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Alice Walker has always turned to poetry to express some of her most personal and deeply felt concerns. She has said that her poems—even the happy ones—emerge from an accumulation of sadness, when she stands again “in the sunlight.” “[This collection] has two fine strengths—a music that comes along sometimes, as sad and cheery as a lonely woman’s whistling—and Miss Walker’s own tragicomic gifts” (New York Times Book Review).

Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful: Poems Details

Date : Published September 1st 1988 by New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich (first published April 1st 1985)

ISBN : 9780151421695

Author : Alice Walker

Format : Hardcover 79 pages

Genre : Poetry, Cultural, African American, Nonfiction



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From Reader Review Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful: Poems for online ebook

Kelsey says

phew. so beautiful and honest.

Walker

When I no longer have your heart
I will not request your body
your presence
or even your polite conversation.
I will go away to a far country
separated from you by the sea
--on which I cannot walk--
and refrain from even sending
letters
describing my pain.

Bionic Jean says

Most readers know of Alice Walker. She is a writer who is celebrated worldwide, having won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983 — the first African-American woman to do so — for *"The Color Purple"*. She has written many bestselling novels, short stories and essays and four children's books, as well as ten volumes of poetry. Alice Walker has worked to address problems of injustice, inequality, and poverty as an activist, a teacher, and public intellectual.

Alice Walker's first collection of poems, *"Once"*, in 1968, was precipitated by her pregnancy and abortion while she was at college. They are intensely personal and full of despair, describing her confusion, isolation, and thoughts of suicide. She viewed writing poetry as a kind of therapy as she worked through her problems. Her second collection in 1973, *"Revolutionary Petunias"*, deals with more public issues, particularly civil and women's rights, from an individual's point of view. In her third collection, six years later, *"Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning"*, she returned to personal thoughts of family and friendship, using her grandparents' long, solid relationship as a focus.

Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful was her fourth volume of poetry, although it was the first to be published in Great Britain, in 1985. The poems date from between 1979 and 1984, several of them having previously been printed in various women's and family magazines. The poems are all very accessible.

The title of this collection is from a verse by a Native American shaman *"Lame Deer — Seeker of Vision"* who, on considering the terrible problems brought by the white settlers, with their whiskey, found she could almost forgive them, because they also brought the beauty of horses to the North American Plains.

Alice Walker is sometimes described as strident and politicised, in both her speech and her writing. The significance in both this title and the dedication to two of her ancestors therefore, is that in these poems,

Alice Walker tries to ameliorate her sharp antipathy, and looks for a saving grace in the most terrible circumstances, and even in the hearts of brutal oppressors. It sets the tone for the collection. She is mostly concerned with contemporary social issues. Some poems here addresses huge concerns, such as the need to save our earth from destruction by war and pollution, but in others her attention turns towards small intimate moments, and hidden subliminal thoughts. She describes exchanges between lovers and enemies.

In a way **Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful** blends the attitudes from her second and third collections, by maintaining a direct, personal voice in the poems, often focusing on an individual's daily struggles to preserve dignity and liberty despite oppression, hardship and world problems. Alice Walker writes of ageing, of motherhood and childhood, expressing important topics such as regret, love, and courage. She praises the endurance of the human spirit which has endured slavery and humiliation, yet still flourishes and grows. She writes, too, about ordinary joys such as "*My daughter is coming!*" a lover's warmth, and even about poetry itself:

*"Letting go
in order to hold on
I gradually understand
how poems are made."*

Alice Walker writes in free verse, and uses direct language with simple images. Reading it is more like reading the conversation, or inner thoughts, of an articulate, observant woman. She rarely employs devices or conventions usual in poetry; there are no metaphors, and little use of rhyme or structured metre; an occasional line is repeated for emphasis maybe, but otherwise the lines are like her speech, but chopped up into various short lengths. The language is spare, with few embellishments or attempts at moving description. The common feature to all the poems is that they are didactic. Alice Walker herself say that she has always turned to poetry to express some of her most personal and deeply felt concerns. She maintains that her poems, even the happier ones, emerge from a growing accumulation of sadness, to stand again "*in the sunlight*".

The first poem in this collection, "*Remember*" entreats us not to forget what the condition of black woman used to be:

*"I am the girl
holding their babies
cooking their meals
sweeping their yards
washing their clothes
Dark and rotting
and wounded, wounded"*

and stating her position now:

*"I am the woman
with the blessed
dark skin
I am the woman
with teeth repaired
I am the woman
with the healing eye"*

the ear that hears.

*I am the woman: Dark,
repaired, healed
Listening to you.*

*I would give
to the human race
only hope ...*

Justice and Hope

Let us begin”

The simplicity, short line lengths — only one word sometimes — and careful use of capital letters, is typical of her poetry. It is reminiscent of some e.e. cummings's work.

In the next poem, “*These Mornings of Rain*”, Alice Walker speaks gently, with soft eloquence, of love:

*“These mornings
I do not need
my beloveds’ arms about me
until much later
in the day ...
to love and be loved
in absentia
is joy enough for me”*

(The apostrophe is as it was printed.)

There is also a lamentation for lost love, entitled “*Walker*”. It is quite short, just one stanza:

*“When I no longer have your heart
I will not request your body
your presence
or even your polite conversation.
I will go away to a far country
separated from you by the sea
—on which I cannot walk—
and refrain even from sending
letters
describing my pain.”*

And here is another of just one stanza, later in the collection, “*love is not concerned*”:

*“love is not concerned
with whom you pray
or where you slept
the night you ran away*

*from home
love is concerned
that the beating of your heart
should kill no one.”*

Nevertheless some of these poems are desolate. She writes with outrage, of racism, injustice and hunger. Alice Walker's poems span the whole range of human emotions. In the poem “*A Few Sirens*”, she expresses despair at the human condition:

*“But in the world
children are lost;
whole countries of children
starved to death
before the age
of five
each year;
their mothers squatted
in the filth around
the empty cooking pot
wondering:”*

It is sometimes disturbingly alienating, such as this, from “*Each One Pull One*”:

*“We do not worship them.
We do not worship their movies.
We do not worship their songs.
We do not think their newscasts
cast the news.
We do not admire their president.
We know why the White House is white.
We do not find their children irresistible;
We do not agree they should inherit the earth.”*

Apparently once Alice Walker's daughter asked her if she was prejudiced. She then realised that perhaps she had spoken out once too often against white males.

*“These days I think of Rebecca.
'Mama, are you a racist?' she asks
And I realise I have badmouthed white people
once too often
in her presence”*

I too have this slight worry. I do not feel that deliberately separating races, black versus white, and demonising males, so as to encourage antagonism between the genders, can be good. I understand the temptation, the resentment, the savage indictment that injustice still reigns in society: the fate of poor black people, who toil so that white men may savour the jewels that adorn heads of state. And yet, these thoughts are perhaps better expressed in her essays, or revealed in her novels.

The other aspect I find surprising is the poetry's simplicity; its use of simple form and diction. Critics have

praised this as reminiscent of African-American folk parables. One said: “*this quality “permits her to reveal homespun truths of human behavior and emotion.”*” Other have pronounced it “mundane”. Clearly the boundaries between prose and poetry are hardly recognised in her work. Her verse, like her prose, is often rhythmic; but if she rhymes or alliterates, it seems to be almost accidental.

There is a song-like quality in some. This poem is actually called “*Song*”:

*The world is full of colored
people
People of Color
Tra-la-la
The world is full of
colored people
Tra-la-la-la-la“*

This continues for five more verses, with various repetitions. I can recognise the joy, the celebratory aspect, but it does not speak to me.

Here are the final words in the collection:

*“Surely the earth can be saved
by all the people
who insist
on love.*

Surely the earth can be saved for us.”

I can see where Alice Walker’s preoccupations come from. She was born in Georgia, where her father was a sharecropper. When she was eight years old, she was shot by her brother with an air gun, which fired metal balls. This left her scarred and blind in one eye. Perhaps her anti-male attitude is rooted in this tragic accident, since she felt her father also let her down, by his inability to obtain proper medical treatment for her. The disfigurement made Alice Walker shy and self-conscious, and this led her to writing to try to express herself. Throughout her life, she has respected her mother’s strength and dignity despite their poverty. She remembers her mother’s perseverance, working in the garden to create beauty, even in such unlikely, disadvantaged conditions.

It is perhaps not surprising that Alice Walker’s poetry celebrates womankind, and the solidarity of black people. She revels in a bond of sisterhood with women throughout the world, and a joyous celebration of the female principle touching on mysticism, in its expression of the divine. She has a reverence for the earth, and a sense of unity with all living creatures. Alice Walker’s poetry is highly personal and generally didactic, usually coming from traumatic or other events in her own life. Other poems are related to causes she advocates and feels strongly about, and injustices over which she agonises. With Alice Walker it is always the message that counts. I kept thinking, as I read these however, how much I prefer Maya Angelou’s poetry. Some is deceptively simple and direct, others lush and lyrical, yet others nuanced, complex and full of hidden meanings waiting to be teased out.

The “*New York Times Book Review*” said: “[*This collection*] has two fine strengths: a music that comes along sometimes, as sad and cheery as a lonely woman’s whistling, and Miss Walker’s own tragicomic gifts”

Many of my friends have rated it five stars, but I cannot say I agree. I share Alice Walker's views for the most part, but her poetry is not to my taste. It is too simple. I prefer poems which move me by the quality of their language and their imagery. I like complexity, and to look beneath, for another meaning. I like variation of pattern, of style and metre. Just because I agree with what she says, does not mean that I wish to have my views parroted back to me in pseudo-poetic form. It is not ... enough. With written works, I try to rate what I read, rather than the views behind the expression.

However, I am keeping this at my default of three stars, because I think it will appeal to those who do not regularly read poetry, and may tempt others who say they do not like poetry, because they think it is "too difficult". This type of poetry is universally appealing.

It does not feel like reading poetry. That is both its fault and its virtue.

Here is a complete list of all 41 poems in this volume, in alphabetical order:

1971
Attentiveness
The Diamonds On Liz's Bosom
Each One, Pull One
Every Morning
Family Of
A Few Sirens
First, They Said *
Gray
How Poems Are Made: A Discredited View
I Said To Poetry
I'm Really Very Fond
If Those People Like You
Killers
Listen
Love Is Not Concerned
Mississippi Winter (1)
Mississippi Winter (2)
Mississippi Winter (3)
Mississippi Winter (4)
My Daughter Is Coming
No One Can Watch The Wasichu
On Sight
Overnights
Poem At Thirty-nine
Remember
Representing The Universe
S M
She Said
Song
Songless
These Days

These Mornings Of Rain
The Thing Itself
Torture
Walker
We Alone
Well
When Golda Meir Was In Africa
Who?
Without Commercials

This is my favourite poem in the collection, “*First, they said*”:

“*First, they said we were savages.*
But we knew how well we had treated them
and knew we were not savages.

They they said we were immoral.
But we knew minimal clothing
Did not equal immoral.

Next, they said our race was inferior.
But we knew our mothers
and we knew that our race
was not inferior.

After that, they said we were
a backward people.
But we knew our fathers
and knew we were not backward.

So, then they said we were
obstructing Progress.
But we knew the rhythm of our days
and knew that we were not obstructing Progress.

Eventually, they said the truth is that you eat
too much and your villages take up too much
of the land. But we knew we and our children
were starving and our villages were burned
to the ground. So we knew we were not eating
too much or taking up too much of the land.

Finally, they had to agree with us.

They said: You are right. It is not your savagery
or your immorality or your racial inferiority or
your people's backwardness or your obstructing of
Progress or your appetite or your infestation of the land
that is at fault. No. What is at fault

is your existence itself.

*Here is money, they said. Raise an army
among your people, and exterminate
yourselves.*

*In our inferior backwardness
we took the money. Raised an army among our people,
And now, the people protected, we wait,
for the next insulting words
coming out of that mouth.”*

Laura Jane says

This collection of poems were very touching and had deep meaning in them. Walker continuously brought up several topics in her poems, such as discrimination, slavery, native americans, war, peace, and love. Her poems reach to the good and bad in everything and can relate to almost any reader.

Amy says

This was a re-read for our Mother daughter book club. I love the imagery in her poetry. I can't wait to share this one with the girls.

Megan says

Sometimes startling, sometimes brutal, sometimes comforting. There's an energy in a lot of these poems that really made them burrow down into my consciousness, which is just what I want from poetry, anyway. My favorite poems were the ones that laid forth our relationship to the world (natural and social worlds, in particular) and that affirmed our power of redefinition of that relationship, which Walker demonstrated so elegantly in "We Alone":

We Alone

*We alone can devalue gold
by not caring
if it falls or rises
in the marketplace.
Wherever there is gold
there is a chain, you know,
and if your chain
is gold
so much the worse
for you.*

*Feathers, shells
and sea-shaped stones
are all as rare.*

*This could be our revolution:
to love what is plentiful
as much as
what's scarce.*

Lori says

The poems in this collection are generally short with fairly short lines. Many poems provide insights into the African-American experience or reflect on events of the 1960s and 1970s. I found the poetry enjoyable.

Tristan says

Read in Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems 1965-1990 Complete

Actual rating: 3.75 stars

Yet again, Walker failed to live up to the musicality of her early poetry, but this collection had much more poetry and power than either Revolutionary Petunias or Goodnight Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning. Walker is definitely moving away from the "poetry as space-around-the-words" technique that she employed in her earlier work, and the final leap into a poetry of what *is* present is reflected in a collection that contains longer poems and mid-length (and even a few long) lines that really make the poems begin to sing in a new way. This is no longer the music of compression, but of long, connected groups of ideas and motifs. Walker's Native American heritage surfaces in these poems as well; the title comes from a quote from *Black Elk Speaks* about the influence of European colonialism on North America and she has a number of poems that reference the struggles of cultures and races faced by the native inhabitants of the land, including a group of poems that discuss the "Wasichu". "Family Of" discusses a spectral "Wasichu" trying to enter her consciousness and "No One Can watch the Wasichu" is a powerful depiction of the overwhelming presence of white culture and of the societal oppression that people of racial minorities can feel. The use of the Native American narrative as an encapsulation of the greater narrative of race in the United States is a fascinating technique--it highlights the depth of the disparity among races and works to universalize the minority experience.

The poems in the "Mississippi Winter" sequence, "These Mornings of Rain", and "These Days" were the most lyrical of the collection although there were a number of others that flowed more lyrically than in her last two books. "These Mornings of Rain" is a hymn to life:

On these blustery mornings
in a city
that could be wet
from my kisses
I need nothing else.

And then again,
I need it all.

while the "Mississippi Winter" poems are at once peaceful and aggressive, simple and layered reminisces on a time and place, describing herself in terms of: "She was not happy/with fences" and certain that she "must whistle/like a woman undaunted" until she reaches her end--regardless of the anticipated lack of a "good" end. Finally "These Days" is a long poem and a call to love and preservation. She describes many people, each full of love, compassion, and joy followed by a haunting refrain of "Surely the Earth can be saved for [name]" ending with the final inhabitant being simply "us":

These days I think of Robert
folding his child's tiny shirts
eating TV dinners ("A kind of *processed* flavor")
rushing off each morning to school--then to the office,
the supermarket, the inevitable meeting: writing,
speaking, marching against oppression, hunger,
ignorance.
And in between having affair
with tiny wildflowers and gigantic
rocks.

In all, this was a well-constructed and engaging collection of poems, much more in line with the expectations set by *Once*

Mary says

A collection of poems by Alice Walker. I love how her spirit and ethical sense comes through each poem. My favorite poem is "We Alone" which calls us to eschew a love of precious metals and gems which cause ruin to the earth and the people who mine for these rare materials: "This could be our revolution: / to love what is plentiful / as much as / what's scarce."

Alisa Wilhelm says

Super-readable and still powerful and beautiful. Recommended for people who are interested in social justice and human rights.

Eba says

(Also read on October 18, 2011)

Dominic says

Reading poems by Alice Walker never cease to leave me eager to write—to capture what I am and what I feel about the world around me at this very moment. I imagine her at her desk, perhaps in a room of her own, working through her own pain and uncomfortable emotions and creating these lovely and accessible musings, often with a little twist like this one:

"This could be our revolution:
To love what is plentiful
as much as
what's scarce."

or

"On these blustery mornings
in a city
that could be wet
from my kisses
I need nothing else.

And then again,
I need it all."

You can't help but think, "I can do that." And with poetry, it's entirely true. Don't let anyone else tell you otherwise. Poetry is designed, like meditation or yoga, so we can all reap the benefits of the practice. Alice Walker is a wonderful teacher.

There are so many gems in this slim volume—poems of all sizes about the ecstasy of love, the fear of cruelty, the pain of injustice, and the sometimes tenuous bonds between people. Don't miss the last poem, "These Days," a ten page poem in which Walker writes a series of celebrations of "people I think of as friends" (including Gloria Steinem and John Lennon & Yoko Ono). I'm definitely making a version of that poem.

Julia Tracey says

Some lovely poems here. The first 2/3 of the collection inspired and delighted me. I found the last third not weaker, but less interesting in general. That may be my opinion vs a general commentary on Alice Walker, whose work I love. Perhaps they are from a different period in her life. I just didn't feel the lure of the last section. The up-front poems are riveting. Enjoyed this, and will keep it on my poetry shelf. Which is a good thing.

Melki says

Some wonderful stuff here.

My three favorites?

The hopeful:

WE ALONE

*We alone can devalue gold
by not caring
if it falls or rises
in the marketplace.
Wherever there is gold
there is a chain, you know,
and if your chain
is gold
so much the worse
for you.*

*Feathers, shells
and sea-shaped stones
are all as rare.*

*This could be our revolution:
to love what is plentiful
as much as
what's scarce.*

The angry:

THE DIAMONDS ON LIZ's BOSOM

*The diamonds on Liz's bosom
are not as bright
as his eyes
the morning they took him
to work in the mines.
The rubies in Nancy's
jewel box (Oh, how he loves red!)
not as vivid
as the despair
in his children's
frowns.*

Oh, those Africans!

*Everywhere you look
they're bleeding*

*and crying
Crying and bleeding
on some of the whitest necks
in your town.*

And the warm and fuzzy:

THESE MORNINGS OF RAIN

*These mornings of rain
when the house is cozy
and the phone doesn't ring
and I am alone
though snug
in my daughter's
fire-red robe*

*These mornings of rain
when my lover's large socks
cushion my chilly feet
and meditation
has made me one
with the pine tree
outside my door*

*These mornings of rain
when all noises coming
from the street
have a slippery sound
and the wind whistles
and I have had my cup
of green tea*

*These mornings
in Fall
when I have slept late
and dreamed
of people I like
in places where we're
obviously on vacation*

*These mornings
I do not need
my beloveds' arms about me
until much later
in the day.*

*I do not need food
I do not need the postperson
I do not need my best friend
to call me
with the latest
on the invasion of Grenada
and her life*

I do not need anything.

*To be warm, to be dry,
to be writing poems again
(after months of distraction
and emptiness!)
to love and be loved
in absentia
is joy enough for me.*

*On these blustery mornings
in a city
that could be wet
from my kisses
I need nothing else.*

*And then again,
I need it all.*

Jerry-Mac says

I registered a book at BookCrossing.com!
<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/14185730>

Chris says

Perhaps Walker should be better known for her poetry than simply best known for The Color Purple. The poems are about race as well as being a woman. This kindle edition includes a brief biography with photos of the author.
