

I. From Poetics to Politics: Feminist Criticism as a Tool to Study

Adrienne Rich

Traditionally, art and politics have been treated as different subjects, art being an aesthetic manifestation of the self, and politics an ideological position concerning the public sphere. But in the last decades, theorists have talked about the rhetorical fusion of poetry and politics. In that sense Adrienne Rich is the person of poetics as well as politics. Being a poet, she obviously has concern with poetics but as a major activist as well as forerunner of the feminist movement, she shows concern with the politics too. Many critics also have discussed about her poetics and politics. Their analysis shows that her poetry indicates towards the shift from poetics to politics. As her writing career advances, she has become more and more political. Of course poetics is unavoidable in the poetry but gradually her focus seems to shift from poetics to politics. Her collection of essays also charts her education as a poet.

As the political content of her education expanded, she turned from highly wrought formalism to open form poetics. "For a poet concerned with both poetry and politics, the "poetic line" matters in both senses of the term as the unit of verse and as poetic lineage" (Hart 398). Thus her earlier formalism could not meet her search for political statement. It satisfied just aesthetic criteria. She experimented with the modernists as the content is embodied in the form. But she later realized the river of canonical modernists was polluted. As such she adopted one way of breaking with the convention, like using long, discursive lines- either from Ghazal or from cinematic analogy of 'Shooting

Script', which provided her with open ended model that retained a form with which to struggle.

The poet's mode of seeing and saying and changing is language. Rich has learned to accept and work with common language not as an admission to defeat but as a strategy for rescuing language from the oppressors' structure of meaning by reconstituting words, relations, signification subversively from within choice of such strategy defines Rich's stance in the configuration of contemporary poetics.

Rich considers poetry not as an aesthetic end in-itself but as a vehicle and medium for purposes and values extrinsic and transcendent to art as such like T.S. Eliot. As Albert Gelpi also argues "Both poets, Loeffelholz tells us, view poetry in terms of conversion, as an agent for radical change in the terms and aims of human existence" (435). But her belief is in long-term optimism that piece by piece change will come, little by little minds change and it is possible to sacrifice immediate effect to long-term transformation. She trusts that finally we will make change not through sudden revelation but through slow turn of consciousness.

Thus, though Rich's earlier poems give focus to formal aptness and craft, politics determines the vector of her later poetry. Her politics so much informs her poetics that the two become indivisible. The theorist who discusses about the indivisible relationship between poetics and politics is MiKhail Bakhtin, a Marxist as well as formalist.

A Bakhtinian neologism important and relevant in the connection of poetics and politics is 'dialogism'. The term is related both to dialogue and to

dialectic. To Bakhtin a literary work is not a text whose meanings are produced by the play of impersonal linguistic or economic or cultural forces, but a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices or modes of discourse, each of which is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon, and as such is the product of manifold determinants that are specific to class, social group, and speech community. This notion of dialogism as presented by Bakhtin asserts that like other acts of communication, writing even at its most artistic, always concerns the representation, reporting, and discussion of social practices. Dialogs among people of different social groups give rise to dialectically contrasting discourses as poetics is always guided by the politics of the user. Bakhtin argued for the semantic aspects of literary work for what mattered was not how something was merely made but rather what its meaning was. He stressed the importance of this meaning in the social and the historical context. His rejection of Russian Formalism also bases on the very ground of its insensitivity and indifference to history. As Bakhtin writes:

A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms.

But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces that unite and centralize verbal ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia. (Pandey 397)

For Bakhtin, self is never finished as it exists as a dialogic relationship. Every 'I' has 'thou' and includes the 'thou'. 'Being' in itself is 'being with'. His

stand is that we cannot determine simultaneity as fact for there are only systems of reference and thus there is only dialogism.

His essay “Discourse in the novel” functions as his final and sophisticated statement on dialogism. Bakhtin is the theorist of genre, particularly the novel, the history and nature of which he describes in a new way. Contrasting the novel with the poem, he emphasizes the “freedom” for the point of view of others to reveal themselves’. He discovers in the novels the full liveliness of a linguistic and hence cultural context. About the novel as the reflection of variety and difference that exist in the society, A.C. Goodson writes “The novel discloses the tensions lurking beneath the veneer of social order (whatever order) within the structures of its discourse” (44). At the heart of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism is “heteroglossia”, i.e., multi-voicedness, which is presented as the essence of novelistic discourse. In this respect, he sees novel as the most democratic genre of all. He makes a pointed distinction between ‘dialogical’ discourse and ‘monologic’ discourse. The dialogical discourse explicitly or implicitly acknowledges the language of the other, the controlling presence of a social context while monologic discourse is the mode of authoritative discourse.

Commonly recognized as the basic ‘Building-block’ of Bakhtin’s thought upon which all the other concepts depend, ‘dialogism’ may most simply be thought of in relation to the conditions we associate with ‘dialogue’ in everyday life. For Bakhtin, every thought become a matter of ‘dialogue’ and ‘difference’, and each dialogue requires the pre-existence of differences. This variation or difference is in fact, the product of context and circumstances one

is in. His principle of dialogism is to be recognized at the level of the individual word, not only in exchanges between relatively entire utterances. Bakhtin uses the word 'hidden polemic' in order to describe the words and utterances that are actively in dialogue with other words or utterances not present in the text and which they try to defend themselves against. As Lynne Pearce in one of the articles writes "... all words, all sentences are oriented toward someone else's speech, regardless of whether that 'other' is present in the text or not" (228). So, there always exists centrifugal movement, liberation from the authority or suppressive force in Bakhtinian dialogism.

Bakhtinian criticism rejects those theoretical schools that base their idea on purely linguistic analysis. Rather, it concerns with language or discourse as a social phenomenon rejecting the notion of the isolated, finished, and monologic utterance, divorced from its verbal and actual context and standing open not to any possible sort of active response but to passive understanding. Words are considered as active, dynamic social signs, capable of taking as different meanings and annotations for different social classes in different social and historical situations. Thus each word has its own politics depending on the context.

The politics that Adrienne Rich's poetics embodies is 'Feminism'. She is a pioneer; witness, and prophet for the women's movement. At the core of Rich's aesthetic is an awareness of power and its constructs in the patriarchy. In her own words:

The power to describe the world is the ultimate power. In describing the world, like naming, male science, male religion,

male art, male history, male politics and prophecies have created or eliminated possibilities, disguised or revealed alternative, generated or withheld choices, determined, finally, which human options shall be visible and which shall be driven underground. (122)

This extract illustrates her attitude towards male power that has been used since long ago to real power that the males possess being superior rather it is just a created power. It is the power that they possessed creating discourse in every aspect of life and art. The faulty judgment of taking women's historical experience as identical with men's also belongs to the consciousness of the dominant culture invented and popularized by males. When the time of judgment comes these males try to show males and females as equal, but in real practice disparity is widespread. Rich again says "... not merely language, but thought-patterns, intellectual models, perception itself are organized out of the exclusion and reification of women" and further adds "the realm of knowledge and culture we are trying to survey is a landscape partitioned everywhere with barbed-wire" (122). Thus, Rich's politics is mainly directed towards male biasness and prejudice in the patriarchal society.

Feminism, which has evolved as one of the major approaches in the literary studies, is like most broad-based philosophical perspective and accommodates several species under its genus. It is no longer taken as a certain movement that is bound by certain set of assumptions and nor it is completed after certain time period. British author and critic Rebecca West also remarks; "I myself have never have been able to find-out precisely what

feminism is” (219). Feminism is not a theory of certain group but has its presence all over the world. Basically the theory of being oppressed and the victims of prejudice, it has its relevance all the time and in all places of the world. Though variety and diversity is prevalent in feminism, yet all of them share some of the fundamental characteristics that are common to all.

Feminist criticism is the criticism of minority. So, protest is the major voice in this criticism. Indeed feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather than what is present, reflecting concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in a patriarchal culture, a culture organized in favor of men. This culture has remained pervasively dominant in the civilization since the emergence of human community. The dominance is felt and conspicuous in all areas of human concern. So, feminism protests against this constructed but not natural dominance and oppression. As Carolyn J. Allen also writes “... feminists... see the necessity for insisting not only on the oppressive nature of patriarchal power but on its systematic construction as well” (278). The basic view of all human civilizations is pervasively patriarchal which is formed in such a way that ultimately subordinates women to men in all cultural domains. Women are also brought up and trained in the same culture that tends to internalize the patriarchal ideology with conscious and unconscious presupposition about male superiority. As such they derogate their own sex and co-operate their own subordination. But feminist criticism widely holds that one’s sex is determined by anatomy. Drawing clear distinction between sex and gender they condemn the cultural constructs that are used for male domination. They assert that the sexual difference is the

difference that males and females get by birth. So, they accept the difference that is biological, but they strongly go against the concept of 'gender'. This gender has nothing to do with biological difference, but is just a cultural construct. One is not born a woman but it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine. By this very cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative while feminine, by systematic opposition is identified with what masculine is not, i.e., passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional. The same socio-cultural consciousness or ideology also pervades in art and literature considered as canonical.

With its emphasis on canon reformation and revisionist approach feminist cultural criticism intersects with postmodernism in considering the construction of the "subject". If seen from one angle feminism is committed to the material change to which post-modernism has nothing to do as it is preoccupied with language and the free play of signifiers. But if seen from the another angle, both meet for "postmodernism asserts the ascendance of the subject over what has seemed the safety of "the self", and feminist critics often revise this assertion to understand how "woman" is constructed by "cultural practices" (Allen 279). Feminism takes the marginal stance and tries to denaturalize the sexual categories to illustrate how what appears to be "naturally" female, like caring for the needs of others, is the function of gender of culturally learned expectation rather than of inborn tendencies feminist critic Kaja Silverman also suggests that the subject is constituted by

“the relationship between ethnology, psychoanalysis and semiotics always with very precise historical and economic determinants” (130). French psychoanalyst and semiotician Julia Kristeva also asserts the some idea of gender as cultural construct that “a woman cannot ‘be’ In ‘woman’ I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies” (137). Thus the central focus of feminist criticism is basically the cultural constructs that have tended to subordinate and marginalize females.

These feminist writers and readers have always tried to work against the grain. Since the Greek era and perhaps even before, it has been the trend of western philosophical tradition to define females in negative and derogatory terms. Aristotle claims that the female becomes female by virtue of certain “lack of qualities”. Medieval philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas also expressed the similar idea when he said that a woman is an “imperfect man”. Similarly, the pre-Mendelian thinkers thought that male’s sperm is always active and can give form to a passive ovum which wants the farmer’s seeds to grow. Even in the modern era philosophers like Freud emerged who also created the similar type of discourse to marginalize females. He invented a new term called “penis-envy”. Sexual difference is basic to the theories of psychoanalysis from Freud to recent psychoanalysts. Feminist critiques of these models have shown them not only to be gendered but also to be male. Freud’s emphasis on the “castration complex” itself is also derogatory to women. Lacan reads Freud in the light of structural linguistics to understand the construction of a subject positioned as user of language.

But like Saussure's model, Lacan's model of language also needs difference and this difference is marked by woman. As such, woman becomes a fantasy, the other, the not-man in Lacanian theory. Thus, this model is problematic for the feminists in its relegation of woman to a place of negation. Since the philosophical trend has been such, feminists are conscious of the necessity for insisting not only on the oppressive nature of patriarchal power but on its systematic construction as well.

Although the 'feminist movement' as such emerged in the concerted form in the 1960s and the ferment of 1960s provided the movement with its ideological core, vitality and impetus, yet it was not the start of feminism. It was only a renewal of the old tradition of thought and action which was manipulated by patriarchal psyche. Number of reasons account for its reemergence

“...like a push for general educational reform; a demand for social justice and racial equality that generated a renewed commitment to gender equity; some worry about the dissipation of the talents of educated women; the entrance of women of all races and classes into the public labor force, which provoked fresh questions about their education; and new technologies of reproduction, such as birth control, which helped to redefine women's sexuality.” (Grenblatt 256)

But this movement remains indebted to the predecessors who brought and gradually helped to spread this feminist consciousness demanding for justice. We cannot deny the contributions of revolutionary nineteenth and early

twentieth century authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, George Eliot, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf for the materialization and development of feminist movement. The seventeenth, the eighteenth and even some of the nineteenth century writers were afraid of attempting the pen for the fear that they might be considered beyond natural for their audacity. Thus, those who dared are really appreciable and great.

Mary Wollstonecraft is the first woman to write overtly advocating for the rights of woman. Her *A vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) well deserves its rank as the first great feminist work. The book became seminal for raising the issues about women. Wollstonecraft speaks for the political and social rights of women in this book. She suggests that the equality is possible only when education is granted to women. Commenting on the male made notion that a female must be beautiful, innocent and subservient to them, she says that “females...brought back to childhood...have no sufficient strength of mind to efface the super inductions of art that have smothered nature” and again adds that “False notions of beauty and delicacy... produce a sickly sickness, rather than delicacy of organs” (Adams 395). She is against the constructed consciousness that grows along with the physical growth and the thought shaped by it. The tragedy is that this consciousness is the biased creation of patriarchal propaganda. Thus, Wollstonecraft appeals to the all females to take initiation in education in order to go against the “unnatural weakness” to achieve that ‘perfection’ which all human beings aspire per. Only then they can rise from the petty level of enticing and satisfying men’s desire.

With her book *A Room of One's Own*, an early twentieth century feminist writer as well as critic Virginia Woolf came against the trend of imprisoning women within the domesticity. Her phrase “a room of one's own” is a loaded metaphor that includes the material resources, literary tradition and space their own language etc. She states how women are intimidated to write something and how they have been looked negatively when they tried to do something more than that is prescribed to their sex. Harshly criticizing this tendency of hindering women's progress, she writes that “It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex” (Adams 822). Woolf's vision of the society is a just and balanced one in which males and females do get equal opportunity and inspiration, and come together in purpose and desire. She aspires for such space in the society where equality exists and women also get chance to develop their personality.

With the intellectual framework of existentialism, that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’, come the French philosopher and novelist Simon de Beauvoir. Her most famous book *The second Sex* (1994) “encapsulated an argument that would propel feminist thinking for next fifty years or more” (Tolan 319). This book elaborates the culture's definition the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity. Beauvoir posits a question ‘what is a woman?’ that lies at the heart of entire feminist inquiry. She insists against the myth of woman and her nature that these notions have nothing to do with women because women have nothing womanish by their birth; it is patriarchy which makes them so. She argues that there is no

physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men. Patriarchal definitions have been based on “essence” is her main assertion. In *The Second Sex*, “Beauvoir constructed an epic account of gender division throughout history, examining biological, psychological historical and cultural explanations for the reduction of women to a second and lesser sex” (320). A single question that runs through every feminist debate is the question of essentialism whether there is an innate and natural difference between men and women. The essentialists stand for the biological and thus emotional and psychological difference between two sexes. But anti-essentialists like Beauvoir argue that the sexual difference is a consequence of cultural conditioning.

Another anti-essentialist who became the most notable advocate of Beauvoir is the American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone. Her important book *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) pursued the same arguments that were presented in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. Firestone believed that the roots of women’s oppressions are biological and so their liberation requires a biological revolution. Writing on Firestone’s vision of inequality elimination between sexes, Fiona Tolan also says “Once biological difference was overcome, the cultural differences that are supported would fall away and woman would prove herself equal to man” (323). Firestone suggests for employing technology to lift the task of reproduction from women for it has helped to cause fall in the female body and create inequality.

One notable feminist to address the construction of women within male writing is Kate Millet. Her book *Sexual Politics* (1969) was the first widely

read work of feminist literary criticism that focuses upon the twin poles of gender as biology and culture. “According to Millett”, Tolan writes, “The relationship between men and women must be understood as a deeply embedded power structure with political implications” (326). Millett argues that all aspects of society and culture function according to a sexual politics that encouraged women internalize their own inferiority until it becomes psychologically rooted.

In 1977, Elaine Showalter published one of the most influential works of feminist criticism named *A Literature of Their Own*. In this book, Showalter does two things, first makes a survey of the history of women’s literary development and divides it into three different groups each having one dominant characteristic, and second she forwards the concept of “gynocriticism”. The first phase, according to her is the ‘feminine phase’ that covers the period from 1840 to 1880. In this phase, the female writers adopted the dominant male tradition and themes. The second phase (1880-1920) is the ‘feminist phase’ when women advocated for their rights and equality. The subsequent phase runs from 1920 onward during which they focused on self discovery, female experiences and rejection of universalization. Within the present phase, Showalter describes four current models of difference taken up by many feminists around the world: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural. ‘Gynocriticism’ is the term coined and popularized by Showalter. It is a radical mode in the 20th century feminism which emphasizes on the autonomy of females. The major objective of gynocriticism is to discover the specificity in a woman’s text that makes it a woman’s text not of man’s.

Since feminism is broad-based practice, many species have developed with the passage of time and influence of other movements. Rosemarie Tong, a feminist critic and analyst, in her book *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, identifies seven major species of feminism namely 'liberal', 'Marxist', 'radical', 'psychoanalytic', 'socialist', 'existentialist' and 'postmodern'. But the central focus of the dissertation is the Adrienne Rich and her radical feminism. Thus, I will make a brief introduction to two general fashions called liberal feminism, the obvious place to begin a survey of feminist thought and radical feminism, in which Rich is located and will finally focus on the radical feminism of Adrienne Rich.

As the initial stage in the development of feminist thought, liberal feminism demands for the gender justice insisting on equality and fairness in the society's race for goods and services, it claims that none of the runners is systematically disadvantaged. The liberal feminists tend to deemphasize men's power over women and accept that the men are simply the victims of Sex-role conditioning. Its main emphasis is that "female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance and/or success in the so-called public world" (Tong 2).

Liberal feminism, evolved from 'Liberalism' a school of political thought, received its classical formulation in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and in John Strauss Mill's "The Subjection of Women". Wollstonecraft wrote at a time when the economic and social position of European women was in decline. In reading *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, we see how affluence in the industrialized Europe of the

eighteenth century worked against the married bourgeois women of the time. “Because they are not allowed to exercise outdoors lest they tan their lily-white skin, they lack healthy bodies. Because they are not permitted to make their own decisions, they lack liberty” (14). Wollstonecraft compared these women with the birds confined to the cages who have nothing to do but plume themselves and “Stalk with mock Majesty from perch to perch” (14).

What Wollstonecraft most wanted for woman is personhood. Although she did not use the terms such as “socially constructed gender roles”, she denied that women are, by nature, more pleasure seeking and pleasure giving than men. Despite the limitations of her analysis, Wollstonecraft did present a vision of a woman, “strong in mind and body”, who is not a “slave” to her passions, her husband, or her children (16). She reasoned that if denied the chance to develop their rational powers, to become moral persons who have concerns, causes, and commitments beyond personal pleasure, men would become overly “emotional”, a term Wollstonecraft tended to associate with hypersensitivity, extreme narcissism, and excessive self-indulgence. She insisted that “if rationality is the capacity that distinguishes brute animals from human persons, then unless girls are brute animals, women as well as men have this capacity” (15). Hence, her focus was on equal opportunity for women as men to develop the rational faculty. Again and again, Wollstonecraft celebrated reason, usually at the expense of emotion.

Writing approximately one hundred years later, John Strauss Mill and Harriot Taylor Mill joined Wollstonecraft in celebrating reason. But they differed from Wollstonecraft in their conception of rationality and in their

insistence that if we are to achieve sexual equality, or gender justice, then society must not only give women the same education as men; society also must provide women with the some civil liberties and economic opportunities that men enjoy. Although Taylor adhered to many traditional assumptions about women's maternal nature and role, she nonetheless disagreed with his contention that the liberated woman's occupation is to "adorn and beautify" rather than to support life. Taylor believed that if given free reign, "numbers" of women may trade in the "career" of marriage and motherhood for something else.

Betty Freidan, a twentieth century liberal feminist, writes in her book *The Feminine Mystique* that the "feminine mystique"-that is, the idea that women can find satisfaction exclusively in the traditional role of wife and mother- has left women, at least middle-class, suburban, white heterosexual housewives, feeling empty and miserable. Deprived of meaningful goals, these women dust and polish their furniture as if they were Sisyphus rolling an enormous boulder up a steep hill only to have it roll down again. Freidan's cure for suburban housewives' addiction to motherhood and wifedom was to work outside the home. However, she was not asking women to sacrifice marriage and motherhood for a high-powered career. The error in the feminine mystique that Freidan finds is its claim that "women, if they wish to be normal as well as moral, ought to choose marriage and motherhood over career" (23). Like Wollstonecraft, Taylor and Mill before her, Freidan sent women out into the public realm without summoning men into the private domain.

In contrast to conservatives, radical feminists have no interest in preserving the kind of “natural order”, or biological status quo that subordinated women to men. Rather, their aim is to question the concept of a “natural order”. One of the ways to approach the school of radical feminism is to point to their insistence that women’s oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. Liberal feminists view males also as the victims of sex-role conditioning. But radical feminists insist that male power, in societies such as ours is at the root of the social construction of gender. “It is the patriarchal system that oppresses women, as a system characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition, a system that cannot be reformed but only ripped out root and branch” (2).

Although radical feminist writings are as distinct as they are myriad, one of their frequent themes is the effect of female biology on woman’s self reception, status, and function in the private and public domain. Thus, their major focus lies on the issues of biology like reproduction and mothering or gender and sexuality. The crude reasoning behind this selection is that radical feminists, more than liberal or Marxist feminists, have directed attention to the ways in which men attempt to control women’s bodies, and they have also explicitly articulated the ways in which men have constructed female sexuality to serve not women’s but men’s needs, wants and interests.

Some radical feminists view reproduction as the cause of women’s oppression. Thus, they argue that if this act of reproduction is put under the control of them, then they get emancipation. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone claimed that patriarchy – the systematic subordination of

women – is rooted in the biological inequality of the sexes. This assertion led her to a feminist revision of the materialist theory of history offered by Marx and Engels. Their struggles of “economic classes” as the driving forces of history became “sex classes” in her analysis. For her, the original class distinction is between men and women. “Because Firestone believed that the roots of women’s oppression are biological, she concluded that women’s liberation requires a biological revolution” (73). What makes this biological revolution a real possibility is “technology”. She believed that when women and men stop playing substantially different roles in the reproductive drama, it will be possible to eliminate all sexual roles. When technology is able to perfect “artificial” ways for people to reproduce, the need for the biological family will disappear and, with it, the need to impose genital heterosexuality as a means of ensuring human reproduction. No longer distinct reproductive and productive roles for women and men will make it possible to overcome all of the relations, structures, and ideas that have always divided the human community: oppressing male/oppressed female, exploiting capitalist/exploited worker, white master/black slave. The “joy of giving birth”, invoked so frequently in this society, is a “patriarchal myth” (75). This biological motherhood is the root of further evils. Hence, once women no longer have to reproduce, the primary rationale for keeping them at home disappears; and with the entrance of women into the workplace, the family will no longer exist as an economic unit. Same theme is expressed in Marge Piercy’s science fiction novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

But there is another group of radical feminists who think that far from liberating women, reproductive technology will further consolidate men's power over women. They argue that if a woman is to free herself from man's control, she has to understand that the source of her oppression is also the source of her liberation. Despite the fact that the process of reproduction has been a "bitter trap" for woman, it also contains for her untapped "possibilities" and "freedom". O'Brien, a radical feminist critic, analyzed reproduction through the lens of male alienation from reproduction. According to her, patriarchy is man's compensation for and attempt to counteract the alienation of his reproductive consciousness. It is clear that motherhood can be understood as a lived relationship with a child from the moment of its conception onward, but fatherhood cannot be understood in the same way. Thus, in order to take control of their children, men seek to control women's bodies. O'Brien insists that for this reason, women should be wary of the kind of reproductive technologies Firestone celebrates. For her, these technologies are simply new ways for men to get something, i.e., a child, for nothing.

Adrienne Rich is one of those radical feminists who stand for the celebration of femininity and female biology. She is against those feminists who prefer technology. She urges all the women to recognize this power of their biology. Women are the creators of this entire world. Thus in her view "The jealousy stems largely from men's realization that all human life on the planet is born of woman, that woman has unique power to create life" (79). Women's reproductive power lies at the heart of this male jealousy and female strength at the same time. Given their jealousy and fear of women's

reproductive powers, men quickly realized, according to Rich, that if patriarchy wishes to survive, let alone thrive, it must restrict the power of the mother. Due to this reason, males immediately took control over everything that is especially feminine like: giving birth, its process, even how to feel while being pregnant, whether to feel pain or pleasure while giving birth to child etc. That's why Rich's central urge for all women is that they should no longer sit passively, rather would actively direct childbirth, regaining control of the pleasures as well as the pains of the experience. She thinks that men have convinced women that unless a woman is a mother, she is not really a woman and patriarchy has kept women convinced that mothering is their one and only job. So, if women took control of child bearing and child rearing, more mothers would be able to experience biological motherhood on their own. In her opinion, a woman must not give up on her body before she has had a chance to use it as she thinks best.

As such woman's body has come to stand for the totalizing and essentializing features of her 1970s feminism. The lesbian body of identity and sameness figured heavily in her poetry of the 70s. Lesbianism is not a matter of sexual preference, but rather one of political choice which every woman must make if she is to become woman identified and thereby end male supremacy. Rich's famous essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) also proposed an expanded sense of what "lesbian existence" might mean- the 'lesbian continuum'. Rich writes "all women exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify as lesbian or not"(Gelpi 219). In her opinion,

lesbianism is about being attracted to the power. The primary bonding between women is natural which Rich calls lesbianism but this bonding is disrupted by the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality in all women's lives. Rich in the above article writes:

Women have been convinced that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable- even if unsatisfying or oppressive- components of their lives. The chastity belt; child marriage; erasure of lesbian existence...in art, literature, film; idealization of heterosexual romance and marriage- these are some fairly obvious forms of compulsion. (209)

Rich's contribution in the age studies is also very significant and praiseworthy. Unlike the majority's indifference to ageing and if there the feeling of senescence, Rich is positively defiant about aging. Thus, in this dissertation, I have included some of her poems that bear the theme of aging too.

II. Poetics and Politics in Rich's Early Poetry

Though the feminist consciousness and female issues take central concern in Rich's poetry, gradual change can be seen in her way of dealing with it and the force that the issue bears with the passage of time. Her adventure from a feminist writer mimicking and following the footprints of the male poets in the beginning to the radical feminist activist with lesbian concept also clearly illuminates the change that the poet has gone through. In her earlier poetry Rich equally values the traditional form, images and the symbols as handled by the male poets though thematically she somehow deviated from those male predecessors and contemporaries. But in her later poetry, her major focus becomes the theme. Her later poetry challenges the premises of patriarchal discourse whether manifested in academic criticism, political rhetoric or her own residual solipsism.

Rich's early poetry also emphasizes the ways in which one copes with frustration and pain by imposing the mind and will upon the emotions to control experience, and her traditional forms and language express this attitude towards life. Although this latent tendency towards feminism is recognized by most of the critics, some of them like Kevin Stein deny it. For Stein, "early in her career Rich was the darling of the literary patriarchy" (32). He supports such declaration by analyzing Auden's forward to Rich's first collection. Of course in the beginning she wrote the poems following the footprints of male predecessors like Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNeice, Stevens, Yeats etc; but her sense of urgency for change that will reconstitute language and restore its life-giving power becomes a driving force and a major principle

of form in her poetry. Though Rich does not exhibit aggressive feminist perspectives at the beginning, we can still find in these early poems that women artists encounter struggles that rise from the conflicts between their inner desires and the outward restraint from the artistic society that is hosted by a majority of male writers. Under the formality and bashfulness of her first volume, there are glimpses of what her work would represent in the next decades. Martin states that “praise for meeting traditional standards gave her the courage to be innovative and to break social and poetic conventions in her later work” (175).

As Rich’s vision centers upon women as the hope for survival of the world- a world that she sees as having denied to women, the validity of their emotions, the wisdom of their mature, and the strength of their unity- her style gradually becomes more open and personal, and in her latest works it reaches visionary power. Evaluating this change that has taken place in Rich’s poetry, Sylvia Henneberg writes:

Most of the attention devoted to Rich’s power of change has been concentrated on the transition from Rich as reticent, self-censoring aesthete of the fifties to Rich as Radical lesbian poet of the seventies and early eighties. (348)

By the sixties, Rich started to substitute the traditional male aesthetic that she had learned from her father and in Radcliffe for a poetics more related to her personal life, and in this sense more passionate. Dealing with personal issues gave her the necessary confidence to make experiments with her poetry. She found that the poem itself engenders new sensations and new awareness as it

progresses. So, it is difficult to write a poem with a neat handful of materials and express the materials according to a prior plan. The more she deviated from the predefined and set plans of traditional poetry, her poetry became more and more focused on the feminist issues. She stands against an order that is male- governed and that keeps women alien to themselves and each other.

Summing up her position Rich says in an interview:

I do see saving the lives of women as a priority. The “humanity” trip- not women’s liberation, but human liberation- tends to feel too easy to me. Women have always supported every “human” liberation movement, every movement for social change; there have always been women womaning the barricades, but it’s never been for us, or about us. I think that women ought to be putting women first now. Which is not to say that we’re against the other half of humanity, but just to say that if we don’t put ourselves first, we’re never going to make it to full humanity. (qtd in Gelpi 358)

Thus, afterwards the sole purpose of Rich’s literary career has been “putting women first”.

Three criteria have been used to analyze her poetry and the changing attitude she has shown towards it. They are: Poetics and Politics in her early poetry, Feminist Politics in later poetry, and Age Poetry. I have selected the poems “Storm Warnings”, “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”, “Bears”, “A Walk by the Charles”, “Autumn Equinox”, “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law”, “The Roofwalker”, “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children”, “Valediction

Forbidding Mourning”, “Planetarium”, “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus”, “Diving into the Wreck”, “The Stranger”, “Trying to Talk With a Man”, “Twenty-One Love Poems”, “Power”, “Contradictions: Tracking Poems”, “Life and Letters”, “When this Clangor in the Brain”, “At Majority”, “Rusted Legacy”. Some of these poems are analyzed in detail whereas others are just referred to.

Adrienne Rich’s poetic career begins with the mimicry of male poetry. Brought up in the conservative American Society of then, she was greatly influenced by the modernist tradition as well as patriarchal trends of writing poetry. She wrote under the influence of a male writing tradition remounting to Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, John Donne, W.H. Auden, MacNeice, Wallace Stevens, and W. B. Yeats etc. As such her earlier poems equally focused on the poetics though the feminist consciousness had already started to sprout from the very beginning. In this sense, she treated the feminist themes from the initial phase but under the control of traditional poetic norms and values. There remains the dream of freedom and equality but at the same time imprisonment due to her timidity to break away from patriarchal tradition. Her earlier two collections *A Change of World* (1951) and *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems* (1955) are the poems of this type.

Her first collection *A Change of World* was published in 1951, when she was still an undergraduate in Radcliff. In his introduction to the collection, Auden praised her for her mastery of form, delicacy and restraint from striving for intense individuality. In her essay “When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision”, Rich has written: “I know that my style was formed first by male

poets... Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNeice, Stevens, Yeats.

What I chiefly learned from them was craft” (Gelpi 171). In that early phase she chiefly spoke through personae or using other distancing techniques, following the prevalent poetic ideal of objectivity that was intended to express the universal through restraint of open, personal emotion. Her several poems directly concern the effort to confine and control emotion through aesthetic form.

“Storm Warnings”, a poem about her growing consciousness and her vague effort to suppress it is a good example of the use of this technique of distancing in which Rich uses Eliot’s “objective correlative” technique in order to reveal her inner turmoil. Through the description of the “weather abroad”, i.e., a physical storm, she gives outlet to the “weather in the heart”, i.e. the inner emotional conflict that she was going through.

The poem begins with the description of the physical storm that is taking place outside the house inside which the persona is resting. The strength of the storm can be easily guessed as “The glass has been falling all the afternoon... / what winds are walking overhead, what zone/of gray unrest is moving across” (Gelpi 3). The storm is very violent. The first stanza correlates the second stanza for it is the description of the inner turmoil of the persona. She is a woman raised in the traditional patriarchal society that teaches woman to be very submissive, disciplined and obedient. But despite this she is feeling the violent storm of growing feminist consciousness. Like trying to get safety by closing the glasses, dropping the curtain and setting a match to candles sheathed in glass, she tries to suppress this consciousness

being indifferent to it. Despite this, the effort proves to be vague and fragile for as the insistent whine of the weather continually disturbs her through the unsealed aperture, this rebellious thinking also does not allow her to be totally indifferent.

The storm is outside as well as inside. Due to this emotional conflict she is feeling suffocation. Yet she cannot do anything else besides listening the “insistent whine” being helpless because “This is our sole defense against the season; / Who live in troubled regions” (3). So is the compulsion to the women who live in the troubled regions of patriarchal norms, values, restrictions.

The cleverly designed structure allows her to progress in an organized manner to explain both an external and internal conflict held by the speaker. The controlled iambic rhythm, broken appropriately in the first, fourth and sixth lines by an anapest as the wind strains against the glass, contain the threat of violent weather, just as the imagined room protects the poet. Rich uses extended metaphor to define ideas and emotions, a technique that is considered effective in patriarchal tradition. Another poem “At a Bach Concert” also reveals Rich’s concept of poetry at this period of her life, as she defines it through as analogy to music. In this poem, she articulated a distinctly Audenesque aesthetic which proclaims “A too-compassionate art is half an art.” But even this early in her work, Rich extends the meanings of this traditional activity beyond its usual implication of passive, patient acceptance.

Under the formality and bashfulness of her first volume, there are glimpses of what her work would represent in the next decades. On analyzing her male writing influences, Rich states:

Looking back at poems I wrote before I was twenty-one, I'm startled because beneath the conscious craft are the glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote the poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men. (171)

An example of this split between a conscious craft and these glimpses predicting some characteristic of other future poetry can be seen in the poems like "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers".

Written during the initial phase of her literary career, Rich's poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" also reveals the suppression and domination of the females and their creativity in the patriarchal society but she takes help of patriarchal and traditional form, images and symbols in order to convey the theme. In the poem, the assertion against the patriarchy is imagined only in terms set by the patriarchs. Her "tapestry tigers" are not just individual artistic expressions; they are politically inflected, engaged in patriarchal chivalry myths. The poem, in fact, is the product of her training as a poet under patriarchal tradition. However, though her poetics is traditional and patriarchal, yet her politics gives glimpses to what her work would represent in the next decades. As Rich writes: "In those years formalism was part of the strategy- like asbestos gloves; it allowed me to handle materials I couldn't pick up barehanded" (qtd. in Gelpi 311).

Composed in three carefully rhymed stanzas, the poem at first seems as homage to the speaker's aunt's skill in stitching a panel with tiger. But, a detailed reading reveals images and symbols that suggest a relation of oppression concerning Aunt Jennifer and her husband. Rich depicts such a woman who does not break from the accepted roles of society. Aunt Jennifer produces tigers but not spontaneously, rather under control of a male, represented by "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band / Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" (Gelpi 4). Physically the wedding ring might be light, but it sits heavily upon her hand due to the cultural limitations and restrictions imposed upon a woman after the creation of this bond, i.e., marriage. Though there is no physical presence of this male figure, this very trivial thing ring is sufficient to keep the aunt under his control. The image of 'wedding band' brings the feeling of slavery, domination and fear. But despite this dominance, she embroiders tigers that "do not fear men".

The "tiger" is the central symbol in the poem. Through this symbol her creation assumes a form of power. Her aspiration for freedom, fearlessness, independence and strength is reflected in her stitching. But it is worth noting that this idea is ironically interlaced with the use of a regular meter and a craft obedient to traditional patterns of poetry. Such formal structure can be read as a correlative of Aunt Jennifer's household confinement. Aunt Jennifer is paralyzed in the poem; her only action is to stitch the tigers, her stillness contributing to compose her submission. In the last stanza, suddenly the speaker foresees Aunt Jennifer's death without significant emotional change in mood. Her death seems only to confirm the paralysis of her life. But the

remaining art concedes her a sense of immortality and a freedom from the dominance she experienced while married.

In the central symbols of the poem—the tapestry tigers and the uncle’s wedding band— the individual and social, the personal and the political meet in the poem. The tapestry tigers are not just individual artistic expression but engaged in patriarchal chivalry myths. By the physical intimacy of a wedding band and by the familial presence conferred by “Uncle’s” wedding band, “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” personalizes the presence of patriarchal politics. The poem’s structure also draws the personal into the political and political into the personal. The parallel syntactical structures of verses one and two suggest the relatedness of their content. Though verse one nominally describes artistic freedom, and verse two nominally describes patriarchal power, the structural affinities between the two verses resist the strict binarizing the rebellion and repression. The final verse of the poem persists in this destabilization as here rebellion and repression meet in the simultaneity of the fearless tigers and the lifeless aunt:

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
 Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
 The tigers in the panel that she made
 Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid. (Gelpi 4)

What makes the poem very interesting is the interplay between rebellion and repression, between the individual and the social, between the personal and the political.

The problem in the poem is that the tigers are clearly masculine figures. They are not only masculine, but heroic figures of one of the most role bound of all the substructures of patriarchy, i.e., chivalry. Her tigers are attractive but finally seducing her to another submission to the male. As the power is envisioned only in terms that are culturally determined as masculine, the revolutionary content of the vision remains insufficient. The fact that the assertion against the patriarchy is imagined in terms set by the patriarchs may be seen as Aunt Jennifer's framing her needlework, but patriarchy's framing of Aunt Jennifer. As the fingers metonymically represent Aunt Jennifer's desires remain bounded by the wedding ring, so Rich's feminist awareness remains bounded by the formal demands of her verse.

In her essay "When We Dead Awaken", Rich herself notes that "It was important to me that Aunt Jennifer was a person as distinct from herself as possible- distanced by the formalism of the poem, by its objective, observant tone" (171). Such distance allowed her to handle issues she could not pick up barehanded.

Another example of her continuity in terms of style is the poem "Bears". Rich's "Bears" is another poem that is her continuity in terms of her style and emphasis on poetic devices in order to reveal the theme that she wants to convey to her readers. As the major theme in her earlier poems has been the alienation, suffocation felt by women confined within the patriarchal domesticity, norms and values, this poem also revolves around the same concern. In such a society female creativity and aspiration do go unnoticed

and unfulfilled. This general female lot is presented in the poem with the symbolic representation of the “bears”.

Consisted of four tercets and one quatrain, the poem uses the figures of bears to express, on a first level of understanding, the speaker’s assemblage of fear, astonishment and pride for having dreamt of “wonderful bears”, but a certain lament for awakening and losing them. Beginning two lines of the poem make us clear about the speaker’s passion for the wonderfully amazing creature and their sudden loss: “wonderful bears that walked my room all night/Where are you gone, your sleek and fairy fur” (7). As the bears stand for her creative power, the young poet immersed in late night thinking is scared as well as proud of her huge bear-like thought: “Your thick nocturnal pacing in my room? / My bears, who keeps you now, in pride and fear” (7). Her bear-like thoughts are “nocturnal” for due to the social and cultural restrictions and limitations, they do not dare to be exposed to the light and remain always neglected in the society that undervalues the creativity of those whose realm is prescribed “domesticity”.

Despite the passion for independence, freedom and creativity, suppression as well as uselessness of female creativity in the male dominated society lies at the heart of the poem. But her poem still denotes her mimicry of conservative poetic patterns, repeating the animal-mediated strategy for voicing her needs as “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” had demonstrated. In this early poem, Rich manages to explore brilliantly the sonorous aspects of poem, fusing olfactory and visual senses. But, in spite of that, “Bears” explores certain “accent” of Emily Dickinson’s influence, which may indicate Rich’s

incipient movements out of the male tradition in poetry. Although Rich's second collection showed increasing separation from a male poetics, in her twenties she was still unaware of the possibilities of a committed poetry when related to social causes. This is visible in the domestic space of "Bears", which restrains the speaker's scope to a nocturnal bedroom location without relating it to any external question.

Rich's earliest volume *A Change of World* introduces two themes that have persisted throughout her career: the pyrrhic victories of human accomplishment in the battle against time and the plight of being a woman. Many poems describe the patience and accommodation every woman must learn if she is to remain in a relationship with a man. But in her early career, Rich was not fully aware of the real nature of her conflicts, and the pattern of images and motifs that begins to develop here is partially unconscious. Thus, though it has been justly praised for its fine craftsmanship *A change of World* has many echoes of her masters and muted notes of her personal voice.

Her second collection *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems* continues the mimicry of conservative poetry and the same tone and style. Again the major theme is the need for caution and control in art and life. Her poems were not yet able to fulfill her longings or to discuss women-centered and political issues openly. A number of poems written while Rich was travelling in England and Europe are about famous places. These and even the less exotic spots are viewed through the detachment of the tourist, though the particular scene may act as a backdrop for a subdued expression of pain in a fallen world. Rich's "A Walk by the Charles" is a fine poem of this type in

which the visual and musical renditions of landscape combines with philosophical contemplation. The language of the poem is often dependent upon literary allusion and authority, and the style upon her mentors.

“Autumn Equinox”, her semi-autobiographical poem, presents a middle-aged female speaker reflecting on her marriage. It is an expression of the speaker’s dissatisfaction with her married life. But in this poem also, the poet skillfully maintains the conversational tone within the iambic pentameter form. Rich reveals the marriage relationship as the center of the problem: a woman with a quiet acceptance of her diminished expectations of life. The erotic passion of woman is hinted at but repressed, seemingly by the demands of art as well as of society.

The season during which the narrative takes place is very symbolic and meaningful in the poem. Autumn is the season of fall and death in the conventional poetic idea. The atmosphere is also one of resignation and silence; and a sense of the speaker’s patient anticipation of death, paralleled by autumn’s calm move toward winter, pervades the lines. The speaker’s life is also like autumn without any excitement and charm for Lyman, the husband. He has never been the man of her dreams and she joined him out of “a woman’s need for love of any kind” (96). The speaker and Lyman are only the “semblance of bride and groom”. The wedding, to her, is not the blissful climax of her life, but a dry immutability.

The poem is appropriately set during the autumn equinox, the time of year when night, which might be associated with the female speaker, and day, representing her husband Lyman, are of equal length and strength. From this

point on, night will be longer. As surely as autumn equinox will give way to longer nights, the wife will succeed in changing the terms of her marriage. Now onwards, she will take control of all the privileges and priorities that have always worked to her disadvantage until now and will be altered. When she claims, “We finish off / Not quiet as we began” (99), she is expressing confidence in this change.

The primary attack of the poem is not on the individuals like Lyman, but on the entire institution called marriage which, Rich thinks, brings unhappiness in the lives of both individuals involved. In this institution, Rich focuses more on difference rather than union. In her opinion, each individual is different from other and marriage attempts to ignore those differences. If marriage is the common language, then the common language is too limited. So, the language of difference that acknowledges the individuality of identities is for more preferable to her.

The *Diamond Cutters and Other Poems* also has been recognized for strengths similar to those of her earlier volume; but mixed with the strong praise are hints of disappointment-questioning whether she is growing as a poet or settling into, and for, an achieved style with too much facility and overdependence on models. Rich herself was dissatisfied with those poems which seemed to her mere exercises for poems she hadn't written. Her refusal to write in the same form in the next collection also illustrates this dissatisfaction.

III. Feminist Politics in Rich's Later Poetry

After the completion of the two volumes, Rich's writing became more and more political and indifferent to conventional poetic tradition. By the sixties, Rich started to substitute the traditional male aesthetic that she had learned from her father and in Radcliff for a poetics more related to her personal life, and in this sense more passionate. Dealing with the personal issues gave her the necessary confidence to make experiments with her poetry. She was taught to write in the previously plotted form. But she gradually noticed that such predetermination and craftsman labor of adjusting the poems to meet impositions of a given poetic tradition kills the spontaneity and restricts their force. Thus, from this newborn poetry of the sixties, Rich demanded an active role, willing to produce organic poems, the poems that are experiences but not about experiences. Then onwards, she lost connection with the traditional "perfection of order" with increasing commitment to feminist issues.

In this regard, her third collection *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* is the transitional book in terms of form as well as content. In the collection, poet was generating a form and a technique compatible to the necessities of her emotional life, something her earlier poems could not express. Making revision of her own writing in her essay "When We Dead Awaken", Rich writes:

"In the late fifties I was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman... I began to feel that my fragments and scraps had a common consciousness and

common theme, one which I would have been very unwilling to put on paper at an earlier time because I had been taught that poetry should be “universal”, which meant, of course, nonfemale.” (175)

The title poem of the collection is her first fully feminist poem written in ten loosely connected free-verse sections. The force of “Snapshots” in the title of the poem indicates how much she was abandoning her idea of poetry as careful craft set against the storms of life. Written during 1958-60, Rich’s “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law” is a poem that projects the depression of a middle class woman who is educated and has greater potential but is silenced and ignored in the patriarchal culture. Thus, she is compelled to remain within the kitchen despite her aspiration for “Sloppy Sky” (Ferguson 420). This poem, in fact, tries to reveal the consciousness of the women of the period of transition when women had become conscious of the restrictions and burdens imposed upon them by patriarchal culture, society, family and literature, yet were not able to surpass these limitations. As a result, their pathetic situation is that of unbearable anxiety and depression. Denial of the authentic selfhood of the woman in the male dominated society and the effects that it lays in a conscious woman lies at the heart of this poem.

The poem uses the pictorial technique of presentation as indicated by its title word “snapshots”. A Female addresser of the poem tells us about two women of two generations; mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law being a woman of older generation is quite ignorant of her restriction and usurpation imposed by patriarchal culture. As such she thinks

right whatever is prescribed to her and concentrates in making herself beautiful to please those males who actually suppress her: “belle... / with henna-colored hair, skin like a peach bud/still have your dresses copied from that time” (420). She is an unconscious victim of patriarchy. But unlike this old lady, her daughter-in-law is a conscious victim of this monopoly. She knows and thus shows her rage “banging the coffee-pot into the sink” (420). Despite this she is unable to reveal this in front of the real cause. The poet, in fact, holds that a woman loses her individuality the very moment she yields to male domination whether she knowingly or unknowingly does this. When domesticity overshadows their creativity, women lose their true self as well as freedom. Unless they claim their autonomous identity, the potential that they possess remains unutilized like the daughter-in-law of the poem.

Challenging the language of traditional patriarchal culture, Rich condemns men like Cicero, Horace, Campion, Diderot, Johnson and Shakespeare as the flattering, insulting, condescending enemies of women’s intellect, who contributed to a culture which values women only for male pleasure. The poem explores the legacy of self-hatred and wasted energy experienced by a woman in this patriarchal society and at the same time condemns the fake notion of woman’s success defined by feminine mystique. It is the lamentation on the waste of energy in society that values women not in terms of wisdom or intellectual beauty but for their physical beauty. In fact, Rich insists, the traditional and proper roles of good wife and housekeeper are a woman’s funeral preparations. Judith McDaniel says:

In “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” Rich shows us a young woman who is beginning to realize that her identity is not that of the women she has been given as models: “Nervy, glowering your daughter/ wipes the teaspoons, grows another way.” (Gelpi 313)

Thus, the poem is not only about the restrictions and expectations from a woman in the culture led by males but also the growing consciousness against it.

As a feminist poem, the focus of consciousness in the poem is a young woman who is aware of the forces that limit her and other women; and there is a gradual progression from her feelings of restriction, hopelessness, and subdued rage toward a hope for change. The tone is a mixture of sympathy and outrage toward the woman who is an accomplice in the denial of her own life. The poem begins with the picture of the mother-in-law, her “mind now, moldering like wedding-cake”, “Crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge / of mere fact” (Ferguson 420). The stifling role of the mother-in-law leads to an urgent plea for all women to realize the demeaning effects of being praised for mediocrity. Two sections recognize Emily Dickinson and Mary Wollstonecraft as women who, through remarkable courage and control, did not settle for mediocrity. These examples lead to a vision of the modern woman who will break out of the reductive pattern of relationships and expectation: “Well, / She’s long about her coming, who must be / more merciless to herself than history. / Her mind full to the wind” (423).

By the end of the poem, speaker, thus, offers a snapshot of freedom. Because the speaker is actually addressing her own self in the role of daughter-in-law, the poem's dramatic monologue is a kind of self education as well. The speaker realizes that the time is male and so her urge for the females is to surpass it recognizing her potential. After the realization her tone of anger transforms to sympathy to those who are the victims of same culture. Her battle begins not against an individual but entire psyche that has enslaved the females since long back.

The poems in this volume completely shake off Auden's epitaph of "modest" and instead present bold, disturbing images, particularly of women in domestic situations. Rich's need to get out of the house and in a figurative sense out of the house of this culture is figured in the apocalyptic flying woman of "Snapshots". The collection directly turned to the problems faced by a young woman, wife and mother in a cold-war-time America that started to change very fast with the popularization of television, the progressive participation of women as an economic force and the consequent empowerment of women's movements. Another poem concerning the same problem is "The Roofwalker" in which she identifies with the builder, the roofwalker, standing on the roof of the unfinished house.

"The Roofwalker" portrays the life of daring self-exposure that is, at the same time, unchosen and therefore a passive submission to rules not of her own making. The poem treats poetry itself as a vehicle for the poet's life and compares the poet to a construction worker balanced precariously on a rafter, "exposed, larger than life, / and due to break my neck" (Gelpi 16). The female

poet has labored “with infinite exertion” and succeeded in laying “a roof I can’t live under” (16). In her poems after sixties, the entire thrust of her poetry is to re-order social values and structures by a more searching engagement with people and social forces.

Dedicated to the poet Denise Levertov and a response to Levertov’s “From the Roof”, the poem deals with the problem of voice that plagued the feminist writers of the time. Emphasizing the main problem during the time McDaniel writes: “In the fifties and sixties it was difficult for a woman to escape the fact that poet was masculine noun” (Gelpi 314). The problem of the poem is same that of language and voice. The female constructor of the poem is a poet who has labored much in order to build a house from where she is excluded for it is the house of patriarchal tradition. Her exertions were thwarted because “A life I didn’t choose / chose me” (16). She is utterly unable to feel the satisfaction at the home that gives her no room and become what she dreams of being.

As per the poem, the speaker has used certain tools while constructing but the tragedy is that they are the wrong ones: “... even / my tools are the wrong ones / for what I have to do” (16). But Rich is not specific whether these “wrong tools” stand for the problem of gender identification – a woman writing in a man’s voice and poetic form, or simply the problem of a formal style. However, both are connected to the use of language which the poet is finding increasingly awkward. The very language becomes a hindrance to the phenomena Rich wishes to describe due to its limited and sexist vocabulary. Willard Spiegelman writes:

No wonder, then, that Rich's poetry became increasingly didactic and overtly concerned with the power of language to hide and distort. One's whole life-as-translation necessitated an attempt, however arduous, to speak in the original tongue and to authenticate the true self. But how can the poet do this when language itself works against her? – her tools are wrong ones.
(Gelpi 374)

What to do with inadequate tools and how to find the right ones are Rich's early, breakthrough motifs. Thus, in this poem also, she questions not only the adequacy of maps to guide to truth but also the purposelessness of any daring that is merely apparent. Thus, she questions the worth of her own metaphor:

Was it worth while to lay –
with infinite exertion –
a roof I can't live under?
-All those blueprints,
closings of gaps,
measuring, calculations? (16)

The poem exemplifies her difficulties during the period. The self-exploration here comes to mean a quest for an adequate language.

In reaction against definitions of "woman" allowed by the game, Rich at first identifies the new possibilities of self-realization with "masculine" qualities within herself and so with images of men in several poems near the end of book. The "larger than life roofwalker is a naked man". Their masculine strength derives not from mere physical courage but from the power of mind

and will and judgment. At the end of the “Snapshots” the boy-like woman, cutting through the currents, is linked with “mind” and “light”. In Jungian psychology the poet is at this point imagining herself in terms of her “animus”, the archetypally “masculine” component in the woman’s psyche which corresponds to the “anima” or archetypally “female” component in the man’s psyche.

Her magnificent next volume *The Will to change* (1971) shows her making the longer poem of her own, using it as a vehicle for building emotional intensity and turning meditation into a form of rhetorical action. As its title points out, the book marks Rich’s will to promote change through and in her poetry. It charts her accelerating passage into the public sphere, a passage that forced critics to develop new approaches to her work. In the five section poem “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children”, for the first time Rich inserts prose in her poetry:

My neighbor, a scientist and rare-collector, telephones me in a state of violent emotion. He tells me that my son and his, aged eleven and twelve, have on the last day of school burned a mathematics textbook in the backyard. He has forbidden my son to come to his house for a week, and has forbidden his own son to leave the house during that time. “The burning of a book” he says’ “arouses terrible sensations in me’ memories of Hitler; there are few things that upset me so much as the idea of burning a book.” (Gelpi 40)

In initiating the poem with this prose introduction, Rich establishes a tone of intimacy with her readers, mainly female ones. The clarity and objectivity of the prose associated to the familiar issue described serve to call the attention of mother readers, implicitly appealing to a type of communal understanding between women, as next door housewife neighbors sharing secrets and experiences concerning sexuality and motherhood.

One of the major problems that the book focuses is communication for the females in the patriarchally formed language system. She expresses her anguish about a language that has been used to support tyranny. In “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children”, Rich writes:

knowledge of the oppressor
 this is the oppressor’s language,
 yet I need it to talk to yet
 ...
 there are books that describe all this
 and they are useless. (41-42)

Rich feels to be the prisoner of this language for it is inappropriate and unfit for her needs. Despite this, she cannot do anything rejecting this language due to the lack of her own. On Rich’s recognition of the problem, yet powerlessness Charles Altieri writes:

“In her most effective renderings of pathos Rich seems to recognize his link between her frustrated powerlessness and the only style available in which she can even render pain... The

forces of oppression ultimately reduce the poem to prose and prose to obsessive repetition among associations. (Gelpi 352)

Rich turns hopefully to modern film as a model for the “reconstruction” of “the oppressor’s language”. She was fascinated with the films of Jean-Luc Godard and other New wave filmmakers who experimented with the handheld camera, fast zooms, rapid panning, freeze frames, and jump cuts. With this freedom and flexibility, thematic meaning comes through rapid images that build to motifs, rather than through more traditional narrative.

Another poem dealing with the same theme is “Valediction Forbidding Mourning”. In her attempt of condemning the system that represses women, Rich turns to language and grammar here. In the poem she expresses how the masculinely interpreted language does not allow the females to fully express their feelings and also makes an urge to women writers to take control over this language with revolutionary and unique vision though very common in their own way. The female speaker in the beginning of the poem feels suffocation due to the failure of proper expression and thus speaks in the fragmented phrases like “My Swirling Wants. Your frozen lips” (Ferguson 423). For a female speaker there are many things to say. Yet her lips remain frozen and still because in the phallogocentric world, the grammar itself turns and attacks the female user. The words define women as ‘Other’ and negate the feminine perspectives. Thus, though the female writers write, their writing also turns “empty notations” (423) on their part as all the themes are also masculine. In those already existing themes, these female writers get nothing expressed of their own.

The way this language is taught to females tends to make them dumb and rather than making them able of every expression, it slows the “healing of wounds” (423). Everything they want to reveal gets suppressed for it is interpreted from the male perspective. Thus, Rich’s major concern in the poem is that “Language assaults as well as corrupts, but the woman wants to control, rather than submit to, the only power she may own” (Gelpi 375). The speaker views the repetition of the male themes, metaphors by the female writers without their original interpretation as the death of their femininity which she detests most.

In Rich’s opinion, language is nothing but a locus of metaphors. What matters most in language is interpretation for it is the “mobile army of metaphors” in Nietzschean terms. Who is the main manipulator of it and how it is interpreted play central role as for as language is concerned. Thus, Rich says:

A last attempt: the language is a dialect called metaphor.
 These images go unglossed: hair, glacier, flashlight.
 When I think of a landscape I am thinking of a time.
 When I talk of taking a trip I mean forever.
 I could say: those mountains have a meaning
 but further than that I could not say. (423)

Until now, like other female writers, she has tried to speak remaining within the male made boundary of meaning. But she has failed and her writings resulted in “empty notations” without her true expression. Thus, the speaker finally dares to make an attempt with language in a different way. She wants

to take control of the language she uses for “language is a dialect called metaphor”. The essence of metaphor lies in interpretation. Hence, now onwards, she wants to give it her own meaning that helps her give outlet to her repressed expressions. She won’t do anything very extraordinary; rather “do something very common, in my own way” (423). To do something very common in an original and own way itself defines the departure of the speaker from the repetition that she identifies ‘death’. The very “commonness” of the goal surpasses the assertion of individuality as the single voice asks to speak for other. “Speaking for others allows her to speak for herself” (Gelpi 376).

Thus, this poem shows how even language, a means of communication, has been taken under patriarchal control and females have been made silent due to the lack of expression. In the poem, the urge and appeal for the all females to take control of their means of expression and write their experience or themes whether or not males accept it becomes powerful. In her view, what is needed for the success is control of their own than suffering remaining within other’s control.

The Will to Change continues to combine personal and political commitment, centering of the pressing need for the act of will to change the self and the world. In the poem “Planetarium”, through the voice of the astronomer Caroline Herschel, Rich makes her own direct statement of commitment for her art as an instrument for change:

... I am an instrument in the shape
of a woman trying to translate pulsations
into images for the relief of the body

and the reconstruction the mind. (39)

In the poem Rich revives the forgotten figure of an astronomer. In doing so, she instruments her poem with the purpose of discovering “women’s history”. Through her lyric, she rises oppressed woman from a forgetfulness caused by patriarchal exclusions of female figures. As their history is emphasized, factual injustices are denounced since many of those women had their merits stolen, denied or were burnt or killed because of the ideas. One of the poems dealing with the same will to change is “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus” in which the poet assumes the role a spokesperson of the woman’s liberation movement and promises devotion to the causes she defends. The dreamy atmosphere of the poem is borrowed from scenes and images of Jean Cocteau’s movie *Orphee* which is about Orpheus to depict herself as a woman whose animus is archetypal poet. What the dream-poem traces out is the resurrection of Orpheus through the woman’s determination to resist all depersonalizing forces- psychological, political, sexual- arrayed against the exercise of her powers.

The persona really dreams she is the personification of the Death of Orpheus, a humanized figure of death that takes Orpheus’s life and not the dead Orpheus. As the poem is the part of a dream, the animus-poet comes alive again within the psyche, and his return is a sign of and a measure of her ability to see through and to move forward on her “mission”. First the persona creates an opposition between the authorities and her, and after that uses a discourse of self-enforcement, which confers her heroic traces: “I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers/and those powers severely limited/ by

authorities whose faces I rarely see” (Gelpi43). The prime of life is the most energetic and useful phase which the persona uses in order to go against the authority, i.e., an unseen binding force. She is “a woman” and yet goes through not the course laid by the authorities as the safe way to remain intact but the one intimated by the fullness of her powers as the only way to deliver herself whole.

In the Anglo-Saxon culture generally “Death” is a male character with an important presence in poetry. But, in this poem Rich makes use of the Latin representation of Death in that movie which shows Death played by a powerful woman dressed in black, moving in a black Rolls Royce escorted by motorcyclists equivalent to the Hell’s Angels. She took advantage of this Latin female Death and subverted the patriarchal existing symbol of male Death. Politically, her attitude can be interpreted as a way of diminishing men’s power over women, since male reference for Death demonstrates a patriarchal orientation of language. Moreover, the dead poet indicated in the poem can be analyzed as a reference to the male poets who have influenced Rich’s early poems.

As the title of the poem suggests, the poem is not directly connected to the public sphere, it is just the persona’s dreamy and therefore unconscious desire. But the persona’s affirmative voice and the use of anaphora “I am a woman” with strong passion and assertion of the mission against patriarchy makes the poem equally strong. The title asserts the euphoria in the poet’s voice, in acknowledging that the poem is a dream, i.e., the reported celebration is unreal and at most works as a wish of the way things might have been to

women. Within this wish, the speaker swears herself to lucidity, i.e., promising to be conscious. The speaker here is more conscious of her powers and their repercussion, indicating to the readers that they should value the force in the prime of their lives. Rich incorporates a heroic or messianic element in her voice as a poet, proper to generate followers and to make her a spokeswoman. Albert Gelpi also writes:

The result is a restoration to poetry of an ancient and primitive power, lost in the crack-up which the last centuries have documented. The power of the bard in the tribe has long since declined with the power of prophecy. Adrienne Rich's mission is to live out her dream of a society of individual men and women. (296)

Main motive in the poem is the selfhood. But here, this is not merely a private struggle but a summons to us all. The female critic Claire Keyes also reveals a womanly admiration for Rich that confirms this vision of Rich as a heroine: "Significant ... is that Rich assumes the role of the bard among her people. As a woman who dares to transcend patriarchal barriers in becoming this "bard" (122).

The poem has mythic dimension in a singularly demythologized time. It is a myth not because her experience has been appended, by literary allusion, to gods and goddesses, but because her experience is rendered so deeply and truly that it reaches common impulses and springs, so that, without gods and goddesses, we can participate in the process of discovery and determination.

In her next transitional volume *Diving into the Wreck* Rich makes the direct plunge into experience. Her poems, which had presented different elements as irony a decade before in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, straight connections to political activism in *Leaflets*, or the recognition of a heroic, dreamlike and audacious tone in *The Will to Change*, increase in *Diving into the Wreck* the will Rich had manifested : to write poems that are experiences. After this collection, Rich began more and more to combine her critique of patriarchy with a positive search for women's community, a search based on both utopian visions and historical understanding of women's lives. The book attracted an extraordinarily heated critical response and established Rich as a major voice in the women's movement. In her review of *Diving into the Wreck*, a feminist writer Margaret Atwood points out:

These poems convince me most often when they are true to themselves as structures of words and images, when they resist the temptation to sloganize, when they don't preach at me. "The words are purposes. / The words are maps" Rich says, and I like them better when they are maps (though Rich would probably say the two depend on each other and I would probably agree). (Gelpi 282)

In Rich's poetry, Atwood appreciates its lyricism. This lyricism is more visible in poems that merge personal aspects of her life in social situations also experienced by her readers. Atwood found in Rich's poems not a repetition of ongoing discussion concerning feminism, nor another means to reinforce existent ideologies related to women liberation. Rather she identified a poetry

that within its proper features found its own way of reacting to a given situation. Among these features, there is the use of myths, which Atwood perceives as obsolete and wrecked.

Undoubtedly, the myth has an important role in the narrative title poem “Diving into the Wreck”, and consequently in the volume. In this title poem, Rich expresses her wrath regarding the position of women in the culture constructed by the patriarchal system. This cultural construct of patriarchy is represented in the form of old myths that presents women as dualistic creature as well as the “other”. Domination, depersonalization and dehumanization are the treatments that women have been getting from males since mythical time. Thus, taking a humanistic perspective, Rich wants to reconstitute this wrecked culture. The wreck she is diving into is the wreck of obsolete myths and a battered bulk of the sexual definitions of the past.

While re-envisioning the content, Rich taps the energies and plots of myth in this poem of journey and transformation. There is a hero, a quest, and a buried treasure, but the hero is woman; the quest is a critique of old myths; and the treasure is knowledge: the whole buried knowledge of the personal and cultural foundering of the relations between the sexes. This stranger-poet-survivor carries “a book of myths” in which her /his “names do not appear”. These are the old myths of patriarchy, the myths that split male and female irreconcilably into two warring factions, the myths that perpetuate the battle between the sexes.

It is a very carefully managed journey as she loaded the camera and checked the edge of the knife blade, put on her body armor and mask. After

such preparation, the poem starts to take the reader down, into an ocean of symbols, leading to the final one at the bottom: the wreck. During this diving, the speaker feels like an insect, small inside the hugeness of the liquid surrounding environment: “I crawl like an insect down the ladder” (53). The ocean as a vast body of water that links continents and provides minerals and food to billions of being can be associated to maternal nourishment. Thus, the water that composes it can be identified as belonging to the female realm.

The ocean represents the unknown, the uncontrolled medium that takes the diver to the objective: the wreck. One possible interpretation for this liquid medium is language. As Rich’s speaker goes down, the ocean becomes darker and the purpose of the journey is clearly revealed:

I came to explore the Wreck.
 The Words are purposes
 The words are maps.
 I came to see the damage that was done
 and the treasures that prevail.
 ...
 the thing i came for:
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck
 the thing itself and not the myth (54)

The objective is to look at the “damage done” “The thing itself”, i.e., “the wreck” focuses not on myths or histories about the wreck, but on the results, on what is drowned, “the damage that was done”. Since “the thing itself” is wrecked, presumably in some historic or utopian period men and women knew

how to “fluctuate” or live on the earth, before the wreck. In this ideal period, humans would express their very nature out of social impositions or gender roles. But in contrast, the wreck and its myths encompass the ways of our culture has imposed differences upon men and women, differences that wrecked on equally mythicized harmony. In this sense, the speaker’s search ends with an unexpected discovery: “I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair / streams back, the merman in his armored body... I am she: I am he” (55). The figure is passionate with the passion transparent to the universal.

Rich’s enthusiastic effort to create a myth of androgynous sexuality is very important in this poem. Implicit in Rich’s image of the androgynous is the idea that we must write new myths, create new definitions of humanity which will not glorify this angry chasm between the sexes but heal it. Until now the myths created by the masculine tradition have strengthened this conflict more and more. So, Rich wants to go against it with humanistic vision. Behind this idea lies the notion that the great artist must be mentally bisexual and it is not only the artist who must make the emphatic leap beyond gender, but any of us who would try to save the world from destruction. Thus, Rich’s “Diving into the Wreck”, Gilbert writes, “takes the full plunge, in keeping with Rich’s more aggressive stance toward knowledge” (148).

The poem with its fundamentally downward trajectory and incremental descent critiques the old knowledge that unjustly overshadows and excludes women. As Deihl writes: “Her search for a shared mythology becomes a means of reclaiming a communal experience for women that takes them into history, on an archaeological dig for lost possibilities of metaphor” (Gelpi

404). The search ends in the androgyny conceded to the diver. It is a measure of reconciliation between men and women. The search, in fact, is an aspiration for such a utopian community where no one is excluded and everyone gets justly represented without any sexual biasness. The important idea hidden behind this androgynous creature is also very reconciliation.

The issue of androgyny presented by Rich as an alternative to diminish the pressure that the myth of sexual differentiation has exerted upon society seems to be a transitory alternative in her poetry. The idea recurs in the poem “The Stranger”, in the same volume, I which she states that “I am the androgyny” (53). In this poem, beyond sexuality and myth, the theme is also related to language and the psychology of beings. Perhaps a reason for abandoning the androgyny is Rich’s disillusion with the utopian possibilities of the androgyny.

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 about the powerless and the powerful is presented throughout the book through a sharp, clear style and through metaphors which become their own myths. The landscapes are diverse. The first poem of the collection “Trying to Talk with a Man” occurs in a desert. With an important qualification to the epic extension between inner and outer life, Rich’s “Trying to Talk with a Man” firmly connects the public culture of violence with the politics of the personal and the system of patriarchy. In the poem, the landscape of modern civilization, the condemned scenery of a bomb-testing site, provides an epic extension of the inner affliction, which is a feminist consciousness that is

accompanied by a loss of faith in the honesty of daily culture. “Whole LP collections, films we starred in /... the language of love-letters, of suicide notes, / afternoons on the riverbank / pretending to be children” (Gelpi 48). However, the title and language point not to the landscape of holocaust though the setting is such, but to the intimacy of a collapsing marriage, i.e., a male-female relationship. For that purpose, Rich juxtaposes the imagery of domestic life against the arid condemned scenery of a Nevada test site.

The setting of the poem is a desert, a desert which is not only deprivation and sterility, the place where everything except the essentials has been discarded, but the place where bombs are tested. The “I” and “you” of the poem have given up all the frivolities of their previous lives, “suicide notes” as well as “love letters” (48) in order to undertake the risk of changing the desert; but it becomes clear that the scenery is already condemned, that the bombs are not external threats but the internal ones. The poet realizes that they are deceiving themselves, “talking of the danger / as if it were not ourselves / as if we were testing anything else” (49). The desert is already in the past, beyond salvation though not beyond understanding.

In “Trying to talk with a Man”, the first lines seem flatly factual and public: “Out in this desert we are testing bombs, / that’s why we come here” (48). As the poem progresses, the recognition that political and interpersonal violence reflect one another grow. Political violence vents personal frustration that may itself be historically determined. Interpersonal violence is political and theatrical; its destructive, explosive testing mimics public antagonisms. Accompanied by this condemned scenery, metaphysically the cultural one, the

female persona of the poem feels more helpless with the man than without him. They try to be very friendly and helpful in their talk that they talked of people “caring” for each other “in emergencies”, but the tragedy is that “you look at me like an emergency” (49).

Instead of using familiar images to portray extreme horror, Rich uses extreme images to express the demeaning effects of a painful breakup between a man and a woman:

Out here I feel more helpless
with you than without you
You mention the danger
and list the equipment
...
talking of the danger
as if it were not ourselves
as if we were testing anything else. (49)

Not only does our shared notion of a nuclear explosion convey the despair of the poet, but in a fashion more subtle, Rich’s poem weaves a distinctly subjective yet broadly human experience into the very fabric of our conception of nuclear weapons. The personal dread created by a failed relationship equals the deep cultural dread associated with annihilation. Amidst entire humanity, Rich’s focus always lies on women: “I do see saving the lives of women as a priority” (qtd. in Gelpi 58). Thus, in this poem, though she takes the landscape of holocaust, the interpersonal relation between the man and the woman means more.

Poems in *The Dream of a Common Language* are a vision of being one with all life, with faith that this vision can be fulfilled and with hope that men may learn the art of survival from women. Her poetry has moved beyond anger into a tone of quiet celebration. In the review of the collection Olga Broumas writes “[It] is a document, both historical and emotional, of one woman’s fierce desire and dedication to actualizing that wish among women and, failing that ... speechless, standing” (322). It is, in fact, about what has been or is possible among women in the world as we know it.

For Rich, the sense of communion has come through the way of lesbian feminism as she believes that compulsory heterosexuality in the central structure that perpetuates male domination. But her personal choice does not lead to any intent to impose it on others. Rather, it leads to a greater insistence upon the freedom of choice for each individual in the discovery of personal fulfillment. Her “Twenty-One Love Poems” are sonnets of ecstasy which courageously reveal Rich’s erotic relationship with another woman. Both form and content increase the reference to a lesbian love. There is no vindication or propaganda, men are not accused of crimes, nor hated, and they are barely mentioned in the poems. The speaker sings her love naturally; traditional romantic male poet would do in the nineteenth century, backed by the sonnet frame. Rather than screaming for equal rights, Rich wittily appropriates and undermines a male tradition to validate her praise for love between women.

Her poem “Power” from the same collection celebrates female power that comes from the wounds in this patriarchal society. This poem “Power” revisits history to reconstruct two opposing views of power, one illegitimate

and self-cantered, the other legitimate because selfless. In the poem she asks vindication for the belief that patriarchy is in some ways a degeneration and women exerting power would use it differently from men: non-possessively, non-violently and non-destructively. For this purpose, Rich gives an analysis of the polish-born chemist and physicist, Marie Curie, who dies from the effects of radium, of which she had discovered the healing power. The portrait of Marie Curie, as idealized or as incomplete as it might be, is offered as a point of comparison.

The complexities of power are inherent in the story of Marie Curie, who discovered the vital properties of uranium and who died from radiation poisoning. Thus, the moving and sympathetic account of this woman is significant not only for its overt portrait of a famous female scientist, but also for its implicit criticism of male power misused. Males, who see the world as a place to gain power through capitalistic aggressiveness, competition and financial exploitation, are ultimately self destructive.

Initial part of the poem, that seems quite unrelated to poem and its title, in fact, is revising of myth. These lines echo Kore myths. The hero is a woman and the treasure is not simply scientific knowledge but knowledge of self as the poet describes an attempt to reach into this earth for the sources, the origins of woman's distinctive power. Rich, however, quickly shifts from medicine to the making of medical cures, from passivity to activity, and hence from mythic associations to a specific historical figure, Madam Curie, whose legacy can take concrete form in discursive language.

The second gesture of the poem is toward a text and model: the story of Marie Curie, a woman who seeks a “cure”, denying that the “element she had purified” causes her fatal illness. Her refusal to confront the crippling force of her success and to recognize the deadly implications of original discovery enables Curie to continue her work at the cost of her life. “Like Marie Curie in “Power”, achievement depends upon the sacrifice of one’s self” (Gelpi 407). Denying the reality of the flesh is an essential precondition for the woman inventor’s success:

she died a famous woman denying

her wounds

denying

her wounds come from same source as her power (73)

What she is denying, of course, is the inevitable destruction of self in her work, as well as knowledge that her power and wounds share a common source.

In this puzzling end of the poem, Rich may be making a reference to her own poetic career, in which wounds and sufferings come from the same source as her poetic power. Like Curie, a woman poet must recognize a similar repression of her knowledge that what she is doing involves a deliberate rejection of the borrowed power of the tradition, the necessity of incurring the self-inflicted wounds which mark the birth of an individuated poetic voice “sympathy” with another’s problems can lead to “understanding” features of one’s own condition, and “efforts at self definition” can become instruments for appreciating the “problems oppressing others” (356). Thus, the

poem ultimately becomes the poet's quest to explore her own wounds as a potential source of power.

Rich uses the life of dead woman as a moral example of woman under patriarchy, fragmented and cut off from the sources of her own power yet grasping towards it. Thus, Marie Curie died "denying... her wounds came from the same source as her power" (73). While patriarchal history chronicles victories and victors, feminist history registers a record of resistance, and thus it may be called a history of enemies. But this is not to say that feminist history doesn't celebrate women's power. Rather, it serves to expose oppression and oppressors.

In the 1980s, the underlying premises of Rich's poetics and politics changed. It shifted from the dream of a common language to identity politics. Women's body has come to stand for the totalizing and essentializing feature of her 1970s feminism, discredited politically as the imposition of white, believes in gender as the primary oppression, patriarchy understood in monolithic and ahistorical terms always the same in its effects. If Rich gives up her dream of a common language, it is because it ignores so many voices, languages, gestures, actions.

The idea of the poet as stranger is not new in Rich's work. But the stranger identity that Rich invokes in the 1980s has no imaginary role as androgyny or representative status; instead, estrangement and marginality are symptomatic of specific and diverse conditions. Her emphasis is often on knowledge about differences grounded firmly in empirical experience. Her two volumes of poetry in the 1980s *Your Native Land, Your Life* and *Time's*

Power reflect this skepticism about theory's value. Rich afterwards, in fact, actively disengages with the theorizing of academic feminists in the 1980s. Her poetry reflects what Harriet Davidson describes as "a certain amount of contradiction... and even confusion" (188). There is no unitary self and sensibility in these volumes.

The final section of *Your Native Land, Your Life*, titled "Contradictions: Tracking Poems", is very suggestive of the searching process. This search has no readily apparent beginning, middle and end. Lynda K. Bundtzen in her article about Rich's changing politics writes: "‘Contradictions’ opens with a sense of an inner and outer wasteland and ends not with redemption, but only with vague aspiration" (337). Although she addresses a "you" in these poems, she is often unclear whether a recognizable reader actually exists or whether she is talking to herself. The relationship between the poet and reader is itself a contradiction. If the "you" in these poems is sometimes the reader and sometimes the poet, then, it reflects pervasive doubt about location, about being inside or outside minds and bodies that are different.

The lesbian body of identity and sameness figures heavily in her poetry of the 70s. But with the revision, Rich moves away from the body and its "repossession" by women as a principal figuration for power. The "Contradictions" may be understood as Revision of the idealized body of the mother, the lesbian body of identity and, sameness that figured so heavily in her poetry of the seventies.

IV. Feminist Strains in Rich's Age Poetry

Besides her contribution in the feminist movement and feminism, Rich's contribution in the age studies is equally appreciable and noticeable. Few feminist writes of sometime have tried to bring the issue of aging in focus, but there is always a gap in the consistent discussion. Several critics and activists have linked this absence of any sustained discourse of aging to the failures or insufficiencies of feminism. These critics take such tendency of the feminist writers as their fear of aging and thus the female compliance in patriarchal values. But Adrienne Rich is one of the "creative crones", i.e. "women writers who offer constructive approach to aging and old age" and "whose marginalization as women has... sensitized them to the importance of a critical examination centering on the perceptions and realities of later life" (Henneberg 107).

There are two strategies of dealing with age: first, by making age omnipresence and second, dealing with the age less obviously but that nevertheless advances our understanding of what aging is in our culture. Rich adopts second way of dealing with aging. She rarely isolates age as a prominent concern, but frequently incorporates it into her far-reaching political spectrum, connecting it to her interest in the interrelation between generations.

Aging is a traumatic feeling to any elderly being. As one ages, feeling of hopelessness, pessimism and sense of fatigue overcomes her/him. On the part of males, loss of strength becomes the cause of this feeling of pessimism whereas in a patriarchal culture that is obsessed with normative ideas of

feminine beauty, loss of physical glow and charm becomes the major cause of this pessimism and trauma for a female. In E. Ann Kaplan's opinion there is always 'complex interconnections' (2) between individual and cultural trauma. But Rich challenges our cultural assumptions about self-perception in old age as described by Kathleen Woodward's model of the mirror stage of old age:

The horror of the mirror image of the decrepit body can be understood as the inverse of the pleasure of the mirror image of the youthful Narcissus. As we age we increasingly separate what we take to be our real selves from our bodies. We say that our real selves—that is our youthful selves—are hidden inside our bodies. Our bodies are old, we are not. Old age can thus be described as a state in which the body is in opposition to the self, and we are alienated from our bodies. This is a common psychological truth. (104)

Thus, this truth commonly held in our society in general, is not entirely applicable to Rich's case.

Even in her earlier poems there is age consciousness. She examines aging, late life and death in a sustained and more than conventionally poetic way. Many poems even from her early collection *A Change of World* like "Life and Letters", "Why Else But to Forestall this Hour" are related to aging thematically. A more positive response to age is registered in the poem "When this Clangor in the Brain" in which old age is seen as the powerful climax of the energetic late life. Rich grows more positively defiant to commonly held

notion of old age in the poem “At Majority”. In this poem, she connects old age with beauty while youth with ravages.

Her concern for old age becomes even more significant in the later works. An example with the clear theme of age is “Contradictions: Tracking Poems” in which older Rich is addressing her younger self telling her to resume her thoughts on aging:

Dear Adrienne:

I am calling you up tonight

as I might call up a friend as I might call up a ghost

to ask what you intend to do

with the rest of your life. (128)

Her more recent poem “Memorize This” also challenges the taboo imposed on sexual intimacy in late life. Sylvia B. Henneberg noticing this age consciousness in Rich in her late life writes: “As Rich herself ages, she begins to uncover and explore such topics as physical pain, self-renewal, memory, and life review all of which are significant aspects of age studies” (116).

To Rich, time is a powerful resource rather than an enemy. She is less threatened by aging and by the passage of time. With a striking trust in process, Rich is confident in greater change achieved through little changes. Her self-imposed task is to be the nation’s conscience. That’s why she wants no effect regretting or defying aging. As she writes in the poem “Rusted Legacy”, she wants to avoid becoming “scabbed with rust” (52). Rich’s own aging is folded into her larger concern for a declining century and millennium and a deteriorating culture and youth. She views old age as the matter of both

public responsibility as well as self-esteem. She thinks that the state should be responsible to the elder citizens of the nation. “Rich understands age not primarily as a personal drama with which she must come to terms but, as a public responsibility that requires certain kinds of action and certain kinds of art” (Hennerberg 121). But she valorizes private effort and self-confidence over the public responsibilities. An older person herself / himself must be strong enough not to take old age as the end of everything. Rather she should take it actively. Life actually could be lived with a grain of hope.

V. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have tried to analyze the poetic career of Adrienne Rich in terms of her poetics and politics, and her changing attitudes towards them. While her early poetry equally values poetics and politics, poetry written during the middle period of her poetic career shows her feminist beliefs. Her late poetry unfolds her previous feminism into broader amplitude of commitment to other social causes. All in all, feminist consciousness occupies the major space in her poetic career.

Poetics and politics are intimately woven in her poetry. Her energy, time and life are not for individual purpose but for the cause of entire women's community. For her transformation goes beyond personal realm, and extends and reaches to culture and society through poem's ability to challenge the given assumptions and established values, and offer a new vision. Rejecting art as an aesthetic end in itself, Rich actively participates in the political and social debates in her poetry.

Male oppression, usurpation, biased attitude, injustice, unequal treatment towards females have remained at the heart of her poetic career since the very beginning. But in the initial phase she seems to be bridled by the male aesthetic tradition due to her training and could not be open in her treatment of these issues. There remains a tension between the aspiration and imprisonment. Thematically she tries to reveal the suppressed female passions for creativity, strength, equality and freedom, but poetically she could not free herself from the male set norms and the true freedom that she

passionately aspired is hindered in these poems. As such, these poems do not exhibit aggressive perspective; rather subtly reveal the plight of those who are confined within the four ways of domesticity. They are, in fact, expository rather than invasive and intense in their treatment for she could not surpass the tradition.

As her poetic career advance, she becomes more political and more devoted to the causes of women's upliftment. She becomes overtly political, bold in the treatment of feminist issues and strongly committed to the use of poetry as an instrument of social change. Her rejection of the perfectionist traditional order made her more committed to the feminist issues.

Being a feminist activist, she ultimately deals with the female issues, but her method of dealing is not usual attack on males; her emphasis is on the creation of the females' community for the consolidation of their strength. While doing so, she supports lesbianism, which is a strategy to downplay the importance of men for women. Advocating a lesbian relationship among women, she challenges the notion of heterosexuality as a natural biological phenomenon. What is called natural is in fact constructed, and heterosexuality is also constructed by males for their pleasure. Thus, to challenge this masculine opportunism, she celebrates love among women.

For Rich, patriarchally interpreted and appropriated language is another means that hinders the progress of women as they cannot speak even of their own. But she is not pessimistic about the means of expression for language is nothing but a jumble of metaphors and it has been appropriated by males till now. That's the reason why they have possessed power. Rich wants

to possess this strength and through this power of language connect women by interpreting language on their own being indifferent to whether the males accept it or not. In this stance also rejection and exclusion become important rather than the worry and cry for not being able to express the self.

In comparison to the other feminist poets utterly aggressive in their attack, Rich is very compromising. Her feminist attitude, guided as it is by a more humanistic vision and need for social change, does not allow her to be too harsh towards the patriarchs. The concept of androgyny in many of her poems also supports this vision. In this sense, Rich's feminism embodies broader political scope as compared to the parochial polemics of other feminisms. Her concern for the greater social issue can be recognized in her poetry of aging too. Of course aging and the traumatic feeling related to it are the concern of every woman. But despite being a woman Rich discards the traditional notion of youth and aging and urges all aged people to disown the feeling of trauma developing self-esteem and be the continuum to bridge the generation gap. At the same time she suggests the youths to develop positive attitude towards the senior citizens of the nation.

In this way Rich's poetic career begins with the imitation of male aesthetic. As it advances, it becomes more concentrated on the feminist issues and their development but not parochially; rather with broader political scope, greater social concerns, and more humanistic perspective.

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