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From the Personal to the Collective: A Trans-textual Reading of the Autobiographical in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"

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ABSTRACT

This research is intended to introduce a trans-textual reading of Maya Angelou's autobiographical novel I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and her poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" in an attempt to prove that Angelou passed from the personal in I know to the collective in "Caged bird" through analyzing both works in the light of intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality and architextuality as different categories of transtextuality. Analyzed and linked together, both works prove typical for an intratextual reading that is held to support the main proposition held in the research. What Angelou delineated as personal and individual in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is metaphorically and poetically expressed with brevity in "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" to address the collective and the university. Both works bring a plethora of themes that are brought powerfully into the texts through some stylistic devices and techniques, and held intact together through the form and structure of each work. The autobiographical form of the novel is tackled as an aiding tool that tells and supports much of the themes analyzed and discussed in the research making sense of the proposed departure from the personal to the collective in both works.

Introduction

The research aims at drawing upon the autobiographical element to introduce a trans-textual reading of Maya Angelou's autobiography I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and her poem that is given the same title. The focus on reading the works through their titles is intended as a paratextual analysis, and linking the two works by the same writer together is intended to present an intra-textual reading that does not work separately from intertextuality, as a general term, that relates the works to other African American texts. The paratextual reading is based on reading the title in both works trying to investigate them separately and then to use the same tool, i.e. the title, to link them together. The intended trans-textual reading is attempted in direct relation to the narrative structure and thematic content of both works: the novel I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and the poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings".

Maya Angelou (1928- 2014) is an African-American poet, memoirist, and actress. She was born Marguerite Ann Johnson. Her brother Bailey gave her the nickname "Maya," which she adopted, later, as her preferred name, and her husband gave her her family name "Angelou". Generally speaking, Maya Angelou's autobiographical work includes a series of seven autobiographies, often referred to collectively as The Maya Angelou Series or The Maya Angelou Autobiographies. These books are I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969); Gather Together in My Name (1974); Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976); The Heart of a Woman (1981); And Still I Rise (1986); All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986); A Song Flung Up to Heaven (2002). Each of these chronicles represents a different phase of Angelou's life, but they all share some common themes like identity, struggle, and empowerment. They are all infused with social commentary, reflecting on the systemic racism of her time and the impact it had on her life and community. For example, the phase that Angelou portrays in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is her childhood and early adolescence bringing in issues of racial and personal identity. She blends the notion of personal struggle to find a place in a world fraught with racial discrimination and personal trauma with the collective one i.e. the

struggle of all the African Americans in America. Meanwhile, the phase that The Heart of a Woman and All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes addresses relates to her involvement in the civil rights movement and her experiences as an African American woman in the 20th century. And Still I Rise comes later to emphasize other themes like empowerment and self-actualization as if Angelou is writing her own journey from victimization towards self-empowerment. Trying to limit the scope of analysis, the research aims, through a trans-textual reading of two of Angelou's works, to reflect upon all these themes introduced in Angelou's works, investigating how the poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (1969) corresponds to the phase presented in Angelou's novel I Know Why the Bird Sings (1969).

Since any literary text is nothing but the total sum of all the things that helped in producing it, it has become necessary to read Angelou's autobiography I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in relation to what Gerald Genette calls "architextuality". In his seminal work on textual theory: Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree (1982), he states that "[t]he subject of poetics… is not the text considered in its singularity… but rather the architexuality of the text…. [which means] the entire set of general or transcendent categories- types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres- from which emerges such a singular text" (1). He, then, states that the subject of poetics is rather "transtextuality" of which 'architextuality' is just a type. Actually, transtextuality designates a range of ways in which literary texts interact to, reference, or influence other texts. It supposes that a text is not an isolated entity; instead, it is just part of a whole tradition that is kept tight by a net of intertextual relationships, based on the use of some techniques that vary according to the kind of trans-textuality proposed. In addition, it is directly related to the reader-response theory as it asserts the importance of reader's interpretation. Here, the text's meaning changes according to the degree of the reader's familiarity with the intertextual references, paratextual elements, and other trans-textual elements in the text.

Trans-textuality falls into categories according to the relationship held between the

texts in question. For example, there is 'inter-textuality', which Genette defines as the "relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts… the actual presence of one text within another" (1-2). It shows how a certain text is influenced by other texts and it is based on techniques such as 'allusions', i.e. indirect references to another text which necessitates that the reader be acquainted with it so that s/he can understand. Another technique of intertextuality is 'quotations', i.e. directly using text from another work. An example of this category is T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land and how it creates through allusions to many other texts a complex platform of literary texts held in an interconnected paradigm of literary discussion. Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow is another example which is known for miscellaneous allusions to historical, popular and cultural events.

The second category of trans-textuality is 'paratextuality', which is concerned with the relationship between a text and its other supplementary or non-text elements, such as titles, prefaces, introductions, footnotes and endnotes. The third is 'metatextuality', which investigates the ways a certain text comments on or criticizes another text by focusing on literary conventions and styles, and it may develop into meta-narratives, like Coetze's Foe, which is a meta-narrative reflecting on Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Genette calls this "the relationship most often labeled 'commentary'. It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it… without naming it" (4). The fourth category is 'hyper-textuality', which works on finding out the implied relationship between a text and its subsequent versions. Genette defines this as the relationship uniting two texts, one is called 'hypertext' (the recent text) and the other is called 'hypotext' (the earlier one). The condition he holds for a hypertextual reading here is that the relationship "is not that of commentary" (5). This may take the form of adaptations, i.e. changing a text into another medium (e.g., a novel into a film). Among many examples, there is the adaptation of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter into series and then into movies, where the films transform the original text into a different medium while maintaining basic component elements. It may also take the form of rewritings, i.e. modifying or

expanding upon the original text. An example of rewritings is Homer's classical epic Odyssey which has been of a great influence on many other texts, ranging from Virgil's Aeneid to James Joyce's Ulysses which "is not just a homage to Homer's epic but an active dialogue with it, using its structure and themes to explore modern existential dilemmas" (Butler 72). It becomes a complex interplay of references to many other texts like some of Shakespeare's plays, bringing them all into his work. The fifth category of transtextuality is architextuality, which is concerned with the inherited characteristics that are given to the text by the genre it belongs to i.e. a poem, a novel, etc. Four of these categories are to be investigated into Angelou's I Know and "Caged Bird" in an attempt to prove how the two texts are related: the intertextual, the paratextual, the metatextual and the architextual.

I Know Why the Bird Sings, published in 1969, constitutes a cornerstone in the writing of autobiography reflecting many themes that get it out of the narrow context of self-representation to the universal context of human representation coming through one of the most painful human experiences of oppression, i.e the African-American experience. Here, Angelou powerfully depicts the harsh realities of racial segregation and discrimination in the South in a work that comes to be a "pioneering work in the genre, combining personal narrative with a broader social critique" ((O'Meally 142). Angelou's novel covers her life from early childhood to her teenage years, and it is composed of a series of vignettes that tell of key events and experiences in Angelou's life like her childhood experience of parental abandonment, sexual abuse, and racial practices. It begins with Angelou's early years in Stamps, Arkansas, where she and her brother Bailey are sent to live with their grandmother. It goes through the details of her experience of sexual abuse by her mother's boyfriend and his subsequent death, up through her adolescent years in San Francisco as she struggles to formulate her sense of identity and achieve self-discovery; something that comes to constitute a pivotal theme that shapes the literary canon of Maya Angelou. Throughout the novel, "Maya changes from a victim of abuse and racism to a complex self-aware individual. She is an emblematic

representation of every black girl growing up in America in the 1930s." (N. Roşcan 33), spinning honor and success out of trauma.

Put within the domain of an 'intense concern with the demands of otherness' (Zapata 523-4), trauma arises to be a key element in Angelou's autobiographies, in general, and in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, in particular, where she tells of her experiences of childhood sexual abuse and racial discrimination. In her novel, she shows how it "was awful to be Negro and have no control over [her] life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against [her] color with no chance of defense" (I Know 128). Her trauma, that is literarily portrayed through a detailed individual account, uncovers to tell of the collective injustice inherited in the African American experience. In the first scene of the novel, Marguerite (young Maya) and her brother Bailey Johnson are sent to their grandmother on a train unsupervised, with tags on their wrists "instructed—'To Whom It May Concern'" (I Know 7). They became nothing more than the tags put on their wrists. This calls to mind the sense of objectification slaves were subjected to being reduced to just numbers or letters without full names, as Paul D in Morrison's Beloved. Their humanity is violated by their own parents who do not bother going themselves to 'deliver' the children; something that foreshadows the more bitter humiliation that the children are destined to face later when they grow up. Their "[f]ather shipped [them] home to his mother" (I Know 7); again, the use of the word "shipped" brings to mind the African people's whole journey of suffering and humiliation kidnapped from their safety to slavery, like what happened to the two children. The scene, thus, is an individual microcosmic representation of a collective macrocosmic one. Angelou, then, adds: "Years later I discovered that the United States had been crossed thousands of times by frightened Black children travelling alone to their newly affluent parents in Northern cities, or back to grandmothers in Southern towns when the urban North renegaded on its economic promises" (I Know 7). She here starts to get from the individual to the communal.

Specifying trauma to her very close circle, Angelou extends this sense of trauma to be three-faceted as she writes, "The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power." (I Know 191). However, all her female characters are fighters and survivors in their own rights, and they come to have such strong characters, as portrayed, simply because they have survived against impossible odds. Examples are her grandmother Momma Henderson and her teacher Miss Williams. Therefore, through their traumatized experiences, they obviously show heroism, courage, and strength despite the "fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance." (I Know 191).

Actually, trauma is turned by Angelou, throughout the narrative, to be the route towards both resilience and determination to rise above her social conditions, overcoming adversity and oppression. She asserts this when she writes, "I was not going to be a free girl at the end of my life if I had to listen to myself cry for ever" (I Know 54). Trying to rise out of this trauma, Angelou, finally, reaches a sense of satisfaction that leads to a true self-discovery. Though she "encountered many defeats in her life… she remained undefeated. The situational irony is evident at every stage in the life of Maya Angelou. Though these circumstances were traumatic, Angelou faced them with temerity" (Sasidher & Lakshmi 77). She comes to realize that she is a human inhabiting the vast universe, no more and no less, getting to identify her worth not allowing others to do it for her. She writes, "I realized that I was a child of the universe, no better or worse than any other being. My place in it was not to be defined by others but by my own sense of worth" (I Know 212). Here, Angelou hints to the link she wants to hold between her personal experience and the overall fabric of her black people suffering. Here, she sends a message of dignity to

her people on one hand, and to the whole world, on the other. Her experiences of trauma and discrimination do not only define her; instead, they contribute to her growth and self-assertion.

In such a way, the theme of trauma is brought in Angelou's work to speak out the anger and frustration of an artist kept caged in the 'othered' category on the human scale. Here, she shows how it feels to be a humiliated person. She delineates it thoroughly in the dentist chapter of her autobiography. The chapter tells of one humiliating incident when the child Maya is rejected by a dentist who refuses to take off her rotten teeth because his "policy is [he]' d rather stick [his] hand in a dog' s mouth than in a nigger's." (I Know 134). In her novel, Angelou "focuses almost entirely on the inner spaces of her emotional and personal life, crafting a 'literary' autobiography that becomes not merely a personal record but also a stage on which the sins of the past can be recalled and rituals of healing and reconciliation enacted" (J. Braxton 4). Being an 'other' enhanced her urge to find her own self and formulate an identity. Consequently, the theme of otherness is held tight to enhance the autobiographical form of the novel as "the very awareness of her enforced marginality becomes an additional catalyst for life writing, for testifying, for 'telling it like it is.'" (Braxton 4)

Along the novel, Angelou uses spatial metaphors to express her feelings. For example, she portrays her sense of humiliation when she tries to visualize it through describing her perception of a local store she once goes to: "The store was a stark reminder of the world's prejudice—a place where our presence was tolerated, but not welcomed" (I Know 95). She sees the store as a microcosm of a world she cannot get altogether in one place, time, or action. The shop is a miniature of a world Angelou cannot bring as a whole into her novel in its full capacity. Instead, she gives her readers just one place to be able to identify and feel what she means. The store comes to encapsulate this intended world's injustice. This kind of metaphors extends to her poem "Caged Bird", where the cage comes to symbolize this world of

oppression the store stands for. Literary critic Robert O'Meally observes that Angelou's novel challenges traditional notions of autobiography by integrating lyrical and poetic elements" (O'Meally 142). Here, the aim of the research is represented, as it tries to intermingle the typically lyrical and poetic in her poem with the literary and artistic in her novel.

The shift from the sexual abuse in childhood to the work and study experiences in adulthood is held as a structural formation that corresponds thematically to the journey Angelou underwent from the silenced traumatized child, who apparently lost her ability to speak after the death of her abuser to a self-assertive young woman, who manages to attain herself a place in a society that, she knows, rejects her, together with her people and culture. At that phase of her life, she writes, "I was not a woman yet, nor a girl really. I was more like a child, I was, of course, at the same time an adolescent, a girl-child who had not yet found her true self" (I know 130). This shows how confused and torn she was as she was turning from childhood to adolescence struggling hard to reconcile her emerging self with her past one. Through the process of writing her autobiographical novel, Angelou explains how she had reached an outstanding empowering state as she writes: "I had been through the fire and come out stronger. My voice, once stifled, was now my instrument of strength and liberation" (I Know 320). Her voice which was once silenced because of abuse turns out to be the same tool of self-empowerment. She stands the test of adversity to get out brilliantly specially through writing down her experience and give her voice a way to go to the whole world speaking of the unspoken and donate her voice to those who were not allowed to have one. In this regard, literary scholar Mary Jane Luetkemeyer notes: "Angelou's autobiography set a new standard for African American memoirs, providing a voice to experiences that had previously been marginalized or ignored" (Luetkemeyer 67). She wonderfully drives her readers to the satisfying end of the novel which is very indicative as it ends with the birth of Angelou's son, and "With the birth of her child Maya is herself born into a mature engagement with the forces of life" (S. Smith "The Song" 374). The ending is

intended to be a new beginning.

The shift, portrayed in Angelou's novel I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, from failure to empowerment is clearly portrayed in her poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" through the structure of the poem, that is written in six stanzas. Angelou's poem "Caged Bird" was first published in 1969. The poem uses the extended metaphor of a caged bird to explore the same themes of oppression, freedom, and resilience, as in the novel I Know. "Caged Bird" is mainly a lyric poem that contrasts the experiences of a free bird, symbolizing liberation and hope, with those of a caged bird, symbolizing imprisonment and oppression. The poem's structure moves alternatively from the first to the second, underscoring the differences between them. It starts with the free bird soaring high in the sky, experiencing the joy of freedom: "The free bird leaps / on the back of the wind / and floats downstream / till the current ends" ("Caged Bird" lines 1-4). The words "leaps", "floats" connote free motion and unlimited action as the bird moves from the high "wind" to the low "downstream". He does not even have temporal limit as he floats "till the current ends", undergoing the experience as a whole process, being in control as he drives "the back of the wind". Here, Angelou creates a state of being that is intended to express the idea of free will and determination. On the other hand, the caged bird's experience is marked by confinement: "But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams / his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream" ("Caged Bird", lines 16-17). Here, "leaps" is substituted by "stands"; a word that indicates a state of stagnation, and the "back of the wind" is contrasted to the "grave of dreams" which were once born and are forever buried dead. The bird himself loses his features and is changed to a shadow that comes to stand for all the oppressed. They are all brought into one figure that is nameless and featureless. The state of singing now is more identified as cries of sorrow as the bird "shouts on a nightmare scream". Standing still on the grave of his hopes and aspiration for freedom, all his dreams are turned into nightmares that tell only of the senses of failure and repression. The sudden shift shocks the reader and creates a visual representation of the state of oppression

Angelou wants to deliver. Here, the juxtaposition succeeds to pinpoint the main theme delineated throughout the poem, i.e. freedom vs. imprisonment.

The stylistic devices employed in the poem are very supportive of the thematic content working on enriching the effect intended on the readers. The poem is composed of six stanzas, the first of which introduces the reader to a visual image of a free bird soaring high in the sky. The second shifts the reader to a contrasting scene portraying a caged bird that is kept oppressed and tied. The poem is written in free verse, with no single rhyme scheme or metrical pattern that links all the lines together. However, there are some examples of iambic meter. Alliteration, which is the repetition of consonants at the beginning of multiple words, "is a very handy tool for foregrounding the initial sounds to achieve emphasis and to aid memorability" (R. Benczes 6). It is used in "soft" and "sighing"; "worms" and "waiting"; and in "shadow" and "shouts", giving the poem a sort of phonological constancy that corresponds to the semantic implication. Here, alliteration helps in stabilizing the scene for the reader to catch its sensuous feeling. Shifting from the free-bird scene to the caged bird scene, the reader may not catch the intended feeling or emotional state. Alliteration, thus, gives a temporal chance to the writer to send, and to the reader to receive.

Another device used is enjambment which is used technically to support the emotional state Angelou aims at getting her readers into. For example, the enjambment used in the transition between the first and second lines in the first stanza: "A free bird leaps/ on the back of the wind" works on increasing the pace of the poem to go in accordance with the "leaping" and the increase in the speed of the free bird's flying "on the back of the wind", getting the reader to experience the sense of freedom and unlimited space within which the free bird exists. On another hand, the enjambment used in the third and fourth lines in the second stanza: "can seldom see through/ his bars of rage" is employed to create a sense of tension that moves the reader toward sympathizing with the caged bird feeling his sense of confinement. The reader is to be held stabilized till s/he gets into a certain emotional state that

would not be achieved had been there a break in expressing the idea itself. In general, enjambment, here, helps in setting the realistic tone Angelou aims at, and in proposing that the song of the oppressed will go on and will never stop. Enjambment, which aims at "lending a realistic conversational rhythm" to the poem (Quinn, Edward 137), suits its autobiographical nature that is mainly based on a dialogue between the writer and the reader.

What is brought very special in the poem is the link held between imprisonment and singing. Angelou writes about the caged bird: "His wings are clipped and his feet are tied / so he opens his throat to sing" ("Caged Bird" lines 12-13). The bird is confined and his wings, his tools of flying high in the sky, are clipped and his feet are brought tied together, so that he cannot even move. The conjunction "so" is used to link the description of the bird's status of confinement to what will come in the next line, concerning his singing. The reason why the bird sings is that he is trapped and imprisoned. Again, the bird does not open his mouth. He opens his "throat" which lies deeper and farther into his body. What is generally expected is that the freed bird is the one who is supposed to sing, as singing is a sign of happiness. In contrast, Angelou surprises the reader by the fact that the caged bird also sings and she knows well why he sings. Like herself, the bird's singing calls for his freedom. Though he is imprisoned, it is a must for him to sing because it is "absolutely necessary to voice out what one feels or what one is going through; only then will one's plea for help will be heard." (S. Fathima 65). His singing becomes an objective correlative of his confinement. Still, his screams are put into the form of sound and music, and in spite of the fact that he cries, he continues to sing; something which signifies hope and resilience.

going through; only then will one's plea for help will be heard.

The act of singing becomes in itself a metaphor for the caged bird's persistence and yearn for freedom, as Angelou writes: "The caged bird sings / with a fearful trill / of things unknown / but longed for still" ("Caged Bird", lines 19-22). Even if he is afraid and in spite of the fact that he is singing of things unknown and unspoken of,

the bird longs for singing. He keeps on singing, even if his voice is shaken; he is proving to himself, as well as for the others, that still he has a voice. The description of the caged bird's song to be a "fearful trill" hints to his deep yearning for freedom, despite his apparent inability to do it well. This continuous attempt of the caged bird to sing even while being imprisoned in his cage represents the unfulfilled hopes and unsatisfied dreams of those who are oppressed and kept under siege. The power of singing liberates him out of his pain of imprisonment. It highlights how the oppressed can set themselves spiritually free by singing out their suffering and documenting their pain. So, singing "is not a carol of joy or glee,/ But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,/ But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—" (Dunbar lines 18-20)

Thus, duality is brought by Angelou as central to the representation of what she needs to assert. Here, duality is held through the juxtaposition between the two birds, and the contrast deconstructed between singing and imprisonment. Again, duality is manifested in imagery itself, like in "on the back of the wind" and "on the graves of dreams". This, actually, asserts the emotional impact of the poem and brings to the foreground the idea of presenting contrasting experiences as a tool of clarifying and highlighting the theme of oppression. Duality is also brought on the level of the tone which varies from the cheerful and delightful to the gloomy and grieved. The first is linked to the free bird's perspective which is characterized by a tone of joy and liberation, while the second is related to the caged bird's perspective which is marked by a tone of sorrow and longing. The tone duality created here is intended to pinpoint the disparity between freedom and oppression. Duality, here, extends to symbolize the duality in perceiving Black Americans as free, but enslaved, as Angelou explains in I Know, "The white people in the South had decided that the only way to maintain control was to force black people to live like slaves, even though they were supposedly free" (174). This duality is a hint of the systemic racism and dehumanization that African Americans used to face in America.

In "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", the bird is a symbol that stands for Angelou

herself as she struggles for freedom and self-expression, and it extends, thus, to symbolize all the oppressed' attempts at liberation "for the caged bird/ sings of freedom" ("Cage Bird" lines 21-22). The poem in its structure and content corresponds to the novel in such a way that makes a trans-textual reading of both a necessity within the whole attempt of introducing Maya Angelou's works and appreciating her significance. Both "Caged Bird" and I Know are structured to reflect on the theme of confinement and freedom. However, while "Caged Bird" starts with the free bird symbol, I Know starts with Marguerite, the confined, still young, version of Maya Angelou. The ruling factor here is the form, which brings into analysis an architextual reading of both works. Here, the literary genre itself lends the text part of its contextual significance. Through the poem, Angelou wants to create a simultaneous emotional reaction through a short poetic form, so she begins with intensively visualizing how freedom feels before she abruptly moves to the contrasting state of imprisonment. She, thus, succeeds in creating in the readers that sense of gain and loss alternatively, and in bringing them to sense how her people have been kept in a continuous state of instability and permanent sense of failure. Here, it is worth noting that this typically reflects what happened at that time during the time of the civil rights movement, which turned to be a great failure for the African Americans. In other words, Angelou want to portray how people felt after getting the glimpses of victory imagining that they had achieved the first step toward freedom before they were shocked to realize that all this was mere illusion. They remained oppressed, humiliated and segregated within their history of slavery. For that reason, the poetic form is suitable as it generates the emotional state inside the readers' mind. In the novel, which is autobiographical in the first place, Angelou starts chronologically from childhood to youth; from confinement to freedom, as the form gives her the chance and space to give details and elaborate on actions and events. On the other hand, and through the extended metaphor of the bird, Angelou keeps on moving from the free to the caged bird to give her readers the impression that freedom is not easy since it necessitates persistence and struggle. She makes

them first sense it then takes it away to put them in alert to keep on working and never to give up.

This juxtaposition discussed in the poem finds its equivalent in the novel through the extended comparison held between Maya, the child, and Maya, the famous writer and the successful woman activist. In this regard, Susan Gilbert proposes the existence of two voices in I Know: "the child, growing to consciousness of herself and the limits of her world, and the author, experienced, confident, and didactic." (39). Consequently, it comes clear that Angelou's autobiography moves from the Bildungsroman autobiography, that traces Angelou's young life towards the spiritual autobiography that traces the adult Angelou towards her professional development. The novel, thus, turns into a metatext that "is a text commenting on another text" (H. Plett 22) since it presents a detailed commentary on the poem. In other words, what the poem abstractly symbolizes, the novel crystalizes into actions and supporting incidents.

Within the context of the form, it is important to note how the literary effect of the poetic imagery in "Caged Bird" extends to Angelou's I Know, which is generally known for its vivid imagery, lyrical prose, and nonlinear storytelling. Examples are the similes in "I was called Old Lady and chided for moving and talking like winter's molasses" (51), and in "[Bailey] smelled like a vinegar barrel or a sour angel" (19). Another is the symbolism in "Just my breath, carrying my words out, might poison people and they'd curl up and die like the black fat slugs that only pretended. I had to stop talking" (64), and in "[Bailey] said I was quite brave, and that was my cue to reveal our confrontation with the peckerwood dentist and Momma's incredible powers" (137). A third is the hyperbole in "Sympathy is next to shit in the dictionary, and I can't even read" (147), or in describing the aristocrat Mrs. Bertha Flowers: "She had the grace of control to appear warm in the coldest weather, and on the Arkansas summer days it seemed she had a private breeze which swirled around, cooling her" (69). Alliteration is traced in "I mastered the art of crocheting and tatting, and there was a lifetime's supply of dainty doilies that would never be used in sacheted dresser

drawers" (77), and in "The time crowded together and at an End of Days I was swinging on the back of the rackety trolley, smiling sweetly and persuading my charges to 'step forward in the car, please.'" (190). Again, Angelou is keen on creating an authentic realistic atmosphere by stimulating the senses as in "The odors of onions and oranges and kerosene had been mixing all night and wouldn't be disturbed until the wooded slat was removed from the door and the early morning air forced its way in with the bodies of people who had walked miles to reach the pickup place" (8), and in "I sliced onions, and Bailey opened two or even three cans of sardines and allowed their juice of oil and fishing boats to ooze down and around the sides" (15), for example. Bringing nature into her text enriches its appeal and emotional sense as in "The sounds of the new morning had been replaced with grumbles about cheating houses, weighted scales, snakes, skimpy cotton and dusty rows" (9) and in "Chicken suppers and gambling games were rioting on a twenty-four-hour basis downstairs" (185) .The parallel construction in "We danced the jitterbug to Count Basie, the Lindy and the Big Apple to Cab Calloway, and the Half Time Texas Hop to Duke Ellington" (180), and in "A pyramid of flesh with the whitefolks on the bottom, as the broad base, then the Indians with their silly tomahawks and teepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spirituals sticking out of their mouths" (128). All these stylistic devices combining the phonological, e.g. alliteration, and the semantic, e.g. similes, help consolidate the literary and emotional effect that supports the thematic context of the novel.

Intertextuality, as a concept, was also tackled by the literary theorist Julia Kristeva who believes that "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 36), and was expanded by Roland Barthes to explore the ways texts influence and reference each other. Barthes proposes that a text is a combination of quotations from other works and cultural discourses; something that makes a certain text nothing but an interplay of many

other texts. He believes that "[t]he text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (Barthes, 146). Concerning intertextuality, I Know is found abundant in external references, quotations and allusions, unlike "Caged Bird". Reading both works together is what lends them an intertextual bond that is deeply found to be an intratextual one since they both fall into the realm of Angelou's own writing production. Intratextuality here is meant to refer to the internal relationship between the novel and the poem not as completely separate works, but as two main blocks in the whole edifice of the writings of one distinguished writer.

In Angelou's autobiographies, usually there are references to historical, cultural, and literary texts that are intended to link and relate her personal experiences to broader historical and cultural contexts trying to locate herself into a universal context of existence. One clear example is the allusion to William Shakespeare's works. In "The Graduation" chapter in I Know, Angelou reflects on the powerful effect of words on people, writing: "I had learned the value of words from the Bard, from Shakespeare's insistence that 'the pen is mightier than the sword'" (I Know 195). This has a direct relation to the theme of voice, brought here by Angelou as a person who truly means what it feels not to have one, on one hand, and as a person responsible for delivering the voice of people who are hindered any tools of self-expression, on the other. This voice theme is magnified in her poem "Caged Bird", which brings in voice, represented in 'singing' to symbolize the process of protest and fighting for liberation. Actually, this reference to Shakespeare asserts Angelou's belief in the influential power of literature on two sides. The first is related to how Shakespeare himself has affected her own vision and formulated her mind by his 'words'. The other side is related to how Angelou works on delivering her message to the world through her written 'word', which resonates Shakespeare's.

Intertextuality is, again, brought forth by quoting James Weldon Johnson's poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing", which is sung by the students at the end of the graduation scene in response to the insult directed to the audience by a White guest. Angelou writes that it seemed as if she had not ever heard such words before in spite

of the fact that she had sung them many times when she was a child. Johnson's poem was "the Negro national anthem. Out of habit [they] were singing it" and "Every child…had learned that song with his ABC's" (I Know 130). Getting Johnson's poem into the novel is an attempt of bringing in its call for liberty for and unity of the Black race. The scene is followed by a group of children coming to the stage completing the hymn. Angelou wonderfully explains her feeling after hearing the words sung by the students, the parents and the children: "We were on top again. As always, again. We survived. The depths had been icy and dark, but now a bright sun spoke to our souls" (I Know131). Johnson is a famous Harlem figure whose poem, like Angelou's autobiography, evolve "from the stuff of the black experience, with its suffering and its survival," and hence "is a paradigm of Angelou's own artistic endeavor in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (K. Kinnamon 132-33).

Another example of inter-textuality through allusions is Angelou's reference to classic African American literature and cultural texts like her reference to Langston Hughes's poetry, writing: "Hughes's poetry taught me that my voice, though small, had the power to sing and to be heard" (I know 112). Here, she admits the effect of Hughes's works on her and on her struggle for attaining self-discovery and identity formation, echoing his significance in reflecting and shaping the African-American experience. Again, there is the reference to other figures like Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner who she hoped they had killed all whitefolks; Abraham Lincoln who she hoped he "had been assassinated before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation" (128); Harriet Tubman who, she wished, had been killed by that blow on her head; and Christopher Columbus who should have drowned in the Santa Maria. All these wishes were her response against the humiliation she felt after hearing a White guy comparing what improvements the White school and the Black would receive, showing the great discrepancies between them.

Trying to set a context for the two works, one finds the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement perfect as a common background. As Bhabha puts it, "The context in which a text is produced and received plays a significant role in shaping its

intertextual connections. Analyzing these contexts helps us understand the ways in which texts interact and influence each other" (103). Both the selected works were found to be literary attempts to document for the Civil Rights Movement, and, thus, they share Angelou's intention to literarily reflect on the struggle of the African Americans for freedom and equality. The Civil Rights Movement took place during the 1950s and 1960s for Black Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. The movement was brought up to put into action what the Civil War could not. It aimed at abolishing all the illegal practices held by White Americans and enforced by law. The protest activities included sit-ins, boycotts, protest marches, freedom rides, and lobbying government officials for legislative action. The protestors faced opposition and were subjected to bombings and beatings, arrest and assassination. The key events that featured this two-decade period were the Brown v. Board of Education's campaign, Montgomery Bus Boycott, Little Rock school integration crisis, Birmingham campaign, The March on Washington, and The Selma civil rights marches. However, by the end of the 1960s, the civil rights movement had succeeded to bring in some of the aspired for goals in law and public practices through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 that put an end to many of the Jim Crow Era's laws and practices. Here comes clear the interplay Angelou' s autobiography is intended to present between her personal memoir and a historical national protest for equality as her narrative reflects the struggles of African Americans underwent to attain freedom. Angelou puts it directly, writing: "I was a child of the Civil Rights Movement, living through its trials and triumphs. My story is part of the larger narrative of struggle for justice" (I Know 310). Consequently, I Know, together with her other autobiographies, become the share Angelou participated with in literature to immortalize many incidents and experiences her people went through, among which is the Civil Right Movement. In such a way, she managed to engage with and contribute to the historical discourse of freedom and racial equality.

Storytelling is one inter-textual element that links Angelou's I Know and "Caged

Bird". It exceeds its importance as a technique to represent a folkloric and cultural significance that enhances the artistic canon of African American literature. Reflecting the oral traditions and cultural stories that formulate the African American identity, storytelling is brought to I Know in two respects, one is related to the text itself, and the other is related to the events narrated inside it. The first aspect appears in the act of telling one's own story in the form of autobiography, which is a literary genre in its own way. Here, storytelling springs as a persistent tool of keeping the legacy of people and nations since "stories are a way of preserving the connectivity of events that would otherwise be disassociated over time" (Schank 124). The second aspect is represented and embodied in Angelou's grandmother, who plays a significant role in her upbringing, and whose stories reflect on the wisdom and storytelling traditions of the African American community. Angelou calls her grandmother "a living repository of our cultural stories and traditions. Her tales were not just stories but lessons in resilience and strength" (I Know 75). The grandmother's stories extend to include the stories told by the women at her quilting gatherings. These stories told of black men being lynched; black men running away; white women punishing Black women for just being the subject of their husbands' sexual desire, without getting even angry with the husbands themselves. The two aspects of storytelling, thus, are synthesized in the novel to serve the mission of continuity since "[i]n the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives…. we also become variants of the culture's canonical forms" (J. Bruner 15) that we reflect on and are shaped by. On both levels, storytelling has a therapeutic function that fulfills and satisfies one's urges for compensation as "we do not live only in the time of clocks. We also live in the time of stories, and through this time it is sometimes possible to see things and to feel things that could not be seen or felt earlier on." (M. Freeman 125). It gives people the chance to relive their moments of failure and success and becomes, as Valerie Gray Hardcastle and Katherine Nelson (2003) call, a "process of meaning making".

Another intertextual element linking I Know and "Caged Bird" is the thematic

content that relates them to the whole literary canon of aspiring for freedom and equality through searching for identity and self-discovery inherited in other African American works, like in Baldwin's and Toni Morrison' works. Here, Angelou asserts, "My quest for identity was not unique but part of a larger conversation about self-discovery and personal growth. Many writers have explored these themes, and my story adds to that rich tradition" (I Know 233). Again, resilience is another theme that is linked firmly to freedom as it asserts one's ability to bounce back from difficulties towards stability. Angelou shows through her autobiography how she managed to embrace adversity and get out victorious. The image of the caged bird singing within the background of another free bird, soaring in the sky, in "Caged Bird", parallels Angelou's experiences in I Know, enduring hardships in order to achieve her identity. She refers to this when she writes, "The caged bird's song was a metaphor for the resilience I had to cultivate in the face of adversity. This theme resonates with many literary works that depict the struggle for freedom and dignity" (I Know 322). Actually, this thematic connection between the novel and the poem enhances the message of self-discovery and resilience, lying at the core of Angelou's narrative. In this way, both works extend the narrative and thematic borders of the other, illustrating the dynamic relationship between the personal and the collective, and drawing up lines for a universal panorama of human rights for freedom and equality achieved through a hard journey of struggle and resilience.

Concluding the intertextual reading of I Know and "Caged Bird", one should refer to the closure of both works as each ending is intended, in both works, to be a new opening. According to Mary Lupton, "What distinguishes… Angelou's autobiographical method…. is her very denial of closure…. Angelou, by continuing her narrative, denies the form and its history, creating from each ending a new beginning, relocating the center to some luminous place in a volume yet to be." (257-8). I Know is followed by other autobiographical novels which complete documenting for her successive stages of development and "Caged Bird" ends in a refrain that emphasizes the sense of continuity and non-stop suffering with hope in

life. The refrain, being a "A phrase, line or lines repeated at intervals during a poem" (J. Cuddon 736), succeeds to set a continuum that resists a closure.

Investigating intertextuality in Angelou's novel and attempting at an intra-textual reading, relating her novel and poem, one finds that while 'intratextuality' proves the complementary nature of the relationship between the two works, 'intertextuality' is employed to give the impression of completeness and integrity among works of the whole canon of African American literature. Readers are to feel such integrity as s/he is to be familiar with other texts mentioned or alluded to in order to gain true appreciation of the works read. In this regard, Judith Butler explains how "[i]ntertextual analysis allows readers to see how texts converse with one another, offering new insights and interpretations that enhance our understanding of both the individual work and its place in literary history" (89). This proves how intertextuality works on deepening meaning and enriching texts with a myriad of interpretations. Linking this to Angelou's I Know and "Caged Bird", one finds that Angelou is able to set an ongoing dialogue about personal and cultural quest for identity in African American literature through presenting a real-life story and its symbolic poetic representative that extends its message to all the oppressed in the universe through a contextual understanding of both works.

Moving on to the para-textual level, 'I know why the caged bird sings', as a title, suggests the core message and themes of the work as it anticipates what the writer will do. Maya Angelou knows why the oppressed, who is meant to be symbolized by the bird, is always trying to sing in a way to liberate him/herself from all the limitations practiced against him/her. It is worthy to note here that the title in both works is an allusion to the broader cultural narrative of the African American struggle for dignity and equality, as it comes from "Sympathy", a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906). The poem was published in his 1899 collection Lyrics of the Hearthside. It portrays the painful struggle of the African Americans for freedom and self-expression through speaking about a caged bird tantalized by all features of freedom in nature outside the bars of the cage. In the opening chapter

of her novel I Know, Angelou answers the question her title poses, writing: "The title of my book was inspired by Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem. The caged bird sings not because it is free but because it has hope" (5). She refers to Dunbar's poem to locate her autobiography within a broader framework of literary tradition, on one hand, as Dunbar's poem was published earlier, in 1899. On another hand, Dunbar's poem helps Angelou to infuse her narrative with that theme of confinement and freedom that goes out to reflect on her own individual journey towards freedom. Angelou assures the influence of this poem directly as she writes: "Dunbar's 'Caged Bird' echoed my own sense of confinement and the longing for liberation" (I Know 15). However, setting her aim at linking the personal to the collective, Angelou gets Dunbar's poem a step further as she gets into the scene another bird which is made free just to deepen the effect and enhance the emotional impact through comparing it to the caged one, driving her readers to have hope that freedom will be once attained.

Another paratextual element is the preface which offers a critical insight into Angelou's aim and sets the context of the novel. In the preface, Angelou refers to the challenges that she experienced in writing about her childhood and how her life experiences affected her literary achievement. Here, she states, "In writing this book, I had to confront painful memories and experiences. My aim was to capture not just the sorrow but also the strength that emerged from those moments" (I Know xi). In addition, this preface sets out the dominant tone of optimism and persistence for the reader before going on reading the novel. Angelou wants to prevent her readers from developing any negative presupposition about her writing her life journey which is full of difficulties and suffering. The preface acts as a statement that lines up the reader's approach with awareness of the kind of experiences they are going to read about, on one hand and sufficient emotional depth to locate such experiences within their historical and social collective context. She puts this clearly as she writes, "This book is not just my story but a reflection of the collective struggle of African Americans for dignity and justice" (I Know 342).

In some versions of I Know, Angelou inserted photographs and illustrations that aim at visualizing her narrative and endow it with authenticity and intimacy. In such a way, she manages to keep her readers emotionally linked to the events and realistically evaluate the experiences presented. Consequently, a paratextual reading of Maya Angelou's I Know shows how some non-textual supplementary materials, such as its title, preface, and other contextual elements enrich the understanding and the interpretation of the autobiography. In general, a paratextual element proves to play a crucial role in formulating the reader's attitude toward the text, even before starting reading. It also helps shaping perceptions, and gives hints concerning the author's intentions.

The importance of Maya Angelou's autobiographical works exceeds a mere reflection of her literary career since her works are presented within a social and historical crucible of events and experiences. Her autobiographies are known for such a profound description that works, together with storytelling, to merge the personal and the collective in one whole entity. Her I Know was particularly praised as "a moving and eloquent testament to the human spirit. Her narrative voice resonates with authenticity and grace" (The New York Times Review). The significance of the novel, which takes the form of a memoir, extends its literary nature towards its social influence that is brought out from the implied discussions on race, gender, and identity in American society. Consequently, it has been regarded as a catalyst for conversations about racial injustice and personal empowerment that proves its important role in shaping the genre of autobiography, in general, and the African American autobiography, in particular.

Autobiography is the writing by oneself about one's self from one's own view point. Consequently, it holds inherited in its own nature the full sense of subjectivity. However, as a genre, it has many facets that makes this sense of subjectivity vary in degree according to the intention and the writing strategies of the writer. Black autobiography is characterized by a high degree of authenticity as all what it entails is implicitly, representing an overall paradigm of terror and discrimination. Roger

Rosenblatt approaches this when he states that while "[a]utobiography as a genre should be the history of individual craziness… black autobiography the outer reality in which heroes move is so massive and absolute in its craziness that any one person's individual idiosyncrasies seem almost dull in their normality" (174). What any autobiographer focuses on is showing how his life is different from those around him by pointing out what is special about him. On the other hand, a Black autobiographer, is never able to drive his readers to experience such astonishment because whatever s/he may mention is considered nothing in comparison to the true atrocities in the Blacks' real life.

The importance of autobiography lies mainly in its attempt at self-construction. As Kotre puts it, "The remembering self…. fashions a remembered self. I establishes me" (118) and from here springs the necessity to learn how to tell stories of one's self. Autobiography entails recalling memories into a certain structure through storytelling. Not all memories are recalled; the recalled memories are those that "become valued in their own right—not because they predict the future and guide present action, but because they are shareable with others and thus serve a social solidarity function" (Nelson 12). Autobiography is linked to memory, which has many forms, by means of storytelling and narration to formulate a sense of self that, in turn, forms one's identity. Here, S. Smith explains:

Mobilized to tell a story, memory is the intersection of material, experiential, and sociocultural forces. Producing situational meaning, acts of remembering and telling reform and rematerialize the embodied subject of narration. The materiality of our bodies, the sense we have of ourselves as centers of consciousness, and the stories through which we learn and choose to make our experiential history meaningful all conjoin, so that bodies, selves, memories, stories cannot be understood independently of one another. ("Material Selves"108)

The assertions and reflections done in the autobiography are not true of the past events related, but are generated through narrating them. At times of failure,

Angelou, for example, has not experienced that sense of challenging push forward. She did not see her trauma, in the first place, as a shaping factor of her success. Therefore, her retelling of her life story re-embodied her past self into her current one. She re-introduced her history into a new form that makes its narrated form, including memories and stories, inseparable from her body and self. In other words, in autobiography, a writer holds a dialogue between the past, on one hand, and the present, on the other; between history and contemporariness; between memory and interpretation. As James Olney puts it: “Each side is used to see and guide the other. The past leads the present; history is seen as a background to understand contemporary events; and memory is recalled to be refined and interpreted so as to tell what was then ambiguous and now clear” (244). In an autobiography, all the pieces of the puzzle are brought aside and moved to create an integrated picture of what used to be.

Thus, memory here is of a vital importance since it makes up the essence of autobiography. without memory, there is no autobiography. Melvin Dixon believes that memory “becomes a tool to regain and reconstruct not just the past but history itself" (18-19). It becomes a tool for reconstructing what one is unwilling to repeat. Putting it another way, Karen Fields writes, "[M]emory collaborates with forces separate from actual past events, such as an individual's wishes, a moment's connotations, an environment's clues, an emotion's demands, a self's evolution, a mind's manufacture of order" (150). It is worth noting here that memories are the raw material for constructing an autobiography as they connect what used to be with what actually exists in a constructive way. Through memory, autobiography furnishes what is already completed. Consequently, inherent in autobiography is a sense of completeness that is needed to fulfill its significance. One who tells or writes autobiography must have undergone a journey and completed it in order to be able to narrate it. Past and present must constitute two separate reference points that complement each other since “we interpret the past from the standpoint of the

present, seeking to determine how it might have contributed to this very moment. And this is a determination that cannot possibly be made until this moment has arrived." (Freeman 123). In other words, what is told in autobiography is not mere past inserted in its vast openness and indeterminacy; instead, it is the past guided and redirected by present seeming as if they have gone through an everlasting dialogue that decodes many incidents and events to be a series of epiphanies on the individual level, turned by the writer to communal ones. Consequently, "through a series of episodic chapters, [Angelou] selects and chronicles those incidents from which she, as a girlchild, learned valuable, life-deter mining truths about the world, about her community, and about herself truths incarnated in moments of insight (initiation) and discovery of self. By identifying these epiphanies, the reader is able to define the unique vision of the work and its precise and individual illumination of reality." (D. Mc Pherson 24). From here springs the controversy concerning the fictionality of autobiography.

The fictionality of autobiography arises from two main points. The first is related to the fact that it is impossible to ever get back to past moments and tell them exactly as they were, and this makes autobiography "hopelessly inventive" (Gazzaniga 2). The second springs from the notion of narrativity as truly linked to fictionality, and since autobiography is based on narrativity, it is inherently fictional. Autobiography substitutes the clock-time perception by the narrative-time perception; the former is the unchangeable actual real perception while the latter is the represented and re-lived perception. As Leigh Gilmore explains, autobiography "draws its authority less from its resemblance to real life than from its proximity to discourses of truth and identity, less from reference or mimesis than from the cultural power of truth telling" (8). From here comes autobiography's artistic significance and fictionality that is supported in I Know by the element of the fantastic.

Fantasy constitutes a considerable part of Angelou's autobiography. She starts the

novel fantasizing:

Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn't let me straighten? My light-blue eyes were going to hypnotize them…. Because I was really white and because a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil. (2)

This is a fantasy that bitterly tells a lot about reality. Here, Angelou relates her self-image to her racial entity. She fantasizes that she was "really white" but an act of jealous turned her black. Her self-hatred found no outlet except through fantasy. Because the world, with all its discrimination that covered class, race and gender, banned her from having a respectable image, young Angelou decided to have it her own way. This is to be compared with her statement near the end of the novel when she writes: "I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race" (156). In this stage of her life, she did not need to fantasize about her physical shape as she had formulated a true sense of herself that unites her with a long history of existence i.e. the African American culture. Instead, she fantasizes that her slave ancestors had have killed all Whites, and Colombus had not ever found his way to America. Here, fantasy takes a different form that suits the adult Angelou who had learnt about self-control and known that the insult directed to her and her people in the graduation party cannot be violently responded to.

The autobiographical nature of the novel comes to be Angelou's tool to prove her proposed fact about the strength of the female black personality and her persistence. Autobiography, thus, acts "as an invaluable map of Black women's movement and subjectivities. Indeed, Black women autobiographers are curators of untold histories that they are determined to tell" (K. Blockett 420). In I Know, Angelou lays bare all

the racial and social impediments that could have hindered her from achieving her dreams. The readers, while reading her novel, are recalling how successful she became, and, thus, receiving her message of hope with ease. Marguerite Johnson (the true personality) evolves into Maya Angelou (the symbolic character), a celebrated poet, writer, and lecturer, who taught at the Universities of California, Kansas, and Ghana. Angelou was honored for her academic and humanistic contributions as a Rockefeller Foundation Scholar and a Yale University Fellow. She worked for the African Review in Ghana and the Arab Observer in Egypt, as an editor. She is keen to give, through her autobiography, the consciousness she acquired to her readers. "On the Pulse of the Morning" was read by Maya Angelou in celebration of the inauguration of the American president Bill Clinton, to be the first black and the first woman ever honored to be commissioned to write a poem for such an occasion.

Angelou's autobiography, being a female one, exceeds in a degree other male autobiographies since it adds to the genre another dimension of analysis, i.e. gender. Angelou introduces a collective life story that moves from loneliness and pain to survival, fulfillment, and a realization of a defining 'Other' identity, that comes in many different shapes to represent the 'young 'female' 'Black' American she is. Writing her autobiography, thus, becomes Angelou's tool for confrontation and answering back the atrocities she had been subjected to as an African American girl. Writing about her rape, Angelou announces her disdain of the somatophobia, fear of the body, that is inherited in minority group societies. She uses her pen to fight for her body, which is a representative of the oppression her people are subjected. In other words, she believes that somatophobia maximizes the sense of oppression, and for that reason she decided to speak it out by speaking about her rape. As Mary Vermillion puts it: "The woman who records her own rape must—if she does not wish to do with her pen what Lucrece does with her sword—close the distance between her body and whatever her society posits as a woman's integral self (i.e., sexual reputation, mind, soul, desire, or will)." (244). A Black woman hates her body

because it does not meet the requirements of beauty which makes people love her. As a result, she is banned by the American society from an important aspect of femininity itself. Here, psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price M. Cobb state that "if femininity is rooted in feeling oneself eminently lovable, then a society which views [the Black woman] as unattractive and repellent has also denied her this fundamental wellspring of femininity" (49). Regarding somatophobia as a characteristic feature that is tightly related to the rape women slaves were physically subjected to, Angelou takes it a step forward to be a sign of the Black female's internalization of the racial conception of the African American female body as a site of oppression. For that reason, she is not reluctant to make her rape a crucial event in her novel. Here, it is worth noting to mention that rape itself has become an extended metaphor in African American literature not only to document for a physical facet of oppression and injustice, but also to use it metaphorically to allude to the process of driving the Africans, who were kidnapped in Africa and shipped to America, unwillingly out of their honor, identity, culture and identity.

This relationship between femininity and love arising from the idea of somatophobia brings the discussion to an important character in the novel who is Momma Henderson, Angelou's paternal grandmother. Momma Henderson, who proves to be one of the strongest representations of a female Black woman in African American literature, is one of the factors that gave Maya the unconditional love that would help her cure from somatophobia. Momma Henderson represents the grandmother figure that, according to Mildred A. Hill-Lubin, both in Africa and in America, "has been a significant force in the stability and the continuity of the Black family and the community" (257). Again, she represents the safe side of the world for Maya. She "positions herself as a literal harrier between her family and a 'dangerous' white world, even though she must subject herself to racial insult to do so…when verbally assaulted by the adolescent girls, Momma Henderson remains outwardly "cool," giving no visible sign of her inner turmoil" (Braxton 8). As Angelou called her in

one of her interviews, Momma Henderson “was a fortress that could not be entered into.” (Braxton 10). Angelou admits her grandmother’s role in furnishing her soul with the sense of love she needs to accept herself and acclaim her body as part of her identity. Angelou says, “That's what I mean by love. I don't mean indulgence. The larger society could say anything it wanted, anything about me, but my grandmother said I was somebody. (Braxton 12). She never tries to tell her that she was not ugly; instead, she gave her the love to proceed and examine this body in achieving success and fighting for survival.

By writing her own life, Angelou manages to turn mirrors into windows. She succeeds in converting what is personal and limited to one individual, i.e. her autobiography in I Know, to a documentary of the pain of a whole nation, i.e. her poem "Caged Bird". Here, the personalized experience that she sees when she looks at her own mirror is changed into a history of oppression and racial discrimination that opens up to address millions of people. Through her autobiography, she opens up the window to witness a collective journey from slavery to freedom passing through many events and experiences. The legacy of slavery and the ongoing struggle for civil rights, at the time of writing her novel, form a backdrop to Angelou’s story. She relates how her childhood experiences were shaped by racism, drawing on the historical context of Jim Crow laws: “The segregation and injustice were not just personal battles but part of a larger historical struggle that defined the era” (I Know 76). By framing her personal narrative within this historical context, Angelou highlights the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences. The autobiography also engages with historical and cultural texts, situating Angelou’s personal experiences within a broader context; something that deepens its exploration of identity and transformation within the framework of African American history.

Consequently, the mirror, that is designed to reflect only what exists in front of it, is turned into a window that makes the reader watch a whole panorama of the African American history in America. Her lyrical narrative, fused with social commentary,

has significantly contributed to the genre of autobiography. In this regard, Jacqueline Jones Royster writes that Angelou's autobiography "encapsulates the struggles of marginalized communities, reflecting both their pain and their indomitable spirit" (Royster 92). Here, it is worth noting that both I know and "Caged Bird" were published during a critical time of crucial social and political upheaval in the United States, including the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, Angelou's use of the 'caged bird' symbolism in both works corresponds to the experiences not only of the African Americans but also to all those others facing systemic discrimination and inequality. Consequently, while the novel is deeply saturated in the individual, the poem reflects the broader struggle for civil rights and social justice, capturing the spirit of resistance and hope that characterized the era.

Angelou lives in her writing the un-lived life she dreamt of by retailoring her 'lived life' into a new one through storytelling and narration proving that "the very stories that we tell in turn become the lives that we live and the material bodies that we are" (Kotre 118). One does not get the true meaning of what s/he passes through at the time of its occurrence. Each and every experience becomes like one piece of a big puzzle that needs to be fixed in a place that fits it within the overall fabric of existence. In her autobiography, Angelou brings in thousands of lives in the shape of one life presented as Maya Angelou. She asserts how she believes in the power of words and in the power of literature in shaping the world, as she writes, "Words are things. I'm convinced that they are as solid as trees. Words are things. They are a part of the earth and air" (I Know 220). Here, she gives words the power that is like that of her people. She gives words the power of trees that have roots to link her and her people to a whole history of resistance and struggle for freedom. She perceives her role in keeping the word going on for the whole story of a whole nation to be going on. She believes in the role of literature in empowering her and her people. Autobiography, thus, comes to have a psychological function that it became for Angelou "a process of catharsis, in which she spoke about the profound effects that childhood sexual trauma had upon her and the displacement from her family" (N.

Roşca 34).

On another hand, the reader undergoes a different experience in the opposite direction. While Angelou, as a writer, moves from the individual to the collective, the reader moves from the collective back to the individual. Angelou is talented enough not to turn any of her readers away. A reader who enjoys her poem "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" is not necessarily an African American, but any oppressed who finds in the experience of the bird a wide window to look from and apply to his/her experience of oppression. Here, for the reader, the collective is reduced to address the personal, and the experience of the whole is minimized to tell that of the individual. In such a way, the game that the writer excels at i.e. turning the individual to the collective, is turned the other way round for the reader who works on converting the collective to the individual that talks directly to his/her own experience. Reading Angelou's autobiographies, one finds a distinctive narrative voice that blends lyrical prose with realistic storytelling. She uses first-person narration to give her readers the chance to experience her own life events intimately and authentically. Through her works, she wants to announce a message: "I've learned that I still have a great deal of self-worth, despite what others may think. I am in control of my own destiny" (I Know 321).

Through her autobiographies, Maya Angelou's succeeded in providing an in-depth exploration of her own life, managing to intertwine what is personal with what is collective. She, thus, created a powerful legacy that stands to mark the collective experience of a whole nation. Through her novel and poem, Angelou reflects on her experiences with racism as a shaping tool of depicting her understanding of herself and her place in society. Her works became iconic as they present a profound representation of such universal themes as oppression and human suffering. Maya Angelou's I Know and "Caged Bird" are deeply rooted in the tradition of literary autobiography, and a key literary concept that enriches the understanding of this autobiography is intertextuality, which examines how texts reference or are influenced by other texts by drawing upon various literary, historical, and cultural

texts, enhancing its depth and meaning. Both works, through a trans-textual analysis prove to engage with each other to spin one common literary narrative of their writer's quest for identity through setting free a great potential for struggle and resilience extending the personal towards the collective and universal. This trans-textual analysis of Angelou's I Know and "Caged Bird" may open up a space for a geo-critical reading of Angelou's autobiographies as they range to include many places and countries e.g. America, Ghana, Egypt.

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