ALIENATION

... prominence is given to a term that had previously had no particular psychoanalytic force - - alienation. The term allows precarious bridges to be built between clinical psychiatry, popular notions of madness, Hegelian metaphysics and the Marxist tradition in social theory.

The mirror-bemused infant setting forth on his career of delusional ego building is condemned to the madness of the madhouse (alienation). Lacan does not spare the child these rigors. But the Entremündung of Hegel and Marx, familiarly translated into French as alienation, provide the infant’s wretchedness with a certain philosophical dignity. . . . [Malcolm Bowie, Lacan, 1991, p. 24]

The alienation of the individual is inalienable. One cannot banish the world, if alienation is present in one’s psyche. Whatever one does, one cannot dismiss it [alienation]. It is too easy to detest it or abjure it but it is too hard to shed it. In this context, the pointed observation of Malcolm Bowie is worth quoting here [Lacan, 1991, p. 25]:

All beings, Lacan reminds us, are born prematurely. It takes them a long time to acquire full motor control and to become capable of successful volitional acts. The mirror image is a mirage of the “I” and promises that the individual’s latent powers of coordination will eventually be realized; indeed it has a role of triggering the development of these. So far so good. But the “alienating destination” of the “I” is tirelessly intent upon freezing a subjective process that
cannot be frozen, introducing stagnation into the mobile field of human
desire. . . .

A strict class society, carried to caste extremes, brings with it relief from
competitive tension, but it aggravates the frustrations of initiative and choice of one’s
own work; in addition, the man of the lower class must internalize feelings of
inferiority and cultivate a degree of self-hatred and contempt. In this sense, he is
internalizing feelings and attitudes towards himself of self-destruction. And industrial
society of the present age brings its characteristic mode of alienation to the worker or
labourer.

Ely Chinoy’s observation, in this regard, is worth quoting here [Automobile
Workers and the Assembly Line, 1955, p. 126]:

Nearly four-fifths of . . . workers cherished the dream of leaving the
factory forever. Mostly they longed for the independence of small
businessmen. As he approached middle age, the worker sadly
renounced his dream, and resigned himself to the assembly line. This
alienation of man from the machine, which stands against him,
imposing its rhythm on him so that he is satellite to its motions, is
something, which is common to all industrial societies, whether they
be capitalist or socialist. . . .

Furthermore, the statement of Walker and Guest read appropriately well in
conjunction with the argument of Ely Chinoy adduced above [The Man on the
Assembly Line, 1952, p. 52]:

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The work isn’t hard, it’s the never ending pace . . . The guys yell “hurrah” whenever the line breaks down . . . You can hear it all over the plant. . . .

The job gets so sickening - - day in and day out plugging in ignition wires. I get through with one motor, turn around, and there’s another motor staring me in the face. It’s sickening. . . .

This is the fate of every worker. In this machine age, he is driven to boredom. Perforce, he has to submit himself to mechanicalness, dailiness, and dull daily routine. As a result, he is reduced to the position of an automaton. He becomes like everyone else a mere cipher in the cog of the society. In fact, he turns into a squarerootofminusone. In fine, he loses his individualism. If he is to be a bohemian non-conformist, he suffers alienation. This is the fate of Maya Angelou while serving under the White woman, Mrs. Cullinan, as described by her in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.

But Marx reads a qualified positive aspect of alienation of the individual thus, which carries the tinge of the negative side also. The relevant passage makes interesting reading in the context, and it is worth quoting here [Lacan, 1991, pp. 24-25]:

For Marx, the alienation of the individual from his labor, not only acts as a prototype for all other alienated relationships (between man and nature, between the individual and society, between the individual
his own body) but gives a clear indication of where the route towards reintegration lies. . . .

The migration of the term [alienation] from level to level helps him [the worker] to produce both an extremely broad map of human society and a cogent political message. . . .


For Lacan, on the other hand, the prototypical alienation that occurs at the mirror stage is seen weaving its way haphazardly through society. .

He starves his hypothesis of the clinical data that could test its organizing power, and produces. . . .

On his part, Lacan has this to say [Lacan, 1991, p. 25]:

Thus, this Gestalt - - whose pregnancy should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable - - be these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own fabrication tends to find completion [Emphasis as in the Original]. . . .

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At this juncture, a brief analysis of the general background related to alienation becomes imperative and necessary. Moreover, there are the overlapping and continuities of the absurd and alienation.

Alienation is self-imposed. It arises because of one’s non-conformist postures and one’s unwillingness to acquiesce to the diktat of the society and the Establishment. Lewis S. Feuer argues this point [“Leadership and Democracy in the Collective Settlements of Israel”, in Studies in Leadership, 1950, p. 375]:

He reacted to communality by going off by himself, by standing aloof.
. . . Then people show up as petty, ludicrous, selfish, malicious, cruel: You fall into an attitude of general contempt; you hate and become still further hated from your fellows. It is a closed circle, a squirrel cage from which there is no release. . . . Pettiness and selfishness creep in, even in the midst of their community based on equality and fraternity [My Emphasis]. . . .

This is what happens to Maya Angelou and other Black women in America, which proclaims in its Preamble to the Constitution that all men are born equal. The Black men and Black women suffer degradation, degeneration, dehumanization, and experience alienation. This condition of alienation is acute and sharp in the case of Black women such as Maya Angelou.

Reverting to the general discussion on alienation with the overlapping and continuities of the absurd. It ought to be stressed that the neurotic suffers from self-imposed alienation. The mentally deficient person experiences alienation. Similarly,
the person of superior talents and competencies suffers alienation at the hands of the less capable and minimal-knowledge persons. Racial determinants cause alienation. In fact, the alienation of race is distinct and irreducible to the other modes. The Black writers have told of the Veil, which exists between them and White men. W. E. B. du Bois argues thus [The Souls of Black Folk, 1953, p. 209]:

Within the Veil he [the Black] was born said I; and there within shall he live - - a Negro [Black] and a Negro’s [Black’s] son. . . .

This racial alienation could co-exist with a planned socialized economy; it has found its place in socialist parties and labour movements. The first generation immigrant suffers alienation in an alien land. Furthermore, the alienation of generations appears especially in the gerontocratic societies of the Far East. The youth in the Japanese Zengakuren, for instance, find little to admire in the older generation; they must look for their inspiration to persons outside their national history or create their own ideas.

At this point, it becomes necessary to make a note on the concept of alienation, which is defined thus [The New Encyclopedia Britannica, vol I (1988), 270]:

[Alienation] is the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, product of work, or self. Despite its popularity in the analysis of contemporary life the idea of alienation remains an ambiguous concept with elusive meanings. . . .
The term, *alienation*, is generally accepted to refer to powerlessness, in the sense that one’s destiny is not under one’s control. The other dimensions and constructed scales to measure statistically a person’s degree of alienation are meaninglessness, purposelessness, *normlessness*, cultural estrangement and social isolation.

Eric Josephson and Mary Josephson define alienation thus [*Introduction to Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society*, 1962, p. 13]:

> [Alienation is] an individual feeling or a state of dissociation from self, from others and from World at large. . . .

For an existentialist, alienation is a state reached after paying a price for choosing, willing, and deciding to be free from an external control that comes from institutions, events, laws, people, and ideas external to himself. If such a price is not paid, then alienation or isolation is not attained and suffered. Thus, alienation is the state of liberation from all forces other than the choosing self; it is the servitude forced on the individual who is conscious that he is rejecting a concept that must exist since he is always conscious of being forced to reject that concept continually.

In fact, the great problems of contemporary society have all been described as arising from different modes of alienation. Edmund Fuller argues thus [*Man in Modern Fiction*, 1958, p. 3]:

> . . . man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine, and ruin, but [sic] from inner problem . . . a conviction of isolation, randomness, [and] meaninglessness in his way of existence. . . .
The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation, which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the credibility loss or gap, the compartmentalization of life, the stunning of personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness in life, and so on. The pervasive sense of alienation has corroded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in spirit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. His very notion of reality has profoundly changed. Consequently, he suffers from an acute sense of *rootlessness*, which may manifest itself as the alienation from oneself, from one’s own fellow men, and from nature: The injuries inflicted and the scars left on his psyche make him realize only of his hopelessness *Angst*-ridden and utterly hopeless, he finds life infinitely vast, without any proper linkage to hold it together from falling apart. Painfully aware of his precarious position, man experiences today severe limitations arising out of randomness and alienation.

As stated earlier, there are different kinds of alienation that characterize the modern people. They are the following:

1. The Artistic Alienation
2. The Self-imposed Alienation
3. The Alienation of the Superior Intellect
4. The Alienation of the Inferior Intellect
5. The Alienation of Race
6. The Alienation of the Neurotic
7. The Alienation of the Generations
8. The Alienation of the Class Society
9. The Alienation of the Competitive Society
10. The Alienation of the Mass Society
11. The Alienation of the Industrial Society

These eleven different kinds of alienation are independent of one another.

Lewis Feuer argues to the point thus [Quoted in *Alienation: A Case Book*, 1983, p. 88]:

These modes of alienation are independent of [sic] each other. A class society need not be a competitive one; there have been competitive economies, which were founded on handicrafts, and mass societies, such as the Indian and Chinese, which were pre-industrial. . . .

Again the alienated person finds himself at odds with popular culture. He attaches a low value to goal and beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society. The alienation of self-estrangement, as is the case with that of Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is equated with the notion of other-directedness. But then, the inner-directed and other-directed both share the alienated status.

One’s behaviour is dependent upon future rewards. The person becomes self-estranged because he enjoys nothing for its own sake. There is a sound insight in this formulation, but it has nothing to do with other-directedness and inner-directedness. The condition of Maya Angelou is precisely this. At this point, a brief consideration of the absurd becomes necessary as it overlaps and continues with alienation. Two statements one by Eugene Ionesco and the other by Albert Camus capture the spirit of
the absurd. The first one runs thus [“Wars les armes de la ville”, in Casiers de la Campagne Madeline Renaud-Jean-Louis Berrault, 1957, p. 7]:

Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless. . . .

The second argument of Camus reads well in conjunction with the assertion of Ionesco and it runs thus [Quoted in The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, 1981, p. 132]:

“What in fact is the absurd man?” Camus asks. “He who, without negating it does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live without appeal, to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits [Italics as in the Original]. . . .

Modern man enslaves himself to mechanicalness, dailiness, and dull daily routine. All the human values, ethical tenets, moral principles, and spiritual directions are lost on him. He drifts away from the moral and spiritual centre, and occupies the place of his choice in the circle of materiality. These result in frustration and depression. All these have left a great impact on the minds of people, particularly the intellectuals.

Moreover, in the modern world the merchant in man is awakened. He turns into a money-conscious person. He is aware of only one thing and that is how to spin more dollars in every hour of his existence. He is prepared to sacrifice his
individuality, if he could earn more and hoard more. He indulges, therefore, in
cutthroat competition and men rivalry. He enslaves himself to mechanicalness,
dailiness, and routineness. He transforms by his extreme materialism the world into
one of degeneration, degradation, and dehumanization. In fine, the world today is a
Kafkan wasteland world. To such a malaise is traceable the current absurd conditions.

The Absurdists rebel against the essential beliefs and values, both of
traditional culture, and conventional literature. Therefore, accepted norms, principles,
and prescriptions carry no conviction to the Absurdists.

Furthermore, the human being in his existence confronts mysteries, doubts,
uncertainties, irresolvables, and unanswerables. He witnesses deaths. He experiences
growth, mutability, change, decay and death. He suffers pain and anguish. He is
constantly aware of Angst that torments him continually. In fact Angst is cancerous,
and it affects everyone, and spares none. When he addresses the universe for answers
to his existential predicaments the universe remains passive. In fact, the universe
remains totally unaffected by the joys and sorrows of the goings-on of life. Albert
Camus argues to the point [Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942, p. 18]:

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man
feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile.

This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly
constitutes the meaning of Absurdity.

The term, absurd, means anything that is ridiculous, out of harmony with
reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, and illogical. But the Absurdists
place the accent on the senseless irrationalism, senselessness of life, the inevitable
devaluation of ideals, purity and purpose, and the irrationality of the human condition.
The Absurdists study the individual as an alienate cast in the universe that remains
totally impassive and unconcerned. The universe is indifferent to his feelings
thoughts, pains and sorrows, sufferings, plights and predicaments, and Angst -- the
stresses and strains -- the Sturm-und-Drang.

The universe appears to the Absurdist to possess no truth, value, or meaning.
In the context of man’s existence originality ending in void, and ending in
nothingness, all the actions of man end in negation. Moreover, existence turns to be
one of anguish, and therefore revolves around the absurd. The Absurdists find that no
rational answers are there for the mysteries, doubts, uncertainties, irresolvables, and
unanswerables. Like Melville’s Bartleby, the Scrivener, they confront a blank wall,
which permits no probes beyond it. But what the Absurdists are conscious of the
inevitability of these human conditions and the existential predicaments. It is the
inevitability that is repetitive, and in that repetitiveness is captured the eternity that
defies definition.

Moreover, just as Sisyphus rolls the round stone up to the peak of the hill only
to find it roll down. He repeats this act of rolling the stone up to the peak of the hill
knowing the inevitable outcome. Similarly if one confronts the Absurdist and
senseless condition of modern life, the existential predicaments, and mysteries,
doubts, uncertainties, irresolvables, and unanswerables, cheerfully and game fully he
becomes an Absurd Hero like Sisyphus. On the other hand if he tries to avoid them in
the spirit of a defeatist then he turns into an Absurd Fool.
At this point, it ought to be recorded that one detects the overlapping and continuities of the Absurd and existentialism. For instance, the Absurdists and the atheist existentialist headed by Jean-Paul Sartre recognize that at the root of one’s being there is nothingness. They argue that man has the liberty, and the free will, and the need to constantly create his own self in a succession of choices that leads him form one state of absurdity to another. The hope of salvation, they argue, is an evasion of suffering and anguish that spring from the reality of the human condition. Arthur Adamov through a brilliant statement of the metaphysical anguish that point to the similar thought processes on this inevitable human condition, defining the mind and art of the Absurdists and the atheist existentialists, and it runs thus [L’Aveu (The Confession), 1946, p. 19]:

What is there? Know first of all what I am. But who am I? All I know of myself is that I suffer. And if I suffer it is because of the origin of myself there is mutilation, separation. I am separated, what I am separated from - - I cannot name it. But I am separated. . . .

The separated alienation is tormented by his private obsessions. Franz Kafka in his trilogy, The Trial, Amerika, and The Castle, and in his short fictions exemplifies this. Through his fictions and short fictions Franz Kafka meticulously and exactly describes nightmares obsessions, anxieties, anguish, and guilt feelings of a sensitive human being lost in a world of conventions and dull routine.

This is precisely the experience of Maya Angelou after Mr. Freeman raped her. Her obsession with rape and violence persists with her though she was raped at
the age of eight. Martin Estlin comments thus [The Theater of the Absurd, 1976, pp. 344-345]:

The images of Kafka’s own sense of loss of contact with reality and his feelings of guilt at being unable to regain it - - the nightmare of K accused of a crime against a law he has never known; the predicament of that other K, the surveyor, who has been summoned to a castle he cannot penetrate - - have become the supreme expression of the situation of modern man. . . .

The pointed observation of Ionesco on Kafka reads well in conjunction with that Martin Estlin, quoted above, and it runs thus [“Wars les armes de la ville”, in Casiers de la Campagne Madeline Renaud-Jean-Louis Berrault, 1957, p. 4]:

This theme of man lost in a labyrinth, without a guiding thread, is basic . . . in Kafka’s work. Yet if man no longer has a guiding thread, it is because he no longer wants to have one. Hence, his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history. . . .

The Absurdists present the world as senseless and lacking a unifying principle. It is based on the idea that human thought cannot reduce the totality of the universe to a complete, unified, coherent system. Martin Estlin, in this connection, makes a pointed observation, which is worth quoting here [The Theater of the Absurd, 1976, p. 415]:

It is . . . impossible to now why it [the world] was created, what part man has been assigned in it, and what constitutes right actions and
wrong actions [and] . . . a picture of the universe lacking all . . . clear cut definitions appears deprived of sense and sanity and tragically absurd. . . .

Therefore, the Absurdists dismiss the mythical, the metaphysical, religious, and philosophical systems for they do not provide complete explanations of the world and man’s place in it. To them nothing is more real than nothing. They maintain that areas of impenetrable darkness surround man. He never knows his true nature and purpose. No one provides him with ready-made rules of conduct.

Albert Camus argues the point thus [Le Mythe de Sisyphe, 1942, p. 94]:

The certainty of the existence of a God who would give meaning to life has a far greater attraction than the knowledge that without him one could do evil without being punished. The choice between these alternatives would not be difficult. But there is no choice and that is where the bitterness begins. . . .

The Absurdists appreciate the fact that there is a vast difference between knowing something to be the case in the conceptual sphere and experiencing it as a living reality. They argue that large segments of knowledge and experience remain beyond the bounds of human thought. Therefore, the Absurdists express modern man’s endeavour to confront Angst, anguish, and sense of loss, and absence of solutions. They search with dignity and confront the universe deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless, and absurd.
Maya Angelou treats the theme of alienation admirably and adequately in her works particularly in here autobiographical fiction *Gather Together in My Name*. She suffers alienation as a single mother. She experiences alienation as a working mother in a White dominated American society. She pushes her son, Guy, to suffer alienation because of the compulsions of her career and her night outs as a prostitute to keep both ends meet.

Moreover, Maya Angelou argues that the Whites push the Blacks particularly the Black women into a state of alienation. In other words, careers, and clothing are marks of the second-class citizenry that pushes the Blacks to a state of segregated alienation. In this context, Selwyn Cudjoe makes a pointed observation, which is worth quoting here [“Maya Angelou and the Autobiographical Statement,” in *Black Women Writers 1950-1980*, Ed. Mari Evans, 1984, pp. 16-17]:

In *Gather Together in My Name* [there is] the richly textured ethical life of the Black people of the rural South and the dignity with which they live their lives. [They] are but broken as we enter the *alienated* and *fragmented* live, which the urban world of America engenders. It is these conditions of *alienation* and *fragmentation*, which characterize the life of Maya Angelou as she seeks to situate herself in urban California during her sixteenth to seventeenth years. . . .

In developing the theme of motherhood, Maya Angelou applies the same quality of honesty to her role of a single alienated mother as he does to her role of prostitute; in fact the two tend to interact in their elements of pain, struggle, and imperfection, and loss. One of the problems any working single mother faces is
finding childcare. This compulsion forces Maya Angelou to get alienated from her son, Guy, and her son, Guy getting alienated from his mother. Both suffer the pangs of alienation.

Maya Angelou needs an adequate baby sitter to care for Guy while she is working, which means, at least in the case of being a prostitute, all night assistance. She finds an excellent baby sitter in Mother Cleo, a fat woman who likes babies and even takes in White infants, although she charges more for them.

Another baby sitter, acquired after the interlude in Stamps, is Big Mary Dalton an affectionate woman who lives in Stockton, where Maya takes a job as a fry cook under Mrs. Cullinan, and then as a prostitute, Big Mary Dalton arranges for Guy to live in her house, with Maya Angelou taking her son on her day off. After she meets L. D. Tolbrook, though, Maya Angelou occasionally forfeits her day off with Guy to be with her boyfriend.

In a powerful treatment of child loss because of her own self alienating herself from her son Guy due to her career in *Gather Together in My Name*, Maya Angelou goes to Big Mary Dalton’s house and finds it deserted. A neighbor tells her that Big Mary Dalton moved away three days earlier, and that she probably went to her brother’s place in Bakersfield. After a desperate search and a long bus ride, Maya Angelou locates Big Mary Dalton and her angry son, whose feelings of alienated abandonment echo her own unhappiness during childhood.

Of the numerous references in *Gather Together in My Name* that addresses Maya Angelou’s feelings of inadequacy as the alienated single mother, who gets
alienated from her son because of her preoccupations, the Big Mary Dalton’s episode is surely one. This is the angry reaction from the alienated Guy who feels alienated from his single alienated mother who gets alienated from her son, Guy, by her own actions [Gather Together in My Name, 1974, p. 163]:

Guy cries and pulls his mother’s hair, and expresses his fury at being deserted [and thereby to suffer alienation] for so long a time. Maya Angelou sheds bitter tears acknowledges her first guilt [My Emphasis].

... Maya Angelou admits at having ignored her son Guy who suffers feeling alienated from his mother.

This forces Big Mary Dalton to comment thus [Gather Together in My Name, 1974, p. 147]: “Ain’t you got time for him?” Maya Angelou leaves him alone to experience the pangs of alienation on the night that Troubadour Martin ushers her to the drug den near the San Francisco docks. This leaving away Guy in the hands of others makes Guy feel that he is alienated from his own mother.

The clothing of the Blacks particularly the Black women kept them segregated from the Whites. In fact the clothing of the Blacks was the means by which the Whites kept the blacks separated and alienated from them. In fact, clothing is an indicator of class and character. Clothing identified the Blacks as inferior and lower in status and this is the subtle way for the Whites to keep the Blacks alienated. There is the reference to clothing in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings [1970, p. 134]:

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Her [Maya Angelou’s] ugly purple frock made a noise like crepe paper on the back of a hearse. . . .

The Whites keep the Blacks because of their Diaspora - - displacement, disorientation, colour bar, and cultural divide - - alienated from others. The Blacks remain cut off from their ancestral homes and ancestral traditions and tribal ways and the Black culture. As such they suffer rootlessness and experience alienation in a foreign land such as America.

In this regard, the most significant similarity between the childhood years of Maya Angelou and her son, Guy, is the condition of Diaspora - - displacement, disorientation, colour bar, and cultural divide - - in a familial as well as a geographical sense. Both Maya Angelou and her son, Guy, are displaced from their immediate families several times during their youth and an all these occasions they experience the pangs of alienation. They are placed in the care of relatives or family friends and are moved from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and from State to State.

In a brief flashback in the second chapter of The Heart of a Woman, the writer reminds us of the displacement, which characterized her youth and links this aspect of her past with her son’s present attitude. When Guy is fourteen, Maya Angelou decides to move to New York. She does not bring Guy to New York until he has found a place for them to live, and when he arrives after a one-month separation, he initially resists her attempts to make a new home for them.

This is precisely because that these separations of the son from his mother make both the mother and the son experience the pangs of alienation. From this and
similar encounters with Guy, Maya Angelou learns that the continual displacements of her own childhood is something she cannot prevent from recurring in her son’s life. The painful result is the continual states of alienation of both the mother and the son.

Rather than a unique cycle perpetuated only within her family, Maya Angelou’s individual story presents a clear pattern commonly shared and passed along to new generations continually. In fact, she identifies her own situation and the threat of displacement as a common condition among Black families in America and acknowledges the special responsibility of the Black mother.

In this context, the pointed observation of Carol E. Neubauer is worth mentioning here [Displacement and the Autobiographical Style in Maya Angelou’s *The Heart of a Woman,*” in *Black American Literature Forum,* Vol. 17, No. 3 (Fall, 1983), pp. 123-124]:

She [Maya Angelou] questions whether she loves her children enough - - or more terribly, doe she love them too much? . . . In the face of these contradictions, she must provide a blanket of security, which warms but does not suffocate, and she must tell her children the truth about the power of White power without suggesting that it cannot be challenged. . . .

Providing stability for the children as the family disintegrates is a virtually impossible task, not only for Maya Angelou but also for many Black women in similar situations. After the dissolution of the family, the single parent in her state of alienation is only left with a overwhelming sense of guilt and inadequacy; and, for
Maya Angelou, the burden of alienation is all the more taxing, because she has been responsible for her son experiencing alienation from his mother from the very beginning of his life.

As Maya Angelou narrates selected events that illustrate the periods of displacement and the consequential alienation of her son, Guy, from his mother, she adopts elements both from fiction and fantasy. Although she is clearly working within the genre of autobiography, Maya Angelou freely borrows from these two traditionally more imaginative types of writing, on numerous occasions, she has employed what has become a rather personalized autobiographical style, a method, which integrates ingredients from diverse modes of writing and gracefully crosses over traditionally static generic lines.

Incidentally, the extraordinary skill at fantasizing makes Maya Angelou enjoy distinct artistic alienation from other Black women writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Lorraine Hansberry, Toni Cade Bambara, and Rita Dove to quote a few.

One of the most memorable uses of fantasy in all of Maya Angelou’s writing is found in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and involves a visit to the racist dentist’s clinic in Stamps. As a child she imagines her grandmother grows to gigantic height and instantly gains a superhuman strength to retaliate against the bigoted dentist who refuses to treat Maya Angelou.

In *The Heart of a Woman*, Maya Angelou combines fiction and fantasy with the more standard biographical or historical mode to capture the subtleties of her
relationship with her son to emphasize the apparent similarity between their lives which is both suffer the pangs of alienation.

In *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas*, Maya Angelou explores her adulthood, as she moves back and defines herself more centrally within the mainstream of the Black experience. In this work also the theme of absence and separation leading to states of alienation as experienced both by the mother and the son are focused sharply and pointedly.

In this context, the candid remark of Mary Jane Lupton is worth recording here [Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion, 1998, p. 108]:

The major source of Angelou’s anxiety in *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas* is her temporary separation from her son, Guy. Much off Maya’s struggle in this [Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas] the most tangled of the autobiographies, concerns her private role as a single mother [acutely suffering from alienation] versus her public role as a committed actress, one whose career makes it necessary to leave Guy for long stretches of time [during which times Guy experiences the pangs of alienation]. Chosen to perform in the European tour of *Porgy and Bess*, she faces the realization that in leaving Guy with his grandmother, she will repeat the hateful pattern established by her parents when they left her and Bailey in the hands of Momma Henderson. Her feelings re compounded by the fact that, as a young, Black, single, alienated mother, she bears the ultimate responsibility for her son experiencing
alienation because of her leaving him alone in the care of baby sitters.

The mother/son behaviour pattern in *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas* shows Guy, the son seeking affection in his state of alienation in the absence of his mother and Maya Angelou as the single, alienated mother in conflict over the need to love versus the need to be a fully realized person.

One expects Maya Angelou, lead dance performer of the *Porgy and Bess* tour of Europe and North Africa to enjoy what her labor has earned. Instead, on every description of Milan, Paris or Venice, there appears a lament about her alienated son, Guy that shuts of her positive experiences.

On seeing French children playing outside the train window, Maya Angelou writes thus *[Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas, 1976, p.191]*:

The longing for my own son threatened to engulf me. . . .

When she comes home to discover Guy’s skin scaling from disease Maya Angelou *[Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, 1976, p.233]*:

I had ruined my beautiful son by neglect, and neither of us would ever forgive me. . . .

The autobiographical work, *Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas*, 1976, opens with a scene of displacement, which leads to alienation. Such a state of alienation, Maya Angelou feels a sense of being unanchored [rootless and
by extension alienated] as the family bonds of her youth are torn asunder under the impact of urban life in California.

Under these new circumstances Maya Angelou examines her feeling and her relationship with the larger White society as she encounters White people on an intimate personal level for the first time. The Blacks feel alienated from the Whites. In other words, by offering a declassed and second-class citizenry to the Blacks the Whites keep the blacks in an alienated state. The Blacks and the Whites lived separately in Stamps and the occasion for shared and mutual relations did not exist.

Before Maya Angelou can enter into any relationship, though she must dispense with all the stereotyped notions she has about White people. Indeed it is no longer possible to argue. Maya Angelou maintains thus [Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas, 1976, p. 20]:

It wasn’t nice to reveal one’s feelings to strangers. And nothing on earth was stranger to me [Maya Angelou] than a friendly White woman. . .

In her adulthood, Maya Angelou is forced to make a decision about marrying Tosh, a White man, who is courting her through her son. Part of the difficulty arises from Maya Angelou’s awareness that Whites had violated her people for centuries. She remarks thus [Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas, 1976, p. 20]:

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Anger and guilt decided before my birth that *Black was Black and White was White* and although the two might share sex, they must never exchange love [Italics as in the Original]. . . .

Maya Angelou feels that her situation has turned quite absurd by her marriage to Tosh, the White man. This marriage until she divorces him later keeps her alienated from her own Black people on one side and the Whites who were not prepared to welcome her on the other side. She confronts the problem with a sort of evasion when she tells herself about Tosh thus [*Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas*, 1976, p. 22]:

[Tosh] was Greek, not White American; therefore I [Maya Angelou] needn’t feel that I had betrayed my race by marrying one of the enemy, nor could White Americans believe that I had so forgiven them the past that I was ready to love a member of their tribe. . . .

Maya Angelou is not entirely satisfied by the truce she makes with her Blackness and for the rest of her marriage has to contend with the guilt created by her liaison with a White male. With the end of her marriage, the tears came and the fright that she would cast into a maelstrom of rootlessness - - by extension alienation - - momentarily embroidered her mind.

Soon, however, it gave way to the knowledge that she would be ridiculed by her belief in their belief that she was another victim of a “White man [who] had taken a Black woman’s body and left her hopeless, helpless and alone” [*Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas*, 1976, p. 23].
At the end of this encounter, however, she would be prepared to deal with her own life, having gained a certain entrance to the White world and possessing, already, the stubborn realities of Black life.

The autobiographical fictions and poetry of Maya Angelou reveal a vital need to transform the elements of a stultifying and destructive personal, social, political, and historical milieu into a sensual and physical refuge. Loneliness [alienation] and instantiation [another form of alienation] pervade both her love and political poetry, but are counterpoised by a glorification of life and sensuality, which produces transcendence over all, which could otherwise destroy and create her despair. This world of sensuality becomes a fortress against potentially alienating forces, that is, men, war, oppression of any kind, in the real world.

For instance, transcendence becomes the ironically complicated prophetic message, which reads thus [“The Calling of Negroes,” in The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou, 1994, p. 141]:

He went to being called a Coloured man
after answering to “hey nigger,”
Now that’s a big jump,
anyway you figger,
Hey, Baby, Watch my smoke,
From colored man to Negro
With the “N” in caps
was like saying Japanese
instead of saying Japs.
I mean, during the war

The next big step
was change for true
From Negro in caps
to being a Jew.
Now, Sing Yiddish Mama.

Light, Yello, Brown
and Dark Brown skin,
were o.k. colors
to describe him then,
He was a bouquet of Roses.

He changed his seasons
like an almanac,
Now you’ll get hurt
if you don’t call him “Black”
Nigguh, I ain’t playin’ this time. . . .

Maya Angelou employs the title “The Calling of Names” with its article, “the” and preposition, “of”, to signal the formalizing and distancing [form of alienation] aesthetic in the poem.

While Maya Angelou’s political poetry suggests the irony of emotional instantiation [form of alienation] by using bodily imagery as her objective correlative, her love poetry almost equally as often employs this series of patterns to capture an
image, an instant, an emotional attitude. Moreover, fantasy often rounds out the missing parts of the human whole when reality fails to explain fully what she sees. Here in the following poem, “To a Man,” she explores this mystery, this instantiation [form of alienation] from the understanding of a man [“To a Man,” in The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou, 1994, p. 121]:

My man is
Black Golden Amber
Changing
Warm mouths of Brandy Fine
Cautious sunlight on a patterned rug
Coughing laughter, rocked on a whirl of French tobacco Graceful turns on woolen stilts
Secretive?
A cat’s eye

Southern, Plump and tender with navy bean sullenness And did I say “Tender?”
The gentleness
A big cat stalk through stubborn bush
And did I mention “Amber?”
The heatless fire consuming itself

My man is Amber
Changing
Always into itself

New. Now New

Still itself,

Still. . .

Thus, Maya Angelou subjects the theme of alienation to fictional treatment quite adequately and admirably.