

4-2023

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Chloe Bard  
*Germanna Community College*

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### Recommended Citation

Bard, Chloe, "Poetry Analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks" (2023). *Student Writing*. 58.  
[https://commons.vccs.edu/student\\_writing/58](https://commons.vccs.edu/student_writing/58)

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Chloe E. Bard

Professor Engel

English 275

27 March 2023

### Poetry Analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks, a poet of the 1900's, made the courageous decision to write poetry that embodied alternative topics that dealt with motherhood. Lucille Clifton, a poet during this time period, accredited a poem of her own with appreciation to Brooks. Clifton is quoted saying that without the publishing of "The Mother", that her own poem "would not have been possible" (Holladay). Brooks sparked the start of women feeling comfortable publishing alternative views to motherhood. Motherhood is a rather extensive topic that embodies many different societal expectations for women. Women are frequently found being judged or looked down upon for particular decisions made regarding the raising of children. There are many different ideologies when it comes to raising children and motherhood in general. The author Gwendolyn Brooks uses a number of different methods to showcase alternative ways of thinking about motherhood. Throughout her three poems "The Mother", "A Sunset of the City", and "The Children of the Poor": Brooks discusses that motherhood is not always a positive experience for mothers. These poems fluidly connect to the thematic idea of disrupting ideologies by giving three alternative representations of motherhood which go against the societal expectations set for mothers.

A journal article in the *American Quarterly* written by Gertrude Reif Hughes and published by Johns Hopkins University Press, stated that Brooks' poems were a large part of the modern feminist movement (Hughes). Hughes wrote that Brooks' poems challenged harsh practices that were upheld during this time period (Hughes). Additionally Hughes mentions that

Brooks takes on an alternative perspective of women's appropriated roles during this time period. (Hughes). Hughes very likely could be referring to Brooks alternative perspectives on motherhood, such as a woman making the decision to carry a child to term. It was also mentioned by Hughes that Brooks' poems exhibited powerful ideologies related to modernism from a feminist perspective (Hughes). Brooks' poems exhibited her strong beliefs and viewpoints even if they were not widely accepted by society during this time.

Gwendolyn Brooks was around the age of 50 during the late sixties and early seventies. Around this time she has been described to have recognized a new sense of self when current political movements interested her intellectually (Hughes). Though she had said in an interview that she was previously aware of her personal political beliefs and values (Hughes). This time period had great historical significance to Brooks personally. It was a time where the women's rights movement was taking place. Simultaneously, the civil rights movement was taking place. Brooks is both a person of color and a woman. She likely had momentum from these two historical events which allowed her to take on the alternative representations of motherhood from the viewpoint of a woman of color.

Abortion will always be a popular topic of discussion among people. Brooks tackles this immense topic as one of her alternative representations of motherhood. Abortion during this time period was a topic that was talked about way less frequently than it currently is. If a woman got pregnant she was expected to carry the child to term and not have a second doubt. Society expected women to welcome motherhood with open arms. However Brooks writes from the perspective of a person who had an abortion and the thoughts following her decision. In her poem "The Mother" she discusses the deeper feeling and thoughts that goes through the head of a mother after having an abortion. The first stanza of the poem discusses that "Abortions will not

let you forget” (Brooks line 1). Brooks is saying that once a woman has an abortion that she will never forget not only the procedure but what could have been a child that was never born. She is explaining that an abortion is more than a procedure. She is implying that it is a physical as well as a mental strain on the individual. She later discusses the things she stole from them such as their tears, lives, names, and so on (Brooks). One literary analysis of the poem states that the poem “...takes the form of an apology spoken by the mother to the aborted...” (Holladay). Brooks is writing a poem for what could be out of guilt from having an abortion. Women of this time, especially women of color, were not allowed to express their thoughts and feelings. Especially if it dealt with their own bodies because such things were considered taboo, or not frequently talked about. Women during this time are also further united because of the women’s rights movement.

Socioeconomics is a heavily studied topic specifically within the United States due to the wide range of individuals and their rather varying incomes. Gwendolyn Brooks chose to write about the less favorable side of the scale in her poem “The Children of the Poor”. This poem discusses the difficulty of raising children when being financially impoverished. This is an alternative perspective of motherhood because many people don’t connect motherhood and financial hardship as one linked struggle. An author who analyzed this poem considered it to be relatable to many people (Leclerc). Within this poem, Brooks takes on another alternative perspective of motherhood. The first line of the second stanza poses the question “What shall I give my children? who are poor,” (Brooks, line 15). This question is slightly rhetorical because if the mother is considering her own children to be poor, she is also calling herself poor. This question may also be posed by the mother to assess what she could be giving her children that is not obtained with money, such as love or wisdom. Brooks continues writing about her children

and states “Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand No velvet and no velvety valor;” (lines 17-18). Brooks is describing that even though her children are not well off financially, that they do not beg for things such as velvet. One writer's analysis of the poem comes to the conclusion that children who are in need will not beg (Leclerc). While children who are not in fact in need, will be the ones to beg for things such as velvet (Leclerc). This is due to the fact that children who are poor are aware that they are not able to enjoy life's luxuries or something that is not considered a need, such as velvet; therefore they would not beg for such an item. While a child who is on the more wealthy side of the scale, is able to beg for luxuries such as velvet because they already have their basic needs met.

Gwendolyn Brooks' third alternative representation of motherhood comes from the perspective of a mother who is no longer perceived as a motherly figure by her family. The mother's children have grown into adults who have their own children to raise. This then leaves the mother of the poem questioning what she should now do that her job is considered complete. In the poem “A Sunset of the City”, Brooks writes “Already I am no longer looked at with lechery or love. My daughters and sons have put me away with marbles and dolls,” (lines 1-3). The writer is saying that she is no longer perceived as a sexual being or looked at lovingly. She is making the comparison of being stored away in a drawer or a closet where games and toys go. This is likely because the writer is being treated like a fragile and lifeless object rather than a human. She is making the comparison of being stored away in a closet or a drawer where games and toys go. One literary critic makes the comparison of the writer's sons and daughters putting away their childish belongings, similarly to putting their mother away, and leaving the city they grew up in for better opportunities (Instituto). This critic also mentions the writer's perspective of being observant of the passage of time and the changes that come along with it. The poem

suggests that the writer felt helpless due to the change in responsibilities from being a mother to now not having duties or responsibilities. Another critic takes a similar stance and states that the poem encompasses the deepest and hardest struggles of an middle aged woman in her current culture (Lisella). This author also makes the comparison of once a mother's job is over, that she is in a way forced to step out of that role. More specifically once a woman has fulfilled the expectation of both child bearing and raising, she is then almost rendered useless to society. The poem suggests that Brooks may be speaking from experience with her own children. However she doesn't mention her own children specifically within the poem. This poem continues the theme of disrupting ideologies by writing about motherhood from the alternative perspective of what follows the mother once her motherly duties are completed.

The author Gwendolyn Brooks uses a number of different ways to showcase alternative ways of thinking about motherhood. Throughout her three poems "The Mother", "A Sunset of the City", and "The Children of the Poor": Brooks discusses that motherhood is not always a positive experience for all mothers. The first alternative stance Brooks writes about is what some consider to be controversial is abortion. In this poem she discusses what happens to an individual after they get an abortion and how this pain is on a deeper level than physical pain and is long lasting. She wrote this poem to give women who had abortions a voice. The second poem she writes about motherhood from the alternative standpoint of raising children while financially struggling. She wrote this poem to make people aware that there are mothers who feel like all they can offer their children is their love rather than physical items that can be bought. Lastly she wrote a poem from the alternative perspective of what happens to a mother once she is no longer perceived as a mother but rather an object. She wrote this poem to bring awareness to bring attention to society that women aren't just around for birthing and raising their children. Though

they are still human beings and should be treated as such even after raising children. Gwendolyn Brooks wrote poetry about alternative representations of motherhood to educate society that motherhood is more than raising children. Her poems all have a deeper meaning that bring attention to issues she saw and to give a voice to issues around the topic of motherhood.

Gwendolyn Brooks is a poet that chose the less traveled path. Brooks paved the way for both women and people of color to write poetry that dealt with heavy topics that needed to be addressed and discussed.

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