



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### A Socio-Stylistic Analysis of Adrienne Rich's Poem "Dividing into the Wreck"

**Mahendra Kumar Budhathoki, PhD** 

Bishwa Bhasa Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

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**Corresponding Author :** Mahendra Kumar Budhathoki, **Email:** [mahendratunp@gmail.com](mailto:mahendratunp@gmail.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

Women's oppression and subjugation have been throughout human history. Rich, as a feminist, portrays the issues of gender in her poems, and attempts to recreate the women's history and voices for women's liberation. Stylistic analysis is significant to explore the meaning of a text. This study explores the stylistic devices in Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" associating with the socio-cultural issue of gender injustice in the patriarchal society and women's liberation. The study shows how linguistic and literary features of the poem present the meaning and effect. It fulfils the gap between the meaning and meaning making evidences in the analysis. This study has used a socio-stylistic analysis as the theoretical tool. The findings of the study are that stylistic devices such as allusion, enjambment, alliteration, allegory, symbols are used to make poetic effects on readers and/or people to eradicate the "myths" and redefine womanhood in modern society. The speaker of the poem encourages women to self-discovery the truth of women for the

women's rights, identity and gender justice in the modern society. Rich as the speaker of the poem rejects the false stories of history and makes a journey to dive into the ocean of the damaged history. Thus, Rich's feminist voice depicted in her poems encourages the common women and feminists to recreate a new history for gender equality.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender equality, liberation, linguistic devices, socio-stylistics, subjugation

#### INTRODUCTION

The study explores socio-stylistic aspects of Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" emphasizing the poetic impacts of gender. Women's oppression and subjugation have been reflected throughout human history. "There is no private life which is not determined by a wider public life" (Rich 2016, p. 353). Men have held the power in the patriarchal family and society, and created obscured stories about women. In this context, American poet Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), who focuses on gender discrimination, deconstructs the history

and redefine the truth of womanhood in the modern society. She divulges knowledge and the use of language for women's freedom from the patriarchal society.

Rich writes poems associated with gender issue and problems. "Rich's poetic vision examining the cultural and patriarchal discourse becomes not only woman-centered but also nature-centered to show how human and non-human subjectivities are similarly marginalized" (Erkan, 2012, p. 240). Rich as a woman, wife and mother depicts her unhappiness into her poems. "She became increasingly sensitive to issues of social justice and came to feel that she was no longer a dutiful daughter of the patriarchy, but a poet of the oppositional imagination" (Stein, 2017, p. 16). She examines the women's lives and humanity in the exiting patriarchy. "She grew increasingly involved in the feminist movement, speaking at conferences, and writing poems and essays that became foundational works for feminism and lesbian feminism. ... Identity becomes a pressing issue for Rich through her politicization into feminism" (Stein, 2017, p. 16). Her writings propagate the themes of personhood, power, politics, social justice and humanity with gender issue, sexuality, and lesbianism. Men's world determine how and what women should act and believe. She voices for the social change and human cooperation to achieve the goals of peace and justice in the society. She challenges the gender discriminations and segregations through the powerful language use. Seidman (2006) writes, "The considerable moral pressure exerted by her work has never been compromised by a sacrifice of the "beautiful" – the lovely vowels, consonants, images, and metaphors of her emotional intelligence" (p. 228). The thoughts, emotions and conflicts on certain subject matters are conveyed through words, syntactic structures and figurative languages. Such uses of the language impact on readers' understanding of poems.

A language represents the socio-

cultural aspects of a community; Rich is described as "feminist stylistics" (Zuraikat et al., 2020, p. 750). This study is concerned with gender discrimination that exists in all societies and the language styles employed to express the gender issue. The study investigates the various styles such as structure and diction employed by Rich's poem to release women from the gender-bias webs in a male-dominated society. Stylistic devices explicate the themes and messages in texts and poems. The writer uses stylistic devices to create particular effects and evoke certain meanings and themes in texts. The study analyzes the poetic devices that affect the meaning of women's exploitation and self-discovery for women's empowerment.

Rich usually depicts the feminist vents in her poems. Many readers may have difficulty grasping the meanings and themes of the poems. To comprehend her poem, readers should identify and analyze the stylistic devices, linguistic instruments and literary devices. The problem that readers encounter is the association of the meaning with the stylistic devices in a text. The readers must recognize what the literary/stylistic devices plays for the effects on the readers to impart the meanings and themes of the poem. The identification and connection of stylistic devices with an issue draws the readers' attentions to the meaning of the poem. What and how do the linguistic and literary aspects of the poem support to its meanings and themes? How are meanings made in a literary text "Diving into the Wreck"?

The objective of the study is to explore literary and/or linguistic devices to analyze the gender issue in Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" through the viewpoint of socio-stylistics theory.

## **THEORETICAL TOOL: SOCIO-STYLISTICS**

The language features contribute to the meanings of literary texts. Short and Leech (1981) defines style as the uses of

words and linguistic aspects in a specific situation. Short (1996) describes stylistics as a linguistic approach to the literary text, and Mugair and Mahadi (2014) discuss stylistics as a linguistic device. Language features of a text generate its theme. The concept of socio-stylistics is enhanced from the theory of stylistics in literary studies. Sociolinguistics is interwoven with sociology, anthropology and linguistics (Mallinson & Kendal, 2013). Stylistics is "the study of any situationally distinctive use of language and of choices made by individuals and social groups in their usage of language in all linguistic domains", while sociolinguistics is "a branch of linguistics that studies the ways in which language is integrated with human society with reference to such race, ethnicity, class, sex, and social institution" (Crystal, 1992). Stylistics in literary criticism analyzes the language of literature by exploiting the concepts of linguistics.

Socio-stylistics might be defined as a subfield of linguistics that investigates the characteristics of different language varieties in relation to their specific applications in various contexts. It makes an effort to establish principles that are able to account for the particular linguistic decisions that are made by individuals and social groups in their communication. (Mubarak & Joodi, 2023, p. 74)

People create the meaning using various linguistic features. Literary stylistics explores how the themes and messages are constructed by certain linguistic devices, patterns and choices in texts. "The important issue for us is that language can carry ideologies, either explicitly or implicitly" (Jeffries, 2010, p. 8). The stylistic devices enact the textual effects and meanings in literary texts. The meanings are associated with socio-cultural issues, such as gender. According to Bennett (2000), "intuitions, social causes and interpretative skills are so important in socio-stylistics that

stylisticians always avoid vague evaluation about the way formal linguistic features are manipulated" (cited in Ashipu, 2010, p. 114). This makes a voice influential.

Messages are conveyed through poetic language. Poetry generally deviates from common language rules. Poets alter the standard syntactic patterns, common diction and textual structures for the effects of aesthetic judgement and sensibility; it is concerned with poetic license in the literary world. "Stylisticians try to provide 'hard' data to support existing 'intuitions' about a literary work", "suggest new interpretations of literary works based on linguistic evidence" and "attempt to establish general points about how literary meanings are made" (Barry, 2011, pp. 203-205). Stylistics as an approach provides scientific objectivity for the interpretation of literary texts. Stylistics is the study of literary style i.e. use of language in a literary text (Widdowson, 2004). Haynes (1989) states that stylistics is the study of linguistics which shows the way of an author's thinking in literary works. Stylistic devices convey writers' feelings, experiences, thoughts and ideas to readers; the features of language portrayed in literary texts function to interpret the texts.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study is a qualitative textual research. The study focuses on analyzing the issue of gender in Adrienne Rich's poem 'Diving into the Wreck' through the exploration of stylistic devices. The required data is collected and analyzed from the Rich's poem 'Diving into the Wreck'. The stylistic devices support the poet's intuition and meaning conveyed in the poem. Ferguson's (1996) model is used to analyze the socio-stylistics context to achieve the objective of the study. Based on the theories of Ferguson (1996), Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) and Leech (1969), Rich's poem 'Diving into the Wreck' is analyzed: socio-stylistic model – stylistics – gender – grammatical

stylistic devices and language grammatical deviations. This study analyzes stylistic devices and mechanisms exploited by the poet Rich to define women's identity. The researcher has analyzed the phonological level (alliteration, assonance, etc.) and semantic level (literary devices such as metaphor and symbolism) of the language of the poem to construct the meaning. The stylistic devices depicted in the poem are analyzed from the feminine lens.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Feminine Vent and Stylistic Analysis in the Poem

Adrienne Rich depicts the struggles for exploration of women's identity and their relationship to the past in the poem "Diving into the Wreck" published in free verse in *Diving into the Wreck* (1973).

Working for change, the women in this book break out of their homes to explore a larger world represented by oceans and deserts as they seek to turn civilization from its destructive paths into new directions, creating new myths, redirecting anger into new channels. In [it], women's lives are the central focus as Rich gives voice to women's experience, developing a "common language" that will bring the dark country of our lives into the common light of day. (Stain, 2017, p. 71)

Women must compensate of an endangered society and women utilize their power to self-discovery and women liberation. "The title of *Diving into the Wreck*, her first to use a verb, suggests its active adventure-seeking" (Stain, 2017, p. 71). Although the poem opens with a scientific description of divining into the ocean, the poetess Rich has used a casual tone throughout the poem. Rich exploits an extended metaphor and many symbols to convey the meaning of women's struggle for creating women's rights, identity and liberation in modern society. "The speaker explores a sunken ship to learn about the

failure of traditional myths and in the process discovers her/his androgynous nature" (p. 75). The ten stanza poem of varying lengths opens with the persona's preparations for the dive into the wreck. "The most personal is the most political: *Diving* takes the truism to superlative degrees" (Spaide, 2020, p. 103). Rich politicizes women's traumatic experiences for gender justice. To dive into the wreck, the speaker has "read the book of myths" (line 1) that refers not to physical diving into the sea, but to the origin of feminine myths created by masculine society. "The poem represents the journey of Rich to search for historical obstacles on women" (Jaber & Ali, 2023, pp. 38-39). Rich uses literary devices and evocative words to impart influential meaning, gender injustice to a patriarchal society.

### Allusion

Rich has used two significant allusions in this poem: "Cousteau" (line 9) and "mermaid" (line 72), a "merman" (line 73). The first allusion appears in lines 8-12:

I am having to do this  
not like **Cousteau** with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone.

Jacques-Yves Cousteau (1910–1997) is the prominent French underwater explorer. The speaker distinguishes with the Sea Explorer Cousteau who dived with his teams and many more supports, but the speaker of the poem explored alone in the 'wreck'. The second allusion is in the ninth stanza:

This is the place.  
And I am here, the **mermaid** whose  
dark hair  
streams black, the **merman** in his  
armored body  
We circle silently  
about the wreck  
we dive into the hold.

### I am she: I am he

The speaker describes herself with "the mermaid", "the merman" and "I am

she: I am he" as an androgynous figure representing in various mythologies such as Greco-Roman mythology (Dionysus and Orpheus), Jungian psychology (*anima*). These allusions impact on feminine strength to patriarchal society. The speaker seeks to explore the gender equality between male and female in the modern society.

Rich uses alliterations throughout the poem to draw readers' attention on the connection of words/ phrases and evoke the meanings. In line 5, the voiced sound /b/ of "body-armor" and "black" draws readers' attention to the words and preparation for diving into the wreck like the preparation of battle. In the poem, the bilabial plosive voiced consonant /b/ sound indicates a strong feminist voice or vibration letting out of the discriminated and oppressed voice box of the speaker and/or women. In the fourth stanza, the bilabial plosive voiced /b/, bilabial plosive voiceless /p/ bilabial nasal voiced /m/ sounds are the alliterations that indicate the frightening and excited pace of the speaker's movements into the ocean.

First the air is **blue** and then  
it is **bluer** and then green and then  
**black** I am **black**ing out and yet  
**my** **mask** is **powerful**  
it **pumps my blood** with **power**

In the poem, the sibilance and the alveolar fricative voiceless sound /s/ is used as an alliteration in line 11 "sun-flooded schooner" and "some sundry equipment" in line 21 to signify the merciful sounds of the ocean's surface, the soft splash of water against a ship, the noise of the waves, and the preparing for the dive. It represents the merciful voice of patriarchal society against active feminists. A figure of speech sibilance /s/ is also used in "staring," "sun," "salt and sway" to reveal the watery underworld, i.e. illusory patriarchal society. In line 23, the diacope and alveolar flap voiced sound /r/ "rung after rung" impresses the careful and purposeful movements of the speaker and/or women into the ocean representing patriarchal history. The harsh alliteration sound /kr/ in line 29 and 30

"cripple" and "crawl" shows the difficulties of the speaker's and women's movements towards the ocean, patriarchal myths.

In line 55, the alveolar plosive voiced sound /d/ "I came to see the **damage** that was **done**" conveys the destruction, violence and heavy effect on the speaker and women. Many alliterations are used in the poem: "body," "black" (line 3), "sun," "schooner" (line 11), "side," "schooner" (line 16), "We," "what" (line 17-18), "some sundry" (line 21), "between," "besides," "breathe" (lines 49-51), "cowardice," "courage" (line 88) and "carrying," "camera" (line 91). These alliterations manifest the speaker's and also women's oppression, experiences, feelings, emotions and courage in the poem. The speaker has "the courage" for the self-discovery of womanhood.

### Allegory

The first person speaker descends into sea to investigate and explore the destructed shipwreck. It can be interpreted as an allegory to the speakers and also women's exploration of the damaging false myths as well as true self, identity of womanhood in the patriarchal socio-cultural history. The "wreck" refers to the past narratives about women created by men. The female speaker's journey is to exhibit obfuscated stories of women throughout the gender history and discovered the truth about women.

The use of enjambments in verse refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet, or stanza; its use means the run of lines in poetry without punctuations expresses the emotions of the subjugated and oppressed speaker and women in the poem. The enjambments are in lines 4-7, 8—12 and throughout the poem. Rich uses a caesura that means a break or pause in the beginning, middle or the end of a line of poems. The fifth stanza is an example of a figure of speech caesura:

And now: it is easy to forget  
what I came for



among so many who have always  
lived here  
swaying their crenellated fans  
between the reefs  
and besides  
you breathe differently down here.

The caesura conveys comfortable feeling and confident of the speaker in the journey into the shipwreck. She identifies truth of womanhood in the origin of history. Assonance is also used in the poem. For instance, a short vowel /i/ is repeated in line 29 "My flippers cripple me" which creates an effect in the poem. Hyperbole that means an exaggeration for emphasis or dramatic effect is used in line forty "the sea is not a question of power"; it signifies the power of womanhood in the history.

### Symbols in the Poem

The word "wreck" in the title serves as a symbol in the poem. A wreck means a state of destruction, disaster, shattering and disintegration of something. "The wreck" the speaker explores is both the submerged self and a society poised on the verge of destruction" (Stain, 2017, p. 75). "Diving" refers to the facing, exploring and understanding a disaster horrific and traumatic. One stylistic device is the symbol "wreck" that evinces women's shattering history. The speaker dives "into the wreck" to explore and understand the disaster of women, the "myths" (false notion, misconception) loaded to women and their pain and suffering in the early history of women. In the poem, the symbol "wreck" repeatedly appears: "I came to explore the wreck" (line 52), "I came to see the damage that was done / and the treasures that prevail. / "I stroke the beam of my lamp / slowly along the flank / of something more permanent / than fish or weed" (lines 55-60), "the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth" (lines 62-63), "We circle silently / about the wreck / we dive into the hold" (lines 74-76), "whose breasts still bear the stress / whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies / obscurely

inside barrels / half-wedged and left to rot / we are the half-destroyed instruments / that once held to a course / the water-eaten log / the fouled compass" (lines 79-86) and "back to this scene" (line 90). The style of repetition emphasizes the theme of the destructed history of women in the world, and the speaker struggles to recreate the actual history of women and literate those from the false beliefs, distorted ideas, and myths imposed to the women.

Another powerful symbol "the book of myths" (line 1) does not indicate to a real book, rather symbolizes to the false narratives, misconceptions and misbeliefs that shaped the speaker's and other women's untruthful fabricated identity. "The book of myths" refers to the historical defective narratives about women. The flawed stories about women have wrongly shaped women's identity and gender roles, and led them to the pathetic conditions in the society. The speaker investigates the myths about women engendered throughout history in order to create actual identity for the liberation- "the story of the wreck" and "the thing itself". "The words are purposes" (line 53) and "the words are maps" (line 54) signify that "the words" have destroyed the women's rights, liberation and identity in the society. Masculine society has created certain false "words" and "maps" to subvert women since ancient times; men constructed 'myths' for women subversions. The symbols related to "myths" are stretched as an extended metaphor in the poem: "First having read the book of myths" (line 1), "The words are purposes. / The words are maps." (line 53-54), "the thing I came for: / the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth" (lines 61-63) and "a book of myths / in which / our names do not appear" (lines 92-94). The "names" of women have not been written in the "book of myths" throughout the history. Men were in power and wrote false stories about women; the untrue narratives shaped the women as weak. Then, the oppression of women and erasure of women's voices

began in past history of humankind.

"The drowned face always staring/ toward the sun" (lines 64-65) symbolize women's faces and skulls that have looked for women's rights and liberation in society. Here, "the sun" refers to the knowledge, human rights, humanity and freedom for women. The actual "face" of women has been "drowned" in the mythical history created by men. "The drowned face" indicates the skull of the actual victim woman and female trauma and oppression in the patriarchal history. The "book of myths" created by men has "drowned" women through submersion in "myths" and inhalation of false stories about women: "the drowned face always staring / toward the sun" (lines 64-65) and "whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes" (78). The speaker takes a "journey of self-discovery and exploration, gaining freedom and wholeness for themselves" (Stain, 2017, p. 76). The submerged women have "open eyes" for liberation, and they have to ignite courage for women's identity. Rich attempts "to materialize feminism and antiracism" (Savonick, 2017, p. 312). Rich voices against structural injustice on women through her poem.

## CONCLUSION

This study discusses literary devices to explore the feminist vent in Adrienne Rich's poem in "Diving into the Wreck" through the theory of stylistic analysis. Rich rejects the history of women created by patriarchal society. Rich dives with courage to explore truth of women identity and rejects the false "book of myths" that segregated, subjugated and oppressed women throughout history. Rich uses allusions, caesura, allegory, metaphor, alliteration, symbols, etc. to make the effects in the gender injustice in history. The speaker (female) of the poem rejects male myths about women as truth and dives into the damaged stories to discover truth for womanhood. She uses powerful and evocative words for women identity, empowerment and self-discovery.

Rich aims to recreate the history with true stories of women, and redefine womanhood in modern society. The stylistic devices are discussed connecting with a socio-cultural gender issue in the poem. Novice researchers and students of English will enhance their analytic skills in literary readings. Educators can adopt this method of analysis to improve learning outcomes. This study suggests to objectively explore more themes on Rich's poems and others', too.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I declare that this manuscript is originally produced by me.

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