

"song of solemnity"



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Adrienne Rich's " Song" plays out an uncomfortably intimate melody concerning a woman's feelings of inescapable loneliness. Adrienne asserts the tortured song of this woman's soul so beautifully, teasing the reader early on with passivity, and then cunningly slips into prose so lovely that the reader cannot help but be intoxicated, drawn in like a lover. But like a midnight seductress, Rich sweetly seduces only to leave her lover mystified and spellbound, yet shattered by the silence that comes at the song's end. Through " Song" Rich lets the reader try her on, lets the reader think we have gotten under her skin, only to leave us as isolated as we seemed to think she was. The sweet sad melody of " Song" quite simply put is that as much as people may think we can penetrate each other, we are always left alone to our own devices and often times we cannot even find it to trust the song of ourselves to be enough. Rich begins the poem with " You're wondering if I'm lonely" already creating a disparity between " you," the reader, and " I," the poet. These two characters are separate, alone; different from each other, the line in the sand is drawn. The distance between " you" and " I" is even greater emphasized with simple capitalization, drawing the eye immediately to both words that rise away from the others. By immediately addressing her reader, Rich has succeeded in appealing to the reader's greatest interest, themselves and now can be content in having a captive audience. By continuing with " OK, then yes, I'm lonely" the reader has already made some small victory by making this poet, this stranger, admit to and concede to what we are now wondering about. She continues, " as a plane rides lonely and level/on its radio beam" emphasizing her loneliness again by repeating the word, drumming it into our minds, but also by taking us out of the world of you and I and placing us

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far far above the earth on a lone plane riding on a invisible beam, so dense that is beyond our eye, just as she is beyond us. The lone plane is left "aiming/ across the Rockies/for the blue-strung aisles/ of an airfield on the ocean." Once again, Rich reiterates disparity, first with " You" and " I," now with the heights of land and the depth of sea. Both places evoke feelings of loneliness as both are displaced from simple land, one reaching into the heights of the heavens, and one surrounded by ' water, water everywhere.' To begin the second stanza, Rich again separates the reader from herself, but this time with more conviction, stating " You want to ask, am I lonely?" telling us what it is that we want, almost coyly knowing but whip lashes us out of our calm with " Well, of course," as if the want is ridiculous. With the line " lonely/ as a woman driving across country," she again plays on the notions we already have, knowing that we will naturally make a woman driving alone more vulnerable, more fragile than we would a strong self actualized man driving. No, Rich knows just as well as a state highway trooper that a woman driving alone seems to scream lost, alone, vulnerable, searching in a way that a lone male driver never will. Rich isolates further dividing us now with time and space in " day after day, leaving behind/ mile after mile/." The thoughts become as segmented and as separate as the reader and the poet, the distance between them longer than time itself wider than miles can measure, like the loneliness of the human heart, deeper than all the depths we have explored and have yet to explore. Rich iterates leaving behind, " little towns she might have stopped/and lived and died in, lonely" suggesting travel without an ending, without a place to end, suggesting her loneliness is just as incurable. The real accent here is how she ends the sentence with the echo of " lonely," almost using the word as

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punctuation." "If I'm lonely" pushes the reader away, sending a barreling blow by questioning something that was admitted. Has Rich been honest with us? Or was this all some elaborate farce? The word "If" stands as a contradiction to us, her trusting reader, and further serves to isolate us from her feelings, as if we could not even fully conceive the notion of lonely. Expanding on this she goes on with "it must be the loneliness/ of waking first, of breathing/dawn's first cold breath on the city". The idea of being entirely alone in a city of hundreds, even thousands evokes such a mournful feeling of seclusion, and again she takes this feeling further by making the example come closer to home, in this case, literal home. "of being the one awake/ in a house wrapped in sleep" perfectly and painfully scars the reader with her singularity. She is the one awake, while even the house has sleep to wrap itself in and keep itself warm with while she lies awake with only dawn's cold breath. The repetition of "If I'm lonely" makes all the more pronounced the solitude implied with: "it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore/in the last red light of the year." Once again the idea of cold comes into play, only now the idea of cold is exhilarated by reaching the stage of being ice. The word last here accents the idea of one, alone. This last light "that knows what it is, that knows it's neither" has the casual freedom of knowing sublimely and simply what it is, but Rich bitterly cannot come to such an easy answer. Yet the rowboat knows it is neither "ice nor mud nor winter light/ but wood, with a gift for burning." The tone of longing here to define oneself in such simple terms really reaches out to the reader. The only real gift the rowboat can give is in its destruction, to burn up into ashes and fade away, just as Rich knows eventually she will. Rich here looks at how simply we define ourselves, just as a rowboat is a rowboat and I am a student and Rich is a

writer, but really we are so much deeper, but we cannot ever know what it is to be Rich or the rowboat. We can only know ourselves and that is a journey that lifetimes are spent traveling and oftentimes the only final destination we reach is a death full of unanswered questions, sometimes empty like floating rowboats with no purpose. Through isolating language and clear tone, Rich is able to bring her reader in just close enough to let them feel the pain as she pushes them away. And that is when the reader finds that we are all trying to get closer in our art and in our song, but sometimes the distances between are just like melody: unseen by the human eye but felt in the deepest corners of our hearts