Adrienne Rich Comparing And Contrasting Poems Essay, Research Paper

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Adrienne Rich Comparing and Contrasting Poems.

“From where does your strength come, you southern jew/ split at the root, raised in a castle of air”. This is a quote from Adrienne Rich’s 1982 essay, “Sources”. Adrienne Rich is a southern jew who grew up in the forties. As she grew up, her father hid the fact that they were Jewish. Her father acted like he was fully assimilated and didn’t show ethnicity in any way. He did this to fit into society that was against Jewish people. This quote reflects one of many themes Rich deals with in her poetry. The theme is racism, hate, and bigotry.

In many of Rich’s works she talks about being oppressed. In the poems, “1948: Jews”, “Two Arts”, and “A Vision” there is a theme of oppression. In the poem ” 1948: Jews”, Rich refers to her college years. At her college, she was to stay away from Jews. No matter how brilliant a person was, she couldn’t unite with them as a group because socially it was less acceptable. She couldn’t let herself get attached, she had to avoid her own ethnicity to survive in American culture. “Never mind just going to sleep like an ordinary person” Rich says about the situation in the end of the poem. An ordinary person; this portrays the feeling she had about the great discrimination that was going on at the time. Rich didn’t feel like an ordinary person. She felt hate from society due to her background.

This poem differs from Rich’s other works in many ways. I found that most of Adrienne Rich’s poetry was very hard to understand. I found threw reading Rich’s poetry, she sometimes left the reader room to make his/ her own conclusions about the meaning. In this poem, Rich was very clear to the point. At her college, there was great racial tension and she felt she could not be herself there. I found, that I personally can feel the poem better, if I can really grasp the meaning. As opposed to left to wonder and draw my own conclusions.

Another great poem by Adrienne Rich was ” Two Arts”. One theme in the poem, similar to “1948: Jews” is racism , hate, and being a southern Jew in the forties. In the poem, Rich talks about sculpting a perfect person free of any limiting factor, such as race or gender. This creation is great art. She talks about presenting this perfect person or work of art to the art instructor. I thought this represented her presenting her person to the public. It was socially acceptable and it was a piece of art. “This time they will love you, standing on the glass table, fluent and robed at last, and all your origins countered” Rich says. In this quote, Rich describes putting all your origins behind and being on a glass table for every one to see. You are robed and ready for life. You have been molded into the ideal person. This is another example of the theme of racism that Rich brings up in her poetry. This is also a poem in which Rich wrote it to give you a definite idea. She doesn’t really give the reader much room to negotiate what the meaning of the poem is. I like reading poems that are more literal, to me they have more value.

This poem differs from the others in many ways. This poem is more like a fantasy of what it would be like to be perfect. This almost seems like a childhood dream; to be someone your not. The poem “1948: Jews” is more factual. This type of poem are based on real life experience and therefor I feel they are of more value (Rich2 53)

“A Vision” is another poem written by Adrienne Rich that discusses the issue of racism

This poem is in memory of Simone Weil. Weil was a French, political activist, and social philosopher who was very influential in the early twentieth century. Her writings greatly effected French and English social thought. Later in Simone Weil’s career, she would be denied a teaching position because she was Jewish. I believe this is why Rich talks about her. She can relate, they were both Jewish women in the forties. Weil died in the turmoil of WWII. She could not survive with the rations of food the Germans were giving. I would imagine she is one of Rich’s heroes. She is a fellow women who lived the life of a Jewish person in early twentieth century. She also fought for what she believed like Rich (Encarta).

“This enforced loss of control” Adrienne Rich says in the poem “A Vision”. This poem and quote refer to being forced to lose a persons identity, character, and perhaps ethnicity. This is exactly what Weil and Rich experience. A loss of identity. Rich’s father practically abandons his heritage to fit into a racist society. Weil dies in the holocaust. This poem talks about losing your self and the fear of not seeing the big picture. The poem also talks of having a test of faith. In this, I believe Rich is again comparing her life to Weil. They both were Jewish women who were the victim of racism or felt racism. This was a great test of faith. A test of who could survive in a society that was against them (Rich1 50).

This poem differs from the other poems in many ways. One thing about this poem that is different from the others is you have to draw your own conclusions. Adrienne will sometimes write and not really display the theme, but let you imply what it is. That is what she did in this poem. It wasn’t a completely clear poem to me at all. I was left with a feeling about its meaning but I was uncertain. This is different from the other two poems because their ideas were very pronounced (Rich1 50).

In an literary criticism, on the poems of the book “A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far” from which the poem “A Vision” came, Kathryn Kilgore tells her thoughts. Kathryn Kiglore doesn’t like this work of Rich’s. She talks about the work as showing hatred of men. “Since Rich is capable of writing phenomenal poetry, it’s disappointing when she doesn’t” Kilgore says. She says that her poetry in this book is jumpy, wordy, and politically motivated. She says this is a feminist vision. Its poetry that is man-hating. It tries to put great thought behind political issues and apply it to poetry. It doesn’t work. I agree, for example the poem “A Vision” was about Simone Weil a fellow woman who was persecuted. This is okay. What I didn’t like was the “girl power” twist that was added. I thought the poem was not very clear (Kilgore 22).

Adrienne Rich is a brilliant writer and poet. She wrote many brilliant poems with many great themes. She wrote about racism and journeyed into unconquered territory with becoming opened in her poetry about being a lesbian. Adrienne Rich is a powerful and interesting writer with brilliant ideas on the world.

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