

# E-Content

## American Literature

Semester: III

Lecture 20

*Prepared by:*

*Mohd. Fazil Akhtar*

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Course Name: Data structures using C

**Lecture 20: Critical Discussion on Maya Angelou:**  
'Still I Rise'

- The poem 'Still I Rise' written by Maya Angelou fixates upon the oppression and the persecution of the society directed towards the African American – especially woman – in her time.

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- This poem strongly elucidates – while obliterating the social inferiority of the African American – that no matter what the constitution or the level of injustice, there will always be those who will ‘rise’ up from these tyrannies and evolve and change the nature and course of the society for the better; something which Maya Angelou achieved in her lifetime.
- Maya Angelou was a historian, a songwriter, a novelist, a playwright, etc. She has written extensively and all her works are critically acclaimed and widely renowned and acknowledged.

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### Analysis

- To begin with, what intrigued me extensively whilst I first embarked upon my analysis of the poem was the three word title of the poem itself: *'Still I rise'*. *The title – if pondered upon correctly – conceives the summary and the initial message running throughout the poem.*

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- The word 'still' refers to 'something happening for longer than expected' or 'a situation or action that continues to the present because it has not finished'.
- The poet uses the word 'still' to connote the perpetuity of the tyrannical oppression of the society. By stating "bitter" and "twisted lies" she mocks and taunts the society for making racial as well as sexist and discriminating comments and judgments. The poet also states: "write me down in history" referring towards the notion that history is written as per the society and its curriculum, and that those opposing it are always portrayed as the antagonist and wrongdoers. Also, beautifully, referring towards the superiority of the superior class and the inferiority of the inferior class, and how in the eyes of the people the former are always correct and how the latter are always wrong no matter what the situation.

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•Furthermore, the poet uses rhetorical questions such as “does my sassiness upset you?” to taunt the racial society more. The entire fourth stanza can be taken into account at that matter. The poet delineates for the readers the expectations of the society after analyzing it herself. She states: “want to see me broken...lowered my eyes...shoulders falling down...” This surmises for the readers the abusive society of that time and their harassment.

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• In the sixth stanza when the poet states: “shoot...words”, “cut...eyes”, “kill...hatefulness”, the readers are fully capable of comprehending the fact that the persecutions still haven’t ended. They are ongoing, infact they are inflicted upon the victims in every manner: “words, cuts, and hatefulnes”. This choice of words and use of tone intensifies the effect of the poem and adds a different layer to it; giving it more emotion and integrity.

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- The entire poem is composed in first person narrative. The letter 'I' in the title informs the readers about the ensuing format of the poem.
- Maya Angelou uses the first person narrative to her advantage in a very skillful manner in order to boast about her success "oil wells...", to rebuke the society and their unjust customs "want to see me broken" and finally informing the world that no matter the persecutions and sexist discrimination "still I'll rise".



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- The third word in the title of the poem is perhaps the most influential and critical in accordance to the poem and the message which it is striving to convey.
- The definition of 'rise' in the English Language is: "An upward movement; an instance of rising". Throughout the poem the readers witness the various patterns in which the poet urges those who are stifled within the shackles of oppression to 'rise' and take action. As an example, the poet ridicules the society and their customs – as discussed above – and rubs her success into their faces. Hence, she rises from within the persecution and the harassment and urges others to do so too.

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- Towards the beginning, the poet enumerates the society's oppression and then, in the likes of a fatal incursion, she defiantly states that: "like dust, I'll rise", "like air, I'll rise". Amongst those various reasons of comparing herself to "dust", one could be the fact that dust consists of small particles, yet it is fully capable of causing harm, for example blinding someone's vision.
- Likewise, by comparing herself to "dust", one could suggest and allude that she was in fact warning the members of the society; warning them not to think of her as a child; warning them not to think of her as dirt because "like dust" she may be small but she is fully capable of causing them – and anyone else with such intentions – harm; something which is clearly evident and portrayed in the fifth and the sixth stanza of the poem, while also relevant throughout.

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- Moreover, 'rise' generally refers to an action. For example, a man was sitting down and then he 'rose' up. Which forces the readers to ponder, from where or what does the poet talk about rising from? The answer to this particular question can be obtained from the last few stanzas of the poem: "History's shame...", "Past that's rooted in pain...", "Nights of fear..." and "daybreak...wondrously clear".
- The poet talks about rising from within these oppressive and smothering situations towards a better and brighter future that is "wondrously clear". Her final repetition of the sentence "I rise" three times explains the whirlwind of emotions blowing inside of her and her dream of being treated as equal and with just.

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Reference Page

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise>

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