

Adrienne rich



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The poetry of Adrienne Rich documents the struggles and difficulties that women endure in the modern world. Many of these difficulties are the result of the nature of the society in which we live. Rich suggests that this society of ours is inherently biased towards the male. The consequence of this for women is that they are never given the opportunities to actualise their potential or even communicate their true feelings and desires. One of the fundamental problems as Rich perceives is the very language that we use. It is designed to promote the male and his values and needs, often at the expense of the female.

In the poem 'Our Whole Life' the speaker states that 'Our whole life' is a translation'. Women, it seems, are obliged to speak a language that does little more than provide support for a system that is inherently opposed to their empowerment. Whenever they seek to communicate their messages are 'rendered into the oppressor's language' - i. e. that of the male. It is not, however, the case that Rich is suggesting that men are consciously dominating women through the language that they use. The problem is really a lot more insidious and complicated than that.

Rich is conscious of the fact that the words and phrases we use in everyday speech have a history, their meanings were established long before we came to speak them. And it is Rich's belief that at the root of language and the values that we take to be given and eternal, lies an origin, a point of origination where roles were first established. The whole notion of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman has a history, yet it is a history that extends so far back in time that it is almost impossible to

determine where it all began and who is ultimately responsible for the roles that we adopt in the modern world.

In 'Diving Into The Wreck Rich uses the dive into the dark depths of the sea to symbolise her efforts to penetrate the murky waters of history in order to see what lies at the bottom. She has read about what might be there in a 'book of myths' but she wants to find out for herself. What she finds is a Wreck, an old ship that is battered and broken, but Whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies/ obscurely inside barrels'. It seems that this ship is a symbol of the origins of who we are and how we understand ourselves.

Down here with the wreck the speaker of the poem seems to lose all solid notions of what it means to be a woman. Her gender becomes ambiguous and gender- definitions become fluid and vague. The suggestion seems to be that the roles of men and women in society have a history, they are not established in fact, are not absolutely intrinsic to who we are. If we can get back to the origins, to the beginning, when these definitions were first established we might be able to re-define and redetermine roles.

Why, the poet asks, should we live our lives according to definitions that we had no role in creating, that were established way back before we were even born. 'Diving Into The Wreck suggests that there may be possibilities of rediscovering and re-learning who we are, if we are willing to try: We are, I am, you are by cowardice or courage the one who find our way back to this scene carrying a knife, a camera a book of myths in which our names do not appear One woman who did have the courage to re-define the role of women

in society was Marie Curie, the Polish scientist who was responsible for advances in nuclear power due to her