
Ideological Resistance in Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck"

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Abstract

Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" takes an issue with woman identity. Questioning the ideologically preoccupied masculine stereotyping of woman, Rich envisions a world of independence and harmony in which male-female dichotomy ceases to exist. The poem symbolically states three distinct phases of journey to express protest and psychological victory over gender disparity in the male-controlled society. It raises the idea that the false stereotypical and socio-political framing about gender and its roles are inimical to maintaining equality in society. The main objective of the study is to infer how the patriarchal society generated a conventional system to keep women out of mainstream and also the way typical females planned to gain control of the vagaries of androcentric culture. I used Tyson's resistance theory as the main theoretical tool to analyze and interpret the poem. This theoretical stratagem preserves the literature related to the struggle for freedom and impartiality. This article argues that the poem challenges the institutional apparatuses that naturalize women's role and identity and advocates to establish gender impartiality in the society. I contend that this poem is the bedrock for the establishment of independence. The overall inference of the paper is that the protracted prejudice that leads to life-threatening exploitation creates revolt through literature and leads to plausible upheaval in society. Thus, it is discernible that literature, far from being the innocent figment of imagination, represents a subtle voice of resistance against exploitation and prejudice.

Keywords: identity, ideology, impartiality, power, resistance

Introduction

Adrienne Rich's imagery-packed poem "Diving into the Wreck" is an unflinching assertion of the poet's rage against the gender-biased invisible ideology that has long circumscribed women's identity in its constricting fold. Clearly, Rich is outraged and unwaveringly puts up an agenda on the table: breaking away from this deeply entrenched prejudice to establish fraternity and equality in society. She shows the complexities of women's participation in the protest because society has enclosed its form to demolish female identity. Her underlying postulation is to maintain gender equality. Scarborough and Risman (2020, p.40) discuss the roles of gender studies, "Gender studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that examines gender inequality." Socially-structured gender disparity has been an ongoing scholarly study: "Gender scholars began analyzing inequalities and social relations between women and men from the early 1970s through today"

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(p.51). Obviously, gender experts have raised the issue in terms of women's franchise and equal educational opportunities.

The poem revolts against the male-centered stereotypical othering. Cranny-Francis et.al. (2003, pp.140-150) scrutinize the origin and function of stereotype, "The word stereotype comes from the technology of printing presses where it refers to the metal plates used to make exact and multiple copies." They move one step further and assert that ideological framing "sets up the symbolic boundaries and then characterizes inequalities as natural differences" and "assaults the subject with an image produced within the social realm." They further state how they are institutionalized. "By 'institution' we mean a set of relationships and/or practices which are expressions of mainstream social values and beliefs" (p.13). Tyson (2013, p.139) agrees with Rich that imperceptible ideology is more dangerous than visible ideology: "we have become so accustomed to a patriarchal ideology that it often seems invisible. However, its invisibility makes this ideology all the more dangerous." Tyson and Rich both point out that invisible ideology is perilous because it seeps through the society without anybody noticing it explicitly and works insidiously in terms of othering the females.

The underlying assumption prevalent in the society is that the role of females is contrary to what the males have expected of them, to which females respond that it is the implicit conventions subtly operating through different state apparatuses and institutions that have damaged their true identity. As a consequence, they are bound to rebel the male-centric convention as it masks their exact individuality.

"Diving into the Wreck" symbolizes this confrontation and ultimate victory over this indistinguishable gender-biased convention. Rich's dedication leads her to investigate and gain control of the vicissitudes of androcentric society, reflecting of what Tyson argues (2013): "Patriarchy, traditional gender roles, the objectification of women, sexism, and the 'cult of true womanhood'" are the fundamental invisible customs that weaken the true potentiality of females due to misogynistic approach of society. "Patriarchal programming is unnatural, unhealthy, and unethical," according to Tyson (2013, p.142) because it only implies "conforming to traditional gender roles." Traditional gender norms are "created by patriarchy rather than nature." The positions that have been assigned are a result of the sociopolitical positioning. Women are barred from political leadership and decision-making due to "patriarchal stereotypes" that classify good and bad girls based on whether they embrace tradition or not. Tyson (2013, p.148) defines work place exploitation of women as "they had to fend for themselves in a workplace that exploited women by confining them to low-paying, insecure jobs where they were vulnerable to sexual harassment." Structural power structures that are maintained physically and institutionally are inimical to them, which encourages the poetics of resistance. Tyson states (2013, p.143), the people are programmed to believe women as "innately inferior to men: less intelligent, less rational, less courageous, and so forth", casting "men as decision-makers and women as dutiful followers." Such invisible predicaments are the building blocks of equal access to power and politics. Tyson (2013, p.143) reiterates the 19th-century concept "cult of true womanhood" which was a "white cultural ideal" that still shapes male thinking. True women were "fragile, submissive, and sexually pure." (p.144) The same concept dominates them even in the 21st century.

The invisible power to suppress women from the mainstream and toss them to the margin exists in the mindset of people. Habib (2011, pp.254-255) relates "patriarchy" with "a political institution" which is, in turn, framed on "ideological contexts." Bertens (2001, p.218) critically remarks about ideological framing that "gender pervades western culture within its standard privileging of masculinity." This is the reason why Rich sets the message through the poem to overthrow the political positioning for equity. So, identity is a major issue for philosophers. Pope (2001, p.243) "refers to the social and historical makeup of a person, personality as a construct." The make-up has to be dynamic and inclusive but it should not perceive "identity as other." The invisible plane of labelling gears up one and damages the other.

'Diving into the Wreck' is not simply the expedition into the river. The poem works on the theme of resistance and advocacy for equity. The three stages of movement of the poem: establishment of the foundation, diving beneath water and sightseeing the smashup to maintain the true potentiality of the females tie up with Tyson's resistance theory. These phases emblematically specify the willingness to face the challenges of life in the process of the protest, possible adversities, and the definitive triumph for gender impartiality respectively. As a result, this poem serves as the foundation for opposition to male-controlled ideology and maintain equity.

Research Questions

The poem 'Diving into the Wreck' asserts to smash up the gender-biased world to uphold uniformity in the society. The declaration is largely backed by the dense symbols and imageries. What do they signify? What is the rhetorical import of the way she is making such military-like proclamation? Are the symbols and imageries evocative of some sorts of ideological resistance? If they are intended to disrupt the existing symbolic order established by the male, which symbols and imageries in sync with her line of argument? Do what she claims and the metaphors used to represent those claims match in terms of meaning making? This paper responds the aforementioned interrogations through textual analysis and interpretation.

Research Methodology

'Diving into the Wreck' is a poem that undertakes to elevate the social status of females through verse. For the justification of the argument, textual evidences, images, symbols, expert opinion and critical observations are the supporting evidences. The researcher used 'Diving into the Wreck' as the text for the analysis and interpretation through the theoretical point of Tyson's resistance theory. Helgeson (2012), Graff, A. & Korolczuk (2022), Habib (2011) Imelda & Pilcher (2004), Scarborough & Risman (2020) and Tyson (2013) are the major secondary sources of the study to scrutinize the text. Hence, this is qualitative study. The text and the critical visions are the foundations for the justification of the logic that gender-biased society has created split among people. The harmony in the society is conceivable only through social inclusion.

Resistance to Patriarchal Ideology

Rich's 'Diving into the Wreck' deals with the substance of the journey to go deep into the journey and jolt the gender-biased world. The first two stanzas arrange the base for the speaker's journey.

At the very outset, the poem evokes the imagery of the “books of myth” orient readers to the academic culture and conventions that frame the invisible archetypal structures places male as the core and female as the margin. Imelda and Pilcher (2004, p. x) advocate that “Women had begun to contest the hegemony of a canon of great works of literature which practically excluded women” and “prohibited the emergence of great women in this arena.” This biased ideological positioning leads the poet to commence the poetics of resistance.

The poet sets on a journey for the establishment of equal identity. The “body armour”, “black rubber” “awkward mask”, “ladder”, and “maritime floss” (Ferguson et.al. pp.1797-1798) designates the preliminary preparation for the journey. The objects are the equipments required for the long journey underneath the water. These preparatory gadgets symbolically resemble Sutton’s contention (2003, p.40) that “Men have beaten down women and passed laws to keep women as second-class citizens for centuries” and they have to revolt to overthrow “oppressive laws and customs.” This first stage of the journey refers to the poet's physical preparation for the battle in pursuit of the victory.

The envisioning of the forthcoming troubles indicates her current position and probable hazard, which lie ahead of her. But Rich is firm to complete her mission to create self-determination and equivalence. She is not saddened as Tyson (2013, p .141) articulates, “So, don’t be upset if you find it difficult to figure out.” She is content with an ‘assiduous team’, though “alone”. She believes that individual determination leads to success for which she stalks out unaccompanied. To justify the validity of her journey, she draws an allusion to “Cousteau”, a French underwater explorer, photographer, and author. She shows the contrast between her journey and that of Cousteau to indicate that she was involved in the journey alone for the change but the French photographer moved in the mass. The ladder as a symbol designates descending and ascending for a successful voyage. Outwardly, the mission is unaccompanied however she has the team for support “There is a ladder/the ladder is always there” (Ferguson et.al. pp.1797-1798). The ladder as a symbol identifies the invisible group support in her mission.

Diving underneath the water highlights adversities confronting poet during her journey. The beginning of the third stanza “I go down” indicates the course of diving, revealing her adversities: “the oxygen immerses me”, “My flippers cripple me,” and “I crawl like an insect.” I am Blacking out-difficult and hardship”. Despite such hurdles, she is determined to continue her journey to finalize her mission. She has to face an oxygen crisis, be cripple, and crawl like an insect. She compares herself with the insect to show how hard the journey is. The air is blue and making it difficult to dive but her obligation is so “powerful” that she sticks with her responsibility tenaciously.

The speaker’s promise to accomplish the mission without a physical companion shows her a lone but determined crusader: “I have to learn alone” The formation of identity shows the willingness to value identity. Ultimately, she confesses “I came to explore the wreck.” She witnesses the social harm: “I came to see the damage that was done,” The damage created the “drowned face” that is the “evidence of damage.” She witnesses the physical wreck and connects with the gender smash-up. Graff and Korolczuk (2022, p.4) assert that it is no longer possible to think seriously about democracy and politics while ignoring gender issues. “However, they have a major concern “in support of what they call family values.” The gender debate should not smash up the family structure. The harm that the structured masculine society is the subject of her investigation. The

hardships are the obstacles that females have faced in the process of establishing a biased-free situation.

Adrienne Rich wishes to break away with the predetermined patriarchal framework that undermines the importance and identity of females which is visible in the society. Her mission is to dismantle gender-biased relationships and develop equal opportunity in society. She uses metaphor to back up her claim in this free verse. The speaker in this extract is a female who wishes to explore the tribulations that are caused by the male in the patriarchal society and ultimately visits "the place" to get the situation under her control. The beginning of the stanza indicates her presence "I am here" to identify the "wreck". The maltreatment that the male-superior society structured with an "armoured body" to dominate females is the subject of her investigation and she does so. The use of images "dark hair" and "streams black" designate the unfavourable situation due to which she has to "circle silently" and "dive into the hold" to take the situation under her control to challenge gender partiality. The use of the metaphor "I am he" blurs the demarcation line for inequality.

The blurring of the gendered identity is the mission of the poet. She attempts to resist the preoccupied society and raises her voice for independence. Ultimately, she reaches and gets the situation in her "hold" and advocates to blur the gender identity, "I am she, I am he". This is the point for equality where society judges not on the foundation of gender but on intelligence. She voices to establish her identity despite the probable complexity. She reaches her destination. She has to fight continuously to create a situation of equilibrium: "I am she; I am he." According to Habib (2011, p.256), "Kristeva sees the arts as ongoing a *Jouissance* that threatens to disrupt the symbolic order. She sees this potential, especially in poetry and literature." Rich has the same line of thought as Kristeva's claim that this verse too disrupts the symbolic order, let the world should apprehend the potential threat in the absence of independence. To create a sense of equality, gender-predisposed demarcation has to be faded and she does so. Helgeson (2012, p.9) interprets with the psychological aspect that "sex refers to biological category; gender the psychological category." The statement compellingly blows up the hierarchy and establishes equality in terms of gender. Here lies the psychological satisfaction of the speaker because she is successful to identify the collision and work on it to raise the existing position to the level of positive connotation.

The speaker resolves to destroy ideological framework and establish a gendered self. "The thing I came for" to explore the wreck advocates to bear the "stress" and complete the journey. She struggles to find her identity despite the probable scars. We have to adopt a new way to redeem the lost things because females for the males are the "half-destroyed instruments." To take back this view there has to be a continuous struggle to create "I am she; I am he." Velar and Schuster (2007, p. xxii) declare that resistance to institutional codes advances creativity, "The source of resistance to these codes is often the impetus for creativity." Rich points out the way patriarchal society creates the framework to obscure the value and identity of females. Hence, they have to blur the border line through resistance.

Liberty, gender equality, and philanthropic treatment are revelations of the speaker. Without freedom and gender impartiality, marginalized people cannot be in the mainstream. The poem's ultimate goal is to keep women in the mainstream. The stages in the poem indicate these issues impartially. Othering mars the self of the speaker for which she advocates for equal access to

social and power issues. The suitable strategies for the speaker in the poem are metaphorical presentation in this verse. Mythical allusion and historical references in the poem support the justification of the resistance. The verse without rhyme scheme is appropriate to speak for the elimination of the crash. The journey into the sea represents freedom and equality.

The exquisiteness of the verse lies in the use of figurative language to justify the confrontation. The journey into the 'Sea' by the speaker metaphorically signifies the voyage for independence. 'Diving' connotes the process of plunging into the unfavorable world for expedition and revolt. 'Wreck' is the metaphor for the planned accident for the females that the enclosed socio-political framing created for the females. The use of metaphor has made the piece significant for the resistance ideology. Thus, the short metaphorical poem gives the picture of a society in which females realized that they are treated as others, and therefore, they are ready to plunge into the disorder and overcome it. Without vigorous exercises, it is too hard to create equity among the beings of society as the speaker in the poem does.

The poem emphasizes humanity based on the experience of the teller through a metaphorical journey. The speaker is physically alone yet psychologically associated with others because she is on a mission for liberty and rights. The mission is to highlight the sea as framed ideology and the traveler as a female. The sea has vast possibilities whereas the traveler is bound to accept certain codes even to take control of it. Her firm conviction is to tell the story that she has to dive into the wreck to crack the established norms. She fails to know from the surface what the wreck is. So, she has to dive into the depth and goes beyond the surface. The narration at the end changes from 'I' to 'We' to show that she is not alone. The feminist world is with her to applaud in the sequence of the tasks. People failed to understand the wreck without confronting it. This is the journey of discovery of loss and resistance to the established patriarchal ideology. Using the metaphor of wreck, she likes to recall her vicissitudes of life. This leads to self-discovery and the discovery of knowledge that in turn leads to a sense of resistance to the designed male framework.

Conclusion

The poem is an epitome of the resistance to socio-political enclosing and stimulates to introduce the marginalized people into the mainstream. Once there is an extreme point of exploitation; resistance dismantles the archetypal frames. The patriarchal ideology prolongs suffocation for the females. Therefore, they struggle for freedom and equality. The phases of the journey refer to the phases of resistance in a real-life situation. This is the psychological expedition that anticipates finding out the roots of the suffering in society and overcoming them. The metaphorical journey leads to discovering the causes and consequences of gender disparity and enunciating for the resolution through struggle. The situation compels females to refurbish the invisible chains and plunge into the world of independence and liberation. The text deals with the voice of the resistance to dominant sociopolitical ideology that plans to defend one and smash the other. Excessive exclusion generates social hollowness to control which people must be aware of the significance of fraternity.

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