An Unknown Girl By Moniza Alvi Versus Still I Rise By Maya Angelou

‘Still I Rise’ by Maya Angelou is about people who have been oppressed, she tells us about some of her own experiences. Herself, Maya Angelou, is an African-American woman, she says herself in her life she had to deal with racism and many different forms of discrimination. Angelou’s poem expresses many themes which include racism, oppression, and pride, she provides the audience with a snap-shot of what her life was like and how she managed, she explains herself as confident and independent which can be seen throughout her poem.

‘An Unknown Girl’ by Moniza Alvi is an entirely different poem, Alvi was born in Pakistan but she moved to England only when she was a few months old. Throughout the whole of her poem she describes to the reader how she feels when she goes back to her ‘motherland’. She uses many examples of imagery on the reader to show them clearly what she sees and how she feels. The main themes in this poem are cultural identity and the sense of belonging exploring these themes in her writing. This poem is about her visit to India and how she has a connection to the country and the people in it which she does not have when she is in England.

In ‘An Unknown Girl’ by Moniza Alvi, she expresses her feelings through imagery which are intertwined throughout: ‘She squeezes a wet brown line from a nozzle.’ this could be a cultural reference as the ground is usually associated with being ‘brown’ showing that the speaker has a strong connection between her and her heritage. Alvi uses many examples of colour imagery in her poem, to captivate the reader and paint a colourful image in the reader's mind: ‘a peacock spreads its lines across my palm’ peacocks are known to be elegant creatures which could be her describing how she sees the henna that she is getting on her hand like a colourful ‘peacock’. The metaphor: ‘I have new brown veins’ implies that she now feels connected to the marketplace or she has a stronger bond between her and her mother-land ‘new’ could mean that she has left her ‘old veins’ behind and she feels like a new person now that she is connected spiritually and emotionally.

In “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou, there is a repetition of the word ‘rise’. In the simile, ‘You may trod me in the very dirt But still, like dust, I’ll rise.’ she compares herself to dust and how it ‘rises’, rises could show how she thinks that she is above all the hatred, that nobody can ‘drag her down’ as dust cannot be trapped. Also, you cannot get rid of the air, which she could be linking to herself, how no one can get rid of her. Throughout her poem, she constantly refers back to oppression, how it has shaped how she is today, with years of having to overcome oppression. Angelou had to face sexual oppression, after having a traumatic experience when she was young, had an effect on how she would then act in the future. Angelou’s use of imagery is one of the factors that make this poem touching, ‘Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes?’ the word ‘broken’ describes how she could feel on the inside, usually being associated when an item is damaged or needs repairing, having this rhetorical question in her poem draws the reader's attention and makes them feel sympathy for her and what she has experienced in her times. ‘Bowed head and lowered eyes’, when one bows their head it is commonly related to defeat, she could also imply that she does not care about what may or may not happen to herself. These could be underlying her true feelings, how she is affected by what people are saying although she never shows that she is affected by it.

‘That I dance like I’ve got diamonds at the meeting of my thighs?’ This imagery brings to the reader's mind bright and vibrant colours, diamonds themselves being quite shiny and expensive, this could also represent how elegantly she dances, how she is compared to an expensive and valuable piece of jewelry.

Moniza Alvi fills her poem, ‘An Unknown Girl’, with metaphors, shown in the quote: ‘Colour leaves the street float up in balloons. Dummies in shop-fronts tilt and stare’ she could be referring to the people that are shopping as ‘dummies’ because they are mesmerized by the ‘colour leaving the streets’ and they are staring up in awe. She goes on to describe her surroundings in the marketplace: ‘Studded with neon’ paints a very vivid image in the reader's mind, which correlates to sunshine which also brings happiness and that is what she feels when she is back in India in her home country, this could alternatively mean that when she feels guided, ‘neon’ being a light source could represent to the audience that it is taking her along the correct path and she should follow. This could link back to the quote: ‘I have new brown veins’ that she continuously conveys a feeling of belonging and acceptance. The quotes that have been chosen all relate to imagery which helps the reader to understand the text more thoroughly

Maya Angelou’s ‘Still I Rise’ is filled with imagery, alongside the imagery that she uses there is also a lot of historical references: ‘Cause I dance like I’ve got oil wells pumping in my living room’, not only is this historical but it also builds an image in the eyes of the reader, with it also being a simile this quote is very descriptive which draws the attention of the reader. ‘You may shoot me with your words, you may cut me with your eyes, you may kill me with your hatefulness, but still, like air, I’ll rise.’ This particular selection of words, ‘shoot, cut and kill’ is dark imagery which has an emotional effect on the reader, the word ‘hatefulness’ presents to us that she was not wanted and most people hated her, they wanted to see her broken and crumbled. Once again Angelou ends this line with a simile ‘but still, like air, I’ll rise’ which shows that she believes that she can escape what she is a part of. This quote relates to the question because it gives the reader a sense of sympathy for her but also admiration as she is persistent and does not give up on what she wants to achieve.

Both ‘An Unknown Girl’ and ‘Still I Rise’ are full of imagery, making these poems more interesting, the themes that are braided through adds to the complexity of the poems but also the simplicity. Having studied both pieces of text I can say that I felt that ‘An Unknown Girl’ moved me more, relating to the text myself I could easily follow what was being said. Analysing these poems brought a new sense of respect for the people that have to experience intense emotions and how they deal with the loss and pressure of life. Contextually, this helps the reader to understand the text as it may not be something in which they can easily relate to, so Angelou creates a passage in a way that can be understood by many.

Commentary:

‘An Unknown Girl’ by Moniza Alvi and ‘Still I Rise’ by Maya Angelou are both poems that I chose to analyse because as much as the other poems were interesting, I did not find myself attracted to them. Myself, I am attracted to reading and writing about people's past experiences and I find it interesting to know what people have been through, everyone has their different ways of dealing with matters and I like to ‘step into other people's shoes’ and experience for myself (not to the same extent) what it would be like in these situations. The poem that attracted me the most was ‘An Unknown Girl’ because as being a person who has left my home country

I feel a sense of loss, whenever I go back to my origin I can feel a connection between me and that land. The other poems which I could choose from were ‘Out, Out -’ by Robert Frost and ‘The Bright Lights of Sarajevo’, both of these poems I did find interesting, however, it was not to the same extent as what I had chosen, the main themes in ‘The Bright Lights of Sarajevo’ are war, deprivation, and love, the themes in ‘Out, Out -’ include death, strength, and masculinity. Structurally I liked how ‘Still I Rise’ was displayed, having a set number of lines per stanza, for me it made the poem flow easily and it was not hard to follow. I liked the poems I chose very much and I am glad that I was able to analyse them in more detail. I found that the poems I chose were very empowering, in the way that the poems made me feel sympathetic to the writer and also made me want to help those who are in need. ‘Still I Rise’ could be significant to Maya Angelou because she has seen this throughout her life and she can relate to what is happening throughout the piece.