

Narrative of Defiance: Autobiographical Remembrance in the Selected Poems of Maya Angelou

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the autobiographical undercurrents in select poems by Maya Angelou namely, "Still I Rise," "Caged Bird," "Phenomenal Woman," "Woman Work," "Our Grandmothers," "Alone," "The Mothering Blackness," and "On the Pulse of Morning" as sites of contestation where suppression, violence, discrimination, and identity crises are confronted and transcended. Angelou draws from her lived experiences of racial terror, sexual trauma, and gendered marginalization, transforming personal wounds into collective anthems of defiance. In "Still I Rise" and "Caged Bird," the speaker endures metaphorical shootings with words, cuts from hateful eyes, and the caged silence imposed by systemic racism, embodying an identity crisis born of violent dehumanization yet rising through unyielding song and sass. "Woman Work" and "Our Grandmothers" evoke the gruelling labour of Black women—picking cotton, facing lynching threats, and temple exclusions highlighting suppression through endless toil and historical brutality that fractures self-hood amid ancestral legacies of injustice. Meanwhile, "Phenomenal Woman," "Alone," and "The Mothering Blackness" navigate identity crises at the intersections of race and gender, where alienation from "alien dreams" and northern winds' threats yield to nurturing Blackness and communal embrace, resisting the erasure of Black female worth. "On the Pulse of Morning" extends this to a hopeful pulse of collective memory, urging liberation from oppression's shadows. Through these works, Angelou not only documents the psychic toll of discrimination lynchings, verbal assaults, and institutional hypocrisy but also reclaims agency, modelling how autobiographical poetry can heal fractured identities and fuel

global discourses on resistance. This analysis invites scholars to consider Angelou's verses as blueprints for dismantling enduring hierarchies of power.

Keywords: Autobiographical poetry, Racial suppression, Gendered violence, Identity reclamation.
