Within the last fifteen years, Maya Angelou has become one of the best-known black writers in the United States. Her reputation rests firmly on her prolific career as an autobiographer, poet, dancer-singer, actress, producer, director, scriptwriter, political activist, and editor. Throughout her life, she has identified with the South, and she calls Stamps, Arkansas, where she spent ten years of her childhood, her home.

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson on 4 April 1928 in St. Louis to Vivian Baxter and Bailey Johnson, a civilian dietician for the U.S. Navy. At age three, when her parents' marriage ended in divorce, she was sent, along with her brother, Bailey, from Long Beach to Stamps to be cared for by their paternal grandmother, Mrs. Annie Henderson. During the next ten years, a time of severe economic depression and intense racial bigotry in the South, she spent nearly all of her time either in school, at the daily meetings of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, or at her grandmother's general merchandise store. In 1940, she graduated with top honors from the Lafayette County Training School and soon thereafter returned to her mother, who lived in the San Francisco-Oakland area at that time. There she continued her education at George Washington High School under the direction of her beloved Miss Kirwin. At the same time, she attended evening classes at the California Labor School, where she received a scholarship to study drama and dance. A few weeks after she received her high school diploma, she gave birth to her son, Guy Bailey Johnson.

Her career as a professional entertainer began on the West Coast, where she performed as a dancer-singer at the Purple Onion in the early 1950s. While working in this popular cabaret, she was spotted by members of the Porgy and Bess cast and invited to audition for the chorus. Upon her return from the play's 1954-55 tour of Europe and Africa, she continued to perform at nightclubs throughout the United States, acquiring valuable experience that would eventually lead her into new avenues of professional work.

In 1959, Angelou and her son moved to New York, where she soon joined the Harlem Writers Guild at the invitation of John Killens. Together with Godfrey Cambridge, she produced, directed, and starred in Cabaret for Freedom to raise funds for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Following the close of the highly successful show, she accepted the position of Northern coordinator for the SCLC at the request of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Her work in theater landed her the role of the White Queen in Genet's The Blacks, directed by Gene Frankel at St. Mark's Playhouse. For this production, she joined a cast of stars—Roscoe Lee Brown, Godfrey Cambridge, James Earl Jones, and Cicely Tyson. In 1974, she adapted Sophocles’ Ajax for its premiere at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. Original screenplays to her credit include the film version of Georgia, Georgia and the television productions of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and The Sisters. She also authored and produced a television series on African traditions inherent in American culture and played the role of Kunte Kinte's grandmother in Roots. For PBS programming, she served as a guest interviewer on Assignment America and most recently appeared in a special series on creativity hosted by Bill Moyers, which featured a return visit to Stamps.

Among her other honors, Maya Angelou was appointed to the Commission of International Women's Year by former President Carter. In 1975, Ladies' Home Journal named her Woman of the Year in communications. A trustee of the American Film Institute, she is also one of the few women members of the Directors Guild. In recent years, she has received more than a dozen honorary degrees, including one from the University of Arkansas located near her childhood home. Fluent in seven languages, she has worked as the editor of the Arab Observer in Cairo and the African Review in Ghana. In December 1981, Angelou accepted a lifetime appointment as the first Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, where she lectures on literature and popular culture. In 1983, Women in Communications
Her personal life has been anything but smooth. As a young mother, Angelou had to endure painful periods of separation from her son while she worked at more than one job to support them. Often her ventures into show business would take her far from home, and she would put Guy in the care of her mother or babysitters. When she was twenty-one years old, she married Tosh Angelos, a sailor of Greek-American ancestry, but their marriage ended after three years. While working in New York, she met and later married Vusumzi Make, a black South African activist who traveled extensively raising money to end apartheid. They divided their time between New York and Cairo, but after a few years their marriage deteriorated. In 1973, Angelou married Paul du Feu, a carpenter and construction worker she had met in London. They lived together on the West Coast during most of their seven-year marriage.

Although she is rarely called a regional writer, Maya Angelou is frequently identified with the new generation of Southern writers. She has always called the South her home, and recently, after much deliberation, she settled in North Carolina, ending an absence of more than thirty years. Her autobiographies and poetry are rich with references to her childhood home in Arkansas and to the South in general. For Angelou, as for many black American writers, the South has become a powerfully evocative metaphor for the history of racial bigotry and social inequality, for brutal inhumanity and final failure. Yet the South also represents a life-affirming force energized by a somewhat spiritual bond to the land itself. It is a region where generations of black families have sacrificed their brightest dreams for a better future; yet it is here that ties to forebears whose very blood has nourished the soil are most vibrant and resilient. Stamps, Arkansas, in the 1930s was not a place where a black child could grow up freely or reach her full intellectual and social potential, but the town was nevertheless the home of Angelou's grandmother, who came to stand for all the courage and stability she ever knew as a child.

Her literary reputation is based on the publication of five volumes of autobiography (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together in My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, The Heart of a Woman, and All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes) and five volumes of poetry (Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fo I Diie, Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well, And Still I Rise, Shaker, Why Don't You Sing? and Now Sheba Sings the Song). In the twenty years of her publishing history, she has developed a rapport with her audiences who await each new work as a continuation of an ongoing dialogue with the author. Beginning with Caged Bird in 1970, her works have received wide critical acclaim and have been praised for reaching universal truths while examining the complicated life of one individual. The broad appeal of her autobiographies and poetry is evidenced in the numerous college anthologies that include portions of her work and in the popularity of the television adaptation of Caged Bird. In years to come, Angelou's voice, already recognized as one of the most original and versatile, will be measured by the standards of great American writers of our time.

In her first volume of autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970), Maya Angelou calls displacement the most important loss in her childhood, because she is separated from her mother and father at age three and never fully regains a sense of security and belonging. Her displacement from her family is not only an emotional handicap but is compounded by an equally unsettling sense of racial and geographic displacement. Her parents frequently move Angelou and her brother, Bailey, from St. Louis to Arkansas to the West Coast. As young children in Stamps in the 1930s, racial prejudice severely limits their lives. Within the first pages, she sums up this demoralizing period of alienation: "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." The pain of her continual rejection comes not only from the displacement itself, but even more poignantly, from the child's acute understanding of prejudice. A smooth, clean razor would be enough of a threat, but a rusty, jagged one leaves no doubt in the victim's mind.

In Caged Bird, Angelou recounts many explosive incidents of the racial discrimination she experienced as a child. In the 1930s, Stamps was a fully segregated town. Marguerite and Bailey, however, are welcomed by a grandmother who is not only devoted to them but, as owner of the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store, is highly successful and independent. Momma is their most constant source of love and strength. "I saw only her power and strength. She was taller than any woman in my personal world, and her hands were so large they could span my head from ear to ear." As powerful as her grandmother's presence seems to Marguerite, Momma uses her strength solely to guide and protect her family but not to confront the white community directly. Momma's resilient power usually reassures Marguerite, but one of the child's most difficult lessons teaches her that racial prejudice in Stamps can effectively circumscribe and even defeat her grandmother's protective influence.

In fact, it is only in the autobiographical narrative that Momma's personality begins to loom larger than life and provides Angelou's memories of childhood with a sense of personal dignity and meaning. On one occasion, for example, Momma takes Marguerite to the local dentist to be treated for a severe toothache. The dentist, who is ironically named Lincoln, refuses to treat the child, even though he is indebted to Momma for a loan she extended to him during the depression: "Annie, my policy is I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's." The lawyer witness to this scene, Marguerite suffers not only from the pain of her two decayed teeth, which have been reduced to tiny enamel bits by the avenging "Angel of the candy counter," but also from the utter humiliation of the dentist's bigotry as well: "It seemed terribly unfair to have a toothache and a headache and have to bear at the same time the heavy burden of Blackness."

In an alternate version of the confrontation, which Angelou deliberately fantasizes and then italicizes to emphasize its invention, Momma asks Marguerite to wait for her outside the dentist's office. As the door closes, the frightened child imagines her grandmother becoming "ten feet tall with eight-foot arms." Without mincing words, Momma instructs Lincoln to "leave Stamps by sundown" and "never again practice dentistry": "When you get settled in your next place, you will be a vegetarian caring for dogs with the mange, cats with the cholera and cows with the epizootic. Is that clear?" The poetic justice in Momma's superhuman power is perfect; the racist dentist who refused to treat her ailing
granddaughter will in the future be restricted to treating the dogs he prefers to "niggers." After a trip to the black dentist in Texarkana, Momma and Marguerite return to Stamps, where we learn the "real" version of the story by overhearing a conversation between Momma and Uncle Willie. In spite of her prodigious powers, all that Momma accomplishes in Dr. Lincoln's office is to demand ten dollars as unpaid interest on the loan to pay for their bus trip to Texarkana.

In the child's imagined version, fantasy comes into play as the recounted scene ventures into the unreal or the impossible. Momma becomes a sort of superwoman of enormous proportions ("ten feet tall with eight-foot arms") and comes to the helpless child's rescue. In this alternate vision, Angelou switches to fantasy to suggest the depth of the child's humiliation and the residue of pain even after her two bad teeth have been pulled. Fantasy, finally, is used to demonstrate the undiminished strength of the character of Momma. Summarizing the complete anecdote, Angelou attests, "I preferred, much preferred, my version." Carefully selected elements of fiction and fantasy in the scene involving Dr. Lincoln and her childhood hero, Momma, partially compensate for the racial displacement that she experiences as a child.

When Angelou is thirteen, she and Bailey leave the repressive atmosphere of Stamps to join their mother. During these years, she continues to look for a place in life that will dissolve her sense of displacement. By the time she and Bailey are in their early teens, they have criss-crossed the western half of the country traveling between their parents' separate homes and their grandmother's in Stamps. Her sense of geographic displacement alone would be enough to upset any child's security, since the life-styles of her father in southern California and her mother in St. Louis and later in San Francisco represent worlds completely different and even foreign to the pace of life in the rural South. Each time the children move, a different set of relatives or another of their parents' lovers greet them, and they never feel a part of a stable family group, except when they are in Stamps at the general store with Momma and Uncle Willie.

Once settled in San Francisco in the early 1940s, Angelou enrolls at George Washington High School and the California Labor School, where she studies dance and drama in evening classes. She excels in both schools, and her teachers quickly recognize her intelligence and talent. Later, she breaks the color barrier by becoming the first black female conductor on the San Francisco streetcars. Just months before her high school graduation, she engages in a one-time sexual encounter to prove her sexuality to herself and becomes pregnant. *Caged Bird*, however, ends on a note of awakening with the birth of her son and the beginning of a significant measure of strength and confidence in her ability to succeed and find her place in life. As autobiographer, Angelou uses the theme of displacement to unify the first volume of her life story as well as to suggest her long-term determination to create security and permanency in her life.

Between the conclusion of *Caged Bird* and the beginning of Angelou's second volume of autobiography, *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), there is virtually no break in the narrative. As the first ends with the birth of her son, the second starts when Guy is only a few months old. As a whole, *Gather Together* tells the story of his first three years and focuses on a young single mother's struggle to achieve respect, love, and a sense of self-worth. Her battle to win financial independence and the devotion of a faithful man could hardly have been easy in the years immediately following World War II, when racial discrimination, unemployment, and McCarthyism were all on the rise. In spite of her initial optimism, which is, incidentally, shared by many members of the post-war black community who fervently believed that "race prejudice was dead. A mistake made by a young country. Something to be forgiven as an unpleasant act committed by an intoxicated friend," Angelou soon realizes that her dreams for a better America are still too fragile to survive. But worst of all is the burden of guilt that rests on the shoulders of the seventeen-year-old mother who desperately believes that she must assume full adult responsibility. Fortunately, her mother encourages her to set high goals, to maintain her sense of dignity and self-worth, and to work hard to succeed. Her mother's words come back to her throughout her life: "Anything worth doing is worth doing well," and "be the best of anything you get into."

Like many young women who came of age in the postwar era, Angelou easily imagines herself moving into a life modeled on *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. She describes herself as both a "product of Hollywood upbringing" and her own "romanticism" and continually envisions herself smoothly slipping into the role guaranteed by popular culture. Whenever she meets a man who might potentially fulfill her dream, she anticipates the enviable comfort of "settling down." The scenario is always the same: "I would always wear pretty aprons and my son would play in the Little League. My husband would come home (he looked like Curly) and smoke his pipe in the den as I made cookies for the Scouts meeting," or "We would live quietly in a pretty little house and I'd have another child, a girl, and the two children (whom he'd love equally) would climb over his knees and I would make three layer caramel cakes in my electric kitchen until they went off to college." These glamorous dreams, of course, never quite materialize, but Angelou maintains a hopeful outlook and a determination to support and protect herself and her infant son. Her primary motivation during these early years of motherhood is to spare her son the insecurity and rejection she faced as a child. During these years, Angelou even works as an absentee madam and a prostitute, in hopes of achieving a regular family life and easing her unyielding sense of guilt over not being able to provide herself and her son with financial and familial security.

Yet Angelou understands that the hurdles she has to cross on her road to success are often higher than those set by her own expectations and standards of performance. Although she spends the first years of her son's life in California, both in the Bay Area and in San Diego, she often faces racial discrimination reminiscent of her childhood experiences in the South. At one point in *Gather Together*, when she suspects that her thriving business as a madam or a two-prostitute house will soon be uncovered by the police, Angelou returns to Stamps with her son, hoping to find the same comfort and protection she had known as a child. Specifically, she seeks her grandmother's "protective embrace" and her "courage" as well as the "shield of anonymity," but she soon realizes that the South is not ready to welcome her and that she has "outgrown" its "childhood protection." The five years she has spent in school and working in California have broadened her horizons and convinced her of her right to be accepted on the basis of her character and intelligence. But the South to which she returns is unchanged: "The town was halved
Not long after her arrival in Stamps, Angelou comes face to face with the double standards of racial discrimination during an unpleasant confrontation with a salesclerk in the white-owned general merchandise store. Although she attempts to explain to her grandmother why she refused to accept the clerk's humiliating insults, Momma warns her that her "principles" are all too flimsy a protection against the unrestrained contempt of bigotry: "You think 'cause you've been to California these crazy people won't kill you? You think them lunatic cracker boys won't try to catch you in the road and violate you? You think because of your all-fired principle some of the men won't feel like putting their white sheets on and riding over here to stir up trouble? You do, you're wrong." That same day, her grandmother sends her back to California where she and her son are somewhat more distanced from the lingering hatred of the South. Not until the filming of a segment for Bill Moyers' PBS series on creativity thirty years later does Angelou return to her childhood home.

Upon her return to the Bay Area and to her mother's home, she is more determined than ever to achieve independence and win the respect of others. Leaving her son in the care of baby-sitters, she works long hours first as a dancer and entertainer and then as a short-order cook in Stockton. But as is often the case, the reality of her situation falls far below her ideal, and Angelou eventually turns to marijuana as a temporary consolation: "The pot had been important when I was alone and lonely, when my present was dull and the future uncertain." During this period, she also falls in love with an older man who is a professional gambler supported by prostitution. When his luck fails him, Angelou agrees to help him pay his debt by becoming a prostitute herself. She makes this sacrifice fully believing that after her man has regained his financial security, he will marry her and provide her with the fulfillment of her romantic dream. Rationalizing her decision, she compares prostitution to marriage: "There are married women who are more whores than a street prostitute because they have sold their bodies for marriage licenses, and there are some women who sleep with men who have great integrity because they are doing it for a purpose." But once again her dreams are disappointed, and she finds herself on her own at the end.

The second volume of her autobiography ends just before she decides to settle down with a man she pictures as an "ideal husband," who is in fact a heroin addict and gambler. Before it is too late, Angelou learns that she is on the verge of embracing disaster and defeat. At the end, she regains her innocence through the lessons of a compassionate drug addict: "I had walked the precipice and seen it all; and at the critical moment, one man's generosity pushed me safely away from the edge.... I had given a promise and found my innocence. I swore I'd never lose it again." With these words, ready to accept the challenge of life anew, Angelou brings the second volume of her life story to a close. In Gather Together in My Name, a title inspired by the Gospel of Matthew (18:20), she asks her family and readers to gather around her and bear witness to her past.

The third volume of Maya Angelou's autobiography, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976) concentrates on the early years of her career as a professional dancer and singer, her related experience with racial prejudice, and with the guilt suffered through separation from her young son. During her childhood, her love for music grows through her almost daily attendance at the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Stamps and through her dance classes in California. Music in fact is her closest companion and source of moral support during her first few months back in the San Francisco area. She calls music her "refuge" during this period of her life and welcomes its protective embrace, into which she could "crawl into the spaces between the notes and curl [her] back to loneliness." Without losing any time, she secures a job in sales and inventory at the Melrose Record Shop on Fillmore, which at the time served as a meeting place for musicians and music lovers of all description. In addition to earning enough money to quit her two previous jobs and bring her son home from the baby-sitter's in the evenings and on Sundays, Angelou also gains valuable exposure to the newest releases in blues and jazz and to an expansive circle of eccentric people.

Her sales position at the record shop is her first step into the world of entertainment. Her hours behind the cashier counter studying catalogs and helping customers make their selections bring her an easy familiarity with the newest stars and songs. Relying on her dance lessons and her trusted memory of popular lyrics, she later auditions for a position as a dancer at the Garden of Allah, where she is eventually hired as the first black show girl. Unlike the three white women who are also featured in the nightly show, Angelou is not required to strip but rather earns her audience's attention on the basis of her dance routines alone. All of the dancers, however, are instructed to supplement their regular salary by selling B-grade drinks and bottles of champagne on commission to interested customers. At first reluctant to put herself at the mercy of fawning, flirtatious spectators, she soon learns to sell more drinks than any of the others, simply by giving away the house secret on the composition of the ginger ale and Seven-Up cocktails and the details of the commission scale. But her success evokes the jealousy of the other women, and soon her first venture into professional entertainment comes to an end.

Through contacts established during her work at the Garden of Allah, Angelou auditions for an opening at the Purple Onion, a North Beach cabaret where she soon replaces Jorie Remus and shares the nightly bill with Phyllis Diller. After lessons with her drama coach, Lloyd Clark, who, incidentally, is responsible for coining her stage name, Maya Angelou, she polishes her style as an interpretative dancer and perfects a series of calypso songs that eventually comprise her regular act at the cabaret. Although the audience at the Purple Onion has never been entertained by a performer like Angelou, she quickly becomes extremely popular and gains much wider exposure than she did as a dancer at the Garden of Allah. Many professional stars and talent scouts, visiting San Francisco from New York and Chicago, drop in at the Purple Onion and some eventually invite her to audition for their shows. In 1954, for example, Leonard Sillman brought his Broadway hit New Faces of 1953 to the Bay Area. When she learns through friends that Sillman needed a replacement for Eartha Kitt, who would be leaving for an engagement in Las
Vegas, she jumps at the chance to work with a cast of talented performers. Even though she is invited to join the show, the management at the Purple Onion refuses to release her from her contract. Her first real show business break, therefore, does not come until after she goes to New York to try out for a new Broadway show called *House of Flowers*, starring Pearl Bailey and directed by Saint Subber. While there she is unexpectedly asked to join the company of *Porgy and Bess* in the role of Ruby, just as the troupe is finishing up its engagement in Montreal and embarking on its first European tour. She accepts, thereby launching her international career as a dancer-singer.

As her professional career in entertainment develops, Angelou worries about her responsibility to care for her young son and provide him with a secure family life. In *Singin' and Swingin'* she continues to trace her pursuit of romantic ideals in the face of loneliness and disappointment. While working in the Melrose Record Shop, she meets Tosh Angelos, a sailor of Greek-American heritage, and later marries him. Her first impression of marriage could not have been more idealistic:

*At last I was a housewife, legally a member of that enviable tribe of consumers whom security made fat as butter and who under no circumstances considered living by bread alone, because their husbands brought home the bacon. I had a son, a father for him, a husband and a pretty home for us to live in. My life began to resemble a Good Housekeeping advertisement. I cooked well-balanced meals and molded fabulous jello desserts. My floors were dangerous with daily applications of wax and our furniture slick with polish.*

Unfortunately, after a year, Tosh and she begin to argue and recognize that their different attitudes stand in the way of true compatibility and trust. Her "Eden"-like homelife and "cocoon of safety" begin to smother her sense of integrity and independence. In her autobiography, she describes this difficult period as a time in which she felt a "sense of loss," which "suffused [her] until [she] was suffocating within the vapors." When their marriage ends, Angelou again looks for a way to give her young child a stable home and a permanent sense of family security. Understandably, her son temporarily distrusts her and wonders whether she will stop loving him and leave him behind to be cared for by others.

Before she marries Tosh, she seriously questions the nature of inter-racial marriage and is advised by others, including her mother, to examine the relationship carefully. Throughout *Singin' and Swingin'* she studies her attitude toward white people and explains her growing familiarity with their life-styles and their acceptance of her as an equal within the world of entertainment. When she first meets her future Greek-American husband, she suspects that her racial heritage precludes the possibility of any kind of permanent relationship. Her Southern childhood is too close, too vibrant in her memory: "I would never forget the slavery tales, or my Southern past, where all whites, including the poor and ignorant, had the right to speak rudely to and even physically abuse any Negro they met. I knew the ugliness of white prejudice." Although she discounts her suspicion in her dealings with Tosh Angelos, her deeply rooted fears stay close to the surface as she comes to associate with a large number of white artists and entertainers during her career as a dancer: "I knew you could never tell about white people. Negroes had survived centuries of inhuman treatment and retained their humanity by hoping for the best from their pale-skinned oppressors but at the same time being prepared for the worst." Later, during her role as Ruby in *Porgy and Bess*, which played throughout Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, she observes the double standards of white people who readily accept black Americans in Europe, because they are fascinated by their exotic foreignness, but who are equally quick to discriminate against other people of color. In North Africa, she witnesses yet another version of racial bigotry in the way members of the Arab elite mistreat their African servants, "not realizing that auction blocks and whipping posts were too recent in our history for us [black Americans] to be comfortable around slavey servants."

While in Rome, Angelou decides to cut short her engagement with *Porgy and Bess*, not because she has witnessed the complexities of racial prejudice but rather because she realizes that her son has suffered during her extended absence. Throughout her European tour, she carries the burden of guilt, which comes to characterize her early years of motherhood. Although she recognizes the pattern of abandonment emerging in her son's life as it had in her own, she often sees no alternative than to accept a job and, with it, the pain of separation. Finally, upon learning that her son has developed a severe and seemingly untreatable rash in her absence, she decides to return to San Francisco. Once there, she quickly sees no alternative than to accept a job and, with it, the pain of separation. Fortunately, after a year, Tosh and she begin to argue and recognize that their different attitudes stand in the way of true compatibility and trust. Their marriage ends, Angelou again looks for a way to give her young child a stable home and a permanent sense of family security. Understandably, her son temporarily distrusts her and wonders whether she will stop loving him and leave him behind to be cared for by others.

In the fourth in the autobiographical series, *The Heart of a Woman* (1980), the fourth in the autobiographical series, Maya Angelou continues the account of her son's youth and, in the process, repeatedly returns to the story of her childhood. The references to her childhood serve partly to create a textual link for readers who might be unfamiliar with the earlier volumes and partly to emphasize the suggestive similarities between her childhood and her son's. Her overwhelming sense of displacement and instability is, ironically, her son's burden too. In a brief flashback in the second chapter, she reminds us of the displacement that characterized her youth and links this aspect of her past with her son's present attitude. When Guy is fourteen, Angelou decides to move to New York. She does not bring Guy to the East until she has found a place for them to live, and when he arrives after a one-month separation, he initially resists her attempts to make a new home for them.

*The air between us [Angelou and Guy] was burdened with his aloof scorn. I understood him too well. When I was three my parents divorced in Long Beach, California, and sent me and my four-year-old brother, unescorted, to our paternal grandmother. We wore wrist tags which informed anyone concerned that we were Marguerite and Bailey Johnson, en route to Mrs. Annie Henderson in Stamps, Arkansas. Except for disastrous and mercifully brief encounters with each of them when I was seven, we...*
didn't see our parents again until I was thirteen.

From this and similar encounters with Guy, Angelou learns that the continual displacement of her own childhood is something she cannot prevent from recurring in her son's life.

In New York, Angelou begins to work as the Northern coordinator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and devotes most of her time to raising funds, boosting membership, and organizing volunteer labor, both in the office and in the neighborhoods. Throughout _Heart of a Woman_, she expands her own narrative by including anecdotes about well-known entertainers and political figures. Her account of a visit with Martin Luther King, Jr., at her SCLC office is just one example of this autobiographical technique. When Dr. King pays his first visit to the New York office during her tenure, she does not have advance notice of his presence and rushes into her office one day after lunch to find him sitting at her desk. They begin to talk about her background and eventually focus their comments on her brother, Bailey:

"Come on, take your seat back and tell me about yourself." ... When I mentioned my brother Bailey, he asked what he was doing now. The question stopped me. He was friendly and understanding, but if I told him my brother was in prison, I couldn't be sure how long his understanding would last. I could lose my job. Even more important, I might lose his respect. Birds of a feather and all that, but I took a chance and told him Bailey was in Sing Sing. He dropped his head and looked at his hands. ... "I understand. Disappointment drives our young men to some desperate lengths." Sympathy and sadness kept his voice low. "That's why we must fight and win. We must save the Baileys of the world. And Maya, never stop loving him. Never give up on him. Never deny him. And remember, he is freer than those who hold him behind bars."

Angelou appreciates King's sympathy and of course shares his hope that their work will make the world more fair and free. She recognizes the undeniable effects of displacement on Bailey's life and fervently hopes that her own son will be spared any further humiliation and rejection.

From time to time, Angelou sees marriage as the answer to her own sense of dislocation and fully envisions a perfect future with various prospective husbands. While in New York, she meets Vusumzi Make, a black South African freedom fighter, and imagines that he will provide her with the same domestic security she had hoped would develop from other relationships: "I was getting a husband, and a part of that gift was having someone to share responsibility and guilt." Yet her hopes are even more idealistic than usual, inasmuch as she imagines herself participating in the liberation of South Africa as Vus Make's wife: "With my courage added to his own, he would succeed in bringing the ignominious white rule in South Africa to an end. If I didn't already have the qualities he needed, then I would just develop them. Infatuation made me believe in my ability to create myself into my lover's desire." In reality, Angelou is only willing to go so far in re-creating herself to meet her husband's desires and is all too soon frustrated with her role as Make's wife. He does not want her to work but is unable on his own to support his expensive tastes as well as his family. They are evicted from their New York apartment just before they leave for Egypt and soon face similar problems in Cairo. Their marriage dissolves after some months, despite Angelou's efforts to contribute to their financial assets by working as editor of the _Arab Observer_. In _Heart of a Woman_, she underscores the illusionary nature of her fantasy about marriage to show how her perspective has shifted over the years and how much understanding she has gained about life in general. Re-creating these fantasies in her autobiography is a subtle form of truth telling and a way to present hard-earned insights about her life to her readers.

A second type of fantasy in _Heart of a Woman_ is borne out in reality rather than in illusion, as is the case with her expectations of marriage. One of the most important uses of the second kind of fantasy involves a sequence that demonstrates how much she fears for Guy's safety throughout his youth. A few days after mother and son arrive in Accra, where they move when her marriage with Vus Make deteriorates, some friends invite them to a picnic. Although his mother declines, Guy immediately accepts the invitation in a show of independence. On the way home from the day's outing, her son is seriously injured in an automobile accident. Even though he has had very little experience driving, his intoxicated host asks Guy to drive. When their return is delayed, Angelou is terrified by her recurring fear for Guy's safety. Later, in the Korle Bu emergency ward, her familiar fantasy about harm endangering her son's life moves to the level of reality, as she relates the vulnerability she feels in her role as mother with full responsibility for the well-being of her only child. In a new country, estranged from her husband and with no immediate prospects for employment, she possesses very little control over her life or her son's safety. After the accident in Ghana, Guy is not only fighting for independence from his mother but also for life itself. The conclusion of _Heart of a Woman_, nevertheless, announces a new beginning for Angelou and hope for her future relationship with Guy.

Her most recent autobiography, _All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes_ (1986), has swept Angelou to new heights of critical and popular acclaim. Her life story resumes exactly where it ended chronologically and geographically in _The Heart of a Woman_, with Guy's recovery from his automobile accident in Accra. Although only portions of two earlier volumes of her autobiographical narrative occur in Africa, her latest addition to the series takes place almost exclusively in Ghana. In _All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes_, however, Angelou focuses primarily on the story of her and many other black Americans' attempts in the early 1960s to return to the ancestral home in Africa. As in her previous autobiographies, she explores the theme of displacement and the difficulties involved in creating a home for oneself, one's family, and one's people.

In choosing to live in Ghana following the deterioration of her marriage to Vus Make, Angelou hopes to find a place where she and her son can make a home for themselves, free at last from the racial bigotry she has faced throughout the United States, Europe, and parts of the Middle East. While Guy is recuperating from his injuries, she carefully evaluates her assets and concludes that since his birth, her only home has been...
wherever she and her son are together: "we had been each other's home and center for seventeen years. He could die if he wanted to and go off to wherever dead folks go, but I, I would be left without a home." Her initial expectations, therefore, for feeling at ease and settling down in West Africa are, understandably, considerable: "We had come home, and if home was not what we had expected, never mind, our need for belonging allowed us to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befiting our imagination." Unfortunately, the Ghanian people do not readily accept Angelou, her son, and most of the black American community in Accra, and they unexpectedly find themselves isolated and often ignored.

Taken as a whole, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes recounts the sequence of events that gradually brings the autobiographer closer to an understanding and eventually to an acceptance of the seemingly unbreachable distance between the Ghanians and the black American expatriates. Within the first few weeks of her stay in Ghana, Angelou suspects that she has mistakenly followed the misdirected footsteps of other black Americans who "had not come home, but had left one familiar place of painful memory for another strange place with none." In time, she understands that their alienation is most likely based on the fact that they, unlike the Ghanians, are the descendants of African slaves, who painfully bear the knowledge that "not all slaves were stolen, nor were all slave dealers European." No one in the expatriate group can feel fully at ease in Africa as long as they carry the haunting suspicion that "African slavery stemmed mostly from tribal exploitation" and not solely from European colonial imperialism.

Angelou, nevertheless, perseveres; she eventually settles into lasting friendships with both Americans and Africans and finds work through her talents as a journalist and a performer. With her professional and personal contacts, she meets many African political activists, as well as diplomats and artists from around the world. These acquaintances, in addition to a brief tour in Berlin and Venice with the original St. Mark's Playhouse company of Genet's The Blacks, enlarge Angelou's perspective on racial complexities and help her locate a place in Africa where she can live, albeit temporarily, at peace.

In All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes, Angelou continually reminds the reader that the quest for a place to call home is virtually endemic to the human condition. During her time in Ghana, she comes to understand that the search is seldom successful, regardless of the political or social circumstances involved. Toward the end of her personal narrative, Angelou sums up her conclusions about the struggle to find or create a home: "If the heart of Africa still remained allusive, my search for it had brought me closer to understanding myself and other human beings. The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." In a 1984 interview conducted during the period when she was completing an earlier draft of All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes, Angelou voices the same illuminating insight:

[Neubauer]: How far will the fifth volume go? [Angelou]: Actually, it's a new kind. It's really quite a new voice. I'm looking at the black American resident, me and the other black American residents in Ghana, and trying to see all the magic of the eternal quest of human beings to go home again. That is maybe what life is anyway. To return to the Creator. All of that naivete, the innocence of trying to. That awful rowing towards God, whatever it is. Whether it's to return to your village or the lover you lost or the youth that some people want to return to or the beauty that some want to return to. Writing autobiography frequently involves this quest to return to the past, to the home. Sometimes, if the home can't be found, if it can't be located again, then that home or that love or that family, whatever has been lost, is recreated or invented. Yes, of course. That's it! That's what I'm seeing in this trek back to Africa. That in so many cases that idealized home of course is non-existent. In so many cases some black Americans created it on the spot. On the spot. And I did too. Created something, looked, seemed like what we have idealized very far from reality.

Whatever vision of home Angelou creates for herself and her son in Ghana, she discovers a heightened sense of self-awareness and independence. By the end of her stay in West Africa, she has a renewed image of herself as a woman, lover, mother, writer, performer, and political activist. In her state of fortified strength, she decides to leave Africa and return to the country of her birth, however disturbing the memories of slavery and the reality of racial hatred. In fact, Angelou ends her sojourn in foreign lands to commit herself to Malcolm X's struggle for racial equality and social justice in the United States, by planning to work as an office coordinator for the Organization of Afro-American Unity. She has finally freed herself from the illusion of claiming an ancestral home in Africa. Ironically, perhaps, with the writing of All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes and the brilliant clarity of the autobiographical present, "this trek back to Africa," Maya Angelou also decides to return to the South, and for the first time since her youth, make her home there. Although she has learned that "the idealized home of course is non-existent," she leaves her readers to suspect that her traveling shoes are never really out of sight; if nothing else, we will soon find ourselves following her paths of autobiographical discovery once again.

Most of the thirty-eight poems in Maya Angelou's Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie (1971) appeared several years earlier in a collection called The Poetry of Maya Angelou. Among these are some of her best known pieces, such as "Miss Scarlett, Mr. Rhett and Other Latter Day Saints" and "Harlem Hopsotch." The volume is divided into two parts; the first deals with love, its joy and inevitable sorrow, and the second with the trials of the black race. Taken as a whole, the poems cover a wide range of settings from Harlem streets to Southern churches to abandoned African coasts. These poems contain a certain power, which stems from the strong metric control that finds its way into the terse lines characteristic of her poetry. Not a word is wasted, not a beat lost. Angelou's poetic voice speaks with a sure confidence that dares return to even the most painful memories to capture the first signs of loss or hate.
The first twenty poems of *Cool Drink* describe the whole gamut of love, from the first moment of passionate discovery to the first suspicion of painful loss. One poem, in fact, is entitled “The Gamut” and in its sonnet form moves from "velvet soft" dawn when "my true love approaches" to the "deathly quiet" of night when "my true love is leaving." Two poems, “To a Husband” and “After,” however, celebrate the joyous fulfillment of love. In the first, Angelou suggests that her husband is a symbol of African strength and beauty and that through his almost majestic presence she can sense the former riches of the exploited continent. To capture his vibrant spirit, she retreats to Africa's original splendor and conjures up images as ancient as "Pharoah's tomb":

You're Africa to me  
At brightest dawn.  
The congo's green and  
Copper's brackish hue ...  
In this one man, she sees the vital strength of an entire race: "A continent to build / With Black Man's brawn." His sacrifice, reminiscent of generations of unacknowledged labor, inspires her love and her commitment to the African cause. “After” also speaks of the love between woman and man but is far more tender and passionate. The scene is the lovers' bed when "no sound falls / from the moaning sky" and "no scowl wrinkles / the evening pool." Here, as in “To a Husband,” love is seen as strong and sustaining, even jubilant in its harmonious union, its peaceful calm. Even "the stars lean down / A stony brilliance" in recognition of their love. And yet there is a certain absent emptiness in the quiet that hints of future loss.

In the second section, Angelou turns her attention to the lives of black people in America from the the time of slavery to the rebellious 1960s. Her themes deal broadly with the painful anguish suffered by blacks forced into submission, with guilt over accepting too much, and with protest and basic survival.

“No No No No” is a poem about the rejection of American myths that promise justice for all but only guarantee freedom for a few. The powerfully cadenced stanzas in turn decry the immorality of American involvement in Vietnam,

while crackling babies  
in napalm coats  
stretch mouths to receive  
burning tears ...  
as well as the insincere invitation of the Statue of Liberty, which welcomes immigrants who crossed "over the sinuous cemetery / of my many brothers," and the inadequate apologies offered by white liberals. The first stanza ends with the refrain that titles the complete collection of poems, "JUST GIVE ME A COOL DRINK OF WATER 'FORE I DIIIE." In the second half of the poem, the speaker identifies with those who suffered humiliation  
on the back porches  
of forever  
in the kitchens and fields  
of rejections  
and boldly cautions that the dreams and hopes of a better tomorrow have vanished. Even pity, the last defense against inhumanity, is spent.

Two poems that embody the poet's confident determination that conditions must improve for the black race are “Times-Square-Shoeshine Composition” and “Harlem Hopscotch.” Both ring with a lively, invincible beat that carries defeated figures into at least momentary triumph. “Times-Square” tells the story of a shoeshine man who claims to be an unequaled master at his trade. He cleans and shines shoes to a vibrant rhythm that sustains his spirit in spite of humiliating circumstances. When a would-be customer offers him twenty-five cents instead of the requested thirty-five cents, the shoeshine man refuses the job and flatly renounces the insulting attempt to minimize the value of his trade. Fully appreciating his own expertise, the vendor proudly instructs his potential Times Square patron to give his measly quarter to his daughter, sister, or mamma, for they clearly need it more than he does. Denying the charge that he is a "greedy bigot," the shoeshine man simply admits that he is a striving "capitalist," trying to be successful in a city owned by the super rich.

Moving uptown, “Harlem Hopscotch” celebrates the sheer strength necessary for survival. The rhythm of this powerful poem echoes the beat of feet, first hopping, then suspended in air, and finally landing in the appropriate square. To live in a world measured by such blunt announcements as "food is gone" and "the rent is due," people need to be extremely energetic and resilient. Compounding the pressures of hunger, poverty, and unemployment is the racial bigotry that consistently discriminates against people of color. Life itself has become a brutal game of hopscotch, a series of desperate yet hopeful leaps, landing but never pausing long: "In the air, now both feet down. / Since you black,  
don't stick around." Yet in the final analysis, the words that bring the poem and the complete collection to a close triumphantly announce the poet's victory: "Both feet flat, the game is done. / They think I lost. I think I won." These poems in their sensitive treatment of both love and black identity are the poet's own defense against the incredible odds in the game of life.
Within four years of the publication of *Just Give Me a Cool Drink 'fore I Diiie*, Maya Angelou completed a second volume of poetry, *Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well* (1975). By the time of its release, her reputation as a poet who transforms much of the pain and disappointment of life into lively verse had been established. During the 1970s, her reading public grew accustomed to seeing her poems printed in *Cosmopolitan*. Angelou had become recognized not only as a spokesperson for blacks and women, but also for all people who are committed to raising the moral standards of living in the United States. The poems collected in *My Wings*, indeed, appear at the end of the Vietnam era and in some important ways exceed the scope of her first volume. Many question traditional American values and urge people to make an honest appraisal of the demoralizing rift between the ideal and the real. Along with poems about love and the oppression of black people, the poet adds several that directly challenge Americans to reexamine their lives and to strive to reach the potential richness that has been compromised by self-interest since the beginnings of the country.

One of the most moving poems in *My Wings* is entitled “Alone,” in which carefully measured verses describe the general alienation of people in the twentieth century. “Alone” is not directed at any one particular sector of society but rather is focused on the human condition in general. No one, the poet cautions, can live in this world alone. This message punctuates the end of the three major stanzas and also serves as a separate refrain between each and at the close of the poem:

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Angelou begins by looking within herself and discovering that her soul is without a home. Moving from an inward glimpse to an outward sweep, she recognizes that even millionaires suffer from this modern malaise and live lonely lives with "hearts of stone." Finally, she warns her readers to listen carefully and change the direction of their lives:

Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering.

For its own survival, the human race must break down barriers and rescue one another from loneliness. The only cure, the poet predicts, is to acknowledge common interests and work toward common goals.

A poem entitled “America” is no less penetrating in its account of the country's problems. Again Angelou pleads with the American people to "discover this country" and realize its full potential. In its two-hundred-year history, "the gold of her promise / has never been mined." The promise of justice for all has not been kept and in spite of "her crops of abundance / the fruit and the grain," many citizens live below the poverty line and never have enough food to feed their families. Similarly, racial bigotry has denied generations of Americans their full dignity and natural rights, while depriving them of the opportunity to contribute freely to the nation's strength. At the close of the poem, Angelou calls for the end of "legends untrue," which are perpetrated through history to "entrap" America's children. The only hope for the country is to discard these false myths once and for all and to guarantee that all people benefit from democratic principles.

In one poem, “Southeast Arkansia,” the poet shifts her attention from the general condition of humanity to the plight of black people in America. The setting of this tightly structured poem is the locale where Angelou spent most of her childhood. At the end of the three stanzas, she poses a question concerning the responsibility and guilt involved in the exploitation of the slaves. Presumably, the white men most immediately involved have never answered for their inhumane treatment of "bartered flesh and broken bones." The poet doubts that they have ever even paused to "ponder" or "wonder" about their proclivity to value profit more than human life.

Any discussion of *My Wings* that did not address the poems written about the nature of love would be necessarily incomplete. The entire volume is dedicated to Paul du Feu, Angelou's husband from 1973 to 1980. One very brief poem, “Passing Time,” speaks of a love that is finely balanced and delicately counterpoised. This love stretches over time, blanketing both the beginning and end of a day: "Your skin like dawn / Mine like dusk." Together is reached a certain harmony that carries the lovers through the day, perfectly complementing each other's spirit. Equally economical in form is the poem “Greedy,” which in nine short lines compares a lonely lover to Christ. While she is separated from her man, "the day hangs heavy / loose and grey." The woman feels as if she is wearing "a crown of thorns" and "a shirt of hair." Alone, she suffers in her solitude and mourns that

No one knows
my lonely heart
when we're apart.

Such is love in the world of *My Wings*; when all is going well, love sustains and inspires, but when love fades, loneliness and pain have free rein.

As the title of Maya Angelou's third volume of poetry, *And Still I Rise* (1978), suggests, this collection contains a hopeful determination to rise above discouraging defeat. These poems are inspired and spoken by a confident voice of strength that recognizes its own power and will no
longer be pushed into passivity. The book consists of thirty-two poems, which are divided into three sections, "Touch Me, Life, Not Softly," "Traveling," and "And Still I Rise." Two poems, "Phenomenal Woman" and "Just for a Time" appeared in Cosmopolitan in 1978. Taken as a whole, this series of poems covers a broader range of subjects than the earlier two volumes and shifts smoothly from issues such as springtime and aging to sexual awakening, drug addition, and Christian salvation. The familiar themes of love and its inevitable loneliness and the oppressive climate of the South are still central concerns. But even more striking than the poet's careful treatment of these subjects is her attention to the nature of woman and the importance of family.

One of the best poems in this collection is "Phenomenal Woman," which captures the essence of womanhood and at the same time describes the many talents of the poet herself. As is characteristic of Angelou's poetic style, the lines are terse and forcefully, albeit irregularly, rhymed. The words themselves are short, often monosyllabic, and collectively create an even, provocative rhythm that resounds with underlying confidence. In four different stanzas, a woman explains her special graces that make her stand out in a crowd and attract the attention of both men and women, although she is not, by her own admission, "cut or built to suit a fashion model's size." One by one, she enumerates her gifts, from "the span of my hips" to "the curl of my lips," from "the flash of my teeth" to "the joy in my feet." Yet her attraction is not purely physical; men seek her for her "inner mystery," "the grace of [her] style," and "the need for [her] care." Together each alluring part adds up to a phenomenal woman who need not "bow" her head but can walk tall with a quiet pride that beckons those in her presence.

Similar to "Phenomenal Woman" in its economical form, strong rhyme scheme, and forceful rhythm is "Woman Work." The two poems also bear a thematic resemblance in their praise of woman's vitality. Although "Woman Work" does not concern the physical appeal of woman, as "Phenomenal Woman" does, it delivers a corresponding litany of the endless cycle of chores in a woman's typical day. In the first stanza, the long list unravels itself in forcefully rhymed couplets:

I've got the children to tend
The clothes to mend
The floor to mop
The food to shop
Then the chicken to fry
Then baby to dry.

Following the complete category of tasks, the poet adds four shorter stanzas, which reveal the source of woman's strength. This woman claims the sunshine, rain, and dew as well as storms, wind, and snow as her own. The dew cools her brow, the wind lifts her "across the sky," the snow covers her "with white / Cold icy kisses," all bringing her rest and eventually the strength to continue. For her, there is no other source of solace and consolation than nature and its powerful elements.

In two poems, "Willie" and "Kin," Angelou turns her attention from woman to her family. "Willie" tells the story of her paternal uncle, with whom she and her brother, Bailey, lived during their childhood in Stamps, Arkansas. This man, although "crippled and limping, always walking lame," knows the secret of survival. For years, he suffers humiliation and loneliness, both as a result of his physical affliction and his color. Yet from him, the child learns about the hidden richness of life and later follows his example to overcome seemingly insurmountable hardships. Willie's undying message echoes throughout the poem: "I may cry and I will die, / But my spirit is the soul of every spring" and "my spirit is the surge of open seas." Although he cannot personally change the inhumane way people treat their brothers and sisters, Willie's spirit will always be around; for, as he says, "I am the time," and his inspiration lives on beyond him.

As in "Willie," the setting of "Kin" is the South, particularly Arkansas, and the subject is family. This powerful poem is dedicated to Bailey and is based on the painful separation of brother and sister during their adult years. As children, Marguerite and Bailey were constant companions and buffered each other somewhat from the continual awareness of what it meant to grow up black in the South. Then, she writes, "We were entwined in red rings / Of blood and loneliness.... " Now, distanced by time and Bailey's involvement with drugs, the poet is left...

... to force strangers
Into brother molds, exacting
Taxations they never
Owed or could pay.

Meanwhile, her brother slips further and further away and fights...

... to die, thinking
In destruction lies the seed
Of birth....

Although she cannot reach him in his "regions of terror," Angelou sinks through memory to "silent walks in Southern woods" and an "Arkansas twilight" and is willing to concede that her brother "may be right."

But ultimately, the poet challenges her readers to fight against the insipid invitation of destruction and death. Throughout And Still I Rise, the
The caged bird sings on which he perches. Appearing both in the middle and end of the poem, this stanza serves as a dual refrain: sing. Trapped by the unyielding bars of his cage, the bird can only lift his voice in protest against his imprisonment and the "grave of dreams" soars to "name the sky his own." Unlike his unbound brother, the caged bird leads a life of confinement that sorely inhibits his need to fly and "trade winds soft through the sighing trees" and even "dares to claim the sky." He feeds on "fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn" and autobiography, Perhaps the most powerful poem in this collection is replace the "liquid notes of / Sorrow songs" with "a new song. A song / Of Southern peace." Although the memories of "ancient / Wrongs" sorrow. Now, "dusty / Flags droop their unbearable / Sadness." Yet the poet calls for a new dream to rise up from the rich soil of Georgia and Smell of fresh sweat. / In Southern fields." beautifully lyrical cadences, recalls the unforgotten memories of slavery, which linger like "odors of Southern cities" and the "great green / nostrils and the skin from your back. Similarly, in the very brief poem “Prelude to a Parting,” a woman lying in bed beside her lover senses the imminent end when he draws away from her touch. Yet neither will acknowledge "the tacit fact" or face the "awful fear of losing," knowing, as they do without speaking, that nothing will "cause / a fleeing love / to stay." Not all of the love poems in this collection suggest deception or dishonesty, but most describe the seemingly inevitable loss of love. The title poem, “Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?,” belongs to this second group. A woman, "evicted from sleep's mute palace" and lying awake alone in bed, remembers the "perfect harmonies" and the "insistent / rhythm" of a lost love. Her life fills with silence now that love has withdrawn its music, its "chanteys" that "hummed / [her] life alive." Now she rests "somewhere / between the unsung notes of night" and passionately asks love to return its song to her life: "O Shaker, why don't you sing?" This mournful apostrophe to love serves as a refrain in an unsung song and, in its second utterance, brings the poem to a close unanswered. The same determined voice comes through in a number of other poems that relate unabiding anguish over the oppression of the black race. Several of these poems deal specifically with the inhumane treatment of the slaves in the South. “A Georgia Song,” for example, in its beautifully lyrical cadences, recalls the unforgotten memories of slavery, which linger like "odors of Southern cities" and the "great green / Smell of fresh sweat. / In Southern fields." Angelou deftly recounts the "ancient / Wrongs" and describes a South broken by injustice and sorrow. Now, "dusty / Flags droop their unbearable / Sadness." Yet the poet calls for a new dream to rise up from the rich soil of Georgia and replace the "liquid notes of / Sorrow songs" with "a new song. A song / Of Southern peace." Although the memories of "ancient / Wrongs" can never be forgotten, the poem invites a renewal of Southern dreams and peace. Perhaps the most powerful poem in this collection is “Caged Bird,” which inevitably brings Angelou's audience full circle with her best-known autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. This poem tells the story of a free bird and a caged bird. The free bird floats leisurely on "trade winds soft through the sighing trees" and even "dares to claim the sky." He feeds on "fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn" and soars to "name the sky his own." Unlike his unbound brother, the caged bird leads a life of confinement that sorely inhibits his need to fly and sing. Trapped by the unyielding bars of his cage, the bird can only lift his voice in protest against his imprisonment and the "grave of dreams" on which he perches. Appearing both in the middle and end of the poem, this stanza serves as a dual refrain:
The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Although he sings of "things unknown," the bird's song of freedom is heard even as far as the "distant hill." His song is his protest, his only alternative to submission and entrapment. Angelou knows why the caged bird and all oppressed beings must sing. Her poems in *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?* imply that as long as such melodies are sung and heard, hope and strength will overcome defeated dreams.

At the end of *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Angelou hints at her association with Tom Feelings, a young black American artist who lived in Ghana during the early 1960s. Angelou cites Malcolm X's introduction of this newcomer to the black American expatriate community: "A young painter named Tom Feelings is coming to Ghana. Do everything you can for him. I am counting on you." By introducing Feelings at the conclusion of her latest autobiography, she subtly sets the scene for her most recent publication, *Now Sheba Sings the Song* (1987), a single poem, illustrated by eighty-two of Feelings's drawings of black women, sketched throughout the world over a period of twenty-five years. Together the poem and the sepia-toned drawings royally celebrate the universal majesty of the black woman. In his introduction to the book, Feelings credits Angelou as the "someone who shared a similar experience [with the women he drew], someone who traveled, opened up, took in, and mentally recorded everything observed. And most important of all, it [his collaborator] had to be someone whose center is woman." Angelou's poem, in turn, glorifies the spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual powers of black women or what Feelings calls "Africa's beauty, strength, and dignity [which are] wherever the Black woman is." Angelou affirms the black woman's "love of good and God and Life" and beckons "he who is daring and brave" to meet the open challenge of the radiant Queen of Sheba. Maya Angelou's songs, like Sheba's, testify to the creative powers inherent in the works of today's Southern women writers. (pp. 114-41)

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