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Analysis of Maya Angelou's Poem "Still I Rise"

Slavery undermined overall well-being among African Americans and denied them equal opportunities to advance economically and socially. The poem "Still I Rise," authored by Maya Angelou, focuses on the impacts of racism on African Americans. Angelou makes a declaration that the hateful society cannot determine her success. Besides, Angelou demonstrates a sense of courage, pride, and injustice toward people of color. Although Angelou explores the impacts of slavery on female African Americans, she uses her experience, metaphor, tone, and repetition in the poem "Still I Rise" to show the importance of embracing courage and pride to succeed in life.

Angelou examines the impacts of racism on people of color. The line "out of the huts of history's shame" shows the social injustices that people of color experienced during slavery (Angelou 29). The poet argues that people of color lived in huts, which attracted mockeries from those who could afford good housing. Economic exploitation promoted by slavery denied African Americans an equal opportunity to lead better lives. Angelou states that she is "up from a past that's rooted in pain" (31). The statement implies that slavery institution caused extreme suffering among people of color. The pain disempowered African Americans, discouraging them from realizing economic growth, like whites experienced in their lives. The poem "Still I Rise" follows an auto-fiction genre that blends truth and memory (Gupta 59). Angelou's truth portrays the suffering and bitter experience of people of color in a country with a history of enslaved individuals and segregation regulations. African Americans struggled to achieve self-realization, esteem, and acknowledgment in a white-

dominated country. Hence, Angelou notes that slavery institutions negatively impacted people of color and marginalized them from realizing quality and successful lives.

Angelou uses metaphor in describing her life experience to show the need to embrace courage and pride in one's success. The statement "I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide" metaphorically describes the author's life (Angelou 33-34). Angelou uses the two lines to describe her unstoppable nature despite being an African American. Besides, she uses the metaphor to warn those who undermine African Americans to be cautious with her instinctive abilities and determination. In her poem "Still I Rise," Angelou states that:

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise. (21-24)

These four lines demonstrate the beauty of Angelou's freedom from subjugation, desperation, and enslavement, which gives rise to optimism in embracing an undefeated desire. Angelou uses her poem to justify that she cannot admit to any defeat regardless of the real-life challenges she encountered. Moreover, most African American women experience numerous exploitation cases but are less likely to engage in professional help-seeking (Mushonga et al. 152). Common barriers among the minority groups, such as racism, stigma, and lack of cultural competence, deny these women the opportunity to fight for equal rights and well-being. In turn, these challenges and barriers encouraged Angelou to embrace the courage to overcome the extreme social challenges across society. Therefore, Angelou uses metaphor to describe her fearless attitude since she enjoys freedom from the systemic social and cultural barriers.

Further on, Angelou uses a seductive tone to demonstrate the courage of African American females in overcoming the challenges posed by slavery. Angelou states, “Does my sexiness upset you / Does it come as a surprise” (25-26). Angelou expresses a sense of courage because she expresses the way of challenging people’s tendency to undermine women of color. The seductive tone presents Angelou as a free-spirited woman who dares to challenge the social injustices that African American women face. The two lines “That I dance like I’ve got diamonds / At the meeting of my thighs” signify a sense of freedom and independence (Angelou 27-28). The act of dancing conjures the image of freedom for an African American woman. The passage ‘like I’ve got diamonds’ signifies a sense of independence that encourages Angelou to express her beauty and sexuality. Angelou depicts her span as fragile development as she grows physically and emotionally (Aslam 62). This statement shows how Angelou uses the poem to represent her self-image with courage and resilience to overcome social barriers. Therefore, the poet uses seductive language to demonstrate the African American women’s courage to overcome social and cultural challenges posed by slavery.

Angelou uses the tone and repetition to demonstrate the need to embrace the courage to succeed in life. In this case, Angelou uses a triumphant tone that depicts the poet’s readiness to challenge those who suppress her abilities (Aslam 69). It means that Angelou had gained unmeasurable self-confidence despite the challenges experienced during slavery. Angelou justifies that the oppressed and silenced African American women should gain adequate courage to overcome the incalculable social challenges. Angelou uses the phrase “I rise” repeatedly to show the determination to succeed despite the obstacles that come in her way (Aslam 69). Angelou uses the phrase to emphasize her intentions to rise and succeed despite the challenges she experiences in life. Besides, Angelou expresses the hope and self-confidence she gained throughout her challenging life. The word ‘rise’ appears ten times as a

constant rhyme in Angelou's poem (Aslam 70). Accumulating the word 'rise' creates a sense of positive development and growth. Angelou relies on this repetition to show the obsession with the notion of progress and improvement. Hence, Angelou relies on tone and repetition to justify the need to embrace the courage to overcome real-life challenges.

In conclusion, Angelou's "Still I Rise" explores how slavery and cultural barriers disenfranchised female African Americans. Angelou uses her real-life experience to express the pain that women of color experienced as they struggled to succeed in their lives. Besides, the author uses various stylistic devices, like metaphor, tone, and repetition in the poem "Still I Rise" to justify that people should embrace the courage to succeed in their lives. Through metaphor, the poet describes herself as unstoppable who is willing to overcome any underlying obstacle in her life. Angelou uses seductive and triumphant tones to express her desire to conquer emerging challenges that hinder her from achieving desirable success. Finally, the repetition of the word 'rise' creates a unique notion of sustained growth in Angelou's life.

Works Cited

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