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The Issue of Race in Post-Colonial African American Poetry

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Abstract

With studying of selected poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, the researcher aims to investigate the issue of race in Post-Colonial African American poetry via comparative- typological approaches. Brooks tries to depict the social inequality and the subordination of her people that has happened during the sixties of the twentieth century. As a result, Brooks' poetry was an attempt to forcefully encourage the blacks to be inspired by their heritage to attain their principal role in the society. As a conclusion, Brooks places emphasis on the humanistic love too being one of the principal requirements to a happy and brotherly life.

Keywords: Issue, Race, African American, Poetry.

El tema de la raza en la poesía afroamericana postcolonial

Resumen

Con el estudio de poemas seleccionados por Gwendolyn Brooks, el investigador tiene como objetivo investigar el tema de la raza en la poesía afroamericana postcolonial a través de enfoques tipológicos comparativos. Brooks trata de representar la desigualdad social y la subordinación de su gente que ha ocurrido durante los años sesenta del siglo veinte. Como resultado, la poesía de Brooks fue un intento de alentar enérgicamente a los negros a inspirarse en su herencia para alcanzar su papel principal en la sociedad. Como conclusión, Brooks pone énfasis en que el amor humanista es uno de los requisitos principales para una vida feliz y fraternal.

Palabras clave: tema, raza, afroamericano, poesía.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fortunately, Gwendolyn Brooks was to grow in a house where education, values and culture were given lavish significance. Keziah, her mother, was a teacher before she got married. Reared up with the white culture all around her, Brooks had imbibed the Americans of the day. Though the Africans were not entirely lost, it was lurking beneath the layers of white culture attained from books, friends, schools and locality. Such locality, though Black, yet it attempts to forget its Blackness through drenching into the white culture as much as possible. Consequently, it was quite normal that this Americans is to be prevalent in her poetry. Gwendolyn Brooks

recollects how her own family to celebrate all the important holidays, Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving Day, Easter Sunday with her own family. Such celebrations in a Black household that she knew made the Black glory or greatness or grandeur. Due to the secondary role the blacks got in the American society and the oppression as well as the rejection they faced from the social and political institutions, they, blacks, tried hard to search for acceptance. Consequently, this led to another problem which is the loss of identity and more liminal position in life. Such issues, as well as problems, were the consequences of race discrimination. For those people suffered poverty and negligence due to their race such reject led them to suffer and try to prove themselves essential in life and the world. Issues of this sort preserved bedeviling in her mind and it was the awakening of 1960's that gave her voice to express her deepest feelings of resentment and soreness. Her early years of writing poetry, from 1945 until the late 1960's, demonstrate Brooks as an integrationist, a poet who strives to find her position in the American literary mainstream. After that, achieving universality in her poetry, was her aim together with the desire to be recognized and valued. Such quality of being accepted by white audiences is taken while she was a member of the Harlem Renaissance and it was further fulfilled when Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize for her collection (Bloom, 2003) and she was the first Black poet to have this prize.

2. METHODOLOGY

Brooks being a poet of the people makes the exposition of her poems sought from race-communal standpoints. Her poem *Bolden* (2003) published in *A Street in Bonnevillle* tackles the individual pain, but it at the same time gives an insinuation on the matriarchy of African antiquity. African societies comprehend maternity as a blessing from the gods. Pain in this poem comes from a murder committed by the mother. She had poisoned the umbilical cord of her children. Murder in itself is bad and its bad effect is further deepened when the murderer is the mother. In this case, the grief is heartbreaking. Aside from that when she admits her murder or the guilt she committed this is an obvious proof of her extreme pain saying: I have heard in the voices of the wind the voice of my dim killed children. Then comes the justification: If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths, believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate. This means that she has no children now to experience the normal activities with like playing with them, exchange love with, care about, or feel the joy of tears and sorrow. Brooks tried to say that such people, the black, are afraid of communal collapse, and they are inhabiting the communal surroundings where if they want to persist economically, they must endure manual family labor. Yet still, for them, children are valuable and motherhood esteemed. Hence, such cultural background was from where Brooks made her poem. Therefore, *The Mother*, confessed her crime personally, yet she is not a common criminal, she actually is a profound woman stunned by the politics of the time.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brooks in *The Mother* considers the effect of poverty on the lives of poor, especially women. Women when they commit such an action they live worries and anxiety because of such decisions. There might be here an autobiographical reference to Brooks. She refers to herself as a familiar mother by taking the decision of killing her child rather than the world she is living in. she commits the crime and she admits it because she wanted to protect them from the sever reality she was sure they are going to live, yet she regrets it because she feels that she has taken from them any possible joy and happiness they might enjoy (Pearse, 2003).

The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
The singers and workers that never handled the air.
You will never neglect or beat
Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.
You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.

Then she wonders the rightfulness of this action:
...if I sinned if I seized
Your luck
And your lives from your unfinished reach,
If I stole your births and your names,

Your straight baby tears and your games,
You are stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages ,
Aches, and your deaths,
If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate

The last lines of the previous quotes indicate an irony. For because of her love towards them and worry about them as well as her circumstances, she did commit the abortions. She was well-assured that she will not be able to do all those activities mentioned. This is to be justified as due to the political circumstances and experiences that astounded them including the mother. They are afflicted by the dread of communal fragmentation. They are also a kind of people who economically survive only through family employment. With such cultural background Brooks shaped her poem and paved the way for her readers to figure out how The Mother who will not mother her children, rather would murder them. The way of Brooks' presentation was in a magnificent style that presents The Mother as not a common criminal, but a profound woman astounded by the policies of the experience she lived in reality. Therefore, Brooks, as usual, has talked about and endures the talk about such problematic issues like those often are of original familiar traumas such as abortion, color and parenthood in deficiency. Disobedient to such agonizing history of racist false consciousness that refuses to yield a usable past, she has she made replicas of personal and public dignity for the sake of cultural survival. Consequently The Mother, as a character, was an example of a ghetto mother who scuffles to persist kind of scuffle that

will not authorize her to provision a new life. For she places emphasis on her rejection of the imperiled and banned urban youth.

In *A Street in Brooks* (1970) Brooks appeared as a poet who has further practical achievement that was the usual in the mid-1940s. The volume consists of a series of poems portraying life in Bronzeville in an underprivileged, urban scenery. Brooks manipulated the traditional poetic forms like the sonnet, ballad and narrative poems. Hence, the volume is a compilation of diversity of poetic forms that makes Brooks' characters alive. She presents in it ballads, urban blues poems, sonnets and Chaucerian stanzas reflecting the many influences on her so that she can provide her voice finally. Despite form diversity, there is still this same idea in the volume's poems. These poems talk about stories related to poetic figures, their struggles, their simple victories as well as eventually their unheroic persistence. Brooks was writing her actual experience from her simple second-floor apartment at the corner trying to depict the realities as life goes on in Bronzeville, the whole of Chicago's South Side, the way she sees and experiences them (Debo, 2014).

In her early poetry, Brooks named Chicago's vast black South Side as Bronzeville. Bronzeville was embodied in her first volume of poetry where the Bronzeville poems were the poems that release the pathos of petty destinies, the whimper of the wounded, the tiny incidents that plague the lives of the desperately poor, and the problems of common prejudice. She used to depict the struggling black people with a mastery of language. *A Street in Bronzeville*

encompasses twenty poems below this heading with lower-case letters for the headings of the minor poems. They focus on the characters with fleeting situations about life in Bronzeville. Among the poems in this volume was the old-marrieds, a depiction of an aged couple:

But in the crowding darkness not a word did they say.
 Though the pretty-coated birds had piped so lightly all day.
 And he had seen the lovers in the little side-streets.
 And she had heard the morning stories clogged with sweets.
 It was quite a time for loving. It was midnight. It was May.
 But in the crowded darkness not a word did they say.

In *A Street in Bronzeville* Brooks shaped permanent figures like Matthew Cole, an old, isolated character who only smile at certain memories like say, thoughts of a little boy licorice-full/Without a nickel for Sunday School, In Brooks' *Kitchenette Building*, which is a short poem there is an emphasis on social consciousness. With the usage of a language that contains metrical pauses and beats, to attain simplicity but a very intricate meaning. In this poem, Brooks starts quoting Eliot's *the Waste Land*: We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan/ Grayed in and gray in an action or respond to the expected melancholia. Then quickly these contemplations left aside by the appeal of everyday life on the South Side:

We wonder. But not well! Not for a minute!
Since Number five is out of the bathroom no,
We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

When Brooks sensed the world with its overwhelming emotional power, she hated the world of concrete anxieties; those showed to be intensified by poverty. The depiction of the hard reality and how it sharply contrasts with imagination is a common mention in this volume. An obvious example is *The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith*. It is a long narrative poem of 150 lines that have a mixture of satire and empathy. The satirical tone and its contrasts start right from the beginning with the title; with the protagonist's name that contains the unusual and the usual at the same time.

Inamoratas, with an approbation,
Bestowed his title. Blessed his inclination.
He wakes, unwinds, elaborately: a cat
Tawny, reluctant, royal. He is fat
And fine this morning. Definite. Reimbursed.

Brooks introduces here a narrator who uses the mock-heroic. When *Satin-Legs* begins his morning washings, the speaker develops into an atypically persistent lecturer. Then he began talking to you who is supposed to be innocent. Later he assumed to be a white. Then there was a passage of fourteen lines, regarding the suitability of *Satin-Legs'* choice of scents and oils:

Might his happiest
 Alternative (you muse) be, after all,
 A bit of gentle garden in the best
 Of taste and straight tradition? Maybe so.
 But you forget, or did you ever know,
 His heritage of cabbage and pigtails,
 Old intimacy with alleys, garbage pails,
 Down in the deep (but always beautiful) South
 Where roses blush their blithest (it is said)
 And sweet magnolias put Chanel to shame.

This has been ended with may be so. What Satin-Legs has was just an artificial flower composed of feathers, for his collar. Then the speaker says, ah, there is little hope. Satin-Legs will have his lotion, lavender, and oil. This happened in the first two short asides:

Unless you care to set the world a-boil
 And do a lot of equalizing things,
 Remove a little ermine, say, from kings,
 Shake hands with paupers and appoint them men.

Hence the speaker conclusively goes back to an inspection about speaker's dualistic sense of language and class. For when Satin-Legs is satirized, the addressee is also satirized because of his ignorance. Such issue of Brooks' place in a white literary establishment had in fact.

Written in 1963, *A Song in the Front yard* shows the simple and pure feeling of a naive girl who wishes to taste some of the pleasures of the backyard. This might be taken on the surface level, yet if one digs deep into the layers of meaning the poem might carry, a different meaning might appear also together with the significance of the period the poem written in. There is a sense that the girl is not as naive as the first reading of the poem suggest, for the dermal metaphorical examination of the poem discloses an essential race as well as class concerns. Consequently, there is in accordance with the era of writing the poem in, a symbolism related to the insinuation of isolation and the consequent mode of integration. The girl says right in the first stanza that I have stayed in the front yard all my life/ I want a peek at the back. A girl gets sick of a rose. This explains that she has never been to the backyard and she wants to peek at it having a romanticized idea about it, consequently about poverty. She wants to see the weeds there as well as the coarseness of untended being. This is only because she gets sick of a rose. She is longing for the world of the backyard that she finds exciting without knowing the restrictions of this world, or what the world represents. She says: I want a peek at the back/ where it is rough and untended and hungry weed grows/ a girl gets sick of a rose this might imply the idea that she knows about the two worlds (back and front) as having a dichotomy that is juxtaposed, the back as opposed to the front. The back is likened to what is rough, untended and hungry while the front is likened to a rose. There is awareness here rather than naiveté, an awareness that expresses a wish to get rid of property and convention (O'Clair, 2012).

The girl's desire to go to the backyard is what has been directly stated in the second stanza I want to go to the backyard now/ and maybe down the alley. The girl at the beginning says she peeks and now she wants to go there because of she maybe down the alley/ to where the charity children play here one might find this dermal metaphorical examination. Consequently, there is a class distinction here, though not quite apparent. The girl talked about charity child, a phrase that is not hers but her mother's as a reference to the children in the alley. Therefore she herself is not a charity children and such is the segmentation. This means that class distinction does exist and it does have a legacy through generations. This is further emphasized in the third stanza when the girl mentioned that she has an actual experience with them for she says: They do some wonderful things/ They have some wonderful fun, It is highlighted through the contrasting views between the mother and the child who is the narrator by describing them as having wonderful things the thing that might be rejected by the mother. Also when the mother mentions them by the name referring to their future saying:

Johnnie Mae

Will grow up to be a bad woman.

That George will be taken to Jail soon or late

On account of last winter he sold our back gate

Metaphorically speaking that George's selling their back gate is significant. For it has an insinuation about her longing to go out of the backyard. When George sold their back gate, he enables the girl to have an admittance to the backyard and the children in the alley as well as the alley itself. Symbolically speaking eliminating the gate means eliminating the traditional segmentation created by the classists including the mother of the girl herself. So the third and fourth stanza convey a struggle:

They do some wonderful things.
They have some wonderful fun.
My mother sneers, but I say it is fine
How they do not have to go in at quarter to nine.
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae
Will grow up to be a bad woman.
That George will be taken to Jail soon or late
On account of last winter he sold our back gate.
But I say it is fine. Honest I do.
And I would like to be a bad woman, too.
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
And strut down the street with paint on my face.

It seems that the daughter's ideas about the children that have been taken from her romanticized idea about the backyard affected her future views on her child, and this consequently may protect her and her child from the life of immortality. Therefore, the girl considers it

fine to be a bad woman stating that she knows what is a bad woman is. Therefore, there is class distinction clear in the poem which is basic in the society represented by the mother who considers herself and class as elitists and how such method rendered meaningless by the daughter's view that she is not different from the children of the alley. Such disparities related to economic matters are quietly related to race as well. For symbolically speaking back and front yards stand for institutionalized racial separation that was obvious during that period. Hence, black people where to enter and have been serviced through the back doors of the institutions at the 1960s period. Another symbol is the roses in the poem and that they stand for the white and the white society in general and how far she is sick of roses. Hence, some black people try to have integration through being enrolled in white schools. Thus, integration might be a solution to this problem from the viewpoint of the children who long to get free from the limitation of class, race, and paternal authority adapting simple understanding of life. This might also serve as affirming racial pride and equality.

This is a clear indication of the dehumanization experienced by the whites towards the black. Another example of racial violence is The Ballad of Rudolph Reed. The poem is a sharp ironical presentation of the viciousness practiced against a Black family who tries to obtain a house in a white community. There is a sense of detachment achieved by the form of the poem which is the ballad.

Rudolph Reed was oaken.

His wife was oaken too.

And his two good girls and his good little man
Oakened as they grew.

Brutality happened when such an atmosphere is given, for the white people start throwing rocks at the house of Reed. Such a thing led to his death while he was trying to protect his daughter who has been wounded due to these throwing rocks. This is an example of the recent racist actions against blacks. The poem was strongly made to show the ugliness of Reed's death, he died trying to protect the wounded daughter of his. One of his daughters. The poem ends powerfully depicting the dichotomy of sorrow as well as strength:

By the time he had hurt his fourth white man
Rudolph Reed was dead.
His neighbors gathered and kicked his corpse.
Nigger his neighbors said.
Small Mabel whimpered all night long,
For calling herself the cause.
Her oak-eyed mother did no thing
But change the bloody gauze.

This is an exemplification of the idea that the black experience is a violent one. It is because that Reed attempts to encompass the beyond limitations stated by the whites, he faced violence:

I am not hungry for berries.
I am not hungry for bread.
But hungry for a house
Where at night a man in bed
May never hear the plaster
Stir as if in pain.
May never hear the roaches
Falling like fat rain. . . .
All I know is I shall know it,
And fight for it when I find it.

Not only he faced violence, but violence was so severe; simply it was the reaction of the whites to his attempt to extend:

The first night, a rock, big as two fists.
The second, a rock big as three. . . .
The third night, a silvery ring of glass.

Simply he was defending his aspiration, yet the result was his death and what makes the matter worse is when his neighbors collected and hit out his dead body saying: Nigger. What is worse is that he was unsuccessful, and this is the case of most of the blacks that Brooks tried to highlight. Hence Brooks here tries to show racism against the Blacks as well as the consequences of this on their moods and attitudes. They grew frustrated and desperate. An obvious example

about that is my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell where the frustrated Blacks are clearly depicted, no matter old or young they are:

I hold my honey and I store my bread
In little jars and cabinets of my will. . . .
I am very hungry. I am incomplete.
And none can tell when I may dine again.
No man can give me any word but Wait,
The puny light. I keep eyes pointed in

Quite clear here that there is this sense of despair and frustration due to the fact that there is no hope in life and every possible solution is beyond reach. Problems do exist and racism is there, they (Blacks) cannot escape. Yet in this poem, there is only frustration and hopelessness with no anger or agitation. Gwendolyn Brooks because of the increasing bad conditions of the blacks and the sever violence they underwent because of their skin and ethnicity, felt the necessity to change her style in dealing with the matters related to the blacks. The blacks are no longer inferior searching for their value in the eyes of the white but they got a gradual awareness about themselves and their own value in life, in the society whom they are part of and due to the liminal position that had been imposed on them by the whites, they decided to attain their own value violently. This was widely advocated by Brooks in form and themes as well. Thus she begun through this phase make the blacks know their own heritage, qualities as well as their significance in life as human beings who are supposed to work

together, be united to achieve this goal. Brooks is more dedicated to the cause of her people not only in theme but also in language for in this phase of her life she began more using black English as being the language of the street with its idioms and words like Ain which is black. A clear example is when Mrs. Sallie discovered the absence of Pepita she says: suddenly, counting noses, Mrs. Sallie sees no pepita. Where pepita be? The reference to be here is a Black English (Hudson, 1972).

Another story of those stories is that of Alfred. He is portrayed by Brooks as a chorus does in the tragedy by foreshadowing, summarizing and interpreting the action as the characters pursue their separate wants and needs Functionally, Brooks used him to provide a uniting effect to the poem as well as she can describe Africa:

Alfred can tell of

Poet, and Muller, and president of Senegal, who in voice and body, loves sun, listens to the rich pound in and beneath the black feet of Africa.

Here, he speaks about something lacking to the black Americans and the possibility of his being poet –king like Leopold Seder Senghor, the founder of the term negritude according to the speaker, Alfred, these things Africa can give to them. Then in the second poem After Mecca she talked about the assassinated Black Muslim leader Malcolm X:

Original.

Ragged-round.

Rich-robust.

He had hawk-man's eyes.

We gasped. We saw the maleness.

The maleness raking out and making guttural the air and pushing us to walls.

He opened us –

Who was a key?

Who was a man?

Brooks here shows some sort of sympathy towards such leaders, like Malcolm X, because she considers them heroes and that they should be looked at and followed. Hence they are considered as an inspiring hero because they call for the rights of the blacks. Once the blacks are going to be inspired by them, they are going to act militantly because those heroes died or slain defending the rights of the black people. Therefore, Brooks in these poems trying to motivate the black to act violently towards those who oppress them. Brooks' quest for self-identity was a major element in her poetry and resulted in group-identity. For in her poetry she tried to make what is unheard quite heard by others, not through the great emphasis on the black power or the nationalism. She tried to reconstruct ideas and feelings so that they can be noticed by others. This is quite similar to the idea of the riot. Hence, Brooks (2005) is to talk about not only black pride or even black dignity but to express unity among black Americans. The unity they can make whether in relation to family or even the

community as a whole, which is of supreme importance. Therefore, she was after creating unity among the oppressed as well as those who have been rejected and subjugated. And to talk about their ambitions, attitudes as well as their anxieties. After all, she was talking about the American and the long historical racism and despair they faced in their life. Brooks' poetry reflects certain violence as being needed without reproaching or scolding those who have indulged in racism. Her late poetry reflects the way she holds blackness and liberation which is universal for all humanity before its being significant for the blacks first. Therefore, her quest is for identity as well as the affirmation of this identity and self-esteem. She reproduces the pressure of her time because of racial subjugation: On the street, we smile/ we go/ in different directions/ down the imperturbable street (Watkins, 1987).

This is also was reinforced by Brooks in the second part of Riot entitled The Third Sermon on the Warplane. Like the other parts of this poem, it according to William H. Hansell seems express Brooks' sense that violence against a system which tolerates injustice while comfortably preoccupied with materialistic abundance is inevitable. Consequently, the poem expresses the necessary step towards informing white America that the old ways must end. The violence is intended not to destroy the system but to restore it or bring it closer to the realization of its ideals. The major idea in the poem is that there is rebirth out of certain rebellious action together with destruction. To achieve this idea in this part Brooks alluded to the mythological creature, the Phoenix. Those black marchers are metaphorically similar to the Phoenix, throughout their actions, they might destroy themselves

just like the Phoenix when it destroys itself by fire. But this is not the end because by doing so they are going to rise again like the Phoenix when rose from ashes after her destruction, to achieve their goals. The title of this part, as Brooks used to do in most of her poems, was symbolic. The word sermon in its religious connotation was to show and place emphasis on the religious dedication for the civil rights activists and the word Worland reelects the political and religious uproar in the United States in the late sixties. Hence, the title word, warp, is significant as well as its image in it. It is a Greek word that means whirl, together with the word sermon suggests a difficult time facing the blacks. It also means bent or swollen, indicating the physical difficulty the blacks face metaphorically speaking. So physically as well as spiritually the blacks are fermenting and expecting difficulty due to the subjugation they witness in this era, the late sixties. Besides Brooks used this word figuratively as an indication of the blacks being principal in the life of the American in America despite the miserable conditions they live depending on Bois's claim, we have woven ourselves with the very warp of this nation.

In the first stanza of the poem, Brooks introduces a Black Philosopher who was talking about the quiet, beautiful and unrestful earth:

The earth is a beautiful place.

Water mirrors and things to be reflected.

Goldenrod across the little lagoon (Lindberg, 1996).

There is beauty in the earth with its constructive note, yet there is also an orientation to the need of violence for the blacks. Hence comes the idea of chaining the people at the mouth of the Black Philosopher. The Philosopher takes the reader back to the epigraph of Martin Luther and states the idea that oppression is just like enchaining people. Yet it seems that the keepers of those chains cannot hear the sounds of the chains made by those enchained. He advised them to listen because it seems that you do not hear the remarkable music. Once you hear it, you will join it and make black blues. Then Brooks describes the riot's development while changing the tone of the poem in the following stanzas. Obviously, the major theme of the poem is introduced from the first part of, the demand for demolition to reach construction. And such a thing is reinforced by the epigraph, yet contradiction is also there at the beginning of the poem; contrast between the beginning and the epigraph (Kent, 1971):

Our chains are in the keep of the keeper in a labeled cabinet on the second shelf by the cookies. . .

Sonatas. The arabesques. . .

There is a rattle, sometimes.

You do not hear it who mind only

Cookies and crunch them.

You do not hear the remarkable music—‘A

Death Song for You Before You Die’.

If you could hear it

You would make music too.

The black blues.

She talked about a vacant restaurant, Jessie's Kitchen:

Nobody's eating Jessie's Perfect Food.

Crazy flowers

Cry up across the sky, spreading and hissing

This is it.

Where Crazy flowers or fires binge across the sky declaring the start of the riot, hissing this is/it. They want to start this riot because they feel that there are things theirs and they want to restore them once more (Moore, 1965):

The Young men run.

They will not steal Bing Crosby but will steal

Melvin Van Peebles who made Lillie a thing of Zamphougi

A thing of red wiggles and trebles.

Therefore, Brooks' description continues to show these men running about, to pass over albums by Bing Crosby to steal Melvin Van Peebles albums. This indicates their being different from a mindless crowd to an assembly who in their stealing is presenting a declaration about their abhorrence for anything representative of the

status quo. Then little rioters steal a radio from hell (maybe a burning store) trying to listen to some music from James Brown, Mingus, Young-Holt, Coleman, John. In the midst of this disorder, they got the desire to enjoy when there is no limitation to restrain them. They got freedom and start singing the blues, yet it will not last long because, However, what/ is going on/ is going on. Through their participation in the riot and the way in stealing things, the poet wants to say that the riot is not that typical one. An image of fire is used in the next stanza to stand for renewal, revolution and hope. Fire/ That is their way of lighting candles in the dark/ ness. There is another reference to a fire that serves partially in providing the meaning of the horrors of riot (Mandela, 2011).

Fire .

That is their way of lighting candles in the darkness.

A White Philosopher said

It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.

These candles curse —

Inverting the deeps of the darkness.

Here to make fire is not for brightness or a promise of renewal, but for the sake of eradicating darkness. For Brooks here intends to say that white culture's superior conceiving poorly veils its sinister but real role in the violence. In this case, darkness does not only means the black community, yet it means also the unrecognized absence, and therefore this represents the depths of darkness. That is why this is

followed by the White Philosopher's wisdom as it is better to light one candle than curse the darkness. This wisdom indicates the idea that a candle has been lit and it is the candle that lit to intensify darkness. Here there is irony, to say besides the positive side of the candle there is a destructive or negative one, obliteration turns out to be formation. This is just to support the rioters. When the police came after that, the reader might figure out that there is a sense of irony here by referring to the candle for it does not mean progress rather it means highlighting what is going to happen especially when they say: guard here, guns loaded. Everything ends here and the rioters scattered in a very painful way (Hansell, 2003).

The next stanza describes the death of a young rioter, a black woman, killed by the policemen, a lover, and a gut gal. After that Brooks leads the readers to a headline from the Sun-Times which 'Nine Die and this headline mark the beginning of the next stanza giving within it a number of real people to call so that they can check the widespread gossips appeared after the riot. Then there was a eulogy for Richard peanut Washington, a Chicago gang leader, who was admired and respected:

Cool purrs Peanut. Peanut is
Richard—a Ranger and a gentleman.
A Signature. A Herald. And a Span.
This Peanut will not let his men explode.
And Rico will not.
Neither will Sengali.

Nor Bop nor Jeff, Geronimo nor Lover.
 These merely peer and purr'
 And pass the Passion over (Taylor, 1991).

He is a representative of the Blackstone Rangers. Since he is esteemed, so he is going to control things and he will not let things go out of control. Besides he is A Herald, religious, so he is capable of uniting past with the present and he is going to bring a transformation, a signature. Therefore, not all the riot is bad, sometimes it is good and with benefit. The gang members who participate in the riot are to sense profound estrangement to the extent that they will not improve into having shared individuality like other rioters but they are going to preserve their own faithfulness to their own gang only: thou confer/ with ranging Ranger men for they will not explode Then some people, like the white, cannot comprehend why there is riot and see in the riot only obliteration in the properties:

But WHY do These People offend themselves?
 Say they
 Who say also it is time.
 It is time to help
 These People.

The whites, then, are unable to sense the significance behind the riot which Brooks says as being their no longer acceptable to subjugation. And the fact that something well-intentioned if going to

be achieved, a step in the direction of gaining their identity. Brooks here is mocking the white- encoded Law (my newish Voice). Brooks finally says that there is something should be heard and the Phoenix will rise once more from the ashes. Lies are told and legends made/ Phoenix rises unafraid. Therefore, the poem ends with the following lines:

The Black Philosopher will remember:
There they came to life and exulted,
The hurt mute.
Then it was over.
The dust, as they say, settled.

These are the words of the Black Philosopher, who announces the fact that the hurt mute is no longer going to be mute, and no longer are they going to be hurt, referring of course to the Black Americans. No longer silence and passivity are going to be found, those people are to reject anything that is going to dehumanize them like their being part of the strategies that intend to make them white consequently this means being subjected to prejudice and oppression and at the same time means being deprived of their identity as well as humanity. Therefore, the poem presents the upper-class white man's, John Cabot, deafness to the black people and the result was his death. Consequently, the Black Philosopher, asks them to listen to music

carefully because the name of the song is A/ Death Song for You before You Die. And this exactly what happened to Cabot. Hence comes the reference once more to the Phoenix as a sign of deeper insight made by the renewal and this is the intention of the third part of the poem (Malewitz, 2006; Wiese, 2005).

In the third section of the poem, *An Aspect of Love, Alive in the Ice and Fire* Brooks keeps on her description, but this time, she describes what happens after the riot between the two people. She starts with it is the morning of our love; here the morning indicates the beginning of the day, a new beginning in which it is a time when people love each other and accept each other. A physical light in the room is to stand for spark the Phoenix uses to kindling itself as self-accepting as a lion in African velvet. Leading to the time of not-to-end. This means there is a change that has happened due to this riot and the participation in it. She in this part portrays one of her total men, addressing him in a straight line saying: You are direct, and self-accepting as a lion/in African velvet. You are level, lean/ remote. Then, they, finally, go down the imperturbable street. Actually, Brooks took the title of the poem from Robert Frost's *Fire and Ice*, then she tried to place together two groups of lovers, just to show the possible end of this tumult which either in hatred (ice) or passionately (Fire). Black people after the riot according to Sears and Mc Conahay got much proud about themselves after the riot, they argue that:

Black's image of blackness became notably more positive over time, following the riot. Black pride was particularly strong among the

New Urban Blacks. It appeared to have become a core mainstream value in the contemporary northern urban ghetto, where the best educated and best-informed blacks showed the highest levels of black pride. Therefore, Brooks suggests a different and new world and at the same time different and new people. This is the outcome of riot is people who love each other and capable of living with each other. They can also go down to the imperturbable street with full confidence that though they have been made of ice and fire, yet they can live with this and beyond it as well: this is the shining joy/ the time of not-to-end thus the battle or riot has led to love and peace. The second part of Riot that is The Third Sermon on the Warplane is similar to In the Mecca, for the narrative perception in this poem moves rapidly from place to place with little or no transition, presenting a series of scenes and speeches merged together to give an generalized as well as intentionally disjointed explanation of a ghetto riot.

The Life of Lincoln West from Brooks (2012), the volume in which she encourages violence as a mode to attain social equivalence, is a ballad about the feeling of a small, seven-year-old boy who is Lincoln West, the ugliest boy that everyone ever saw. Due to his being ugly, the boy was unable to make communication with others. People reject him and his family members as well for his shape looks like an insult to everybody. Brooks portrays his ugliness so badly to the extent that even his father could not bear the sight of him and his teacher at school find it difficult to be as pleased with him as with others. But aside from all these things Lincoln was so creative and children like him because he made up/games, told stories, and when/ their Most

Acceptable friends came, they leave him. Here there is a need to belong, a desire for acceptance which is not found. The story represents the search for his self-identity for he feels inferior due to his uneven features (Shaw, 1986):

The pendulous lip, the
Branching ears, the eyes so wide and wild,
The vague vibrant brown of the skin,
And, most disturbing, the great head.⁶¹

With the development of the poem, its realistic aspect becomes so obvious:

One day, while he was yet seven,
A thing happened. In the down-town movies
With his mother a white
Man in the seat beside him whispered
Loudly to a companion, and pointed at
The little Line.
There! That is the kind I have been wanting
To show you! One of the best
Example of the specie. Not like
Those diluted Negroes you see so much of on
The street these days, but the
Real thing.
Black, ugly, and odd. You

Can see the savagery. The blunt
Blackness. That is the real
Thing.

The child in this poem reflects Brooks' tendency towards militancy for he pursues a more militant solution to his situation. Here Lincoln West is far more violent in his attitudes towards racial matters. The feelings of blackness are his problem, Lincoln experiences much frustration due to his Negroid or African presence. He has been greatly exposed to the danger that is why he develops into the victim of ferocity and recognized in relation to his African heritage, therefore, got a racial rather than a personal character. Brooks here in an indirect way tries to reflect the tragedy as well as its relation to the individuals through juxtaposing opposites so that one might infer a clear understanding of his life. In this poem there is death in life, this is what the boy is feeling. Correspondingly, in *The Boy Died in my Alley*, from Clark (1987) the boy here undertakes a panic attitude: I have closed my heart-ears late and early/ and I have killed him ever. Here the type of love, which is the motherly love, the very strong one as well as the one who has implied power behind the voice of the character trying to give a grounding to the black in instructing them about the black and the militant ways in defending their rights. In this poem Brooks is asking for a making action, any kind of action against violence for she makes the incident of the violent death of a small boy in her alley, behind her house, an occasion to call her people to be active. They should act against subjugation and violence for though the

reason behind the boy's violent death is unknown, yet they should act so that they can achieve individual conversion:

I never saw his face at all.
I never saw his future fall.
But I have known this Boy.

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

Here Brooks considers herself responsible for the death of the boy though she is in reality not and she considered his blood as if ornaments [her] alley. Doing so she tried to make sense out of the senseless death of the boy by calling to change through committing action, even though violent. Brooks in this poem implicitly calls for a direct resistance: The red floor of my alley/ is a special speech to me. Doing so she highlights clearly the black pride and self -assertion.

4. CONCLUSION

Gwendolyn Brooks is an African American poet and the first winner of the Pulitzer Prize was capable of overcoming all the impediments that might stand against her dreams and consequently the dreams of her people due to race, ethnicity and oppression. Throughout

her poetry, she was struggling just like her people who were struggling in reality for self-assertion against social, political in addition to physical offensives. In her poems, she reflects this energy with the sort of an increased intensity. Her poetry, which is well-known by the very poetical descriptions of the African American city life, provides an urgent desire to sustain the beauty and humanistic love as a result of being confronted with violence as well as suffering. Brooks throughout her literary career tried to highlight the oppression her people are exposed to, yet this was, in her early phase of writing, through hidden messages by simple descriptions of the daily activities and the lives of the black people. Consequently, this is to be done through European forms like the sonnets. Thus the contents of her poetry were African American while the form was European.

With the increase of violence towards the black and the progress Brooks herself witnessed in life as well as in her literary career, for she witnessed the Fisk university meetings and the development of the civil rights movements, she underwent a new tone as well as a new vision. She began to encourage the blacks to struggle even more violently to achieve their own freedom from the domination of the whites and to reject being subjected to others under the terminology of the minority for they are not less than them. In this case, she is to highlight racial awareness among the blacks and this coincides with the use of free verse to enlighten the blacks about their freedom and the attitude to live among others freely and with love. Brooks, in this case, encouraged communal work to attain self-expression for individuals. Opposites could live with each other with

love and understanding of the rights as well as the equality of each other. Thus Brooks underwent a transformation from integrationist into militant then moves towards searching for freedom in a world of love and brotherhood.

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