

Adrienne Rich is an inspiring, female, American poet who worked closely with the Women's Liberation Movement in the later years of her life. Throughout her poetry, Rich's beliefs and views are abundantly clear about the destructive values and structures that society inflicts on us, through her use of powerful imagery and her engaging style consisting of metaphors, range of tones, rhyme and symbolism. Rich conveys an understanding of worry and anxiety that can be created at times of political unrest that so many of us can often feel through the image of a storm in her poem 'Storm Warning'. Rich is a daring poet who isn't afraid to question the patriarchal values that have been inflicted on women throughout the ages, she deals with the unjust topics of male and female stereotypes in her poems 'Aunt Jennifer's Tiger' and 'Diving into the Wreck'. Rich's poems often have a conversational and lyrical tone that so many of her readers can relate to. In her poem 'Trying to Talk to Man', she demonstrates the difficulty of a failing marriage but also how strenuous it can be, especially for men, to express their feelings because of what society has taught them. Rich isn't frightened to deal with the harsh realities and beliefs that society has destructively imposed throughout her poetry.

When we first look at Rich's poem 'Storm Warning', it looks as though it is a precautionary poem about preparing for a storm to hit. However on deeper analysis, Rich uses the image of living in a cold, stormy area as a metaphor for an unstable society and internal struggles we face within ourselves, 'weather abroad and weather in the heart alike regardless of prediction'. When Rich wrote this poem, the world was in the middle of the Cold War. Her conversational tone and use of half rhyme suggests her uneasiness about how the outside world was losing its harmony, 'what winds are walking overhead, what zone of grey unrest is moving across the land'. There is a sense that Rich, like so many others at this time, are feeling powerless facing the storm. Not only a physical storm but the anxiety of the stormy fears that the ambiguous society brings, 'this is our sole defence against the season'. The image Rich paints of preparing for a storm creates a terrifying atmosphere with her reference to 'the sky goes black'. The black clouds of the storm are similar to the dark thoughts that storm and cloud our minds. I feel Rich is trying to deal with the feelings of concern and apprehension throughout this poem, she suggests that 'these are things we have learned to do'. I understand that Rich, although dealing with the feelings uncertainty, is trying her best to stay calm and control. The destructiveness of society has thought her to do so.

Learning to survive a destructive society is very much an ongoing theme in Rich's poem 'Aunt Jennifer's Tiger'. Rich examines the oppressive and patriarchal society that women are subjected to through the fictional characters of an aunt and uncle. The tiger within in the poem symbolises males because a tiger is seen as a fierce and brave creature that many animals fear. Rich demonstrates the freedom and pride men have with the repetition of the word 'prance'. She emphasises the security men have with their freedom when she says 'they do not fear the men beneath the tree, they pace in sleek chivalric certainty'. The powerlessness that women feel within the strict, male dominated society when entering marriage is evidently seen when Rich explains that the her imaginary aunt felt the 'massive weight under the Uncle's wedding band'. She creates a stark image of women being trapped within marriage as there were major restraints on women when they got married, they were expected to do as their husbands say and become mothers or homemakers. The capitalisation of the letter U in the word uncle demonstrates his dominance, not only within the marriage but what society valued and thought was conventional. Rich's poem is a statement of powerlessness and how that powerlessness continues even when women die, 'when aunt is dead her terrified hands will be still ringed with the ordeals she was mastered by' however men 'will go on prancing, proud and unafraid'. Rich has painted ominous image of the oppressive society women will never conquer if society does not modify the negative values it has inflicted.

#### **Paragraph 4 – 'Living in Sin'**

- Free verse poem.
- Blinded by the romantic idea of her boyfriend, soon becomes unsatisfactory with living with him.
- Idealism vs reality
- Begin to see Rich's ideas change the older she gets.

#### **Paragraph 5 – 'Diving into the Wreck'**

- Rich identify herself as a strong feminist
- Explores the image of women being disempowered and written out of History
- Functional metaphors

#### **Paragraph 6 – 'Trying to Talk with a Man'**

- A failing marriage told through metaphors.
- Similes – destructiveness of marriage
- Inability of a man and wife to express their feelings
- Confessional poem

#### **Paragraph 7 – Conclusion**

- Link main points back to question/thesis



Emily Dickinson has been described as ‘feeling what she does and she feels it in all its strangeness more deeply’. Dickinson has a unique and dark approach to poetry, while she is vivid in her descriptions like describing her own funeral and death in ‘I Heard a Fly Buzz when I Died’ and ‘I Felt a Funeral in My Brain’, to say she has an energetic style would be quite wrong. Dickinson dares to explore the strangeness and incomprehensible aspects of our world. She encapsulates her readers and encourages them to question the human condition through her use of sombre and melancholic tones like in ‘After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes’. Dickinson was quite shy to experience the world and lead a reclusive path, while she did have a fascination with living, her focus tended to zone in on the struggles and grim side like in her poem ‘There’s a Certain Slant of Light’, she explores her oppressive religion and constant fear of death. We can see in her poems ‘Hope is Thing with Feathers’ and ‘A Bird Came Down the Walk’, she was eager for a connection and through her striking use of nature images we understand her desire to not just exist but to attain a fulfilling lifestyle. It makes us all the more sympathetic to Dickinson, we begin to see her reclusive life lead her to focus on the gloomy aspects of living and unable to experience the rich and colourful elements of the world.

Dickinson explores her fascination with the darker side of life and its dark experiences throughout her poem ‘I Felt a Funeral in my Brain’. Her poem focuses on the idea of being conscious in a coffin throughout her own funeral. She vividly describes her funeral using the sense of sound, she states she heard ‘mourners to and fro’, a typical funeral scene. Her tone is lacking energy and is more so on the melancholic side which is appropriate for a funeral. I feel Dickinson may have had a fear of being buried alive or not being able to experience being dead. This fear may have resulted in her reclusive lifestyle and as a result deprived her of life’s rich experiences. She creates an eerie atmosphere using a simile, ‘service, like a drum beating’. She forms an image that death is attempting to get to her and is almost knocking away at her. She suggests that her ‘mind going numb’, implying she is slowly dying and she is becoming drowsy. She spurs her readers into a feeling of alarm, we begin to question Dickinson’s state of mind when she wrote this poem. She creates a sharp image of death and says ‘being but an ear... solitary here’, implying that it is just her and death now and all she can do is listen to the silence forever. Her chilling image of her and the silence evokes a sense of fear within her readers. Her use of caesuras really creates a sense of drama and compels readers to think what now? She says ‘finished knowing – then –’. I feel the caesuras imply she has finally taken her last breathe. I think the caesuras represent the abruptness of death that while Dickinson was dying throughout her poem, death can be so hasty to stop you mid-sentence. Dickinson’s obsession with death and dying is astonishing and her animated exploration of what she thought this experience would be like is quite fascinating.

Dickinson's poetry was like her diary, she expressed her deepest fears and emotions, many of these fears she painted quite strikingly. In her poem 'After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes', she shares an overwhelming emotional pain she is feeling. Again, Dickinson focuses on the dull side of life and seems to be unable to enjoy and connect with life. She says that her nerves 'sit ceremonious like tombs', her use of simile invites the reader to understand that she is feeling numb and her heart is feeling cold like the stone in a tomb. Dickinson's use of hyperbole heightens this idea of her inability to savour life and all it has to offer when she says 'the stiff heart questions was it he, that bore, and yesterday, or centuries before'. She implies she has been feeling this pessimistic for so long that she can't remember the last time she felt something. We feel a sense of concern, when she mentions that 'the feet, mechanical, go round', Dickinson implies that she isn't living but that she is just existing in this world. We feel sympathetic towards Dickinson, for her to share such a dark time in her life must have been very difficult. She paints a dramatic image of the shadowy aspect of life in the last two ambiguous lines of her poem. She mentions 'freezing persons', I feel it is an indication to the fact she is losing any sense of emotion and will to live, she's numb. Her last line causes a lot of worry, with the use of caesuras, she says 'first – chill – then stupor – then letting go –'. We begin to wonder as readers, has Dickinson let go of what has been bothering her or like in 'I Felt a Funeral in my Brain', I feel the caesura indicates that she has lost any will to live and embrace life from this pain.

It is evident, Dickinson lacked any real love of life and the experiences it had to offer. She seemed to focus on the gloomy elements, however I feel after studying her poem, 'I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died', she is attempting to pursue the idea of a 'perfect' death to demonstrate that even in dying, we can undergo a final rich experience the world has to offer. Her poem focuses on her idealistic death but also a huge fear of losing that impeccable moment. From the beginning of the poem a very morbid, dull tone is established, 'I heard a fly buzz when I died'. However, she depicts that there is a stillness and a sense of calm in the room, 'between the heavens of a storm'. The picture Dickinson is painting is her ideal final moments with mourners and family and their 'breaths gathering firm'. Dickinson's fascination with death and dying is conveyed strongly throughout the poem that it evokes the question within readers' how she lived till the age of fifty five if she was so focused on the end. She mentions the 'King' in stanza two, suggesting that death is King and she's peacefully waiting for him and is prepared for death, 'I willed my keepsakes'. Despite divulging into the dark and cruel theme of death, she has managed to create an harmonious scene with her soothing but sorrowful tone. Dickinson has thought carefully and meticulously about how she expects her experience of death and dying to take form. However, by the end of the poem, the calm picture soon changes with the annoying buzzing of a fly, 'there interposed a fly'. The fly and its uncontrollable energetic mood is symbolic of Dickinson's fear of losing control. She paints an expressive image of the fly ruining her last few moments and she emphasises this through the alliteration of the letter 'B', 'stumbling buzz- between the light and me'. The fly has intercepted her and her tranquil death something she had hoped would be a rich experience. Dickinson employs the use of caesuras again at the end of the poem, she says 'I could not see to see –', readers are questioning has she taken her final breath? I feel after reading this poem, Dickinson was theatrical portrayal in her of a 'perfect' death, which is quite astonishing, I feel she is a skilful and creative poet who encourages her readers to pursue the idea that our final moments on earth should be a rich experience like the rest of life.

Dickinson shares an insight with her readers that it was her religion that prevented her from enjoying life. In her poem 'There's a Certain Slant of Light', her melancholic and pessimistic tone is seen throughout. She sets the scene mentioning 'winter afternoons', winter is considered to be a dark and cold time of year and representative of death. She mentions that winter 'oppresses, like the heft of cathedral tunes', her reference to religion through the word 'cathedral' indicates that Dickinson may be afraid of death because she was Calvinist. Calvinism has very strong beliefs about death and dying. Predestination was a huge part, meaning it was pre-decided before you were born if you went to heaven or hell, no matter how much sin you committed or how angelic you were on earth, it was 'pre-destined'. Dickinson mentions 'heavenly hurt', implying that her fear of death may stem from the oppressive Calvinist beliefs. I feel Dickinson has anxiety about death and living, and she does wish she can neglect her religion but what if it has been decided she can enter Heaven. I also feel Dickinson may be worried about committing a sin and that God may re-think his decision if she was pre-destined for heaven. There's no way she can know for certain and it seems to be a very heavy burden on her. She is suffering from serious spiritual pain, she mentions there's 'no scar but internal difference' Her struggle is hurting her heart and it makes us, her readers, sympathetic to her. The use of the word 'slant' indicates there's a constant reminder of what death could be for her, the slant offers almost like a sneak peek of her afterlife. Dickinson uses personification to really emphasise her dread of death, 'the landscape listens', nature is reflecting her emotions. Her use of simile and caesuras at the end indicates a sign of hope, 'when it goes, tis like the distance – on the look of death-', the slant of light doesn't always creep around her, sometimes it leaves. The caesuras suggest that she can let go of this fear from time to time. I feel Dickinson struggled so much with her religion and the idea of dying because she really was anxious and fearful of what was decided for her.

#### **Paragraph 6 – 'A Bird Came Down the Walk'**

- A poem about nature and her reclusive life
- Expresses her struggle for connection to the outside world
- The bird symbolises her and her fears of the world

#### **Paragraph 7 – 'Hope is a Thing with Feathers'**

- Poem about nature and hope
- Hope is fragile, like Dickinson
- Explores her relationship with hope – hope to enjoy life?

#### **Paragraph 8 – Conclusion**

Link conclusion back to main thesis

W.B Yeats once said “there is another world, but it is in this one”, I feel this phrase is apt when reading Yeats’s poetry. He has a remarkable ability to immerse the reader in his writings. His use of carefully selected language that paint striking images about topics such history, particularly in ‘September 1913’, end up absorbing the reader so much that it almost feels like we are witnessing the events of the poem first hand. Yeats’ continues this theme of absorption in the ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’, he imparts the comforting sense of coming home, that the majority of us are familiar with, with the biblical legend the ‘Prodigal Son’. His choice of soft syllables and onomatopoeia create a sense of home. Yeats’ often draws on familiar yet fascinating ideas to engage his readers, he reflects on the history of his love life, particularly the loss of love, in his poem ‘The Wild Swans and Coole’, using melancholic symbolism. Yeats’ is consistently trying to connect his readers to his poetry through what is recognizable in order for them to relate, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ and ‘Under Ben Bulbin’ do just that through their incorporation of Irish and Greek history and mythology that constructs vivid images using metaphor. Yeats’ is a skilful yet delicate poet, who not only undertakes to confer his ideas but immerse his readers into his world of poetry.

Yeats’ lived through such a prominent time in Irish history, that it is no surprise many of his poems include these historic events. In his poem ‘September 1913’, he expresses his views on the 1913 lockout and the state that Ireland is in at this point in time. The poem opens with a sarcastic and bitter tone suggesting Yeats is disgusted with Ireland. He plays on the word ‘save’, ‘for men were born to pray and save’, suggesting that he isn’t happy with how the rich people of Ireland are controlling his beloved country. The play on the word ‘save’ hints that Yeats observes the rich man saving all his money but his soul won’t be saved because of his greed. Yeats refers to the idea that that the prayers these men pray are not out of spirituality but out of fear for their selfish actions, ‘prayer to shivering prayer’. Yeats has no fear voicing his aversion of Ireland’s state, he repeats the phrase ‘romantic Irelands dead and gone, it’s with O’Leary in the grave’. The reference to John O’Leary who fought so hard for an independent Ireland and who was someone that Yeats admired reinforces his frustration with the situation in Ireland. Yeats creates a striking image of a defeated and bloody Ireland and he questions the people, did the likes of Wolfe Tone and Fitzgerald die in vain? ‘That all that blood was shed’. Yeats creates an atmosphere that 1913 Ireland was a selfish and cynical time and the great war heroes died ‘for this’. It’s evident that Yeats is a true patriot of his country but that he is struggling to overcome how much Ireland has fallen. There is no mention of the future or hope within the final stanza, indicating that Yeats has become quite disheartened, he doesn’t see any way forward for his beloved country.

Despite the troublesome state that Ireland was in, Yeats still adores his homeland. In his poem 'Lake Isle of Innisfree', Yeats draws on the biblical legend of the 'Prodigal son' to express his longing to be home. When he wrote this poem, Yeats was living in London and his admiration for his homeland was apparent. He opens the poem with the phrase 'I will arise and go no'. The repetition of the simple word 'go' conveys the stress and anxiety that Yeats so much wishes to be at home, much like the Prodigal son. He creates a comforting, peaceful atmosphere through his use of sibilance and onomatopoeia, 'sounds by the shore'. Yeats has a proficient skill of constructing an image within the readers mind, that it feels so much like we are experiencing what he is expressing. He constructs a scene of comfort and relaxation that the lake isle of Innisfree has to offer in comparison to the hustle and bustle of a busy city. His return to his homeland will be wonderful much like the Prodigal son's return, he establishes that even nature will be joyous with his return with the 'midnights all a glimmer'. It's evident, despite the grievances he defines in other poems, that Yeats has a desire to be at home. The imagery he has created through his harmonious language appeals to us readers as well. He creates a desire within us to be at the lake isle.

When we think of history, we think of events in the past. While Yeats explores political and social history within his poetry, he dives into reflecting on the history of his love life in his poem 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. The poem is set at dusk and the reference to 'Autumn beauty' and 'October twilight' suggests that Yeats is at the later stages of his life and reflecting back on his choices in the matter of the heart. He draws on the symbol of the swan to do so. Swans are an elegant creature and symbolise love and romance. Yeats observing the swans says 'nine and fifty swans', which is unusual because swans more often travel in pairings. We can divulge that the swans represent Yeats and that he is lonely with no one to love. This idea is reinforced when he says 'the heart is sore'. His word choice is quite sombre and encourages an idea of what could have been. His use of short harsh vowels in the words 'trod' and 'tread' suggest he has lost love and he is feeling a sense of animosity. This idea is reinforced with the reference to 'broken rings', hinting that a marriage or serious relationship has broken down. Reflecting on the history of his love life is quite a mournful task for Yeats, however he is such an exhilarating poet because he does not shy away from the harsh realities of life.

**Paragraph 5: 'Sailing to Byzantium'**

- Yeats is growing older and confronting the harsh realities of aging.
- Reference to biblical legend/myth of the three wise men
- Use of metaphors to depict aging
- Rhyme – creates a rhythm of a decreasing heart rate

**Paragraph 6: 'Under Ben Bulbin'**

- Yeats' valediction to Irish poetry.
- Strong themes of Irishness and Irish History
- Untraditional form – Yeats encouraging creativity and originality of them poem
- Imagery of Irish life

**Paragraph 7: Conclusion**

- Link main points back to thesis