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**From Tupak to Heaney via Rosa Parks: Utilizing Nikki Giovanni’s Poetry in English Courses**

Addressing general perceptions by both teachers and students, on all levels, that poetry is difficult, I discuss in this paper how poems may be introduced in broader cultural contexts, aiming at sparking an interest in contemporary poetry. The basis of my presentation is a paper, “Nikki Giovanni's Poetry: A Creative Writing Perspective,” given at Örebro University’s 2016 *Teaching English Literature in Cultural/Historical Context* workshop, which addressed ways in which poetry can be introduced in English courses in teacher programs. Giovanni’s poems, due to their accessibility and their current poetic themes, offer a good point of departure for readers unaccustomed to poetry. With a short autobiographical poem as a starting point - an account of the poet’s African American cultural background – I explore ways to open poetry in diverse cultural directions. Essentially, my pedagogic approach is intertextual, as Giovanni’s poems are related to popular cultural modes. I suggest that poetry, with its brevity and open-endedness, can enhance the study of English language and culture, beyond the close study of formal properties.

“an account of the poet’s African American cultural background” is not very accurate. Perhaps “a poem which references the poet’s African American cultural background” instead.

Then, “as Giovanni’s poems are related to popular cultural modes” should either omit the poets name “as poems are related to popular cultural modes” or include “other poems” “as Giovanni’s poems are related to other poems and popular cultural modes” because I involve more than Giovanni’s poems.

Biography

Maria Proitsaki was born in Greece and received her BA from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Mid Sweden University, at Sundsvall, Sweden, completing a thesis which examines the works of Nikki Giovanni and Rita Dove. She has taught extensively at different Universities in Sweden and has published papers on Giovanni’s and Dove’s poetry as well as creative writing.