

Abstract

“Double-Speak: The Literary Language of Phillis Wheatley and Gwendolyn Brooks”

A Capstone Project by Christina Litherland (2017)

This capstone project looks at the poetic work of African American poets Phillis Wheatley and Gwendolyn Brooks and the use of “Double-speak” in their poetry. Double-speak is the literary expression of various types of double/dual consciousness as explained by earlier African American scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon. Central to understanding how double-speak operates in the text is the issue of audience for which the scholarship of Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin is incorporated. By contrasting the social and cultural environment of Wheatley and Brooks as well as interpreting the language of their work, we can see connections between them and the larger African American literary tradition and see how they use double-speak to interact with their different audiences and use it effectively as a tool of the communication they could not have beyond the poems themselves. Poems discussed include “On Being Brought from Africa to America” and “On the Death of Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, 1770” by Phillis Wheatley and “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon” and “Second Sermon on the Warpland” by Gwendolyn Brooks.