THEMES

- Role of Women (their subjugation)
- Politics and The Oppressor
- Her personal Experience as a Feminist
- Nature
- Relationships

HER POETRY

- Draws on everyday experiences to make complex ideas accessible
- Is refreshing and revolutionary - she wishes to bring about change
- Wishes to change the way in which women see themselves, the way in which men see women, and indeed, the way in which men see themselves
- Is confessional - grounded in her own life and experiences, especially in her marriage
- Achieves impact through her distinctive use of metaphors
- Transcends stereotypical feminism
- Challenges patriarchal society
- Rewards her reader with precious gems of vibrant images and shining symbols in her exploration of the difficulties of modern life
- Uses contrast to shine the spotlight on modern dilemmas and to pose interesting questions
- Speaks for both herself and her generations in the throes of great change
- Is challenging, original and thought provoking
- Trace the evolution of her feminist ideals from her youthful unease with male dominance to her new ideology, which is a vision of society free of male domination, perhaps a society where the genders coalesce

STYLE

Early Poems:

- Formal and consciously distanced from her subject matter
- Stanzas are measured and regular, often with rhyming patterns
- Language is formal, fitting into regular stanzas of iambic pentameter
- Diction is simple, often monosyllabic

Later Poems:

- More informal, colloquial and less structured
- Stanzas become irregular
- Language is common and accessible
POEM 1 - STORM WARNING

MAIN POINTS

● About someone living in a storm region and also the metaphorical storms that blow inside of us
● The world around Rich is in a state of unrest - Cold War etc.
● Just like the storm, these wars are a force much greater than our human powers, that while it can be measured and even predicted, it is out of our control (paradox)
● The weather represents an interior state. "Weather abroad and weather in the heart." Neither can be controlled.
● The lighting of candles reminds us of the powerful failure caused by a storm. When a storm breaks, all the comforts of modern civilisation seem puny against it's elemental force.
● We can prepare ourselves as much as possible for the imminent arrival of a storm, but we are powerless to stop its arrival and the destruction it can cause
● We have all felt powerless in situations beyond our control, whether it is delays at an airport, facing an exam or waiting for hospital test results.
● Rich captures the unease we all experience in these situations as she moves restlessly about - "I leave the book."
● She calmly states how people have learnt to deal with these tragedies - "These are the things we have learnt to do, we who live in troubled regions."

TECHNIQUES

● **RHYME:** each stanza has one rhyme or half rhyme. However the other lines don't rhyme it is as if the storm has destroyed harmony in the outside world
● **ASSONANCE:** 'a' sound in opening line creates creepy or eerie suspense. 'i' - insistent whine sound and mood of wind
● **ALLITERATION:** 'w' sound emphasises that the subject of the poem is the air

POEM 2 - AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS

MAIN POINTS

● Cleverly uses strict iambic pentameter metre to mirror the confined constrictions of the aunt's marriage
● Commentary on how women artists experience the restraints of traditional roles (e.g. wife, mother, homemaker)
Marriage is where women sacrifice their creative abilities. They become repressed and overcome by the male dominant power. Women accepted this in the 1950's.

'Aunt Jennifer,' oppressed and repressed in a patriarchal male-dominated marriage, creates an alternate world

This unhappy woman whose 'fingers fluttering through wool' are the only expression of her personality, as she create the antithesis of her situation, the proud 'tigers' which 'prance across a screen.'

They are unlike the oppressed aunt, who is cowed beneath 'the massive weight of uncle's wedding band.'

The dominance of her husband is suggested by the capitalisation of 'Uncle.' - a symbol of a patriarchal society.

The tigers are everything the aunt is not. They are symbols of power, they lead independent lives.

This poem is making a stark statement about power and powerlessness.

Even though the aunt in death seems to be subjugated, her hands are 'terrified,' her creation of the exotic tigers will live on, 'proud and unafraid.'

This reminds me of Aung San Suu Kyi, the quiet heroine in Burma, with her fragile beauty, who is an image of resistance against domination.

The hands that fluttered and found 'even the ivory needle hard to pull' paradoxically made possible the very opposite - an image of certain power and pride.

**TECHNIQUES**

- **REPTITION:** 'prance' to emphasise the pride and freedom of tigers 'ringed' echoes 'wedding band.'
- **ASSONANCE:** 'i' sound creates sad and mournful effect
- **ALLITERATION:** 'p' in 'prancing proud' emphasises the feeling of confidence

**POEM 3 - LIVING IN SIN**

**MAIN POINTS**

- A young woman, blinded by the romantic idea of living with her artist boyfriend in a bohemian love nest expects that her life is going to be idyllic
- Soon, however, the romantic haze of early love is dispersed by the reality of daily living - each dawn she wakes up to the same dull routine
- This poem graphically describes a young woman's disenchantment with her partner and her domestic arrangements
- 'No dust upon the furniture of love.' - a perfect scenario is deftly sketched, almost like a photographic display in a glossy home magazine, but the reality proves to be very different.
The contrasting picture of real life is shown with a clever selection of details - the heavy thud of the 'milkman's tramp,' the cold light of the 'morning,' the leftovers of last night's meal...

She does not feel that she can voice a complaint about the situation. It would be a form of betrayal - 'Half-heresy.'

At line 15 her partner emerges, oblivious to the unsatisfactory domestic situation.

Her keen awareness is clearly contrasted with his total indifference.

He is relaxed, casual, he yawns, runs a few notes on the keyboard, shrugs at himself in the mirror and goes out to buy cigarettes.

He seems focused on himself, he seems to lack commitment - 'declared it out of tune.'

He does not engage with the woman. Is this why 'living in sin' has lost some of its allure,

Yet despite all this we see in line 23 the woman is not prepared to give up on her dreams

The romantic illusion of a life 'Living In Sin' in Bohemian glory, is shattered by these carefully crafted contrasts.

The thrilling life she has hoped to lead is contained in the alliteration of the letter 'p' and the adjective 'persian' - everything was supposed to be perfect, glossy, exotic.

This poem is an aubade, a morning song for lovers parting after a night of passion with vows of never-ending love

What a contrast to this is reality, vividly speaking of the gap existing between the idealised, romantic version of life as it really is

POEM 4 - TRYING TO TALK WITH A MAN

MAIN POINTS

The poem is rich in functional metaphor - not a spontaneous metaphor (poetic ornament to decorate or embellish). Rather, they are logical, throughout, functional and are sustained throughout the poem (embody the central idea of the poem or 'carry' the poem)

Is a confessional poem about about the poets failing relationship with her husband set in the Nevada Desert which was used as a testing -ground for American nuclear bombs.

The arid desert represents a dead marriage, a burnt out relationship.

And just as bombs are tested in the desert, the marriage is being tested, and they find that just as bombs are exploded, their marriage is about to explode.

The 'ghost town' of the desert, surrounded by silence, represents the silence of their marriage where they no longer have anything meaningful to say to eachother.

She remembers that the trip was an attempt to change the face of their weakening relationship

The speakers partners speaks of nuclear testing and the dangers of testing weapons, so as to steer clear of testing their own one-to-one relationship.
- The poem's ending signals the end of their relationship. It has been tried, tested and it has failed
- The mood in the closing lines is of honest acceptance. He paces the floor but cannot confront what is really happening
- When speaker courageously admits what their relationship is over he seems unable and ill-equipped to come to terms with it - men portrayed as inadequate, insensitive, ill-equipped to deal with emotions. His emotions are repressed
- Talking might have solved the problem but the title suggests it is not possible to talk with a man and certainly not this man in particular

TECHNIQUES

- **ALLITERATION**: "surrounded by silence" - emphasises and brings lyrical quality
- **SIMILES**: "an emergency"

POEM 5 - DIVING INTO THE WRECK

MAIN POINTS

- The speaker explores her own inheritance and past but also speaks for all women who have been disempowered, sidelined and written out of history. This poem is her story but could also be read as a journey into the subconscious
- An image goes far beyond the narrative to explore essential concerns
- The poem is built on the powerful use of sustained metaphors. The 'wreck' presents images of loss, of things buried deep, and covered over - it may be seen to be symbolic of women over thousands of years of patriarchal rule
- The 'dive' may be seen as a metaphoric quest to find the early truths of male/females relationships; as a journey to find a time before 'His' and 'Hers' dominated how we think about the world
- The poet has reached a point in her life where she is questioning, challenged assumptions and situations that she is uncomfortable with.
- She is prepared to go deeper in search of the truth and the image of diving into the wreck already signals that what she'll find there is something broken
- The book of myths represents a male-dominated world and contains traditional views of gender roles
- What the wreckage is a metaphor for is never answered explicitly and the poem is all the more effective because of it. We can interpret it in our own way and relate it to our own lives
- The merging of the human speaker with the mythical merman and mermaid is not only an interesting surreal touch but it is the moment when truth meets myth - allows us to contemplate how each one of us embody male and female qualities

Copyright © Conor Dorgan
This poem is a vivid, memorable, sensuous journey - explore many issue and affirms woman's role, woman's courage and womanhood

TECHNIQUES

- FUNCTIONAL METAPHOR
- IMAGERY: haunting, private and beautiful
- USE OF PRESENT TENSE: immediate link between speaker and reader
- RHYTHM AND RHYME: creates beautiful, quiet mood, emphasise e.g. 'I go down.'

POEM 6 - FROM A SURVIVOR

BACKGROUND

- Rich aged 42
- Written following her break-up and her husband's suicide
- Her father also died a few years previously
- Charts the difficult stages of grief and survival
- The poem is fragmented, which is symbolic

MAIN POINTS

- This poem is quite confessional. It is honest, open and personal, telling us how she felt when she first married and how she feels how that her marriage is over
- This is a confessional poem from a female perspective where Rich sets out how naive she and her husband were when they married
- Looking back almost twenty years after marrying, she sees how her life has changed, or rather how she has changed her life
- Her marriage is over, her husband is 'wastefully dead.'
- Now that her marriage is over she can see him objectively, can reflect on what his 'body could and could not do.'
- She has had the courage to change, to leave the unhappy marriage and now she says her life is 'a succession of brief amazing movements each one making possible the next.' She has discovered a whole range of new experiences

Copyright © Conor Dorgan
The passing of time has changed the speaker's life and her understanding of the marriage pact.

The poem is divided into ten parts which could be said to suggest fragmentation, loss, fragility, a feeling of tentativeness.

Her husband didn't survive.

**TECHNIQUES**

- **LAYOUT**: fragmented suggests loss, fragility etc.
- **LANGUAGE**: simple and confessional.