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Amends

By Adrienne Rich

Adrienne Rich was a poet and essayist who was called 'one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century', and was credited with bringing 'the oppression of women and lesbians to the forefront of poetic discourse.' Many of her poems have been used to combat female suppression. Amends shows her belief the women were suppressed and unnoticed and that women were then left to make amends for others actions. This poem could also be interpreted as a fight for the natural world. Amends is a sixteen-line poem divided into four quatrains. It contains a repetition of 'as it' and it could be interpreted as an allegory. It also contains some examples of sibilance and personification. It does not have a rhyme scheme or meter but the punctuation is notable; there is very little punctuation throughout the poem, Rich may have done this to mimic the movements of the moonlight and create a soft, soothing effect. Another interpretation is that the lack of punctuations is used to create a feminine effect; the poem begins with a soft, tranquil tone but by the third stanza a sense of aggression is developed.

The title of the poem is 'Amends' is defined by google dictionary as 'compensate or make up for a wrongdoing.' It could tell us that this poem is the 'moonlight' or women trying to make amends. The poem starts and ends with the word 'amends', this shows a loop which implies that nothing has changed and no amends have been made.

The poem begins with 'Nights like this: on the cold apple-bough', it tells us that this night is unique, it is not like any other nights, the apple could be used to signify knowledge. This sentence is also an allusion to Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, specifically, Act 5 Scene 1. During this time, Lorenzo tries to woo Jessica who rejects his advances. She, who was Jewish, converts to Christianity to elope but soon starts to see Lorenzo as the obnoxious person. She tries to make amends.

The word 'cold' creates a bleak atmosphere. It describes the night as distant and lonely. The next line 'a white star, then another' could be used as a symbol of hope. A white star is like a beacon shining in cold night. If you look carefully you will then see 'another exploding out of the bark'. This is a metaphor for women who are not heard. Women are the hope in the darkness and they are usually suppressed so you need to look hard enough to see 'another' and when you see it, you will also see many other 'stars' 'exploding out of the bark' eager to be heard and to spread their knowledge. It proves that the unjust portrayals of women were wrong. The last line of the stanza is 'on the ground, moonlight picking at small stones', this is used to signify that the 'moonlight' a metaphor for women is starting her day. The phrase 'small stones' gives you a small range of view as if women were restricted.

The next stanza moves smoothly with little punctuation and repetition of the phrase 'as it', it has many descriptions of nature and its work. Now the phrase 'greater stones' is used, this zooms out of the confined area and allows women to look at the bigger world waiting for them. The moonlight 'rises with the surf' could show that women had their ups and downs during their fight for equality, just like how a wave rises and then crashes. The second line of the stanza tells you that even though sometimes they had trouble they did not give up: 'laying its cheek for moments on the sand'. They rested themselves only for moments before getting back up again and going back to the fight.

'it licks the broken ledge' showing a motherly action, much like how tiger mothers lick their young to soothe their wound, and as they flow up the cliffs and flick across the tracks. It shows that women are capable of doing anything they wish to do. They can 'flick', 'lick' and 'flow' if they want to. The calm tone of this stanza shows that their movement was peaceful, but the abrupt /k/ sounds show that if pushed they could move 'across' the peaceful boundaries and turn violent just like Mother Nature has a calm before the storm.

In stanza three there is a sudden shift of mood and tone, it is now aggressive. The 'moonlight' now looks at the man-made objects and situations. The first line talks about the early feminism movements: 'unavailing pours into the gash', the movements were not working and the efforts were useless. 'gash' is a human wound which does not heal easily, this tells us that the early movements would take a long time to be effective. Gash is also a vulgar term used for women. The first efforts made by women were often belittled and put down and called 'gash'. The next line is that the efforts were poured into 'sand-and-gravel quarry'. This imagery gives a negative atmosphere, quarry is a place where land has been excavated to obtain stones and other materials, it shows how women were abused during their movement towards equality; gravel is hard and sharp, showing their tough fight to equality. The poet also creates an image of a crop dusting plane. The fuselage of crop-dusting plane is in the hangar and as if it is sleeping, the movement is also gaining power. We can say this because a crop dusting plane is powerful and is relaxing, this is used as a metaphor for the increase of power in the movement.

The last stanza of the poem shows us that the 'moonlight' 'soaks through cracks into the trailers'; this gives you an image of a sponge soaking up all the water. The light of the moon must also be very powerful if it can go between small cracks of a trailer, thus is a motif of the increasing power of feminism. The next line describes the people nervously sleeping. This shows us that many people were ignorant and as the movement gained force the ignorant authorities became nervous. The next line describes the moonlight as a peaceful dweller looking at the sleepers. The last line is very effective as it is the end of the repetition of 'as it', instead it begins with 'as if'. The last line is consequential: 'as if to make amends'. The moonlight is shown as if it makes amends, but does it? 'as if' –a very important phrase –tells us that the moonlight, a symbol for women, ultimately does not apologize. It shows the empowerment of women. Women are always expected to apologize, sometimes even if it is not their fault, they show no remorse for their movement; it shows the revolution has been a success. The moon, represents women, and the sleepers represent everyone else ignorant and just as women are expected to apologize, they shouldn't have to. The sleepers need to apologize, even if they start from something small like a pebble. Change begins with small stones, and then grows bigger.

Amends is a beautiful, enigmatic poem which shows the struggles and success of the early feminist movement which has shaped twenty-first century. Rich has carefully weaved the theme of feminism in the poem but numerous other themes have been laced in which are open to many interpretations. The theme of environmentalism is seen in this poem too, where the moon plays nature who is repeatedly trying to fix every problem by 'licks[ing] the broken ledge' and 'flicks[ing] across the tracks' but as it gets to the human, the tone is harsh. It is harder to solve this problem caused by man; the nature's problems were elementary but the man-made, issues are hard to solve. Rich

tells us that nature works hard enough to keep this world running, it does not have time solve human corruption. This intricate poem holds many other mysteries to be unravelled and is a deceptively simple poem which holds treasures of the lands unknown.