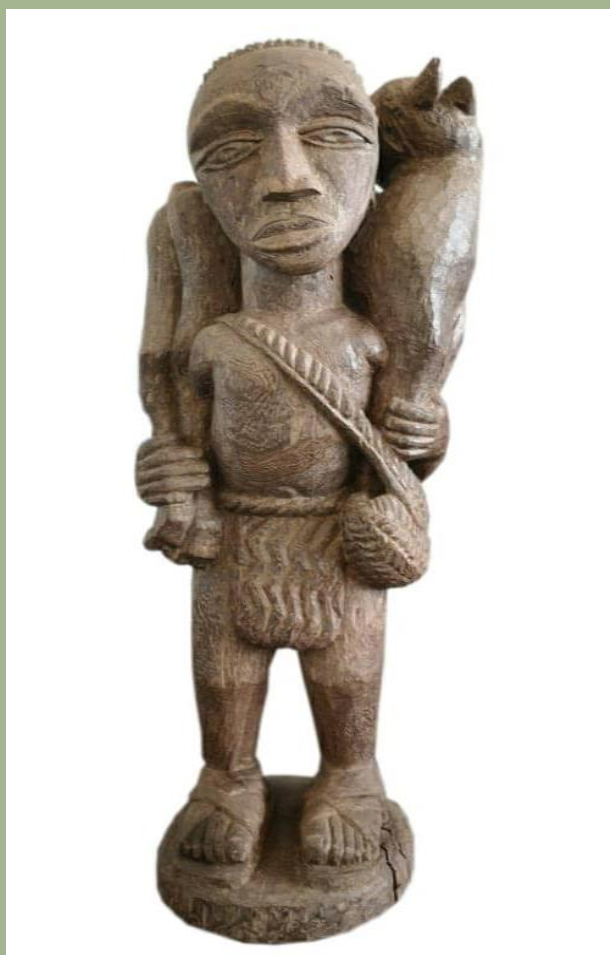


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Couverture : Figure de chasseur bantou de l'Afrique centrale. Statuette collectée par le Laboratoire d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire (actuelle Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines de l'Université Marien Ngouabi), entre les années 1975 et 1980. Dans les langues kongo de cette sous-région, le bon chasseur est justement appelé « *NTELA* ». Par métonymie, ce nom symbolise l'homme constamment animé par la quête des savoirs et des connaissances ; un scientifique qui cherche, qui trouve et qui partage ses trouvailles avec les autres au moyen de la publication.

Les opinions exprimées dans les différents textes publiés ici sont celles de leurs auteurs. Elles n'engagent nullement la Revue *NTELA*

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Le mot de la rédaction

Le comité de rédaction de la revue *Ntela* est heureux de présenter dans cette livraison d'autres articles reçus pour le compte du numéro de décembre 2021. On le voit, il s'agit ici du second volume de ce deuxième numéro qui souligne le dynamisme de la recherche et de la diffusion des savoirs en Afrique, notamment dans l'espace académique CAMES. L'idée de faire deux volumes se justifie par la densité numérique et la diversité originelle des textes retenus par le comité des pairs consultés pour leur évaluation.

Les articles constituant le premier volume de ce numéro concernent trois disciplines des sciences humaines proches que sont l'histoire, la géographie et la philosophie. Ceux réunis dans ces colonnes concernent la sociologie, la psychologie, les sciences de l'éducation, la communication, la littérature, les sciences du langage et l'anglais. Ils viennent des pays comme le Bénin, la Côte d'Ivoire, la République du Congo et le Togo. L'honneur et le plaisir qui sont pour nous de publier, dans ce volume, les vingt-trois textes originaux venus d'horizons scientifiques divers nous confortent dans notre engagement de participer efficacement à la mission de diffuser les savoirs en Afrique et dans le reste du monde.

Le comité de rédaction félicite les auteurs et tous ceux qui ont collaboré dans la matérialisation de cette œuvre. Il leur souhaite, déjà, une bonne fin d'année, dans l'espoir que celle qui s'ouvre bientôt leur offre encore des perspectives meilleures. Les lecteurs de l'ensemble des textes publiés dans ce deuxième numéro sont encouragés à en faire bon usage et à participer, de la sorte, au développement de l'Afrique. La publication du troisième numéro de *Ntela* interviendra en juin 2022. C'est un rendez-vous ferme !

La rédaction

**IV. LITTÉRATURE, SCIENCES DU LANGAGE
ET ANGLAIS**

Grift, Perseverance, and Resilience on the Golden Path to Ascendancy: A Critical Reading of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" and Langston Hughes's "Mother to Son."

Kodzo Kuma AHONDO*

Abstract

When coming to grip with adversity and oppression in life, people react differently for one reason or another. Some choose confrontation when others adopt less direct strategies. In the field of literature, authors have not departed from this rule of the choice of strategy. Maya Angelou in her poem "Still I Rise" (1978) uses a confrontational attitude whereas Langston Hughes adopts a more reserved but efficient strategy in his poem "Mother to Son" (1922). The speakers of the two poems live in an environment made hostile by the mainstream American society. Relying on the two poems with an Afrocentric stance, this study is contrived to assess the divergent strategies Angelou and Hughes embrace to resist and overcome racism and oppression.

Keywords

Afrocentric stance, ascendancy, golden path, perseverance.

Résumé

Lorsque les humains affrontent l'adversité et l'oppression dans la vie, ils réagissent différemment pour une raison ou une autre. Certains choisissent la confrontation alors que d'autres adoptent des stratégies moins directes. Dans le domaine de la littérature, les auteurs n'ont pas dérogé à cette règle du choix de la stratégie. Maya Angelou dans « *Still I Rise* » (1978) utilise une attitude basée sur la confrontation, alors que Langston Hughes adopte une stratégie plus réservée mais efficace dans « *Mother to Son* » (1922) ; les locuteurs des deux poèmes vivaient dans un environnement rendu hostile par la société américaine dominante. S'appuyant sur les deux poèmes avec une position afrocentrique, cette étude se propose d'évaluer les stratégies divergentes qu'Angelou et Hughes adoptent pour résister et surmonter le racisme et l'oppression aux États-Unis.

Mots-clés

Ascendance, chemin d'or, persévérance, position afrocentrique, résilience.

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Introduction

“It’s not the strongest of the species that survive, not the most intelligent but the one most responsive to change” (Darwin 1809).

The history of African Americans has been enshrined in violence of all kinds, oppression, and persecutions since the European raids in Africa, their kidnapping and deportation, and the forced labor camps known as plantations. In reaction to this hostility, some Africans committed suicide, many mothers killed their own babies, others rebelled against white kidnappers, buyers, retailers, and slave-masters. After the abolition of slavery in 1863, the predatory nature of whites has not changed much. They designed new ways to keep African Americans in a position not really far from slavery, if not worse, with racism and its horde of lynching, incarceration policy, police brutality, to name a few.

Then and now, many African American activists, artists, ministers, writers, and poets have also devised strategies to respond to the American racism. Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou, two renowned African American poets whose texts are the focus in this study, were no exception. Langston Hughes, a poet, a novelist, a playwright, a columnist of the Harlem Renaissance, and a social activist was known for defending his race.

Likewise, Maya Angelou, a poet, a memoirist, playwright, and movie writer who received dozens of awards and over fifty honorary degrees, was a keen defender of the black race. One important interest of this study is the choice of the poets: a male and a female, in order to balance the analysis through both genders’ telescopes.

Hughes’ “Mother to Son” and by Angelou’s “Still I Rise” are the two poems about the African Americans’ struggles in the American racist society. According to Toby Altman (2019, p. 1), “Mother to Son” is a dramatic monologue about surviving in the face of American racism.” For R. Baxter Miller (1975, p. 109) the poem is about a black mother who *“addresses her son in a dramatic monologue. First, she makes clear the hardships of Black life and thus suggests the paradox of the American mythmakers, who assert that all Americans are equal.”* Toby Altman (2019, p. 2-3) further explains that *“This suggests something important about surviving in a racist society: for the speaker, it requires genuine resilience and perseverance in the face of seemingly endless dangers and obstacles.”* It is precisely this genuine resilience and

perseverance in “Mother to Son” that Maya Angelou addresses in her famous poem “Still I Rise.”

“Still I Rise” is part of a 1978 collection similarly titled: *And Still I Rise*. The poem is a reaction to the struggles experienced by African American women in the long history of oppression and discrimination in America” (Nkopuruk and Odusina, 2019, p. 3). These scholars also note that “On the whole, Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise” deploys rich poetic devices to a number of purposes such as explaining, illustrating, revealing and clarifying” (Nkopuruk and Odusina, 2019, p. 5).

As a matter of fact, Hughes and Angelou address the same phenomenon, yet with different approaches. It is definitely this difference in approach both poets deploy that constitutes the essence of this study. While comparing these two poems, this paper seeks to assess and examine the various strategies the speakers of the two poems embrace to resist and overcome racism and oppression in America.

To reach the aforementioned objective, Molefi Kete Asante’s Afrocentricity serves as the theoretical frame. “*Afrocentricity is actually a paradigm which infuses all phenomena from the standpoint of African people as subjects in human history rather than as on the fringes of someone else’s culture*” (Turner and Asante, 2002, p. 718). In other words, Afrocentricity helps read a text from an African perspective, bearing in mind that Africans are the descendants of the very first inhabitants of the earth, the elder of human race, and the guide of humanity in terms of civilization. This paper also leans on structural approach to deal with poetic form, linguistic approach to examine language in terms of register, and paratextual approach to analyze the poem title and elements that sustain this analysis.

1. Angelou and Hughes: Two Strategies, One Purpose

The perusal of Langston Hughes’s “Mother to Son” and Maya Angelou’s “*Still I Rise*” highlights the commonality of their goal, the struggle against racism in America, the divergence in their strategies, though the outcome is the same. From this perspective, knowing about the two poets’ life experience sheds more lights on their poems.

Three happenings strongly molded Hughes’s writing perspective, the first of which is the Great Migration which was the consequence of racism and white brutishness against Blacks in the U.S. South. The second happening which is linked to the Great Migration was the white lynch culture which climaxed in the 1919 Red Summer (Miller, 2004, p. 28). Last, the Harlem Renaissance which is a reaction to American

racism. Bearing in mind that “Mother to Son” is written in 1922 when the lynching culture is at vogue in America, Hughes’s poetic strategy is covered, the mother fearing to send her son to an obvious death if the strategy is confrontational. This was what happened in the 1919 Red Summer with the lynching of 23 Blacks, over five hundred injured, and one thousand Black families left homeless (Miller, 2004, p. 28). This covered poetic strategy is what Toby Altman (2019, p. 2) refers to when he opines that, *“the poem doesn't explicitly mention race.”*

Though Hughes’s strategy is covered, it is nevertheless realistic and straightforward. Toby Altman (2019, p. 1) observes that the speaker is *“... realistic and straightforward about these difficulties; she doesn't sugar-coat anything. She doesn't suggest that racism will end—she never imagines, in this conversation with her son, at least, a world without the obstacles and dangers that she has endured”*. The speaker is simply realistic here. In the same vein, Altman (T. Altman, 2019, p.3) notes that,

the speaker is not using a soothing, sweet voice. Instead, she’s being direct and tough with her son. The diacope of ‘don’t’ further underscores the speaker's conviction. The speaker might be exhausted and disappointed that she’s had to spend her life fighting against unfair, racist obstacles. But her resiliency remains undiminished-as does her confidence that she can overcome the obstacles still in front of her.

“Mother to Son” inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. in many of his speeches. *“Well, life for none of us has been a crystal stair. But we must keep moving. If you can't fly, run; if you can't run, walk; if you can't walk, crawl, but by all means keep moving!”* (Miller, 2013, p. 426). King encourages his people by saying that *“Well, life for none of us has been a crystal stair, but we've got to keep going. We'll keep going through the sunshine and the rain. Some days will be dark and dreary, but we will keep going”* (Carson, 2005, p. 433). He vehemently preached that *“Prodigious hilltops of opposition will rise before us, but we will keep going. Mountains of evil will stand in our path, but we will keep going”* (Carson, 2005, p. 433). The resilience and perseverance King was encouraging his people to develop Jerry Scher (2013, para. 1) explains:

Resilience and perseverance are crucial behavioral competencies when individuals and organizations must overcome significant obstacles. The capacity to be flexible as well as demonstrate the range of responses to adversity will dramatically impact our level of future success.

Resilience and perseverance, two sides of the same coin, are also central to the understanding of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise". According to BkaHolic14 (2014, para. 1), "*The poem's literal meaning is a sarcastic response towards the people who look down on the speaker. To the narrator, the poem metaphorically describes her strength to always survive the battle against people's criticism of her and her ancestors.*" Though resilience and perseverance are central to the poem, its communicative strategy is far different from Hughes's. It is rather sarcastic and confrontational. "*In "Still I Rise" Angelou talks directly to her oppressors about how she has overcome her difficulties. She states how she rises whenever she is knocked down by her oppressors*" (A. Igwedibia, et al., 2019, p. 68). So, to say, the "*general orientation of the poem is the importance of perseverance and persistence*" (A. Igwedibia, et al., 2019, p. 68). To grasp the reason behind Angelou's confrontational strategy, it is vital that one examines her life experience.

In a *Black Scholar Interview*, Maya Angelou (1977, p. 47), asserted that "*I suspect that I have been a "liberated" woman in the sense that that term is now used most of my life.*" In the same interview, she vehemently protested against the fact that "*A great writer only writes one book every five years. Says who? Who made that rule? I don't believe it. Just because it is told to me I don't believe it; on general principle I don't believe it*" (M. Angelou (1977, p. 46). These two quotes speak volume about the poetess. In addition, she strongly believes that "*There is something very healthy about struggling against evil. It's very positive, puts a little spring in your step*" (M. Angelou, 1977, p. 53). As a 'liberated woman', Angelou seeks to implement her attitude in her writing.

Another important aspect of Angelou's life experience is her stay in Africa. In another interview with Carol E. Neubauer (1987, p. 291) about Africa, Maya Angelou said, "*That's it! That's what I'm seeing in this trek back to Africa. That in so many cases that idealized home of course is non-existent.*" Though this idealized home is no longer existing, the inner peace she had experienced there is outstanding. To Angelou living in America as a Black person is "*like growing up with a terrible sound in your ears day and night. Terrible, a kind of sound that is unrelenting, that pulls your hairs up on your body*" (M. Angelou, 1977, p. 49). Once she went away from this terrible sound to Africa, she realized that "*when you get used to the peace, the quietude, the lack of pressure, then you begin to think, my God, how have my people*

survived that crap and still to survive it with some style, some passion, some humor” (C. E. Neubauer, 1987, p. 291).

If despite many centuries of Arabic and European racism through the enslavement of Blacks, imperialism and colonization, Maya Angelou was able to experience peace, quietude, and lack of pressure in Africa, it is not surprising that she is deeply proud of her race and her people’s culture which shows her defiant attitude in “*Still I Rise*.” Adaoma Igwedibia et al., (2019, p. 68) observe that “*As one reads through the poem, one finds out that there is defiance as if the speaker is trying to prick the conscience of the oppressor by reminding them of their wrongs and the present realities.*” Also “*The sense of ‘sassiness’ in the poem suggests an arrogant self-confidence backed up by the use of laugh times and sexiness. Yes, Angelou’s use of hyperbole with these nouns adds a kind of absurd beauty to the poem*” (A. Igwedibia, et al., 2019, p. 68).

Angelou’s “*Still I Rise*,” is “*a protest poem that tends to rewrite a given narrative. Maya Angelou’s approach in the poem is not pretentious, her aggression throughout the poem is loud and her message is clear and her stance is unapologetically vehement*” (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 69). The poem “*replicates the speaker’s determination not to succumb to the humiliations and the oppression against the African Americans which of course is the optimal relevance*” (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 69). The ultimate goal of Hughes and Angelou is the final victory of their people through determination, perseverance, and resilience.

2. Structure and Poetic Form

2.1. The Poetic Form and the Speaker

To proceed with the analysis of “*Mother to Son*” and “*Still I Rise*,” it is fundamental to examine their nature and their structure. In this regard, the structural approach helps the reader grasp the structure of the poems. Both poems are dramatic monologues in which both speakers are black women, though their poetic form and audience are different. Kahfi Gibran and Ariya Jati (2016, p. 2) notice that “*Hughes describes the struggle in a free verse of 20 lines. The free verse describes how the mother’s struggle to make her life better when she lived in the era of slavery, and it also describes the mother’s advice to her son.*” Hughes’s poem “*Mother to Son*” is twenty-line free verse in which the speaker, a black mother, initiates her son to the realities of living in a hostile and

racist American society. *“The images describe figuratively a mother’s advises [sic] for her son about freedom from slavery. The mother tells her son that freedom needs struggle”* (K. Gibran and A. Jati, 2016, p. 2). This idea of freedom, either from slavery or from racism and oppression, perfectly matches the free verse form of “Mother to Son.”

As for “Still I Rise,” it is a nine-stanza lyric poem of which the last one has nine lines, the first seven are quatrains, and a sestet (stanza eight). It has rhymes and other devices and conveys powerful feelings. The first seven stanzas which are quatrains have an ABCB rhymes scheme which will be better developed in the sound patterns section of this study. Though “Still I Rise” conveys powerful emotions of defiance, rebellion, and pride, the rhyme scheme helps channel the emotions for victory goals. According to Igwedibia et al., (2019, p. 68), the speaker in “Still I Rise” reveals *“how ready she is to overcome anything with her self-esteem. She shows how nothing can bring her down because no matter how catastrophic the snares of the fowlers are, she is sure she would fall back to track.”* The audience of the speaker is the white American oppressor.

The apparent divergence in the poetic forms of both poems has not dented their unity in purpose, which is the ultimate triumph of African Americans over racism, injustice, and persecution. Both speakers are African American women, who are mother to the elder of human race, the black race. As women who give birth or will give birth to human life, they have a moral duty to initiate their progeny and brothers into how to preserve life, fight to achieve freedom.

2.2. The Titles

In addition to Afrocentricity, the paratextual approach is used in this section to analyze the titles. The titles of the two poems operate like their eyes and door to the understanding of these poems. From an Afrocentric perspective “Mother to Son” brings to the reader’s mind the image of Isis, an ancient Egyptian goddess, and her son, Horus. The title reveals that it is the mother who introduces a child to adulthood. It is the mother who raises the child and tells it the history of their people, the culture, the spirituality, and the world view of their people. The Black mother introduces her son to have a realistic reading of events in the lynching culture they have been living in. Likewise, it is Isis who tells Horus the history of his father Osiris and trained him

psychologically to fight and overthrow his uncle Seth, Osiris's murderer and the symbol of their oppression.

"Still I Rise" represents the moral superiority of the speaker and a dissuasion tool as far as the white oppressor is concerned. If well thought of, the poem's title tells the audience that it is useless trying to oppress the speaker because she will rise above the millions of obstacles they may set. "Still I Rise" could also be viewed as an African philosophy of resistance that had characterized them since their encounter with the white man.

2.3. The Theme and the Message

When the speaker opens the monologue with line 1 "*Well, son, I'll tell you:*", she introduces the themes of hardships, courage, and hope. As an extended metaphor, "*Mother to Son*" explores the determination, the stamina the speaker deploys to climb up the "*no crystal stair*" line 2. The reader can clearly see that the mother and the son are from two different but consecutive generations. "*Mother and Son*" is didactic. It is the transition period where the mother hands over to her son the resistance philosophy of her people, which had begun centuries back. It is the illustration of difficulties and obstacles Blacks have faced in America, and the heartbreaking sacrifices they were forced to make to secure a better future for the next generation.

This message of hope that emanates from "*Mother to Son*" is also central to the understanding of "*Still I Rise*." Adaoma Igwedibia et al., (2019, p. 68) explain that "*the poem is far-reaching, and the voice is loud and clear. There are moons and suns, tides and black ocean; there is clear daybreak and ancestral gifts all joining together in a crescendo of hope.*" Abhijeet Pratap (2018, para. 3) asserts "While the poet gives a powerful blow on the one hand to discrimination and slavery, on the other she evokes a picture of hope that the flame God lit could never be extinguished by men". The message of the poem is "loud and clear - no matter the cruelty, regardless of method and circumstance, the seemed victim will surely rise, and the slave will overcome adversity" (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 68).

Since "Still I Rise" is undoubtedly written with the black slavery and civil rights issues in mind" (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 68), it is critical to note the vehemence of the confidence which flows in the speaker's voice and attitude in the poem. The first stanza of the poem begins by stating how words have no power over her. Still, in the opening of the

poem, we find vehement confidence as well as a positive attitude that the narrator possesses” (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 68). This confidence and pride of the Black woman, the speaker, are understandable because she realizes her status of being the mother of all human races on earth, black, white, yellow or red. This status opens the door to the universal scope of this poem. “Still I Rise” is “*universal in its appeal in that any innocent individual, any minority, any nation subject to oppression or abuse could understand the underlying message of the poem, which is, don’t give in to torture, bullying, humiliation and injustice*” (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 68).

3. Language Pattern

3.1. Figurative Language

The backbone of all the other poetic elements is the use of language. In “*Mother to Son*” and “*Still I Rise*” the speakers use Ebonics, the African American Vernacular English, which is in fact their mother tongue. There is a common saying in some part of Africa which asserts that serious things are said in one’s own mother tongue. In “*Mother to Son*” the use of “I’ll (line 1), “ain’t been” (line 2), “It’s” (line 3), “I’ve been a-climbin’ on” (line 9), “And reachin’ landin’s,” (line 9), “turnin’” (line 10), “turnin’” (line 11), “goin’” (line 12), “ain’t been no light.” (Line 13), “Cause you finds it’s kinder hard” (line 16), “For I’ve still goin’, honey,” (line 18) “I’ve still climbin’,” (line 19) and “And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair” (line 20) demonstrates the life-changing character of lesson the mother is teaching.

While Langston Hughes uses Ebonics abundantly in his poem, Maya Angelou’s poem shows very little of it: “Cause” (lines 7 and 19) and “Diggin’” (line 20). There is very little use of the Ebonics in the poem because of the audience, the white oppressor. The speaker wants her audience to clearly get her message through a plain use of the English language. She does not intend to mince her or speak Ebonics, which might mislead her message and show that she is afraid. The excessive use Ebonics in “*Still I Rise*” would betray or even kill the message.

A further perusal of “*Mother to Son*” reveals an interesting structure. From lines 1 to 7, the speaker describes the hardships of her life. “Second (8-13), the mother acknowledges the personal and racial progress represented by her metaphor of ascent” (Miller, 1975, p. 109). And “Last (14-20), she teaches the child in a powerful refrain her moral of endurance: “*And life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.*” (Miller,

1975, p. 109). These three sections of the poem make the extended metaphor that runs across the poem. The extended metaphor compares the speaker's life journey to the "no crystal stair" with "tacks" (3), "Splinters" (4), "torn up boards" (5), and "no carpet on the floor" (6) in it.

The alternation of double negative "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair." (2) and negative form "And places with no carpet on the floor-" (6) with affirmative form "It's had tacks in it, / And splinters, / And boards torn up, (3-5) in the first section of the poem expounds the depressive nature the speaker's hardships. The negative form focuses on the absence of comfort and opportunity, "crystal" and "carpet" while the affirmative form emphasizes the presence of trouble, problems, difficulties, and obstacles, "tacks", "splinters" and "torn up boards". The word "Bare" which closes this first section, an adjective, reinforces the idea of lack and weighs with an extreme power on the speaker's challenges. In the same vein, "Lines 4-6 then each start with the word "And." These are instances of polysyndeton and anaphora, and they emphasize the way the dangers pile up on top of each other" (T. Altman, 2019, p. 2). This polysyndeton and anaphora are repeated twice in the poem.

It is appealing to note that "The speaker of "Mother to Son" uses polysyndeton twice in the poem-first in lines 4-6 and later in lines 10-12. In lines 4-6, the speaker is describing, metaphorically, the challenges and obstacles she's faced in a racist society" (T. Altman, 2019, p. 7). And in "lines 4-6, the repeated "ands" emphasized the number of the dangers the speaker has faced. In lines 10-12, it emphasizes just how far she's climbed. Once again, the speaker transforms the dangers that she encounters into a source of strength" (T. Altman, 2019, p. 3).

The second section (7-13) shifts the focus of the speaker from her hardships to her response to them. The conjunction "But" (7) introduces the opposition between the challenges and the speaker's reaction through perseverance and resilience. It changes the tone from problem stating to solution finding. It is in the two lines "But all the time / I'se been a-climbin' on," (8-9) that the reader is first exposed to the notions of perseverance and resilience. "But all the time" past, and present "I'se been a-climbin' on," opens doors to Angelou's "Still I Rise" as both poems cross, overlap and blend together in perseverance and resilience.

"Still I Rise" also has an internal structure that breaks the 9-stanza poem in four sections which all end with "rise". The first section is

stanza 1 which ends with “I’ll **rise**” (1-4). Section two brings together stanzas 2 and 3 and ends with “I’ll **rise**” (5-12). Section three runs from stanza 4 to stanza 6 and ends with “I’ll rise” (13-24). And the last section moves from stanza 7 to stanza 9 and ends with “I **rise**” (25-43). Angelou’s aesthetic skills are fully at work in this poem. Section one has one stanza, section two counts two and section three adds up three stanzas.

The first section of Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise” introduces the probability of the white oppressor’s decision to put the speaker down. Section two tells about the confidence and the positive attitude of the speaker coupled with her resilience and determination which she fuels with the certainty of nature, “moon, sun, tides” (9-10). Section three exposes the true intention of the oppressor to weaken the speaker and keeps her down forever, and the tools of the oppressor are “shoot, cut, and kill” (21-23). The last section of “Still I Rise” mirrors the hardships of Blacks as “Mother to Son” portrays, “huts of history’s shame” (29), “a past that’s rooted in pain” (31), and “nights of terror and fear” (35). This last section quenches all the assaults of the oppressor. Of all the ten times “I’ll Rise” or “I Rise” have been used in the Angelou’s poem, seven are present in this last section. This vehemently expresses the speaker’s triumph over the oppressor.

Maya Angelou has also used simile, hyperbole, and metaphor to exhibit the speaker’s confidence, defiance, and triumph. “Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides, / Just like hopes springing high,” (9-11), and “That I dance like I’ve got diamonds” (27). Whatever the weather, the season, and the era the moon, the sun and the tide never fail rising. Beside the simile, the speaker uses hyperbole to reveal the extent to which the oppressor might go in his evil deeds. Despite the size, the depth, the width, the height of white oppression, the black people will rise. In the same vein, the use of metaphor reinforces this idea of resilience, perseverance, and triumph. “I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide” (33-34), and “I am the dream and the hope of the slave” (40) simply confirms this.

3.2. Sentence Types and Tenses

Based on the covered or indirect, and confrontational strategies that Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou have respectively adopted in the poems under study, punctuations, tenses, and types of sentences have played a major role.

While considering the three sections in “Mother and Son”, the colon that ends the first line “Well, son, I’ll tell you:” has introduced the conflict or the problem in the poem (1-7). The conjunction “But” on line 8, introducing the resistance and perseverance attitude of the speaker, marks the change in tone, (8-13). The “So” of line 14 introduces the consequences that derives from the conflict and the speaker’s appropriate reaction. The combination of “So” (14) and the imperative form “Don’t you set down on the steps / ’Cause you finds it’s kinder hard. / Don’t you fall now-” (15-17) urges the son to realize that resignation or failure is not an option. Despite the dangers and hardships, the son has no other option than “Still Rising.” In addition, the tenses the poet uses also participate to the attitude of perseverance and resilience. Section one uses the past perfect, which suggests the problem of racism is stuck in the past, while the present perfect and the present perfect progressive of sections two and three demonstrate that the scope of the speaker’s resilience surpasses the obstacles in her life.

As for “Still I Rise,” Imikan Nkopuruk and Kehinde Saheed Oduşina (2019, p. 4) observe that “*The sentence types that are commonly used in the poem are the imperative and the interrogative. The use of these sentence types harmonizes with the tone and the mood of the poetic persona.*” And Adaoma Igwedibia et al., (2019, p. 68) note that “In the same vein, there are two questions rhetorically asked by the speaker in the second stanza of which are ironically encapsulated in contradictions.” The speaker uses the interrogative sentences in form of rhetorical questions mostly to taunt the oppressor. “Does my sassiness upset you? / Why are you beset with gloom?” (A. Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 5-6), and “Does my sexiness upset you?” (Adaoma Igwedibia et al., 2019, p. 25) are some examples. The speaker’s pride even goes higher in the taunting attitude through the combination of a rhetorical question and the imperative form in lines 17-18, “Does my haughtiness offend you? / Don’t you take it awful hard.”

3.3. Sound Pattern: Words, Sound, and Rhymes

It has been said that Langston Hughes’s poem “Mother to Son” is a free verse. Though there is no rhyme scheme, the rhythm and the sounds produced by words are abundant in the poem. According to Toby Altman (2019, p. 2), “*The speaker uses a series of devices to underline the severity of these dangers.*” Alliteration, assonance, and consonance are some of the examples. The scholar argues that “The speaker of

“Mother to Son” uses alliteration throughout the poem. The device emphasizes the severity of the obstacles she’s had to overcome—and, at the same time, it also underlines her persistence and bravery in facing those obstacles” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 5). The scholar further asserts that “The speaker also uses alliteration to subtly underline her triumph. In lines 5 and 7, there’s an alliterative /b/ sound, which appears in “boards” and “bare.” In lines 8 and 9, the /b/ sound returns in “But” and “been” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 3). Alliteration has sustained the speaker’s description of her hardships and obstacles as well as her determination, perseverance, and resilience. *“It’s striking that the same alliteration appears in both places. It runs through two different parts of the poem: it’s there when the speaker describes the dangers she’s faced and it’s there when she describes triumphing over those dangers”* (T. Altman, 2019, p. 3).

In the same vein, *“The speaker of “Mother to Son” uses assonance throughout the poem. The device often helps her emphasize the dangers she has faced and the damage that such dangers have inflicted on her”* (T. Altman, 2019, p. 6). For instance, “the assonant, nasally /a/ sound in line 3: “It’s had tacks in it.” The line sounds sharp and scary, just like the thing it describes” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 2). Consonance is also in the list of devices the poet deploys to convey the central message. The speaker “uses consonance to emphasize the danger that she’s endured during her life-and, at the same time, to underscore the force of her conviction about how her son should confront the difficulties of living in a racist society” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 6). An example of consonance is in line 2, “Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.” Altman declares that *“The line is thick with consonant /l/, /f/, /r/, /n/, and /t/ sounds. These are harsh and sharp sounds, making the line sounds dangerous and difficult as the life that she describes”* (T. Altman, 2019, p. 2).

As for Angelou’s “Still I Rise”, it is important to remember that the poem has a rhyme scheme of ABCB in the first seven stanza: “history / **lies** / dirt / **rise**” (1-4), for instance. Stanzas eight and nine respectively follow the ABABCC, and the ABABCCBBB rhyme schemes: “shame / **rise** / pain / **rise** / wide / tide” (29-34), and “fear / **rise** / clear / **rise** / gave / slave / **rise** / **rise** / **rise**” (35-43). It is in these two end stanzas that the triumph of the speaker is most vivid with the repetition of the word “rise” as to overwhelm and confuse her white oppressor and defeat him. The rhyme scheme of “Still I Rise” suggests the regular and rhythmic movement of words and sounds. This regularity and rhythm go hand in hand with the certitude overcoming oppression. Like the

moon and the sun follow a rhythmic and regular path and print the certitude of their cycle on the pages of the cosmos, so shall the black people rise. With the certainty of tides that go up and down, black people and all oppressed people will rise.

Overall, Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou have a common goal of survival and the triumph of their own oppressed race though the strategies they have employed are divergent. “Mother to Son” has a didactic tone and optimistic mood (in the face of hardship and sadness), whereas “Still I Rise” uses a determined and confident tone and is inspirational in mood. The Afrocentric view on the texts under study is that both poems are Afrocentric in that they express an African view of the world.

3.4. Symbolism

The divergence of poetic strategies of both poets is also shown through the use of symbolism. Langston Hughes uses symbols to express the presence of elements which highlight the absence of others: the “crystal stair” (2), “light” (13), and darkness (12). This establishes a duality hardships and comfort throughout the poem. Maya Angelou’s use of symbols conveys duality between attitude and materialism, so the oppressor gets the message in their own world view: “oil wells” (7), “gold mines” (19), and “diamonds” (27).

Toby Altman (2019, p. 4) observes that “The “crystal stair” is just the opposite of the staircase she’s had to use. Crystals are smooth, shiny, and beautiful; they suggest glamor, luxury, and ease.” So, “In other words, the “crystal stair” is basically the opposite of the staircase the speaker has had to climb” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 1). The stair the speaker has been climbing in “Mother to Son” which is present, in fact alludes to the absence of the “crystal stair.” The point is that the oppressor has prevented her to take the crystal stair. Comfort has been taken away from her. Though the speaker does not name him, the oppressor is constantly present in every line of the poem. The anonymous oppressor is behind each obstacle, every “tack”, every “splinter”, every “torn up board”.

The symbols of darkness and light create a vivid image of the duality between the presence and the absence of the opposite element. Toby Altman (2019, p. 4) notes that “Darkness in the poem is a symbol for hopelessness and despair. It appears in line 12, where the speaker describes how, as she climbed up a dangerous, poorly maintained

staircase, she was “sometimes goin’ in the dark”. Darkness here is strongly linked to hope which is absent. When the speaker brings in “light” which is also associated with hope; it rather expresses the absence of the latter. “In line 13, the speaker notes that she has often had “no light.” In other words, she has had no hope. As a symbol, then, “light” works with the symbol that appears in line 12, “dark” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 4). Clearly put, “Both symbols emphasize that the speaker has experienced despair and hopelessness as she has struggled to overcome the obstacles and dangers of living in a racist society” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 4). The double negative form used in line 13 “ain’t” and “no” to express the absence of light (hope) strengthens the thickness of the dark (despair) and renders it more palpable.

The origin of the conflict in Angelou’s poem is the fact that the oppressor wants to enjoy comfort, prestige, privilege at the expense of the speaker. The oppressor wants to dominate the speaker. So, the symbols of the oppressor’s comfort and security are “gold mine”, “oil wells”, and “diamonds.” The use of these symbols expresses duality between the attitude of the speaker and the materialism-ideology of the oppressor. The use of simile with these symbols is tale telling. “Like” compares the speaker’s attitude and what the oppressor recognizes as source of wealth and security. “Cause I walk like I’ve got oil wells / Pumping in my living room” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 7-8). Of course, the speaker does not have any oil wells pumping in her living room, but her confidence shows in her walking. The same thing applies to the two other symbols. In “Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines / Diggin’ in my own back yard.” (19-20) and “That I dance like I’ve got diamonds / At the meeting of my thighs?” (T. Altman, 2019, p. 27-28) one can see the positive attitude of the speaker. The three verbs in these lines “walk”, “laugh” and “dance” reinforce the confidence and defiance attitude of the speaker.

Conclusion

This study has sought to assess and examine the various strategies Hughes and Angelou embrace to resist and overcome racism and oppression in America. Langston Hughes’ “*Mother to Son*” has adopted a covered or indirect strategy to convey the speaker’s message to her son, while Maya Angelou has taken a confrontational and defiant attitude in “*Still I Rise*.” The commonality in purpose of both poets has not suffered any alteration. To reach the aforementioned objective,

Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentricity has served as theoretical frame. It advocates for a conscious understanding of the role that African people play now and have played in history. In this perspective, the two poems under study can be viewed as Afrocentric texts. In addition, the structural approach has helped to deal with the poetic form, the paratextual approach has examined the title of the poems, and the linguistic approach has helped to assess the use of language in the poems.

The study has found out that oppression many a time may weaken the perpetrator and strengthen the oppressed. This confers onto the oppressed a moral victory over the oppressor. It also shows that the capacity of mankind for perseverance and resilience is limitless and should not be overlooked nor undermined in human relationships. It has also been demonstrated that it is absolutely useless to oppress people because the Maker has endowed them with an unbreakable proclivity for perseverance and resilience.

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Le volume de textes reçus dans le cadre de cette livraison suggère à l'évidence, par l'originalité des sujets abordés, leur variété discursive et leur diversité originelle, que malgré les drames (pandémie de Covid-19, terrorisme, guerres asymétriques, changement climatique et ses effets pervers, etc.) auxquels notre monde actuel est confronté, les chercheurs africains restent déterminés à repousser le plus loin possible les frontières de la recherche. Aussi paradoxal que cela puisse paraître, ces situations anormales leur offrent de meilleures perspectives de réflexions savantes, dont les résultats permettent de mieux comprendre ce qu'est l'homme dans son essence. Ainsi, bravant la peur, les chercheurs améliorent leurs harmoniques afin de livrer au monde des éléments explicatifs de sa complexité. Ils montrent une résilience à toutes ces situations traumatisantes qu'ils exploitent à leur avantage, en tirant d'elles le maximum de ce qui constituent des champs de recherche.

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