

Voice of the Voiceless - A Study of Maya Angelou's

I know why the Caged Bird sings

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Maya Angelou, the African- American poet and a civil rights activist is widely regarded as the 'Black woman's poet laureate'. Her reflections on the society and the times she lived in are vividly expressed in her poetry. The poem as a whole can be seen as a reflection on social disparity in racism, and the ideals of freedom and justice. Using the metaphor of birds, she vividly portrays the inequality of justice seen in the society of her time which differentiates between the African-American community and its white American counterpart.

Angelou uses the metaphor of a bird struggling to escape its cage. The caged bird represents Angelou's confinement resulting from racism and oppression. She describes a bird with clipped wings. Its feet have been tied and it has been placed in a cage that prevents it from flying away. Despite its fear, the caged bird continues to sing of freedom. She describes the joy that a free bird takes in soaring through the sky.

She also explicates the nature of both freedom and captivity by creating a sharp contrast between the two using birds as the metaphor. She puts greater emphasis on the lamentable stage of the caged bird, and contrasts this with that of the free bird.

Angelou originally decided to write this poem because not enough had been written for young black girls in America. She wanted to remind her fellow African Americans that in spite of the obstacles and the pain they endured, there was much love and humour to be found in the African American community.

But despite her original intentions, she found that when she began writing, her ideas and audience changed: "I saw it was not just for black girls but for young Jewish boys and old chinese woman" (Julianelli 124).

The poem became much popular not only because of continues to be instructive on matters of race and gender, but also because it is universal in its appeal. The poem addresses both the specific and the universal elements. It traces Angelou's journey from a lonely and insecure child to an adolescent who survives many hardships and emerges as a self-reliant and mature young woman.

The study reveals the fact that the poem is not an isolated story of a single individual. It is rather a multi layered chronicle that can offer insight about the history and culture of a people at a particular time and place and that raises issues

of profound and universal significance. It also throws lighter and illustrates the historical content of the work and helps the readers to understand more fully the issues it raises.

Works Cited

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