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California Polytechnic State University

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World-Renowned Poet Adrienne Rich To Read at Cal Poly May 16

SAN LUIS OBISPO - World-renowned poet Adrienne Rich, whose writings often confront the problems of women and the brutalities of international oppression, will give a reading at 7 p.m. May 16 in Chumash Auditorium at Cal Poly.

Rich is widely considered to be one of the two most influential and accomplished living American poets, according to Kevin Clark, Cal Poly poetry writing professor.

South African writer Nadine Gordimer proclaimed Rich to be "the Blake of American letters."

Poet W.S. Merwin said, "Adrienne Rich's poems, volume after volume, have been the makings of one of the authentic, unpredictable, urgent, essential voices of our time. All her life she has been in love with the hope of telling utter truth, and her command of language from the first has been startlingly powerful."

"In fact, Rich is not only a brilliant, ground-breaking poet," Clark said, "but also a superb, deeply important prose writer."

Rich's first book "A Change of World," won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1951. Since then her popularity among readers and critics has grown to international proportions.

Rich has received the Bollingen Prize, the Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award, the Academy of American Poets Fellowship, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Lenore Marshall Prize, the National Book Award and a MacArthur Fellowship.

In 1997 she was awarded the Academy of American Poets' Wallace Stevens Award for outstanding and proven mastery in the art of poetry.

"In both her poetry and speaking engagements, Rich delivers language that is intended to incite action and invoke deliberation -- about poverty, racism, sexism, violence, love between women, problems of survival, and marginality," said Clark.

Rich said that her poetry seeks to create a dialectical relationship between "the personal, or lyric voice and the so-called political -- really, the voice of the individual speaking not just to herself, or to a beloved friend, but to and from a collective, a social realm."

"I remember walking across the street from the GED teaching center where I was working in Hackensack, N.J., one day three decades ago and wandering into a bookstore where I found Rich's book 'Diving into the Wreck,' recalled Clark. "By the time I'd finished that book the next day, I'd become a different writer.

"Rich's poetry is not only accessible to most readers but it consistently finds new ways to make our ordinary, personal lives connect with larger, deeply important issues," Clark said. "I learned many things from her work. Perhaps most importantly, I came to see that good, aesthetically accomplished verse could be persuasively, movingly political. It didn't have to be shrill rant."

Clark said that Rich is the type of writer who "deserves the Nobel Prize in literature."

The Cal Poly English Department's Student Fee Committee is sponsoring the reading. English professor Kathryn Rummell, advisor to the Student Fee Committee, said that, after English majors set aside much of their student fee increase for guaranteeing more senior-level literature courses, they wanted to bring a writer they most admired.

"We were very fortunate," said Rummell, "that Adrienne Rich was so willing to come to our campus. This will be a thrill for the students and the community."

The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call Rummell at 756-2142.

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