

## Analytical Evaluation: Poems by Adrienne Rich

Much of the poetry of Adrienne Rich involves themes of self-examination. Her messages tend to be serious and heavy, void of levity. Her themes are daring and unconventional. She is a lesbian and a radical women's libber. Her poetry explores herself as a woman and a lesbian; plus myths about men and women, in general, and their relationships with one another. She often talks about the animus, which she believes should be suppressed in men and developed in women.

Her messages are often expressed in extended metaphors or conceits. Because she speaks about both the outer and inner realities, and in some way brings them together, she could be considered a metaphysical poet. The style she most often uses is short, dense lines in unrhymed, free verse format. For analysis, I have chosen four poems: "Storm Warnings," "An Unsaid Word," "The Roofwalker," and "Ghost of a Chance."

The first poem, "Storm Warnings," is unrhymed, controlled iambic pentameter with some anapest for accentuation. In this poem there's a feeling of tension and apprehension; a sense of imminent doom. The poem contains an extended metaphor, that of a storm brewing outside. The speaker anxiously prepares her surroundings to protect herself against the storm's certain ravages. The storm represents pending or restrained violence which comes from both outside from other people, and from inside of oneself. The winds also represent the "winds of change."

In the first stanza, the "winds" are personified: "What winds are walking overhead." This casts a more ominous overtone because the wind seems to take on evil human characteristics.

Another technique Rich uses in this poem is alliteration. In line three, she uses the letter "w" four times: "What winds are walking overhead, what zone." Since "w" has a blowing sound when pronounced, the alliteration serves to enforce the sound of the wind. Line six also has a string of four "w's," but here it doesn't seem intentional. Rather, it seems more like a natural function of the words needed for the thought.

As mentioned, the meter is primarily iambic pentameter. However, she deviates from this pattern in line one using anapest to stress the word "falling." Also, in line six she uses anapest to stress "closed," which stresses the idea that she wants to be shut off from the outside. Again, in stanza two, line three, there's stress on "single." And then again in stanza four, line five, the anapest stress accentuates "sole" to give the feeling of vulnerability: "This is our sole defense against the season."

The second poem, "An Unsaid Word," is a very short poem of only seven lines. It is free verse with predominately iambic meter. Except in one place, there doesn't appear to be any purposeful use of stress or alliteration. However, the most important feature of this poem is the last word of each line. These words are all key words which receive more emphasis because of their conspicuous placement. Each end word or last syllable is stressed.

The subject of this poem deals with the relationship between a man and a woman. For such a short poem, the message is ripe with meanings. Often the women in Rich's poems are portrayed in a position of control and domination by men. Such is the case in "The Unsaid Word." The poem expresses the difficulty of a woman who must learn to conform and confine herself to the man's ways and whims. And, of course, losing herself in the process.

The "Roofwalker," the third poem, is written in free verse without meter or rhyme. An extended metaphor is used, which also contains a metaphor within it. The main metaphor is of house

builders and roofers. The speaker compares herself to the roofwalker, which represents the risks she must take if she breaks free of the confined life she lives as a housewife. Then she compares her past life to the builders. She questions the value of the life she's worked so hard to "build" and realizes now that after all the time she spent building this life, she doesn't even have the "right tools" for her future. In this poem, the female speaker sees herself as a man, which would indicate problems in her sexual identity.

There is no particular emphasis with stresses, meters, or sounds. Rich does, however, use a word play of "difference" and "indifference." She cleverly uses these two words to switch the speaker from the person who is outside to the person who is inside, but who paradoxically is looking out at the person outside--the same person.

The second metaphor compares the roofwalker to a sailor on a ship "on a listing deck," with "the wave of darkness about to break on their heads." The metaphor is successful in presenting an image of the precariousness of walking on a sloping roof. In addition, the image of darkness as a wave about to break over them is effective because the darkness would make their jobs much more hazardous. Rich also places the words "wave" and "break" at the end of the lines to create emphasis.

The last poem, "Ghost of a Chance," is also written in unrhymed free verse.

The subject, again, is about the relationship between a man and a woman. The woman, once again, appears in a subservient position to the man. The man has the privilege to "think"--to have intelligence. However, as the poem progresses, the man begins to lose his stature until he's reduced to a fish flopping on the beach. Eventually, a wave comes in and pulls him out to sea.

It appears that special stress is used only in one place: "Keep off! Give him room!" The first three words are stressed for obvious reasons. Rich creates emphasis in this poem primarily by word placement within the lines, and by varying the line lengths. For example, we see the image of a "half-dead fish" flopping and crawling, "almost breathing." The two next lines, "the raw, agonizing/air," gives the feeling of being out of breath because of the punctuation and line lengths. The last two lines have the most striking emphasis. The second to the last line is by far the longest line in the poem. Then, it is followed by a single, small word. The lines are: "pulls it back blind into the triumphant" "sea." The effect is that the sea is sucking the fish out because it literally requires the reader to take a long breath of air to read it. Placing "sea" on a separate line following such a strong word as "triumphant" diminishes the sound of "sea," which already has a soft sound. In other words, "triumphant" is super emphasized. Thus, instead of the "sea" being triumphant, it is more likely the speaker--the woman--and perhaps the speaker is also the "sea."

As far as my opinion about Rich as a poet, I believe she is a very good poet. She has superb control over the language. Although she seems to most frequently write in free verse, she clearly has the ability to write very controlled, metered poetry. Her imagery is interesting and original, and sometimes quite brilliant. Her style, though, is usually complicated and dense. Her subjects are highly political and extreme in their views. Because of the density and extremist views, for me, her poetry is very hard to read.

Rich's poetry is not the kind of poetry I enjoy reading. Since I am a woman, I can relate to a small part of what she says. But for the most part, I can't relate to it at all. In fact, I found that it usually put me off. I found her work oppressive and depressive. I have a heavy, weighted down feeling when I'm working with her poems. This is definitely not the kind of poetry I would read in the future. I did not enjoy doing the analyses for these two papers. So, yes, I think she's a good poet; but, no, I would not read her work again unless forced to in another classroom situation.