

= Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing ? =

Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing ? is author and poet Maya Angelou 's fourth volume of poetry , published by Random House in 1983 . It was published during one of the most productive periods in Angelou 's career ; she had written four autobiographies and published three other volumes of poetry up to that point . 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 . Many of the poems in Shaker focus on survival despite threatened freedom , lost love , and defeated dreams . Over half of them are love poems , and emphasize the inevitable loss of love . " Caged Bird " , which refers to Angelou 's first autobiography , is contained in this volume .

= = Background = =

Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing is Maya Angelou 's fourth 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 .

The publication of Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing occurred during one of the most productive periods of Angelou 's career . She had written songs for Roberta Flack and had composed movie scores . She had written articles , short stories , TV scripts and documentaries , autobiographies , and poetry , she produced plays , and was named a visiting professor of several colleges and universities . Angelou was given a multitude of awards during this period , including over thirty honorary degrees from colleges and universities from all over the world . In 1981 , after ten years of marriage , Angelou and her husband Paul du Feu divorced . Angelou returned to the southern United States , where she accepted the lifetime Reynolds Professorship of American Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston @-@ Salem , North Carolina , and taught a variety of subjects that reflected her interests , including philosophy , ethics , theology , science , theater , and writing .

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 them . Bloom calls her performances " characteristically dynamic " , and says that Angelou " 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 's began , early in her writing career , alternating the publication of an autobiography and a volume of poetry . By the time Shaker was published in 1983 , she had published four autobiographies , eventually going on to publish seven . Her publisher , Random House , placed the poems in Shaker 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 were her three previous collections , Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ' fore I Diie (1971) , Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well , and And Still I Rise (1978) , along with I Shall Not Be Moved , published in 1990 . Angelou 's publisher placed four poems in a smaller volume , entitled Phenomenal Woman in 1995 .

= = Themes = =

According to critic Carol E. Neubauer , like Angelou 's previous poetry collections , " Shaker celebrates the ability to survive despite threatened freedom , lost love , and defeated dreams . Neubauer also states that the poems in this volume are full of " the control and confidence that have become characteristic of Angelou 's work in general " . Their tone moves from themes of strength to humor and satire , and captures , more than her previous poetry , the loneliness of lovers and the sacrifice that many slaves experienced without succumbing to defeat or despair .

Over half the poems in Shaker focus on love and doomed relationships . In " The Lie " , for example , the speaker feels compelled to use deception to protect herself from her lover 's abandonment . In the brief poem " Prelude to a Parting " , the speaker instinctively senses the inevitable and implicit end of her relationship , especially when her lover draws away from her touch . Not all the love poems in the volume focus on dishonesty or deception , but most , such as the title poem " Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing ? " , describe the inevitable loss of love .

The rest of the poems in Shaker emphasize determination despite the " unabiding anguish over the oppression of the black race " , and deal with the cruel treatment of slaves in the South . In the poem " Family Affairs " , Angelou uses the German fairy tale " Rapunzel " as a framework to summarize her painful origins of slavery and to compare Black / white tensions . Critic J. T. Keefe calls it " a wise and deeply felt poem " . Neubauer considers Angelou 's poem " Caged Bird " , which she says " inevitably brings Angelou 's audience full circle " with her first autobiography , as the most powerful poem in the volume . Keefe agrees , and calls it Angelou 's " central motif " and a rhythmical and hypnotic chant that cries out to be sung " . Neubauer states , " Her poems in Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing imply that as long as such melodies are sung and heard , hope and strength will overcome defeated dreams " . Scholar Yasmin Y. DeGout agrees , and cites " A Plagued Journey " as an example of Angelou 's themes of liberation found in all her poetry . In the poem , Angelou calls for a reconsideration of the beliefs that limit human beings , and insists that " hope allows action and forces engagement with the world " .

= = Reviews = =

Janet B. Blundell , in Library Journal , finds Angelou 's poetry lacking in comparison to her prose , and states , " The reader is jarred by stilted , ' poetic ' language and stilted , sing @-@ song , school @-@ girlish rhyme " . She finds the best poems in Shaker are the ones that are structured like blues music . Mary S. Cosgrove , in Horn Book Magazine , calls the poems in Shaker " a lyrical outpouring of seasoned feelings from the heart and mind " , and calls Angelou " musical , rhythmical , and enchanting " . J.T. Keefe , in World Literature Today , says about Shaker " : " Deceptively light and graceful , Maya Angelou 's poems are lyrical , emotional , melancholy " . Keefe compares Angelou 's poems to music , especially the music of French singer Édith Piaf , and also states , " These poems are full of shining hurt as , like curving scimitars , they skillfully pierce the hearts of their readers " .

= = Poems = =

Shaker , Why Don 't You Sing ? , which contains 28 poems , is dedicated to Angelou 's son , Guy Johnson , and to her grandson , Colin Ashanti Murphy Johnson .