

Wanda why aren't
you dead



Tiffany Anderson Dr. Zubeck English 110 “ Wanda Why Aren't You Dead” A poem is a composition of emotional language or expression artists incorporate into their form of art. Poetry can be extremely emotional coming from the artist. The poem “ Wanda Why Aren't You Dead” by Wanda Coleman focuses on an African American woman who is degraded and belittled by the people she associates with. It shows just how damaging words can truly be when used to hurt a person. Wanda Why Aren't You Dead” is about Wanda's struggling with the people around her and their harsh opinions about her, however maintaining her identity and becoming stronger by the end of the poem. Wanda, being a poet, expresses her feelings into this poem and does a phenomenal job at it. It allows the readers to feel what the protagonist feels and share in her sadness. Coleman's protagonist undergoes internal conflict within herself due to the bullying she experiences from others. They batter her name around and disrespect her constantly, shown by the repetition of the name Wanda.

The voices in the poem point out her imperfections, annoy her, support her insecurities, and antagonize her in any way they can. Wanda has no good features, according to the busybodies in the poem. Wanda is scrutinized for her appearance and any other noticeable aspect she has. The meddlers ask her constantly why she does or does not look a certain way. For example, one says, “ why don't you lose weight” (5) While another says, “ how come your feet are so goddamn big” (7). These small insults amplify as the poem progresses.

They become more malicious and cruel. She relives these hurtful judgements recurrently throughout the poem. Throughout the poem, Wanda is told

numerous hurtful and malicious things about herself. Wanda has been verbally and probably physically abused on more than one occasion. The questions they ask her are not actually questions, they are verbal attacks. The tormentors do not want an answer, they solely wish to hurt Wanda. They question who she is, her appearance, her well-being, and even her existence. Her tormentors stereotype her for being black, they include her in the fabrication that all black women behave the same and are alike. One example, " what is it like being black" (10) questions her identity as a black woman, as if she can speak on behalf of the entire race. The insults poke at her continuously throughout the poem. They disrespect her family, personality, her intellect, and her integrity. These harsh statements do not affect not what Wanda believes about herself. They are the voices of people who know her that are saying what they think about her.

But, she beats herself up with the harsh memories of the comments made towards her. The meddlers could be anyone in her community: friends, family, even strangers. They pick out any visible flaw about her and throw it in her face. They feed her insecurities and add on to them. The readers can even feel pity towards Wanda because she is being brought down. Camille Paglia, a literary critic, touches this topic of Wanda conquering over the abuse she endures in her analysis of the poem, stating: " The wonder is that she survives and thrives" (8.) due to the fact that one of Wanda's meddlers asks her, " i wonder / why ain't you dead" (28-29). She fights off all of their bad judgments on her and she remains her own person. They ask Wanda more than once during the poem why she is so angry and defensive. One tormentor states, " wanda you're ALWAYS on the attack" (25). Wanda is

defensive to protect herself from any damage their harsh words could inflict on her. All the annoyances and comments throughout the poem do not matter to her anymore; the reader of this poem can tell as the tone and language changes in the poem right at the ending.

The poem turns from its attacking tone to a more apologetic. One line, "wanda I didn't know I was hurting you / that was an accident" (18-19) shows that at some point someone began to see they were hurting wanda and felt remorse for it. Camille Paglia's analysis of the poem points out specific details about Wanda. She points out Wanda's lifestyle and other aspects of her was well. Paglia gives her view of the meddlers and their intentions of the mean comments they make towards Wanda. She says that wanda is " an individual pitted against the tyranny of the group" (4.). Wanda is an individual who is being attacked and pointed out by others. She is continuously judged because of her outer appearance and even her preference of men. Paglia also mentions Wanda's reaction to her bullies. Instead of Wanda breaking and consuming herself in all the vulgar things said to her, she regains control and maintains her individuality. In her analysis of the poem, she states, " when the worst can be said, reality seems less harsh. " Wanda overlooks and disregards all the comments thrown at her and stays herself regardless.

Wanda revolts from her tormentors' harsh views of her and proves them wrong, however she remains the same by the end of the poem showing she refuses to change to please anyone. Once Wanda makes it clear she is fighting back at the statements said to her, it sets a different tone in the poem. The poem now shows that Wanda has won victory over her bullies and

becomes a stronger woman. She is finally her own person who does not listen to what people say about her. By the end of the poem, Wanda is her own person and comes out on top. She proves her tormentors wrong and does not change.

She does not believe she is any of the things said about her. She does not want to be molded into any of the things suggested to her, she would rather disregard the harsh judgements and be her own woman. The statement, "why ain't you dead" (27) clearly shows that the poet is still alive, she has survived all the criticism and hurt. But, she is stronger than she was before which leaves the tormentors wondering how she has done it. Wanda gives the poem life by disregarding and looking over the criticism thrown at her and being her own person, despite the meddlers' attempts to break her.