

Original Article

A Multifaceted Appraisal of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" as a Supportive Resource in the Accompaniment of Cancer Patients

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ABSTRACT

Background: Poetry has become a fascinating tool in recovery and healing settings, fostering emotional engagement, self-reflection, and empathy. This exploration delves into the potential of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" as a supportive resource across various contexts.

Methods: A comprehensive approach was taken for this study. Initially, a close reading of "Still I Rise" was conducted to unpack its main message, literary techniques, and their effects on readers. Next, a critical evaluation assessed how well the poem aligns with recovery and healing goals and its ability to encourage emotional processing and self-reflection. Lastly, the analysis looked at how this poem could serve individuals seeking reflection and personal growth outside of clinical environments.

Results: The close reading highlighted that "Still I Rise" delivers a potent message about resilience and triumph over hardship. The poem employs striking imagery, dynamic verbs, and repetition to underscore its central theme effectively. The critical evaluation indicated that the themes within the poem resonate strongly with therapeutic objectives, as its emotional weight can aid individuals in exploring and validating their challenging experiences. Furthermore, the poem's cultural relevance and adaptability make it suitable for various recovery and healing accompaniments and personal reflections beyond clinical contexts.

Discussion: While focusing on a single poem presents limitations—such as the subjectivity of interpretation—this study underscores the promise of "Still I Rise" as a supportive tool. Future research could broaden this inquiry by comparing the effectiveness of different poems and examining how diverse readers respond across varying backgrounds.

Conclusion: "Still I Rise" holds considerable potential as an accompaniment tool due to its capacity to connect with experiences of overcoming adversity and inspire self-affirmation. This study adds to the understanding that engaging with poetry can foster healing and personal growth in both individual contexts and survival settings.

Keywords: Poetry reading and expression, "Still I Rise," Maya Angelou, Resilience, Emotional Processing, Self-Reflection, Personal Growth

INTRODUCTION

Poetry has long been a window into human emotions and experiences, with growing evidence supporting its therapeutic value.¹ Research shows how engaging with poetry deepens emotional connection and self-understanding.^{1,2} In medical education, poetry has proven particularly valuable, enhancing students' empathy and patient care approaches.²

The impact of poetry therapy aligns beautifully with therapeutic practices focused on client empowerment.³ Group poetry sessions have shown remarkable results, particularly in uplifting women facing breast cancer.⁴ While "Still I Rise" hasn't been extensively studied in therapy, its themes of resilience naturally support therapeutic objectives.⁵ Studies show cancer patients who engage with poetry develop stronger emotional resilience and reduced anxiety.^{6,7}

Our research explores "Still I Rise" as a tool for enhanced poetry engagement, examining its themes and therapeutic potential in clinical settings. While this analysis inevitably includes personal interpretations,¹ understanding the poem's impact could guide healthcare advocates in fostering patient empowerment. Future studies might explore various poems' effectiveness across different demographics,² but this work aims to understand how "Still I Rise" can catalyze healing and self-discovery.

METHODS

Close Reading and Critical Appraisal

We developed several focused questions for thorough literary analysis, recognizing that complex texts need multiple angles of inquiry. This approach combines experience in poetry analysis,² understanding of reader responses,³ and critical evaluation methods.^{4,5} Drawing on literary expertise, we created systematic assessment frameworks for evaluating poems in therapeutic settings, addressing quality and impact factors (Supplementary Material). These tools, while preliminary, provide a foundation for future research validation.

Our analysis of "Still I Rise" followed a methodical path - examining word choice, imagery, and sound patterns before exploring themes and historical context. This process culminated in understanding the poem's core message and lasting impact.

We critically evaluated "Still I Rise" for its recovery and healing potential, focusing on how its themes, accessibility, and emotional resonance could enhance patient engagement and self-reflection during poetry sessions. We looked at the poem's universal appeal, cultural awareness, and adaptability across different recovery and healing contexts.

The analysis weighed "Still I Rise" as a tool for self-discovery and healing, considering its literary merit, alignment with recovery and healing goals, and emotional impact on patients. After careful evaluation of these factors, we recommended its use in poetry reading and expression sessions.

While this study focused on close reading rather than direct patient interaction, we acknowledged valuable feedback from a Zoom conference. The questionnaires (in supplementary materials) offer tools for future research to gather patient responses and compare different poems' effectiveness in therapeutic settings.

Leveraging Generative AI for Task Completion and Enhanced Writing

This research employed diverse AI tools to generate concepts and questions mitigating bias. Templates for well-defined prompts ensured consistent outputs. The most suitable tools were chosen: ChatGPT for conversations and brainstorming, Claude for structured content, Perplexity

for research, and Gemini for data integration., and Magisterium for theology. This approach maximized effectiveness and achieved optimal results.

This research involved carefully defining AI tasks by providing relevant background information, specifying desired output formats and content, and including any necessary constraints as special instructions. Each AI-generated concept underwent cross-validation across multiple AI platforms (*ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini*). Responses were meticulously reviewed and tweaked to ensure effective AI utilization according to principles of clarity, conciseness, relevance, consistency, and engagement. Sections directly related to analysis were focus on, while irrelevant information was removed to maintain focus.

In writing the manuscript, AI tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini were used to reword text, rearrange sentences, restructure sentences and suggest more appropriate words or phrases. Grammarly was used to correct grammatical and spelling errors.

RESULTS

Close Reading

Close reading involves thoroughly examining each line to grasp its meaning, tone, and literary devices. A quick analysis revealed resilience and triumph as key themes. Phrases like "You may" and "Still I Rise" set a tone of defiance and confidence. Notable structural features include repetition, rhetorical questions, and vivid imagery.

The language was analyzed next. Words such as "defiance" and "empowerment" shape the tone, while metaphors like "rising like moons" and phrases such as "trod me in the dirt" add depth. Repetition, particularly "Still I Rise," amplifies the core message.

Figurative language enhances imagery and creates strong mental visuals, as in "dust, I'll rise." Sensory details, like "shoot me with your words," forge a connection to overcoming adversity.

These elements underscore the poem's focus on perseverance, empowerment, and identity. Themes of resilience intertwine with self-worth, while cultural pride bolsters strength. The poem celebrates triumph over hardship and the value of self-belief.

The structure further supports these ideas. Short stanzas, enjambment, and the lack of strict rhyme create momentum and emphasize individuality. Repetition of "Still I Rise" reinforces its essence.

Lastly, analysis highlighted auditory qualities, its impact on readers, and its lasting legacy in literature.

The analysis emphasized the poem's language, tone, and musicality, highlighting its brevity and enjambment, which create momentum. Phonetic elements like alliteration ("huts of history's") and consonance ("sassiness, upset, still") enhance auditory appeal, adding emotional depth. These aspects make "Still I Rise" both impactful and engaging to read or hear.

The reader's experience and critical interpretation were explored. The poem celebrates triumph over adversity through potent diction, vivid imagery, and universally resonant themes. While lacking a structured rhyme pattern, this choice may be deliberate, emphasizing optimism and self-confidence while encouraging reflection on identity and persecution.

Contextual factors enrich understanding. Maya Angelou's experience with racism and the Civil Rights era provides vital context.¹ The poem's resistance aligns with the struggle for equal rights, resonating deeply with marginalized individuals facing similar challenges.²

Its place in literary history was examined through comparisons with other works. "Still I Rise" shares themes with African American poetry yet adopts a stronger, defiant tone. It continues the

tradition of celebrating resilience in African American literature, a legacy the poem upholds with conviction.³

Critical Appraisal

Authentic Emotional Engagement

The poem's relevance shines in reading and expressing poetry with accompaniment. Themes like engagement, emotional response, and self-discovery align with its purpose. Its direct language, organized structure, and vivid imagery enhance its suitability for various literacy levels, fostering connection.

Emotionally, "Still I Rise" evokes empathy, validation, and catharsis, creating a safe space for clients to explore emotions. Its symbolism and layered interpretations encourage self-examination and reflection, focusing on resilience and empowerment—key elements in accompaniment.

The poem respects cultural diversity, affirming every individual's value and fostering resonance across backgrounds. This inclusivity strengthens its role in diverse support initiatives. Poetry reading promotes self-expression, introspection, and understanding, contributing to meaning-making in a shared context.

Ethically, therapists must ensure informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and respect for client autonomy. Used with care, "Still I Rise" empowers clients, making it a powerful tool in supportive environments.

Universal Emotional Resonance

The appraisal examined the poem's relevance and impact beyond its original context. Its strength lies in exploring universal experiences like resilience, empowerment, identity, and progress, transcending cultural boundaries. These themes resonate deeply, making "Still I Rise" a tool for introspection and growth.

The poem celebrates cultural pride while fostering inclusivity, creating a sense of connection among diverse readers and reinforcing collective humanity. Its adaptability makes it applicable in various settings, from individual to community contexts. This versatility allows caregivers to use it for self-expression, emotional exploration, and understanding, promoting personal development.

"Still I Rise" supports accompaniment by encouraging empathy and growth. Its flexible use enables providers to customize applications for recovery and wellness. Clinical expertise ensures its alignment with therapeutic methods.¹ The poem integrates evidence-based approaches like CBT, narrative therapy, and mindfulness, making it a valuable resource.

Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" is a profound, adaptable work that transcends cultural and individual boundaries, offering transformative potential across contexts.

Suitability and Recommendation

The quality of "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou is remarkable, showcasing linguistic precision and artistic excellence. Angelou's use of repetition, imagery, and metaphor amplifies its impact, while her distinctive voice and exploration of resilience and empowerment elevate it as a literary masterpiece. The poem's themes resonate universally, addressing experiences of identity, empowerment, and the enduring human spirit.

"Still I Rise" elicits strong emotional responses, inspiring hope and courage while encouraging deep reflection. Its powerful language and poetic devices enhance its aesthetic appeal and relevance. This universality makes the poem meaningful across diverse contexts, deeply connecting with readers.

Given its exceptional quality, resonance, and emotional impact, "Still I Rise" is highly recommended for reflective reading and expression.

DISCUSSION

While the author's questions and classification framework offer a structured way to analyze poems, their subjectivity may limit participants' exploration of a poem's meaning. Rigid frameworks may overlook the unique emotional reactions and experiences cancer survivors bring to interpretation. Emphasizing categorization might also hinder the free dialogue and self-discovery vital in a supportive setting.

Acknowledging these limitations, the framework still supports poetry's potency in accompaniment. Recognizing its intricacies allows for a nuanced approach, particularly with works like "Still I Rise."

"Still I Rise" is more than a poem about overcoming hardship—it celebrates the resilient human spirit. It inspires readers to recognize their strength and surmount obstacles.

The poem is also a valuable resource for supportive care providers. Its themes of resilience, empowerment, and triumph encourage self-discovery and healing. Clear language, vivid imagery, and an organized structure make it accessible to clients from diverse backgrounds, fostering connection and engagement in accompaniment sessions.

The poem evokes feelings like empathy, affirmation, and catharsis, creating a safe space for individuals to explore their emotions and experiences of overcoming obstacles. Its depth and symbolism invite contemplation, fostering introspection and self-examination on resilience and empowerment, essential aspects of accompaniment. "Still I Rise" connects deeply with people from diverse backgrounds, promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity. It serves as a foundation for activities like self-expression, fostering empathy, and adopting new perspectives, all contributing to positive therapeutic outcomes.

For cancer survivors, Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" offers profound support. The themes of resilience and self-empowerment resonate strongly, addressing the challenges they face. Visuals like "rising from the dust" inspire a renewed sense of strength and determination in the face of illness.

The poem explores adversity, resistance, and ultimate victory, helping survivors process their complex emotions and find affirmation in their struggles. It also addresses self-esteem issues survivors may face, celebrating the inherent worth and dignity of every person. For those grappling with physical or emotional changes, "Still I Rise" reinforces their value, regardless of the challenges they encounter.

"Still I Rise" fosters resilience and a sense of inclusion, addressing feelings of isolation often experienced by cancer survivors. Its themes connect readers to a larger community of individuals who have overcome hardships, promoting collective humanity and belonging.

The poem's message encourages personal growth, urging cancer survivors to reflect on their experiences of resilience and personal development as essential parts of recovery. "Still I Rise" inspires introspection and self-reflection, helping individuals navigate their journey toward healing.

However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The analysis focuses solely on "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou, limiting the applicability of findings to other poems or genres.² While close reading and critical appraisal provide valuable insights, these interpretations can be subjective, influenced by the reader's background and experiences.¹ Additionally, the study emphasizes the text over the reader's personal experiences and external factors that might shape their interpretation.²

To evaluate the effectiveness of "Still I Rise" as a supportive tool, a pilot study with a single cancer survivor is proposed. The poem would be shared electronically, allowing the participant to read it independently. Following this, they would complete a self-guided questionnaire exploring their thoughts, emotions, and reactions to the poem.

Analyzing the participant's responses would provide insights into whether the poem facilitates self-exploration, emotional processing, and engagement with resilience and empowerment. This initial study would help determine the feasibility of broader research on the poem's effectiveness for cancer survivors.

The use of AI to generate research to generate questions and concepts was hampered by technical and resource limitations. The study faced significant limitations in preserving AI output due to subscription-based access restrictions. The researcher has an incomplete record of intermediate AI responses and tweaks due to focus on the final desired output. Thus as part of recommendations use of AI should entail secured comprehensive AI platform subscriptions, develop standardized documentation protocols and checked on reproducibility.

Relying solely on literature searches, AI, and the researcher's experience to evaluate poetry analysis is limiting. Literature may not capture the full range of reader responses or nuanced critical methods. AI lacks human interpretation and emotional resonance. Researcher bias can also skew evaluations. A more holistic approach should include qualitative methods, such as interviews with diverse readers vis a vis validation of questionnaire as instrument to enrich understanding and ensure a more comprehensive evaluation framework.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the feasibility of using Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" for close reading, critical appraisal, and expressive purposes. Close reading revealed the central theme of resilience, conveyed through vivid imagery, impactful language, and literary techniques. Critical appraisal highlighted the poem's alignment with session objectives, fostering emotional exploration, introspection, and empowerment in an accompanying environment. Its universal themes and ability to promote connection and self-reflection make it a powerful tool for personal growth.

However, the study's focus on a single poem and the subjectivity of interpretation highlight the need for further research. Future studies could compare the effectiveness of different poems, examine reader responses across diverse demographics, and evaluate the long-term impact of poetry accompaniments on personal development.

Despite these limitations, "Still I Rise" shows great potential as a support resource. Its themes of overcoming adversity and inspiring strength make it a valuable tool for fostering resilience and emotional healing. Further research on poetry's role in enhancing well-being is warranted, with "Still I Rise" exemplifying the profound impact literature can have on the human spirit.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Tanael SB. Supplementary material: a multifaceted appraisal of Maya Angelou's *Still I Rise* as a

supportive resource in the accompaniment of cancer patients. *Philipp J Oncol* [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2025 Jun 9];1(1):e010s. Available from: <https://www.philsoconc.org/post/a-multifaceted-appraisal-of-maya-angelou-s-still-i-rise-as-a-supportive-resource-in-the-accompani-1>

ETHICS STATEMENT

While derived from anonymized proceedings of the monthly ONCOLLABORATE conference, this manuscript did not undergo formal ethics board review. However, the authors ensured the privacy of the case study participants was fully protected.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

SBT, from conceptualization, review of literature, design of close reading and critical appraisal tools, writing and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to commercial or financial relationships.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This article reflects the views and findings of the authors alone and does not necessarily represent the official position of the author's affiliated organizations, the publisher, editors, or reviewers. We encourage readers to remember that the content presented here does not constitute endorsement or approval by any of the entities above.

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DECLARATION OF USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In the preparation of this manuscript, Gemini 1.5 Flash and Grammarly were utilized to refine grammatical structure and phrasing. The authors have thoroughly reviewed, edited, and verified all content generated by AI, taking full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final published work. The use of AI did not extend to data analysis, interpretation of results, or the drawing of scientific conclusions. All scientific content, intellectual contributions, and research findings presented herein are solely those of the authors.

In addition, generative AI tools—including ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, and Gemini—were intentionally employed to support the development of the two structured question sets and the classification scheme presented in the supplementary materials. These tools were used to generate prompts, refine question clarity, organize thematic categories, and propose preliminary classification criteria grounded in literary, clinical, and pastoral-spiritual dimensions.

The purpose of employing AI in this context was to initiate a systematic approach to critically appraising poems that may be of therapeutic value to patients, particularly in settings of accompaniment, reflection, and meaning-making. The question sets and classification framework

are **exploratory and provisional**, serving as a conceptual foundation for future work. The authors acknowledge that further development, field testing, and formal validation are necessary to ensure the reliability and applicability of their approach in diverse clinical and spiritual care contexts.

All AI-assisted outputs were critically reviewed, revised, and contextualized by the authors. Final editorial and scholarly responsibility lies entirely with the human authors, who affirm the ethical, intellectual, and clinical integrity of the work.

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