

Be Nobody's Darling: Alice Walker

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Alice Walker is an author, activist, and poet who is internationally celebrated because of her collection of novels, short stories, children's books, essays, and poetry. In 1983, she published her novel *The Color Purple*, which brought her international recognition, apart from winning her the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The Pulitzer Prize award made her the first African American woman to win such an award in fiction. The most significant theme of most feminist works is the factors surrounding African women, such as their relationships with each other and others in the community. According to Bethel (176), this gives African American women authors and poets an edge over others as they tell the stories from their own perspective, which is enough to capture the respect and attention of their subjects.

In 1944, Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, the lastborn in a family of eight children. She later, in the early 1960s, enrolled in Spelman College, which admitted only black women (White 246-47). Her stay was short-lived as she left due to the atmosphere she referred to as puritanical. She later joined Sarah Lawrence College, where she graduated and relocated to Mississippi, where she was involved with the registration of black voters (Biography.com, n.d). Since then, she has been involved in activism activities because she strongly believed in extending compassion to others through defending human rights and that of all living beings (Moore & Billingsley, n.d). Hence, her personal life acts as a basis for her to capture her readers' attention through her feminist works.

One of her famous works, the poem *Be Nobody's Darling* is about the conflict between comfort and conformity. According to Bates, in his book entitled *A Critical Companion*, the poem uses a didactic tone full of wisdom to encourage the readers to have the courage to be different. In the beginning, she urges the readers to be nobody's darling and to be an outcast (1, 2), meaning that they should stand up for justice and truth even when it would mean death. In lines 23-25, she states that many had died due to the brave words that hurt others. Thus, her main emphasis is encouraging the readers to choose to walk alone/die rather than to see injustice prevail.

The poem utilizes several poetic elements in order to convey the purpose of the poem to the target audience. The poet chooses not to include a rhyming scheme in the poem so as to get this somber message to the readers. Hence, she randomly grouped syllables in the lines, which creates a rhythm that is not steady.

"Be an outcast. Qualified to live among the dead (27-29)" is a symbol that the living cannot live with death. The poet tells the readers that it is better to be an outcast, which comes with independence, than to be someone else's person, and that it is better to relate to the dead for being different than to relate to someone you dislike. This line also qualifies to be used as a metaphor as the poet is comparing the living to the dead without the use of the words as or like (Napierkowski & Ruby, 307-389). The use of the simile "Take the contradictions of your life and wrap around you like a

shawl" (3-6) by the poet is an emphasis to the reader that they should embrace the problems, mistakes, and faults in life by making them part of who they are. The message she strongly conveys here is that the readers should use their faults, problems, and mistakes to mold and shape them into better, stronger individuals. She reassures them that being an outcast will allow them to define their sense of self and help boost the readers' confidence and self-esteem.

The use of repetition in the poem is to emphasize the major purpose of the poet (Napierkowski & Ruby, 307-389). For instance, the first and the second lines in the poem are repeated to emphasize the benefits of being an outcast and nobody's darling. Moreover, repeating the word askance adds a grim tone to the message as it reminds the readers that the outcast life comes with negativity. Thus, despite being nobody's darling, independent, and defiant, the outcast life presents a difficult struggle in life. In addition, the poet's language is to her advantage. For instance, she states that people succumb to madness instead of going mad. Hence, by using words such as askance, succumb, impetuous, ample, and merry, Walker Alice makes her message stronger and clearer to her readers.

The poet carefully chooses her words in this poem so as to emphasize and draw the message home. For instance, the words "impetuous fools" are used to refer to the entire humanity, whom she likens to dead people. Here, the poet asserts that the entire humanity is dead inside as they are dull to their individuality. The use of short sentences in the poem provides a deeper insight into the words and the poem in general, which sends a very powerful message to the readers (Napierkowski & Ruby, 307-689). In addition, by introducing the aspect of contrast between the stanzas, the poet is able to emphasize her message succinctly. The first stanza is made longer to illustrate the message more deeply, but the last two stanzas are made short to emphasize the key points in the poem as a whole.

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