

## Novella by, Adrienne Rich 1962

A short story

1 Two people in a room, speaking harshly.

2 One gets up, goes out to walk

3 (That is the man)

4 The other goes into the next room

5 and washes the dishes, cracking one.

6 (That is the woman)

7 It gets dark outside.

8 The children quarrel in the attic.

9 She has no blood left in her heart.

10 The man comes back to a dark house.

11 The only light is in the attic.

12 He has forgotten his key.

13 He rings at his own door.

14 and hears sobbing on the stairs.

15 The lights go on in the house.

16 The door closes behind him.

17 Outside, separate as minds

18 the stars too come alight.

} Comparison – see the word “as”



### Background on the poet: Adrienne Rich (May 16, 1929 – March 27, 2012)

Born: Adrienne Cecile Rich, May 16, 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Occupation: Poet, non-fiction writer, essayist

Genres: Poetry, non-fiction

Notable work(s): *Diving Into the Wreck*

Notable award(s):

National Book Award - 1974

Bollingen Prize - 2003

Griffin Poetry Prize - 2010

She was an American poet, essayist and feminist – seen as "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century". She was also known for paying attention to the oppression of women and lesbians in her writings.

**Style of poem:** Written more in story format – title: Novella means “short story”. Almost every line ends in a full stop making the absences of flow and rhythm in the poem obvious and also emphasizing the stark and bitter relationship between the two people.

**Free verse** – the many punctuation marks almost cause the poem to become robotic – maybe as robotic as the actions of the man and wife in the poem?

What is **FREE VERSE**? Free verse is an open form of poetry. It does not use consistent meter patterns, rhyme, or any other musical pattern. It thus tends to follow the rhythm of natural speech.

The poem is written in a **very impersonal tone** – look at the use of all the pronouns like: he, she, one, the other – without ever referring to anyone's name or description of what they look like.

Please look at all the **references to "darkness"**, no light and coldness (of the heart)

This is an extract from the obituary that was printed in the Los Angeles Times when she died:

## Adrienne Rich dies at 82; feminist poet and essayist

Adrienne Rich, a much-awarded feminist poet and essayist, dies at 82. She 'was a voice for the feminist movement when it was just starting and didn't have a voice,' an expert says.

**March 28, 2012** By Mary Rourke, Special to the Los Angeles Times

Adrienne Rich, a pioneering feminist poet and essayist who challenged what she considered to be the myths of the American dream and subsequently received high literary honors, died Tuesday at her home in Santa Cruz. She was 82.

The cause was complications from the rheumatoid arthritis that had plagued her for much of her life, said a son, Pablo Conrad.

"Adrienne Rich made a very important contribution to poetry,"

Helen Vendler, a Harvard University professor and literary critic told The Times in 2005. "She was able to articulate a modern American conscience. She had the command of language and the imagery to express it."

Rich came of age during the social upheaval of the 1960s and '70s and was best known as an advocate of women's rights, which she explored in poetry and prose. But she also passionately addressed the antiwar movement and wrote of the marginalized and underprivileged.

Her intense critique of contemporary society combined with her political activism set her apart from other leading women poets of her generation, including Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. She attended rallies against the Vietnam War, organized poetry readings for peace and marched for women's rights — and urged every writer to address social injustice in their art.

From her first book of poems in the early 1950s, Rich revealed her feminist bearings, and when universities introduced courses in women's studies, Rich was likely to be included.

"Adrienne Rich was a voice for the feminist movement when it was just starting and didn't have a voice," said Barbara Gelpi, a professor emeritus of English and women's studies at Stanford University who with her husband, Albert, co-edited the 1993 volume "Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose."

"She expressed the sources of women's pain when women were coming to a sense of their own history and potential," Barbara Gelpi said in a 2005 interview with The Times.

Rich was a major presence among post-World War II American poets, according to Albert Gelpi, an emeritus professor of American literature at Stanford.



## Poetry Eng FAL: SACAI support material – Novella (A Rich)

Her experiences "resonated with the political and social environment of the time," he said. "That is what made her poetry so powerful."

Her personal life continued to provide material for poems – example when she wrote "Novella," in 1962.

### Short summary of poem

It consists of 18 short lines, most of them ending with a full stop as punctuation and telling a short story (**a novella**), a brief extract of the life of a married couple. They seem to have a quarrel, "two people in a room, speaking harshly". The reader is thrown right in the middle of things, but does not know why or about what the couple fights, but he gets to know how they react to it and what they do afterwards.

It is interesting that Rich does not refer to the two people as husband and wife. We can only assume that they are married, or even a couple, based on the facts that they are living in the same house and have children. She only mentions in brackets "That is the man" and "That is the woman" like it is immaterial and it does not carry any weight of who is who or if they are female or male. In a way the two people seem to be abstract objects. At the end of the poem they do not act. The lights simply go on in the house and the door closes without apparent influence of the woman or the man.

**The title of the poem** tells us that there is a kind of **story almost of middle-length size** novella in this short poem. While the man and woman are fighting, we also read about the children quarrelling – the effect of constant conflict between the parents?

The fighting seems like routine for them - after a fight, one going out, the other staying home, and later they get back to the routine. As usual, he forgets to take his key and rings the doorbell so that the woman has to open the door for him, still crying on the stairs. However, she feels no emotional intensity from him and has no warm blood left in her heart. Outside, like their minds separate to each other, the stars are scattered in the sky.



*This poem is about the conflict between man and woman/husband and wife and also how it affects the children.*