



Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice

D.H. Melhem

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Gwendolyn Brooks is one of the major American poets of this century and the first black woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry (1950). Yet far less critical attention has focused on her work than on that of her peers.

In this comprehensive biocritical study, Melhem—herself a poet and critic—traces the development of Brooks's poetry over four decades, from such early works as *A Street in Bronzeville*, *Annie Allen*, and *The Bean Eaters*, to the more recent *In the Mecca*, *Riot*, and *To Disembark*.

In addition to analyzing the poetic devices used, Melhem examines the biographical, historical, and literary contexts of Brooks's poetry: her upbringing and education, her political involvement in the struggle for civil rights, her efforts on behalf of young black poets, her role as a teacher, and her influence on black letters. Among the many sources examined are such revealing documents as Brooks's correspondence with her editor of twenty years and with other writers and critics.

From Melhem's illuminating study emerges a picture of the poet as prophet. Brooks's work, she shows, is consciously charged with the quest for emancipation and leadership, for black unity and pride. At the same time, Brooks is seen as one of the preeminent American poets of this century, influencing both African American letters and American literature generally. This important book is an indispensable guide to the work of a consummate poet.

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