

# Principles of literary criticism

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Literary Research Paper ENGL 3173 Principles of Literary Criticism Name: Precious Joy A. Berida Date: January 14, 2013 Year and Section: BSED EN 3-1D Professor: Dr Junithesmer D. Rosales Still I Rise by Maya Angelou: A Poem Overcoming Prejudice “ Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou is a courageous and inspiring poem written about the emerging prominence of African Americans published on the year 1978. It was published in Angelou's poem collection titled “ And Still I Rise”, two years after her musical dramatic production “ And Still I Rise” was produced. Still I Rise” is a poem about overcoming the trials and survival of women over slavery, racialdiscriminationand sexism wherein sexism is defined as prejudice or discrimination based on sex; especially discrimination against women and, or behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex. It may include the belief that a human of one sex is intrinsically superior to the other. (Wikipedia, n. d. ) Maya Angelou, born Marguerite Ann Johnson on April 4, 1928, is an African-American.

On the time that she made the poem “ Still I Rise”, the rising reputation of her race occurred during the nation'scivil rightsmovement. During the nation’s civil rights movement, black citizens have suffered from extreme discrimination and racial harassment. They were forced to leave their lives in Africa and get on upon a journey to United States where they would be put to work as slaves. But then the blacks fought against discrimination whenever it was possible.

They sued in court to stop separate seating in railroad cars, states' disfranchisement of voters, and denial to access restaurants and schools. The black people experienced violation ofhuman rightsand were not treated

as human beings but possessions of the white people. In her poem, the author herself represents not only her race but particularly black African American women who suffered from humiliation, discrimination and slavery. Maya Angelou is like directly talking to the people who wants to oppress over her or discriminate her on the race she belongs. On the time that there had a big segregation between the blacks and the whites by the year 1978, it motivated Maya Angelou to write this poem representing a strong character over the oppressors which she believes that she will overcome all the struggles and remains the faith that she will rise in victory. The poem is composed of 8 stanzas, 52 lines and is written in free verse. The rhyming of the poem is A, B, C, and B except the last stanza.

Imagery overpowers the literary piece. The author used figurative language that is very appealing for it conveys strong emotions and gives a big impact to the people who read it. The author often used figure of speech such as simile, metaphor and personification. For example, “ Just like moons and like suns” (line 9), classified as simile, can be interpreted as a comparison on how the moon and sun rises every day and night, and on how the author herself rises from the difficulties that she had gone through. “ Shoulders falling down like teardrops” (line 15), which is also simile, seemed a comparison on how a person’s shoulders drop when they feel so down, similar to how teardrops fall from the eyes when being harmed, badly hurt, or emotionally wounded since it mentioned the word “ teardrop” which is mostly associated with sadness. “ Does my sassiness upset you? ” (line 5); “ Do you want to see me broken? ” (line 13); “ Does my haughtiness offend you? ” (line 17); “ Does my sexiness offend you? (line 25), these lines somewhat get the

reader's attention since the writer started to ask questions. It gives a connection between the reader and the writer and it is very effective because Maya Angelou wants to make the readers read the poem and take it to a more personal level. The author seemed a little sarcastic on how she asked these lines. " Oil wells; gold mines; diamonds", which is a metaphor, are known to be very valuable and expensive in this present time.

Maya Angelou is like these valuables to herself. She sees herself as a worthy creation and that she also deserves respect and love from other people that tend to degrade her just because she is a black American woman. " At the meeting of my thighs" (line 28), signifies her sexuality of being a woman. " I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide" (line 33); " Welling and swelling I bear in the tide. " (line 34), the black ocean pertains to Maya Angelou being a black American.

The words " leaping" and " wide" show a positive attitude towards freedom and hope, even though that in the time the poem was written, black American has no freedom and are slaves of the whites. On the other hand, " welling" pertains to the writer's ups, " swelling" are her downs, " tides" are the waves or obstacles she had gone through, where it can be concluded that she accepts and endures all the pain, and that she will stand still after all the obstacles. Maya Angelou used pronouns such as " I" and " you".

It is said that the pronoun " I" represents black Americans, including Maya Angelou herself that fought against the uncivilized treatment to them during the nation's civil right movement. On the other hand, the pronoun " you" pertains to the white Americans that tend to be superior over the blacks wherein the latter became a slave of the white people. The poem has a

positive tone. Even though the theme of Maya Angelou's masterpiece is discrimination, it is clearly stated that she is still optimistic and believes that whatever trials, circumstances or obstacles may happen, she will still rise and stand proud.

Phrases such as " I Rise" and " Still I Rise" are used repetitively in the poem which we can we can interpret that of all the hardships that she had gone through, Maya Angelou has this strong disposition that she will continually rise and conquer, and in every trials that will come, she becomes stronger. " Bringing the gifts my ancestors gave" (line 39) shows the authors appreciation of their race portraying that they are proud being black Americans. " I am the dream and the hope of the slave. (line 40), depicts a strong belief that by writing this poem entitled " Still I Rise" black Americans will have the will and conviction to fight for their rights. This shows how Maya Angelou believes that one person stepping up to make a difference or to have their voices heard will not only help themselves, but it also has a potential of helping those who are suffering from the same or similar discrimination. The conclusion in the final stanza is a glorious ending and reflection of being the hope and the dream of slaves as reflected in the freedom and opportunity of the present day.

The message drives a point that no matter what stumbling blocks, cruel words or expressions of contempt, the protagonist will be victorious in the end. According toPoetryFoundation (2010), some critics have argued that Angelou's prose is superior to her poetry. Maya Angelou's poetry is " sassy. " When we hear her poetry, we listen to ourselves. Indeed, Angelou's poetry can also be traced to African-American oral traditions like slave and work

songs, especially in her use of personal narrative and emphasis on individual responses to hardship, oppression and loss, just like this literary piece entitled “ Still I Rise”.

In addition to examining individual experience, Angelou’s poems often respond to matters like race and sex on a larger social and psychological scale. Describing her work to George Plimpton, Angelou has said, “ Once I got into it I realized I was following a tradition established by Frederick Douglass—the slave narrative—speaking in the first-person singular talking about the first-person plural, always saying I meaning ‘we’.

Trying to work with that form, the autobiographical mode, to change it, to make it bigger, richer, finer, and more inclusive in the twentieth century has been a great challenge for me”. Dr. Maya Angelou is one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time. She is hailed as a global renaissance woman. References Online Resources: Golberg, Adai. (2011). Poetry analysis: Still I Rise, by Maya Angelou. Retrieved January 12, 2013, from [http://www. helium. com/items/2068831-still-i-rise-analysis-maya-angelou](http://www.helium.com/items/2068831-still-i-rise-analysis-maya-angelou)

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