Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

The prevalence of social disparities, cultural inequalities, and gender oppression have shaped societies and continues to influence human experiences, often finding their ways into literature as central themes. Poetry, as a literary form, has historically served as a medium for highlighting societal issues, offering insights into the complexities of human existence, and advocating for social change. The works of Maya Angelou and William Blake exemplify this tradition, addressing the multifaceted dimensions of inequality and oppression across different time periods and cultural contexts[1].

Cultural inequalities manifest as power imbalances and marginalization of certain groups due to their race, ethnicity, or cultural heritage. In the case of Maya Angelou, her poetry provides a poignant exploration of the African American experience, spotlighting the cultural subjugation endured during the era of slavery and the systemic racism that persisted in the post-slavery period. Her works offer a voice to the historically silenced and underscore the struggles of Black individuals in navigating a world that often denies their humanity and cultural identity. William Blake, on the other hand, critiques cultural and social injustices of 18th and 19th-century England, particularly the effects of industrialization and class stratification on marginalized groups. His poetry emphasizes the moral and cultural decay that stems from societal oppression, providing a critique that resonates across generations[2].

Social disparities, often arising from economic inequalities and systemic injustices, create a divide in access to opportunities and achievements. Angelou's poetry frequently grapples with the lingering effects of such disparities, highlighting how socioeconomic disadvantage stifles the potential of individuals and communities. Her works resonate with

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themes of resilience, dignity, and self-empowerment in the face of systemic challenges. Similarly, Blake's poems address the stark realities of poverty and class inequality in his era, painting vivid pictures of exploitation and the dehumanizing effects of industrial capitalism. Both poets use their works to shed light on the intersection of economic inequality and social marginalization, which continue to plague societies globally[3].

Gender inequalities are another recurring theme in the works of Angelou and, to a lesser extent, Blake. Angelou's poetry is renowned for its celebration of femininity and the resilience of women, particularly women of color, in the face of patriarchal structures and societal expectations. Her works emphasize empowerment and reclaiming agency in a world that often undervalues women's contributions. Although Blake's treatment of gender issues is less direct, his portrayals of innocence and experience frequently reflect on societal constraints imposed on individuals, including gender-based oppression[4].

Social oppression, the overarching mechanism driving cultural inequalities, social disparities, and gender inequalities, are a unifying theme in the poetry of Angelou and Blake. Through their works, both poets critique the systems of oppression that perpetuate human suffering and hinder societal progress. Angelou's narratives of personal and collective resilience provide a roadmap for transcending oppression, while Blake's visionary and often mystical critique of societal structures encourages introspection and reform[1, 2].

Literature serves as a mirror to real-life experiences, capturing the complexities of human interactions, societal dynamics, and the inequalities embedded within them. Through its forms, such as novels, poetry, plays, and essays, literature not only documents human experiences but also inspires readers to empathize with others and recognize the need for social change. This thesis examines the disparities and achievement gaps reflected in the poetry of Maya Angelou and William Blake, offering a comparative analysis of how two distinct societies perpetuated social inequalities that hinder individuals from achieving their

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potential. By exploring intersections of cultural inequalities, social disparities, gender inequalities, and social oppression, the study highlights the universal relevance of the struggle for social justice and equity across time and place. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of literature's role as both a reflection of societal conditions and a catalyst for addressing persistent injustices[5].

Literature and Societal Constructs

Literature is how humans view life. The historical context of Literature has gone beyond cosmology, it recognizes the experiences of a continuous situation that portrays both good and bad values of the society. Often as a reflection that presents how people think, do, or picture their society. Despite the definition of Literature, as a body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived aesthetic excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified according to various systems, including language, national origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter[6].

Literature is a method of recording, preserving, and transmitting knowledge and entertainment. It can also have a social, psychological, spiritual, or political role[6, 7]. Etymologically, the term literature is derived from the Latin word "Literatura/Litteratura, "learning, writing, grammar," originally "writing formed with letters," from litera/littera, "letter." Despite this, the term has also been applied to spoken or sung texts. Literature is often referred to synecdochically as "writing," especially creative writing, and poetically as "the craft of writing"[7].

Literature helps us to learn new and existing facts about an ongoing experience that occurs from another point of view books like Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give" or* Jacqueline Woodson's *"Brown Girl Dreaming* provide relatable role models and validate the experiences of students of colour, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation to succeed academically.

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In other words, one of the primary ways literature addresses disparities is by enhancing cultural awareness and empathy. Reading about different cultures, experiences, and perspectives helps students understand and appreciate diversity. For instance, works by authors from marginalized communities can shed light on systemic issues and personal struggles often overlooked in mainstream narratives. This awareness can lead to greater empathy and a more inclusive school environment, crucial for closing achievement gaps[8].

Literature is enjoyable. This is a feature of Literature that is often overlooked, but it might be the most important. Reading is fun. It gives us a break from our daily lives in the same way that watching a film does, but it enables us to use our imaginations much more than a film. With so many books, we can decide what kind of Literature we feel like reading at any given time. Approximately 63% of people read for pleasure as adults, and this habit usually starts in childhood[3, 4]. By amplifying marginalized voices, Literature empowers individuals and communities to share their stories and perspectives. This representation fosters a sense of belonging and validation, success of authors like demonstrates the impact of diverse narratives in broadening societal understanding and promoting inclusivity[9].

Literature has long been a medium through which writers explore and critique social inequalities, often reflecting the conditions and challenges of their times. This topic focuses on two poets' literary works who have significantly contributed to this discourse Maya Angelou and William Blake. Though they wrote in vastly different periods and contexts, their works resonate with a common concern for the marginalized and the disenfranchised, making them compelling subjects for a comparative study on disparities and achievement gaps. Their literary fiction explores the facets of the human condition and may involve social commentary[10].

Literature plays a crucial role in addressing disparities and achievement gaps in society. By reflecting societal issues, fostering empathy, and inspiring change, literature not only

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highlights injustices but also advocates for a more equitable and inclusive world. Through the power of storytelling, literature has the potential to transform perspectives, bridge divides, and empower marginalized communities, ultimately contributing to the creation of a just society[11].

The exploration of disparities and achievement gaps in the poetry of Maya Angelou and William Blake underscores the enduring power of literature to reflect and challenge societal inequalities. Both poets use their unique voices and artistic visions to bring attention to the struggles of the marginalized, urging readers to confront and address the injustices of their times. By comparing the works of Angelou and Blake, this study aims to highlight the universal nature of themes related to inequality and achievement, demonstrating how literature serves as a vital tool for social critique and change. The analysis of their selected poems will provide deeper insights into the ways in which different historical and cultural contexts shape the depiction of these issues, while also revealing the commonalities that connect human experiences across time and space[12].

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1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite notable advances in civil rights and policies aimed at promoting equity, entrenched disparities and achievement gaps persist across societies. These enduring inequalities rooted in historical legacies, institutional practices, and intersecting axes of race, class, and gender systemically restrict access to quality education, meaningful employment, healthcare, and political participation. As a result, many individuals and communities continue to face barriers that limit opportunity and hinder the full realization of human potential.

These inequalities, often rooted in economic imbalance, racial discrimination, and systemic injustice, perpetuate divisions that hinder equal access to opportunities and suppress the realization of human potential. Within this context, literature and poetry in particular has historically functioned as a vital purpose through which writers interrogate structures of oppression, illuminate the struggles of

marginalised communities, and articulate visions of justice and freedom. Maya Angelou and William Blake, though separated by centuries and cultural milieus, converge in their poetic commitment to exposing social inequities and challenging entrenched systems of exclusion. Yet, a significant scholarly gap remains in comparative analyses that investigate how their distinct voices and techniques intersect in addressing these concerns. The problem, therefore, lies in the insufficient critical attention to the ways in which Angelou and Blake employ symbolism, imagery, and other poetic devices to reflect and critique the persistence of social disparities and achievement gaps, and there is limited comparative evidence exploring how their works collectively addresses these issue regardless of their individual circumstances and timeline of each poets, this will reveal the enduring nature of inequality and provide critical insights into the ways literature mirrors and challenges societal structures,through symbolism, imagery, and other poetic techniques used in the selected poems for this discourse.

This gap underscores the need to study their poetry as a medium through which themes of injustice, resilience, and hope are articulated.

Maya Angelou, writing in the context of 20th-century America, addresses the racial and gender-based disparities that have historically disadvantaged African Americans and women, limiting their opportunities and achievements. Her poems highlight the psychological and social barriers imposed by prejudice and discrimination, revealing the personal resilience needed to combat these structural inequities. Meanwhile, William Blake’ s work, rooted in 18th-century England, reflects the rigid class system and economic disparities that defined his society, emphasizing how industrialization and social stratification restricted individual freedoms and thwarted aspirations.

This study seeks to fill that gap by situating their works within broader conversations on literature’s role in confronting inequality and advocating for human dignity.

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Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate how Maya Angelou and William Blake use poetry to highlight social disparities and achievement gaps, by examining the influence of race, class, and other socio-economic factors on individual potential in their respective societies. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

i. examine how Maya Angelou and William Blake portray social disparities and achievement gaps in selected poems.

ii. discuss the experience and development of the poets in both works, and examine how they navigate and respond to systemic inequalities.

iii. compare and contrast the poetic techniques used by Maya Angelou and William Blake to express themes of social inequality and restricted potentials.

1. 4. Research Questions:

1. How does Maya Angelou and William Blake portray social disparities and achievement gaps in their selected poems?

2. How do the poets' experiences and personal development in both works reveal their strategies for navigating and responding to systemic inequalities?"

3. In what ways do Maya Angelou and William Blake utilize contrasting poetic techniques to convey themes of social inequality and restricted human potential within their respective bodies of work?

1.5 Significance of the Study:

This study holds significance for both literary scholarship and social discourse by examining how two poets from distinct historical and cultural backgrounds Maya Angelou

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and William Blake can address the enduring themes of social disparities and achievement gaps. By exploring these themes, this research offers insights into the ways literature reflects societal inequities and amplifies the voices of the marginalized.

Firstly, this study contributes to comparative literary analysis by highlighting similarities and differences in Angelou's and Blake's portrayals of inequality, despite their differing social contexts. Understanding these perspectives deepens our awareness of how factors such as race, class, and socio-economic background shape individuals' lived experiences and opportunities, regardless of time and place.

Secondly, this research emphasizes the relevance of Angelou's and Blake's work to contemporary discussions on social justice. By analyzing their poetic techniques and thematic concerns, this study demonstrates how literature can serve as a vehicle for social change, fostering empathy, awareness, and resilience. Angelou's emphasis on overcoming racial and gender-based oppression, alongside Blake's critique of class-based injustices, provides valuable perspectives for ongoing efforts to address inequalities in today's society.

Finally, this study serves as a resource for educators, students, and readers interested in the intersections between literature, social justice, and historical context. By bridging the gap between 18th-century England and 20th-century America, this research encourages a broader understanding of the shared struggles that continue to impact marginalized communities worldwide.

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1.6 Scope of the Study

This study explores how Maya Angelou and William Blake use poetry to highlight social disparities and achievement gaps, tracing their portrayals of marginalized voices and societal constraints. Focusing on selected poems, this research delves into Angelou's "Still I Rise" and "Caged Bird", as well as Blake's The Little Black Boy" from Songs of Innocence and of Experience and London. By analyzing each poet's use of imagery, tone, and symbolism, this

study illuminates how they express issues of inequality, oppression, and human potential. A close reading of these works allows for an exploration of how both poets, despite being separated by centuries, resonate in their thematic approach to human resilience and the struggle for equity.

The scope extends to a comparative analysis of the social themes and literary techniques employed by Angelou and Blake. This includes examining each poet's response to racial inequality, economic disparity, and limited social mobility, as well as assessing their stylistic choices to convey impactful messages on social justice. Drawing on history, sociology, and literary theory, this study contextualizes their work within broader societal issues, while also examining how these poems continue to resonate in contemporary discussions on social justice. Through critical responses and analysis, this study demonstrates how Angelou's and Blake's poetry transcends their times, underscoring the enduring relevance of literature in challenging societal norms and inspiring change toward a more equitable world.

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1.7 Limitation of the Study

While this study offers significant insights into the representation of social disparities and achievement gaps in the selected poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake, it is not without its limitations. One of the foremost constraints is the focus on only a limited number of poems specifically "Still I Rise and Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou, and "London" and "The Little Black Boy" by William Blake. Although these poems are rich in themes relevant to the study, they may not represent the entirety of each poet's oeuvre or the full scope of their socio-political commentary. Consequently, the findings of this study are limited in their generalizability to the broader body of work produced by both poets.

Additionally, the study relies primarily on literary and thematic analysis, which, while insightful, may not capture the full cultural and historical nuances embedded in the texts. The

interpretation of poetic elements such as symbolism, tone, and diction is inherently subjective, and while care has been taken to apply consistent analytical frameworks, alternative readings are possible. Furthermore, the socio-political contexts of 18th-century England and 20th-century America differ significantly, making direct comparisons between Blake and Angelou complex. Although comparative literature allows for cross-cultural exploration, the disparities in time, geography, and socio-political structures may affect the depth to which parallels can be drawn.

Another limitation lies in the scope of theoretical engagement. While the study is guided by frameworks such as social justice theory and critical race theory, it does not exhaust all possible theoretical lenses through which the poems could be interpreted. The focus on race, class, and socio-economic factors may also overlook other equally important aspects such as gender, spirituality, and personal trauma, which are present in the poets' works. Lastly, access to comprehensive biographical data and historical reception of the poems may have been limited by the availability of resources, particularly with respect to William Blake, whose posthumous recognition evolved over centuries.

Despite these limitations, the study remains a valuable contribution to the discourse on literature as a reflection and critique of societal inequalities. The constraints identified do not diminish the relevance of the findings but rather highlight opportunities for further research in related areas.

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1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

The operational definition in this thesis makes it possible to outline specific and clear parameters for defining the key terms and variables for the purpose of the study in this thesis. It defines these terms and how they will be used in the context of the study, guaranteeing their

operationalization or the possibility to measure them in practice. This aid in establishing generalizability and reliability in the study.

Disparities: Defined for the purpose of analysis in terms of such distinctions existing in themes and personas experiences with different narrative conclusions in the poems, which focus on race, class, and gender/ language and thus, socioeconomic status.

Achievement Gaps: Accomplishments, characterized as the portrayal of the lack of equal opportunities and achievements in the poems demonstrated through the characters' triumphs and failures in relation to prevalent social concerns.

Disparities in achievement will then be defined based on how education and social accomplishment are depicted in the poems. This will entail a thematic analysis aimed at identifying positive and negative aspects regarding education, success and recognition within the society.

Thematic elements: The theme of oppression will be listed by manually coding instances where characters or narrators of the texts voice feelings of oppression, suppression, and discrimination.

Symbolism: is also going to be evaluated based on the fact of whether or not certain symbols will be used in poems and their relevance in connection with the poems' themes of disparity and achievement. This encompasses assigning a code to objects, color, settings and other entities that point to other abstract ideas.

Social Inequalities: Social inequalities refer to the uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges among individuals or groups within a society. These inequalities arise due to systemic barriers rooted in socioeconomic status, race, gender, or other identity factors. In literature, social inequalities are often depicted as the struggles faced by marginalized communities, reflecting the broader societal structures that maintain hierarchies and power imbalances. This theme is crucial for understanding how societal norms and

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institutions perpetuate exclusion and limit individuals' potential for personal and collective growth.

Economic Disparities: Economic disparities are the differences in wealth, income, and access to economic resources among individuals or groups within a society. These disparities are often a result of systemic inequalities, such as discriminatory labor practices, unequal access to education, and historical injustices. In poetry, economic disparities are portrayed as barriers to social mobility and as sources of frustration, suffering, and resilience. By addressing these themes, literature exposes the socio-economic challenges that contribute to the widening gap between the privileged and the underprivileged.

Political Disparities: Political disparities denote the unequal access to political power, representation, and participation in decision-making processes. These disparities are often shaped by systemic oppression, exclusionary policies, and socio-economic hierarchies that marginalize certain groups. In literature, political disparities may be explored through narratives of disenfranchisement, advocacy for equity, and critiques of oppressive regimes. This theme highlights the struggles for political voice and agency, emphasizing the need for inclusivity and equitable governance.

Racial Discrimination: Racial discrimination refers to the systemic and individual acts of prejudice, exclusion, or disadvantage based on race or ethnicity. It manifests in various forms, including unequal access to education, employment, and justice, as well as stereotyping and cultural erasure. In poetry, racial discrimination is often a powerful theme used to shed light on the lived experiences of marginalized racial groups, challenge societal biases, and advocate for racial equality and justice.

Social Class: Social class pertains to the categorization of individuals or groups based on their socio-economic status, which includes wealth, occupation, education, and cultural capital. The theme of social class in literature frequently explores the struggles of the lower

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and working classes, the privileges of the elite, and the tensions between different social strata. By examining social class, literature provides a lens to critique societal structures and question the fairness of wealth distribution and social mobility.

Race and Gender Oppression: Race and gender oppression refers to the systemic marginalization and exploitation of individuals based on their race and gender identities. This dual oppression often intersects, creating compounded disadvantages for people, particularly women of color, in both public and private spheres. In literature, the theme of race and gender oppression is explored to highlight the lived realities of those who face these dual burdens, advocate for equity, and underscore the resilience and agency of marginalized individuals in the face of systemic injustices.

These operational definitions provide a clear framework for understanding the critical themes explored in the thesis, enabling a deeper engagement with the selection poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake.

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Endnotes

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Chapter Two

Literature Review

Generally, analyses of representations of injustices and achievement inequalities are likely to concentrate on ideologies of social injustice, oppression, and the propensity for emancipation and equity. By using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Comparative Literature Theory, this chapter discusses the relationship between literary works, academic and current relevant works on disparities, and the achievement gaps in the selected Poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake. This literature review will seek to present a contrast in themes and styles through a discussion of the two poets whose works are from different eras, from different cultural backgrounds, and under different social circumstances. In analyzing their poetry thematically and critically in this chapter, it is, therefore, the hope of the author to offer an interpretation of how each poet approaches or fails to address social justice, identity, and human experience, and the larger implications of these disparities on their artistic output and capital.

2.1 Conceptual Review

This literature review synthesizes scholarly perspectives on the themes of disparities and rich achievement gaps in the selected works of Maya Angelou and William Blake, providing a comprehensive understanding of the critical issues surrounding the texts. This will highlight key findings and gaps in poems, and this review will also focus on socioeconomic disparities in educational attainment, examining how factors such as income, race, and geographic location influence educational outcomes. By systematically reviewing the existing literature, we aim to identify key trends, underlying mechanisms, and potential policy solutions.

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The key variables relevant to the analysis of disparities and achievement gaps in the selected poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake. Each variable will be defined, contextualized, and connected to the theoretical framework.

2.1.1 Disparities

Disparities has a way of affecting people's self-esteem as it presents itself to be a mini god that dispute the society defined by class, color, what background or hierarchy social groups you belong to. This topic is important and it focuses on the area of social economic issues, the gaps in which people achieve their goals in a system that doesn't favor them, the theme of oppression, inequality, loss of identity, lack of opportunities and other thematic factors through the lens of literary works by navigating this variables to uncover ways through which these issues are addressed using comparative literature theory and critical race theory (CRT) in considering this framework to examine a robust review on social issues and cultures as they relate to significant challenges that dominate the societal narratives of unfairness, diversity through literature[1].

Disparities are mostly faced by women who have limited access to themselves, No matter what their culture or background will be they are commonly referred to as "weak" and secondary to their male counterparts. In every part of the world, women at times face a common problem that is of gender discrimination and in most of the settled societies women in all class have experienced very low status, oppression and lend towards their exploitation. Women in whole like Asia, Europe or the Middle East is unable to have any influence over their political, religious, social and cultural lives of her society. She neither owns any property nor inherits it but she herself is treated as a property. In ancient times, if a man raped a woman, the punishment was given to his wife, for it is her responsibility that the wife handed her over to the rapist which is her husband[1, 2].

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In Angelou's poetry, disparities often reflect the African American experience, highlighting the historical and ongoing impact of slavery, segregation, and racial discrimination. Born on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri Maya Angelou was born to Mr. Bailey Johnson and Vivian Baxter. After her parents' divorce Angelou along with her brother at the age of 3 and 4 respectively, went to live with their paternal grandmother Mrs. Anne Henderson to Stamps in Arkansas. With education and family condition Angelou was quite fortunate. Her grandmother owned a Store in Stamps which earned her well to support her family even at the time of great depression eventually followed by World War II. Her momma (grandmother) was the most influential figure in her life. She sowed the seeds of religion, manners and confidence in Maya. Another influence of her life was Mrs, Bertha Flowers who was a white woman. After Maya was raped by Mr. Freeman her mother's boyfriend, Mrs. Flowers helped her to overcome the emotional trauma of sexual abuse by diverting and motivating her towards reading poetry and literature, she added that 'It is language alone which separates him(man) from lower animals'. She was one of the few White women praised by Angelou. Maya added that Mrs. Flowers was 'the aristocrat of Black Stamps' and appeared 'warm in the coldest weather'. Mrs. Flowers influence was so strong on Angelou that she considered her as the 'richest white woman in town'[2,3].

After graduating from Toussaint L'Overture in St. Louis she began working as the first African-American streetcar conductor. She married Tosh Angelou, despite having a son at the age of 16 without being married, but their marriage didn't work and they got a divorce. After having a successful career in writing and acting she got married again to Paul Du Few but got divorced again. Angelou published various poems and short books, and all her poems have been collected in The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou. She was not just limited with writing poetry, but also wrote various screenplays, cookbooks, movie scripts and biographies. Later in her life she was honored by the most coveted Presidential Medal of

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Freedom by President Barack Obama. She died on May 28, 2014, leaving a lasting impact on generations to come[4].

As for this study of disparities in both race and social justice perspectives, Maya Angelou's poems "Caged Bird" and "I Still Rise" contains strong and appropriate figures of speech as well as narratives. In Caged Bird" Angelou uses the free bird and the caged bird to give a comparison and to raise themes like liberation and oppression. The caged bird relates to people or certain categories of the population who are impaired and isolated by situational or structural violence. In this case, learners and minorities in education and society. The use of imagery of a bird confined in a cage yet sings shows the strength and faith that are present even when going through even the toughest of times, symbolizing the differences between those who enjoy freedom and those who are oppressed. The caged bird, trapped and restricted, sings of freedom despite its confinement[5].

Ngesti Retno Palupl stated that the result of Maya Angelou's poems are classified into three sounds of African American poetry that reflect firstly, the sound of freedom that represent in "caged bird"' secondly equality, represented in the poem and thirdly the sound of racism that represents in "I still rise" disparities highlighted in this selected poem of study, "The caged bird" represents marginalized groups, who face systemic oppression and discrimination that reflects the ongoing struggles against racial injustice[6, 7]. The caged bird lack of freedom and opportunities mirrors the broader social and economic disparities experienced by marginalized communities. "I still rise" is a declaration of resilience, an empowering poem that has bright tones of protest and calls for self-respect in the face of oppression. Oppression is evident in this poetry; the speaker speaks to the authority figure with authority, in confronting oppression, the speaker claims agency, power affirming the invulnerability despite the oppressors' attempts of suppressing the subject declaring their worth and power regardless of the attempts to dominate them[8].

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These disparities arise from high levels of residential segregation and have implications from health and well-being in child hood and throughout the life course. The fact that health disparities are rooted in social factors, such as residential segregation and an unequal treatment, geography of opportunity, should not have a paralyzing effect on the public health community. They investigate the need to move beyond conventional public health and health care approaches to consider policies to improve access to opportunity-rich-neighborhoods through enhanced housing mobility, and to increase the opportunities for healthy living in disadvantaged neighborhoods[9].

Angelou's works are seen as most important when it comes to the study of disparities in segregated neighborhoods. The unfair treatment that goes around communities with improper housing, healthcare factors and children whose livelihoods depend heavily on their backgrounds. [14] There have been number of studies based on the works of Maya Angelou from different perspectives. Majorly the studies found about her work includes the issues like feminism, black women's struggle against the Whites, black identity, oppression, racial stereotypes as a minority within a majority, sexuality etc. [15] In his work discussed about the low self-esteem that black women have due to constant degradation from the society. He shows how Angelou encourages[10].

These selected poems of Maya Angelou will justify the study of disparities as it also recognizes the spirit to fight systemic differences cause one to be different by recognizing the strength within to break the chains of societal relegation. Each of the poems presented has aimed at painting a picture of inequality in as much as both of them have symbolized personal strength. They focus on structural features as well. The cage represents the restrictions on the free movement of the bird in the poem 'I Still Rise' simulates the struggles of the speaker symbolically represents the struggles of minorities. Another themes that will be discuss in this study is hope and resilience. However, there is hope in both poems to continue

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striving and to endure despite the many inequalities. Songs of the caged bird is a song of the freedom, and the persona of Maya "I Still Rise" enshrines the will to rise. When comparing the suffering of the oppressed to the strength that must come with overcoming them, Angelou's poems are definitely able, delivering poignant messages on inequality and strength of those who rise above it[11].

A British writer whose vision on disparities shows the relationship between his poetry and the diabolical movement in England. Choosing the right poems as selected to achieve this objective, "London" and "The little black boy". The equivalent of the oppressed to a black imagery with a white imagery in understanding both aspect of race, sufferings, struggles, to an adequate portrayal of both perspectives on the subject of discrimination against other minor groups in a socioeconomic community. Most researchers found an interesting fact about William Blake, he was said to be unschooled but he could make so many literary works. William Blake's life were full of joy and sorrows, struggles, glory days and getting his first vision in his biography, it is useful to examine "The Songs of Innocence" as an indication of Blake's progress in terms of the artistic maturity of the poet even though some of the poems are not profound and profound. It may seem that audience is primarily children, and most of poems in anthology have rather a weird, childish beauty regarding topics and words as well as the structure and meter of verse and rhymes[12, 13].

This is a book of wonderful poems, an evil and suffering world if you will, with all its pleasures and delights. Yet, in "'The little black boy'" along with "The chimney sweeper" we found the face of racial discrimination and sufferings of the poor. Seeing racism and hardships of the poor as a part of disparities in social order. However, majority of the poems in this collection are short and musical and, one could say they are "happy songs"; in them, one even feels that there is social harmony or at the very least, a child's perception of order in the world as manifested by the line "God's in his heaven, All's right with the world" But there

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are exceptions to this: there is "'The Little Black Boy'" and "'The Chimney sweeper' second collection, "The Songs of Experience" was comparatively much more mature. It depicted agony of hopeless wretchedness. This was a transformation of the poet in his way of thinking about life. This is often an important aspect of experience; one had a more profound feeling of what evil is capable of and of the immense suffering of the people's existence. Some of the changing symbols include that of the lamb which is replaced with that of the tiger. It is certainly, one of the most important ones which encompass all the idea of Blake's poetry[14].

As for poetic geniuses, William Blake was the most extraordinary figure of the given period. His lyrics can be entitled as belonging to the most typical examples of the manifestations of the romantic spirit. He motivated the Romantic poets with the elements that are good and evil, heaven and hell, knowledge and innocence, equality and inequality, discrimination of the poor from the rich society and the exterior and the imagination. The poems of this poet had a romantic spirit, images and symbols and the spirit of revolution. He was recognized to be the pioneer of romantic poetry[15].

In this poem Blake uses his own vision and paints a panoramic even though ghastly picture of the many sorrows, physical and metaphysical in London. He paints a picture of the dirty, miserable streets of London and describes the wretched people at the bottom of the society, homeless, soldiers, child slavery and harlots into the same category. The whole poem focuses on cries of these people with pains and injustice done on them, as well as opening the veil to show the dichotomy of the haves and the have nots-the poor. It may be said that the poem is concerned with illustrating the socioeconomic disparities of England, of the time many institutions such as the church, royalty, new industries and the military are criticized. The main figure and the leading topic of this poem are the absence of freedom in man and the sources of this absence[16].

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This is quite a peculiar poem in a sense that it portrays London in such a dark horrific and critical way while the city was considered to be the epitome of advanced technology and receiving the credit for being the core of western civilization and the British Empire. “The little black boy” is a powerful poem on race, religion and the inherent disparities on how William Blake understood and reflect his own personal beliefs about race during his time. Using a comparative approach to study these selected poems, comparing both Maya and William Blake’s views on this topic of disparities[17].

There was a tremendous prejudice between the white and the blacks, colonization, and slave trade across the Atlantic. These factors greatly affected the perception of race, and many societies established themselves with racial inequality, it was seen that technology was overvalued than the lives of people most especially the bottom societies who were used for the purpose of change. Blake was producing his works when slavery was still in vogue and a lot of racism was manifested legally in Britain and in many parts of the British Empire[18].

Religious elements play the significant role in most of the creations of the author William Blake and the poem “’The Little Black Boy’” does not exclude this rule. The poem also relates to Christianity and more specifically, the concept of everyone being equal before God as opposed to inequity in the physical world with regards to the color of one’s skin. Some of the features which are evident from the poem include a use of a cross, an implication that in the sight of the lord, all people especially the black ones are created equal. The black boy’s skin is described as a “cloud” that will dissolve in afterlife and show the soul that is clean from blemishes; this part of the poem paints Blake’s revulsion toward racism[19]. Thus, as all the above demonstrates, for the impact of the visions, for the mechanics of the images, and for the totality with all the techniques demonstrated, Blake portrays the great suffering of the British society in the French Revolution and industrial revolution hence “London” deserves “the mightiest brief poem”. All in all, “London” is a very pessimistic poem that

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realistically portrays the existing problems without offering any means or ways to solve these problems depicted in every line. this darkness that is depicted throughout the nightmarish outlook is strongly embedded in the mind of the reader[20].

Thus, like William Blake, possibly this poem is designed to portray the horror and unfairness that was London in the most impactful way possible. While The little boy dwells on the critical heritage of William Blake's criticism of slavery. in this attractive song, an attempt is made in this study specially on the reversal of the roles of the white boy and the black boy in realizing the core principles of human love which breaks the barriers of caste, color and creed. William Blake, using his skillful touches both with the lines and the images and with the strong allusions to the biblical themes of love, very effectively connives at the supreme importance of bearing with any human beings irrespective of caste, color and creed which is the basis for peaceful and healthy human co-existence[21]. In summary, each of these poems are concerned with inequality, whether it is racism, social or economic, however, they do not address the problem in the same way or to the same extent. Blake's works are inclined to present a darker outlook at equality, hinting that one can become equal only spiritually or protesting against other organic causes underlying suffering. While her poems speak to the violation of the rights of black women, Angelou's poems are more assertively inspiring, as they acknowledge the need to endure such injustice and the spirit to overcome it. Both poems "'The Little Black Boy'" by William Blake and "'Caged Bird'"'by Maya Angelou depict the idea of race discrimination in their poetry, but in different ways, Blake offers readers a means of escaping racial differences by joining the Lord who doesn't discriminate since we are equal in the sight of the lord. while Angelou brings together the physical fight for liberty and the longing for equality. Each poem will reveal what the poets mean by disparity and the problematize social injustice, while Blake tackles it in the context of social

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classes and the Industrial Revolution, Angelou uses the image of a caged bird and I still rise to speak about the black people's plight in America and call for resilience[22].

CRT as mentioned earlier, CRT enlightens the world that racism is ordinary, and race is socially constructed thus helping in analyzing how Angelou presents racism as normal and woven in the society through the lens of poetry. Comparative Literature Analysis This makes it possible to compare as to how Angelou and Blake capture the essence of social inequalities in the poems, disregarding the facts that they're of different historical and/or cultural backgrounds[23].

2.1.2 Achievement gaps

The term "Achievement gap" has over the past been used to define disparities in scores achieved by students of color as compared to the White student's scores usually in standardized tests or course exams. Original examining students of color more specifically the black community as they too experienced marginalization in education due to racism, the term is now applied to comparatively any student population to middle and upper class, Choosing White men as the reference group is done at the cost of the rest of the learners from other groups such as Harper and Milner[24]. The comparisons that are made based on the cultural values of one domineering group take the idea of 'difference' as a 'deficit,' and the reification possibility undermines the humanity of people in the stigmatized groups[25].

Moreover, by centering White, wealthy, male performance, it also means that other Students of color, even those from assimilating groups who may obtain higher test scores such as Asian American Students, can be dehumanized as model minorities or good at just Math"[26]. Socioeconomic achievement gap or the difference in scores on tests of academic achievement between those students from higher and lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds is quite famous in sociology which focuses on education. Cross-sectional studies reveal that SES achievement gaps are prevalent across a number of advanced and

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developing countries. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. This implies that in most societies, children in low SES do not even get the same learning experiences in or outside class as the high SES students. In a large number of countries, SES differences adversely affect social mobility[27]. This goes against the historic culture in the United States or other societies that have embraced education as 'great equalizer' but it may not be so in societies that have never thought of themselves as meritocracies. More recently, there has been increasing concern as to whether the SES achievement gap may be widening, or otherwise developing in a particular way over time[28]. Achievement gap may therefore be defined as the achievement of certain aims or objectives that an individual or a group of people set to achieve notably under adverse conditions. As for achievement, according to Angelou, it can be discussed as a process when a person or a group of people surmount the obstacles in result of racial segregation, which can be considered an empowering story. Thus, the achievement within Blake's works can be best understood and interpreted as a didactic process of the victory over social sin and pervasiveness[29].

This poem rather symbolizes the plight of special ethnic groups, which through the cage, symbolizes oppression against their freedom. The caged bird losing sight of its wings which has been clipped, and legs which are tied, sings liberality but cannot grasp it. Such imagery can be related to the participants' educational process and first of all students from the underprivileged backgrounds or districts. Such students endure injustice from the system by only getting poor resources, low expectations, and other forms of prejudice, which means their possibilities of learning are basically "locked up". As relates to the achievement gap, the caged bird as described in the poem is the students who are locked in by the cage of socioeconomic, racial and educational disparities. As they may say "the bird sings" they may be restricted by these systematic laminations. In this context, the "free bird" symbolizes students who are from a higher class and background compared to the others and have better

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opportunities in choosing their careers and do not get restricted by the limitations that are set deliberately by the society. The achievement gap is therefore the consequence of such distinct circumstances and can be summed up thus: while some are flying high, others are imprisoned[30].

'Still, I Rise' can be viewed as the poet's response and transformative vow to rise against oppression. Angelou uses assertiveness of language and the repeated checkpoint both 'I rise' in order to convey the strength, which is necessary to overcome the difficulties. However, if placed within the Achievement Gap context, then the following poem can be viewed as students' desire to push forward and succeed despite challenges encompassing their daily lives. The aforementioned 'I rise' chant is revolutionary for students who clearly want to overcome barriers occasioned by the achievement gap. It looks at desire and determination apparent in most marginalized students who study hard to make their academic dreams come through, irrespective of the numerous barriers. The actual theme of the poem lies in people's determination; although they are in captivity and the tenders are unfair, they have a spirit that cannot be tamed[31].

Together, these poems highlight the dual realities of the achievement gap: the structural barriers which limit the chances of some 'Caged Bird'"and the rejection of such conditions by people who want to fight them 'Still I Rise'. Focusing on the achievement gap implies addressing not only the issues which prevent some students from 'Staying Caged' but directing the right amount of attention to 'rising' students as well. In his poem "The Little Black Boy," Blake continues his vision of restoring black people's identity and equality in the spiritual realm. The poem focuses on the comparison between the potential of the black boy and that of a white child, which explains the racially inflected division between the two. The black boy's mother reassures him that while people in bodies are unjust on the earth, in God, they are equal. In the book, the achievement gap is represented as not only a physical but a

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spiritual fight that the black boy has to level against the equality that discriminates the worth of his existence[32].

When situated within an achievement gap framework, the poem captures the perpetuity of racism in shaping access to education in a country. The journey of the black boy himself as well as the education system that he experiences can therefore be used as an allegory to represent the impact of systemic racism and discrimination in relation to the performance of minority students. The concept of achievement gap, which is measured based on differences in the academic results of white students and students of color also reflects in the poem with concern to issues of fairness and oppression of people of color. The hope the black boy has for equality on the spiritual plane can be similarly connected to the fight for education equity where the students of color try their best to surpass every barrier set in front of them by a system that has been unfair to them from the beginning[33].

In "'London'," the city is described in a rather dark manner, or the manifestation of deterioration in human rights as a result of industrialization that led to forming class divide between the poor majority and the rich few. Blake condemns systematic social and economic unfairness which keep people in cycles of immiseration that the 'mind-forged manacles' stand for the suffering and despair in 'London'' stem from the lack of chances to escape the lower status which has been assigned by the systems that reign over the poor[34].

In connection with the achievement gap, 'London' can be regarded as an analysis of the social factors causing the differences in educational scores. The "marks of weakness and the marks of woe" that Blake mentions are similar to the odds that students from low SES background may encounter that hinders and restricts his/her learning ability. The abolition of a society where the powerful fleece the vulnerable is a view that contributes to the present discourse on how poverty, the scarcity of resources, and ineffective schooling reproduce the achievement gap. The narrator's London is one in which society enforces one's suffering and

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restrains people in poverty's chains as much as educational systems that maintain the gap between the achievers and underachievers. Therefore, the mentioned poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake reflect the issue of inequalities that exist in a society and how a person having hope and strength can overcome barriers to reach goals[35].

2.3.3 Literary Context:Poetry as Expression

Poetry is beauty, truth, imagination, history, self-expression, the transcendence of capital, the voice of the people and of the writer's, the voice of the people between whom the barriers have fallen. [16] Every writer can write about what is seen or unseen of social life. As John Stuart Mill said in the essay with this title more than one hundred and ninety years ago "the subject of Poetry is either nothing or it is what is left for Art in its highest sense, and for the living human spirit; and that the line between Poetry, so illustrated and defined as being beyond all dispute, and what is not Poetry, whether this is set forth with logical clearness or not, is a line felt"[36].

Poetry can be very individual, can represent the poet himself and can be more global in terms of its view on society. In his essay, Arnold pays an homage to poetry. The major role of poetry is the interpretation of life. As it has been stated when there is no poetry to complete science, science is not complete. Religion we have is the strongest and it is mostly expressed and reinforced in an automatic poetic language. With his quotes Poetry is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science Arnold agrees with Wordsworth. As a result, he claimed that religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry[37].

He also avers that poetry can offer assurance and sustenance to mankind. His opinion is poetry as the criticism of life under laws of poetic truth and of poetic beauty. For poetry to fulfill such destiny, poetry must be all that is needed and therefore attain the greatest standard. It can be added that the keenest criticism of life is in the best of poems.

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Poetry is a mode of language that through aesthetic and sometimes rhythmic devices conveys meaning beyond the literal, or paraphrase, and which achieves emotional effect and rich imagery. It is characterized by the way it employs the different structural units--meter, rhyme, line-breaks to express intricate thoughts in a tightly wound form. "Poetry has traditionally been the venue for personal feeling, social criticism or universal insight[38].

For the last two or three hundred years poetry had been considered as lyric (which it is), and lyric changed from a term used for songs and short poems made on occasion to a term used for a type of poetry that conveys personal feeling in an intensified and rhythmically structured form, directed, or rather, obliquely addressed to a single reader simply because this identification of all poetry with lyric means that when it comes to poetry a particular person must express it with all their hearts[37, 38]. The included poems selected for this study by Maya Angelou and William Blake "'The Caged Bird', 'Still I Rise', 'London', and 'The Little Black Boy'" all address issues of injustice, inequality and rebellion against the oppressive structures of society. These pieces or poetry offer a deep sociological and racial analysis of the roots of achievement gaps, specifically as they relate to race, class, and identity. When read in tandem, these poems reveal much about how marginalized groups experience discrimination and provide a framework for understanding disparities and achievement gaps more broadly. Collectively these texts provide a robust literary resource for critical thinking, and intervening in, the complicated processes that create and maintain achievement gaps in the lives of individuals in the modern world[39].

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2.2. Theoretical Framework

Race, literature, and justice are the concepts that came to the fore of perspectives on cultural processes and power in the modern academic environment. CRT and Comparative Literature are two scholarly areas that, when combined, provide the deep understanding of

how literature reproduces, represents or resists the racist and socio-political structures of the society. CRT, which posits race and racism as constitutive of contemporary society, makes it a useful lens for analyzing texts that engage identity, subjugation, rebellion, politics and systems of power.

Comparative Literature, in contrast, enables a scholar to approach different works, traditions, or systems without the need to limit himself to certain country or culture and to analyze interrelation or difference of these or those themes and ideas. CRT and Comparative Literature together generate a fascinating area of study that not only deconstructs the oppressive racial dynamics produced by literary works, but also explores the ways in which other cultures in their literature represent race and rebellion. In this theoretical study, the author or researcher will analyze how CRT and Comparative Literature can work together for enhancing the understanding of the function of literature in reflecting and challenging social inequalities.

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2.2.1 Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory is "a collection of critical stances against the existing legal order from a race-based point of view". Education week describes the core of CRT as the idea that that race is a social construct and racism is neither an individual bias nor prejudice it is "embedded in the legal system" and supplemented with policies and procedures[18]. University of Alabama School of Law professor Richard Delgado, a co-founder of critical race theory, defines it as "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power"[19].

A pedagogical theorist who introduced CRT to the field of education describes CRT as an "interdisciplinary approach that seeks to understand and combat race inequity in society. Critical race theory (CRT) is a method through which scholars analyze and disseminate civil

rights and the history of race, particularly in the United States. It is quite important to understand that critical race theory presents one more approach to addressing the problem than the mainstream American liberal racial justice. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was designed by its creators to be rooted in the premise that race is a social construction and racism is neither a personal attitude nor a preconception but a part of the legal framework and supported by the policies and procedures. Critics of CRT, however, claim that it derives only from stories and emotions to reasons, that construes an essential premise of liberalism as a myth, that denies truth and merit, and that alarms white liberals. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, objectivity is "the quality or character of being objective; impartiality; freedom from partisanship or bias[21, 22].

The various conservative political lawmakers in the U.S. have moved to prohibit or limit the teaching of CRT, and other critical race theory in the primary and secondary school. Critics of such bans claim that CRT is all of the following: The propaganda of lies, anti-American and a villainization of white people, a radical leftist indoctrination tool, and targeting children. Critics of these attempts to exclude CRT have blamed ban advocates of distorting the principles and relevance of CRT and the aim of muffling discourse on racism, equity, justice, and race history. Critical Race Theory is defined by its proponents as an interdisciplinary study of how laws, social and political movements, and media construct and are constructed by notions of race and ethnicity[22].

The use of the word critical in the name refers to the critical thinking, critical theory, and critical criticism used in education and not criticizing or blaming people. CRT is also applied to sociology to analyze social, political and legal relations as well as to power relations based on the aspect of race and racism. For instance, the CRT conceptual framework focuses on issues of race in laws and the legal system, including racially disproportionate imprisonment rates in the United States. According to CRT scholars, race is a social construct

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and not a biological reality. CRT proposes that racially based events and distinguishing features of racial groups are mutable, varied, and frequently implicit rather than fixed or direct results of individual bigotry. CRT scholars think that the social and legal construction of race helps mainly White people and inconveniences people of color, they also think that the liberal idea of U. S. law being color-blind plays a big part in perpetuating a racially unjust society where apparently color-blind rules are still racially oppressive for people of color[23].

The New Right crafted and deployed the idea of color blindness from neoconservative policy-making institutes to the Reagan-Bush era during Reagan administration incidence of divorce resulted from wives' nurses' demanding careers. As many conservatives of that period thought that equality of the races had been achieved and the race specific civil rights movement no more than a "threat to democracy". The rationality of the color-blindness used in 'reverse discrimination' during the post-civil rights era is predicated on a certain view on 'equal opportunity' whereby the state is required to only provide a 'playing field'. Not for the purpose of achieving equitable distribution of resources. In contrast, Crenshaw pointed out that formally race-neutral laws are still racially oppressive, given the outcomes. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla Silva characterizes this new and less brutal kind of racism as non-mechanistic racism because of the use of frameworks of abstract liberalism to erase race, to naturalize outcomes like separation of people based on race in places like neighborhoods, to attribute specific cultural practices to race, and to bring about a 'minimization of racism'[24].

Critical Race Theory History

CRT is focused on the analysis of the social, cultural as well as the legal aspects in relation to race and racism. CRT also stressed that the fact that white people became and remained richer and more politically powerful than people of other races was due to intentional racism by the latter group only. It was also because of complex, evolving formal or informal societal and cultural norms and regulations that one couldn't always be aware of.

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Historically critical race theory can be described as a subcategory of CLS scholarship about race that developed from several critical events. CRT developed because of a fear that the applications of liberal civil rights principles in the United States in areas such as legislative redistricting, affirmative action, criminal justice sentencing, and campus codes of conduct for speech appeared to have reached a state of stagnation[26].

After the progressive movements of the 50s and 60s to eradicate discrimination in schooling, hiring and housing there came reactions in the form of counter reforms. What was revealed from the supreme court and from the lower courts was a general hostility to policies such as affirmative action that incorporated race to remedy historical and cumulative racism and inequality[27].

The legal requirements to prove illicit prejudice became especially onerous, and the pace of racial reform slowed, and began to reverse. The hiring of faculty of color at leading educational institutions stalled. School integration, as promised by Brown v. Board of Education, did not materialize. White fight from newly integrated neighborhoods re-established familiar social and racial separations. Entrenched hiring and lending practices further cemented underclass status for many families of color. Frustrated by this backlash, and the perceived failure of traditional civil rights theories and methods, a group of legal scholars, including Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, began to openly criticize the role of law in the construction and maintenance of racially based social and economic oppression. They also began looking for an explanation of why this seeming retraction occurred, and how to formulate new strategies to effect transformation[28]. There are many examples of the events and locations that are important to CRT's history, which he discussed briefly, emphasizing on one at Harvard. Located in a classroom skirmish between students of color and white administrators over the marginalization of race in the classroom and the curriculum, Edward Taylor as a college

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professor had a certain interest and also illustrates, and believe CRT's application to some of the leading issues in education, including teacher demographics, classroom racial dynamics, and programs of study[29].

Of course, one of these first wave pioneers was Derrick Bell, the first black man to be tenured in Harvard School of Law who disproportionately laid the foundation for an academic agenda that made race, racism, and colonialism as the core and central issues in the sphere of intellectual legal inquiry. In 1980 he stepped down in disappointment the lack of affirmative action employment of women of color at Harvard's law school and relocated to Portland to become the dean at the University of Oregon. At Harvard, some of them, including Kimberlé Crenshaw and Mari Matsuda, asked that a Black person teach Bell's highly acclaimed course, 'Race, Racism and American Law.' Their request was turned down. Years later, Crenshaw remembered Harvard officials' frustration and misunderstanding of the students' actions[30].

They found it hard to comprehend why the students would demand a Black teacher even when there was none to teach the class, implicitly thinking that the students would opt for an elite white teacher over a poor black one. It was also confusing for them to know why a specific class and class on race was needed since the African American issue could have been already addressed in Harvard's class on constitutional law and a course on employment discrimination. The students did not attend the class. They set up their own version of an alternative class with Bell's race, racism and American Law as text for the semester and invited some of the most renowned civil rights academics and lawyers such as Dick Delgado and Charles Lawrence to teach a chapter each week. This alternative course was a venue for a budding scholarly project on how to 'build up a complete picture of the legal construction of race and racism in this country'[31]. What these embryonic scholars realized was that their

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objections to the law school's reasoning lacked "an adequate critical vocabulary for articulating exactly what [they] found wrong in [the school's] arguments."

It is noted that "Alternative Course" was one of the first attempts at critical race theory institutionalization. The progressive White law professors contributed their support and recommendations, such as granting credits for independent study. Harvard was not the only school that experiencing the students protest about the slow movement for the hiring of minority teachers. In fact, students of color in major law schools across the United States staged a boycott of classes in 1989. Every major law school had no Latino or Latina professors and no Asian Americans. Dershowitz An Organization called the Coalition for a Diverse Faculty at the Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California Berkeley was preparing brochures to deliver with law school student organizations. In response, Boalt Hall administrators invited Charles Lawrence and Richard Delgado to give a presentation[32].

The CLS conference held in Los Angeles in 1986 was another significant event because the Minority Critiques Panel led to a special issue of Harvard Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Law review which contained thought provoking articles. This workshop, the founding fathers, including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and approximately eight others defined a name and the plan of further investigation. Being geographically located in different institutions, those early critical race scholars relied on phone support, while meeting frequently at large law conferences. Thus, over the space of a few years, utilizing study groups, seminars and informal networks, the outlines of this new intellectual formation were established and it was soon producing an embryo corpus of scholarly work[33].

Distrusting the mainstream definitions of objectivity, methods of empirical verification, and claims of color blindness, the early "Crits" experimented with the forms of skepticism of liberalism, critical legal studies, Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism. For Latinos and Latinas, one important progenitor was Rudolfo Acuna, who wrote Occupied America,

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offering a new framework for American history, having excluded a Mexico that had been occupied in territory by foreign invaders. As with other subfields of critical research, this scholarship started with the awareness of how knowledge legitimation, classification, and nomenclature entailed power. Majoritarian self-interest was also noted to have been another factor contributing to what appeared to be the waves of more and less civil rights legislation and enforcement. CRT scholars have also redefined racism as the structural, societal norms, policies, practices, and structures that perpetuate group domination and oppression, rank, pay, and achievement[35].

Thus, the terms of 'White', and 'Black' presented in CRT scholarship are not referential to persons or group persons. Instead, it points to a specific political and legal system born out of the White European Supremacist movement and the colonialism of the world. "Non-White" is ambiguous and can be therefore used interchangeably with "Black." Critical race theory should be seen not as a group of concepts or proposition. Its scholarship is, however, characterized by a number of specific observations: the fact that racism is normal in society; the concept of interest convergence, according to which Whites tolerate black advancement only where it also benefits them; the need to consider historical impacts of European imperialism; and a focus on the stories of oppressed peoples (narrative) over and above the opinions of Whites[36].

Basic tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Richard Delgado (a founder of CRT) and Stefancic outline several general propositions relating to race and racism that most critical race theorists would affirm and even if there is significant deviation among the members of the movement. These propositions can be described as providing a framework of "fundamental assumptions" characteristic for CRT[26]. The influence of race as a social construct and the conventional existence of racism; First, race is a social construct and not a biological category. The concept

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of the biogenetic race, which presupposes the division of the human species into separate categories based on inherited physical and behavioral features, was only denied in the second half of the twentieth century in the context of genetic research. Contemporary sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and other scholars have come to accept race as a social construction, though what social construction and the process of constructing something means continues to be a matter of discussion. Some CRT theorists, race is conceived as a constructed equivalence between a physical attribute, such as skin color, specific facial feature, or hair texture and a set of mental and behavioral dispositions viewed as desirable or undesirable. The associations have been established and cultivated by the ruling classes, (in the United States for example, whites of western European origin) with the aim of supporting oppression and subjugation of the other groups based on the premise of inferiority, moral decadence or inability to govern themselves[27].

Second, racism in the United States is normal, not aberrational; it is just how most people of color live their lives on a daily basis. While the over-pitched racists and their ideas have receded from the white populace as compared to before the mid of the twentieth century, while legal racism epitomized by the 'Jim Crow' laws that segregated blacks and denied them civil rights in the South is now all but, in the dust, most blacks remain a target of discrimination or unfair treatment in totality, in both formal and informal manners as evidenced by a multitude of social indices. For instance, African Americans and Hispanics, or Latinxs, on average have a higher probability of being turned down for a loan or a job than a similarly qualified white person; their average price for a wide array of goods and services (cars, for example), is higher than whites; such minorities are more likely to be profiled by police or the general white populace; and minorities die in police encounters in an unjustified manner at higher rates than whites Black and other persons of color are more likely to be incarcerated and for longer times that whites even when the latter had been convicted of the

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same crime. Blacks and Hispanics still reside in racially isolated and high poverty areas due to discrimination and practices such as zoning laws in many 'white' neighborhoods that push out those of lower income. Again, the same way predominantly Black or Hispanic neighborhoods are less likely to get or receive fewer or inferior public services, and this equally applies to public education. Consequently, the poor quality of education is an obstacle to finding better paying jobs and this in effect marginalizes people from escaping impoverished neighborhoods. Blacks and Hispanics likewise get a lower or even worse quality of healthcare compared to Whites and therefore, do not live as long on the average[28].

Most racisms that are practiced on people of color are often described as 'microaggressions,' and they are spoken or acted in a manner that is most often ambiguous and unintentional or subconscious and can be seen as a manifestation of an inherent prejudice based on race. It may also be targeted towards other oppressed/marginalized groups such as women and sexual minorities for instance, drawing from an actual case documented in the CRT literature, a white professor of an elite university walking with other colleagues, upon sighting a Black female student walking down the corridor of the building, loudly called out to her saying, 'Oh, you should have locked your door back there as you left your purse. 'Racial microaggressions are rather frequent, which points to the fact that racism is much more widespread than many racists consciously realize, and their long-term impact on people of colour can be alarming[29].

Work and employment, differential radicalization, intersectionality, and the voice of color: Third, due to what CRT scholars call interest convergence or material determinism, the gains (or losses) made by people of color are beneficial to the dominant whites. Therefore, the 'racial order' underlying the organization of America society may remain intact or strengthened even when the legal rights of the oppressed or the exploited are enhanced. Perhaps the most shocking argument though provided for this thesis was given by Derrick

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Bell, one of the pioneers of CRT, the first black tenured professor of law at Harvard University, when he argued that the decision on Brown v. Board of Education, which abolished the 'separate but equal' doctrine established in Plessy v. Ferguson, occurred when it did because (31) white elites feared social unrest among the black i.e, the reason for this was the elite white people feared that former black soldiers who had fought gallantly in World War II and Korea might cause trouble when they came back to a life of discrimination and exploitation by whites. Another possibility that could change the Cold War strategy of the USSR is if the United States were viewed as being undeniably racist. It is important to note that this occurred at a time when there was unrest among African Americans due to their military contribution during the war and there was also a threat of diminished American influence in developing countries which would have worked against its strategic efforts in fighting off communist expansion[30].

At the time of its release, Bell's opinion that Brown decision was an outcome of white and black people's interests coming together in perfect harmony seemed utterly baseless yet it was later confirmed a historical fact by historical research which showed that the US Department of Justice opted to support integration following a series of secret messages from the US State Department regarding the need to enhance America's image abroad. The interest convergence thesis has since then been used to describe several cases with regard to racial equality in law[31].

Fourth, minority group members are regularly subject to "differential racialization," or the assignment to them of different arrays of negative characteristics, again depending on what serves the interests or needs of majority group members. Such characteristics are embodied in the images projected by the popular culture (e.g., movies, television dramas and sitcoms, novels), the news media (television newscasts and commentaries, newspapers, newsmagazines), and even the history presented in public schools. Before World War II, for

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example, blacks were frequently portrayed as childlike, happy-go-lucky servants and laborers who knew their place. But beginning in earnest with World War II and continuing through the 1950s and 1960s as blacks protested their inferior status or whites' unjust treatment of them they increasingly came to be seen as dangerous criminals who had a natural propensity for violence (particularly black males) or as lazy parasites living off hardworking white tax payers[32].

Fifth, by the thesis of the 'intersectionality' or 'anti-essentialism,' one cannot describe any person solely by several criteria. For instance, an African American female can also be a lesbian, a feminist, a Christian and so on at the same time.

Finally, (hence the voice of colour thesis) it is suggested that racists are in a good position more than everyone else to enlighten other members of a racist group (or groups) about the characteristic features of racism and its consequences. As a result, a process called 'legal storytelling' became popular worldwide; the theory presupposes that the expositions of racists' victims or people of colour enlighten others about how the legal system operates[33].

Some key criticisms of critical race theory have come from both academicians and politicians. Legal scholars and jurists of left, center and right have criticized many facets of CRT; Critics of CRT have often accused the paradigm of endorsing an utterly irrational and postmodernist influenced rejection of both reason and objective reality as demonstrated for instance by the 'voice of colour' thesis and other issues discussed in the CRT scholarship. Critics have claimed that critical race theorists are overemphasizing the liberal thought of neutrality, equality, and fairness within the law and the legal processes and have disregarded the objective standards of merit in academics and employment opportunities; they argue that any disparity concerning race or ethnicity in legal, academic or employment achievements as indicators of racism in institutions and as a basis for making affirmative racial balances in legal, academic, and economic arenas. In a similar sentiment, there has also been criticism

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that critical race theorists only view any external critique of the approach adopted, regardless of its intention, as a manifestation of racism[34].

The troubled history of anti-black racism in the United States received a renewed and empathetic focus within the nation in the 2010s after an American man of German and Afro-Peruvian descent was acquitted of murder charges for having shot and killed an unarmed black teenager that he perceived as suspicious, several more recent subsequent unjustified killings of black people by police members prompted protests in various cities across the country and birthed the Black Lives Matters (BLMIn the face of more protests and opinion polls showing that much of the country supports the Black Lives Matter movement, Republican President Donald Trump and his political supporters directly embraced caricatural tropes of Black people, resourcing BLM protestors as thugs, fabricating the act of violence as protesters attacking the police force and private property[31,32].

As previously indicated, against racism, but to redirect public attention from this problem and create an urgent social issue artificially to energize conservative Americans, Trump and other Republicans chose to vilify CRT as a lie of the 'woke' Democrats who wanted to destroy America and promote anti-white bigotry. They also warned that leftist teachers are trying to brainwash America's children by introducing CRT in public learning institutions. In fact, for its final developed form, CRT was only being taught in law schools, colleges and universities, though some popular simplified versions of some of the overtones it presented had been adopted in some of the public schools' syllabi. A variety of Republican-led states passed laws banning the teaching of what was labeled critical race theory, which, in essence, means that racism exists in the United States, Black people are oppressed because of their race, whites are racists even if they are not aware of it, whites benefit from rights that are denied to non-whites or people of color, and other similar tropes. As such, the bans help to prevent any teaching, let alone at the middle- and high-school levels, that provides other

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histories of racism in the United States than the standard one or addresses the actual nature and reality of racism. In the last few months of his presidency Trump himself imposed a ban on racial-sensitivity training in federal agencies stating that the workshops promote 'divisive' and 'anti-American' views. In the opinion of some critics, Trump's order and the statewide bans that he and other governors decreed were a teensy bit ironic in the former case because Trump himself had encouraged racists' sentiments among white voters and used racists' language, including slurs; in the latter case because the bans appeared to vindicate CRT scholars' claim that racism is baked into the nation's laws and its legal system[35]. In conclusively, CRT has impacted literature in areas beyond the traditionally defined legal discourse, a fact illustrated through the following subject areas: women and gender studies, education, American studies and sociology. Spin-off movements by Asian American, Latinx, LGBTQ, Muslim, and Native American scholars have also emerged. Apart from the ones above, CRT scholars have turned their attention to hate speech and hate crimes, affirmative action, immigration, identity politics, and voting rights[36].

2.2.2 Comparative Literature Theory (CLT):

Comparative Literature has been conventionally understood as the comparison of two or more literatures (English and German can be an example) along with many-faceted aspects of these literatures based on these aspects may include the historical, the gendered, the economical, the cultural, the social, the philosophical, the religious or linguistic aspect of the compared cultures. Comparative literature is the study of literature and other cultural expressions across linguistic and cultural boundaries; most often it compares works and authors using two different languages but it can also compare literary works written in the same language if they are part of two different nations or cultures. It can also deal with the relation of literature to other forms of art or other modes of artistic portrayal or, in a wider

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context, the relation of literature to the other modes or fields of human mental endeavour. Comparative Literature offers a unique opportunity within contemporary academic practices to explore texts and ideas across barriers of language, temporality and discipline. While doing this, this program also allows us to reflect more deeply upon the nature of those barriers and how they gain their validation[24, 25].

Comparative Literature as an academic field was established in the 19th century at the same time as some other new fields including Comparative Law or Comparative Philology. The purpose of those disciplines consisted in identifying what was similar in various legal systems, various languages or, in the case of Comparative Literature, various literatures. The origin of the term has been widely discussed, though it is certain that its first movements were undoubtedly French. The first use of the term can be traced to the volume Cours de Littérature comparée comprised of several texts published in 1816 by Jean-François-Michel Noël, yet it was relatively different from the current Comparative Literature. The earliest writers were Abel-François Villemain, Philarète Chasles and Jean-Jacques Ampère. The evolution of the industry and analysis is attributed to Charles-Augustin Saint-Beuve who used the term Comparative Literature in 1868 despite using "compared literary history" in 1840. The first special journal in the field was published 1877 in Cluj Romania and was from Hugo Meltzl. It was translated into several languages, meaning 'comparative literature journal'. When in 1879 it started its journey of an association with several differences it was known as Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum. In English, the term has been popularized by Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett in a work published in 1886 which is also entitled Comparative Literature[25].

Comparatists are supposed to be fluent in a number of foreign languages, and be familiar with two or more literary traditions and literary theory. This work analyses the reasons why literary translation has traditionally been considered an activity (or a product)

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qualitatively inferior to literary writing and original texts; it considers the way in which Comparative Literature has questioned the legitimacy of studying texts in translation, especially when they belonged to European literary traditions and the way in which this reluctance was overcome when Comparative Literature adopted a multiculturalist bias; it highlights the contributions made by Translation Studies to the study of literary translation, understood as a product and from a descriptive point of view; finally, it analyses contemporary reformulations of the concept of "world literature" and some scholarly arguments against it[26].

Comparative literature as a field of study takes literature beyond the limit of one culture or one language. It involves studying and comparing texts which are usually from different cultural, linguistic or national contexts with the view of knowing how such texts relate, how they are dissimilar and how they interrelate. Here are some of the basic tenets of comparative literature: Comparing Literatures Across Borders: Comparative literature implies the study of literature of other countries, languages and cultures aiming at how these pieces of literature convey, affect or differ. Understanding Cultural Contexts: One is evaluated on how one addresses the ways in which cultural, historical and social factors form writing and if those writings allude to those factors[28].

Incorporating Multiple Disciplines: Comparative literature also at time involves combining findings from other fields such as history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and art for enhancement of comparison of literature works. Exploring Different Media: It can also involve comparisons within single forms of media or across multiple (e. g., literature and film) and it can also contrast literary texts with other forms of art such as music, visual art[29]. Identifying Common Themes: Comparative literature often tends to highlight certain subject or object that are recurring in literature ranging from love, death, identity to exile.

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Genre Studies: It also requires comparison of how different genres (for example, epic, novel, poetry) are addressed in different traditions of the literature. Translation Studies: As a field, comparative literature does not shy away from the importance of such practices as translation in the transfer of the texts. It examines how translation impacts on the meaning, reception and interpretation of literary works. Multilingualism: Humanities involved use of texts in its original form hence scholars have to be knowledgeable with languages and regional differences. Tracing Literary Influence: The field deals with interactions between the literary systems how, for example, the Western literary system can affect the Eastern one and vice versa[26]. Intertextuality: It studies intertextuality, or how on text might allude to, paraphrase or transform another in terms of an intersecting culture or language. Thus, comparative literature means expanding the range of literature readings with various voices, traditions, and perspectives in order to gain more understanding of human experience that is encapsulated by art of words, globally[27].

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

The issues of the disparities and achievement gaps are among the topics that are very popular and important for studying in the current society and within the field of education and social sciences. These gaps which may be evident based on race, gender, and class, and other dimensions of social inequality, are not only present in the learning environments but are also well mirrored in literary texts. Given that literature is a reflection of society's state, it becomes pivotal to analyze such topics through pieces of literature as they depict the reality in a detailed manner[28].

Over the recent past there have been increased engagement in research on and with an aim of understanding the differences and gaps that exist in literature, especially in selected poems. These differences are commonly rooted in other fundamental inequality issues such as; racism, sexism, classism and educational chances. The differences in standards which can

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be observed on the example of literary analysis and interpretation are the signs of inequality in cultural and academic capital which readers and scholars possess when apprehending poetic texts[29].

This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on the intersection of disparities and achievement gaps as they are represented and critiqued in selected poems. By examining how poets articulate these gaps, this review will highlight the ways in which poetry can both reflect and challenge societal inequities. The selected poems for this study are not merely artistic expressions but are also vehicles through which issues of disparity are both revealed and contested. This review will therefore engage with critical theories related to race, class, and gender, as well as pedagogical approaches that address the achievement gaps in literary education. Through this examination, the review seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how disparities and achievement gaps are both depicted in and impacted by the study of poetry, offering insights that may inform broader educational and literary practices[31, 32].

"Essays in Aesthetics" offers a definition that theory of literary discourse and foam is referred to as poetics. It can be referred specially to the theory of poetry although some people in the course of speaking misapply the term so often that refers to the concept contained in the theory. According to Aristotle's book "The Poetics" he defined poetics as the study of poetry which dissect basic part of poetry and after dissecting states the shared outcome. The poetics basically speaking deals with the tragedy and the epic[33].

The themes of racial disparity and achievement in his analysis. This assessed Angelou's personal narratives and poems with special reference to black racial profiling and endurance. According to Walker, personal stories and concrete imagery used by Angelou succeeded in emphasizing the main experiences of African Americans. With thematic analysis of selected poems and auto correspondences. The key findings of this research are

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Angelou's works contain many themes and motifs associated with life in the USA and serves to expose systematic racism and bigotry while showing pride in Afro-Americans' achievements[34].

"Experiences of Marginalized Women: I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings in Focus" shows that black feminism in a simplest way is about uplifting of women and their supporters advocate for women and independently write, talk and act on women matters for growth. Feminism, in general, has many kinds that show the struggle that women undertake to speak for themselves in the world. They stand out for women of the world who are violated by the dominating male society. feminism continues the division of the feminist on the behalf of nationality, religion and race[35].

"Canary Petunias in Bloom: Article Black Feminism in Poetry of Alice Walker and Rita Dove' clearly highlights that White feminist are only concerned with the white women's issue and are not willing to take cognizance of the attempts being made by black colour women like 'African-American' women. In addition, Izgarjan & Markoz in "Alice Walker's Womanism: This website's article titled "Black Women in Light of Other Black Women: Perspectives Past and Present" states that effort of black women for her right is rejected to be advocated by white women. This is after getting knowledge of the real truth and formed a movement which is known as the Black Feminist movement"[36].

Survival is identified as another feature of Maya Angelou's poetry by Janouskova. According to Janouskova, unlike other previous research that examined one of the poems of Angelou or grouped them under a particular theme, the study considered all poems and categorized them according to the terms signifying survival. Black women's hardships, worth, and resilience proved their spirituality of survival. Since Angelou recited various odes as poems containing humor and religious ideas, the idea of survival in her poetry was elaborated in the components of humor, melody, and religion. Cited in the study; Angelou's poetry is

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greatly renowned for creating the story of their existence. Angelou also stressed the role of female character in their struggle for. freedom and how her grandma existed as a beacon of light within realms of suffering and confusion. The integration of culture in everyday people's lives was put into perspective through Angelou's writing style[37, 38].

Looking at Angelou's work, Naderi shares that the author presided over the voice of black women and in her poetry highlighted her protest against racism and prejudice. the study does not focus on any of the five poems which are mentioned in the discussions. Naderi observation were not to focus on the poems titled ""Caged Bird", "Phenomenal Woman, When I Think about Myself,"On the Pulse of Morning and "Still I Rise". Besides the focus on the conceptual framework of the black subject in its distinctiveness and magnificence, the study was also aimed to reveal that Angelou tried to describe how black women indeed could live and succeed as they were challenged by psychic and cultural contempt of white males. Angelou is best known worldwide for her poetry and other forms of artistic writing and she has been highly acclaimed for her memoirs. Some of Angelous poems are centered on the life of black women. All the women portrayed in her poems share the similar qualities of being black women[39]. In a study conducted by Ilham, the existence of racism in the specified poems as per the textual features and contents of the poems Maya Angelou has written was identified. The selected poems for the study were: "'America','"'Africa', "'Ain't That Bad','"'My Guilt', 'Riot': 60s". The listed songs include Harlem Hopscotch, On Working White Liberal, One More Round, Our Grandmother, and Sepia Fashion Show[40].

"The Calling of Names, "The Thirteen (Black)" and "The Thirteen (White)". The investigation finally revealed that Angelou had a positive attitude toward perseverance. The researcher felt that Angelou's poems portray the setting of racial conflict in a simplistic manner because she provides a comparison between the lives of the black and white community, where the disparity can be seen according to how they spend their lives and what

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they are preoccupied with. In the research, Iham as pointed out that Angelou's poems contain several instances of racism and slavery which involve prejudice, class struggle, and isolationism, as well as supremacy and subjection[38, 39].

They explored various works of Angelou wherein she overcomes the traumatic events surrounding and inside her. It was not specifying any poem, but it evaluated them with a robust mode. The paper showed the process of trauma and identity construction through the example of an African-American woman Angelou. Angelou depicted as an example of strength and versatility; it is impossible to overemphasize the role of Perseverance in the process of her development and becoming. The internalization of trauma helps her to fulfill her drive for survival and growth. This research also illustrated how the autobiography that forms the basis of Angelou's poems is inextricable from the artistry. The study was helpful in showing how writing helped Angelou to understand her past and create a path through it. turning her into a beacon of positivity, courage, and strength[38].

Another researcher studied by Bennett. Bennett analyzed Blake's anti-slavery poems with emphasis on the way he discussed racial subjugation. Although the study focused on Blake's work, he successfully employed imagery and grasped moral persuasion to call for an end to slavery. Looking at the Anti-Slavery poems by Blake through Historical and textual analysis. The final result shows that religion and morality are some of the themes depicted by Blake, and they address the issue of slavery as well as condemning the society's hypocrisy of the proponents[39]. Study research by Clarke and Roberts. This paper sought to analyze the treatment of social justice themes by Blake and his peers, including Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine. This comparative analysis also brought out a sense of how Blake was able to approach social critique in ways that are different from the other Romantics as he incorporates elements of mysticism and visionary artistry into his work. According to the used Methodology Comparative literary analysis theory and later conclusion of Findings that,

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blasting through the narrow straits of genre, class, and prosody, Blake's social vision and poetry make him unique among reformist writers of the Romantic era[40]. "figures of speech are extraordinary, original, non-literal uses of language, common to lively speech and literature". In writing a poem, almost the poet uses figurative language for a good reason. One of the goals is to express the words that they want to say vividly and forcefully.

The reasons for the effectiveness of saying in figurative language. First, figurative languages afford us imaginative pleasure. Second, figures of speech are a way of bringing additional imagery into verse and of making the abstract concrete of making poetry more sensuous. Third, figures of speech are a way of adding emotional intensity to otherwise merely informative statements and of conveying attitudes along with information. Lastly, figures of speech are a means of concentration, a way of saying much in brief compass[39].

Theories of Personality, that "the individual psychology of Adler describes the optimist view of human who lean upon the social interest concept, namely the feeling of become one with the entire humans". There are some differences of opinion between Adler and his predecessor, Freud, which makes their relationship, becomes brittle. Here is the Feist's suggestion of the differences between that theoretician. Freud redraws all of motivations become sex and aggression, while Adler observes that humans are more motivated by the social influence and by their struggle to reach the superiority or success. Freud assume that human has little choices or does not have any choices at all in forming their personality, while Adler believes that human has a big responsibility of who they are. The Freud's assumption that the behavior at the present is formed by the past experiences, opposite to the Adler's opinion that it is formed by human's vision of future. It contrasts to Freud who is very emphasize the unconscious component in behavior, Adler believes that human who is health psychologically, is commonly aware of what they do and why they do it[40].

2.4 Conceptual Framework

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In examining the thematic undercurrents of disparities and achievement gaps in the poems "I Still Rise" by Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou, and "The Little Black Boy" by William Blake, the application of theoretical frameworks such as Comparative Analysis (CA) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) becomes essential.These frameworks are crucial in explaining how the poets give voice to the plight of disadvantaged personalities and groups especially with regards to racism and social injustice[41].

Comparative Literature Analysis/Theory (CLT) This allows us to explore the similarities and differences across these poems, highlighting how each poet addresses the concept of struggle, resilience, and identity in the face of systemic oppression. When we critically analyse Blake's works in relation to Angelou's works, it is possible to identify patterns in the treatment of race in literature and the portrayal of the achievement gap in both contemporary African American culture and in 18th-century England[24, 25].

Critical Race Theory (CRT) which started in legal studies and has spread across disciplinary fields provides an effective lens for understanding these poems. CRT focuses on race and racism as critical in creating and managing social inequalities while comparing how these structures are espoused in texts. When applied to Angelou and Blake works, CRT enables the understanding of how race, identity and power relations are portrayed hence drawing out the racial inequalities and gaps in achievement that the poets address[22]. Comparative Analysis of "Caged Bird" and "London" Comparing the two poems, "Caged Bird", by Maya Angelou and "London", by William Blake, with several similarities notably in theme, metaphorical representation and general mood can be seen. Comparing the poems, we can highlight the following: Both poems raise questions of oppression and liberation; however, they do so in different ways. "Caged Bird", uses the image of a bird in a cage to reflect the effect of prejudice on the mind. The differences between the free bird and the caged bird gives the audience the idea of equality in opportunities as well as the performance

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inequality that results from inequalities. The fact that the caged bird continues to sing, or in other words, to express its freedom of spirit and contend with its lot in life, is the hope of the oppressed[31].

William Blake's "London" and Maya Angelou's "Caged Bird" are powerful poems that explore themes of oppression, freedom, and the human spirit's response to social constraints. Focusing on the study rather than the different eras it was written, both poems use vivid imagery and symbolism to critique the systemic forces that limit individual freedom and perpetuate suffering. This comparative analysis examines the similarities and differences in how these two poems address these themes. Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the interpretation of Disparities and gaps in achievement "'The little Black Boy'" and "'I Still Rise'; Applying Critical Race Theory to these poems reveals the ways in which they address and challenge the systemic structures that enforce racial disparities. CRT posits that racism is not merely the product of individual prejudice but is embedded in the legal, social, and economic systems that shape society. This perspective allows us to see how each poem critiques these systems and offers alternative visions of empowerment and equality[32].

"I Still Rise" can be seen as a direct response to the pervasive narratives of racial inferiority that CRT seeks to dismantle. The poem's celebration of blackness and its rejection of societal stereotypes align with CRT's emphasis on the importance of counter-narratives that challenge dominant racial ideologies. Blake's "The Little Black Boy," while more ambiguous in its portrayal of race, can also be interpreted through a CRT lens. The poem critiques the religious and societal structures that perpetuate racial disparities, even as it reveals the internalized racism that complicates the boy's sense of self. Blake's work thus serves as an early literary exploration of the themes that CRT would later formalize[35].

The two theoretical frameworks embraced in this paper are Comparative Analysis and Critical Race Theory that provides an understanding of the disparities and achievement gaps

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depicted in ‘I Still Rise’, ‘Caged Bird,’ and ‘The Little Black Boy’ and ‘London’.” Therefore, analysing the manner in which Angelou and Blake address the themes under analysis as well as applying CRT as a lens to interpret the works under analysis, it is feasible to get more in-depth understanding of these poems are thus not only politically charged about race but also improbable narratives of the racial other that propose possibilities of subversive agency against oppressive social formations of their historical present[43, 44].

2.5 Summary of Gaps in Literature Reviewed

The discourse surrounding social disparities and achievement gaps in literature has traditionally leaned heavily toward the works of Black poets and authors, particularly those who write from lived experiences of racial and social oppression. Many previous studies and critical reviews that delve into themes such as racism, classism, gender inequality, resistance, and systemic oppression tend to prioritize the voices of Black literary figures. While this emphasis is valid and necessary—given the historical marginalization of Black writers—it also creates a critical gap: the exclusion or under-examination of how white poets, particularly those from earlier historical contexts like William Blake, grapple with similar themes. This recurring academic tendency risks reinforcing a form of literary typecasting in which Black authors are viewed solely as spokespersons for social injustices, while white authors are often seen as neutral or detached from such realities. This study seeks to interrogate that imbalance by placing Maya Angelou and William Blake side by side, thereby diversifying the critical conversation around who can speak to issues of disparity, inequality, and achievement gaps in society.

Breaking the stereotype that only Black poets write about oppression and resistance allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of literature as a whole. It disrupts the unspoken assumption that racial and social critique is the sole domain of minority voices and

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reveals how such concerns transcend race and time. In this regard, the present study highlights a critical void in the comparative literary space: the lack of analytical engagement with how white poets especially those from structurally different societies and historical moments contribute to the global narrative of injustice and social critique. By drawing from Blake's radical critiques of industrial-era England and Angelou's poetic renderings of civil rights struggles in twentieth-century America, this research captures the universality of human yearning for freedom, dignity, and equal opportunity. This cross-temporal and cross-racial dialogue not only expands the canon but also invites new frameworks for understanding poetic resistance, empathy, and solidarity across disparate contexts.

Another gap that this study aims to address is the often superficial comparison of poetic forms and themes without delving into the unique linguistic styles, narrative strategies, and symbolic frameworks that shape individual poems. While several studies have explored Maya Angelou's identity and her use of empowering language, few have taken the time to analyze her poetry alongside that of a poet like Blake, whose mystical and symbolic style offers a complex vision of societal constraints and spiritual liberation. Existing literature may have analyzed Blake's works mostly within the context of romanticism, religious symbolism, or political critique, but rarely are his poems juxtaposed against those of a modern Black female poet like Angelou. This study seeks to fill that void by introducing a thematic and stylistic comparison that foregrounds the individuality of both poets while also uncovering the shared structural tools they use to interrogate injustice. The comparison will include an examination of diction, rhythm, tone, and imagery, demonstrating how language becomes a site of resistance and reflection in both poetic traditions.

Furthermore, the selected poems—'Still I Rise' and 'Caged Bird' by Maya Angelou and 'London' and 'The Little Black Boy' by William Blake offer a unique opportunity to explore how social injustices are internalized, expressed, and resisted through verse. These works

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highlight the compounded impact of societal discrimination rooted in racial, gendered, and class-based hierarchies. Yet, the academic field has seldom placed these specific texts in conversation with each other. The lack of comparative inquiry into how these poets conceptualize oppression, potential, and resilience leaves a significant gap in the literary discourse. This research addresses that gap by offering a comparative reading that not only emphasizes thematic alignment but also identifies points of divergence in poetic approach, cultural orientation, and philosophical outlook. This opens the way for a broader understanding of how poets from contrasting worlds interpret and give voice to structural inequalities that hinder human flourishing.

Lastly, this study responds to the absence of scholarly interest in understanding how a white poet like William Blake conceptualizes injustice and how that view contrasts or aligns with a Black poet like Maya Angelou. The inclusion of both poets in the same study challenges the compartmentalization often present in literary scholarship, where racial and temporal divisions inhibit holistic understanding. Blake, though not writing from a marginalized racial identity, addresses poverty, child labor, and systemic corruption with profound sensitivity and revolutionary vision. On the other hand, Angelou, writing from within the heart of America's racial and gendered injustices, draws from her personal experiences to give poetic form to resistance and hope. Comparing these perspectives not only bridges historical and racial divides but also reframes our understanding of empathy, advocacy, and resistance across different societal roles. In doing so, this study contributes to dismantling narrow academic boundaries and promotes a more integrated, inclusive approach to literary analysis.

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Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing content analysis as the principal methodological approach to uncover and examine the intricate layers of meaning embedded in the selected poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake. This approach is

particularly suited to the present investigation because it facilitates a nuanced understanding of language, symbolism, metaphors, and thematic constructions used by both poets to articulate social disparities and achievement gaps. A qualitative methodology is indispensable for literary research of this nature, given its emphasis on interpretation, subjectivity, and context-specific inquiry.

The study engages in close textual analysis, interpreting how language operates to expose inequality, resistance, and human dignity, thus providing insight into the socio-political climates that informed the poets' creative expressions. The comparative framework of this design allows for a side-by-side evaluation of how Angelou and Blake portray societal imbalances—be it through racial, economic, or gendered lenses—and further allows the study to account for historical and cultural distinctions while seeking commonalities. This dual focus provides a richer analytical perspective, underscoring how both poets, though distanced by time, geography, and racial identity, converge in their literary mission to critique injustice and elevate marginalized voices. In order to strengthen the theoretical backbone of the analysis, the study is guided by Critical Race Theory and Comparative literature Analysis. Critical Race Theory helps interrogate the power structures and racial constructs evident in both poets' worlds, offering a framework through which the intersection of race, oppression, and identity can be analyzed.

Blake's portrayal of marginalized subjects in poems like 'London' and 'The Little Black Boy' gains renewed relevance when viewed through the prism of race and systemic inequality, even though his era and context differ markedly from Angelou's. On the other hand, The research design is thus not just analytical but also interpretive and transformative, seeking not merely to dissect poetic techniques but also to understand their ideological and societal implications. The methods of data collection involve a meticulous selection and reading of the four chosen poems: 'Still I Rise' and 'Caged Bird' by Maya Angelou, and 'The

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Little Black Boy' and 'London' by William Blake. These poems were chosen due to their thematic richness and direct engagement with the issues of oppression, racial and social inequality, and the struggle for self-realization. The poems will be subjected to repeated readings to identify recurring motifs, rhetorical devices, and figurative language, which will then be coded according to emerging thematic patterns. These codes will serve as the foundation for the comparative analysis and thematic discussion that follows. In analyzing the data, the study will follow a line-by-line interpretation strategy, drawing connections between poetic devices and the social realities they signify. Attention will be paid to diction, tone, metaphor, repetition, and imagery, as well as to structural aspects such as stanza formation and rhythm, all of which contribute to the thematic weight of the poems. Furthermore, the ethical considerations in conducting this study are minimal, as it involves the analysis of published literary texts rather than interaction with human participants.

However, care will be taken to maintain scholarly integrity by properly referencing all sources, avoiding plagiarism, and respecting the intellectual property of the authors. The study also commits to fair and unbiased interpretation of the poems, striving to represent the poets intended meanings while acknowledging the interpretive nature of literary analysis. The justification for adopting this research design lies in its ability to capture the complexity and depth of poetic communication, which cannot be fully explored through quantitative or statistical methods. The qualitative, content-analytic, and comparative approach employed here allows for a robust and layered exploration of how poetry functions as a medium of social critique and as a vessel for articulating the lived experiences of individuals marginalized by race, class, and societal structures. By choosing this path, the study positions itself not only as a contribution to literary scholarship but also as a relevant commentary on enduring social issues mirrored in poetic art across centuries.

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3.2 Population of the Study

In a conventional empirical research setting, the term "population" refers to a group of individuals or items from which data can be gathered and analyzed to reach meaningful conclusions; however, in literary research—particularly one involving textual and thematic analysis—the term requires a contextual redefinition, especially when the primary sources are works of art such as poems. In this study, the "population" does not consist of people or respondents, but of a curated selection of literary texts that serve as the core focus of the analysis. The population of the study is thus constituted by four seminal poems written by two iconic poets from different epochs and racial backgrounds: Maya Angelou's''Still I Rise 'and 'Caged Bird', and William Blake's 'The Little Black Boy' and 'London'. These poems were intentionally selected for their explicit engagement with themes of social disparities, oppression, resistance, and the potential—or lack thereof—for individual achievement within structurally unjust societies. The rationale for their selection lies in the depth of their sociopolitical commentary, the clarity of their moral voice, and their resonant symbolism that transcends time and place. Though Angelou and Blake differ significantly in their biographical, cultural, and historical backgrounds—Angelou being an African-American woman whose poetry grew out of the Civil Rights Movement and the lived experience of racism and sexism, and Blake being an English Romantic poet reacting to the corruption and alienation wrought by industrialization and institutional religion—they converge in their poetic vision of a world where human potential is too often stifled by systemic forces beyond individual control.

The poems serve not merely as isolated artifacts but as representative samples of a broader literary tradition that critiques injustice while offering glimpses of hope, resilience, and transcendence. By treating these texts as the population of the study, the research acknowledges that each poem is a universe of its own, rich with layers of meaning, historical

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references, and ideological positioning. The use of these specific poems allows the study to concentrate on a manageable yet thematically diverse body of work that encapsulates the poets' broader philosophical concerns. 'Still I Rise' is a poem of defiant resilience in the face of racial and gender oppression, using repetitive affirmation to assert Black womanhood's indomitable spirit. 'Caged Bird,' through stark imagery and metaphor, contrasts the experiences of the free and the oppressed, effectively using the bird as a symbol of constrained potential and systemic silencing. Meanwhile, Blake's 'The Little Black Boy' offers a poignant and complex exploration of race, spirituality, and innocence through the lens of a child who is both mystified and reconciled by the concept of divine equality. London, on the other hand, paints a grim portrait of urban life under tyranny, where every cry and curse echoes systemic exploitation and despair. Each of these poems thus functions as a data point within the study's broader analytical framework, offering unique yet complementary perspectives on the central themes of disparity and achievement gaps. By focusing on these specific texts, the study is able to conduct an intensive analysis without diluting its focus or stretching its theoretical frameworks too thin.

Moreover, treating the poems themselves as the population allows the study to redefine literary inquiry as a legitimate form of empirical investigation, one that is rooted not in statistics but in linguistic, symbolic, and thematic patterns that reveal larger truths about society and human experience. This conceptual framing also permits a more fluid and adaptable analytical structure, wherein each poem is subjected to the same rigorous interpretive lens, enabling meaningful comparisons across divergent poetic styles, narrative voices, and socio-political contexts. In doing so, the study elevates the poems from mere texts to dynamic sources of insight, capable of shedding light on how literature not only reflects but also critiques and reshapes societal understanding of justice, inequality, and human

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potential. Thus, the population of this study, while non-human and finite, is rich in interpretive possibilities and instrumental to achieving the research objectives.

3.3 Sample Technique

The sampling technique employed in this study is purposeful sampling, which is particularly well-suited for a qualitative study that emphasizes deep, content-driven literary analysis. This approach allows for the intentional selection of texts that are rich in thematic relevance to the subject under investigation. In the context of exploring disparities and achievement gaps through poetry, the chosen works—Maya Angelou's"'Still I Rise'"and "'Caged Bird'," and William Blake's 'The Little Black Boy'" and "'London'"—are deliberately selected due to their overt engagement with themes of inequality, systemic injustice, and the social constraints imposed on individuals based on race, class, and other hierarchical factors. These four poems serve as fertile ground for critical exploration within the framework of Comparative Literature, Social Justice Theory, and Critical Race Theory. They are not selected randomly but are representative of the poets broader philosophical and political concerns. Maya Angelou's works are known for their defiant tone, embodiment of the African American struggle, and celebration of resilience, while William Blake's poetry is marked by its critique of societal and institutional oppression, especially as seen through the lens of the Romantic eras radical thought. The criteria for sample selection, therefore, are based on the relevance of each poem to the central concepts of racial disparity and achievement gap, as well as their potential to yield significant insights when examined through the proposed theoretical lenses. The sampling also aligns with the Comparative Literature technique, which necessitates choosing texts that, though from different historical and cultural contexts, engage with analogous themes, allowing for a fruitful juxtaposition.

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The poems will be analyzed not only for their overt content but also for their nuanced symbolism, metaphoric structures, and narrative voices that communicate resistance, suffering, and hope. Critical Race Theory will be instrumental in dissecting how race and power relations operate within each poem, while Social Justice Theory will help illuminate the moral and ethical implications of the disparities portrayed. Furthermore, the application of these theories will aid in interrogating the effectiveness of each poet's approach in evoking emotional and intellectual responses from their audience. By employing these methodologies and selecting these particular poems, the study positions itself to generate a comprehensive and balanced analysis that accounts for both the poets' individual perspectives and the broader societal structures they critique. The selection also allows for the inclusion of intersectional perspectives—such as the intersections of race and gender in Angelou's poems, or class and age in Blake's—thereby enriching the analysis. As each poem presents a unique voice and context, they collectively offer a mosaic of social commentary that bridges historical divides and connects different struggles for justice. Ultimately, this sampling strategy ensures that the data set is manageable, thematically coherent, and analytically rewarding, supporting the study's aim of critically engaging with the role of poetry in articulating and challenging social disparities and achievement gaps.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection process for this study is centered on the primary texts—the four selected poems: Maya Angelou's "'Still I Rise'" and "'Caged Bird'," and William Blake's "'The Little Black Boy'" and "'London'"which constitute the core of the analysis. These texts are chosen based on their capacity to encapsulate the nuanced experiences of marginalization, resilience, and socio-political critique, aligning closely with the themes of disparities and achievement gaps. The use of these poems as primary data is integral to the research's qualitative design, which emphasizes depth of interpretation over breadth of

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coverage. Each of these works offers a distinctive perspective on oppression: “Still I Rise” exemplifies a confident rejection of racial inferiority and a powerful assertion of dignity, while ’Caged Bird’ explores the psychological and existential constraints imposed on individuals by systemic racism. On the other hand, “’The Little Black Boy’ reflects the spiritual and racial innocence of childhood overshadowed by colonial ideology, and “’London’” presents a stark indictment of urban poverty, institutional corruption, and generational suffering.

These poems were not selected arbitrarily but chosen with purpose to reflect the essence of the research question, ensuring they collectively capture the intersectional dynamics of race, class, and gender as reflected through poetic discourse. Secondary data will supplement the analysis through scholarly articles, literary critiques, academic journals, and books that discuss the poets’ broader oeuvre, critical interpretations of the selected poems, and relevant theoretical frameworks such as Social Justice Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Comparative Literature. The use of secondary sources will help contextualize the primary texts historically and culturally while also offering insight into how other scholars have interpreted similar themes. This dual-layered approach to data collection—incorporating both textual analysis and scholarly discourse—enhances the study’s analytical rigor and academic credibility. The study will also draw on historical and biographical information about the poets, especially Angelou’s lived experiences of racism and Blake’s radical political views during the Industrial Revolution. These backgrounds will provide a rich contextual backdrop against which the poems can be interpreted, revealing the poets’ motivations and the societal forces they sought to challenge.

Additionally, the collection of critical commentary on how each poem has been received over time will offer a diachronic view of their cultural significance and evolving interpretations. By combining primary literary texts with an array of secondary academic

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resources, the data collection method ensures a comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of how disparities and achievement gaps are constructed and contested within poetic narratives. The emphasis on purposive rather than random selection underscores the study's commitment to depth, thematic relevance, and scholarly integrity, thereby laying a solid foundation for the subsequent stages of data analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in this research will center on a critical literary examination of the selected poems, using close reading as the primary analytical tool. This method is particularly effective for interpreting poetic texts, as it involves a meticulous inspection of language, form, structure, and thematic elements to uncover deeper meanings embedded within the text. The study will focus on Maya Angelou's "'Still I Rise'" and "'Caged Bird', and William Blake's 'The Little Black Boy' and 'London', paying close attention to how each poet utilizes literary devices such as imagery, metaphor, symbolism, rhythm, and diction to highlight themes related to social inequality, racial injustice, and systemic marginalization. The goal is to decode how the poets artistically represent disparities in social and economic achievement, as well as how they invoke emotional and intellectual engagement from readers. The analysis will draw heavily on thematic interpretation, looking at how the central motifs in each poem such as confinement, resilience, innocence, suffering, and hope are developed and how they resonate with broader issues in the societies from which the poems emerged. For instance, Angelou's"'Still I Rise'"will be examined for its celebratory tone and affirmations of Black pride in the face of oppression, while 'Caged Bird' will be analyzed for its powerful juxtaposition between freedom and captivity as a metaphor for racial segregation.

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In contrast, Blake's "'The Little Black Boy' will be assessed for its religious and racial undertones, revealing the contradictions of colonial Christianity, and 'London' will be analyzed for its depiction of urban decay and institutional neglect. Critical Race Theory will guide the analysis by helping to decode how race and systemic power relations are embedded within poetic language and imagery. Social Justice Theory will support the exploration of ethical and moral implications of the disparities portrayed, particularly in terms of how the poets advocate for a more equitable world. Comparative analysis will also be employed to draw parallels and contrasts between Angelou's and Blake's approaches to similar themes, despite their different historical and cultural backgrounds. This comparative method will allow the study to highlight both convergences and divergences in their representations of social disparity and achievement gaps. For example, while both poets critique societal constraints, Angelou often emphasizes personal triumph and agency, whereas Blake tends to focus on systemic and spiritual entrapment. The study will also examine the ways in which the poets' respective audiences and intended effects influence their rhetorical strategies.

Attention will be paid to the poets' use of voice—whether passive, active, or communal and how this voice amplifies or suppresses individual and collective experiences of injustice. The data analysis will further explore intersectionality, particularly how race, gender, and class interact in the poems to create layered forms of oppression or resistance. Ultimately, the critical literary analysis will be an iterative process, involving constant movement between the text, theoretical frameworks, and existing scholarship to construct a coherent and compelling interpretation. The data will be organized thematically, and the findings will be synthesized to articulate how poetic language can be a powerful vehicle for challenging inequities and advocating for justice. Through this rigorous analytical approach, the study will demonstrate how the selected poems serve not only as literary expressions but

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also as socio-political commentaries that illuminate and contest the realities of disparity and unequal achievement in society.

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Chapter Four

Result and Discussion of Findings

In this chapter, we will analyse the key findings about disparities and achievement gaps in Maya Angelou's"'caged Bird'" and "'Still I Rise'" as well as William Blake's''London' and "'The Little Black Boy'. It will focus on how each poet employs language, imagery, tone, symbolism, figurative expressions and narrative structure to reflect the limiting effects of social, racial, and economic inequalities within their respective literary contexts, through a comparative analysis of their works. This discussion expands on the thematic and literary frameworks developed in preceding chapters, as the following discussion will examine how poetic expressions of marginalization and resistance relate to overarching societal concerns such as; race, class, oppression, and the pursuit and yearning for both personal and collective freedom. Specifically, this study meticulously examine how each poem serves as a reflection not only of the personal struggles, experiences of individuals but also of the pervasive, systemic forces that profoundly shape, influence and often restrict human potential, there by illuminating the intricate dynamics between individual agency and societal structures.

As this chapter will provide an insight into the ways in which literary representations reflect, refracts, and shape our understanding of the intricate dynamics between identity, power and human potential.

4.1 Research Question One

How does Maya Angelou and William Blake portray social disparities and achievement gaps in their selected poems?

This research question centers on the comparative analysis of how this two prominent poets address the issues of social disparities and achievement gaps within their respective poetic works. This research question seeks to understand the specific literary techniques and thematic elements in this contexts through which each poems represents the complex societal problems.

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Disparities as perviously defined to be an unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges based on race, class, gender and other social categories. Achievement gaps defined as an observation of difference or limitations in performance between different groups of people often correlated with social disparities. As both poets "Maya Angelou and William Blake" addresses this issues in their poems, though they do so with different focus and different stylistic approach. Using ""caged Bird" and "'The Little Black Boy" to illustrate some major thematic points and figurative concepts to answer this point.

Racial Subjugation and Metaphorical expression

In Maya Angelou's""I know Why The Caged Bird Sings' , Racial subjugation and metaphorical expression work together to powerfully portray disparities and achievement gaps. The "caged bird" is a central metaphor that represents individuals confined by systemic racism and societal barriers, especially racial discrimination that focuses on self and societal freedom from racial subjugation, as she uses personal narrative to illustrate the systemic barriers and emotional toll of discrimination in the poem, confidently highlights their strength and honors their blackness against ongoing injustices and the downward degrading of their identity. This Subjugation manifests as limited access to opportunities, education and social mobility creating significant achievement gaps. The poem does not shy away from depicting the emotional and psychological toll of this oppression, showing how it stifles potential and dreams. The poem describes the opposing experience between two birds. One bird which is able to live in nature and freedom as it pleases while a caged bird that suffers in captivity. In these two birds, as representing a large and small piece of meaning, Angelou portrays poignant picture of oppression, giving the reader a clear view of the privilege of the oppressor and the defiance of spirit of the oppressed, as well as the kind of pain that can be

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endured. For instance, one can argue that the poem presents an allegory of being a Black individual living in America.

Maya brings up the issue of freedom, which is central to the human life because man cannot be able to go about his daily business if he is a prisoner. Freedom here goes beyond just being away from the walls of a prison. It further extends to mean psychological freedom, economic freedom, social and even political freedom. In this first stanza " A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky". Angelous uses vivid metaphor to illustrate the stark contrast between freedom and confinement. The "free bird" symbolizes white individuals who enjoy privileged and unrestricted access to resources and opportunities. This imagery evokes ease and natural movement, the "free bird" effortlessly rides "the wind and floats downstream" symbolizing a life of prosperity where opportunities come easily. There are no obstacles or struggles the bird faces, is simply flows with the current. "And dips his wing in the orange sun rays", this line is filled with warmth and light representing joy and access to the best that life has to offer "the orange sun rays" symbolizes success, happiness and fulfillment, all of which are readily available to the free bird. The last line in the first stanza "and dares to claim the sky" This is a very powerful and interesting statement of ownership filled with a lot of freedom, the free bird has the audacity to claim the entire sky as its own, signifying limitless possibilities and the confidence to pursue any beautiful future or dreams without fear of restrictions.

The free bird serves as a metaphor that embodies the essence of freedom and privilege, symbolizing a reality that many enjoy, but not all can access. Through this powerful image, Angelou shades light on the stark contrast between the lives of those who are unencumbered by systematic oppression and those who are forced to navigate a world filled with barriers and limitations. The carefree flight of the free bird, and access to the sun's rays stand in stark

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contrast to the caged bird's confinement and struggle for expression, this contrast underscores the injustice of racial subjugation and the denial of opportunities for black individuals to achieve their full potential.

In the context of racial subjugation, the free bird represents white individuals in a society structured to benefit them. They move through life with ease, enjoying privileges and opportunities without facing the systemic barriers that hinder black individuals, the poem emphasizes that freedom is not merely a physical necessity but a fundamental human requirement; its denial inflicts profound psychological and emotional distress.

In William Blake's "The Little Black Boy," the poet employs a complex interplay of racial subjugation and metaphorical expression to navigate the fraught terrain of racial disparities and achievement gaps between white and black subjects. However, Blake's perspective on these issues is multifaceted and open to interpretation, reflecting both the poet's critique of societal norms and his own entanglement within the dominant discourses of his time. As such, the poem presents a nuanced yet problematic exploration of racial identity, spirituality, and the human condition, warranting a critical examination of its representational strategies and ideological underpinnings.

The poem takes place during the 1700s in the British Empire, a time when racial inequality was a normal part of society. The Black Boy is born into a system that sees his dark skin as a sign of being lesser than others. His mother tells him that God is in the east, bringing light and warmth, but the boy feels he is "deprived of light" because of his skin color. This early image emphasizes the racial bias that affects the boy's life right from the start. The poem subtly critiques the racial attitudes of the time by presenting the black boy as innocent and spiritual. He internalizes the idea that his blackness is a trial or a temporary condition, believing that in heaven, all will be equal. This reflects the subjugated mindset imposed upon black individuals, who were often taught to accept their earthly suffering in the hope of a

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better afterlife. Blake uses metaphorical expression to explore the themes of race, identity, and spiritual redemption. In the third stanza, the phrase "looking on the rising sun" introduces a powerful symbol: “the sun”. For instance, the “sun” is a central metaphor, this isn't just any sun; it stands for God's love, the very source of life and warmth. The Black Boy feels left out, "deprived of light" because of his skin, as if he's cut off from God's affection. But here's where it gets interesting: his mother tells him that the sun also burns of true affection, and his black skin is a way to handle the intensity of God's love. It's a complex metaphor that can be interpreted in several ways; It could be seen as a way to justify the suffering of black people, suggesting that their trials on earth are part of a divine plan. It could suggest that black people possess a unique spiritual strength, enabling them to endure dreadful pains and hardships that others cannot. It could also be a critique of the racial ideology that imposes these burdens on black people, forcing them to find spiritual justifications for their suffering.

In the final stanza, the lines “*And we are put on earth a little space, That we may learn to bear the beams of love, And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove* Blake uses the metaphor of the *black bodies and sun-burnt face* as a "cloud" or "shady grove" to suggest that the black boy's physical appearance is a temporary condition, a veil that obscures the true essence of his being. This can be interpreted as a critique of the racial prejudice that reduces individuals to their physical attributes, ignoring their inherent worth and potential. The *cloud" or shady grove* also implies a sense of protection, suggesting that the black boy's skin color is a shield against the full intensity of "the beams of love."

The phrase *bear the beams of love* is particularly significant in the context of racial subjugation. It symbolizes that those who are marginalized and oppressed are given a unique opportunity to develop resilience and compassion. The black boy's ability to "bear the beams

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of love" despite the prejudice he faces is a testament to his spiritual strength and capacity for empathy.

However, the stanza also acknowledges the disparities and achievement gaps that result from racial subjugation. The *cloud or shady grove* can be seen as a barrier that prevents the black boy from fully accessing the opportunities and resources available to others. This metaphorical expression of inequality highlights the systemic obstacles that hinder the progress and potential of marginalized communities. This poem portrays disparities and achievement gaps in several ways, for instance; the level of knowledge or access to learning as the white children have access to education and better opportunities that are denied to the black boy, the only teacher he has was his mother where he learnt about God and the world through which are shaped by the experience of racial subjugation, Instead of receiving formal education and engaging in age-appropriate play, he was prematurely subjected to a rigid indoctrination centered on his racial identity, thereby cultivating resilience from a young age. He internalized a belief in his inherent inferiority based on racial characteristics, leading him to perceive a divine preference for white children and anticipate a subservient role in the afterlife. This conviction fostered a sense of alienation and the perception that white children, akin to celestial beings, enjoyed a closer relationship with God. The poem highlights the psychological impact of racial prejudice on the black boy. He internalizes the idea that his blackness is a burden and longs for a state of being where he is no longer defined by his race.

The poem's ending is somewhat ambiguous. The black boy states that when he is freed from his black body, he will "stand and stroke" the white child and "be like him." This could be interpreted as a desire for equality and reconciliation, but it could also be seen as an acceptance of white superiority.

Unfulfilled dreams and Aspirations: Tonality as the voice of broken dreams

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In Maya Angelou's 'The Caged Bird Sings' , the theme of unfulfilled dreams emerges through the contrast between the caged bird and the free bird, symbolizing the emotional and psychological consequences of oppression. It shows how oppression, whether physical or social limits can cage the dreams of people, making them stay yearning for what they never will have, and what will always be out of reach to fulfill. The bird in the cage represents repression of individuals by external factors such as discrimination based on the skin color, low income or the minority struggles and those force hinder people to transform their dreams into realities as they cannot see overcome societal or organizational restraints.

In the fourth stanza, the poet further develops the idea of shattered dreams, and oppression leading to limited opportunities and access to life. The image of the caged bird standing *"On the grave of dreams*" creates the impression of total destruction, the end result of life, the beginning of despair, and of total loss, symbolizing the fact that dreams are dead for the "caged bird. In lines 5-8 of stanza four, the poem shifts to a tonal and more deeper level of despair. "*But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams*" is a stark image. The grave symbolizes the death of potential, the burial of hopes. The caged bird, representing those oppressed and unable to achieve their aspirations, is literally standing on this grave. This signifies that the bird is constantly confronted with the reality of its limitations and the loss of what could have been. "His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream" is where Angelou masterfully uses sensory language. The shadow, a symbol of the bird's true self, the potential it holds, is "shouting." It's not just a regular shout; it's a "nightmare scream." This indicates the intense pain, frustration, and horror of being confined and unable to pursue one's dreams. "His shadow shouts on a nightmare scream" escalates the tonality to one of intense anguish. The use of "shouts" and "nightmare scream" creates a feeling of desperation and torment. It's not a quiet lament; it's an outcry of pain. The shadow, representing the bird's true potential, is

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screaming in a nightmare, indicating that the unrealized dreams are a source of ongoing horror and suffering. The tone and mood here is raw and visceral.

The shadow is screaming because the bird's aspirations are being brutally suppressed. “His wings are clipped” and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing." This is perhaps the most poignant part. The physical constraints *clipped wings* (inability to soar and achieve) and tied feet (inability to move freely and pursue opportunities) are directly linked to the theme of unfulfilled aspirations. Despite these limitations the bird sings, *his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing i*ntroduces a tone of resignation mixed with defiance. The clipped wings and tied feet symbolize the physical and metaphorical constraints that prevent the bird from achieving its dreams. The phrase "so he opens his throat to sing" adds a layer of bittersweet resolve. The act of singing is an attempt to find solace and expression in the face of overwhelming limitations, but it also underscores the tragedy of the bird's situation. The tonality is one of constrained hope, a desperate attempt to find a voice amidst broken dreams. The collective impact of these struggles resulted into generations of lost potentials, bruised under the ground and the emotional trauma, anguish that comes with it.

In essence, these lines encapsulate the agony of unfulfilled dreams, the constant reminder of what could have been, and the desperate attempt to find an outlet for expression despite overwhelming constraints. The caged bird's song is not a song of joy, but a song born of pain and resilience, these lines create a tonality that is heavy with sorrow, frustration, and a sense of stifled potential. The voice is one of broken dreams, expressing the pain and anguish of being unable to achieve one's aspirations. The poem uses vivid imagery and powerful language to convey the depth of this despair, making the caged birds song a poignant symbol of resilience in the face of oppression.

While Maya Angelou's "Caged Bird" poignantly illustrates the theme of unrealized aspirations and the stifling of potential, William Blake's "The Little Black Boy" offers a

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contrasting perspective, emphasizing themes of hope and acceptance as a means of transcending racial prejudice and envisioning a future of spiritual equality.

Hopes and Acceptance of unfulfilled expectations

William Blake's ""The Little Black Boy" is a profound poetic work that engages deeply with the themes of racial identity, spiritual equality, and the social disparities that arise from colonial and cultural hierarchies. Written in the late 18th century, the poem forms part of Blake's Songs of Innocence, a collection that explores childhood, innocence, and moral development, often against a backdrop of societal corruption and oppression. In this particular poem, Blake gives voice to a young Black child who navigates a racially prejudiced world with the spiritual teachings imparted by his mother. Through this child's narrative, Blake highlights the internalized oppression of Black individuals and critiques the racist ideologies prevalent in his time. Though written by a white poet, the poem powerfully addresses the psychological and social toll of racial inequality and offers a vision of universal love and unity under God that critiques the racial and social hierarchies of Blake's society.

The poem's title introduces the "Little Black Boy," whose blackness immediately invokes a series of figurative expressions. In the opening lines, the boy declares, "My mother bore me in the southern wild, and I am black, but O! my soul is white," establishing a central dichotomy between outward appearance and intrinsic worth. The boy's assertion of a "white" soul symbolic of purity and divine proximity reveals an internalization of white superiority, indicative of the psychological impact of colonial ideology, where blackness is often associated with inferiority. This duality underscores the racial disparities ingrained within societal and religious constructs, compelling the child to assert his spiritual value in the face of systemic prejudice.

the protagonist's hopes and expectations are centered on attaining a realm characterized by egalitarian values, wherein he and a white child might coexist without the imposition of racial

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prejudice. This aspiration underscores an unfulfilled yearning for reciprocal affection and acceptance, highlighting the disparities inherent in his lived experience.

Blake employs personification to imbue natural elements with human-like qualities, enhancing the poem's thematic depth. For instance, the sun is personified as a figure that loves and warms all equally: "Look on the rising sun: there God does live And gives his light, and gives his heat away." This personification of the sun as a benevolent, life-giving force suggests a divine impartiality that contrasts sharply with the racial prejudice experienced by the little black boy. The sun's indiscriminate warmth symbolizes God's universal love, offering a sense of hope that transcends earthly discrimination.

The poem is steeped in irony, particularly in the boy's acceptance of his subordinate role and his hope for a heavenly reward. The boy's belief that he must endure earthly suffering to be worthy of God's love is a poignant example: "And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face / Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove." This acceptance is ironic because it reflects the internalization of oppressive ideologies that perpetuate racial inequality. The boy's hope for acceptance in heaven is intertwined with the idea that he must first be cleansed of his blackness, highlighting the damaging effects of racial prejudice on his self-perception.

The mood of the poem is complex, oscillating between hope and resignation. The tone is similarly nuanced, blending elements of acceptance with subtle undertones of critique. The boy's initial acceptance of his racial identity and his hope for divine acceptance create a mood of cautious optimism. However, the underlying irony and the stark realities of racial disparities introduce a sense of melancholy and resignation. The tone is hopeful in its depiction of the boy's faith and resilience, yet critical in its portrayal of the societal norms that perpetuate racial inequality.

4.2 Research Question Two

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How do the poet's experience and personal development in both works reveal their strategies for navigating and responding to systemic inequities?

Symbolism and Imagery Reflecting Justice in 'London' and 'Still I Rise'

William Blake and Maya Angelou, through their powerful poems "London" and "Still I Rise," offer profound insights into navigating and responding to systemic inequities. Both poets draw upon personal experiences and development to craft strategies that challenge the injustices of their respective societies. Blake, writing during the Industrial Revolution, witnessed the stark disparities in London, while Angelou, writing in the 20th century, confronted the enduring legacy of racism and oppression.

In "London," Blake employs vivid symbolism and imagery to expose the moral and social decay of the city. The poem is filled with images of suffering and constraint, reflecting the loss of innocence and freedom caused by industrialization and social injustice. Similarly, Angelou's "Still I Rise" uses powerful imagery and symbolism to celebrate resilience and resistance in the face of oppression. The poem is an anthem of hope and defiance, asserting the speaker's determination to overcome adversity and rise above the systemic inequities that seek to diminish her. Through their distinct voices and experiences, Blake and Angelou reveal the strategies of bearing witness, resisting oppression, and reclaiming dignity in the face of systemic inequities.

In "'London', Blake walks through the city and exposes the invisible but pervasive forces of injustice. His use of repetition in the opening lines "I wander through each chartered street / Near where the chartered Thames does flow" this immediately evokes the image of confinement. The word "chartered" suggests legal ownership or control, and its repetition emphasizes the unnatural domination of both people and nature by institutions such as the government and the monarchy. The "chartered Thames," symbolizing freedom and natural flow, being restricted by human authority, like the government and the Church, control and

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restrict even natural elements like the river. It suggests that everything is owned and regulated, leaving no space for freedom. This becomes a powerful image of justice constrained and corrupted. "Marks of weakness, marks of woe" These "marks" symbolize the suffering and despair etched on the faces of the people. It is a direct commentary on the human cost of industrialization and social inequality.

Blake also employs visceral imagery to reflect the human cost of this systemic domination. He writes, *In every cry of every man, / In every Infants cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban, / The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.*" These lines present justice not as an abstract principle, but as something denied to ordinary people. The mind-forged manacles are symbolic of internalized oppression—beliefs and constraints placed in the minds of citizens by those in power. The repetition of every emphasizes the ubiquity of this suffering, suggesting that injustice is not limited to a few but spread throughout society. Blake's personal development as a radical thinker is evident here: he perceives that systemic inequities are sustained not just through physical means, but through psychological control. This powerful image *Mind-forg'd manacles* represents the mental and psychological constraints imposed by society. People are trapped not just by physical chains but by the beliefs and ideologies that keep them submissive.

Further symbolism appears in Blake's depiction of institutional failure: *How the Chimney-sweeper's cry / Every blackning Church appalls.*" The church, traditionally seen as a moral authority, is described as blackning," The color black symbolizes corruption and moral decay. By associating the church with darkness, Blake critiques its failure to address the suffering of the people. The crying child—forced into dangerous labor—symbolizes the innocent victims of industrial exploitation. The church's failure to protect them is a symbolic indictment of organized religion's alignment with the state, rather than with moral

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righteousness. Blake's personal disdain for these institutions, shaped by his mystical and anti-authoritarian worldview, informs this damning imagery.

Justice, in Blake's vision, is not present ,it is absent, corrupted, or betrayed. The image of the "hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls evokes violent repression. The Palace walls symbolize royal and state power, and the soldier's suffering becomes a blood-stained mark upon those in control. This image is particularly potent, suggesting that the very foundations of state authority are built on the suffering of those it claims to protect. Blake uses this imagery to critique a society in which power structures systematically deny justice to its people and instead maintain control through violence and fear.

Blake's strategy is to expose the grim realities of social injustice and challenge the institutions that perpetuate it. He doesn't offer a direct solution, but his poem serves as a wake-up call, urging readers to recognize the chains that bind them.

In contrast to Blake's bleak portrayal of injustice, Maya Angelou's"'Still I Rise'" uses imagery and symbolism to portray justice as the triumphant response to centuries of oppression. The poem is rooted in her personal experiences as a Black woman in America, shaped by the legacy of slavery, racism, and gender inequality. Unlike Blake, whose imagery reveals a crumbling, corrupted world, Angelou's symbolic language builds a portrait of resilience, self-worth, and hope.

But still, like dust, I'll rise: The recurring image of rising symbolizes her unwavering determination to overcome adversity. Dust, though seemingly insignificant, is persistent and cannot be truly suppressed. "sassiness," "sexiness," and "haughtiness": These traits, often used to demean Black women, are reclaimed as sources of strength and pride. They symbolize her refusal to be defined by others' negative stereotypes.

You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies: This opening acknowledges the historical and ongoing attempts to diminish and erase the experiences of Black people.

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One of the most powerful recurring images in "Still I Rise" is that of nature. Angelou writes: "*Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides, / Just like hopes springing high, / Still I'll rise.*" Here, the poet likens her resilience to natural forces moons, suns, tides which are unstoppable and eternal. This is a radical reassertion of justice, her rising is not contingent on others approval or on social permission; it is as natural and inevitable as the laws of the universe. The symbolism presents justice as something elemental, something that cannot be permanently denied. This reflects Angelou's personal development from trauma to empowerment her life and work are testimonies to the idea that justice is both an internal force and a collective destiny.

Angelou also employs symbolic language to reclaim dignity in the face of historical and systemic injustice. When she asks, Does my sassiness upset you? or Does my haughtiness offend you?" she uses rhetorical questions to challenge the reader's (or oppressor's) discomfort with her confidence. Her tone is assertive, and her body becomes symbolic of strength and beauty: *I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.* The ocean imagery represents depth, power, and ancestral memory suggesting that her strength is drawn from generations of resilience. This symbolic portrayal of the self counters centuries of objectification and degradation, asserting justice through self-love and pride.

The poem's central metaphor "'Still i Rise' is itself a powerful symbol. It represents the refusal to be diminished, erased, or defeated by injustice. Each stanza's repetition of this phrase functions like a mantra of resistance. While Blake's imagery seeks to expose and condemn, Angelou's seeks to affirm and empower. While Blake exposes the harsh realities of oppression, Angelou focuses on the power of resilience and resistance. Both poets use symbolism and imagery to convey their experiences and offer strategies for navigating

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systemic inequities. Blake's approach is to critique and challenge, while Angelou's is to uplift and empower.

Angelou's personal experience, including the racism she faced in segregated America and her survival of trauma, informs her symbolic celebration of self. The poem becomes a space where justice is not only demanded but lived. Her voice, symbolic of all marginalized voices, refuses to be silenced. This is most evident in the closing lines:"*Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, / I am the dream and the hope of the slave. / I rise / I rise / I rise."* These lines combine the personal and the historical. She positions herself as the embodiment of justice delayed but not denied, turning personal identity into a symbol of historical vindication.

Blake and Angelou both use powerful imagery to reflect on justice, but they do so through contrasting methods and moods. Blake's imagery is dark, accusatory, and prophetic. It reflects a world where justice is absent, and people are entrapped by oppressive structures. His symbols manacles, blood-stained palaces, blackened churches serve as warnings, urging readers to see and question the inequities surrounding them. His personal development from spiritual mystic to social critic is reflected in this poetic strategy of confrontation.

Angelou, by contrast, employs imagery that is uplifting, defiant, and empowering. Her symbols natural forces, golden mines, oceans suggest strength, wealth, and inevitability. Justice, for her, is not merely a concept but an internal and ancestral truth. Her personal evolution into a voice of resistance is embodied in the poem's metaphors of rising, enduring, and shining. While Blake asks readers to witness injustice, Angelou commands them to witness survival and triumph.

Both poets also use bodily imagery, but to different ends. Blake emphasizes the physical toll of oppression the *infants cry, the soldier's sigh, the blood on palace walls*. These images evoke suffering and demand accountability. Angelou's body is a site of joy and power

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her hips, her walk, her laughter are not shamed but celebrated. In this way, the personal body becomes political, challenging norms that equate pride with defiance.

Through symbolism and imagery, both poets turn the abstract concept of justice into a lived, felt experience. Their words do more than describe injustice—they make the reader see it, feel it, or in Angelou's case, overcome it.

Conclusion

In both 'London' and 'Still I Rise' symbolism and imagery are central to the poets' strategies for responding to systemic injustice. William Blake, shaped by the turmoil of industrial-era London, uses dark and haunting imagery to reveal how institutions imprison the mind and body. Maya Angelou, drawing on her experience of racial and gender oppression, uses luminous and powerful symbols to affirm dignity and assert self-worth. Though their tones and visions differ, both poets engage the reader emotionally and intellectually, using poetic imagery to advocate for justice and human liberation. Their work demonstrates that poetry is not merely aesthetic it is a tool for resistance, revelation, and transformation.

William Blake and Maya Angelou construct their poetic voices from deeply personal experiences, and their evolving identities become instruments for responding to systemic inequities. In London, Blake's identity as a visionary and social critic emerges through a dark portrayal of urban life, revealing his growing disillusionment with institutions. In 'Still I Rise' ," Angelou's poem reflects her journey from marginalization to empowerment, using the development of her personal and cultural identity to counter historical and systemic oppression. Both poets use their evolving perspectives to position the self not only as a witness to injustice but also as a powerful agent of resistance.

Blake's identity as a poet is intricately tied to his radical spiritual and social beliefs. Born in 1757, Blake lived during the rise of industrial capitalism and witnessed the moral and

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economic decay it produced. Initially influenced by Christian mysticism and Romantic ideals, Blake's personal development saw a shift toward revolutionary thinking. In 'London'," this development is reflected in the speaker's critical stance toward religious, political, and economic institutions. The speaker is not merely a passive observer but a conscious individual shaped by experience, moving through the city with eyes wide open to the suffering around him. His identity, as revealed in the poem, is that of an enlightened individual who refuses to accept societal norms as just or natural.

The speaker in 'London' is presented as morally awake and emotionally affected, which aligns with Blake's own perception of the poet as a prophet and seer. His personal development is marked by a rejection of the institutionalized religion and monarchy that many in his society still supported. This is most evident in the critical tone and the condemnation of systemic injustice seen in lines such as *every blackning Church appalls" and Runs in blood down Palace walls.* These images reflect not only Blake's ideological identity but also his moral transformation. Through his own intellectual and spiritual growth, Blake developed a poetic persona that channels outrage and empathy a personal development that allows him to engage more deeply with the world's inequities.

Blake's poetic identity also resists conformity and embraces individual perception as a means of truth. In *mind-forg'd manacles,* he critiques how society conditions people to accept their chains, an insight that comes from his personal belief in the imaginative mind as a liberating force. His identity as a poet becomes inseparable from his role as a social commentator. Unlike many of his contemporaries who glorified the state or the church, Blake's experience led him to see these powers as inherently unjust. His personal journey from conventional faith to radical critique shapes the voice of London, making it a poem of profound identity-based dissent.

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In contrast to Blake's accusatory tone and external observations, Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" constructs identity from within celebrating the internal power to overcome external oppression. Angelou's personal development is central to the voice of the poem. Born in 1928 and raised in a racially segregated America, she experienced trauma, racism, and silencing from an early age. However, her growth as a poet, activist, and performer transformed those early experiences into a foundation for strength. In 'Still I Rise', the speaker's identity reflects Angelou's evolution into a proud Black woman who refuses to be broken by systemic injustice. Her development into an empowered voice gives the poem its emotional resonance and persuasive authority.

The speaker in 'Still I Rise' is assertive, self-assured, and confrontational in ways that mirror Angelou's own life journey. The repetition of"'I rise' throughout the poem symbolizes her personal growth and increasing confidence in her identity. Where earlier in life she might have felt silenced or diminished, the poet now reclaims her voice and demands recognition. This development is rooted not only in personal resilience but also in a collective historical identity. When she writes,*"I am the dream and the hope of the slave*, she situates herself within a lineage of struggle and survival. Her personal development is therefore inseparable from her cultural and historical identity; her rising is both an individual triumph and a communal affirmation.

Angelou's identity as a poet of resistance is further strengthened by her conscious redefinition of beauty, pride, and femininity. She uses the body: *Does my sassiness upset you?" and "Does my sexiness offend you?*" as a site of power rather than shame. This reclamation reflects her personal growth from someone shaped by social restrictions to someone who challenges and reshapes them. Her identity is no longer reactive but actively reshaping the narrative. This is a major departure from voices of the past that pleaded for

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justice Angelou demands it. Her personal development allows her to move from victimhood to victory, and this evolution gives 'Still I Rise' its unshakable strength.

While Blake's identity is forged through witnessing the suffering of others and developing a critique of society, Angelou's identity is constructed through the internalization of that suffering and the transformation of pain into pride. Both, however, arrive at a place where their identity compels them to speak out. Their poetic voices are not detached narrators but individuals shaped by experience and changed through reflection. In both poems, personal development leads to a deeper understanding of systemic structures and a commitment to resisting them.

The different historical contexts in which the poets lived also shaped their identities. Blake's England was a society moving rapidly toward industrial capitalism, with strict class divisions and rising poverty. His response to injustice was informed by a visionary belief in human potential, which grew stronger as he rejected the religious and political orthodoxy of his time. His development from a mystical artist into a radical social critic is reflected in the tone of 'London'," where the individual voice becomes a moral conscience for society.

Angelou's America, on the other hand, was emerging from the era of Jim Crow laws and entering a new phase of civil rights struggles. Her identity as a Black woman in the mid-20th century was shaped by a history of slavery, discrimination, and resistance. Her personal development was marked by surviving trauma and reclaiming her narrative. Through writing, she reasserted control over how she was seen, and this personal evolution empowered her to speak for others. "Still I Rise" becomes the culmination of that journey where the self is not only healed but honored.

The function of identity in both poems is also shaped by the poets' awareness of their audience. Blake writes as a witness calling attention to injustice; his development compels him to urge others to see what he sees. Angelou writes as a survivor declaring her dignity; her

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development leads her to encourage others to find pride and purpose. Both poets, through their growth, develop a sense of moral obligation to communicate the truth as they see it. Their poems are thus deeply personal but never purely individual they speak to collective experience and shared struggle.

Furthermore, both poets use the development of identity as a means of destabilizing the dominant narratives that justify inequity. Blake's poem exposes the myth of a just and ordered society; his personal evolution allows him to see past appearances and articulate the inner decay of institutions. Angelou's poem dismantles the stereotype of the submissive, broken Black woman; her personal growth enables her to present a counter narrative of resilience and grace. In both cases, personal development results in a sharper, more courageous poetic voice one that no longer seeks validation but insists on truth.

Ultimately, the theme of identity and personal development in "London" and "Still I Rise" underscores the power of the evolving self in the face of injustice. Blake's increasing disillusionment with institutional hypocrisy informs a poetic identity rooted in moral outrage. Angelou's personal healing and reclamation of heritage inform a poetic identity rooted in dignity and pride. Both poets show that navigating systemic inequity is not only a political act but also a deeply personal journey. Their identities are not fixed but forged through struggle, reflection, and the refusal to remain silent. In this way, both "London" and "Still I Rise" transform the personal into the political, making their poetic voices lasting instruments of justice.

Exposure and Empowerment

In William Blake's 'London' and Maya Angelou's 'Still I Rise', the poets adopt contrasting yet equally powerful strategies to respond to systemic inequities. Blake's approach centers on exposure uncovering the hidden mechanisms of social and institutional oppression that devastate the lives of ordinary people. Angelou, on the other hand, employs

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the strategy of empowerment crafting a voice that rises above the weight of history to affirm dignity and defiance. These two strategies exposure and empowerment emerge not only from differing poetic intentions but also from each poet's personal development and historical context. Together, they reveal how art can either shine a light on injustice or become a source of liberation for the marginalized.

William Blake's London is a study in bleak revelation. The speaker walks through the city, and each observation adds to the mounting horror of a society bound by invisible chains. Blake's strategy is to expose the city's moral decay by vividly describing its impact on the people. In the lines; *Marks of weakness, marks of woe,* he describes not just the physical appearance of Londoners, but the deep psychological scars left by a system that dehumanizes them. The repetition of every in the lines ; *In every cry of every Man, / In every Infants cry of fear"* emphasizes the widespread nature of this suffering. Blake's poetic intent is to make the reader see what society has trained them to ignore the pervasive and systemic nature of oppression.

Blake's exposure of injustice is grounded in his personal development as a critic of institutional power. As a radical thinker, Blake believed that the state, church, and economic systems worked together to enslave the human spirit. This belief is dramatized in the metaphor of *mind-forg'd manacles, a* powerful image suggesting that the oppression of the people is not only physical but psychological. These"manacles"symbolize the internalized beliefs that keep people passive and compliant. Through this metaphor, Blake exposes how systems of control embed themselves in the very consciousness of individuals, making them unable to imagine freedom. Blake's exposure of systemic injustice is thus not merely social but deeply existential; he reveals how institutions strip people of their capacity to dream, to resist, and to reclaim their humanity.

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In London," institutions are not just present but actively complicit in suffering. Blake targets them explicitly: "*How the Chimney-sweepers' cry / Every blackning Church appalls" and "the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls.*" Here, Blake holds the Church and the monarchy accountable for the suffering of the vulnerable. The blackening of the church is both literal—smog and soot from industrial London—and symbolic—a metaphor for moral corruption. The image of blood on palace walls turns symbols of national pride into scenes of horror, indicting those in power. By exposing these realities, Blake rejects any illusion of justice or benevolence. His strategy is not to inspire hope, but to demand awareness and confrontation.

Maya Angelou, by contrast, employs the poetic strategy of empowerment in "Still I Rise." While Blake looks outward to expose the cruelty of institutions, Angelou looks inward and backward drawing strength from her identity and heritage to transcend oppression. The poem is not primarily an indictment, though injustice is acknowledged; it is a declaration of survival and self-assertion. Angelou's speaker is unbroken, unbowed, and unapologetic. "You may trod me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I'll rise," she writes. The act of rising becomes symbolic of the personal and collective power to resist dehumanization.

Angelou's strategy of empowerment emerges from her personal experiences of racism, sexual violence, and marginalization. Her early life was marked by trauma and silencing, but her development into a poet and activist gave her a platform to reclaim her narrative. In "Still I Rise", this personal journey becomes a universal message for all those who have been oppressed. The repeated phrase"*I rise* functions as both a refrain and an affirmation, empowering readers with each repetition. It transforms past suffering into a source of strength and dignity. Where Blake's speaker bears witness to pain, Angelou's'speaker rises above it empowered by self-knowledge, ancestral resilience, and an unshakeable sense of worth.

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The poem's imagery contributes to this empowerment. Angelou compares her resilience to natural and cosmic forces: "*Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides."* These similes suggest that her rising is inevitable, unstoppable, and governed by a force greater than any human system. This poetic framing affirms the dignity of the speaker as part of something eternal and powerful. Justice, in this sense, is not demanded from the outside world but discovered within. Angelou empowers by internalizing justice—making it a personal truth rather than an institutional gift.

Angelou's empowerment also comes from her ability to reclaim and redefine the narrative imposed on her. She mocks the oppressors discomfort with her confidence and sensuality: "*Does my sassiness upset you? / Why are you beset with gloom?*" These questions challenge the dominant gaze, turning shame into pride. Her very body so often policed and objectified is reclaimed as a site of joy and agency. This is an especially radical act of empowerment given the historical context of the sexual and racial oppression of Black women. Angelou not only refuses to be shamed she finds strength in the very things used to marginalize her. In doing so, she empowers others to embrace their identity fully and defiantly. The contrast between Blake and Angelou's strategies exposure versus empowerment can also be seen in how they position the reader. Blake's reader is implicated; the poem functions as a moral indictment. The speaker's tone is somber, prophetic, and accusatory. By exposing the rot at the heart of society, Blake forces the reader to confront the suffering they may ignore or participate in. The emotional response he seeks is discomfort, followed by awareness. This is a crucial part of his poetic strategy: to use poetry as a mirror that reveals the hidden injustices of daily life.

Angelou, however, invites the reader to join her in her rising. Her poem is not accusatory, but invitational. Her voice is not only personal but communal she rises not just as herself, but as "the dream and the hope of the slave." This phrase ties her personal

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empowerment to a collective historical struggle, transforming the poem into a celebration of resilience across generations. Her audience is not the oppressor, but those who have been oppressed, silenced, and forgotten. For them, the poem is a rallying cry, an anthem of endurance and hope.

While Blake's exposure of injustice is rooted in moral outrage and social critique, Angelou's empowerment strategy is rooted in survival and self-love. Both strategies are deeply effective and emerge naturally from the poets' lived realities. Blake, living in 18th-century industrial England, watched as poverty, child labor, and state power crushed the human spirit. His poems often served as acts of resistance against institutional cruelty. Angelou, writing in 20th-century America, lived through Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement, and the ongoing struggles of Black Americans. Her poetry became a space of healing, affirmation, and collective uplift.

Despite their differences, both poets ultimately believe in the transformative power of the human voice. Blake's exposure reveals truth and demands moral reckoning; Angelou's empowerment offers hope and renewal. In this way, their strategies complement each other. Exposure creates awareness, while empowerment provides the strength to act. Together, they show how poetry can respond to injustice not only by revealing it but by transcending it.

The legacy of both strategies continues to influence contemporary poets and activists. Blake's model of poetic exposure has inspired generations of writers to use art as a tool for critique. Angelou's empowering voice has become a touchstone for those seeking to affirm their worth in the face of adversity. In both cases, poetry serves as more than expression it becomes intervention.

Personal Voice and Collective Identity: Reclaiming Power through Poetic Persona

The literary personas adopted by poets often function not merely as expressive tools but as strategic embodiments of individual and communal identity, particularly in contexts of

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systemic inequity. In William Blake's "London" and Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise," the poetic voice does more than recount personal suffering—it reclaims dignity, invokes solidarity, and critiques oppressive institutions. Both poets, influenced by the socio-political circumstances of their times and their personal encounters with injustice, craft poetic personas that represent the voice of the marginalized. In doing so, they construct identities that transcend the personal and become symbols of collective resistance. Through this lens, personal voice becomes not only a narrative tool but also a means of communal empowerment and political defiance.

In "London," Blake's use of a first-person observer does not explicitly refer to himself but represents a sensitive, socially aware persona who walks through the city and internalizes its sorrows. This speaker, though unnamed, is an extension of Blake's lived frustration with the social institutions of late 18th-century Britain—especially the Church, monarchy, and industrial system. The speaker's journey is not passive; it is a deliberate witnessing, one that reveals the voices of others—the "cry of every Man," the "infant's cry of fear," and the repression felt in every street and institution. The poet's persona is that of a moral visionary, one who fuses personal sensitivity with collective empathy. He does not separate himself from the suffering of others; instead, he channels it, drawing on his personal discontent to amplify the communal voice of disillusionment and exploitation. This blending of individual and societal anguish positions Blake's poetic voice as a conduit through which the voiceless are heard.

Similarly, in "Still I Rise," Maya Angelou crafts a distinctly autobiographical yet symbolically inclusive voice. The repetition of the personal pronoun "I" is deceptively individualistic; it appears to speak solely for the poet, yet it quickly becomes evident that this "I" represents generations of Black people, particularly Black women, who have been subjugated, erased, and diminished by racist and sexist systems. Angelou's own

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experiences—growing up in the racially segregated American South, enduring trauma, and rising to prominence despite societal constraints—infuse the poem with personal triumph. However, her "I" becomes archetypal. The refrain "I rise" echoes as a chant for all historically silenced groups, and her triumph is emblematic of a broader social and spiritual awakening. In this way, her personal voice becomes an inclusive symbol of strength and defiance against systemic inequities.

The poetic personas in both works do more than communicate grievances—they assert agency. Blake's persona in "London" is not merely recording injustice but actively critiquing it. His tone, though restrained, is charged with indictment: the "black'ning Church," the "mind-forged manacles," and the corruption of innocence are not natural occurrences—they are systemic consequences of political and religious structures. The speaker's authority stems from his ability to name these injustices, to identify and expose them in poetic terms. This act of naming is itself a strategy of power reclamation, one that Blake uses to voice the silent wounds of a city numbed by routine oppression. The persona's empathy is radical; it transforms observation into moral resistance.

Angelou, by contrast, asserts her agency more audibly. Her poetic voice is not that of a silent observer but of an assertive survivor. Each stanza escalates in confidence, turning historical trauma into rhetorical power. Her repeated rhetorical questions—"Did you want to see me broken?" "Does my sassiness upset you?"—challenge the reader and the system alike. These questions are both personal and political. They emerge from Angelou's intimate understanding of oppression but are directed outward, confronting societal structures that demean and devalue. The unapologetic tone of the speaker becomes a weapon against the legacy of dehumanization. Her poetic persona refuses victimhood, and in doing so, she offers a model of resistance for others navigating systemic inequities.

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Both Blake and Angelou also employ strategies that root their poetic personas in a kind of spiritual or moral superiority. Blake's speaker, while narrating from within a corrupted city, positions himself as morally awake in contrast to the apathetic masses. His persona is spiritually aligned with the suffering children, the soldiers, and the prostitutes, not with the rulers and priests. This positioning allows Blake to critique from within and above—a dual vantage point that enhances his authority. Similarly, Angelou's persona elevates herself above the historical trauma that sought to confine her. Her pride, sensuality, and spiritual resilience are not just personal affirmations; they are statements of collective endurance. When she writes, "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave," she fuses historical memory with present-day triumph. This line explicitly collapses the boundary between the individual and the community, linking her personal rise with the ancestral struggle for freedom and dignity.

Importantly, both poets turn their poetic personas into instruments for reclaiming narrative control. In "London," Blake's persona re-narrates the story of a grand city into one of despair and control, challenging the dominant narratives of progress and power. By highlighting the "marks of weakness, marks of woe," he subverts the idea of London as a thriving empire and instead portrays it as spiritually bankrupt and socially degraded. The poet, through his speaker, rewrites the urban space into a site of oppression and decay. This re-narration is a method of ideological resistance, as it challenges readers to see beyond the façade of national pride and to confront the lived realities of the poor and the disenfranchised.

Angelou, on the other hand, reclaims control over the narratives that have historically denigrated Black identity. The poetic voice she creates does not beg for acceptance; it asserts worth. Her imagery—rising like dust, dancing like oil wells—reimagines Black identity not as degraded but as luminous and boundless. Through her poetic persona, Angelou challenges the centuries of stereotypes, exclusion, and violence that sought to define Blackness. She

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retells history from the perspective of one who was supposed to remain silenced but instead sings. In doing so, she reclaims language itself as a space of liberation, turning poetic speech into a form of resistance and self-definition.

While the tone and stylistic approaches differ, both poets demonstrate how personal voice, rooted in lived experience, can transcend the boundaries of individual expression to serve a communal and emancipatory purpose. Blake's poetic persona mourns with the masses and exposes systemic rot, while Angelou's voice declares victory over it. Both strategies are equally potent: one dissects the problem; the other celebrates survival beyond it. Their respective developments as individuals—Blake's philosophical dissent in a period of imperial and religious control, and Angelou's emergence from personal trauma into literary and political authority—shape their poetic strategies. Their experiences do not just inform their art; they are embedded in it, turning poetry into a weapon against silence and complicity.

Moreover, these poetic personas extend beyond the page. They invite readers to see themselves in the voice of the poet. Blake's readers are challenged to recognize the mind-forged manacles of their own making, while Angelou's readers are inspired to rise, again and again. The poets do not isolate themselves from their audiences but rather create inclusive voices that speak to shared pain and collective power. Their personas are not egocentric but representational, functioning as mirrors and beacons. Through this, both poets perform a radical act: they offer the reader a place within the poem, a shared stake in the struggle, and a shared hope in resistance.

In conclusion, the poetic personas crafted in "London" and "Still I Rise" reveal how personal voice, when grounded in lived experience, can articulate collective identity and resistance. Blake's speaker, shaped by his disillusionment with societal structures, becomes a vessel for communal lament and moral clarity. Angelou's poetic "I," forged from personal and ancestral survival, becomes an emblem of dignity and rising strength. In both cases, the

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poets employ their personal development not as isolated journeys but as bridges to the collective, using poetic voice to challenge inequity and reclaim narrative authority. Through these strategies, both Blake and Angelou affirm that the personal is political, and that the poetic persona, when wielded with purpose, becomes a powerful force against systemic injustice.

Poetic Structure and Tonal Contrasts as Instruments of Subversion

The effectiveness of poetry in confronting systemic inequities lies not only in its themes or content but also in the technical choices made by the poet. Structural design, rhythm, rhyme, line arrangement, and tonal quality are not simply aesthetic tools—they are deeply ideological. In "London" by William Blake and "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou, the poets deliberately use structural form and tonal variance as instruments of resistance. These elements provide powerful undercurrents for their critique of oppression and their envisioning of emancipation. The poems' formal aspects reflect each poet's personal experiences and strategic use of poetry as a platform for dismantling oppressive norms. Blake employs rigid structure and a hauntingly melancholic tone to convey institutional confinement and spiritual decay, while Angelou adopts a more fluid structure, rich with assertive and triumphant tones, to express liberation and defiance. These contrasting poetic approaches embody the poets' respective personal histories and ideological battles, transforming form into subversion.

William Blake's "London" is a carefully constructed four-stanza poem with a tight ABAB rhyme scheme and regular iambic tetrameter. This deliberate structural rigidity reflects the constraints imposed on the human spirit by the institutions of state, religion, and industry. Blake, writing in the context of the late 18th century—a period marked by growing urbanization, the Industrial Revolution, and the moral hypocrisy of the Church—channels his

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discontent into a formally restrained poem that ironically mirrors the very repression he condemns. The uniformity of the poem's structure parallels the systemic oppression suffered by the London poor. Every quatrain reinforces the stifling atmosphere of a city governed by regulation and controlled behavior, where freedom is an illusion. The speaker walks through "each chartered street," a phrase that emphasizes the legal and economic control exercised over public space and private life. The consistency in form serves to enhance the thematic critique of a society boxed into predictable misery.

This structural uniformity also contributes to a tone of hopelessness and inevitability. The speaker's observations are presented in a steady, almost resigned cadence, as though the suffering witnessed is both expected and permanent. The rhyme scheme does not offer surprise or relief but rather reaffirms the cyclical nature of despair. For example, the rhyme between "woe" and "flow" in the first stanza connects emotional suffering with the natural rhythm of life, suggesting that anguish has become a defining current in the city. Blake's use of structure thus transforms poetic order into a metaphor for societal entrapment. His personal disillusionment with the institutions of his day especially the Church and monarchy is reflected in the suffocating symmetry of the poem. Blake, a visionary and radical thinker for his time, manipulates poetic form to reflect a world where imagination and innocence are stifled by control and tradition.

In contrast, Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" bursts forth with structural dynamism and tonal shifts that reflect resilience, defiance, and an uncontainable spirit. The poem does not conform to a rigid structure; instead, it plays with stanza length, repetition, and rhythmic variation. This deliberate looseness reflects Angelou's experience as a Black woman breaking free from the historical chains of racism, slavery, and gender-based subjugation. Unlike Blake's structured pessimism, Angelou's poetic structure mimics the motion of rising it builds momentum with each stanza, refusing to be boxed into predictable rhythm. The repetition of

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the phrase “I rise” functions both as refrain and escalation, providing a rhythmic heartbeat that empowers the poem. The variability in stanza length from quatrains to tercets to extended lines—demonstrates a break from poetic convention that mirrors the thematic insistence on freedom and autonomy. Structure becomes liberation.

Angelou’s mastery of tone also serves as a subversive tool. Throughout "Still I Rise," the speaker’s voice evolves from questioning and challenging the oppressor to boldly asserting self-worth and historical triumph. The tonal journey from sarcastic inquiry—“Does my sassiness upset you?”—to unapologetic celebration—“I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide”—reflects the emotional and psychological journey of the marginalized, from internalized oppression to proud self-affirmation. This tonal progression is not accidental; it is rooted in Angelou’s own life, marked by experiences of trauma, racial discrimination, and eventual global recognition as a literary and political figure. The tonal contrasts throughout the poem—moving from sarcasm to joy, indignation to triumph—act as a defiant refusal to adhere to a singular emotional state dictated by external systems of control. This multiplicity of tone itself resists the flattening and dehumanizing tendencies of systemic inequality.

Furthermore, Angelou employs colloquial language, accessible diction, and rhythmic patterns drawn from Black oral traditions such as gospel preaching and blues music to infuse her poem with cultural specificity. These elements reflect her identity and background, and they subtly defy the Eurocentric literary standards that often marginalize non-Western forms of expression. Her use of internal rhyme (“You may trod me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I’ll rise”) and repetition reflects both poetic sophistication and cultural rootedness. By employing these forms, Angelou makes a political statement: her voice, shaped by her cultural and historical lineage, is not only valid but also powerful. Her structural choices become a form of cultural assertion, embedding subversion into every poetic decision.

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While Blake's structure emphasizes the suffocating effects of systemic oppression, Angelou's flexible form underscores the power of transcending it. These contrasting approaches reflect the different personal and historical contexts in which the poets lived. Blake, witnessing the rise of industrial capitalism and the moral decay of British institutions, turns to symmetry and metrical discipline as a way to reveal entrapment. Angelou, navigating the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and civil rights struggles, expresses rebellion and recovery through structural freedom. Their experiences shape how they manipulate poetic form—not as passive conventions but as rhetorical tools that either mirror or resist systemic forces.

The tonal differences between the two works further deepen their subversive quality. In "London," Blake's tone is somber, sorrowful, and observational. His subdued voice lends credibility to the poem's moral indictment. Rather than shouting his rage, he allows the imagery—the "hapless soldier's sigh," the "youthful harlot's curse"—to evoke horror. The restraint in tone creates a haunting effect that compels readers to feel the weight of suffering. This quiet sadness becomes more powerful than overt protest, suggesting that the poet has internalized the city's spiritual rot. His subversion lies in the cold precision with which he exposes decay under the guise of civility. Blake's personal spiritual outlook—rooted in mysticism, prophecy, and radical egalitarianism—compels him to subvert the poem's surface calm with profound moral rage.

Angelou's tone, by contrast, is anything but restrained. It is bold, exuberant, sometimes mocking, and always affirming. Her tone destabilizes narratives of inferiority by replacing them with unapologetic pride. This is especially evident in stanzas that drip with sarcasm—"You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies"—as the speaker confronts the historical distortion of Black lives and achievements. Sarcasm here is not only a literary device but a political stance, exposing the absurdity of white supremacy. Angelou's personal development—from a silenced young girl to an acclaimed writer and activist—is mirrored in

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the tonal arc of the poem. Her voice has learned not only to speak but to sing and soar. This evolution of tone becomes a testament to her journey, transforming her poetry into a tool of emotional and cultural emancipation.

Importantly, both poets use structure and tone not merely for aesthetic pleasure but as ideological weapons. These formal choices create tension and movement within the poems, urging readers to think critically and feel deeply. Blake lulls the reader into rhythmic calm only to deliver harsh social commentary; Angelou invites the reader into rhythmic celebration while unearthing deep wounds. This dynamic interplay between form and message allows both poets to engage with systemic inequity in ways that resonate beyond the surface. Their use of poetic technique becomes an act of social engagement—where rhythm reflects ideology, and tone exposes truth.

Moreover, the contrast between Blake's and Angelou's poetic techniques reflects their respective positions within systems of power. Blake, as a white male poet in imperial Britain, was able to critique his society from within, employing classical forms to challenge their moral emptiness. Angelou, as a Black woman in a deeply racist and patriarchal society, uses form not just to critique but to reimagine power itself. Her poem does not merely describe inequality—it disassembles its logic and replaces it with a vision of joy, beauty, and resistance. This distinction underscores the role of poetic form not only as a mirror of injustice but as a transformative force.

In conclusion, the structural and tonal strategies employed in "London" and "Still I Rise" reveal how poetic form can serve as a vehicle for social critique and personal affirmation. Blake's rigid structure and somber tone encapsulate the constriction of a society defined by institutional control and spiritual decay. Angelou's fluid structure and affirming tone reflect a journey from historical pain to self-defined glory. These choices are deeply informed by the poets' personal experiences—Blake's frustration with 18th-century Britain's moral hypocrisy,

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and Angelou's rise from personal trauma to cultural icon. Through poetic form, both authors subvert the systems that would silence them, showing that in poetry, the way words are arranged and spoken can be as radical as the words themselves. Thus, structure and tone become not only artistic elements but acts of rebellion—tools with which the poets navigate and respond to the systemic inequities that shape their worlds.

Historical Consciousness and Lived Experience as Resistance Tools

Poetry has long served as a powerful medium for bearing witness to history, articulating lived experience, and contesting systems of oppression. In both William Blake's "London" and Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise," the poets invoke their historical realities and personal development as instruments of resistance. Their lived experiences—though separated by centuries and sociopolitical contexts—serve as the emotional and intellectual foundation for their poetic critique of systemic inequities. Blake's disillusionment with the institutions of late 18th-century Britain is channeled through a prophetic lens, transforming his observations into a grim moral indictment of societal decay. Angelou, on the other hand, confronts the legacy of slavery, racism, and gendered subjugation in America by drawing from her own autobiography and the broader collective memory of Black resistance. Their historical consciousness not only informs their poetic content but also empowers their voices to challenge dominant narratives and give voice to the marginalized. In doing so, both poets demonstrate how poetry becomes a means of resisting erasure and reclaiming agency in the face of systemic injustice.

William Blake's "London" is deeply embedded in the historical landscape of late 18th-century England—a period marked by the Industrial Revolution, increasing economic disparity, moral hypocrisy, and a rigidly hierarchical society. Blake lived during a time when urbanization was transforming London into a bustling but spiritually bankrupt metropolis. He

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witnessed firsthand the effects of child labor, the corruption of religious institutions, and the disillusionment that followed the failure of revolutionary ideals. His disappointment with the unrealized promise of the Enlightenment and the decline of moral and spiritual values informs every line of "London." The poem is not merely a commentary on physical poverty but a lament for the loss of innocence, the destruction of imagination, and the internalization of oppression. The line “mind-forg’d manacles” is emblematic of Blake’s historical insight: he suggests that the true prison is not just material deprivation but the psychological conditioning imposed by institutions like the Church, the monarchy, and the legal system.

This historical awareness shapes the poem’s narrative voice and imagery. The “chartered streets” and “chartered Thames” represent a society so thoroughly colonized by commerce and legality that even nature has been brought under control. Blake, as both an artist and social critic, transforms his personal frustration into a universal indictment of systemic control. The speaker walks through the city as a witness and prophet, recording the cries of infants and the curses of harlots. These images reflect the consequences of societal neglect, where the vulnerable—children, women, and the poor—suffer at the hands of institutions designed to control rather than liberate. Blake’s lived experience, particularly his rejection of conventional religion and politics, informs his decision to amplify these voices. His poetry becomes a historical document of resistance, using symbolic imagery to expose the moral and spiritual failures of his age.

Maya Angelou’s "Still I Rise," by contrast, emerges from a different but equally oppressive historical landscape. Angelou’s life spans critical eras in African American history, including segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, and post-Jim Crow America. Born in 1928, she experienced firsthand the sting of racism, economic hardship, and sexual trauma. These experiences are not incidental to her poetry, they are its foundation. "Still I Rise" is a declaration of survival in the face of historical dehumanization. Her repeated affirmation—“I

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rise"—is not merely about personal triumph but about the cumulative strength of generations who have endured slavery, discrimination, and social erasure. Angelou's lived experience as a Black woman in America allows her to speak with both authority and intimacy. Her personal pain becomes political expression, and her poetic voice becomes a vessel for ancestral resilience.

The historical consciousness in Angelou's work is most evident in her deliberate references to slavery and racial injustice. Lines like "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave / I am the dream and the hope of the slave" explicitly root her empowerment in a long history of struggle and survival. Angelou does not view herself in isolation; rather, she stands as a continuation of a historical lineage. Her poetry becomes a bridge between past and present, allowing her to speak not only for herself but for the silenced voices of her community. This merging of the personal and the historical is a strategic act—it reclaims the power of storytelling and reframes history from the perspective of the oppressed. In this way, Angelou reasserts narrative control and challenges dominant versions of history that have sought to minimize or erase Black contributions and identities.

Blake and Angelou both understand that historical consciousness is not passive remembrance—it is an active form of resistance. For Blake, the spiritual degradation of London is a symptom of institutional rot that he believes can only be healed through visionary imagination. His historical insight compels him to confront the disjunction between Christian doctrine and the Church's complicity in social injustice. In the poem, the "black'ning Church" is not only a literal image of industrial soot staining religious buildings but a metaphor for moral corruption. Blake's resistance lies in his refusal to accept institutional narratives at face value. His poetry exposes the contradictions of his society, drawing attention to how history, if unchallenged, becomes a tool of repression. His personal

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experience as an outcast—marginalized for his radical views—makes him particularly sensitive to the dangers of historical amnesia and conformity.

Angelou, similarly, uses history as both a wound and a weapon. While the memory of slavery and racism is painful, she reclaims it as a source of strength. The poem's defiant tone—mocking the oppressor's attempt to "write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies"—is a direct challenge to the distortions of the historical record. Angelou recognizes that history has often been manipulated to justify inequality. By confronting and rewriting that history through poetry, she transforms a legacy of trauma into a narrative of triumph. Her lived experience, shaped by both suffering and resilience, gives her poem a dual edge: it cuts through deception while building up the silenced.

The poets' personal development is deeply tied to their evolving engagement with history. Blake's spiritual vision matured in defiance of Enlightenment rationalism and the encroachment of capitalism. He developed a unique theological and philosophical worldview that placed imagination above reason and personal revelation above institutional dogma. This development is evident in "London," where his disillusionment is not cynical but visionary. The poet does not merely grieve over social injustice—he calls for moral awakening. His personal journey as a poet, engraver, and radical outsider gives him the authority to speak against the dehumanizing forces of his time. The poem's mournful tone and vivid images reflect the inner conflict of a man torn between visionary hope and empirical despair.

Angelou's development follows a different arc but with equally profound implications. From the traumatic muteness of her childhood to her eventual rise as a global voice of resistance, Angelou's life story is a testament to the power of reclaiming voice and agency. "Still I Rise" encapsulates this journey—each stanza a step from silence to celebration. Her historical consciousness is not merely academic or rhetorical; it is lived. Angelou witnessed the violence of racism not only in systemic forms but in everyday encounters. Her personal

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development as a performer, writer, and activist infuses her poetry with multifaceted insight. She embodies the very triumph her poem proclaims. Her resistance is both spiritual and material, both personal and political.

Despite their different temporal and social contexts, both poets treat historical awareness as integral to their craft and purpose. They refuse to allow history to be the domain of the powerful alone. Instead, they reclaim it through poetry, inscribing the pain, survival, and resistance of the marginalized into literary memory. Blake uses historical imagery—such as the "soldier's sigh" and the "youthful harlot's curse"—to highlight the human cost of empire and moral decay. These are not isolated images but parts of a larger historical critique. Angelou uses references to slavery, cultural pride, and ancestral inheritance to demonstrate how the present is shaped by the past—and how poetry can redeem both.

Their strategies for navigating systemic inequities are therefore rooted in the belief that history must be confronted, not ignored. They understand that power often lies in who gets to tell the story. Through poetry, they take control of that narrative, using their lived experience to expose injustice and to imagine alternatives. This is not only a poetic act but a political one. In asserting their voices against the grain of dominant narratives, they challenge readers to do the same—to question, to feel, and to resist.

In conclusion, "London" and "Still I Rise" illustrate how historical consciousness and lived experience function as potent tools of resistance. William Blake, shaped by the oppressive structures and spiritual contradictions of his era, turns his personal disillusionment into a visionary critique of institutional decay. Maya Angelou, molded by the enduring legacy of racial and gendered oppression, uses her personal and collective history to assert defiant hope and self-worth. Both poets convert their intimate encounters with injustice into public declarations of resistance, revealing how the poetic engagement with history is not merely retrospective but actively transformative. Their works remind us that to write poetry in the

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face of systemic inequity is to insist on being seen, heard, and remembered—on one's own terms.

4.3 Research Question Three

In what ways do Maya Angelou and William Blake utilize constructing poetic techniques to convey the themes of Social inequality and restricted human potentials within their respective bodies of work?

Metaphorical Language Representing Mental and Physical Enslavement

William Blake and Maya Angelou both harness the power of metaphor to articulate the pervasive effects of systemic inequality and the stifling of human potential. Their metaphorical language gives form to the otherwise intangible forces of mental control, institutional violence, and generational trauma. While their poetic styles and historical contexts differ, both use metaphor to convey how social structures create both external oppression and internalized limitations, emphasizing how deeply inequality penetrates the human psyche and how it shapes collective consciousness.

In Blake's "London", the metaphor of "mind-forged manacles" is among the most striking and enduring representations of mental enslavement in English poetry. These invisible chains are not physical instruments of imprisonment but psychological constructs imposed by society beliefs, ideologies, and internalized norms that limit human imagination, autonomy, and moral judgment. The phrase implies that the people of London are complicit in their own oppression not through guilt, but through indoctrination. By forging the manacles in their minds, they become prisoners of ideas planted by the state, church, and economy. This metaphor is a potent critique of a society that conditions its members to accept their suffering as natural or inevitable.

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Blake's use of metaphor here aligns with his larger philosophical belief that the human imagination is the ultimate source of freedom. The "mind" in "mind-forged manacles" points not just to intellect but to spiritual and creative consciousness. In this way, the metaphor exposes how systemic forces do not merely control people physically, but also distort their perception of what is possible. Mental enslavement, then, is more insidious than physical chains it prevents individuals from even desiring freedom. Blake presents this internalization of oppression as the true tragedy of modern civilization: people are not only dominated but have come to believe in their own inferiority.

Angelou, in "'Still I Rise', also employs metaphor to dramatize the experience of oppression, but she does so through the lens of survival and reclamation. Her metaphors reflect both the historical weight of slavery and the personal strength that emerges in spite of it. For example, the metaphor "I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide" encapsulates the enormity and depth of both ancestral suffering and collective resilience. The ocean here symbolizes a vast, unstoppable force suggesting that despite centuries of subjugation, the spirit of Black people cannot be contained. Unlike Blake's static metaphors of confinement, Angelou's metaphor is fluid, rising, and moving forward. This reflects a core difference in how each poet envisions the path out of enslavement: Blake mourns the paralysis of society, while Angelou celebrates the potential for movement and rebirth.

Where Blake's metaphors often illuminate suffering, Angelou's metaphorical language transforms pain into power. Her line "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, / I am the dream and the hope of the slave" collapses time, linking her personal identity to a collective historical struggle. The metaphor positions Angelou not as a singular individual, but as the culmination of generations of resilience. Here, enslavement is not just historical but metaphysical a force that tried to erase identity and hope. Yet, Angelou's existence and voice

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serve as living metaphors for freedom reclaimed. This moment in the poem metaphorically redeems history, suggesting that the hopes of enslaved ancestors are realized in the confident articulation of her defiant voice.

The differences in metaphorical strategy between Blake and Angelou are deeply influenced by their respective contexts. Blake was writing during the rise of industrial capitalism in 18th-century England, where social inequality was often justified by religious doctrine and political rhetoric. His metaphors point to a world where the soul is enslaved not by chains, but by ideology. In "London", institutions like the Church and the monarchy are not named metaphorically but are tied directly to metaphors of corruption and blood. The "black'ning Church" is a metaphor for moral hypocrisy, where the institution that should embody spiritual salvation instead becomes a source of darkness and complicity. Similarly, "Runs in blood down Palace walls" suggests that the cost of empire and monarchy is human suffering, hidden behind grandeur. These metaphors do more than describe they accuse. Blake's use of metaphor serves as a moral x-ray, exposing the diseased heart of institutions that appear noble on the surface.

Angelou, by contrast, lived in a 20th-century America shaped by segregation, the civil rights movement, and the enduring legacies of slavery. Her metaphors reflect both the ongoing trauma of racial oppression and the inner strength that resists it. The metaphor of being trodden into the "very dirt" and yet rising again likens her struggle to natural processes, making resilience seem inevitable and organic. These metaphors are not only empowering, but inclusive they invite others, particularly Black readers and women, to see themselves in her voice and journey. While Blake uses metaphor to indict and awaken, Angelou uses it to uplift and affirm. Both, however, use metaphor to turn personal or collective suffering into poetic truth.

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Another metaphor central to Angelou's empowerment is her use of wealth and treasure imagery. Lines like "I walk like I've got oil wells / Pumping in my living room" use exaggerated metaphor to challenge the narratives of poverty, scarcity, and dispossession traditionally assigned to Black identity. By comparing herself to someone possessing immense natural wealth, Angelou inverts the metaphor of deficiency into one of abundance. This metaphor, while humorous and bold, carries a serious message: Black identity is not impoverished it is rich, vital, and self-sustaining. This use of metaphor functions as psychological resistance to the narratives imposed by dominant culture. In a sense, it is a metaphorical act of decolonization replacing imposed meanings with self-defined ones.

In contrast, Blake's metaphors often lack any redemptive turn. Even his portrayal of childhood, often associated with innocence, is laden with metaphors of exploitation and despair. The "Chimney-sweeper's cry" is not merely a sound, it is a metaphor for lost innocence, labor exploitation, and institutional failure. The image of children crying out from the soot-filled chimneys of London speaks to a society where even the most vulnerable are commodified. Unlike Angelou's triumphant metaphor of rising, Blake's metaphor is static and mournful it does not move upward or forward. This reflects his perception that without a transformation of consciousness, society is doomed to cyclic suffering. His metaphors, therefore, do not offer hope they offer warning.

A key difference also lies in how metaphor is tied to movement. Angelou's metaphors often involve rising, swelling, walking, and leaping kinetic language that suggests progress and resistance. Blake's metaphors are filled with images of confinement, repetition, and stagnation. In "London," the speaker walks through "charter'd streets" where everything is regulated, mapped, and controlled. Even movement is metaphorically restricted. The city becomes a metaphor for a kind of social claustrophobia, where every path leads to oppression.

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This metaphorical landscape mirrors Blake's broader philosophical view: that society imprisons not just the body but the soul.

Yet, both poets converge in their use of metaphor to transform the ordinary into the symbolic. Everyday experiences walking through a city or asserting one's presence become charged with political meaning. This is the power of metaphor: it allows poets to encode layers of critique, emotion, and meaning into brief, vivid phrases. It transforms the visible world into a vehicle for hidden truths. Both Angelou and Blake master this technique, though their emotional tones differ. Blake's metaphors evoke sorrow and outrage; Angelou's inspire courage and self-love.

In conclusion, metaphorical language in 'London' and 'Still I Rise'"functions as a central poetic technique through which Blake and Angelou explore the limitations placed on human potential by unjust social structures. Blake's metaphors emphasize internalized oppression, institutional hypocrisy, and the psychological toll of urban life. Angelou's metaphors highlight resilience, inherited strength, and the reclamation of dignity. Both poets, though writing centuries apart, demonstrate how metaphor can both reveal the mechanisms of enslavement and articulate a vision of liberation. In their hands, metaphor is not just literary ornament it is a weapon against silence, a mirror held to power, and a voice for those denied one.

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Voice and Tone as Resistance

Both William Blake and Maya Angelou employ voice and tone as key poetic techniques to resist and expose social inequality and the restrictive forces that limit human potential. By using voice as a means of self-expression, and tone to establish emotional resonance, both poets craft works that actively resist the systemic oppression of their respective societies. Though Blake and Angelou write in vastly different contexts and

historical periods, they share a profound belief in the power of the individual's voice to resist tyranny and injustice. While Blake's tone is one of moral outrage and sorrow, Angelou's tone conveys confidence, defiance, and resilience. Through these distinctive tones, the poets not only critique oppressive systems but also affirm the strength of the human spirit.

In Blake's "London," the tone is one of moral outrage and sorrow, which exposes the corruption and exploitation inherent in the social and institutional structures of 18th-century London. Blake's tone is deeply accusatory as he critiques the systemic inequalities he perceives in the city's streets. The speaker, who moves through the city, surveys its people and institutions, noting the suffering of the poor and the complicity of the powerful in perpetuating that suffering.

In "London," Blake doesn't just describe the city; he critiques it. The poem's voice is weary and disillusioned, reflecting the speaker's deep sadness and anger at the social injustices he sees all around him. Blake uses a somber tone to convey the oppressive atmosphere of London. Words like "chartered," "wept," and "curse" create a sense of despair and confinement. The poet in the poem isn't a detached observer. He is deeply affected by the suffering he witnesses. Blake's use of the first person ("I wander through each chartered street") puts us right there with him, making the experience personal and immediate. This directness amplifies the poem's emotional impact.

Blake's tone is also rebellious. He challenges the institutions and social structures that perpetuate misery. The "mind-forg'd manacles" suggest that people are imprisoned not just by physical constraints but by their own beliefs and attitudes, which are imposed by society. This is a direct attack on the status quo. By using a critical and mournful voice, Blake resists the indifference and complacency that allow injustice to continue. The poem is a call to awareness and a challenge to the reader to recognize and fight against the forces that oppress humanity.

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The tone here is one of sorrow and mournfulness as the poet surveys the city and observes the toll that social and economic systems have taken on its inhabitants. The repeated use of the word “charter’d” emphasizes the control and regulation of the city, suggesting that even the very streets and river have been commodified and are governed by laws that restrict the freedom of the people. Blake’s tone here conveys a sense of hopelessness, as the people are trapped not only physically but emotionally in a system that reduces them to mere products of exploitation.

As the poem progresses, Blake’s tone shifts to one of moral outrage, as he directs his anger at the institutions that sustain inequality and exploitation. In the second stanza, the speaker observes the “Chimney-sweeper’s cry” and the “hapless Soldier’s sigh” both of which symbolize the brutal labor and suffering endured by the working class. Blake’s tone is accusatory as he suggests that the Church and the monarchy, institutions that are supposed to provide care and protection for the people, are complicit in the suffering of the poor:

In the fourth and last stanza of William Blake’s poem “London” reveals a particularly powerful and loaded with social critique.

“But most through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse”
“Blasts the new born Infants tear,

“And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse”.

In this stanza, the voice becomes even more pointed and accusatory. Blake shifts from observing general suffering to focusing on specific instances of moral and social decay. The tone is bitter and condemning, reflecting the speaker's outrage at the corruption and exploitation he sees.

The use of the word "curse" is significant. It suggests a deep, pervasive corruption that poisons even the most innocent aspects of life. The "youthful Harlot’s curse" isn't just about

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individual sin; it represents the broader societal ills that force people into desperate situations. This connects to the "new born Infant's tear," highlighting the cycle of suffering that traps people from birth.

The phrase "Marriage hearse" is a powerful oxymoron that combines the joy of marriage with the finality of death. This suggests that even institutions meant to be sacred and life-affirming are tainted by the corruption and disease of London. The tone here is one of utter disillusionment and despair. Through this stanza, Blake uses his voice to directly confront and condemn the social and moral decay he witnesses. The tone is accusatory and filled with righteous anger, making it a powerful form of resistance against the injustices of his time. By highlighting these grim realities, Blake challenges his readers to recognize and question the structures that perpetuate such suffering.

In this context, Blake's tone serves as a form of resistance against the complacency and corruption of the institutions of his time. Through the use of moral outrage and lamentation, Blake exposes the hypocrisy of those in power, showing how the very institutions that should be working to alleviate suffering are instead complicit in perpetuating it. Blake's voice, filled with anguish and anger, challenges the reader to confront the inhumanity of the social systems that exist, urging them to recognize the exploitation and oppression of the poor as a moral failure.

Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" presents a contrasting tone of defiance, resilience, and empowerment. Angelou's tone is one of confidence and self-assertion, as she rejects the oppressive forces that seek to define and limit her identity. The speaker in "Still I Rise" refuses to be cowed by the historical, racial, and gender-based oppression that has sought to diminish her strength and spirit. Through her tone, Angelou expresses a powerful resistance to societal forces that would reduce her to an object of subjugation.

The tone of defiance is immediately apparent in the opening lines of the poem:

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"You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise."

The image of being trodden upon reduced to dust evokes the history of slavery and racism, where Black people, especially women, were treated as disposable and inferior. However, Angelou transforms this image of degradation into a symbol of resilience. Dust, traditionally seen as insignificant, becomes a metaphor for the speaker's unyielding strength and ability to rise above the forces that seek to diminish her. The tone of defiance is established through this simple but powerful declaration. The speaker refuses to accept the oppressive labels imposed upon her and asserts her right to rise above them.

Throughout the poem, Angelou's tone grows increasingly empowered as she affirms her identity and challenges the social constructs that have sought to limit her. The repetition of the phrase "Still I rise" serves as both a refrain and a mantra, reinforcing the speaker's determination and unshakable will. Each repetition of the phrase echoes the speaker's resistance to being defined by others or constrained by the limitations imposed on her because of her race and gender. Angelou's tone is also marked by a sense of pride and celebration of her identity. In the lines:

"Does my sassiness upset you"?
" Why are you beset with gloom?"

Angelou confronts the discomfort of her oppressors, challenging them not only for their treatment of her but also for their inability to understand her strength and confidence. The rhetorical question "Why are you beset with gloom?" suggests that the oppressors' discontent arises not from the speaker's actions but from their inability to accept a Black woman's self-assurance. Angelou's tone here is playful and sarcastic,as she mocks those who feel threatened by her strength. This tone of defiance is not born of anger but of a deep-seated belief in the inviolability of her worth and dignity.

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Moreover, Angelou's tone of empowerment extends beyond the personal to the collective. In lines such as: *I am the dream and the hope of the slave."*

The speaker positions herself as a representative of the struggles and dreams of generations of Black people who have endured slavery and oppression. In this way, the tone of empowerment becomes a collective resistance a celebration of the strength and resilience of the entire community. Angelou's voice does not merely resist the oppressors; it affirms the worth and dignity of an entire people. The speaker's assertion of self-worth becomes an act of collective resistance, affirming the humanity and dignity of all those who have been oppressed.

While both Blake and Angelou use voice and tone as means of resistance, their approaches reflect their differing historical contexts. Blake's tone of moral outrage and lamentation in "London" is shaped by the harsh realities of 18th-century industrial England, where economic exploitation and class oppression were rampant. His tone critiques the moral decay of society, particularly through its institutions, and calls for a radical transformation of the social order.

Angelou's tone, on the other hand, reflects the experience of racial and gender oppression in 20th-century America. Her tone is defiant and empowered, focusing not just on exposing injustice but also on reclaiming the power and dignity of the oppressed. Where Blake's tone seeks to awaken the conscience of the reader and inspire change, Angelou's tone affirms the unbreakable spirit of those who have been marginalized, offering a message of hope and pride.

Despite these differences, both poets use voice and tone as powerful tools of resistance, exposing the harsh realities of their societies and asserting the humanity and strength of those oppressed. Blake's sorrowful and indignant tone serves as a critique of the systems that perpetuate inequality, while Angelou's defiant and celebratory tone serves as a

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means of asserting self-worth and dignity in the face of dehumanization. Both poets recognize that the human spirit can be oppressed but never fully crushed and their poems stand as testaments to the power of voice and tone in the fight against oppression.

Repetition and Structure Emphasizing Confinement

Both William Blake in "London" and Maya Angelou in "Still I Rise" employ the techniques of repetition and structure to convey the themes of confinement, oppression, and the struggle for liberation. Through careful manipulation of these poetic devices, both poets draw attention to the dehumanizing effects of systemic inequality and create a sense of entrapment that reflects the restricted lives of their subjects. While Blake's use of repetition and structure emphasizes the suffocating grip of social, political, and religious systems, Angelou employs these techniques to showcase the tension between confinement and the eventual rise above it. The contrasting use of repetition and structure in the two poems serves to both highlight the tragedy of oppression and assert the resilience of the human spirit.

Blake's Repetition and Structure: Confinement Through Social Systems

In "London," Blake uses repetition and structure to emphasize the theme of confinement both physical and psychological imposed by the oppressive social, economic, and religious systems of 18th-century England. The structure of the poem, with its four quatrains written in iambic tetrameter, creates a sense of regularity and uniformity that reflects the rigid and monotonous control these systems exert over individuals. The measured rhythm and the repetition of key words and phrases reinforce the feeling of a world that is trapped in a cycle of exploitation and suffering. The first noticeable use of repetition is in the word "charter'd," which appears twice in the first stanza:

"I wander thro' each charter'd street,
"Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
"And mark in every face I meet

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“Marks of weakness, marks of woe.”

The word charter’d suggests that even the most basic elements of life streets and rivers are bound by legal and institutional constraints. It implies that the very fabric of the city is governed by systems of control, reinforcing the idea that the individual is not free but subject to the laws, taxes, and regulations that serve the wealthy and powerful. The repetition of the word “charter’d establishes the sense that the entire city from its streets to its river—is controlled, both physically and metaphorically, by the upper classes.

Furthermore, Blake’s repetition of the words weakness and woe” in the same stanza contributes to a sense of physical and emotional confinement. The repetition of these terms underscores the pervasive nature of suffering and reveals how deeply it has taken root in the faces of the people. The speaker’s lamentation“marks of weakness, marks of woe” implies that these marks are not only visible but permanent, as if the individuals are branded by the social and economic forces that oppress them. The repetition of these marks suggests that suffering is not temporary but embedded within the very structure of society.

In subsequent stanzas, Blake uses repetition to highlight the systemic nature of confinement. The poem second stanza mentions the *Chimney-sweepers cry* and *the hapless Soldiers sigh,* both of which represent different forms of forced labor and exploitation. The repetition of the sound cry and sigh creates an eerie echo that underscores the ongoing and never-ending nature of the suffering experienced by the oppressed. These cries and sighs become recurrent symbols of the exploitation and subjugation that persist despite efforts to resist.

Blake’s use of quatrains and a regular rhyme scheme in “London” also reinforces the sense of inescapability and monotony. The structured form of the poem contrasts sharply with the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the human suffering Blake describes. This tension between form and content serves to emphasize the rigidity and oppressiveness of societal

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structures that seek to control and restrict human potential. The regularity of the rhyme scheme, much like the oppressive systems Blake critiques, suggests a world in which there is little room for change or liberation. The poem's structure mirrors the suffocating grip of the systems that perpetuate inequality and suffering.

In contrast to Blake's portrayal of confinement, Angelou uses repetition and structure in "Still I Rise" to emphasize the tension between oppression and liberation, with the eventual focus being on resistance and empowerment. Angelou's tone is less about lamentation and more about asserting defiance in the face of confinement. Through the repetition of the phrase "I rise," Angelou creates a rhythmic assertion of resistance, emphasizing the repeated struggle for freedom and self-determination.

This phrase, repeated at the end of each stanza, serves as a declaration of self-empowerment and resilience. The repetition of these words functions almost like a mantra, a form of spiritual affirmation that helps the speaker and the reader transcend the oppressive forces that seek to hold them down. By repeating "*I rise*" in every stanza, Angelou emphasizes that the process of resistance is continuous, cyclical, and inevitable. Each iteration of the phrase reinforces the idea that no matter how many times the speaker is oppressed or subjugated, hey will rise again. The act of rising is not a singular event but a constant assertion of agency and power.

Additionally, the poem's structure mirrors this sense of repetition and unrelenting resistance. Angelou's poem is made up of seven stanzas, each ending with the repetition of "Still I rise." The regularity of the structure, in this case, serves not to imprison but to affirm the speaker's resilience. The poem builds in emotional intensity as it progresses, each stanza serving as a declaration of the speaker's ability to overcome obstacles and resist oppression. The repetition here functions not as a sign of entrapment, but as a tool of empowerment a means by which the speaker reclaims their autonomy and identity.

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In the structure of the poem, the speaker's rise becomes an act of defiance against every force that attempts to restrict or confine them. The repetition of the refrain emphasizes the importance of reclaiming one's power in the face of adversity. Unlike Blake's use of repetition to convey the enduring and inescapable nature of suffering, Angelou's use of repetition speaks to the ongoing battle against those who seek to diminish the speaker's dignity and humanity. In this way, the poem's repetition mirrors the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

The structure of "'Still I Rise' also contrasts with Blake's rigid quatrains by adopting a more flexible and free-flowing form, with varying line lengths and stanzas of different sizes. This fluidity suggests freedom and movement, qualities that stand in stark opposition to the physical and psychological confinement depicted in "London." The freedom of the poem's structure reflects the speaker's ultimate liberation from the forces of oppression.

While both Blake and Angelou use repetition to convey the themes of confinement and resistance, their approaches highlight the different ways that oppression is conceptualized in their respective societies. Blake's use of repetition emphasizes the endurance of suffering and the rigid control exercised by institutional powers. In contrast, Angelou's repetition serves to reinforce the constant and unyielding spirit of resistance, culminating in the eventual triumph of self-empowerment.

Blake's structured quatrains and regular rhyme scheme reflect the rigid and monotonous nature of the oppressive systems he critiques. The confinement in Blake's poem is total, affecting not only the bodies but also the minds of the people. The regularity of the poem's form mirrors the unchanging and oppressive environment of the city, in which there is little room for escape or transformation.

On the other hand, Angelou's poem employs a more flexible structure to symbolize the possibility of liberation. Her repetitive refrain, "'Still I rise', becomes a call to action, an

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assertion that no matter how many times the speaker is knocked down, they will continue to rise, again and again. The fluidity of Angelou's structure reflects the speaker's ability to adapt, to resist, and to transcend the limitations imposed by society.

While Blake's repetition underscores the inescapability of oppression, Angelou's repetition represents the unbreakable nature of human spirit. Both poets use repetition and structure to critique system of oppression, but while Blake's poem focuses on the tragedy of confinement, Angelou's highlights the triumph of resistance and resilience. Through their respective uses of repetition and structure, both William Blake and Maya Angelou explore the themes of confinement and liberation in powerful ways. Blake's poem "London" uses these devices to expose the suffocating effects of oppressive social, economic, and religious systems. The repetitive language and structured form evoke the monotony and rigidity of these systems, underscoring the sense of entrapment that pervades the lives of the oppressed. In contrast, Angelou's poem ""Still I Rise""uses repetition and structure to celebrate the speaker's resilience and empowerment. Through the refrain ""Still I rise"," Angelou emphasizes the unbroken spirit of resistance and the ultimate victory of personal and collective liberation.

In both poems, the poets harness the power of repetition and structure to craft a vivid portrayal of the human struggle against oppression. These techniques enable both Blake and Angelou to engage with the deep emotional and psychological impacts of systemic inequality while also offering paths toward empowerment and change.

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4.4 Synopsis of "Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou's poem "Caged Bird" is a powerful exploration of the themes of freedom, oppression, and the human spirit. The poem contrasts the experiences of a free bird and a caged bird, using vivid imagery to convey the emotional weight of confinement and the

longing for liberation. The poem begins with the depiction of the free bird, which symbolizes those who experience freedom in life. This bird is described as soaring through the sky, enjoying the warmth of the sun, and reveling in the open air. The free bird represents individuals who are unencumbered by societal constraints and can express themselves fully. Its ability to fly and sing freely illustrates a life filled with opportunities, joy, and the fulfillment of potential.

In stark contrast, the caged bird embodies the experience of oppression and confinement. Angelou uses powerful imagery to depict the caged bird's struggle. It is trapped within its cage, unable to escape and explore the world beyond its bars. The caged bird's song is not one of joy but rather a mournful expression of pain and longing. This bird's desire for freedom is palpable; it sings for the hope of liberation, conveying a deep sense of yearning and frustration. The caged bird's plight serves as a metaphor for marginalized individuals and communities who are denied their rights and freedoms. Angelou's use of repetition is significant in the poem. The refrain of the caged bird singing emphasizes the persistence of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Despite its confinement, the caged bird continues to sing, symbolizing the indomitable spirit of those who resist oppression. This act of singing becomes an assertion of identity and a refusal to be silenced. The caged bird's song resonates with the struggles of people who fight against injustice and inequality, making it a universal symbol of the quest for freedom.

The poem also highlights the psychological effects of oppression. The caged bird's experience is marked by fear and the awareness of its limitations. Angelou poignantly illustrates how confinement can stifle creativity and potential. The caged bird's longing for freedom is not just a physical desire; it represents a deeper emotional and spiritual need for self-expression and autonomy. This duality captures the essence of the human experience—where the desire for freedom is often met with harsh realities. Angelou's background as an

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African American woman adds layers of meaning to the poem. The caged bird can be seen as a representation of the African American experience, particularly during the era of segregation and civil rights struggles. The poem resonates with the historical context of oppression faced by Black individuals in America, making it a powerful commentary on race and inequality. Angelou's own life experiences inform her portrayal of the caged bird, as she draws upon the collective memory of those who have been marginalized and silenced.

In conclusion, "Caged Bird" is a poignant reflection on the themes of freedom, oppression, and resilience. Through the contrasting images of the free bird and the caged bird, Angelou captures the essence of the human struggle for liberation. The poem serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of hope and the enduring spirit of those who resist injustice. By giving voice to the caged bird, Angelou not only highlights the pain of confinement but also celebrates the strength and determination of those who continue to sing for freedom, making the poem a timeless anthem for all who yearn for liberation.

Synopsis of "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou

"Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou is a powerful and defiant poem that celebrates the resilience, strength, and indomitable spirit of Black people in the face of historical and ongoing oppression. Through vivid imagery, rhetorical questions, and a confident tone, Angelou crafts a message of hope and self-affirmation, encouraging readers to rise above adversity and claim their inherent worth. The poem opens with a direct challenge to those who seek to diminish and oppress the speaker. Angelou immediately establishes a tone of defiance and resilience, asserting that despite attempts to suppress her spirit, she will rise. The opening lines, "You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies," highlight the historical context of the poem, acknowledging the ways in which Black people have been misrepresented and marginalized. However, the speaker refuses to be defined by these falsehoods, declaring, "But still, like dust, I'll rise." This sets the stage for the poem's

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central theme: the speaker's unwavering determination to overcome adversity and assert her dignity.

In the subsequent stanzas, Angelou explores the various forms of oppression and discrimination that the speaker faces. She questions why her oppressors are "beset with gloom" when they see her walking as if she has "oil wells / Pumping in my living room." This imagery suggests that the speaker's confidence and self-assurance are a source of discomfort and envy for those who seek to control her. The reference to "oil wells" also hints at the economic exploitation and systemic inequalities that have historically plagued Black communities. Despite these challenges, the speaker remains unbowed, her spirit unbroken. Angelou continues to challenge her oppressors, questioning whether her "sassiness upset" them and why they are "girded by gloom." She acknowledges the pain and suffering that she has endured, but refuses to let it define her. Instead, she draws strength from her ancestors, invoking the legacy of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. The lines, "Just like moons and like suns, / With the certainty of tides, / Just like hopes springing high, / Still I'll rise," emphasize the speaker's connection to a larger historical and natural order. She is part of a continuum of resilience, drawing strength from the past and looking forward to a future of liberation.

As the poem progresses, Angelou incorporates more specific imagery of historical oppression, referencing slavery and the Jim Crow era. She asks, "Did you want to see me broken? / Bowed head and lowered eyes?" This confronts the dehumanizing effects of racism, highlighting the ways in which oppressors seek to strip their victims of their dignity and self-worth. The speaker refuses to conform to these expectations, asserting her right to stand tall and proud. She declares, "You may shoot me with your words, / You may cut me with your eyes, / You may kill me with your hatefulness, / But still, like air, I'll rise." This powerful stanza encapsulates the poem's central message of resilience, demonstrating that even in the

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face of violence and hatred, the speaker's spirit cannot be extinguished. In the final stanzas, Angelou celebrates the beauty, strength, and resilience of Black women. She invokes images of Black womanhood, referencing her "sexiness" and her ability to bring "the sun" as gifts. The lines, "I am the dream and the hope of the slave," connect the speaker to the legacy of slavery, suggesting that she embodies the aspirations and struggles of her ancestors. This is a powerful statement of self-affirmation, asserting the speaker's right to exist and thrive in a world that has historically denied her that right.

The poem concludes with a triumphant declaration of self-worth and liberation. Angelou repeats the refrain, "I rise," emphasizing the speaker's unwavering determination to overcome adversity. She rises "up from a past that's rooted in pain," rising as "a black ocean, leaping and wide." This imagery suggests that the speaker's strength is boundless, like the ocean, and that she is part of a larger collective of Black people who are rising together. The final lines of the poem, "I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, / Welling and swelling I bear in the tide," reinforce the idea that the speaker's spirit is indomitable and that she will continue to rise, no matter what challenges she faces. "Still I Rise" is a testament to the power of resilience, self-affirmation, and collective identity. Through vivid imagery, rhetorical questions, and a confident tone, Maya Angelou crafts a message of hope and empowerment, encouraging readers to rise above adversity and claim their inherent worth. The poem's enduring popularity is a testament to its universal appeal, resonating with people of all backgrounds who have faced oppression and discrimination. It serves as a reminder that even in the darkest of times, the human spirit can endure and triumph.

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Synopsis of "'The Little Black Boy' by William Blake.

William Blake's "The Little Black Boy", first published in 1789 as part of his collection Songs of Innocence, is a profound meditation on race, divine love, innocence, spiritual

identity, and human equality. Though structured in the voice of a child, the poem's thematic range and moral resonance surpass simple narration, engaging readers in a complex dialogue on racial consciousness and theological universality. Written during a period in England marked by slavery, colonialism, and deep-seated racial hierarchies, Blake's work emerges as both a lyrical masterpiece and a radical philosophical text. The poem is simultaneously intimate and universal, deeply personal yet unequivocally political.

The poem opens with the simple yet emotionally charged declaration by a young African boy: "My mother bore me in the southern wild, / And I am black, but O! my soul is white." These lines immediately set the tone of duality that permeates the entire poem. On one hand, the child acknowledges his racial identity—the "black" skin attributed to his birth in the "southern wild," which likely refers to sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, he emphasizes the purity of his soul, asserting that it is "white." This juxtaposition is critical: the physical blackness is positioned alongside a metaphorical whiteness of the soul, which, in Christian allegory, connotes innocence, virtue, and spiritual sanctity.

This early declaration also reveals the internalized perception of racial valuation common in Blake's era. The use of the phrase "my soul is white" is not a self-rejection, but a plea for recognition—that beneath superficial distinctions lies a divine sameness. Blake uses this tension to challenge the prevailing ideologies of the time, particularly the association of blackness with moral or spiritual deficiency. Rather than condemn the child's voice for aspiring to "whiteness," Blake empowers it as a critique of societal standards that equate skin color with spiritual worth.

The second stanza continues with the boy reflecting on his life under the blazing sun of his homeland. He states, "White as an angel is the English child: / But I am black as if bereaved of light." Again, the racial binary is invoked, but this time it is filled with sorrow and longing. The word "bereaved" signals loss—a perceived absence of light, of divine favor,

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of acceptance. This emotional complexity highlights the psychological consequences of racial exclusion. Still, Blake does not let the poem rest in despair. Instead, he uses this foundation of suffering to construct a spiritual narrative of elevation and redemption.

The boy soon recounts a conversation with his mother, a figure of nurturing wisdom and spiritual insight. She becomes a pivotal presence in the poem, not merely as a maternal figure but as a prophetess or theological teacher. In soft, comforting tones, she reframes the boy's identity and pain in light of divine truth: "Look on the rising sun: there God does live, / And gives his light, and gives his heat away." The sun here is symbolic of God's presence, love, and spiritual vitality. Rather than a burning, oppressive force, it is a benevolent one a sign of divine generosity that radiates to all people.

The poem's recurring sun imagery thus assumes dual significance. On the literal level, it reflects the natural environment of the boy's origin—Africa's intense sunlight. On the symbolic level, it represents divine warmth, energy, and enlightenment. The mother explains that their darker skin is the result of their proximity to this divine sun. They are not cursed by blackness; rather, they are blessed to bear the mark of divine intimacy. Blake's metaphor reclaims the African identity from its degraded colonial construction and repositions it as spiritually superior, more attuned to God's essence.

In this context, the sun does not burn to punish, but to prepare. The mother tells her son that earthly life is a transient stage a cloud that covers the soul. Bodies, with their racial markers, are ephemeral vessels. In the presence of God, these bodily distinctions will melt away. All people, regardless of race, will stand equal and united in the "heat" of divine love. This theological message is both comforting and revolutionary. It not only provides spiritual solace to the boy but challenges the entire edifice of racial stratification.

The mother's lesson, however, goes beyond passive endurance. She tells her son that his suffering will enable him to teach others about love: "And these black bodies and this sun-

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burnt face / Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove." This line elevates the child's racial identity into a moral mission. His blackness, far from being a burden, is a pedagogical tool—a symbol of grace and divine proximity. He is not a recipient of charity, but a giver of light. In the Christian tradition, this is a deeply Christological move: the one who suffers becomes the redeemer, the teacher.

The boy takes his mother's teachings to heart and begins to envision a future in which he and a white English child will stand together, free from the divisions imposed by the world. He imagines that he will be able to help the white boy receive God's love: "I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear / To lean in joy upon our Father's knee." This role reversal is potent. The black boy, once deemed inferior, becomes the protector, the mentor, the spiritual elder. His familiarity with divine light gives him strength to guide others. The English child, unaccustomed to this intense spiritual heat, must be shaded and led.

Blake's poetic vision here is layered and deeply subversive. On the surface, it is a tender expression of brotherhood and compassion. On a deeper level, it is an indictment of the moral immaturity of the dominant race. The white boy, symbol of colonial innocence and entitlement, is portrayed as spiritually unprepared—requiring the wisdom of his darker counterpart to access divine love. This upends 18th-century racial logic and recasts the black child as morally and spiritually advanced.

Structurally, the poem consists of seven quatrains written in a regular AABB rhyme scheme. This rhythmic simplicity enhances the song-like quality of the poem, making it accessible and resonant. The choice of a child speaker is deliberate and significant. In Blake's poetic universe, children are sacred vessels of truth. Their untainted vision allows them to perceive divine realities that adults—corrupted by society and institutional religion—often miss. In "The Little Black Boy", the child is not only the narrator but the carrier of a divine message. His innocence, shaped by suffering and love, transforms him into a spiritual sage.

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Throughout the poem, Blake uses religious symbolism to critique both social injustice and theological distortion. The sun, the cloud, the soul, and the heat are not mere literary devices but deeply encoded signifiers of Blake's radical theology. He believed that organized religion had strayed from the teachings of Christ, and he often equated divine truth with personal revelation, imagination, and love. In this light, "The Little Black Boy" becomes a poetic sermon—a call to spiritual awakening and ethical transformation.

One of the most poignant aspects of the poem is its conclusion, where the black boy envisions a scene of post-mortal unity and tenderness. "And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair, / And be like him, and he will then love me." This image is soft, redemptive, and quietly heartbreaking. The black boy still seeks the love and acceptance of the white child. Despite all the spiritual wisdom he possesses, his final desire is emotional recognition. He yearns not just for equality, but for affection. His act of stroking the boy's hair is maternal, Christlike, and symbolic of reconciliation.

Critics have offered varied interpretations of this closing image. Some view it as the ultimate realization of universal brotherhood, where love transcends race. Others see it as bittersweet, revealing the lingering scars of internalized racism. Even in heaven, the black boy seems to seek approval from the white boy. His self-worth is still tethered to the other's gaze. This tension is not resolved by the poem but deliberately left open, adding to its emotional complexity.

Blake's theological universe often blurs the lines between innocence and experience, heaven and earth, suffering and salvation. In "The Little Black Boy", he constructs a world where these oppositions are ultimately dissolved in the fire of divine love. Yet he does not ignore the historical realities of oppression. The spiritual journey the boy undertakes is rooted

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in real-world suffering. His wisdom is not abstract; it is earned through pain, endurance, and love.

In extending this poetic narrative to a broader philosophical canvas, "The Little Black Boy" exemplifies Blake's conviction that true divinity is accessible to the meek, the marginalized, and the childlike. The poem condemns the superficiality of racial discrimination while offering an alternative vision grounded in Christian universalism. It suggests that the souls worth cannot be measured by the color of skin but by its capacity for love, endurance, and truth.

Moreover, the poem has profound implications for pedagogy and moral education. It is, in essence, a lesson passed from mother to child and then from child to world. The transmission of wisdom from a black mother to her son destabilizes Eurocentric notions of authority and wisdom. In Blake's poem, the oppressed teach the oppressors; the colonized are spiritual leaders. This inversion is a radical act of poetic justice.

The poem also speaks to the psychological dimensions of race and identity. The black boys journey from sorrow to spiritual empowerment reflects a process of self-affirmation. Yet it also reveals the deep wounds inflicted by societal rejection. His yearning for love from the white boy mirrors the struggle of the oppressed to be seen, not merely as equals, but as beloved. This emotional undercurrent gives the poem its lasting power.

In historical context, "The Little Black Boy" was revolutionary. At a time when the Atlantic slave trade was thriving and pseudo-scientific racism was gaining traction, Blake dared to imagine a black child as a moral teacher and divine vessel. His poem did not merely call for empathy; it demanded transformation. It questioned the very foundations of Western religious and racial ideology.

In literary terms, the poem belongs to the genre of spiritual allegory, yet it transcends genre boundaries. Its simplicity masks a philosophical depth that continues to challenge

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readers. The characters—the mother, the boy, the sun, and the English child—are not just narrative elements; they are symbols in an intricate moral drama. Each line contributes to a layered meditation on identity, divinity, and justice.

The legacy of "The Little Black Boy" endures because it offers more than solace—it offers vision. It imagines a world where love is the only measure of worth, where suffering becomes a path to enlightenment, and where the light of the sun is shared equally by all. Blake's message, rooted in 18th-century radicalism, resonates in today's global conversations about race, identity, and equality.

In conclusion, "The Little Black Boy" by William Blake is a poetic masterpiece that transcends its time. Through the innocent voice of a child, it delivers a searing critique of racial injustice and a luminous vision of spiritual equality. Its themes of divine love, maternal wisdom, racial identity, and redemptive suffering are woven into a narrative that is both simple and profound. Blake challenges us to look beyond the surface, to recognize the soul's whiteness not as a racial ideal but as a metaphor for purity, love, and unity. In doing so, he affirms the dignity of every human being and reveals the transformative power of poetic and spiritual imagination.

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Analysis of "London" by William Blake

William Blake's poem "London" stands as one of the most powerful critiques of institutional oppression, psychological enslavement, and spiritual decay in English literature. First published in 1794 in his collection Songs of Experience, "London" is Blake's grim portrayal of the British capital during the Industrial Revolution. Through haunting imagery, harsh diction, and a tightly controlled structure, Blake exposes the manifold suffering that pervades the lives of ordinary citizens. The poems brevity does not undermine its profundity; rather, it intensifies its emotional and philosophical resonance, ensuring that every line

delivers a blow to the reader's conscience. In this analysis, we will examine Blake's use of language, structure, symbolism, and historical context to explore how "London" operates as a prophetic denunciation of systemic corruption and human despair. The poem opens with a deeply personal tone as the speaker narrates his journey through the city:

"I wander through each charter'd street, / Near where the charter'd Thames does flow."

The word "wander" suggests aimlessness, evoking a feeling of disorientation that mirrors the speaker's emotional response to what he observes. Yet the presence of the term "charter'd", repeated twice in the first two lines, reveals a more alarming idea. In 18th-century Britain, to be "chartered" often meant that a street or river was under legal or proprietary control. Blake uses this term ironically to critique the overreach of economic and political powers that claim ownership over even natural elements like the Thames. The river, a symbol of natural freedom and continuity, is now subject to the same constraints as the city streets, thus undermining the Romantic ideal of nature as a refuge from societal corruption. This notion of urban entrapment is extended further in the next lines:

"And mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe."

Blake draws a visual and auditory connection between the act of noticing and the signs of suffering. The repetition of "mark" in its verb and noun forms intensifies the speaker's helpless recognition of universal distress. The use of the word "every" signals the pervasiveness of this misery. No individual is exempt from the emotional, psychological, and perhaps even physical degradation brought on by city life. The "marks" on the faces may symbolize both visible expressions of sorrow and invisible scars inflicted by an oppressive society. The alliteration of "weakness" and "woe" reinforces the lyrical lamentation tone while emphasizing human vulnerability.

Blake does not stop at describing surface appearances; he delves deeper into the psychological enslavement of the populace:

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"In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban, / The mind-forg'd manacles I hear."

This stanza is particularly significant for its auditory imagery. Blake transitions from visual observation to the act of hearing—a shift that introduces the poem's central philosophical claim. The repetition of "every" builds a rhythm that mimics the inescapability of suffering. The cries are not only emotional outbursts; they become a chorus of anguish echoing throughout the city.

The phrase "mind-forg'd manacles" stands out as one of Blake's most famous metaphors. It captures the idea that the true chains binding the people are not physical but psychological—constructed by social conventions, religious dogma, and political ideologies. Drawing from Enlightenment ideas and opposing them, Blake argues that reason and logic, when imposed without compassion or imagination, result in the imprisonment of the human mind. The "manacles" are not only mental shackles but also suggestive of how institutions condition people to accept their suffering as inevitable, or even deserved. This internalized oppression is, to Blake, more insidious than any external constraint, because it disables rebellion at its source: consciousness. The third stanza brings Blake's criticism directly to the doors of institutional power:

"How the Chimney-sweeper's cry / Every blackning Church appalls, / And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls."

Here, Blake names the victims and the perpetrators in stark, accusatory language. The "Chimney-sweeper" represents exploited child laborers, many of whom were sold into the job at a young age. Their work not only endangered their physical health but also deprived them of childhood and education. Blake's earlier poem, "The Chimney Sweeper" from Songs of Innocence, had already addressed this issue, but in "London", the tone is darker and more accusatory.

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The “black’ning Church” is a dual image—literal and symbolic. It could refer to the physical soot accumulating on buildings in industrial London, but more importantly, it refers to the moral degradation of the Church itself. Despite its professed role as a sanctuary and moral compass, the Church is appalled not by the existence of child labor, but by the reminder of its complicity in it. The institution that should protect the innocent instead recoils from the truth of its own failure. The term “black’ning” further evokes spiritual decay, implying that the Church has lost its purity and purpose.

Blake continues his condemnation with the “hapless Soldier’s sigh,” an image that conjures both pity and horror. Soldiers, like chimney-sweepers, are portrayed as victims of an indifferent ruling class. The line “Runs in blood down Palace walls” connects the soldier’s suffering directly to the monarchy. The contrast between the anonymous, suffering soldier and the grand, impersonal “Palace” exposes the social hierarchy that values power over human life. The blood on the palace walls could also allude to revolutionary threats—the possibility that continued oppression may lead to violent rebellion, as had occurred in France just a few years prior. Blake warns that systemic violence breeds only more violence.

The final stanza shifts from public institutions to private relationships, showing how social corruption penetrates even the most intimate spaces:

“But most thro’ midnight streets I hear / How the youthful Harlot’s curse / Blasts the new-born Infant’s tear, / And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.”

This is perhaps the most jarring and grotesque imagery in the poem. The “midnight streets” create a setting of secrecy and darkness, suggesting that even the night offers no respite from suffering. The “youthful Harlot” represents both a real person—a young prostitute forced into sex work by poverty—and a broader symbol of lost innocence. Her “curse” is not merely a vulgarity; it is a bitter lament and condemnation of a society that has failed her. The fact that

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this curse impacts a “new-born Infant” connects one generation’s suffering to the next, implying a cyclical inheritance of trauma and despair.

The oxymoronic phrase “Marriage hearse” encapsulates the complete inversion of social values. What should be a symbol of love, fertility, and unity becomes entwined with death and decay. The institution of marriage, tainted by sexual exploitation, disease, and moral corruption, offers no sanctuary. This final image reinforces the poem’s central thesis: that no area of life—public or private—is untouched by institutionalized injustice.

From a structural perspective, "London" is a carefully crafted poem. It consists of four quatrains, each with an ABAB rhyme scheme, providing a sense of order and regularity that mirrors the mechanical rigidity of the city it describes. This formal control contrasts with the chaotic emotional content, reinforcing Blake’s theme of restriction. The regular meter—iambic tetrameter—is frequently disrupted by enjambment and irregular punctuation, suggesting the inability of formal systems to contain human suffering.

Blake’s poetic technique also deserves attention. He employs a mixture of sensory imagery visual, auditory, and tactile to immerse the reader in the grim reality of London life. The poem is rich in irony and allusion. The reference to the “Palace walls,” for example, subtly invokes the British monarchy, yet Blake refrains from explicit denunciation, allowing his imagery to carry the weight of his critique. Likewise, the use of “ban” in the second stanza may be read as both a proclamation and a restriction, capturing the dual functions of legal and religious edicts in maintaining the status quo.

Contextually, "London" must be understood within the framework of Blake’s broader philosophy and the historical realities of his time. The late 18th century was a period of rapid industrialization, urban growth, and social inequality in England. While the Enlightenment celebrated reason, progress, and civilization, Blake was deeply suspicious of these ideals when divorced from spiritual and moral integrity. He believed that reason, when weaponized

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by institutions, led to tyranny and dehumanization. Thus, "London" is not just a literal description of the city, but a symbolic landscape in which every street and sound testifies to humanity's fall from grace.

Blake was also influenced by revolutionary ideas. The French and American revolutions had challenged monarchic and religious authority, and Blake, though not a political radical in the traditional sense, shared their desire for liberty and human dignity. His critique is less about specific policies and more about spiritual and psychological freedom. The "mind-forg'd manacles" are ultimately more dangerous than iron chains because they condition people to accept their suffering as immutable.

In "London", the city becomes a hellish parody of itself—a place where the Church blackens rather than blesses, where palaces are stained with blood, and where birth and marriage are infected with disease and despair. This dark vision aligns with Blake's dualistic view of the world, wherein innocence is perpetually threatened by experience, and redemption is possible only through prophetic vision and moral awakening. Blake does not offer easy solutions. His role, as he saw it, was to reveal the truth behind appearances and to awaken the imagination and conscience of his readers.

The continued relevance of "London" in the modern era speaks to Blake's prophetic genius. His themes of inequality, institutional corruption, psychological manipulation, and spiritual decay are not confined to 18th-century England. Urban poverty, child exploitation, war, and moral hypocrisy remain pressing issues. The poem's capacity to evoke empathy, indignation, and reflection makes it a timeless piece of literature. Its power lies not in polemic but in its poetic precision—a distillation of complex social and existential truths into just sixteen lines.

In conclusion, William Blake's "London" is a masterclass in poetic economy and moral vision. Through evocative imagery, symbolic richness, and rhythmic control, Blake exposes

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the many layers of suffering in an urban society governed by oppressive structures. The poem's relentless progression—from street observations to institutional critique to intimate devastation—reveals how deeply systemic corruption penetrates human life. At once a lament, a protest, and a warning, "London" compels readers to confront the consequences of allowing power to dominate compassion, and reason to eclipse imagination. It is a work that remains hauntingly relevant, demanding not only to be read but to be felt, remembered, and reckoned with.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the summary of findings, conclusion, recommendations, the findings of the study, contribution to knowledge and the areas of further research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to explore the portrayal of social disparities and achievement gaps in the selected poems of Maya Angelou and William Blake, focusing on their depictions of

inequality, systemic challenges, and human potential. Both poets, though separated by centuries and cultural backgrounds, share a deep commitment to addressing social issues through their art. This exploration has revealed that despite these differences, Angelou and Blake employ poetry as a powerful medium to expose societal inequities, highlight the resilience of the marginalized, and advocate for justice and equality. Through close analysis, the study identifies the shared and unique ways in which each poet reflects and critiques the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of their respective times.

In examining the selected poems, this study found that Angelou's and Blake's works echo the themes of social stratification and personal resilience against adversity. Angelou's"'Still I Rise' and 'Caged Bird' portray the strength and hope of oppressed individuals, using powerful imagery and a resilient tone to depict the struggle for equality and personal dignity. Her poetry champions the spirit of perseverance amidst a harsh social landscape, encapsulating the defiance and inner strength of marginalized groups. Similarly, Blake's "'The Little Black Boy' and 'London'"offer profound insights into the limitations placed upon individuals by rigid social hierarchies and systemic oppression. In "The Little Black Boy"," Blake expresses a vision of spiritual equality, questioning racial and social discrimination, while in "London," he portrays the oppressive atmosphere of urban life, highlighting the plight of the working class and the impact of economic injustice.

The study also identified significant historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that shape the poets' approach to social disparities. Angelou's experiences as an African American woman in the 20th century influenced her portrayal of racial inequality, drawing on her own life to emphasize themes of resilience and empowerment. In contrast, Blake, a Romantic-era poet, was deeply affected by the socioeconomic turmoil of his time, particularly the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the rigid class structure in England. These distinct backgrounds informed each poet's approach to social critique, with Angelou's poetry resonating with

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themes of racial and gender inequality and Blake's works critiquing the socio-economic oppression of the industrial age.

Furthermore, the study revealed that both Angelou and Blake use specific poetic techniques to emphasize their messages. Angelou's use of repetitive affirmations, vivid imagery, and a commanding tone intensifies the impact of her themes, fostering a sense of empowerment. Blake's use of symbolism, simple yet profound language, and a reflective tone allows him to explore complex social and spiritual themes subtly yet effectively. These stylistic choices reinforce their respective messages on social justice, making their poems timeless and influential in promoting awareness of societal issues.

Overall, this study underscores the enduring relevance of Angelou's and Blake's poetry in addressing social disparities and achievement gaps. Their work reflects a deep commitment to challenging inequality and advocating for a more inclusive and just society, demonstrating how poetry can be a compelling vehicle for social change. The analysis confirms that despite the passage of time, the social issues explored by Angelou and Blake remain pertinent today, as their works continue to inspire readers to confront and address the inequalities that persist in modern society.

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5.2 Conclusion

This study has explored how Maya Angelou and William Blake, two poets from vastly different times and cultural backgrounds, address social disparities and achievement gaps in their works. Through a focused analysis of Angelou's "Still I Rise" and "Caged Bird" alongside Blake's "The Little Black Boy" and "London," this thesis has shown that both poets use their unique voices and stylistic techniques to bring attention to issues of inequality, oppression, and human potential. Each poet, in their own way, portrays the struggles faced by

marginalized individuals and communities, challenging societal norms and advocating for justice. Angelou's work emphasizes resilience and the triumph of the human spirit in the face of adversity, while Blake's poetry often highlights the moral and spiritual implications of social injustice.

In analyzing the social, historical, and cultural contexts behind Angelou's and Blake's poetry, this study has also illustrated the impact of their respective environments on their poetic expressions. Angelou's experiences as an African American woman in a racially segregated society inform her powerful portrayal of racial and gender-based oppression. Her work is a celebration of survival and empowerment, urging readers to rise above the constraints imposed by society. Blake, on the other hand, writes from the perspective of a Romantic poet deeply critical of the industrial and social changes in 18th-century England. His poems reflect a critique of the rigid class structures and economic exploitation that defined his time, underscoring the emotional and psychological toll of systemic oppression. Through their works, both poets call for an awareness of social injustice and an aspiration for change.

The thematic connections between Angelou's and Blake's poetry reveal that issues of inequality and limited personal potential are not confined to any single era or society. The enduring nature of these themes underscores the universal relevance of their work, with both poets offering insights that resonate across generations. Their poetry not only reflects individual and collective struggles but also provides a means of envisioning a more just and equitable society. Through their commitment to social critique and the exploration of human resilience, Angelou and Blake's works continue to inspire readers to confront the disparities and challenges that persist in contemporary society.

Ultimately, this study affirms the power of poetry as a medium for social commentary and change. Angelou's and Blake's poems serve as profound reflections on the human

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experience, highlighting the potential of literature to bring attention to social inequalities and motivate action. By examining the intersections of art, society, and justice within their works, this research contributes to an understanding of how literary expressions can transcend their historical contexts, encouraging ongoing discussions about social justice and the possibilities of human achievement.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge for further exploration and appreciation of poetry's role in highlighting social disparities and achievement gaps. First, it is essential for educators to incorporate the works of poets like Maya Angelou and William Blake into educational curricula across diverse settings. Their poems offer valuable insights into social justice issues and human resilience, making them effective tools for fostering empathy and critical thinking among students. By studying these works, learners can gain a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of inequality, and how literature can serve as a platform for marginalized voices. This approach could encourage students to engage in discussions on social issues and inspire them to become active participants in societal change.

For literary scholars, a comparative approach to analyzing poets from different periods such as Angelou and Blake can yield insights into the universality and evolution of themes related to social disparities. Future research should consider expanding the scope beyond these two poets to include other voices from diverse backgrounds and time periods. This broader exploration could uncover new perspectives on how literature addresses social and economic challenges and could highlight the distinct yet interconnected ways writers from various contexts engage with issues of justice and human potential. Additionally, interdisciplinary research that combines literary analysis with historical, sociological, and

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psychological insights may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape poets' responses to social inequalities.

In the realm of public engagement, literary organizations and cultural institutions could promote community events that highlight the works of Angelou, Blake, and other poets who address social justice themes. Poetry readings, panel discussions, and workshops focused on social disparity and achievement gaps could provide a platform for discussion and reflection, encouraging audiences to relate the insights from poetry to their own experiences. Such events could not only promote an appreciation of literature but also foster community dialogue on contemporary social issues, making literature a bridge between past and present struggles for equality.

Finally, it is recommended that future research consider the limitations of this study and build upon its framework by exploring additional poets and literary genres that address themes of inequality and achievement. Researchers should consider examining modern poets whose work resonates with themes of social justice and who use innovative techniques to engage contemporary audiences. By expanding the range of literary voices and exploring various artistic forms, future studies can continue to illuminate the powerful role of literature in challenging social norms and envisioning a more equitable world. Through these efforts, the insights and impact of poets like Angelou and Blake can be extended, helping to inspire future generations toward a greater commitment to justice and equality.

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5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the field of literary analysis by presenting a comparative examination of social disparities and achievement gaps in the poetry of Maya Angelou and William Blake. By juxtaposing the works of these two poets, who come from distinct cultural backgrounds and historical periods, this research highlights the universal relevance of themes

related to social inequality and the human struggle for dignity and justice. This comparative approach enhances our understanding of how literature, despite cultural and temporal differences, serves as a powerful medium for addressing societal issues. It also emphasizes the role of poetry as a reflection of both individual and collective experiences of marginalization, resilience, and empowerment.

Moreover, this research enriches the academic discourse on the intersection of literature and social justice by incorporating insights from social theories, particularly Social Justice Theory and Adlerian Theory. These theoretical perspectives provide a nuanced framework for analyzing how Angelou and Blake portray societal limitations and individual potential, contributing to a more layered understanding of their poetic messages. The integration of these theories not only underscores the depth of social criticism embedded in their works but also positions literature as a field interconnected with psychology, sociology, and ethics, demonstrating its capacity to engage with real-world issues.

Additionally, this study broadens the scope of social justice-oriented literary criticism by identifying the literary techniques and stylistic choices that Angelou and Blake employ to convey their messages. Through detailed analyses of imagery, symbolism, and tone, the research provides insights into how specific poetic devices can amplify the themes of inequality and social aspiration. This analysis serves as a guide for future research in exploring how other literary works address social and economic challenges, fostering a greater appreciation for literature's potential to inspire empathy and critical reflection on societal norms.

Finally, this research contributes to knowledge by reaffirming the enduring relevance of Angelou's and Blake's works in contemporary discussions on social justice. By connecting their poems to present-day issues, this study demonstrates how classic and modern literature can continue to inspire and inform efforts toward creating a more equitable society. This

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perspective reinforces the value of literature as a transformative force, capable of bridging historical divides and resonating with current social movements, thus enriching the broader understanding of literature's role in shaping social consciousness and driving societal progress.

5.5 Suggested Areas for Further Research

Building upon the insights from this study, there are several areas that future research could explore to deepen the understanding of social disparities and achievement gaps in literature. One suggested area is to extend the comparative analysis to include a broader range of poets and literary genres that address themes of social justice. Investigating other writers from diverse cultural and temporal backgrounds would allow for a more comprehensive exploration of how various societies and eras engage with issues of inequality and human potential. This could include examining poets from underrepresented backgrounds or those whose work has yet to receive extensive critical attention, which would further diversify the understanding of social disparity in literature.

Another area for further research is to explore the role of poetic form and structure in conveying social messages. While this study focuses on content and literary devices, a deeper look into how formal elements like meter, rhyme, and line structure impact the interpretation of social themes could provide valuable insights. Researchers could analyze how certain forms may lend themselves to themes of resistance, confinement, or liberation, enhancing the understanding of the relationship between form and message in socially conscious poetry.

Interdisciplinary research that combines literary analysis with insights from sociology, psychology, and political science could also be a fruitful direction. Future studies might examine how historical, economic, or psychological factors influence the way poets address themes of social justice and individual achievement. This approach would enrich the analysis

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by adding layers of context and allowing for a more multidimensional understanding of the themes present in literary works.

Additionally, future research could investigate the reception of social justice poetry in different socio-political contexts. Exploring how readers from various cultural and generational backgrounds interpret the works of poets like Maya Angelou and William Blake would offer insights into the shifting perceptions of social justice over time. Such studies could also analyze the impact of these poets' works on contemporary social movements and how their messages resonate with audiences in the digital age.

Finally, it would be beneficial for further research to explore how literature addressing social disparities can be used in educational and community programs to promote empathy and social awareness. Studies could assess the impact of incorporating social justice poetry into curricula, analyzing how engagement with such texts influences students' perspectives on social issues. By examining these areas, future research can continue to expand the understanding of literature's role in confronting inequality and inspiring societal change.

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Dark hearts. *Unpublished*

An Angel is Born. *Unpublished*

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G. Major Conferences/ Workshops Attended with Dates:

Institute of Personality Development and Customer Relationship Management (IPD - CRM). 2021.

Theatre and Media Workshop, 2018.

Leadcity University' Pro-chancellors's community service, 2021

H. Referees:

Name: Julius Onobhayedo

Occupation: Engineer

Phone Number: 0811 551 5000

Name: Victory Okeoluwa

Occupation: CEO OF Enreach Empire Entertainment.

Phone Number: 07049018100

Name: Miracle Ogechi Otiono

Occupation: Music Producer/Music Director

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The University Compliance Certification

This is to certify that the thesis by Osereme Esther ONOBHAYEDO with the matric number LCU/PG/005417 in the Department of Languages and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State is in full compliance with the approved University Format and Style.

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Signature Date

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