

Racism

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Gwendolyn Brooks was born in Kansas City in 1917. She died at the age of 83 in the year 2000. Her father was a janitor who had given up his ambition of going in to medical school since he could not afford her mother was formerly a teacher but gave up teaching for marriage and motherhood. Since her early childhood Brooks encountered racial prejudice not only from her neighborhood but also from the schools she attended.

This encounter was to be a great inspiration of her works later on in life. She won the prestigious Pulitzer price for poetry in 1950. *Maud Martha* was Brooks's first novel. It revolves around the life of Martha the main protagonist and her journey from childhood, through adolescence and finally into womanhood. In many narratives, African women who grew up in societies with racism are represented either as having been victims of the system or having struggled to fight the injustice within their societies.

However, in writing ' *Maud Martha*', Brooks did not follow this common trend.

Instead, she represented Martha as a woman who passed through a normal life and would have easily been left out of a crowd. The main problem that we see with Martha is her obsession with beauty. Regardless of this fact, there is the actual representation of the neighborhood. The representation of crowded streets beauty parlors and nightclubs that depict the two sides of their lives is colorful. Having grown up in a hostile world Martha tries to protect her daughter from the racially sensitive society, although she does not achieve this goal in completion she still is able to preserve her dignity and self-esteem through natural means. This is how Brooks is able to shift from mainstream styles and strategies of narrative to give us a clear picture

of how a woman from a black family would be able to live in a white-dominated society and racial prejudice and still maintain her dignity.

In writing this story Brooks appears to have been writing a semi-autography of her. The life of Martha in this case is a partial representation of the writers' life herself. However, in writing the story Brooks removes the political element associated with her life especially in adulthood. She tries to normalize the life of Martha so that many people especially those who did not grow as minorities in their societies can associate with her writings. By representing Martha as an ordinary black woman in a white, dominated society Brooks is able to represent the true worth or value of an African-American woman, who ignores social doctrines or stereotypes, and traditional genres to reveal her true self as well as earn respect and enjoy her dignity as a woman.

Toni Cade Bambara was an American author, college professor and social activist. She was born in 1939 and died in 1995. Bambara concerned herself with many feminist organizations especially to help young black women. Her first collection of short stories 'Gorilla, my love' was published in 1972. The collection included stories like 'Raymond's Run', 'Gorilla, my love', and 'Blues Ain't No Mockin Bird'.

Most of the stories in this collection are told in a first-person point of view. Most of them have the narrator as a young sassy girl who is brave, tough and caring. Toni Bambara tries to relay her messages related to racism through depiction in most of her short stories of young black girls. In these stories, the girls resist normalizing gender constructs, stereotypes and

accepted norms in order to show that they can dictate what happens to them and not to be naive and subjective or lenient to social negative constructs. By doing, this Bambara adds to literature a new and a rebellious generation of women that will change the perception of the majority white population on female African Americans. Not only was Bambara an advocate of women's rights but she was also vigorously committed to nationalism.

In doing this, she did not only achieve this through mass action or public seminars but she also achieved this through her writings. For example, her short story collection 'Gorilla my love' was one way she achieved this through her writings. In most stories in this collection, she uses the first-person prose of a young girl that is determined to be tough to achieve her goals although deep inside she is still sensitive and caring. Bildungsroman is a genre in the literary world of writing novels in which the writer's main intent is to portray certain social issues or characters in a novel by focusing on a protagonist's psychological as well as moral growth from childhood to adulthood. In order for Bildungsroman to be effective, certain changes must be evident in order for us to claim success. In "Gorilla my love", Bambara explores the life of a young girl Hazel who has a conviction that adults nowadays do not treat children with honesty and respect.

Being an African-American girl living in New York City Hazel is brought up by two loving parents who show her the value of education as well as being honest. By using the young girl's mindset Bambara is putting across a challenge to the adults especially African-American women. If a young girl can feel betrayed by her elders and question their deeds, yet she is supposed to be naive and subjective, Bambara is challenging black people

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who are racially discriminated against to rise up and fight for their rights. It is possible that Bambara did not want to directly incite blacks to social activism but instead tried to use the young girls' mindset to make them realize her intention so that they can rise up and fight oppression and racial prejudice. Bildungsroman is sometimes inter-changed with coming-of age texts. As a genre in literature, it is important that change be noticed in the protagonists that are represented to us.

It is a genre common to minority and women writers. From the texts, we have read in class it is clear that war, as a theme is almost present in all. War in this case is not necessarily violent but it could be spiritual, emotional or even a socially oriented war. For the sake of analysis, I will look at war as a theme in “ Maud Martha” and “ Gorilla my love”. Renowned female African American writers write the two articles above. The two coming-of age texts explore the themes of war in different perspectives.

However it is, clear to the reader that the themes are used to represent some form of social vice that is of concern to the writers. In “ Maud Martha”, Brooks brings out the theme of war mainly on the issue of beauty. She is obsessed with beauty and Martha is at war with not only herself but also the family and society since she cannot understand why people tend to like her sister, Helen just because she is light-skinned. She is at war since she sees herself being smarter, having nicer hair and even being kinder than she sees her sister. This is an example of internal war. Because of this, Martha even refuses to marry her first boyfriend.

It is painful as Mootry notes “ to love your father so deeply yet to hear him openly express, along with your mother and brother, preference for a sister who, out of a need for security, follows her mother’s advice and marries a much older man, and the family doctor, at that!” (Mootry, 2010). On the other hand in Bambara’s “ Gorilla, my love”, the theme of war is also explored. In this story the protagonist Hazel, is at war with adults and the society in general. In addition, internal war is represented in this story. Hazel is at war because she does not understand why adults are not trustworthy anymore. She is at war since she has come to realize that adults betray children.

While she expects adults to take care of children and put children interests, first they are actually hypocrites who cannot be expected to tell the truth especially where children are concerned. In both of these articles, the theme of internal war is represented depending on the protagonist’s point of view. In the first case, war is mainly because of racial prejudice. The effects of racial prejudice on young Martha affect her psychologically and this goes on in to adulthood. Effects of racial prejudice starts to wither later on in her motherhood stage, especially after giving birth to her first daughter.

On the other hand, the issue of dishonesty and untrustworthiness of adults mainly affect Hazel. She compares what is going on in their family to what she sees in the theaters that we come to learn that she attends regularly. Thus although hazel is still a young kid her frequenting the theaters has expanded her thinking capacity and she is more of an adult than a child. For many years, the minority black population has been racially discriminated against in the United States. It is not just the women who were victims but <https://assignbuster.com/racism-essay-samples/>

the men as well. Discrimination was widespread from the education sector, health sector, welfare services and the transport sector.

Living in the United States at this time was chaotic for them. Although racism has subsided it was not until the end of the Jim Crow laws in 1965 that institutional or state-sponsored racism declined albeit not significantly. From the discussions above, it is clear that coming-of age texts especially those written by black women or by minority, writers had a hidden message in their themes. Due to racism, it was difficult for them to express themselves freely for fear of their lives. Regardless of this reality they were not scared away but instead they devised ways through mainstream literature to express their views, opinions and thoughts to the public without appearing radical.

This one aspect helped them to be actively involved in nationalism and social activism in order to ensure that both majority and minority groups had equal rights. In a democratic sense, what they were trying to say is that even if the majority (whites) had their way, the minority (blacks) would also have their say.