

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Reconstructing the Human World: The Poetic Vision of Adrienne Rich**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master  
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**By**

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## **Abstract**

Rich's poetry does not merely extend to the culture to challenge the given assumptions to women, but also offers new visions. Rich questions more than the social inequalities experienced by women. She argues women should not waste their energies, lives, time and intellects for the sake of men but for whole-woman-community and human beings.

Consciousness and self-knowledge of female experiences and language and energies for women is more than a search for identity. A woman's freedom depends on the freedom of the whole women community. So Rich speaks for the communal freedom. She affirms that without the task of reconstruction of the world, only the task of attacking gender stereotypes can not liberate women.

Women should stay together to create a new mythology to correct patriarchal distortion and to change the cultural lens. She insists on the identification with all women to set the world on fire and frame plans for its reconstruction. She calls out for sisterhood, a new politics, a new language, to achieve women's liberation and true humanity.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This research focuses to deal Adrienne Rich's demolition of the patriarchal views and values, traditions imposed upon women, and her reconstructive views and vision to the human world in which all women and men can be. They will not seek the female identity in future to assert their true individualities. This research deals how the feminist consciousness of experience and language and the concept of female community reconstruct the degraded human world into a complete wholeness. The consciousness and self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity.

Adrienne Rich, in many poems, has depicted her upset with the limitations placed on women in the society. Rich views the patriarchal structure of the society as the root of oppression. Within such society, for a few years, many women spent their intellects, minds, time, energies and lives in search of their own individual identities but they could not pay attention to dismantle the existing patriarchal views, values, traditions and limitations given to women. But Rich argues that within the patriarchal world, women cannot achieve their identities and liberation. Rich says, in *Arts of the Possible* "every group that lives under the naming and image-making power of a dominant culture is at risk from the mental fragmentation, and needs an art that can resist it" (49). Living within the male-structured tradition, norms, it is almost impossible to have female identity; it is like a proverb that it is difficult to fight with Pope living in Rome. A change in the concept sexual identity is essential.

In Rich's view, if a woman, in the past, got her identity within the patriarchal world, other could not, and even that identity could not contribute for living to other women as human beings. Rich, in the poem, "Power," states that Marie Curie became a famous woman, a great scientist, and got her identity and had power. But

neither Curie's identity nor radium has especially cured women's ills and humanity's illness. She failed to understand the "truth" of her own experience. Rich argues Curie's life became a metaphor for woman's lives in patriarchal society but not for whole human beings, men and women, in the human world. Though Marie Curie spent her intellect, energies, time, life to be a woman scientist in the patriarchal world, her efforts and identity could not dismantle the boundaries of patriarchal world. Women could not get space of the "truth" of female body and rights. Even today, women are in search of their identities. Rich questions when women will utilize their intellects, visions, energies and time for the betterment of whole human beings if women of all generations always have to occupy their intellects, visions, energies for merely female identities.

Adrienne Rich does not compromise with her own individual identity, liberation and freedom, but moves forward with courage to re-create the human world in which all women will achieve their identities, liberation and freedom. As women exceed all the boundaries of patriarchal world, liberation and freedom will be at hand; the new human world will be recreated. Jostein Garder says: "the new view of human beings led to show new outlook" (*Modern Literary Theory* 218).

### **Adrienne Rich and Her Works**

Adrienne Rich is one of the major living poets of America who is alive to want more than life, wants it for others starving and unborn. Rich was born on 16 May, 1929 in Baltimore, USA, the elder of two daughters of Arnold Rich and Helen Jones. Her father, Arnold Rich was a doctor and pathology professor at John Hopkins University, and her mother, Helen Jones, was a gifted pianist and composer who sacrificed her public life in order to make her domestic life successful. Rich grew up in submerged family tensions and silences from the conflicts between the

religious and cultural heritage of her father's Jewish background and her gentile mother's southern Protestantism. She describes herself as a split at the root neither gentile nor Jew, Yankee nor rebel. Rich's family was marginalized because her father was a Jew, and Baltimore was a rather anti-Semitic city. Such circumstances made her feel something lapses in the human world; it encouraged her to reform the human world again so that nobody feels as 'other' or exclusion from the mass of the human beings.

Rich spent her childhood in a white middle class and patriarchal home under well-economic condition and advanced circumstances. It was a male-dominated household in a largely male dominated society. Arnold Rich was a man of the house, molding and shaping the lives of his family members. Neither mother nor daughters had any strength to hold out against neither him nor the will or desire to do so. That male-dominated house regulated them what they should be on the view of the society, but disregarded what they wanted to be. In her childhood, Adrienne Rich was "raised as a son, taught to study but not to pray, taught to hold reading and writing sacred" (Keys, *The Aesthetics of Power* 1). Arnold Rich taught her until the fourth grade in Ronald Park Country School. At an early age, he encouraged her to write poetry insisting metrical competence, and he was offended by the free verse which she liked. After school, she left her family home to attend Radcliff College. In 1951, Rich graduated from Radcliff, and published her first volume of poems, *A Change of World* (1951), elegantly crafted, tightly rhymed poetry which was the product of teaching of Arnold Rich. Her literary career began with the publication of it.

In 1953, Rich married Alfred Conard, a Harvard economist and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she bore sons in the next five years. Like her father, Alfred Conard was a high-minded Jewish intellectual who exhibited



substantial ambivalence concerning his ethnic and religious identity. That couple of Rich and Conard was ill-sorted couple. Her married life was an emotionally and artistically difficult period; she was struggling with conflicts over the prescribed role of womanhood versus those of artistry, over tension between sexual and creative role, love and anger.

In the late fifties and early sixties, there were issues she could not easily name to herself in the patriarchal home; there were feelings for which she felt guilty, and for which there was no wider cultural recognition, that she needed. Rich, then, was totally unprepared emotionally and intellectually for the role expected of Jewish wife and mother which she had so impulsively taken up herself: "a life I did not choose," she wrote in "The RoofWalker" "choose me" (49). She was in need of such a human world where she could choose her own life.

During the decade of the 1970, Adrienne Rich and Alfred Conard were separated and divorced. Her freedom from her marriage bond seems to have liberated her sensibility. Her divorce case became the sign of crossing the bar of patriarchal society (norms and values). She, then, became increasingly involved in the feminist movements through which she can create a human world where all human beings, visions and ideas can exist. All her family experience inspired her to dismantle the traditional patriarchal world and to create a new human world with the help of female community. So that, female of coming generation won't have to search the identity as women. Instead, they can spend their intellects, minds, energies and time for the betterment of the whole human beings. So Rich's striving to create a new human world is not to find out of single female identity, but her attempt is to deconstruct the existing male-dominated society and to reconstruct the world where all male and female can exist or stay without discrimination.

Rich's *The Diamond Cutters* is of traditional male influence poems. Rich's mimicry of her poetic mentors provided little indication of her later distinctiveness as a feminist poet, and understandably so. Her mimicry gives a way to subversion of her models and, to a certain extent, of patriarchal values. *Snapshot of Daughter-in-law* stands as a watershed in her poetic development. For the first time, in language freer and more intimate and contextual, she situates her materials and emotions against themes of language, boundaries, resistance, escape, and moments of life altering choice.

In *Necessities of Life* (1966), Rich's inchoate feelings of personal conflict, sexual alienation, and cultural oppression were finding increasing articulation in the longer social / political currents gathering force through the sixties, from the civil rights movements to the antiwar movement, to the emergent women's movement. *Leaflets* (1969), *The Will to Change* (1971), and *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) demonstrate a progressive coming to power as Rich contends against the desolation patriarchy enacts on literal and psychic landscape. Intimately connected with this struggle for empowerment and action is the deepening of her determination "to write directly and overtly as a woman, out of woman's body and experience" (*American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies* 571).

With each subsequent volume, *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978), *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981), *The Fact of a Doorframe; Poems Selected and New* (1984), *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986), *Time's Power* (1989) and *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991) and prose like *Arts of the Possible* has conformed are radicalized her fusion of political commitment and poetic vision. In her urging women to "re-vision" and be "disloyal", she has engaged ever wider experiences of women across cultures, history, and ethnicity, addressing themes of verbal privilege, male violence, and lesbian identity.

Poetry has been read and interpreted from various perspectives and angles. However, the approach of the present study is different. This study talks about the reconstruction of the patriarchal world into a whole human world.

For more clarifications and justification, a short introduction about life of Rich and her works is presented in this chapter. The study has little to do with Rich's political vision that signifies the demolition of the traditional patriarchal world, and Rich's new human world. Before dealing them, it is better to have a brief look at what reconstruction the human world refers to.

Reconstruction, in general, is a state of remaking or re-ordering the former system for the easiness. *Dictionary of Philosophy* defines it as "a kind of philosophical analysis, by which certain concepts seem in same way problematic, are shown to be reducible to other ones which causes less trouble" (83). Rich emphasizes on reconstruction of that patriarchal world which is problematic to women and causes troubles to women. *Dictionary of Philosophy* further defines reconstructive as a "theory that knowledge is not something we acquire but something that we produce; that the objects in an area of inquiry are not there to be discovered, but are invented or reconstructed" (83). The concept of women constructed by male authorities is not considerable well to women, so women should reproduce the concepts about women for the betterment of themselves and to whole human beings.

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines "construct' as "an idea of belief that is based on various pieces of evidence which are not always true' (264) and 'construction' as "the reacting of something from ideas, opinions and knowledge" (264). The existing patriarchal world constructs concepts about women and a social reality as an elaborate network of agreed upon perceptions. It regards women as social objects, devoted mothers, dutiful wives, half man, passivity, whore etc. Rich says, "Miscarried knowledge twist us/like hot sheets thrown askew (Like This

Together 63). It is time for women to reshape or rename the world, even if the monolithic patriarchy threatens to render such efforts futile:" [ . . . ] the world, we have to make it, [ . . . ] (84).

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines the world "reconstructing" as "building or making something again that have been damaged or that no longer exists; "reconstruction" as 'the process of changing or improving the condition of something or the way it works. (1061-62).

The existing monolithic patriarchal world is constructed on the perceptions of men that world wields women. The human world is not only of males but also of females. The exclusion of women does not refer the human world as a complete wholeness. William Shakespeare says, "All the world's a stage, and all its men and women are the actors." He knew that it was not merely men's world in Elizabethan days. Nor had it ever been just men's world. It is not just men's world today. On the world's stage, throughout the ages of the past, in its human dramas, women played major roles and great supporting roles. Every economic, political structure of history, women played to build. The human world emphasizes the importance of human beings—their nature and places in the universe. Both male and female are the center. In the human world, every person has dignity and worth, and, therefore, should command the respect of every other person.

Patriarchal society misuses some words like humanism, human beings, androgyny, mankind, man (men), he, his to conceal smoldering violence. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* states 'human being' as "a person rather than an animal or a machine" (635). 'A person' refers both woman and man. But male authorities take word 'man' to indicate the whole human beings. M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Term* states, humanism as the "dignity and central position of human beings in the universe" (83). Instead, woman is excluded in the constructed

male culture. Thomas Mautner in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* States that "humanism has [. . .] usually based on a belief in man's capacity for self-cultivation and self-improvement, and in the process of mankind." Here the words "man" and "mankind" seems to indicate all human beings or race, but patriarchal society takes these words to refer to male but not female. Males take it as their own access or achievements but not of females. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines 'humankind' as "people in general"; 'mankind' as all human beings thought about as large group; the human race but "womankind" is defined as "women in general".

Through such definitions of patriarchal world, we conclude that mankind refers all humankind but womankind does not. Women are excluded from the human world. 'Man' represents woman but woman cannot represent the man, so it is man's world that is necessary to be reconstructed into the whole human world. Male culture considers mankind as "all human beings" but womankind as a separatist or exclusion from human beings. Thus women's dignity and central position in the universe is excluded even in humanism. Human being/race should not refer only to man but also woman. Rich affirms to reshape or reconstruct the human world where all men and women can be.

### **Rich's Political Vision**

Rich's long poetic career mirrors her position as an artist-witness to the violence, exploitation and injustice, not only in America but also all over the world. The writings of Rich have helped to transform the current understanding of women's experience and of such facet of identity as motherhood, lesbianism, gender and ethnicity. Over the past thirty years, she has become one of the most eloquent, provocative voices on the value of art, the politics of sexuality, gender, border race,

and she is driven by this aspiration till now. She has developed from being sensitive observer of her life to a woman intent on coming to grips with the political sources of her pain. Her mission as a poet is to break down existing social reality to recreate a new world. Her mission of writing poetry is “not to win prizes but to change the laws of history” (*The Aesthetic of Poems* 161).

Through-out her life, Rich has been struggling with conflicts over the prescribed roles of womanhood versus artist, over tensions between sexual and creative roles, love and anger over complementary relationship between the state and the artist, and the debate between the realms of public, and the private, and majority and minority. She gave up the easy way of academic poetry and cast herself in a political fray. She consciously has fused of politics and poetry. For her, the best poems of feminism becomes of “community.” Rich defines the political impulse in “The Blue Gharals” in *The Fact Of A Doorframe*. Her pomes powerfully protest against social and political injustice in American society. Rich is the spokesperson for those who do not have the gift of language, whose voices are unheard, whose presence in the society is not felt and who are less conscious of what they are living thorough. She is a poet with a program, an artist with an agenda. She wants to restructure the human world. Her vision is that woman generates not only children but also vision, thought. She says:

We need a world in which every woman in presiding genius for her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bring forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions and thinking, necessary to sustain, console and after human existence—a new relationship to universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power,

motherhood, work, meanings; thinking itself will be transformed. (*Arts of the Possible* 116)

Rich commits herself to re-create a female community that is dedicated to nurturing ethos and reverence for life. She wants a new world in which all women have the visions and thinking. She believes that the new social order must begin with the truth of female body as opposed to male mind.

Rich's career was influenced by different movements in different periods: the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Lesbian Movement and by the Writings of James Baldwin, Martin Luther king, Karl Marx and history. She began to judge the political and social reality in terms of womanhood. Her poetry becomes didactic which aims to change the people's lives.

Rich's poetry embodies the political agenda because her works try to dismantle the patriarchal norms and values and, then, recreate the norms and values for not only male or female but for whole human beings. For her, poetry is a liberating language, which connects the fragments of women's lives and replenishes their desire.

Rich rejects not men, but destructive masculinity. She is simultaneously a political, polemical and lyric poet. Except the poems based upon the political background, she connects the personal pain with political, which existed in the contemporary society. It grows out of political conflicts and tensions. Through the evolution of her poetry, her political spirit can be seen in her works. Among them, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in Law* takes her into the wider world of politics and social activism. In this volume, her attempt is to reconstruct the society and language. She redirects the feminine and female as positive forces moving from the power of man as an exploiter to power of woman as an "explorer" of new boundaries. Sometimes,

she becomes more aggressive with males who exploit the women. Anger can be both destructive and creative; but her anger celebrates life, not death as Sylvia Plath did.

Rich says that 'personal is political' (*Art of the possible* 119). *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963), *Necessities of Life* (1969), *The Will to Change* (1971), *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) record the political upheavals of the 1960's and 70's.

## **CHAPTER II: FEMINISM**

“To know woman merely as a subject of man in long history is to know no history.”

**-Mary Ritter Beard**

### **The Awakening Consciousness of Women**

Feminist criticism has also self-consciously traced its own evolving intellectual and institutional nature. The traces of women's subjection by men date far back to the ancient myths and scripture. Lilith, according to a Jewish myth, was Adam's first wife who considered herself equal to him. Unlike Eve, she was created from the dust as Adam was created. Lilith objected to lying beneath him and being controlled and suppressed by him as she felt herself his equal. She was probably the first woman who claimed her equality with man. When Adam asked for her submission, she bluntly rejected him and flew away in the lap of nature, to the edge of the Red sea. But the gods threatened her to return or to lose a hundred of her children daily to death. The bold Lilith preferred punishment to patriarchal marriage. For this refusing the authority, she was excluded from the human community and was condemned the more painful punishment to kill her own children.

The myth of Lilith suggests that women are not just submissive, but valiant enough to revolt against the dominating male authority. They have to bear great



troublesome for this be. We find many such historical and mythical incidents where women have taken formidable shapes along with time to set themselves free from the power and control of man. But in male dominated society, such female figures are naked either as whore, witches or mad women. They have often been undervalued in comparison to men. It becomes clear, if we take some of the outstanding literary characters. Lady Macbeth is considered monster while Macbeth noble, Medea is merely a witch while Oedipus a heroic figure, and King Lear's madness is gloriously universal while Ophelia's a just pathetic. Whenever suffered, such preservers of female identity have been found to have taken refuge in nature. The sirens were the inhabitants of the sea beaches or the wild forests. Philomel, Procne's sister, is believed to have been continuously raising her voice against the male ferocity in the form of bird. Ophelia dives into the pond and dissolves herself into nature. Edmund Spenser's Essour, half woman and half serpent, had her den in the wild.

Circe, Medusa, Mothers of death, Scyll, Gorgons and Goddesses of Night are the other "monstrous" representatives of women who had tried to define themselves by dauntly confronting the power of authority. From the patriarchal point of view all these mythical figures are the terrible objects in that they eschew the submissive silences of domesticity. But from the female perspective, those "monster" women are simple women who seek the power of self-articulation.

There are certainly, many exemplary female characters that were submissively virtuous in the eyes of men. But it is 'monstrous' figures who are taken to be the stereotypes of feminist movement in the development of modern feminist theories. Even Geoffrey Chaucer depicted his Wife of Bath's subversive vision of patriarchal institutions in the form of hag, whore, the madwomen who seeks supreme power over her won life and that of her husband. Even today the threat of the hag still lurks

behind the well- accepted paragon of women's stories encouraging the modern feminist to revise the old literature from feminist perspective.

Coming down to the seventeenth century New England, we find a history of Puritanism which sub-ordinated women too much. How hateful the Puritan authority was towards women can be clear if we examine the note in the journal by John Winthrop, the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He severely criticized a woman for her 'crime' of being involved in reading and writing being a woman. He states:

Anne Hopkins has fallen into a sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason, which had been growing upon her divers years, by occasion of giving herself wholly to reading and writing, and had written many books. If she had attended her household affairs, and such things as belong to women [ . . . ]. She had kept her wits. (qtd in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* 145)

Alike such assumption of women's inferiority, Aristotle says, "the female is female by the virtue of a cretin lack of qualities (Selden *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* 134), Sigmund Freud's assumption is that female sexuality is shaped by "Penis-envy."

The women, later on, had to labor much to erase such assumptions to women, and to have the equal identity and position in patriarchal society and to achieve recognition in literature. The nineteenth and the twentieth century women had to come across various difficulties to establish themselves as the human beings and as the writers in the society. Only by crossing those difficulties they could reject the debilitating prescriptions of males and recover the lost for mothers who could help them to find their female power. However, women also began to engage renaissance

criticism generating feminist critique and increased attention to women writers. Mary Wollstonecraft spoke for the political and social rights of women in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

The seventeenth, the eighteenth century and even some of the nineteenth century women writers were afraid of attempting the pen for the fear that they might be considered mad-women for their audacity. But in course of time, women grew more conscious of their rights, they truly attempted the pen and proved themselves equally powerful as writers to the males.

Undergoing different crosscurrents like the Suffrage Movement, Civil Rights Movements and Liberation Movements in the early parts of the twentieth century, feminism took shape as a concerted movement only after 1960's. The ferment of the 1960's provided feminism with its ideological core, vitality and impetus. The first half of the twentieth century feminists were ultimately successful in gaining the right to vote in 1991 and were instrumental in the enactment of protective legislation for women workers in the 1920's and 1930's. These social feminists concerned with reform to improve the status of women within their separate sphere. At the same time, they were challenged by the radical feminists who rejected protective legislation. They also raised questions on patriarchal authority in so much that social feminist accused them of being anti-family.

The early twentieth century feminist writers, Virginia Woolf, in her *A Room of her Own* stated about how women are imprisoned within the domestic premises and are stopped from trying the pen into patriarchal constructed culture and society. In her essay "Professions for Women," Woolf discussed the disabling nineteenth century ideology of womanhood. When the feminist trend of her time was towards equality with men and the erasure of differences, Woolf held for radical changes that

would occur as women's freedom and their suppressed values began to affect conceptions of power, family and social life in the past shaped by men. Woolf proposed a society in which men and women would come together in purpose and desire.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, elaborates our culture's definition of the non-reciprocal and hierarchal nature of the relationship between masculinity and femininity. "He" is subject or self, "she" is object or not self: that is she is otherness. This 'otherness' of woman has the effect of equating masculinity with humanity and so our language conditions us to speak of 'mankind' instead of 'humankind', and to use the masculine pronoun 'he' to represent both men and women M.H. Abrams states "the prevailing concepts of gender and language are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization" (235). According to de Beauvoir, a major interest of feminists has been to reconstitute all the ways to do justice to female point of view, concerns, values and to break this patriarchal power.

Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* has pointed out that feminist criticism, with its emphasis on the women writer's inevitable consciousness of her own gender, has allowed us to "see meaning in what has previously been empty space."

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* is an investigation of typical motifs and patterns among nineteenth century women writers. The nineteenth century women writers, according to Gilbert and Gubar, chose to express their own female anger in a series of duplicitous textual strategies whereby both the angel and the monster, the sweet heroine and the madwoman, are aspects of the author's self image, as well as elements of her treacherous anti-patriarchal strategies. Patriarchal aesthetics always want a girl to be an inanimate

*object d'art*. They suggest the feminists first to struggle "against the effects of a socialization which makes conflict with the will of her precursors (male) seem absurd, futile" (49).

The new feminism of the 1960's and 70's attempts to break down the barriers between the male and female spheres more completely. Mary Beard devoted her life:

To reconstructing women's pasts in efforts to end the invisibility, [. . .] and to asserting and demonstrating the centrality of women in history and the need to incorporate that conception of women in history into the main stream of historical writing. (*Making Women's History 170*)

### **Feminism as a Force for Social Change**

Second generation feminism questions more than the social inequalities experienced by women. It looks also at the deep-seated ideological structures which inevitably place women at a disadvantage in relation to men. Patriarchy is one such structure, and the social contract is another. Second generation feminism challenges the gender bias in language, law and philosophy. It argues that women should not just aim to be like men, but should aim to develop a new, specifically feminine, language, law and mythology, and, at extent, a new world.

Contemporary feminist theory moves across borders to recruit the energies of autobiography, social, polemic and poetry. The theory matters because all representations are what make constructions of male knowledge and subjectivity possible. Through the representations, we shape our identities and our worlds. The feminist theory requires us to think cultural identities in new ways, and feminist

borders crossing are not simply metaphorical but grow out of a strong belief that criticism can help bring a more equitable world.

To centralize women's experiences of sexuality, work and the family inevitably challenges traditional frameworks of knowledge. Feminism incorporates diverse ideas which share three major perceptions; that gender is a social construction which oppresses women more than men; that patriarchy shapes this construction; that women's experiential knowledge is a basis for a future non-sexist society. These assumptions inform feminism's double agenda: the task of critique, attacking gender stereotypes, and the task of constructions. Without the second task, feminism has no goal.

These themes give feminism a particular interest in cultural constructions of gender including in literature. Literature produces representations of gender difference which contribute to the social perception that men and women are of unequal value. Women often become feminists by becoming conscious of, and criticizing, the power of symbolic misrepresentations of women. How do feminist theorists escape the patterns of thought and master tools of the academy, Audre Lorde argued, if the master's stool will never dismantle the master's house?

With the publication of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) the second wave criticism began as a spatial construction, as border crossing, with its key theme "the personal is political" linking two hitherto conceptually, separately spaced worlds. What feminist literary criticism uniquely offered is revolutionary standpoint, not simply, or not only, new critical tools. Yet, in the 1970's feminist criticism was certainly beyond the border of the traditional academy, indeed, it was invisible. Faced with the misogyny, feminist literary criticism in the 1970's tended to define space diachronically as origin, as the significance of male or female authorship.

Second wave feminism is often characterized as "the break with the fathers" because critics such as Kate Millet, Germaine Greer and Mary Ellmann made revisionary readings of what Ellmann calls 'phallic' writing. Critics focused on sexist vocabulary and gender stereotypes in the work of male authors, and highlighted the ways in which these writers commonly ascribe particular features, such as 'hysteria' and 'passivity' only to women. The feminist criticism developed the study of women writers and woman identified theme in term of gynocriticism.

As titles of feminist book, Tillies Olsen's *Silences* and Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*, make clear that a constant issue in this period is communication. The vital work of this decade was to explore distinctive women's language and culture. Rather than defining a "universal woman's text", Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* preferred to identify a female "sub-culture". Certainly, gynocriticism's stress on the significance of women's literary friendships held sway during the early 1980's, evident in the continuing popularity of Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born*, and cultural feminism, feminists writing about the mother/daughter nexus.

Gilbert and Gubar, in *No Man's Land* discuss how lesbian expatriates in Paris 'reinvented gender'. They explore the consumerism of the Gilded Age in an informed materialist analysis describe the sexual imagery of imperialism. "Male" and "female" are fictive constructs variously shaped by the culture.

One of the great achievements of Anglo-American feminist criticism in the 1980's was its ability to identify and conduct a very diverse gendered literary criticism. Feminist criticism proved firstly that literature was not simply a collection of great texts but was deeply structured by social and sexual ideologies, and secondly, that certain preoccupations and techniques predominate in women's writing in relation to those social structures. Yet

what is also clear now about that decade is the innovative and self-conscious rapprochement that was taking place between feminist criticism and feminist writing in the work of Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde. Feminist criticism was now married to feminist creative writing in a rich terrain of autobiographies, fictional narratives and poetic histories.

In the 1980's, Gilbert and Gubar's theme of a woman's anxiety of authorship was given shape in the first deconstructive text of feminist criticism, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*. The key feminist focus in this work was on language. The challenge was, by interrogating the relation between gender identity and language, to refigure the powerful and sexually expressive relationship between language, literary forms and women's and men's psyches. Helen Cixous argues that *écriture féminine* is to be found in metaphors of female sexuality and woman's genital and libidinal differences.

French feminists' determination to break through patriarchal critical practices- by creating new forms of writing and thinking which could not be described as the 'other' half of male-defined rationality - inspired excitement and debate. Julia Kristeva identified this new feminine language as 'the semiotic' which she defines as the pre-oedipal language of the mother and infants.

Deconstruction appears a sophisticated and potentially revolutionary approach because it dismantled linguistic binary oppositions between men and women. However, a deconstructive approach can also evade the real practical and theoretical differences between racial or / and ethnic feminists and racial lesbian feminists. Audre Lorde stated that we can not create a useful feminist criticism with the methods and form of language that we inherit from '*the master's house*.'

The critique of heterosexism in literary criticism, the recovery of lost lesbian writing and search for a lesbian aesthetic as well as the construction of queer theory, form the extensive work of critics such as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Bonnie Zimmerman that



deconstruct the culture and the use of language. Lesbian feminist criticism challenges male-defined concepts of femininity and lesbian images and strategies in their historical and cultural moments. The significance of mother/daughter relationships and varieties of female bonding in feminist writing are replicated in the close relationships between feminist readers/critics/writers. Queer theory is a discourse reversing homophobic categories to connect race, sexuality and activism.

The questions raised by the theoretical ferment of the 1980's and by the revelations of lesbian critics led to a reshaping of critical identity which emerged as a gender theory.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men* argued that representations of homosexuality could not be understood outside of their relation to women and to the gender system itself. She said to recruit "the representational finesse of deconstructive feminism" (12). Women do not, unproblematically, fit into decades of linear masculine history.

Inventive gynographic critics also do not necessarily use words in the right order but use parentheses, blank spaces and hyphenated titles to dramatize the constraining border between conceptual systems. Helen Cixous in 'Sorties' describes the oppositional border between 'culture/nature' as an opposition between 'men' and 'women'. Her strategy for transforming this border is to explore 'sign' language which depends on allusions, metaphor and the body.

In America, Mary Daly changes syntax—the whole structure of sentences—not just vocabulary. Women must, she claims, connect their language with their bodies to "remember the dismembered body of our heritage" (*Making Women's History* 196). The continual reworking of the borders between different uses of vocabulary which are power-inflected can subvert traditional theory. One major way in which feminism has reconstituted knowledge is precisely through changing aspects of the language with the invention of new terms such as "sexism".

By crossing the boundary between traditional academic objectivity and women's own emotions, Nancy Miller sharpens our sense of the absence of women's emotional discourses in traditional academic life. The strong investment in making graphic marks, particularly italics, ellipses and hyphens, acts as a powerful and exemplary tool of struggle. Gyno-graphic criticism explores connections between gendered structures of feeling and "public" historical events in an open-ended way. A performance of identities is a continually remaking the boundaries between lesbian and academic identities through a montage of poetry, myth, autobiography and history.

What feminism teaches is that literary/critical languages, like any others, are not simply technologies of communication but intensely caught up in gender judgements. The beginning of a new age (world) seems to invoke a state of mind preoccupied with metaphoric changes.

The most generative feminist revisions focus on three key issues: politics, pedagogy/performance and positionality. Political criticism has a clear personal presence which invites dialogue and yet is passionately a politics of difference. Such writing often begins with social and political judgements, and evaluates texts with a partisan, self-reflexive vision. Currently feminists are turning pedagogy itself into a process of cultural reconstruction while simultaneously deconstructing the canon. This kind of pedagogy searches out historical repetitions and paradoxes to help to create own dialects of difference. The issue positionality is addressed by border criticism that emphasizes the different cultural codes and bioconceptual realities. Border criticism looks at gender performances dialectically through the visual and the literary to cut across the distinction between subjective and objective meanings.

By destroying the idea that literary theory is a bounded entity, feminist theorists move on from simply identifying the 'facts' of cultures to cultural transformations.

## **The Feminist Critique of Male Knowledge**

A feminist critique of existing knowledge forms began to develop as academic feminists started to discover the difficulties inherent in using existing discipline-based frameworks to explore the ideas which were emerging from the grassroots Women's Movement. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The second Sex*, wrote about how men both made the world and went on to represent it from their own point of view, which they then confused with the absolute truth. The American feminist, Catharine Mackinnon, has doubled this position 'the male epistemological stance.' Mackinnon observes that "men create the world from their own point of view, which then becomes the truth to be described [. . .]. Power to create the world from one's point of view is power in the male form" (qtd. In *Redrawing the Boundaries* 259).

Mackinnon's arguments draw attention not just to what might have been overlooked or left out from a woman's point of view in various knowledge creating process. It also points to the fact that the issues which have been given attention, together with the ways this has been achieved, have derived from male interests and ways of seeing. The content, concepts, theories and methods of academic subjects have largely derived from a male perspective of the universe as structured and ordered.

Where there is interest in more private matters, such as the family, this ignores those aspects of particular concern to women, such as housework, motherhood, the role of emotions and sexuality. The aspects of women's experience have been properly researched as women's studies occurred.

Another point is that the social world, as it is constructed from a male perspective, affords men a privileged position. Dorothy Smith refers to the existence of two worlds, the

male and the female, where the domestic sphere has been constructed as the domain of women and portrayed as dependent on, as well as subordinate, to the world of men. It means that women have been forced to conceptualize their world in terms of derived from those of men. Women have been alienated from their experiences because they have not been able to represent and understand them on their own terms. A similar point has also been made by feminist historians and literary critics who have criticized the ways in which their subjects have been determined on the basis of man's interest and criteria.

The concern about objectivity was also significant characteristic of early feminist debates about knowledge and, still, features prominently in them today. Feminists have been critical about claims as to the possibility of producing value-neutral accounts about the nature of the social world. Firstly, the supposed objectivity of masculinist knowledge has been exposed as a sham due to its partial nature and gender-blindness. Feminists have also been skeptical about the possibilities of ever being able to produce completely objective understanding or 'truth'. This is because it is impossible for researchers to stand outside of a social situation, since their taken for granted biographical and cultural assumptions will always be implicated in the questions that are asked, how these are studied and the interpretations that are made. For this reason, more reliable knowledge will be produced if we are reflexively aware of the hidden agendas that will be brought to the practice of research and knowledge-creation more generally.

Individual disciplines themselves are gender blind, presenting male values and experiences as general human ones and as representative of all. Autonomous women's studies are required because of the necessity for all women to alter their frames of reference to ones in which women's different and differing ideas, knowledge, experiences, needs, and interests are accepted as legitimate in their own

right and form the basis of research, and knowledge-creation. Each kind of women's studies involves theorizing the gendered power relations inherent in current knowledge creation processes. In placing women themselves at the center of research and analysis, they question how previous meanings have been constructed and evaluated.

Feminist knowledge challenges the silencing, stereotyping, marginalization and misrepresentation of women in historical, social, literary and cultural studies. It questions assumptions, discovers and disseminates empirical evidence, and grapples with the conceptual and explanatory implications of restoring the female half of humanity.

The terms and topic which structured the practices of existing disciplines have to be re-evaluated and redesigned. The reconstructive idea focuses on new areas of concern and the generation of new concepts and theories. Knowledge is transformed by a continuing insistence on the relevance of private phenomena and not just the masculinist emphasis on the public sphere. Feminists should be self critical and self aware of their own situations and of the nature of patriarchy or male power, the relationship between gender power and inequality, and other forms of domination and exploitation. All women should be defined in terms of universal sisterhood, meaning that they should be described in terms of the things they experienced and shared in common.

## **Lesbian Concept in Feminism**

Lesbian feminist criticism challenges male-defined concepts of femininity and examines lesbian images and strategies in their historical and cultural moments. Lesbian criticism was not a single unified body of work. It emerged in the 1980's as a kind of annexe of feminist criticism. But nowadays it is taken as a fully disciplinary independence. Adrienne Rich's remarks, in "Notes Toward a Politics of Location", are particularly opposite for a discussion of lesbian theory. Although many recent developments have come from academics trained in deconstruction and post structuralism, the roots of lesbian theory lie in direct, personal and polemical writing: the language may have changed, but the debates show continuity. Lesbian theory has main three preoccupations: identity, sexuality and community. Separately or in conjunction, those concerns prompt a whole range of lesbian theoretical writings from the 1960s to 1990s. Following Rich's metaphor, we might say that identity, sexuality and community are 'the earth' to which lesbian theory returns. In the last three decades, lesbian theory exemplified in fiction and poetry.

What is true for feminists in general is truer still for lesbians: the personal is not only political, it is where the theory has to start. It is thorough reflecting on personal, lived experience that lesbians move towards 'theory' Rich's sense of the word: 'the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees'. The theory is also a collective endeavour. The personal is directed to communal ends: lesbian feminists are defining and re-creating identity, helping something to come into being that is more than the sum of the individual women's stories. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers speak of women's same sex desire in terms of 'female sexual inversion' or 'female homosexuality'. Those writers and historians who see continuity between 'inversion', 'female homosexuality' and 'lesbianism' still tend to see lesbian consciousness as a late nineteenth century phenomena: no lesbian

consciousness before the sexologists and their theories because how can we be conscious of what we are if we don't have a word for it?

A recurring feature of lesbian theoretical writings of the last thirty years on identity, sexuality and community is the self definition of lesbian (s) and/or lesbianism (s) in relation to other identities, groups, or movements. This relation is characteristically an oppositional one, whether the opposition is to heterosexual feminism, gay liberation or queer politics. Yet it begins from a vantage point of lesbians who have sought inclusion within the political movements they now chastise. Lesbians reflect on their exclusion from, or silencing within, those movements, and on the causes of that silencing and exclusion. Gene Damon, nickname of Barbara Grier, editor of *The Ladder*, notes that many of the women's rights groups shun and fear lesbians because of the brand they fear they will receive

For Martha Shelly, lesbianism is one road to freedom-freedom from oppression by man; men's hostility to the lesbian is fuelled by her independence, 'a terrible threat to male supremacy' (45). Shelly states that 'any woman can be lesbian', but the heterosexual women repress 'the lesbian inside them' through fear. Gene Damon's article suggests that lesbians are born, not made; that they do not have a choice about belonging to the last totally persecuted minority group in this united states, that is homosexuals. Women have been taught not to believe in themselves, in their judgement, but to act dumb, and wait for a man to make the decision, but not allowed to organize, talk and dominate.

The place of lesbianism within the women's movement meanwhile remained a vexed question. Lesbians had been variously represented as a threat, an irrelevance of Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). But some writers were suggesting that fully committed feminists were "lesbians" in the political sense, even if they had 'never had sexual relations with other women'; that all feminist should sport badges

proclaiming 'I am a lesbian'. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminists stated in 1979 in "Only Women" that:

All feminists can and should be political lesbians. Our definition of a political lesbian is a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean sexual activity with women. The heterosexual is the basic units of the political structure of male supremacy [. . .] heterosexual women are collaborators with enemy [. . .]. Every woman who lives with or fuck a man helps to maintain the oppression of our sisters and hinders our struggle. (*Making Women's History* 177)

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. While women reserved their sexual energies for men, they also cast women as second-class citizens, unworthy of that ultimate commitment.

Adrienne Rich's celebrated and controversial essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), not only emphasized the ideological and practical forces by which heterosexuality is socially imposed and maintained. It also proposed an expanded sense of what lesbian existence" might mean—the 'lesbian continuum'. The term 'lesbian continuum' includes a range - through each woman's life and through history—of women identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another women. 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" (54).. On Rich's 'continuum', women's 'romantic friendship', and / or 'marriage resistance' and 'gyn/affection' would count as signs of 'lesbian existence'. Clinical definitions of 'lesbianism' according to sexual practice are not only unnecessarily restrictive but



unreliable, Rich suggests that they obscure the vital continuities between all kinds of shared female experience. We have moved from the idea that any woman can be lesbian, or that every woman should be a political lesbian, to the theory that every woman is on the lesbian continuum at one time or another— whatever her own sense of identity or identification may be.

Criticism of Rich's 'continuum' model overlapped with criticisms of 'political lesbianism'. Rich herself later expressed concern that women who had never questioned 'the privileges and solipsism of heterosexuality' were using 'lesbian continuum' as 'a safe way to describe their felt connections with women, without having to share in the risks and threats of lesbian existence' (*Arts of the Possible* 79).

Traditional feminist theory has had a limited understanding of class differences or of how sexuality and self are shaped by both desire and denial; a monolithic notion of patriarchy as the root of all social evils is unhelpfully simplistic. The ideology implies that women are all sisters who should turn their anger and suspicion only on the world outside the lesbian community. Lesbian theory and lesbian, community must be political, otherwise it becomes worthless. Questions of lesbian identity, sexuality and community have been debated and explored in poetry in Rich's "Twenty One Love Poems". Poetic sequences have explored sexual differences and identity formation. Through constructing lesbian community, feminists switch its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience. Attention is switched to the need to reconstruct a new canon of women's writing by rewriting the history in such a way that neglected women writers will be given new prominence.

Traditional (past) feminists battled day by day for the valid human beings, not just appendages of men. They separately moved for it but became failure to get the

valid human beings as men. So, Rich takes the term 'lesbianism' as a force and strength for the egalitarian human world. Lesbianism is about being attracted to power that, in her opinion makes great. Lesbianism is the sense of desiring themselves and the thing that makes women attract toward strong women. All women share certain similarities and this causes a special connection among/between women. Here the women are showing the 'sense of desire for oneself' which is a reason for Rich's becoming a lesbian.

Rich constructs a lesbian-feminist approach to lesbian history. The search for lesbian history needs to be understood politically, not simply as the search for exceptional women who were lesbians, but as the search for power, for nascent undefined feminism, for she says that women have been refusing male possession. It describes, in other words, a wide range of women identified experience, not simply a sexual experience with another woman. In this respect, as Keyes says, "it is a movement of the human psyche: a seeming cultural rejection of masculinism' (8).

From Rich's point of view lesbianism has brought the possibility of new energy and strength in Women Liberation Movement. In the full connection between woman and woman, she has found a new center form which to voice compassion, human caring, and the protection of life, and to bring the "energy of creation", the 'energy of relation' finally into harmony with each other.

Rich believes that compulsory heterosexuality in the central social structure perpetuates male domination. She suggests a reconstruction of the concept of lesbianism which can capture women's on going resistance to patriarchal domination. Heterosexuality is, in fact, an institution shaped to perpetuate male social and economical privileges. It shows that the ideology of difference as the natural basis for sexual attraction is in fact, a construction. The primary bonding between women is natural. But it is disrupted by the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality in all

women's lives. Women who resist heterosexuality are in favor of the more natural state of woman-identification, which is the broader definition Rich gives to lesbianism.

## CHAPTER III: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### Rich's Reconstructing Vision

Adrienne Rich is one of the intellectually challenging modern living poets of America. Rich, along with her poetry, has played the significant role to social and political change. Her poetry provides a chronicle of the evolving consciousness of the modern woman. At the core of her aesthetic is an awareness of power and its constructs in the patriarchy. Rich tells of the experience of women who refuse to accept patriarchal definitions of femininity by separating themselves from the political and social reality that trivializes and subordinates females. Her poetry is tied with the reality of the world with its global implications.

A patriarchal society is one in which males are dominant, and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystic and aesthetic, and excluded from the practical and political realms. As a feminist poet, Rich insists on the importance of the 'identification with all women' and commits herself to the re-creation of female community that is dedicated to a nurturing ethos and a reverence for life. This community of women, Rich affirms, will not only resist the damaging and crippling effects of patriarchy but also create a culture in which women have equal economic, social, and political rights with men. In a concluding prophetic stanza of "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", Rich envisions a heroine who will emerge from the collective feminist struggle:

Well,

She's long about her coming who must be

more merciless to herself than history.  
Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge  
breasted and glancing through the currents,  
taking the light upon her  
at least as beautiful as any boy  
or helicopter,

Poised, still coming,

her fine blades making the air wince  
but her cargo  
no promise then:  
delivered  
palpable  
Ours. (38-39)

Rich's heroine commemorates the ancient mysteries of blood and birth, but no longer will she be defined only by her reproductive functions. Her understanding and experience of life will give her vision as effective and commanding as history. The future heroine (woman) will be in command of her body, her erotic and creative energies, and will celebrate life, not death. She will not be a servant but autonomous, self-directing, and free from patriarchal edict. This new woman will not proceed full-grown from the head of Zeus, or from Adam's side. She must cross through the danger of this life: she must survive and transcend a culture that can wound, sometimes kill her.

*Snapshots of a daughter-in-law* explores women's experiences consistently and there energies were directed to meeting the needs of men. The little poem, "Snapshots of Daughter-in-law", explores the legacy of self-hate and wasted energy experienced by a woman in the patriarchal society that demands her subordination to

man. Woman's success was defined by the feminine mystique, the 'sweetly laughing; sweetly singing' (36). Woman who must attract and hold a man who cares for her, that is 'takes care' of her.

Rich laments the waste of energy in a society that values women not for wisdom and experience but for beauty: "Sigh no more, ladies/Time is male/and in his cups drinks to the fair." Time, which should enrich by adding fullness and complexity to life, becomes an enemy: "have Nature shown/her household books to you, daughter-in-law/that her sons never saw?"

Those women who are aware of their situation in the patriarchal society and want to be independent women are hounded by guilt or the fear of being unfeminine:

A woman, partly brave and partly good,  
who fought with what she partly understood.  
Few men about her would or could do more,  
hence she was labeled harpy, shrew and whore. (37)

Because of such anxiety of "labeled harpy, shrew and whore", though women understood themselves and patriarchy, they could not dare to fight for their independence. Instead, their anger is denied, converted into despair and even madness or suicide: 'A thinking women sleeps with monsters./ The beak that grips her, she becomes.'

A woman has to play the conventional role. She holds that woman loses her individuality at the very moment she yields to male domination. The image of the monsters reveals the violent attitude of men to women. Men control their power to cramp their creativeness. The role, prescribed by the male society, of women is not inherent but imposed by force. The "thinking woman" reveals women's underlying strength.

Rich strives with the cultural traps, insisting on the primacy of her perceptions, as did Mary Wollstonecraft, in spite of being labeled 'harpy, shrew and whore'. Trapped in the feminine ethic of selflessness, women are midwives to men: "Nursing your nerves/to rest, I've roused my own; well, / now for a few bad hours!" (The Afterwake 43). It describes experience of a working-woman. In patriarchal society, a woman has to nurse in the family as nurse in the hospital. While woman (nurse) works to clam down the nerves of men (Patient), she becomes so tensed. The energy of the woman has been mobilized to meet the demands of the man: she has succeeded in soothing him by absorbing his anxiety and pain; he is sleep, and she is alone, too tense and exhausted to sleep.

In the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", Rich explores the restraints and limitations imposed upon married women. The first stanza depicts a woman recalling her youth and vanity:

You once a belle in Shreveport,  
With henna-colored hair, skin likes a peach bud,  
still have your dresses copied from that time,  
and play a Chopin prelude  
called by Cartot: "*delicious recollections*  
*float like perfume through the memory*".(35)

The 'you' refers to any woman lived her youth in domestic and romantic situation. The speaker claims for a change in their attitude. In this poem, each fragment beings difference women in particular situation that move through domestic activities criticizing their conventional roles, and in the last section proposing change.

Rich, in the second stanza, uses domestic metaphors to illuminate the torturous and slave like aspect of women (Daughter-in-Law):

Sometimes she's let the tapstream scald her arm,

a match burn to her thumbnail,  
or held her hand above the kettle's snout  
right in the woodly steam. (35)

Rich employs plural voices in her poetry, and uses the pronoun "I" to portray the life of different women.

The poem "An Unsaid Word" depicts woman's negative experience of power. Characterized by the themes of evasion, disguise and denial, this seven line poem concerns a "good" woman who could get attention of her man through her power to seduce him. She chooses not to do this, thus "unsaid word".

She who has power to call her man  
From that estranged intensity  
Where his mind forages alone  
Yet keeps her peace and leaves him free,  
And when his thoughts to her return  
Stands where he left her, still his own,  
Knows this hardest thing to learn. (5)

It tells the story of a woman's willing subservience to sexual roles that allow a man to wander free while a woman stands still "where he left her". In effect, the woman appears as the fulfillment of a male fantasy, for she mutes her power and remains silent, her words of desire or complaint "unsaid". The woman has denied her desire for her man for the sake of his freedom. In fact, his freedom seems predicated upon the limitations imposed on the woman. Woman's sense of her own ability to create pulls against all the forces willing her to be dependent: to "stand where he left her, still his own," that is, to be a traditional woman.

In 'Aunt Jennifer's Tiger's,' Rich depicts such a woman who does not break from the accepted roles of society. Aunt Jennifer does not have the freedom to live



because of the social conventions and circumstance. Despite her creative genius, Jennifer suffers from the distraction of marriage and male domination: "The massive weight of uncle's wedding band/sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" (4). The "massive weight" is man's control over woman and "the wedding band" is the symbol of this control. The image of 'wedding band' brings a feeling of slavery, domination and fear. Rich does not want to live a life like Aunt Jennifer's; Aunt must have been an active and independent woman. Aunt executed the secret of prancing tigers that indicates she wishes to be free and experience life actively in full control of herself: "they do not fear the man [. . .]."

Aunt Jennifer is totally victimized by the oppression of custom and law that results tragedy of loss of freedom. Aunt dies and she would not overcome the misery of her marriage. Although she dies, her desires in form of tigers would never die:

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

In the "Fact of Door Frame", Rich states traditional and conventional woman and man's image:

Two people in a room, speaking harshly.  
One gets up, goes out to walk,  
(That is the man.)  
The other goes into the next room  
and washes the dishes, cracking one.  
(That is the woman.) (38)

The society's customs and conventions make women spend their lives inside the domestic walls; but men spend outside the walls—freedom. Women are surrounded

by patriarchal boundaries; many women can not bear to cross the boundaries because of the patriarchal threatening that devalues them. The bold and conscious women do not want to perpetuate the myth that a woman's only goal in life is to marry well.

Rich realizes that it is urgent to change the society's view of woman as submissive and of man as dominant. Rich depicts man as a destructive force: "A man's world. But finished./ They themselves have sold it to the machines" (Waking in the Dark). The patriarchal society exploits the women in terms of physical beauty: "we are his dreams."

Rich, therefore, wants to smash the cultural trap imposed by the patriarchy and come out of the solitary confinement. She reveals an increasing impatience with the divided world of men and women:

What has happened here will do  
To bite the living world in two,  
Half for me and half for you.  
Here at last I fix a line  
Serving the world's design  
Too small to hold both yours and mine. (Boundary 5)

Her experience is unmediated by cultural edicts. The patriarchal culture and society trivializes the positions and contributions of women, and does not honor their needs. So, Rich views that such a situation divides the world into two: "half for [women] and half for [men]." She wants to create a female community, separated from the male community, in which they can utilize their energy, knowledge, time and mind for themselves, at last, for whole human beings. She wants to "fix a line" in between the two worlds so that patriarchal culture will not enter into women's world and not torture them.

There's enormity in a hair

Enough to led men not to share.

Narrow confines of a sphere

But put an ocean or a fence

Between two opposite intents.

A hair would span the difference. (Boundary 5)

Rich purposes the idea that women should not let men enter into woman's world, and not to share their energies and experience for the sake of men. Being near to women, men always create difficulties to women, and they do not honor women's intents. So, Rich wants to put a fence between "two opposite intents".

In "Merely to Know", Rich expresses a desire to relinquish economic and psychological dependency, to know the man for his own sake rather than to use him:

I'll give you back

Yourself at last to the last part.

I take nothing, only look.

Change nothing. Have no need to change.

Merely to know and let you go. (41)

Rich articulates her dissatisfaction to the foremothers who always followed patriarchal conventions and taught their offspring to do that: "my predecessors blind me –." Here, Rich wants to grow into a giant to pull women from the troubled sea of feminine fulfillment into a safe haven of women's upliftment:

Let me take you by hair

and drag you backward to the light,

there sponge like press my gaze

patiently upon your eyes. (40)

Doing away with love mitigates all their woes.

In the third section of the poem, Rich spurns cultural norms and resolves to follow her inner direction:

Spirit like water  
molded by unseen stone  
and sandbar, pleats and funnels  
according to its won  
submerged necessity. (Merely to Know 41)

This resolution to follow her own path, to understand her own experience in her own terms leads to spiritual autonomy and psychological authenticity. She accepts her intrinsic energy and begins to interact with the world on her own terms.

In "Necessities of life," Rich explores the fundamental truth of her own life. History threatens to consume her – "whole biographies swamp up and/swallowed me like Jonah" (55) – but she resists its influence and forms: "I used myself, let nothing use me. [. . .] /What life was there, was mine." She separates herself from the socio-historical context, her own personal reality emerges. "I learned to make myself [. . .] /now and again to name / over the bare necessities " (55-56).

Women have the power to name themselves as well as their environment, as Wendy Marten in *American Writer: A Collection of Literary biographies* says:

As she becomes increasingly conscious of the pain and the need to understand its psychic and historical origins, her poetry reflects the needs to name her own experiences for herself and to reweave the fabric of her life. (509)

Women should be aware of the patriarchal psyche and history to reflect their truth in the society.

Any woman's life, for Rich, is part of a larger social reality. Her poetry explores the possibilities for reweaving the fabric of private and public (political) lives, women, she says, should be active to reshape the world:

[. . .] A new  
era is coming in , Gauche as we are, it seems  
we have to play our part. (The Demon lover 82)

It is time for women to re-shape the world, even if the monolithic patriarchy threatens to render such efforts futile: "[.....] The World, we have to make it" (84) .

For Rich, language is power. If language is the quintessential human activity, Then, exercise of language is what makes us more fully human, the shapers of our lives, rather than the victims of forces beyond our control. Those people who suffer from injustice most are the least able to articulate their sufferings; and that the silent majority, if released into language, would not be content with a perpetuation of the conditions which have betrayed them. The knowing language is not simply learning the jargon of an elite, fitting unexceptionably into the status quo, but learning that language can be used as a means of changing reality. With this concept, Rich states every woman should be aware of male language that does not bear true female experiences. Rich believes that language helps to liberate women and give freedom from oppression of male language. "Change" means transformation, not merely "something different" but an actual restructuring of the mind—her mind, and subsequently, other minds.

In "Planetarium", Rich moves as an instrument to change the existing world into a new world:

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 of the mind. (116)

She transcribes woman pulsations into images to reconstruct the mind of the people.

For Rich, poetic language does not simply involve reflections about cultural experience, but can be a means for changing consciousness and for creating social change. She wants to change the "words" given to the women, and her words can change people's lives. She writes; "I wanted to choose words that even you/ would have to be changed by" (Implosions 95). Here, Rich wants to generate female language that will represent the truth of female 'wants' and lips' (136). That language will change the patriarchal mind. Women are bound to use the language developed by males as Rich tells

"You show me the poems of some women/ my age, or younger/ Translated from your language" (Diving into the Wreck 40).

Women are bound to write and to speak in male's language, the "oppressor's tongue" that places male at a higher position and female at lower. Traditional conventions place the male as "lord" of the house and property. This concept of ownership makes them able to suppress women everywhere. 'Oppressor's language' like "brotherhood", "mankind" cannot address women's voice. Rich stresses that women should reclaim language so that their voices might be heard.

As she starts to express her experience and "wants" in her own language (words); "the grammar turn[s] and attack [s] [her]" (A Valediction Forbidding Mourning 136). Such attacks undermine the female, and causes hindrance on the way of female progress. The traditional rules of "grammar" no longer serve the woman; what she writes and speaks is meaningless in the male's language. Women have to write on themes of female experience under "duress" (coercion or threat): "Themes, written under duress. / Emptiness of notations" (137). At the end of the poem, Rich asserts that she will no longer mourn for the domination of the means of

expression by males: she will start writing "something very common in my own way" (137).

For Rich, language is not "only words" but connecting power. Through power of language, women can connect with themselves and with everything in the universe. She is conscious of the existing society, and she sees the world has to be changed. Her mission as a poet is to break down existing social reality to create, or re-create, a true reality and to re-create the forms of civilization.

Unfortunately, Rich uses "the oppressor's language" to try to express herself in the language that has no names for her experience. In doing so, she will find a new language to repair the failures of communication (means understanding between man and woman). Rich affirms that the failures of communication between women and men, between oppressors and the oppressed is, in part, the consequence of the consistent denial of human feeling. In "Natural Resources", Rich expresses her anger about those men who threaten to interfere with the process of female discovery—men misuse words like "humanism" and "androgyny" to conceal smoldering violence: "children picking up guns / for that is what is to be a man" (259).

She warns against "a passivity we mistake /—in the desperation of our search—/ for gentleness," and calls forth the active nurturing power in women to "help the earth deliver." The energy for the recreation of the world comes from generations of women to bring forth and sustain life.

My heart is moved by all I cannot save.  
so much has been destroyed  
I have to cast my lot with those  
who age after age, perversely,  
with no extraordinary power,  
reconstitute the world. (Natural Resources 264)

## **Rich's Humanistic Vision**

In the present reformist milieu of the progressive era, women still in many societies, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of "other", colonized by various forms of patriarchal domination all over the world. Throughout history, the clearest identity has been male, women as sex never claimed a historic role: civilization as we know it is man – made. Even the universal term for all human beings is man. Mankind refers to humankind but womankind does not indicate human but only woman in patriarchal world. Domination, depersonalization and dehumanization are vectors of the patriarchal soul. Rich in her poetry feels man's inhumanity to women.

Humanism is a way of looking at the world which emphasizes the importance of human beings—their nature and place in the universe. Humanism teaches that every person has dignity and worth and therefore should command the respect of every other person. All humanists agree that all people, male and female, black and white, European and non-European etc. are the center in the world. The humanistic attempt to view life both ideally and realistically is seen in poetry, painting and Sculpture.. Today's humanists interpret the meaning of life rather than just describing the physical world or society. The study of the humanism is the highest expression of human values and a means to developing the free, responsible individual, and a means to developing the free responsible individual. Humanism is basically an outlook centered on the autonomy of the human being as a dignified rational being, possessing the source of truth and right. Humanism's final court of appeal is human reason rather than any external authority, and its goal is in the finite existence. Humanists believe that we people are capable of making choices changing minds.



Humanism values the dignity of the individual and his or her inalienable right to justice, liberty and freedom of thought and the pursuit of happiness. Humanism is, in sum, a philosophy of those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for their own morals and their own lives, and for the lives of their communities and the world in which we live.

Humanism is a philosophy so joyous service for the greater good of all humanity when we speak of equality, of women and men, of blacks and whites, of all the world's people, of the world without a slave, of environmental justice for all the world's people, exploitation free society based on equality, justice, co-existence, we are talking about humanism.

Rich's endeavor to women's liberation from male knowledge, her constant fight for environmental justice, her effort at revitalizing language, and her attempt to create a new world where all people can be, all these show her concern for humanism. She is responsive to our shared nightmares, to shattering social tensions to general dehumanization of particular groups. Rich carries the burden of the world in her poetry. Her concern is how history, culture, and individuals tyrannize the innocent. The issues related to women traditionally have derived from male interests and ways of seeing. The social world constructed from a male perspective or knowledge gives men a privileged position, subject but women a marginalized position and object.

How can there be a merging of the female with the male if the male has never recognized the value of female? Rich has discovered the androgynous ideal as a vision of human wholeness, as she writes in "The Stranger": "I am the androgyny/ I am the living mind you fail to describe/ in your dead language." Though women have the quality of both male and female, male knowledge and language cannot give the value of human beings to women but take women as the subordination to male.

Her voice finds an echo in William Wordsworth's intent "to restore through poetry the integrity and value of life that which binds us together as human beings below layers of rationality and civilized behaviors" (*The Norton Anthology of Poetry*).

We can comprehend Rich's disclaimer of androgyny in "Natural Resources", she writes:

There are words I cannot choose again:

humanism                      androgyny

Such words have no shame in them, no difference

before the raging stoic grand mothers. (262)

The "grandmothers" could possibly refer to all the women throughout history who have been denied by "the fathers" in their preference for the male over the female. This preference to the male and negligence to the female is dis-humanity. Rich's poetry attempts to redress this imbalance with her focus on women, her female imagery, and the drive she has to develop a female aesthetic in poems addressed to women and shaped by this focus as the female.

Rich, in her poetry speaks of the marginalized, suppressed, and deprived people from social and economic justice. She firmly believes that one must not abandon one's sense of guilt and responsibility. Her poetry has humanistic vision at its center. Rich believes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. In the seventies, Rich found women in the USA oppressed by dead culture led by men. The false consciousness of American bourgeois society, Rich realized, was unfit for the whole women community and other minor groups. So, she started a "consciousness-raising" movement through feminism in order to create a new society based on justice and equity that meant the rejection of male metaphor to women , the confidence in self, a bond of sisterhood, a new solidarity of mother and

daughter. Her goal of feminism is quest for the liberation, both inner and outer, of mankind and womankind.

Rich is against the exploitation of women as sex playthings (beautiful and weak), as pregnant women (helpless), as machine for reproduction of offspring (object), as middle aged woman (no beautiful), as older woman (to be ignored). She wants to make them free from such socio economic and biological prison created by men and society.

Rich clarifies her theme of degeneracy of human world (humanity) in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*: "in order to live a fully human life we require not only control of our bodies, we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence." (qtd. *The Aesthetics of Power* 140).

Rich's commitment is to liberate whole women community. She wants to "end to suffering and to change the laws of history" (*The Aesthetics of Power* 123). She believes that only a political movement of women can demolish the well entrenched social order structured only on the basis of male knowledge. She speaks of the mere universal struggle of humanity in a disordered, fragmentary world where women and other groups are marginalized and dehumanized. She writes of the struggle of the socially marginalized people in the world where there are definite limits to growth and boundaries to thought: "I'm a woman [. . .] / feeling the fullness of her power / at the precise moment where she must not use them" ('I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus' 120).

Rich thinks it is the duty of the poet to bear witness to, and protest, the social evils. She appears to manifest the reformer's faith that there is something that can be done against evil and her poem invokes heroes and heroines who fought for social welfare. Her poems also commemorate people from marginal groups who have been

victims of oppression. Describing the dangerous illusions, the betrayal the hypocrisy all over the society , Rich says, "But I can't stop seeing like this / more and more I see like this everywhere " (Source 16). She was " the faithful drudging child/ . . . becomes the woman with a mission not to win prizes/ but to change the laws of history" (Source). She makes people conscious of the right to live lives in a way which is satisfying and fulfilling to themselves.

Rich's poem revisits history to reconstruct to opposing views of power, one self centered, the other selfless. Rich wants to selfless power which has the ability to embrace the whole humankind. The oppressor is in the center. The oppressed people are social outcasts who are at the perimeter. She wants to reshape the society where all can have equal opportunity and no exploitation of any group of human beings. Her concern is not about the individual but about the whole human beings.

Rich is a 'woman with a mission' and she knows the mission remains unfulfilled so long as one percent of the people hold ninety percent of the world's assets. So Rich speaks for the majority of human– kind.

Rich tries to escape from the trappings of her own mortal condition and to seize transcendence by an act of willful depersonalization. Rich speaks to the human condition and the truths of the heart. While Rich may not use the term "humanism" anymore, it applies to the posture she takes in "Transcendental Etude." The poem focuses on the experience of daily life, and Rich uses the example of woman sitting in kitchen, making patterns out of "bits of yarn", once again, her commitment to the commonplace circumstances of ordinary existence. Rich is not only concerned with mastery or product, "the striving for greatness, brilliance", but "only with musing of a mind/one with her body." "Etude" uses the metaphor of spinning and weaving:

experienced fingers quietly pushing  
dark against bright, silk against roughness,

pulling the tenets of a life together  
with no more will to mastery,  
only care for the many-lived, unending  
forms in which she finds herself. (269)

Women still need to claim their place in human society as equals, not as subordinate members, and they should emphasize the difference between male and female experience of the world. But that difference is shaped by the patriarchal structures feminists are opposing; and to remain faithful to it is to play the patriarchal game. As long as patriarchy is dominant, it still remains politically essential for feminists to defend women as women in order to counteract the patriarchal oppression that precisely despises women as women.

With the publication of the *Diving into the Wreck*, Rich heralded the changing world for women in her opinion; women need not be submissive anymore. Her poems are a form of protest against male domination. Her poetry is a socially and politically conscious voice, which strongly urges for equality and justice. For humanitarian purpose, she challenges the male who interrupt women's movement. Feminism, for Rich, means a belief in the social, political, and economic equality of women and men.

In "Natural Resources", Rich asserts that there is much work yet to be done, and the poet expresses anger about these men who threaten to interfere with the process of female discovery—men who misuse words like "humanism" and "androgyny" to conceal smoldering violence: "children picking up guns / for that is what it is to be a man." She warns against " a passivity we mistake/ in the desperation of our search / for gentleness" and calls forth the active nurturing power in women to recreate the human world. The energy for this recreation of the world desire comes from generations of women who bring forth and sustain life.

Rich defines and addresses her villain more clearly: a patriarchal culture that inherently devalues anything female or feminine. She advocates a women centered vision of creative energies that she aligns with lesbianism. It would be a world that values women as fully human beings.

### **Lesbian Concept as a Force for Women's Liberation**

Rich takes lesbianism considerably more than simply a switch in sexual preference between women. For Rich, lesbianism is a way to freedom. It means desiring themselves, choosing themselves as women and choosing their bonds and connection to other women. Rich defines lesbianism that women who resist heterosexuality are in the side of the natural state of woman—identification. Lesbianism is nothing as simple as the fact that two women might go to bed together, rather it is a sense attracted to "strong women."

Rich feels that lesbianism is about being attracted to the powers that makes women's liberation. Rich states in *On Lies, Secrets and Silences*:

I believe it is the lesbian in every woman who is compelled by female energy, who gravitates toward strong women who seek a literature that will express that energy and strength. It is the lesbian in us which drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, and grasp the full connection between woman and woman. (qtd. in *The Aesthetic of Power* 167)

Lesbianism has brought the new energy and strength for the women's liberation from patriarchal bonds. In the full connection between woman and woman, she finds a new place from which to voice human caring, protection of life and a

means to bring the "energy of relation" and the "energy of creation", finally into harmony with each other.

Compulsory heterosexuality, Rich believes, perpetuates male domination in the social structure. She suggests a reconstruction of the concept of lesbianism in term of a trans–historical continuum, which can capture women's ongoing resistance to patriarchal domination. She expands it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of inner life and practical support, the bonding against male tyranny. "It is", as Keys says, "a movement of the human psyche: a seeming cultural rejection of masculinism" (8).

For Rich, lesbianism is women community that includes:

a range, through each women's life and through out history, of woman-identified–experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another women."

(qtd. Barry, *Lesbian Criticism*141)

Rich affirms that women's isolated and lonely attempt cannot change "the savagely fathered and unbothered world" (*From an Old House in America* 214) and remake "this trailing knitted thing" (*Diving into the Wreck* 151).

Therefore, women should bond together and break the existing culture imposed by male perceptions. By creating lesbian community and radical demolition can cease the male's values and dominants. For this women must be self-conscious and self–defining human beings and share their experiences themselves.

Rich suggests women should stay together to create a new mythology to correct patriarchal distortion and change the cultural lens, as she expresses in "When We Dead Awaken".

Even you fellow–creature, sister,  
sitting across from me, dark with love,

working like me to pick apart  
working with me to remake  
this trailing knitted thing this cloth of darkness,  
this women's garment, trying to save the skein. (151)

Together the women are trying to undo the damage that has been done to themselves. She sees the need for sisterhood for a community to counteract the isolation of women's lives. Women need to help each other to find their power that can dismantle the cultured male society, and reconstruct the world for the liberation of women. Rich uses the image "remake this trailing knitted thing" to suggest that women must recreate themselves using a new power— female bonding. For this, they must cross the boundaries of patriarchal world, as Rich says, "You give up keeping track of anniversaries,/ You begin to write in your diaries / More honestly than ever" (151).

Rich asks women for confrontation with their experience stripped of patriarchal myth. In order to create a suppression-free community, they must come out together from patriarchal cage, and tell the truths. Rich further states:

Yet never have we been closer to the truth  
of the lies we were living listen to me:  
the faithfulness I can imagine would be a weed  
flowering in tar, a blue energy piercing  
the massed atoms of bedrock disbelief.

(When We Dead Awaken 151-52)

Women had to be lived in the lies about women created by patriarchal society. They never got a chance to the "truth" of themselves. So that Rich believes the "faithfulness" of lesbian community can be a power for the social change even if the



monolithic patriarchy threatens. That power and "energy" dismantles "the massed atoms of a bedrock disbelief."

Women should be conscious about their existence with their own knowledge; they should know who they are. Rich in "Waking in the Dark" asserts:

The thing that arrest me is  
how we are composed of molecules  
.....  
Arranged without our knowledge and consent. (151)

Women's role and identity is shaped by male knowledge that is not truth but only perceptions of male to female: "Miscarried knowledge twist us/ like hot sheets thrown askew" (Like This Together 63). Therefore, it is time for women to redefine female and their experiences; to rename the world using their "knowledge and consent". Until women can understand the assumptions in which they are drenched they cannot know themselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for sisterhood, for women, is more than a search for identity. It is a part of their refusal of the self-destructiveness of male dominated society.

Rich emphasizes the need for sisterhood, for a community of women to counteract the isolation of women's lives and she surprises at the possibilities of collective female energy in "After Twenty Years":

It is strange to be so many women,  
eating and drinking at the same table,  
those who bathed their children in the same basin,  
who kept their secrets from each other  
walked the floors of their lives in separate room  
and flow into history now as the woman of their time. (157)

For Rich lesbianism is a road to liberalism. She in "The Tress" describes a collective attempt of roots, eaves and twigs as a lesbian community to unchain themselves from their home-bonding lives into freedom and recognition:

All night the roots work  
to disengage themselves from the cracks  
in the Veranda floor.  
The leaves strain towards the glass  
small twigs stiff with exertion. (60)

To liberate themselves, women should have their own female community as the contribution of roots, leaves and twigs for a stance of the "tree."

The poet affirms that the lesbian feminist revolution not only leads to a social transformation and reformation but also silences all whispers and murmurs regarding the same;

[. . .] The glass is breaking  
the trees are stumbling forward  
into the night. Winds rush to meet them.  
The moon is broken like a mirror,  
its pieces flash now in the crown  
of the tallest oak. (61)

The image "the crown" as the reward of the rebellian shows the broken feminine limitations of the patriarchal society. Rich affirms that women "want to live like trees" (Twenty-One Love Poems 236).

Rich depicts, in "Twenty-One Love Poems", a lesbian relationship which seems more emotional complexity and controversial with its pleasures and joys. Though women want to enjoy with lesbian relationship, patriarchy threatens and separates them: "I wake up in your bed. I know I have been dreaming/ much earlier,

the alarm broke us from each other,/ you have been at your desk for hours" (237).

She shows the loneliness and separation that come from desperate love. Rich's simple and prose-like stanzas reveal erotic relationship between women. These poems, in "Twenty-One Love Poems", represent a leap of faith, a desire to trust her love enough to affirm it publicly:

[. . .] I dreamed you were a poem  
I say, a poem I wanted to show someone . . .  
and laugh and fall dreaming again  
of the desire to show you to every one I love,  
to more openly together  
in the pull of gravity, which is not simple,  
which carries the feathered grass long way down the up-  
breathing air. (237)

Moving 'openly together' is complicated and dangerous in the culture that is not fundamentally accepting of non-traditional sexual involvements.

The poet marvels at the power of her love for someone very much like her, yet different:

Your small hands, precisely equal to my own-  
Only thumb is larger, longer-in these hands  
I could trust the world, or in many hands like these  
handling power tools or steering-wheel  
or touching a human face . . . Such hands could turn  
the unborn child right ways in the birth canal. (239)

These lines reveal Rich's preference for women in positions of power and extend her vision of women capabilities.

She finds deep pleasure and joy in the similarities and differences of herself  
and her lover:

But we have different voices, even in sleep,  
and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different  
and the past echoing through our bloodstreams  
is freighted with different language, different meanings—  
Though in any chronicle of the world we share  
it could be written with new meaning  
we were two lovers of one gender,  
we were two women of one generation. (242)

The simple statement "we were two lovers of one gender,/we were two women of  
one generation" is not obscured by an opaque image; instead, its direct simplicity is a  
strong declaration of lesbian community for the women's liberation from the cultured  
male society.

Sleeping, turning in turn like planets  
rotating in their midnight meadow:  
a touch is enough to let us know  
we're not alone in the universe, even in sleep:  
the dream-ghost of two worlds  
walking their ghost-towns, almost address each other. (241)

The connection among women is 'enough' to know their community that can  
drastically dismantle the boundaries of patriarchy and create a new world.

The eros that spreads in all of the poems is connected in "The Floating Poem,  
Unnumbered":

. . . Your traveled, generous thighs  
between which my whole face has come and come—

the innocence and wisdom of the place my tongue has found there  
the live, insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth—  
your touch on me, firm, protective, searching  
me out, your strong tongue and slender fingers  
searching where I had been waiting years for you  
in my rose-wet cave – whatever happens, this is.

(Included in *Twenty-One Love Poems* 243)

The poem on the surface is about a sexual encounter between two women. The play on "traveled, generous thighs" and "come and come" conveys the physical and emotional power of their passion. Rich goes on to explain that lesbianism is the sense of desiring themselves and the thing that makes gravitate towards strong women. The idea of a strong woman is seen with the descriptions of "generous thigh," "strong tongue" and "firm, protective." This shows how it is the strength and the femininity that make lesbianism appealing to Rich. The poem shows how all women share certain similarities and this causes a special connection between women.

This is not an easy love—few loves are; there are external obstacles. The civilization and culture created by male agreed-upon perceptions takes lesbianism as problematic but heterosexuality as heroic activities, as Rich says in "*Twenty-One Love Poems (XIX)*":

Two women together is work  
nothing in civilization has made simple,  
two people together is a work  
heroic in its ordinariness. (245)

Rich's deconstructing the hetero/homo dichotomy has radical implications in the liberation and freedom of women, since all such distinctions are constructed in the same way, so that to challenge this one is to challenge all the others too.

Lesbianism is a force against "rigid definitions" and polar oppositions, expressed in terms of gaps, spaces, disruption, the experimental, radical disruption, interrogation, and so on.

Rich suggests creating a community of women based on shared values and goal, which is in harmony with nature free from patriarchal politics and patriarchal civilization. For Rich, lesbian community should redefine the female and their experiences. She affirms the need for female community: to undo the old order, "grouping through spines of nightmare," to find and mark out "the line dividing/lucidity from darkness" (From an Old House in America 221-22.). The network of sisterhood must be preserved so that women can rename their experiences and emotions, and create their future.

For Rich, lesbian community should have own language that does not simply reflect about cultural experiences but can be a means for changing consciousness and for creating social change. Language is not "only words" but connecting power. Through the power of common language, women can connect with everything in the universe.

Rich insists on the importance of identification with all women. She commits herself to re-create a female community that is dedicated to a nurturing ethos and reverence for life. She wants a new world in which all women have visions and thinking. After being conscious of sacrificial womanhood, she believes, the new social order must begin with the truth of female body as opposed to the male mind.

## CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

To a significant extent, all poets are concerned with transformation. The very making of poem involves a change from perceived reality or experience into a verbal utterance shaped by the poet's imagination and craft. For Adrienne Rich, however, transformation goes beyond the act of writing; it extends to the culture at large through the poem's ability to challenge the given assumptions, and offer new visions. Rich questions more than the social inequities experienced by women. She argues women should not waste their energy, time and life only for the sake of their individual identities and for men but for whole women community and human beings.

Rich affirms feminism has specially two tasks for the social change: the task of critique, attacking gender stereotypes, and the task of constructions. Without the second task, feminism has no goal and there will not be the sphere for women's liberation.

Rich believes that the feminist consciousness of experience and language, and the concept of female community reconstruct the degraded human world into a complete wholeness. The consciousness and self knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity.

Rich does not compromise with her own individual identity, liberation and freedom, but moves forward to re-create the human world in which all women will achieve their identities, liberations and freedom. As women exceed all the boundaries of patriarchal world, liberation and freedom will be at hand; the new human world will be created.

Rich's poetry has explored the space where realms intersect, incorporating feminist, lesbian, humanitarian point of view. Through her poems, she encourages

women to listen only to what their hearts tell them. Rich's "An Unsaid Word" depicts woman's negative experience of power. It tells of a woman's willing subservience to sexual roles that allow a man to wonder free while a woman stands still 'where he left her'. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" offers an image of power revealed and restrained by domestic arts. In the poem, a woman takes the way, a fantastic world, to free herself from the social confinement. But she does not break the social convention and circumstance. Rich questions how women get freedom and liberation without breaking up boundaries of patriarchal world. So she does not want to choose a life like Jennifer's. Any woman like Aunt must have been an active and independent woman.

Rich in the poem 'Boundary' wants to smash the cultural trap imposed by the patriarchy and come out of the solitary confinement. She wants to create a female community, separated from male community, in which they can utilize their energy, knowledge, time for themselves, and for the whole human beings.

Her "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" reflects the tensions she experienced as a wife and mother. The experience of motherhood was eventually to radicalize her. She expresses anger to patriarchal society and acknowledges a need for change. Rich laments the waste of energy in the society that values women not for wisdom and experience but for beauty. Rich believes that women should not only dismantle the patriarchal world but also create the world into a new one. In the concluding stanza, Rich envisions autonomous women who will emerge from the collective feminist struggle, no longer will she be defined only by her reproductive functions.

At the same time, Rich began to distrust her medium because of its close ties to patriarchal culture: "This is the oppressor's language/yet I need it to talk to you." For Rich, language is not "only words" but connecting power. Through power of language women can connect with themselves and with everything in the universe.



She does not mourn for the domination of the means of expression by males, she will start writing "something very common in my own way". She wants to break down existing social reality to create, or re-create, a new world, and to re-create the forms of civilization.

In "Diving into the Wreck", she expresses her anger regarding women's position in the culture, and alludes to problematic dualities, or to images of otherness. She affirms patriarchal culture that inherently devalues anything female or feminine. Domination, depersonalization and dehumanization are vectors of the patriarchal soul. Rich in poetry feels man's inhumanity to women. Rich's endeavor to women's liberation from male knowledge, her effort at revitalizing language, and her attempt to create a new world where all people can be, all these show her concern for humanism. The impulse behind the search is to "reconstitute the world."

Rich advocates a woman-centered vision of creative energies that she aligns with lesbianism. Rich's lesbian love sequence, "Twenty-One Love Poems" is as striking for its sensuousness as it is for its philosophical probing. Her poetry reveals the contemporary understanding of the social construction of gender. Rich's strategies are more usefully seen as a counterpoint to the pervasiveness of patriarchal culture, which harms men as well as women. Women together can create "a whole new world."

For Rich lesbianism is a way to freedom. It means desiring themselves, choosing themselves as women and choosing their bonds and connection to other women. Female community has brought the new energy and strength for the women's liberation from patriarchal bonds. Women should bond together and break the existing culture imposed by male perceptions.

By creating lesbian community and radical demolition can cease the male's values and dominants. For this women must be self conscious and self-defining

human beings, and share their experiences themselves. Rich suggests women should stay together to create a new mythology to correct patriarchal distortion and change the cultural lens. Rich concerns with a new concept of civilization that is women-centered, women-identified and women- created.

Her aim of a better language and a better world aligns her with the visionary poetics of Whitman. She suggests to cross the boundaries of patriarchy and to go "somewhere/the brain had not yet gone." She wants to be in community, not be alone to deconstruct the world and reconstruct it into a new world.

Rich raises the issues of consciousness of women's deepest feeling and language used by patriarchal society. She sees the need to redefine the human world and female experiences, and to help other women collectively to "re-vision" their lives. Rich wants to create a community of women based on shared values and goal, which is in harmony with nature free form patriarchal politics and patriarchal civilization. The network of lesbian community can name their experiences, and create the future. For Rich, poetic language does not simply involve reflection about cultural experiences but can be a means for changing consciousness and for creating a new human world.

For the sake of women's freedom, liberation, and true existence they should be ready to break all the assumptions norms, traditions and values constructed by the patriarchal society that are the real obstacle on women's ways. Rich becomes a revolutionary. She thinks of destroying the prevailing social structure and system to re-create a new one where women's freedom, liberation and true existence will be guaranteed and they will not be treated as subordinates of men, rather as true human beings. Rich thinks of destructing the traditions, norms and values of the patriarchy imposed on women to set free and to liberate from the patriarchal society. Rich

imagines destroying the world of male with the help of the lesbian/female community and the awareness of female experience and language.

Rich realizes the fact that a women's freedom depends on the freedom of the whole women, she speaks for the communal freedom. Till there is the patriarchal society, there is no true liberation and freedom of women. Rich not only finds wholeness, but also establishes a platform from which to move the world. The ills of patriarchy can be abolished only through sisterhood, through nurturing. She longs to change the world, and the door to change exists but the door itself makes no promises. So Rich affirms every woman must have been an active and independent woman for their true liberation and freedom.

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