Gwendolyn Brooks Essay, Research Paper

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Writing with uncommon strength, Gwendolyn Brooks creates haunting images of black America, and their struggle in escaping the scathing hatred of many white Americans. Her stories, such as in the “Ballad of Rudolph Reed”, portray courage and perseverance. In those like “The Boy Died in My Alley” Brooks portrays both the weakness of black America and the unfortunate lack of care spawned from oppression. In “The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie” Brooks unveils another aspect of her skill by entering the domestic arena with the lingering limitations imposed by prejudice. These aspects, such as strength and finesse, are among Brooks great attributes. Worthy of exploration, Brooks powerful and haunting techniques can be separated and explored in the above mentioned poems. Each work contains a specific tactic, which effectively promotes her ideas. It is for that reason, tactics mixed with ideas, which have placed Brooks among the finest poets.

Perhaps because of Brooks’ use of a stiff format, “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed” may be her strongest work. Imbuing the poem with incredible lines and description, Brooks transforms Rudolph Reed, who is the character the poem is built around, into a storybook hero, or a tragic character whose only flaw was the love he held for his family. Brooks creates a strong, solid character who is more than another fictional martyr, but a human being. The Finesse she imbued in this work from the first stylized

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stanza: “Rudolph Reed was oaken.\ His wife was oaken too.\ And his two girls and his good little man\ Oakened as they grew.” (1081, 1-4) Here brooks’ symbolic use of the word oakened, coupled with the use of a rhyme scheme of the second and last sentence of every stanza causes the reader to more deeply feel what the character and his family are going through. Using the idea of a dream home, Brooks stabbed to the heart of the American dream and where those of African descent fit into it. Every person, man or woman, has at one time or another dreamt of living in a beautiful home:

“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\ “May never here the plaster\ stir as if in pain.\ May never here the roaches\ Falling like fat rain.\ “Where never wife and children need\ Go blinking through the gloom.\ Where every room of many rooms\ Will be full of room.\ “Oh my house shall have its east or west\ Or north or south behind it.\ All I know is I shall know it,\ And fight for it when I find it.” (1081, 5-20)

Without her use of the above dream, Brooks would have been unable to bring an effective human perspective to Rudolph Reed and his family. Once this human side was

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created, the horrible demise of Rudolph Reed struck with an intensity which would otherwise have been lost.

Losing finesse in place of what at first seems a shallow attempt at poetry, “The Boy Died in My Alley” develops into an incredible exploration of enfeeblement. Brooks power comes again from her ability to bring the reader into a human world, with human characters. It explores the pain one person feels, and the hopelessness spawned from it. Although relatively few people live in an area where crime is so rampant as in “The Boy Died in My Alley”, it strikes a chord of fear and depression most in society may relate to. The use of a strong beat in this poem help to create the frantic yet uncanny depression found throughout the poem:

“Policeman pounded on my door.\ “Who is it?” “POLICE!” Policeman yelled.\ “A boy was dying in your Alley.\ A boy is dead, and in your alley.\ And have you known this boy before?”\ I have known this boy before.\ I have known this boy before, who\ ornaments my alley.\ I never saw his face at all.\ I never saw his futurefall.\ But I have known this boy.

(1084, 10-21)

The staccato rhythm Brooks uses is developed through repeating many of the lines. The lines are not exact copies,

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but keep the poem rolling forward, which is important if Brooks hopes to keep the reader active in the storyline. Included for the staccato rhythm, is a short curt sentence structure:

“Without my having known.\ Policeman said, next morning,\ “Apparently died alone.”\ “You heard a shot?” Policeman said.\ Shots I hear and shots I hear.\ I never see the dead.” (1083, 1-6)

This use of rhythm is the style the work hinges on. In many ways the broken sentences remind the reader of the forms the English language have taken for black Americans. Again, it can be pointed out this was the intention of Brooks. In ways not seen in “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed”, Brooks acts as the conductor of a symphony of words and style.

An intoxicating work is “The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie”. Second only to “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed”, “Chocolate Mabbie” has an unrivaled depth of character. Once again, Brooks draws the reader deep into the human soul. She bares the wheels and cogs which keep people moving. It is the one thing nearly every man woman and child has felt from one time or another, that Brooks delves into. Bringing to life a little girl of seven, Brooks creates a vision of human life. Unfortunately it is painfully aware to the reader Mabbie’s crush will never manifest itself beyond herself:

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“Oh, warm is the waiting for joys, my dears!\ And it cannot be too long.\ Oh, pity the little poor chocolate lips\ That carry the bubble of song!\ Out came the saucily bold Willie Boone.\ It was woe for our Mabbie now.\ He wore like a jewel a lemon-hued lynx\ With sand-waves loving her brow.

Mabbie is black, and her crush is white. Brooks again crushes the readers senses with the struggle of inequality and racism. As in “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed”, Brooks uses both finesse, and human characters. She allows the reader to feel close to the characters. She gives them a chance to realize they may have lived through a time in their lives which were as difficult.

It is safe to say, Gwendolyn Brooks is a master of styles. Her ideas come to life on the page through careful examination of possible stylistic interpretations; will it be finesse, rhythm or a combination of both. Brooks brings out the best a work has to offer with strong, powerful lines, with enough finesse to lull the reader into the story.

An Exploration

of

Style

by: Will Peiffer

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