

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Introduction to Caged Bird

Born April 4th 1928, parents divorced when she was young.

Experiences racial discrimination in Stamps, and was raped by her mother's boyfriend. Became a Civil Rights Activist in 1964 with MLK, returned to America to help Malcolm X, presented with a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010. On NYT bestseller list for 2 years consecutively

"The only writer who has chosen the autobiographical form for self expression"

Context: 1969, the African-American Civil Rights Movement

- Jim Crow era (separate but equal law in 1954)
- Title "Caged Bird": racism, sexism, poverty, white male gaze and abuse are all "cages"

Literary Autobiography: coming-of-age autobiographical fiction

- Formation of self and identity: Bildungsroman
- She uses this story as an empowering tool as she comes to terms with her low self-esteem and insecurities
- In terms of literary sketches; the story is not chronological, grouping various scenes together, and doesn't reflect an age to age growth but more general growth
- Chapter 3 (KKK scene) and 5 (powhitetrash) (both 10 years old)
- But follows a common theme/message, presenting the futility of indignation and the utility of subtle resistance as ways of responding to racism
- Autobiography: how does memory work? In bits and pieces; episodes, parallels the way memory itself works, in vignettes
- Increasing awareness of pride in race: growing sense of pride in her race, "proud to be Negro, just be being herself" (79), Joe Louis's victory "proved that we were the strongest people in the world" (115), and Maya's conclusion at the end of the graduation scene: "I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race" (156) while in the prologue she wishes she was a white girl

Narrative voice and form: dual narrative voice, slave narrative, non-chronological

- Adult and child narrator
- She uses herself as a focus to symbolize every black girl growing up in America during those times
- Huge influence on Oprah Winfrey
- Narrative deconstructs the consciousness of rape and links social and cultural mechanisms that empower violence against both racial groups
- Her childhood narrator provides a critical look at these structures: "layering"
- Willingness to ridicule her former self-deceptions indicates her own critical stances towards herself, comments on her young immaturity and innocence, so she can comment retrospectively

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- “My past is my present” – Angelou
- Adult voice: representation of all Afro-American woman, and “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 an unnecessary insult.”
- Child voice: unaware, innocent and exploring the world, and the private self, childishness reflected in the language
- Both: “It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life...we should all be dead” (153) a young teenage girl, commenting for all Negroes. Synthesis represents everyone including her childlike self
- Slave voice: racism/historical background, the 1st person singular talking about 3rd person plural

Racism and discrimination/oppression (binary opposition)

- Language socialization, particularly at a time when certain language was punishable by spanking, division of society by the language they speak, code switching and language as identity (191). “Powhitetrash”, “hunk uh cheese”, “sody crackers”. Code switching is a self-conscious tendency, sparked by awareness. Angelou knows when she is an outsider; language as indicator of power
- When she corrects her grandmother in her head, pages 82, 47 (father’s language), 88-89 (by the way incident). Vernacular vs. educated English.
- Binary opposition: the blacks can only be understood using the white community
- Language: the importance of names (page 24, a thousand other appellations indicating familial relationship and lowliness of the addressor)
- Page 95, Mrs. Cullinan calling her Mary
- Page 27 “bye, Annie”, no respect while she says “miss xxx” (white power)

Sexuality and identity – decimation of her identity: literal loss of voice

- Page 76: I was called impudent and my muteness sullenness
- Sense of regret in killing Freeman
- Punctuated and disjointed recollection of the incident
- “Somatophobia (being afraid of ones own body) that afflicts Maya and her race”
- The caged bird sings because it longs to be free
- Continuous exploration of herself: the well of Loneliness (231) when she thinks she is lesbian. She gives herself up to a boy in order to clarify her position. Low self-esteem leading to giving up of herself.

Literature and reading

- The books are a form of her identity and restoration after rape (93)
- Shakespeare and Dickens (86-87)
- She rediscovers her own voice after reading
- Books protect her in enabling her to seek solace and restoration
- Extensive references to literature and borrowing from white men

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Symbolism of the store

- Is a safer representation of the community
- Page 54, she draws strength from the experiences of the store

Culture/Symbol: singing

- Builds identity, fostering a sense of unity against the whites
- Graduation song to respond to the racist white speaker (155)
- Slave narrative, the use of song and oral tradition to survive and unite

Humor

- “Mother wit” – Alan Dundes
- Humor of caricature, to deal with oppression (29)
- Humor is used to mask serious issues. Deals with them in a light-hearted manner (109)
- Humor and religion (108-109). Religion is a subtle way of fighting back against oppression, revival scenes, self-righteousness of the people

Religion

- Big characteristic of Momma
- Psychological weapon, the hymn to counter the humiliation of powhitetrash
- Gives way to self-righteousness and hypocrisy (revival scenes)

Title

- Comes from poem “Sympathy” by Lawrence Dunbar
- Caging of authentic African American identity and voice by white supremacy
- Title reminds readers of the possibility of simultaneously losing control of their own lives and losing their freedom – Lyman B. Hagen
- Who are the caged birds, what is their narrative

Genre

- Autobiography/autobiographical fiction
- Bildungsroman (growth and formation)
- Pomo Literature
- Black American literary tradition: slave narrative under the colonial gaze

Characteristics

- Not strictly chronological
- Composite of three or four characters into one

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Prologue and Chapter 1

Prologue describes Maya's attempt to say the Easter rhyme and she reflects on how ugly she and her dress was. Chapter ends with her running away, followed by Maya reflecting. How does this prologue set up the novel? What has changed? How does it change? The church is celebrating Christ's resurrection while Maya experiences death of temporary relief from confines of static racial identity, inability to speak.

Ideas/issues raised links to two main themes of identity and racism

- Disconnect of dual selves (personal identity and constructs of racial oppression)
 - Her inevitable role as an African American girl in an era of racism vs. an idealized self-image
 - Adult narrative voice used to provide structure to urgent thoughts of the child Maya: self-reflexivity
 - Similes and strong images are her style of writing, emotional violence of her thoughts as a child reflected in the writing
 - Self consciousness of physical appearance also expresses frustration at self-repression, pointing at things she dislikes about the black community
 - "Burst like a dropped watermelon", her discomfort as being defined by the black community and white society
 - Violent visual imagery represents the emotional violence of forced self-repression
- Symbolism of the dress
 - "Looked like magic", initially the vehicle for retreating from the harsh reality of life as an African American child. Is a projection of desire for significance
 - "Just thinking about it made me go around with angel's dust sprinkled over my face for days", as child-like fantasizing, longing for importance, a recognition of the "true" identity that the community is unable to perceive, granting her the brief feeling of empowerment
 - But when she is confronted with reminder of her status at church, her dress is suddenly just a "plain ugly cut down from a white woman's once-was-purple throwaway", "everyone in church was looking at my skinny legs"
 - Gives way to the pain of harsh revelation of the role that young Maya has been consigned to within the racial dynamic: futility of overcoming repression through identifying with something outside of her
 - "Now that I was sucking in air to breathe out shame it sounded like crepe paper on the back of hearses"
- Displacement

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- Maya is already separate from the other children who are making fun of her forgetfulness: displaced from her environment and the kids do not support her
- Emotional isolation from other children
- Pain of being perceived as the “other” through the negation of blackness and femininity: “the rust on the razor”
- In Chapter 1: sense of being unwanted from early in life, tags on their wrist like pieces of luggage, a porter had been charged with their welfare
- Personification of urban cities make the lack of self-worth more viscerally express, north vs. south, the link to the American Civil War
- Initial transience: the episode of Maya’s arrival in Stamps reveals the roots of inner conflict: “the town reacted to us as its inhabitants had reacted to all things new before our coming...it closed in around us, as a real mother embraces a stranger’s child. Warmly, but not too familiarly”
- Powerlessness at transcending fate
 - “I tripped over a foot stuck out from the children’s pew.”
 - A green persimmon, or it could have been a lemon, caught me between the legs and squeezed...Then before I reached the door, the sting was burning down my legs and into my Sunday socks.” Forces beyond Maya’s control: the inability to redeem herself in unfortunate circumstances
 - Powerlessness of the black community in Stamps: “guide my feet this day along the straight and narrow...” prayers are in first person, making it a lot more personal and real. Also in direct speech and vividly remembered
 - Presence of the Klan later on
 - Seen in the lives of the cotton-pickers; the attempt to use collective spirit of camaraderie in the community to take the sting off their jobs, mornings in the Store vs. the revelation of cruel reality of the life of a cotton picker
 - Chapter ends with stark reminder of the poverty that black community is doomed to: “cage” of the cotton-pickers, forcing Maya to become conscious of inequality early on
 - Momma is more affluent than the rest but is still gracious and beneficial

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Chapter 2

Mainly a description of her experience with Uncle Willie, and Uncle Willie's hiding of his disability and her introduction to literature

His disability and ability to lead a stable life unlike the majority of the black men who can barely make ends meet make him the butt of the community's jokes. Maya sees Uncle Willie hiding his handicap from two strangers and understands the tiresomeness of the contempt and pity he feels, and makes her closer to him. Meanwhile, she falls in love with reading, especially Shakespeare, though she feels guilty because he is white

Tone

- Retrospective
- Constantly reflecting on her thoughts back then
- She is embarrassed by her uncle's disability

Setting

- Framework for the historical narrative she is positioned in, reflecting the harsh realities of life that the blacks led
- The Jim Crow era (post-Reconstruction) saw destruction of the black farmer at the hands of resentful whites, bringing severe segregation laws that pervaded every walk of life and spurred the development of the KKK

Willie as a parallel to Maya—idea of the physical form as a gauge of one's worth in society

- Maya sees him as a model on how to deal with the disability, as she sees her own black skin as a disability
- Her love for Shakespeare is noted
- His attempt to hide the disability in front of two passing customers sees the attempt to remove the potential contempt
- Momma also has her own prejudices and imposes cages on Maya, restricting what she likes, cross reference to the white poets in chapter with Mrs. Flowers
- She sees that her uncle's disability is actually a cruel joke of nature
- "Double-tiered barrier", blackness and disability, similar to Maya as she is black and a woman
- Direct voice: stuttering of the uncle, the suffering that Uncle Willie goes through is vividly portrayed and displayed

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Chapter 3 and 4

Her own self-loathing

Somatophobia – fear of her human body

- Pays close attention to physical features of others such as Mr. McElroy, Bailey and white people
- She believed everyone in church was looking at her skinny legs
- Notes that her father was handsome, her mother was too beautiful to have children: feels unworthy to have even been born
- Express dislike of her own body
- Contrasts herself with her brother Bailey, through the use of binaries, polarized description in page 18, she is even more grateful for Bailey's love of her

Community and Family

- Issue of her own physical appearance: isolated from her family, especially when elders say things about her physical appearance, under scrutiny and harsh criticism from her own people
- Mr. McElroy is exalted and a near anachronism in Stamps
- The pride that she feels for an independent Black man comes from integrating herself into her own race, where her loyalty to the community allows her to feel a sense of familial pride despite her physical exclusion
- Significance of Momma and Mr. McElroy not going to church despite staying next to Momma
- Mr. McElroy is Willie's Mrs. Flowers

Race dynamics

- Whites are the "the unknowing majority" and the blacks are the "knowing minority" (17).
- "Crossing the black area of Stamps" vs. the white area, where the black area shapes her identity, the whites don't cross to the black side except to lynch or humiliate them

Community and family

- Store is the center of the black community, momma as the moral center of the family and the economic center of the black community, food becomes part of their identity (soul food)
- Store is closely linked with the idea of comfort and refuge (Uncle Willie hides in the store)
- Retrospective voice: nostalgia

Religion

- Bailey is elevated as a representative of the Christian faith: "my pretty black brother was my kingdom come" (20)

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- Contrasted to Reverend Thomas, who is not seen in a good light
- Religion to Maya is centered around people, not literal acts practicing religion

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Chapter 5 and 6

5 talks about Momma's 2 commandments (don't be dirty or impudent), which the powhitechildren don't follow

Major incident: rude behavior of the young girls, and Momma did not react but maintained her posture and continued humming. Moral victory for Momma.

6 is more comical: Reverend Howard Thomas, discussed the reasons for not liking him, and talked about Sister Monroe.

Racial Oppression

- By the whites, consciousness even at a young age of the oppression suffered by her race
- Idea of displacement: "the displaced air", "chasing out the air and even changing the well-known scents"
- Race as an overbearing instrument of power
 - "They took liberties in my Store that I would never dare"
 - Maya and Bailey relegated to "stand, solemn, quiet"
 - White children addressed Momma and Uncle Willie by their first names
- Value system framing the chapter: impudence and dirtiness as Momma's main values
 - Challenge to Momma
 - Taunting momma to probe a reaction and bringing her down to their level
 - Treating her like another child "Annie" and zero respect
 - Social order makes it such that Momma has to respect them
- Injustice and indignation: good and worthy people oppressed just because of their skin color
 - Some of the white families lived on Momma's farmland
 - Maya's feelings: "crying shame", "angry frustration", "God should strike them dumb at once"
 - Contrast between the powhitetrash and Maya clean and respectful vs. dirty and impudent
 - 23-24: "familial relationship and the lowliness of the addressor" vs. "Annie"
 - Economic and intellectual stature: richer and smarter but the powhitetrash are superior just because of their race
 - Tenacity of the blacks: the actions of the girls being a challenge to Momma, who displays fortitude and dignity
 - Maya wanted to retreat into the store when she saw the white trash, but Momma refused to retreat: "seemed to have turned into stone herself"

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- Smiled and continued humming, addressed them with “Miz” when they left, never lost her temper. Retains dignity and moral high ground
- Younger voice: perceived it as subservience and powerlessness, “crying in rage”, “a firecracked July-the-fourth burst”, contrasts with Momma who is likened to a “brown moon”, tranquility and calm
- Does not turn her head when the girls leave, maintaining position of dignity and superiority
- Transcends the ugliness of the girls’ actions, characterizes momma as having the tenacity and ability to survive and triumph in a hostile environment
- Religion and music (Christianity as respite): “glory, glory, hallelujah”
- “Temporary transcendence and an articulation of spirit”

Comic relief in chapter 6

- Child narrator primarily
- Form:
 - Ignorance of child narrator (29 and 31)
 - “(I used to think that he went west to heaven, but Momma straightened me out. He just went to Texarkana)”
 - “Doing ‘it’”
 - Reverend Thomas (29)
 - “Ugly, fat and he laughed like a hog with the colic”
 - Physical and slapstick humor (33-34, 36-37)
 - Sister Monroe’s regular tussles with Reverend and the ushers (33-34) “Preach it”
 - Language (37)
- Humor masks the grim racial undertones, talked about black man whose “things had been cut off”, “shot on the head” “and thrown into a pond” (31)
- Punctuation by the reflexive comments of the adult narrator (35)

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Chapter 7

Characterizes Momma and displays her strength and power but her own cage is self-restraint

“I saw only her power and strength”, the hyperbolic language bringing her out as being larger than life. Momma’s voice

Momma’s husbands are useless and take advantage of her, setting up the context for rape. Momma is also stoic and very self-restrained

Momma and identity: “Mrs”

Momma’s stature in the community vs. her stature in the wider community that is very small

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Chapter 8

The power that comes with materials/self worth (contrast between black and white, the difference between moral and material wealth), the relationship between Maya, Bailey and their parents

Frugality of the blacks combined with their generosity and resourcefulness

Sardonic humor: vanilla vs. chocolate ice cream, ridiculous yet true (farcical)

Chitlins

“People in Stamps used to say”

- Idiosyncratic
- Gullibility of the child narrator

Store as the economic center of the black community

Dual effects: material powers but also show a loss of self-worth, as this is proof of the abandonment by their parents (mother’s facelessness), emotiveness in the usage of the child narrator, allows for the personalization of a communal experience + socio-economic situation

Maya’s own economic status vs. the rest of the community (the emotional poverty)

Thoughts and feelings: yearning, anger, bitterness, and resentment

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Chapter 9

Characterization of Father: “he strutted, throwing ers and errors...” as a projection of power and importance, but he is actually just a doorman, real vs. ostensible power: the mother is unassuming

Father makes her feel inferior through his characterization

- Language difference
- “Bailey was his son...but I was an orphan that they picked up to provide Bailey with company” (48)
- “Uncle Willy was suffering under our father’s bombastic pressure” (49)
- Momma was “more concerned with her crippled offspring than the one who could fly away from the nest” (49) contrasts the presentation of power: implies the lack of responsibility
- Link to the later neglect of Maya in Mexico and Maya has to be the parent in the end
- Trope of the strong black woman
- Father has no cages
- Affects her relationship with Bailey: “I was certainly very vexed with Bailey”, “trying to butter up Dad” (50)
- Patronizing tone towards Maya “Daddy’s baby” (50)
- He has no claim over her as he didn’t raise her
- He functions as the contrast to Momma, and late Vivian Baxter who is absent but still protective

Characterisation of Vivian Baxter

- “write about a hurricane in its perfect power” (51)
- “Her red lips (Momma said it was a sin to wear red lipstick)” (51)
- Irreverent compared to Momma
- In religion and respect for authority: Vivian is empowered, defying existing power structures in different ways: the dentist vs. pragmatism and unconformity
- The parents are aping white ways
- Madonna-whore (mother is a bit more promiscuous)
- Segregation of Stamps vs. St. Louis

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Chapter 10

Setting changes to St. Louis

- “Prohibition, gambling and their related vocations” (53)
- Sharp shift from religious emphasis
- Food and community
- Education: the “whitefolk enunciation” (55) despite their lower educational standards
- Maya feels more displaced from St Louis, link to isolation and self-consciousness
- Reflects the *Bildungsroman*
- Foreshadows readers for the rape of Maya as Momma is not around anymore
- Whole world is turned topsy turvy by their parents

Introduction to Grandmother and Grandfather Baxter

- They offer an alternative to the traditional power only available to whites, which subverts the status quo
- She is “nearly white” and has power even though she is black and female
- Socially progressive: “I rather you have a good brain than a cute behind”

The mother

- Introduces her to dance, link to how it was a source of liberation for the blacks
- “It was to be years before I found the joy and freedom...”
- Mother’s brothers are protective figures
- “Unrelenting meanness” (57)
- “Just don’t kill him” (57)
- Link to Bailey acting on the rape of Maya
- Patterson incident
- Self-loathing of racial qualities using Mother’s characterization
- “Pretty, light-skinned with straight hair” (59)
- “Light-skinned” is deemed to be beautiful, as is straight hair

Humor

- Child’s narrative voice
- “I should grab for the balls right away”
- Mr. Freeman is emasculated by Maya’s description: “his breasts used to embarrass me”, “lay on his chest like little flat titties” (59)
- “Siditty” as the marker

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Name – Maya

- Impact of Bailey on Maya
- “Mya Sister” to “Maya”
- Protectiveness and its impact on her
- Theme of identity

Mr. Freeman

- Page 59
- “Sluggish inferiority of old men married to younger women” (60)
- “When she left the room, his eyes allowed her reluctantly to go” (60)
- Male gaze
- Lingering sense of his gaze

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Chapter 11 and 12

Maya and Bailey move to St. Louis

Literary Autobiography

- Chronological progression
- Increasingly mature
- Constant dislocation

Therefore characterization develops as such:

- Racist environment and familial dislocation which leads to familial confusion and reduction of identity
- Betrayal of trust, shame and disenfranchisement
- Identity reconstruction with Mrs. Flowers

Possible questions

- Link to literary autobiography genre thus awareness of character development is important
 - How has reaction to racism developed throughout the story
 - Isolation's impact on Maya
 - Emotional dislocation
- Initial isolation and dislocation as context for how Maya reconstructs herself

Synopsis

- Mother is often absent
- Mr. Freeman lusts and is dysfunctional
- Sexual abuses of Maya
- Maya's rape
- Psychological breakdown
- Withdrawal (betrayal of grown-ups)

Mother dear

- "I could never completely understand her realness...I thought she was beautiful."
- "He was lucky to get her"
- Maya never actually speaks to her mother

"Rape raises issues of trusts, truth and lie, love, the naturalness of a child's craving for human contact."

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Betrayal of trust

- Sexual innocence
 - "It was his 'thing' on my leg."
 - "I knew that lots of people did 'it' and that they used their 'things' to do this deed, but no one I knew had ever done it to anybody"
- Natural want for human contact (and a corruption of it)
 - "This was probably my real father"
 - "Would that mean that he would never hold me again?"
 - "It was beating just for me"
 - "Would he still love me?"
 - "I didn't want to admit that I had in fact liked him holding me"
- Violence
 - Isolation through the intimacy with cruelty and death, despite its injustice
 - "I'm gonna kill you"
 - "I couldn't understand why he wanted to kill my brother."
 - Sexual violence upon Maya
 - "The pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the child's body breaking open, because the body can, and the mind of the rapist cannot stop."

Powerlessness and guilt

- Sort of a possession of Mr. Freeman
- "A man was dead because I lied"

Collapse of identity

- Respecting, acknowledging both her body and her words
- Mutism collapses her identity
- Borne from her guilt

Disintegration of Maya's identity through her muteness

Initial suffering, her subsequent reconstruction of identity and Maya being the most powerless representation

Rape as a symbol for the abuse of the Blacks

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Chapter 13 and 14

Aftermath of the rape—her lie and subsequent mutism is a major turning point in her development; sees her return to Stamps

Rejection and lack of self-worth manifests itself in her misinterpretation of Mr. Freeman's words and actions—believes that he died because of her

Somatophobia: fear of her own body and what it can do to others

Strong moral compass: has a strong sense of integrity and reflected in her juvenile, innocent perspective and her interpretation of the consequences of her lies—she is guilty not over the rape itself, but rather lying on the stand, which is then magnified by Mr. Freeman's death as well as lying by omission to Bailey

Effect of the juvenile voice: hyperbolic language and confused, guilt-ridden tone coupled with vivid, almost violent imagery and religious references

Bildungsroman and growth: she is able to put the rape past her and matures as a result

Irony of suffering: the community is subjected to so much hurt and pain but they are still capable of inflicting the same on others e.g. the murder of Mr. Freeman

Chapter 14 sees Maya return to Stamps and mild comic relief—humor—while the focus shifts to Bailey because of her own mutism, seeing his growth and the development of his wit

Knowing their place: "Their decision to be satisfied with life's inequities was a lesson for me" (77)

Characterization of Stamps: as drab, boring, uneventful and negative

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Chapter 15 and 16

Spoken word and its links to identity

Child's lack of autonomy

- Momma downplays the significance of her rape
- Lifts her dress over her
- "Children these days..." (84)
 - Still regarding her as a child even after the rape has forced her to mature
 - C.f. library seats were made for children
- "Womanish"
 - Gulf in maturity, when her discomfort is labeled with womanish nature, St. Louis conflated with the rape
- Her rape is swept under the carpet

Characterization of Mrs. Flowers

- Elevated socio-economic status, the "aristocrat of Black Stamps"
- Empowerment of the black woman (strong black woman) and her association with women in English novels
- She used to wish she was a boy but this is now subverted
- Subverts the typical definition of beauty and elegance in White literature
 - "She made me proud to be a Negro just by being herself" (82)
- Two layers of subversion: anti-feminism and racism
- Gives Maya a sense of security and significance
 - "I was liked, and what a difference it made" (85)
 - "...I've been meaning to talk to her, anyway" (83)
 - Singles her out for attention
 - In contrasts to Mr. Freeman who uses her only for sexual pleasure

Spoken word as a symbol for empowerment

- Speech, language and identity
- Maya is self-conscious over Momma's grammar "not 'is', Momma, for two or more" (82)
- Power of the spoken word
- Mrs. Flower's lessons: language is man's way of communicating (85)
- It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning (85)

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- Spoken word and its power (86)
- “By the way” episode illustrates the dual ability of language to empower and provoke, the fatality of misinterpretation of language
- Blacks having the moral high ground, “White folks’ mouths were most in general loose and their words were an abomination to Christ” (89)

How is comedy created in this chapter?

- The “by the way” incident

Mrs. Cullinan

- Racial displacement
- Racism: naming the black identity as per their own prerogative
- Yet another “cage”
- Importance of language in affirming identity and as a tool for oppression

Subtle resistance against racism

- Maya breaks her heirloom
- Page 94
- She cannot demand anything directly but walks out with Miss Glory screaming and breaks free
- “Her name’s Margaret, goddamn it, her name’s Margaret” (95)

Contrast in Mother figures

- Comparing Momma vs. Mrs. Flowers
- Indications of a split mother

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Chapter 17

Events

- Bailey does not return home, tells only Maya why she was late
- Seeing “mother dear”, Bailey cries and Maya is happy

Growth and maturity

- Rape as a turning point, page 97
- Helplessness and passiveness as a result of growth, pages 96, 97, 102
- Infusion of adult and children voice, page 97
- Preservation of childishness through humor as a symbol of purity, page 100 and 101

Familial dislocation

- Stamps is transformed into a hostile ground due to the consequences of the rape, pages 98 and 100
- Distancing between Maya and the family, page 98
- Commentary of race in familial relations, page 97
- Maya can sympathize with but still rejects Momma’s own response to her actions.

She finds solace and security in Bailey

- The strength of their relationship through protectiveness, page 98
- Displays the growing distance due to their different responses to Mother Dear
- Choice to position their tumultuous relationship signifying a growing inner instability in Maya, page 102

Yearning for mother

- Yearning keeps Maya rooted to her purity and childish hopefulness
- Deification of mother is a symbol to show how Maya tried to be resilient, not entrenched in a world of despair
- Yearning kept them close but also shows them drifting, page 44

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Chapter 18

Pervaded with cynicism and sarcasm, critiquing religion and its power of solace with the oppressed Blacks, describing the work of the Blacks, focusing on the events within a revival, and Maya asserts ultimately that the music of worship and blues were indistinguishable in encapsulating their hope and joy.

Growth of Maya: finding herself through deliberations on race and religion, distancing through observation of others that accentuates the sense in which she is being actively changed even as she passively observes the world

Racial identity

- Pain at watching her race suffer, page 103
- She blames her race, page 103, 104
- Critical of her race's predicament, shows an exposition on her finding of self-acceptance, page 112

Religious criticism

- Cynical representation of religion's impact, page 103 and 110
- Irreverent references towards religious processions, page 106, 107, 108
- Sense of faith and belief in page 111
- Pragmatic view of religion, page 112

Humor/Cynicism

- Analyses and handles Maya's trauma through a different lens
- Accentuates irreverence in religion and racial predicament
- Does not trivialize faith nor racial price, but presents an internal conflict and finding of self, which is consistent with the development of Maya after the rape
- A convention in Black literature which is powerfully used through the authorial voice to present the predicament of the Blacks, used as self-deprecation to explore the contradictions and suffering of racial injustice

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Chapter 19

Identity of Maya and the African American Community

- Narrative voice (Adult vs. Communal voice)
- Joe Louis as a symbol of black repudiation of white superiority
 - Captivated the crowd
 - Victory for the black community
 - Joe Louis was vilified by the white press as he was considered dangerous and threatening
 - Derogatory nicknames especially after Jack Johnson
 - Fighting Primo Carnera who outweighed him by 65 lbs
 - Identification with Louis due to the narrative voice
 - Page 115: "my race groaned", "our people"
 - Tense atmosphere "if Joe lost", dehumanization and reference to religion and God
- Racial discrimination
- Contrast in linguistics
 - Ebonics
 - "He gone whip him till that white boy call him Momma"
 - "whip that cracker like it's open season"
 - Subversion of roles of Whites and Blacks.
 - Professional white commentary "addressing as "ladies and gentlemen"
 - Power is unknowingly bequeathed to the blacks
 - Humorous contrast in language and description, emphasizing racial differences, social status and discrimination.
 - "A black boy. Some black mother's son." (116), racial pride
 - Anticlimactic ending, the irony of appearance of progress
- Humor and irony
- The one radio in the store

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 20

Bildungsroman, identity of Maya as a girl/woman

The picnic

- She makes her first friend
- Close friendship and she receives a VDay note from Valdon but she destroys it
- Realizes his innocence and becomes a girl again
- Page 120, incident externalizes her internal conflict, stemming from the trauma of experience with Mr. Freeman
- Her intellectual maturity progresses in this Bildungsroman

Louis Kendricks brings back the child narrator

- "...the prettiest female in Stamps next to Mrs. Flowers" (120)
- Jane Eyre, a proto-feminist idea of the strong woman
- Page 122, inventing the "Tut" language, irony is that she has to return to becoming a child after becoming a woman

Tommy Valdon

- Creates paranoia in Maya, brings up memories of her traumatic experiences
- Page 123
- Stichomythic questions running through her mind
- Exasperated, terrified tone
- Pages 125, anticlimactic ending

Confusion of the child narrator: girl or woman?

Undercurrents of previous child abuse and female oppression

Humor

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 21

Humor

- “There he initiated girls...hips” (126)
- “Joyce knew she had made a conquest” (126)
- Sex is explored very innocently and is an awkward stage of burgeoning sexuality that Bailey comes to terms with

Uncomfortable echoes of the rape

- Though Maya has matured because of the rape, there is the painful reminder that she is still a child
- Joyce’s taking advantage of Bailey

Bailey’s bildungsroman

- Page 128, 130
- Parallel of Mr. Freeman’s domination

Growing distance between Maya and Bailey

- Page 128-129

Function as a Literary Autobiography

- What is the purpose of this chapter?

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 22

Momma's influence

- Larger than life (39)
- Initial fear in 141 and 143, but crawls under Momma in 143 in the end
- Centrality of religion

Intimations of Mortality

- 138-139
- 139, burial ceremony
- First conscious cognizance of her own mortality
- Crucial awareness compels Maya to devote an entire chapter and is marked in page 135, connects herself with death
- Death is pivotal to her sense of self, the ultimate challenge to death is her own assertion of self and her willingness to face annihilation and overcome it.
- Death as the metaphor of self

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 23

Donleavy speaks very condescendingly to the Blacks; but rescued by Henry Reed

Education: descriptions of graduating students' behaviors as they studied for finals and face the reality of moving on from school, page 145

- "Graduation epidemic", page 144
- Spending for the event, page 145 and 148
- "Momma made a Sunday breakfast although it was only a Friday." (149)
- Education is the source of joy and confidence for Maya, from pages 146-147 and 150

Racism

- Page 151, subversion
- Imposing cages on the Blacks, page 152
- Graduation...was finished for Maya before her name was called. (153)

Solidarity and Unity of the Black Community

- Singing, 156, Negro Anthem
- Scepticisms and cynicism, instability of the sense of belonging to the black community, 155-156
- "The tears...were not wiped away in shame" (156)
- "Proud member of the...Negro race" (156)

Centrality of Religion

- Out of God's bosom I had won reprieve, 149
- Light-hearted, humorous interjection, page 158

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 24

White dentist who refuses treatment although he was lent money before

Texarkana

- “Dr. Lincoln owed us a favor” (158)
- Going in by the backdoor (160)
- Apathy of Dr. Lincoln in page 161

Characterization of Momma

- “When you come to borrow my money you didn’t have to beg.” (161)
- Momma triumphs because of her calmness, patience and tenacity
- Maternal and sacrificial love, 161
- 163: rare instance of a display of affection

Narrative Voice

- Child narrator’s voice brought into question
- Fantasy-like portrayal of Momma is largely hyperbolic

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 25

The idea of truth

- Genre of Bildungsroman
 - Moral and psychological growth of the main character

Narrative Voice

- “Knowing Momma, I knew that I never knew Momma” (165)
- Antithetical and secretive, cautious with language
- Little trust with much fear and harm, governed by the effect of racism and slavery

Encounter with Racist Violence

- Page 167, 168
- Bailey’s shock
- “We didn’t do it. We did nothing wrong”

Effects of racism

- Interpretation by the child narrator
 - Pages 166-168
- Response from adults
 - Falling back on religion
 - “Exploded” in a general human reaction
 - Debilitating truth from Bailey
- “The humorless puzzle of inequality and hate.” (168)

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 26

Vivian throws a party with milk chocolate and brown biscuits. Maya recalls how Vivian shot one of her partners for verbally abusing her.

Deifies Mother Vivian, page 171 and the religious allusion

- Vivian is captivating (173)

Children have complete adoration for her

- Raw and honest love
- Page 175: pride
- Rhetorical question

Characterization of Mother Vivian

1st impression vs. after arriving with Momma in California

Characterisation of Vivian

- Avenue of learning/exposure for her children
 - Page 171, glamorized
 - Foodie education (176)
- Brave and bold
 - (176) shooting
 - "A little .32
 - Affirmative tone and the ability of Vivian to command respect

Narrative voice

Slips between child and adult narrator, weaves many voices. Plurality of narratives

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 27

Moving to San Francisco at the onset of WW2, shift with the setting and times
Relationship with “the times and the city”
Racism in San Francisco

Themes: Displacement, reconstruction of identity and the pervasiveness of racism

Shift in times and setting, narrated in 3rd person, elevation of black status, for the first time she is now “a boss, a spender”.

Maya’s relationship with the city: the air of collective displacement, the impermanence of life in wartime, the undertone of fear and violence.

Connection to the city: everyone is disconnected so she is not disconnected, “the city acted in wartime like an intelligent woman under siege”

City as a state of beauty and a state of freedom: a symbol of a fresh start, liberation from the cages of entrapment. She becomes dauntless and free of fears, thinks that life was just one great risk for the living.

Love for San Francisco reinforced by her romanticized outlook for the city.

“Pride and Prejudice stalked in tandem the beautiful hills”

But racism is still prevalent: treatment of the Japanese

Pervasiveness of Racism: “White matron”, white superiority, falsely accused “negro civilian”, collective black victory

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapter 28

One of the three black students

Miss Kirwin, dance and drama

“Love yourself”: increasing acceptance, pride and love for her race

“I came to love my people more”

Comfort and familiarity, contrast to Stamps and her disgust for herself

School life in San Francisco is a lot better than in St. Louis

Miss Kirwin

- “In love with information”
- Expands her intellectual horizons
- Disregards race entirely
- “No different students”
- Does not belittle students
- Method of addressing Maya

Humor and Dance

- Helping Maya overcome her issues of self-image

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Chapters 29 and 30

Setting

- Where she lives
- 14 room house
- Daddy Clidell
- Contrasted San Francisco with Stamps
- Religious focus vs. "much-powdered prostitutes" (186)
- "their different accents, and personalities and foods" (186)

Ethics/Black Morality

- Crime as justifiable and empowering
- "The needs of a society determine its ethics" (190)
- "Victims of the world's most comprehensive robbery" (191)
- Elevation and acceptance of white partner
- Crime on part of the blacks is "amusing or gratifying" (187) to her
- Exacerbated intelligence of conmen – "It just goes to show you how white folks can be deceived by their own deception (188)
- Unification through sentiment of "shared robbery", page 190, the "body collective", the single I as the plural We
- Infusion of adult voice
- Robin Hood complex
- Contrast with sardonic revival vignette

Language

- Colloquial vs. written word
- Ability to code-switch
- Divide between the streets and the educated
- Maintaining their racial identity while progressing in society

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Characterization

- Dolores
 - Maya's lack of self-confidence
 - "her English, like everything else about her, was absolutely perfect" (194)
 - "Unformed body of a girl" (193)
 - Fighting for Daddy Bailey's attention
 - Puts up a pretense "my husband, Mr. Johnson" (194)
 - Yearns for significance
- Daddy Bailey
 - Charming, funny, tall and handsome and generous (197-198)
 - Untruthful and pretentious, (193-194)
 - Selfish; cheats on Dolores
 - Inability to protect Maya and catalyzes her maturation
 - Juxtapose this characterization of Daddy Clidell
 - "Daddy wore his amused impenetrable face constantly" (194)
- Daddy Clidell
 - Commands respect, down to earth
 - Conservative dresser man of honor (187)
 - Genuine care for Maya, beckoned and elicited admiration (186)
- Characterization of Mother
 - Contrast with Momma
 - Focus on materialism
 - Different types of societal conditioning
 - Pampers her children

Maturation

- Bildungsroman
- "Held long adult conversations with me" (186)
- Initial state
- Reverence of Daddy Bailey "a manor house" (192)
- Excitement over vacation and low self-esteem (193)
- Still idolizes her father despite the disappointment of the vacation (197)
- Fear of abandonment (199)
- Helplessness in 200
- "I overcame me reserve and tore my tonsils loose" (198)
- Gains self-confidence, "why not the brilliant Marguerite Johnson" (201)
- "I would speak to him like the peasant he was" (203)
- Overcomes her fear and empowers herself
- Hyperbolic language reflects magnitude of her feat (202)
- "The mountain I had just conquered" (202)
- "I had never felt better" (203)
- Changed perception of daddy Bailey "watched what I now know was a pitiful spectacle" (195)
- Failure to afford significance to Maya "he didn't appreciate the greatness of my achievement" (205)

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

- Maya's turnaround in her attitude towards him "we drove into the city in a cold an private silence" (205), "said from the haughty level" (204)

Chapters 31 and 32

Events

- 31: return from Mexico, fight and temporary accommodation, Maya runs away
- 32: car in the junkyards, community of children, returned to mother's home

Fifteen, bildungsroman, adult and teenage voice, humor

Dolores

- Traditional housewife
- Compared to influential black women
- Petty and rude, sensitive

Daddy Bailey

- Portrayed in a negative light
- Never mentioned again
- Treats Dolores badly
 - "Kid" (206)
 - "Pretentious little bitch (206)
- Absent and irresponsible father
- Lets Maya down repeatedly
- In opposition with Daddy Clidell
- Maya feels let down by her father
- Hungry for her father's love

Identity

- Offering Dolores sympathy

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

- Relationship with Mother
- Hints of the effect of rape
- Growth and independence
- Freedom and power
- A black lace handkerchief
- Impact on Maya

Chapter 33 and 34

Caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power.

Addressing race and racism

- Part of Bildungsroman
- “first Negro on the San Francisco streetcars” (228)
- Mature view on racism
- “Fellow victim of the same puppeteer” (226)
- Maya becomes Momma

Addressing gender

- A woman who does not depend on a man
- Maya emulating Vivian
 - “Firm believer in self-sufficiency”, the “original do-it-yourself girl”
- Role of females in empowering Maya
- Identity from strong female characters other than males
- Page 230, a formidable character, the struggle won by survivors

Juxtaposition with Bailey

- Bailey is a foil to highlight Maya’s development
- His displacement works against him, page 223: “no heart nor art to drag him back to the reeking reality of our life and times”, “Bailey sat wrapped in his decision, anaesthetized by youth.”
- He attempts to assimilate identities which are not his, page 217 and 218
- Borne out of insecurities, but fails because he’s trying to compete with “overshadowing rivals” (218)

IOC Notes – Maya Angelou

Bailey's isolation (imagery)

- Isolated in language
- Isolation in setting
- "We had said all we could say"

Relationship between Maya and Bailey

- Growing distance, she is no longer dependent on Bailey
- Chapter 33 formalizes Bailey's departure from Maya's life
- Page 223 "don't worry I'll be okey-dokey"
- From "we" to "he and I"

Chapter 35

Physical attributes and her sexual discovery

The Well of Loneliness

Novel was a "treat and threat" (231)

Sexual identity: lesbianism

Resurgence of the childlike voice

Gender dynamics: seeking their definition and identity from men

Sex and sexual identity

- Gender/power dynamics
- Unsatisfying experience

Innocence/Naiveté

- Through humor and narrative voice
- (231-232)

Familial support

- Gets it only after getting pregnant

Identity: Motherhood