Critical Analysis of Poetry: Issues of Racism, Women's Rights, and Maltreatment in Still I Rise

The author of ‘Still I Rise’, Maya Angelou contributions social issues that she faced such as overcoming racism, women's rights, and maltreatment throughout the 1940s.And how she has imapcted many readers with the persona of this poem.Whereas the poem ‘Disabled’ Owenn wilfred opens up his struggles in world war 1 and its aftermath in his life and how he wasn't accepted by society.’Still, I Rise’ and ‘Disbled’ are two poems where there persona speaks of rising above discrimination and marginalisation due to racism. And would lead to exploring how both writers use language, structure, and form to represent marginalised figures and the impact on the reader.

Firstly, notice how ‘still I rise’ has a very encouraging and motivating tone in its title itself, whereas in ‘Disabled’ is depressing and is the complete opposite. Both poets have used several poetic devices to highlight opposing effects on their marginalised figures. Maya Angelou presents the idea of marginalization and subjugation leading to a regrowth and ultimately resulting in healthy survival, where women aren’t just equals, but superior to men. She uses powerful adjective to describe how she was treated throughout her life and how she fought for herself to challenge the reader to think about their attitude towards marginalised people. For example /angelou describes that she has been characterised through ‘bitter twisted lies’.This reveals that she is harsh and aggressive, she was like this because she had to stand up for herself as black people didn’t have equal rights and she wanted to show people.

Both poems use language to represent how the suffering is impacting each persona. The persona in Disabled has an overall pessimistic and self-effacing language as a result of his current life situation which causes him to surrender to the suffering, whereas the persona in Still I Rise is much more about defeating the suffering, therefore peppering the optimism and defiance against the suffering throughout the poem. Both poems however do focus on relieving themselves of the suffering. Wilfred Owen’s focus on relief lies heavily on the form of escapism via death, as he the pqersona sits ‘waiting for dark’. The adjective ‘dark’ is used metaphorically to tempt the hidden implications of death, which immediately establishes the tone of misery and emotional suffering that is conveyed when the persona ‘shivered in his ghastly suit of grey’, an alliteration that inaugurates the lack of vibrancy felt by the persona, which proves the desperation and urgency to escape the direct suffering that is rooted in his ‘legless, sewn short at elbow’ state of existence. The heavy use of sibilance in these two lines of the first stanza are utilised by Owen to accurately render the swift speed of the injuries of war occur which conveys the veritable merciless nature of war, permitting the reader to emotionally sympathize with the tortured persona, therefore being granted the ability to comprehend the pursuit of death and the strange comforts it’s able to provide. But it isn’t until the last line of this stanza where it’s confirmed by Owen that the persona does perceive death as an instrument of solace, but rather when ‘gathering sleep had mothered’ the persona. The noun ‘sleep’ is a gentle facade for death and the verbal modifier ‘mothered’ has a nurturing sensation, therefore the deliberate composition of the two gives the reader the authorization required to discern death as a cultivating and appealing form of escape. To contrast Disabled, Maya Angelou’s Still I Rise, has another approach to escaping the suffering, which happens to have the opposite polarity to Wilfred Owen’s Disabled. The constant repetition and reappearance of the modal

phrase ‘still I’ll rise’ is Angelou’s ply of the hardships brought forward by the suffering to not only overcome it but also how she deploys the use of nature to secure the certainty of the vanquishing of the suffering. The most predominant utilization of nature is in the third stanza where ‘with the certainty of tides’ confirms the previously made statement.

Alongside the of language, both poets utilize the convenience of structure, particularly the rhyme scheme and stanza lines, to convey the patterns in which suffering is presented. In Disabled, Owen uses the irregularities in the rhyme scheme and stanza structure to portray a sense of abandonment and pessimism of the future. Opposing that, Still, I Rise has an organized and spruce rhyme scheme all the way through, but the quatrain stanza technique is disrupted to dispatch a trajectory message against the suffering. Collectively, however, both poets display schematically uneven stanzas to traject their outlooks of how the suffering is endured. Disabled has an overall disorganized stanza structure, with most of them ranging from 7-8 lines, but the most riveting and pivotal stanza is the second last three lined stanza which just so happens. Owen’s hidden intention behind doing so is to visually show the reader how the suffering of the persona has compromised his will and reason to live by acting as a turning, as the following stanza mentions how he will ‘do what the rules consider wise’ when it is ‘cold and late’. The personification of the noun ‘rules’ is anonymizing personnel who are responsible for support, so Owen can portray their true disengagement thus allowing the reader to clearly infer the abandonment and marginalization of the persona, making the enduring of the suffering even more difficult to bare. Additionally, the adjectival pair of ‘cold and late’ in the last stanza, interjects a melancholic aura, much like the first stanza, therefore making the structure cyclical. Owen’s rationale for doing this is to prove to the reader that the pessimistic emotional state while suffering, in turn, makes it an endless psychological battle for the persona, to further ratify the reader to believe that the suffering tolerated by the persona is immeasurable, making it more viable to give up, clearly aiding Owen in establishing the true pessimistic nature of the persona. In opposition to Wilfred Owen’s Disabled, Maya Angelou’s use of uneven stanzas in Still I Rise is used to insinuate positive and inspiring attitudes regarding the endurance, or rather, the battle against suffering. This becomes clear in the last stanza, in particular, the three final lines where the phrase ‘I rise’ is repeated three consecutive lines. The reader’s perception of the said structural technique is real life imagery, as the towering of the phrase is a visual scene that creates an upwards movement, proving that Angelou’s intentions were to halt the tholing of the suffering and instead pushing it in the past. A further elaboration of the phrase ‘I rise’, in the present tense, is that it slightly differs from its previous future tense partner ‘I’ll rise’. The notable difference doesn’t lie in what the changes in tense makes, but rather, how the tenses change. Perceptibly, the change consists of minusing two letters from ‘I’ll rise’ to form ‘I rise’, and the said change will allocate Angelou with the power to convey the minimal change to terminate the cycle of suffering to the reader, signifying that the persona doesn’t require much effort to halt the suffering wheel, which really cooperates with Angelou to establish a positive attitude. Therefore, the persona in Disabled and the persona in Still I Rise is dissimulate because one gives in as a result of the endless suffering, and one forces past as a result of fighting against their suffering.

Setting aside the poems’ languages and structures, the form in which both authors craft their poems aids them in depicting the end of their persona’s fates. The poets simultaneously use form, specifically the type of narration that they choose. In Disabled, Owen’s adopted a typical story narrative tone. The poem’s compelling nature, however, emerges towards the end of the poem, which generates a sad conclusion of despair as ‘now he will spend a few sick years in Institutes’, which is the polar opposite of a typical narrative story that ends in ‘happily ever

after’. The insinuation of such tactics amplifies the depth of the suffering that proves the resolution so arduous that the classic omniscient story narrator is unable to overturn the persona’s dire fate of giving into the hopelessness and pessimism of the suffering that they endure. On a more acute level, the analysis that can be inferred from the use of the narrative approach is not that the ending is unhappy, but rather that the happy ending wasn’t what the persona desired. On the last line of the stanza, the reference to sleep resurfaces when the persona inquire about being ‘put into bed’. As mentioned previously, the poem’s structure is cyclical and as in the first stanza and mention of sleep was associated with death then it reoccurs in the last stanza, too, signifying that it is the persona’s preferred denouement. The inquisition of ‘why don’t they come and put him to bed’ is the persona’s expression of disappointment by an unfulfilling end, which cooperates with the cyclical structure to make the end of the suffering as ambiguous as possible. On the other hand, Angelou’s narration acquires a musical intonation. This ensues especially in sixth stanza with the repetition of ‘you may’ at the beginning of its first three lines. Through creating a chant-like rhythm and combining it with the optimistic language and positive attitude created by the structure, Angelou crafts an anthem for those that relate to the suffering of the persona. By creating somewhat of an army to rise against the suffering, Angelou’s persona displays the use of unity to put an end to their suffering. Another complex form analysis is the very first word of the title ‘still’. The use of this conditional adverb can be interpreted very strongly to portray the persistence of the persona as they resist the suffering despite everything. The contrast created here is that Angelou’s persona has an immense willpower to withstand the suffering through resilience, whereas Owen’s persona is inordinately tired to do so and yields to the suffering.

In conclusion, both poets utilize the form, structure, and language to portray the different ways in which suffering can be dealt with. As cited many times already, the persona in Disabled more often than not surrenders to the overwhelming weight of the suffering due to his [the persona’s] pessimistic outlook on their suffering and, therefore, his ability to battle against it, while the persona in Still I Rise is constantly displaying their belligerence by constantly defying their suffering as a result of their general optimistic perception of their suffering.