



Blacks

Gwendolyn Brooks

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Here is a necessary collection of poetry for admirers of words and treasurers of literary beauty. Spanning more than 30 years, this collection of literary masterpieces by the venerable Ms. Gwendolyn Brooks, arguably Illinois' most beloved Poet Laureate and Chicago's elder black literary stateswoman, *Blacks* includes all of Ms. Brooks' critically acclaimed writings. Within its covers is the groundbreaking "Annie Allen," which earned her the Pulitzer Prize in 1950. There is also the sweepingly beautiful and finely crafted "A Street in Bronzeville," a highly anticipated and lauded poetic treasure that spoke volumes for this great poet's love of black people, Chicago's Black community, and even the community of the world. *Blacks* includes a special treat, *Maud Martha*, Brooks' only novel.

Blacks Details

Date : Published January 1st 1994 by Third World Press (first published 1987)

ISBN : 9780883781050

Author : Gwendolyn Brooks

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Glen Engel-Cox says

A collection of poetry by Brooks, probably the most honored African- American poet. It also includes "Maud Martha," Brooks' single novel to date. I liked the novel, but felt it was a little too much for me. I like poetry, but I think I like it in small doses, where I can relax and read and reread it without concentrating on how much time it is taking me to do so. Her fiction is like poetry, in the sense that it had as much to do with the vision of things as it did with the characterization or the plot. This is my failing as a reader: I've never cared that much for description, and the longer it continues, the more likely I am to tune out.

But the short poems here, especially from her earlier period, I like a lot. The subjects are strong and powerful, the economy and purpose of the prose admirable. One of my favorites was a poem called "Queen of the Blues," which contrasted the stage persona of a Billie Holiday-like singer with the treatment she receives as an African-American woman. Queen or no queen, she still has the blues. Or "The Murder," about a young boy who sits his toddler brother on fire then doesn't understand when the little brother isn't around afterwards. I did not care as much for her later poems, which were much more experimental in form and harder to follow in content.

A correspondent also complained about the later poems, bothered by their lack of rhyme and lack of clear purpose. While it is true that the latter selections don't rhyme, it's not true that not all of it doesn't. A LiveJournal user posted their essay on "Queen of the Blues," along with the entire poem. I think it shows that Brooks has something to say and does so fairly clearly, although any poetry worth anything contains subtext and imagery that deepens with increased familiarity.

BlackBookie says

I really really enjoyed the surprise that was maud martha in the middle! (No spoilers)

Sean says

thanks greggy! quite excellent so far (still just poetry hopping, i'll keep you posted on the novel-reading such as it may be...)

Michael says

Spanning over three decades of work, from the well-wrought formalism of *Annie Allen* to the frenetic pace of *In the Mecca*, *Blacks* showcases Brooks's incredibly versatile range as a writer: few poets have successfully written so many different kinds of poems.

Carol says

A through investigation to Gwendolyn Brooks who I had read only slightly before. Clearly she honed her skills as she continued and I enjoyed the later poems. But the wonderful moment of this book, for me, was reading *Maud Martha*. She says it is fiction but I felt like I was living in the character's skins. It is also poetry that is a pleasure to read.

Allison Church says

I normally dislike poetry and I never heard of this poet when I signed up for the class this is for. But I enjoyed her work and she was brilliant.

Sarah says

This tome's got pretty much everything GB wrote except, unfortunately (or fortunately? some of the later stuff isn't so great), all the later stuff she published with black presses after she left Harper Collins. It's even got the novel, *Maud Martha*, she published back in the day, which is average as a novel though fascinating if you really like Gwendolyn Brooks. Which I do. Read it and be in awe of a woman who could live life in Jim Crow Chicago, write life in Jim Crow Chicago, and continually express herself in punchy formal poems.

Megan says

I love her poem "Song in the Front Yard" so I picked up this book. It is a good thick collection of some of her best poetry and Ms. Brooks excellent novel *Maud Martha*. I had read selections from *Maud Martha* in classes over the year, but never the whole novel. *Maud Martha* is honest and aware. She makes hard choices and sticks to them through the consequences. She is a realist and a bit self-effacing. There are babies born and talk of war and daily disappointments of lost jobs and family squabbles. And through it all is an underpinning of hopeful expectation that the future will be better.

Brandon says

The only poem I read was "Gay Chaps at the Bar." I remember Brooks as a careful and insightful poet. The gay chaps spoke with "athletic language."

Didi says

This is a phenomenal collection of poetry spanning about thirty years of Gwendolyn Brooks's writing. It

even includes the short novel Maud Martha and Annie Allen, the collection of poetry that she won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950. Brooks was genius with the words - lyrical, meaningful, and cultural she put the emphasis just where it should be. I definitely think this is a must read and addition to those who love and collect Brooks's work. For those that are discovering Brooks and Poetry, this is a fantastic place to start. For me the ultimate surprise was that Maud Martha was included because I wasn't expecting that. It was the cherry on top. This is my first 5-star read of 2016 and I'm pleased that it's come so soon in the year. Motivated to continue reading the rest of Brooks's work because there are still more to get to....

Jen says

This book was a gift, and I ended up enjoying a lot of Brooks' lesser known poems. But my favorites remain -- Sadie and Maud; The Bean Eaters; and We Real Cool.

Michael says

I dig Gwendolyn Brooks. I really do. I like the book cover. I like the title. But she's hit or miss with me. Half the poems I dig, I dig until I've hit in the middle of the earth. The others are not over my head (doesn't mean I get them), because being over my head means I still have some emotional reaction. I'm just cold. There's no reaction. So overall, buy it for the prose and half the poetry, because getting 50% dope poems is still better than 100% wack ones.

E.B. says

Gwendolyn Brooks is fucking incredible.

Jennifer says

An uneven collection. When she is good, she is very very good, but it is an unfortunate decision (by someone) to throw so much of Brooks' work into a single book willy-nilly. Again, I am frustrated by the ubiquitous practice of publishing poems without their dates and in no particular sequence! When they are tumbled into a single collection, even the publication date is lost as a crude indicator. Books are dated, paintings are dated, why not individual poems? I would love to have a sense of continuity and evolution, but this (and others) are like artifacts removed from their archaeological context. Another comment: I wish Brooks was not SO dedicated to the rigidity of rhyme, which I feel as a stifling effect on her work.

Claire S says

First section of my daughter's English class is all about Gwendolyn. Can't wait to read her finally (separately from my daughter of course, I just am re-doing my high school learning experience now, with her much-better curriculum. We sometimes chat for a second or two about this or that, but basically I read her assigned

works for thoroughly selfish reasons.
