

# DUALITY IN ADRIENNE RICH'S *DIVING INTO THE WRECK*

RACHEL GLAZER — UNIVERSITY OF NORTH GEORGIA

## Duality

Rich

- Uses two traditionally opposing forces in juxtaposition and blends them to show that they are neither mutually exclusive nor entirely opposite
- Breaks down the dichotomies Western society values
- Eases the reader into the dark, watery depths of the subconscious, countering the stark separation between worlds which is implied in the poem's title.

Rich breaks down duality in describing her persona's descent into the dark sea of the damaged sexuality within herself and within society to demonstrate that by blending gender dichotomies, one can achieve a truer and more complete sense of one's humanity.

## Fluid, formless... feminine?

## ANDROGYNOUS IMAGRY

Although a wreck implies death and doom, water is often a metaphor for the womb

- In utero, male and female are possible simultaneously
- The poem's persona experiences fluid transition between female and male lines 72 through 73:

"And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair/ streams black, the merman in his armored body."

- Although they represent beauty and war respectively, both blend into the dark surrounding water.
- The subconscious is of an undefined sex

- The narrator's **id** has been disrupted by the ship, sunken by unaccepting and tumultuous social forces. She is finally tending to her repressed identity.

*"She seeks 'the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth,' while enacting a watery descent that inverts the ascents and conquests of male heroism... she implies the necessity, for a woman, of distinguishing between myth and reality" (Ostriker 71-72).*

- Traditionally, men's aspirations are directed outward: man walking on the moon, Icarus flying to sun, or men going above and beyond the call of duty
- The speaker dives *down*. She is not seeking manhood, recognition or greatness, but rather self-understanding.
- By diving into the wreck, she dissects "the evidence of damage" that has collected at the bottom of her subconscious, where no human can stay for long.
- She brings air with her, necessary in such a primal thoughts and a reminder of the society to which she must return.

## Fluidity vs. Solidity

- The sea's fluidity contrasts the rigid social divides of land.
- Ostriker states, "the heroines we find in women's revisionist mythology are more often fluid than solid" (88).
- The book of myths "gives shape to amorphous experience" (Martin 189).
- Formless ≠ Useless
- Rich "experiments with language...in the hope of creating new words and new myths that celebrate the power of women buried in the wreck" (Ratcliffe 134).
- In exploring the wreck, the narrator makes tangible the struggle to understand and repair the otherwise amorphous injury inflicted by a rigid, dichotomous society.

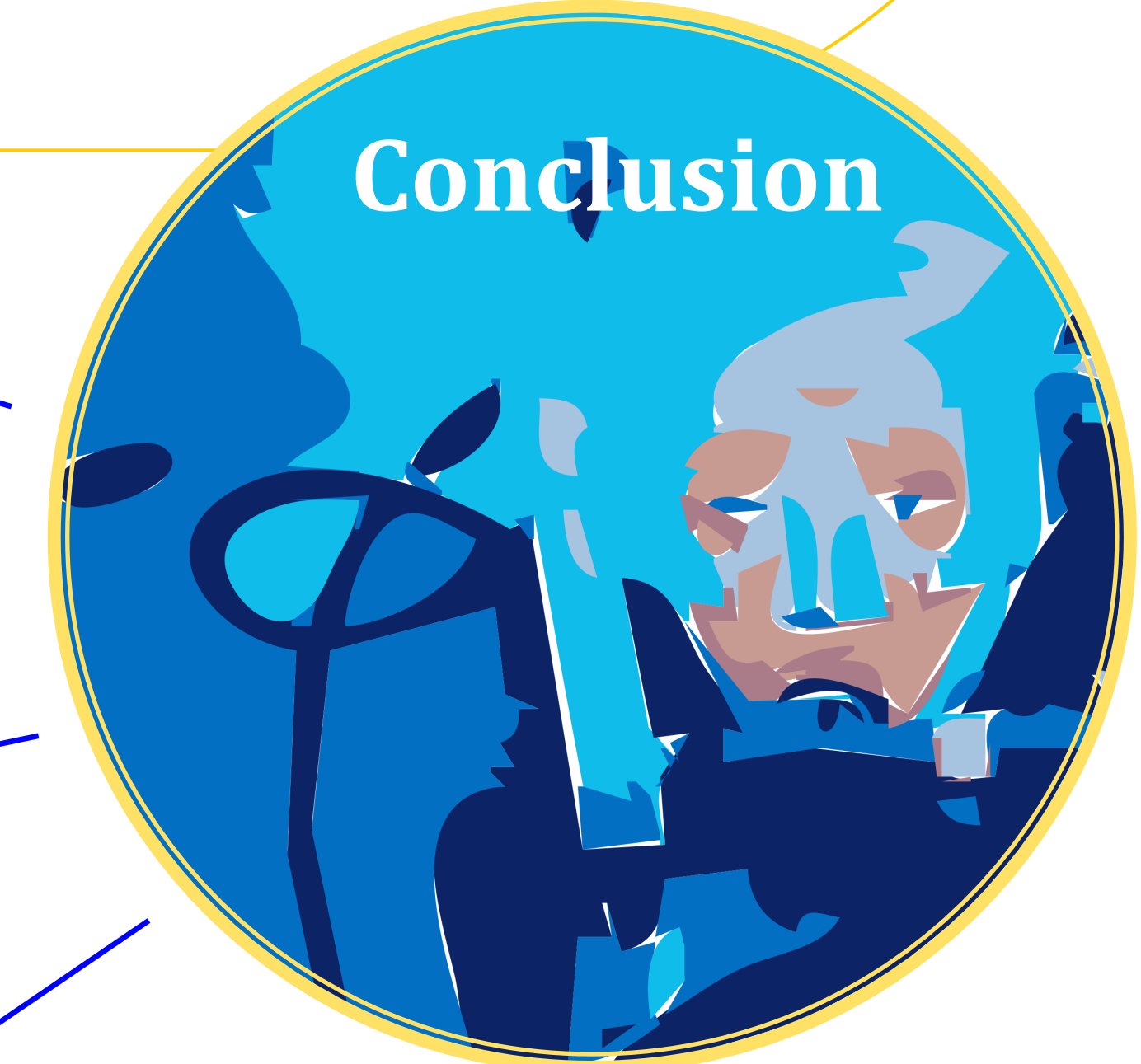
The "we" within herself implies that the reader is also androgynous. In taking the reader down into the depths with the narrator,

the reader becomes part of the "we" in "we know what it is for,/ we who have used it" (17-18).

Our history is as much a part of us as our current thoughts and sensations. Rich's choice to make "we" a part of navigation equipment indicates that the unisex human instinct was once a viable option for Western society, but we lost our way.

In the end, it is not the hesitant, clumsily armored woman of the first stanza, but rather the fluid, androgynous self who is able to recover the truth of the past and return to the air to rewrite history.

## Conclusion



## SOURCES

- Martin, Wendy. *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. Print.
- Mdlsoft. "scuba." Clipart. *Openclipart*. 15 Sept. 2013. Web. 9 Jan. 2014.
- Ostriker, Alicia. "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." *Signs*, 8.1 (1982): 68-90. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. *Anglo-American Feminist Challenges To The Rhetorical Traditions: Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost). Web. 31 Oct. 2013.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Diving into the Wreck." *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets, 2009. Web. 25 Oct. 2013.