms 36). The truly positive nature of the poem is revealed in the last stanza. ?And remembering... Remembering with twinklings and twinges? (9, 10).
In the spring of 1967, Brooks and her friend Danner participated in the Second Fisk University Writers? Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Brooks enjoyed a warm reception was amazed by the young black audience?s energetic response to Amiri Baraka?s work. From this point forward, Brooks began associating with young poets in the Black Arts Movement, particularly Haki Madhubuti (Don L. Lee) and Walter Bradford, who became like sons to her, and absorbing tenets of the ??Black aesthetic?? that would remain critical to her work, long after she had distanced herself from that label. She found personal and artistic affirmation in the movement?s assertion that ??Black is Beautiful?? and embraced the challenge of writing poems as a black person, about blacks, and to a black audience. She published her work thereafter only with black presses. Her poetic style and interest in Black Studies was forever changed after attending the Conference. There was a tremendous change occurred in her poetic carrier. It will be clear from the words of James P. Draper in his work Black Literature Criticism (1999). Draper examines the influences on Brooks, and her commitment to ordinary urban Blacks:

Brooks is best known for her sensitive portraits of ordinary urban blacks who encounter racism and poverty in their daily lives? Inspired by the black power movement and the militancy of such poets as Amiri
Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Haki R. Madhubiti (Don L. Lee), Brooks began to explore the marginality of black life through vivid imagery and forceful language and to recognize rage and despair among black people as her own. (287)

Her poetic expression in ?Riot? (1969) and ?Family Pictures ? (1970) was heavily influenced by the social and political turbulence of the late 1960?s, and her poetry became more community oriented. Her autobiography Report from Part One (1972) illustrates her spiritual change during this time as well documenting the events leading up to the 1967 conference at Fisk University. The subtle optimistic hints of social equality from her earlier work were replaced by the disenchantment of the Civil Rights Movements and Black Power Movements. Her next works ?Beckonings? (1975), ?Primer for Blacks? (1980), and ?To Disembark? (1981) reflect this frustration and many of the poems promote anarchy and violence as a way to achieve social equality.

Brooks? later books include ?Children Coming Home? (1991) and the second half of her autobiography Report from Part Two (1996). Brooks privileged the fight for racial equality over black women?s struggle for gender equity; the decline in focus on women in her poetry was arguably an unintended side effect of the black
aesthetic’s male-centered politics. Toward the end of her career, trips to Kenya, Russia, and Ghana, along with increased awareness of the South African antiapartheid struggle, promoted a more global focus on blacks in Brooks’ poetry, as evident in *The Near-Johannesburg Boy and Other Poems* (1986) and *Gottschalk and the Grande Tarantelle*? (1988), with which she was particularly pleased.

Brooks used her position as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1985 to 1986 and her life appointment as Poet Laureate of Illinois (beginning 1968) for this purpose, holding readings and sponsoring contests for personally funded prizes, among other activities. The State and the Black Poetic Community have honored her contributions in a variety of ways, including renaming an Illinois Junior High School for her and establishing the Gwendolyn Brooks Center at Chicago State University. She received the lifetime achievement award from the National Endowment for Arts, the National Book Foundation Award for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. Brooks’ other awards include two Guggenheims, the 1994 National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson Lectureship, the highest honour of the Government and more than fifty honorary degrees.

Women writers also protested against the denial of their rights by the male. The Black women writers especially expressed their hatred for slavery in their race-oriented poems. Maya
Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison and Carolyn R. ders are some of the Black women writers who struggled for the freedom of women. Linda Brent detects in *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*,

Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own? (6)

Brooks’ distinctive autobiographies, *Report from Part One* (1972) and *Report from Part Two* (1996) provide invaluable insight into the life and mind of a writer whose career was shaped by the interaction between an insistence on artistic excellence, on one hand, and a commitment to exposing and countering racial, gendered, and economic injustice through poetry on the other. Brooks had been suffering from cancer for some time and she died peacefully with her family and friends reading to her.

The first chapter introduces the two great Black intellectuals, Claude McKay and Gwendolyn Brooks, who identify themself with the suffering Blacks. The poems of Claude McKay come out of his reading of life and society in the North of America while the poems of Brooks bloom out of her real life experience. Further, the literary growth of their period, the background of the age in which they have lived and the biographical notes of them are briefed.
The second chapter *Segregation, an Abomination* deals with the life of oppression and constraints experienced by the Blacks as a result of racial discrimination. Physical, psychological and sexual torments undergone by the Blacks are focused. Deep-rooted animosity between the Blacks and the Whites, deprivation of the Blacks from their homeland, poverty, punishments and suppressions impinged on the Blacks are discussed as well.

Under the third chapter *Masculinism versus Feminism*, the gender wise efforts and challenges of the two poets, to eliminate all the odds and pressures of the rights-denied fellowmen paid attention to. Their humanistic concerns for their suffering Black race, who longs for freedom and their integrated endeavours towards equality of human rights are highlighted.

The fourth chapter entitled *Stylistics* brings to light the subtle blending of traditional forms employed by the poets in their poems. The fusion of all these literary techniques and styles reveal the excellent stylistic features of the poems under study.

The concluding chapter *Summation* consolidates the similarities and differences found between the two poets in their writings. Direction of further scope of this topic is also prescribed.

The researcher, while coming to know of the plight of the Blacks, is induced to know more about the lives of the oppressed Blacks. Thus the researcher selected Claude McKay and Wendylyn
Brooks, who lived in the period of Civil Rights Movement, James Weldon Johnson and Black Arts Movement, to understand the life situations of the suffering Blacks. Their writings inspired the researcher than that of any other. The following words of Brooks in an interview bear the motivation. "I’m just a black poet, and I write about what I see, what interests me, and I’m seeing new things." (5)

Brooks’ poems represent her own life experiences she encounters, her feelings and thoughts. They are the reproductions of the social forces which act on them, and they bear the responses and solutions to the turbulent environment.

As American liberators, McKay and Brooks examine the major American themes like identity crisis, racial segregation, sense of the past, liberation, equality and search for self. Claude McKay in his Selected Poems, "The Negro’s Tragedy," expresses that what I write is urged out of my blood? (9),

It is the Negro’s tragedy I feel
Which binds me like a heavy iron chain,
It is the Negro’s wounds I want to heal
Because I know the keenness of his pain. (1-4)

The Black writers, as Shelley in his poem "To a Skylark" remarks, "tell of saddest thought? (90) of the coloured people. Sartre points out that:

35
The black race is a chosen race because it has had the horrible privilege of touching the depths of unhappiness? The black man who is Conscious of himself sees himself as the man Who has taken the whole of human suffering upon himself and who suffers for all? (Orpheus 31)

The researcher finds that the poets put on the miseries of others as garments. Understandably therefore, the Black creationists, McKay and Brooks cry over the lot of their race and try to create an awareness or consciousness in the minds of the suffering Blacks. McKay writes in A Negro Poet, ? At first, I was horrified, my spirit revolted against the ignoble cruelty and blindness of it? (48). Belonging to the fraternity of slaves, McKay felt it his noble mission to fight for their rights. He never hesitates to voice his protest.

Black literature, by and large, is reminiscent in character. Brooks and McKay are concerned with Black life, Black men, and Black spirit. Their evolution as poets partially corresponded with the social upheavals that they witnessed. The critical years of the thirties and forties left indelible scars of hunger and poverty on Brooks, but, because of a strong and closely-knit family, she survived. She always got unflinching encouragement and support.
from her parents. Both McKay and Brooks take pride in their race. They are acutely conscious of their race and the problems faced and confronted by the Blacks. Thus McKay’s and Brooks’ portrayal of denials, deprivations and dehumanization of the Blacks in their poetry would not only reveal the unique features of their poetry but also prove them as the Voice of the Black Conscience.

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