



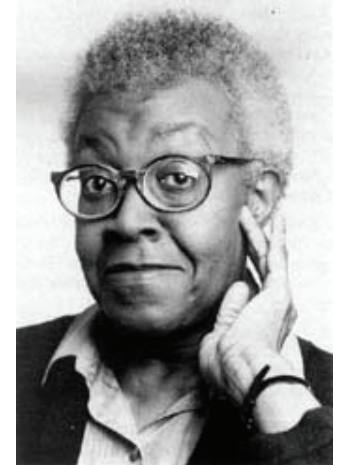
# Gwendolyn Brooks

## Biography

Gwendolyn Brooks was born to Keziah Corine Wims and David Anderson Brooks on June 17, 1917 in Topeka, Kansas. Her family moved to their permanent residence on Champlin Avenue in Chicago when Brooks was four. Shortly after their move (at the age of seven), Brooks began rhyming, and by the young age of thirteen she had her first poem published. She became a weekly contributor to the Chicago Defender and attended Wilson Junior College, from which she graduated in 1936. In 1937, when Brooks was twenty, her work appeared in two anthologies.

Gwendolyn Brooks won her first major award in 1943 at the Midwestern Writers' Conference. In addition to several other honorariums (among which are two Guggenheim awards, her appointment as Poet Laureate of Illinois, and the National Endowment for the Arts Lifetime Achievement Award), Brooks was the first African-American writer to both win the Pulitzer Prize (1949) and to be appointed to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1976). Brooks received more than fifty honorary doctorates from colleges and universities. In 1969, the Gwendolyn Brooks Cultural Center opened on the campus of Western Illinois University. After a lifetime of proficient verse writing, Brooks died of cancer in December 2000. She was 83 years old.

Gwendolyn Brooks' work has undergone several transitions throughout her career. Arthur P. Davis, in *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900-1960*, states that "... she has changed her style as well as her viewpoint in midcareer. When she first published in 1945. . . she definitely held [the] position [of a literary integrationist]. In her last two poetical collections, however, she has abandoned that attitude and gone 'black'" (Wright 97).



### Quick Facts

- \* 1917-2000
- \* African-American poet, novelist, and writer
- \* Won the Pulitzer Prize for *Annie Allen* in 1949

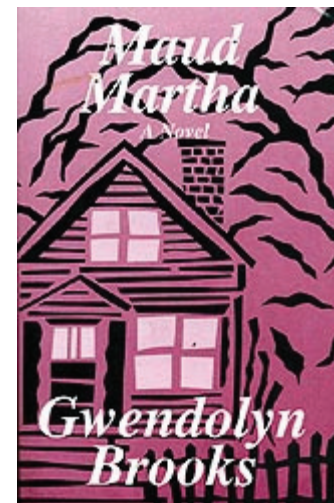
This page was researched and submitted by Katie O'Gara on 3/14/97 and edited and updated by Lauren Curtright on 8/24/04.



# Gwendolyn Brooks

## Biography continued

Despite these transitions, Gwendolyn Brooks offers insight into African-American culture, commentary on the impact of racial and ethnic identity on life, and a vision of the pressures of day-to-day existence throughout all of her literature. All three of these themes take precedence in *Maud Martha*, Brooks' novel. From early in her life, Maud Martha Brown is repeatedly subjected to racial prejudice from within, and outside of, her community. She comes to regard herself as less attractive than other African-American girls because of her darker skin color, and she is repeatedly treated as undesirable by members of other ethnic groups; for example, when she is unable to pay the full price for the merchandise at a hat store, the white sales clerk treats Maud Martha in a belittling manner. The apartment in which Maud Martha and her husband, Paul Phillips, live provides a view into African-American life and daily existence. After moving into their new home, Maud Martha notices that "there was a whole lot of grayness here" (Brooks 64). Day to day life for Maud Martha is an ordeal and offers little excitement and few meaningful rewards. Despite this, a true sense of community among the residents does exist -- Maud Martha's neighbors come rushing to her aid when she gives birth to her daughter.



This view into African-American culture recurs in several of Brooks' other works, including *The Bean Eaters* (a view into the life of impoverished yet content elderly African-Americans) and *We Real Cool* (a stream of thoughts of poor inner-city African-Americans who have adopted a hoodlum lifestyle). The most dominant theme in Brooks' work is the impact of ethnicity and life experiences on one's view of life. Brooks incorporates this belief into "Young Heroes: To Keorapetse Kgositsile (Willie)" in her collection *Family Pictures*. While most readers may regard Afrika (the focal character of "Young Heroes") as a "horror . . . in working clothes" (Brooks 15), Brooks looks up to him as the man who will enlighten the African-American race through his teachings.



# Gwendolyn Brooks

## Biography continued

Many critics say Brooks has been underappreciated. According to James M. Johnson of Ramparts, “No white poet of her quality is so undervalued, so unpardonably unread. She ought to be widely appreciated. . . as one of our most remarkable woman poets. . . .” (Wright 46). While her poetry has been well-received by many critics, Maud Martha has not gained as much praise. Noel Schraufnagel regards Maud Martha as “. . .the type of enduring black woman that has become a stereotype” (Wright 136), essentially revealing his opinion that Brooks has done nothing new in this work. Despite Schraufnagel’s rather negative view of the novel, several other critics have looked upon it favorably; for example, Barbara Christian praises the book’s “[heightening of] our awareness of the wonderfulness of the commonplace” (Wright 136).

## Selected Bibliography

### Works by the author

- Report from Part Two* (Third World Press, 1996)
- Children Coming Home* (The David Company, 1988)
- Gottschalk and the Grande Tarantelle* (Third World Press, 1988)
- Winnie* (Third World Press, 1988)
- Blacks* (Third World Press, 1987)
- Mayor Harold Washington and Chicago, the I Will City* (Brooks Press, 1983)
- Very Young Poets* (Brooks Press, 1983)
- To Disembark* (Third World Press, 1981)
- Primer for Blacks* (Brooks Press, 1980)
- Beckonings* (Broadside Press, 1975)
- The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves, or What You Really Are, You Really Are* (Third World Press, 1974)
- Aloneness* (Broadside Press, 1971)
- Black Steel: Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali* (Broadside Press, 1971)
- A Broadside Treasury* (Broadside Press, 1971)
- Jump Bad* (Broadside Press, 1971)
- The World of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Harper & Row, 1971)



# Gwendolyn Brooks

## Selected Bibliography continued

### Works by the author continued

- Family Pictures* (Broadside Press, 1970)  
*Riot* (Broadside Press, 1969)  
*In the Mecca* (Harper & Row, 1968)  
*The Wall* (Broadside Press, 1967)  
*We Real Cool* (Broadside Press, 1966)  
*Selected Poems* (Harper & Row, 1963)  
*The Bean Eaters* (Harper, 1960)  
*Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (Harper, 1956)  
*Maud Martha* (Harper, 1953)  
*Annie Allen* (Harper, 1949)  
*A Street In Bronzeville* (Harper, 1945)

### Works about the author

- Brown, Patricia L. , Don L. Lee, and Francis Ward, eds. "To Gwen, with Love" (*Colorado Review*, 1989).
- Callahan, John. F. "Essentially an Essential African: Gwendolyn Brooks and the Awakening to Audience" (*North Dakota Quarterly*, 1987).
- Childress, Paulette. *A Womanist Social Protest Tradition in Twentieth Century African-American Literature: Fiction by Marita Bonner, Ann Petry, Dorothy West, and Gwendolyn Brooks* (*Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1999).
- Davis, Arthur P. *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900-1960* (Howard University Press, 1974).
- Dworkin, Ira. "'The Evading Eye': The Transgeneric Prose of Gwendolyn Brooks" (*CLA Journal*, 2003).
- Gery, John. "Subversive Parody in the Early Poems of Gwendolyn Brooks" (*South Central Review: The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association*, 1999).
- Hubbard, Stacy Carson. "'A Splintery Box': Race and Gender in the Sonnets of Gwendolyn Brooks" (*Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*, 1992).



# Gwendolyn Brooks

## Selected Bibliography continued

### Works about the author continued

- Iker, Karen. “‘The Bit of Art, That Could Not Come from Any Other’: Gwendolyn Brooks’s Maud Martha and the Bildungsroman Revised” (*In Process: A Graduate Student Journal of African-American and African Diasporan Literature and Culture*, 1996).
- Johnson, Mark. “Brooks’ ‘Gang Girls’” (*Explicator*, 2003).
- Kent, George E. *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* (University Press of Kentucky, 1990).
- Kufrin, Joan. “Gwendolyn Brooks” in *Uncommon Women* (New Century Publishers, 1981).
- Loff, Jon N. “Gwendolyn Brooks: A Bibliography” (*College Language Association Journal*, 1973).
- Lowney, John. “‘A Material Collapse That Is Construction’: History and Counter-Memory in Gwendolyn Brooks’s *In the Mecca*” (*MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 1998).
- Madhubuti, Haki R., ed. *Say That the River Turns: The Impact of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Third World Press, 1987).
- Melhem, D. H. *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice* (University Press of Kentucky, 1987).
- . “Gwendolyn Brooks: Humanism and Heroism” in *Heroism in the New Black Poetry: Interviews and Interviews* (University Press of Kentucky, 1990).
- Mihaila, Rodica. “Metamorphoses of Blackness in the Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks” (*B. A. S. : British and American Studies/Revista de Studii Britanice si Americane*, 1998).
- Miller, R. Baxter. *Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks: A Reference Guide* (G. K. Hall, 1978).
- Mootry, Maria K., and Gary Smith. *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction* (University Press of Illinois, 1987).
- Shaw, Harry B. *Gwendolyn Brooks* (Twayne, 1980).
- Wright, Stephen Caldwell. *The Chicago Collective: Poems for and Inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks* (Christopher-Burghardt, 1990).
- , ed. *On Gwendolyn Brooks: Reliant Contemplation* (University of Michigan Press, 1996).
- Various authors. “Gwendolyn Brooks: A Symposium” (*Field: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, Fall).



# Gwendolyn Brooks

## Archives

### Correspondence

- James A. Emanuel Collection, General Correspondence, 1948-1994, n.d. , Box 1, Gwendolyn Brooks, 1970-1974, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- James Bertolino, Papers, 1968-1980, letters to JB from Gwendolyn Brooks, Ohio University Libraries
- Joyce Ann Joyce, Papers, 1950?-2001, [Folder 14] Joyce Papers: Correspondence - Gwendolyn Brooks, Valdosta State University.
- Hoyt Fuller, Papers, 1940-1981, Personal Correspondence (1953-1981), Atlanta University Center, Georgia.
- Records, 1959-1984, Correspondence of Robert Burns, executive editor of US Catholic, 1959-1984; Correspondents include Brooks; University of Notre Dame Libraries.
- Papers of [Francis] Coleman Rosenberger, 1946-1952, Series II: Letters and Postcards, from Brooks, Nov. 30, 1946, University of Virginia Libraries.
- Hannah Kahn, Papers, 1940-1987, Series 2, 1957-1986; includes correspondence with Brooks; University of Florida Libraries. Letter to Gwendolyn Brooks, Oct. 4, 1956, from Langston Hughes, University of Virginia Libraries.
- Jack Conroy Papers, 1924-1991, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

### Poetry

- The Frank P. Piskor Collection of Robert Frost; includes poetry written by Gwendolyn Brooks on the occasion of Frost's death; St. Lawrence University Libraries.