

Margaret Atwood on: "Diving into the Wreck"

The wreck she is diving into, in the very strong title poem, is the wreck of obsolete myths, particularly myths about men and women. She is journeying to something that is already in the past, in order to discover for herself the reality behind the myth, "the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth." What she finds is part treasure and part corpse, and she also finds that she herself is part of it, a "half-destroyed instrument." As explorer she is detached; she carries a knife to cut her way in, cut structures apart; a camera to record; and the book of myths itself, a book which has hitherto had no place for explorers like herself.

This quest--the quest for something beyond myths, for the truths about men and women, about the "I" and the "You," the He and the She, or more generally (in the references to wars and persecutions of various kinds) about the powerless and the powerful--is presented throughout the book through a sharp, clear style and through metaphors which become their own myths. At their most successful the poems move like dreams, simultaneously revealing and alluding, disguising and concealing. The truth, it seems, is not just what you find when you open a door: it is itself a door, which the poet is always on the verge of going through.

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Excerpted Criticism [1]

Criticism Target:

Adrienne Rich [2]

Author:

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Poem:

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