

= Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well =

Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well is a book of poems by American author Maya Angelou , published by Random House in 1975 . It is Angelou 's second volume of poetry , written after her first two autobiographies and first volume of poetry were published . Angelou considers herself a poet and a playwright , but is best known for her seven autobiographies , especially her first , I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings , although her poetry has also been successful . She began , early in her writing career , alternating the publication of an autobiography and a volume of poetry . Although her poetry collections have been best @-@ sellers , they have not received serious critical attention .

Oh Pray is divided into five parts and consists of 36 poems . The volume is dedicated to " Paul " . Like many of Angelou 's poems , the poetry in the volume has been characterized as light verse . They contain identifications with ordinary objects and universal identifications . Oh Pray has received mixed reviews from critics ; one critic states that the poems in it are best if read aloud . They focus on themes of love , insight , and tension , and on overcoming difficulties . Angelou writes about ordinary objects and experiences , and with deep feelings , about a variety of racial themes and concerns .

= = Background = =

Oh Pray My Wings are Gonna Fit Me Well is Maya Angelou 's second volume of poetry . She studied and began writing poetry at a young age . After her rape at the age of eight , as recounted in her first autobiography I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969) , she dealt with her trauma by memorizing and reciting great works of literature , including poetry , which helped bring her out of her self @-@ imposed muteness . Angelou 's film Georgia , Georgia , produced by a Swedish film company and filmed in Sweden , was the first screenplay written by a Black woman , and was released in 1972 . Angelou married Welsh carpenter and ex @-@ husband of Germaine Greer , Paul du Feu , in San Francisco in 1973 .

Although Angelou considered herself a playwright and poet when her editor Robert Loomis challenged her to write Caged Bird , she has been best known for her autobiographies . Many of Angelou 's readers identify her as a poet first and an autobiographer second , but like Lynn Z. Bloom , many critics consider her autobiographies more important than her poetry . Critic William Sylvester agrees , and states that although her books have been best @-@ sellers , her poetry has " received little serious critical attention " . Bloom also believes that Angelou 's poetry is more interesting when she recites it . Bloom calls Angelou 's performances " characteristically dynamic " , and says that she " moves exuberantly , vigorously to reinforce the rhythms of the lines , the tone of the words . Her singing and dancing and electrifying stage presence transcend the predictable words and phrases " .

Angelou began , early in her writing career , alternating the publication of an autobiography and a volume of poetry . Her first volume of poetry , Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ' fore I Diie (1971) , which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize , followed her first autobiography , and Oh Pray followed the publication of her second autobiography , Gather Together in My Name (1974) . Her publisher , Random House , placed the poems in Oh Pray in her first collection of poetry , The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou (1994) , perhaps to capitalize on her popularity following her reading of her poem " On the Pulse of Morning " at President Bill Clinton 's inauguration in 1993 . Also in the 1994 collection was Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ' fore I Diie and two more published after Oh Pray , And Still I Rise (1978) and Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing ? (1983) . Angelou 's publisher placed four more poems in a smaller volume , entitled Phenomenal Woman , in 1995 .

= = Themes = =

Many of Angelou 's poems can be characterized as light verse . For example , Hagen characterizes " On Reaching Forty " as a light rumination about growing older . Angelou expresses sadness about

having already reaching milestones in her youth , and ends the poem unexpectedly by humorously and ironically expressing admiration for those who die early . In this volume and in others , Angelou pairs poems together (" America " and " Africa " ; " Communication I " and Communication II ") to strengthen her themes .

The poems in this volume , like her poems in other volumes and contexts , contain universal identifications with ordinary objects . For example , " The Telephone " describes her relationship with an object , and how it has intruded upon the silence and solitude of her life . In this poem , which is three structured stanzas long , Angelou demands that the telephone ring , despite her resentment of its intrusion and her dependency upon it . She uses familiar and feminine metaphors , and themes also found in blues songs , such as the colors black and blue and weekend loneliness . In the poem " Poor Girl " , Angelou uses the vernacular to express universal themes , in the voice of a teenage girl who has lost her boyfriend .

Scholar Yasmin Y. DeGout cites " The Couple " as an example of Angelou 's practice of subtly including more than one level of meaning in her poems , of her ability to translate her personal experience into political discourse , and her placement of themes of racism and liberation . Angelou combines liberation ideology and poetic technique to challenge society 's concepts of gender identity , especially in how it affects women . She varies the length of the poem 's lines , beginning in the first stanza and continuing throughout the poem , to convey ambiguity and doubt , and to demand that the reader question their perceptions of gender and power . " The Couple " , starting in its second stanza , attacks class @-@ based ideals of masculinity in society . The poem ends by demanding that the social constructs surrounding gender and class end , and insists that human survival depends upon recognizing shared emotions and experience , regardless of one 's gender or position in society .

= = Poems = =

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= = Critical response = =

Kathryn Gibbs Harris , in her review in Library Journal , states that the poems in Oh Pray , like " Child Dead in Old Seas " , are good heritage ballads with excellent lyrics . She calls " This Winter Day " colorful and pleasant , and states that it reminds her of a genre painting . She , like many critics about much of Angelou 's poetry , says , " The poems work best read aloud " . The critic in Booklist considers the way in which the poems are organized distracting , but says that it " does not diminish the street @-@ wise soundings infused with a particular pain and pride " . According to the review , the rhyme in " Here 's to Adhering " is simple , but its structure is deceptively complex . The critic also says , " The sardonic quality of ' On Reaching Forty ' reduces age to a minor milestone ; nationhood is elevated to a higher yet deeper plane in ' Africa ' and in ' America . ' ' The Pusher ' is a typical Angelou acceleration , but it is ' Chicken @-@ Licken ' that causes a dead halt " . Poetry critic Sandra Gilbert says that Angelou 's poems , " when they 're not awkward or stilted , are corny " .

According to a reviewer in Choice , the poems in Oh Pray focus on themes of love , insight , and tension . They also focus on " the black condition celebrated triumphant over difficulties " . The reviewer finds some poems uneven , sometimes banal , also best if read aloud , and meant to " be reread and laughed over and thought about " . Reviewer James Finn Cotter states that this volume suffers from " the dangers of success " that happen when poets gain too much fame too soon . Gilbert blames Angelou 's publishers for capitalizing on her success as an autobiographer , stating that Oh Pray " ... is such a painfully untalented collection of poems that I can 't think of any reason other than the Maya myth for it to be in print " . Writer Lyman B. Hagen responds to Gilbert 's criticism by stating that Angelou had been a poet long before she began writing prose and that Angelou 's audience is comfortable with her sparse lines . He insists that Angelou 's critics have missed the power of her poems ' message in her apparently simple lines . Hagen calls Angelou 's

poetry light verse . He states that she writes about ordinary objects and experiences , and with deep feelings , about a variety of racial themes and concerns .