
I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings: Critical Analysis

In 1969, an autobiography hit bookshelves across the nation, ushering topics such as racism, identity, sexual assault and literacy to the forefront of American culture. Forty-eight years later, the words of Maya Angelou are as relevant today as they were the day they were published. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is Angelou's first autobiography. It would be the work that would raise her image from Ms. Calypso the dancer to the novelist, philosopher and civil rights activists that history has come to know. Written at the end of the 1960's, it's easy to understand the meaning behind the autobiography. Ideas of identity and racism were televised on a weekly basis. Movements like the Civil Rights Movement and progressive ideas were taking a more mobile approach and taking the culture by storm. Fast-forward to current events and society still struggles with the issues of the past. Though progress has been shown, the problem has never been eliminated.

Maya Angelou's poem 'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings' describes the state of two birds, where one is free and 'floats' and 'dares to claim the sky', while the other is caged in his 'bars of rage'. This is obviously referring to how African Americans were used as slaves and the white man was free to do as they pleased. The first and the fourth stanza shows the delight of the free bird experiencing freedom, whereas the rest of the stanzas concentrate on the plight of the caged bird. Angelou puts greater emphasis on the lamentable state of the caged bird, and contrasts this with that of the free bird. As the poet depicts in the poem, the free bird floats on the back of the wind, dips his wings in the orange sun rays and claims the sky as his own. He thinks of another breeze through the trees and dreams of good eatables like fat worms waiting on bright lawn. He lives in a colorful, bright and dreamy world. On the other hand, the caged bird walks sadly inside his narrow cage and tries hard to see through the bars of his cage. His wings are clipped and feet are tied. He lets out his 'nightmare scream' to express his agony, anger and fear. Sometimes, the caged bird opens his throat to sing. He sings of freedom and hope. Angelou's poem uses metaphors and juxtaposition to express the idea that freedom is a natural state and knowledge of this fact cannot be undone by any amount of oppression, imprisonment or limitation of opportunity.

Maya Angelou uses a myriad of poetic devices in 'Caged Bird,' including metaphor, rhyme, imagery, alliteration, personification, and repetition. The two I will be studying are repetition and metaphors one of the reasons that she has chosen to use metaphors in her poem is to draw a better picture for the reader and is easier to get the point across passively-aggressively. With repetition, it is used to emphasize a feeling or idea or develop a sense of urgency. One way the poet uses a metaphor is "his wings are clipped and his feet are tied" which means that he has been oppressed and trapped not able to escape from the white man's grasp. A point of repetition is fearful trill or shadow shouts which having these two words has the occurrence of the same sound or letter at the start of the word this also provides a deeper meaning to the word more than just the words fearful or shouts having another word gives it a deeper meaning than if it didn't. Having metaphors in this poem really helps draw a better picture of the events than if it didn't have metaphors and added with the alliteration really strengthens and deepens the meanings of certain phrases and alliteration used in the poem.

Even for a poem written in 1969 it can still be implemented in today's society with current

problems like sexism. The reason this can be considered to relate to this poem in the poem from Maya Angelou it talks about how there is a caged bird and a free bird which is an African American person and a white man this can also be applied to sexism which is discrimination based on a persons sex or gender like people think men are superior to women because of strength or just because they think they are better like slavery the white people thought they were better than the African Americans because there skin tone.

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