
Comparison Of Poems Still I Rise Maya Angelou Disabled Wilfred Owen

Both poems, 'Still I Rise' by Maya Angelou and 'Disabled' by Wilfred Owen explore the theme of the past and its consequences upon the present. 'Still I Rise' is a positive and almost defiant piece of lyrical poetry, refusing to allow the poet's troubled past to affect her present. It shows Angelou's will power and how "like dust she'll rise". While in 'Disabled' the soldier's present makes him long for his past, leaving him very melancholic and wondering "why dont they come and put him into bed?"

The title 'Disabled' is particularly noteworthy as it shows how the soldier's disability sets him apart from other people and that he is unable to enjoy life again. It's short, directness tells us that that this is the soldier's identity, the poem does not use his name, simply refers to himself, the subject as "Disabled", that he is defined by his physical state and not by who he is as a person.

This is further emphasized later in the poem by the fact that "women's eyes passed from him to the strong men that were whole". Owen's use of the word 'whole' suggests that soldier feels incomplete without the use of his limbs and that he will never enjoy the same quality of life as he did before, after the war.

On the other hand, in 'Still I Rise' the title uses a metaphor that is repeated throughout the poem, giving the poem a lyrical, tone that develops rhythm throughout the poem. The title is in the present tense, firstly showing that she has and will always rise above those who 'trod me in the very dirt.' Secondly, using this tense allows Angelou to convey to the reader her strength and resolve, she demonstrates through its repetition that this phrase will always hold true and she will always prevail.

Both Angelou and Owen use the opening lines of the poem to set the overall atmosphere. Angelou uses direct and strong sentences to display her defiant, conflagrant attitude where "You may write me down in history...../ You may trod me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I'll rise."

In Stanza 1, Angelou shows how she doesn't care about what people say about, even if they are "bitter, twisted lies," and this illustrates to the reader how words have no power over her. This is further emphasised by her use of strong, defiant words. On the other hand in Disabled, the poem opens with the soldier in the dark, isolated, lonely, waiting for someone to come put him to sleep, the language here is quite melancholy.

Owen also sets the atmosphere more dramatically by showing the reader the harsh reality of the present. To picture the ex-soldier's suit is "legless, sewn short at the elbow" illustrates with great impact and visual imagery that the soldier lost his limbs at war.

The soldier's mood is echoed in line 4, when he describes the "Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn," showing that to him they sound melancholic, reminding him of something similar to his own sadness, longing and grieving felt at funerals. Line 5 where the narrator tells us of

“Voices of play and pleasure” show us how voices that would to most, sound joyful, to the soldier sound painful and remind him of what he has lost and of his memories of happier times when he himself was able to play just as these young boys are now. Grief is an underlying theme throughout the poem which contrasts with Angelou who uses her past to motivate her.

Lines 4 and 5 carry greater emphasis, indicating to the reader the depth of the soldier’s depression through the use of repetition of the word “Voices” at the beginning of each line. They give a sense of overwhelming noise surrounding the soldier who cannot escape these sad voices which could also imply his own voice in amongst them, telling him how much he has lost and how hopeless his life is now.

The contrast between the outlooks of the narrators of the poems are further emphasised in stanza 2. In “Still I Rise” Maya’s confident and positive attitude is a stark contrast to the sad soldier reminiscing about his past. Angelou uses imagery of such grandeur and strength, telling us of her ‘oil wells/Pumping in my living room’, and in this we see how opposed the perceptions and attitudes of the two narrators are. Angelou answers her ‘oppressors’ with her “sassiness” and she seems amused by how they are “beset with gloom”, while Owen creates vivid imagery describing “how slim / Girls’ waists are,” yet these memories of joy are described in a depressing forlorn tone because he has no chance of being with a woman, which the reader is continuously reminded of. This continues in Stanza 3, where Owen describes how “There was an artist silly for his face,” telling the reader how handsome and sought after he was, but how he has lost it all now as he is “Disabled.” The stanza is heavy with regret for his past decision to join the war.

Both writers use repetition in their poems to emphasize key points in their respective poems. In ‘Still I Rise’ Angelou repeats the phrase “I rise” throughout the poem particularly in the last stanza. Maya Angelou was renowned for her perseverance and in this poem she shows how she has the strength to stand up in the face of oppression. Her use of repetition ensures that her message will stick in the reader’s mind and acts as a ‘backbone’ to the poem. Furthermore, the poem ends with an emphasis upon her strength and helps to conclude the message of her poem; despite the adversities she faces, she will rise.

Meanwhile, the use of repetition in ‘Disabled’ shows Owen’s disdain and anger towards the military system and the pressures of society. The soldiers joined the army after attending a football match, showing how unaware they were of the significance or consequences joining the army had. The repetition of the word ‘after’ shows that he joined after such an insignificant event in contrast to the major life decision that he was making, further amplifying the casualness of his decision. Owen is trying to illustrate how the enthusiasm of society for war, without any regard for its consequences, can create unrealistic expectations which can often ruin lives.

In this poem, the soldier represents the many, “ He sat in a wheeled chair,” in this Owen uses anonymity at the beginning of the poem with the pronoun “He” which means it could be any of the many soldiers returning from war. Furthermore, we learn nothing more about the identity of the soldier, not even his name, this again shows how society did not understand war, what it meant and how it would affect the population at large.

Stanza 4 of each poem is particularly interesting as they both explore the expectations of society. In ‘Still I Rise’ as an african-american women at the time mainstream society wanted her to have a “ Bowed head and lowered eyes”, whilst in Disabled the soldier is carried

shoulder-high, after only scoring a goal. In these simple sentences we see the parallel between being a white male, and a colored female at that time. The white male was always celebrated and dominant in his achievements, while no matter the achievements of the 'coloured female', society wanted her to be hidden, broken and of course subservient. Yet despite these expectations of society, both narrators have gone against them and we see Angelou defiant and clear in her ambition while the soldier feels like his disability has robbed him of his place in society and life.

In stanza 3, Owen shows the mental aging of the soldier in the lines "For it was younger than his youth, last year. / Now, he is old; his back will never brace;" The use of a hyperbole here shows the lasting effect of war and how the soldier will never enjoy the same quality of life as he has been mentally and physically scarred by the effects of war. This is in stark contrast to the soldier's past, prior to when he joined the military, which is described in enticing detail. Before the soldier went to war "girls glanced lovelier". This use of alliteration amplifies the significance of the enchanting beauty of the soldier's glory days.

Maya Angelou also combines the use of several poetic devices in "Still I Rise" to paint a vivid picture. However, in contrast to Owen's melancholic despair, Angelou tells the reader of her endurance, hope and strength. Angelou particularly uses nature as a semantic field, this is especially evident in verse three, when she says "Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides, / Just like hopes springing high, / Still I'll rise." - Here Angelou is trying to say just like the moon and sun rise and set, her courage can be relied upon and will help her overcome those who oppress her in a repetitive cycle. Her courage and determination are as inevitable as the passage of time, as marked by the lunar and solar cycles and the natural ebb and flow of the tides.

Angelou's also uses tone to evoke clear emotions, ranging from anger/ sympathy to her and hope in the future in the reader. Her tone is inconsistent through the poem, with the narrative voice ranging from annoyed in line 2, "With your bitter, twisted lies" and sassy to optimistic and cheerful, for example in line 19 "Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines". This varying tone indicates the tumultuous journey her life has taken her through. Although the direct tone changes from stanza to stanza the reader can still pick up Angelou's underlying, consistent tone which is challenging and feisty. This shows the determination of the poet to ensure her message heard refusing to allow her oppressors to win in keeping her silent.

The tone Owen uses throughout the poem is one of loss and melancholy. This is evidently displayed in the despairing tones used by the soldier to describe his present and the depressive longing with which he describes his past. We feel a strong sense of loss in Stanza 2. He begins the stanza by describing the atmosphere of the town which "...used to swing so gay ". The use of this enjambment makes the reader clearly understand how happy and light things used to be and how much the soldier is hanging onto these lost memories. This contrasts greatly with the declarative sentence in line 10, where we the readers are told this was "In the old times, before he threw away his knees."

In stanza three, Owen says "He's lost his colour very far from here," the fact that his face had lost all its color, indicates that his life has been poured out of him during the war, through the loss of his limbs — the soldier feels that half of his life is already over. The line 'And leap of purple spurted from his thigh' constitutes a dramatic climax with the use of the assonance of "p". It signifies that the energy and vigour of the young man is now gone, and given the way the

soldier is now described, in his place is an old man. The rhythm/pace is quite fast, with assonantly rhymed 'spurt' and 'purple'. (Semantic field of colour imagery - Grey blue purple)

Owen also uses metaphors and personification, "Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him", where sleep is personified as a mother gathering her children to her at the end of the day. It is a gentle metaphor which evokes deep pity in the reader for a man who is cold and tired and yet unable to leave or change his position until someone remembers that he needs putting to bed. This line is very effective as it also shows the reader that the soldier has very little comfort and it is only when he sleeps does he find any comfort as the sleep from the voices (and thoughts) that trouble his mind.

Both poets use the organisation and layout of their poems to depict to the reader and clear journey through the past and the present of the protagonists. The poem 'Still I Rise' in organised quatrains until we reach the seventh stanza, after which there is no regularity to the structure. The eighth and ninth stanza have six and nine lines respectively. This symbolizes how now, later in life, the poet is free from those who oppressed her. The repetition of 'I rise' is also a statement of liberation. The abcb rhyming system becomes an ababcc in stanza eight forms and in stanza nine ababccbbb. example?

In 'Disabled', the poem is divided into two separate sections; his life before the war began and the reality of life after the war. This is shown by the fact that the language in 'Disabled' changes from the joyous description of his youth to the more morbid diction of the present.

In the last stanza of each poem the respective poets talk about the future. The juxtaposition between the pejorative language in Disabled and the ameliorative language in 'Still I Rise' clearly indicates to the reader the direction of the lives of our protagonists and how they are choosing to move forward through life. At the end of 'Still I Rise' Angelou is looking forward to the future, leaving behind the "nights of terror and fear" in the past, rising up, filled with hope. While on the other hand, in 'Disabled', the soldier "will spend a few sick years in institutes", the soldier does not look forward to the future, and waits "for dark" which is a euphemism for death.

Angelou-

Words have no power over her

LANguage

Expand on poetic devices used and how

In conclusion, both poems give us an interesting depiction of society and its views and morals at the time and even more interestingly, 'Still I Rise' by Maya Angelou and 'Disabled' by Wilfred Owen explore the theme of the past and its effects on the present and the future.

In Disabled grief and loss is an underlying theme throughout the poem, Owen explores how the soldier feels his disability sets him apart from other people, and how the soldier has mentally aged beyond his physical age due to the experiences he has suffered through. Owen takes the reader on a vivid journey of images of his present and his past to evoke strong emotion in the reader and his melancholic tone of loss leads the reader to feel exceptional empathy for the

consequences of war and how foolishly we enter into war without truly appreciating where it can and will lead us.

This contrasts with Angelou who uses her past and her suffering to motivate her. She uses several poetic devices in 'Still I Rise' to paint a vivid picture to show how she has and will always rise above those who trod her in the very dirt and uses repetition of the phrase "I rise" to convey her strength. 'Still I Rise' is a positive and almost defiant piece of lyrical poetry, refusing to allow the poet's troubled past to affect her present. It shows Angelou's will power. Angelou's attitude of perseverance is in stark contrast with the soldier in 'Disabled' who is very melancholic and wondering "why don't they come and put him into bed?"

Commentary

I chose Maya Angelou's poem 'Still I Rise' and 'Disabled' by Wilfred Owen to compare on the subject of past and present. I considered comparing 'Still I Rise' with the poem 'An Unknown Girl' by Moniza Alvi, on the theme of heritage and culture because of the way that Alvi creates sympathy within the reader, for in this modern multinational world we often lose touch with the old traditions.

However, I ultimately decided against it and chose the poem 'Disabled' because I felt it was an eye-opening poem. The way in which Owen created emotion in the reader by showing them the thoughts and the story of an (ex-) soldier who had lost all his limbs is hard-hitting, and heart-breaking. Owen makes you realise the foolishness and ignorance of society with regards to the consequences of war and what happened to so many veterans when they came back no longer 'whole'.

I chose 'Still I Rise' because I especially enjoyed it, I feel rather strongly about the message of the poem, to continue to rise in the face of tribulations. Angelou really makes you think about this and yourself while you accompany her on her journey of defiance and hope as you read the poem.