

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

THE SUBJECTS OF MOTHERHOOD AND MARRIAGE IN THE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF MAYA ANGELOU.

URIAH STONEWELL TETTEH

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AUTOBIOGRAPHERS OF MAYA ANGELOU.

BY

URIAH STONEWELL TETTEH

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DECLARATIONS

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

CANDIDATE'S SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

NAME: URIAH STONEWELL TETTEH

SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

The autobiography is the medium Angelou chooses to recount the defining phases of her experience as an African-American. In fact, she uses it to define her identity – who she is, her culture, and her past, present and future. Maya Angelou has a collection of autobiographical texts, which chronicle her life from infancy to adulthood. In these collections, she recounts the hard and good times of her life. This essay discusses how Angelou uses the subjects of motherhood and marriage to define her identity, and the merits of the literary techniques she uses in doing this.

The merit of her literary techniques is explained in how Angelou uses both marriage and motherhood role-plays to establish an identity for herself within the African-American tradition where the role of the woman takes centre-stage in the upbringing of children, especially in the single family setting as was the case of Angelou. The study looks at how Angelou uses language artistically by making references to some characteristics of the genre, such as first-person narration, chronological order, flashback, and an emphasis on the self, among other figurative levels of meaning like similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and personification to display her mastery and craftsmanship over her narrative. The study concludes that Angelou's use of art enables her to successfully illustrate autobiography as an art form that is meant to teach and entertain her reading audience.

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DEDICATION

To my dear wife Maggie, and my family.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A. INTRODUCTION

About two hundred years ago, Africans underwent a historical landmark of change through the emergence of chattel slavery and the slave trade. This change brought in its wake lots of effects on the traditional African culture. Many family ties were broken, many wounds were created and left uncovered, hence leaving living scars on the memories of those Africans and their descendants who were left in Africa, and of course those who were taken slaves. Many innocent but energetic young men and women were sold into slavery. They were turned into domestic servants and plantation farmhands by those who came to buy and enslave them. History was made by these events. These events had been preserved by historians and writers of literary stories through their writings. The difference between literature and history thus becomes necessary in this regard. Whereas history presents records of very important past events, literature transmutes these events into art in the form of stories, through the medium of literary style and techniques, that entertain, inform and educate.

The American continent became the host country for some of these people who were enslaved. They worked under very inhumane conditions. Most of them lost their lives in the course of undergoing these pressures. Their ties to their ancestry were definitely cut. Most of them were even given different names so as to cut all links they had to their ancestry and roots. Baker Jr. (1987) explained that when slavery was abolished in the latter part of the nineteenth century on the American soil, many African-Americans still had no identity created by themselves. Living without an identity was, of course difficult. When after many years the awareness of the loss came to the fore, some



notable leaders and thinkers among them in the African-American community like Locke, Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois, the critical period of the Harlem Renaissance began between the 1920's and 1930 . There was a transformational period in the lives of many soul-searching African-Americans in three ways. In the first place, the period of the Harlem renaissance really created the awareness in them about their loss of identity and non-existence and so, this gingered them to wake up to face the challenges around them with much capability. Secondly, the period of the Harlem renaissance made them see their worth as African-Americans who have a lot to offer themselves and their fellow African-Americans by making use of available resources in every aspect of American life to better their lots in a very difficult economic terrain. Finally, the period created the awareness of the unified and persevering prowess of the black man creatively and intellectually in a white-dominated American continent. Most of the black intellectuals and artists that emerged saw the need to form clubs that helped to discover talents among them and they all supported any such person to either begin as a writer or artist. With these unified fronts, they helped to support each other intellectually and economically. (p7)

The 1920's through to about 1930 saw the emergence of the period of the Harlem Renaissance. It was a period of unprecedented outburst of creative activity among African- Americans in all fields of art. Beginning as a series of literary discussions in the lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village) and upper Manhattan (Harlem) sections of New York City, this African-American cultural movement became known as "The New Negroe Movement" and later as the Harlem Renaissance. More than a literary movement and more than a social revolt against racism, the Harlem Renaissance exalted the unique

culture of African-Americans and redefined African-American expression. African-Americans were encouraged to celebrate their heritage and to become “The New Negro,” a term coined by sociologist and critic Alain LeRoy Locke in 1925.

One of the factors that contributed to the rise of the Harlem Renaissance was the great migration of African-Americans to the northern cities such as New York, Chicago and Washington, D. C. between 1919 and 1926. Black urban migration, combined with trends in American society as a whole toward experimentation during the 1920’s, and the rise of radical black intellectuals – including Locke, Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of The Crisis Magazine – all contributed to the particular styles and unprecedented success of black artists during the period of the Harlem Renaissance. The period of the Harlem renaissance saw the emergence of men and women of letters both in the arts, music and entertainment, and secular life. Some of the men and women that came up were Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Angelina W. Grimke, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Ida B. Wells – Barnett, Lois Mailou Jones, William H. Johnson and Palmer Hayden. Other artists and writers who emerged many decades later like Alice Walker, Lorraine Hansberry and Angelou became so much glued to some of the philosophies and ideologies of the renaissance, which was formulated around the issue of the reawakening of the black identity.

Angelou, for instance, has written works including a comprehensive collection of poems, essays and autobiographies. In her autobiographies, just like most of her works, she categorically presents the themes of motherhood and marriage. Angelou has a sequel of six autobiographies, which reveal her life story to any reader interested in knowing

about her life. These novels include I Know why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together in My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, The Heart of a Woman, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes and A Song Flung up from Heaven. All of these novels critically document Maya Angelou's strive to achieve and make an impression in life as an independent woman and mother, and finally, and most importantly, as a respectable African American.

## B. THE CONCEPT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is very important at this stage of the work to present an explanation of the concept of autobiography as a literary genre. It is quite complex trying to explain the concept of autobiography because there is no set form or structure for an autobiography, and as well, there are no boundaries or limits to it as a literary genre. Different definitions have been offered to explain the concept of autobiography. The study will explain a few of these definitions and relate them to Angelou's autobiographies. It is important to note, however, that Olney (1980) has a definition which seems appropriate for this study. In his book Autobiography Essays Theoretical and Critical explained that everyone knows what autobiography is, but no two observers of an issue, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement. Olney after making this assertion explained firstly that the autobiography in some tangled, obscure, shifting, and ungraspable way, is or stands for, or memorializes, or replaces, or makes something else out of someone's life. In a more detailed way, Olney (1980) explains that the autobiography is "...a fascination with self and its profound, its endless mysteries and, accompanying that

fascination, an anxiety about the self, an anxiety about the dimness and the vulnerability of that entity that no one has ever seen or touched or tasted.” (p23).

One other writer, Lejeune (1989) explained that the autobiography is a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence stressing his individual life and especially the history of personality. One other writer, Egan (1999) explains that an autobiography is a memory that reaches tentacles out into each of these different times: the time now, the time then, and the time of an individual’s historical context. It is clear from the above concepts given that in a sense, autobiography is the writing of one’s own life story. An autobiography may thus be based solely or entirely on the writer’s memory. In recounting her life vividly to her readers in the form of a story, Maya Angelou succeeds in writing an autobiography. Angelou tells her life story from her own viewpoint only. Readers, therefore, get the chance to experience firsthand the situations that Angelou goes through in her travels, struggles and successes, through the journey of life. She, therefore, uses the first person narrative to present her story to show that she wrote the story herself. It is worth noting, however, that Angelou deliberately presents her life’s hardships and achievements not just as a mere story for entertainment but for reflection by all who read it to learn something from her life.

Autobiography, which is about the self or the autos or the “I” can be as varied as the self is. Everybody at one point in time has fantasies. These fantasies are as much a part of their real lives as the food they eat everyday or the certificates they earn after completing a course. What this means is that, autobiographers can mix their fantasies with facts in their writings; these can create problems for readers, as they will have difficulty trying unsuccessfully to differentiate between the autobiographer’s fantasies

(fiction) from facts. Autobiographers can vary their use of time as well as their mix of fantasy and reality. Just as people have difficulty pinpointing when a human life begins, so does the autobiographer have difficulty pinpointing at what point the self begins, at conception, at birth, at the first moment of conscious thought, or perhaps during a particularly relevant fantasy or dream. There is also the other question of when the autobiographer ends. Is it at the moment that the writer stops writing? Unlike the biographer who includes the beginning, middle and end of a person's life, the autobiographer may live on and on and perhaps long enough in several more lives or changes of the self.

Angelou's autobiographies, which would be the primary source of this research, are thus based entirely on her memory of different times in her life. They start from her childhood days as a girl of four with her brother Bailey of five years when they go to live with their grandmother, Momma Henderson, at Stamps, Arkansas. These accounts are recollected through flashbacks in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970) and concluded with the novel, A Song Flung up from Heaven (2000). In this final account, Angelou recounts her return to America to work for Malcolm X who had just changed his name to Malcolm Malik-Shabazz and his politics from Black Nationalism to a socialist version of Pan-Africanism. The final autobiography, A Song Flung up from Heaven, however, ends with Angelou beginning to write her first story of her life. The end of her autobiography is not really known since she may write more about other events that occurred in her life after she finally goes back to settle in America. Of course, all authors or novelists, in particular, transform the events of their lives into art, but the autobiography purports to tell in novel form, the author's own story. Usually, the author

and other characters are given different names. While the events of the author's life are recounted, there is no pretence of neutrality or even truth. The life may be reported the way the author wishes it has been, with enemies more clearly loathsome and/or triumphs more complete than perhaps they were in real life. Angelou's style of writing will also be examined in this essay.

Angelou succeeds in bringing out her innermost feelings and the usual routines of her past life up to a point in the form of novels for her readers. In these autobiographies, the themes of motherhood and marriage are clearly displayed. Some very important terms that may be mentioned frequently and be used extensively in this research include "autobiography", "biography", and "racism". The autobiography refers to a written account of the life of a person written by himself or herself. The biography is also a written account of a person written by some other person other than himself. Racism is any form of discrimination leveled against a person on grounds of his or her race. In America from where our primary source is taken, different forms of racism were perpetrated against most black men and women on grounds of their skin colour and this research will focus on how this form of discrimination has necessitated the development of the theme of identity in Angelou's works, specifically her autobiographies. This work will thus focus on the autobiographies of Angelou, specifically on her development of the tropes of motherhood and marriage as a blueprint to develop an identity.

This research has the following as its purpose:

1. To explain Angelou's use of the tropes of motherhood and marriage to define her understanding of identity.
2. To discuss the merits of Angelou's literary style of presenting her autobiographies

As it has been noted earlier, this research aims at exploring Angelou's presentation of her dual roles as a mother and later as a married woman using language in a special way to make her message come through to her readers. It is hoped that this study will create an avenue to open up new paths for further research into the study of autobiography as a unique genre in the area of prose.

The African-American writer has written about many interesting issues, some of which are racism, poverty, prosperity, love, hatred, identity, vengeance, among others. These are mostly presented through the literary genres available to him. However, this study will investigate the issue of motherhood and marriage role-plays, but this time considering the autobiography as a genre of literature, especially those of Angelou. These autobiography collections include: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970), Gather Together in My Name (1974), Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976), The Heart of a Woman,(1981), All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986) and A Song Flung up from Heaven. (2000)

In the development of the theme of identity, one cannot disregard the psychological notion of the 'self' and probably, narrowing down the argument using the psychoanalysis theory of Freud. The Black American's search for the self, using either violent upheavals or less resilient means, would be considered. In the heat of the racially-motivated forms of discrimination, most black people tried to escape by venting their anger on their fellow blacks who were under their authority. Since the theme of identity is to be treated as the underlying thematic impression running across all the autobiographies, the discussion of various themes present in the narratives would be regarded as a very important medium through which the research would be conducted.

Here, the various themes exploited by Angelou in her novels would be adequately considered and discussed alongside other stylistic techniques she uses in developing her themes. Unless for the sake of reviewing of existing and related literature, other related materials would be consulted for the purpose of making an objective analysis of the topic under discussion.

The researcher decided to choose these autobiographies because out of the works of the writer, these books contain striking traces of the development of the themes of motherhood and marriage that easily stand out as useful data sources needed by the researcher to conduct the research. It is important to state that for a study of this nature an extensive library research would be done. The thesis will make a critical analysis of the literary techniques Angelou uses to develop her narratives.

The thesis makes some critical analysis of books, articles, reviews and academic journals. The second chapter would discuss reviews of some related literature, while the third and fourth chapters would be limited to detailed analysis of Angelou's use of the tropes of motherhood and marriage, respectively, while explaining alongside Angelou's use of some literary techniques like humour, figurative language, employment of the serial autobiography technique, authorial commentary, voice, time and time distortion, the story-within-a-story technique, name changes, among others like the blend of the first person narrative technique and dialogue to highlight these subjects. The final chapter will focus on the conclusion to the work.



### C. BIO-DATA OF MAYA ANGELOU

Angelou is the author of six autobiographies and nine volumes of poetry. Angelou's literary talent has earned a reputation in contemporary literature as one of America's most candid and inspirational authors. In addition to her literary achievements, Angelou has had a prolific career as a singer, dancer, actress, playwright, director, editor, lecturer, and civil rights activist.

Born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was called "Maya" by her brother Bailey as a shortened version of "My sister" (Angelou, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, p84). At the age of three, young Angelou and four-year-old Bailey crisscrossed the country, unescorted, by train from Long Beach, California, to the home of their paternal grandmother, Mrs. Annie Henderson, in Stamps, Arkansas. This was after their parents, Bailey Johnson Sr. and Vivian Baxter, decided to end their marriage. It is important to mention here that the divorce of Angelou's parents marks the genesis of Angelou's loss of identity. "Momma," Angelou's name for her grandmother, Mrs. Annie Henderson, was a religious and economically independent woman. Annie Henderson owned property, which she rented to the 'powhitetrash', a neighbouring white population in Arkansas that treated the blacks with much scorn, which was a true situation in the rural South of the 1930s. Momma Henderson also owned and operated the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store, which served as a social centre for the poor blacks of Stamps. This strong-willed attitude of Angelou's grandmother, Momma Henderson will mark itself in Angelou's later life as an emblem to discover her true potential as an energetic young black girl.

Angelou's early memories of her grandmother, Momma Henderson were those of a woman whose "world was bordered on all sides with work, duty, religion and 'her place' " (Angelou: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, p57) and "who came to stand for all the courage and stability she ever knew as a child" (Neubauer, 1983). She also remembers that her grandmother never "knew that a deep-brooding love hung over everything she touched," and Angelou "saw only her power and strength" (Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, p46). Grandmother Henderson's resiliency and immense personal pride embodied strength in the face of severe economic depression and the racism that surrounds them everywhere. From her example, Angelou learned that she had the power to control her own destiny and to take pride in herself despite the negative effects of the poverty and racism she experienced while growing up in the segregated South. In fact, Angelou kept these attributes she learned from her grandmum and they helped to shape her adult life, especially as a wife and mother.

Angelou spent most of her childhood in Stamps, except for a brief period of time in 1936 when she and Bailey were sent to St. Louis to live with their mother. In St. Louis, the Johnson children found themselves more academically advanced than their schoolmates. They skipped ahead a grade because they did "arithmetic at a mature level" from working in their grandmother's store and "read well because in Stamps there wasn't anything else to do" (Caged Bird p63). Maya took out her first library card in St. Louis and "read more than ever" (Caged Bird p75). She greatly admired the strong heroes of Horatio Alger and the Sunday funnies "who always conquered in the end" (p76).

However, Angelou's stay in St. Louis turned into a nightmare when her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, raped her. As an eight-year-old child devoid of true affection,

Angelou became confused by Freeman's attentions and the true nature of his activities prior to the rape. Traumatized by the belief of her complicity in the crime and with her accusation against Freeman leading to a trial and his subsequent murder, young Angelou retreated into a world of silence. It can again be realized how deep Angelou's loss of identity becomes after this incident when her childhood innocence is abused and taken away from her through rape. Burdened with guilt over Freeman's death, she believed her words had the power to kill and if she "talked to anyone else that person might die too" (Angelou, Caged Bird, p87).

The stress of these events caused young Angelou and Bailey to once again be sent back to their Grandmother Henderson. "For nearly a year," Angelou wrote, "I sopped around the house, the Store, the school and the church, like an old biscuit, dirty and inedible" (Angelou, Caged Bird, p93). The familiarity and quietness of Stamps, coupled with the love of her grandmother and the attentions of Mrs. Bertha Flowers, an elegant black woman whom Angelou viewed as an aristocrat amidst the poverty of Stamps, helped Angelou regain her voice. Mrs. Flowers told Angelou: "Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning." (p98). Sharing afternoons of reading literary classics in her home, Mrs. Flowers introduced Angelou not only to a love of books but to a world of imagination, creativity, and the power of the written word, as well as teaching her that she "must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy" (p99). The narration of Angelou about the role of Mrs. Flowers in her life is a clear way of developing the theme of identity in the autobiographies by the narrator.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1990) contends in “Myth and History” that Mrs. Flowers “joined the world of Stamps to the world of literature, [and] embodied in [Angelou’s] person the dreams that shaped Marguerite’s imagination” (p232). Through the inner strength and deep personal pride of her grandmother and the imperturbable dignity and wisdom of Mrs. Flowers, Angelou gained positive life-affirming values while also learning to appreciate the strength found in a black community bonded together by faith and adversity. Despite her painful childhood experiences and the effects of the racial prejudice she encountered growing up in the South, the years Angelou lived in Stamps, Arkansas, provided her with the fertile ground of imagination for the first volume of her most popular autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Her formative years at Stamps also strengthens her in the area of racial tolerance so that she is able to withstand some of the pressures that came along with the straps of racial discrimination, something she experiences, especially in her marriage to Tosh Angelos.

In 1940, after graduating from the Lafayette Training School in Stamps, Angelou and Bailey were once again taken from their grandmother’s home and sent to live with their mother in San Francisco. She skipped ahead two semesters at George Washington High School and won a scholarship to attend evening classes at the California Labor School, where she studied drama and dance. One literary critic Miles Shapiro (1994) wrote that Angelou once told an interviewer that “The only two things I’ve ever loved in my life are dancing and writing” (p67). Angelou’s relationship with her mother began to improve as she grew to see her mother’s positive qualities, and she no longer harboured bitterness toward her mother’s past abandonment. Shapiro (1994) notes that “the daughter was better able to understand the spirit and independence of her mother” and that “much

of her own philosophy is derived from her mother's approach" (p69). It becomes obvious why Angelou does not want to create the same negligible attitude that she goes through at the hands of her parents hence creating a tighter closeness between herself and her son Guy, an action that reinforces the theme of motherhood.

However, her relationship with her father remained chaotic. An invitation to spend a summer vacation with him and his girlfriend ended with Maya running away to spend several weeks in an automobile junkyard, sleeping in abandoned cars as "the newest member of an egalitarian, multiracial commune of young ragamuffins" (Shapiro, p71). One may think that this experience will further make Angelou lose her sense of direction in life. However, Smith (1999) has a different picture altogether. Smith believes the experience provided her (Angelou) with knowledge of self-determination and a confirmation of her self-worth" (p11) as well as the importance of community. These feelings led Angelou to recall in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings that the unquestioning acceptance by her peers had dislodged the familiar insecurity, and that the lack of criticism evidenced by their ad hoc community influenced her, and set a tone of tolerance for her life" (Caged Bird, p254). Even though Angelou viewed this experience in a positive light, after a month, she called her mother for help to return home.

Before returning to school in 1944, Angelou decided to take a job as a demonstration of her newfound self-reliance. Despite many obstacles, one of which was the company's policy of refusing to hire blacks, Angelou became the first black woman trolley car conductor for San Francisco's Market Street Railway. But this was also a time of confusion for the teenager. She began to grow concerned about her sexual attractiveness and questioned her sexuality. In I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,

Angelou wrote: “I was being crushed by two unrelenting forces: the uneasy suspicion that I might not be a normal female and my newly awakening sexual appetite” (p280). The only answer for Angelou was to confront these mysteries head-on through sexual experimentation, a clear indication that she was confused by childhood thoughts and her femininity. A loveless sexual encounter, which further deepens her loss of identity, left her pregnant at the age of sixteen. The year she graduated from high school, she gave birth to a son, Clyde (Guy) Johnson, and there she left childhood behind.

For the next few years, determined to be on her own and support herself and her infant son, Angelou worked at a string of dead-end jobs: a cook at the Creole Cafe, a cocktail waitress at the High Hat Club in San Diego, and the owner of a small brothel. Despite her chaotic lifestyle, she continued her love affair with books, especially the nineteenth and twentieth century Russian authors Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Chekhov, and Gorky. She was again on the move from city to city, with a brief visit to her grandmother in Stamps, still unchanged and “halved by racial prejudice and the smell of old fears, and hate, and guilt” (M. Angelou, Gather Together in my Name, pp61-62), and attempted to settle back in California with her mother. Unhappy with her life, Maya Angelou tried to enlist in the army but was rejected, worked briefly as a dancer, and in an attempt to aid a lover, became a prostitute for a short time. She became aware of the dangers of her lifestyle and the negative effect it had on her young son after a baby-sitter abducted him, and she almost lost him. Later, a friend’s exposure to the brutality of the underworld prevented Angelou from sinking deeper into the dark world of drugs. Angelou writes in Gather Together in my Name: “No one had ever cared for me so much...one man’s generosity pushed me safely away from the edge” (p181). Maya Angelou chronicles

these events and her relationships in the second volume of her autobiography, Gather Together in My Name.

In 1952, Maya Angelou married a white ex-sailor, Tosh Angelos, but the marriage failed due in part to Angelou's fear that her son's pride in his black ancestry might be compromised with a white stepfather. In addition, her husband's atheism influenced the dissolution of the marriage. According to Shapiro, Angelou "regarded the church as a defining element of her black heritage that she did not wish to relinquish" as a way of showing her affirmative action of entrenching her identity as a growing and conscious black woman. (Angelou, Gather Together in my Name, p87). During her marriage, however, Angelou's dance career took a promising turn. And it was in 1953, while performing at the Purple Onion, a cabaret in San Francisco, that she first used the stage name of Maya Angelou. Her dancing and singing at the Purple Onion attracted the attention of the producers of the touring Opera company Porgy and Bess which has an all-black cast. Angelou was chosen for the role of Ruby, and during 1954 and 1955 she toured twenty-two European nations with the opera, which Angelou felt had "the greatest array of Negro talent [she] had ever seen" (Angelou, Singin' and Swingin' p113).

In her autobiography Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976) she writes about the awe she felt while on tour: "I was really in Italy...me, Marguerite Johnson, who had read bout Verona and the sad lovers while growing up in a dusty Southern village" (p140). For Angelou, performing at the Paris nightclubs, the Mars Club and the Rose Rouge, was also a personal highlight. In spite of her successes, she missed her son and felt guilty when she learned he had suffered in her absence. After being informed of an untreatable skin ailment that Guy had contracted, she left Porgy and

Bess to return home. This action is a clear expression of Angelou's maternal instincts, and something that explains the theme of motherhood, a central theme in this discussion.

Angelou reunited with her son but was still interested in pursuing a career in show business. In The Heart of a Woman, she describes how her singing/acting career and writing career blossom. While working as a calypso dancer in the past, she had composed the lyrics to songs from poems she had written. Her interest in writing poetry evolved into short story writing. This interest in writing was encouraged by a black novelist, John Oliver Killens, who encouraged Angelou to pursue her literary talents by moving to New York City and joining the Harlem Writers Guild. In 1959, Angelou moved to Brooklyn with her son and renewed her love for writing. She became an active member of the Harlem Writers Guild, who critiqued her literary skills and offered valuable advice, such as "Write each sentence over and over again, until it seems you've used every combination possible, then write it again" (The Heart of a Woman, p44).

It was an exciting time in New York, and Angelou met several famous people, such as Bayard Rustin, a leader in Martin Luther King's civil rights organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Angelou's deep concern about the "hating and fearing" of blacks by whites led to her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement (Angelou, The Heart of a Woman, p211). First, she helped to organize and perform in the Cabaret for Freedom, an off-Broadway musical revue produced for the benefit of the SCLC. She also performed in another off-Broadway play, "The Blacks", Jean Genet's dramatic indictment of colonial imperialism, which "reflected the real-life confrontations that were occurring daily in America's streets" between whites and blacks (Angelou, The Heart of a Woman, p211). Angelou was then chosen to succeed Rustin as



northern coordinator for the SCLC. Her involvement in the Civil Rights struggle also led to her introduction to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Vusumzi Make, a South African freedom fighter who became her second husband. It was during this time that Angelou really felt a real urge to help in the struggle that had began a long time before she was born to entrench an identity for all black people in America.

Two years after her marriage to Vusumzi Make, the South African freedom fighter, that is in 1959, Angelou moved to Cairo, Egypt, with Make and her son. Although Angelou did not have experience as a journalist, she became associate editor of the Arab Observer, English-language news weekly in Cairo. In 1962, after her marriage to Vusi Make ended, due in part to his philandering, Angelou remained in Africa and, with her son, moved to Accra, Ghana. Her wondering trips in Africa can be said to be her fervent search for an identity and roots in Africa.

Two days after arriving in Ghana, her son Guy was critically injured in an automobile accident. While Guy recovered from his injuries, Angelou became involved in a group of black American expatriates who had a desire to return to their roots. In the fifth volume of her autobiography, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes, she states: "We had come home...we knew that we were mostly unwanted in the land of our birth and saw promise on our ancestral continent" (p19). During this time, Angelou became an assistant administrator at the University of Ghana's School of Music and Dance at the Institute of African Studies. She also continued her career in journalism at the Ghanaian Times and as a feature editor of the African Review. Angelou felt welcome in Africa where for the first time "Black and brown skin did not herald debasement and a divinely created inferiority" (Angelou, All God's Children need Traveling Shoes, p16). During a

journey to the Ghanaian town of Keta, she believed she reconnected with her African heritage. She wept with the women of the village for the lost people, their ancestors and hers. But [she] was also weeping with a curious joy. Despite the murders, rapes and suicides, we had survived. The middle passage and the auction block had not erased us” (Angelou, All God’s Children need Traveling Shoes, p207). Angelou discovered that, like her ancestors uprooted by slavery, she, too, could keep Africa a part of her spirit despite physical separation from the Motherland. No matter how much she loved Africa and its connection to her ancestral roots, Angelou realized that America was now her true home. She decided in 1965 to return home to America with the belief that there was still the hope and promise of equality yet to be fulfilled in America. Angelou reiterates this hope at the conclusion of All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes: “Through the centuries of despair and dislocation, we had been creative, because we faced down death by daring to hope” (p207). In 1968, Angelou wrote “Black, Blues, Black”, a series of ten one-hour programs for the National Educational Television highlighting the role of African culture in America.

#### D. SUMMARY OF TEXTS

At this point in the discussion, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of each of the autobiographies of Angelou. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Angelou’s evocative autobiography about her painful childhood growing up in Stamps, Arkansas, was published in 1970. The title of her memoir is taken from a favorite childhood poem titled “Sympathy” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. The book met with great critical acclaim due to its personal honesty dealing with the distressful issues of rejection, racism, and

fear; and yet it is often sprinkled with humor, warmth, and love. In 1973, Maya Angelou married her third husband, English writer and cartoonist Paul de Feu.

The second text of Angelou's autobiography, Gather Together in My Name, was published in 1974. The title was inspired by the Gospel of Mark (18:20) as "she asks her family and readers to gather around her and bear witness to her past" (Nebauer, "Self," in Bloom, Maya Angelou p199). Revealing these painful events from her past was difficult for Angelou, but she hoped that by doing so others might benefit from her message: "You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated" (Coleman, "Review of All God's Children" in Contemporary Literary Criticism, 1991, p36)

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas, volume three of her autobiography, was published in 1976 and highlights Angelou's stage career and her European tour with the opera *Porgy and Bess*. The title was derived from the African American tradition of spending Saturday night and Sunday evening socializing, attending church services, and enjoying a Sunday meal in order to sustain them through the rest of the arduous workweek.

In addition to the publication of three volumes of her autobiography, the decade of the 1970s was also enhanced by other literary contributions from Angelou. Her first volume of poetry, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diie, published in 1971, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and she wrote the screenplay for "Georgia, Georgia" in 1972. Two other collections of poetry, Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well and And Still I Rise, appeared in 1975 and 1978, respectively. Along with her poetry, Angelou was involved in writing the teleplay for the television version of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", which premiered on CBS in 1979. Besides her literary endeavors,

Angelou was also involved in directing two plays, “Ajax” and “And Still I Rise”. She earned a Tony nomination for her Broadway debut in the play “Look Away” in 1973 and an Emmy nomination for her performance of Kunta Kinte’s grandmother in the television mini-series “Roots”. Academically, Angelou has been a distinguished visiting professor at Wake Forest University, Wichita State University, and California State University. She was selected as a Rockefeller Foundation Scholar in Italy in 1975 and that same year was appointed a member of the American Revolution Bicentennial Council by President Gerald R. Ford.

In 1981, The Heart of a Woman, volume four of Angelou’s autobiography, was published. Lupton (1998) mentions that the title was inspired by a poem written by Georgia Douglas Johnson, “a poet who wrote with emotion about gender” (p49). In this inspiring personal narrative, Angelou chronicled her experiences in New York City where she explored her literary and dramatic talents, her commitment to the civil rights struggle, and her often turbulent relationship with her teenage son Guy. That same year, her marriage to Paul de Feu ended in divorce, and she relocated to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where in 1982 she was appointed the lifetime Reynolds Chair in American Studies at Wake Forest University, where she lectures on literature and popular culture.

Angelou’s fifth autobiography, All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes, was published in 1986. This memoir recounts Angelou’s quest for identity by reconnecting with the homeland of her African ancestors. In returning to the Mother continent of Africa she not only finds “the roots of [her] beginning” (p206), but she is inspired and strengthened by her search “for it brought [her] closer to understanding [herself] and other human beings” (p196). Nonetheless, she also discovers that although part of her

soul belongs to Africa, as an African American, America is now her true home. All of Maya Angelou's autobiographies convey the struggles and triumphs of her life with grace, and a strong sense of self-affirmation. Angelou told an interviewer in 1973 that she was not only interested in survival but "survival with some style, some faith" (Shapiro, 1994, p.17). Therefore, her narratives convey a message of survival for African American people to rise above poverty, prejudice, and lack of power. It is quite clear from the synopsis that Angelou's autobiographies are dominated largely by the subjects of motherhood and marriage. However, it is evident that to carefully explain these subjects, she employs literary style, which makes her rise above other writers of the genre, and gives her readers the promise of unique revelations about herself as an individual.

More collections of poetry followed with the 1983 publication of Shaker, Why Don't You Sing; I Shall Not Be Moved in 1990; My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken and Me and The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou in 1994; and Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems Celebrating Women in 1994. Chosen by President-elect Bill Clinton to compose a poem for his inauguration, she delivered her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" to the nation at his inauguration in 1993. The 665 words of the poem described "a dark vision of American history ...but one suffused nonetheless with hope" (Shapiro, 1994, p17). The essence of the poem parallels "the poet's own history... [of] poverty and racial oppression" and survival "to reach a point where she could look with optimism toward the future" (p17). In 1993, a selection of essays titled Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now was published, followed in 1997 by Even the Stars Look Lonesome, another selection of essays. This collection carefully explores the inner and personal thoughts of Angelou about many issues in life; racism, good

neighbourliness, on ageing and sexuality, youthful and adult perceptions of marriage and the affections of motherhood. The latter subjects mentioned in the previous sentence are well explored that her writers see the essays as Angelou's afterthoughts on the subjects of motherhood and marriage as explained in her autobiographies.

Besides her many literary and dramatic accomplishments, Angelou speaks six languages and has been honored by the academic world, receiving the Yale University Fellowship in 1970. Although Angelou has not earned a college degree, she has been granted Honorary Doctorates from Smith College and Mills College and now holds more than fifty other honorary degrees. She is often referred to as Dr. Maya Angelou. Other awards include a National Book Award nomination for I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in 1970, Essence magazine's 1992 Woman of the Year, the Horatio Alger Award for 1992, and the Frank G. Wells Award at the American Teachers Awards ceremony in 1995. Angelou is also a member of several prominent organizations, such as the Directors Guild of America, the American Film Institute, and the Harlem Writers Guild. She has served on several commissions and is a highly sought-after lecturer. She has composed musical scores and has written, directed, and acted in several plays and films. Maya Angelou became the first black woman to have an original script produced with the film *Georgia, Georgia* in 1972. Recently in 2002, she co-authored and co-hosted a series of documentaries with her son Guy Johnson, titled "Maya Angelou's America: A Journey of the Heart." This really shows her closeness to her son Guy who is all grown up and still glued to her mother because of the unique nurturing she offered him when he was growing up. The subject of motherhood is somehow enforced while one gains an insight into Angelou's achievements in life as a successful African-American woman. One

important thing worth noting is that it is this same detailed life story that Angelou presents in her phases of autobiographies, that becomes the focus of this paper. However, she does this with some style and an understanding of the characteristics of the genre.

The foregoing chapter has presented a vivid introduction to the study in general. It has highlighted the concept of autobiography, the purpose of the study, the thesis statement, and bio-data of Maya Angelou. The next chapter of the study, however, will discuss some reviews on some related literature. The main issues to be discussed will be related literature on issues on Angelou's childhood memories, her experiences of motherhood and marriage and finally, literary style.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The excitement of autobiography as a category of study is that it links together many different subjects – literature, history, sociology and cultural studies. It is also true that within each of these fields, the study of autobiography explodes disciplinary boundaries and requires an understanding of other approaches and practices. Maya Angelou's texts in autobiography incorporates other disciplines ranging from her narration of her personal historical accounts, sociological implications of incident she witnessed and experienced and the cultural background information she gives to her readers. Her narratives have generated both critical and popular interests since their publications. The works made by some writers about Maya Angelou's narratives are on the whole interesting and enlightening because of the way they speak together while others diverge on major issues and stylistic techniques prevalent in the various texts. This part of the discussion is reserved solely for a thematic and literary discussion of the writings of the writings of some critics and writers about Angelou's texts in autobiography. The major issues this work will tackle involve the childhood memories of Maya Angelou and its impact on shaping her thoughts and experiences in her later life as a woman, and the subjects of motherhood and marriage. The reviews will also capture the impact of the choice of Angelou's literary style in presenting her narratives around the subjects of motherhood and marriage to redefine her identity.



B. REVIEW ON THE ROLE OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

The first major issue which most scholars discuss at length is in the area of childhood memories and its impact on shaping Angelou's thoughts and experiences in the realization of her identity. One scholar who discusses this is Kelly. Kelly (1970) in reviewing Angelou's first autobiography I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings reveals that Angelou uses her first narrative in the autobiography series to confidently reach back in memory to pull out the painful childhood times when children fail to break the adult code and disastrously breach laws they know nothing of. She explains again that the novel chronicles when the very young swings easily from hysterical laughter to awful loneliness; from a hunger for heroes to the voluntary pleasure-pain game of wondering who their real parents are and how long before they take them to their authentic home. Kelly explains that the initial state of confusion and wandering that young Angelou goes through is representative of the search for self and knowledge about what the world had in stock for her. The childhood arrival in a home that Kelly mentions in this instance refers to the gain of knowledge, the transition from childhood to adulthood and the gain of an identity.

Kelly goes on further to say that the author allows her story to range in an extraordinary fashion along the field of human emotion. She writes that with a child's fatalism and fear of the unknown or the future, a deep cut ushers in visions of death. However, she adds that with a child's addiction to romance and melodrama, she [Angelou] imagines ending her life in the back-yard of a Mexican family, among people she does not know. To Kelly, it is as if Angelou has a time machine because she so unerringly records the private world of the young where sin is the original sin and

embarrassment, the penultimate (p32). Kelly's critical work about Angelou's childhood memories really explains to her readers the reasons and effects of some of the young Angelou's actions and sends them deep down Angelou's line of thinking. Kelly's assertions enable readers to better understand the reasons for Angelou's decisions and appreciate that to a very large extent, Angelou accepts responsibility for her youthful decisions and experiences, hence helping her to know her vision in life.

Bloom (1994) authenticates Kelly's arguments when he asserts that Angelou makes some decisions on the spot because she has no other choices and he believes that most of these decisions, whether good or bad, help to bring Angelou to where she is today – a successful Black woman. Bloom agrees with Kelly more when he explains that Angelou's initial struggles in life as a child growing up in Stamps with her paternal grandmother when her parents get divorced are a real challenge that help Angelou to grow stronger in life to find meaning and rest for herself in adult life. This argument is meaningful because Angelou's struggles in life as a child really help to prepare her for the real challenges that await her in her adult life.

However, Bloom adds another interesting twist to his line of argument about Angelou's childhood memories. He explains that Angelou's childhood memories help to also shape her future perception and fantasy about her adult marriage life. Bloom links the various forms of instability that Angelou experiences in her two failed marriages to the divorce of her parents which occurs way back during her childhood. The linkage that Bloom makes between Angelou's failed marriages and her parents' divorce during her childhood is somehow questionable. The reason is that even though some psychologists may believe failed marriages and other negative tendencies in marriages could have far-

reaching consequences on the children who may witness them, it is not so in Angelou's case. Well, even though Angelou does not give a vivid reason in her narrative as to why her parents divorced, probably because she and her older brother Bailey were too young to know exactly what went wrong, it may have been far different from the reasons for which Angelou divorces Tosh and Make.

Another writer Smith (1999) adds her voice to the childhood memory argument. Smith makes a different argument altogether. She believes that the opening in the Angelou collection of texts in autobiography begins with the primal childhood scene, as recollected through Angelou's narration. Smith compares this opening to that of Wright's Native Son, both of which bring into focus the nature of the imprisoning environment from which the child or the self will seek escape. Smith explains that the choice of this scene by Angelou reinforces the subjects of loss and alienation, and a vigorous attempt by Angelou at integration. This, according to Smith, also helps to finally reinforce the issue of identity that Angelou seeks to search for right from the very beginning of her journey through life. As a mother and married woman, Angelou is seen trying to dismiss the factor of alienation and enforcing integration of people of all races. The study sees reason with this argument by Smith since the story lines in the narrative texts portray Angelou trying to live in harmony with people of different races; both black and white alike. To prove this, she gets married on two occasions to a Greek and South African.

Gottlieb (1974) explains that it is clear from a careful reading of the second volume of Angelou's life stories that it lacks the density of childhood. Gottlieb explains that the ridiculous and touching posturing of a young girl in the process of growing up are

superimposed on the serious business of survival and responsibility for a child. Thus, Angelou's insistence on taking full responsibility for her own life, her frank and humorous examination of her self, according to Gottlieb, will challenge many a reader to be as honest under easier circumstances and concludes that Angelou's second book is about her life as a young black woman in America, and not a child, and this she believes is engrossing and important, rich in text and funny and wise in informing her readers. Gottlieb, however, does not agree with both Kelly and Smith who both thought that the earlier autobiographies portray childhood memories and experiences. Gottlieb believes that those childhood memories recollected by Angelou should not convince any reader into believing that those stories are about childhood. To Gottlieb, the earlier texts in autobiography, especially Caged Bird and Gather Together even though illustrate her search for identity by telling of an episodic searching and wandering period in Angelou's life lack the density of childhood.

Kent (1975) does not appear to agree with Gottlieb. Kent believes that the early narratives of Angelou are solely about Angelou's childhood memories, a view shared also by Kelly and Smith. He does this by praising Angelou for carefully exploiting her childhood memories to pass on a very beautiful message on to many youthful readers with a very serious zeal. To Kent, the details of the description of young Angelou's actions and decisions in the first two novels, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and Gather Together in my Name clearly illustrate a presentation of the memories of an adult about her childhood.

Arensberg (1976) presents a message that may be presented as contrary to that of Kent: whereas Kent is more or less praising Angelou for her careful and serious message

to her readers, Arensberg feels that there is no seriousness with the way Angelou presents her narrative. Arensberg sees Angelou as someone who presents the stories about her childhood struggles, pains and misfortunes with much seriousness; yet, in the course of her presentation, Angelou uses wit and humour, something which, to some extent, toned down the seriousness of her story. Arensberg believes that this style of writing presents a contrary meaning to her narrative. To her, a reader is tempted to believe that really, what Angelou is trying to portray is not really a true picture of her suffering, pains and misfortune, which she describes into much detail. Arensberg, therefore, chooses the title “Death as a Metaphor of Self” to examine Angelou’s ironic style of writing about her youth which, seems counterpoint to the meaning of her narrative. However, this study does not agree with Arensberg because Angelou uses wit and humour at different levels of the narratives to ease the tension which crops up in most of the infancy narratives. Her use of humour should, therefore, not erase the seriousness that readers should attach to her texts.

McMurry (1976) is yet another writer who contributes to the reviews of Angelou’s works. In the South Atlantic Bulletin, McMurry titles her review “Role-Playing as Art in Maya Angelou’s Caged Bird”. Here in this review, McMurry directs her argument to Angelou’s easy blending of childhood and motherhood role-plays by Angelou in the same piece of story. She argues that despite the easiness with which Angelou carefully explores her life as a child and then in the latter part of the story I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, she explores in another vein her role as a young mother, which is very artistic indeed. She believes the blend of these two roles really helps to bring out the best in Angelou. McMurry explains that Angelou is a woman of

different roles and can fit into any role life throws to her as a challenge. McMurry, therefore, prescribed this character trait to every modern woman who wants to possess and take charge of her destiny and future. The blend of childhood and motherhood role-plays is a way of showing her readers that she has learnt enough from the transition from childhood to motherhood such that she can easily tell of it to encourage others without mincing words.

Ott (1981) who also contributes his quota to the reviews on Angelou's works cites in the journal, Contemporary Literary Criticism (Vol. 35, p30) that although "Angelou's story of her adult life lacks [the] inherent drama or terrible poignancy of her childhood...it is nonetheless a stirring record of the complex fabric of a black woman's life" (CLC Vol. 35, p30). This assertion by Ott clearly rules out any arguments made by some scholars like Kent that the narratives of Angelou give credit to serious childhood memories as recollected and narrated by Angelou. Ott, therefore, finds himself in the same arena with Gottlieb and McMurry making similar assertions concerning Angelou's narratives about her childhood.

Froula, (1986) adds her voice to the reviews on Angelou's childhood memories. This time, Froula turns her attention to one specific aspect of Angelou's formative years which is her rape ordeal, and lashes heavily at perpetrators of sexual violence against children. Froula makes reference to Angelou's ordeal when she is raped by her mother's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. She explains that this particular incident Angelou narrates may be just one small incident she (Angelou) refers to but she wants readers to know that it is representative of a far larger moral issue going on in the larger Black American society. Froula calls for affirmative action to nib these forms of abuse in

the bud because many innocent young girls and women are victimised by their fellow Black neighbours, relatives and even sometimes whites.

Froula (1986) explains further that the fact that Angelou's maternal uncles give instant justice to the perpetrator, Mr. Freeman by murdering him reveals yet another disturbing problem within the large African-American culture that also needs to be stemmed: she calls the instant justice fair but too harsh. The fairness in the punishment is that it is meant to show solidarity, love and support and most importantly, a sense of belongingness to the victim, young Angelou, but according to Froula, readers become surprised to hear Angelou blaming herself for the death of Mr. Freeman. Angelou blames herself for being the person who leads Mr. Freeman on to eventually abuse her. The harshness of the punishment, to Froula, stems from the fact that Mr. Freeman is murdered instead of being made to face a jury as the American system would allow. She uses her essay to rebuke gangster activities of using crime to pay back crime in Black American communities.

Vermillion (1992) has in her essay "Re-embodiment of the Self" published in Vol. 77 of Contemporary Literary Criticism an extended analysis of Angelou's representation of rape and the "fear that afflict(s) Maya and her race" in Caged Bird and concludes that through the autobiographical process, Angelou also "reconstructs her own body" and "celebrates the bodies of other black women" (p32). Vermillion's essay truly captures a vivid picture of some of the various forms of violence and abuse which are the lot of black American girls and women perpetrated by both black and white men. Vermillion makes reference to Angelou's rape by Mr. Freeman saying that Angelou, after the rape was further ostracized into her own world. This becomes pronounced, especially after

the murder of Mr. Freeman by young Angelou's maternal uncles, described by Vermillion as another set of violent black men. Vermillion continues that since Maya blames herself, something she (Vermillion) agrees most rape victims sometimes do, she further blames herself for the murder of Mr. Freeman, her perpetrator. Vermillion, however, is quick to add that readers should not forget that it was around this same period that the famous Mrs. Bertha Flowers comes into Young Angelou's life. The coming of Mrs. Flowers into young Angelou's life, according to Vermillion, is very significant indeed since it was she who helps young Angelou to wake up from her unfortunate situation and equips her with the talent of building the literacy of reading and writing, and again to a very large extent helps to shape her thoughts to the pursuance of knowing who she is and wants to be in future.

Collins (2000) also reviews Angelou's works in the second edition of her book on knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment entitled Black Feminist Thought, when she makes reference to little Angelou's painful recognition in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings of the fact that she could really be truly beautiful if she became white. Actually, she quotes this in her discussion of the issue of beauty standards as a major issue that preoccupies the minds of most Black American women. Collins remarks that Since U. S. Black women have been most uniformly harmed by the colour issue that is the by-product of U. S. racism, it is important to explore how prevailing standards of beauty affect U. S. Black women's treatment in everyday life. Collins quotes a portion of Angelou's first autobiography to support her claim. She believes that the long standing attention of most writers to the theme of beauty standards as a medium of the Black American's search for identity reveals the conflicted feelings concerning



standards of beauty being used by most Black Americans among whom include the young Angelou in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. The young Angelou in the first narrative explains that she looked simple because she is black. She occupies her mind with the thoughts of being white and looking beautiful. Collins explains that most black children nurture the wish to be white, a colour that they mistakenly consider as the standard symbol of beauty. Collins is, however, quick to play down this standard that preoccupies the mind of black children in America and black women in general. She makes the claim that in childhood, young blacks should be made to know that their colour is unique and healthier than some other skin pigments that they may have thought of to be the standard of beauty. To Collins, the childhood period of a young black girl or boy should be a period to appreciate the black colour as a beautiful resource worth nurturing for a lifetime.

#### C. REVIEW OF MOTHERHOOD ROLE-PLAY

Aside childhood memories, this work will explore one other major issue which attracts popular interest in the narratives of Angelou - the subject of motherhood. Motherhood refers to the state of being a mother. A mother refers to the female parent of a child or a person who is acting as a mother to a child. It is noteworthy that the narratives of Angelou are flooded with this subject from the first novel right up to the last. Many critics, therefore, have had their fair share of the discussion on how it really affects the whole message Angelou wishes to convey to her readers. The texts mention Angelou's role-play as a mother, Angelou's mother's earlier neglect of her children's welfare and upkeep, the role played by Angelou's grandmother, the surrogate motherhood role-play

by Mrs. Bertha Flowers, Vivian Baxter Johnson's boldness to take on her rightful place in Angelou's life as a mother, and other women who take on motherhood roles to take care of Angelou's son. Lupton (1990) in her article "Singing the Black Mother: Angelou and the Autobiography Continuity" discusses the unifying theme of motherhood in Angelou's narrative. She argues that this theme is scattered throughout the six texts in autobiography and so that it serves as the centre around which the story revolves. Lupton believes other themes are highlighted in the texts, but the one which is more enforced is that of motherhood. She even argues that motherhood is explained from different angles: biological motherhood, family motherhood, surrogate motherhood and communal motherhood. These types of motherhood role plays, she explains, are more prevalent in marginalized societies than among very privileged groups.

This argument is further complemented by Bloom (1999). Bloom's argument is that Angelou explores the theme of motherhood so successfully than most writers of the genre ever did. In his opinion, Angelou's texts in autobiography transcend barriers and boundaries and reveals the ever-nurturing heart instilled in Angelou and the members of her black community in the area of mothering a child. This statement of Bloom helps, therefore, to enforce the point that people help one another within the Black community to raise children.

The other mother theory that Collins propounds becomes central to the foregoing argument. Collins (2000) explains that other Black American women take up the role of caretakers of children of their family members and neighbours to enable the parents go about their daily activities without having to go pay for the expensive services of nannies. To Collins, this practice is ideal to the Black American community and it plays a central

role in black motherhood and culture. The work agrees with Collins because taking a look at the life of Angelou, it is obvious that other women play mothering roles to relieve Angelou of the duties of motherhood while she goes about her duties to make some money to take care of herself and family.

Neubauer (1983) also discusses the subject of motherhood from another angle. She limits her discussion to the issue of displacement and begins with the neglect of motherhood responsibility on the part of Vivian Baxter Johnson, Angelou's mother. Neubauer argues that Angelou and her elder brother Bailey become displaced at the beginning of the story because of the divorce which exposes the children to parental neglect, specifically the care and love of their biological mother. Neubauer continues to say that despite the fact that the loss of motherhood begins Angelou's problems and the search for home, it is this same subject of motherhood that Angelou discovers that brings a solution to her early problems in life. Specific reference is made to the motherhood care offered Angelou and her brother Bailey by their paternal grandmother Momma Henderson and to Angelou by Mrs. Bertha Flowers. In this light, therefore, Neubauer's argument seems to be similar to that of Lupton, specifically in the area of motherhood in general.

Bloom (1999) comments on the subject of displacement that Neubauer mentions saying that "such rejection a child internalizes and translates as a rejection of self: ultimately the loss of home occasions the loss of self worth." (p7) Bloom explains implicitly that the loss of home (occasioned by the divorce of the parents and the temporal loss of biological motherhood) influences Angelou's self image and identity." (p7) Neubauer, therefore, brings meaning to this comment when she argues that Angelou,

right from the beginning “continually reminds the reader that the quest for a place to call home is virtually endemic to the human condition” (p206). This thesis agrees with Neubauer when she says that the divorce of Angelou’s parents begins the loss of motherhood care that Angelou and her brother go through during their early life period. It again agrees with Neubauer when she concludes that the finding of a mother’s care in the persons of Momma Henderson and Mrs. Bertha Flowers represents Angelou’s discovery of meaning and hope in life. This is because in the thesis’ estimation, Angelou learns a lot of very positive things from her grandmother Momma Henderson and Mrs. Bertha Flowers who instill in her the sense of strong will of feminine character and the discipline of literature respectively as traits, which according to her help shaped her for her future career.

Angelou (2004) explains in “Phenomenal Mothers I Have Known,” an article she wrote and published in the magazine Ebony that she is what she is today because of the wonderful roles played by some women who were very instrumental in bringing her up. Making reference to some names she mentions in her texts in autobiography including Momma Henderson, Mrs. Bertha Flowers and her own biological mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson, she showers praises on them for the wonderful upbringing they give her, especially about the African – American way of life. She confesses that all the inspirations she get to move her on are from these wonderful women. However, Angelou singles out her paternal grandmother, Momma Henderson and comments that her unique sense of parentage and motherhood out of which emanates her strong sense of will-power as a woman is worthy of emulation for every African-American woman. Angelou adds that she herself is one such phenomenal woman. The study shares a similar view with

Angelou's assertion of having gained much inspiration from the women she singles out – Momma Henderson, Vivian Baxter Johnson, and Mrs. Bertha Flowers. However, in the opinion of this thesis, other women who help Angelou bring up her son by playing the role of nannies are also very phenomenal in their assumption of mother-figure roles in the life of Angelou's son and they deserve recognition.

Similar to Angelou's exaltation of her "mothers" in "Phenomenal Mothers", Braxton (1989) advances the claim in "Song" that Maya Angelou celebrates black motherhood in her "grandmother's feminine heroism, wisdom, and un-selfishness" (p127). Braxton uses Angelou's grandmother as a blueprint to exalt the level-headedness, the strong-willed nature, the hardworking and industrious nature, and above all, the virtue of submissiveness to authority and the possession of a very humble spirit of many positive-minded African-American women. These are virtues, which according to Bloom help to make the Black mother exceptional.

Again, Demetrakopoulos (1980), in "The Metaphysics of Matrilinealism in Women's Autobiography:..." makes an argument quite similar to Angelou's statement in "Phenomenal Mothers" when he describes Angelou's grandmother Momma Henderson as "an archetype of those noble, barely educated black women who inspire their children with a faith in themselves against the severest odds" (33). Both Annie Henderson and Vivian Baxter act as nurturers and protectors in their respective roles as grandmother and mother, respectively. To the writer, Demetrakopoulos, Angelou who in turn gives birth at the end of Caged Bird learns to fulfill the role of nurturer and protector as a new mother to her young son, Guy.

Braxton (1989) writes that Maya Angelou's relationship with Mrs. Bertha

Flowers “represents another important turning point in the development of the autobiographer’s consciousness” (p136) when her maternal influence helps Angelou tap into her creative resources and find self-healing. Lupton (1998) explores the subject of motherhood as a controlling element in Gather Together in My Name, stating that it “controls the plot...” (p74). Lupton explores the theme of motherhood further by saying that it is Maya Angelou’s motherhood that keeps her connected to the world of responsibility” (p 86, p87).

Likewise, the subject of motherhood evolves in the third volume, Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas. Lupton (1990) again offers the argument that “the mother-son behavior pattern in Singin’ and Swingin’ shows...Maya Angelou as the mother in conflict over the need to love versus the need to be a fully realized person” (p108). In Lupton’s view, the theme of motherhood becomes more complex in The Heart of a Woman but is nonetheless at the heart of the narrative. She adds that the fourth narrative presents a time of fluctuation between dependence and independence for mother and son, and between Maya and her own mother. At the end, a mature Maya Angelou finds herself alone: “Maya Angelou is at this moment simply herself” (p131). Although the theme of motherhood does not consume the text of All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes, it is developed as a positive way to round up the series in that it “suggests liberation” (p157). The theme of motherhood also aligns Angelou’s quest for acceptance by Mother Africa with the theme of identity and displacement. Her quest for racial identity and “home,” a place of belonging, are intricately interwoven within the context of the subjects of motherhood and marriage.

Carby (1987) in the book Reconstructing Womanhood adds more flavour to the

point advanced by Angelou in “Phenomenal Mothers”. Though Carby does not directly mention Angelou and the influence of her paternal grandmother, Momma Henderson, he carefully explores the motherhood roles that most grandmothers within the African American tradition play in the lives of many successful Americans. Carby’s argument directly enforces the argument of Angelou in “Phenomenal Mothers” when she specifically recognizes her grandmother’s role in shaping her adult life. Carby educates his readers to learn positively from grandmothers and appreciate them since within the African-American tradition, most grannies have assumed the role of mothers who nurture and train individuals that will take on the mantle of power in the future. Carby emphasizes that in reconstructing womanhood, the character traits of fairness, the zeal to protect, the instinctive drive of industry and the power to sustain one’s emotion and independence in the face of adversity should be duly enforced by all mothers.

The various autobiographies of Angelou all seek to praise motherhood, womanhood and reserve a special place for the issue of marriage. One such writer who comments on these is Phillips (1975). Phillips comments that the events of Angelou’s life make interesting reading in the study of the subject of motherhood and womanhood. Some of the events that Phillips touches on include Angelou as an unwed mother, an unlucky lovebird, a prostitute, an enduring mother with strong motherly instincts, and a woman with the ability to adapt to adversity functioning, among many others. All these, according to Phillips, are strong experiences that Angelou, like most struggling women, goes through to help shape her thoughts for the future. In fact, it strengthens her in her search for stability, independence and home, all of which molds her finally to know where she had come from, who she is at the present and wants her and her son to be in

the future.

In Cudjoe's 1984 essay "Maya Angelou and the Autobiographical Statement," which Bloom adds to his essay collections titled Maya Angelou, he contends, "Whereas [Angelou] presented herself as an integral part of the society in Caged Bird, in Gather Together she separated herself ... and projected a strikingly individual ethos." (p69). This development, in Cudjoe's opinion, weakens the work because it relies on individual exploits rather than "traditional collective wisdom and/or suffering of the group" (pp69–70). In an analysis of Caged Bird, Gather Together, and Singin' and Swingin', Bloom quotes Cudjoe again presenting another view of Angelou, and this time cites Angelou's celebration of black womanhood throughout the texts by her presentation of "a powerful, authentic and profound signification of the condition of Afro-American womanhood in her quest for understanding and love rather than for bitterness and despair" (pp60–61).

Similarly, Collins (2000) touches on the sub-topic, "Black Women's Relationship with One Another" and categorically makes reference to Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. She claims that the mother-daughter relationship is a fundamental thing that exists among Black women. To Collins, many Black mothers empower their daughters by giving them the legacy of the knowledge to survive as African-American women. This, to some extent, goes a long way to touch on the search for identity theme in Angelou's works. This legacy passed on from mother to daughter in the Black-American community is a survival mechanism used in a community of immense marginalization because of skin colour, sex, and other forms of minority groupings. Collins thus refers to this as a fundamental reason why most autobiographies like Maya Angelou's first novel make mothers and mother-figures emerge as central figures or



heroines. In Angelou's autobiographies, we see her mother, grandmother and surrogate-mother-in-the-making, Vivian Baxter, Momma Henderson and Mrs. Flowers, respectively being made the heroines of her stories, and of course, including herself.

According to Lupton (1990), in "Singing the Black Mother," throughout the volumes of Angelou's narratives, motherhood remains a dominant theme and unifying element, so that "the mother-child configuration forms the basic pattern against which other relationships are measured" (p260).

The celebration of motherhood is further given prominence by Nelson (2002) in his book Africa-American Autobiographers: A Sourcebook when he mentions the zeal of some women to single-handedly face their hardship without any help whatsoever. He explains that some women refuse help even in the face of hardship because of their zeal to protect their ego and prove their independence. This makes Nelson's argument quite similar to that of Carby. Nelson makes reference to Angelou at the time when she goes looking for a job that will bring her recognition, money and independence, but lacked the skills necessary to achieve these goals in a dominant white economy. Additionally, Angelou according to Nelson believes that to achieve her goals, she must leave her mother and stepfather who have supported her as a child, and define a new life for herself and her two-month old son. Even though, Maya Angelou knows that leaving her mother's home creates a double bind for her as struggling single mother, she still leaves "stubbornly" to assert her independence. Nelson celebrates motherhood using the example of Maya Angelou since she manages to sail through all her hardship and excels at the end of the mothering struggle. This thesis shares thought with Nelson in that there are other incidents in the narratives where Angelou proves herself worthy

of fighting her struggles even in the face of imminent disgrace.

Nelson mentions one such incident that comes up in the narratives. Vivian Baxter Johnson, Angelou's mother offers to help her from time to time in the upkeep of her (Angelou's) son, but she refuses the offer even when she knows there is no job ready for her and so, may need the offer being given by her mother. At the end, Angelou does not take the offer and succeeds in her life of independence as a mother. It is therefore appropriate to celebrate motherhood using Angelou as a practical example, as Nelson does.

The discussion of the literature on motherhood cannot be complete without the mentioning of the mother-child relationship that exists in the narratives. All the critics mentioned earlier in this discussion share the view that the underlying issue behind all the arguments being made is motherly love exhibited by all the characters concerned. It is true that Mrs. Bertha Flowers develops some form of maternal love for Little Angelou at the time when she recuperates from her rape ordeal; it is also true that even though Vivian Baxter Johnson because of the divorce leaves her children at very tender ages of their lives, she still loves her children and even tries to make up with her when she (Angelou) becomes a teenage mother. It is also true that Momma Henderson exhibits love for her son and his children; hence she accepts young Angelou and Bailey into her home in Stamps, Arkansas. According to Lupton (1990), the mother's love for her child becomes one of the most important issues brought up in the narratives of Angelou.

Lupton mentions the circumstances through which Angelou becomes a mother. Lupton (1998) argues that it is Angelou's own initiative that makes her become a teenage mother. To her, becoming a mother is a passage to independence and comfort. It is,

therefore, no wonder that she (Angelou) nurtures and attaches so much seriousness to the business of motherhood. In Traveling Shoes, Angelou's love for her son is specially highlighted. In Ghana when Angelou hears about the car accident of Guy, her reaction and how she handles the whole situation really represent motherly love to the highest bidder and it is evenly mentioned in all the volumes of autobiography.

#### D. REVIEW ON ANGELOU'S MARRIAGE EXPERIENCES

Aside the subject of motherhood, marriage is another area that attracts some critical comments. In all the six volumes, Angelou records her experiences of marriage with two men: Tosh Angelos and Vusi Make. These two men play very important parts in the life of Angelou. One writer Bloom (1994) explains that at the time Angelou meets her first husband Tosh Angelos, she wanted a husband who will help bring up her son. Bloom links motherly love to the discussion on marriage by explaining that it is not for economic or any selfish reasons that Angelou agrees to marry Tosh but for the sake of Guy who needs a father's presence, love and care to enable him grow into a responsible and mentally-balanced adult. Bloom is suggesting here that Angelou necessarily does not have to marry Tosh but for the love that she has for her son.

Elliot (1989) reveals in Conversations with Maya Angelou that getting married is for Angelou a ticket to a never-to-attain independence. Elliot points out that Angelou's response to the question of why she gets married is that she initially thought that she could gain independence that she had long sought after. This revelation goes contrary to the argument of Bloom about the reason for Angelou's decision to marry Tosh, her first husband. However, one would wonder what kind of independence Angelou is referring

to since she does not explain further. On Angelou's movement from one marriage to another, Neubauer (1983) re-echoes what Angelou asserts in her interview with Elliot. Neubauer explains that the movement of Angelou from one marriage to another signifies inadequacy and search for independence and freedom. This view explains the fact that Angelou does not achieve the independence she sought to gain during her marriage with Tosh Angelos and Vusi Make. This thesis agrees with Neubauer in this area of discussion, even though it agrees also with Bloom's contrary argument as well. As it would be recalled, Bloom links Guy, Angelou's only son to the reason why Angelou gets married to show her motherly love to him. After her second marriage breaks down, Angelou realizes that her dream of finding independence and freedom in marriage becomes a mirage. It is, therefore, not surprising that she turns her focus to find that independence and freedom in developing a career that she finds pleasure in for herself.

In a related argument advanced by Vermillion (1992), readers get enlightened about one of the reasons why Angelou does not attain independence and freedom in her two marriages. Even though Elliot (1989) and Neubauer (1983) mention the fact that Angelou never attains the independence and freedom she hopes to gain from her marriage, a point this thesis agrees totally with, they do not categorically explain some of the reasons why this much-sought-after independence and freedom become unattainable. However, Vermillion (1992) points out one saying that the marriage with Tosh Angelos become a stumbling block between Angelou and the Black church, the only community of friends that Angelou knows from her childhood days growing up at Stamps, Arkansas. As it would be recalled, Angelou is brought up by Momma Henderson, her paternal grandmother who insists that she frequents and develops her fellowship at the Black

church. When Angelou gets married to Tosh Angelos, her first husband, who is an atheist, he bars her from fellowshiping with members of the Black church. Vermillion sites this instance as one of the reasons why Angelou's much-sought-after independence and freedom become a mirage. This thesis believes that the break-down of Angelou's first marriage can be firmly attributed to Tosh Angelo's atheist stance of preventing Angelou's fellowship with members of the Black church.

Abel (1981) explains the importance of church and friendship in the life of African-American women. Abel sees the Black church, an institution that most young Blacks are introduced to by their parents or guardians, as fertile grounds for growing friendship and communal linkages between members of the Black community. Abel does not see reason in why a husband should prevent his wife from fraternizing with the Black community in the Black church since in her estimation, the Black church symbolizes an ideal place where most African-Americans could identify themselves with their fellow Black neighbours.

Adding a different twist to the issues discussed so far under the subject of marriage, Lupton (1998) in her book Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion discusses the role fantasy plays in the marriage of Angelou leading to their collapse. Angelou gets married to people who are of different cultures and philosophies. As it would be recalled in her narratives, long before she comes of age and thinks of settling down with a man, Angelou mentions some of the fantasies she forms in her mind about the kind of wife she hopes to be. Lupton explains that Angelou's marriages collapse because they both do not meet the demands of her fantasy. It is only when she comes face-to-face with reality that she realizes that in real life most of the fantasies we create do not meet our expectations.

Bloom (1994) shares quite a related view though he looks at it from a different angle. Bloom expresses his views on the non-attainability of freedom and independence by women in oppressive relationships with intolerant and racist individuals. He explains that since Angelou fantasizes about marrying a man who will hold her in high esteem, respect her views and give her much authority in the household, it would have been expected that she would be happy when she makes these choices of marrying Tosh Angelos and Vusi Make. These fantasies, according to Bloom, become unattainable because of the racial and intolerant tendencies that Angelou's two husbands display during their marriage to her. In reality, it is true that Angelou has some expectations for her marriage and to a very large extent, because she does not achieve these expectations, she finally realizes her dissatisfaction in both marriages so they collapse.

#### E. REVIEW OF ANGELOU'S LITERARY STYLE

The next issue that attracted the attention of critics to Angelou's works is her writing style. Several writers have commented on Angelou's literary style of presentation with different remarks. Kelly (1970) explains that Angelou accommodates her literary style to the various settings her story moves through. In explaining this assertion, she claims that Angelou describes a rural vignette, which is "sweet-milk fresh in her memory..." and a San Francisco rooming house where "Chicken suppers and gambling games were rioting on a twenty-four hour basis downstairs." Kelly identifies that Angelou uses very strong and appropriate metaphors but to her (Kelly) her (Angelou's) similes are less often so. However, despite these recognizable facts, Kelly explains that these lapses in poetic style

are undeniably balanced by the insight Angelou offers into the effects of social conditioning on the lifestyle and self-concept of a Black child growing up in the rural South of the 1930's.

On another platform, Walker (1995) believes that the first volume is not even 'accurate,' and to him, when the book is looked at critically after almost thirty years on the shelves, it is full of bias, authoritative, and is almost wildly funny, like certain urban myths. However, Walker is quick to say that Angelou is not the stylist that Himes is, nor a Richard Wright and that she (Angelou) manages, however, a witty poetic flow (intensely more successful than in her book of poems, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie) that is sometimes cute, sometimes lax, and often apt. One begins to wonder what basis Walker has for comparing Angelou with Himes and Richard Wright because he does not justify this assertion. However, the fact still remains that Walkers' point that Angelou's Caged Bird is inaccurate because of its bias and authoritative nature is irrelevant. This is because as expected of every writer using the first person narrative approach, he or she should stamp an authority over the narrative. As for the bias nature of the work, every writer decides what he wants to do with his or her narrative.

Walker again reveals that Miss Angelou has the right instincts, which anyone who is given to prattling about his life seems to possess. Walker in his critical review develops the theory of "mythomania" and refers to it as Angelou's forceful power of narration. He actually suggests that this particular quality of Angelou to her narratives gives life to her stories and makes them seem so real to life. Walker suggests that this "mythomania" quality in Angelou's narration is something that "she applies cannily, preserving the fiction that one can recall and, from a distance, whole conversations and

surrounding thoughts - as if she were a reel of recording tape, consuming for later regurgitation a problematic life.”(p99) Further, Walker argues that Angelou is schooled in situation ethics, licensing them retroactively to cover her having been a prostitute and indulging in so many other immoral acts, and yet, she makes them seem almost enviable that she pulled them off so well.

In the February 1991 edition of Journal of Reading, Graham writes in “Making Language Sing: An interview with Maya Angelou” that Angelou explains personally that she deliberately chooses to write in a language that will be very universal. Graham (1991) questions Angelou to explain what she (Angelou) means by the choice of the word “universal” since she (Angelou) writes her novels in standard American English. Angelou explains that it is not the language type she is referring to but the simplicity of the language. Angelou adds that her choice of very simple words and familiar diction has made her novels universal. Angelou uses language that goes down well with all her readers, be it young or old, highly educated or less educated. She explains that in order to drum home her message further, she tries to achieve verisimilitude by enhancing her descriptive ability. Angelou describes incidents into its minutest detail using many adverbs and adjectives as far as possible so that vivid images are created. She explains that it is for the sake of enhancing her description and narration that she uses many metaphors, similes and some few examples of personifications and hyperboles that in totality help to explain her message of celebrating motherhood and enhancing the role of women in the institution of marriage.

Still on Angelou’s narrative style, Walker again suggests that Miss Angelou possesses an ear for folkways; the fact that they spawn abundantly in the warm stream of



narration, adding enough mother wit and humor to give the events a "rightness." To Walker, Angelou is to some extent coy, and never allows her readers a really good, voyeur's glimpse into the conjugal bed that several male characters enjoy with her; rather, she teases. It is important to say here that Walker is rather praising Angelou in this enterprise for not being so "raw" and "sexy" in her narration of incidents related to her bedroom, and to some extent, her "behind-closed-doors" interaction with her male bedfellows she comes into contact with during her relentless search for romantic love bliss encounters. Walker explains further that though the author is never mawkishly sentimental, she shows herself to have been, like most people, silly, only more so, than many of us will admit. Despite all these shortfalls in the life of Angelou, Walker concludes that she is still so proud, as depicted in her narratives. She stumbles, falls, but like the phoenix, she rises renewed and becomes whole again.

Suckernick (1980) also writes a review on Angelou's second autobiography Gather Together in my Name. In this review, Suckernick carefully criticizes the book as an entertaining piece of funny elements, and more specifically, what she calls "chain of anecdotes" that places too much importance on the tale and not the teller even though the other way round (where focus should be placed on the teller rather than the tale) is rather the correct option. Suckernick's review, to some extent, adds more value to the assertion made by Arensberg (1976). Arensberg is very critical on Angelou's work saying that the humour in the narrative helps to tone down the seriousness in the message, and this is no different from Lynn Suckernick's argument. Suckernick, therefore, believes that the "chain of anecdotes" makes the narrative lack the temperament needed to "linger and infuse [readers] long after the anecdotes are forgotten" (p12). Suckernick and Arensberg,

therefore, have the opinion that it is the funny elements (comic elements and pieces of anecdotes) Angelou injects into her narratives that help to sustain the interest of readers in their reading of each narrative from cover to cover.

Neubauer (1983) also presents her criticism of Angelou's narratives in the area of literary style three years after Lynn Suckernick's. This time round, she probably takes cue from Olney's critical theory of autobiography. Neubauer explains that to her, Angelou uses devices identified with writing fiction rather than autobiographies, resulting in a number of writers, including herself (Neubauer), classifying Angelou's narratives as "autobiographical fiction and not autobiographies". (Lupton, Maya Angelou, p29) As it can be recollected, Olney (1980) explains the difficulty of establishing autobiographical fiction from autobiography because of the possible unconditional blend of fantasy from fact. Olney had explained that a person's fantasy is as much a part of him or her as far as possible. Because of this assertion, it becomes clear that Angelou's use of elements from both fiction and fantasy in her narratives as asserted by Neubauer in her essay "Displacement..." is a direct acceptance of Olney's theory by Neubauer concerning the narratives. He adds finally, that Angelou may be employing "a rather personalized autobiographical style." (p27).

However, a positive review by Gottlieb (1974) in Readings on Maya Angelou who earlier in 1974 reviewed Angelou's first work praises Angelou's ability to write "like a song, and like the truth ...the product of a born writer's senses nourished on black church singing... and on literature" (p129). Gottlieb's review is a positive one because she is full of praise for Angelou concerning her literary achievement in the first autobiography. Gottlieb explains that in the first narrative, Angelou carefully presents

her issues in a very simple and real manner. Gottlieb confesses that the narrative gives her a real feel of the actual situations she would never have known about; the extent of the hardships, poverty, and injustices that existed in America during the first half of the twentieth century. To Gottlieb, the reality of the incidents are like the reality of the words found flowing in the lyrics of songs sung in a black church on Sundays.

O'Neale (1984) once again adds her voice to the commentaries on Angelou's autobiographical texts and this time, she comments briefly on Angelou's writing style. With specific highlights on the novels of Angelou, specifically her autobiographies, O'Neale believes that unlike her (Angelou's) poetry, which is a continuation of traditional oral expression in Afro-American literature, Angelou's prose follows classic techniques in non-poetic Western forms. She explains that the material in each book while chronologically marking Angelou's life is nonetheless arranged in loosely structured plot sequences, which are skillfully controlled. To expatiate further, she (O'Neale) uses the first autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings as an example to give the highlight of her point. She says that the tenuous psyche of a sensitive, withdrawn child is traumatically jarred by rape, an act she categorically refers to as 'treacherous' and from which neither the reader nor the protagonist recover at the end of the book. From her viewpoint, her (Angelou's) uncles' "justified" revenge upon the rapist, and her years of readjustment in a closed world of speechlessness despite the warm nurturing of her grandmother, her grand-uncle, her beloved brother Bailey, and the entire Stamps community are a clear display of catharsis. Certainly to her, every reader should share some sympathy for young Angelou at that stage of the story where she

evokes emotions of the reader.

Again, O'Neale pinpoints that after her (Angelou's) reluctant second reunion with her vivacious mother and even her absurdly unlucky pregnancy at the end, she does not escape the reader's anticipatory wonder. The reason why she says this is that the act of rape by a trusted adult is narrated so fast because Angelou herself says in Caged Bird that while raping her "he (Mr. Freeman) was moving so fast and his heart was beating so hard that she was afraid that he would die." (p98) When Mr. Freeman subsides, however, so does Maya Angelou's fright. O'Neale's review shows how Angelou stylistically approaches her narration of incidents with style. In using the rape incident of Caged Bird to highlight this, O'Neale's readers turn to get the picture of a fast moving activity which has no feeling for the victim (Angelou); rather it displays selfishness and wickedness on the part of the perpetrator (Mr. Freeman). O'Neale's review, therefore, exposes the extent to which certain Black people can go to take advantage of weaklings around them to satisfy their own selfish needs in the event when they themselves cannot stand up to face their own destiny in a racially oppressive society. Mr. Freeman's action of raping young Angelou, according to O'Neale, attests to this fact.

Braxton (1989) is next to add her voice to the Angelou reviews in the area of Angelou's literary style. In her essay "A Song of Transcendence: Maya Angelou," she carefully likens Angelou's use of language, suspended moments of consciousness, and detail to that of Zora Neale Hurston and Era Bell Thompson, concluding that "it is perhaps the most aesthetically satisfying autobiography written by a black woman in this period" (p128). In fact, her review gives further meaning to Lupton's argument about the relevance of the series of events and fragments that show what happens in real life and

Braxton cannot help but to agree more. Braxton believes that the fragmented events narrated by Angelou are more like issues that occur in our everyday lives, making Angelou's autobiographies look so real. She pinpoints to instances in the narratives like the rape of young Angelou by Mr. Freeman, the revenge on Freeman by Maya Angelou's uncles, the teenage pregnancy of Maya Angelou, Maya Angelou as a teenage mother, the denial of the supposed father to own up to his responsibility of accepting the pregnancy, among a host of others she mentions. Braxton believes that these issues were happening during the days of Angelou's childhood and they are still happening in our days as well. She finally ends by saying that though Angelou's autobiographies tell her readers about her (Angelou's) life into its minutest detail, they help mirror society as it was then and is today. To Braxton, language and detail are the yardsticks to Angelou's success in the area of style. Making reference to Zora Neale Hurston, for instance, Braxton argues that she does a great job with the use of language and detailed description of characters and events in her novel Their Eyes Were Watching God. Braxton believes that Angelou's use of techniques like episodic series of events, detailed description and language is the main source of the success of Maya Angelou's narratives.

Nilson (1990), another critic of Angelou remarks a few months after the publication of Angelou's third volume of autobiography, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas that Angelou came out with a highly acclaimed third part of her autobiography which to her does not need to be read as a continuation of the other two volumes, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and Gather Together in My Name, although people who have read those books will be especially interested in the new one. Nilson makes it known that besides the always-present Angelou zest and style, the value

of the book is that it covers the period of her life when she makes the transition from being part-time clerk in a record store to being "somebody." Allan Pace Nilson claims that the part of the book that fascinated her the most is the recounting of her tour as a featured dancer in 'Porgy and Bess' when it toured Italy, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Egypt. Nilson sees the third volume as more of a travelogue than any normal story. The reason for this assertion by Nilson is that most of the events that Angelou narrates in this third text are about her travels in Europe. However, one very important thing worth recognizing about Nilson's review of the third volume is his declaration that this third volume begins Angelou's rise into fame and stardom; a turning point in her life when she begins her actual search for an identity. Finally, Nilson in this review of the third volume suggests that because of the cast of characters, Angelou's keen sense of observation, and her lively writing, this is no ordinary travelogue. He said thus: "For readers who have a harder time getting into poetry than into prose, this book might make an exciting introduction to Angelou's poetry." (p21)

According to Lewis (1991), Angelou's success in The Heart of a Woman is due to her style of writing. Lewis also believes that Angelou performs a great task in making her narratives evoke the emotions of her readers. Lewis, therefore, is writing along the same lines of thought with critics like Sondra O'Neale (1984). Lewis explains that the uniqueness of Angelou's narrative style of writing can be identified in her use of simple diction, her blend of both formal American standard of English and the informal African-American slang, use of some figurative language forms like allusion, similes, metaphors, flashbacks, among some others to pass on her story to her readers. Lewis believes that Angelou handled these techniques so well that they draw the readers'

emotions closer to the story line.

On another platform, Lupton (1998) in analyzing the first five volumes of the narrative in respect to the autobiographical tradition, Lupton (1998) writes an essay “Singing the Black Mother: Maya Angelou and Autobiographical Continuity” and in that he concludes that Angelou is considered a major contemporary author and contributor to the black autobiographical tradition whose literary reputation is based on her volume of autobiographical series and her poetry. Her storytelling abilities are marked with wisdom and humor as she reveals herself to the scrutiny of the reader with an often painful but honest candour. Angelou’s memoirs inspire hope in the face of adversity and reveal the resiliency of the human spirit as she “leads her readers to recognize that the human spirit needs not cave in to ignorance, hatred, and oppression” (p14).

Still on Lupton’s discussion of Angelou’s literary style, she writes in Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion that “the writing techniques Angelou uses in her autobiographies are the same devices used in writing fiction: vividly conceived characters and careful development of theme, setting, plot, and language” (p30). Another feature of Angelou’s work that Lupton identifies is the employment of the serial autobiography style to convey her story. Lupton contends that “the volumes of Angelou’s series far exceed the standard number of volumes in an autobiography ...so that they are in a sub-genre known as ‘serial autobiographies’” (p32). One of the foremost examples of serial autobiography in the black literary tradition that Lupton makes reference to is Frederick Douglass’s two-part autobiography Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and My Bondage and My Freedom, published in 1845 and 1855, respectively. There is a freedom, a continuous fluctuation in the serial form of

autobiographical writing that the single form does not allow, but there is also the increased need for transitions, cross-references, continuity, and discipline (p32). Lupton concludes that Angelou expertly uses all that is needed to write the serial autobiography; even though she has done the unexpected. She adds that Angelou herself is quoted as saying that she enjoys the “stretching” required in going from book to book (p32).

In a similar analysis made about the form of autobiography that Angelou has adopted, Fox-Genovese (1990) argues on the subject of structure in Angelou’s autobiographical text. To her, the text is that of a journey or an odyssey in a quest for self-knowledge, self-identity, and “home.” The first volume, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, finds the child Maya crisscrossing the United States from place to place with no permanent place of home. Fox-Genovese, therefore, explains that Angelou’s literary journey begins with a literal journey as she travels from California to her Grandmother Henderson’s home in Stamps, Arkansas, when she is three years old. The journey will continue eastward from California to New York, ending finally on the Mother Continent of Africa throughout the next volumes of her autobiographical text. Angelou’s linear journey, in search of home and self-definition, according to Fox-Genovese, comes full circle when she realizes that no matter how much she loves Africa, the root of her ancestry, it is not her true home, and so she returns “home” to America. Fox-Genovese, thus examines the texts as a literal journey conveyed through a literary vein from chapter to chapter, book to book through a vertical linear progression all in a search for stability and home that will bring meaning to Angelou’s life.

Lupton (1998) comes out with a similar argument to that of O’Neale’s presentation after her wide-ranging investigation of Angelou’s works. In her work titled



Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion, Lupton sees authenticity in the “episodic series of fragments that mirror the kind of discord found in actual life” (p78). Lupton argues almost on the same lines as O’Neale (1984). As it would be recalled, O’Neale mentions the loosely structured plots, which she (O’Neale) asserts are skillfully controlled by Angelou. This issue by O’Neale is authenticated by Lupton when she says that the loose nature of the arrangements of the plot recognizes a simple but basic universal fact of life: that life will not always be straight and perfect as one will want it to be, and that there will surely be ups and downs. Thus, since the narratives recount the life of Angelou with all its good and bad times, especially with Angelou trying hard to overcome the bad ones, her use of the loosely connected plot sequences, according to Lupton, is timely and appropriate.

## VI. THEORY OF FEMINISM

Feminism is the belief that women have equal political, social, sexual, intellectual and economic rights to men. It involves various movements, theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference that advocate equality for women, and that campaign for women’s rights and issues. Three main waves make up the evolution of Feminism: the nineteenth and twentieth century making up the first wave; the second being the 1960’s and 70’s, and the third wave extends from the 1990’s to the present time. These periods in the history of Feminism became movements from which feminist literary theory evolved. The first period concerned itself mainly with women’s right to vote. The second focused on the women’s liberation movement which

campaigns for social and legal equality for women. The third wave is a continuation of and a reaction to the perceived failures of the movement of the second wave.

It is important to note here that Angelou's texts in autobiography are fashioned along the lines of the second and third waves. In all six texts, the two major subjects of motherhood and marriage clearly display her association with the Civil Rights Movement, which though was not gender specific, justifies the explanation of the fight against social and legal inequality, an area where women's condition is paramount.

Feminist literary theory is a complex, dynamic area of study that draws from a wide range of critical theories, including psychoanalysis, Marxism, cultural materialism, anthropology and structuralism. Although Feminist Literary theory is often described simply as the use of feminist principles and techniques to analyze the textual constructions of gendered meaning, feminist' definitions of gender and of feminism have undergone a number of significant alterations since the early 1970's. By adopting already existing feminist insights and applying them in new ways, literary theorists transform them, thus creating an increasingly diversified field of study.

Feminist literary theory is divided into four main components that focus in various ways on gender-based issues: an analysis of representations of women in male-authored texts; "gyno-criticism" referring to the development of a unique female aesthetic and an alternative women's literary tradition (Showalter, 1989); gender studies or an analysis of the ways all texts, including those written by men are marked by gender; and finally, an examination of how racial, sexual and class differences among women explain previous models of gendered reading and writing. One has to realize, however,

that these four components are variedly interconnected. This is because they represent issues which often occur simultaneously.

There is also Black feminism which argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. Forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore race can discriminate against many people, including women, through racial bias. Out of this, it became evident that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. One of the theories that evolved out of this movement is “Womanism” in Walker (1983). Alice Walker and other Womanists point out that black women experience a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white women. They point to the emergence of Black feminism after earlier movements led by white middle-class women largely ignored oppression based on race and class.

Collins (2000) defines Black feminism, in Black Feminist Thought, as including women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society. Black feminists contend that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. There is a long-standing and important alliance between postcolonial feminists, which overlaps with transnational feminism and third-world feminism, and black feminists. Both have struggled for recognition, not only from men in their own culture, but also from Western feminists.

Recent Black Feminism is a political and social movement that grew out of Black women's feelings of discontent with both the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. One of the foundation texts of Black Feminism is Mary Ann Weathers' "Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force", published in 1969 in the radical feminist magazine No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation. Weathers states her belief that "Women's Liberation should be considered as a strategy for an eventual tie-up with the entire revolutionary movement consisting of women, men, and children." (p54). However, she posits that "(w)e women must start this thing rolling" because "All women suffer oppression, even white women, particularly poor white women, and especially Indian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Oriental and Black American women whose oppression is tripled by any of the above-mentioned. But we do have females' oppression in common. This means that we can begin to talk to other women with this common factor and start building links with them and thereby build and transform the revolutionary force we are now beginning to amass" (p54). The discussion continues with an argument for a specificity of oppression against Black women. The work opposing both racism and capitalism states that: "The black woman is demanding a new set of female definitions and recognition of herself as a citizen, companion and confidant, not a matriarchal villain or a step stool baby-maker." (p56) Role integration advocates the complementary recognition of man and woman, not the competitive recognition of one.

Not only did the Civil Rights Movement primarily focus only on the oppression of black men, but many black women faced severe sexism within Civil Rights groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Feminist Movement

focused on the problems faced by white women. For instance, earning the power to work outside of the home was not an accomplishment for black feminists; they had been working all along. Neither movement confronted the issues that concerned black women specifically. Because of their intersectional position, black women were being systematically ignored by both movements: "All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men but Some of Us are Brave" (p xvi), as quoted in the introduction to a 1982 book by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith.

Black women began creating theory and developing a new movement which spoke to the combination of problems they were battling, including sexism, racism, and classism. Davis (1989) for instance, shows that while Afro-American women were suffering from compulsory sterilization programs, white women were subjected to multiple unwilled pregnancies and had to clandestinely abort. White (1989) expresses her belief that feminists need to revise the movement's relationship to the concept of "the family"; to acknowledge that, for Women of Color, "the family is not only a source of male dominance, but a source of resistance to racism as well." (p239)

Smith (2000) states her opinion in her introduction to the reissue of the 1983 Black feminist anthology, Home Girls, that "to this day most Black women are unwilling to jeopardize their 'racial credibility' (as defined by Black men) to address the realities of sexism." (p xiv) Smith also notes that "even fewer are willing to bring up homophobia and heterosexism, which are, of course, inextricably linked to gender oppression." (p xiv)

Angelou's texts completely identify with Showalter's unique female aesthetic figure and the theories developed in the discussions of Walker, Collins, Davis, White and

Weathers. Angelou presents a female character in her portrayal of the roles played by her own character; Momma Henderson, her grandmother; and Mrs. Bertha Flowers, her surrogate mother. Mention is also made of the contributory roles of other black women who performed very impressive mothering roles for Angelou's son. It is clear that Showalter's "gyno-criticism" philosophy of the aesthetic female character is ably represented in Angelou's narratives.

Angelou again lends her narratives to be subjected to the final critical component of Black feminist theory. She examines the existent differences prevailing between women because of sex, race, and class play very important roles in helping shape Angelou through her formative years to adulthood. Angelou mentions the choice she makes as a teenage girl to experience sexual intercourse for the first time though she knows that society will frown upon such a choice, the choice she makes to keep her pregnancy without going through an abortion, among several other decisions she makes. The mere fact that she boldly tells of certain otherwise "shameful" and "forbidden" practices in which she gets herself involved as a youth, like her engagement as a prostitute, girlfriend of a "pimp", conveyor of stolen goods, among others is quite unusual for a woman telling her own story. Most of these incidents would have been portrayed in a very colourful but probably in a very derogatory way by some male authors to exalt male chauvinism. As a feminist, Angelou has an interest of showing how feminism can be exalted using such stories, as unpleasant as they may sound.

It can thus be said that Angelou's narratives clearly display aspects of the four divisions of feminist literary theory at one stage or another and lend themselves to fall within the confines of criticism in the area of Black feminist theory. Judging from the

presentation of the subjects of motherhood and marriage, one gets a feel that feminist tendencies are evenly deployed in all six narratives.

## VII. SUMMARY OF REVIEWS

To conclude on the review, it can be said that it primarily tackled the following major issues: the impact of Angelou's childhood memories in shaping her adult life and the subjects of motherhood and marriage. On the childhood memories, the seemingly similar and divergent views expressed by the writers all boil down to the fact that Angelou's experiences as a child helped prepare her for the tough challenges of her future roles as a mother and wife. In the area of motherhood, writers proposed that the over-protective attitude of Angelou for her son may probably emanate from the initial parental neglect that she and her older brother suffered at the hands of their biological parents. Writers again pointed out that the fantasies of marital bliss that lead to her movement from one marriage to the other did, of course, begin from her memories she had from childhood when she fancied Hollywood movies.

The related literature on motherhood and marriage mentioned the various instances where motherhood and marriage are identified in the narratives. The writers explained that the motherhood roles played by other African-American women who helped take care of Angelou's son, the roles of the following people: Mrs. Bertha Flowers, Momma Henderson, Vivian Baxter Johnson and Angelou herself were given prominence as primary avenues to celebrate womanhood. On marriage, the related literature highlighted that the movement of Angelou from one marriage to the other, though represented the never-to-attain independence that she had long sought after, was a

period of education for her. Thus, she learns that in the real world fantasies do not always come true, especially in marriage. Angelou, according to her critics, learned some life lessons the hard way, so that she comes to realize that when Cinderella meets her dream prince, she does not after all live happily ever after. Consequently, the major point worth noting is that no matter the challenges a woman goes through as a mother and a wife, she can put up a strong sense of determination and will-power to succeed in celebrating womanhood at the end.

Finally, it becomes clear from the reviews examined so far that they confirm existing knowledge in the study field of autobiography. On the four major issues reviewed: effect of childhood memories, motherhood, marriage, and literary style, it can be deduced that all the writers mentioned agree that the confusion and wandering of Angelou as a child, mother and wife clearly represent one thing – search for meaning and stability in life. The contributory writers' unison in agreement, and the additional opinions that the thesis adds help to confirm existing knowledge in the study field of autobiography.

This chapter has been examining the opinions of some writers about some major issues in Angelou's autobiographies. The next chapter, however, will examine Angelou's treatment of the trope of motherhood and some literary techniques she employs to present her narratives.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE SUBJECT OF MOTHERHOOD IN ANGELOU'S NARRATIVES

Maya Angelou is one writer who has contributed immensely to the genre of autobiography in America. She has to her credit six autobiographies that all point to or depict the effort of a single individual to reach the peak of survival in a world where only the fittest can survive. In each of these autobiographies, her life story is narrated in a very candid way without any reservations, whatsoever. As a contributor to the genre of autobiography, she expertly probes into the interior self of her main character and narrates her story in a very subtle way. By so doing, she creates the platform for her readers to vividly understand every bit of her characters' actions. As a writer, Angelou employs humour and self-mockery. This, to a large extent, distinguishes her from other writers. To realize this, she uses comic elements and incidents as well as issues related to mockery of herself on many occasions in her autobiography.

One other area where her uniqueness as a writer is displayed is her linguistic sensibility. Angelou carefully presents language in both a formal and informal way. Angelou presents the traditional African American accent alongside very formal usage of the American dialect in her autobiography. The traditional African-American accent gives her readers the enabling environment to have a real feel of the incidents being narrated by Angelou at any point in the story. Angelou can again be accorded mistress of the genre because of her ability to balance the quest for human individuality with the general condition of Black Americans. She does this carefully with her exploitative use of detail any time she sets to narrating a particular incident.

By boldly and, most importantly, carefully exposing issues such as rape,

pedophilia and incestuous abuse within the black community, Maya Angelou breaks new grounds in the whole area of autobiography. It is clear that she is not the only person who has successfully done this within the black community as far as prose writing is concerned. Though it is not written using the style of the autobiography, the Bluest Eye of Toni Morrison (1970) does a similar exposition when Pecola Breedlove is abused by her own father, Cholly Breedlove. Maya Angelou again uses her maturing understanding of community and family to project an individual's attempt to maintain relentlessly, a sense of self-esteem within a societal group that is undergoing a cultural metamorphosis or transition. This chapter of the study seeks to focus on Angelou's motherhood role as a controlling device, which helps to propel her presentation of the theme of identity. Again, the various literary devices Angelou uses to realize this goal will also be discussed. There will be a discussion in how racial, class and gender oppression affected Angelou's experience of motherhood in the United States in the 1940's through to the 1960's the period during, which Maya Angelou becomes a mother.

The significance of motherhood, as would be realised, is a unifying element in Angelou's autobiographies and collection of essays. This is mainly because the interplay between mother and child creates thematic continuity in many respects. For example, at the end of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, readers realize that it is more or less a mark of the beginning of Angelou's life transition from being little Marguerite to young mother Angelou. In Gather Together in my Name, the beginning of and real struggles of Angelou's life as teenage mother are recounted. In Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas Angelou traces or recounts the problems she faced with her sub-conscious mind about her continual blend of her pursuit of success as an entertainer and

the guilt she always felt as a mother who periodically left her child in someone else's care so as to ensure a better future for herself and this same child. The Heart of a Woman, however, moves a little forward from such incidents that she recounts in Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, even though they are not too different from them, to incidents regarding the life of a more mature woman. The last two autobiographies, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes and A Song Flung up from Heaven frantically record the life of Angelou and her son, Guy who have both become adults and have managed to establish a healthy sense of balance between dependence and independence. Here, she narrates when she leaves him at Ghana's premier university, University of Ghana while she returns to the United States of America.

This study explores the feminist undertones prevalent in the texts and its application to the themes under discussion to a major length. The assumption that women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially and psychologically will be looked at from the point of view of Angelou whose writing appears to support the relevance of this assumption and makes every effort to rise above the challenge. Angelou has proven to be helpful as an Afro-American feminist who reveals the political, social, and theoretical limitations inherent in white mainstream feminists' neglect of cultural experience different from their own. Angelou succeeds in using her texts to analyze the ways in which gender oppressions cannot be understood differently from racial oppression. Using her narratives, Angelou explains to her reading public that a black woman suffers double oppression from the masculine world by being a black woman. Angelou defies the Victorian ideal of the "true woman" who is supposed to be submissive, fragile and sexually pure. She categorically uses her situation to single

out black and poor women whose existence meant survival through hard physical labour, untold hardships throughout their lives or through a very major part of their lives, and who are vulnerable to rape and to sexual exploitation in many aspects of life.

These areas singled out are clearly portrayed by Angelou when she narrates the hardships she faces in her formative years and even as a single mother; when as a young girl, she is raped by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman; and when she is sexually exploited by her boyfriend during her days as a prostitute. Since Feminists have the intention of bringing value to the works by and about women's issues to awaken society to the plight of women, Angelou succeeds in contributing her quota as a feminist. It is clear from the narratives that she raises lots of issues about women's plight within the larger patriarchal American society and goes the length to defy the chains of this patriarchy using the two subjects of motherhood and marriage.

In this chapter of the study, there would be extensive discussions on Angelou's motherhood roles displayed through her autobiographies. There will again be a discussion of how race, class and gender oppressions affect the experience of motherhood in the United States in the 1940's and 1960's. These basically would be related to the first three volumes of her autobiographies. This section of the thesis argues that Angelou's experiences as a working class mother nullifies the myth around the socially-accepted white people's notion of the domesticated mother, a notion inherited from the Victorian ideals where the mother stays at home to perform household chores mainly while the man goes to work. It again goes a long way to show how Angelou's struggles as a single mother undermine, once again, the white notion of the supremacy of the nuclear family structure. These points go a long way to challenge the notion of true

motherhood, a more or less elite European perception that has shaped the thoughts of people about family life in the United States. One scholar Siphokazi Koyana (2002) refers to this notion of true motherhood as “the cult of domesticity”. This was a notion developed in the mid- nineteenth century and this portrayed the idea that the true woman is that female who lives in a state of confinement, or better still, a state of self-containment within her immediate or nuclear family structure. By this notion, therefore, certain specific, separate roles for men and women have been assigned to both men and women. For women, there is a total economic dependence on men. In such a way, therefore, the concept of motherhood is seen as a true human occupation.

Angelou carefully inscribes in her autobiographies certain feminist perspectives as a way of carefully reflecting on black women’s roles as workers within the family and society at large. This, therefore, helps to bring into sharp focus the ideologies that serve to project women’s experiences as mothers and wives and working mothers at the same time. From the very beginning of her experiences as a teenage mother, Angelou struggles with the need to work so as to earn a living to provide for herself and her baby. With her racial and class background, it becomes less surprising or none at all that Angelou’s experiences of motherhood are intertwined with work. She thus uses her narratives of her life as an effective attempt to reveal the multiple and dynamic interconnections between households, that is the house and family and the larger political economy.

It is important to state that Angelou is a black American woman who comes from a long tradition of feminist independence and responsibility. As can be recalled historically, slavery never allowed for domesticity among slave women; slave women were made to work in the plantations, houses or fields. This, to a large extent, traces the

genesis of independence and responsibility of the black American female within the black American Community. Angelou is raised by two women. First, she is raised by her father's mother, Momma Henderson who was a daughter of ex-slaves. Momma Henderson is a mother and a self-sufficient businesswoman in her own right. Angelou gives birth to her son Guy, while she is still living with her biological mother, Vivian Baxter who also happens to be a self-sufficient entrepreneur in her own right. Of the two women who controlled Angelou in her early years, it is clearly revealed in her narration that they each did not live with their husbands. Momma Henderson is a widow and Vivian Baxter is divorced. In both houses where Angelou grows up, there is no male income provider. Vivian Baxter, Angelou's biological mother often has live-in-lovers who help pay for her upkeep, but Angelou reveals that she (Vivian Baxter) never stops earning her own income. Even when Vivian is married to a successful businessman, she continues to earn her own income by renting out rooms in her fourteen (14)-room apartment. It is quite important to note that in Vivian Baxter and Momma Henderson's homes, even if there were male breadwinners, the women would still have to work to add to or supplement the often way-too-low wages that internal colonialism ensured black men to earn. The term internal colonialism as used in this sense implied a system that existed in the United States, which fostered discriminatory barriers and wage scales that kept minorities at the bottom of the economic scale, doing the dirtiest and most menial jobs. It becomes obvious that a growing individual like Angelou in such deplorable black American household conditions of life has no future or for that matter an identity of her own. Thus, it becomes obvious why she had to struggle through all odds to gain her economic freedom just like her paternal grandmother and her biological mother.

For black women and women of other racially-oppressed groups, the issue of motherhood was, and had always been inseparably linked with both productive and reproductive work. Collins (2000) explained that for white folks in America during Angelou's childhood days, the issue of motherhood was usually associated with domesticity and reproductive labour; that is work inside the home, ideal to the Victorian arrangement. Due to the historical links that blacks and whites have to slavery, work was associated with social class and race in the American culture. According to the domestic ideology of the conceptual notion of true womanhood which referred to white women as "domestic angels and mothers of superior moral quality" ladies did not engage themselves in very hard work and if they did were not to appear to have done any work at all. (p201). Black mothers expressed themselves in what Collins refers to as the trope of "the enraged mother". Black women in this regard, according to Collins (2000) were supposed to be tough-minded in the course of providing for and protecting their children. This, obviously, is due to the ready assumption that America is a dangerous place for children and mothers.

Angelou, as a young struggling mother is clearly depicted in her autobiography as someone who has much knowledge about what was going on around her. Her tough mindedness is exhibited in one clear instance when she stands firm by her son Guy at the latter's school. The white-coloured school administrators tried to discriminate against her son at school saying he has been cursing and Angelou would not just allow that to happen. In her own words, Angelou proclaims that she knew it was one sure way of giving her only son an assurance that he can always count on her for survival, love, care, support and, most importantly, protection. Angelou confesses in her writing that she

knew that incident was one sure way of asserting her grounds and individuality, first as a co-equal to the white school administrators and, secondly, as a loving mother who cares for and supports the interest of her son. The narration of that incident ends with the decision of Angelou to transfer her son, Guy from that school to another school despite the discomfort and all that she is aware may evolve from that decision. However, she confirms her happiness about her ability to prevent the white-coloured school administrators from humiliating, chastising and degrading her only son.

In yet another episode, Angelou clearly narrates the incident of her mother Vivian Baxter's ultimate defensive and protective attitude towards her, especially at the hotel. This incident goes a long way to develop the trope of the enraged mother. When the hotel administrator discovered that Angelou is black, they told her there is no space available, her mother Vivian Baxter Johnson came to her aid. Vivian Baxter's strong will and threats cow down the hotel attendants into instant submission. She manages to establish her bravery using the philosophy of the enraged mother. Collins (2000) mentions yet another reason why black mothers had to assume the role of the enraged mother. She explained that during the time of slavery, black women had to work just like their male counterparts on the farms and prepare chores at home.

Again, Collins mentions the term "mother work" and explains in no uncertain terms that it shows that the institution of motherhood and work in the black and other oppressed communities are inseparable. Collins does not end her explanation there but further shows how the white feminists' double-split consciousness of the public sphere (economic and political discourse) from domestic (private, non-economic and non-political) regrettably distinguishes one domain as "male" and the other as "female" in a



manner that disregards black women's realities. Working class and racially-oppressed women often work at home in many income-earning activities. Some of these income earning activities include, for example, letting out rooms, as we see both Vivian Baxter Johnson, Angelou's mother and Momma Henderson, Angelou's grandmother doing, child-minding as we see young mother Angelou and Momma Henderson doing, sewing, washing and pressing laundry, and a lot other things like we see Maya Angelou doing at night club dancing floors, bus terminals, among a host of other things. It can, therefore, be said, especially using young mother Angelou as a point of discussion, that black mothers can never exclusively be domesticated. It is very important to say that contrary to the white notion of "true womanhood" that was still rife or upheld in the middle of the twentieth century when productive work was still seen as separable from motherhood, black mothers always made work part of their daily existence.

In Angelou's case as a jobless poor black young girl, she had the option of seeking government assistance and support in looking after herself and her fatherless child. Because of her strong will, she rejects the options of seeking government assistance and support in bringing up her child, even though she is still a very young mother. Angelou makes this decision due to her reliance on her experience of black culture, which integrates self-reliance and motherhood, even though it becomes clear from the reading of her autobiography that Angelou's fights and struggles to ascertain an identity for herself and child within the African American culture. Her decision leads her to work situations that highlight how the racist economic system, capitalism drives black women into a kind of poverty that is not only financial but at times also moral. In Gather Together In My Name, the sequel to I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou

writes about the problems she faced as a working teenage mother, a black girl with no professional background to whom only the most menial jobs are available. Readers see Angelou living along the periphery of society, exploring the perimeter of “the cage”. This occurs simply because the young Maya Angelou has no skill and she refuses her mother, Vivian Baxter’s offer to take care of her son so that she (Angelou) can continue with her education.

It is important to note here that Angelou’s rejection of her mother, Vivian Baxter’s offer to help her during a time when she needed it most is driven by idealism, feigned independence and pride, and most probably, lack of trust for her mother. The issue of lack of trust becomes understandable once readers remember that Vivian Baxter has earlier on during Angelou’s childhood neglected her two young children; Angelou and her older brother. Since the young Angelou believes that her present predicament of being a young jobless uninformed teenage mother could have been avoided if her mother, Vivian Baxter has been there to tutor her about the imminence of such unfortunate situations in the life of a black girl, Angelou’s distrust of her mother in the area of child upbringing deepens; hence she rejects her offer and takes upon herself the task to struggle to gain an identity for herself and her son. Ironically, however, when the going gets tougher, readers later realize that Angelou leaves her son Guy with Vivian Baxter, this same mother whom she had initially displayed a vehement distrust of. In fact, Angelou leaves Guy in the care of his grandmother Vivian Baxter for a whole year when she had to go on an international tour with the “Porgy and Bess” group across Europe. The situation can also somehow be explained in another dimension. During the time, Angelou had lived close to her mother for quite some time and probably had grown

confident that she could after all be a good mother when offered the chance. The other obvious reason was economic. The “Porgy and Bess” tour of Europe was the first real traveling experience outside the U.S.A that Angelou has ever had and a way of amassing some money for her savings that will keep her and her child going for quite some time before she gets another job.

During the post-world war II period, poverty was very rife in America and many parts of the world. This made a lot of people resort to doing all forms and sorts of jobs available and unavailable to make money, so as to enable them run away from the strings and corridors of poverty. In fact, poverty became rife at the doorsteps of many people. In the wake of this situation, therefore, there emerged gamblers, prostitutes, black marketeers and a lot others. For Maya Angelou, it is such an environment that she found herself in and so she realized the utmost need to find a means of survival to support her growing baby boy, Guy and of course, herself. This invariably leads young mother Maya Angelou to make some quick and easy choices; she works as a prostitute with the hope of raising enough money for herself and to rescue her sugar-daddy boyfriend from debt. Angelou did have another reason, other than just raising money to keep her going and to rescue her sugar daddy pimp from debt; she hopes that doing what she did would make him (the sugar daddy pimp) divorce his wife and ultimately marry her (Angelou); something he never did. This particular circumstance exposes in very clear terms how some black men, and this time not the racist white environment and system, have willingly extorted and abused their black female counterparts and, more especially, undermined their ability to work.

In Angelou's autobiographies, the lack of skill and the racist practice of excluding blacks from meaningful employment are shown clearly by Angelou's work experiences. The racist practice of excluding blacks from meaningful employment became a major reason for blacks always having feelings of despair, engaging in drug abuse and other violent activities, attempting suicides, and probably preferring to work outside the home. In her autobiographies, Angelou spells out a very clear example of the practice of excluding black mothers from serious constructive economic employment when she recalls the incident where a white supervisor fails (her) in a simple test that is supposed to qualify her as a trainee operator. With this failure, Angelou is seen ending up as a money collector in bus terminals waiting upon white girls who happened to be her classmates. It becomes obvious that Angelou uses this incident as one of her reasons for protesting against certain injustices in the system like racism. Angelou goes through some other forms of racial discrimination in some of her narratives and she narrates them as a form of protest.

Angelou records these issues throughout her autobiographies. She, therefore, uses her own life as evidence to show that conditions that occurred when one became a working mother rapidly improved when poor people are given jobs to make them earn money to live decently. The jobs may be demeaning and tough but they may still help to improve upon the life of the working mother. For instance Angelou gains a job to scrape paints off cars by hand, and she reveals that this becomes very helpful to her in her quest to find money to make her son, Guy and herself happy. Despite the toughness of the job, working mothers like Maya Angelou are rapidly improved by way of their hitherto poor or bad economic situation. For instance, when Angelou is given an opportunity to appear

in “Porgy and Bess”, her life is improved drastically for the better. Maya Angelou’s financial situation from this time becomes better and thereafter, her whole life becomes fulfilling. She is now better able to provide for herself and her son Guy.

Angelou actually lists a long list of normal jobs that she engages herself in to make ends meet. These are jobs meant, in fact, for those on the fringes of society. These menial jobs include salesgirl in a music record shop, where her luck shines so that she meets the first man who proposes to marry her, waitress, a short-order cook, R. L Poole’s dance partner and conveyor of stolen clothes. In fact, she graduates a bit from the very menial jobs she is engaged in to some menial jobs, which are more respectable than conveying stolen goods. She becomes an assistant in a Real Estate office and later an assistant in a dress shop. One thing becomes clear about Angelou’s long list of menial jobs. It clearly reveals that it is a false notion or assumption that working outside the home would enable women to get themselves liberated from their economic dependency on men.

In fact, during the 1960’s some people believed in the assumption that when women of colour and working class white women work outside their homes, they gain an economic liberation from the total dependency on their male counterparts. This actually makes some sense in that women are able to gain some money to buy anything they wanted, when, hitherto, they would depend on their men to determine their ability to purchase that thing or not. However, one thing again is very clear. The argument still remains that probably it is the working class white women who are able to gain this form of liberation because the economic and racial institutions allow for them to get good jobs that pay well. However, women of colour are frustrated by the system such that they gain

only menial jobs that pay them little money as remuneration which could not take them through the month; hence making them remain dependent on their male counterparts. It is even very ironical to note that such husbands that these women seemingly depend on are themselves victims of the system and so, are themselves exploited in low-paying jobs.

The assumption is that white middle class feminists limited their definition of work to high paying careers. The result of this assumption, therefore, is that a very high majority of black women and other women of colour and working-class white women did not identify themselves with any particular movement that failed to address their desire to quit working, since the work they were and are still doing was not totally liberating and fulfilling. Early feminist movements only brought out reasons why women, especially those of colour continued to be exploited by the system and their male counterpart. However, these movements failed to arm the majority of women with strategies against economic exploitation and dehumanization. Most importantly in this regard, Angelou's introduction of the issue of racially and economically oppressed women who are mothers and also work which is a revision of white middle-class female or maternal discourse is as necessary as her redefinition of family. It is somehow an addition to the discussion of feminists about strategizing women's outlook to solving the problems of economic exploitation and dehumanization. The issue of women mothers who work, otherwise called "motherwork" is an important issue discussed at all levels of African American Literature. Collins (2000) helps readers to understand "motherwork" in her book Black Feminist Thought as all women who assist biological mothers by sharing motherhood responsibilities to bring up a child while the biological mother finds a job to keep herself, child and, if possible, family going. Angelou thus adds this to the discussion of feminists

so that if the issue of motherwork is clearly implemented, black women and other poor women may help themselves fight economic oppression and other forms of disadvantages, which are their lot.

The issue of “other mothers” as depicted by Collins (2000) appears in most parts of Angelou’s autobiographies. It would have been very difficult or almost impossible for Angelou to work full-time if she did not have her mother and community of other willing-to-help women around her to rely on for assistance with the care of her child. It is not only women who help mothers to bring up and take care of children; some men who are willing to help, which of course include some husbands who are available, also form part of the crop of people that help make motherwork an easy task and a reality. In Angelou’s autobiographies, we see some men taking the challenging responsibility to be caretakers of Guy Johnson, Angelou’s son. One thing, however, is very clear as far as the discussion is concerned. This is realized in the fact that Angelou boldly uses the issue of motherwork as an aspect of motherhood to define an identity for herself and all black women in this regard. Angelou implicitly shows her identification with the black community where the feel or sense of belongingness to a community is well entrenched. Angelou relies basically on other mothers, especially in the upbringing and caretaking of her son, Guy because the extended family in black communities includes even people outside one’s line of kinship who willingly display or show a sense of loyalty and obligation. It is based on this explanatory premise that Angelou comfortably leaves her son, Guy, in the care of different care providers or friends while she goes on searching for a new job which is quite sustainable. It is quite important to say that this sense of obligation, community and yet again the tendency and love to share the responsibilities of

motherhood are all values which, most importantly, have ensured the survival of many African families. This is probably, one of the numerous legacies, I believe, that the early African slaves carried over to the Americas and left for their descendants, including Maya Angelou. Clearly, it becomes obvious that Angelou is able to use this to explore the theme of identity fully.

On the same level of demonstrating to her readers the traditional centrality of Patricia Hill Collins' othermothers theory in the role of black motherhood, Angelou challenges the notion of the west that children are property and she helps to demonstrate the importance of sharing one's children with other women in the community. White women in the west have long had the notion that their children are to be protected from all other people except the parents. They do not leave their children in the care of anybody at all. They leave them in the care of nannies who have been thoroughly investigated and interviewed. They protect their children just like the way they protect their property. Black American women in America, however, do not regard their children as property. It does not mean that black women do not protect their children; they do, but they feel free to leave their children in the care of other black women who are ever willing to do the caretaking for free. In fact, Angelou shows how African and African-American communities have long realized that vesting one person, especially parent or guardian with the full responsibility of motherhood may not be very wise, hence the acceptance of the "othermothers" role, which Collins explains. In demonstrating this further in her novels, Angelou recollects the time when she and her elder brother, Bailey, as children were left in the care of their paternal grandmother, Momma Henderson, without any fear whatsoever from their parents. Momma, their paternal grandmother



does this for free. When Angelou also gives birth, she at various points in time leaves her young growing child, Guy Johnson, in the care of his grandmother, Vivian Baxter Johnson, and later in the care of some few friends of hers. They all decided to take care of Guy for free.

In using this othermothers' role to firmly develop her theme of search for identity, Maya Angelou can be said to have launched a powerful attack on the nuclear family structure. Although Angelou's writings demand respect for the working mother, the extended family and for other mothers (other neighbours in the society who give helping hands in motherhood role-play), her struggles demonstrate clearly the tensions inherent or present in belonging to a group that values these notions of family, while living in a far larger society that has no regard for them. The tension being referred to became evident in Angelou's feeling of rejection while she is still a child in her grandmother's care and, of course her own frustration when faced with the sole responsibility of raising her own son, Guy Johnson. Angelou pursues with boldness self-fulfilling career ambitions and living her own life with adequate confidence needed by a young woman of her age to survive in America. Despite all her confidence, Angelou relies on her folks to help care for Guy. In the mid-twentieth Century in America, the ideology was that good mothers put their children's needs before all others, including their own. The larger cultural expectation, therefore, is that a mother should stay with her child at all times. Maya Angelou adheres to this singular cultural expectation religiously. As expected, so as to show her belongingness and identity to the society of black Americans, Angelou follows the footprints of other aggressive black mothers. Through her determination to protect

her child at all cost against all odds, we appreciate this singular effort as very encouraging and she sends this message to other upcoming mothers to do same.

In another area of discussion under the subject of motherhood, Angelou's explanation in her first narrative text in autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, of how she comes to have two mothers, Vivian Baxter Johnson, her own biological mother and Momma Henderson, her paternal grandmother and how the latter helps to shape her thoughts in adult life are worth discussing. She refers to both women as her mothers because they both played a major role in bringing her up during her formative years. Actually, Angelou spends a major part of her formative years with Momma Henderson, her paternal grandmother more than with her biological mother, Vivian Baxter. It is true that she spends some time with Vivian Baxter Johnson during such times when she is very young but most of her days as a child are with Momma Henderson. Momma's visions and worldview, therefore, help to shape young Maya Angelou's thoughts to a very large extent. This pattern of living with one's grandmother continues in the narratives in autobiographies when her (Angelou's) son, Guy is sometimes left in the care of his grandmother, Vivian Baxter Johnson. As a young black single mother, Angelou single-handedly provides both emotional and physical care and support for her only child. Angelou's experience of family as recorded throughout her volumes of autobiography follows a set of principles, which are particularly different from that of Americans who belong to the white middle-class population. Collins (2000) gave some explanation that white middle class Americans belong to the white middle-class population. White middle class Americans believe the family is supposed to be nuclear and restricted to the household. This notion, therefore, required the presence of a

wife, children and a father who must earn just enough money to prevent his wife and children from working. In this type of family, therefore, the father solely provides for the home and possesses as much power and will over the women in the household, as well as those at his workplace. For those workers at his workplace, the white middle class father exerts even greater powers over them in the case where the workers are predominantly black workers, since owing to their race, class and gender the white middle class father earns more than them. Obviously, the white ruling class has set this up as the standard pattern and practice that everybody, including the blacks should obey without objection. Angelou's principles and notion of family, which are totally contrary to these principles, permit her to see the family as purely extended.

Angelou believes in coming into contact and being in touch with members of the extended family always. Members of the extended family here include grandfathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, and others. This notion that Angelou has about family is probably based on the circumstances surrounding her own upbringing during her formative years, especially in Stamps, Arkansas where she lived with her elder brother, Bailey Jr., grandmother and uncle. When Angelou grows up and becomes a mother, even though she stays away from her family members, she keeps making contacts with them, especially her mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson, who also takes particular interest in her daughter, Angelou and grandson. Angelou even narrates how she takes the pain to visit her brother often in jail to make him see her as caring and still related. In the fifth volume, All Gods Children Need Traveling Shoes, Angelou narrates of her periodic visits to prison to see her brother, Bailey Jr., her travels back to Stamps, Arkansas where she is brought up, to see her uncle and some old folks she remembers growing up with. It is

very important to mention here that Angelou initially despised her parents; both Vivian Baxter and Bailey Johnson Sr. due to the treatment of rejection they displayed towards them [Angelou and her brother Bailey Jr.]. Surprisingly, Angelou's relationship with her mother begins to improve as she grows to see her mother's positive qualities, and she no longer harbours bitterness toward her mother's past abandonment. It is quite easy to explain this situation where Angelou as a young daughter is better able to understand the spirit and independence of her mother, and that out of this independence, much of her own philosophy is derived.

It is clear from the foregoing that Angelou, as a single mother goes through a lot of struggles to maintain herself and her growing son. She is undoubtedly a very strong individual who determines to get what she sets out to get for herself. It is quite obvious that the whole idea of motherhood that she plays in the story is conceived by herself and so, if she becomes a sufferer or struggling woman out of that she needs not blame anybody. The whole process of becoming a mother is initiated by herself for the need to take on adventure into the world of grown-ups and for lack of attention, she decides on her own to experience lovemaking with a good-looking neighbour boy and she gets pregnant. Her initial reaction to the discovery that she is pregnant is one of mixed feelings. She explains that she did not really know what to do. Upon the advice of her only brother, Bailey, she keeps the pregnancy for eight weeks and one day before informing her parents, which really gives them the biggest shock of their lives. One important thing worth noting is that for a girl around her age to do such a daring thing really shows she is bold. Angelou's personality is admirable even as a young girl even before she becomes a woman, and for that matter a mother.

In discussing the subject of motherhood in Angelou's autobiography, the surrogate mother – figure role played by Mrs. Flowers in the life of Angelou becomes very important. This is because in Angelou's search for an identity, the very genesis of her quest for true ideals as a woman, a Black and above all, a creative writer began with the teachings of Mrs. Flowers. Mrs. Flowers is a polished, refined and highly educated Black American widow. Because of the way she is, she was highly respected in the Stamps community. Mrs. Flowers comes into Angelou's life during young Angelou's period of silence when she was brought to Stamps, Arkansas where her grand mum was to recuperate after her rape by Mr. Freeman. It will be recalled that just after the rape incident, Mr. Freeman was murdered by Angelou's violent uncles who just could not come to terms with seeing their young niece of eight years old being abused in such a way by no other person than their own sister's boyfriend. Angelou, therefore, becomes timid, silent and non-resilient. The reason is that Angelou felt she is to blame for the whole situation; the fact that she feels she initiated the rape made her feel she is the cause of Mr. Freeman's death.

When Bailey and Angelou are sent back to Momma Henderson, their father's mother, Angelou recalls that she becomes withdrawn and recoils into a world of her own such that she would not talk to anybody except to Bailey. Her granny becomes disturbed and reports the case to Mrs. Flowers who also decides to help bring young Angelou out of her predicament. Mrs. Flowers begins her surrogate mother – figure role in Angelou's life from this time. She invites young Angelou to her apartment, which Angelou describes as very beautiful and has a sense of simplicity about it. As a surrogate mother – figure to Angelou, Mrs. Flower teaches Maya Angelou the very important aspects of

being a woman: neatness, kindness, hard work, confidence, a feature which Angelou confesses she holds on to without any reservation, and above all, literacy. In fact, it is Mrs. Flowers who instills the discipline of creative writing in Angelou. Angelou learns how to be a creative writer and this is a talent that helps her in her whole lifetime. Readers can recollect that she takes on career jobs related to creative writing when she finds herself in Africa; Egypt and Ghana. The discipline of creative writing which Mrs. Flowers teaches her during her recuperating period in Stamps, Arkansas after her rape, helps her to make a living for herself and her son, more especially, during the time she falls out with Vusi Make, her second husband in Africa. The attention of Mrs. Bertha Flowers, an elegant black woman whom Angelou viewed as an aristocrat amidst the poverty of Stamps, helped Angelou regain her voice. Mrs. Flowers told young Angelou: “Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning”. (p98). Sharing afternoons of reading literary classics in her home, Mrs. Flowers introduced Angelou not only to a love of books but to a world of imagination, creativity, and the power of the written word, as well as teaching her that she “must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy”. (p99)

It is clear from the foregoing that Angelou vividly paints a picture of how she performs creditably in the area of motherhood taking inspiration and support from Momma Henderson, her paternal grandmother, Mrs. Bertha Flowers, other women who helped her as caretakers of her son while she got busy making some money to fend for

herself and her son, and to some extent, Vivian Baxter Johnson, her biological mother. However, to successfully highlight the subject of motherhood, Angelou uses literary style to present it in the way she wanted. Some of the aspects of style that Angelou chooses to highlight her narrative are her blending of the first-person narrative point of view and some elements of dialogue, the story-within-the-story technique, time and time distortion, figurative language and the use of the serial autobiography style. These aspects of style help Angelou to successfully explain the subject of motherhood.

Angelou uses the first person narrative technique, which is very normal for every writer of an autobiography. The first person narrative technique is aimed at making the story achieve a sense of reality. Readers, therefore, see the narrator using expressions mostly dominated by the first person singular and plural pronouns. However, in Angelou's autobiography, despite the fact that she uses the first person narrative technique, she uses this with a special blend of dialogue with the characters she comes into contact with. Even though the blend of dialogue with the first person narrative is quite unusual with autobiographies, Angelou chooses to do this for the reason of bringing her readers close to the heart of the narrative to have a first hand feel of her actual experiences. She does this by using direct quotations to present her actual words and that of her speakers in the various narratives. All six narratives contain the blend of first person point of view and dialogue. Since the use of dialogue is not very common in the choice of the first person, it also provides readers with the chance to see more into the relationship between Angelou and other characters. By so doing, readers are able to see what other characters think of the protagonist and what the protagonist also thinks of them. Dialogue is recorded mostly between Angelou and her brother, Bailey; Angelou

and Bailey with their grandmother, Momma; Angelou and her mother, Vivian; Angelou and Tosh Angelos; Angelou and Vusumzi Make; among others. These incidents of the blend of dialogue and the first person point of view help to develop the discussion of Angelou on the subjects of motherhood and marriage and again enhances her strive to achieve verisimilitude.

Aside the dialogue, Angelou's usage of the first person narrative technique is admirable. Since all the narratives are autobiographies that chronicle her life's story, Angelou in narrating her infancy narratives, achievements, life crisis, among others is compelled to use this technique judiciously to achieve her aim of writing – to showcase the admirable successes of lessons of failure that she chalks in the areas of motherhood and marriage to redefine her identity. The most important things worth noting about Angelou's use of the first person narrative technique are very simple to explain. In the first place, readers of her autobiography tend to appreciate the stories to be non-fictitious works of art rather than fiction for the sake of art. This is very easy to explain. By her use of the first person narrative, readers believe that the main character who is herself Angelou, the author of the various autobiographies, is right in the centre of the action, hence the fact that she does not dilute her stories by adding or subtracting incidents from her stories. She tends to be very sure of every incident that she narrates because the writer herself who also happens to be the heroine of the story is a direct or first hand witness of the account, and more, she experiences everything herself. This issue, therefore, explains why the narration seems so real and so she narrates incidents without leaving any minute detail out. After she has exhausted every incident, she carries a good impression to her



readers about the story at whichever level the story has attained, and so her (readers) get abreast with the present state of affairs, and all past incidents.

For example, at the point where Angelou narrates the incident where the disrespectful white girl comes to tease her grandmother in front of her shop in Stamps, Arkansas, Angelou narrates how she felt about the action of the white girls. Readers really get to know the social and economic state of affairs through her narration. The fact remains from that narration that the Blacks in Stamps are under-privileged and that they fear the white population, as displayed in Momma's reaction towards the girl who disrespectfully teases her.

The same can be said about Angelou's narration of the incident of her rape by her mother's "husband", Mr. Freeman when she (Angelou) and her brother go to live with their mother. With her use of the first person narrative technique, Angelou makes readers aware of the feelings she has or develops for Mr. Freeman even though at her age, she is considered an infant and so should not under any circumstance develop that kind of passionate feeling for her rapist. As she uses the first person narrative technique, readers recognize her authority over the story, as she is the narrator and so really appreciates the after-thoughts and comments that she adds to the narration. She goes the step further to interpret and add her opinion to most issues that crop up in the course of the narration. The first person narrative is used in many parts of her autobiographies and these help the reader a lot to understand some of the fundamental issues like the subjects of motherhood and marriage in the stories.

Angelou chalks some success in developing the subjects of motherhood and marriage in her autobiographies by adopting the story-within-a-story technique in her

narration. The story-within-a-story technique is realized when different stories are brought into the narration of a particular story by a narrator for the sake of helping readers understand a particular incident better. Readers get the chance to know why the main character may be behaving in a particular way at the present time or another. Readers may also understand why certain issues are tackled or approached by certain characters or the main character in a particular way and not in another way. Maya Angelou uses this technique in her narration and it successfully helps to develop her discussion of the subjects of motherhood and marriage to her readers. The narrator, actually, succeeds in bringing in a different story mostly through flashback when she takes readers back to the past to narrate another story mostly when she remembers why something she is doing at the present is like that or taking a particular shape in the present. However, it is important to state here that the story-within-a-story technique is not always brought in through flashbacks. The narrator may fantasize about something she or he wishes to experience in life in future and that may also be delivered to readers through the story-within-a-story technique. Of course, in Angelou's autobiography, especially in The Heart of a Woman, readers get the chance to appreciate another story within this same story she was narrating about her life. Angelou narrates about her fancy concerning the type of marriage bliss she would like to experience, one that is based on the euro-centric romance love bliss where the woman becomes a domesticated housewife whose business is to take care of the children and chores at home while her husband goes to work to bring home money to fend for the wife and children and make them happy at all times. Anyway, Angelou realizes that these romantic ideals could not materialize; hence she had to discard those dreams and hallucinations and move on with her life.

These are dreams that she created in her mind by viewing movies and other pictures at the cinema. It is right to note that when she realized that these pictures she fantasized about are not real, she had the encouragement to go live her life devoid of fantasy – work and fend for herself and her growing son, which would finally give them liberty and freedom from all forms of oppression; be it racial, sexual, social and economic. The subjects of motherhood and marriage are highlighted in this instance.

The story -within-a-story technique is expertly used by Angelou when through her thoughts, readers are sent into the future to experience first-hand the romantic ideals of Maya Angelou and all her aspirations for a romantic marriage. Before Angelou gets married to Tosh Angelos and later Vusumzi Make, she engages through fantasy a time when she is married to a lovely handsome, a man of her dreams. This fantasy involves a marriage full of eternal bliss. The story continues that she becomes a housewife and all her activities for the day are limited to the house. She thus has the responsibility of taking care of the home and providing sexual satisfaction for herself and her romantic fantasy husband. This husband, however, makes sure that his wife (Angelou) is well catered for and provided with everything she needs. It is unfortunate however, that his fantasy does not become a reality after all, and she herself acknowledges that by way of an after-thought. All these incidents are based on her fantasy and she tells them in a story form within the main narration. This helps to further develop the discussion of the subjects of motherhood and marriage to her readers.

There is yet another literary feature that Angelou introduces to enhance her discussion of the subjects of motherhood and marriage in her narratives in autobiography. This is the feature of time and time distortion. Angelou begins the story when young

Angelou is in church and cannot hold her bladder any longer. Young Angelou's age is not noted in this particular incident, which serves as the introduction to the story, but the reader can guess that she is somewhere between five and seven years old. Then the author switches the story back in time to when young Angelou is three years old and her brother is four. Their parents are divorcing, and the children are shipped alone with their name tags on their wrists from California to Stamps, Arkansas, to live with their paternal grandmother, Mrs. Annie Henderson. There is a sudden flashforward to young Angelou's school years where she talks about falling in love with William Shakespeare and enjoying passionately Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and many other writers. After this, there is a foreshadowing of a major change in Angelou's life when she departs from Stamps for good at the age of thirteen. Following this, there is a flashforward to a traumatic scene where Angelou, at the age of ten, was forced to watch her grandmother being taunted cruelly by the racist children of Stamps. In between the flashforwards, the story follows Angelou's early years in chronological order with frequent references to her ages five, six, and seven years old. A flashback to the marriage of Grandfather Baxter, a West Indian Black, to Grandmother Baxter, an octoroon or quadroon, who was raised by a German family in Cairo, Illinois follows. This flashback into Angelou's maternal family heritage gives the reader an understanding of Maya's mother life, especially about how she came to lead an unusual and exotic gambling life in St. Louis. This is typical of women's autobiography. Writers give an insight into people's history to explain why some particular lifestyles are adopted by their characters. In this particular instance, Angelou's mother's exotic lifestyle is linked to her family background.

At the age of seven, Angelou and her eight year old brother Bailey move away from the relative quiet and safety environment of Stamps and their grandmother to St. Louis. Life in St. Louis with their beautiful and fun-loving mother is exciting and fulfilling for Bailey, but the city remains a foreign country to Maya who in this chapter foreshadows her silent, post-rape departure with the saying, "I didn't come to stay." Angelou further describes her painful rape by her mother's boyfriend Mr. Freeman, and its after-effects of anxiety, fear, and guilt. The incident where Bailey cries at the hospital bedside of his sister gives the reader an insight into the close and supportive relationship between Bailey and his sister. Angelou then foreshadows the break in that relationship by her passing remark that it would be fifteen years before she, Maya, would see her brother Bailey cry again.

Further in the narration, Angelou introduces flashback of eleven-year-old Angelou's feelings about having attended the funeral of Mrs. Taylor to illustrate her fanciful, sensitive, and superstitious mind. The memory of the funeral was triggered when Mr. Taylor, a possible suitor of Mrs. Henderson, Angelou's grandmother, came to call and described a dream that he had had of his wife who came to him saying that she wanted some children. When young Angelou, who believed in ghosts and haunts, was asked by her grandmother to leave the light of the family circle around the warm pot-bellied stove to fetch a long-handled fork in the dark kitchen, the two minute trip of fear and panic in the dark took Maya through cemeteries, gravestones, and black cats. This flashback gives the reader an insight into the inner life of the child Maya, the future novelist and poet.

The rest of the novel follows young Angelou in fairly straight chronological order through to age sixteen when, in doubt about her own sexuality, she gives her virginity to a young man whom she scarcely knows in order to find out if she is a lesbian. Although the sexual experience, which was awkward and unromantic, does not give her the answer to her question, it does give her an unwanted pregnancy which she manages to hide from her parents until the final month. The novel ends with her giving birth to a son three weeks after having graduated from high school. Now, every reader will be somehow confused if he or she does not keep track of references to historical time periods and at the same time keeping track of other time references. The next three novels chronicle Angelou's later teenage years in which she gets involved in prostitution, loses her son temporarily to a kidnapper, has a short marriage, travels in Europe, and works in Africa. She becomes a singer, dancer, educator, editor, and a prolific writer of prose and poetry. These incidents of time distortion are carefully interwoven into the mainstream narration of Angelou's autobiography with such flexibility that it does not really make the stories difficult to appreciate.

The next issue for discussion in this chapter examines Angelou's vivid use of symbols and figurative language. Starting with the title of the first novel, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and that of the last one A Song Flung Up From Heaven, which is taken from the poem, "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar, she makes extensive use of imagery, similes, and metaphors to express her feelings of entrapment, anger, and violation. The short excerpt of the poem reads:

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!

When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;

When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,  
And the river flows like a stream of glass;  
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,  
And the faint perfume from the chalice steals---  
I know what the caged bird feels!

(Dunbar, 1913).

Using the poem above, she expresses the issue of entrapment in a way that Maya Angelou, the American black, is like the Caged Bird who beats its wings till its blood is red on the cruel bars of the cage that society has put her into. The poem contains striking images of the theme of entrapment developed through imagery and symbolism, and these are tied closely with the imagery of the novel. Again, Angelou develops the image of an angry personality. This is expertly explained with the incident where Angelou, upon hearing the racist graduation speech imagined a pyramid of flesh with the white folks on the bottom, as the broad base, then the Indians with their tomahawks and teepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spirituals sticking out of their mouths. The image of violation is also introduced into the narratives with the rape of Angelou. The image of the violation is closely tied to that of pain. Angelou presents the picture of the breaking, tearing and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The poem, therefore, helps Angelou to vividly paint those images she wanted to portray to her readers.

Angelou makes use of similes, metaphors, and personification to further develop her subjects of motherhood and marriage. Angelou uses the following figurative language to give further meaning to her message in all her autobiographies. In the area of

similes, some few illustrations will be explained. She uses similes in the following expressions “My mother was like a pretty kite that floated just above my head. If I liked I could pull it in to me by saying I had to go to the toilet or by starting a fight with Bailey.” (Caged Bird, p54). Again, she uses the expression “For nearly a year, I sopped around the house, the store, the school and the church, like an old biscuit, dirty and inedible.” (Caged Bird, p77). The above expressions, among several others, add beauty and colour to Angelou’s autobiographies. They add beauty and enforce her power of creating mental pictures in the mind’s eye of her readers. In expressing her fondness and admiration for some women-figures like grandmum Momma Henderson, or her biological mother Vivian Baxter Johnson, or even Mrs. Flowers, Angelou likens herself to them choosing their admirable qualities. These comparisons help in her development of the subjects of motherhood.

Aside the use of similes, Angelou also uses some figurative forms of language in the area of metaphors. A few of these will be discussed. She writes thus; “Mother was a blithe chick nuzzling around the large, solid dark hen. The sounds they made had a rich inner harmony.” (Caged Bird, p126). In another incident, Angelou writes “Momma’s deep, slow voice lay under my mother’s rapid peeps and chirps.” (Caged Bird, p171) Another illustration of metaphor is realized when Angelou writes; “I hefted the burden of pregnancy at sixteen onto my own shoulders where it belonged. Admittedly, I staggered under the weight.” (Caged Bird, p242). The subject of motherhood is further enforced by these mental pictures she creates. this is because the examples above all point to aspects of motherhood roles that she plays or other women played that deserve admiration.



Personification is another feature of imagery that Angelou explores to add colour and beauty to her narratives and helps to develop the subjects of motherhood and marriage. She uses the expressions: “The Depression must have its [toll] on the white section of Stamps with cyclonic impact, but it seeped into the Black area slowly, like a thief with misgivings.’ (Caged Bird, p41). There is also another example of personification in the expression; “After a minute or two, silence would rush into the room from its hiding place because I had eaten up all the sounds.” (Caged Bird, p73). There are a lot more aspects of figurative language used in the various autobiographies that together help Angelou to better drum home her message to her readers. It is important to note that there are several other instances of personification and other forms of imagery that Angelou uses in her in the narratives that all help Angelou to further deepen the pictures that she hopes to send to her readers.

It is noteworthy that Angelou’s narratives in autobiography have conformed to the standard stylistic features of autobiography. These features which include the use of the first person narrative point of view, employment of imagery and other stylistic techniques used in prose, have been used effectively in sending down her message to her readers. However, it is clear that she has added a different twist to the standard form by blending dialogue with the first person point of view. Her success in doing this is noticeable in how she enables her readers to get a real feel and experience of the activity that unfolds during the occurrence of the various incidents, especially by way of using dialogue.

The aspects of literary style that have been carefully explored in this chapter include Angelou’s employment of humour through the introduction of comic elements,

authorial commentary, change and distortion in names of some characters, voice and voice change, blend of first person point of view and some elements of dialogue, the story-within-a-story technique, time and time distortions and finally, figurative language. It is, in fact, the expert use of literary style that enables her to successfully develop the subjects of motherhood and marriage which together help her to portray the theme of identity. It is important, however, to state that Angelou uses identical methods in her use of literary style to write almost all her autobiographies despite the passage of time. However, it is only her third series that looks more like a travelogue rather than a normal story, since the third volume recounts mainly incidents of Angelou's travels across Europe when she toured with the Porgy and Bess group. Despite the argument of the third volume being branded as a travelogue, it still maintains all the literary flavour prevalent in the other autobiographies. The literary style she adopts in all the narratives are successfully developed to carefully develop the theme of identity through the subjects of motherhood and marriage. These literary techniques that Angelou uses do, to a very large extent, help explain the fact that Angelou was able to tell her true life story with a blend of fact and art.

The foregoing chapter has been analyzing Angelou's role as a mother and how it helped shape her mentality and wellbeing as an independent young woman and mother living in a community that does not give equal opportunities to women. The chapter also re-enforces the inspiration that Angelou draws from the motherhood roles that some women like Momma Henderson, Mrs. Bertha Flowers, Vivian Baxter Johnson and other African-American women who helped in the care of Angelou's son played in her life. Finally, the chapter analyses Angelou's choice of some literary techniques she employs

in her discussion of the subject on motherhood in her narratives in autobiography. The next chapter will tackle the issue of marriage as a strong landmark in Angelou's life that she uses to find her destiny and gain an identity as an independent woman. The next chapter will again discuss some aspects of literary style that Angelou adopts to present the subject of marriage.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SUBJECT OF MARRIAGE IN ANGELOU'S NARRATIVES

The previous chapter of the study has explained how Angelou uses the subject of motherhood as a tool to identify herself with members of her race and to exhibit how the subject helps her to be independent and become strengthened as a woman going through struggles. It also critically highlighted Angelou's maternal and motherhood role-play and showed how she excels through thick and thin in this enterprise of survival as part of her assiduous search for an identity. This chapter of the study, however, explores Angelou's search for self-knowledge and fulfillment through marriage. The study reveals the discrepancy between her fantasy of marriage and the actual experience such that despite her expectations, marriage fails to bring stability to Angelou's life. This chapter of the study investigates how Angelou's marital experiences in life become a threshold of rediscovery of herself and her son on one hand, and on another the male counterparts she comes into intimate marital relationships with.

As a young teenage girl and mother, she discovers that being independent would enable her to search and finally find that identity, which would make her know who she is, make others know who she is and rather than inviting their sympathy for her unfortunate predicament, arouse their admiration and support in every way possible. For Angelou's experiences as a married woman, it is evident that she moves from one marital relationship to another without any stability whatsoever. Angelou, as an individual fantasizes of a marriage without blemish and boredom. However, in all the marriages she contracts, she does not get the blissfulness she wishes to experience. It can be said that the movement of Angelou from one marriage to another plainly unveils her lack of

fulfillment and lack of happiness that she has been fantasizing about since her childhood. This need for a husband is one that she believes would give her and her son an identity that would enable her to call herself independent, self-reliant and above all, a responsible and respectable individual in her society. Angelou's fantasy of marriage and the actual experience that she goes through in marriage do not in any way match.

As it would be recalled, the first contact of Angelou with a man started with her mother's live-in boyfriend, Mr. Freeman who rapes Angelou at a very tender age. We also learn that the lovemaking between Angelou and the good-looking teenage neighbour boy who impregnates her was not a passionate one. The very young Angelou often fantasized about growing up to be a responsible housewife. Angelou in Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas describes how even at age nineteen, her life turned towards the acquisition of more than the basic needs of life. Her romantic fantasies, which were influenced by Hollywood movies and lyrics from popular blues music and jazz, are confronted with reality when, in 1949 she marries her first husband Tosh Angelos, a Greek native. When she marries Tosh, she begins to nurture and have belief in the aggressive notion that "marriage would give (her) a world free from danger, diseases and want" (Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas). Quite soon into the marriage, she discovers that real life offers no such guarantee. As a housewife, she describes herself in the third volume of her autobiography, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas as:

“Legally a member of that enviable tribe of consumers whom  
security made fat and butter and whom no circumstances  
considered living by bread alone, because their

husbands brought home the bacon'' (p33)

However, Tosh Angelos as the head of the household expects her to relinquish the idea of participating periodically and regularly in the activities of the black church, and of course, her black folks and friends. This development in the life of Angelou helps to throw more light on the theme of identity. The reason is simple to explain. This is a young woman in search of home and identity for herself and her son. This identity incorporates anything that would be within her wildest dreams and expectation, happiness in her daily life, freedom to express herself freely, and freedom to associate herself with any group at all irrespective of its religious, political and socio-economic worldview, happiness in her marriage, among several others. This position of Tosh Angelos is anything but an imaginary barricade that seeks to limit the happiness and blissful adventures that Angelou seeks to pursue in life.

Angelou's husband, Tosh Angelos is a very private person and an atheist as well; hence he undermines the role of the black church in his wife's life. As a member of an oppressed group, Maya Angelou values her spiritual life very much but Tosh, her husband does not need that. As it would be recalled, Angelou had been brought up to understand the importance of the church in a man's life by her grand mother, Momma Henderson and for that matter, God in the life of human beings. Momma Henderson, her paternal grandmother whom she grows up with instilled this discipline in her and that she (Angelou) would not let go. It is an identifiable mark or bond between her and her grandmother, Momma Henderson. It is relevant to appreciate the fact that Tosh Angelos is a white man who enjoys racial and gender privileges and so, does not appear to understand the importance of religious faith to his wife Angelou.

It is again important to explain Angelou's obsession with her religious faith, and for that matter the black church. Her presence in the black church and her association with her fellow black men and women give her a sense of belonging. Many blacks in America associate themselves with religious groups so that they feel accepted and identified within the group. It is this sense of being identified as a member of the black church, and for that matter, the black community that Angelou wanted. Angelou narrates in the autobiography that she could not just resist the happiness she feels within herself anytime she visits the black church; hence she steals time away from Tosh to go and worship with the black church in the community. She mentions how earnestly she steals time away treacherously to go having fellowship with her folks because identifying herself with the black church, in her own estimation, makes her feel happy being with her people, race, and her kinsmen and women.

Quite ironically, Angelou's association with the black church becomes one of the main reasons for the break-up of her marriage with Tosh Angelos, her first husband. According to Shapiro (1994), Angelou "regarded the church as a defining element of her black heritage that she did not wish to relinquish". (p87) This goes a long way to explain how paramount the issue of identifying herself with her fellow black Americans is to her. Angelou knows that she has no other family other than her fellow blacks. Whether she likes it or not, her fellow blacks are the same hospitable people she has always known, and they are very accommodating such that they are ready to help her out of any unfortunate situation that she finds herself in. This is displayed openly in the fact that despite her obsession with a stable marriage life, Angelou sees hers to Tosh break down before her very eyes due to some very petty squabbles and the religious intolerance on

the part of Tosh Angelos. Before Angelou's marriage with Tosh finally collapses, she compromises a lot of herself and puts up with her husband Tosh's demands no matter how unpleasant those demands are to her. Obviously, it is clear that Angelou is ready to live the marriage dream she had been obsessed with to the fullest. However, to some extent, she contributes to the collapse of her marriage to Tosh in 1952 because she surrenders all of her independence to Tosh. As prescribed in most women's magazines, which Angelou had read, she had been a near-perfect a wife to her husband as far as possible.

Despite all these, her husband, Tosh cannot bear the restrictions of this ideal nuclear family structure, which he has created anymore than he can bear the strain of being part of an inter-racial marriage in the early 1950's. Angelou reveals in Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas that she actually learns a lesson in life after her marriage collapses; that she should always be focused and learn to be independent, and not allow her life to be solely dependent on a man; she actually makes this resolution in her life when she realises that the novelty of the marriage with Tosh had worn off, leaving her and her son with little stability. Angelou confesses that she became, as it were: "a saner, healthy person than the young, greedy girl who has wanted a man to belong to' (p51)

After the marriage falls on the rocks, Angelou critically comments on all that have happened during her short married life, and one very distinguishing thing that can be made up of her authorial commentary is that Angelou felt maturer and very open-minded than before. She realizes that everybody makes a mistake at one point in his or her life mostly through youthful exuberance and anxiety for experience and adventure. This



education that Angelou sees herself going through goes a long way to open up her mind to knowing more about herself. To a very large extent, it is this lesson of life that seriously rekindles the spirit of her relentless search for her identity. Angelou becomes this positive-minded young girl who is divorced. She makes it her belief that she can do better in life, probably in her next marriage to learn more about life. Obviously, one then becomes aware of the reasons for the earlier comment made about her (Angelou's) movement from one marriage to another that it helps to bring sanity and development and education to her life.

On yet another platform, a very serious discussion can also be raised concerning Angelou's ideal of a glamorous Hollywood fantasy marriage. It can be concluded that her fantasy reflects her mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson's influence on her, even though she (Angelou) would not mostly accept this. Casting one's mind back, readers learn how Angelou becomes influenced by the glamour and beauty of her mother when young Angelou meets her after a four-year separation period. Angelou herself confesses in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings that she "...had never seen a woman as pretty as she who was called my 'mother'"(p112 )

Angelou, as a writer of her own life story, reveals that her mother, Vivian, lives her life as if she were wealthier than she actually is. Vivian Baxter Johnson works in gambling salons, but lives as though she is a movie star. The reality is that, when Angelou comes to know her mother, she can only compare her to a movie star, who she (Vivian Baxter Johnson) is not, and an enchanting Blues music singer who attracts men to herself, which she actually does in a manner that makes her more than the average mother. Laying stress on this connection between Vivian Baxter Johnson and the

movies, Angelou recalls her early experiences at the cinema in which Kay Francis, a white actress, who closely resembled Angelou's mother, Vivian, starred. In the first autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Angelou herself writes that when viewing one movie:

“I laughed too, but not at the hateful jokes (the movie) made on my people. I laughed because, except that she was white, the big movie star looked just like my mother. Except that she has a big mansion with a thousand servants, she lived just like my mother. And it was funny to think of the white folks not knowing that the woman they were adoring could be my mother's twin, except that she was white and my mother was prettier. Much prettier. The movie star made me happy. It was extraordinary good fortune to be able to give up one's money and go see one's mother whenever one wanted.” (pp 118-119)

It is relevant to declare that the strong impression that Angelou forms as a child makes it easy to see why she wanted to be a movie star. It is Angelou's mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson who encourages Angelou to study dance and drama from the very beginning. Vivian Baxter Johnson, therefore, takes the initiative to teach Angelou her first dancing steps and the art of body movement in a bar. Ironically, Angelou makes a total comparative study of her mother's lifestyle and the ordinary simple one and realizes that her mother's beauty and blues lifestyle that she wanted to pass on to her is highly competitive. She comes to the full realization that she can not cope with such a lifestyle. The reality on the ground is that, after Angelou makes the comparison, she acknowledges

that she is ugly, feels often neglected and inferior. However, despite everything, her mother's competitive lifestyle, some of which she struggles to copy and others which she relentlessly rejects, becomes her ticket to success and one that ultimately leads to the beginning of her writing career. Angelou rejects some of Vivian Baxter Johnson's maternal and marital practices. For instance, unlike her mother, Vivian who rejected her two children, Angelou is very protective of her child. When Angelou loses both husbands too, unlike Vivian her mother who chooses to stay with live-in boyfriends who help in her upkeep and payment of her domestic bills, Angelou decides to stay alone to struggle to fend for herself single-handedly, and train her only son, Guy Johnson.

On another level, Angelou perseveres to live her life as if nothing had happened to her after her first marriage to Tosh Angelos breaks down. It is very important to say that Angelou's second marriage to Vusi Make also helps her to rediscover her true self and identity in very many ways. It has been noted earlier that her movement from one marriage to another is a sort of education for her since she learns more about marriage, women, men, her fellow black Americans and other Africans as a whole. Angelou, therefore, continues to narrate her experiences with Vusi Make, who happened to be a black South African Political activist.

Vusi Make becomes the second husband of Angelou. When she meets him, she is engaged to a divorced black American bail bondsman by name Thomas Allen. During this time Maya Angelou had assumed a social role as a radical Civil Rights activist, a fundraiser and the Northern Coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which is an organization founded by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thomas Allen realizes how desperate she is to marry him. This is reflected in Angelou's

own words when she narrates how she goes about entertaining the idea of straightening her hair and wearing pretty hats with flowers and gloves so she can look like an attractive, marriageable material and potential homemaker for Thomas Allen, instead of the non-traditional career woman she really is. Angelou now learns a lot of lessons in life and becomes intelligent. Angelou, during this time, does not appreciate that idea of living in a marriage where conversation is limited to her “shouting” in the bedroom and her man’s “grunting” at the dining table. What this really implies is that although Angelou is fully aware of the fact that her boyfriend, Thomas Allen wants only sex and good food from her, she is prepared to consider that as sufficient, as long as she has “a husband.” Obviously, this idea that she creates as far as her relationship to this boyfriend of hers was concerned was just not the best for her. When she meets Vusi Make, however, she sees in him a more suitable suitor and she marries him, so that it becomes another very hasty decision by her in the area of marriage. Angelou’s mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson, advises her (Angelou) against marrying Make because she (Vivian) feels he is a total stranger to the culture of the Black American lifestyle and society. Left to Vivian Baxter Johnson alone, Angelou would marry Thomas Allen, the bail bondsman because she believes Angelou is more familiar with him before the appearance of the freedom fighter, Vusi Make.

The theme of the clash between the fantasies of marital bliss versus the real experience of marriage is fully developed when Angelou gets married to Vusi Make. Angelou narrates how she initially felt mature when she gets the divorce from Tosh Angelos. She reveals that she gets very much educated about the meaninglessness of romantic bliss and how destructive it can be to the person fantasizing about it if it does

not become a reality. It becomes rather very discouraging when Angelou still holds on to this same concept of romantic bliss even in her second marriage. Angelou's youthful exuberance may have accounted for this situation. This is because the impression one gets after reading through the pages that narrate her second marriage experiences is that Angelou had learnt no lesson at all from all that happened to her when she gets married to Vusi Make. It is, however, important to realize that the second experience, though quite disappointing just like the first, and which could have been avoided if Angelou had made it a point to change certain thoughts based on fantasy, strengthens her in her learning process and her search for identity. As it has been noted earlier, fantasy dominates Angelou's second marriage. Angelou could have avoided the second marriage if she had eschewed those fantasy thoughts of the Hollywood portrayals of romance, Africa (because Vusi Make promises to take her to Africa, the native land of the coloured people) and, of course, the lifestyle of ease and glamour that her mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson pursues. The following passage from the fourth narrative text in the autobiography, The Heart of a Woman, clearly illustrates what actually influences Maya Angelou to marry the South African freedom fighter, Vusi Make:

“At the dining table, he spread before me the lights and shadows of Africa. Glories stood in thrilling array. Warrior queens, in necklaces of blue and white beads, led armies against marauding Europeans. Nubile girls danced in celebration of the victories of Shaka, the Zulu King.” (p150)

The above passage clearly illustrates the fantasies, which ultimately drive Angelou into marrying Make. As it had been noted earlier, when she confesses that she became

maturer and wiser after her disappointment by Tosh in their marriage, one would have expected that Angelou would be more careful and extra vigilant and that she would never again rely on romantic fantasies when she finds herself on the marriage market. Unfortunately, she jumps into the arms of a man she hardly knows because she was still in the school of life learning about the intricacies of being a mature human being, an independent woman, a responsible woman and a married person. In these episodes of her married experiences, the theme of the search for stability is fully developed.

The movement of Angelou from one marriage to another and yet, gaining no stability whatsoever can be given a psychological explanation. It is the view of this paper that one reason why Angelou gets married to both Tosh Angelos and Vusi Make at different times of her life is her zeal to gain security for herself and her son. Psychologically, Angelou's fear of having no future security has been a long standing one which she has had since childhood when her parents got divorced and still haunts her. Angelou thus harbours the hope that getting married will drive away that fear and give her and the son that future security she has long hoped for. It is unfortunate that she realizes too late that marriage cannot give her that security she has long hoped for.

Another psychological explanation that can be given to the reason why Angelou kept moving from one marriage to the other is that the early divorce of her parents during her infancy created a vacuum of absence of a father in Angelou's life which she thought a husband could fill. Since psychologically she yearned for a father's love, she thought meeting Tosh and later Vusi would enable her to experience a father's love and care through them. Unfortunately for her things do not move the way she wanted and the marriage to each of the two men collapses.

Angelou's second husband, Vusi Make has some attitudinal similarity to Tosh Angelos, her first husband. They both expected Angelou to confine all her activities to the home and not outside the home. However, the difference between them is that Vusi Make seems to demand that a lot more of Angelou's energy be spent on work in the home, while Tosh Angelos would not mind Angelou combining a few jobs outside the home with the chores at home. The end result of it all is that, in reality, Angelou becomes spiritually starved in her marriage to Tosh Angelos since he is an atheist, and to Vusi Make, Angelou becomes physically overworked during their marriage.

Vusi Make, according to Angelou's own revelation in her narration, supervises and thoroughly inspects her house cleaning to ensure that she reaches every little dirt under their bed and has removed every bit of dirt from almost every surface in the household. It reaches a point that Angelou reveals how frustrated she becomes and so she writes in The Heart of a Woman how she felt. She wrote thus:

“I wanted to be a wife and to create a beautiful home to make my man happy, but there was more to life than being a diligent maid with a permanent pussy”. (p168)

This confession that Angelou critically makes is indeed very important in the assumption that she is really learning a very serious lesson in her life. This rings a bell to every reader that she is gradually climbing up the maturation tree or ladder. The daily hectic routine of Angelou is described as very daunting. She critically gives this description in very clear terms in the following terms in The Heart of a Woman:

“It seems to me that I washed, scrubbed, mopped, dusted and waxed thoroughly every other day.... “I wiped down

the walls, because dirty finger prints could spoil his day,  
and ironed his starched shirts....' (p166)

Angelou does not stop there but then continues her description to show how intense her daily chores were so that her readers would realize the impression she sought to create further about the great amount of physical exhaustion through which she went daily. In The Heart of a Woman, she continues thus:

“Each meal at home was a culinary creation. Chicken Kiev and feijode, Eggs Benedict and Turkey Tetrzzini. A good woman put ironed shirts on the bed and matched the toilet paper to the colour of the bathroom tile. I was unemployed but I had never worked so hard in all my life.” (p166)

With all these expectations from Vusi Make, one would expect that he may do what is definitely expected of him: providing for Angelou's every need. Angelou definitely expected her husband, Vusi Make, to meet his side of the bargain by providing for her and her son. It is very ironical however, that Vusi Make is not a good provider. As a political activist, he has an unstable income which entirely depends upon the aids and donations from sympathetic sponsors. Despite these, he rather desires an opulent and wealthy lifestyle that he cannot afford. Vusi Make, according to our narrator who has first-hand information about this man, has an insatiable taste for expensive furniture and classy décor. This lifestyle of Vusi Make rather disgracefully lands his family into huge debts and embarrassment. Angelou finally discovers that Make with all his promises of excitement and exotic pleasure is neither faithful nor reliable; he is not capable of supporting them. Angelou on seeing and realizing this, quickly learns a lesson again and



confidently asks for a divorce. Angelou realizes that her second marriage did not give her the joy she envisaged. Vusi Make's unreliable attempt to restrict her fails and, therefore, she starts working outside her home, something she knows how to do best. In taking this step, therefore, Angelou can be said to have reawakened her quest for an identity again. To a very large extent, this is the beginning of a long term fixed mentality that Angelou comes up with; to be steadfast against men who promise women "heaven" but deliver nothing. It is possible that the experience Angelou had with Tosh and later Vusi Make may have propelled her decision to stay single for as long as it makes her stay independent of male oppression and chauvinism.

Angelou decides to work to make a living for herself and her son in the country of Egypt without relying on Vusi Make who by this time had displayed traits of unfaithfulness and gross incompetence in his duties as a provider for the home. Indeed, except for her short-lived marriage to Tosh Angelos, Angelou has worked ever since she turned the age of sixteen. In reality, Maya Angelou as an industrious woman had always known how much money she had, how to spend it and when to pay her bills. These traits were overshadowed and covered by Vusi Make when she got married to him. Apart from making her a diligent housewife, Vusi Make kept Angelou in the dark about very crucial issues like the finance of the family and so she becomes frustrated and powerless. When she decides to find something economically meaningful to herself, finally, she becomes liberated and discovers the true identity of herself; the aspiring, industrious, focused, bold, energetic, and above all, the conscious and determined woman that she really is. It is quite clear from the foregoing that the very forceful, energetic and determined young woman that she is, Angelou makes a rebellious decision to work despite Vusi Make's

resistance and this clearly demonstrates how she successfully reclaims her identity and independence. This bold and thoughtful choice she makes to work for herself and child at that point in her life, which of course is very unusual of an independent black woman of her age again illustrates her pragmatism as she faces her life's situation and reality squarely.

It is a fact that because African American women have always worked and bought their own high priced items like cars, furniture, clothes and houses they have always had a strong influence and position in the home. The earnings of their black male counterparts, who most often assume positions in their (African American women's) lives as husbands and partners have not been able to provide more than half of the family's income and expenses. Black women, therefore, have had more working relationships with their husbands than is rather the case with white coloured women. (Harris, 2002). This picture being painted is sprawled out in Angelou's autobiographies when she finally decides to work for the first time in her second marriage. One thing again is revealed to readers by Angelou in her narrative, especially covering the incidents where Angelou travels to England and later to Africa, specifically Ghana and meets some African women. It comes to her realization that despite Vusi Make's portrayal of Africa and its people to her, African women were not as submissive, mute and powerless as his ideology held them to be. The reason, as Angelou herself reveals, is that in reality, they (African women) have always worked. The various forms of work she categorically mentions include farming in the fields, making arts and crafts items for their own use and for sale, or even entrepreneurs at the market place. It was in fact the patriarchal policy of the colonialists to make men more privileged in education, training and funding

programmes that made men more superior and diminished the roles of women in the public sphere.

Angelou's second marriage that also comes to an end abruptly goes a long way to prove wrong her fantasy that marriage will bring stability and security of all forms to her doorstep. The short of it all is that Angelou becomes educated about the fact that meeting the "dream man" to settle down with in the "dream marriage" will not totally liberate her from all the hardships associated with living in this world as a woman of substance. Those thoughts, as things turned out to be finally, are escapist Hollywood dreams that rarely mature into reality. Indeed, it is Angelou's healthy sense of work ethics and the enterprising spirit that she possesses that altogether enable her to boldly move her to gain the freedom she had long sought for.

It's very important to project in real life that most women unfortunately and regrettably give more value to interpersonal relationships than to their individual work. The end result of it all is that even those women who have achieved economic self-sufficiency are often unable to liberate themselves from oppressive relationship with sexist and racist individuals just like those women who do not work and depend entirely on others for their economic survival (Harris, 2002).

It could be said that Angelou's desire for a good marriage and husband is directly linked to her desire to get a male role model for her son so that he will be an independent, intelligent, and well-rounded son. With her forcefulness and determination as a woman who is bent on establishing an identity for herself, Angelou in her narratives explains how she ends up proving to all, especially her mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson and all her readers that despite the prevailing notions present at the time when she went through

these situations, the presence of a father for her son, just like her own situation of growing up without the influence of a biological father, does not always matter necessarily in the consolidation of an identity for oneself. This is because Angelou with devotion and dedication brings up Guy, her son in a very steadfast fashion that does not in any way make him a wayward son.

Angelou's texts in autobiography have explained her roles as a young mother and then as a married woman. In order to effectively develop these two subjects, Angelou successfully employs literary style to drive home her message developed along the lines of the subject of motherhood and marriage. This brings to the fore the argument of whether the literary style of Angelou allows for the autobiographies to be considered as art or factual autobiographies. However, it is logical that for every story, be it fiction or non-fiction, there must be a way of narrating it with a bit or more of artistic and literary flavour.

It is, therefore, very factual for any reader of the autobiographies of Angelou to acknowledge that her life stories are interestingly told by a master story-teller in the person of Angelou. Some of the literary techniques she employs include the following: her use of humour and comic elements, authorial commentaries, change and distortion in names of some characters, and voice and voice change. This section of the chapter in this study takes a look at some of these techniques that Angelou uses to expertly develop the subject of marriage in her autobiographies.

Humour is employed by Angelou in most parts of her autobiographies. She expertly uses this technique to heighten the interest of her readers. One medium she uses to inject humour in her narration is by being very blunt about some of the things she was

saying. It is not very common for a writer to be very blunt and so candid to the extent that she will tell her own story and mention things like rape, incidents about her practice of prostitution, among others. Well, Angelou candidly mentions some of these things that she was involved in. In the midst of the tension that builds up during her narration of some of these events, she injects comic elements to overshadow if not to “erase” totally the supposedly “shameful” impression around these incidents. Angelou narrates such incidents with comic elements alongside the narration such that readers become convinced to accept these shameful situations just as they are since for most of these incidents, she had to endure them because she was either a child or a teenage single-mother who had to work extra hard to care for herself and her growing son. On a particular occasion, Angelou narrates the incident where the “powhitetrash” girls of Stamps come to tease her grandmother, Mrs. Henderson, at her store. The descriptions Angelou gives to the white girls were enough to make a reader see the extent of her (Angelou’s) anger. Angelou describes how “very dirty”, “uncultured” and “ill-mannered” they are. The descriptions of their underwear and dresses are elements that lie underneath her seriousness during the narration.

Angelou’s narration of her mother’s intervention at the hotel where they were meeting is another very good example of the successful use of humour. Angelou explains how the hotel attendant nearly disgraced her by denying her of the room she had booked earlier on telephone, simply because of racial discrimination. The story goes that Vivian Baxter Johnson, Angelou’s mother, comes to her (Angelou’s) rescue with anger at the hotel attendant. Even though she seemed serious, the description she gives about Vivian Baxter Johnson’s reaction to the action of the attendant was funny enough to send

every reader laughing, especially after her triumph over the attendant. The humour becomes noticeable when Angelou describes the shrewdness with which her mother cows the white attendant into submission. Angelou's narration points out the vehemence with which the attendant refuses to rent out the room to her because of racial undertones only for him to "melt" and change his attitude like an obedient child who is being forced to do the right thing at the verbal explosions of her mother. The humour that arises here goes to highlight the subject of motherhood since it is related to an instinctive maternal defence and protection of one's child in the face of danger and oppression.

There are several other incidents where Angelou uses humour to develop the subjects of motherhood and marriage. One of these includes Angelou's first experience at the Harlem Writers' Guild. Her narration and description of her emotion and composure at the guild is sure to at least create some humour. She narrates in The Heart of a Woman:

"I read the character and set description despite the sudden perversity of my body. The blood pounded in my ears but not enough to drown the skinny sound of my voice. My hands shook so that I had to lay the pages in my lap, but that was not a good solution to the tricks my knees were playing. They lifted voluntarily, pulling my heels off the floor and then trembled like disturbed Jello." (p42).

One other episode where Angelou's humour becomes noticeable is where she narrates the story of her first meeting with Vusumzi Make, the man who becomes her second husband. She tells of an invitation that Vusumzi Make made to her son to see her off in The Heart of a Woman:

“At the door, Make stopped us. ‘Miss Angelou, just a minute. Guy, I would be honoured to see your mother home.’ Make knew that asking Guy’s permission would please us both. My son smiled, loving the old world formality, straight out of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Corsican Brothers*. ‘Thank you, Mr. Make, I am seeing her home.’ I could have pinched him till he screamed.” (pp128-129)

It is Angelou’s candour and openness about issues that bring about the humour in her. This incident tells of Make’s early attempts at courting Angelou for marriage. The subjects of marriage and motherhood, therefore, get highlighted in this humorous appeal by Angelou.

Angelou also employs after-thoughts and comments, which otherwise would be called authorial commentary in a prose narrative written in the third person point of view. These after-thoughts and comments help make Angelou’s readers get to know her impressions about incidents which occur around her. Authorial commentary refers to the after-comments that a writer passes after the narration of an incident. These comments represent the view, impression and after-thought of a narrator concerning particular incidents being narrated in a story. Authorial commentaries are particularly even more effective when the voice of the narrator or the point of view is in the third-person. The reason is that once the narrator is all-knowing (as is the case in the third person narrative voice or the omniscient), he or she can pass his after-thoughts or comments about some incidents just to make the incidents sound credible. In the case of the use of authorial commentary in the first-person narrative voice, readers get to know what the narrator himself thinks about particular incidents unfolding. In this case, however, the incidents

are not left to the sole subjective judgment of readers. Maya Angelou does a good job by presenting her after-thoughts and extra comments on some incidents she narrates which go a long way to help in her presentation of the subjects of motherhood and marriage.

In the various narratives, Angelou presents more commentaries after her graduation, her early sexual experiences, and the disobedient behaviour of the “powhitetrash” girls at Stamps, her impression about her rape ordeal by Mr. Freeman and his subsequent murder by her maternal uncles. Some other incidents in which readers see Angelou giving her after-thoughts about her impressions about her mother after she [Angelou] narrated the incident about her visit to the cinema to watch movies about the ideally sophisticated lady who behaved and looked exactly like her mother, Vivian Baxter Johnson, and finally, the comments she passes to convey her impression about her grandmother, Momma Henderson and finally Mrs. Bertha Flowers, the lady who first introduces Angelou to the beautiful art of reading and creative writing. In relation to the subjects of marriage and motherhood, some specific incidents are worth referring to.

Angelou makes reference to the time when she expresses doubts about her feelings for her son taking into consideration the thoughts expressed by most black women in the face of changing situations in the family and society as an after-thought.

In The Heart of a Woman she writes thus:

“The black mother perceives destruction at every door  
ruination at every window, and even she herself is not beyond her own  
suspicion. She questions whether she loves her children enough  
- or more terribly, does she love them too much? Do her looks cause  
embarrassment – or even more terrifying, is she so attractive her sons



begin to desire her and her daughters begin to hate her. (pp40-41)

Again, after Angelou's marriage to her first husband collapses, readers get to know much about how she felt about the dissolution of the marriage through an after-thought comment. After the marriage falls on the rocks, Angelou critically comments on all that have happened during her short married life, and one very distinguishing thing that can be made up of those comments is that she claims she felt maturer and became very open-minded. She lamented that she had realized that everybody makes a mistake at one point in his or her life mostly through youthful exuberance and anxiety for experience and adventure. These comments really helped in the development of the subjects of motherhood and marriage.

Aside the after-thoughts that Angelou presented as a stylistic technique to present her narratives, there is yet another technique she used and this is the serial autobiography style. Serial autobiographies are a collation of autobiographies written and published serially but which all have the same person as the object of focus for its readers. A writer, therefore, may write his or her life story in a serial form. Angelou does a similar thing in her narratives with each capturing a particular period in her life beginning with the first one I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings published in 1970 and ending with A Song Flung Up From Heaven also published in 2000. In-between the first and the last autobiographies, there are four others. Each autobiography categorically narrates specific incidents of Angelou's life and begins from where the previous autobiography that comes before it ended. The series format, therefore, becomes a very important stylistic technique Angelou uses to drive home her message to her readers. This is because the various narratives individually represent part of a whole series that collectively present the story

of a journey in a search for love, home, self-knowledge and identity and develops the subjects of motherhood and identity. It is very important, however, to indicate that when one out of the serial autobiography is omitted from the collective, it will indicate an incompleteness that will do the whole collective narrative a big disservice. This is because in terms of chronology, should any of the narratives be left unread, one cannot adequately follow the story in its wholeness. For example, should a reader finish reading Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976) and move on straight away to Gather Together in my Name (1974) one may miss most of the details that touch on the subject of marriage since all the details of Angelou's marital experiences with Vusumzi Make are spelled out in The Heart of a Woman (1981). Right from the ending of Caged Bird, (1970) Angelou becomes a mother and she plays this role throughout all the remaining autobiographies. Logically, therefore, when a reader foregoes the reading of any one of the narratives in the series, he or she may miss Angelou's discussions on the subjects of motherhood and marriage, which may not be adequate for a clearer understanding of the narratives.

Change or distortion in names of characters is also another stylistic feature that Angelou introduces in her work. In the various narratives the names of some characters are used interchangeably, hence increasing the possibility of confusion within readers as to knowing who the character really is. It is very important for any creative writer to show consistency in the use of names of his or her characters in the narrative process. If there is no consistency, readers will be very confused about the character's identity and that of other characters. However, Angelou breaches the rule of name consistency in the creative writing process, yet her readers do not get confused as it would be expected, but

rather get along very well with her. Angelou herself uses five different names in all the autobiographies to refer to her heroine in the various narratives. She gives the heroine names like “Maya”, “Marguerite”, “Ritie”, “Margaret” and finally, “May”. This distortion is obviously supposed to be confusing to any reader yet, in the case of Angelou’s autobiography, the narration is presented in such a way that the narrator allows readers to know who a different name is referring to. She does this by giving further explanations as to how the name change came about and she continues to make references to these names so often such that her readers get used to the different names for the same character.

Moving the argument away from Maya Angelou, it again becomes evident that her son is also given three different names in the autobiographies. He is introduced to readers as Guy Johnson from birth. Readers get to know this at the end of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, the first autobiography in the series, when he is born. Yet, as the story unfolds, readers will realize that Guy Johnson is given another name as Claude Johnson in the third autobiography, Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas. A further reading of the autobiographies gives another revelation of another change in Guy’s name from Claude Johnson to Clyde Johnson. Angelou employs the use of some descriptive attributes to erase any confusion bound to occur in the minds of readers about the specific identity of her characters. Thus, even though, she changes the names of some of the characters within the individual series of narratives, readers still get along with her without any problem or confusion. Again, Angelou’s grandmother is given two names within the narratives. These are Momma and Mrs. Henderson. Once again, Angelou carefully steers her narration using detailed description and detail in such

a way that readers intimately know who Angelou is referring to at any episode where her grandmother is mentioned.

The next stylistic feature Angelou uses is that of voice and voice changes. The voice tells who is telling the story. Angelou uses the technique of voice to enable readers distinguish between the private self of Maya as a person and the public self, Maya, and the representation of all Afro-American women. A look at this quotation from the first in the series, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970) will give an insight into the discussion of voice and voice changes in the narratives.

“I ran, peeing and crying, not toward the toilet or back but to, our house I’d get a whipping for it, to be sure, and the nasty children would get something new to tease me about. I laughed anyway, partially for the sweet release; still, the greater joy came not only from being liberated from the silly church but from the knowledge that I wouldn’t die from a busted head.”

(P7)

This is the private self of Maya Angelou. The “I” is not young Maya speaking in her own childish voice although some of the words are the words of a child, as in words like “silly church” and “busted head” These are the words of the mature writer looking back on her life and describing a relatively minor but still traumatic childhood experience from an adult point of view using at times adult words and phrases, as in words like “sweet release” and “the greater joy”. But, as the adult Angelou describes an incident which she most likely actually experienced as a child, she is also recalling her personal feelings about it as she later reflects back upon it as an adult. At this point a careful look will be made into another quotation on that same page.

“If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat...It is the unnecessary insult”. (P7)

It is still the adult Angelou speaking but gone are the adult personal feelings. Here she is speaking for the representative young Black female experience which she summarizes in different words near the end of her novel: she uses the literary style of voice and voice change to reveal that 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.

During Angelou's graduation from Central High in Stamps, Arkansas, the reader hears both voices of Angelou as Maya reflects on the words of the white racist speaker. Thus her voice confesses in Caged Bird thus: “It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense. We should all be dead.”(p153). This is Angelou, the young teenager thinking privately to herself. She uses words that she did not dare to speak aloud. At the same time it is Maya Angelou, the public self, speaking for all Blacks. Notably, it can be said here that the sense of collective responsibility, a sensibility charged by the disparagement of the group, is reflected. In the impotence of childhood there is nothing the narrator can do, but the charges which have been leveled against her people will not soon be forgotten as she made it clear to her readers. This narrative feature of voice and the changes that come within its usage, therefore, helps her readers to carefully follow her line of thought in her narratives.

To sum up, it's clear to note that the chapter has been examining Angelou's experiences as a married woman, and how those experiences become a springboard for her to grow from the fantasy of her little girl's world into the real world of adults. In fact, the subject of marriage has been identified in this section of the paper as a tool of education for Angelou since she gets involved in inter-racial marriages that open up her understanding that marriage is mostly about sacrifices, and not always about love and infatuation. The chapter also discusses some features of literary style that Angelou chooses to present her narratives. The significance of these techniques lies in the fact that they reveal Angelou as a crafty writer who writes with style to enable her stories come out with a clear message, which in the case of her narratives are on the subjects of marriage and motherhood. The chapter that follows presents a detailed conclusion to the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The thesis has critically examined the narratives of the famous African American writer Angelou. All the narratives are altogether written to drive home a certain point. They all paint the picture through the work of art about the life of a talented artist; an intelligent young girl; her childhood, her ordeals, her adulthood, and almost everything she does by way of finding survival for herself and her growing son. The narratives in autobiography are unified through a number of repeated themes and through the developing character of the narrator. In their scope, they stretch over time and place, from America to Africa and back to America from a confused childhood to an accomplished adulthood. With so expansive a project, Angelou focuses on herself and her interaction with others: with the jazz singer Billie Holiday; with the actor Godfrey Cambridge; with Tosh Angelos, a Greek and Vusumzi Make, a South African freedom fighter; with the African American community in Ghana, with the world leader Malcolm X, among many other great men and women she comes into contact with. That is not to say that in an autobiography, the narrator cannot show his or her interaction with other characters.

Angelou, in writing these autobiographies, has assured herself a prominent place in American literature. She guides the reader through a quarter of a century of American and African-American history, revealed through the point of view of a strong and affectionate black woman. By opening up the pages of her narrative, Angelou proves her contribution to the autobiographical tradition by enriching it with the narrative of the contemporary experience of the single mother and female sensibility in marriage. Angelou is considered by Worley and Jesse Perry Jr. (1998) as a major contemporary

author and contributor to the black autobiographical tradition whose literary reputation is based on her volumes of autobiographical series and her poetry. The titles of the autobiographies are, in the order of publication, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together in My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas, The Heart of a Woman, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes and finally, A Song Flung Up from Heaven. Her storytelling abilities are marked with wisdom and humor as she reveals herself to the scrutiny of the reader with an often painful but honest candour. Angelou's memoirs inspire hope in the face of adversity and reveal the resiliency of the human spirit as she "leads her readers to recognize that the human spirit need not cave in to ignorance, hatred, and oppression" (Leone, p14).

The review of related literature in the first chapter further made mention of the fact that the structure of Angelou's autobiographical text is that of a journey or an odyssey in a quest for self-knowledge, self-identity, education and home. It was cited with an example using the first volume, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, where the study points out that readers find the child Maya crisscrossing the United States from place to place with no permanent sense of home. Angelou's journey begins with a literal journey as she travels from California to her Grandmother Henderson's home in Stamps, Arkansas, when she is three years old. The journey, as the study pointed out, will continue eastward from California to New York, ending finally on the Mother Continent of Africa throughout the other four volumes of her autobiographical text. The study further revealed that Angelou's linear journey, in search of home, identity, education and self-definition, comes full circle when she realizes that no matter how much she loves



Africa, the roots of her ancestry, it is not her true home; the reason for which she returns “home” to America.

The major issues that this study particularly focused on as far as the narratives are concerned are motherhood and marriage. The first part of the work introduces readers to the introductory aspect of the work. The review of related literature was also included in the first chapter. Notable writers who have contributed to the study of Angelou’s work by way of critique were mentioned, and their comments were discussed accordingly in connection to the study’s main interest. The first chapter ends with a thesis statement that carefully mentions what this whole study is about.

The subjects of motherhood and marriage, which are the primary thematic interests of the study, were explained in the study as the blueprints which Angelou uses to get herself educated about the challenges in life. It was mentioned that these subjects that enable her redefine her identity thread their way through all the volumes of Angelou’s narratives. However, the study categorically insists that although there are many psychological and emotional setbacks for Maya Angelou throughout her life in her quest for self, she does find self-affirmation along the journey. The study for instance highlighted in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, during young Angelou’s time of voluntary muteness, it is Mrs. Flowers, a surrogate mother-figure, through affirmation and acceptance of the child for herself, who helps young Angelou reevaluate her self-image.

The second chapter of the work was solely reserved for the discussion of the subject of Angelou’s motherhood to display her search for identity. Throughout the volumes of Angelou’s narratives, motherhood remains a dominant theme and unifying

element. The study mentions how the need to protect herself, and most especially, her young baby, becomes one way of asserting herself as an independent woman. Both Annie Henderson and Vivian Baxter act as nurturers and protectors in their respective roles. In turn, Angelou, who becomes a mother at the end of Caged Bird, learns to fulfill the role of nurturer and protector as a new mother. The study again mentions that Angelou's relationship with Mrs. Bertha Flowers represents another important turning point in the development of the autobiographer's consciousness when her maternal influence helps young Angelou tap into her creative resources and find self-healing.

The study offers the argument that the mother-son behaviour pattern in the volumes, especially in Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas shows Angelou as the mother in conflict over the need to love versus the need to be a fully realized person. The theme of motherhood becomes more complex in The Heart of a Woman, for instance because it represented a time of fluctuation between dependence and independence for mother and son, and between Maya and her own mother. At the end, a mature Maya Angelou finds herself alone. The study carefully reveals that the theme of motherhood suggests liberation and also aligns Angelou's quest for acceptance by Mother Africa with the theme of identity and displacement. Her quest for racial identity and home, a place of belonging, are intricately interwoven within the context of those themes of motherhood and displacement. The second chapter of the study fully discussed the motherhood roles of Angelou and it revealed that the maternal trope in the autobiographies has been fully developed as a controlling device, which helps to propel her search for identity. Again, the chapter critically examined the situation where racial, class, and gender oppression and segregation affected Angelou's motherhood experience

in the U. S. A. in the 1940's through to the 1960's during which time Angelou becomes a mother. The significance of motherhood as a unifying element in the autobiographies was highlighted. The study of Angelou's life reveals that she debunked right from the time she became a mother the idea of working inside the home. However, the study revealed that Angelou refutes this whole idea and proves that she has an identity to the tradition of feminist independence and responsibility which takes its roots from working slave women who work from dawn to dusk to feed whole households including their male counterparts and even white slave owners and their families. Her mother as a working mother, and her grandmother as a workingwoman, also practically bring to life Angelou's link to a family of working mothers. As a mother, Angelou is seen to be working tirelessly to make ends meet to prevent her from being dependent.

Still on the issue of motherhood being used by Angelou to drive home her message of search for an identity, Angelou's tough-mindedness as a mother was discussed. The study critically makes reference to the fact that Angelou, as a young mother, was very tough-minded and struggles hard enough to assert her identity even in the face of opposition from the racist white environment in which she found herself. Particular insight was made by the study to the time when Angelou was looking for a job as a plant instructor and was refused the job simply because she was a woman and black. Angelou stands up against the white would-be-employer to openly protest this form of discrimination. The study discussed that the obvious reason why she [Angelou] had to do this, displaying her tough-mindedness, was that she was a single mother who was struggling to make ends meet for both her child and herself.

One other thing the study particularly gives attention to under the issue of motherhood, as an issue of prime importance as far as the search for identity theme is concerned is the trope of the enraged mother. In this particular vein, it was noted that Angelou displays an open air of rage as a mother when an attempt was made by her son's school administrators to marginalize him and discriminate against him. Another incident that the discussion referred to under the issue of the enraged mother under the trope of motherhood was that of Vivian Baxter Johnson's rage and fury at the white – skinned hotel administrator who tried discriminating against Maya Angelou at the hotel where Angelou goes to meet her mother, Vivian. It was, however, mentioned in the discussion that the act of the enraged mother, which was displayed by Angelou's mother at the hotel gave Angelou some air of confidence and respect for her mother, an attitude she extended to all members of her race.

On the subject of motherhood in the second chapter, the fact that Angelou was raised by two mothers was also discussed as a strong factor that increases Angelou's understanding of the Black American tradition of motherhood. Angelou points to two very able women, and probably three in the persons of Vivian Baxter, Momma Henderson, and Mrs. Flowers, who raised her. Vivian Baxter and Momma Henderson were pictured by Angelou to be very strong female role models who played very significant roles in Angelou's formative and adult life. Grandmother Henderson was resilient and had immense personal pride, embodied strength in the face of severe economic depression and the racism that surrounds them everywhere. From her example, Angelou learned that she had the power to control her own destiny and to take pride in herself despite the negative effects of the poverty and racism she experienced while

growing up in the segregated South. The attentions of Mrs. Bertha Flowers, an elegant black woman whom Angelou viewed as an aristocrat amidst the poverty of Stamps, helped Angelou not only to love books but also to register her brain to the world of imagination, creativity, and the power of the written word. She also teaches her that she must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. These three women, were, therefore, recognized by the study to have served as mothers and role models for Angelou, and so, they used their motherhood role plays to influence Angelou in her search for an identity. It is also very important to mention that at the end of the second chapter, some stylistic devices used by Angelou to drive home her message to her readers were discussed. Some of these devices mentioned and discussed include humour, which helps to bring relaxation to her reader and enforce the subjects of motherhood and marriage. One other feature of style Angelou makes use of to drive her message clearly to the readers' doorstep is her presentation of after-thoughts and comments. The chapter also discusses the first person narrative point of view, and the story-within-a-story technique. One impression that the study forms is that these stylistic features used by Angelou in her narratives, though are not uncharacteristic of most autobiographies, have been used in such a way that they make the stories very easy to read and understand and enjoyable from chapter to chapter and page to page.

In the third chapter, an extensive highlight of Angelou's experience of marriage is presented to show how she uses this medium to search for an identity. In fact, the study clearly shows Angelou's marital relationships she contracts as one sure way through which she gets herself educated about certain nuances of life. Angelou records two marital relationships in her volumes of her autobiographies: her marriage to Tosh

Angelos and Vusumsi Make. Notably, the third chapter of the work explains that neither works out for her. Highlights of her marriage to each of the husbands were made in the third chapter.

The study revealed that initially, Angelou's marriage to Tosh appeared fulfilling and smooth sailing until some few things started going wrong and the marriage fell on the rocks. Two clear reasons were assigned to why the marriage collapsed: first was Angelou's fear that her son's pride in his Black ancestry might be compromised with the presence of a white father. It becomes even clearer that Angelou's insistence on maintaining a Black ancestral pride in her son meant that she was not ready to see all that effort wasted because of her marriage to a white-coloured man. It was re-iterated that this was a clear display of the theme of search for an identity; secondly, the atheism of her husband, Tosh Angelos quickly facilitated the break-up of that marriage. The chapter records that Tosh's atheism manifested itself in his strict directional orders to Angelou not to go worship in the Black church. It was highlighted briefly that Angelou regarded the Black church as a symbolic representation of her recognition of her Black identity. She regarded the Black church as a defining element of her Black heritage that she did not wish to relinquish. The third chapter extensively discussed how and why she felt that being among her people to fellowship with them gave Angelou some form of identity, which is not just religious, but social and racial. One other highlight made concerning this incident was that Angelou's defiance of her husband, Tosh's orders is a clear indication of how she wanted to maintain close ties with members of her race to preserve her racial identity even to the peril of her marriage.

The third chapter gives focus to Angelou's second marriage to Vusumzi Make, the South African freedom fighter. It mentions the caution that Vivian Baxter Johnson, Angelou's mother gives to her about marrying someone she barely knows. Angelou's mother had actually preferred her to marry Thomas Allen, the bails bondsman, because this is someone she knows. It was recorded that Angelou, with the strong character that she has, preferred to marry the freedom fighter from South Africa, a gross refusal to listen to her mother's counsel. The chapter categorically mentions that the theme of the clash between marital bliss versus the real experience of marriage is fully developed with Angelou's marriage of Make. The third chapter judiciously exposes Angelou's immaturity at that point of her life despite her self-claim of having become maturer after her divorce of Tosh Angelos. The chapter reveals how Angelou still held on to the Hollywood-influenced notion of romantic bliss in marriages. It was as a result of finding no fulfillment that the marriage breaks down within some few months after it was contracted. A little comparison between the two husbands of Angelou was done to find out how they both related to her in their marriage. It was found out that the two men have something common about them, which was the fact that they both undermined the freedom, dignity and independence of Angelou; they failed to realize that she is a woman with a strong identity and a woman who makes a strong impression wherever she went. In the midst of all these underpinnings, Angelou perseveres and frees herself of these two men at different stages of her life. The conclusion drawn from the third chapter indicates that marriage fails to bring stability and adequacy to Angelou's life, hence her movement from one marriage to another. Ultimately, she gets divorced to both men and she really learns a lot from her experiences with them.

Both the second and third chapters discussed alongside their explanations of the subjects of motherhood and marriage Angelou's use of literary art to convey her message to her readers. They explore some aspects of literary art that Angelou successfully makes judicious use of, including her use of humour, after-thoughts and comments, change and distortion in names of some characters and voice and voice change. The other techniques that they discuss are the blend of the first person point of view and some elements of dialogue, the story-within-a-story technique, time and time distortions and finally, figurative language. The impression of the features of style used by Angelou concludes that Angelou was very successful in her employment of these techniques since they successfully help in the development of the subjects of motherhood and marriage.

In conclusion, it can be said that the subjects of motherhood and marriage which are the main issues discussed so far are successfully conveyed by Angelou. Various instances where motherhood and marriage came to the fore have been analyzed bringing out their import as inspirational guides to Angelou. The lessons that Angelou learns from the institution of marriage are also highlighted in the discussions made so far. The study reveals that the subjects of motherhood and marriage are successfully conveyed by Angelou through the deployment of some features of literary style. The features are not rare in the writing of autobiographical texts; however, the fact that she uses these features of style is indicative of the fact that she is a writer who adheres to the modalities of art. She blends dialogue with the first person narrative point of view, the only thing which the study perceives as uncommon. This style is successfully deployed since readers of the texts get a real feel of the actual words of other characters together with that of the writer herself, hence increasing their understanding of some of their actions. The study revealed



that Angelou used identical methods of literary style in all the narratives despite the passage of time. The same literary methods were used from book to book in order to make the subjects of motherhood and marriage take centre-stage in each text. Change in names of same characters, the use of same figurative language, the story-within-a-story technique, serial autobiography continuity, flashbacks and flash-forwards to distort time, among others are used repeatedly in all the texts. The features of literary style deployed by Angelou in her narratives help readers absorb her message of re-defining her identity through the subjects of motherhood and marriage.

Finally, it is important to state that despite the various hardships and unfortunate things that happen to Angelou: an unwed mother; an unlucky lovebird; a life of a prostitute, she struggles and prevails over them all. She becomes an enduring mother and a persevering wife with strong motherly instincts and a woman with the ability to adapt to all situations, be it good or bad. All these help to shape Angelou's thoughts for the future and strengthen to redefine her identity. Her message, therefore, instills the hope of survival for all her readers to rise above poverty, prejudice, and lack of power so that they can be seen by all to have persevered strongly to make an impression that will linger on in the minds of all people, even people of a race that is different from theirs.

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