

GWENDOLYN BROOKS AND 20TH-CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY

Professor Karen Ford
English 650-34739
Thursday 2:00-4:50
fordk@uoregon.edu

118 PLC
541-346-1516
Office Hours: Wednesday 11:00-12:00
Friday 10:00-12:00

TEXTS

UO Bookstore

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Blacks*

Charles Henry Rowell, *Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Poem Kit	10%
Close reading (3-5 pages)	10%
Recitation and presentation (10 minutes)	10%
Opening and thesis for seminar paper (2-3 pages)	10%
Annotated bibliography for seminar paper	10%
Seminar paper (12-15 pages)	20%
Revised seminar paper (12-15 pages)	30%

- Assignments must not exceed page (including Notes and Works Cited) or time length, and written work must be printed (not submitted electronically) single sided in Times New Roman 12 or Courier 10 with one-inch margins all around in MLA style.
- Submit written work in my English Department mailbox (118 PLC) by 4:00 on the due dates.
- Incompletes will be given for documented medical emergencies only.
- If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Graduate Program Learning Outcomes for students earning degrees in English states that students who complete the MA or PhD in English

1. will be able to undertake original research with assistance from faculty by (a) identifying new scholarly problems or fields or building on existing ones; (b) locating and assessing current scholarly work in their subject area; (c) framing their own arguments clearly, cogently, and logically, offering convincing evidentiary support for their claims; and (d) explaining how their claims build on, refute, or add to existing scholarly debate and knowledge.
2. will be able to write clearly, correctly, and persuasively.
3. will be acquainted with a variety of methodologies with which to interpret and analyze

literary, film, and/or folkloric texts, and with a variety of fields of literary, film, and/or folkloric study.

Learning outcomes for students completing English 660, Gwendolyn Brooks and 20th-Century African American Poetry, will contribute to the graduate program goals in a number of ways. Class members will

- become knowledgeable about African American poetry and poetics;
- study the life and works of Gwendolyn Brooks and situate Brooks's poetry in the African American literary tradition;
- trace Brooks's influence on contemporary African American poetry;
- practice the methodologies of cultural neoformalism, producing historicized closed readings and arguments in scholarly essays and seminar discussions;
- undertake original research by (a) identifying new scholarly problems in twentieth-century African American poetry or building on existing ones; (b) locating and assessing current scholarly work in this area; (c) framing their own arguments clearly, cogently, and logically, offering convincing evidentiary support for their claims; and (d) explaining how their claims build on, refute, or add to existing scholarly debate and knowledge;
- produce a scholarly essay that is clearly, correctly, and persuasively written on a topic in twentieth-century African American poetry;
- give a clear, coherent oral presentation on the seminar topic within the assigned time limit and field questions from class members;
- assemble an annotated bibliography on the topic of their seminar paper papers, summarizing key critical arguments in clear prose and providing bibliographic citations in MLA style;
- recite poetry aloud with accuracy, responsiveness, and nuance;
- develop their own poetry pedagogy.

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📖 = Readings on Blackboard

Week 1 – April 3

Careful rhymes. Lofty meditations.

Course Introduction; historical overview

Poetry and Poetics: Brooks, “the murder,” “the rites for Cousin Vit” 📖 and in *Blacks*
James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*: Prefaces to the first and second
editions; poems by Dunbar, Cullen, McKay, Bennett 📖

Countee Cullen, *Caroling Dusk*: Foreword; poems by Dunbar, Cullen, McKay, Bennett 📖

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One*: Sections IV and V (55-72)

Further Reading

Robert Kerlin, *Contemporary Poetry of the Negro* 📖

Poem Kit submitted in class.

Week 2 – April 10

The Measure of Race Reverence

Langston Hughes, et al., *Fire!!*: “Foreword” (n.p.), “Flame From the Dark Tower” (16-23) 📖

---, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” 📖

Brooks, *Blacks, A Street in Bronzeville*: “A Street in Bronzeville,” “The Sundays of Satin-Legs
Smith”

---, *Report from Part One* VI and VII (68-72) 📖

---, Interviews with Terkel, Angle 📖

Further Reading

Brooks, *Blacks, A Street in Bronzeville*: “gay chaps at the bar”

Week 3 – April 17

Think of Thaumaturgic Lass

April 14: Close reading due by 4:00 in 118 PLC

Brooks, *Blacks, Annie Allen*: “Notes from the Childhood and Girlhood,” “The Anniad”

---, Interview with Stavros 📖

Further Reading

Brooks, Interview with Newquist 📖

Don L. Lee, “Gwendolyn Brooks: Beyond the Wordmaker—The Making of an African Poet” 📖

Week 4 – April 24**The Untranslatable Ice**

Brooks, *Blacks*, *Annie Allen*: “Appendix to the Anniad”

Film: *Reflections Unheard: Black Women in Civil Rights* and discussion with director and producer Nevline Nnaji, 4:00, Knight Library Browsing Room


Further Reading


Brooks, *Annie Allen*, “The Womanhood”: “the children of the poor”

Week 5 – May 1**Technique of a Variegated Grace**


April 28: Annotated Bibliography due by 4:00 in 118 PLC

Brooks, Hayden, Tolson in *Angles of Ascent*

Robert Hayden, *Collected Poems*: “The Diver,” “Ballad of Sue Ellen Westerfield,” “Night, Death, Mississippi,” “Homage to the Empress of the Blues,” “Those Winter Sundays,” “Middle Passage,” “Runagate, Runagate,” “Aunt Jemima of the Ocean Waves,” El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, “Paul Laurence Dunbar” 

---, *Collected Prose*: “How it Strikes a Contemporary,” “Counterpoise” 

Further Reading

Brooks’s Foreword to *New Negro Poets of the USA* 

Week 6 – May 8**The Last Quatrain**


May 5: Introduction and Thesis due by 4:00 in 118 PLC

Brooks, *Blacks: The Bean Eaters*: “The Bean Eaters,” “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters,” “The Last Quatrain,” “Mrs. Small,” “The Chicago *Defender*,” “Bronzeville Man with a Belt,” “Bronzeville Woman in a Red Hat,” “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed,” “The Egg Boiler”

---, *Report from Part One* (73-78, 82-86) 


Week 7 – May 15**Poems that Kill**

The Black Aesthetic: Neal, “Black Arts,” Karenga, “Black Art” 

Black Fire: Note to the first paperback edition and Foreword; poems by Sanchez, Smith, Jones, Neal, Thomas, Bennett 

Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Marginalia 183-90) 

---, Interviews with Lewis, Fuller et al. 

---, *Report from Part Two* (94-98) 

Further Reading

Dudley Randall, ed., *The Black Poets*, Introduction 

The Black Aesthetic: Gayle, “Black Aesthetic,” Fabio, “Tripping with Black Writing” ☞
Evans, Giovanni, Madhubuti, Rodgers, Sanchez, Knight in *Angles of Ascent*

Week 8 – May 22

New Art and Anthem

Brooks, *Blacks, In the Mecca*: “In the Mecca”
---, Interview with Madhubuti ☞

Further Reading

Harper, Kaufman, Knight, Thomas in *Angles of Ascent*

Brooks, *In the Mecca*, “After Mecca”: “Boy Breaking Glass,” “Medgar Evers,” “Malcolm X,”
“Two Dedications,” “Sermon on the Warpland,” “Second Sermon”; *To Disembark*, “Riot”

Week 9 – May 29

The rough dark Other music!

May 27: Seminar paper, Notes, Works Cited due by 4:00 in 118 PLC

Brooks, *Blacks, Primer for Blacks*: “To Those of My Sisters”; *To the Diaspora*: “To Black Women”

---, *Winnie* ☞

---, Interviews with Hull & Gallagher, Tate ☞

BAM and Gender Poems: Knight, “Black Male”; Sanchez, “blk/ woocommerce,” “Short Poem”;
Cortez, “Rape”; Rodgers, “Last M.F.”; Shange, “no more love”; Hemphill, from *Conditions*
☞

Further Reading

Baraka, *Confirmation*, Introduction ☞

Clifton, Jordan, Lorde in *Angles of Ascent*

Week 10 – June 5

The NBA

Harper, “Makin’ Jump Shots” ☞

Harris, “[Drag],” “Villanelle for the dead white fathers”

Hemphill, “American Hero” ☞

Jackson, “Hoops,” from “Letter to Brooks” ☞

Johnson, “LeRoi Eating Watermelon at Howard” ☞

Angles of Ascent: Rowells, “Writing Self, Writing Community: An Introduction”; Ellis, “All
Their Stanzas Look Alike” (315), Tretheway, “Incident” (411), Dargan, “Search for Robert
Hayden” (435)

Baraka, “A Post-Racial Anthology?” ☞

Greg Tate, “Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke.” *Flyboy in the Buttermilk* ☞

Further Reading

Ai, Coleman, Komunyakaa, Mullen, Ellis in *Angles of Ascent*

Finals Week – June 9-13

June 12 : Seminar Paper Revision due by 4:00 in 118 PLC

BOOKS ON RESERVE AT KNIGHT LIBRARY

Baraka & Baraka, eds. *Confirmation*

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Blacks*

---. *Children Coming Home*

---. *Report from Part One*

---. *Report from Part Two*

Stephen Caldwell Wright, ed. *On Gwendolyn Brooks: Reliant Contemplation*

Cheryl Clarke. "After Mecca": *Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement*

Countee Cullen. *Caroling Dusk*

Joanne V. Gabbin, ed. *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*

Addison Gayle, Jr., ed. *The Black Aesthetic*

Gloria Wade Gayles, ed. *Conversations with Gwendolyn Brooks*

Robert Hayden, *Collected Poems*

---. *Collected Prose*

Stephen E. Henderson. *Understanding the New Black Poetry*

Langston Hughes, et al. *Fire!!*

Langston Hughes, ed. *New Negro Poets of the USA*

James Weldon Johnson. *The Book of American Negro Poetry*

LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal, eds. *Black Fire*

Robert Kerlin. *Contemporary Poetry of the Negro*

D. H. Melhem. *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice*

Angelyn Mitchell, ed. *An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*

Aldon Lynn Nielsen. *Black Chant: Languages of African American Innovation.*

Dudley Randall, ed. *The Black Poets*

Henry Charles Rowell, ed. *Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry*

Evie Shockley. *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry*

Lorenzo Thomas. *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry*

ONLINE ARCHIVES AND RESOURCES

Modern American Poetry Site: <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/>

Penn Sound: Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing:

<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/>

Poetry Foundation: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org>

Academy of American Poets: Poetry.org: <http://www.poets.org/index.php>

The Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov>

Reflections Unheard information: <http://reflectionsunheardfilm.com>